

RAO BULLETIN

1 May 2012

PDF Edition

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Attachment - Veteran Legislation as of 27 Apr 2012

Attachment - Wisconsin State Veteran's Benefits

Attachment - USN Ship Designations

Attachment - Submarine Nostalgia

Attachment - Vet License Plates Louisiana

Attachment - Gulf War Battle at Rumaila

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RAO Bulletin Websites Update 02: I have been advised by the Webmaster of American Legion's Post 119 at http://post_119_gulfport_ms.tripod.com/rao1.html that due to equipment and time restraints they can no longer post the RAO Bulletin on their site. Also, the Editor of CFL News Chat has advised that due to recent changes imposed by his provider, any attachments in excess of 200 Kbytes on <http://s11.zetaboards.com/CFLNewsChat/forum/27519/> under pinned topics will no longer open/download for general public direct access. As a result anyone now desiring to access the PDF Edition of the RAO Bulletin via the CFLNewsChat must do a onetime registration by going to <http://anyveteran.org/smf/index.php?action=login1> and following the registration prompts. Assuming you selected the 'Forever' option for the amount of time to be logged in you will not have to repeat this procedure each time. At this site you can also access an alphabetical listing of all Bulletin articles and attachments published in the last 5 years which are available for recall upon request to <mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net>.

Subscribers who cannot open/download PDF files or intend to post the Bulletin on a website should use the Website Edition of the Bulletin posted on the Veterans Resources site <http://www.veteransresources.org/rao-bulletin/>. Bear in mind this site normally does not post the Bulletin until 2 to 5 days after its publication. The Website Edition is a modified version of the Bulletin with Word attachments. In it, articles sourced from MilitaryTimes appear as abbreviated headers with websites to access to read/download the full article. This format is necessary due to their enforcement of copyright restrictions to enhance their advertising revenue.

I estimate this change will impact on about 5000 readers who cannot rely on their servers to forward the Bulletin to them twice monthly. The servers that consistently block the Bulletin are AOL.com, Wmconnect.com, Cyberspace.com, Netscape.net, and af.mil. Subscribers with these addrees have been removed from my active directory and will not be reinstated until they provide an email addree I can reach. The servers that randomly block the Bulletin are Comcast.net, Msn.com, Verizon.net, Earthlink.net, and Roadrunner plus numerous government servers. Subscribers with these addrees are sent a Bulletin every time. [Source: Editor/Publisher RAO Bulletin 28 Apr 2012 ++]

NDAA 2013: In late April there was a focus on next year's National Defense Authorization Act in both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. In the House the HASC's Personnel Subcommittee marked up the FY2013 NDAA bill H.R.4310 and sent it on to the full Committee for their consideration. The mark-up did not include any of the Pentagon's proposals to increase TRICARE enrollment fees in TRICARE Prime, or creating yearly enrollment fees for TRICARE for Life and TRICARE Standard that would apply to military retirees. Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) in his opening statement said that the mark up "Make(s) clear that non-monetary contributions to health care benefits made by our troops and their families through a career of service to America represents pre-payment of health care premiums in retirement." This is very good news but is only the first step. Next comes the consideration of the full Committee. The mark-up also included:

- Authorize a troop pay increase of 1.7% and extend bonuses and special pay for our men and women in uniform.
- Limit end strength reductions for the active Army and Marine Corps.
- Provide significant new regulations and procedures for combating and prosecuting sexual assault within the military.
- Extend access to family housing for six months and Commissary and Exchange benefits for two years for troops who are involuntarily separated.
- By silence on the issue, reject the Pentagon proposal for two additional rounds of Base Reduction and Closure (BRAC) action.

- Authorize \$30 million in Impact Aid assistance for civilian schools with significant populations of military children.
- Protect child custody agreements in the event of deployment of the military parent.
- Extend certain refinancing help for qualifying servicemembers who can't sell their homes in conjunction with a military-ordered relocation.
- Authorize transition benefits of 180 days of TRICARE Reserve Select health coverage and TRICARE dental coverage for members involuntarily separated from the Selected Reserve.
- Require the Defense Department to establish a unified medical command

On 25 APR the Senate Armed Services Committee heard testimony on the FY2013 NDAA. The Senate Armed Services Committee' Subcommittee on Personnel heard from DOD's service personnel officials who continued to lobby for higher out-of-pocket TRICARE health insurance fees for retirees and their families. In written testimony the Army's top personnel official wrote TRICARE "is a superb health benefit, one of the best in the country" but the time has come to scale back. "Just as in all areas of the defense budget, we need to make decisions that preserve a strong benefit yet reflect the fiscal realities of the times," said Thomas Lamont, the assistant Army secretary for manpower and reserve affairs. "The proposed TRICARE fees reflect appropriate adjustments, and the TRICARE benefit will remain on of the finest and most generous health benefits available in the country," said Juan Garcia, the assistant Navy secretary for manpower and reserve affairs. It is clear that DOD is not letting up from their push to get these fees authorized. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted 27 Apr 2012 ++]

Food Myths Update 01: When the subject of food comes up, we are usually overwhelmed because of the different opinions and options concerning what food we should or should not eat. Consequently, keeping up with food trends can be extremely difficult. So, what is really fact or fiction when it comes to eating healthy? If you need more information, visit <http://www.eatright.org> , or if you have questions, contact a VA Registered Dietitian at (713) 791-1414 ext. 3976, 4296, or 6166. The following covers the truth about some food myths:

Myth 1. "I am diabetic so I should not eat anything white."

Truth: Avoiding an entire group of food is never a good idea. A person may feel they are being cheated and eat more than they normally would at the next meal. Diabetics should monitor the amount of carbohydrates they consume; but, they should not completely avoid them. Other names for carbohydrates are "carbs" or "starches." White foods such as potatoes, rice, bread, and sugar do contain carbohydrates. However, many foods that are not white such as corn, peas, brown rice, fruit juice, and soda also contain carbohydrates. For example, a cup of orange juice would elevate your blood sugar as much as a piece of white bread. Therefore, "white" foods can fit into a diabetic diet as easily as other foods. Eating healthy is all about balance which includes a proper diet adjusted to your body needs and activity level.

Myth 2. "Artificial sweeteners are bad for me."

Truth: Artificial sweeteners are also called sugar substitutes (SS). Examples of sugar substitutes are Sweet 'N Low, Equal, Splenda, and Truvia. They are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA must approve foods as safe before they can be sold. However, SS have a bad reputation as something that can cause cancer. Current research has found no clear link between their use and the risk of cancer in humans.

Myth 3. "Sea salt is better than table salt."

Truth: Sea salt has the same amount of sodium (salt) as table salt. If you are looking for a salt substitute, try herbs or salt-free seasonings. Also, check the ingredient list on foods you purchase to make sure the food is truly salt-free.

Myth 4. “Eggs are bad for me”

Truth: Eggs have a bad reputation because the yolks are high in cholesterol. Nevertheless, eggs are good to eat in modest amounts of three or four a week. Also, eggs are a great source of protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin D, and Vitamin B12. Furthermore, if your cholesterol is high try eating just the egg whites or low cholesterol eggs.

Myth 5. “Eating before bedtime makes me gain weight.”

Truth: The food you eat before bedtime will not make you gain any more weight than food you eat during the day. Weight gain occurs when you consume more calories than you burn with exercise or physical activity. So, if you exercised enough in the day to burn off the calories in the late night snack, you will not gain weight. One thing to consider is that late night snacking occurs because you are bored. Thus, if you are snacking out of boredom, not hunger, those late-night calories probably will catch up with you which will result in weight gain.

[Source: VA Star Mar/Apr 2012 ++]

Student Veterans of America Update 03: On 26 APR Student Veterans of America (SVA) published the list of 26 for-profit institutions whose SVA charters had been revoked. The removal of SVA chapters resulted from a routine, annual review of all chapters. "SVA chapters must be established and led by student veterans. Student veteran organizations in development, or created by university administrators, defeats the fundamental spirit of the SVA chapter," said Michael Dakduk, Executive Director of Student Veterans of America. "In addition to being a peer support group, SVA chapters exist as campus and community based advocacy organizations. It appears that some for-profit schools do not understand our model, or worse –they understand our model and they choose to exploit it for personal gain." This is important because:

- 1) It defrauds veterans seeking advice from SVA’s student leaders;
- 2) It deters veterans who would otherwise form chapters at these campuses;
- 3) It misrepresents these chapters as being a point of contact for veterans seeking out their peers who can help them with transition issues and introduce them to a community of individuals that share similar experiences;
- 4) It undermines the legitimacy and reputation of SVA.

Many military and veteran-friendly school lists cite having a SVA chapter as a criterion for becoming ‘veteran-friendly’. The term ‘military-friendly’, or ‘veteran-friendly’, as it relates to academic institutions is ill-defined. "I am concerned that certain for-profit schools may be taking advantage of the SVA brand to legitimize their programs. This may be an example of certain schools establishing fake SVA chapters to appear on a military-friendly list. By being featured on these lists, those schools can then advertise their programs as accommodating to veterans – although the term military and veteran friendly lacks any real definition. This is an extreme example of misrepresentation. There is a pattern of impropriety among certain for-profit institutions of higher learning." Those found to be in non-compliance are:

- Allied American University
- Anthem College-Online
- Argosy University-Online
- Argosy University-San Bernardino
- Art Institute Of California-Orange County
- Art Institute Of California-Sacramento
- Art Institute Of Michigan
- Art Institute Of New York City
- Art Institute Of Pittsburgh

- Art Institute Of Pittsburgh-Online
- Art Institute Of Washington
- Art Institutes International-Kansas City
- Ashworth College
- Brown Mackie College-Akron
- Devry University-Orlando South
- ECPI College Of Technology-Innsbrook
- ECPI College Of Technology-Raleigh
- ECPI College Of Technology-Richmond
- Expression College For Digital Arts
- Fashion Institute Of Design & Merchandising
- ITT Technical Institute-South Bend
- ITT Technical Institute-Springfield
- ITT Technical Institute-Strongsville
- Medical Careers Institute
- South University-Alabama
- South University-Georgia

[Source: <http://www.studentveterans.org> News 25 Apr 2012 ++]

Clark AFB Vet Cemetery Update 03: On 19 APR Senators Kelly Ayotte (R-NH) and Mark Begich (D-AK) introduced legislation aimed at restoring the Clark Veterans Cemetery in the Philippines. The Remembering America's Forgotten Veterans Cemetery Act (S.2320) would require the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) to restore, operate, and maintain Clark Veterans Cemetery to honor the courageous Americans buried there. The ABMC is an independent agency of the U.S. government charged with managing overseas cemeteries and monuments. The Senate bill is a companion measure to H.R.4168 which was introduced by Representative Frank Guinta (R-NH) last month. "The U.S. government has a moral responsibility to care for veterans cemeteries that honor those who have bravely served our country," said Senator Ayotte. "The American veterans buried in Clark Veterans Cemetery deserve a dignified and well-maintained final resting place, and it's time for the U.S. government to fulfill its responsibility to care for this sacred ground." Senator Begich said, "America's veterans deserve dignity and honor no matter where they are buried. It is our duty to recognize their service by making sure this cemetery is maintained appropriately, and this final resting place of thousands of service members should not be left in disrepair."



Clark Veterans Cemetery

The Caring for the Fallen Act (H.R.4168), on which subcommittee hearings have been held, currently has 10 cosponsors. A “watered down” version of Guinta’s bill is now advancing within the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs (HVAC). The revised provision, which has been attached to annual VA COLA legislation, now requires the ABMC to “study” the matter and then report their findings to Congress. Clark Veterans Cemetery was consigned to oblivion in 1991, when Mount Pinatubo’s gigantic eruption forced the U.S. to abandon the sprawling air base surrounding it. Retired U.S. soldiers, Marines and sailors volunteer to keep watch, relying on donations to try to maintain the grounds, but they lament that they’re helplessly short on funds to fix things, and that Washington is unwilling to help. It’s the veterans’ cemetery that America forgot. [Source: AFSA On Call 25 Apr 2012 ++]

Breast Cancer Update 03: An Army doctor has helped develop a vaccine that he believes will prevent cancer, or at least its recurrence. The drug NeuVax began phase III clinical trials 20 JAN which Col. George Peoples said could lead to its Food and Drug Administration approval. Peoples is chief of surgical oncology at the San Antonio Military Medical Center when he's not traveling the world to provide surgical expertise or working to try and find a cure for cancer. The phase III clinical trial for NeuVax will involve at least 700 breast cancer patients at 100 sites in the United States and abroad. The trial is titled PRESENT, Prevention of Recurrence in Early-Stage, Node-Positive Breast Cancer with Low to Intermediate HER2 Expression with NeuVax Treatment. Participants will receive one intradermal injection every month for six months, followed by a booster inoculation every six months thereafter. The primary endpoint is disease-free survival at three years. "The first patient was vaccinated with NeuVax in January at San Antonio Military Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas," Peoples said.

Peoples is the director and principal investigator for a Cancer Vaccine Development Program that he has been working on since the early 90s. The vaccine carries the generic name E75. This third and final phase of testing before FDA approval will bring NeuVax one step closer to the market and to the breast cancer patients who need more options, Peoples said. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 203,000 individuals in the United States are diagnosed with invasive breast cancer each year. The current vaccine is the result of nearly 20 years of research by Peoples and others, and has paralleled the development of the drug Herceptin. "Herceptin is one of our biggest breast cancer drugs right now. It targets a protein commonly over-expressed in breast cancer cells called human epidermal growth factor receptor 2, or HER2/neu. This drug has cut the rate of breast cancer recurrence in half ; the first drug to ever have this dramatic of a response. "So of course, HER2/neu became the molecule of the decade and Herceptin now is a multi-billion dollar drug," Peoples said. [Source: U.S Army Homepage Rob McIlvaine article

http://www.army.mil/article/78062/Army_surgeon_on_track_to_head_off_cancer_before_it_starts/ 18 Apr 2012 ++]

Dengue Fever: Dengue fever is a virus-based disease spread by mosquitoes. It begins with a sudden high fever, often as high as 104 - 105 degrees Fahrenheit. A flat, red rash may appear over most of the body 2 - 5 days after the fever starts. A second rash, which looks like the measles, appears later in the disease. Infected people may have increased skin sensitivity and are very uncomfortable. Other symptoms include: Headache (especially behind the eyes), Fatigue, Joint aches, Muscle aches, Nausea, Swollen lymph nodes, and Vomiting. More than one-third of the world’s population live in areas at risk for transmission. Dengue infection is a leading cause of illness and death in the tropics and subtropics.

Navy medical researchers are conducting their first human clinical trial for a vaccine to protect U.S. troops from dengue, a potentially deadly mosquito-transmitted virus found in the tropical and subtropical areas of the world. No treatment or cure exists for dengue, which is carried by a particular type of mosquito, said Navy Cmdr. Tad Kochel,

chief of Viral and Rickettsial Disease research at the Naval Medical Research Center in Silver Springs, Maryland. Kochel said the disease is endemic in Southeast Asia, Africa, South America and the Caribbean. Dengue puts 2 million people at risk worldwide, and adds about 500,000 new cases each year, Kochel said. Dengue also can cause 25,000 deaths annually, mostly among children who aren't hospitalized before severe illness can set in. "We need a vaccine because the troops are deployed where dengue is actively transmitted," said Kochel, who developed the Navy's dengue vaccine in 1993, which is now in the trial phase to determine whether it is safe and effective. Kochel, who has a doctorate in virology, said a vaccine against the virus will have to cover each of its four strains.



Some dengue strains cause few symptoms, while others can cause high fever, internal bleeding and shock, among other symptoms, said Navy Lt. Cmdr. (Dr.) Janine Danko, department deputy chief. Dengue is not contagious, she said. It is contracted when bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus. Once a person is bitten, however, subsequent bites from infected mosquitoes have cumulative effects and can result in more severe cases of the disease. "People who get it a second or third time in their lives can have more severe disease symptoms," Danko said. "A soldier who is deployed to a tropical area, bitten by a mosquito and infected with dengue may not even know it. He may feel 'punky' and have a fever a day or two. If he's deployed again to other areas with dengue, he's at higher risk of infection, because his body has seen it before." Because there is no treatment for dengue, prevention is vital. "We always have campaigns to reduce dengue transmission," Kochel said. "Troops in endemic areas are encouraged to kill the mosquitoes, use pesticides, ensure living areas have no standing water, and use a repellent. But these things are not 100 percent. That's why we need a vaccine."

Research for a dengue vaccine has been under way for more than 20 years, but its availability still is five to 10 years away, Kochel said. A vaccine that prevents all four strains of dengue must pass stringent Food and Drug Administration requirements before it can be licensed and marketed for human use. The price tag that comes with vaccine development also is great. "The dollar amount for these studies is pretty exponential," Kochel said. The Navy researchers emphasized that they're not working in a vacuum to develop a vaccine. "The Navy, in collaboration with the Army, has three vaccines," Kochel said. "We are testing products individually and in combination with our counterparts, such as universities and private companies that also are working on vaccines." Of the various vaccines in different stages of development, Kochel said, not one is ahead of the others. "Everyone's trying to get over this hurdle of getting good immune responses against all four types of the virus," he said, adding that the "perfect vaccine" does not yet exist to protect U.S. troops from all strains. [Source: AFPS Terri Moon Cronk article 26 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Suicide Prevention Update 11: In the last three years working at the Veterans Crisis Line 1 (800) 273-8255, responder Christina Tallie says she has had fewer than 10 exchanges with callers that have traumatized her. But she still gets anxious recalling them. The worst involved a lengthy, frustrating phone call with a frantic veteran that ended with a sudden gunshot. She was so upset, she couldn't work the rest of the day, and thought about quitting. "I told [the supervisors] that I just had to walk away," she said. "I just ... It was more than I

could handle right then.” When police arrived at the caller’s address hours later, they discovered it was a prank. That doesn’t make the memory any easier for Tallie. Staffers with the VA’s suicide prevention efforts say pranks are sad but commonplace, not just in their office but across the crisis hotline industry. Caitlin Thompson, clinical care coordinator for the veterans hotline, said that prank calls to their offices total hundreds each week. The problem has gotten even worse as the VA expands into online-chat and text-message outreach. Sometimes, callers just use the services as a catch-all answer service, for veterans programs or anything else they can think of. One recent texter keeps asking if he can pay his phone bill using the suicide hotline. But often, prankers prefer the voiceless services because they’re harder to trace, and make mischief easier for the fakers. “With the live phone calls, sometimes you can hear [the caller] laughing, or other people giggling in the background,” Tallie said. “You don’t get that on a computer.” In extreme cases -- like the fake gunshot call Tallie took – the prank can end up in criminal charges for those involved. But Thompson said officials don’t obsess over the problem, and often try to move past the disgusting deception. “Unfortunately, it’s just part of the job,” she said. [Source: Stars & Stripes Leo Shane article 24 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Ambulance Coverage: Veterans suffering heart attacks or other perilous emergencies could be risking their lives to avoid ambulance bills. About twice a day, an ambulance is sent to Florida’s Viera VA Outpatient Clinic, many times to pick up someone who went there instead of calling 9-1-1 or going straight to a hospital emergency room. More often than not, fire-rescue department records show the patients report chest pains, trouble breathing or other emergency symptoms that the VA clinic is not equipped to deal with. “You don’t want to come to the VA clinic and risk your life, passing emergency rooms along the way,” said Tiy Sanchez, a VA administrator in Orlando. According to veterans’ advocates and medical professionals working with patients daily, some are going to veterans’ clinics first because they say they can’t afford an ambulance bill as high as \$600 and they believe that cost won’t be covered by their veterans’ benefits or private insurance unless they go to the clinic first. “I think if it’s anything serious, they should call 9-1-1, then worry about the details later,” said Ron Butt, a Vietnam vet who now works with local disabled veterans. “With the economy, it’s intimidating to dial that 9-1-1.”

Some are worried because the decisions patients are making threaten their own safety and unnecessarily tie up county ambulances in a densely populated area. Last year, public records show ambulances in Brevard County FL took 293 patients — who county responders determined needed emergency care — from the clinic to hospitals, most to Viera Hospital about 2½ miles away. Stations in neighboring areas are affected too, because they are called in to cover when the Viera station responds to the clinic. “Our primary goal is to have the 9-1-1 system available for those who truly need it,” said Orlando Dominguez, Brevard County Fire-Rescue’s Emergency Medical Services Division chief. He said that agency is working with the VA to reduce the number of calls. But, he stressed that the department shifts rescue units around to cover the Viera area as needed. “Yes, obviously you have a unit committed to the VA, but it’s not any different than going to a home,” Dominguez said.

According to Brevard County Fire-Rescue records, county ambulances responded to 550 calls from the clinic last year. Of those, 293 people needed emergency transport. That averages at least two calls per day — and about one transport per day — for the Monday-to-Friday work week that the clinic is open. The clinic sees an average of 1,100 patients per day. “Some veterans choose not to follow what is in their best health interest in a way to save money, just as other people in the community do when it comes to making medical decisions or following medical advice,” said Tony Ingram, social work supervisor at the VA clinic. Ambulance bills can be pricey. For emergencies, the average is \$600. For non-emergency cases, such as delivering a patient to a nursing home, the average ambulance fee is about \$350. If the ambulance picks them up at the clinic, the Department of Veterans Affairs picks up 100 percent of the bill. If not, the veteran may have to file extra paperwork and negotiate to get the bill paid, depending

on their personal circumstances. They know they might end up paying part or all of the bill themselves. “I think the economy plays a part in that,” said Dr. Thomas Howard, chief medical officer at the VA clinic.

Butt, who volunteers with the Disabled Veterans of America chapter in Melbourne, and medical professionals noted that while the economy is a factor, in some cases, veterans are probably in denial, too, about the seriousness of their symptoms, not realizing their chest pains are a heart attack. The VA is trying to educate patients on two fronts. First, in many emergency cases, a veteran’s health benefits will cover ambulance services — for instance, if the patient was seen by VA within the past two years and has no other private insurance. It doesn’t matter about the location as much. Each case is different, Sanchez said. “It’s not a simple yes or no,” she said. Second, they’re reminding patients that delaying treatment can lead to serious, permanent damage or even death. The Viera clinic has hung “Save Your Life” signs warning veterans to call 9-1-1 in emergencies rather than waiting. “I do educate them that their well-being is the most important thing, and they should not drive past a hospital in a medical emergency to come to the VA,” Ingram said. Ingram said the majority of people transported via ambulance don’t have urgent symptoms. “Most veterans come to the clinic because they are sick, and then after being evaluated by the medical provider are determined they need hospitalization or more care than can be provided by our outpatient clinic,” Ingram said. The county fire-rescue records show 550 calls in 2011, 502 in 2010 and 451 in 2009. The VA reimburses the county for each emergency run. The bill was \$179,380 in 2011. So far, the county has collected \$73,321, with the balance still being processed by the VA. [Source: Florida Today Norman Moody article 22 Apr 2012 ++]



A patient is put into an ambulance at the VA Outpatient Clinic in Viera.

VA Presumptive Herbicide Diseases Update 01: When Ralph Bozella came home from Vietnam in 1972, he was happy he’d survived and was ready to get on with life. Because he had escaped any serious wounds in combat, he never gave a thought to disabilities. Four decades later, his time in Vietnam is haunting his health. But thanks to a little-known law, he is receiving thousands of dollars a month in disability pay and free health care for a heart problem that he may have contracted when exposed to Agent Orange and other chemicals used to kill vegetation and expose the enemy. Nearly 2.6 million Americans served in Vietnam, and anyone who set foot there during the war is eligible for compensation if they suffer from one of 16 ailments. Some are fairly common, like Type II diabetes, ischemic heart disease, and prostate cancer. The vast majority of these veterans are now in their 60s and 70s, and much more likely to develop the diseases covered by the law. Many veterans may not know that illnesses appearing so much later could qualify them for combat-related disability.



Ralph Bozella in 1972

Bozella, now 63 and a retired school teacher in Longmont, found out his heart disease qualified because in 2004, he had finally asked for help for PTSD, and ended up in Veterans Administration care. “When we were in ‘Nam, we used to talk about going back to ‘the world’, thinking how good things would be when we got home,” he said. “But it turned out to be bedlam for me. I was so confused. I couldn’t keep a job. I had trouble with authority. So I began to self-medicate through drinking, smoking and other things.” Bozella, like many combat vets, carried that emotional baggage until some fellow vets convinced him to get it checked out. “I found out I had PTSD.... my wife had been telling me that for years but I never listened to her,” he said. Six years later, in 2010, he developed breathing and heart problems that required doctors to install a stent. “They (the VA) determined that it was ischemic heart disease that was related to Agent Orange,” he said. Ischemic means decreased blood supply, and it is one of the most common forms of heart disease. “If you were in ‘Nam, even for one day, and now have one of 16 medical conditions, you qualify for benefits, automatically,” Bozella explained.

There is no need for proof of actual exposure to Agent Orange or other poisons -- and that makes the program differ sharply from some other federal compensation programs. Nuclear weapons workers, such as those at the former Rocky Flats plant near Denver, must find records proving significant exposure to radiation and toxic chemicals before they can get aid, and that has been a major obstacle for them. Congress eliminated requiring proof of exposure after the Centers for Disease Control spent five years and \$48 million trying and failing to identify which veterans had been exposed to Agent Orange. The defoliant, which contained a known carcinogenic – dioxin – was sprayed over nearly 12 percent of the country to eliminate enemy cover in the thick foliage, and to destroy local food sources. The Agent Orange law, passed in 1991, states that a military person who was in Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975 and has been diagnosed with one of the named conditions qualifies for disability benefits. These payments can range up to \$2,673 a month for 100 percent disability. Sailors on inland waterways, termed “brown waters,” qualify as well. Congress now has two bills pending authorizing the same benefits for “blue water” sailors, whose ships came within 12 miles of shore, because the defoliants may have drifted that far. The bill also would extend benefits to some veterans who served in Panama and the South Korean DMZ during that time. Children of Vietnam veterans with certain birth defects also are covered.

The VA has no record of how many veterans have requested or received Agent Orange compensation, because it tracks claims only by disability. Since September 2010, just under 31,000 Vietnam vets have filed for Agent Orange compensation, according to Randal Noller of the VA. A veteran may file a claim by presenting proof of service (form DD-214), proof of having been in Vietnam such as orders, medals etc., and an acceptable diagnosis of the medical condition, according to the VA office in Lakewood. It said most claims are processed within six months. Of course, it’s not that simple, said Ann Weakley, a retired VA administrator and claims processor. “The VA can be weird,” she said. “Papers get lost, sometimes it’s hard to find records, people get very frustrated. The entire process can take up to a year, including a physical exam and a disability rating board review, she said. “But you need to stay with it. I suggest you find someone to help you, like the Veteran’s county office, the VFW or the American Legion.

The state has three Veteran's Centers in Pueblo, Colorado Springs and in the Lowry area in Denver. These are run by state employees, who can be helpful," Weakley said.

Calling the VA directly is not advised. It has one toll-free telephone number for the entire country. On three recent tries, the average wait time was 34 minutes; the longest was 45 minutes. Veterans can also try the local office of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. If unknown refer to the VA's National Facilities Locator site <http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isflash=1>. For metro Denver it is 155 Van Gordon Dr., Lakewood, and can be reached by telephone at 1-800-827-1000. The Colorado Division of Veterans Affairs office, which can assist veterans with filing federal claims, is at 1355 S. Colorado Blvd., Suite 113, Denver, 80222. Telephone is (303) 343-1268. Bozella now believes so strongly in helping veterans learn about medical problems associated with war that he volunteers full-time for the American Legion. He also was elected president of the United Veterans Committee of Colorado, a nonprofit umbrella organization of more than 45 veterans' organizations helping Colorado's estimated 460,000 vets.

AGENT ORANGE AILMENTS

Medical conditions covered by the 1991 Agent Orange Act include:

- Prostate Cancer
- Respiratory cancers
- Multiple Myeloma
- Type II diabetes
- Hodgkin's disease
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Soft tissue sarcoma (cancer)
- Chloracne
- Porphyria Cutanea Tarda
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Chronic Lymphocytic leukemia
- B-cell leukemias
- Parkinson's disease
- Ischemic heart disease
- AL Amyloidosis
- Spina Bifida and certain other birth defects in vets' children.

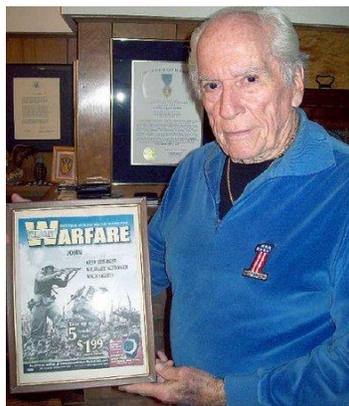
[Source: Colorado Springs The Gazette Mike McPhee article 23 Apr 2012 ++]

Stolen Valor Update 64: **John Carl Pequignot**, 85, of Fort Wayne has told many people he fought the Japanese in three major battles as a Navy corpsman during World War II and that he was injured three separate times. Depending on where he is discussing his war history, he may talk about when he was taken as prisoner of war and held in a camp in Luzon, Philippines, or sometimes it's Guam. The recounting of his military career often includes details about a clash where half of his face was blown off by a grenade. He underwent 27 reconstructive surgeries made possible by hip bone parts donated by more than a dozen Marines he saved, he has said. After the war, Pequignot said, President Harry Truman personally presented him a sword for his heroism. For years, Pequignot has told some portions of these stories to youth groups, at churches and in retirement homes. In 2007, he was presented a Silver Star, the third-highest honor in the military. In 2010, he was made an honorary member of the Indianapolis Korean War Veterans Association, Chapter 259, and is featured in the group's online video project, "Tell America." The Journal Gazette ran a story on Veterans Day in November in which Pequignot was prominently featured talking about his World War II experiences.

But according to Navy records, Pequignot was never in battle and never left the U.S. during his military service. There is no official documentation that would indicate he was a POW, and archivists at Truman’s presidential library said they have no record of a meeting. In fact, the name Pequignot does not appear at all. A convicted thief and bank robber after the war, Pequignot has insisted for years that the Navy lost all of his overseas records. But military records obtained by The Journal Gazette from the National Archives and Records Administration in St. Louis seem to account for almost every day Pequignot was in the service. Nothing in the records corroborates any of his military stories. Because of the discrepancies, U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar’s office has backed away from a push to award Pequignot the Medal of Honor – an award numerous local residents have championed on Pequignot’s behalf.

Too young for active service, the records show Pequignot worked in Fort Wayne at the Pennsylvania Railroad yards until he was accepted into active service on July 28, 1944, a month before his 18th birthday and a year before the war ended. He was discharged on July 12, 1946. He served the majority of those two years in California, according to military records. Pequignot claims to have been a corpsman, an enlisted person with some medical training who serves the Navy and Marines as a medic in times of war. But Navy records do not list any medical training for Pequignot. Asked about the discrepancy, Pequignot said he took a two-week course on an island – he did not remember its name – north of Australia in the fall of 1944. During a battle in Saipan in November 1944, he claims to have received serious injuries to his leg from flying shrapnel while involved in hand-to-hand combat. He was then transferred by the USS Comfort to a military hospital to recuperate until March 28, he said. But during that time, official military records place him at a Naval training center in Oklahoma.

Pequignot tells of another battle he was in on the island of Iwo Jima on Feb. 19, 1945. But Navy records show he was in California then. Asked about the conflicting dates, Pequignot said his memory “may be off by a few days or so.” Pequignot has said he was critically injured when a grenade detonated mid-air in Okinawa on April 1, 1945, blowing off half his face and jaw. According to Pequignot, he recuperated in a base hospital in Okinawa for five months before being sent back to the States. He claims to have undergone 27 surgeries to repair the damage. The first surgery was performed in Okinawa, he said, when 15 Marines volunteered to donate parts of their hip bones to help reconstruct his face. But according to documents related to his official military discharge in July 1946, Pequignot “required neither medical nor dental attention.” Despite his claims of critical injuries and months of surgeries and rehabilitation, military records indicate his health was normal with “no defects, abnormalities or injuries.” Records confirm he served aboard the USS Shangri-La, as he claims, but the Navy said he was aboard the ship after the war, from Oct. 26, 1945, to May 17, 1946.



John Pequignot

Jonn Lilyea, a retired infantry platoon sergeant who served in Desert Storm, recently noted Pequignot’s claims in his popular military blog, “This ain’t hell, but you can see it from here.” “Saipan, Iwo Jima and Okinawa were

operations by different (Marine Corps) units,” Lilyea wrote, “so he must have really been bounced around.” After leaving the Navy, Pequignot was a Fort Wayne police officer until he was convicted in 1958 for involvement in a car theft ring. Six years later, he was convicted of bank robbery in Allen County. All of that “was long ago” and has no bearing on his military record, he said. In later years, Pequignot was a high school sports referee and did janitorial work.

He has qualified for 50 percent disability pay from the Department of Veterans Affairs based on “conditions of military service.” He receives \$845 a month as compensation for tinnitus and hearing loss. Claims for shrapnel wounds and tremors of the hand and arm were denied, according to VA documents. Pequignot has a number of medals and ribbons, many in a glass case and some on the uniform he wears when he makes presentations, he said. He claims to have three Purple Hearts, an Asiatic-Pacific Ribbon, China Service Ribbon, Japan Occupation Ribbon, Distinguished Marksman Ribbon and a Presidential Citation. Official records show Pequignot received a World War II Victory Medal and Victory Ribbon, which were given to all veterans who served during WWII, and an Asiatic-Pacific Ribbon, which was given to all veterans who served in the Pacific. In a ceremony at Allen County Public Library on Oct. 30, 2007, Pequignot was presented with a belated Silver Star – the third-highest honor in the military – given for distinguished gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States. The Korean War Veterans hosted the event, and the medal was presented by then-state Sen. Gary Dillon. Dillon remembers the event but has no idea where the Silver Star originated or where the order came from, he said. He was simply asked to show up and make the presentation, as elected officials are often asked to do, he said.

Although it’s possible that a belated award would not be found in many WWII records, the citation would have had to be signed by a senior Navy officer such as an admiral or a Department of the Navy civilian official at the secretary level, often both, said Col. Wayne Morris, USMC, of Jacksonville, N.C. Pequignot was unable to produce any paperwork for the citation. The belated Silver Star medal would have had to be processed through the Navy Board for Corrections of Military Records, said C. Douglas Sterner, curator for the Military Times Hall of Valor in Alexandria, Va. “It doesn’t appear that was done,” he said. James Yaney, a Korean War veteran who has pushed for the Medal of Honor for his friend Pequignot, said the Silver Star medal was sent directly from Veterans Affairs to Pequignot. Sterner said Lugar’s office backed off the Medal of Honor nomination when officials at the Navy Decorations board found there was no validity to Pequignot’s claims. The Navy had been provided with a copy of Pequignot’s Purple Heart citation, which it deemed not to be authentic, said Sterner, who played a major role in the passage of federal law making it a misdemeanor to falsely claim a military medal. “There is no evidence he earned a Silver Star or one, much less three, Purple Hearts,” Sterner said. “We do not believe he was a corpsman, and there is no evidence he was ever a prisoner of war.” Yaney said he was “completely devastated” about the lack of evidence to support Pequignot’s claims. Still, Pequignot maintains his version of his military service is the truth. “There’s no way to prove I’m telling the truth if the Navy won’t present my side,” he said. [Source: The Journal Gazette Vivian Sade article 22 Apr 2012 ++]

Stolen Valor Update 65: POWs from the Vietnam War contend that **Dave Groves**, a West Jordan man honored last week by the Veterans Administration and years ago by the University of Utah, was never held captive in Vietnam. Groves does not appear on a database of Department of Defense Vietnam-era POWs, compiled from military records. “He’s a typical liar,” said Mike McGrath, historian of Nam-POW, a nonprofit organization of Vietnam prisoners of war. “There are 540 of us still alive from Vietnam, and we have 3,000 wannabees who want to be us.” Groves, who has hired an attorney after a week of online challenges to his truthfulness, insists he was a POW who for unexplained reasons does not appear in the Pentagon’s database. “We are retaining legal counsel. Until then we have no further comment except to say these accusations are entirely false and defamatory,” Groves’ wife, Fran Groves, said 20 APR.

On 13 APR, Groves was one of nearly two dozen men honored at a luncheon for POWs hosted by the Veterans Administration in Salt Lake City. Fran Groves said last weekend that the couple have been invited to the annual luncheon since 1992; they have a commemorative plaque from the VA hanging in their home. In 2000, Groves was honored at the University of Utah's annual Veterans Day celebration, where he shared the roster with nine other men praised for wartime heroics. At the U. event, typically one of Utah's biggest on Veterans Day, Groves was applauded as a highly decorated soldier. The program — and a short biography still displayed on the U.'s Veterans Day website — says Groves was awarded three Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars and two Crosses of Gallantry. That information came from an interview the university conducted with Groves before the event, said Keith Sterling, spokesman at the U. The university's marketing and communications office, which stages the event, no longer has a file on Groves because the event was nearly 12 years ago, Sterling said. Such files typically include nomination forms and some documentation of a military record.

At the 13 APR VA luncheon, Groves said in an interview that he was held captive by the North Vietnamese for six months after his unit, part of the Army's 5th Special Forces, was ambushed. He said he was the only survivor of the ambush, and escaped with other U.S. servicemen, spending two weeks in the jungle before they were found by a Marine patrol. The VA has not yet responded to questions, submitted 18 APR, about how it vets its honorees. Spokesman James Brown said a response is expected Tuesday. Mary Schantag, chairwoman of the board of P.O.W. Network, which keeps an online database about former POWs and purported "phonies," said she is convinced Groves is the latter. She filed a request with the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis earlier this week for Groves' military records. She said that an NPRC employee told her in a phone conversation 20 APR that he could find no military record for Groves in the database. She is expecting a written notice to that effect in the mail. The Tribune also filed a request for Groves' military records, considered the definitive evidence of service.



Dave Groves

POW appreciation luncheon Friday, April 13

While the DOD database is rarely wrong, one former POW questioned by the network did prove he was held in Vietnam and mistakenly left off the list, McGrath said. "In all of the 3,000 cases [investigated by P.O.W. Network] only one was correct that he was a POW," McGrath said. Schantag said the P.O.W. Network flagged Groves in 2003 after he participated in a VA luncheon, but whether the VA was ever informed about the network's suspicions is not clear. Dale Osborne of Salt Lake City, who spent four and a half years in a North Vietnamese POW camp, said he can't understand why anyone would claim to have been imprisoned. "There was no valor in being captured," said Osborne, who was in the Navy. Nonetheless, he said, "We did go through four or five years of starvation and torture. To have someone come up and claim, 'I did too,' it just burns me up." The Groves case reveals another side to the ongoing scourge of stolen valor. Even when the Pentagon does make a database available, as it does for POWs and those missing in action, it doesn't mean that organizations honoring veterans will make inquiries.

Investigating whether a person served in the military or earned medals for combat wounds or valor is much more difficult. There is no public database for those, and it can take months or years to get a response from the St. Louis center. Schantag and McGrath said the VA has mistakenly listed people as POWs in the past. A 2009 investigation by The Associated Press found the VA paying disability benefits to 966 Vietnam POWs even though there were then only about 550 living, according to the Department of Defense. The VA also was giving disability payments to 286 veterans who claimed to have been taken prisoner during the first Gulf War, although the Department of Defense at the time said there were only 21 surviving POWs from that conflict. "They believe these frauds and grant them benefits and money based on falsehoods," McGrath said. [Source: The Salt Lake Tribune Kristen Moulton article 23 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Outside Medical Claims Update 01: Cleveland Davis' is a combat veteran who received the Purple Heart for injuries suffered in Vietnam. Christmas Day 2005, his head began hurting, and his speech became slurred. His family thought he might be suffering a stroke. They rushed him from his Charlotte home to nearby Carolinas Medical Center. Doctors found problems, including a blood clot next to his brain and severe circulation problems in his legs. Doctors amputated Davis' left leg, drained blood from the clot and kept him for more than a month for an array of tests and procedures. In early 2006, the bills started arriving. The hospital said Davis was responsible for paying nearly \$200,000. Carolinas HealthCare System later sued Davis to collect on the bill. Davis contends that if the hospital had done its job properly, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs probably would have covered his medical bills. In court papers, he argued that the hospital didn't properly process the documents needed to submit the bills to the VA. But when the VA refused to pay, they say, the bill became Davis' responsibility.



Cleveland Davis

Davis is one of thousands of patients sued by Carolinas HealthCare. It's a bill-collection practice that most North Carolina hospitals have chosen to avoid. But officials say they are obligated to try to collect whatever they can from patients who can afford to pay. In Davis' case, the resolution of the dispute in 2008 proved costly. Davis said he agreed to pay \$700 a month for three years to the hospital and clinics that provided his care. After that, he said, he agreed to pay \$200 a month to the hospital. Those payments have been his single biggest monthly expense, he says, and he still can't understand how the total bill climbed so high. Davis receives about \$4,400 a month from the VA. After exhausting most of his savings, he mortgaged his modest three-bedroom house in northeast Charlotte – valued at \$134,000 – which had been paid in full before his hospitalization. Otherwise, he says, there's no way he could make his monthly medical payments. For now, he closely watches expenses and cringes each time he sends his check to the hospital. "If I didn't have to pay this, I could pay my (other) bills without a struggle," said Davis, now 64. He has paid only a small portion of his bill so far. "I know I'll spend the rest of my life paying this."

Davis has been able to avoid bankruptcy – but not the stress associated with fighting the hospital. Officials with Carolinas HealthCare say the VA initially agreed that Davis was covered. But later, after Davis was discharged, the VA notified CMC it wouldn't pay for his care. Under federal rules, the VA will pay for emergency care in non-VA hospitals, but only until a patient is stabilized. After that, the policy says, the patient, a responsible party or the hospital should arrange for the patient's transfer to a VA facility. Carolinas HealthCare officials say they repeatedly contacted the VA regarding Davis' transfer, but the patient was never offered a bed. Carolinas HealthCare said in a statement that it tried to work with Davis and the VA but could never get the federal government to pay. "The patient legally remains responsible for payment of the care provided," the hospital said. Usually even-tempered, Davis doesn't try to conceal his feelings about CMC. "I don't ever want to go back there," he tells his wife and children. "If I get sick and the VA is full, take me straight to the funeral home." [Source: The Charlotte Observer Ames Alexander article 21 Apr 2012 ++]

Cardiovascular Disease Update 01: An American Heart Association expert panel has concluded that gum disease is has not been demonstrated to be a factor in causing cardiovascular disease and treating gum disease does not appear to prevent or influence the course of atherosclerotic vascular disease. A link between the two disorders has been proposed for more than a century, and patients and providers have been increasingly presented with claims that gum treatment strategies offer cardiovascular protection. Both disorders share several common risk factors (cigarette smoking, age, and diabetes mellitus) but the most likely reason they are found together is that people who have good oral hygiene also tend to have a healthy lifestyle that helps protect against cardiovascular disease. [Source: Journal of the American Heart Assn article 18 Apr 2012 ++]

DoD 2013 Budget Update 18: Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, has informed the House Armed Services Committee that the Army would join the other services and not send Congress an "unfunded priorities list," a long-time tradition. The Army General thanked Armed Services Committee Ranking Member Adam Smith (D-WA) for the opportunity to address fiscal year unfunded Army requirements and said, "In lieu of submitting an unfunded requirement list, I am soliciting your support of the Army Budget request in the FY13 President's Budget." Submittal of the "wish list" of desired spending that didn't make the president's budget cut is an annual, customary submission that helps members of the Armed Services Committee understand potential risks that need serious consideration and close attention. Two points:

1. It is a tradition for the Ranking Minority Member on the Committee to request an unfunded priority list from the Service Chiefs; and,
2. The President's FY13 budget would reduce Army ground forces by 100,000 over ten years. Something that many have been saying is too much too quickly before a thorough assessment of possible future needs is completed.

[Source: NAUS Weekly Update 20 Apr 2012 ++]

USERRA Update 13: Legislation to strengthen a law protecting the employment rights of veterans and military servicemembers has been introduced in the Senate. The legislation S.2299, called the Servicemembers Rights Enforcement Improvement Act "will help force the hand of those who have failed to follow the law when it comes to providing our nation's heroes with the basic safeguards they deserve," said Sen. Patty Murray, (D-WA.), chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, who introduced the bill on 18 APR. The legislation is meant to improve enforcement of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, known as USERRA,

which mandates that service members not be denied jobs or otherwise be penalized by employers because of their military obligations. The federal government, the nation's largest employer of veterans, is also the biggest offender of the law, The Washington Post reported in February. The bill would strengthen the employment protections in USERRA by:

- Enabling the Attorney General to investigate and file suit against a pattern or practice of USERRA violations by a state or private employer;
- Allowing the United States to serve as a named plaintiff in USERRA suits and to issue civil investigative demands for relevant documentary material; and
- Providing the Special Counsel with authority to subpoena relevant testimony and documents from Federal employees and agencies to carry out investigations.

SCRA protects servicemembers from discriminations and disabilities due to service in civil legal proceedings. This new bill would strengthen its protections by:

- Strengthening the protections that prevent judgments against a servicemember when they cannot appear in court because of military service;
- Broadening the authority of the Attorney General to investigate allegations of SCRA violations; and
- Clarifying the right of servicemembers to bring a private law suit to assert their SCRA rights.

Last month, John Berry, director of the Office of Personnel Management, issued a memo to senior federal executives calling for zero tolerance for federal violations of the USERRA. Murray's bill would also strengthen protections for servicemembers who are improperly overcharged or foreclosed upon by banks. The proposed legislation is being supported by several veterans organizations. "Servicemembers who currently seek relief under these acts often face significant roadblocks," said Paul Rieckhoff, founder and executive director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. "Even if a violation exists, it can be difficult and expensive for vets to challenge employers armed with greater legal and financial resources." [Source: Washington Post Steve Vogel article 19 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Mental Health Care Update 11: The Department of Veterans Affairs plans to hire 1,900 new mental health staffers to deal with gaps in existing psychiatric care and to prepare the agency for next wave of veterans returning home from war. Veterans groups hailed the news as a much-needed move to cut down on wait times for mental health care. But they also questioned whether filling the positions can be done, given the nationwide shortage of those specialists and the high vacancy rates which already exist throughout the department. Last year, department specialists provided mental health services to 1.3 million veterans. Since 2007, the VA has seen a 35 percent increase in the number of patients receiving mental health care. It currently employs nearly 20,600 mental health staffers. The 1,900 new positions will include 1,600 clinicians — nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers — and another 300 support staff.

In a statement, VA secretary Eric Shinseki said that the move is designed to anticipate the needs of returning veterans. "History shows that the costs of war will continue to grow for a decade or more after the operational missions in Iraq and Afghanistan have ended," he said. "As more veterans return home, we must ensure that all veterans have access to quality mental health care." Next week, in response to congressional requests, the VA inspector general's office is expected to release findings detailing longer-than-promised wait times for that mental health care. In addition, a USA Today report earlier this month found that many psychiatrist posts within the department's hospitals are currently unfilled, with vacancy rates above 20 percent in many rural areas. Comments regarding the proposed hiring's included:

- Joe Davis, spokesman for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, said hiring the new staffers would be a boost for veterans' care, but the group remains concerned about where the new specialists will be assigned and how they are going to recruit so many mental health practitioners when there is a nation-wide shortage. "The success of the decision remains to be seen," he said.
- Jacob Gadd, deputy director of the American Legion's Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation Division, said their officials are hopeful the new posts — and the existing vacancies — can be filled quickly. "There's a great need for this mental health staff," he said.
- House Veterans Affairs Chairman Jeff Miller, R-Fla., said he'll ask the VA for a revised budget detailing whether past funds assigned for mental health priorities were properly used, or if they were diverted to other areas. He called the new hires a step forward, but also called for better intervention training for all VA employees, to recognize signs of post-traumatic stress and suicidal thoughts. "There are a surge of veterans coming home, and VA must be prepared to meet their needs," he said. "Right now, too many veterans fall through the cracks."
- VA department officials said recruitment for the new posts will begin this month, and they will pay for the effort by shifting funds from other budget accounts. As the 1,900 new employees are added, they will continue to assess overall staffing levels and could hire more specialists in the future.

[Source: Stars & Stripes Leo Shane article 19 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Mental Health Care Update 12: The Department of Veterans Affairs has expanded its mental health services to include professionals from two additional health care fields: marriage and family therapists (MFT) and licensed professional mental health counselors (LPMHC). "The addition of these two mental health professions is an important part of VA's mission to expand access to mental health services," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Veterans and their families can face unique challenges. By providing a complete range of services, we can help them address those challenges and help keep more families together." The two fields will be included in the hiring of an additional 1,900 mental health staff nationwide that VA announced 19 APR. Recruitment and hiring will be done at the local level. The new professionals will provide mental health diagnostic and psychosocial treatment services for Veterans and their families in coordination with existing mental health professionals at VA's medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics, and Vet Centers. VA has developed qualification standards for employment as LPMHCs and MFTs and has announced the appointments of mental health and health science professionals to serve on professional standards boards. The boards will review applicants for LPMHC and MFT positions in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to determine eligibility for employment and the government grade level appropriate for the individual in the selected position. The boards will also review promotions in these positions. For more information about mental health care that VA provides, visit:

<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/>. [Source: VA News Release 24 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Mental Health Care Update 13: Nearly seven years after problems with wait-time data were uncovered, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) still has a patient-scheduling system that is "broken," according to Linda Halliday of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Inspector General (OIG). And on 25 APR, Halliday testified before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) at a hearing that focused on VA's mental health care. Sen. Patty Murray (D=WA) opened the hearing as committee chair and quickly drew attention to an OIG report released 23 APR that found VHA's data on waiting times for mental health care patients was grossly inaccurate. Murray said the OIG findings "show some serious discrepancies in what VA has been telling this committee" and that "the existing scheduling system is hopelessly insufficient and needs to be replaced." She

said VA "is failing to meet its own mandates for timeliness, and instead is finding ways to make the date look like they are complying."



Linda Halliday

While VHA reported, for fiscal year 2011, that 95 percent of first-time patients received full mental health evaluations within 14 days, Halliday testified that OIG's analysis "projected that VHA provided only 49 percent (approximately 184,000) of first-time patients their evaluations within 14 days." The report also noted that VHA completed only 64 percent of new patient appointments within 14 days of their desired date. "We found VHA's mental-health performance data is not accurate or reliable," Halliday told the committee. "VHA's measures do not adequately reflect critical dimensions of mental health-care access." She said that inaccuracies in data collected by VHA on mental-health staffing and productivity made it less useful for VHA decision-makers to "evaluate productivity across the system, and establish mental-health staffing and productivity standards."

American Legion National Commander Fang A. Wong said the hearing "shines a bright light on the problems VHA continues to have with its data collection on waiting times for our veterans being treated for mental-health issues. We can understand a four- or five-percent margin of error in these statistics, but they were off by almost 50 percent. How does one account for such wild inaccuracy by a federal agency? Especially one that is responsible for treating our veterans?" Wong said the Legion has urged VA to increase its mental-health care staff and facilities. "Adding 1,900 more positions in mental health care is a step in the right direction, but it now appears they may be in need of some new data analysts at VHA." They should have gotten the message by now. We saw this problem crop up in two previous OIG audits — one in 2005 and another in 2007. And their patient-scheduling problem still isn't fixed. The American Legion is asking the same question as Congress asked at the hearing: Why?" The SVAC held two previous hearings on VA mental health care last year in July and November. Murray said the committee was finding "a discrepancy between what VA was telling us, and what the providers were saying" and called upon the VA's OIG "to investigate the true availability of mental health-care services at VA facilities."

William Schoenhard, testifying for VA, agreed with OIG's assessment that the patient-scheduling system needs to be revised. He also said mental-health services must continue to be further integrated into primary care, and that stigmas associated with mental health care need to be addressed. "Madame Chairman, we know our work to improve the delivery of mental health care to veterans will never be done. We appreciate your support and encouragement in identifying and resolving challenges, as we find new ways to care for veterans." VA has been working to develop a new scheduling system for its patients. "VA officials told us that their new scheduling package would be open-sourced and could take up to two years to put into place," said Jacob Gadd, deputy director of health in the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division. "We most assuredly applaud VA's addition of 1,900 additional mental health-care workers, but without an accurate and effective scheduling system, how will optimal use be made of all those new clinicians and support staff?" While the committee members asked many tough questions during the hearing, Murray made it clear that "while we have discussed a number of problems with the

system at large, none of this reflects poorly on VA's providers. I believe I can speak for all of us in thanking VA's many mental health providers for the incredible job they do. Let there be no mistake, these individuals are incredibly dedicated in their mission." [Source: American Legion article 26 Apr 2012 ++]

USS Scorpion Update 01: Shipwreck disaster experts are calling for a deep-sea expedition to a lost U.S. nuclear attack sub, the USS Scorpion, in an effort to verify a new theory on what caused the Cold War vessel to sink. The Scorpion was lost May 22, 1968, killing 99 men, about 400 miles south of the Azores Islands in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. The sub has been inspected by undersea recovery teams, including a visit in 1985 by oceanographer Robert Ballard before his team's discovery of the Titanic shipwreck. The cause of the sub's loss has remained hotly disputed. A Navy Court of Inquiry found "the cause of the loss cannot be definitively ascertained." "The families of those 99 men are still out there, and they want to know what happened," says former U.S. naval officer Paul Boyne, who presented a new mechanical explanation for the loss of the sub at a recent marine forensics symposium just outside Washington. Panelists at the event called for a summer expedition to the sub's wreck, led by P.H. Nargeolet, another Titanic explorer, saying it might put to rest a multitude of theories about the Scorpion's demise -- ranging from a covert Soviet attack to a torpedo self-firing into the ship to a faulty trash disposal.

Evidence for a more mundane explanation comes from the sub's propeller shaft, Boyne says. Undersea photographs show it rests about 20 yards outside the wreck on the seafloor, about 11,220 feet underwater. Boyne suggests that rubber bearings holding the propeller shaft failed, putting stress on the coupling connecting it to the engine. The coupling's bolts failed catastrophically during a deep test dive, the theory goes, spilling water into the sub too rapidly to allow ballast maneuvers to raise the ship to the surface. As support, Boyne points to the loss in 1963 of the USS Thresher, the only other nuclear submarine lost by the Navy. The Thresher suffered a similar crushing end but retained its propeller shaft within its hull. In its planned proposal to the U.S. Navy's Naval History & Heritage Command (NHHC) in Washington, the team would send a robot sub to the wreck to photograph the displaced shaft. The robot would send a small tethered camera into the ship's engine room to examine the damage to the coupling bolts.

Because the sub carried two nuclear-tipped torpedoes and a nuclear reactor, the Navy has periodically tested the water around the submarine for radiological releases, at least as recently as 1998. "What happened to the Scorpion isn't so much a mystery, as a secret," says Ed Offley, author of *Scorpion Down: Sunk by the Soviets, Buried by the Pentagon*, which argues for the covert Soviet sub attack explanation. Investigators who start from technical documents related to the ship's loss, typically differ with his interpretation, he says, which was based on interviews with Navy personnel. "It couldn't hurt to have a documented expedition to Scorpion," says Offley, who is not a member of the proposed expedition team. On May 27, 1968, family members of the USS Scorpion's crew waited on a Norfolk dock for the return of the submarine. At least 11 of them have joined in the call for the expedition. [Source: Stars & Stripes Dan Vergano 12 Apr 2012 ++]

Agent Orange & Hypertension Update 01: A new Army Chemical Corps Vietnam-Era Veterans Health Study is designed to learn if high blood pressure (hypertension) and some chronic respiratory diseases are related to herbicide exposure during the Vietnam War. This study follows a request by Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki for VA to conduct research on the association between herbicide exposure and high blood pressure (hypertension), as a basis for understanding if hypertension is related to military service in Vietnam. VA is also interested in learning more about the relationship between herbicide exposure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). This study is a follow-up of a similar study conducted between 1999-2000

where the health status of individuals who served in the Army Chemical Corps since the 1990s was examined. Researchers have two questions:

- Is the risk of high blood pressure (hypertension) related to Agent Orange exposure during service in Vietnam?
- Is the risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), including chronic bronchitis and emphysema, related to Agent Orange exposure during service in Vietnam?

Approximately 4,000 Veterans who served in the U.S. Army Chemical Corps sometime during the Vietnam era (1965-1973) were asked to participate in this study. Army Chemical Corps personnel were responsible for the maintenance and distribution or application of chemicals for military operations. Army Chemical Corps personnel who served in Vietnam during the Vietnam War constitute the largest group of Army Vietnam Veterans who were thought to have had the greatest potential exposure to herbicides. Participants from earlier Army Chemical Corps study rosters were selected and additional volunteers are not needed. Each Veteran selected for this study represents other Veterans with similar characteristics. Study methods will include telephone interviews, reviewing medical records, and measuring the blood pressure and lung function of the selected Veterans. [Source: <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/epidemiology/studies/vietnam-army-chemical-corps.asp> Apr 2012 ++]

Korean War 60th Anniversary Update 02: On 17 APR, Representative Charles Rangel (D-NY) was joined by colleagues Representatives. John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI), Sam Johnson (R-TX), and Howard Coble (R-NC), as he introduced H.Res. 618, a resolution that urges Congress to designate 2012-2013 as the "Year of the Korean War Veteran," and recognizing the 60th anniversary of the Korean War. Rangel and the three original co-sponsors to the bill are the last four remaining Korean War Veterans in the U.S. Congress. "Many Korean War Veterans came home from Korea without much of the fanfare that the heroes of World War II received and slowly, the American public is forgetting the sacrifice that our Korean War heroes displayed. Our nation has a responsibility to make sure that doesn't happen," said Rangel.

"The Korean War Veterans halted the tide of communism on the Korean Peninsula and it is largely because of their sacrifices that the Republic of Korea was able to develop into a modern and prosperous democracy," Rangel stated. "My comrades and I are proud to see that in the 60 years since the outbreak of the War, South Korea has emerged from a war-torn country into one of the major players in the world in addition to being the seventh-largest trading partner of the United States ." Added Rangel: "I hope our nation will be able to pay proper tribute the heroes that fought in the Korean War before history forgets them completely. This celebration may be the last one, in which a lot of my comrades, most of whom are over 80 years old, will be able to participate. Not too many of us will be around for the 70th anniversary."

To ensure that the Korean War is never again called the Forgotten War, The Department of Defense 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration (KW60) Committee, a task force authorized by the 2011 Defense Authorization Bill, requested Rangel to spearhead this resolution. The KW60 Committee will implement a national campaign to honor America 's Korean War Veterans. The campaign will remember those still counted among the Missing in Action, educate the American people concerning the ongoing relevance of the Forgotten War, and include commemorative ceremonies in the United States and Korea in recognition of June 25, 1950 and July 27, 1953. It will also launch a media and outreach campaign for Veterans Day 2012. This resolution will enhance those efforts and give the campaign a platform for a nationwide commemoration. [Source: AFSA On Call 19 Apr 2012 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure ~ Lejeune Update 28: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

Key lawmakers are appealing directly to President Obama to get the Veterans Affairs Department to provide free health care to veterans who were exposed to contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune during a 30-year span that ended in 1987. Their appeal comes after VA — while acknowledging the drinking water in barracks, housing, schools, hospitals and offices on the base was contaminated — has refused to provide health care until there is a clear link to adverse health effects. This might not be determined before 2014. Millions of people who lived and worked at Camp Lejeune could have been affected by the industrial and toxic wastes, but years of study about the possible duration and level of contamination have provided only “limited” and “suggestive” evidence that exposure for more than 20 years might have resulted in issues such as kidney cancer.

In February, Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), the House Veterans Affairs Committee chairman, proposed VA could at least provide health care for Camp Lejeune veterans by creating a special health care category that covered them. The cost of care could be paid, Miller suggested, by \$5 billion in excess health care funds the VA discovered when preparing the 2013 budget. Miller’s proposal, which would have applied only to veterans and not to family members who might have lived or visited Lejeune, was rejected by VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, who said in a 9 APR response to Miller that it was premature to provide health care to everyone who served at Lejeune from 1957 until 1987. Shinseki suggested veterans could still file for disability claims if they felt they had a service-connected disability. About 1,000 Camp Lejeune veterans have filed disability claims, he said, and 238 were found to have service-connected disabilities “for some reason” that did not depend on a scientific link to consuming contaminated ground water.

Miller and other lawmakers are not ready to take no for an answer. In a joint letter to President Obama, sent 20 APR, the leaders of the House and Senate veterans’ affairs committee are renewing Miller’s suggestion. “The VA has existing resources which could be reserved without derailing other initiatives,” the letter says, asking that a portion of excess funds resulting from overestimating health care costs be allocated “to provide care for sick Camp Lejeune veterans and family members.” The letter is signed by Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee chairwoman; Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), the ranking Republican on Murray’s committee and a longtime advocate of government health care for Lejeune veterans and families; and by Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA), ranking Democrat on Miller’s committee “There is enough scientific evidence already that warrants giving the benefit of the doubt to those who need help now,” the joint letter says. [Source: ArmyTimes Rick Maze article 23 Apr 2012 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Emissions Update 18: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

Veterans advocates favor proposed legislation that would require the Veterans Affairs Department to record the names of troops and veterans who served near open-air burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. But some veterans groups say H.R.3337, the Open Burn Pit Registry Act, does not cast a wide enough net to capture all who may suffer health problems related to environmental exposure in the war zones — not just smoke from unit-level waste burns but also air pollution and dust particulates. Representatives from several veterans groups told the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee’s health panel 16 APR that a “burn pit register” would improve the ability of the Defense Department and VA to care for troops and veterans with health concerns possibly related to the billowing smoke that poured from waste disposal pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. They say the accounting also would improve veterans’ ability to file future claims. “Burn pits have the potential to be the

insidious and long lasting health issue of our generation that Agent Orange has been for Vietnam-era veterans,” said Ramsey Sulayman of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

The register, proposed by Rep. Todd Akin (R-MO) would cost roughly \$2 million, according to VA. The plan has bipartisan support from more than 50 House members. But Ralph Ibson, national policy director for the Wounded Warrior Project, worries that the proposed bill does not cover other “environmental factors in southwest Asia” that “may also be implicated in increased risk of illness.” The Institute of Medicine recently suggested that “service in Iraq and Afghanistan — a broader consideration of air pollution than exposure only to burn pit emissions — might be associated with long-term health effects,” Ibson said. VA opposes the bill because current law already permits the department to create a registry, according to Robert Jesse, VA principal deputy undersecretary for health. Jesse added that VA officials believe a registry is not the “appropriate epidemiological tool ... to identify possible adverse health effects associated with certain environmental exposures.” Neither VA’s Agent Orange nor Gulf War registers “have been useful in terms of researching the types of health concerns raised by the veterans,” he argued. VA is monitoring Iraq and Afghanistan veterans in two long-term epidemiological studies, the Millennium Cohort and New Generation studies. [Source: ArmyTimes Patricia Kime article 30 Apr 2012 ++]

Military Retirement Commission: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not

authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

A major veterans group says the Pentagon is stacking the deck with its plan for an independent retirement reform commission by proposing that a majority of its members have no military experience and declaring that cutting benefits is a chief goal. “This is not impartial — it’s a loaded deck,” said Joe Davis of Veterans of Foreign Wars, a 2.1 million-member organization that opposes the commission, which the Defense Department wants Congress to approve. Under the DoD proposal, the commission would have nine members — six appointed by Congress, three by the president. A minimum of three, but no more than four, commissioners could have military experience, with at least one having served as an enlisted member and at least one in a reserve component. Final recommendations by the commission would require five votes, so commissioners with military experience could be outvoted by those who never served, under the Pentagon proposal. “For the Defense Department to limit veteran representation on a so-called independent commission means the outcome is already a done deal,” Davis said.

The House and Senate Armed Services committees will consider the plan for inclusion in the 2013 defense authorization bill. No commissioners could be members of any military or veterans advocacy group, and none could have worked for such groups in the year before appointment to the commission. The bulk of the commission would be made up of people with “significant experience in federal retirement systems.” The Pentagon plan specifically states that the commission’s work would not adversely affect current troops. However, current troops would be allowed to choose an alternative retirement option that might benefit them, if they so desire.

Over the years, commissions, advisory groups, task forces and think tanks within and outside the Pentagon have proposed overhauling military retirement. But the new commission is a more serious threat, Davis said, because of its proposed fast-track path. Under the formal proposal sent to Congress on 13 APR, the president and Congress can accept or reject the commission’s final plan in full but may not modify it in any way. “This is the part where we are railroaded,” Davis said. “Where did that come from? Why would you mess with the integrity of the all-volunteer force with some plan that cannot be modified?” The commission would have 15 months to propose an overhaul of retired pay, working from a yet undisclosed plan to be provided by the secretary of defense. That plan is expected to propose eliminating traditional 20-year retirement, in place since 1946, and replacing it with a civilian-style, tax-deferred savings plan in which troops with as few as 10 years of service would accrue some retirement savings.

Recommendations would go to the White House and Congress. The president could disapprove specific recommendations, with commissioners getting one month to make revisions, if they choose. The president would approve or reject the final product. If it is approved, Congress would have 90 days to approve or reject it, with no ability to make changes.

Because it would take up to six months to set up the commission, 15 months for it to do its work, two months for presidential consideration and three months for Congress to review the final product, defense officials offer no estimates at this point about potential cost savings. But saving money is one of the five guiding principles in the Pentagon plan. "Putting the budget ahead of the troops is going to signal an end to the all-volunteer force, which ... has served our nation extremely well," Davis said. Defense officials, however, view the current system as outdated. "Unlike their predecessors, the generation entering the workforce today expects to work for many employers" over a career, defense officials said in their proposal to Congress. While not providing specifics, defense officials said they want to move away from the fixed 20-year system to a plan that gives at least something to a broader swath of the force. "Today, only a fraction of the force receives any retirement," officials said. "In fact, most leave with no retirement benefits." [Source: ArmyTimes Rick Maze article 30 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Budget 2013 Update 04: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.) Funding for veterans' health care programs is not subject to sequestration, the White House budget office announced 22 APR, ending months of speculation about how across-the-board budget cuts could be applied early next year if Congress cannot find a way to avoid fiscal disaster. Sequestration, looming because Congress and the White House failed to reach an agreement on a 10-year, \$1.2 trillion deficit reduction plan, also will not cut veterans' benefits, leaving only administrative expenses of the Veterans Affairs Department subject to reductions, according to legal opinion issued 22 APR by the White House's Office of Management and Budget. The announcement came in a letter to the Government Accountability Office, which had asked the White House for clarification about the automatic cuts' effect on VA. The Budget Control Act of 2011, which set up mechanism for cutting federal programs if a deficit spending agreement wasn't reached, specifically exempted veterans' benefits but had no clear statement about what might happen to veterans' medical care expenses.

Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee chairwoman and the Senate's chief negotiator last year in the attempt to get an agreement on cutting federal spending, said she is "pleased that this legal ambiguity has been cleared up." Murray said during negotiations with the House, "I can remember fighting for this exception as one area we cannot afford to cut back on." While the letter clarifies the situation for veterans' programs, the fate of military benefits remains unclear. The Budget Control Act allows, but does not require, the Defense Department to shield all military personnel programs from sequestration. It appears the military would face a cut of about \$57 billion, roughly 18 percent for each account, under sequestration. If personnel programs are exempt, the Defense Department would still have to save \$57 billion, and would be forced to just make deeper cuts in other programs. Defense Department officials have not said what they intend to do. [Source: NavyTimes Rick Maze article 23 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Claims Assistance Update 04: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.) Attorneys who help veterans file benefits claims are

worried that electronic claims processing will hurt rather than help some people unless lawyers also have access to the claims records. Electronic claims filing already is available from the Veterans Affairs Department, and is expected to expand over the next two years as VA tries to speed claims processing. Electronic claims are expected to help because their format ensures key information is collected, and because some claims can be processed almost entirely using computer software. But for security reasons, access to electronic records will be severely restricted. That has drawn complaints from veterans service officers and lawyers who help veterans. “The lack of access undermines our veterans’ due process and property rights,” said Paul Sullivan, a managing director at the Bethesda, Md.,-based law firm Bergmann & Moore LLC, who testified Wednesday before the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee on behalf of the National Organization of Veterans’ Advocates (NOVA). Sullivan said the Veterans’ Benefits Management System “does not contain a component absolutely vital to our nation’s veterans and beneficiaries: full and immediate access to veterans’ claims records by their attorney or agent.” “This is the top complaint of NOVA members who work with veterans every day,” he said.

Veterans who get help generally fare better in claims decisions, according to Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., the veterans’ committee chairman. “Being represented throughout the disability claims process is effective,” Miller said. “Study after study shows that veterans with representation have a greater chance of recovering their earned benefits than if they are not represented.” VA acknowledges as much. On average, compensation for a veteran represented by an agent, lawyer or veterans service officer was 144 percent higher than for a veteran who did not have representation, according to a 2005 report by the VA inspector general. That report may overstate the advantage, however, because veterans with simple claims for a single disability — and for lower compensation — might be more likely to file without help, while those with more significant disabilities and more complex claims might be more likely to seek help. Attorneys are not asking for anything unusual, Sullivan said. The Social Security Administration already allows read-only access to records for appointed representatives, he said. Congress could mandate access to electronic records.

A second request from Sullivan would involve changing VA culture. He complained that staff at some VA regional offices who are supposed to serve as liaisons with attorneys and agents are not helpful. Some, he said, “are directed by their supervisors to refuse to provide attorneys and agents with critical information.” In some cases, staffers provide wrong information or refuse to provide any answers, telling attorneys to call the VA’s hotline for help, he said. “Private practitioners currently have no assured access to VA claims processors, and long delays often result in cases where VA communicates with veteran advocates only via the U.S. Postal Service,” he said. Service officers from major veterans organizations who help file claims often are located in the regional office, and have access to staff and records. But they also have concerns about the new electronic claims system. VA is working on an access system for veterans service officers, but details have not been announced. There is no plan at the moment to grant similar access to a lawyer or other representative. “In order for us to do our job effectively, we must have access to VA computer systems, records, facilities and personnel,” said James Wear of Veterans of Foreign Wars. “Without this access, we might as well stand on the curb and shout at regional office buildings.” [Source: NavyTimes Rick Maze article 18 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Health Care Enrollment Update 03: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.) A lawmaker’s proposal that war veterans should be automatically enrolled in the Veterans Affairs Department health system has divided veterans groups over concerns that the legislation would strain an already burdened system and estrange those who did not serve in combat. Rep. Bill Owens (D-NY) said he sponsored H.R.1460 to ease the transition of injured personnel to the VA health system and reduce the paperwork associated with processing out of the military. Some advocacy groups, including the

American Legion and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, strongly favor the bill. But others, including the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), oppose it. Some comments were:

- “It could prove polarizing and send the message to non-deployed veterans that they do not qualify for VA health care,” said Shane Barker, VFW senior legislative associate.
- “Automatic enrollment of only combat theater veterans will likely be perceived as a negative decision by noncombat veterans, causing them to view it as a form of health care rationing and the government’s attempt to diminish their contributions of service to their country,” said retired Navy Cmdr. Rene Campos of MOAA.
- Adrian Atizado, assistant national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans (DAV), said automatic enrollment could “squeeze out” an older generation of veterans who have yet to enroll but will need care later in life. And it could cause a logjam for obtaining services after enrollment, he added. “We are keenly aware of delays in timely access once enrolled, generally because of insufficient VA resources, capacity or geographic barriers,” he said.

At a hearing on the proposed legislation and other veteran-related bills, the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee’s health panel gave little indication of how they will handle the proposed bill. The subcommittee would have to approve the bill for it to advance in the legislative process. Other proposed bills under consideration by the panel include:

- H.R.3016, a bill to direct the Defense Department and VA to jointly manage the Federal Recovery Coordination Program, an initiative that assigns a nurse manager or social worker to wounded warriors to guide them through their recovery and rehabilitation process.
- H.R.3279, proposing to amend a law allowing VA to provide monetary assistance and services for caregivers to include those helping seriously ill veterans.

Veterans groups unanimously support the latter and generally said they favor the former, emphasizing that the entire Federal Recovery Coordination Program needs better oversight by VA, DoD and Congress. Robert Jesse, VA’s principal deputy undersecretary for health, said his department has not yet formed an opinion on Owens’ bill. But VA opposes the effort to direct joint operation of the FRCP, saying the proposed legislation duplicates existing requirements for the two departments to work together. He added that VA supports expanding comprehensive assistance for family caregivers to include those helping the seriously ill, but VA would need to define the term “serious illness” to determine who would be eligible. According to VA, the legislation would result in an estimated 870 veterans and service members qualifying for the caregiver stipend and benefits, at a total cost of \$45 million the first year and \$263.5 million over five years. [Source: NavyTimes Patricia Kime article 18 Apr 2012 ++]

MCAS Futenma Okinawa Update 04: A top member of Japan’s ruling party privately asked local leaders here on 17 APR to support the relocation of the Futenma air station to Kadena Air Base, according to those who participated in the meetings. But mayors of two towns near Kadena said they rejected the proposal by Hajime Ishii, a senior member of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda’s Democratic Party of Japan who traveled to the island to sound out the municipal governments on shifting Marine helicopters and other aircraft to the Air Force base. With support from the U.S. Senate, the idea has been gaining steam over the past year, and Ishii’s visit came as U.S. and Japanese diplomats met again in Tokyo in another attempt to come to an agreement on the realignment of U.S. forces on Okinawa. Okinawa City Mayor Mitsuko Tomon said she met with Ishii for about one hour and told him that residents would never accept new Marine Corps air traffic at Kadena after enduring decades of noise from the Air Force. “I was told that it is a plan to move the Futenma operations to military bases in multiple locations throughout Japan, and Kadena is one of them,” she said. Ishii did not give further details of the proposal or say what

other U.S. bases may be affected, but Ishii told her that information would be made clear in the “not-so-distant future,” according to Tomon.

During a press conference 17 APR in Naha, Ishii said he is proposing to move Futenma to another U.S. military base temporarily, possibly one on Okinawa, until a permanent location somewhere else in Japan can be found. The lawmaker would not confirm that Kadena is being considered. He said he is planning to make a formal proposal to Noda for the relocation of Futenma before the end of the month. The U.S. Senate already has mandated that the U.S. military conduct an independent study this year that specifically considers moving the Marine Corps flight operations at Futenma to Kadena Air Base as an alternative to current realignment plans, which call for building an off-shore airfield near the city of Nago. The U.S. and Japan want to redeploy about 8,000 Marines off Okinawa and close some bases here, including Futenma. But public opposition to the Nago plan has held up progress for years and prompted the two countries to begin renegotiating plans for U.S. forces in February. Under the Kadena plan, Marine Corps flight operations would be relocated to the air base, and some Air Force units would be shifted to other bases in the region. Sen. Jim Webb (D-WV), who traveled to Japan earlier this month to push for a breakthrough in the realignment, has said the Kadena proposal could result in decrease in military air traffic on the island.



Marines from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, get set to board the USS Germantown, on Feb. 2, 2012, in preparation for a routine patrol of the Asia-Pacific region. U.S. Marines based on Okinawa reportedly would be spread out across the Pacific as part of a strategic realignment plan now being worked out with Japan

On 16 APR, U.S. Assistant Secretary of East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell met again with Japanese delegates at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo for the newest round of negotiations. “It’s still a work in progress, we’re still comparing perspectives, but we’ve made a lot of progress over the course of discussions yesterday and today, and I’m very confident that we will be able to come to an agreement on the way forward between the United States and Japan on issues associated with force realignment,” Campbell said Monday, according to a transcript released by the State Department. The meeting comes in advance of a planned trip to the U.S. by Noda later this month. Both countries have indicated his trip may coincide with developments in a new security agreement. [Source: Stars & Stripes Travis Tritten and Chiyomi Sumida article 17 Apr 2011 ++]

Vet Cremains Update 10: On 20 APR ten veterans were buried with full honors in an Arizona cemetery. One served in Africa during World War II, another in Korea. A third earned an Army Commendation Medal for his service in Vietnam. The men were homeless or indigent when they died, and their remains sat unclaimed in funeral homes for months, even years. In other states, volunteers have found the remains of veterans who fought in the Civil War. A new bill S.2244 : Veterans Missing in America Act of 2012 from Sens. Rob Portman R-OH) and Mark Begich (D-AK) would instruct the Department of Veterans Affairs to work with veterans’ organizations to help find and identify the unclaimed remains of former servicemembers, and, if they are eligible, to ensure their interment in national cemeteries. Portman and Begich’s office predict bipartisan support for the bill,

which they expect to pass with little resistance. A similar bill H.R.2051 sponsored by Rep. Pat Tiberi, R-Ohio, already has 38 co-sponsors. But a version that was introduced in the last Congress died in committee.

Fred Salanti, the executive director of the Missing in America Project, which looks for and identifies the unclaimed remains of veterans and their dependents, worries that this year's legislation will meet a similar fate. "To me it's very frustrating, because anybody that hears what we're doing or sees what we're doing automatically is on board," he said. Since Salanti's organization began in 2006, its work has led to the recovery, identification and burial of the remains of more than 1,600 veterans. He said the volunteers expected to reach 2,000 burials within the next couple of months. Many of the veterans they find were homeless or indigent when they died, he explained, while others were lost in mix-ups after their spouses or other loved ones died. The legislation, Salanti hopes, would help streamline the process and encourage funeral homes — which are sometimes fearful of releasing information or burial rights due to liability issues — to work with veterans' organizations to identify unclaimed remains.

Neither the National Funeral Directors Association nor the Cremation Association of North America has records on the number of unclaimed remains at funeral homes. Barbara Kemmis, the executive director of the Cremation Association of North America, said the issue of unclaimed remains came up at a recent trade conference. Her impression from funeral home directors was that it's an extensive problem. Funeral home directors will, "to a one," she said, do everything they can to preserve cremated remains on the off chance that someone claims them. Some have even put up additions or new buildings to store them. The Congressional Budget Office hasn't researched the cost of the Senate bill yet. A representative from Portman's office said the CBO suggested that the cost should be low, considering that the VA already sets aside money for burying eligible veterans in national cemeteries. Another provision of both versions of the bill would instruct the VA to create a nationwide public database of missing remains to aid in their identification. Portman's office added that the VA already keeps a database of veterans' grave sites that could be adapted for accounting for missing remains, keeping costs down. There's no CBO research into the House version of the bill, either, but an aide from Tiberi's office said the cost would be "negligible." [Source: Medil News service Andy Matarrese article 19 Apr 2012 ++]

Vet Cremains Update 11: The Missing in America Project (MIAP) will conduct its first ceremony in the State of Virginia by honoring eighteen veterans whose cremated remains have been in the care of Altmeyer Funeral Homes of Newport News, Virginia Beach, and Bucktrout Funeral Home in Williamsburg, yet have remained unclaimed. Services will be conducted with full military honors for the following eighteen veterans at 11:00 am, Saturday, May 12, 2012 at Bucktrout Funeral Home, 4124 Ironbound Road, Williamsburg, VA 23188

- Sgt. Carrel D. Cramer, 1920-1973, WWII US Army Air Force 1940-1945
- PFC Willie N. Dailey, 1933-2010, USA 1955-1957
- Captain Raymond H. Diggle, 1914-2003, USN Retired 1942-1972
- Corporal Durwood C. Ewell, 1930-1988, USA 1950-1953
- Fireman First Class Petty Officer Henry Ferguson, 1929-2002, USN 1946-1948
- Sgt Carl Galimore, 1922-1996, USA Retired, 1942-Jan 1946, Mar 1946-1965
- Technician 5th Grade Murray Gray, 1919-2001, USA 1942-1946
- Chief Aviation Pilot Henry G. Luhring, 1922-1996, USN 1942-1946
- Technician 4th Grade Martin C. Malone, 1917-1997, USA 1943-1945
- Sgt Peter J. Maresca, 1907-1974, USA 1943-1945
- Sgt Stuart B. Miller, 1896-1989, USA 1917-1919
- Chief Storekeeper Robert A. Rees, 1905-1991, USN 1942-1944
- Pvt George S. Roger, Jr. 1917-1992, USA 1946-1947

- Lt. Parke S. Rouse Jr. 1916-1997, USN 1942-1946
- Pfc Ray C. Seigla, 1924-2007, USA 1943-1946
- Cpl Harry Silverman, Jr. 1917-1978, USA 1943-1946
- AB Thomas B. Smith 1942-2007, US Air Force 1961-1963
- Pfc Robert L. Sumner, 1913-1983, USA Air Corp 1942-1945

A Bucktrout-Altmeier Funeral Home hearse carrying the cremated remains will be escorted by members of the MIAP, Veteran's Recovery Program, with American flags flying on motorcycles and vehicles to Quantico National Cemetery. The hearse will be followed by Patriot Guard Riders, Mustangs M/C, Combat Veterans M/C, other participating veterans organizations and any member of the public who like to attend via motorcycle or vehicle.

Government officials, the public and media are invited to attend. Details are as follows:

- Services will be conducted 12 MAY 2012 at 11:00 am in the Bucktrout Funeral Home, 4124 Ironbound Road, Williamsburg, VA 23188
- Interment is scheduled for 14 MAY 2012 at 09:00 am in Quantico National Cemetery, 18424 Joplin Road, Triangle, VA 22172, Date: May 14, 2012
- For information and/or pre-event media coverage: Charlie Warthling - Virginia MIAP State Coordinator, 757.567.2682(C), 757.468.1139 harley4ever820409@yahoo.com

A second ceremony for which the public is encouraged to attend is scheduled on 10 MAY 2012 at 1300 hrs (1:00 p.m.) at Great Lakes National Cemetery, 4200 Belford Road, Holly, Michigan 48442. The Michigan Police Escort and Honor Guard, Vietnam Veterans of America #154 Honor Guard, American Legion Riders, Patriot Guard Riders, Native American Veterans of SE Michigan are scheduled to participant. The following are to be interred:

- John Wayne Lillibridge, US Army
- Stephen Lewandowski, US Army
- Wanda Sue Greene, spouse of Paul Rayburn Greene, US Army

The purpose of the MISSING IN AMERICA PROJECT is to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed cremated remains of veterans through the joint efforts of private, state and federal organizations; to provide honor and respect to those who have served this country, by securing a final resting place for these forgotten Heroes. For more information, visit <http://www.miap.us>. [Source: MIAP Press Release 18 & 20 Apr 2012 ++]

TSP Update 28: The Thrift Savings Plan Roth option slated to launch 7 MAY will not be available to civilian Defense Department employees and service members until summer or early fall. The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, which oversees the TSP, said earlier this week that not all federal agencies have completed the transition required to implement the Roth 401(k) and some would need additional time. Scheduled availability dates according to DFAS who cited complicated pay systems as the reason for the delay, are now:

- Marine Corps members in June;
- Defense and Veterans Affairs Department civilians in July; and t
- Army, Navy and Air Force service members by October; according to the Defense

The Army, Navy and Air Force have the most complicated systems because each has a different pay structure, and active-duty service members often change posts, DFAS spokesman Tom LaRock said. According to TSP officials, military service members are among those most likely to benefit from the Roth option. For young service members who might receive an annual allowance of \$20,000 to \$25,000, a Roth plan would ensure they are taxed on those earnings in the current year, rather than on presumably higher income upon retirement. The Roth offering is

similar to the one available to private sector employees. It will allow federal employees to invest money that's already been taxed so it cannot be taxed again upon withdrawal, unlike a traditional TSP investment. With the change, participants will be able to invest pretax or after-tax dollars in any of TSP's funds as long as their total contributions are within Internal Revenue Service limits. The IRS increased the cap on individual TSP contributions in 2012 from \$16,500 to \$17,000, due to a change in the cost-of-living index. Employees 50 and older can contribute an additional \$5,500.

"We have millions of people stationed everywhere around the world. When it comes to pay, you better get it right the first time," DFAS spokesman Steve Burghardt said. "We tread carefully in order to make sure that what we do works, and it works today and it works tomorrow and it works for every person." Employees of other agencies and departments also will have to wait longer to invest with a Roth account. Although TSP officials will be ready to enroll all beneficiaries in the new option by 7 MAY, some of the more than 100 payroll offices that submit funds to the TSP will not be ready to process Roth investments by that date, said Kim Weaver, external affairs director for the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board. Many of those offices provide services to several agencies, Weaver said, and FRTIB does not have a list of which payroll offices will be ready. She confirmed the Defense Department will not be ready in response to media inquiries.

This delay could be good for many because there is still a lot to learn about the ROTH TSP. It is not as simple as taxed-in/taxfree-out. It is not exactly like a ROTH IRA and the rules of how it will work really need to be better understood by all. For those considering the possibility of using the ROTH TSP, you have an option of planning ahead and reducing your TSP contributions now to get the matching, saving the reduced funds to supplement a later larger contribution the ROTH TSP while still meeting the IRS limit for the year - and if you decide not to use the ROTH TSP, you'll still be able to increase the regular TSP contributions from your pay with those saved funds to live on - but all TSP contributions have to come from your paychecks and cannot be added to with your savings. Confused yet? Wait till you learn about the pros/cons of the ROTH TSP -- it has the Required Mandatory Distribution at age 70 1/2 like the regular TSP (unless you still a Government employee at that time); there is a five-year requirement now and when you roll it, there will be another five-years for each subsequent roll into another ROTH IRA. (Source: GovExec.com Amanda Palleschi article 13 Apr 2012 ++)

Income Tax Extensions Update 01: Did you miss this year's 17 APR filing deadline. You are not alone. The IRS says 10 million of the 140 million Americans who file tax returns each year ask for extensions – and this year, Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney is one of them, according to The Washington Post. In fact, the IRS website <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=108326,00.html> has an entire section called Filing Late and/or Paying Late. If you have not filed the following is germane:

1. **Missed the deadline.** While midnight 17 APR was the deadline to file your taxes, it's also was the deadline to get an extension to file your taxes. A Form 4868 would have given you extra six months if you filled out the form correctly and sent it in by the deadline. U.S. citizens and residents are granted an automatic 2 month extension beyond 17 April if they are outside the United States or Puerto Rico on that date. If you intend to file during the two month period granted annotate the top of your tax form "**Taxpayer Abroad**" (temporary) or "**Out of the Country**" (you live outside the United States). It's important to understand the ramifications of not filing a past due return and the steps that the IRS will take. Taxpayers who don't file a past due return or contact the IRS are subject to the following:

- Penalties and Interest will be assessed and will increase the amount of tax due. Expect a failure to file penalty of 5% per month of taxes due up to a maximum of 25% with minimum penalty is \$135. In addition

a failure to pay penalty (i.e. interest) of one half of 1% will be assessed. If you pay with an IRS installment plan, that cuts your penalty down to a quarter of a percentage point monthly. If you owe less than \$10,000 and don't have any other problems with the IRS, this is as automatic as the tax-filing extension. You'll have to pay \$105 to set up the installment plan, but that gets cut in half (\$52) if you let the IRS take the money out of your bank account electronically.

- The IRS will file a substitute return for you. But this return is based only on information the IRS has from other sources. Thus, if the IRS prepares this substitute return, it will not include any additional exemptions or expenses you may be entitled to and may overstate your real tax liability.
- Once the tax is assessed the IRS will start the collection process, which can include placing a levy on wages or bank accounts or filing a federal tax lien against your property.
- Even if the IRS has already filed a substitute return, it still makes sense for you to file your own return to make sure you take advantage of all the exemptions, credits, and deductions you are allowed. The IRS will generally adjust your account to reflect the correct figures.

NOTE: Taxpayers who continue to not file a required return and fail to respond to IRS requests for a return may be considered for a variety of enforcement actions. Continued non-compliance by flagrant or repeat nonfilers could result in additional penalties and/or criminal prosecution.

2. **You might be a special case.** There are exceptions to every rule, even those written by the IRS. If you qualify for a program called Fresh Start, you get a penalty-free extension on actually paying your taxes. Even then, you will still owe interest. But you must fall into one of these categories:

- Wage earners who have been unemployed at least 30 consecutive days during 2011 or in 2012 up to this year's April 17 tax deadline; or
- Self-employed individuals who experienced a 25 percent or greater reduction in business income in 2011 due to the economy.
- you've survived a natural disaster in the past year or you were on active military duty, you might also qualify for the same break.

3. **Deadline not applicable.** There's one class of taxpayer that doesn't have to worry about today's deadline: those getting a refund. If Uncle Sam owes you, you won't be penalized for filing late.

4. **How you can avoid owing money on next year's return?** Many people don't file tax returns because they don't have enough money to pay the tax they owe. They find out after completing their return that their withholding or Estimated Tax payments do not equal their tax liability. To help avoid this situation, the IRS can advise taxpayers how to ask an employer to withhold enough tax from their pay. For any income that is not subject to withholding, the IRS can provide information necessary to make quarterly payments to cover any amount to be owed. To make payments electronically check out <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/article/0,,id=174251,00.html>, or go to the EFTPS Web site <http://www.irs.gov/app/scripts/exit.jsp?dest=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.eftps.com%2F>. Changes in financial circumstances could have an impact on taxes. For example, an increase in income, divorce, or selling an asset, may require adjustments to withholding or estimated payments. By taking these steps, taxpayers will be better able to meet their tax obligations and avoid tax day surprises.

[Source: MoneyTalksNews Stacy Johnson article 17 Apr 2012 ++]



VA Claim Processing Update 05: The Department of Veterans Affairs announced 16 APR the national deployment of claims transformation initiatives to 12 regional offices in the remaining months of fiscal year 2012 to improve benefits delivery to Veterans, families and their survivors. "This is an important milestone in our transformation to achieve the goal we established in 2009 of processing all disability claims within 125 days at a 98 percent accuracy level in 2015," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. The 12 regional offices to begin the deployment of the transformation initiatives include: Huntington, W.Va.; Hartford, Conn.; Portland, Ore.; Houston, Texas; Cleveland, Ohio; Des Moines, Iowa; Boise, Idaho; Phoenix, Ariz.; New Orleans, La.; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Atlanta, Ga.; Newark, N.J. This deployment follows four pilot programs at Indianapolis, Ind., Wichita, Kan., Milwaukee, Wis., and Fort Harrison, Mont., in 2012.

VA's transformation plan is based on more than 40 measures that were selected, evaluated, tested and measured from over 600 stakeholder and employee innovation ideas. "This national deployment, consisting of people, process and technology initiatives, follows comprehensive planning and testing to ensure we have the right recipe for success," added Under Secretary for Benefits Allison A. Hickey. During the national deployment, VA will further track and gauge the integrated effects of the transformation plan to reduce the backlog of disability claims and provide Veterans, their families, and survivors with more timely and accurate claims decisions. VA expects to deploy the transformation plan to the remaining 40 regional offices throughout calendar 2013. The major components of the transformation plan that will be nationally deployed include:

- The Intake Processing Center, which adds a formalized process for triaging claims documents and other mail, and drives faster and more accurate association of mail with Veterans' claims files;
- Segmented Processing Lanes, which allow claims that can be more easily rated to move quickly through the system and the more complex claims to be processed by VA's more experienced and skilled employees;
- Cross-Functional Teams, which support a case-management approach to claims processing that minimizes rework and reduces processing time; and
- The Veterans Benefits Management System, which is a new electronic claims processing system that employs rules-based technologies to improve decision speed and quality.

VA has already nationally implemented:

- Quality Review Teams, which are composed of dedicated local quality review specialists who will evaluate station and individual employee performance and conduct in-process reviews to eliminate errors at the earliest possible stage.
- Simplified and Standardized Rating Notification Letters, which give Veterans one simplified decision letter that provides notice of VA's decision, including a summary of the evidence considered and the reason for the decision.

VA provides compensation and pension benefits to more than four million Veterans, family members and survivors. Veterans filing claims may file online through eBenefits, a joint project between the Department of Defense and VA, at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov>. They can check the status of their claim with a Premium eBenefits account, and use a growing number of online services or contact VA Call Centers for more information at 1-800-827-1000 [Source: VA News Release 16 Apr 2012 ++]

Veterans' Treatment Court Update 14: As American military operations draw down in the Middle East, officials in several U.S. states are trying to hold down the number of soldiers who show up in local

criminal courtrooms and jails. The soldiers don't always show visible scars from the battle zone. A larger problem, say those who help treat and study them, are mental and emotional problems caused by violent bomb blasts, constant combat stress and the jarring return home to mostly civilian neighborhoods. "A significant sacrifice falls on a tiny footprint of the population," said James Holbrook, a University of Utah law professor who helped found the National Center for Veterans Studies at the school. "They see a whole host of issues when they come back and try to reintegrate. It's a very isolating experience." Some of the troubled soldiers commit crimes, sometimes driven by mental problems or drug and alcohol abuse. But officials in an increasing number of states say that these veterans — like some drug offenders — belong in rehabilitation and counseling programs instead of behind bars.

During the past three years, at least 27 states across the nation have set up "veterans' treatment courts," aimed at healing instead of punishing. Missouri currently has four such courts in St. Louis, Kansas City, Jackson County and Poplar Bluff. State Rep. Jay Barnes, R-Jefferson City, thinks the state should be adding even more. Barnes is sponsoring legislation to allow circuit courts in Missouri to establish such courts. The measure passed the House earlier this month and is pending before a Senate committee. The 13th Judicial Circuit has been working on a plan to establish a veterans court in Boone County. The circuit has applied for federal funding to establish the court. Defendants in veterans' courts, often first-time offenders, are usually pre-approved by the judge. Also in the courtroom is a liaison from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, scheduling therapy and helping ex-soldiers figure out which VA services they qualify for. In addition to treatment, the courts also try to find veterans who can befriend soldiers and relate their own experiences. For those who successfully complete treatment, some courts allow charges to be reduced or dropped. [Source: Columbia Daily Tribune article 15 Apr 2012 ++]

Manila VARO & OPC Update 06: A day after militants defaced the seal of the United States Embassy in Manila to protest against the RP-US Balikatan joint military exercises, security was beefed up at another US facility 17 APR, this time at the US Department of Veterans' Affairs in Pasay City. Radio dzBB's Sam Nielsen reported that elite police belonging to the Special Action Force guarded the veterans' office to avoid a repeat of the incident at the US Embassy a day earlier. Pasay City police chief Senior Superintendent Melchor Reyes Reyes said while the US facility in Pasay is only for veterans' affairs, they are not discounting the fact that it can be a target of protests. Reyes said they had been on alert since the lightning rally happened at the US Embassy on 16 APR. Some 50 militants on Monday defaced the embassy's seal and facade in a predawn lightning rally, hours before the Philippines-US Balikatan joint exercises were scheduled to start.. The Manila Police District on Tuesday tightened security around the US Embassy with members of the District Public Safety Battalion and the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT), the report said. [Source: GMA News 17 Apr 2011 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure ~ Lejeune Update 27: A group of lawmakers, including Florida Sens. Bill Nelson and Marco Rubio have asked the Pentagon to investigate allegations the Marine Corps and Navy have concealed information about water pollution at Camp Lejeune from regulators and the public. More than 17,000 Floridians may have been exposed to highly contaminated drinking water at the Marine Corps base in North Carolina before 1987, Corps figures show. The Corps has requested in recent months that the federal agency studying contamination at the base redact portions of a public report showing the location of active water wells and water systems at Lejeune. The Corps says releasing that information poses a security risk. Critics of the Corps argue that withholding such information makes it impossible for other scientists to evaluate the report. They say it is an attempt to hinder work that may prove the Corps and Navy culpable in poisoning veterans.

"Some of our offices have received information indicating that the (Navy) and (Corps) have used (public records) exemptions to justify the withholding of key information contained in many of these documents from the public without adequate legal justification," the lawmakers said in a letter to the Pentagon's inspector general. "We want to ensure the reports provided to the public have not, and will not, omit critical information that would aid future scientific inquiry and most importantly, cause the public to doubt the transparency and integrity of this inter-agency process," the letter signed by six senators and three representatives said. The letter was signed by Rubio, a Republican, and Nelson, a Democrat; Sens. Patrick Leahy, D-Vermont, Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, Richard Burr, R-N.C., and Kay Hagan, D-N.C.; and U.S. Reps. John Dingell, D-Mich., Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., and Brad Miller, D-N.C. So far, the inspector general has not said if it will investigate. The Corps said it has withheld nothing from the Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry, which is leading efforts to research the water contamination and its health effects.

ATSDR scientists are currently working on a water model that will help determine the level of contaminants throughout Lejeune going back decades. In January, a technical report supporting that work was released and was redacted at the Navy and Marine Corps' request. "We support (ATSDR) and have given them full access to our data so they can seek science-based answers for our former residents and workers," said Capt. Kendra Hardesty, a Corps spokeswoman. "Secrecy would be counterproductive to this mission." Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and administrator of ATSDR, told lawmakers earlier this year that ATSDR did not have the expertise to determine if the redactions are necessary, so it agreed to withhold the locations of the water system infrastructure. He said location information was "scientifically unnecessary." But the scientist hired by ATSDR to help produce the report took the rare step of criticizing Frieden in a letter to ATSDR's director, saying Frieden's statement about scientific necessity "is patently false and ... borders on the inane and silly." The scientist, Robert Faye, said the redactions "do indeed substantially compromise the technical and scientific integrity" of the report. An ATSDR spokeswoman said in a statement, "ATSDR has received all information necessary for completing" its Lejeune work. "Our science has not been compromised." [Source: Tampa Bay Times William R. Levesque article 13 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Special Monthly Compensation: It is possible to be compensated at a level above 100 percent for service-connected disabilities through VA's special monthly compensation (SMC) program. Conditions that rate SMC are identified by letters ranging from (k) to (s). Refer to rate tables at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/comp02.htm>. For example, a SMC(k) rating provides an additional \$99 per month above whatever your disability payment is already. Some SMC ratings provide \$8,000+ support beyond the amount awarded for a 100 percent disability rating. Medical conditions for which SMC applies include the specific loss or loss of use of organs or extremities — either an amputation or having no effective remaining function in an extremity or organ. VA lists these disabilities as eligible for SMC:

- Loss, or loss of use, of a hand or foot.
- Immobility of a joint or paralysis.
- Loss of sight of an eye (having only light perception).
- Loss, or loss of use, of a reproductive organ.
- Complete loss, or loss of use, of both buttocks.
- Deafness of both ears (having absence of air and bone conduction).
- Inability to communicate by speech (complete organic aphonia).
- Loss of a percentage of tissue from a single breast, or both breasts, from mastectomy or radiation treatment.

VA will pay more for combinations of these disabilities such as loss or loss of use of the feet, legs, hands and arms. The distinction between "loss of a limb" and "loss of use of a limb" is important — you don't have to undergo

an amputation to qualify for SMC. For example, if a veteran cannot balance or push off his foot, he may be considered to have lost the use of that foot, and so would qualify for SMC. Similarly, if a veteran cannot pick up objects with his hand, he may qualify for SMC for loss of use of that hand. In addition, veterans rated 100 percent disabled by VA who are housebound, bedridden or need the aid and attendance of another person also may be eligible for SMC. The amount of payment in these instances varies depending on the level of aid required. SMC payments aren't meant to compensate for potential loss of earnings from a disability but rather for noneconomic factors such as personal inconvenience, social inadaptability or the profound nature of a disability. In determining qualifications for SMC, the VA must review the medical evidence regarding the loss or loss of use and then make a decision regarding the level of SMC to be paid. Contact your nearest VA regional office for more details on SMC or you can call VA's main benefits information hotline toll free at 800-827-1000. VA also has a SMC fact sheet listed at <http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/factsheets/>. [Source: Command Master Chief Alex Keenan, USCG (Ret) article 23 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 60: Mike Grabski, 32, left the Marine Corps in 2006. The burly veteran, who played defensive end on the College of San Mateo football team before joining the military, would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night at home in San Bruno and grab his girlfriend, putting both hands around her neck. "I had no ill will toward her," Mr. Rodriguez, 28, said in an interview, "but while I was asleep I felt like I was still back there, and I acted it out." He said he slept with a .40-caliber Glock pistol under his pillow and drank a bottle of whiskey every night to help him forget the war and fall asleep. In December 2006, he filed a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs, arguing that he deserved a monthly disability check and priority mental health care from the agency because of post-traumatic stress disorder. More than five years later, he is still waiting for a final determination on his case. Rodriguez is one of 870,000 veterans nationwide who are waiting for a decision on a disability claim from the V.A. The waiting list has more than doubled since President Obama took office, despite the appropriation of more than \$300 million for a new computer system and the hiring of thousands of claims professionals nationwide.



VARO Oakland Facilities

The problem is particularly acute in the Bay Area, where, according to figures provided by the V.A., returning soldiers wait an average of 313 days for a decision. Eighty percent must wait at least 125 days. Of the nearly 60 V.A. offices around the country, the Oakland office at 1301 Clay Street, Rm. 1400 North is the slowest. "The place is filled with paper, piles of it, everywhere," said Representative Jackie Speier, a Democrat from San Mateo who toured the Oakland office last month as part of a meeting with the agency's regional director on behalf of a group of constituents with claims dating as far back as six years. According to Speier, the backlog in Oakland has grown so severe that all new claims are immediately sent to V.A. offices in Lincoln, Neb., and Muskogee, Okla., where the backlog is less serious. "It is an epidemic of delay," Speier said. "I did not exactly leave invigorated." The Bay

Citizen was denied a request to tour and photograph the department's Oakland office and interview its director, Douglas Bragg. Mr. Bragg was unavailable for comment, according to Jessica Arifianto, an agency spokeswoman, but she released a statement from the office. "We are continuously working to improve our timeliness and performance in our service to our veterans," it said, citing "ongoing efforts" to improve the quality and timeliness of ratings decisions, including hiring additional staff members, using simpler forms and forming quality control teams. The statement said the office was "taking steps" to meet a goal set by Eric Shinseki, the secretary of Veterans Affairs, to process all disability claims in fewer than 125 days with 98 percent accuracy by 2015.

On a tour of a V.A. facility in New Hampshire on 10 APR, Mr. Shineski said that, nationally, he expected waiting times to be cut in half over the next year as the new strategies are implemented. So far, however, there is little evidence of progress. According to government records, the number of V.A. disability claims, and the resulting backlog, has grown every year since Mr. Obama took office. While the agency has modestly increased the number of claims processed each year, the number of new claims filed has increased by 48 percent over the last four years as a flood of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans return home and file disability claims seeking compensation for wounds suffered in the line of duty (677,000 as of October 2011). At the same time, 231,000 Vietnam veterans have filed fresh disability claims related to diseases that the government only recently acknowledged stemmed from the spraying of the toxic defoliant Agent Orange.

"They build a technology infrastructure but haven't pulled the trigger," said Tom Tarantino, a former Army captain who works as a deputy policy director for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. "So all the extra money and full-time employees have done is prevent the problem from going way into the red. If they hadn't been doing what they were doing, it would be a total disaster." Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of veterans wait. "The V.A. is this monster paperwork machine," said Mike Grabski, 32, an Army veteran of the war in Afghanistan who has been waiting since December 2009 for his disability paperwork to go through. Grabski, who lives in Napa, is unemployed and suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. In 2007, Grabski's friend, Staff Sgt. Larry Rougle, was killed by Taliban fighters. "Seeing your best friend full of holes is not fun," he said. Grabski said that in addition to post-traumatic stress disorder, he sustained a mild traumatic brain injury, shoulder and knee injuries and hearing loss related to bomb blasts during his tours as a paratrooper in Iraq and Afghanistan. He also suffers from asthma, which he said worsened as a result of his service. "It's been a constant heartache," Mr. Grabski said of the disability claims process. "The money would be nice, but it's not about the money. It's about the care. I've got issues that need attending to."



Mike Grabski

For Rodriguez, the Marine Corps veteran from San Bruno, the money is important. He filed his initial disability claim for post-traumatic stress disorder in December 2006 and received a 30 percent rating from the V.A. 403 days later, in January 2008. Rodriguez said the rating, which entitles him to \$389 a month in disability payments, is not generous enough to allow him to take off from work to attend counseling and group therapy sessions that the V.A. offers during business hours. He said he wants the department to give him a 70 percent disability rating, which

would entitle him to \$1,272 in compensation monthly. In an interview, Rodriguez said he still experiences frequent flashbacks and intrusive feelings of guilt and grief, prompted by his experiences conducting house-to-house searches during his deployment in Iraq in 2004, as well as by a stint in New Orleans, where he deployed to collect bodies after Hurricane Katrina. "If they upgraded my claim, I would be able to go to group therapy every day," Mr. Rodriguez said, "and I hope I would get better." In handing down its initial 30 percent rating in 2008, the agency did not dispute Mr. Rodriguez's description of his condition, but wrote that "to assign a greater evaluation, there must be reduced reliability and productivity." Michael Blecker, the executive director of Swords to Plowshares, a nonprofit veterans services organization that is helping Mr. Rodriguez with his appeal, said disability is not only about the ability to work. "It's about somebody's quality of life and making them whole from what they lost in the war," he said. [Source: New York Times Aaron Glantz article 14 Apr 2012 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 61: The Veterans Affairs Department faces a "staggering" backlog of 897,566 disability claims with more than 65 percent pending for more than 125 days, a problem compounded by an error rate of 16 percent, representatives of veterans' services organizations told lawmakers on the House Veterans Affairs Committee on 18 APR. The department has seen a 48 percent increase in claims since 2008. Officials expect the backlog will grow to 1.2 million claims this year and another 50,000 will accrue in 2013 as veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars flood the system, Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki told the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee in March. He vowed to process all claims in fewer than 125 days with a 98 percent accuracy standard by 2015. Veterans' services organizations testimony included:

- Jeffrey Hall, assistant national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans, an advocacy group, told House lawmakers that "while the elimination of the backlog will be a welcome milestone, we must remember that eliminating the backlog is not necessarily the same goal as reforming the claims processing system, nor does it guarantee that veterans are better served."
- James Wear, assistant director for veterans benefits policy for the group Veterans of Foreign Wars, testified that the high error rate and the poor quality of VA's rating decisions, which determine the financial benefits veterans receive, are a serious problem. "Quality of decision-making is problematic . . . The national average [error rate] has remained nearly stationary at 16 percent for months," Wear said, adding the Veterans Benefits Administration's Baltimore regional office has the worst claims error rate in the country - - 29 percent, which is a slight improvement over its error rate of 33 percent just a few months ago.
- Randall Fisher, the American Legion's service officer for Kentucky, told lawmakers that in order to improve the claims process, VA must make training a priority and hire more veterans whose experience would prove beneficial. Hall said due to budget constraints, VA has cut back on training, conducting it locally rather than using its national training academy. "We have concerns that this change was made strictly for short-term financial considerations rather than to achieve the long-term goal of reforming the claims processing system," he said.

Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif., the ranking member on the committee, said, "There's no shortcut of getting around the basics -- of having well-trained employees who are empowered with the right tools and the right systems to get the job done right the first time." Shinseki promised earlier this month that VA will roll out its paperless Veterans Benefit Management System to 16 regional offices by September, with installation in all 56 regional offices in 2013. Hall said he was concerned budget constraints could impede the national rollout of VBMS, and urged the committee to provide full funding for the system. VA requested \$92.3 million for VBMS in 2013, and spent a total of \$343.6 million on the system in 2011 and 2012. Even as it moves to a paperless claims system, Hall said VA still will face older paper claims and it has yet to determine when or how those would be converted to digital files. A majority of claims processed each year are for reopened or appealed claims, which can remain active for decades. "Until all

legacy claims are converted to digital data files, VBA could be forced to continue paper processing for decades," Hall said.

Paul Sullivan, managing director for public affairs and veteran outreach at Bergmann & Moore LLC, a law firm based in Bethesda, Md., said veterans service organizations or lawyers representing veterans cannot gain access to VBMS, something he urged the committee to change. On 16 APR, VA announced plans to streamline and speed up disability claims processing by segmenting claims so those that can be more easily rated can be moved quickly through the system; more complex claims would be handled by more experienced and skilled employees. Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said VA's track record of making changes to its claims processing system has been "substandard." He added that VA needs to ensure that the much touted VBMS system is set up correctly and used efficiently. [Source: NextGov.com Bob Brewin article 19 Apr 2012 ++]

Louisiana Vet Cemeteries Update 03: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) held a dedication ceremony Saturday in Zachary, La., for the Louisiana National Cemetery, which is expected to open for burial this summer. "To offer full burial options for the Veterans of East Baton Rouge Parish and the surrounding area is a top priority," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "With the Louisiana National Cemetery, we are keeping our commitment to provide a final resting place and lasting tribute to the men and women who have kept their commitment to protect and defend our nation." Secretary Shinseki gave the keynote address and was joined by elected officials as the dedication plaque was unveiled. Military honors included a firing detail by Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 23rd Marines. The U.S. Navy Band New Orleans performed. The nearby Port Hudson National Cemetery will close to casketed burials in July 2012, although it will stay active with casketed interments of those with family members already buried there. Space for cremated remains is expected to be depleted in 2015. More than 14,000 military service members, Veterans and family members are interred there. Louisiana National Cemetery is 1.5 miles from Port Hudson National Cemetery on 103.8 acres of land. Construction underway includes both gravesites and columbarium development (for cremation burials) in two phases, providing a full range of burial alternatives to approximately 293,000 Veterans and eligible family members in the East Baton Rouge Parish and the surrounding area. The first phase of construction will be completed in May and will include approximately 17 acres with 2,500 in-ground pre-placed crypts, 1,128 traditional gravesites, an entrance feature, roadway, utilities and infrastructure. The second phase will cover approximately 12 acres, to include an administration building and maintenance complex; a committal service shelter; 1,000 columbarium niches; 1,130 in-ground cremation sites; and a public assembly area. The project will also incorporate systems for water distribution, roads, utilities, signage, landscaping and site furnishings.

The director of Port Hudson National Cemetery for the past three years, Rex Kern, will also direct Louisiana National Cemetery. He is responsible for burial, maintenance and administrative operations at both facilities as well as at Baton Rouge, Alexandria and Natchez National Cemeteries. In 2009, Kern graduated from the year-long Cemetery Director Intern Program at VA's National Cemetery Administration training center in St. Louis. Veterans with a discharge other than dishonorable, their spouses and dependent children are eligible for burial in a national cemetery. Military personnel who die on active duty, their spouses and eligible dependents are also eligible. Other burial benefits for eligible Veterans include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or marker - even if they are not buried in a national cemetery. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at <http://www.cem.va.gov> or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 800-827-1000. Additional information about the Louisiana National Cemetery is available by calling the Port Hudson National Cemetery office at 225-654-3767. Other veteran cemeteries located in Louisiana are:

Federal:

- Alexandria National Cemetery, 209 East Shamrock Ave., Pineville, LA 71360 (No new interments),
- Baton Rouge National Cemetery, 220 North 19th Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70806 (No new interments),
- Port Hudson National Cemetery, 20978 Port Hickey Road, Zachary, LA 70791 Tel: (225) 654-3767

State:

- Northwest LA Veterans Cemetery, 7970 Mike Clark Road, Keithville, LA 71047 Tel: 318-925-0612/5532F Email: nlvc@vetaffairs.la.gov.
- Central Louisiana Veterans Cemetery (CLVC), 3348 University Parkway, Leesville, LA 71446 (adjacent to Fort Polk) Tel: 337-238-6405/6448F Email: clvc@vetaffairs.la.gov.

[Source: VA News Release 29 Mar 2012 ++]

TRICARE User Fees Update 86: At a Pentagon press briefing on 16 APR, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said congressional tinkering with the \$613 billion 2013 Defense Department budget could have unintended consequences and result in a hollow force. Flanked by Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Panetta also defended the long-term Defense strategy unveiled in January, saying it will help the Pentagon to slash its budget by \$487 billion over the next 10 years. In March, Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI), chairman of the House Budget Committee, told a National Journal forum that senior military commanders were dishonest in presenting Congress with a budget request he doesn't believe they fully support. After Dempsey charged Ryan with calling senior military leaders liars, Ryan backed off and said, "I really misspoke." While not addressing Ryan directly, Panetta emphasized that the department's military leadership backed both the 2013 budget and the Defense strategy, which aims to develop a lean, postwar force focused on the Asia-Pacific region and enabled by technology, especially cyber, space and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems.



Defense Secretary Leon Panetta

Panetta said the 2013 budget is a "zero-sum game" and any changes to it will require cuts in key systems and projects that support the long-term strategy. The budget includes increases in fees for the Defense TRICARE health insurance program ranging from \$35 to \$155 per month for military retirees in an effort to curb spiraling health care costs. Defense Comptroller Robert Hale said in February that these increases, after four years, would boost retiree health care costs to just under \$2,000 a year, compared with the \$4,000 per year federal civilian employees pay. The National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS) called on Congress 16 APR to stop the increase in TRICARE fees. Retired Marine Lt. Gen. Jack Klimp, NAUS President and chief executive officer, said, "It's an outrage to hear DoD tell military retirees that the costs for promised benefits are squeezing out available resources for our national defense." Panetta said if Congress does not go along with the TRICARE fee increases this will amount to a \$13

billion hit to the long-term Defense budget, which could affect readiness and possibly lead to reductions in troop strength. [Source: NextGov Bob Brewin article 16 Apr 2012 ++]

TRICARE User Fees Update 87: The National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS) strongly opposes the Pentagon plan for steep increases in TRICARE fees. The federal fiscal year 2013 defense proposal would raise fees for all programs in TRICARE, the military health care plan. “It’s an outrage to hear DoD tell military retirees that the costs for promised benefits are squeezing out available resources for our national defense,” said retired Marine Lieutenant General Jack Klimp, NAUS President and CEO. “NAUS is compelled to protect those who served to protect us,” Klimp said. “After a career of defending our citizens and our freedom, these brave men and women should not have to fight to keep the nation’s side of its obligation.”

Under the Pentagon’s plan, TRICARE Prime annual enrollment fees for a family would jump nearly four-fold over five years. A rapidly growing enrollment fee would be initiated for TRICARE Standard and one would be imposed for the first time on TRICARE for Life, too. Pharmacy copays would increase to \$34 per prescription from \$9. And Beneficiaries would pay \$3 billion more next year for their healthcare benefits they sacrificed in armed service to earn. “Congress has a unique responsibility to act—indeed it has a moral obligation,” the NAUS President said. “TRICARE is an earned benefit. It is an integral part of a moral contract, a practical fulfillment of a nation’s promise to those who honorably served a career in the Uniformed Services.” The NAUS chief executive asks Congress to stop the war on TRICARE, “Protect those who served to protect you. They paid a personal price to earn their benefits. Don’t break faith.”

On an more upbeat note the House Armed Services Subcommittee said “No” to TRICARE fee increases. On 25 APR they released legislative language that will be considered by the Subcommittee on Military Personnel at their markup. Most significant, the Subcommittee mark does not, repeat, does not, contain provisions that will provide for higher TRICARE fees and premiums. Instead, the Subcommittee inserted language expressing a sense of Congress that “Career members of the uniformed services and their families endure unique and extraordinary demands and make extraordinary sacrifices over the course of a 20- to 30-year career in protecting freedom for all Americans; and those decades of sacrifice constitute a significant pre-paid premium for health care during a career member’s retirement that is over and above what the member pays with money.” [Source: NAUS News Release & AFSA On Call 16 & 25 Apr 2012 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 59: On 1APR7 , VA launched the VOW to Hire Heroes Act website. The site provides comprehensive information on all aspects of the VOW Act to include details about the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP), tax credits for employers, vocational rehabilitation services, the transition assistance program, and Department of Labor resources for veterans. Qualified veterans will be able to apply for the VRAP program which offers 12 months of retraining assistance directly from the site starting on 15 MAY 2012. For more information on the new programs and benefits, refer to <http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOW/>. [Source: VFW Washington Update 20 Apr 2012 ++]

GI Bill Update 117: Not waiting for Congress to act, President Barack Obama signed an executive order 27 APR aimed at protecting military families and veterans from the deceptive practices of some for-profit

colleges. Recipients of the GI Bill are often targeted by "diploma mills" because of the "easy availability of the federal loan money." The order will make it harder for post-secondary and technical schools to misrepresent themselves. Four protective actions included in the order aimed at preventing the predatory practices are:

1. Know Before You Owe” - Schools will be required to provide this federal form explaining financial aid to veterans and military personnel on he GI Bill.
2. Schools that Comply - The VA will post on its website which schools have agreed to follow the executive order and follow the protections.
3. Registering the "GI Bill" - To protect the term from being misused, the VA will register the term.
4. Complaint Central - the federal government is ordered to establish one central location where veterans and military families can report a problem or file a complaint making it easier for federal agencies to investigate.



The VA website offers a step-by-step process to the GI Bill, programs and benefits at <http://www.gibill.va.gov> and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) has a very helpful site at <http://newgibill.org> that contains a GI Bill calculator as well as advice from a fellow Vet and information about schools. [Source: Off The Base Bobbie O’Brian article 27 Apr 2012 ++]

Mobilized Reserve 24 APR 2012: The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 24 APR 2012. The net collective result is 1663 fewer reservists mobilized than last reported in the 15 APR 2012 RAO Bulletin. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 50,532; Navy Reserve 4,575; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve 9,815; Marine Corps Reserve 4,557; and the Coast Guard Reserve 839. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 70,318 including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found online at <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20120424ngr.pdf>. Reservist s deactivated since 9/11 total 776,176. [Source: DoD News Release No. 320-12 dtd 27 Apr 2012 ++]

PTSD Update 97: The Army Surgeon General's Office has issued new guidelines for diagnosing PTSD that criticize an approach once routinely used at Madigan Army Medical Center. The policy, obtained by The Seattle Times, specifically discounts tests used to determine whether soldiers are faking symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. It says that poor test results do not constitute malingering. The written tests often were part of the Madigan screening process that overturned the PTSD diagnoses of more than 300 patients during the past five years. Madigan medical-team members cited studies that said fabricated PTSD symptoms were a significant — and often undetected — phenomenon. They offered the tests as an objective way to help identity "PTSD simulators" among the patients under consideration for a medical retirement that offers a pension and other benefits. The team's approach once was

called a "best practice" by Madigan leaders, including Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho, a former commander who now serves as the Army's surgeon general. But earlier this year, amid patient protests about overturned diagnoses, the team was shut down as the Army launched several investigations.

Though none of the Army findings have been publicly released, the April 10 "policy guidance" from the surgeon general charts new directions for PTSD screening at Madigan and elsewhere in the Army medical system. The new policy downplays the frequency of soldiers faking symptoms to gain benefits, citing studies indicating it is rare. It also rejects the view a patient's response to the hundreds of written test questions can determine if a soldier is faking symptoms for financial gain, and it declares that a poor test result "does not equate to malingering, which requires proof of intent..." The new policy offers broad guidance on how the Army medical staff should evaluate and treat patients for PTSD, a condition affecting 5 to 25 percent of soldiers returning from combat zones. The 17-page document was distributed to commanders throughout the Army medical system. The surgeon general's policy document says:

- PTSD is being under — not over — diagnosed. It states that most combat veterans with PTSD do not seek help, and as a result their conditions are not recognized and identified.
- The policy also questions the use of a class of drugs in treating anxiety in troops with PTSD and other mental conditions. The document found "no benefit" from the use of Xanax, Librium, Valium and other drugs known as benzodiazepines in the treatment of PTSD among combat veterans. Moreover, use of those drugs can cause harm, the Surgeon General's Office said. The drugs may increase fear and anxiety responses in these patients. And, once prescribed, they "can be very difficult, if not impossible, to discontinue," due to significant withdrawal symptoms compounded by PTSD, the document states.
- The policy also said the harm outweighs the benefits from the use of some antipsychotics, such as Risperidone, which have shown "disappointing results" in clinical trials involving PTSD.
- PTSD patients may frequently have other physical and mental-health problems. The new memorandum encourages a range of treatment options, including yoga, biofeedback, massage, acupuncture and hypnosis.

In 2008, Congress approved an overhaul of the disability system, saying a soldier rendered unfit for duty by PTSD qualified for a medical retirement. Since then, the number of Army personnel with PTSD receiving a temporary disability (the first step in the retirement process) has escalated sharply. More than 2,790 soldiers were given a PTSD-related temporary disability in 2011, more than a fivefold increase since passage of the congressional overhaul. The pensions, health insurance and other retirement benefits are financed through the Defense Department, which is facing significant budget cuts as Congress struggles to trim federal spending. In a controversial presentation to colleagues last fall, Dr. William Keppler, then the leader of the Madigan screening team, said a PTSD diagnosis could cost as much as \$1.5 million over the lifetime of a soldier, and he urged staff to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. Keppler is a forensic psychiatrist whose work had helped Madigan gain a national reputation for innovative screening for PTSD before questions were raised about the accuracy of his team's diagnoses.



Madigan Army Medical Center

Soldiers evaluated by the screening team often took the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Test, which consists of more than 500 true-or-false questions. Some are relatively straightforward, such as questions about sleep and anxiety. Others are designed to detect patterns of exaggeration, such as answers that reflect what people think mental illness is like rather than what it is actually like. Most of the screenings also included patient interviews. But some of the soldiers who went through the process told The Seattle Times the interviews often felt confrontational, at times hostile. More than 300 patients screened by Keppler's team are now being offered re-evaluations by new screening teams established at Madigan. The results of the new examinations have not been announced. All this has spurred plenty of debate at Madigan and in the broader Army medical community. One forensic team member, Dr. Juliana Ellis-Billingsley, quit in February, and in a letter of resignation blasted the Madigan investigations as a charade. The surgeon general's policy memorandum notes that many soldiers have become wary of the Army's mental-health care providers. It calls for a "culture of trust" that will give more soldiers confidence to seek help. [Source: The Seattle Times Hal Bernton article 22 Apr 2012 ++]

Vet License Plates LA: In Louisiana the following vehicle license plates are available to certain veterans and residents :

- **Purple Heart Plates:** Issued at no additional charge to recipients of the Purple Heart Medal to be used in lieu of the regular motor vehicle registration plates. The recipient may be issued a special plate for each vehicle registered in the recipient's name and such plate shall not be subject to renewal requirements applicable to regular numbered plates.



- **Disabled Veterans Plates:** Available at no additional charge to any Louisiana resident who is at least 50% service connected.



- **"X-POW" License Plates:** Issued upon request without charge and contain the designation of "X-POW," followed by an appropriate number. The plates are not subject to renewal requirements by the Louisiana Department of Public Safety, and they are issued upon application to any former prisoner of war in lieu of the regular motor vehicle registration license plates. (Act 121 of the Louisiana Legislature amends Title 47 of the Louisiana Revised Statutes of 1950 to provide for the issuance of special license plates to those veterans who were former prisoners of war during a wartime period as defined by R.S. 29:251.2.)



- **Gold Star Family License Plates:** Available to immediate family members of armed forces members killed in action. The plate is issued in the same manner as other motor vehicle license plates. The applicant must present a copy of the servicemember's death certificate to the DMV. The charge for the plate is the same as for regular license plates and includes a handling fee of \$3.50.



In addition, the Louisiana Legislature has authorized the Department of Motor Vehicles to issue prestige license plates to certain Louisiana veterans and retired military veterans. These plates will be issued for use on any privately owned passenger car, pickup truck, or van of the veteran applicant. The cost of these plates is the same as the regular issue. In the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Vet License Plates - LA**" contains a summary with pictures of all the veteran related plates available to Louisiana residents and ordering guidelines. This information is also available at <http://omv.dps.state.la.us>. [Source: <http://www.vetaffairs.la.gov/licensing> Apr 2012 ++]

WWII Vets Update 18: Navy veteran John Heller's story of surviving five days in the shark-infested Philippine Sea in the Pacific Theater is about to become a big-screen movie. As part of the National Salute to Veteran Patients Week in a matter-of-fact tone, he told surreal stories at the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit about the five days he bobbed in the sea after his ship, the U.S.S. Indianapolis was sunk by a Japanese submarine torpedo just after midnight on July 30, 1945 "RT Chap FL - 07" <having delivered the parts for the first atomic bomb. The ship sank in 12 minutes with 1,197 men on board. Of the swath of 900 men left floating in the Philippine Sea, only 317 men were rescued. Today, only 41 survivors are still alive. "We had a Marine with us, thank God," said Heller, who joined the Navy in January 1945 at 17 years old. "And if a guy went berserk and started drinking salt water or started swimming away; or tried to take us down with him; he'd have to hit him, and he'd take the jackets off him and make sort of a float ring out of it to give us more buoyancy in the water because our jackets were getting pretty water-soaked." The survivors talked about their parents, home and other mundane things, he said, as they bobbed from early Monday until Friday morning. "It was pretty hard to say what we did during the day: We'd watch the sharks go by," he said. "They'd miss me and get somebody else. But they had a big feast out there. They didn't need a little small guy like me."

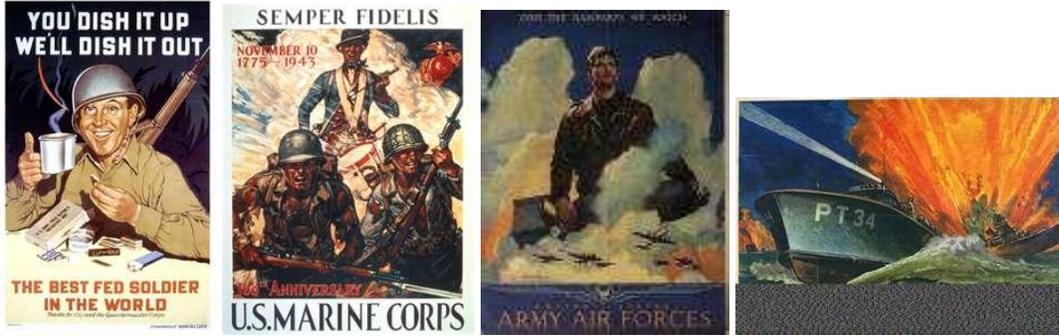


John Heller, 84, a talks about how he survived the torpedoing of the USS Indianapolis

After Heller returned home, he spent 37 years as the owner of four gas stations in Birmingham and Troy, and working in sales in the welding industry. Heller said he gave 22 talks about his experience aboard the Indianapolis last year, something he especially loves to do to educate students. "I enjoy talking to kids because they ask a lot of questions," Heller said. "What did you do in the water?" "RT Chap FL - 07" <that's always the first." Army veteran Charles Scott, 60, of Highland Park said listening to Heller's story helps reinforce that there are others who have lived through the horrors of war "RT Chap FL - 07" <like those he saw in Vietnam during the early 1970s. "I know that somebody else has experienced it besides myself," Scott said. "It helps to know they made it back, like I made it back." West Bloomfield veteran Marty Levine, 63, membership chairman of metro Detroit's Jewish War Veterans of the United States Post 135, said the week's events point out how important it is to support veterans "RT Chap FL - 07" <specifically homeless veterans, the focus of this year's salute week."Tom Brokaw was right: They are the greatest generation," Levine said, quoting the newscaster's book about World War II veterans. "They saved the world so you and I can enjoy the comforts afforded us. I, too, am a veteran, but what they did was incredible." [Source: The Detroit Free Press Tammy Stables Battaglia article 18 Feb 2012 ++]

World War II Posters (4)





POW/MIA Update 18: "Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. More than 83,000 Americans are missing from World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War, the Vietnam War and the 1991 Gulf War. Hundreds of Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/accounted_for. For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1420. The remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

Korea

Today, more than 7,900 Americans remain unaccounted-for from the Korean War.

- DPMO announced 20 APR that the remains of Army Cpl. **James N. Larkin**, 34, of Kirkwood, Mo., a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. He will be buried 24 APR in St. Louis, Mo. On Feb. 11, 1951, Larkin and his unit known as "Support Force 21," from the 2nd Infantry Division, were attacked by Chinese forces near Changbong-ni, South Korea. The unit withdrew to a more defensible position and suffered many losses. Following the battle, Larkin was listed as missing in action. After the 1953 armistice, surviving prisoners of war who returned during "Operation Big Switch" said Larkin had died in April 1951, from battle wounds and malnutrition while captive in the Chinese operated POW camp known as "Bean Camp" located in North Korea. His remains were not returned during Operation Glory in 1954. Between 1991 and 1994, North Korea gave the United States 208 boxes of remains believed to contain the remains of 200-400 U.S. servicemen. North Korean documents, turned over with some of the boxes, indicated that some of the human remains were recovered from Suan County, where Larkin was held as a POW. Scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence, as well as dental comparisons, radiographs, and mitochondrial DNA – which matched that of Larkin's nephews—in the identification of the remains.
- DPMO announced 20 APR that the remains of Army Pfc. **Richard E. Clapp**, 19, of Seattle, Wash., a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. He will be buried April 25, at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C. On Sept. 2, 1950, Clapp and the C Company, 1st Battalion, 27th Infantry Regiment came

under fire near Yulchon, South Korea, and Clapp was killed in action. The Army was unable to identify his remains at the time, and the remains were buried as “Unknown” in a military cemetery on the Korean Peninsula. In 1951, the U.S. consolidated cemeteries on the peninsula. The unknown remains were interred in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. In 2011, due to advances in identification technology, the remains were exhumed for identification. Scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools such as radiograph comparison, and dental records to identify Clapp.

- DPMO announced 23 APR that the remains of Army Sgt. 1st Class **Edris A. Viers**, 32, of Swan, Iowa, a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Burial is scheduled for 27 APR in his hometown. In August 1950, Viers and Battery A, 555th Field Artillery Battalion, were fighting against North Korean forces in a battle known as the “Bloody Gulch,” near Pongam-ni, South Korea. After the battle, on Aug. 12, Viers was listed as missing in action. In late 1950, U.S. Army Graves Registration Service personnel recovered remains of service members from that battlefield, including nine men who were unidentified. These men were buried at the 25th Infantry Division Cemetery in South Korea. In 1951, the U.S. consolidated cemeteries on the peninsula. The unknown remains were re-interred in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. In 2011, due to advances in identification technology, the remains were exhumed for identification. Based on available evidence such as metal identification tags, military clothing, and wartime records, analysts from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) were able to conclude that the remains were a sergeant from the 90th or 555th Field Artillery Battalion, who had died at Pongam-ni. Both groups had suffered losses in the Bloody Gulch battle. Scientists from the JPAC used the circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools such as radiograph comparisons to identify the remains as Viers.
- DPMO announced 24 APR that the remains of a Army Pfc. **Nelson E. Young**, 19, of Suffolk, Mass., U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Burial is scheduled for 28 APR in his hometown in Foxboro, Mass. In late November 1950, Young, and elements of the 31st Regimental Combat Team, known as “Task Force Faith,” were advancing along the eastern banks of the Chosin Reservoir, in North Korea, when they came under attack. On Dec. 2, 1950, Young, along with many other Americans, was listed as missing in action as a result of the heavy fighting. In 1953, returning Americans who had been held as prisoners of war reported that Young had been captured by the Chinese during the battle from Nov. 27- Dec. 1, 1950. He died several months later as a result of malnutrition while being held as a prisoner of war, near the northern end of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea; an area known as “Death Valley.” Between 1991 and 1994, North Korea gave the United States 208 boxes of remains believed to contain the remains of 200-400 U.S. servicemen. North Korean documents, turned over with some of the boxes, indicated that some of the human remains were recovered from the area where Young had reportedly died in captivity, in North Korea. To identify the remains, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence, and forensic identification tools such as dental records, and mitochondrial DNA – which matched Young’s living maternal relatives.

Vietnam

- Army Capt. **Charles R. Barnes**, 27, of Philadelphia, Pa., will be buried 2 MAY, in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C. On March 16, 1969, Barnes and four other service members departed Qui Nhon Airfields bound for Da Nang and Phu Bai, in a U-21A Ute aircraft. As they approached Da Nang, they encountered low clouds and poor visibility. Communications with the aircraft were lost, and they did not land as scheduled. Immediate search efforts were limited due to hazardous weather conditions, and all

five men were listed as missing in action. From 1986-1989, unidentified human remains were turned over to the U.S. from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) in several different instances. None of the remains were identified given the limits of the technology of the time. In 1993, a joint U.S./S.R.V. team, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), conducted investigations in Quang Nam-Da Nang, and Thua Thien-Hue Provinces. interviewed a local Vietnamese citizen who supplied remains and an identification tag bearing Barnes' name, which he claimed to have recovered from an aircraft crash site. In 1999, another joint U.S./S.R.V. team interviewed additional Vietnamese citizens about the crash and they were led to the crash site. In 2000, a joint U.S./S.R.V. team excavated the site and recovered human remains and material evidence. Scientists from the JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence, and forensic identification tools such as mitochondrial DNA – which matched that of Barnes' sister – in the identification of the remains.

[Source: http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases/ Apr 2012 +]

Veteran Support Organizations (09): Military children and spouses can access more scholarships through ThanksUSA, an organization that supports military families. Since 2006, it has awarded 2,200 need-based scholarships totaling about \$6 million. By the end of 2011, it aims to distribute another 500 scholarships valued at \$1.5 million. This charity had a somewhat unusual beginning: two sisters, ages eight and 10, wanted to do more to support the country's war fighters. They developed an idea to tie that support to a national treasure hunt game that would also teach U.S. history and values. Though anyone can play the online game for free, participants are encouraged to make a donation to help fund the scholarships. Private donations and events make up the remainder of the funding. Certain educational institutions participate as well, offering reduced tuition rates or scholarships through the program. Kaplan University is offering 50 percent off four years of tuition at their online school to spouses who meet the award criteria. Hills Bros. Coffee also is providing ThanksUSA scholarships. In each can of grounds, it has placed a coupon with a code. For every 100,000 codes entered online, it will donate 10 scholarships up to 50 total. It also counts "likes" on its Facebook page toward this goal. Michele Stork, executive director of ThanksUSA, says her organization has received five scholarships for this year and expects at least that number for next year. She hopes the public will help them reach the total number available.

Stork explains that these scholarships help the military adapt to changing situations. For Guard and Reserve households, a call to duty interrupts normal paychecks, meaning that sometimes college plans in the family are put on hold. In the families of wounded troops, a spouse might suddenly become the sole breadwinner. "We help the family increase its long-term earning power while reducing the economic strain on the family," Stork says. The program also has ripple benefits through the military. According to Stork, most of the recipients desire to give back to the defense community through their education. She shares that an education major went on to teach military children; science and technology majors plan to develop future military capabilities; medical majors intend to assist troops with physical or mental disabilities; and undergraduates have gone on to serve in the military after earning their degrees. Military families at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, receive their new computers courtesy of Operation Homelink. The organization distributes computers to family members of units preparing to ship overseas so they can stay in touch during the deployment.

Anyone interested in applying for ThanksUSA scholarships can sign up on the website to be reminded when the program opens for 2012. All applications are accepted online from April 1 to May 15. Stork encourages people to ensure they fill out all the necessary forms and attach other necessary paperwork. She urges people to "apply, apply, apply." She also wants the military to know that people are grateful. "We appreciate your service and understand the sacrifices that you and your families make every day," Stork states. But what if people have a hard time accessing the Internet because they lack a home computer? For many junior enlisted families, this is their reality, and beyond

applying for scholarships, it means they miss the best connection to their deployed loved ones. Operation Homelink helps remedy this problem by providing computers to those who need them. Founder and President Dan Shannon estimates that 10 percent to 15 percent of military families fall into this category. “In many cases, their computers may have broken, and they don’t have the funds to replace them or in several cases, the service member took their only laptop with him, and the wife does not have one,” he says. “To illustrate the need, I can tell you that I have met families who have driven five hours each way to come to one of our events to get a computer.” For additional information on ThanksUSA refer to <http://www.thanksusa.org>. For scholarship questions call (877) 849-878. [Source: AFCRA Veterans Focus Rita Boland article Nov 2011 ++]

Saving Money: Cruise ships aren't as all-inclusive as you might believe. So, how much does a cruise cost? It depends. Yes, your accommodations, meals, entertainment and most daytime activities are included in a fare, but there are many pricy onboard temptations that can affect the bottom line. For cruise-ship lovers, bigger can be better...but not always. The per person rate should be:

- Megaships, 2,500 to 6,000 passengers, you should pay: \$75 to \$100 per day.
- Midsize Ships, 1,000 to 2,500 passengers. you should pay: \$50 to \$75 per day.
- Miniships, Fewer than 1,200 passengers, you should pay: \$350 to \$500 per day by sea; \$150 to \$350, by river.



In addition to the basic fare here are some hidden cruise costs and how to avoid them:

1. **Beverages** - On most ships, alcohol, soda and bottled water aren't free, and the barrage to indulge starts as soon as you board, with offers like the Drink of the Day. Although cruise lines ban you from bringing your own booze, most let you pack soda and bottled water. You might also save money with an unlimited drinks package. For free booze, grab a cocktail at the captain's parties, and, if you buy a bottle of wine, drink half and have it corked for the next night.
2. **Gratuities** - Tips for the crew who keep your accommodations spiffy and make sure you're well fed are now typically automatically added to your shipboard bill at a rate of \$10 to \$12 per passenger, per day, depending on the line. Bar bills might also include an automatic 15 percent gratuity. That's a substantial addition to your cruise costs. Although you probably won't want to scrimp here — the crew is trained to impress — you can adjust the amounts up or down at the purser's desk.

3. **Shore Excursions** - Booking shore excursions through a cruise line is easy. But these tours, which run from \$29 to \$150 (and higher for extravagant offerings), are priced to make money for the cruise lines. Planning can pay off. It's nearly always cheaper, for instance, to book through an independent local operator, and to use taxis or other local transportation for trips to the beach.

4. **Alternative Dining and Treats** - You'll find plenty of selections in the ship's dining rooms and casual buffets. But the lines also offer alternative, gourmet venues — which cost an additional \$10 to \$75. Eliminate this as a hidden cost by budgeting accordingly for a special night out or planning to forego it altogether. And watch those extra charges for name-brand ice cream, specialty coffee drinks like espresso, and other treats.

5. **The Spa** - Spas on most ships aren't cheap. Those who pay \$22 for a pedicure at home will be shocked by a \$70 shipboard tab, and a 50-minute massage will run at least \$119. Look for spa specials on port days. Beware, too, of extra charges for some fitness classes — \$10 to \$15, say, for Pilates or Spin.
[Source: AARP Fran Golden article 3 Jan 2012 ++]

VA Fraud Waste & Abuse Update 47:

- **Amarillo TX** - A federal judge sentenced a former Amarillo mail carrier 18 FEB to five months in prison for stealing parcels containing hydrocodone, a prescription pain reliever. Brent West must also serve three years' probation and pay \$450 in restitution to the government, U.S. District Judge Mary Lou Robinson's order said. West, who pleaded guilty to one count of mail theft, must surrender himself to federal authorities by May 14. For about a month last year, West stole seven pieces of mail from the North Amarillo Station, 841 Martin Road, that were mailed from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, his January plea agreement said. In October, customers began notifying post office officials that mail containing the prescription drug was not delivered. Covert cameras installed at the facility led officials to suspect West in the thefts. Postal Service spokesman Robert Bolen said West began his employment as a letter carrier in Amarillo in April 2006, and he has since been fired. [Source: Amarillo Globe News Bobby Cervantes article 18 Apr 2012 ++]

- **Rapid City SD** - Patricia Maki , 69, woman has been convicted on federal charges related to illegally taking veterans' assistance payments. U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson says a jury convicted her of theft of government property, providing a fictitious name and address to the U.S. Postal Service and fraudulent acceptance of veterans ' payments. Maki will be sentenced later. The maximum penalty for the convictions is 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Jonson said Maki took nearly \$60,000 in payments from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs she knew she was not entitled to receive. The payments were made from 2004 until 2010. [Source: Associated Press article 19 Apr 2012 ++]

- **Thornton CO** - Keith Morris, accused of assuming his brother's identity to receive brain surgery and other care at the Denver VA Medical Center, has pleaded guilty 18 APR to health care fraud. He also pleaded guilty to aiding and abetting in a scheme to defraud the Department of Veterans Affairs. Morris' brother is an Army veteran who lives in Albuquerque, N.M. Federal prosecutors say that from May 2003 to September 2009, Morris used his brother's name, Social Security number and birth date to get more than \$148,000 in medical care at the Denver VA Medical Center. Investigators uncovered the scheme after the brother received bills from his insurance company for visits to the center that he never made. [Source: USA Today article 18 Apr 2012 ++]

- **Petersburg TN** - Michael Murdock, a postal worker charged with stealing painkillers from a military veteran on his mail route, pleaded not guilty 20 APR to a nine-count federal indictment in U.S. District Court. He faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted of misappropriation of postal funds and up to five years on each count of theft of stolen mailed matter. Murdock is free on bond as he awaits his 19 JUN trial date. The federal indictment alleges that, while working for the post office near Petersburg, Tenn., he stole \$11,562 that was under his control. Also, that on seven occasions between March 26, 2010, and Jan. 3, 2011, he took hydrocodone tablets prescribed by the Department of Veterans Affairs for a veteran on Murdock's mail route. The Marshall County Tribune newspaper reported in January 2011 that county Detective Sam Bragg searched a farmhouse owned by Murdock after receiving complaints from Phelps about not receiving his medication. Investigators treated a box to be mailed with "clue spray," which is invisible under normal light but shows up under fluorescent lighting, Bragg told the paper. During the search, Bragg used lighting to detect if Murdock had handled the package. "He was glowing," Bragg told the Tribune. [Source: Times Free Press Todd South article 21 Apr 2012 ++]

Notes of Interest:

- **Jobs.** ABC News Diane Sawyer reports U.S. bridge projects going to the Chinese... NOT Americans. Video report is available at <http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/video/us-bridges-roads-built-chinese-firms-14594513?tab=9482930?ion=1206853&playlist=14594944>.
- **Jobs.** Chevron is seeking U.S. Veteran talent. If interested check out <http://www.military.com/jobs-in/employer/chevron/>.
- **Jobs.** If you're interested in serving through a job in VA's health care system, they are hiring. Go to <http://www.vacareers.va.gov> to learn more
- **Denver VAMC.** The operating room at Denver's Veterans Affairs Medical Center has been temporarily closed for specialized cleaning. The VA says the decision to cancel all surgeries is out of an abundance of caution. A residue was found on some surgical instruments during a routine inspection late last month. Surgeries continued without using the affected instruments while they were sanitized. The decision was then made to complete specialized cleaning of all the instruments. The VA says patient care has not been compromised.
- **Vet Service Dogs.** Qualified veterans can obtain a greyhound service dog. The dogs are retired racing dogs and are trained as service dogs at Gadsden Correctional Institute. To find out more information call 352-628-2281 or email <mailto:PrisonGreyhounds@embarqmail.com>.
- **MOH.** The White House announced that President Obama will award Army Specialist Leslie H. Sabo, Jr., the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry. Specialist Sabo will receive the Medal of Honor posthumously for his heroic actions in combat on May 10, 1970, while serving as a rifleman in Company D, 3d Battalion, 506th Infantry, 101st Airborne Division in Se San, Cambodia.
- **AF Reserve.** The Air Force Reserve turned 64 on 14 APR. President Harry Truman in 1948, inspired by Reserve programs activated during WWI, officially forged the Air Force Reserve as a field operating agency of the Air Force.
- **Mortgage Assistance.** If you are unemployed and depending on your situation, MHA's Home Affordable Unemployment Program (UP) may reduce your mortgage payments to 31 percent of your income or suspend them altogether for 12 months or more. Check out <http://www.makinghomeaffordable.gov/pages/default.aspx>.
- **Home Loans.** Private Mortgage Insurance (PMI) is typically required with conventional loans through the FHA. PMI is extra insurance that some lenders mandate before approving loans worth more than 80% of the cost of a home. If the homebuyer can only pay 20% of the total cost of the home, then lenders use PMI to cover their bases. PMI is not required for VA Home Loans.

- **New Subs.** The Navy has announced the names of five new Virginia-class submarines. Five states are getting honored, each one home to significant military installations. They will be named for Illinois, Washington, Colorado, Indiana and South Dakota.
- **Credit Cards.** According to the FTC and the Fair Credit Billing Act (FCBA) your maximum liability under federal law for unauthorized use of your credit card is \$50. If you report the loss before your credit cards are used, the FCBA says the card issuer cannot hold you responsible for any unauthorized charges. If a thief uses your cards before you report them missing, the most you will owe for unauthorized charges is \$50 per card. Also, if the loss involves your credit card number, but not the card itself, you have no liability for unauthorized use.

[Source: Various 16-30 Apr 2012 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 91:



Miami - Three operators of a Miami health care agency were sentenced 25 APR to prison, respectively, for their participation in a \$60 million home health Medicare fraud scheme, announced the Department of Justice, the FBI, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). U.S. District Judge Ursula Ungaro in Miami sentenced Roberto Gonzalez to 120 months in prison, Olga Gonzalez to 87 months in prison, and Fabian Gonzalez to 87 months in prison. Each defendant was also sentenced to three years of supervised release and was ordered to pay \$40 million in restitution, jointly and severally with co-defendants. Roberto, Olga, and Fabian Gonzalez each pleaded guilty last year to one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud. Roberto Gonzalez, 61, was the president and Olga Gonzalez, 57, was the vice president of Nany Home Health Inc., a Florida home health agency that purported to provide home health care and physical therapy services to eligible Medicare beneficiaries. Fabian Gonzalez, 39, was head of the Quality and Assurance Department for Nany. The defendants conspired with patient recruiters, including Miami-area staffing agencies, for the purpose of billing the Medicare program for unnecessary home health care and therapy services. The staffing agencies functioned as patient recruiters and provided patients to Nany. The Gonzalezes and their co-conspirators paid kickbacks and bribes to patient recruiters and the staffing agencies in return for providing patients to Nany, as well as prescriptions, plans of care (POCs), and certifications for medically unnecessary therapy and home health services for Medicare beneficiaries. The Gonzalezes used the prescriptions, POCs, and medical certifications to fraudulently bill Medicare for home health care services, which the Gonzalezes knew was in violation of federal criminal laws. Nany nurses and office staff falsified patient files for Medicare beneficiaries to make it appear that the beneficiaries qualified for home health care and therapy services from Nany when, in fact, the Gonzalezes knew that the beneficiaries did not qualify for and did not receive such

services. The nurses and office staff at Nany described in the nursing notes and patient files symptoms that were non-existent. The Gonzalezes knew that these files were falsified so that Medicare could be billed for medically unnecessary services. From approximately January 2006 through November 2009, Roberto, Olga, Fabian Gonzalez, and their co-conspirators submitted approximately \$60 million in false and fraudulent claims to Medicare, and Medicare paid approximately \$40 million on those claims. [Source: Fraud News Daily 15-30 Apr 2012 ++]

State Veteran's Benefits: The state of Wisconsin provides several benefits to veterans. To obtain information on these refer to the “**Veteran State Benefits WI**” attachment to this Bulletin for an overview of those benefits. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state in the following areas:

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/content/veteran-state-benefits/wisconsin-state-veterans-benefits.html> Apr 2012 ++]

Military History: It was 2 March 1991, and the ground war with Iraq had supposedly ended at sunrise on 28 February with a U.S. declared cease-fire. The preceding week had happened at breakneck speed. Under the command of Lt. Colonel John Craddock, Task Force TUSKER, a tank battalion of the 24th Infantry Division, had charged across the Iraqi border on 24 February, raced nonstop for 36 hours as part of the HAIL MARY, and attacked into the Euphrates River Valley. Despite an attack through the Republican Guard’s 26th Commando Brigade, as well as a night attack into a logistics depot, only three soldiers had been wounded, one seriously. As part of First Brigade, the TUSKERS stood quietly in reserve astride Highway 8, just east of the Rumaila oil fields, blocking the retreat of the Iraqi Army. The remains of the Republican Guard, bottled up in the Basra pocket, were probing the American lines along Highway 8 looking for a way out to Baghdad. Throughout the evening scout elements had reported the movement of vehicles with their lights on. The Division’s Air Cavalry Squadron confirmed the northward movement of over 200 trucks across the Hawr al Hammar causeway, a 2½-mile bridge that crossed a tributary lake of the Euphrates River. It had just been repaired by the Iraqis the evening before. At 0700 hours an armored convoy of T-72s and BMPs from the Hammurabi Division ran into the scouts of 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry and opened fire. Thus, started the Battle at Rumaila which marked the last ground combat engagement of the Gulf War. To read how this battle played out refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “Battle of Rumaila” written by David S. Pierson, Leavenworth, KS. [Source: Military magazine Feb 2011 ++]

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

- May 01 1863 - Civil War: Battle of Chancellorsville, VA (29,000 injured or died)
- May 03 1926 - US marines land in Nicaragua (9-mo after leaving), stay until 1933
- May 03 1945 - WWII: USS Lagarto (SS-371) sunk by Japanese minelayer Hatsutaka in Gulf of Siam. 86 killed.
- May 04 1942 - WWII: Battle of Coral Sea begun (1st sea battle fought solely in air)
- May 05 1864 - Civil War: The Battle of the Wilderness begins in Spotsylvania County, Virginia.

- May 05 1916 - US marines invade Dominican Republic, stay until 1924
- May 05 1945 - WWII: Admiral Karl Dönitz, President of Germany after Hitler's death, orders all German U-boats to cease offensive operations and return to their bases.
- May 06 1863 - Civil War: The Battle of Chancellorsville ends with the defeat of the Army of the Potomac by Confederate troops.
- May 06 1942 - WWII: On Corregidor, the last American forces in the Philippines surrender to the Japanese.
- May 06 1945 - WWII: Axis Sally delivers her last propaganda broadcast to Allied troops (first was on December 11, 1941).
- May 07 1864 - Battle of Wilderness ends (total losses: USA-17,666; CSA-7,500)
- May 07 1915 - WWI: German submarine U-20 sinks RMS Lusitania, killing 1,198 people including 128 Americans. Public reaction to the sinking turns many formerly pro-Germans in the United States against the German Empire.
- May 07 1942 - WWII: During the Battle of the Coral Sea, United States Navy aircraft carrier aircraft attack and sink the Japanese Imperial Navy light aircraft carrier Shoho. The battle marks the first time in the naval history that two enemy fleets fight without visual contact between warring ships.
- May 07 1945 - WWII: Germany signs unconditional surrender terms at Reims, France, ending Germany's participation in the war. The document takes effect the next day.
- May 07 1954 - Vietnam: 55-day Battle of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam ended with Vietnamese insurgents overrunning French forces.
- May 07 1960 - Cold War: U-2 Crisis of 1960 - Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev announces that his nation is holding American U-2 pilot Gary Powers.
- May 07 1984 - Vietnam: Agent Orange class-action suit brought by Vietnam veterans settled out of court for \$180 Million.
- May 08 1942 - WWII: The Battle of the Coral Sea comes to an end with Japanese Imperial Navy aircraft carrier aircraft attacking and sinking the United States Navy aircraft carrier USS Lexington. The battle marks the first time in the naval history that two enemy fleets fight without visual contact between warring ships.
- May 08 1945 - WWII: Combat in Europe ends - V-E Day. German
- May 09 1951 - Korean War: Air raid on Chinese positions at Yalu River
- May 10 1797 - 1st Navy ship, the "United States," is launched
- May 10 1801 - First Barbary War: The Barbary pirates of Tripoli declare war on the United States of America.
- May 10 1941 - WWII: Rudolf Hess parachutes into Scotland in order to try and negotiate a peace deal between the United Kingdom and Germany.
- May 10 1960 - The nuclear submarine USS Triton completes Operation Sandblast, the first underwater circumnavigation of the earth.
- May 10 1969 - Vietnam: The Battle of Dong Ap Bia begins with an assault on Hill 937. It will ultimately become known as Hamburger Hill.
- May 11 1943 - WWII: American troops invade Attu Island in the Aleutian Islands in an attempt to expel occupying Japanese forces.
- May 11 1944 - WWII: The Allies start a major offensive against the Axis Powers on the Gustav Line.
- May 12 1780 - Revolutionary War: Charleston, South Carolina is taken by British forces.,"
- May 12 1864 - American Civil War: the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House: thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers die in "the Bloody Angle".
- May 12 1865 - Civil War: The Battle of Palmito Ranch: the first day of the last major land action to take place during the Civil War, resulting in a Confederate victory.

- May 12 1962 - Douglas MacArthur delivers his famous "Duty, Honor, Country" valedictory speech at the United States Military Academy.
- May 13 1945 - WWII: US troops conquer Dakeshi Okinawa
- May 14 1863 - Civil War: The Battle of Jackson takes place.
- May 14 2005 - The former USS America, a decommissioned supercarrier of the United States Navy, is deliberately sunk in the Atlantic Ocean after four weeks of live-fire exercises. She is the largest ship ever to be disposed of as a target in a military exercise.
- May 15 1942 - WWII: Lieutenant Ronald Reagan, a cavalry officer, applies for reassignment to the Army Air Force, where he would eventually put his thespian background to use on World War II propaganda films.
- May 15 1962 - Vietnam: US marines arrive in Laos.
- May 15 1972: The U.S. Army Ryukyu Islands (Okinawa) reverted to the full control of Japan but the U.S retained its rights to nuclear free bases.

[Source: Various Apr 2012 ++]

Military Trivia 50: Warships in the United States Navy were first designated and numbered in system originating in 1895. Under this system, ships were designated as "Battleship X", "Cruiser X", "Destroyer X", "Torpedo Boat X" and so forth where X was the series hull number as authorized by the US Congress. These designations were usually abbreviated as "B-1", "C-1", "D-1", "TB-1," etc. This system became cumbersome by 1920, as many new ship types had been developed during World War I that needed new categories assigned, especially in the Auxiliary ship area. On 17 July 1920, Acting Secretary of the Navy Robert E. Coontz approved a standardized system of alpha-numeric symbols to identify ship types such that all ships were now designated with a two letter code and a hull number, with the first letter being the ship type and the second letter being the sub-type. For example, the destroyer tender USS Melville, first commissioned as "Destroyer Tender No. 2" in 1915, was now re-designated as "AD-2" with the "A" standing for Auxiliary, the "D" for Destroyer (Tender) and the "2" meaning the second ship in that series. Ship types that did not have a subclassification simply repeated the first letter. So, Battleships became "BB-X" and Destroyers became "DD-X" with X being the same number as previously assigned. Ships that changed classifications were given new hull numbers within their new designation series.

The designation "USS" standing for "United States Ship" was adopted in 1907. Prior to that time, no designation was used in official documents. New-construction ships not yet in commission are currently prefixed with "PCU" which stands for "Pre-Commissioning Unit." In the United States Navy, unlike European Navies, the first ship in a class to be authorized by the US Congress is the designated class leader (class name ship), regardless of the order in which the ships of that class are laid down, launched or commissioned. For example, contrary to many European texts, for the last class of "Standard" battleships, the battleship USS Colorado BB-45 (commissioned 30 August 1923) is the class leader under USN designation standards, not USS Maryland BB-46 (commissioned 21 July 1921). These battleships are thus properly designated as being "USS Colorado BB-45 Class" and not as "USS Maryland BB-46 Class." The attachment to this Bulletin titled "**USN Ship Designations**" covers all designations assigned to date, what they stand for, and notes germane to their function, disposition, and conversion. The lists include many designations that are no longer in use by the current-day US Navy and others that were proposed designations not actually used or were intended for ships that were never built. Designations highlighted in Blue Font are for those ships actually in commission or currently under construction as of 2009. [Source: http://www.navweaps.com/index_tech/index_ships_list.htm Apr 2012 ++]

State Tax Comparisons Update 04: Taxes on land and the buildings on it are the biggest source of revenue for local governments. They are not imposed by states but by the tens of thousands of cities, townships, counties, school districts and other assessing jurisdictions. The state's role is to specify the maximum rate on the market value of the property, or a percentage of it, as the legal standard for the local assessors to follow. The local assessor determines the value to be taxed. You can't escape property taxes in any state. But you can find significantly low rates in certain parts of the country.

- Most states give residents over a certain age a break on their property taxes. In some states, you'll need a relatively low income to qualify.
- Forty states provide either property tax credits or homestead exemptions that limit the value of assessed property subject to tax.
- All 50 states offer some type of property tax relief program, such as freezes that will lock in the assessed value of your property once you reach a certain age, or deferral of taxes until the homeowner moves or dies. They ultimately have to be paid. In addition, counties and municipalities often have their own property tax relief plans.
- Retirees with low incomes and high housing costs may face property tax bills that are higher than they can manage. Some states target property tax relief to those homeowners bearing the greatest burden. Property tax reform that takes into account a homeowner's ability to pay, such as a so-called "property tax circuit breaker," can better protect low-income homeowners from rising property taxes that accompany rising property values. Targeted property tax relief avoids sharp reductions in funding for locally provided public services and inequities based solely on date of purchase.
- A property tax circuit breaker prevents property taxes from "overloading" a taxpayer. Under a typical circuit breaker, the state sets a maximum percentage of income that an eligible family can be expected to pay in property taxes. If property taxes exceed this limit, the state then provides a rebate or credit to the taxpayer. Currently, of the 31 states and the District of Columbia with circuit breakers for homeowners, only six and the District of Columbia permit all households to participate in the program without regard to age.
- Other property tax relief strategies that may be used to target property tax relief include homestead exemptions which exempt a certain amount of a home's value from taxation, credits to rebate a certain percentage of taxes paid, and deferral programs to allow low-income elderly homeowners to defer payment of property taxes until property is sold.

Property Taxes by County - Using data from the 2009 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau) the Tax Foundation, based in Washington, D.C., has published figures on property tax paid by households on owner-occupied housing. It shows median property taxes paid on homes, median home value, taxes as a percentage of home value, median income for homeowners, and taxes as a percent of income. The table includes all 793 counties in the United States (excluding Puerto Rico) with populations greater than 65,000. The figures exclude property taxes paid by businesses, renters and others. The data can be looked at three different ways:

- Property Taxes on Owner-Occupied Housing, by County, Ranked by Taxes As a Percentage of Home Value, 2007 - 2009 (three-year average) <http://www.taxfoundation.org/taxdata/show/27095.html>.
- Property Taxes on Owner-Occupied Housing, by County, Ranked by Taxes As a Percentage of Household Income, 2007 - 2009 (3-year average) <http://www.taxfoundation.org/taxdata/show/27084.html>
- Property Taxes on Owner-Occupied Housing, by County, Ranked by Property Taxes Paid, 2007 - 2009 (3-year average) <http://www.taxfoundation.org/taxdata/show/27083.html>

[Source: MOAA General State Tax Overview Mar 2012 ++]

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

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 7% (prescription drugs, residential utilities, motor fuel, newspapers, healthcare services, and payments made by Medicare and Medicaid are exempt).

Gasoline Tax: 18.8 cents/gallon

Diesel Fuel Tax: 18.8 cents/gallon

Cigarette Tax: 68 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 3%; High – 5%

Income Brackets: Lowest – \$5,000; Highest – \$10,000

Number of Brackets: 3

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$6,000; Married – \$12,000; Dependents – \$1,500. For detail refer to <http://www.dor.ms.gov/info/faqs/IndividualIncomeFAQs.html>

Additional Exemption: 65 or older – \$1,500

Standard Deduction: Single – \$2,300; Married filing jointly – \$4,600

Medical/Dental Deduction: Partial

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Qualified retirement income is exempt from state income tax. Social Security is not taxed, regardless of total income. Retirement income from IRAs, 401s/403s, Keoghs and qualified public and private pension plans is not taxable. Interest income from federal securities and obligations of Mississippi and its political subdivisions are all exempt.

Retired Military Pay: Retired pay is exempt. The exemption is also available to the spouse or other beneficiary upon the death of the primary retiree. Widows' pensions received from the VA are not taxable.

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

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

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

Property Taxes

Property and automobiles are both subject to ad valorem taxes – meaning that the tax is assessed in relationship to the value of the property. Single family residential property is taxed at 10% of its assessed value. All other personal property is assessed at 15% of its value. Motor vehicles are taxed at 30% of their value. The state offers a homestead exemption to all eligible taxpayers. Eligible homeowners should make application with the Tax Assessor in the county where the home is located. This application must be filed between January 1 and April 1. The maximum exemption for regular homeowners is \$300. For homeowners 65 years of age or totally disabled, there is

an exemption on the first \$75,000 true value. You do not have to apply for homestead exemption each year. You should reapply if there were changes in your homestead status (marital, property, ownership, etc.). For additional information, call 601-923-7631 or refer to <http://www.dor.ms.gov/taxareas/property/main.html> for city mileage rates.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax. An estate tax is imposed on the value of a decedent's estate when the total gross estate exceeds the federal exemption of \$1,000,000. The exemption amount will follow the federal exclusion under 26 USC 2010.

For further information, visit the Mississippi Department of Revenue site <http://www.dor.ms.gov> or call 601-923-7000. [Source: www.retirementliving.com Apr 2012 ++]

Aviation Art:



Rising Into the Storm

William S. Phillips' *Rising Into the Storm* places us just off the bow of the Hornet seconds after Doolittle's B-25 has left the deck. The atmosphere moments before had been tense. While two test take-offs from the ship had been performed months earlier off Norfolk, VA, those aircraft were not fully laden with fuel, bombs and crew. Throttles at full power, flaps down and his B-25 straining against its brakes, the plane rattled and roared as Doolittle waited for the release from the flag man. When the signal was given, it was timed so that the carrier would be surging up on the crest of a wave as Doolittle's plane left the deck. The joint velocity of the aircraft, ship and headwind pushed 50 knots. As Doolittle cleared the bow, a wind blast combined with the nose-high attitude they practiced, shot his

Mitchell bomber sharply up in the air. He leveled out before stalling just as the mighty Hornet crashed back into the sea. [Source: <http://www.aviationarthangar.com/avarthariins.html> Apr 2012 ++]

Veteran Legislation Status 27 APR 2012: For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 112th Congress refer to the Bulletin's "**House & Senate Veteran Legislation**" attachment. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication on that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At <http://thomas.loc.gov> you can review a copy of each bill's content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it. To determine what bills, amendments your representative has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on refer to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d111/sponlst.html>.

Grassroots lobbying is perhaps the most effective way to let your Representative and Senators know your opinion. Whether you are calling into a local or Washington, D.C. office; sending a letter or e-mail; signing a petition; or making a personal visit, Members of Congress are the most receptive and open to suggestions from their constituents. The key to increasing cosponsorship on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting legislators know of veteran's feelings on issues. You can reach their Washington office via the Capital Operator direct at (866) 272-6622, (800) 828-0498, or (866) 340-9281 to express your views. Otherwise, you can locate on <http://thomas.loc.gov> your legislator's phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making. Refer to http://www.thecapitol.net/FAQ/cong_schedule.html for dates that you can access your legislators on their home turf.

Have You Heard? Submarine nostalgia

Tired of the daily routine of civilian life. Do you long for the good old days in the service. Here's some things you can try to do at home to once again feel like you are back on a boat

- Sleep on the shelf in your closet. Replace the closet door with a curtain. Two to three hours after you fall asleep, have your wife whip open the curtain, shine a flashlight in your eyes, and mumble "Sorry, wrong rack".
- Set your alarm clock to go off at random times during the night. When it goes off, jump out of bed and get dressed as fast as you can, then run to your kitchen with the garden hose while wearing a scuba mask.
- Have the paperboy give you a haircut.
- Every so often, yell "Emergency Deep", run into the kitchen, and sweep all pots/pans/dishes off of the counter onto the floor. Then, yell at your wife for not having the place "stowed for sea".
- Use 18 scoops of coffee per pot and allow it to sit for 5 or 6 hours before drinking. Never wash any coffee cups.
- Have a fluorescent lamp installed on the bottom of your coffee table and lie under it to read books.
- Put on the headphones from your stereo (don't plug them in). Go and stand in front of your stove. Say (to nobody in particular) "Stove manned and ready". Stand there for 3 or 4 hours. Say (once again to nobody in particular) "Stove secured". Roll up the headphone cord and put them away.
- Tag out the steering wheel, gas pedal, brake pedal, transmission and cigarette lighter when you change the oil in your car.

- Every four hours, check all the fluid levels in your car and log the readings. Check the tire pressure and replace air lost from excessive pressure checks. Be sure to place red tags on ignition stating “DANGER: Do Not Operate” while you perform these checks. Inform your neighbor as to placement of the red tags, the results of the checks, and have him repeat the checks because he did not see you perform them.

If this is not enough refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Submarine Nostalgia**” for more things you can do to remind yourself of the good old days aboard a boat.

“One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is you end up being governed by your inferiors.”

--- **Plato** (Greek philosopher | 424 - 348 BC)

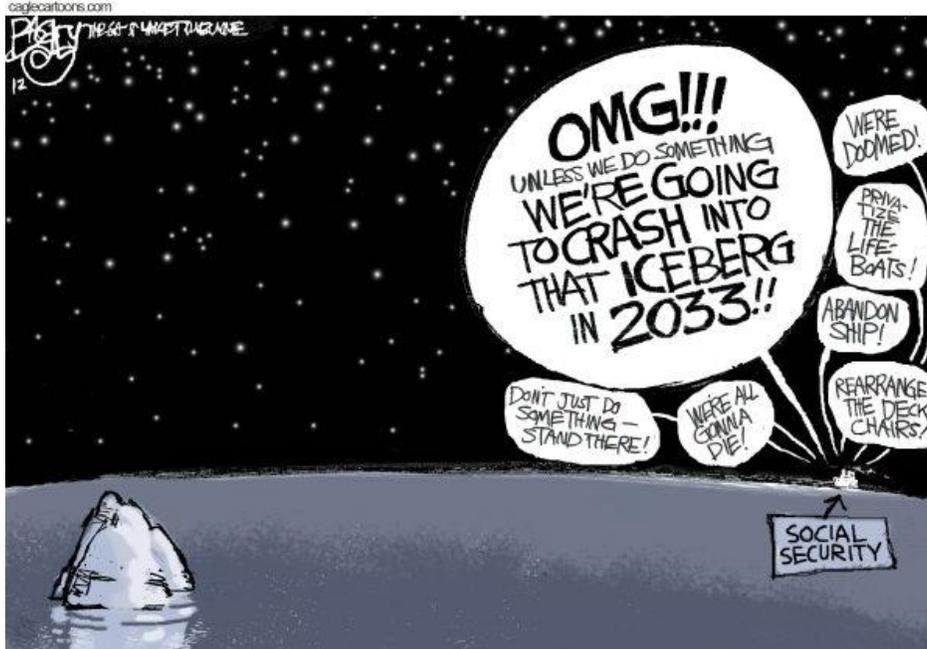




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Another Titanic Metaphor

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