

RAO BULLETIN

1 June 2012

PDF Edition

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Attachment - Veteran Legislation as of 29 May 2012

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Attachment - Vet License Plates Virginia

Attachment - Crossing of the Roer

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Military Recruiting Update 03: In sharp contrast to the peak years of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the Army last year took in no recruits with misconduct convictions or drug or alcohol issues, according to internal documents obtained by The Associated Press. And soldiers already serving on active duty now must meet tougher standards to stay on for further tours in uniform. The Army is also spending hundreds of thousands of dollars less in bonuses to attract recruits or entice soldiers to remain. It's all part of an effort to slash the size of the active duty Army from about 570,000 at the height of the Iraq war to 490,000 by 2017. The cutbacks began last year, and as of the end of March the Army was down to less than 558,000 troops. For a time during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army lowered its recruiting standards, raising the number of recruits who entered the Army with moral, medical and criminal — including felony — waivers. Recruits with misdemeanors, which could range from petty theft and writing bad checks to assault, were allowed into the Army, as well as those with some medical problems or low aptitude scores that might otherwise have disqualified them. A very small fraction of recruits had waivers for felonies, which included convictions for manslaughter, vehicular homicide, robbery and a handful of sex crimes. The sex crimes often involved consensual sex when one of the individuals was under 18.

In 2006, about 20 percent of new Army recruits came in under some type of waiver, and by the next year it had grown to nearly three in 10. After the Defense Department issued new guidelines, the percentage needing waivers started to come down in 2009. Now, as the Army moves to reduce its force, some soldiers will have to leave. Officials say they hope to make cuts largely through voluntary attrition. But Gen. Ray Odierno, the Army chief of staff, has warned that as much as 35 percent of the cuts will be “involuntary” ones that force soldiers to abandon what they had hoped would be long military careers. “This is going to be hard,” said Gen. David Rodriguez, head of U.S. Army Forces Command. “This is tough business. As we increase things like re-enlistment standards, some of the people who were able to re-enlist three years ago won’t be able to re-enlist again.” The Army, in an internal slide presentation, is blunt: “Re-enlistment is a privilege, not a right; some ‘fully qualified’ soldiers will be denied re-enlistment due to force realignment requirements and reductions in end strength.”

In a memo earlier this year, Army Secretary John McHugh laid out more stringent criteria for denying re-enlistment, including rules that would turn away soldiers who have gotten a letter of reprimand for a recent incident

involving the use of drugs or alcohol, or some soldiers who were unable to qualify for a promotion list. "It's all focused on allowing us ... to retain only those soldiers who have the right skills, the right attributes and who help us meet the requirements and are those soldiers which truly have the greatest potential," said Army Brig. Gen. Richard P. Mustion, the Army's director of military personnel management. Last year, as the budget and personnel cuts began to take hold, just a bit more than 10 percent of Army recruits needed waivers to join. The bulk of those — about 7 percent — were medical waivers, which can include poor eyesight that can be corrected. About 3 percent were for misconduct that did not involve convictions. The decline in recent years was almost entirely on conduct waivers, not medical. As an example, there were 189 recruits with "major misconduct" waivers last year, and none with criminal convictions, compared to 546 misconduct waivers in 2009 and 220 with convictions.

Mustion said that as Army recruiters look at the applicants coming in they "are truly able to identify the very best soldiers, future soldiers, and those who display the greatest potential." He said they are evaluating each one on his physical, academic and aptitude test performances "and, quite frankly, would they require a waiver to come into the military versus the next soldier who has the same credentials but wouldn't require a waiver." Waivers have long been a source of debate. Military officials have defended the process, saying it allows good people who once made a minor mistake to enlist. But mid-level officers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan also told top defense officials that the dramatic rise in the number of bad-behavior waivers was a problem, that they were often spending too much time on "problem children." Steven Dale Green, a former 101st Airborne Division soldier, came into the Army on a morals waiver because of an earlier problem with drugs. He is now serving five life terms for killing an Iraqi family and raping and killing the 14-year-old daughter in March 2006.

With the economy struggling, it's still a recruit-rich environment. But Army officials worry that as the economy gets better, they may not get all the high quality recruits they need, and their best soldiers may decide not to re-enlist because they may do better in the corporate world. For now, however, the Army is saving money in the process. According to Mustion, soldiers in just six types of jobs are getting bonuses when they enlist: interpreter/translators, divers, cryptologic linguists, medical laboratory specialists and explosive ordnance disposal specialists. And those bonuses average about \$3,300-\$3,500, he said. That is a steep drop from the \$16,000-\$18,000 bonuses the Army was paying on average to new recruits in 2007-08. In the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2008, the Army paid nearly \$860,000 in enlistment bonuses, compared to just \$77,000 in the 2011 fiscal year. Re-enlistment bonuses for soldiers now average about \$7,500-\$7,700. Military leaders say the key goal is to shape the force as they cut, winnowing out not only the lesser qualified, but keeping the right number of soldiers in critical jobs and all across the ranks, particularly the mid-level officers. "We need to keep the right balance," said Rodriguez. "We don't want a well-modernized force with no personnel that are trained." The Army, he said, "can build a young soldier quickly, but we can't build a major and a sergeant quickly. So we have to figure out the right ratios as we move forward, and we have to be able to expand if we need to." [Source: Associated Press Lolita C. Baldor article 22 May 2012 ++]

VA Comprehensive Care Management Program: A clinical trial of self-management in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) was stopped early because of excess deaths and without a hoped-for decrease in hospitalizations, researchers reported. The Department of Veterans Affairs multi-site randomized trial, conducted among more than 400 patients, recorded 28 deaths in the intervention group compared with 10 in the usual care group, with COPD accounting for the largest proportion of the difference, Vincent S. Fan, MD, MPH, and colleagues reported in the May 14th issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. "We cannot explain the unexpected increase in mortality in the intervention group," Fan and co-authors wrote. "Whatever the reason, our findings suggest that self-management or intensive management protocols may not be appropriate for all subsets of patients with COPD."

The use of comprehensive care management programs is usually associated with improved patient satisfaction, adherence, and disease control in patients with chronic illnesses such as diabetes and arthritis, the authors noted in their introduction. However, trials of such programs in COPD patients "are few in number and highly variable in terms of patients, interventions, outcomes, duration of follow-up, and quality," they wrote. The investigators wanted to find out if COPD patients would be able to avoid hospitalization by taking part in an intense self-management and self-monitoring program. They undertook a trial that enrolled a total of 426 patients at 20 sites; 209 patients were chosen for the intervention and 217 were assigned to usual care (an informational booklet on COPD). Participants in the study were overwhelmingly male (97%), white (86-88%), with a median age of 66, and around 28% were current smokers.

Eligibility requirements included age older than 40 years, current or past history of smoking (equivalent to 10 pack-years), hospitalization for COPD within in the previous 12 months or least one visit in the past year to either a primary care or pulmonary clinic at a Veterans Affairs medical center, and no disease exacerbations in the past 4 weeks. Eligible patients were also required to have a post-bronchodilator ratio of FEV1 to FVC below 0.70, with an FEV1 below 80% predicted. Exclusion criteria included a primary diagnosis of asthma or any medical condition that would impair patient ability to provide informed consent. The intervention consisted of 4 weeks of 90-minute education sessions, which included an action plan to identify and treat COPD exacerbations and scheduled telephone calls from a case manager. Patients in both groups were provided with a COPD information booklet and their physicians were given a copy of COPD guidelines and instructions to follow them. Researchers were supposed to follow both groups to the time of first hospitalization. But the trial was stopped early because of excess mortality after enrolling only half of the hoped-for patients, Fan told MedPage Today in an interview. "We were surprised that the intervention was unsuccessful in changing behaviors and had no effect on hospitalizations," he said.

Among the 209 patients enrolled in the intervention group, 28 deaths occurred from all causes versus 10 in the usual care group. Among those in the intervention group, COPD accounted for the largest proportion of the difference -- 10 deaths. There were no differences seen in the number of hospitalizations or the time to initiation of treatment for an acute exacerbation of COPD. The researchers could not determine the reason that intervention patients did not initiate treatment sooner. It's difficult to figure out why self-management didn't work, Stuart J. Pocock, PhD, of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, wrote in an accompanying editorial. "Although one can argue post hoc about how the protocol of this current trial differs from the others, nothing convincing comes to light; therefore, the possibility of chance must be considered when interpreting these data," he wrote. "It may be best to think of this trial as having stopped for futility -- there was no hint of any beneficial effect on the primary outcome," Pocock continued. "On the other hand, the possibility that genuine harm was done by this behavioral intervention cannot be dismissed. Perhaps insufficient evidence was collected by the investigators about the detailed consequences of the educational package, thus denying us any causal insight into the excess mortality."

Limitations of the study included the inability to determine a specific cause of death in a high proportion of cases, lack of generalizability to other populations, and inability to study the accuracy of the educational materials or the manner in which the intervention was delivered, Fan and colleagues noted. The authors also stressed that threats to internal validity, such as biased group assignments or outcome assessments did not appear to contribute to the findings. [Source: MedPage Today Rita Baron article 16 May 2012 ++]

Commissary Pink Slime: Although the move has more to do with emotion than fact, Defense Commissary Agency officials have announced that "pink slime" no longer will be permitted in its ground beef products. "Although the USDA continues to assure us this process is safe," Chris Burns, DCA director of sales, is quoted in a Pentagon news release, "we have listened to our customers and modified our contracts to require that our

ground beef suppliers only sell us products not treated with (this) process." The transition will be completed by the end of MAY, officials said. In the meantime, USDA organic beef or all-natural ground beef will be sold. "All stores are scheduled to have these modified contracts in place by the end of the month," Burns added. The commissary is responding to nation-wide concerns over the use of lean, finely textured beef subjected to a special antibacterial process. During the furor, media pundits used the phrase "pink slime" to describe the beef product. The American Beef Institute stands behind the process, according to the Pentagon release, saying its use has reduced the occurrence of E.coli by 55 to 60 percent. It has also made use of lean meat that otherwise would be wasted, the institute insists. The product will nonetheless be replaced in military commissaries. "First and foremost, the commissary is a quality-of-life benefit for military customers," Burns is quoted in the news release. "It is important to us that we provide a balanced product assortment that meets the needs of our customers." [Source: The Warner Robins Patriot Gene Rector article 21 May 2012 ++]

Gulf War Syndrome Update 18: For the third time since the 1990-1991 Gulf War, Department of Veterans Affairs researchers will contact Gulf War-era veterans as a part of a long-term study of their health. For the "Follow-up Study of a National Cohort of Gulf War and Gulf Era Veterans," researchers want to learn about how the health of these veterans has changed over time, and about the natural history of long-term conditions like unexplained multi-symptom illnesses. Researchers will begin contacting participants at the end of May 2012. Veterans were previously contacted for a baseline survey in 1995 and a follow-up survey in 2005. This continuing VA effort studies a group of approximately 15,000 Gulf War veterans and 15,000 veterans who served elsewhere during the Gulf War. The study group includes all branches of service, representing active, reserve, and National Guard members. Women are being oversampled to make sure they are represented, making up 20 percent of the study sample. Veterans will respond via a paper or online survey, and researchers will also review medical records from a sample of study participants. Veterans will be asked about health issues that affect them, including chronic medical conditions such as cancer, neurological, respiratory and immunological conditions, as well as general health perceptions, functional status, chronic fatigue syndrome-like illness, unexplained multi-symptom illness and women's health. Veterans will be queried about their level of physical activity and their use of alcohol and tobacco. They also will be asked about their use of VA health care and satisfaction with their care.

More than a dozen scientific articles have been published from the two earlier surveys in the study. This work has investigated multi-symptom illnesses, chronic diseases, and environmental exposures associated with military deployment. For example, a recent scientific article showed that Gulf War veterans' health has worsened over time compared to the health of Gulf War-era veterans who served elsewhere. Gulf War veterans reported higher rates of ongoing unexplained multi-symptom illness, post-traumatic stress disorder, and chronic fatigue syndrome-like illness, along with higher health care utilization, including frequent clinic visits and recurrent hospitalization. These findings, other ongoing studies, and future research efforts will help VA to better understand the health consequences of deployment and guide care delivery. VA is funding the new study by a team from the Post-Deployment Health Epidemiology Program, Office of Public Health. Additional information about this study can be found here. [Source: American Legion Veterans Healthcare article 25 May 2012 ++]

VA Burial Benefit Update 13: Two senators have introduced a bill to ensure dignified burials for veterans after the remains of one were found in a deteriorated cardboard box at the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell. U.S. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, and U.S. Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), ranking member, introduced that legislation, according to a press release from Burr's office. The Dignified Burial of Veterans Act of 2012 (H.R.5833) would authorize the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

to furnish a casket or urn to a deceased veteran when the VA is unable to identify the veteran's next-of-kin, and determines that sufficient resources are not otherwise available to furnish a casket or urn for burial in a national cemetery. This bill would further require that the VA report back to Congress on the industry standard for urns and caskets and whether burials at national cemeteries are meeting that standard. Under current law, the VA is not authorized to purchase a casket or urn for veterans who do not have a next-of-kin to provide one, or the resources to be buried in an appropriate manner.

Murray and Burr, joined by U.S. Sens. Bill Nelson (D-FL) and Marco Rubio (R-FL), introduced this legislation after a veteran, with no known next-of-kin, was buried in a cardboard container at the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell, the press release said. The exposed remains were discovered during a renovation project at the cemetery to realign grave markers and replace dead grass. The veteran's remains were later placed in a bag and reburied with what was left of the cardboard box. The legislators made the following comments:

- "Those who have served our country in uniform deserve our honor, appreciation, and respect, and that responsibility does not end when they pass away," Burr said in the release. "My heart goes out to those affected by the problems at the Florida National Cemetery in Bushnell. We must ensure that the remains of veterans and service members are treated with dignity and respect and that the families of those who have passed away have no doubts as to the quality of the final resting place of their loved ones."
- "When America's heroes make a commitment to serve their country, we make a promise to care for them," Murray said. "That includes helping to provide them with a burial honoring their service. I was deeply disturbed when I heard this news. There is no reason why the remains of a veteran should ever be treated with this lack of dignity. I am pleased we are taking the appropriate steps to right this indescribable wrong." "All veterans deserve a dignified final resting place," Nelson said. "A cardboard box certainly isn't one. That's why we've got to make sure this doesn't happen again."
- "Those who serve our nation in uniform deserve our respect and support, from the moment they commit to serve through their deaths and even beyond as we honor their legacies," Rubio said. "Providing dignified burials for veterans is a solemn pledge we must uphold. Cases like this are outrageous and need to be corrected so that no deceased veteran is ever dishonored in this way again."

[Source: South Lake Press Scott Callahan article 25 May 2012 ++]

VA OEF/OIF Update 04: America's newest veterans are filing for disability benefits at a historic rate, claiming to be the most medically and mentally troubled generation of former troops the nation has ever seen. A staggering 45 percent of the 1.6 million veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are now seeking compensation for injuries they say are service-related. That is more than double the estimate of 21 percent who filed such claims after the Gulf War in the early 1990s, top government officials told The Associated Press. What's more, these new veterans are claiming eight to nine ailments on average, and the most recent ones over the last year are claiming 11 to 14. By comparison, Vietnam veterans are currently receiving compensation for fewer than four, on average, and those from World War II and Korea, just two.

It's unclear how much worse off these new veterans are than their predecessors. Many factors are driving the dramatic increase in claims - the weak economy, more troops surviving wounds, and more awareness of problems such as concussions and PTSD. Almost one-third have been granted disability so far. Government officials and some veterans' advocates say that veterans who might have been able to work with certain disabilities may be more inclined to seek benefits now because they lost jobs or can't find any. Aggressive outreach and advocacy efforts also have brought more veterans into the system, which must evaluate each claim to see if it is war-related. Payments range from \$127 a month for a 10 percent disability to \$2,769 for a full one. As the nation commemorates the more than 6,400 troops who died in post-9/11 wars, the problems of those who survived also draw attention. These new

veterans are seeking a level of help the government did not anticipate, and for which there is no special fund set aside to pay.

The Department of Veterans Affairs is mired in backlogged claims, but "our mission is to take care of whatever the population is," said Allison Hickey, the VA's undersecretary for benefits. "We want them to have what their entitlement is." The 21 percent who filed claims in previous wars is Hickey's estimate of an average for Operation Desert Storm and Desert Shield. The VA has details only on the current disability claims being paid to veterans of each war. The AP spent three months reviewing records and talking with doctors, government officials and former troops to take stock of the new veterans. They are different in many ways from those who fought before them.

- More are from the Reserves and National Guard - 28 percent of those filing disability claims - rather than career military. Reserves and National Guard made up a greater percentage of troops in these wars than they did in previous ones. About 31 percent of Guard/Reserve new veterans have filed claims compared to 56 percent of career military ones.
- More of the new veterans are women, accounting for 12 percent of those who have sought care through the VA. Women also served in greater numbers in these wars than in the past. Some female veterans are claiming PTSD due to military sexual trauma - a new challenge from a disability rating standpoint, Hickey said.
- The new veterans have different types of injuries than previous veterans did. That's partly because improvised bombs have been the main weapon and because body armor and improved battlefield care allowed many of them to survive wounds that in past wars proved fatal.

"They're being kept alive at unprecedented rates," said Dr. David Cifu, the VA's medical rehabilitation chief. More than 95 percent of troops wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan have survived. Larry Bailey II is an example. After tripping a rooftop bomb in Afghanistan last June, the 26-year-old Marine remembers flying into the air, then fellow troops attending to him. "I pretty much knew that my legs were gone. My left hand, from what I remember I still had three fingers on it," although they didn't seem right, Bailey said. "I looked a few times but then they told me to stop looking." Bailey, who is from Zion, Ill., north of Chicago, ended up a triple amputee and expects to get a hand transplant this summer. He is still transitioning from active duty and is not yet a veteran. Just over half of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans eligible for VA care have used it so far. Of those who have sought VA care:

- More than 1,600 of them lost a limb; many others lost fingers or toes.
- At least 156 are blind, and thousands of others have impaired vision.
- More than 177,000 have hearing loss, and more than 350,000 report tinnitus - noise or ringing in the ears.
- Thousands are disfigured, as many as 200 of them so badly that they may need face transplants. One-quarter of battlefield injuries requiring evacuation included wounds to the face or jaw, one study found.

"The numbers are pretty staggering," said Dr. Bohdan Pomahac, a surgeon at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston who has done four face transplants on non-military patients and expects to start doing them soon on veterans. Others have invisible wounds. More than 400,000 of these new veterans have been treated by the VA for a mental health problem, most commonly, PTSD. Tens of thousands of veterans suffered traumatic brain injury, or TBI - mostly mild concussions from bomb blasts - and doctors don't know what's in store for them long-term. Cifu, of the VA, said that roughly 20 percent of active duty troops suffered concussions, but only one-third of them have symptoms lasting beyond a few months. That's still a big number, and "it's very rare that someone has just a single concussion," said David Hovda, director of the UCLA Brain Injury Research Center. Suffering multiple concussions, or one soon after another, raises the risk of long-term problems. A brain injury also makes the brain more susceptible to PTSD, he said. On a more mundane level, many new veterans have back, shoulder and knee problems, aggravated by carrying heavy packs and wearing the body armor that helped keep them alive. One recent study found that 19 percent required orthopedic surgery consultations and 4 percent needed surgery after returning from combat.

All of this adds up to more disability claims, which for years have been coming in faster than the government can handle them. The average wait to get a new one processed grows longer each month and is now about eight months - time that a frustrated, injured veteran might spend with no income. More than 560,000 veterans from all wars currently have claims that are backlogged - older than 125 days. The VA's benefits chief, Hickey, gave these reasons:

- **Sheer volume.** Disability claims from all veterans soared from 888,000 in 2008 to 1.3 million in 2011. Last year's included more than 230,000 new claims from Vietnam veterans and their survivors because of a change in what conditions can be considered related to Agent Orange exposure. Those complex, 50-year-old cases took more than a third of available staff, she said.
- **High number of ailments per claim.** When a veteran claims 11 to 14 problems, each one requires "due diligence" - a medical evaluation and proof that it is service-related, Hickey said.
- **A new mandate to handle the oldest cases first.** Because these tend to be the most complex, they have monopolized staff and pushed up average processing time on new claims, she said.
- **Outmoded systems.** The VA is streamlining and going to electronic records, but for now, "We have 4.4 million case files sitting around 56 regional offices that we have to work with; that slows us down significantly," Hickey said.

Barry Jesinoski, executive director of Disabled American Veterans, called Hickey's efforts "commendable," but said: "The VA has a long way to go" to meet veterans' needs. Even before the surge in Agent Orange cases, VA officials "were already at a place that was unacceptable" on backlogged claims, he said. He and VA officials agree that the economy is motivating some claims. His group helps veterans file them, and he said that sometimes when veterans come in, "We'll say, 'Is your back worse?' and they'll say, 'No, I just lost my job.'" Jesinoski does believe these veterans have more mental problems, especially from multiple deployments. "You just can't keep sending people into war five, six or seven times and expect that they're going to come home just fine," he said. For taxpayers, the ordeal is just beginning. With any war, the cost of caring for veterans rises for several decades and peaks 30 to 40 years later, when diseases of aging are more common, said Harvard economist Linda Bilmes. She estimates the health care and disability costs of the recent wars at \$600 billion to \$900 billion. "This is a huge number and there's no money set aside," she said. "Unless we take steps now into some kind of fund that will grow over time, it's very plausible many people will feel we can't afford these benefits we overpromised." How would that play to these veterans, who all volunteered and now expect the government to keep its end of the bargain? "The deal was, if you get wounded, we're going to supply this level of support," Bilmes said. Right now, "there's a lot of sympathy and a lot of people want to help. But memories are short and times change." [Source: AP Marilyn Marchione article 27 May 2012 ++]

Health Care Reform Update 50: About 10 percent of U.S. veterans under the age of 65 lack health insurance and are not being cared for by the Department of Veterans Affairs, either, according to a study published on 24 MAY. The study estimated that 1.3 million veterans and nearly 950,000 members of their families lack health insurance. These uninsured military families account for 4.8 percent of the 47.3 million uninsured Americans, the Urban Institute and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reported. But the 2010 health reform law might help nearly half of these veterans get health care through expansions of Medicaid, because they make so little money, the researchers wrote. "This is the first published report to provide estimates of uninsurance among nonelderly veterans and their families both nationally and at the state level and to assess the potential for the Affordable Care Act to reduce their uninsurance rates," wrote the Urban Institute's Jennifer Haley and Genevieve Kenney, who used Census data on 129,000 veterans for their study.

“Although the Affordable Care Act does not change the VA or other military health care systems and is not targeted specifically at veterans, it includes a number of provisions aimed at increasing access to affordable coverage that could benefit veterans and their families,” Haley and Kenney wrote. “Nearly half (48.8 percent) of uninsured veterans will likely qualify for expanded Medicaid coverage, while another 40.1 percent have incomes that would allow them to qualify for subsidized coverage through state insurance exchanges, provided that they do not have access to affordable employer-sponsored insurance.” Veterans are doing better than the civilian population overall - just under 18 percent of the total non-elderly population lack health insurance. “Of the estimated 12.5 million nonelderly veterans nationwide, 1.3 million, or just over 1 in 10 are uninsured and do not use VA services,” Haley and Kenney wrote. [Source: National Journal Maggie Fox article 24 May 2012 ++]

CT Veterans Hall of Fame: Department of Veterans' Affairs Commissioner Linda Schwartz has encouraged all citizens to consider nominating distinguished veterans who have made significant contributions to their communities after leaving military service to the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame. The deadline for applications for the Class of 2012 is 3 SEP. Ten Connecticut veterans are inducted each year based on application reviews and recommendations from an executive committee and final selection by the Lt. Governor. Seventy-two current and former citizens of Connecticut have been inducted to date into the Veterans Hall of Fame, including five recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor. "I would like to remind everyone that the purpose of this award established in 2005 was to honor those veterans who left the military and continued to make contributions to their communities," Commissioner Schwartz said. "The Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame has honored many fine men and women who wore the uniform and kept on serving. Their accomplishments have enriched our state in countless ways. We hope that individuals will see this opportunity to honor a veteran that they know". Among the requirements to be eligible for the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame, the nominee must have been born in Connecticut or resided here for at least five years; the nominee must meet the definition of a "veteran" under the Connecticut General Statutes 27-103; and the nominee must have received an honorable discharge from the U.S. Armed Forces. Nomination packets must not exceed five (5) 8 1/2" x 11" pages and must be received by September 3, 2012 at the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, ATTN: Veterans Hall of Fame, 287 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067. Nominations received after September 3rd will be considered for the following year's class. [Source: The Ridgefield Press article 25 May 2012 ++]

Memorial Day Update 04: Soldiers from the Army's 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) fanned out across Arlington National Cemetery 24 MAY, placing over 220,000 American flags at gravestones in a Memorial Day weekend tradition. "I get the privilege of honoring all the ones who have sacrificed so much for our country," Army Capt. Shahin Uddin said as he placed flag after flag at grave markers, always centered and one foot away from the stone. "This is the one day of the year when we get the privilege of coming out here and putting a flag right next to their tombstone to remember them and pay respect." Among those watching "Flags-In" were Helen Willits and her daughter Terese Tunney, both of whom who flew in from Ohio for the ceremony; and Tunney's daughter, Katherine, from Maryland. Willits' husband, Warren, was a World War II veteran who died in 2010. "My dad is buried here," Terese Tunney said, "and it's heartwarming to see all these young soldiers here, doing this service for all their comrades. It's an important day for us, to be with my dad." The "Flags-In" ceremony "brings back a lot of memories for me," added Willits. Another Arlington visitor during the event was Col. Paul Calbos, former commander of Regional Support Command-North in Afghanistan. A week away from retirement after a 30-year Army career, Calbos "wanted to make one of my last actions to come down here to Section 60," where many servicemembers killed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are buried. "I think every American should come to

Arlington to get a feeling for the price of freedom, and what it costs when we send our sons and daughters off to war," Calbos said. "Not an easy decision." [Source: Stars & Stripes Joe Gromelski article 25 May ++]



2012 'Flags In' at Arlington National Cemetery

Vet Housing Update 04: Michigan's U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow on 23 M AY introduced the Homeowners and Military Families Tax Fairness Act that would ensure homeowners who were wrongfully foreclosed upon would not face a tax increase as the result of a settlement reached earlier this year. The settlement with the nation's five largest mortgage banks led to the banks offering families compensation to make up for unlawfully foreclosing on them. Under current law, this settlement relief would be considered regular income for families, forcing homeowners to pay additional taxes after already enduring a wrongful foreclosure."It is bad enough that so many families were taken advantage of and were wrongfully foreclosed on," said Stabenow. "But to add insult to injury, the IRS would require these homeowners to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars in additional income tax as a result of their settlement. That's wrong, and this bill would fix that."

Stabenow's bill would also prevent the banks involved in the agreement from being able to write settlements offered to active duty U.S. servicemembers off of their taxes. Under current law, men and women in uniform have special protection against foreclosure to ensure that their families are not evicted while they are fighting for their country. Stabenow's bill ensures that banks aren't able to get a tax break in the cases where they settled with military families on whom they wrongfully foreclosed. "Protections are rightfully in place to keep military families from being evicted while one or both parents are serving our country," Stabenow said. "Banks who mistreated veterans should certainly not be allowed to take a tax break for doing so." Earlier this year, the Federal Government and 49 State Attorneys General reached a \$25 billion settlement with the nation's five largest mortgage servicers to provide funds to victims of mortgage loan servicing and foreclosure abuses. Among the abusive practices pointed out in the settlement were robo-signing of affidavits, deceptive practices in loan modifications, and misconduct in the foreclosure process-ultimately resulting in banks allegedly foreclosing on homeowners unlawfully. In addition to supporting victims of unfair foreclosure practices, the settlement will provide enhanced loan modifications and support housing counseling and state-level foreclosure prevention programs. More information on the settlement can be found at www.nationalmortgagesettlement.com.

Senator Stabenow's Homeowners and Military Families Tax Fairness Act would exempt this settlement relief from being counted as income, and ensure that no extra taxes are imposed on homeowners who were the victims of fraud or other abuses. Stabenow's bill would also extend the private mortgage insurance deduction, which helps enable first-time and low- and moderate-income borrowers to purchase homes. In March, Stabenow introduced similar legislation called the Mortgage Relief Act that would ensure that underwater homeowners, who owe more on their mortgages than their homes are now worth, would not be burdened with additional income tax if a part of their mortgage loan is forgiven. The IRS formerly considered any loan forgiveness provided to homeowners as income, meaning families already under water would pay thousands of dollars in income tax for phantom income that isn't actual money a family is earning. Stabenow wrote and passed legislation to fix this problem in 2007, but the legislation will expire this year if Congress does not act. [Source: Sen Stabenow on website http://www.stabenow.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=733 27 May 2012 ++]

Vet Housing Update 05: Tim McGraw will be saluting veterans in a big way while on tour this summer. The country music superstar is giving away 25 mortgage-free houses — one for each stop on his upcoming “Brothers of the Sun” tour with Kenny Chesney — to wounded or needy service members. McGraw kicked off the campaign with a Memorial Day concert for military members at New York City’s Beacon Theatre during Fleet Week. “My sister’s a veteran, my uncle’s a veteran, my grandfather was a veteran, one of my best friends is a veteran,” McGraw said in an interview. “I’ve known people my whole life who are in service to America. And I think in my position to be able to do something like that is probably the ultimate thing. So to be able to go on tour and provide sort of a stable foundation for a veteran and their family is something I really look forward to.” McGraw is partnering with the charity Operation Homefront and Chase on the program, dubbed HomeFront, with contributions from the Academy of Country Music’s ACM Lifting Lives program and The Premier Group on behalf of the North Carolina Furniture Manufacturers. “It’s going to be a great opportunity to set a family on track that’s done so much for us and my family,” McGraw said. “So I can’t imagine a better thing to do on tour. It’s going to be fun — I mean every tour date we’re going to be out there.” [Source: Associated Press Chris Talbott article 24 May 2012 ++]

USS Iowa Naval Museum Update 01: The USS Iowa — the iconic World War II-era battleship that once served as transport to President Franklin D. Roosevelt — left San Francisco Bay on Saturday on its way to its new home in Southern California. Surrounded by pleasure boats and other vessels, the 887-foot long, 58,000-ton battlewagon was towed through the bay and passed under the Golden Gate Bridge at about 2:30 p.m. Crowds watched from both sides of the bridge as the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Sockeye provided an official escort and the San Francisco fireboat Phoenix led the way. At the St. Francis Yacht Club on San Francisco’s shoreline, officers and crew members of the USS Decatur, outfitted in their dress whites, saluted as the Iowa drifted past, Rogers said. Club members also honored the Iowa with a farewell gun salute and a signal flag message — ‘Farewell My Dear Friend.’ “Everything has gone beautifully,” said spokesman Bob Rogers of the Pacific Battleship Center, a nonprofit organization that will operate an interactive naval museum on board the USS Iowa at the Port of Los Angeles in San Pedro. “The Phoenix was spraying water in every direction. She took her right out the Gate.”

The Iowa, first commissioned in 1943 and again in 1951 and 1984, saw duty in World War II and the Korean War. The ship once carried Roosevelt to a summit with Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek. It also took part in escorting tankers in the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq war before being decommissioned in 1990. In recent years, she sat in the cold and fog, anchored with other mothballed ships in nearby Suisun Bay. Last year, the Pacific Battleship Center beat out the San Francisco Bay Area city of Vallejo when the Navy awarded the

ship to the organization. The center's future plans include an interactive tour experience that will allow the visitor to experience what life at sea was like during active duty. Among the highlights will be viewing the inside of one of the main gun turrets, seeing the 17.5-inch armored conning station on the bridge and viewing Roosevelt's stateroom. The ship was recently moved to the Port of Richmond, not far from where "Rosie the Riveters" built ships in the 1940s. Workers scrubbed and painted the ship's exterior, replaced the teak deck and reattached the mast in preparation for the museum commissioning in July. The Iowa was scheduled to leave on May 20 but was delayed because of a storm system. As it turned out, its departure came on the same day as weekend celebrations were under way marking the Golden Gate Bridge's 75th anniversary. The trip down the coast was expected to take about four days. [Source: AP article 27 May 2012 ++]

Vietnam War Commemoration Update 02: In a proclamation issued 25 MAY, President Barack Obama urged Americans to remember the courage and sacrifice of U.S. military members who served during the Vietnam War, and he declared May 28, 2012, through November 11, 2025, as the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War. In his proclamation, Obama called upon federal, state, and local officials "to honor our Vietnam veterans, our fallen, our wounded, those unaccounted for, our former prisoners of war, their families, and all who served with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities" during the 13-year commemoration. "As we observe the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, we reflect with solemn reverence upon the valor of a generation that served with honor," Obama said in his proclamation. "We pay tribute to the more than 3 million servicemen and women who left their families to serve bravely, a world away from everything they knew and everyone they loved.

"From Ia Drang to Khe Sanh, from Hue to Saigon and countless villages in between, they pushed through jungles and rice paddies, heat and monsoon, fighting heroically to protect the ideals we hold dear as Americans," the president continued. "Through more than a decade of combat, over air, land, and sea, these proud Americans upheld the highest traditions of our armed forces." Today, grateful Americans "honor more than 58,000 patriots -- their names etched in black granite -- who sacrificed all they had and all they would ever know," Obama said. "We draw inspiration from the heroes who suffered unspeakably as prisoners of war, yet who returned home with their heads held high. We pledge to keep faith with those who were wounded and still carry the scars of war, seen and unseen. With more than 1,600 of our service members still among the missing, we pledge as a nation to do everything in our power to bring these patriots home. "In the reflection of The Wall," he continued, "we see the military family members and veterans who carry a pain that may never fade. May they find peace in knowing their loved ones endure, not only in medals and memories, but in the hearts of all Americans, who are forever grateful for their service, valor, and sacrifice."

Obama urged citizens to "renew our sacred commitment to those who answered our country's call in Vietnam and those who awaited their safe return." Beginning on Memorial Day, May 28, 2012, he said, the federal government will partner with local governments, private organizations, and communities across America to participate in the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War. The 13-year commemoration, he added, will "honor and give thanks to a generation of proud Americans who saw our country through one of the most challenging missions we have ever faced." No amount of words will ever be enough or fully worthy in praising military members for their service in the Vietnam War, nor any honor truly befitting their sacrifice, Obama said. However, "it is never too late to pay tribute to the men and women who answered the call of duty with courage and valor," he said, adding it's also important to "renew our commitment to the fullest possible accounting for those who have not returned." Obama urged all Americans to provide "our Vietnam veterans, their families, and all who have served the fullest respect and support of a grateful nation." [Source: AFPS article 25 May 2012 ++]

National Museum of the U.S. Army Update 01: The National Museum of the U.S. Army (NMUSA) has been established to recognize the service and sacrifice of the American Soldier at home and around the world, at war and during peace. As part of that effort the museum has opened up the Registry of the American Soldier to provide an opportunity for anyone who served in the U.S. Army to have his or her name and service history placed on record at the Museum. If you served, you need to be in the Registry! You may also register the name of a family member or friend, if they currently serve, or have served in the U.S. Army, or submit someone from the past. Currently serving active and Reserve soldiers, veterans and family members and friends of deceased veterans, and descendants of anyone who served in the Army, National Guard, Army Reserve, Army Air Corps, Women's Army Corps and the Women's Army Air Corps from 1775 to the present are invited to be listed in the registry. The Registry will be on permanent display at the Museum, and it will be accessible via the internet for those who cannot visit in person.

The Registry of the American Soldier <http://www.usarmyregistry.org> is a publicly submitted listing of those who served in the U.S. Army. There is no fee for submitting a Soldier's name or photo to the Registry. The Registry is not an official document of the U.S. Government. In an effort to increase the number of Registry of the American Soldier honorees whose entries include photos, The Army Historical Foundation recently waived the \$10 photo processing fee. "Photos of Soldiers in uniform help tell an important part of their story," said Richard Couture, Deputy Executive Director for Donor Marketing. "Soldiers' uniforms, with their decorations, unit crests, patches, and other badges, are a telling complement to the Soldiers' service histories.

Over 91,000 former and currently serving Soldiers are enrolled, and fewer than 3,300 of the honorees' entries include a photo." According to Couture, the Foundation is hoping to improve on that number significantly by reminding the public that there is no fee to register and now there is no fee to submit a photo for future honorees or to add a photo to those already enrolled. "A photo of a Soldier also adds a personal element to a story, puts a face to a name, and more fully recognizes a Soldier." Couture added. Photos can be uploaded electronically via the web site or mailed to National Museum of the United States Army; ATTN: Registry of the American Soldier; PO Box 96281; Washington, DC 20090-6281. Mailed photos must include the full name, rank, and hometown of the Army member exactly as it appears on the Registry. Mailed photos will not be returned. Registry entries can be viewed online at <https://www.usarmyregistry.org/search.aspx>. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted 25 May 2012 ++]

TSP Data Breach: Personal information including Social Security numbers for 123,000 accounts with the Thrift Savings Plan was stolen a year ago. The TSP serves federal employees, service members and their beneficiaries. According to The Army Times the attack occurred in July, but the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board and Serco were not aware of it until they were notified in APR by the FBI. Kim Weaver, spokeswoman for the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board, which manages the TSP program, said. The infected computer was immediately shut down and the security of all TSP and Serco systems was reviewed. The contractor, Serco Inc., which provides services for more than four million federal employees, was targeted in the attack. According to Serco's press release there is no evidence of any funds being diverted or identity theft resulting from the incident. An extensive forensic analysis of the data also shows no indication that the TSP network, which supports TSP's 4.5 million participants, was subjected to unauthorized access. Approximately 43,000 individuals had their personal information including name, address and Social Security number potentially compromised. An additional 80,000 may have had their social security numbers compromised but there is no indication that additional identifying information was also included with those particular individuals. The Federal Retirement Thrift

Investment Board sent letters to the affected TSP account holders Friday with details for call center and how to get free credit monitoring. [Source: Off The Base Bobbie O'Brien article 25 May 2012 ++]

Vet Gravesites: The final resting places for many of the men and women who fought America's wars have fallen into shocking disrepair, with neglect, theft and vandalism prompting veterans groups to question the nation's commitment to honoring its dead soldiers. Advocates say smaller federal, state, county and private cemeteries that contain the graves of service members are often poorly kept, marked by crumbling headstones, overgrown with weeds and littered with debris. Perhaps even worse, many veterans' gravesites have been targets of vandalism and theft. "These are people who have defended our ideals. The way we treat and ultimately revere them in perpetuity is a message for tomorrow's generation," says Tim Tetz, the American Legion national legislative director. "It's a pattern that you're seeing across the country right now. You have cemeteries being expanded or added to with less or the same number of people caring for the grounds. Examples of a faltering commitment to honor America's dead soldiers include:

- Vietnam veteran and retired Army Capt. Ronald Rulon told FoxNews.com he felt his heart drop when he heard that 200 bronze flag stands had been stolen from a local veterans' cemetery where many of his friends and fellow soldiers are buried. "It's terrible," said Rulon, 70, of Mullica Township, N.J. "It's an affront to the veterans who gave their lives so the very people who stole from their graves could have their freedom, and all the niceties they enjoy in their day-to-day life." Startling accounts of theft, vandalism and neglect at smaller veterans' graveyards across the nation have become too common, as cemeteries face budget and staffing shortfalls in a struggling economy.
- A supervisor at one New Jersey county veterans cemetery told FoxNews.com his facility cut half its grounds keeping positions over the past decade, even as the population of those interred rose from 3,000 to 5,000 vets.
- Last year, a maintenance supervisor at the Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery, just outside of Milwaukee, was arrested after allegedly using the veterans cemetery as his private dump, burying everything from cans of paint thinner to television sets, according to The Associated Press.
- A Catholic cemetery outside Boston, the burial site of some 4,000 vets, recently made news when thieves stole 200 brass flag stands to sell for scrap -- a phenomenon so common many are turning to plastic flag holders. A supervisor told FoxNews.com his facility has suffered deep staffing and budget cuts over the last decade, even as the number of graves has risen by 15,000.
- In April, a local utility shut off power to a small cemetery in Jersey City, N.J., where thousands of veterans of wars ranging from the Revolutionary War to World War II are buried after the facility fell behind on its bills. Power was eventually restored to Jersey City & Harsimus Cemetery, home to soldiers from the Civil War.
- Paul Guillou, superintendent of St. Joseph's Cemetery in Pittsfield, Mass, said "We used to have 15 full-time people and now there's only 10. There's more work and less equipment for a greater number of graves. We're asked to do more with less." Guillou said he regrets that caring for veterans' graves is a casualty of budget shortfalls. "These guys and gals served their country, World War I, World War II, Vietnam, Korea. They deserve, at the least, a peaceful interment," he said.



Not all veterans' graves are maintained in a manner befitting the debt owed by a grateful nation.

The graves of veterans can be found in virtually every cemetery in the nation, and private operators owe no more care to their graves than anyone else's. But some exclusively veterans' cemeteries do receive taxpayer funds, including the 131 run by the National Cemetery Association for the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Funding to those cemeteries has remained roughly static at \$250 million over the last decade, even as more veterans of World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars have passed on, according to Tetz. A spokesman for the NCA insisted the federally funded veterans' cemeteries are well kept. "There really isn't problem on the federal level," said Darrin White, who oversees three national cemeteries, as well as a military section of a fourth facility, in the Philadelphia and New Jersey area. "We've kept up with the pace." But advocates say no matter where veterans are buried, their memory and resting places deserve the respect of a grateful nation. "These are people who have defended our ideals ...the way we treat and ultimately revere them in perpetuity is a message for tomorrow's generation about what it means to sacrifice," said Tetz. "If we aren't revering or honoring these people, it begets the question of what tomorrow will bring for our country." [Source: Fox News Mike Jaccarino article 24 May 2012 ++]

DFAS Retiree Seminars: Need help with your retired pay or annuity account? Attend one of the many retiree seminars that take place across the country. This year, Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) Retired and Annuitant Pay will participate in the retiree seminars, stateside and overseas, listed below. Friendly and knowledgeable DFAS representatives will be on hand to provide information and answer questions regarding military retirement pay and annuities. Contact the Retirement Services Office or Retiree Activities Office serving your area for more information regarding seminars.

Date	Location (U.S.)
=====	=====
Jun 16	Tinker Air Force Base, Okla.
Aug 24	Minneapolis, Minn.
Aug 25	Camp Ripley, Minn.
Sept 07	Fort McCoy, Wis.
Sept 15	Fort Drum, NY
Sept 21	Fort Belvoir, Va.

Sept 22 Selfridge, Mich.
 Sept 29 Camp Lejeune, N.C.
 Sept 29 Redstone Arsenal, Ala.
 Sept 29 Fort Dix, NJ
 Oct 26 Fort Rucker, Ala.
 Oct 26 Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio
 Oct 27 Rock Island Arsenal, Ill.
 Oct 27 Joint Base Andrews, Md.
 Nov 03 Fort Knox, Ky.
 Nov 08 Fort Detrick, Md.

Date	Location (Overseas)
=====	=====
Oct 12	Benelux, Belgium
Oct 13	Heidelberg, Germany
Oct 17	Vincenza, Italy
Oct 19	Grafenwohr, Germany
Oct 20	Schweinfurt, Germany
Oct 22	Ramstein Air Force Base, Germany
Oct 24	Ansbach, Germany
Oct 25	Stuttgart, Germany
Oct 26	Kaiserslautern, Germany

More DFAS Retired and Annuitant Pay information is available online at <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary.html>. For mailing list subscribe/unsubscribe instructions and other useful retiree and veterans related links visit the "Links for MIL\RET\VETS" website at <http://www.hostmtb.org>. For DFAS and VA Customer Service contact information refer to <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/about/aboutus/customer-service.html>. [Source: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/seminars.html> 24 May 2012 ++]

Fisher House Expansion Update 08: Military and civilian leaders cut the ribbon for the first Fort Belvoir Fisher House, 22 MAY, during a dedication ceremony at Fort Belvoir Community Hospital. The Fort Belvoir Fisher House joins a network of 56 operational Fisher Houses in the United States and Germany. Fisher Houses are homes donated to the military and Department of Veterans Affairs, where Families can stay while a loved one is receiving treatment. Additionally, the Foundation ensures that Families of servicemembers wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan are not burdened with unnecessary expense during a time of crisis. "Each Fisher House is unique in design and decoration," said Roxanna Calderon, Fisher House manager. "We don't want it to look like cookie-cutter hotel rooms; this is supposed to be 'a home away from home.'"

The Fisher House at Fort Belvoir is a 10,000 square foot home with 12 private guest suites. It includes various common areas including, a kitchen and spacious dining room, a family and living room, and a large laundry facility with multiple washers and dryers. The common areas and guest suites are professionally designed and furnished in the tone and style of the local area. "This home represents an unwavering commitment to both patient and Family-centered care and world-class care provided by the hospital," said Col. Susan Annicelli, Fort Belvoir Community Hospital commander. "As the newest addition to the fleet of Fisher homes opens its doors, it will serve as a beacon of care and comfort that will endure for generations to come." The Fisher House program allows military Families a

place to stay, at no cost, while their loved one is in treatment at a nearby military treatment facility or Veterans Affairs hospital. The home offers a nurturing refuge from the stress of hospitalization, rehabilitation, and recovery.

A hospitalization can last weeks – even months – and Fisher Houses aim to provide more than just housing. Families can share their experiences with the other Families living at the house and support one another. "The Families aren't just by the side of their own loved ones, they're by each other's side during these difficult times," said H.C. Barnum, Medal of Honor recipient. "These homes provide our servicemembers with the very best medicine possible, which is the love and support of their Family members," said Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Lloyd J. Austin, III. Fisher Houses across the nation and in Germany have saved thousands of Families an estimated \$192 million in lodging and transportation costs. Ken Fisher, chairman and chief executive officer of Fisher House Foundation, said the foundation is more than just building houses. "Fisher House believes that 'Thank you for your service' is not enough anymore," Fisher said. "It's more than just words, it is now deeds. It's remembering that behind each and every man or woman that wears this nation's uniform is a Family and that Family serves this nation too." [Source: Belvoir Eagle Kristin Ellis article 24 May 2012 ++]

American Fallen Soldiers Project: On 22 MAY, VA honored all Veterans past and present as part of their WIN (Wellness Is Now) program through the Emotional Wellness Campaign with a gallery of works from The American Fallen Soldiers Project (AFSP). The project was created by Phil Taylor, who has created portraits free of charge for nearly a hundred Gold Star Families. Portraits of 1st Lt. Frank Walkup IV and Spec. Clifford Beattie—sons of VA employees—were featured. The American Fallen Soldiers Project was formed to help provide comfort and healing to the mourning families of our fallen military men and women. With the mission to honor, respect and forever memorialize those who have sacrificed their lives while protecting our freedom, this 501(c)3 non-profit organization makes available to the families, at no cost, an original portrait of their fallen loved one that fully captures their appearance and personality. They also will provide, upon request, reproduction prints on canvas for other immediate family members who did not receive the original painting. Each original portrait and canvas reproduction print is provided mounted and framed.

Portraits may be requested by the primary next of kin or other family member of a fallen American military serviceman who has died during active duty in the Afghanistan, Iraq, or previous wars. However, if the portrait is requested by a distant or non-family member, they ask that the original portrait be given to the immediate family and a canvas reproduction print will be made available to additional immediate family members. Online requests and photograph submission is preferred, but if you cannot submit your form and pictures online, you can download and print the Mail-In Request form at https://fs19.formsite.com/afsp/form642939490/secure_index.html and mail your submission along with your photographs to the address listed. Photographs submitted via mail will not be returned. The portrait will be painted from one of the photographs submitted and will be chosen by the artist. Images submitted do not have to be in military dress. They do not blend multiple photographs or remove goggles, hats, etc. for the portrait as this may distort the final results. Photographs submitted should be ones that you would want to be representative of your loved one for a lifetime. Portrait completion can take up to 24-36 months. Check out the American Fallen Soldiers Project site <http://www.americanfallensoldiers.com> for more information and to view their gallery of portraits done to date. [Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/veteransaffairs/sets/72157629865031844> May 2012 ++]

VA Grave Marker Medallion Update 01: The Department of Veterans Affairs has streamlined the process for families of deceased Veterans to receive a medallion which can be affixed to grave

markers at private cemeteries and indicates the Veteran status of the deceased. “This new form streamlines the ordering process, making it easier for families to order the medallion,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “The families want everyone to know that their loved one was a Veteran. We should help them do that in any way we can.” Previously, families ordered the medallion using the form to order a government headstone or marker. VA has introduced a new form – VA Form 40-1330M – for use solely to order a medallion. The older form, VA Form 40-1330, remains in place to order a traditional government headstone or marker.

The medallion is a device furnished in lieu of a traditional Government headstone or grave marker for Veterans whose death occurred on or after Nov. 1, 1990, and whose grave in a private cemetery is marked with a privately purchased headstone or marker. Under federal law, eligible Veterans buried in a private cemetery are entitled to either a government-furnished grave marker or the medallion, but not both. The medallion is available in three sizes: 5 inches, 3 inches and 1 ½ inches in width. Each bronze medallion features the image of a folded burial flag adorned with laurels and is inscribed with the word “Veteran” at the top and the Veteran’s branch of service at the bottom.



Next of kin receive the medallion, along with a kit that allows the family or the staff of a private cemetery to affix the medallion to a headstone, grave marker, mausoleum or columbarium niche cover. The medallion is available only to Veterans buried in private cemeteries without a government headstone or marker. Families of eligible decedents may also order a memorial headstone or marker when remains are not available for interment. More information about the medallion or headstones and markers can be found at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmorder.asp> . To download the VA Form 40-1330M, Claim for Government Medallion, go to <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-1330M.pdf>.

VA operates 131 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico and 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. Nearly four million Americans, including Veterans of every war and conflict -- from the Revolutionary War to the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan -- are buried in VA’s national cemeteries on more than 19,000 acres. Veterans with a discharge issued under conditions other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a VA national cemetery. Other burial benefits available for all eligible Veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery or a private cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone, grave marker or medallion. Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the VA Web site on the Internet at <http://www.cem.va.gov> or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 1-800-827-1000. [Source: VA News Release 22 May 2012 ++]

Burn Pit Toxic Emissions Update 19: An 8-year assessment of the air quality at one of the largest military bases in Afghanistan reveals that servicemembers' and civilians' exposure to air contaminants from the "burn pits," used for disposing of trash, could pose long-term respiratory problems, according to an Army memo. "The long term health risk associated with air conditions on BAF ... indicates there is a potential that long-term exposure at these levels may increase the risk for developing chronic health conditions such as reduced lung

function or exacerbated chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, atherosclerosis, or other cardiopulmonary diseases," reads a portion of the one-page memo, dated April 15, 2011, obtained by Danger Room and posted to its website at <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/page/2/>.

Preventative medicine teams took weekly air samples at Bagram Air Field, just north of Kabul, beginning in 2002, and measurements for contaminants exceeded healthy standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the posted memo states. Findings and the memo's summary contradict years of government assertions that there was no direct scientific link between poor health issues and exposure to smoke from burn pits, according to Danger Room's report on burn pits in Afghanistan. In October 2001, researchers studying troops' respiratory problems released findings that suggested poor air quality in Iraq and Afghanistan might pose a bigger threat to servicemembers' long-term health than exposure to toxic smoke from burn pits. But they caution that their work still leaves many questions unanswered. Last year, some members of Congress introduced H.R.3337 to create a registry of patients and illnesses believed to be connected to the toxic smoke. [Source: Stars & Stripes article 22 May 2012 ++]



A bulldozer dumps a load of trash into a burn pit just 300 yards from the runway at Bagram Airfield, Jan 2012

Commissary Coupon Use Update 04: Coupons are like cash — and they've been producing a lot of it for some commissary shoppers. But if you're an "extreme couponer" who has used coupons to get large sums of cash back at the commissary register, take heed: Stores are cracking down. As of 1 MAY, Defense Commissary Agency (DECA) policy will clarify that certain extreme couponing practices can be considered abuse of the commissary privilege, such as buying excessive amounts of one item with coupons that exceed the value of the product. If you're suspected of privilege abuse, you could be reported to installation officials — who can suspend or permanently revoke commissary privileges.

Also as of 1 MAY, customers who present coupons that result in "overages" no longer may receive unlimited cash back. Instead, you'll get commissary gift cards for refunds of more than \$25. Overages of less than \$25 will be refunded in cash. For example, if you have a negative balance of \$35.99, you'd get a gift card for \$25 and \$10.99 in cash. "The average coupon user might not notice the policy changes because they are aimed at preventing possible

misuse of the commissary benefit — primarily using coupons to get large amounts of cash back,” said Joseph Jeu, DeCA director and CEO, in a statement announcing the change. Overages happen when the face value of the coupon exceeds the price of the item. Most manufacturer coupons are geared to prices in civilian stores; commissary prices are already discounted. Over the past three years, DeCA officials have seen more customers getting cash back when they use coupons, said Courtney Rogers, DeCA’s customer relations specialist. “Using gift cards to cover coupon ‘overages’ discourages practices contrary to DeCA’s mission,” which is to provide a benefit that sells groceries at cost, she said. The changes “will help bring our policies in line with our retail counterparts and protect the commissary benefit,” she said.

Most coupon overage transactions happen during customers’ normal household shopping. The overages are applied to the rest of the transaction, so little or no cash is due to the customer. “However, there have been instances of customers purchasing large quantities of one or two products using multiple coupons, resulting in large overages,” Rogers said. Commissaries are among the few grocery stores that allow refunds for overages, said Bud Miller, executive director of the Coupon Information Corp., a not-for-profit association of consumer product manufacturers that fights coupon fraud. Unlike the commissaries, none of the military exchanges allows coupons to exceed the value of an item, nor do they allow overages. Why does DeCA allow these overages at all? Unlike other stores — and military exchanges — DeCA does not generate a profit. “Since manufacturers reimburse us for those overages, we would profit from those overages if we did not refund that money to the customer,” Rogers said. A small number of people have received hundreds of dollars in cash back from commissaries, and among them are people who just want the cash, said Miller. “Those are the worst abusers.” Whether in commissaries or in other stores, Miller said, there have been cases in which people bought as much as they could with coupons and not only got cash back but then resold the products for a profit. “It’s a small minority of abusers who make it more difficult for the honest couponers,” he said — to include emptying the shelves for other customers.

The extreme couponing trend has caused civilian grocery stores to make changes, such as limiting the number of the same item you can buy with coupons in one shopping trip. DeCA will continue its policy of limiting coupons to one per item, meaning you’ll still be able to buy multiple packages of the same product as long as you have multiple coupons. As before, the exception is during a particular commissary promotion, when a manufacturer or distributor provides coupons directly to the commissary. Store officials will monitor excessive coupon use. Examples of “suspected privilege abuse” in the revised policy include buying “excessive quantities of an individual item” — more than three cases or 36 units — “with coupons that exceed the value of the product.”

DeCA also is cracking down on “abuse” that doesn’t necessarily involve coupons. Buying more than 36 units of any item — as well as frequently buying large quantities of cigarettes or tobacco products, exceeding one case or 30 units — may not in itself be considered abuse, but it raises a red flag that there may be the potential for abuse, Rogers said. On the commissary section of the site WeUseCoupons.com, some spouses in large families expressed concern about being under suspicion if they bought large quantities of items with coupons. Several said they were fine with the new policy of paying the overage in gift cards. “Keeping the money ‘in-house’ is still better than no overage at all,” one spouse said. “I can always find something at the commissary to put that [money] toward.” The new policy also requires gift cards to be issued, rather than cash, when merchandise costing more than \$25 is being returned without the original receipt. Coupons redeemed in 2011 at military stores by number/value were:

- Defense Commissary Agency: 123 million/\$110 million
- Army and Air Force Exchange Service: 2.4 million/\$5.7 million
- Navy Exchange: 1.6 million/\$2.3 million
- Marine Corps Exchange: 334,000/\$491,000

[Source: Mil.com Karen Jowers article 3 May 2012 ++]

Tricare Prime Update 11: As a result of the 2012 NDAA that was passed into law last year, there is a significant change with a deadline to act that is fast approaching. TRICARE Prime has an option in certain regions of the country for beneficiaries to choose the United States Family Health Plan (USFHP) where they are serviced by Johns Hopkins, Christus Health and other medical providers instead of a Military Treatment Facility (MTF). There are six organizations that sponsor the US Family Health Plan in different regions throughout the United States. Members may transfer from one region to another without an interruption in benefits. To determine if you are in one of these regions and the servicing facility go to <http://www.usfhp.com> and enter your zip code. If you sign up for USFHP after September 30, 2012, you will only be able to use it until age 65. TRICARE beneficiaries who either sign up before September 30th, or who are already currently receiving their care via USFHP, will be grandfathered in and therefore allowed to keep USFHP for life.

There are only about 4 months until the deadline. Those affected are advised to educate themselves as much as possible through TRICARE representatives, pamphlets and web pages and to do the same with USFHP outlets. Then they can make an intelligent decision in the best interests of their particular circumstances. It is impossible to cover all of the scenarios that apply to Prime users as each one has their own set of unique circumstances. Two that might be applicable are:

- You are currently active duty and by regulation use MTF for you, but elect USFHP for your family. If you retire October 1, 2012, or later you have no choice in the matter; at 65 you (and your spouse) will be moved back into MTF care.
- You're retired and already on USFHP before September 30th, but 25 years from now you move to an area that does not offer USFHP. If you haven't paid the Medicare Part B fees (not required while on USFHP) you may have to pay a higher rate to get current with Medicare as you transition back to MTF.

[Source: AFSA On Call 23 May 2012 ++]

DoD/VA Seamless Transition Update 12: The Defense and Veterans Affairs departments will not deploy an integrated electronic health record until 2017, eight years after President Obama kick-started the project, according to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. Panetta noted an initial version of iEHR will be deployed by 2014 to medical facilities in San Antonio and Norfolk, Va., -- a plan announced in April by VA Chief Information Officer Roger Baker -- but Panetta did not provide any new details. Panetta and Shinseki spoke to reporters 21 MAY at the James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, a jointly operated North Chicago Defense-VA hospital that serves as a showcase for iEHR projects. "This center is the first-of-a-kind partnership between our two departments," Panetta said. "This really is a unique demonstration effort to try to bring together the DoD and VA systems."

The reason for the long delay from concept to execution for the iEHR has been partly bureaucratic. Defense and VA did not agree on the basic structure and management of the iEHR until May 2011, and top officials from both departments deferred signing the charter for the Interagency Program Office, which will manage deployment of iEHR until October 2011. The two departments put off until February selecting a director of the Interagency Program Office, Barclay Butler, a former vice president of Harris Healthcare who also served as the chief information officer for the Army Medical Department in 2001 and 2002, until this February. Panetta said when it's completed, iEHR will stand out as "the world's largest electronic health record system" and Shinseki said a project of such scale and importance requires a deliberate approach so "we can get it right." Shinseki added, "We'll go as fast as we can without accepting risk that's not tolerable. 2017 is a target. We're going to begin rolling out the initial capabilities of iEHR in 2014 at those two sites we indicated. If we can go faster, we will. But quality and safety are

the standards we measure ourselves by.” Development of iEHR is a “significant challenge” he added. “I think the folks who work here can provide you insights on that.”

Shinseki did not specify the iEHR challenges the staff at Lovell faces, but Lt. Cmdr. Donna Poulin, the hospital’s chief information systems officer, detailed them in an internal presentation obtained by Nextgov, which highlights problems Defense and VA face as they develop the joint record. Poulin said the iEHR graphical user interface for clinicians that the VA medical center in Honolulu developed and piloted at Lovell functions in a read-only mode, meaning clinicians cannot input data. Clinicians at Lovell must access three separate networks -- VA, Defense and Navy -- all of which use different methods to authenticate end users, and each has different cybersecurity policies. Shinseki emphasized iEHR will be “open in architecture and nonproprietary in design to expand information sharing [and to] eliminate gaps between our two robust health care systems,” in keeping with the use of open source software that he backed in April. This approach conflicts with Defense plans to use commercial software in developing iEHR, according to a Pentagon report submitted to Congress in April -- the opening salvo in what a former top VA official, who declined to be identified, called a battle between the two departments over the basic structure of the iEHR. [Source: NextGov Bob Brewin article 22 May 2012 ++]

National Medical Museum: Featuring artifacts from President Abraham Lincoln's assassination including the bullet that killed him, and information on the progress of treating traumatic brain injuries, the National Museum of Health and Medicine officially reopened to the public on its 150th anniversary 21 MAY at its new location 2500 Linden Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20910 . The lead bullet removed from President Abraham Lincoln is part of an exhibit at the National Medical Museum in Silver Spring, Md. Also included are skull fragments, a small swatch of Lincoln's hair and the probe that is thought to have located the assassin's bullet. The Defense Department-sponsored museum, once called the Army Medical Museum when it was housed at the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., moved into its new building last year as part of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process. Twenty-five million medical objects, including human specimens and some of the first microscopes developed, are displayed at the museum.



Museum offerings include The 20,000-square-foot museum draws the gamut of people from curiosity seekers to medical doctors and students, in addition to history buffs, said Tim Clarke, the museum's deputy director for communications. Museum offerings include displays that showcase specimens of anatomy and pathology, Civil War military medicine and methods for human identification. The museum was established during the Civil War on May

21, 1862, when Army Surgeon General William A. Hammond ordered that military medical objects and specimens would be collected for future study. Since then, objects reaching as far back as the Revolutionary War have been added to the museum's vast collection, Clarke said.



National Museum of Health and Medicine

In the military medicine exhibit, 200-year-old surgical tools are featured, across the aisle from a large slab of concrete flooring taken from Trauma Bay II in Balad, Iraq. It was there that the medical facility saved 98 percent of wounded soldiers' lives from 2003-07, more than any other single medical unit in Iraq. "From doctors to nurses and patients, we've found people connect to that slab of flooring in ways we didn't expect," Clarke said. "They might have known someone who was there, or have another connection to it. It has an emotional effect on people who were saved there." Additionally:

- Advances in military medicine include a collection of cryptic molds of facial reconstruction initiated during the Civil War. Other exhibits showcase techniques in wounded warrior rehabilitation, the growing technology of prostheses, and other advances in medical research.
- A second large gallery houses the collection of military medical history and research from 1862 forward, including the Lincoln assassination and autopsy display.
- Human specimens are preserved in paraffin and in formalin. Jars filled with various limbs and other body parts depict what gunshots can do to such parts as the lower spine, shoulder joint and limbs. The remains of bones collected from the Civil War Battle of Antietam are also on display.
- An exhibit of microscopes — one traced back to the 1600s from Paris — show one that was used when a scientist first determined what became known as a cell.
- The amputated leg of a 27-year-old man with elephantiasis in 1894, which stems from a parasite, is preserved in a large jar-like vat to show what the disease can do to humans. Another exhibit explains the beginnings of biomedical engineering and the study of pathology and physiology from its beginnings to today's advances in the science.
- Specimens of brain tissue show changes from traumatic brain injury -- a signature wound from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most of the specimens are real, although some reproductions are made from molds, such as the reconstructed faces from the Civil War era, Clarke said.

The public also can peer through a window into a lab where they can watch staff members work on future exhibits. These exhibits change periodically to keep the displays supplied with new material. This year's Civil War display is from 1862, Clarke explained, and will be followed by follow-on years of the war, beginning with 1863 next year. The museum is open to the public and for tours, free of charge, every day 10-1730, except Dec. 25. It is wheelchair- accessible. A limited number of wheelchairs may be available for loan (no charge). There are no food services at present. A Medical Museum Science Café meets once a month in Silver Spring and features a variety of topics, which are listed on the museum's web site <http://www.medicalmuseum.mil> , Clarke said. [Source: AFPS Terri Moon Cronk article 22 May 2012 ++]

Dover Air Base Mortuary Update 04:

Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta believes the punishment of supervisors accused of retaliating against whistleblowers at the Port Mortuary at Dover Air Force Base was appropriate, Pentagon Press Secretary George Little said 22 MAY. Whistleblowers at the military mortuary in Delaware, which handles the remains of American service members who are killed or die overseas, pointed to problems at the facility in how some remains were disposed. The whistleblowers said that management at the mortuary retaliated against them. The independent Office of Special Counsel investigated the allegations and found that supervisors did retaliate. The investigators found that Air Force Col. Robert Edmondson, Trevor Dean, and Quinton Keel engaged in reprisals. Air Force leaders reviewed the findings, conducted supplemental investigations and disciplined the men. The Air Force offered Edmondson non-judicial punishment under Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and he accepted. After a hearing and appeal, the final punishment was a reprimand and forfeiture of \$7,000. Dean received a 20-day suspension without pay.

Keel resigned from his position before action could be initiated. Still, the service issued him a letter of censure after his resignation. Air Force Secretary Michael B. Donley reviewed the final disciplinary actions and considers them appropriate, Air Force officials said. "The issues at Dover Port Mortuary are issues that the secretary of defense, indeed, the entire department -- we never want to see them happen again," Little told reporters during a news conference. "Our fallen heroes deserve the highest honor and respect. And we are committed to taking steps to ensure that lapses do not occur in the future." The Office of Special Counsel commended the Air Force for rendering its decisions on disciplinary actions, Little said, and he pointed to the "very thorough and extensive process to review not just the lapses at Dover, but also the disciplinary actions that were levied. And the secretary is satisfied with that process." Panetta was briefed on the whole process, and "he has faith in the process that the Air Force undertook, absolutely," Little said. The punishment for the three supervisors for retaliation is in addition to other penalties imposed for gross mismanagement.

- Edmondson received a letter of reprimand and was denied further command opportunity.
- Keel received an involuntary downgrade to a nonsupervisory position outside the mortuary.
- Dean voluntarily took a downgrade to a nonsupervisory position within organization, but outside the Port Mortuary.

"Looking forward, Air Force leadership is reviewing instructional materials used to train supervisors and employees to ensure military members and civilian employees alike understand the rights of all employees to express important concerns in the workplace," said an Air Force spokesman. "We are committed to a workplace climate that makes individuals feel confident that they can raise any concerns they may have, that those concerns will be taken seriously, and that those raising the concerns will be treated with respect and appreciation." Defense officials stressed that the whistleblowers performed an important service to the Air Force and the nation. "These individuals continue in their positions at AFMAO; the Air Force has taken appropriate actions, including correcting their records to eliminate any negative information that resulted from any prohibited personnel practices committed," the Air Force spokesman said. [Source: AFPS Jim Garamone article 22 May 2012 ++]

Credit Card Authorized User:

When you allow someone to become an authorized user on your account, they're linked to your credit, but you're not linked to theirs. While allowing a family member to take a ride on your credit history is a nice thing to do, and it certainly can't hurt, don't expect miracles. Since they are not liable for the bill – it's still your sole liability – the boost to their credit rating may not be as great as you think. **Experian says on the subject.** It's about adding a spouse, but the idea is the same...Including your wife as an authorized user will help her establish a credit history. Authorized user accounts are included in a credit report and can be

considered when making lending decisions. However, an authorized user has no responsibility for repayment of the debt. For that reason, they often have less bearing on a lender's decision, and may not be included in some credit score calculations. Although authorized user accounts are not always included in credit scores, they will result in a credit history being established and eventually can help your wife qualify independently for her own accounts. In addition, in order for an authorized user to benefit from someone else's credit history, there should be a credit card issued in their name.. Without a card issued in her name , FICO – generator of the most widely used credit score – won't count it when they compute her credit score. [Source: MoneyTalksNews Stacey Johnson article 22 May 2012 ++]

Tax Tips 2011

- **Filing Deadline.** U.S. citizens, resident aliens living abroad, and U.S. military who are outside the U.S. on the regular due date (e.g., April 17, 2012) have until June 15, 2012 to file their federal income tax return.
- **Worldwide Income.** Federal law requires U.S. citizens and resident aliens to report all worldwide income, including income from foreign bank accounts, securities accounts, and trusts.
- **Tax Forms.** In most cases, taxpayers need to complete and attach Schedule B (e.g., interest and ordinary dividends) to their return. Some filers will need to file Form TD F 90-22.1 (e.g., FBAR) with the Treasury by June 30, 2012. And certain other filers will need to complete the new Form 8938 (e.g., Statement of Foreign Financial Assets).
- **Foreign Earned Income Exclusion (FEIE).** Many Americans who live and work abroad qualify for the FEIE. The exclusion allows qualified taxpayers to exempt up to \$92,900 in wages and other foreign earned income from U.S. tax, excluding income from interest, dividends, social security, and capital gains.
- **Credits and Deductions.** Taxpayers can take a credit or deduction for income taxes paid to a foreign country or U.S. possession.
- **Other Forms.** If you own a foreign corporation, trust, LLC, or partnership, you have to file special information return forms (e.g., 5471, 3520-A, etc.) or you may incur huge penalties for failing to file those forms. If you own a foreign mutual fund, you must file as an owner of a Passive Foreign Investment Company (PFIC) or suffer adverse tax consequences on your U.S. taxes.
- **Failure to File Return.** Many expatriates file returns in their resident country and then believe they do not have to file in the U.S. THIS IS WRONG. If you are a green card holder or a U.S. citizen, you must always file a U.S. tax return each year if you earn above a minimum amount of income. The amount varies each year. Until you file a return, the statute of limitations for failing to file never runs out.

[Source: The Tax Baron Report Spring 2012 ++]

IRS Collection Policy Update 05: Each year, countless Americans move abroad hoping to live the life of their dreams. Some envision themselves going rogue and escaping an ever-intrusive government. Others move to accompany a foreign spouse or to seek a job opportunity. Still others move simply to retire in the place of their dreams. In most every case, however, their move represents a radical change in their lives. Yet, there is one

constant: Uncle Sam still wants his taxes. Once upon a time we had the luxury of thinking that once we left America, we were not obliged to file any tax returns or pay any income taxes. The money we earned abroad was ours for the keeping. But such is no longer true. Today, U.S. citizens and residents are obliged to file income tax and information returns on their worldwide income and investments. This income includes foreign dividends, rents, pensions, royalties, and capital gains (or losses) on stocks, bonds, and real estate. And not infrequently are they surprised to discover taxes are owed on this income to the Internal Revenue Service.

Angry Americans in foreign countries who consequently contemplate giving up their U.S. citizenship discover that taking this radical step to avoid paying taxes is not allowed. Otherwise the process of expatriating can be tortuous. Or risky to those who consider staying under the tax filing radar. Today, the U.S. has tax treaties with numerous countries in which they agree to provide financial data on the holdings of U.S. citizens and residents to the IRS. Further, U.S. laws require Americans and deemed residents to report information on their foreign bank accounts (e.g., FBAR) and financial assets (e.g., FATCA). So, what should you know about U.S. taxation if you are a living abroad?

- First, the statute of limitations never runs out on an unfiled tax return. File a tax return each year. Once you file your return the statute of limitation begins, thus limiting the amount of time the IRS has to audit or penalize you for inaccurate and incomplete returns.
- Second, if you live abroad 330 days or more in a consecutive twelve (12) month period, you can exclude a portion of your foreign income earned. If you file as a single person the exclusions are as follows: a) 2006, \$82,400; b) 2007, \$85,700; c) 2008, \$87,600, d) 2009, \$91,400; e) 2010, \$91,500, f) 2011, \$92,900; and g) 2012, 95,100. If you and your spouse meet the residency requirement and you both work abroad and file as "married-filing jointly" the exclusions are double. But they can only be claimed on a filed tax return. They are not automatic if you do not file a return.
- Third, you can claim a foreign tax credit for taxes paid to a foreign country. If you live in a foreign country and are required to pay taxes on income earned in that country, you can claim a foreign tax credit that directly offsets your U.S. taxes. While the credit cannot exceed the amount of U.S. income taxes on foreign earnings, the credit is also applicable to foreign income from other sources. Foreign taxes that exceed the amount allowed on Form 1040 can be carried over to future years.
- Fourth, you do not have to file any state income tax return, provided you have no U.S. income and do not maintain a permanent residence in a state in the U.S. To avoid state income taxes you must eliminate the indices (e.g., driver license, bank accounts, car plates, own property, ongoing utility bills, etc.) of residency used by state taxing bodies to determine residency.
- Fifth, if you own your own business abroad, you may owe U.S. self-employment taxes on your earnings, despite the fact that your earnings are not subject to U.S. taxes as per the foreign earned income exclusion rule. This can apply to you if you are an independent contractor. The self-employment tax rate is 13.3% of your net income from self-employment after a small reduction and includes provisions for social security and Medicare.
- Sixth, in addition to your Form 1040, you must file two financial forms, in order to avoid severe penalties. If you have foreign bank or financial accounts whose aggregate value was \$10,000 or more at any point in time in a given year in the past six (6) years, you must file an FBAR (e.g., Form TD F 90-22.1) for each year the value exceeded \$10,000. If you own foreign financial assets with an aggregate value of specified foreign assets greater than \$50,000 - \$400,000 (reporting threshold depends on filing status), you must file

a FATCA (e.g., Form 8938). Further if you own over 50% interest in a foreign corporation, you must annually file Form 5471. And if you are the beneficiary or trustee of a foreign trust you must file Form 3520-A. The penalty for not filing either of these returns begins at \$10,000. Failure to file these forms when required limits your ability to avoid steep penalties.

- And last, if you moved abroad because you owe substantial amounts of taxes to the IRS or a state taxing authority, consider making an Offer-In-Compromise (OIC). It is not uncommon for past due taxes to get out of hand due to penalties and interest. The federal government and many state governments allow OIC to help taxpayers remedy tax liabilities. While an OIC places a strain on the taxpayer, it's far better than the alternative. There are several bills currently before the Congress that propose preventing Americans who owe back taxes from traveling outside the U.S. by not issuing them passports. One bill, Senate Bill 1813, states that any individual who owes more than \$50,000 to the Internal Revenue Service may be subject to "action with respect to denial, revocation, or limitation of a passport".

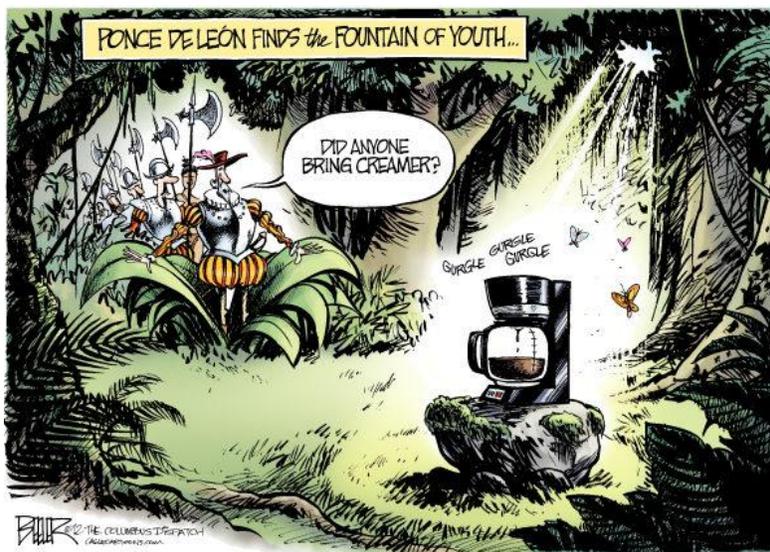
Uncle Sam still wants his taxes, and apparently he's willing to go to great lengths to get them. [Source: The Tax Baron Report Spring 2012 ++]

IRS Collection Policy Update 06: What's worse, not paying your taxes on time or not filing your taxes because you don't have the money to pay your liability? Each year many Americans (and green card holders) fail to file their taxes because they do not have the money to pay what they owe. Believing, perhaps, that the IRS will not know they owe any taxes if they don't tell them they owe. This is magical thinking that never works. In addition, it leads the taxpayer to fail to do the most rational and reasonable thing he can do in this situation, which is to communicate with the IRS by the due date. There are six (6) things to know about paying your taxes.

- First, always file your taxes on time, whether or not you have the funds to pay them. If you believe you will owe taxes, the due date is April 15th.
- Second, if you cannot afford to pay all that you owe, pay a portion of the amount when you file your taxes. This shows good faith and will reduce your penalties and interest.
- Third, if you believe you will need to pay your taxes in installments, you will need to determine how much you owe. If you owe \$50,000 or less, you can request a payment plan online at IRS.gov through Form 9464 (e.g., Online Payment Agreement). If you owe more than \$50,000, you must print, complete, and mail forms 9465-FS (e.g., Installment Agreement Request) and 433-F (e.g., Collection Information Statement). Make sure to make your first installment payment at the time of filing.
- Fourth, send your return via "certified mail". This will provide you with a proof of delivery receipt, a very important item, if the IRS misplaces your return. In fact, it could be your first line of defense against a failure-to-file penalty.
- Fifth, if the IRS approves your installment plan, they will send you monthly bills for the amount you proposed. If they decide your amount was too low, they will request additional information.
- Sixth, communicate with the IRS. Always communicate with the IRS. If you have difficulty paying your taxes, call the IRS and inform them about your circumstance. If you choose to contact them by mail, make sure your correspondence will reach them by the due date. Remember, without communication, the full amount becomes due immediately.

If you cannot pay your taxes when they are due and you fail to communicate with the IRS as described above, the IRS will contact you in clear and unambiguous terms that will be disturbing. Since a federal lien on everything you own and your future income could result, disturbing is an apt word. [Source: The Tax Baron Report Spring 2012 ++]

Coffee Drinkers: Older adults who drank coffee — caffeinated or decaffeinated — had a lower risk of death overall than others who did not drink coffee, according to a study by researchers from the National Cancer Institute (NCI), part of the National Institutes of Health, and AARP. Coffee drinkers were less likely to die from heart disease, respiratory disease, stroke, injuries and accidents, diabetes, and infections, although the association was not seen for cancer. Relative to men and women who did not drink coffee, those who consumed three or more cups of coffee per day had approximately a 10 percent lower risk of death. However, The investigators caution that coffee intake was assessed by self-report at a single time point and therefore might not reflect long-term patterns of intake. For details on this study, go to: <http://www.nih.gov/news/health/may2012/nci-16.htm>. [Source: AUSA Family Programs article 21 May 2012 ++]



VA Hospitals Update 09: To fight the rising number of drug-resistant infections, doctors in Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals are more frequently turning to last-resort antibiotics, known as polymyxins, which can cause serious kidney damage, according to a new study in the journal PLoS One. Their rising use also may increase bacterial resistance to these drugs, leaving doctors, in some cases, with no treatment options. The peer-reviewed study looks at the use of polymyxins, which were discovered more than 50 years ago but went out of favor as better alternatives became available. The authors are physicians and researchers with the University of Utah and the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System. "Because the drugs can produce such damaging side effects, doctors are typically quite reluctant to use polymyxins. We only reach for them when we have no other choice," said Dr. Makoto Jones, one of the authors. Despite this common hesitation to prescribe these drugs, Dr. Jones and his colleagues found that their use increased by 25 percent between 2005 and 2010.

The data was derived from detailed electronic records from individual patients at 127 VA centers over the five-year period. The paper also found a more than four-fold increase in use of another antibiotic called tigecycline, which is also prescribed to treat multidrug-resistant infections. The authors note that use of the drugs in VA medical centers is still low overall, despite the increase seen in their study. There has not been a comparably comprehensive study of polymyxin and tigecycline use in non-VA hospitals. "The absence of new safe and effective antibiotics to

treat serious and life-threatening infections is a particular cause for concern," the authors wrote in the PLoS One article, entitled, "Drugs of Last Resort? The Use of Polymyxins and Tigecycline at U.S. Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, 2005-2010." This study bolsters anecdotal evidence reported by physicians. According to a 2011 survey of 562 infectious diseases doctors conducted via the Emerging Infections Network and recently published in the journal Clinical Infectious Diseases, 64 percent have prescribed polymyxins within the past year. Sixty-three percent of respondents reported caring for a patient with an infection resistant to all available antibacterials and 56 percent observed that the number of these untreatable infections is increasing. Most of the physicians surveyed in 2011 were from non-VA hospitals.

"We need policies to overcome the challenges stifling the development of new antibiotics," said Sharon Ladin, director of the Pew Health Group's Antibiotics and Innovation Project, which funded the study. "These hard-to-treat infections are a special threat for the many military personnel injured in combat, including those recently discharged veterans who suffer prolonged battles with superbugs." The Pew Health Group's Antibiotics and Innovation Project is advocating for measures to incentivize the development of new antibiotics. It has called on Congress to include in its reauthorization of the Prescription Drug User Fee Act of 2012 the provisions that comprised the Generating Antibiotic Incentives Now Act (H.R. 2182, S. 1734), bipartisan legislation that would provide companies developing drugs to treat serious or life-threatening bacterial infections with an extra five years of exclusive rights to market those products. The Pew Health Group conducts rigorous research to form pragmatic policies that prevent unnecessary health risks. It is part of the Pew Charitable Trusts, a nonprofit organization that applies a rigorous, analytical approach to improve public policy, inform the public and stimulate civic life. Learn more at <http://www.pewhealth.org>. [Source: Pharmaceutical Processing Magazine article 19 May 2012 ++]

TFL Pharmacy Benefit Update 01: (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.) Congressional analysts say a House plan requiring older Tricare beneficiaries to fill their long-term prescriptions by mail would not generate the huge annual savings anticipated by lawmakers, but over time it still would be enough to meet a goal of raising \$1 billion to offset reduced pharmacy co-pay fee increases for all Tricare beneficiaries. In an analysis of the House's proposed 2013 national defense bill, the Congressional Budget Office said several factors will keep the proposed pilot program for Tricare For Life retirees from achieving a maximum \$200 million in savings a single year. Those factors include loopholes that will allow beneficiaries to drop the program after a yearlong trial period, as well as research that shows many will not continue filling their long-term prescriptions after the first 30 days, either because they stop taking the medication or their doctor gives them a different prescription for it. CBO estimates that about 10 percent of Tricare For Life users would drop the mail order option after the required year-long time period, and about 15 percent of all prescriptions would never enter the mail order system, as the pilot program would let those with new prescriptions obtain an initial 30-day supply at a retail store.

CBO said that between 2014 and 2017, the program likely would save \$150 million a year, and it estimates that from 2013 to 2022, total savings from the proposal would be \$1.1 billion. The \$1 billion mark is a must for House lawmakers: In order to offset the reduced revenue as a result of limiting future pharmacy copayment increases to no more than the annual cost-of-living adjustment in military retired pay, they needed to raise that amount elsewhere. The Defense Department had pushed a five-year plan that would have raised co-payments for brand-name prescriptions to \$26 in October for both retail and mail-order prescriptions, blocked most non-formulary prescriptions from being filled at retail stores, and raised the mail-order co-pay to \$51 for non-formulary drugs. It also would have tied future increases to medical indexes that historically have risen higher than the annual cost-of-

living adjustment in retired pay. Under the House plan, some Tricare for Life retirees would be exempt from the mail-order pilot program, including:

- Those taking medications the Defense Department could decide would be exempt.
- Those who receive a waiver.
- Anyone who had been in the program at least a year.

Under the pilot mail-order plan, floated by House Armed Services Committee chairman Rep. Buck McKeon (R-CA) beneficiaries would pay nothing for a 90-day supply of generic medications, \$13 for brand-name and \$44 for non-formulary medication. This would mark a \$4 increase for brand-name drugs and a \$19 increase for drugs not on the military's formulary list. House members are debating their version of the bill this week; the Senate Armed Services Committee has not announced its plans for pharmacy co-payments and will begin writing its version of the 2013 defense authorization bill in late May. [Source: NavyTimes Patricia Kime article 16 May 2012 ++]

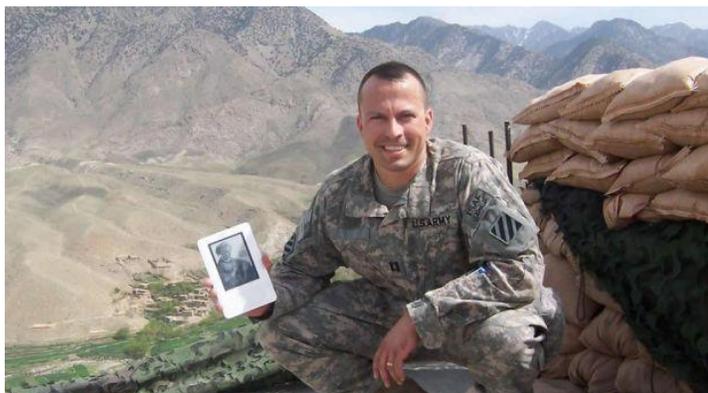
USPS Lithium Battery Policy: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

The U.S. Postal Service is prohibiting shipping of lithium or products containing lithium to international, APO, FPO and DPO addresses. The move, a response to new standards developed by the International Civil Aviation Organization and the Universal Postal Union, will make it much more difficult for the military community and other federal employees overseas to obtain mobile phones, laptops, watches, cameras and other items that use the batteries through the mail. The ban, which went into effect 16 MAY, applies regardless of the quantity, size or watt hours of the batteries, and regardless of whether they are packed in the equipment they are intended to operate.

USPS officials had little to say about the change. "In order to be in compliance with [international] requirements, we had to put this prohibition into effect," said spokesperson Susan McGowan. "I cannot answer the why question. Once they say there's a new regulation, we have to follow it." In a statement provided to Military Times on 17 MAY, the Military Postal Service Agency, which oversees mail going to and from military overseas locations, said the new international rules ban lithium batteries in mail moving on international commercial air transportation. "In keeping with these requirements, the USPS and the Military Postal Service must [prohibit] the shipment of lithium metal or lithium-ion batteries to and from APO, FPO and DPO locations," the statement said. The Naval Supply Systems Command, which oversees Navy postal operations, has issued guidance to the fleet about the new prohibition. "Customers should understand that postal clerks at these locations have been instructed to question patrons and check customs labels for any declarations of lithium batteries or electronic equipment to determine whether lithium batteries are in the shipment," said Tom Rittle, a command official. "Upon identification of packages containing lithium batteries, customers will have the option to remove the batteries or not mail the package."

Lithium batteries, which can overheat, have raised safety concerns in the past. President Obama in February signed a law that includes a provision requiring the U.S. Transportation Department to line up its regulations on lithium battery hazardous materials with International Civil Aviation Organization technical instructions. "This is a big shocker," says John Couch, owner of ShipItApo.com, a company that specializes in reshipping items to troops overseas from vendors who refuse to ship APO/FPO addresses. "It seems like this decision was made in a vacuum. It was done very quietly. I haven't seen any discussion or heard any chatter about it all. It was a shock to us, anyway, and it's going to be an even bigger shock to the troops." Adding to the confusion: USPS officials said they anticipate that on 1 JAN, under revised international rules, customers will be able to mail specific quantities of

lithium batteries overseas, including APO, FPO and DPO addresses, when the batteries are properly installed in the personal electronic devices they are intended to operate.



The Army and Air Force Exchange Service, which operates the exchange online store and catalog for all the services, is working to identify other options for shipping, said spokesman Chris Ward. FedEx will continue to accept consumer electronics containing lithium batteries of less than 100 watts for shipment overseas, said spokeswoman Sally Davenport. The company can't ship to APO or FPO addresses, but ships to specific locations — for example, a specific battalion at Bagram Air Base, she said. Specific information about shipping lithium items is on the FedEx website http://images.fedex.com/us/packaging/guides/BatteryShipments_fxcom.pdf. Davenport noted that this shipping method is more expensive than the USPS; the FedEx website has a calculator that can estimate shipping rates based on destination. DHL spokesman Robert Mintz said his company can accept and handle lithium battery shipments subject to the regulations, if the shipments have been properly labeled and prepared and are sent by pre-approved customers with DHL accounts. But as with FedEx, DHL can't ship to APO or FPO addresses. DHL must have the name of the base, city, country, additional identifying information such as building number or barracks number, a contact name and phone number, and if possible, an email address.

A rough estimate of the book-rate charge of sending a three-pound laptop from Seattle to Germany is \$116.56, Mintz said, and a rough estimate from Seattle to Afghanistan is \$148.53. Couch estimates half the packages he ships contain electronics, with the vast majority of those likely containing lithium batteries. "What doesn't use lithium batteries these days?" he said. He also finds the timing of the ban puzzling. "Why ban them now, all of a sudden, and then say maybe we won't in a few months?" Couch said. "It's all very odd." Darlene S. Casey, a senior public relations representative at the U.S. Postal Service Headquarters in Washington, D.C. said if USPS is able to determine any exceptions prior to January 2013, all customers will immediately be notified -- customers can check <http://www.usps.com> for any service updates, Casey said. USPS Publication 52 - Hazardous, Restricted, and Perishable Mail section 622.5 is the governing regulation that designates Lithium batteries as hazardous material. The Australia Post has similar restrictions on shipping devices using lithium batteries overseas, a policy that went into effect during July 2009. Ironically Lithium batteries are mostly shipped in from overseas. -- Taiwan. Hong Kong. Korea, China. [Source: AirForceTimes Jon Anderson & Karen Jowers article 11 May 2012 ++]

Exchange Gasoline Pricing: (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.)

Everyone is on the lookout for the cheapest gas prices. Accordingly, many retirees question why Exchange gas stations on base charge roughly the same price for fuel as their competitors in town. Their rationale is that if they are not charged federal or state taxes for items purchased from

[exchanges] on base, why do the prices reflect the fuel prices that have the tax added in off base. Actually, the services' military exchange systems do pay taxes on fuel. The Hayden-Cartwright Act requires that all the exchange services "pay federal, state and local motor fuel taxes, as well as underground storage fees, and other costs of running a gas station," said Bryan Driver, spokesman for the Semper Fi and Exchange Services Division, which oversees the Corps' exchange operations, including gas stations. Further fueling competition, some stores outside the gate may choose to price gasoline at a loss while pricing other merchandise much higher to make up for the loss, he noted. "The MCX consistently offers competitive prices in our Marine Marts and gas stations," he said. Actually, if you do price checks over a week you most likely will find the prices at the exchange gas stations on base match the lower end of prices off charged off base.

Editor's Note: I have two cars and purchase gas at least four times a month. At current prices each fill up runs in excess of \$50. There are no base stations close to where I live to compare prices to. However, I have found that Costco consistently offers the lowest gas prices in my geographic area. The only catch is that you must use a Costco credit card (AmExpress) for which they charge \$50 annually. Even so, in my case the card which offers a 3% payback on gasoline gives me at least a \$6 monthly saving (\$72 annual) which puts me a few dollars ahead. [Source: Mil.com Karen Jowers article 17 May 2012 ++]

DoD MISO: A powerful House committee voted 17 MAY to cut by nearly one-third the Pentagon's budget for "military information support operations (MISO)." The House Defense Appropriations Committee also called on Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to submit a report within 30 days of the law's enactment that, among other requirements, would have the Pentagon detail the effectiveness of so-called MISO programs, previously known as psychological operations. In February, a USA Today investigation found that hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent in recent years on information operations. These are essentially marketing efforts aimed at persuading foreign audiences to support U.S. interests, though Pentagon officials acknowledge that little proof exists about their effectiveness. Much of the spending has been funneled to poorly tracked programs, the newspaper found. Also, U.S. sponsorship of the messages is often hidden because the United States lacks credibility among the target audiences, Rear Adm. Hal Pittman, who recently completed a tour running information operations in Afghanistan, told USA Today in February.

The committee voted to cut \$81.5 million from the Pentagon's \$251.6 million request for military information support operations from its 2013 budget. The Pentagon did earn praise from the committee for better oversight of the program than in previous years. Rep. Norm Dicks, the ranking Democrat on the committee, supported the cut because he has been "very skeptical about the lack of detail justifying the program activities and their benefits," said George Behan, his spokesman. A Pentagon spokesman did not respond to a request for comment. Meanwhile, the Pentagon's inspector general's criminal investigative unit launched an inquiry in March into the conduct of Leonie Industries, the Pentagon's top contractor in Afghanistan for information operations. The issues included more than \$4 million in unpaid taxes by the company's owners and treatment of its employees, according to a letter from the inspector general. Since the letter was sent, Leonie officials said the tax bills have been paid.

Last week, Rep. Hank Johnson, a Georgia Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, threatened an amendment to block funding for Pentagon propaganda efforts, citing USA Today reports questioning their efficacy and management. Johnson called the information operations program a "fiasco" and said contracts with Leonie Industries, should be immediately suspended. Johnson also said the Pentagon needs to investigate reprisals against the USA Today journalists who have reported on the program, whom he said were "targeted in a possibly criminal disinformation and reputation attack." Jennifer Plozai, a spokeswoman for the inspector general's office, said

Thursday that its policy is not to confirm the existence of investigations. [Source: USA Today Tom Vanden Brook article 17 May 2012 ++]

Agent Orange Okinawa Update 03: Recently uncovered documents show that the United States conducted top-secret tests of Agent Orange in Okinawa in 1962, according to a veterans services employee. The experiments, believed to have taken place under the auspices of Project AGILE — a classified program to research unconventional warfare techniques — have also been confirmed by a former high-ranking American official. The documents, which include a ship's logbook, army deployment orders and declassified government records, were tracked down by Michelle Gatz, a veterans service officer in Yellow Medicine County, Minnesota. While assisting a former soldier who claims he was poisoned by these defoliants at military ports in Okinawa in the early 1960s, Gatz pieced together the paper trail of how the chemicals were transported from the U.S. to the island aboard the merchant marine ship SS Schuyler Otis Bland. "The ship's logbook shows it was carrying classified cargo that was offloaded under armed guard at White Beach (a U.S. Navy port on Okinawa's east coast) on 25 April, 1962," Gatz told The Japan Times.



Michelle Gatz holds the logbook of the SS Schuyler Otis Bland

The Bland was a civilian-owned ship regularly employed by the U.S. Navy to transport defoliants incognito and that was able to bypass customs inspections of military vessels entering foreign ports. Three months prior to its arrival at Okinawa, the Bland had traveled to South Vietnam to deliver one of the Pentagon's first shipments of defoliants. After departing Okinawa in spring 1962, the Bland sailed to the Panama Canal Zone where, the Panamanian government asserts, the U.S. tested Agent Orange in the early 1960s. Recently, more than 30 U.S. veterans — all of them suffering from diseases consistent with dioxin-exposure — have spoken to The Japan Times about the presence of Agent Orange at 15 military installations in Okinawa, causing widespread alarm that the prefecture remains polluted by notoriously persistent dioxins. The U.S. government has repeatedly denied assistance for these ailing veterans, claiming Agent Orange and similar herbicides were never present in Okinawa. However, the U.S. government still refuses to release large sections of its records related to the defoliant tests it conducted in the 1960s.

Gatz believes the Bland's cargo was used in some of these tests — namely Project AGILE, which was tasked with finding how chemicals could deprive enemy soldiers of jungle cover and crops. The publicly accessible pages of the project show that in 1962, the military was growing impatient with the inconclusive results of early defoliation experiments in South Vietnam, so it ordered an unspecified group in Army Chemical Biological Research "to develop advanced dissemination systems for defoliating vegetation." After filing a request with the Army College in Pennsylvania under the Freedom of Information Act, Gatz was able to pinpoint what she believes

to be the precise unit — the U.S. Army's 267th Chemical Service Platoon. "The 267th was formerly stationed in Alaska, but the records show that in 1962, it was inexplicably reactivated, then transferred to Okinawa. It was brought there to conduct defoliant tests on the island's tropical vegetation," says Gatz. The 267th Chemical Service Platoon was also involved in "Operation Red Hat," the military project that shipped 12,000 tons of U.S. biological and chemical weapons out of Okinawa before its reversion to Japan, according to veterans' testimonies and a 2009 ruling on defoliants by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

A retired American high official made headlines in The Okinawa Times last September when his account broke the military's wall of silence by claiming that the Pentagon had tested defoliants in the island's northern jungles near Kunigami and Higashi villages. In an interview with the newspaper, the official, who declined to be named, stated that Okinawa was selected for such experiments due to its vegetation's similarities to that of Vietnam and the lack of strict safety regulations that curtailed potentially dangerous tests elsewhere. After reading the chain of events pieced together by Gatz, the retired official, who asked to remain anonymous, confirmed that her assertions were correct. However, he added that he was concerned for Gatz's job security now that she was going public with her findings. Gatz says she is determined to pursue the truth no matter what the consequences. "These documents are the smoking gun. Now there is no way that the Department of Defense can continue to deny defoliants were ever on Okinawa. It's time they owned up and started giving these sick veterans the justice they deserve." [Source: Japan Times Jon Mitchell article 17 May 2012 ++]

TRICARE User Fees Update 90: The House Armed Services Committee recently forwarded the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2013 (H.R.4310) to the full House for a vote. The bill added back many of the cuts proposed by the White House, and ignored the DoD's request to increase TRICARE Fees for military retirees. While most expect it to pass in the House, it is also assumed that the Senate will not pass the current version. And, of course the President would surely veto it if it happened to make it through the Senate. On 16 MAY the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that confirmed that the President would veto the bill. The OMB statement states, "If the cumulative effects of the bill impede the ability of the Administration to execute the new defense strategy and to properly direct scarce resources, the President's senior advisors would recommend to the President that he veto the bill." The OMB's "Statement of Administration Policy" responded to the House bill, declaring the administration's "disappointment" with the House for not supporting their budget recommendations.

The report highlights specific sections of the H.R.4310 that differ from their plan, such as limits to the reduction in forces, BRAC, missile defense, and limitations on reduction of nuclear forces, to name a few. One of the areas being watched closely on Military Advantage is the proposal to hike TRICARE fees. The statement makes it clear that the White House is committed to using the fee increases to make TRICARE sustainable. The following is an excerpt from the OMB statement:

- **“TRICARE Fees and Co-Payments:** The Administration agrees that retirees deserve a quality health care benefit. For this very reason, the Administration strongly supports its requested TRICARE fee initiatives that seek to control the spiraling health care costs of the Department of Defense (DOD) while keeping retired beneficiaries' share of these costs well below the levels experienced when the TRICARE program was implemented in the mid-1990s. The projected FY 2013 TRICARE savings of \$1.8 billion and \$12.9 billion through FY 2017 are essential for DOD to successfully address rising personnel costs. DOD needs these savings to balance and maintain investments for key defense priorities. The Administration is very disappointed that the Committee did not support the proposed TRICARE fee increases and included section 718, which, while supporting some fee increases, caps them at levels below those allowed under current

law and below the requested authorization. If section 718 remains in the bill, it would only provide five year savings of \$2.6 billion.”

To read comments on this article or add your own go <http://militaryadvantage.military.com/2012/05/wh-committed-to-hiking-tricare-fees/#idc-container>. [Source: Military.com Military Advantage Terry Howell article 16 May 2012 ++]

TRICARE User Fees Update 91: Senators Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Marco Rubio (R-FL) joined forces this week to introduce a bi-partisan bill to stop unfair TRICARE fee hikes for military beneficiaries. Their Military Health Care Protection Act of 2012 (S.3203) would:

- Acknowledge that servicemembers pre-pay significant healthcare premiums through decades of service and sacrifice, over and above what they pay in cash
- Limit the annual percentage increase in cash fees (including pharmacy copays, TRICARE Standard deductible, and the cap on annual out-of-pocket expenses) to the percentage increase in military retired pay
- Bar any further increase in the existing TRICARE Standard retiree inpatient copay of \$708 per day, recognizing that the current amount is plenty high enough
- Specify that should the Defense Department establish an enrollment system for TRICARE Standard, any eligible beneficiary filing a claim must be automatically enrolled until they opt to disenroll. (This is to ensure beneficiaries who fail to get the word about any new Standard enrollment system don't have their claims rejected for failure to enroll -- e.g., in the event of a serious vehicle accident.)

"We're grateful for Sen. Lautenberg's and Sen. Rubio's leadership in introducing this bill to protect uniformed services beneficiaries from disproportional TRICARE fee increases," said MOAA President VADM Norb Ryan (USN-Ret). "Repeated proposals to raise their healthcare fees by up to \$2,000 a year have been extremely unsettling to the military community. The Lautenberg-Rubio bill would restore a much-needed sense of stability for this core career retention incentive." [Source: MOAA Leg Up 18 May 2012 ++]

Medal of Honor Update 11: President Barack Obama paid tribute 16 MAY to a man who died defending his fellow soldiers 42 years ago, and who the commander-in-chief said represents a generation's honorable and undervalued service. During a White House ceremony, the president awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry, recognizing Army Spc. 4 Leslie H. Sabo Jr., a rifleman with the 101st Airborne Division who was killed in eastern Cambodia during the Vietnam War. Sabo's widow, Rose Mary Sabo-Brown, accepted the award. His brother, George Sabo, also attended the ceremony. Sabo is credited with saving the lives of several of his comrades in Company B, 3rd Battalion, 506th Infantry, when his platoon was ambushed near the Se San River in eastern Cambodia on May 10, 1970. Sabo shielded a comrade from an enemy grenade and silenced a machine-gun bunker before he was killed. "Some 50 American soldiers were nearly surrounded by some 100 North Vietnamese fighters," the president said, adding that other soldiers there that day remembered the enemy as "everywhere – behind trees [and] up in the tress, shooting down." Obama said, "Les was in the rear, and he could have stayed there. But those fighters were unloading on his brothers." The president described Sabo's last moments: "Despite his wounds, despite the danger, Leslie did something extraordinary. He began to crawl straight toward an enemy bunker with machine guns blazing. ... [he] kept crawling, closer to that bunker, even as bullets hit the ground all around him. Then he grabbed a grenade, and he pulled the pin." Sabo's fellow troops have said he held the grenade as long as he could, "knowing it would take his own life, but knowing he could silence that bunker," Obama said. "And he did."



Leslie H. Sabo Jr.

The day he died, Sabo was 22 years old, part of a campaign in Cambodia aimed at preventing North Vietnamese forces from launching Attacks into Vietnam from there. The Army told his Hungarian immigrant parents, his brother, and his bride of eight months -- all waiting for his return to Pennsylvania -- that he had been killed by an enemy sniper while on guard duty. "Leslie Sabo left behind a wife who adored him, a brother who loved him, and parents who cherished him," the president said. "But for decades, they never knew that Les had died a hero ... this story was almost lost to history." Though Sabo's leaders recommended him for the Medal of Honor after that day's fighting, the paperwork was never processed, Obama noted. Instead, another 101st Vietnam veteran, Alton "Tony" Mabb, discovered the award packet in 1999, during a visit to the National Archives. Mabb sought to find answers, Obama said, and the result is that "Today, four decades after Leslie's sacrifice, we can set the record straight." And this month, he noted, the nation will begin to mark the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War. The end of that war, the president said, was "a time when, to our shame, our veterans did not always receive the respect and the thanks they deserved -- a mistake that must never be repeated." Vietnam veterans returning from war were called many things, Obama said, but there was "only one thing they deserved to be called: American patriots."



President presents the MOH to widow Rose Mary Sabo-Brown

The commander-in-chief then called for Sabo's comrades from Bravo Company to stand and be recognized. A group of mostly suited, largely gray-haired, middle-aged men rose in response. The audience -- including First Lady Michelle Obama, Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta and several military service leaders, senators, representatives and friends of the Sabo family -- then stood in a prolonged ovation for the veterans. Obama said Sabo's medal was "bestowed on a single soldier for his singular courage, but it speaks to the service of an entire generation." The president said the families of those who serve also sacrifice. "We see the patriotism of our families who give our nation a piece of their heart," he said. "On days such as this, we can pay tribute." Obama stood with his arm around Rose as they listened to the reading of the citation, and kissed her cheek after presenting her with the framed medal. The nation's highest military honor, the Medal of Honor is awarded for risk of life in combat beyond the call of duty. Sabo's medal is the 247th awarded, and the 155th presented posthumously, for action during the Vietnam War. [Source: AFPS Karen Parrish article 16 May 2012 ++]

GA Vet Home Update 02: Military veterans living in state-run nursing homes will now have to pay a fee for care. It's part of new legislation signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal. Starting late this fall, Georgia will charge about \$23 to cover the cost of care. Military veterans living in state-run nursing homes will now have to pay a fee for care. It's part of new legislation signed into law by Governor Nathan Deal. Up until now, the state has provided public nursing-home services at no cost to veterans. And by filing for a federal VA benefit, veterans receive about \$23 a day meant to go toward their daily nursing home care. But since Georgia is the only state that does not levy the charge, veterans have been able to pocket that cash. Starting late this fall, Georgia will charge the equivalent of that \$23 to cover the cost of care.

Dan Holtz with the Department of Veterans service says the state will use the new funds to expand the number of veterans receiving care at the two state run nursing homes in Augusta and Milledgeville: "We could get additional patients, reopen the building closed in Milledgeville, increase the census in Augusta and we'd be able to treat more veterans and provide more care to the folks who really need it." Thomas Marshburn is a Gulf War veteran living at the state-run nursing home in Milledgeville. He says he understands the importance of the fee, but he'll have to re-work his budget to afford the new expense: "I feel like we should have to pay something, matter of fact, I was quite surprised when I came here I didn't have to pay anything. I just I felt like they should have given us more warning. It's going to hurt, but I'm going to have to cut back somewhere else." Residents of the state's two veteran homes received a memo from the Georgia Commissioner of Veterans Service about the law and the new fee last week. [Source: CPB News Parker Wallace article 15 May 2012 ++]

Vet Charity Watch Update 24: A national charity that vows to help disabled veterans and their families has spent tens of millions on marketing services, all the while doling out massive amounts of candy, hand sanitizer bottles and many other unnecessary items to veteran aid groups, according to a CNN investigation. The Disabled Veterans National Foundation (DVNF) based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 2007, received about \$55.9 million in donations since it began operations in 2007, according to publicly available IRS 990 forms Yet according to the DVNF's tax filings with the IRS, almost none of that money has wound up in the hands of American veterans. Instead, the charity made significant payments to Quadriga Art LLC, which owns two direct-mail fundraising companies hired by the DVNF to help garner donations, according to publicly available IRS 990 forms. Those forms show the charity paid Quadriga and its subsidiary, Brickmill Marketing Services, nearly \$61 million from 2008 until 2010, which was the last year public records were available.

The independent group CharityWatch (<http://charitywatch.org>) who rates over 600 charities gave the DVNF an "F" grade. More than 30 veterans charities were rated by the independent group by the amount they spend on fundraising compared to actual donations, and two-thirds were given either a D or F grade, according to CharityWatch president Daniel Borochoff. "Up to \$2 billion is raised in the name of veterans in this country and it's so sad that a great deal of it's wasted," Borochoff said. "Hundreds of millions of dollars of our charitable dollars intended to help veterans is being squandered and wasted by opportunists and by individuals and companies who see it as a profit-making opportunity." On its website <http://www.dvnf.org>, the DVNF posted a "news bulletin" announcing that the charity had sent badly needed goods "by the truckload" to veterans centers in Birmingham, Alabama, in the wake of last year's devastating tornados. DVNF specifically cited a small veterans charity called St. Benedict's. But the charity's executive director J.D. Simpson said most of the donations from DVNF could hardly be classified as badly needed. Simpson told CNN, "They sent us 2,600 bags of cough drops and 2,200 little bottles of sanitizer. And the great thing was, they sent us 11,520 bags of coconut M&M's. And we didn't have a lot of use for

11,520 bags of coconut M&M's." Simpson said the DVNF also sent him more than 700 pairs of Navy dress shoes, which he said he can't use. He has put them up for purchase at a yard sale.

In its tax filings, the DVNF also claims to have sent millions of dollars of so-called "Goods In Kind" to smaller veterans-related charities around the nation. In one instance, the DVNF claimed more than \$838,000 in fair market value donations to a small charity called US Vets in Prescott, Arizona. CNN obtained the bill of lading for that shipment, which showed that, among other things, hundreds of chefs coats and aprons were included in the delivery, along with a needlepoint design pillowcase and cans of acrylic paint. The goods listed in the two-page shipping document were things "we don't need," a US Vets spokesman said. And at the bottom of the bill of lading, the DVNF itself estimated the value of the shipment at around \$234,000 -- significantly less than the \$838,000 it reported to the IRS. CNN has attempted to get a comment from the DVNF for more than a year, but has received no specific replies, even after submitting several questions in writing. When approached by a CNN crew at the Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Disabled National Veterans president Precilla Wilkewitz rebuffed questions. "Well, this is the Veterans of Foreign Wars and I really didn't think you'd do something like this and we've agreed to talk to you ... answer your questions," she said, standing in the entranceway to her office.

Wilkewitz is the former national legislative liaison for the VFW, which is not directly tied to the Disabled Veterans National Foundation. She said she would answer questions only in writing, but so far CNN has received no response. When asked about Quadriga's relationship with DVNF, spokesman Ron Torossian told CNN in an e-mail that the company is privately owned and "we do not discuss specific client relationships." But according to IRS filings, Quadriga has been paid for direct-mail services by DVNF since the charity was founded in 2007. Torossian did say in his e-mail, "At times, Quadriga chooses to invest money in partnerships with non-profit organizations. Sometimes it is a successful business venture, while others it is not." In a subsequent e-mail, Torossian said Quadriga had lost \$7 million investing in veterans nonprofit organizations. When CNN asked whether that included the Disabled Veterans National Foundation, he said "your facts remain woefully inadequate," but he declined to elaborate in a later e-mail exchange. He also threatened to sue CNN on behalf of Quadriga.

At the small house in Birmingham where J.D. Simpson operates St. Benedict's, he said his main goal is to provide beds to homeless and disabled veterans. He characterized the DVNF operation in harsh terms. "I ask myself what the heck are these people doing stealing from our veterans, because that's what they are doing," Simpsons said. "I don't care how you look at it. These people have sacrificed for our country. And there are some people out there raising money to abuse 'em and that just makes me mad." CharityWatch's top rated veteran and military charities are:

Organization	GRADE
• Armed Services YMCA of the USA	A
• Fisher House Foundation	A+
• Homes For Our Troops	A
• Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund	A+
• Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund	A
• Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America	A
• National Military Family Association	A+
• Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society	A+
• Operation Homefront – N.O.	A

[Source: CNN News David Fitzpatrick and Drew Griffin article 8 May 2012 ++]

VA Women Vet Programs Update 17: The Department of Veterans Affairs' task force on women veterans this month offered its plans for making the health and benefits system more female friendly. The report offers 23 suggestions spanning facility setup, research and treatment priorities, and better data collection, all with the goal of "continuously improving services for women veterans." Now, the department is looking for feedback from the public. Veterans and their advocates have until June 14 to offer their comments and criticism of the plan. Officials said a revised strategy report will be developed in the following weeks. About 1.8 million of the nation's veterans are female (8 percent of the total veteran population), but the task force noted that the VA still struggles with providing adequate care for things like military sexual trauma and mental health issues of female patients. In addition, women veterans are more likely to end up homeless than their male counterparts and have lower enrollment in VA health care programs, both discouraging trends. The recommendations include assessing all VA health facilities to ensure that they meet requirements for female patients' privacy, training staff on specific medical needs of those veterans, creating a "women veterans' employment plan" for the department and developing better metrics to track the success of those programs. To view the report and enter comments, go to <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=VA-2012-VACO-0001-0099>, and click on COMMENT NOW (upper right-hand corner). You can view and/or comment on other proposed Government regulations online at <http://www.regulations.gov>. [Source: Stars & Stripes Leo Shane article 15 May 2012 ++]

VA Women Vet Programs Update 18: Veterans Affairs officials in MAY announced a new partnership with the American Heart Association to help bring new prevention and treatment information to female veterans, who face an elevated risk of cardiovascular disease. The collaboration, which has already begun, includes providing information for patients on programs to help with host of heart-related issues, and training for physicians within the VA on new treatments and practices to reduce those health risks. In coming months, it will also include screening patients more frequently for cardiovascular problems like high blood pressure or diabetes. About one-third of women in America have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, according to the AHA. Dr. John Rumsfeld, national director of cardiology for the Veterans Health Administration, said female veterans – in particular, those suffering from combat injuries or related mental health issues – have an even higher probability of suffering heart disease. More information on the resources is available at the American Heart Association's web site. [Source: Stars & Stripes Leo Shane article 18 May 2012 ++]

DoD Benefit Cuts Update 14: The Center for American Progress (CAP) released a new study, "Reforming Military Compensation," that asserts the Pentagon's FY 2013 defense budget doesn't go nearly far enough in proposing cuts to military pay, retirement, and health care benefits. Like many previous studies, it's a compendium of budget-focused assertions that, at best, miss the point and, at worst, misrepresent the role and purpose of current career compensation incentives. Rather than bandying generalities, let's take a closer look at **specific quotes from the report.**

- *"When TRICARE was created in 1996, working-age retirees contributed about 27% of their health care costs; today that number has fallen to just 11%. Should the Pentagon's recommendations [for large TRICARE fee hikes] be implemented by Congress, military retirees would still contribute just 14% of their health care costs, about half of what they did in 1996."*

First, there was no discussion in 1996 about having retirees pay any percentage of health care costs. Second, MOAA rejects the implied assumption that basing beneficiary fees on a percentage of DoD costs is a reasonable thing to do.

Much of the interim cost increases were driven by readiness needs and the inherent inefficiencies and lack of oversight of the current health care delivery system, and beneficiaries should bear no share of those costs. Finally, unlike CAP, MOAA won't simply accept whatever statistics DoD chooses to cite without far more information about what those figures did and didn't count — which defense leaders so far have declined to share.

- *“Due to the 20-year vesting requirement, Pentagon managers are reluctant to separate personnel who have served more than 10 years but less than 20, not wanting to leave servicemembers without a job and retirement savings. ... This rigidity leaves the retirement program particularly ill-suited for periods in which the force is shrinking significantly, as it is today. ... ”*

MOAA hasn't seen any such reluctance. During the drawdown of the 1990s and the new one now under way, Congress and DoD have exercised multiple authorities, voluntary and involuntary, to separate or retire many, many thousands.

- *“The Defense Department and Congress can and should mandate that working-age retirees above a certain income level be allowed to enroll in TRICARE only if they don't have access to other plans through their employer or spouse.”*

Congress' clear intent always has been that completion of a service career entitles a retired servicemember to TRICARE coverage. Never, ever, anywhere, has anyone in government expressed a caveat that retiree health care coverage is authorized “unless you take a civilian job after leaving service, or unless your spouse has other health coverage, or unless you succeed in life.” The CAP authors would blatantly default on the government's statutory obligation after servicemembers have fulfilled their end of the career-service bargain.

- *“[T]he military retirement system ... has remained unaltered not because of its effectiveness but rather due to the political difficulties involved in modernizing entitlement programs for military personnel.”*

Somebody's not paying attention here. Congress enacted legislation in 1986 that dramatically reduced 20-year retirement benefits — and had to repeal it a decade later after those cuts undermined retention and readiness.

- *“CAP recommends a three-part transition to a 401(k)-based retirement system:*
 - ✓ *All new recruits would enroll in the new system [with benefits delayed until age 60].*
 - ✓ *Personnel with at least 10 years of service would have the option to transition to a 401(k) or retain their current benefits.*
 - ✓ *Personnel with less than 10 years would transition either to a 401(k) or to a modified [retirement] system...that would provide 40% [rather than 50%] of base pay ... and would pay out those benefits no earlier than age 60.”*

Again, the CAP authors choose to ignore retirement history, proposing far greater retirement cuts than already were proven to undermine readiness. The CAP proposal shows a shocking insensitivity to the fundamental difference between military service and civilian working conditions. Why on earth would anyone choose to pursue a military career and all of its inherent sacrifices if all they would earn is a civilian-style benefit?

- *“Because of indifference on the part of the Pentagon leadership, virtually any individual who requests retirement after 20 years of service is automatically allowed to leave.”*

It's hard to conceive any responsible person would put such a sentence in print. Not only do the authors think that 20-plus years of service should only earn a civilian-style retirement benefit, but they also think long-serving

servicemembers should be denied the choice to leave active service? Now there's a deal that would attract America's sons and daughters to a career in uniform, don't you think?

- *“Implemented in 1948, the military retirement system was designed for the draft era, yet it has remained virtually unaltered despite the transition to an all-volunteer force.”*

The CAP authors seem unaware that switching to an all-volunteer force only altered the means of entry into service. The career force always has been a voluntary force. The retirement system was built to attract people to a military career in spite of the unique demands and sacrifice inherent in completing decades of uniformed service. If anything, those conditions are worse today than when the system was established. The hard fact is the current retirement system (together with a bad economy) is the only reason the country was able to sustain the career force through the past decade of war. Had the CAP retirement proposal been in effect during that time, it would have destroyed retention and readiness.

- *“We would not argue ... that the men and women of our military do not deserve to be generously compensated for their professionalism and bravery.”*

Give us a collective break. The CAP authors would — and do — assert repeatedly and explicitly that career servicemembers' service and sacrifice for the nation are worth far, far, less than the country is currently compensating them. It's apparently lunchtime at CAP. [Source: MOAA Government Relations Director 'As I See It' article 11 May 2012 ++]



Col. Steve Strobridge, USAF (Ret.)

Credit Report Scam: Check your credit and/or debit card statements closely this month. Consumers nationwide are finding charges for \$19.95 or more for credit reports they never ordered. The charges appear to be from Experian, Consumerinfo.com or Creditreport.com. Creditreport.com is part of a family of credit reporting sites belonging to Consumerinfo.com, Inc. an Experian company. Falsely charged consumers contacted Experian at the phone number listed on their debit/credit card statement and learned that their card number was used to purchase a credit report for another person. The false charges likely stemmed from a security breach. If you spot a charge on your statement from Experian, Consumerinfo.com or Creditreport.com, you should:

- Call the number listed next to the merchant's name on your credit or debit card statements. The representative will ask for your name and debit or credit card number. If your name and the name on the purchased credit report are not the same, a refund will be issued within 7-14 days. The representative may also ask for your social security number for further verification.
- Immediately contact your debit or credit card issuer to report the misuse and request a new card.
- Report the incident to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) through their ID Theft Clearinghouse at <http://www.ftc.gov/idtheft> . This will allow the FTC to identify patterns associated with the unauthorized transactions and investigate the source of the data breach.

[Source: Better Business Bureau Scam Alert 16 May 2012 ++]

Medicare Reimbursement Rates 2012 Update 11: On 9 MAY, Representatives Allyson Schwartz (D-PA) and Joe Heck (R-NV) introduced H.R.5707, the “Medicare Physician Payment Innovation Act” which would repeal the flawed Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula used to establish physician reimbursement rates for Medicare and TRICARE patients and reform several aspects of Medicare’s payment and delivery systems. According to their joint press statement, H.R.5707:

- Permanently repeals the SGR formula and prevents a 30 percent cut to physician reimbursements scheduled for January 1, 2013
- Provides annual positive payment updates for all physicians for four years.
- Ensures access to preventive care, care coordination, and primary care services through increased payment updates for those services
- . Aggressively tests and evaluates new payment and delivery models .
- Identifies a variety of unique payment models to provide options for providers across medical specialties, practice types, and geographic regions.
- Stabilizes payment rates for providers who demonstrate a commitment to quality and efficiency within a fee-for-service model.
- Ensures long-term stability in the Medicare physician payment system through predictable updates that accurately reflect the cost and value of providing health care services in coordinated care models.

Since 2003, lawmakers have been relying on short-term fixes to address the SGR problem which has become commonly known as the “Doc Fix.” Their most recent effort in December 2001 prevented a 27.4 percent cut in Medicare physician payment rates on March 1 and froze current payment rates through December 2012. Unless Congress acts again, an estimated 30 percent cut in payments to doctors that treat Medicare and TRICARE payments will occur on 1 January. Finding enough the money to resolve the problem once and for all has been difficult for lawmakers. A permanent fix involves mandatory spending and current law requires Congress to find an offset. That hasn’t been easy because it’s a huge amount—experts say it would now cost about \$316 billion to stop the reimbursement rate cuts over the next decade.

Adding fuel to the fire, offsets for changes posed in H.R.5707 come from perceived savings of troop withdrawals in Iraq and Afghanistan . Historically this idea has been extremely controversial and many lawmakers view the maneuver as nothing more than a “Ponzi Scheme.” In sum, Congress hasn’t been able to agree on where to find the kind of cash they need to permanently fix the problem and that probably won’t change soon. Lawmakers are likely hold off on any serious discussions regarding the matter until the November General Election is over, meaning this will be one of many key issues that will be decided in the Lame Duck session of Congress later this year. Those affected are encouraged to contact their legislators and request they support this bipartisan legislation. One easy way to do that is to use the message provided by the FRA Action Center a <http://www.capwiz.com/fra/home/>. Just click the tab on top titled ‘Action Center’ and then the link titled [Support Legislation to Make Doc Fix Permanent \(H.R. 5707\)](#) . [Source: AFSA On Call 15 May 2012 ++]

Colon Cancer Update 03: People getting checked for signs of colon cancer may not need to take a laxative if they choose a CT scan for their cancer screening over a tradition colonoscopy, according to a new study. The findings suggest a so-called CT colonography is almost as good at identifying certain polyps as a traditional

colonoscopy, and researchers said eliminating the need for laxatives may encourage more people to get screened. The results of this study open the door to a more patient-friendly screening," said Dr. Michael Zalis, the study's lead author and director of CT colonography in the department of imaging at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. Zalis added, however, that CT colonography is not yet covered by government insurance programs -- like Medicare and Medicaid -- and more research is needed before people switch to a laxative-free method of screening.

In traditional colonoscopy, a doctor uses a camera called an endoscope to look for signs of cancer within the colon and rectum. The procedure usually requires sedation. During a CT colonography, the colon is filled with a gas and the patient is told to hold their breath while images are taken. For both tests, patients typically take a laxative the night before the screening to eliminate any digested food that might be in the colon. Zalis and his colleagues wanted to test whether or not a CT colonography remained accurate even when the patient did not use a laxative. Instead, people were told to reduce their fiber intake and periodically drink liquids with an added substance that tags the feces in a person's colon. After the images are taken, a computer program -- like software invented by Zalis and two of his coauthors -- removes the feces from the picture, which leaves an empty colon and any polyps. Between June 2005 and October 2010, Zalis and his fellow researchers recruited 605 people -- all between 50 to 85 years old and at average risk of colon cancer -- for their study. Each person underwent a laxative-free CT colonography and then a traditional colonoscopy about five weeks later. Overall, the laxative-free method identified 91 percent of polyps one centimeter or larger, compared to 95 percent with traditional colonoscopy. The difference between the two, according to the researchers, could have been due to chance. That wasn't the case for smaller polyps, however. The researchers found that a traditional colonoscopy was better at identifying polyps under a centimeter in size, compared to the laxative-free CT colonography.

Colonography "does have some advantages and disadvantages and I think it's important for people to know what those are," said Dr. Perry Pickhardt, of the department of radiology at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health in Madison. Pickhardt, who was not involved with the new study, told Reuters Health that some doctors may not be okay with relying on a test that only consistently finds larger polyps. Although it may spot fewer small, pre-cancerous polyps, Zalis said CT colonography is still better than no screening -- and eliminating the laxative preparation may increase the number of people who get the test. "The prep, it turns out, is highly objectionable to many people, and it deters people from getting screened," he said. In his team's study, 290 people said they'd prefer a CT scan for screening in the future, and 175 picked the traditional colonoscopy. [Source: Reuters Andrew M. Seaman article 14 May 2012 ++]

VA Fiduciary Program Update 02: Already a convicted petty thief, Mildred Fedd had pressing bills to pay: parking tickets, a faulty sewage system, house payments and the impound lot holding her truck hostage. So she turned to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and promised - for a small fee - to watch over an 82-year-old disabled veteran. With his \$5,000, she agreed to buy him a burial plot. Instead, the Houston caregiver paid her own bills - and got caught only after she had spent all his money and went back for more, Harris County records show. The Veterans Affairs' Inspector General has repeatedly warned about a plague of fraud and theft in a national program that appoints family members and VA-approved fiduciaries to protect a whopping \$3 billion in assets belonging to veterans the government considers too disabled to manage their own money. In the past decade, twice as many Texans have been prosecuted for stealing from disabled veterans enrolled in the VA fiduciary program as in any other state, records obtained by the Houston Chronicle show. More than 20 veterans' family members and trusted members of the community - including a former police officer, a federal employee and optometrist - have been convicted and others, including two attorneys, face pending charges of stealing from disabled veterans whose assets they'd been assigned to protect, according to court records from across the state.

Waco optometrist David Fram took \$126,250 from a veteran to help prop up his own private business, thefts meticulously documented in financial records later used against him, federal court records show. Charles D. Stange Jr., a former Bexar County sheriff's jailer and ex-military policeman, went to prison himself for stealing \$272,000 he'd supposedly been safeguarding for his own disabled veteran dad. And a Houston lawyer, Joe Phillips, and his wife, both in their 70s, allegedly stole \$2 million from two dozen veterans in another pending case described as the largest rip-off ever reported in the VA fiduciary program - a case in which the perpetrators are accused of hiding thefts for years by forging bank officers' signatures, inventing fake money market accounts and shifting money between various Texas and out-of-state banks. Phillips, whose trial is pending, has denied the allegations and refused interviews. His wife pleaded guilty to conspiracy and filing false income taxes in April.

Many sordid swindles were perpetuated on veterans too ill or disabled to report the crimes, records show. Some crimes went undetected for years before being uncovered through tips, thieves' confessions or the VA's own infrequent checks, interviews with attorneys and court records show. One San Antonio disabled vet's daughter got suspicious when a bill collector called about delinquent payments for a new Ford Focus. Her dad, permanently hospitalized in a VA treatment center for his dementia, no longer drives and knew nothing about a car. A subsequent investigation revealed that his sister, Rosa Avila, and his niece had for five years stolen \$180,000 of his money while telling the veteran "all his VA benefits were being saved" and never bringing him more than \$20 at a time. At least two Texans convicted in veteran scams had criminal records - but still got approved by the VA as fiduciaries. One Houston veteran's sister with prior petty theft convictions blew part of her brother's \$30,000 in at least 20 casino trips, records show.

In interviews and written statements, VA officials told the Chronicle that they have set up a new "hub system" to improve oversight: Texas fiduciaries will be overseen by a Nebraska office. VA now requires background and credit checks for newly appointed money managers, bans ATM withdrawals and reviews bank statements annually. Reports of theft remain rare, officials say, given that 96,000 fiduciaries assist veterans nationwide, about 6,200 in Texas. The most recent Texas conviction involved a 40-year-old Fort Worth woman who got approved to manage her father's VA benefits in July 2008, then stuck him in a nursing home and spent his money on herself. Yolanda R. Robinson got probation and was ordered to repay \$9,305 in January 2012. Justice came too late to help her disabled dad. He died in 2010. [Source: Houston Chronicle Lise Olsen & Lindsay Wise article 21 May 2012 ++]

National Park Pass Program Update 01: Service members and their families will be able to enter all of America's national parks free of charge for a year under an initiative announced 15 MAY. The pass – the America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreation Lands Annual Pass, which normally costs \$80 – became available to service members and their dependents on Armed Forces Day, 19 MAY. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar made the announcement, along with National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis, at a ceremony at Colonial National Historical Park in Yorktown, Va., the site of the last major battle of the Revolutionary War. The area surrounding the park hosts installations from all the military services, including the world's largest naval base. "I think when one goes into Virginia and you see all the sites, the Yorktown battlefield and the whole history of the country, it's important that those who have fought in the tradition of making sure the nation's democracy and freedom are protected also have access to these wonderful sites there," Salazar said yesterday in a conference call with reporters.

The passes allow the holder and passengers in a single private vehicle access to some 2,000 sites that charge per vehicle. At sites where entrance fees are charged per person, it covers the pass owner and three adults age 16 and older. The National Park Service estimates that giving away the passes to service members and their families will result in a revenue loss between \$2 million and \$6 million, but Jarvis said that won't cause a significant impact on

the agency, which collects about \$150 million in fees each year. Military personnel can get the passes at any national park or wildlife refuge that charges an entrance fee by showing their military ID. Family members also will be able to obtain their own pass, even if the service member is deployed or if they are traveling separately. The pass will be accepted at National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Army Corps sites that charge entrance or standard amenity fees. The free pass will be made available for activated members of the National Guard and reserves, but not for military veterans or retirees, whom Jarvis said have other opportunities for free or reduced admission, such as the National Park Service's "Access Pass" or a seniors pass for those 62 and older.

Jarvis, a 40-year Park Service employee, said that while the free passes are a first, they are representative of the parks' history with the military, which dates back to the Buffalo Soldiers' battles with Native Americans in the mid-1800s and the recruitment of former military members to serve as park rangers under the first NPS director, Stephen T. Mather. The Park Service maintains many military historical sites from Gettysburg to Pearl Harbor, and in World War II even closed some parks, such as Mount Rainier in Washington state, to all but active military members, he said. Right after World War II, the Park Service invested heavily in infrastructure to prepare the parks for returning service members, Jarvis said. Today's generation of warriors also deserves a deep connection to the parks, he said. "From my perspective, it is incredibly important to return this group of returning military members to their national parks," Jarvis said. "Nothing is more core to the American experience than the national parks. These are places for quiet and contemplation and to reconnect to the American experience. And we don't want there to be any barriers to that." The free pass initiative is part of the "Joining Forces" campaign First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, launched last year to rally Americans around supporting service members and their families. "Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to our servicemen and women who make great sacrifices to protect our country and preserve our freedom," Dr. Biden said in a White House statement. "In recognition of their service, we are so pleased to be putting out a welcome mat for our military families at America's most beautiful and storied sites." [Source: AFPS Lisa Daniel article 15 May 2012 ++]



Great Falls National Park, Va., is one of 327 parks in the National Park Service system

CT State Park Passes: Veterans with disabilities are now eligible to receive access to all the state parks in Connecticut free of charge for the rest of their lives. The passes can be "used to waive parking fees at all of Connecticut's state parks where a fee is charged," according to the release. The veteran, who does not have to be the driver of vehicle, only has to present the pass to get into the park for free. "These free, lifetime passes are an excellent way for us to show our appreciation to Connecticut's residents and their families who have served our country," said DEEP Deputy Commissioner Susan Frechette in a release 18 MAY. The disabled veterans must

provide copies of the following items to receive their free park passes from the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection:

- Connecticut drivers license or other legal proof of residency.
- Veterans Administration Card or VA benefits letter indicating the service connected disability of any percentage.

Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Dr. Linda S. Schwartz said the passes are a "great gift" for veterans who served the nation. "These passes offer a wonderful opportunity for our disabled veterans to experience the richness and healing qualities of nature and the beauty of our great State," she said in a release. The lifetime passes are available at the following locations:

- DEEP State Park Headquarters, located at 79 Elm St. in Hartford
- Dinosaur State Park, located on West Street in Rocky Hill
- DEEP Eastern District Headquarters, at 209 Hebron Rd. in Marlborough
- DEEP Western District Headquarters, at 230 Plymouth Rd. in Harwinton
- Fort Trumbull State Park, at 90 Walbach St. in New London
- Kellogg Environmental Center, Office of Communications and Education, at 500 Hawthorne Ave. in Derby
- Harkness Memorial State Park, at 275 Great Neck Rd. in Waterford
- Hammonasset Beach State Park, at 1288 Boston Post Rd. in Madison
- Sherwood Island State Park, Exit 18 off I-95 in Westport

When visiting Gillette Castle, Dinosaur and Fort Trumbull State Parks or to fish at the Quinebaug Valley Hatchery, free admittance is provided only for the Disabled Veteran Pass holder. All other visitors will be required to pay the appropriate fee. The passes cannot be used for camping or special events being held at the state parks. The veterans will have to pay the separate admission charges for those activities or events. For more information about the program, call 860-424-3938 or visit the DEEP's website <http://www.ct.gov/deep/site/default.asp>. [Source: CT Dept of Energy & Environmental Protection notice 18 May 2012 ++]

Anheuser-Busch Theme Parks 2012: Through 31 DEC 2012, any member of active duty, activated or drilling reservist, or National Guardsman will receive free admission to one of the Anheuser-Busch parks across the country through the Here's to the Heroes program. The offer is valid for one complimentary single-day admission per person, per year, to one of the following SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment parks:

- SeaWorld Orlando, San Diego, or San Antonio
- Busch Gardens Tampa Bay or Williamsburg
- Sesame Place
- Adventure Island
- Water Country USA

This offer is not valid at Discovery Cove or Aquatica parks or for separate ticketed events including Christmas Town at Busch Gardens Williamsburg and Tampa, Howl-O-Scream at Busch Gardens Tampa and A Very Furry Christmas at Sesame Place. You must register, which can be done at the park entrance or online ahead of time at the Anheuser-Busch Here's to the Heroes website <http://www.herosalute.com>. Up to three dependents may accompany the servicemember. Valid military identification reflecting active status and dependent ID(s) are required. [Source: <http://www.herosalute.com> May 2012 ++]

Veterans' Treatment Court Update 15: As thousands of troops return from war to Connecticut, lawmakers have approved a measure that would give veterans a second chance to avoid prosecution or prison when they commit a minor crime. The House and Senate voted unanimously in recent weeks to pass legislation allowing veterans to use the Accelerated Rehabilitation program twice, rather than just once. The program, also known as AR, is a jail diversion program for people accused of crimes such as reckless driving, street racing, larceny and running from the police. The bill also broadens eligibility for two other pretrial diversionary programs for people with psychiatric disabilities and drug problems. It would allow veterans to participate by requiring that they have a mental health condition amenable to treatment, rather than meeting the definition of a psychiatric disability, and allows court officials to refer veterans to drug treatment programs at veteran facilities. Diversion programs allow defendants to avoid prosecution by successfully completing court-sanctioned treatment programs.

"This bill is incredibly important both for the veterans and their families whose lives will be changed and also for the people of the state of Connecticut who have the opportunity to help veterans who served our country ease back into civilian life," said Margaret Middleton, executive director of the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center. The bill would save the state up to \$3.5 million over the next three years because treatment is cheaper than incarceration and because the federal Veterans Administration can provide much of the treatment, supporters said. A spokesman would not say whether Gov. Dannel P. Malloy plans to sign the bill. "The governor is glad to see the legislature continuing to address the needs of our veterans," said David Bednarz. "He will have his legal staff review the final language once the bill arrives on his desk." About 16,000 Connecticut veterans have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and many are coming home as a result of withdrawing troops from the wars, officials said. About 1,000 veterans would likely benefit annually from the bill, supporters say. Nearly 40 percent of Connecticut veterans returning from war experience post-traumatic stress disorder or partial PTSD, according to the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center. Some do not seek treatment because of the stigma surrounding mental health disorders and wind up with legal troubles such as breach of peace and disorderly conduct, advocates say.

Veterans don't offend at any higher rates than the general population, the Department of Justice has said. State Veterans Affairs Commissioner Linda Schwartz told lawmakers at a hearing that in 2007 her department began to hear about veterans having legal trouble, including thrill-seeking behaviors. "We hear of veterans who drive at excessive speeds much like they did to stay alive in Iraq," Schwartz said at a hearing in February, according to a transcript. "Skills and training that kept them alive in combat areas, including the 'adrenaline rush,' which kept them sharp, is now recreated through thrill-seeking behaviors which are also violations of the law." Some Vietnam veterans who did not receive treatment faced decades of struggles and legal troubles, Schwartz said. "We now know that early interventions and therapeutic treatment and rehabilitation give returning veterans a better chance and a better quality of life and the chance to reach their highest level of function and productivity," Schwartz said.

The legislation comes amid a proliferation of so-called veterans courts across the country which focus on rehabilitation rather than incarceration. Veterans are generally required to plead guilty to their crimes and then generally are placed on probation but must adhere to a strict regimen of counseling, employment and sobriety. Connecticut's measure is similar to laws passed in several states that allow veterans into pretrial diversion programs, said Alison Lawrence, policy specialist at the National Conference of State Legislatures. "Each year we're seeing a few more states create programs such as this," Lawrence said. The bill would help put Connecticut at the forefront of the reforms, said Kate Cahoy, a student at Yale Law School's Veterans Legal Services Clinic which campaigned for the legislation. [Source: Associated Press John Christoffersen article 13 May 2012 ++]

NDAA 2013 Update 02: The Air Force effort to cut aircraft and people from the Air National Guard hit a stumbling block last week when the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) approved an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act that prohibits the service from using authorized funds to divest, retire or transfer any aircraft in its inventory as of 31 MAY. The amendment, which was sponsored by Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA) and Rep. Dave Loebsack (D-IA), and 15 others, also prohibits the Army from divesting, retiring or transferring any C-23 aircraft during fiscal year 2013. A second section of the HASC NDAA stops the Air Force and Army from moving forward with proposed retirement of active Air Force, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard and Army National Guard aircraft in fiscal 13, including all C-27, A-10, C-130, F-16, C-5, KC-135, E-8, MC-12, C-23, or other aircraft slated for retirement/transfer in the president's budget request. In order to cover the cost associated with continuing these operations, this amendment increases funding for Air Force, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve and Army National Guard personnel and operations by \$709.6 million and reduces \$377.3 million of procurement funding for a variety of air-launched munitions, but keeps all of them funded at the president's budget request level or higher. [Source: NGAUS Washington Report 15 May 2012 ++]

NDAA 2013 Update 03: The final version of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 (H.R.4310) passed the House by a bipartisan veto-proof vote of 299-120. The legislation provides the pay, funding and authorities for American's men and women in uniform. The bill authorizes funding for National Defense at \$554.2 billion for the Base Budget, and \$88.5 billion for overseas contingency operations. This level of funding is consistent with the House-passed Budget. The bill includes Congressman Lee Terry (R-NE) amendment which would authorize veterans and active-duty military not in uniform to render the military-style hand salute during the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. "My amendment is based on an idea brought to us by our local VFW that simply seeks to create parity for veterans in and out of uniform who are reciting the Pledge of Allegiance," Terry stated. "Veterans take deep pride in being able to express honor by rendering the military salute each time they reaffirm their fidelity to our great nation and its colors." Current Flag Code authorizes veterans and active-military not in uniform to render the military-style hand salute during the playing of the national anthem and during the raising, lowering or passing of the flag. [Source: Ray 2012 ++]



Congressman Lee Terry (R-NE)

NDAA 2013 Update 04: National Guardsmen, retired Guardsmen, their families and their Reserve counterparts will not be seeing the world via space-available travel. An amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for 2013 that would have given that benefit to those groups, as well as retirees, just as it is to active-component members and their families, was blocked from reaching a floor vote last week by the House Rules Committee. Apparently, the Defense Department has determined that adding these new passengers would have constituted an expense because the weight of the additional flyers would have resulted in an expense to the Air Force. By statute, the space-available program cannot generate cost to the service. The Defense Department's

argument, backed by the support of some veterans service organizations, ruled the day in the committee vote. This amendment was backed strongly by NGAUS and losing in this fashion raised the hackles of Pete Duffy, the NGAUS acting legislative director. "This is novel science," he said, noting that, apparently, the active-component passengers have no weight. It seems, he said, that the active component simply does not want to share one of its perks with its brothers-in-arms in the reserve components. [Source: NGAUS Washington Report 22 May 2012 ++]

NDAA 2013 Update 05: Bass caught during future professional fishing tournaments will not be hooked by sponsorship of the National Guard. That's if an amendment added last week by the House Appropriations Committee to the defense appropriations bill becomes law. Military sponsorship of car racing, wrestling and professional fishing should be a thing of the past, according to Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA), who introduced the bill. A chief co-sponsor is Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., who has introduced the bill in the past only to see it fail. "None of the funds made available in this act may be used to sponsor professional or semiprofessional motorsports, fishing, wrestling or other sports," the amendment reads. McCollum told USA Today that the Guard paid \$650,000 to sponsor a NASCAR Sprint Cup race in Richmond, Va., in September 2010. "One night, one race . . . 439 recruitment leads," she told the newspaper. "Six of those—only six—qualified as potential recruits and then they got zero out of it."

Motorsports has been a major target for Guard recruiting dollars in recent years as it sought to fill its ranks during especially busy times. NASCAR sponsorship, which includes the car driven by fan favorite Dale Earnhardt Jr., will cost the Guard more than \$26 million this fiscal year, down from nearly \$33 million spent the previous fiscal year. That represents less than 9 percent of the total recruiting budget. Over the past five years Earnhardt's racing team has received over \$136 million in taxpayer funds from the National Guard – making him the highest paid military contractor in professional sports. The Guard cited 53,740 leads generated by NASCAR sponsorship in 2009. The Guard also sponsors an IndyCar Series car driven by J.R. Hildebrand. The Army and Air Force have also spent recruiting money on NASCAR sponsorships, but not to the extent the Guard has. The Army paid \$7.1 million for its racing team in 2011. The Air Force paid \$1.6 million last year, the newspaper reported. [Source: Rep. Betty McCollum Press Release 18 May 2012 ++]

NDAA 2013 Update 06: On 24 MAY, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) unanimously approved its version of the FY2013 Defense Authorization Bill. For the most part, it contains good news for the military community, but does leave some troubling issues. Among other provisions, the Senate Committee bill would:

- Bar the Pentagon from implementing proposed dramatic increases in retiree fees for TRICARE Standard, TRICARE Prime, and TRICARE For Life
- By remaining silent on the issue, it would allow the Pentagon to implement significant increases in pharmacy copays (e.g., raising the copay for retail, brand-name medications from the current \$12 to \$26 as of Oct 1, 2012, and eventually to \$34 by Oct 1, 2017).
- Approve force levels proposed by the Pentagon, except for a modest increase for the Air Force.
- Authorize a 1.7% military pay raise on January 1, 2013.
- Require appointment of a Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission to make recommended changes in the military pay and benefits package, primarily for future service entrants, with special rules to expedite congressional consideration that limit debate time and bar any amendments.

(MOAA strongly objects to limiting essential congressional oversight in this way on an issue so essential to long-term retention and readiness.)

- Cut \$660 million from the budget request for military construction and family housing.
- Require appointment of a commission to study the appropriate mix of active duty, Reserve and Guard components for the Air Force.
- Require a Pentagon report on the impacts of the sequester that will cut another \$500 billion from the 10-year defense budget, starting January 2013.
- •Require civilian workforce cuts to generate savings equal to that of a 5% cut in military force levels.
- Require annual reports from each service on dwell time between deployments.
- Allow a PCS move for Selected Reserve members who are separated due to force reductions, but who fill critical vacancies in another Selected Reserve unit more than 150 miles from their home.
- Allow SBP-participating military retirees who waive their retired pay in favor of a survivor annuity under the Federal Employees Retirement System to stop paying SBP premiums.
- Codify space-available travel eligibility for active and reserve component members and their dependents, effective January 1, 2014. The provision includes "grey area" Guard/Reserve retirees but does not explicitly include survivors, as MOAA had supported. The Secretary of Defense would retain authority to designate additional eligibles and designate relative travel priority for the various groups.
- Authorize 180 days of TRICARE Standard coverage for members of the Selected Reserve who are involuntarily separated without cause.
- Authorize the Defense Department to put selected over-the-counter medications on the TRICARE pharmacy formulary and establish a copay for them.
- Require an annual report on access, cost and quality of health care for military dependents with disabilities and special needs.

[Source: MOAA Leg Up 25 May 2012 ++]

Military Research: With the Afghanistan War winding down and the chance to study troops in combat running out, military scientists are conducting record amounts of research on everything from blast effects on the brain to stanching blood loss. At least 47 medical studies are slated for this year, up from 40 last year and 20 in 2010, according to Army Lt. Col. Kevin Chung, who is coordinating the efforts. "This is the largest number of total projects we've had going," he says. The studies look at the process of battlefield care, test new forms of treatment and diagnosis, or attempt to enhance understanding of brain injury. Proponents of battlefield research cite a storied history of breakthroughs that included field ambulances in the Civil War and the discovery of the causes of yellow fever following the Spanish-American War. "It's a real opportunity," says Maj. Gen. Richard Thomas, a doctor who returned from Afghanistan in February. "Combat is the greatest catalyst to medical innovation."

This year, hundreds of soldiers and Marines off the front lines are carefully being asked for consent to have their brains scanned, blood taken or reaction time monitored. "They have to volunteer to participate," says Navy Lt. Cmdr. Octavian Adam, a neurologist leading efforts at a military hospital in Kandahar that involve imaging the brains of troops exposed to blasts. "Most of them ... want to help." Adam's research uses advanced techniques for magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), to, for the first time, actually see evidence of mild traumatic brain injury or concussion caused by exposure to the many buried explosives that detonate during foot patrols by troops in Afghanistan. More than 400 U.S. servicemembers suffered these wounds last year. Three MRI machines were installed in the Afghanistan war zone for the first time last fall. Some of the other research:

- Scientists will draw blood from troops who suffer concussions to test for proteins released when brain damage occurs -- signs of a potential biomarker for future diagnostic help.

- An Air Force study will try to understand how damaged brains react to lower external pressure during high-altitude medevac operations.
- The Army plans to conduct what may be its final field study into the behavioral health and psychological treatment of troops in combat, an effort where hundreds are surveyed or participate in focus groups.

"It is a huge challenge, as you can imagine, to try to do things like this in a war zone," says Army Col. Dallas Hack, director of the Pentagon's trauma research. While the research costs are minimal because scientists often double as medical care officers for the troops, the logistics can be daunting. With Afghan troops slated to take over combat operation next year and U.S. troops withdrawing in 2014, the chance to better understand the effects of combat is quickly passing away, Hack says. "It's a shame for these injuries to occur and not learn as much from them as we can," he says. [Source: USA Today Gregg Zoroya article 14 May 2012 ++]

Oakland Office

VA Claims Backlog Update 64: The Oakland office, which handles benefits claims for veterans from Bakersfield north to the Oregon border, had almost 32,500 claims waiting an average of 269 days — compared with a national target time of 180 days — when the Department of Veterans Affairs inspector general visited in DEC 2011. As of APR 2012, the delay for veterans had increased to 320 average days. Some wait far longer. Vietnam War veteran Richard Carpino, a 70-year-old retired plumber living in Lodi, spent more than seven years in the toxic boiler room of a Navy destroyer, where he was exposed to asbestos. Starting in 2000, he spent more than a decade fighting for his proper disability pay. Even after a congressman wrote a letter on Carpino's behalf, it was an additional 15 months before his claim was accepted and he received payments. He now gets \$2,924 per month from the VA. As for the struggle and wait, Carpino said, "The military was easier. ... There really was no fighting there."



Richard Carpino, 70, of Lodi, Calif

The 320 average pending days at the Oakland center compares with an average of 241 days last month at the other 56 facilities nationwide, according to statistics provided to Rep. Jerry McNerney's (D-CA-11) office. The VA inspector general report also found 39 percent of 90 disability claims inspected were incorrectly processed, and of the eight major office functions inspected in Oakland, only five were in compliance. "There are very high-performing regional centers," McNerney said by phone from Washington, D.C. "Ours is not. What's bothering me is that it has to come to this, where we have congressional hearings (and) bad press before getting any action," he said. "The veterans with disabling injuries, by and large, get taken care of pretty quickly; it's the ones on the margins who are depending on disability assistance that are affected, and their families." McNerney said that at a recent Lodi town hall meeting veterans complained about the long waits. "They feel like they are in a black hole," he said.

Carpino can attest to that. After numerous denials of his claims, he approached McNerney's office in 2008. By June 2010, with his lung capacity about half of normal, Carpino applied for 100 percent disability, and included a letter from the Pleasanton congressman with the application. More than a year later, on 28 SEP, the VA awarded him the full coverage, including retroactive pay. "Anytime they would deny me and gave me the reason, I would go on to the computer and the VA files and find another reason that made me eligible," Carpino said. "It took me 11 years. Eleven years is too long to get compensated. We're trying to find a way to speed it up," he said. The 10 oldest Oakland claims had been pending for between 1,040 and 3,187 days, according to the report. The facility, with 269 full-time employees inside the Ron Dellums Federal Building in downtown Oakland, failed to follow VA policy and provide monthly reviews of claims older than a year, the report found.

A call to the VA media office 10 MAY was not immediately returned. But officials at the Oakland facility concurred with all the report's findings, and management said a plan is in place to ensure that 95 percent of claims completed by July will be those pending more than one year. As of last month, it took an average of 125 days before an Oakland VA employee first eyeballed a veteran's claim, according to McNerney's office. Carpino said such long waits may dissuade returning soldiers from trying to access the help they need. "There are a lot of young guys coming out of Iraq that don't want to get involved in it and don't want to deal with the VA," he said. "A lot of guys are maimed so bad, they have no arms or legs and they have to fight for every last bit and that's not right."

Patrick Leary, a 65-year-old Vietnam War veteran from Pleasanton, filed a claim for treatment of ringing in the ears in May 2011 — caused, he believes, by his years piloting helicopter gunships. In January, he found out his claim was denied because the VA said helicopter pilots were not exposed to much noise — although he said the VA never alerted him — and he appealed. He had his first hearing test last month, and his claim is pending. "If you've got to wait for your disability check, that's a problem," Leary said. "Your first disability check is retroactive to the day you filed, but depending on the severity of your malady, you may not live to get it." The Oakland VA facility has pledged to increase staffing in critical areas, boost training and advance software to speed up and improve its claims process, according to the report. "The thing I want to see is concrete results, not talk about plans to do this and that," McNerney said. "It's a disgrace that we're sitting and talking about this today." [Source: Contra Costa Times Matthias Gafni 11 May 2012 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 65: Slogans welcoming home the nation's heroes from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan can sometimes veil faltering efforts to make sure veterans receive the care and the rewards their military service merits. "Overwhelmingly, the VA is not efficient in meeting the veterans needs," said Richmond attorney Matthew A. Kapinos, a veteran of Army service in Iraq and Afghanistan. "They do the best they can, but the system is broken." Complaints about the hoops that veterans have to jump through to get benefits they are due from the federal Department of Veterans Affairs are widespread, though vets generally say they are pleased with the benefits themselves. Kapinos has been working with the Virginia Bar Association's Veterans Issues Task Force to assist Virginia veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with benefit hurdles. "In 2004, we invaded Iraq," he said. "At that point, the VA should have seen it coming."

- Kim Viniard of Williamsburg, a retired Virginia Air National Guard senior master sergeant who deployed to Saudi Arabia in 2002, has applied for a veterans' disability rating for hearing loss, a common result of military service. "It's still pending," she said. "It's a very time-consuming process. It takes a long time."
- Jon Page of Ruckersville, spent six months in Afghanistan as an Army intelligence officer and qualified for the latest GI Bill educational benefits, which can be transferred to family members. "I was going to transfer mine to my son," he said, but no one told the now-retired Virginia National Guardsman he had to do that before he left active duty. "I'm proud to be a veteran," Page said, "but today I'm frustrated."

- In the case of James Bailey of Richmond, he spent a year as a military working-dog handler and military policeman in Iraq and an undisclosed location. After he left the Air Force in September, he wanted to get his teeth checked, a standard benefit for service members. The VA said he had to apply within 180 days to use that service, but the federal agency didn't respond to his repeated inquiries until two weeks ago. "They told me ... there was nothing they could do for me."



James Bailey

To serve about 22.2 million American vets, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, one of the nation's largest federal agencies, has a budget of \$126.9 billion for the 2012 fiscal year and more than 302,000 employees. More than 8.5 million veterans are enrolled in the VA health care system. About a quarter of the nation's population is potentially eligible for VA benefits and services because they are vets, family members or survivors of veterans, the agency says. In Virginia alone, the VA operates three large medical centers — at Richmond, Hampton and Salem — 15 veterans cemeteries, five vet centers and 11 intake sites on military bases where veterans can apply for benefits, as well as a regional benefits office and a regional loan center. Most vets applaud the quality of their veterans' benefits once they have tapped into the VA system. "My experiences with the VA have been fantastic. I can't say enough about them," said Henrico County's Mike Cross, a Marine veteran who was wounded in Vietnam. "I have never ever had a complaint with the VA. I've been very fortunate."

Between their military pensions and VA expenditures, veterans are an almost \$7 billion-a-year industry in Virginia. "It's really big business," said Paul Galanti, commissioner of the state's Department of Veterans Services. Every 10th Virginian is a veteran of military service to the country. Statewide, 823,000 Virginians are military veterans — from World War II, Korea, the Cold War, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — and 141,000 of them have some disability connected with their service, according to Galanti. The state's vet population ranks seventh in the nation, but in five years, Virginia will be fourth, behind California, Texas and Florida, said Steven Combs, the Department of Veterans Services' chief of staff and director of policy and planning. The biggest problem that veterans and their advocates see in the VA system today is the time the federal agency takes to decide on applications for disability and pension compensation: "over 12 months or more," said Combs, who served in the Air Force.

In the past four years, veterans' claims increased 48 percent, from 888,000 in 2008 to 1.3 million in 2011, the VA says. As of May 5, the number of claims pending more than 125 days was 587,725, or 65.3 percent of the 899,684 claims pending, the VA said. Veterans Affairs says it should be able to decide a claim in 12 days. "We're doing horribly by our veterans," said military sociologist David R. Segal. "We were not prepared for the length and magnitude of the current wars, and therefore did not have the infrastructure to deal with our vets" when they

returned from the combat zones. To veterans, the VA's attitude toward their problems sometimes seems summed up as "delay, deny and hope they die," said Segal, who is director of the Center for Research on Military Organization at the University of Maryland. Reintegration into civilian life is a more severe problem for people who serve in the reserve, Segal said. Active-duty service members return to military bases populated by people who have shared the same difficult experiences and equipped with services designed to help them readjust from their combat experiences, Segal said. That's not true for reserve and National Guard members mobilized for service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The wounds of this war will be TBI (traumatic brain injury) and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)," said Timothy M. Tetz, director of the National Legislative Commission for the American Legion. "A great many are not getting the care they need from the VA." More than 14,000 Virginia Army and Air National Guard soldiers and airmen have been mobilized for active duty since the Sept. 11 attacks on America, said Col. Thom Morgan, the state Guard's director of manpower and personnel. "Someone who doesn't have an issue with PTSD or TBI may have them two or three years down the road," said Morgan, a veteran of service in Afghanistan. "We don't know how many of these concerns are going to go on for years instead of months." The VA's disability claims workload springing from the newest generation of returning war veterans, as well as from veterans of earlier periods, continues to increase, the agency said.

Processing compensation and pension claims takes the VA an average of about 230 days — nearly eight months, according to Diana Rubens, the agency's deputy under secretary for field operations dealing with veterans benefits. "We know and we understand that's far too long," Rubens said. "We recognize we cannot do things the way we've always done them." The VA says it will eliminate the claims backlog and speed up claims decisions with 98 percent accuracy by 2015. "We are largely dependent on paper records," said Rubens, though the agency is moving toward digitizing claims processing. Another veterans benefit, the GI Bill, has seen a near doubling in enrollment in the past half-decade, surging from 523,000 in 2007 to 924,000 in 2011. Making sure former service members receive their GI benefits in a timely fashion "seems like it ought to be fundamentally straightforward," Rubens said, but "when we get to the beginning of every semester, we see an incredible rush of claims coming through the door." "We expect that in the end of this summer, we'll begin to see some improvement in the automated process for paying the GI Bill" benefits, Rubens said.

The state Veterans Service Department has about 750 full- and part-time employees — 85 percent of whom work at its two veterans care centers — and an annual budget of about \$50 million. To help veterans plow through the paperwork to apply for benefits, the state has set up 22 field offices across the commonwealth. "It can be very difficult to do it yourself," said Combs. "We're by far the largest single entity providing veterans benefit assistance," Galanti said. "About 75 percent of the claims we submit get approved." But for retired Virginia Army National Guardsman Jon Page, "It's not about the benefits. The benefits are great. "It's just the red tape you've got to go through to actually stake your claim." [Source: Richmond times-Dispatch Peter Bacqué article 15 May 2012 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 66: California's senators and representatives are demanding answers, and accountability, regarding the state's three Veterans Affairs regional offices -- all of which received scathing reviews in MAY for their slow and inaccurate handling of vets' disability claims. Most of the state's congressional delegation, as well as Sens. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, signed a letter sent 17 MAY to the Veterans Affairs secretary following a critical report by the VA inspector general last week about the Oakland, Los Angeles and San Diego regional offices, which handle all of the state's veteran disability claims. "These reports show that the Los Angeles, Oakland and San Diego VAROs have significant deficiencies as a result of mismanagement and a lack of staff understanding of applicable rules and regulations," according to the letter to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki.

"As a result, the benefits claims of veterans in California take longer to process and experience more errors than veterans' claims in other states." The letter asks for answers to these questions:

- What steps are being taken to ensure the offices address the inspector general recommendations, including how staff will be held accountable?
- What follow-up actions will be taken to ensure the California offices improve?
- Why is the Los Angeles office in "safe mode," allowing staff to not be held accountable to VA standards?

In Oakland last month, the office had average delays of 320 days, the second worst backlog of the nation's benefits centers, according to the VA inspector general's report. One claim had been pending for eight years. In addition, 39 percent of the 90 disability claims inspected in Oakland were incorrectly processed. The other two California facilities were not much better. At the Los Angeles office, 80 percent of claims reviewed in that report were unnecessarily delayed, as were about half of those at the San Diego operation. Also in Los Angeles, 97 percent of temporary total disability evaluations studied for the report were incorrectly processed. In San Diego, 77 percent were processed improperly, as were 53 percent of those in Oakland. Ironically, that inaccuracy rate ranked Oakland as the eighth-most accurate of the 44 VA facilities reviewed. In evaluations of residual disabilities of traumatic brain injuries, the reports found about half of the evaluations were processed incorrectly in all three California facilities -- a higher rate than other regional offices across the country. "I've heard time and again from veterans in California about the troubling delays they experienced while having their claims processed. These are truly heartbreaking stories, and this is not the way their service and sacrifice should be honored," said Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton, who previously wrote Shinseki to add the Oakland office to a group of 12 regional offices to receive updated technology. [Source: Contra Costa Times Matthias Gafni article 17 May 2012 ++]

VA Claims Backlog Update 67: Efforts to simplify and speed up the military's disability evaluation system have instead produced a slower, more frustrating process, according to data released by Congress on 23 MAY. Case completion times under the Integrated Disability Evaluation System — designed in 2008 to create a seamless medical benefits system between the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments — have steadily worsened over the last four years. According to the Government Accountability Office, in 2011 those cases averaged 394 days for wounded active-duty troops and 420 days for wounded reservists, both more than 100 days longer than officials' stated goals and months longer than they took in 2009. In addition, a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee investigation found that up to one-third of mental health claims may have been handled improperly, shortchanging troops on benefits and care.

The news is the latest blow to defense and veterans affairs officials struggling with how to deal with thousands of troops returning from combat with severe physical wounds and little-understood mental scars. Senators questioned whether the departments' respective benefits systems are too broken to be repaired. "I'm going to walk away from this with the sense that the systems are imploding," said Sen. Mike Johanns (R-NE) at a hearing on the issue Wednesday. "Whatever we have done to fix this so far just isn't working." VA and defense officials acknowledged serious flaws, but insisted that the process has made dramatic improvements. About 13,000 troops have used IDES since 2008. The previous evaluation systems averaged about 16 months for cases to be completed, even longer than the current 13-month average. In addition, officials said the IDES process typically gets wounded troops their veterans benefits within two months of their separation from the military, a figure they said was still too slow but dramatically better than the one-year wait under the old system. "We have made progress in improving transparency, improving consistency and reducing processing time," said John Gingrich, VA chief of staff. "But our biggest achievement to date has been the closing of the [post-separation] benefits gap."

Lawmakers were unimpressed. "We can't allow the same problems that plague the old disability claims system to negatively impact the transition of thousands of servicemembers in the next few years," said Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) chairwoman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. "The consequences are too severe." Officials from the Defense Department and VA said they are confident that those processing timelines will be reduced significantly in coming months, but members of the committee said they were skeptical that any such results can be achieved. A staggering 45 percent of the 1.6 million veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are now seeking compensation for injuries they say are service-related. That is more than double the 21 percent who filed such claims after some other relatively recent wars, top government officials told The Associated Press." The "Department of Veterans Affairs is mired in backlogged claims, but 'our mission is to take care of whatever the population is,' said Allison Hickey," the undersecretary for benefits at VA, which is streamlining its claims system "and going to electronic records." For now, though, Hickey says VA has "4.4 million case files sitting around 56 regional offices that we have to work with; that slows us down significantly." [Source: Stars & Stripes Leo Shane article 23 May 2012 ++]



Vet Cremains Update 13: Veterans and civilians stood side by side to honor 10 Ohio veterans whose remains were buried 22 MAY with full military honors, several months after they were found in a funeral home basement. Six veterans conducted a rifle salute, taps was played and the name of each of the men and his dates of service were read at the ceremony under an overcast sky at Dayton National Cemetery. Some in attendance wiped away tears. Among those who read the names was Richard Royer, a Vietnam veteran and Chapin with the American Legion Post 193 in South Carolina. He traveled 11 hours by motorcycle Monday to make it in time for the service and burial. He said the crowd of a couple hundred people far surpassed his expectations. "People have jobs out there," he said. "But they felt strongly enough about our veterans that they came out to support them."



The rifle squad stands at attention during MIAP Memorial Service at the Dayton National Cemetery

The remains of the men were discovered at a Columbus funeral home by the Ohio chapter of the Missing in America Project. The burial was one of several scheduled this year for the national group, which contacts funeral

homes, coroners' offices and state hospitals in an effort to see if the unclaimed cremated remains they have in storage may belong to a veteran. At the end of the service, several veterans took turns passing by the table with the remains, and groups took turns saluting at them. The remains were later buried with a military-issued grave marker. Chastity Booth, the Ohio coordinator for MIAP, spent months arranging the burial to give the Ohio remains a final resting place. She called Tuesday's ceremony bittersweet. "It's bitter because it's taken so long to get here," Booth said. "It's sweet because they're finally here. Booth, a 33-year-old stay-at-home mother, discovered the remains last year at the Cook & Son-Pallay Funeral Home in Columbus, and they were positively identified in November. Once the military records of the men were verified, Booth and a handful of volunteers tried to find next of kin by advertising in the local newspaper and searching online databases. The group knew only the names of the veterans, their service dates and whether they were given any awards.

The remains of 12 veterans were initially discovered, but the families of two veterans declined the burial. Tuesday marked the first burial for Booth, though two more are scheduled for this summer as additional veterans' remains have recently been found. Members of the American Legion Riders led an escort from Columbus to the Dayton cemetery about 75 miles away. Congress is considering legislation that would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to recognize and assist MIAP with the burial of any unclaimed veterans' remains. The House bill, introduced by Rep. Pat Tiberi of Ohio last year, would ease the group's relationship with funeral home directors concerned about insurance liability in releasing remains. A companion Senate bill was introduced in March. [Source: AP Barbara Rodriguez article 22 May 2012 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 64: Improving the employment picture for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans requires addressing, head on, the fears of some employers that returning combat veterans have hidden mental disorders, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee chairwoman s Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) said 24 MAY. While laying out a five-point plan to get more veterans hired by private-sector businesses, Murray said employers' concerns about problems such as traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder are part of the reason why some veterans don't mention their military service on resumes. Veterans, she said, "fear that those who have not served see them all as damaged or unstable ... We need future bosses and coworkers to understand that issues such as post-traumatic stress or depression are natural responses to some of the most stressful events a person can experience," in an address on the Senate floor. "We need them to understand that these illnesses do not afflict every veteran and, most importantly, we need to understand that for those who are affected by the illnesses, they can get help, they can get better and they can get back to their lives."

Murray's remarks come at a time when a growing number of private companies have launched efforts to hire veterans, but the unemployment rate for veterans under age 24 still hovers around 20 percent. "One in five of our nation's heroes cannot find a job to support their family, doesn't have an income that provides stability, and doesn't have work that provides them with the self-esteem and pride that is so critical to their transition home," she said. There are government programs to help, including transition assistance classes for separating service members, GI Bill education benefits, and tax credits for businesses hiring veterans. But Murray said dramatic improvements require getting more private businesses interested specifically in hiring veterans. She proposed five steps business should take:

- Educate human resources departments and the people doing hiring "about the benefits of hiring veterans and how skills they learned in the military translate to work a company does," Murray said. Until now, most of the focus has been on trying to teach separating service members how to translate their military-learned skills into language that businesses can understand, but Murray said training companies would help as well.

- Get help to provide job training and resources for veterans. Some larger companies already do this on their own, but smaller companies could benefit by working with local colleges on on-the-job training to develop or hone skills.
- Publicize job openings with veterans service organizations and at local military bases “so we can help connect veterans with jobs and to work with local one-stop career centers,” Murray said.
- Create internal veterans’ groups to mentor newly discharged veterans.
- Contact local colleges and universities, including community colleges, “to develop a pipeline of the many veterans who are using BI Gill benefits,” Murray said.

Murray doesn’t absolve veterans of their own responsibilities in looking for work: “We also need to make sure our veterans are taking steps to stand out as candidates,” she said. “Unfortunately, too often our veterans don’t see how the skills they learned in the military translate from the battlefield to the working world. One of the biggest reasons for that is often our veterans don’t understand the vernacular of the working world. “I want to reiterate to all of our veterans that no matter what branch you served in or when you served or how long you served, the skills you learned are valuable, and it is up to you to make sure employers see that,” she said. [Source: MilitaryTimes Rick Maze article 24 May 2012 ++]

Veteran Hearing/Mark-up Schedule: Following is the current schedule of Congressional hearings and markups pertaining to the veteran community. Congressional hearings are the principal formal method by which committees collect and analyze information in the early stages of legislative policymaking. Hearings usually include oral testimony from witnesses, and questioning of the witnesses by members of Congress. When a U.S. congressional committee meets to put a legislative bill into final form it is referred to as a mark-up. Veterans are encouraged to contact members of these committees prior to the event listed and provide input on what they want their legislator to do at the event. Membership of each committee and their contact info can be found at <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/committees.tt?commid=svete>:

- **May 31, 2012.** HVAC will conduct an oversight hearing entitled, “Reviewing the Implementation of Major Provisions of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011.” 10:15 A.M.; 334 Cannon
- **June 6, 2012 (formerly May 23).** The Senate Select Committee on Aging will hold a hearing on VA’s Aid and Attendance Program. 2:00 P.M.; Location TBD
- **June 13, 2012 (Formerly May 23rd).** SVAC will conduct a legislative hearing. The agenda includes 26 pieces of legislation.

[Source: Veterans Corner w/Michael Isam 31 May 2012 ++]

Mobilized Reserve 22 MAY 2012: The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 22 MAY 2012. The net collective result is 1,586 fewer reservists mobilized than last reported in the 15 MAY 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 48,284; Navy Reserve 4,414; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve 10,108; Marine Corps Reserve 4,560; and the Coast Guard Reserve 828.

This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 68,194 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/d20120522ngr.pdf> . Reservists deactivated since 9/11 total 779,939. [Source: DoD News Release No. 417-12 dtd 23 May 2012 ++]

PTSD Update 99: Maj. Gary H. Wynn, a research psychiatrist at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, presented new analysis at American Psychiatric Association's annual meeting on 5MAY about why the soldiers don't seek care or drop out of treatment early. Roughly half of the soldiers who return from war with post-traumatic stress disorder don't seek treatment, and many more drop out of therapy early, according to military research presented at last week's American Psychiatric Association's annual meeting. "Fewer than half of the soldiers who report symptoms of combat-related PTSD receive the care they need," Maj. Gary H. Wynn, a research psychiatrist at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, said during a presentation to the association. "And of those soldiers who do start treatment, between 20 percent and 50 percent walk away before its completion."

Army analysis of multiple studies suggests that most servicemembers have at least one experience during deployment that could lead to PTSD, and 15 percent of U.S. infantrymen who have deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan have returned with the disorder, a condition characterized with such symptoms as depression, anger, mistrust, panic, guilt and violent behavior, physical pain, dizziness and trouble sleeping, Wynn said. Experiences that can lead to PTSD include receiving incoming artillery, rocket or mortar fire, being attacked or ambushed or knowing someone seriously injured or killed, he said. Despite these alarming findings, few servicemembers seek help, research shows. And there's a common misperception that the military can simply order a servicemember to report for PTSD treatment, Wynn said in a phone interview. Military members retain the right to refuse psychiatric treatment or medication, unless they are a risk to themselves or others, he said, adding that it wouldn't be good therapy to order people into care. "You want them to be engaged and not feel forced," he said.

The fact that today's soldiers are professionals, rather than draftees, might also be a factor in their reluctance to engage in PTSD therapy, said retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. David Johnson, now executive director of the Center for Advanced Defense Studies in Washington, D.C. Soldiers in an all-volunteer force want to be selected for combat missions and they are afraid that psychological testing will prevent them from deploying," Johnson said. The Army needs to reduce the stigma associated with PTSD and, "let people know it doesn't harm your career," he said, adding that recent rule changes mean soldiers can't be denied a security clearance simply because they've been diagnosed with PTSD. Getting soldiers to seek treatment is only half the battle; doctors must also find ways to keep them in treatment. A soldier might drop out of PTSD therapy for a variety of reasons, including a lack of trust for mental health professionals, a belief that psychological problems tend to work themselves out or a perception that seeking mental health treatment should be a last resort, Johnson said.

While it's possible to see a physical wound heal, it's not obvious when somebody has overcome PTSD. "Soldiers don't like the idea of open-ended therapy," Johnson said, adding that psychiatrists and psychologists could be motivated to keep troops in therapy longer than necessary since they get paid based on how much therapy they provide. "I don't think soldiers are dropping out of treatment because they don't think it works. Perhaps they think it works and nobody can tell them when it is done." Regardless of the reasons, Wynn said it's important that troops get the help they need. "We've learned that keeping soldiers who are already enrolled in PTSD treatment from dropping out is the most important strategy for improving outcomes," he said. The key, Wynn said, is to keep the troops interested. Treatments that include video games, alternative medicine and outdoor activities, such as fly fishing, are common methods. "We want guys to continue these things after they finish treatment," he said. [Source: Stars and Stripes Seth Robson article 15 May 2012 ++]

PTSD Update 100: The Army on 16 MAY launched a review of its handling of post-traumatic stress disorder and other behavioral health evaluations at all of its medical facilities since 2001, in response to fears that some soldiers had their diagnoses reversed because of concerns about the cost of treating them. The announcement follows disclosures that some soldiers diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder had that finding rejected during subsequent evaluations at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state. In reviewing those evaluations this year, Army investigators have found cases where “the original PTSD diagnoses were more accurate,” according to an Army statement. The Army will now review diagnoses and evaluations made at all of its other medical facilities. Army leaders also have ordered an independent review by the Army inspector general into whether the disability evaluation system affects the behavioral health diagnoses given to soldiers, and whether the command climate or other non-medical factors affect the diagnoses, according to information given Wednesday to members of Congress. The diagnoses are the first step in evaluating the amount of disability benefits a soldier receives.

In addition, the Army auditor general has been ordered to audit the U.S. Army Medical Command Ombudsman Program, which was set up as a mediator for soldiers and family members in the wake of the scandal over conditions at the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center. “The Army clearly realizes they have a nationwide, systematic problem on their hands,” said Sen. Patty Murray, (D-WA) the chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, who requested the Army review at Lewis-McChord. “I credit them with taking action, but it will be essential that this vast and truly historic review is done the right way.” The Army’s review of 400 cases at Lewis-McChord has so far led to more than 100 service members having their PTSD diagnoses restored. “Reviewing our processes and policies will ensure that we apply an appropriate standard at every installation - one that is influenced only by the opinion and expertise of our medical professionals,” Secretary of the Army John M. McHugh and Army Chief of Staff Raymond T. Odierno said in a joint statement.

Joint Base Lewis-McChord, one of the largest military installations in the nation, has attracted attention in recent months because of several high-profile incidents. It is the home base for Army Staff Sgt. Robert Bales, accused of massacring 17 Afghan villagers in March, as well as five soldiers who were found guilty in 2010 of charges relating to the killings of three unarmed Afghan civilians. The Army review is to be led by Gen. Lloyd Austin, the Army vice chief of staff, and Undersecretary of the Army Joseph Westphal. The review is meant to identify and correct problems in the Army’s approach to behavioral health diagnoses and disability evaluations. Austin called Murray Wednesday to brief her on the Army review. [Source: Stars & Stripes Steve Vogel article 16 May 2012 ++]

PTSD Update 101: A key leader in the psychiatric community has rejected the idea of altering the name of a traumatic condition affecting estimated tens-of-thousands of U.S. combat veterans -- a move that effectively blocks growing efforts by a small group of psychiatrists and military brass concerned about reducing patient stigma. Dr. Matthew Friedman, who is chairing the committee that is updating the trauma section of the dictionary of mental, said changing the name of the condition could have "unintended negative consequences" because "it would confuse the issue and set up diagnostic distinctions for which there is no scientific evidence." The dictionary, known as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, is considered the bible by the psychiatric association. Last year, then-Army Vice Chief of Staff Peter Chiarelli asked the American Psychiatric Association to modify the name of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to Post-Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI). The four star general says calling the condition a "disorder" perpetuates a bias against the mental health illness and is a barrier to veterans getting the care they need. More recently, two leading trauma psychiatrists similarly asked the Association,

which is updating its dictionary of mental health illness, to change the word "disorder" to "injury," calling the condition PTSI instead. But at the psychiatric association annual conference on 14 MAY, Friedman said the net effect of such a modification would be to tinker with a psychiatric diagnosis rather than help patients. "To change to PTSI without anything else would accomplish nothing positive," Friedman said. For a more in-depth article on the issue refer to <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2012/05/key-psychiatric-doctor-rejects-name-change-for-ptsd.html>. [Source: PBS News Hour Daniel Sagalyn article 10 May 2012 ++]



Dr. Matthew Friedman

PTSD Update 102: Doctors at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center are experimenting with new approaches to help soldiers who are battling Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. "We want something that's quicker and more effective," says Dr. Christopher Pelic of the VA Medical Center. "Sort of in combining treatments with the short burst of therapy." This new form of PTSD therapy, called Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, uses electrical pulses. A veteran sits in a chair and they think about the event that made them feel so out of control while in the war zone. While that is happening, electrical pulses trigger feelings of control inside the veteran's brain. This type of therapy is in its early stages, but doctors at the VA Medical Center say the results are encouraging. "We've seen some folks have a nice turn around early on," says Dr. Pelic. "We haven't had a large number of subjects, but we've seen some nice results."



Veterans with PTSD are also re-living whatever trauma they experienced through a custom designed video game that puts them back in war zone. You wear a set of goggles and you're back in that situation, and we think that helps people who can't really keep those memories and imagination for whatever reason," says Dr. Ron Acierno. And the theme of using technology to assist in PTSD therapy continues outside of the research facility. "Another intervention we're doing is handing out iPads so that veterans who would rather get treatment at home, or if for example they have child care responsibilities or work or if they live far away from the VA centers, they can still get the same treatment," explains Dr. Acierno. All this new technology may one day replace the way veterans have been coping with PTSD for decades, which is the use of a counselor and exposure therapy. Dr. Acierno says that in exposure therapy, "we have people engage in those traumatic memories, things that bother the most, over and over again until they're no longer overwhelming." And while this type of therapy has been helpful for many, doctors are hoping their new high tech forms of therapy will mean quicker relief for veterans who are still battling with stress-inducing memories.

PTSD Update 103: John Huston’s controversial World War II documentary about soldiers suffering from combat stress has been restored by the National Archives and put online at <http://www.filmpreservation.org/preserved-films/screening-room/let-there-be-light-1946> to mark Memorial Day. The film, “Let There Be Light,” was suppressed by the Army and not shown to the public until 1980. The restoration has repaired the soundtrack, allowing viewers to hear once-inaudible conversations between the soldiers and the Army doctors treating them for what was then called shell shock and is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder. “We hope that by making ‘Let There Be Light’ freely available — and by drawing attention to it — that the courageous documentary will find the audience it was intended to serve,” said Annette Melville, director of the National Film Preservation Foundation, which funded the restoration. The film will be available on the foundation’s Web site through August 2012. [Source: Washington Post Steve Vogel article 24 May 2012 ++]



Director JohnHuston 1946

Veteran License Plates VA: An Army veteran is appealing a Virginia Department of Motor Vehicle’s decision that deemed his license plate offensive. The Virginian-Pilot reports that the DMV revoked Chesapeake resident Sean Bujno’s license plate last month. It reads “ICUHAJI,” which can be read as “I see you, Haji.” In court documents, he contends DMV Commissioner Richard Holcomb violated his free-speech and due process rights. Bujno’s attorney, Andrew Meyer, says the plate was on his client’s car for more than four years before he was asked to return it. He says it wasn’t meant to be offensive, but rather to support soldiers who have served in Iraq. DMV spokeswoman Melanie Stokes declined to comment, citing privacy laws. In general, she says personalized tag requests are screened to ensure they don’t violate guidelines.

The Commonwealth of Virginia offers 200 specialized plates to its residents of which 46 are military related. Personalization is available on most plates as well as disabled symbols. The annual plate fee is \$10. If personalization is desired there is another annual \$10 fee. All fees are in addition to normal registration fees. Plates can be ordered on line or in person at one of their DMV offices. If in person you must complete, download, and submit the VSA 10 form available at <https://www.dmv.virginia.gov/webdoc/pdf/vsa10.pdf>. You can view all military/veteran plates available along with ordering details in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Virginia Vet License Plates**”. [Source: Associated Press article and https://www.dmv.virginia.gov/webdoc/citizen/vehicles/plate_search.asp 18May 2012 ++]

WWII Vets Update 20: Roger Nichols recently sat down before Memorial Day in 2009 and recalled his service during World War II and a recent trip to Washington D.C. “We didn’t get to finish our basic training,” said Nichols, 86, detailing how his unit landed in Europe during the war. “The Battle of the Bulge came, and they had to have troops over there, so they just gathered us up and sent us anyway. They had to have the men for replacements, so they just called everybody.” Everybody included Nichols, 19 at the time, who were drafted in 1943. “I tried to volunteer to begin with, but I had an eye that was weak, and the Air Force didn’t want me. So they weren’t interested in me. When we left, there were about three bus loads at one time. We went to Camp Croft, S.C,” of which only memories remain since the camp was abandoned at war’s end. “That old camp has been done away with. It’s close to Carowinds. That was the introduction. They sent us to Fort Bragg and then to Fort Hood in Texas With boot camp over, his unit headed east, across the Atlantic Ocean on a troop ship.

“We landed in Scotland. We went over on the Queen Mary. It was the second biggest ship in the world at that time. As soon as we had a chance, we went over into England. Then we went up through France. Then we went into Germany and into Austria. We wound up in the area where they made ‘The Sound of Music.’ It was beautiful.” It was while his unit battled in the Alps they learned the war was over. “The war ended while we were in that area, then it took about a month to get us all home and get the boats ready to come back.” Despite the war’s end, he remained in the U.S. Army for another year. “I was overseas for about a year. I came back to the states and stayed over a year here in the states.” Once home, his service over, he was asked about the men who shared his experiences and whether the bonds they forged while serving continued in civilian life. “We were kind of in the same area, but we didn’t see each other,” said Nichols.

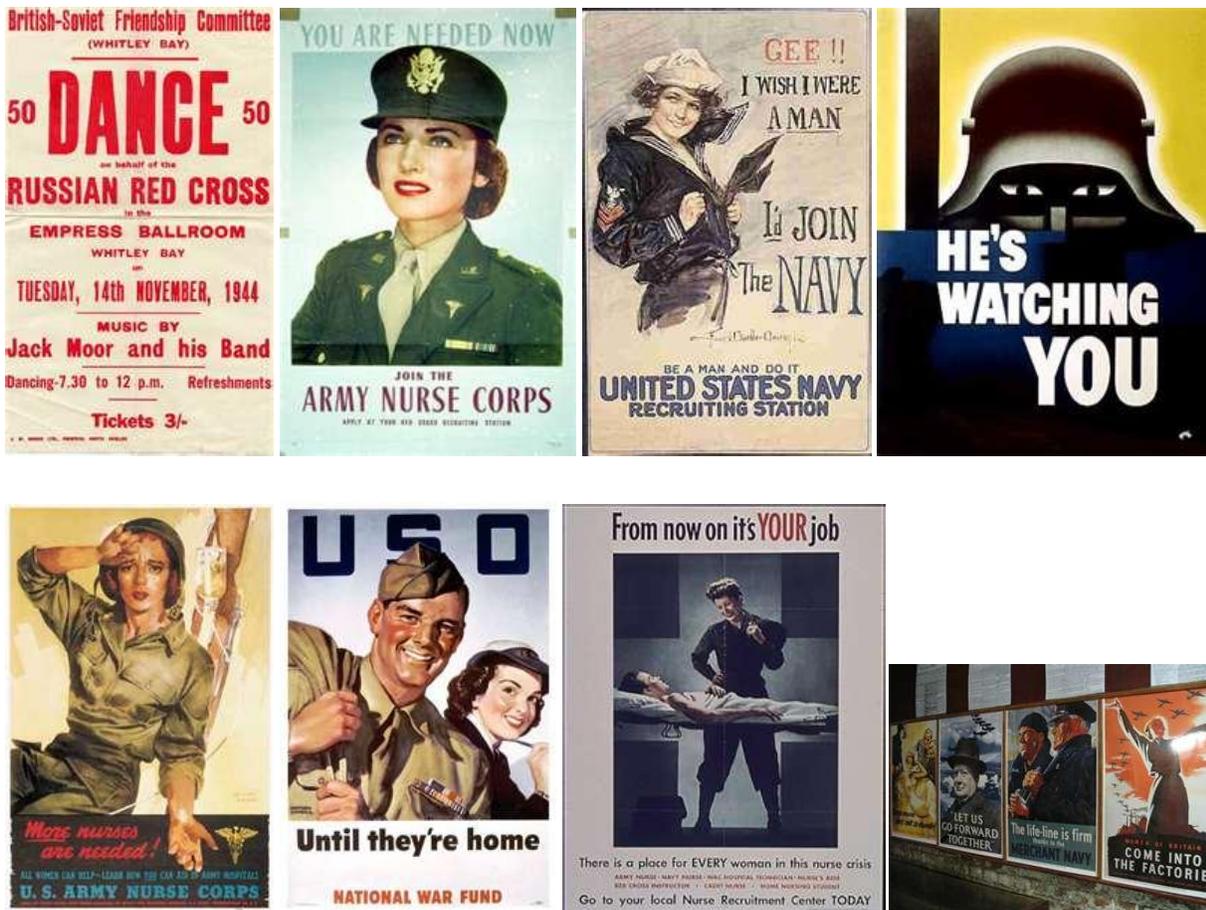


Roger Nichols

Once home, Nichols started his life, a family and joined the American Legion of East Bend North Carolin. “It’s real nice. It’s a real nice group of people. All of them seem to be nice in Yadkin County. We practically know everybody except the younger generation,” he said. He farmed to make a living. “It was hard work here, but it was good back then. If you went to town, jobs didn’t pay back then like R.J. Reynolds. They didn’t pay but \$1.40 an hour, not that in a lot of places. I decided to help my daddy here and farm. It turned out okay. “We had tobacco, the main thing. We had cows and small grain and things like that. But times have changed, I tell you. There ain’t no such thing as a young farmer anymore. It’s expensive. I have worked 14 hours a many a day, get up at four, eat breakfast by daylight, come in at dinner and go right back and work till about 10 o’clock. During that time, he and his wife, who passed away 28 years ago, raised two daughters, one who is a school teacher and another who works at Isothermal College.

While talking about his past his eyes twinkled as he recounted a recent trip to Washington D.C. many aging vets are taking to see the sights and visit the war memorials. Called the Flight of Honor, it is a project that flies vets from around the country to the nation's capital. "It was nice. They put us on a plane in Greensboro. They flew us into Washington, and they picked us up on a bus," he said. He was taken to each memorial for each part of the service. "The driver carried us to the biggest building around, like the Treasury Department. We didn't get to go in. It was something," he said. "Cameron Kent, the announcer, was on there. I didn't know anyone. They assigned someone to be with you in case you needed a wheelchair. There were two people from Lewisville, veterans. "They took care of the veterans real good. There were plenty of wheelchairs. If someone needed a wheelchair, they were available. They treated us nice." [Source: Elkin Tribune Tim Bullard article Nov 2009 ++]

World War II Posters (6)





POW/MIA Update 20: "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 (73,000+), the Korean War (7,900+), the Cold War (126), the Vietnam War (~1700), 1991 Gulf War (0), and OEF/OIF (6). 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

- DPMO announced 15 MAY that the remains of U.S. serviceman Army Cpl. **David L. Catlin**, 19, of Lockney, Texas, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and scheduled for return to his family for burial with full military honors 19 May in his hometown. In late November 1950, Catlin 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, Catlin, 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 Catlin had been captured by the Chinese during a battle in December 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 Catlin 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 Catlin's cousin

- DPMO announced 8 MAY that the remains of U.S. serviceman Army Master Sgt. **Elwood Green**, 33, of Norman, Ark., were scheduled for buried May 12, in Black Springs, Ark. In late November 1950, Green and the E Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, were fighting Chinese forces near Samsu-ri, North Korea. After a full day of fighting, they withdrew to an area south of Sunchon. The 5th Cavalry suffered extensive losses, and numerous Americans were taken captive during that time. On Nov. 28, 1950, Green was listed as missing in action. In 1953, returned U.S. soldiers reported that Green had been captured and died in early 1951 from malnutrition, while in a Chinese POW Camp in North Korea. His remains were not among those returned during Operation Glory in 1954. In 2005, a joint U.S./D.P.R.K. recovery team excavated a burial site in Unsan County and recovered human remains and material evidence. Scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used extensive DNA testing, dental comparisons, and analysis of circumstantial evidence, which took more than 4 years. Mitochondrial DNA – which matched Green’s brother – assisted in his identification.
- DPMO announced 8 MAY that the remains of U.S. serviceman Army Cpl. **Clyde E. Anderson**, 24, of Hamilton, Ohio, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and are scheduled for return to his family for burial with full military honors on 12 MAY in Blanchester, Ohio. In late November 1950, Anderson 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. After coming under attack, they began a fighting withdrawal to positions near Hagaru-ri, south of the Chosin Reservoir. On Nov. 28, 1950, Anderson, was reportedly last seen driving a jeep in a convoy that was ambushed by Communist forces. He was later listed as missing in action. 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 Anderson had last been seen, 7 miles north of Hagaru-ri. 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, radiography comparisons and mitochondrial DNA – which matched Anderson’s nephew and niece.

World War II

- DPMO announced 15 MAY that the remains of U.S. serviceman Army Pfc. **Gerald W. Kight**, 23, of White Salmon, Wash., missing in action from World War II, have been identified and were scheduled for return to his family for burial with full military honors 19 MAY. In September 1944, Kight and the 82nd Division’s 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment were dropped in the vicinity of Nijmegen, Netherlands, as part of the allied invasion codenamed “Market Garden.” Kight was manning a machine gun position near the town of Groesbeek, when he was overrun by German Forces. On Sept. 12, 2011, the Royal Netherlands Army’s Recovery and Identification Unit recovered human remains from a wartime foxhole, in a corn field northeast of Groesbeek. Along with the remains were military uniform fragments, and three military identification tags, which bear the name and home address of Kight and his mother. To identify the remains, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools such as dental comparisons.
- DPMO announced 17 MAY that the remains of U.S. serviceman Marine Corps Cpl. **Wayne R. Erickson**, 19, of Minneapolis, missing in action from World War II, have been identified and were scheduled for return to his family for burial with full military honors 24 May, in Fort Worth, Texas. Erickson was a crewmember aboard a PBJ-1 aircraft that failed to return from a night training mission over the island of Espiritu Santo, in what is known today as Vanuatu. None of the crew was recovered and in 1945 they were

officially presumed deceased. In 1994, a group of private citizens notified the U.S. that aircraft wreckage had been found on the island of Espiritu Santo. Human remains were recovered from the site at that time and turned over to the Department of Defense. In 1999, a survey team traveled to the site, which was located at an elevation of 2,600 ft. in extremely rugged terrain, and determined that recovery teams would need specialized mountain training to safely complete a recovery mission. In 2000, a Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) team visited the site and recovered human remains. From 2009 to 2011, multiple JPAC recovery teams excavated the site and recovered additional remains, aircraft parts and military equipment. Scientists and analysts from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used circumstantial evidence, dental records and mitochondrial DNA – which matched that of Erickson’s niece – in the identification of his remains.

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

Military Families United: For families who pay the ultimate price for freedom, another type of support is necessary. Military Families United (MFU) represents Gold and Blue Star families—those who have lost a loved one or have one serving—advocating for them and for veterans in Congress and offering them help. One of the organization’s main programs is to put on luncheons throughout the country where Gold Star families can meet each other. Through the lunches, attendees form bonds and relationships that last long after the meal. Families who want to speak at the events have a chance to share their loved ones’ stories. Brian Jodice from MFU says, “It’s not just about how they died...it’s about how they lived their lives up to that moment.” It also gives family members help with the healing process, he adds. In addition, the organization is putting together the only comprehensive online database of those killed in the line of duty dating back to World War II. Named the National Gold Star Family Registry, it will be searchable and scalable. “It’s essentially an online memorial to the fallen,” Jodice explains. But rather than simply a list of names and dates, loved ones, including friends and unit members, will be able to go on the site and leave tributes to the heroes listed.

Though the registry is a large undertaking, Jodice says MFU is passionate about it both to support military families and to help everyone understand who these brave men and women were. He adds that the organization would be willing to talk to technology firms who could offer assistance and ideas. And MFU welcomes anyone who would like to donate, spread the word or join the organization to participate. Membership is open to all patriotic Americans. To support Blue Star families, the charity runs **Camp Desert Kids**. This one-day event is held at various military installations across the country to teach kids about deployment and help them feel more comfortable with their parents’ absence. Participants have their passports stamped as they learn about the culture and environment where their parents are serving. “Essentially, it’s Afghanistan for a day,” Jodice says. The kids even can vote for their favorite Afghan food, using the inked finger method of elections in that country. For additional information on Military Families United call 202) 293-4656, email <mailto:info@militaryfamiliesunited.org>, or refer to <http://www.militaryfamiliesunited.org>. [Source: AFCRA Veterans Focus Rita Boland article Nov 2011 ++]

Saving Money: Not all plumbers are created equally. There are basically two types of plumbing companies: small family-owned operations, and larger corporations. When you get estimates check out both. Usually the cheaper will be from the small family-owned. One reason is that plumbers from larger corporate plumbing companies often work on commission, and that encourages them to oversell you on goods and services. This has turned many plumbers into salesmen, whose first priority is to grow their employer’s business as quickly as possible, rather than get your plumbing problem fixed for the lowest price possible. When it comes time to comparing estimates between plumbers, price books are irrelevant. Higher-priced plumbers love to show you “the

price book” to try and convince you that’s what every plumber charges for a given repair procedure. Don’t be fooled – that book only tells you what their company charges. The reality is, every plumber has his own uniquely priced book. Larger plumbing companies also have overhead that the smaller family-run businesses don’t – like maintaining their fleet of trucks and paying for worker’s comp insurance. So how do these higher-priced plumbers manage to stay in business? Because their prices are so high, it only takes a couple of sales to more than make up for all the jobs they lose to savvy shoppers who do their homework. Here are several tips to help ensure you find the right plumber at the right price...

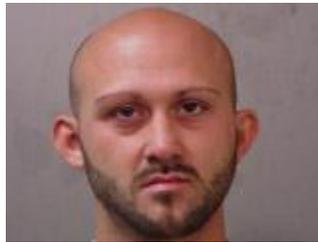
1. **When possible, get references.** There’s no better endorsement for anyone than a word-of-mouth recommendation based upon someone’s personal experience. That applies to contractors of all types: electrical, plumbing, general construction, etc.
2. **Get a minimum of three estimates.** Knowledge is power, so always get at least three estimates before agreeing to have any work done. Otherwise, you may end up paying a lot more than you need to.
3. **Stay away from plumbers who advertise on radio and television.** Those ads cost big money. You’ll ultimately end up paying for that aggressive marketing.
4. **Focus your search on small family-owned plumbing businesses.** Besides lower overhead, smaller family-owned plumbers generally don’t work on commission – so you’re less likely to be oversold on services you don’t really need. And typically smaller advertising budgets mean greater dependence on personal recommendations – and added incentive to consistently provide the best service.
5. **Know that not all plumbing companies are what they seem to be.** When deciding who to call, be careful. Sometimes, larger plumbing corporations will feature a photo on their website or in an advertisement of some random “model family” to give the impression that their company is a small family-owned sole proprietorship.
6. **Make sure your plumber has a contractor’s license.** Licensed contractors are required to complete work in compliance with state-mandated procedures designed to protect us from shoddy workmanship and potential health issues resulting from improper practices. Check your state’s contractor website to verify their status – including any registered complaints and ownership details.
7. **Get an itemized parts estimate from your plumber, then comparison shop.** Plumbers get their parts from wholesale outlets not open to the general public, and those parts are generally not only of better quality than what you’ll find at warehouse home improvement stores, they’re often of comparable price.
8. **Coupons and instant discounts don’t guarantee competitive prices.** Plumbers will often try to lure you in with the promise of a price discount. In our case, the corporate plumber was still more than twice as expensive as the others even after the discount.
9. **Try to avoid scheduling work on holidays and weekends.** Sometimes, a plumbing emergency comes up that requires immediate attention. Just keep in mind that plumbers charge a premium for working on weekends and holidays. Always try to schedule your plumber on a weekday.

Oh, and no matter what day of the week it is, always be sure to tell your plumber to keep his price book in the truck.
[Source: MoneyNewsTalks Len Penzo article 19 Apr 2012 ++]



VA Fraud Waste & Abuse Update 50:

- **Cleveland OH** - Mack Johnson, Jr., 46, and Dawn Mungin, 47, have both been charged with one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud for allegedly scamming the VA out of more than \$110,000. The U.S. Attorney's Office said Johnson owned and operated a VA-approved vendor to provide durable medical equipment to veterans served by the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC). Mungin was a worker there, officials said. The duo reportedly turned in false and/or inflated invoices from Johnson's company that Mungin would approve for payment. The alleged conspiracy also involved the two outbidding their competitors, ensuring their company would get the VA contract. Investigators said no work was ever done and as a result, the two got \$110,581 to which they weren't entitled. The bust was a result of an investigation by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General and the Cleveland Office of the FBI. [Source: ABC Channel 5 News Tina Kaufmann report 15 May 2012 ++]
- **Corning NY** - Giacomo F. Tallarida, 27, allegedly stole seven markers from the Haughey Funeral Home in APR and sold them for scrap. Tallarida was a longtime employee of the funeral home. Veteran memorial markers are placed at the gravesites of deceased veterans. They are typically engraved with the veteran's service record. The stolen markers were personalized and were ready to be placed at gravesites, according to police. After stealing the markers, Tallarida sold the markers as scrap to Swarhout Recycling in Beaver Dams. After purchasing the markers, Swarhout employees contacted authorities, suspecting the markers were stolen. All seven markers have been recovered. Tallarida told The Leader he didn't steal the markers. "No, my God, no," Tallarida said when asked if he stole the bronze. "It was just a misunderstanding." According to Tallarida, the markers were inside a garage at the funeral home that he was directed to clean out. Also, he said he did not keep the money he got for the markers, rather it was turned over to the funeral home. Haughey Funeral Home owner Jack Haughey said Tallarida was often in charge of setting memorial markers at gravesites and would have known such markers were not to be scrapped. "I don't believe they were taken mistakenly," Haughey said, adding that Tallarida's employment was terminated following the incident. Tallarida was arrested 21 MAY and subsequently released on an appearance ticket. If convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of a year in jail. Tallarida said he will fight the charges. [Source: The Leader John Zick article 21 May 2012 ++]



Giacomo Tallarida

- **Bath NY** - VA employee William Daley, 48, pleaded guilty 17 MAY to stealing money from a disabled veteran under his care. He faces a maximum penalty of a year in jail and a fine of \$100,000 and is scheduled to be sentenced 12 SEP in U.S. District Court in Rochester. According to Assistant U.S. Attorney John J. Field, who is handling the case, Daley worked as a registered nurse at the Bath VA Hospital, where he was assigned to care for disabled veterans living there. In 2011, on three separate occasions, Daley stole blank checks from a patient under his care, forged them and obtained a total of \$5,500. The Bath VA Police conducted the investigation. [Source: The Leader article 21 May 2012 ++]

- **Jackson MS** - Authorities say an associate director at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Jackson has been arrested and charged with prescription fraud. Michael Guest, district attorney for Madison and Rankin counties, says 59-year-old Dorothy White-Taylor was arrested. The G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery VA Medical Center website says White-Taylor is the associate director of Patient Care Services. Guest says Taylor has been charged in Rankin County with fraudulently obtaining 12 hydrocodone pills, but there could be more charges filed in other jurisdictions. A condition placed on Taylor's bond is a requirement that she get treatment for substance abuse. The case could go to a grand jury in July or August. [Source: WLOX 13 Jackson MS article 25 May 2012 ++]

[Various 16-31 May 2012 ++]

Notes of Interest:

- **Hep C** - The CDC wants everyone in the "baby boom" generation tested for hepatitis C virus infection. 'Boomers' are believed to represent 75% of the HCV-infected population, although most do not know they are infected.
- **NDAA Amendment** - Each American taxpayer's share of the cost of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan would be calculated and posted on the Defense Department's website under a House amendment to the 2013 NDAA.
- **USN vs. USA**. Check out the Navy Recruiting advertisement at <http://www.stumbleupon.com/su/2Yv7TI/www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZsERX844Tg>.
- **USN USA Rivalry**. Check out <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-2487638612433437293&q=Vetera#>.
- **Blue Star Museums**. Blue Star Families announced the launch of Blue Star Museums, a collaboration among the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Star Families, the Department of Defense, and more than 1,600 museums across America to offer free admission to all active duty military personnel, including active Reserve and National Guard, and their families from Memorial Day through Labor Day 2012.
- **COLA**. Inflation increased by 0.3% in April. For the year, the Consumer Price Index is up 1.7%

[Source: Various 16-31 May 2012 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 93:



- **Houston TX** - A judge has sentenced a Houston-area nurse to eight years and a month in prison after a jury convicted her of a \$5.2 million Medicare fraud scheme. Former Family Healthcare Group nursing

director Ezinne (eh-ZEEN') Ubani also must pay \$2.5 million in restitution. U.S. District Judge Nancy Atlas sentenced her on 16 MAY after a jury convicted her last May of conspiracy count and making false statements. Trial evidence showed she falsified documents to support the fraudulent payments. She's the seventh defendant to be sentenced in the case, with three others still to be sentenced.

- **Jackson MS** -- An ex-office manager has pleaded guilty in what prosecutors say was a multimillion dollar health care fraud in which a cancer clinic gave patients diluted chemotherapy drugs and used old syringes on multiple people. Dr. Meera Sachdeva, Brittany McCoskey and Monica Weeks were indicted last August on charges including conspiracy and witness tampering related to the activities of Rose Cancer Center in Summit. Filings in U.S. District Court in Jackson show that McCoskey pleaded guilty on 17 MAY to one count of giving false statements related to health care matters. The charge is related to billings to Medicaid and Medicare that claim a physician was present during certain procedures.



Dr. Meera Sachdeva

Sachdeva established the clinic in south Mississippi in 2005. Authorities say workers watered down drugs and billed Medicaid, Medicare and insurance companies for more chemotherapy drugs than patients received. The clinic billed Medicaid and Medicare for about \$15.1 million during the alleged scheme. The Mississippi Health Department closed the clinic last year because of "unsafe infection control practices" after 11 patients were hospitalized with the same bacterial infection. The scare led officials to test nearly 300 cancer patients for infections such as HIV. The department has said none of the patients tested had blood-borne viral infections related to the clinic's care. However, a civil lawsuit claims at least one patient died about the time the clinic was shut down from HIV he contracted there. McCoskey's sentencing is set for 6 AUG. The other defendants have pleaded not guilty and await trial. Sachdeva has been held without bond since August because authorities consider her a flight risk. She is a naturalized U.S. citizen from India. Prosecutors said she often traveled overseas and has considerable assets, including bank accounts, in her native country, despite the seizure of about \$6 million. Weeks is free on bond. Prosecutors say she did billing for the clinic. Their trial had been set for May 2, but was postponed. No new trial date has been entered in court records.

- **Lebanon MO** - Rhett E. McCarty, 67, who practiced in Lebanon, was charged in a two-count indictment 23 may for engaging in an alleged \$1.2 million scheme to defraud Medicare and Medicaid. McCarty is a licensed psychologist and private practitioner who provided psychotherapy services to recipients of both Medicare and Medicaid in their homes in the Lebanon area. According to the indictment, he submitted Medicare and Medicaid claims for at least 19 beneficiaries for which he was paid \$1,276,334. The alleged incidents happened since Aug. 22, 2008. According to claims that McCarty submitted, he routinely saw beneficiaries seven days per week and worked long hours every day. McCarty allegedly claimed that he worked every single day of the calendar year from mid-September 2008 through early April 2012, except

for Christmas. McCarty routinely billed for every weekend day and for all holidays except Christmas, the indictment says. However, according to the indictment, beneficiaries who were interviewed during the course of the investigation told investigators that McCarty did not see them for therapy more than once a week and often much less often. In one case, the indictment alleges that McCarty received \$101,712 in payments for a patient he only saw one time. The indictment also charges McCarty with forgery. McCarty forged (or caused another person to forge) the signatures of beneficiaries on patient sign-in sheets in order to obtain \$418,507 in Medicare and Medicaid payments. The indictment also contains a forfeiture allegation, which would require McCarty to forfeit to the government any property derived from the proceeds of the alleged offenses, including \$1,276,334. [Source: Fraud News Daily 1-15 May 2012 ++]
[Source: Fraud News Daily 16-31 May 2012 ++]

Medicaid Fraud Update 63:

- **Bridgeport CT** - Federal authorities have arrested two men from Rhode Island and New York in an alleged \$20 million Medicaid fraud scheme involving dentists' offices in Connecticut. Fifty-nine-year-old Gary Anusavice of North Kingstown, R.I., and 47-year-old Mehran Zamani of Pound Ridge, N.Y., were arrested 24 MAY on charges including health care fraud and making false statements. It's not clear if they have lawyers. Authorities allege Anusavice set up several dental practices in Connecticut, despite having been kicked out of Medicaid and other government health care programs after a 1997 conviction in Massachusetts for submitting false health care claims. Anusavice also lost his right to practice dentistry in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Authorities say Anusavice hired Zamani and other dentists to run the Connecticut offices, including ones in Stamford, Trumbull and West Haven.
- **Brownsville TX** - A Brownsville woman and her daughter-in-law will spend time in prison after they admitted to a Medicaid fraud conspiracy. Felicitas Velez Alanis, 51, and Erika Ortega Alanis, 27, will have to repay \$616,390 to the Texas Medicaid program, U.S. District Judge Randy Crane ordered 24 MAY. Velez was sentenced to three years in prison for her role in the scheme. Ortega received a 32-month sentence. Velez was owner and operator of Vel-Ala Inc., a Medicaid provider that operated as Nisi Medical Equipment and Supplies, primarily in Brownsville and Harlingen. Her daughter-in-law worked in the day-to-day operations of the company. At a plea hearing 6 FEB, the relatives admitted they sent false and fraudulent bills to the Texas Medicaid program for medical supplies that did not go to patients. The duo admitted they regularly billed Medicaid — a government-funded insurance program for low-income residents — for 200 boxes of alcohol prep pads when only one box had been delivered to patients. That fraud added up to a \$600 payback for each \$3 box of alcohol pads. Crane ordered Velez to begin serving her sentence Thursday. Ortega will remain free on bond until 8 JUN, when she reports to prison. Each woman will also serve a three-year term of supervised release after they complete their prison time.
- **Houston TX** - Dr. Donald Gibson II, 56, of Sugarland TX and Sunday Joseph Edem, 53, of Richmond TX have been arrested for health care fraud and conspiracy to commit health care fraud involving medically unnecessary diagnostic testing and physical therapy, U.S. Attorney Kenneth Magidson announced 24 MAY. They are expected to make an initial appearance Friday before U.S. Magistrate Judge Mary Milloy. According to a 17 MAY indictment unsealed Thursday. Gibson ordered, prescribed and authorized medically unnecessary diagnostic tests and other procedures which included allergy tests, pulmonary function tests, vestibular tests, urodynamic tests and physical therapy, among others. These services were then billed to Medicare and Medicaid for payment under Gibson's billing number. From January 2007 through January 2012, Gibson allegedly caused more than \$19.4 million in medical claims to the Medicare and Texas Medicaid Programs. As a result, Medicare deposited approximately \$8.5 million into a bank

account owned and controlled by Gibson. The indictment also alleges Edem operated medical clinics under the names of other individuals to conceal his financial interest in the businesses. Edem and Gibson allegedly conspired with one another to cause the submission of false claims to the Medicare and Medicaid programs and share in the proceeds. Gibson and Edem paid patient recruiters for referring Medicare/Medicaid beneficiaries, according to the indictment, and also paid Medicare beneficiaries for showing up at the medical clinics.

[Source: Fraud News Daily 16-31 Apr 2012 ++]

Alaska

State Veteran's Benefits: The state of Wyoming provides several benefits to veterans. To obtain information on these refer to the “**Veteran State Benefits AK**” 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
- Housing Benefits
- Employment Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Other State Veteran Benefits

[Source: http://veterans.alaska.gov/state_benefits.htm May 2012 ++]

Military History: Since December 1944 the U.S. First and Ninth Armies in Europe had been building up strength behind the swollen little Roer River. On 23 FEB they let go with a stunning night barrage. The Germans at the river were quickly overpowered. Beyond the river the rigid framework of their Rhineland defense began to break down. A week after the first gun had been fired at the Roer, the Ninth had arrived at the Rhine opposite Dusseldorf. The men of the Ninth exchanged shots with the Germans on the other side. Lieut. General William H. Simpson, commander of the Ninth, had been waiting for this drive to the Rhine. If the river was to be crossed by his army, the smooth crossing of the Roer was a battle rehearsal. For weeks the muddy little stream had been an obsession with the men of the Ninth. They prepared and planned to cross it early in February, in coordination with drives by the Canadians and General Patton's Third Army. But on the eve of the crossing the Germans opened the gates in the big earth dams of the upper Roer, partly flooding the cabbage land of the lower valley. General Simpson was forced to postpone the crossing while his engineers calculated when it would be possible. The attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**Crossing of the Roer**” details how the crossing was ultimately made and includes Life Magazine photos of the crossing. [Source: WWII Stories http://carol_fus.tripod.com/army_roer_crossing.html Apr 2012 ++]

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

- Jun 00 1943 - WWII: USS Runner (SS-275) missing. Date of sinking unknown. Possibly sunk by a Japanese mine or combined air and surface attack off northeastern Honshu, Japan. 78 killed
- Jun 01 1812 - War of 1812: U.S. President James Madison asks the Congress to declare war on the United Kingdom.
- Jun 01 1813 - Mortally wounded USS Chesapeake Capt John Lawrence utters Navy motto "Don't give up the ship".
- Jun 01 1918 - WWI Western Front: Battle for Belleau Wood - Allied Forces under John J. Pershing and James Harbord engage Imperial German Forces under Wilhelm, German Crown Prince.

- Jun 01 1944 - WWII: USS Herring (SS-233) sunk by Japanese Army shore battery (Guards Division 52) off Matsuwa Island, Kuriles. 83 killed
- Jun 02 1944 - WWII: Allied "shuttle bombing" of Germany begins, with bombers departing from Italy and landing in the Soviet Union.
- Jun 02 1969 The Australian aircraft carrier Melbourne slices the destroyer USS Frank E. Evans in half off the shore of South Vietnam killing 74 American sailors .
- Jun 03 1861 - Civil War: Union defeats Confederacy at Philippi, WV in first land battle of the war.
- Jun 03 1864 - Civil War: Gen Lee wins his last victory of Civil War at Battle of Cold Harbor.
- Jun 03 1952 Korean War: A rebellion by North Korean prisoners in the Koje prison camp in South Korea is put down by American troops.
- Jun 04 1845 - Mexican-American War: Conflict begins.
- Jun 04 1919 - Latin America Interventions: U.S. Marines invade Costa Rica.
- Jun 04 1940 - WWII: British complete the evacuation of 300,000 troops at Dunkirk.
- Jun 04 1942 - WWII: Battle of Midway Island begins. Japan's 1st major defeat in WWII.
- Jun 04 1944 - USS S-28 (SS-133) lost during ASW exercises off the Hawaiian Islands. 50 died
- Jun 05 1917 - WWI: Ten million U.S. men begin registering for draft.
- Jun 06 1918 - WWI: U.S. Marines enter combat at the Battle of Belleau Wood. 1st U.S. victory of WWI.
- Jun 06 1944 – WWII: D-Day: 150,000 Allied Expeditionary Force lands in Normandy, France.
- Jun 07 1932 - Over 7,000 war veterans march on Washington, D.C., demanding their bonus pay for service in World War I.
- Jun 07 1942 - WWII: Japanese troops lands on Attu, Aleutian Islands.
- Jun 07 1965 - Vietnam: US troops ordered to fight offensively.
- Jun 08 1776 - American Revolution: Battle of Trois-Rivières - American attackers are driven back at Trois-Rivières, Quebec.
- Jun 08 1967 - Six-Day War: The Naval Intelligence ship USS Liberty attacked in the Mediterranean by Israel killing 34 and wounding 171.
- Jun 08 1985 - Bosnia: Downed U.S. Air Force pilot Captain Scott O'Grady is rescued by U.S. Marines in Bosnia.
- Jun 09 1863 - Civil War: the Battle of Brandy Station, Virginia.
- Jun 09 1945 - WWII: Japanese Premier Kantaro Suzuki declares that Japan will fight to the last rather than accept unconditional surrender.
- Jun 09 1999 - Kosovo War: The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and NATO sign a peace treaty.
- Jun 10 1953 - Korean war: Battle of Outpost begins and lasts through the 18th.
- Jun 10 1898 - Spanish American War: U.S. Marines land on the island of Cuba.
- Jun 10 1965 - Vietnam War: The Battle of Dong Xoai begins.
- Jun 10 1999 - Kosovo War: NATO suspends its air strikes after Slobodan Milošević agrees to withdraw Serbian forces from Kosovo.
- Jun 11 1775 - American Revolution: In war's first naval battle Unity (U.S.) captures Margareta (British).
- Jun 12 1918 - WWI: First airplane bombing raid by an American unit, France
- Jun 12 1943 - USS R-12 (SS-89) foundered after battery flooded while off Key West, Florida. 42 died
- Jun 14 1775 American Revolution: The U.S. Army is founded when the Continental Congress authorizes the muster of troops.
- Jun 14 1944 - WWII: First B-29 raid against mainland Japan.
- Jun 14 1944 - WWII: USS Golet (SS-361) missing. Most likely sunk by Japanese guardboat Miya Maru, auxiliary submarine chaser Bunzan Maru, and naval aircraft off northern Honshu, Japan. 82 killed
- Jun 15 1859 - Pig War: Ambiguity in the Oregon Treaty leads to the "Northwestern Boundary Dispute" between U.S. and British/Canadian settlers.

- Jun 15 1898 - Spanish American War: U.S. Marines attack Spanish off Guantánamo Cuba.
[Source: Various May 2012 ++]

Military Trivia 52: See if you can answer the following related to the development of atomic weapons dropped on Japan:

Questions

1. The Manhattan Project effectively started with a letter from two famous scientists to President Roosevelt in 1939, whom they warned of the possibility of nuclear weapons being developed by Germany. They were ...?

Oppenheimer and Feynmann | Einstein and Bohr | Einstein and Szilard | Rutherford and Bohr

2. The Manhattan Project would not have come to fruition without an exceedingly able leader. In overall command was a Army General. What was his name?

Vannevar Bush | "Vinegar Joe" Stillwell | Douglas MacArthur | Leslie Groves

3. Probably the General's wisest decision was to pick a theoretical physicist with little practical engineering experience as overall scientific leader of the Manhattan Project. Who was it?

J. Robert Oppenheimer | Richard Feynmann | Harold Urey | Ralph Serber

4. Nuclear explosives require suitable fissile fuel, an excess of neutrons to sustain a chain reaction, and a sufficient mass to sustain fission of most of the available fuel. This mass is called what?

Fissile mass | Available mass | Critical mass | Self-sustaining mass

5. Only two elements were fissile (i.e. broke into two roughly equal daughter nuclei) with thermal (i.e. slow) neutrons and produced one or more further neutrons to sustain the chain reaction. These were ...?

Uranium & Plutonium 238 | Plutonium 238 & Thorium 233 | Uranium 239 & Thorium 233 | Uranium 235 & Plutonium 239

6. The first controlled nuclear chain reaction was conducted at the University of Chicago in 1942 by the great Enrico Fermi, using Uranium 238 and neutron moderating or slowing by graphite. In what building was this first "atomic pile" located?

Tennis courts | Swimming pool | Handball courts | Squash courts

7. To achieve nuclear detonation it is necessary to assemble the required mass in microseconds before the developing chain reaction blows the components apart. What two methods were employed?

Gun and implosion | Compression and detonation | Compression and explosion | Gun and explosion

8. Most of the theoretical work on the atomic bomb, and all of the final assembly, was conducted at a secret site in New Mexico where a whole town was erected in secret around a former boys' school. What is the name of the place?

9. After the first nuclear explosion at 5:30 AM on July 16th 1945, at the so-called Trinity site, the erudite Robert Oppenheimer was reminded of the following quotation:

- Now we are all sons of bitches!
- I saw a pale horse, and its rider was named Death
- Don't expect to die a natural death!
- I am become Death, the Shatterer of Worlds

10. The Manhattan Project came to fruition with two nuclear blasts on the Japanese homeland at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. These blasts finished WWII, at a heavy cost in human life. What were the names of the B29 bombers which dropped the first nuclear bombs?

- The Great Artiste and Glamorous Glennis
- Nostromo and Sulaco
- Memphis Belle and G for George
- Enola Gay and Bock's Car

Answers

1. **Einstein and Szilard.** Einstein had no further hand in the bomb development. Szilard became an effective campaigner against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Einstein won the Nobel Prize in 1923, interestingly for the photoelectric effect, rather than the much better known Theory of Relativity. Szilard was also a Nobel laureate.

2. **Leslie Groves.** Groves was a colonel in the Army Engineers. Initially disappointed not to get a field command, he more than served his country in the Manhattan Project, named after his previous command in the Manhattan Engineer District. Bush (no relation to either of the Georges) was scientific advisor to several president in the 40's. MacArthur and Stillwell were brilliant field commanders.

3. **J. Robert Oppenheimer.** Oppenheimer was probably the greatest physicist NOT to win the Nobel Prize. He developed theories of condensed matter and even Black Holes, thirty years in advance of his time. He fell foul of the anti-Communist witch-hunts of the McCarthy era. Serber worked on the Manhattan Project as did Feynmann. Urey discovered deuterium (heavy hydrogen) and developed a model of Earth's primordial atmosphere.

4. **Critical mass.** Early calculations indicated a critical mass of several hundred pounds. This was later revised to only a few pounds. Associated shielding and detonating high explosives resulted in the earliest nuclear weapons being very large and heavy - 12,000 pounds or more.

5. **Uranium 235 and Plutonium 239.** Uranium 235 was separated painstakingly from the much more abundant Uranium 238 in natural Uranium by gaseous diffusion of Uranium hexafluoride through thousands of barriers, or as painstakingly by electromagnetic separation by Calutrons. Plutonium 239 was produced by the transmutation of Uranium 238 in reactors at Hanford, Washington.

6. **Squash courts.** There was in fact a vogue for "swimming pool" reactors after the war when ordinary water was used as both coolant and shielding agent.

7. **Gun and implosion.** Plutonium 239 reacts quicker than Uranium 235, hence the quicker implosion method, using focused shock-waves from a sphere of high explosive impinging on a hollow sphere of plutonium, was used at Alamogordo and Nagasaki; the gun method, using a subcritical "bullet" of Uranium 235 fired by a small cannon into a target of the same material. This was used in the Hiroshima bomb.

8. **Los Alamos.** Los Alamos continued to be the most secret town in the U.S. until well after the Cold War. Dugway is the U.S. Army chemical weapons test range in Utah. Alamogordo was the site of the first nuclear explosion and White Sands was a missile testing area close by.

9. **I am become Death, the Shatterer of Worlds.** Oppenheimer's interest in Hindu theology is apparent in this quote from the Baghavad Gita. Kenneth Bainbridge was quoted as saying "Now we are all sons of bitches!" after witnessing the Trinity shot. "I saw a pale horse, and its rider was named Death" is from the Book of Revelations.

10. **Enola Gay and Bock's Car.** The Great Artiste was a weather observation plane on the Hiroshima raid. Glamorous Glennis was the name Chuck Yeager gave to his P51 and X-1 rocket plane (after his wife). Memphis Belle was B17 which survived a record number of operations over Nazi Germany, G for George took part in the Dambusters' raid, Nostromo and Sulaco were Ripley's spaceships in the Aliens series.

[Source: <http://www.funtrivia.com/playquiz.cfm?qid=107208> May 2012 ++]

Tax Burden for Montana 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 **Montana**:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: No general sales tax. A 3% tax on accommodations and campgrounds is added to the 4% tax on rental vehicles.

Gasoline Tax: 27.8 cents/gallon

Diesel Fuel Tax: 28.6 cents/gallon

Cigarette Tax: \$1.70 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: - 1%; High – 6.9%

Income Brackets: Seven. Lowest – \$2,600; Highest – \$15,600

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$2,140; Married – \$4,280;

Dependents – \$2,140

Additional Exemptions: 65 or older – \$2,040

Standard Deduction: (2011) 20% of AGI. If single not less than \$1,820 or more than – \$4,010; If married filing jointly not less than \$3,640 or more than \$8,220.

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: Full

Retirement Income Taxes: Montana taxes all pension and retirement income received while residing in Montana to the extent it is taxable on the federal return. Tier I and Tier II Railroad Retirement benefits are 100% exempt from Montana income tax. The state allows a pension and annuity income exemption of up to \$3,600 per individual, if certain income limitations are met. Early distributions from an IRA do not qualify for this exemption. Social Security benefits taxable in Montana may be different from what is taxable federally. You will need to complete Worksheet VIII – Taxable Social Security Benefits to determine your Montana taxable social security.

Regarding interest income earned, there is a partial interest exemption for taxpayers age 65 or older. If you are single and age 65 or older at the end of the calendar year, you can exempt up to \$1,600 of the interest income that you reported in your federal adjusted gross income. If you are married and filing a joint return with your spouse and at least one of you is age 65 or older at the end of the calendar year, you can exempt up to \$1,600 of the interest income that you reported in your federal adjusted gross income. If you are married and filing your return separately and are age 65 or older at the end of the calendar year, you can exempt up to \$800 of the interest income that you

reported in your federal adjusted gross income. Please note, however, that you are not allowed to exclude interest income earned by and reported by your spouse. For the purpose of this exclusion, when you determine the amount of your interest income, you should consider distributions commonly called dividends on deposits or share accounts as interest. Under no circumstances can you exclude more interest income than what you have reported in your federal adjusted gross income.

Montana taxes some retirement benefits. If you have reported taxable retirement income on the federal income tax return, you may be entitled to a partial exemption of this income. Tier I and Tier II Railroad Retirement benefits are 100% exempt from Montana taxation. Also, if you have received a disability pension, which is identified as a distribution code 3 on your 1099R, you should use the state's disability pension worksheet to determine your deduction instead of the retirement income exclusion.

If you have received retirement income other than Tier II Railroad benefits, you should complete state form W, Worksheet IV in order to determine the amount of your exclusion. Your retirement exclusion is limited to the lesser of your taxable retirement income that you received or \$3,600, as long as your federal adjusted gross income is \$30,000 or less and you are filing a single return, filing jointly with your spouse and only one of you have taxable retirement income, or you are filing as head of household. If both you and your spouse have received retirement income and you are filing jointly with your spouse, and your federal adjusted gross income is \$30,000 or less, you both can exclude the lesser of your taxable retirement income that you receive personally or \$3,600 each for a maximum of \$7,200. If you are filing your income tax return separately on the same form, or on separate forms, the lesser of your retirement income or \$3,600 applies separately to both spouses as long as your separately state federal adjusted gross income is \$30,000 or less.

Retired Military Pay: See above. Survivor benefits are taxed following federal tax rules.

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

All property (real or personal) is subject to state and local taxes. The assessed valuation of real property is based on 100% of its fair market value, then reduced by a phase-in factor and taxed as a percentage thereof. The state established the tax rate to determine the assessed valuation while local taxing units establish the mill levies to determine the property tax. Personal property is also taxed, the most common being motor vehicles. All residential properties receive a 34% exemption but residents must file for the exemption. Residential property of certain disabled veterans, and the spouses of deceased veterans, is exempt from property taxation. Montana property owners can have their property taxes reduced if they meet certain qualifications. Any homeowner or renter age 62 or over can apply for a credit if they have lived in Montana for 9 months, occupied a residence for 6 months, and had a gross household income of less than \$45,000. For a better understanding of property taxes refer to <http://revenue.mt.gov/formsandresources/faq/faq-property-taxes.mcpx> programs. Go to http://revenue.mt.gov/forindividuals/taxes_licenses_fees_permits/Property_Taxes/property-tax-relief.mcpx for more information on property tax relief.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax and no estate tax for deaths occurring after December 31, 2004. For more information go to <http://revenue.mt.gov/formsandresources/downloadable-forms/inheritance-estate-tax.mcpx>.

The state has a statutory provision for automatic adjustment of tax brackets, personal exemptions or standard deductions to the rate of inflation For further information, visit the Montana Department of Revenue site <http://revenue.mt.gov/default.mcp> or call 866-859-2254. If you are thinking of moving to Montana check out <http://mt.gov>. [Source: www.retirementliving.com May 2012 ++]

Aviation Art: Angels of Okinawa



Angels of Okinawa

In 1938 Vought won a contract for what was to become one of the last of the great propeller driven fighter aircraft, the F4U Corsair. Designed to incorporate the most powerful air-cooled radial engine available at the time, the Pratt and Whitney Double Wasp, the Corsair was powerful, heavily armed, ruggedly built, and designed from the onset as a carrier based fighter. The Corsair was fast, and became the first military aircraft to obtain 400 MPH in level flight. The Corsair incorporated the largest three-bladed propeller ever utilized on a single engine aircraft, a unique distinctive gull wing design, and its 2804 cubic inch engine developed a whopping 1800 HP, more than twice the horsepower of the Japanese fighters which dominated the early years of the War in the Pacific. Despite its design emphasis the USN was reluctant to utilize the Corsair for carrier-based operations because of the aircraft's poor pilot visibility during landings. As a result, the Corsair initially entered service with land-based USMC Squadrons in February of 1943. VMF-124, the first squadron to be equipped with Corsairs, quickly realized that they had a very special aircraft, and at the end of their tour of duty, VMF-124 had 68 confirmed kills of Japanese planes in air-to-air combat vs. losses of only 11 Corsairs. The Royal Navy, which procured over 2,000 of the 9,441 Corsairs produced, successfully overcame the pilot visibility problem by incorporating a curved angular approach to landings. Influenced by the Royal Navy's success, the USN re-qualified the Corsair for carrier-based operations in early 1945. During the Okinawa campaign U.S. forces encountered a desperate shift in Japanese strategy which incorporated the full fury of the Kamikaze suicide attack. Lacking experienced pilots, and in hopes of slowing American advances, more than 3,000 Kamikaze planes were directed at the U.S. naval forces during the Okinawa campaign. The Corsair

was instrumental in the fact the 2,600 Kamikazes did not succeed. In his spectacular painting, aviation artist Stan Stokes shows a F4U Corsair of VMF-451 of the Bunker Hill piloted by Marine Major Archie Donahue in action against an incoming (A6M2 Zero) Kamikaze attack during the Okinawa campaign. In three months during the campaign Navy and Marine pilots based on the Bunker Hill recorded 176 kills. However on April 29, 1944 The Bunker Hill's luck ran out. Struck by two Kamikazes within minutes, a four hour conflagration ensued, which killed nearly 400 servicemen, and destroyed the bulk of the ship's aircraft. This forced the withdrawal of the Bunker Hill from the campaign. Despite these losses, the Corsairs deservedly earned one of their nicknames, "Angels of Okinawa," from the thousands of servicemen who no doubt owed their lives to these last of the great propeller driven fighter aircraft, and the courageous pilots who flew them. [Source: <http://www.aviationarthangar.com/avarthaanof.html#description> May 2012 ++]

Veteran Legislation Status 29 MAY 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: The zipper

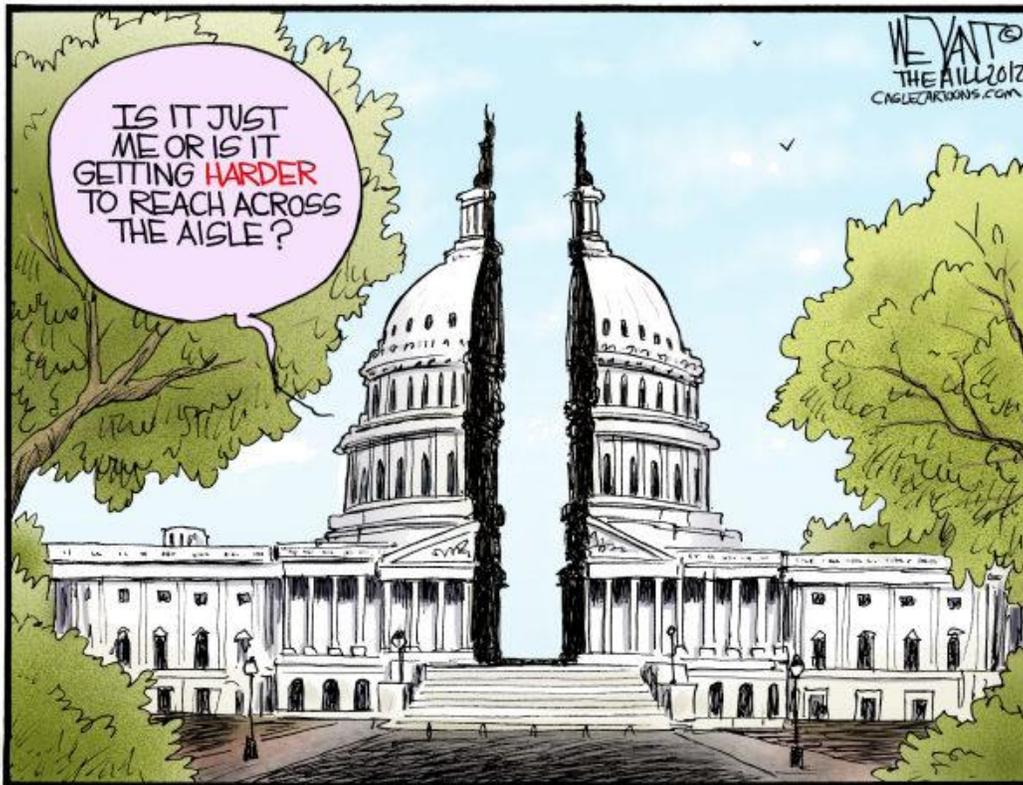
A man walked into a supermarket with his zipper down.
A lady cashier walked up to him and said, 'Your barracks door is open.'
Not a phrase that men normally use, he went on his way looking a bit puzzled.
When he was about done shopping, a man came up and said, 'Your fly is open.'
He zipped up and finished his shopping.
At the checkout, he intentionally got in the line where the lady was who told him about his 'barracks door.'
He was planning to have a little fun with her, so when he reached the counter he said, 'When you saw my barracks door open, did you see a Marine standing in there at attention?'
The lady (naturally smarter than the man) thought for a moment and said . . .
'No, no, I didn't. All I saw was a disabled veteran sitting on a couple of old duffel bags.'

Navy Term of the Day: “As the crow flies”

In a straight line, the shortest route between two points. It was common for 18th and 19th century ships to carry crows on board for use as a last resort when other attempts at navigation failed. When released, a crow will instinctively head to the nearest food supply which would be shore if it is near. Navigators would often time the crow’s flight as a means of measuring the distance from ship to shore.

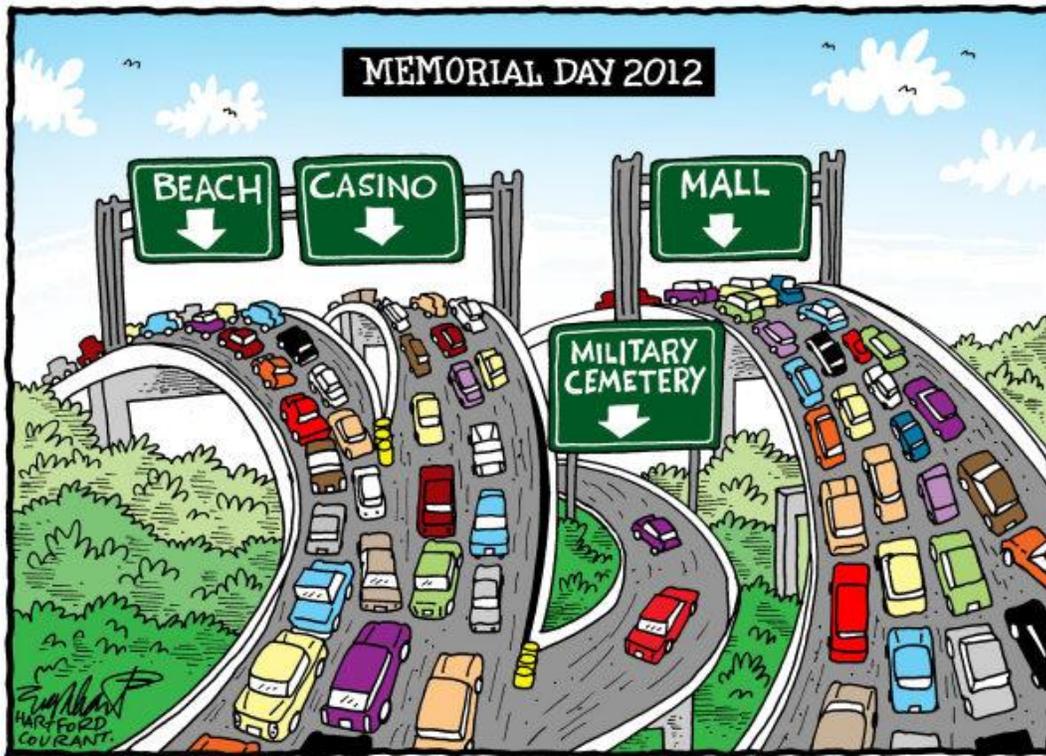
"War is God's way of teaching Americans geography."

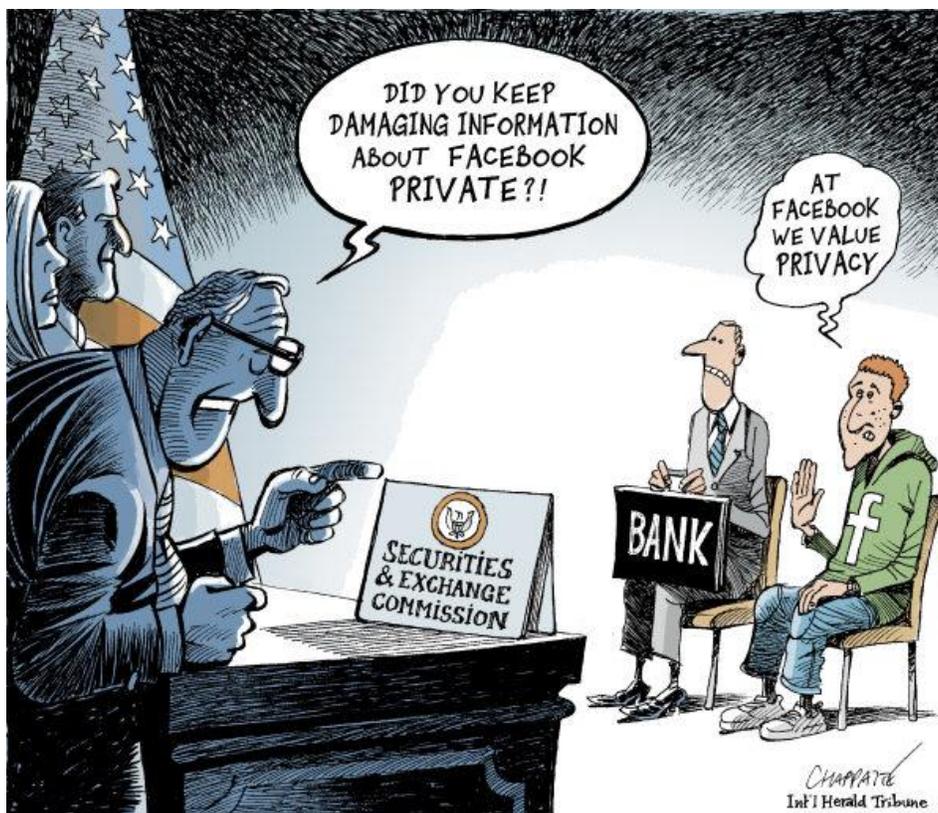
— **Ambrose Bierce** (American editorialist, journalist, short-story writer | 1866-1913)





MARGULIES
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