

RAO BULLETIN

1 January 2013

PDF Edition

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HASC Update 07: In January, 90 new members of Congress will arrive in Washington to serve in the 113th Congress. U.S. News has named seven of them who they predict will shake up Washington and could make an immediate impact on Capitol Hill. Among them is Illinois Democratic Rep. Tammy Duckworth, the first disabled female veteran. She was one of the first female Black Hawk helicopter pilots to fly combat missions and a survivor of a 2004 rocket-propelled grenade attack. She lost both legs and part of her right arm, but managed to safely land her helicopter before attending to her injuries. Duckworth competed in one of the most bitter races in 2012, against Tea Party incumbent Republican Joe Walsh. She proved herself as a hefty fundraiser, outspending her opponent by more than \$3 million. Duckworth, who served as the assistant secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, will serve on the House Armed Services Committee and will be the first female double-amputee to serve in the House of Representatives. Veterans returning from combat will be her focus. Duckworth hopes to increase veterans education and employment opportunities.

The others named by US News who are expected to make their mark are: Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz, Michigan Republican Rep. Kerry Bentivolio, Maine independent Sen. Angus King, North Dakota Democratic Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, South Carolina Republican Sen. Tim Scott, and Massachusetts Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren. [Source: U.S. News | Lauren Fox | 26 Dec 2-12 ++]

Vet Charity Watch Update 31: Go to the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving site <http://www.bbb.org/us/Wise-Giving> and you'll feel assured many charities that flunk other evaluators' criteria are worthy of your contributions. But are they? The Blinded Veterans Association says its goal is to "help veterans and their families overcome the challenges of blindness," according to its website. Services include helping them take advantage of Department of Veterans Affairs services and employment training. Go to the Better Business Bureau's website and you'll feel assured the group is worthy of your donations. It is both accredited by BBB's Wise Giving Alliance charity-rating service and has the group's seal of approval. The American Institute of Philanthropy's CharityWatch, however, gives the group an F. The other leading charity-rating service, Charity Navigator, awards it zero stars out of four. "There are 158,000 veterans that are legally blind, but only 20% of (the association's) budget is spent on field services to help blinded vets," says CharityWatch founder and President Daniel Borochoff. "The rest was primarily used for mailings and public service announcements. Is this really how a blinded veteran, who can't find a job or even pay his gas bill on time, wants his charitable aid to be spent?"

The differences between the groups' ratings underscore one of the challenges facing BBB as its 100th-anniversary year draws to a close. Just as it was dogged by "pay to play" allegations about its business ratings two years ago, some question whether BBB's charity ratings really have teeth, and if the up to \$15,000 it receives annually from charities that pay to use its seal of accreditation influences its decisions. The questions come as many charities, particularly smaller ones, struggle to raise money as the proportion of people's incomes devoted to charitable giving remains stagnant. As people decide where to send their year-end charitable donations, Borochoff doesn't think BBB's ratings should guide them. **"How can you be a watchdog when you are getting paid by the very groups you're supposed to be rating and monitoring?"** he asks.

When he was Connecticut Attorney General in late 2010, Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) reached agreement with BBB that it would stop giving extra rating points because businesses were paying members. Now he says BBB's financial relationship with the charities it rates "unquestionably" raises concerns about credibility and possible conflicts of interest. "State attorneys general should be looking hard at this practice to make sure it is disclosed prominently and transparently," says Blumenthal, adding that "there may be a role for congressional

oversight ... There's a very strong interest on the part of state attorneys general and consumer protection agencies in ensuring that contributors are not misled by ratings and by financial incentives."

Consumers searching at BBB's Give.org for a charity would see a prominent accreditation seal if the charity paid the licensing fee to use it. But they'd have to look for the link on the homepage to learn how the charity seal program works. "A charitable donor is forced to do some independent research to understand what he or she is seeing," says Rick Cohen, former executive director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, now the national correspondent for Nonprofit Quarterly. "It's not that they are withholding the information, (but) it does confuse the issue when you have a seal, and when it is not clearly evident to consumers that the seal was purchased." Art Taylor, CEO of BBB's Wise Giving Alliance, says its ratings are unaffected by its seal sales. In a statement, he noted that the Wise Giving board of directors approves the practice and is headed by David Ormstedt, who chaired Sen. Blumenthal's charity bureau when he was attorney general. "There is a strict separation between the people who do the accreditations and the ones who work on the seal programs," Taylor says. "The only way they can sell a seal is if they get a notification that we have a new charity that meets our standards."

If charities meet BBB's 20 standards for accountability, they are identified as being accredited on its website. The charities can then pay a sliding scale of up to \$15,000 annually for the right to display the seal on their own sites and marketing materials. The seal is a "very popular product" for charities that want to "distinguish themselves," Taylor says. Of the approximately 1,260 charities BBB attempts to evaluate, it accredits about 500, and fails about 300. Most of the rest refused to provide information despite BBB's requests, while about 80 other reviews are in process. BBB has been working to improve its ratings, says Taylor, who announced plans at a charity conference in October to review the truthfulness of fundraising appeal letters. BBB is helping consumers by looking beyond charities' financial ratios — which CharityWatch focuses on — to include issues of governance and other types of accountability, Taylor says. While they give the issue different weight, charity evaluators agree that it's key for donors to know how much of their money goes toward more fundraising and how much is spent on programs. It can mean the difference between feeding the hungry or funding for-profit telemarketers. [Source: USA Today | Jayne O'Donnell | 27 Dec 2012 ++]

VA Rural Access Update 14: Jack Bogrett's life has changed dramatically for the better since The Oregonian newspaper profiled him in a 10 JUN story in the about the frustrations of veterans who live far from Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers. Back then, his colon cancer seemed to be spreading, he was out of pocket for thousands of dollars of medical charges he incurred outside the VA system, and his history with the Portland VA Medical Center was marked by suddenly canceled appointments, misunderstandings and communications glitches. Today, the 63-year-old Vietnam vet is getting gold-plated treatment from the VA, he's been reimbursed for more than \$16,000 of medical expenses and, most important, his cancer has been beaten back to the point he dares to use the word 'cured'. "I haven't felt this good since 2000," he said. "I'm very fortunate." He expected to find out 28 DEC if his cancer is in remission, as he and his wife Lisa hope.

Bogrett said the story in The Oregonian led to a high-level response from the federal agency, which helped match him with Dr. Kyle Robinson, a physician with the Knight Cancer Institute at Oregon Health & Science University who also works at the Portland VA Medical Center. Bogrett also heard from a VA official in Roseburg, who reviewed his records and ordered reimbursement of about \$16,000 in previously approved, but still-unpaid costs Bogrett had incurred at non-VA medical clinics closer to his home on the southern Oregon coast. Bogrett also credits the personal attention from Adam Anicich, deputy director of the Congressional Liaison Service in the office of VA Secretary Eric Shinseki; Dr. Charles Thomas, the chair of the Radiation Medicine Department at OHSU, and others who have gotten involved in his case. Rick Wencl, another Gold Beach veteran whose hepatitis and sciatica

had gone untreated because of what he said last June were VA-imposed restrictions, now is receiving treatment from a specialist in southern Oregon, Bogrett reported.

Bogrett has been through multiple cycles of chemotherapy and radiation, has taken an advanced anticancer drug called Avastin -- and has been drinking mushroom tea brewed by his wife. He and Lisa have ridden rollercoasters of emotion and spent endless hours on the phone and on the road since he was diagnosed. And now they are optimistic about his prognosis. "I definitely know he is on the far end of the spectrum for metastatic colon cancer," Dr. Robinson said by phone 27 DEC. Robinson said such cancers progress, on the average, about two years into the kind of treatment Bogrett has received. But he appears to have gone more than five times longer without such a progression. Whether it's because of Jack's constitution, the way his tumors have responded or even the mushroom tea, said Robinson: "Jack has become a really exceptional person."

The two veterans represent a pair of bright spots amid a growing problem for the VA, which is struggling to keep up with an increasing demand for services and payments. The agency has devoted considerable resources and energy to the problem, but its backlog of patients and clients has grown. A November report from the Government Accountability Office noted that delays in disability evaluations are chronic and continuing. The Center for Investigative Reporting, which keeps statistics on the state of the backlog at multiple VA sites, says the average wait time for more than 824,000 veterans who have filed claims is 277 days. In Portland, the center says, the average wait time is 299 days. The backlog also is reflected by the wait time for appointments. The heart of the problem is that the number of claims is rising faster than the VA is able to meet them. Watchdogs including the department's own Inspector General have persistently noted that the agency needs more staff to manage the rising tide of claims after a decade of war. The agency also is still working toward the seamless sharing of electronic medical records among VA practitioners, the Department of Defense and other providers. [Source: The Oregonian | Mike Francis | 28 Dec 2012 ++]

Vet Prison Inmate Programs Update 01: The white tile floors, cinder-block walls and rows of steel bunks remind Raymond Riddick of the barracks he stayed in during boot camp in the mid-1980s. "Only, the beds weren't bolted to the floor," the former sailor said while giving a tour of his dormitory at Indian Creek Correctional Center in southern Chesapeake. Riddick, who's locked up following a string of car thefts, is one of about 60 former service members serving out criminal sentences in a new veterans dorm at the medium-security prison. State corrections officials christened the wing during a ceremony last month, saying they hoped the program would change lives and prevent war vets from returning to prison. Virginia is the latest in a series of states with large military populations, including Florida and Georgia, that have established veterans-only prison facilities to house and assist the growing numbers of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans who find themselves in trouble with the law. The Indian Creek dorm, open since spring, is one of two veterans wings started this year by the Virginia Department of Corrections. The other is in Haynesville.

About 2,000 of the state's 30,000 inmates identify themselves as veterans, though officials suspect the true number is larger. Many of them struggle with drug addiction and mental disorders. "This dorm allows our veteran offenders a place where they can share ideas and have that camaraderie and that fellowship that comes with their shared experiences," said Jerry Mullen, a clinical supervisor who oversees the veterans program at Indian Creek. "We've developed a curriculum specifically to address post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse and other common issues faced by veterans." The logos of every service branch are painted above the entrance of the dorm. The men are supervised by prison guards with military backgrounds, and they are required to keep their beds and clothing shipshape. Each is assigned a job with a military-themed title: The mess crew serves in the kitchen, the hazmat team is responsible for cleaning up spills, and the intel coordinator gathers information on veterans programs

that might help inmates once they are released. The voluntary program is open to veterans who have been honorably discharged, have shown good behavior and have fewer than two years left to serve.

Beyond the military-themed murals painted on the walls and the neatly made beds, signs that this isn't a typical prison facility can be heard in the nighttime screams of former soldiers struggling with PTSD, and seen in the bullet scars hidden underneath light-blue uniforms. Counselors who are also former service members help the inmates work through mental health problems and encourage them to take responsibility for their crimes. On a recent day, some of the veterans gathered in a common area and participated in a conflict-resolution scenario while others read quietly at their bunks. One former soldier who served tours in Iraq and Afghanistan before being convicted of grand larceny in Chesapeake said he appreciates the efforts taken to help veterans with mental health problems. Even more needs to be done, he said, speaking on the condition that his name not be published. The soldier was shot in the shoulder by insurgents in Iraq and suffers from PTSD. He said he hopes prison staff will do more to help inmates apply for Veterans Administration benefits. "I give them credit for at least acknowledging that veterans need special attention and for trying to do something about it," he said. [Source: The Virginian-Pilot | Mike Hixenbaugh | 27 Dec 2012 ++]

Veterans' Treatment Court Update 17: Military veterans facing incarceration for minor criminal charges would have the option of supervised treatment under a pilot program of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. The Magisterial District Judge Diversion program, aimed at veteran offenders, was initiated in Centre County in November and will be piloted in Monroe and Westmoreland counties starting 1 JAN. Believed to be the only one of its kind in the country, the diversionary program is being tested in the three diverse counties with the goal of developing blueprints for possible expansion statewide. Guidelines were developed by a committee established by the AOPC. "This program has been under development for over three years and is another step in the work we have been doing here in the courts of Pennsylvania, in partnership with the Veterans Administration, to assist returning veterans with their struggles to readjust," said Supreme Court Justice Seamus McCaffery. "What we hope to do here is divert these veterans into treatment before their problems escalate to behaviors that would result in a case getting to the Court of Common Pleas. "The earlier we intervene, the better for the veteran, the better for their family, the better for their community, and the better for the system."

The move follows implementation of a similar statewide Veterans Court program in the Common Pleas Courts that also offers supervised treatment as an alternative to incarceration. By introducing earlier intervention at the magisterial district judge level, program planners hope to curb behavior from worsening among veterans with drug and alcohol abuse, anger management and post-traumatic stress disorder issues. In a collaborative arrangement with the state court system, the Veterans Administration provides treatment services. A veteran charged with summary offenses — such as disorderly conduct, public drunkenness or harassment — could opt for supervised treatment, with the county district attorney's office approval. The charges would be dismissed at the end of a successful six-month treatment period. If a defendant doesn't comply with the terms of the program, the charges would be restored. Pennsylvania has more than one million veterans statewide — including Chief Justice of Pennsylvania Ronald D. Castille and Justice McCaffery. McCaffery is the Supreme Court's liaison to the state's problem-solving courts program, and has been a leading force in establishing Veterans Courts throughout the Commonwealth. [Source: Scranton PA GO Lackawanna article 28 Dec 2012 ++]

Veterans' Treatment Court Update 18: The 17th District Court in Redford Michigan operates a variation on Sobriety Court with its Veterans Treatment Court, offering veterans who are involved in the criminal

justice system a coordinated response to the unique problems they are facing. Military personnel often face intense and traumatic war experiences while they fight for our country. Sadly, the trauma continues even after they return home as they relive the war-zone — fear, horror and feelings of helplessness persist. Anxiety, irritability and emotional numbing are often experienced by veterans. As a result, problems with alcohol and drug use are common as a way of coping. Dedicated in November 2011 by Judge Karen Khalil, it became the fourth Veterans Court in the state. Khalil works closely with the VA and local veterans groups, prosecutors, veterans' defense counsel as well as probation staff and mentors to provide veterans with the tools they need to lead productive and law abiding lives. “We're dealing with a class of defendants that are totally different,” said attorney Richard Graham, who represents all defendants in the Redford-based Veterans Court. “They're coming back with post-traumatic stress disorder. They're using (drugs) to suppress memories rather than to get high.”

Defendants in the court have the chance to meet with their probation officers, representatives from Veterans Affairs and other support groups before court. After they meet in the morning, they go to the courtroom and have their case reviewed by Judge Karen Khalil. The court brings veterans in with other former military members, giving a sense of camaraderie among peers. The 15 current veterans enrolled in the court vary in age and come from all branches of service, but they do have something in common — counting on each other to get through the system and move on with their lives. Khalil said it wasn't always that way. At the beginning, it was common for veterans to ignore each other. But it wasn't long before the dynamic changed. “Now, you see the foundation of the community,” she said. “We've seen a community form.” Judge Brian MacKenzie, of the 52-1 District Court in Novi, says unlike Sobriety Court, Veterans Court is “not pure addiction; it's a hybrid of addiction and mental health.” He said most of the participants have suffered PTSD, brain injuries, or are paranoid schizophrenics. Every participant in Novi's program has to get a physical, which MacKenzie says has resulted in three lives being saved. The Veterans Administration is a big player in this specialty court, and a VA rep is at every meeting in Novi with a secure laptop containing the offender's records.

Farmington Judge Marla Parker said the 47th District Court has an interest in the Veterans Court area but not enough volume to run a full program. They're keeping statistics on their veteran offenders, working with the VA, and will refer individuals to a Veterans Court if necessary. Like the Sobriety Court in Novi, Veterans Court operates on a team concept in the 52-1 and is also 18 months long. The probation officer is different, however. He's Mike McGlown, a former lieutenant in the Army. The fees attached to all drunk driving cases in the 52-1 help cover the staffing of both its Sobriety Court and Veterans Court. Any additional costs in either specialty court, such as the \$13 tests taking at facilities like Jail Alternatives for Michigan Services (JAMS), are up to the offender to cover. Participants have interlocks in their cars which forces them to breathe into a camera-equipped machine that registers alcohol. There's a home version, too, as well as tethers that test for alcohol and location.

The 52-1's Veterans Court was also the 18th in the country and formed in 2009. “And no one has been re-arrested out of about 75,” said MacKenzie. “Five washed out and went to jail, and they haven't been re-arrested either.” At the November 2011 graduation ceremony, Kurt Mosher joined 10 other military veterans who successfully completed the program. “If I had done this when I was 20, I would have been a lot smarter man,” Mosher said of his experience. “It got me the help I needed.” Mosher went on to mentor kids and volunteer in the Veterans Court. Dean Hayden, a former U.S. Marine who was arrested for drunken driving, said initially he was reluctant about the program, but found it has given him “the opportunity to get my life back.” Hayden said he was able to get benefits from the VA he didn't know he had, and has a different outlook on life. [Source: Observer & Eccentric | Cal Stone and David Veselenak | 27 Dec 2012 ++]

Fisher House Expansion Update 09: The Fisher House Foundation recently dedicated a new home to the Veterans Affairs Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS). The new 9,500 square foot Pittsburgh Fisher House located at University Drive C, Bldg 33 Pittsburgh, PA 15240 will serve the families of veterans receiving care at VAPHS. The Pittsburgh Fisher House features 10 suites, each with a private bathroom. For a family to stay at the house free of charge, they must have a family member -- veteran or active-duty service member -- receiving inpatient care at VAPHS and reside 50 miles or more from the hospital. To contact call (412) 360-2030 or email: michael.clark3@va.gov. For more information about Fisher Houses, visit the Fisher House Foundation website <http://www.fisherhouse.org>. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 28 Dec 2012 ++]



Vet Pro Bono Assistance Update 02: There are numerous organizations which provide medical and social services for Veterans, and there are guides for these organizations and services, but there has been no comprehensive system to provide free legal services to Veterans until now. The VALOR Guide in six volumes gathers together in a single reference all known providers of free legal services for California Veterans in order to provide vets assistance with the legal services which they need and have earned through their military service to this country. The volumes cover Northern California, Central California, Los Angeles County, Orange County, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, and San Diego and Imperial Counties. The guide addresses that need by bringing together a network of law firms, clinics and other providers who are dedicated to providing free legal services for Veterans. Not every legal clinic or military legal assistance office can handle every type of legal problem, but by working together, they can provide the right service in the right location. The VALOR Guide is designed to make finding the right legal provider quick and easy. Legal providers are listed in the guide by practice area, by location, and alphabetically.

- If you know the particular type of legal advice you require, you can use the 'Index of Legal Providers by Practice Area' to find a legal provider with expertise in handling your particular problem.
- If you would prefer to find all the legal providers in a particular location, you can use the guide's 'Index of Legal Providers by Location', which arranges legal providers conveniently according to their location within your geographic area.
- If you know the name of the provider and want more information about that provider, the guide's 'Alphabetical Index of Legal Providers' contains an alphabetical list of legal serviceproviders your geographic area including important details regarding their hours of operation, types of services provided, and any applicable restrictions or limitations on those services.

To view the 2012-2012 Central California Edition of the guide refer to the attachment (PDF Only) to this Bulletin titled, "**The Valor Guide**". For inquiries regarding this VALOR Guide, including corrections and requests for copies, please contact: Adam Siegler, Greenberg Traurig, LLP, 1840 Century Park East, Suite 1900, Los Angeles,

VA Suicide Prevention Update 14: The Department of Veterans Affairs in Texas will conduct a mortality study to track causes of death for veterans putting together a model that could allow similar data to be gathered nationwide. The department's decision came two months after an Austin American-Statesman investigation found that nearly as many Texas veterans died from prescription medicines as from suicide. The newspaper says it used autopsy and toxicology reports, inquests and accident reports from more than 50 state agencies to determine the causes of death for 266 Texas veterans who had been receiving disability benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs when they died. The department says its study will look at veterans who served in combat. The VA officials declined to say how the study would be used nationally. [Source: Associated Press article 23 Dec 2012 ++]

Clark AFB Vet Cemetery Update 04: While trying to get ready to leave town the Senate on 21 DEC unanimously approved New Hampshire's Republican Senator Kelly Ayotte's S.2320 legislation that would restore the Clark Veterans Cemetery in the Philippines and transfer its operation and maintenance to the American Battle Monuments Commission. The original co-sponsor was Senator Mark Begich (D-AK). The cemetery is the final resting place for over 8,300 American servicemembers and their families. Clark Air Force Base was abandoned after 1991 when a volcanic explosion covered the base on which the cemetery was located with ash. Subsequently it was overgrown with weeds. Since 1994 volunteers have tried to maintain the cemetery without help from the U.S. government. Senator Ayotte said: "The U.S. government has a moral responsibility to care for veterans cemeteries that honor those who have bravely served our country. The American veterans buried in Clark Veterans Cemetery deserve a dignified and well-maintained final resting place, and it's time for the U.S. to again fulfill its responsibility to care for this sacred ground." The bill still has to clear the House, which is expected to pass the bill and send it to the President for signature into law. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted 21 Dec 2012 ++]

VA Hepatitis C Treatment Update 02: The Food and Drug Administration is warning patients receiving treatment for hepatitis C with a triple drug regimen using Incevik, or telepriver, to be aware of a potentially dangerous, even fatal skin reaction. The FDA on 20 DEC announced it has altered Incevik's label to include stronger warnings after some patients died from complications after developing a serious rash while taking Incevik along with two other medications for hepatitis C. More than 2,700 active duty service members were diagnosed with chronic hepatitis C between 2000 and 2010, according to Pentagon data. The Veterans Health Administration system has 170,000 patients with chronic hepatitis C, and more than 4,800 VA patients are receiving some kind of combination drug therapy for Hepatitis C. Officials urge anyone who takes Incevik and develops a rash that doesn't improve or gets worse after two to three days, or who develops a fever, nausea, inflamed eyes, mouth sores or facial swelling, to seek immediate care.

According to an FDA release, at least two people worldwide have died from complications of the severe skin reactions, and since May 2011, the FDA has received 112 reports of dangerous skin conditions on Incevik treatment. Incevik and another medication, Victrelis, were introduced in 2011 to treat hepatitis C, a previously difficult-to-cure infectious disease, in combination with other drugs. Incevik is manufactured by Vertex Pharmaceuticals; Victrelis is made by Merck. Both regimens cost upward of \$70,000 for treatment, which takes about a year and has a 75 percent

cure rate. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 5.2 million Americans are infected with hepatitis C, with baby boomers making up at least 2 million cases. [Source: Digitalgroup.info | Health | 20 Dec 2012 ++]

Vet Cremains Update 20: The U.S. Senate passed a bill 19 DEC pushed by Reps. Pat Tiberi and Steve Stivers that aims to make it easier for the unclaimed cremated remains of veterans to receive a military burial. The Veterans Missing in America legislation, pushed in the Senate by Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Mark Begich (D-AK), directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to work with veterans' groups to determine whether unidentified or abandoned remains in the nation's funeral homes are those of veterans eligible for burial at a National Cemetery. The provision passed the Senate as part of a larger bill. "Passage of this bill is a commonsense step toward ensuring that we show eligible veterans our respect and gratitude by honoring them with a burial in a National Cemetery," Portman said. Funeral homes around the country store thousands of cremated remains never claimed for a variety of reasons, including a family living far away or no survivors. Funeral directors call the storage rooms "closets of memory." But volunteer groups around the country have stepped in hoping to give the unclaimed remains of veterans a military funeral. In May, Chastity Booth, a volunteer from Randolph, Ohio, organized the military services for 10 veterans from one funeral home in Columbus. The 10 were interred at Dayton National Cemetery on May 22.

The bill that passed the Senate would direct the VA to work with veterans' service organizations and other groups, like the Missing in America Project, in assisting entities in possession of unidentified or abandoned remains to determine if the remains are that of a veteran eligible for burial at a National Cemetery. To learn more about the Veterans Missing in America Project refer to <http://www.miap.us/>. The VA will cover the burial cost if the remains are determined to be that of an eligible veteran who doesn't have a next of kin. Tiberi introduced the bill in the House after a conversation with an Ohio veteran. "Military men and women who have served their country should not be slipping through the cracks if they have no next-of-kin," Tiberi, R-Genoa Township, said. "They deserve the dignity of a proper burial and the appreciation of a grateful nation." [Source: The Columbus Dispatch | Jessica Wehrman | 20 Dec 2012 ++]

MCRMC: The NDAA establishes the *Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission* (MCTMC) to review compensation and retirement benefits. The commission is charged with ensuring the long-term viability of the All-Volunteer Force, enabling a high quality of life for military families, and to modernizing the compensation and retirement systems in a sustainable fashion. The legislation calls for grandfathering current service members and retirees. The Commission will have nine members—the President appoints one member; the Majority Leader of Senate, in consultation with the SASC Chair, appoints two members; the Minority Leader of Senate, in consultation with the Ranking Member of SASC, appoints two; the Speaker of the House, in consultation with the Chair of HASC, appoints two; and the Minority Leader of the House, in consultation with the Ranking member of HASC, appoints two. This process is supposed to occur within 4 months and the eventual reconitions will be submitted to the President within 15 months. Commission members are expected to possess knowledge regarding federal civilian, military and private sector compensation; military family policy development; and implementation and actuarial science. The Secretary of Defense will also make recommendations to Congress in consultations with the Secretaries of Homeland Security, HHS and OMB. The commission will have a budget of \$10,000,000. [Source: AFA Notes | Tom Lasser | 22 Dec 2012 ++]

Save Our Benefit: Commissary and exchange benefits continue to be the target for budget cutters. Repeated attacks on the military resale benefit threaten to eliminate the taxpayer subsidy for commissaries, consolidate the commissary and exchange systems, and raise prices. Some members of Congress propose giving active duty service members a \$400 cash allowance in lieu of the benefit - retirees, Medal of Honor winners, and survivors would get nothing. This would impact adversely on the millions of service members and their families who rely on commissaries and exchanges to stretch their household budgets. Under the present system the average military family of four can save \$7,000 a year. In remote and overseas locations, it is often the only affordable shopping opportunity available. In metropolitan areas, where prices are consistently higher, commissaries and exchanges help keep prices affordable. For some junior enlisted military families and fixed income retirees, savings are the difference between making ends meet and filing for public assistance.

The commissary and exchange benefit continues to rank as one of the most important benefits for military families and is stronger today than ever. While the cost of other federal defense programs have doubled or even tripled in the past five years, the cost of commissary programs have remained constant and are a bargain for the taxpayer. However, if the taxpayer subsidy for commissaries and exchanges is eliminated, to compensate for the loss of funding, commissaries and exchanges would have to raise prices and cut services which could lead to a collapse of the military resale system. Military families and the Nation cannot afford for this to happen. The military resale system is too important of a benefit to lose. Last year it saved military families \$5.6 billion and contributed billions of dollars to the military communities they support. The military resale system also employs 100,000 working Americans, is the largest employer of military families in the world and the leading employer of veterans in the Nation.

In MAR 2012 a coalition of military families, advocacy groups and American industry called Save Our Benefit formed to preserve shopping privileges on military bases. They applied for and were approved as a non-profit organization under the name 'The Coalition to Save our Military Shopping Benefits'. Their mission is to preserve and strengthen a 150-year-old benefit that provides thousands of dollars in annual savings on household necessities, billions of dollars in added employment income for military families and underwrites other billions of dollars in vital on-base community programs and facilities. Their purpose is to provide advocacy and support for military resale programs, which contribute more than a trillion dollars to our economy. Several misguided proposals put forth during the budget debate have called for radical restructuring and diminishment of these benefits under the false notion of saving taxpayer dollars. The Coalition aims to ensure that nothing happens to destroy these benefits and to educate key policy makers about the consequences of moving forward with these proposals.

Touting the significant household savings that commissaries and exchanges bring to military families, the Coalition aims to take a series of measures to insulate from budget reductions what is considered the most efficient and effective benefit provided to military people. For example, over the past five years, costs of commissary programs have remained constant, while the cost of most other Defense programs has doubled and tripled. In order to boost these savings even further, the Coalition aims to ensure that all eligible patrons know they can save 20 to 50 percent by using their benefit. As sales increase and a broader shopping base establishes, prices will be continually driven down, giving military patrons an even greater incentive to utilize their local commissaries and exchanges.

The Coalition brings together military members, partner associations, business and community leaders, and the public to support the continued funding and operation of military commissaries and exchanges. They provide information on the operation of the resale system, improve business conditions, and serve as a focal point to address the mounting threats against this critical military benefit. You can join the Coalition at <http://saveourbenefit.org/register.html> to receive the latest news, alerts, best deals, promotional events and take action on timely issues that impact the availability of this benefit for all those who are serving our nation. There are no fees or obligations associated with joining. [Source: <http://saveourbenefit.org> Dec 2012 ++]



Save Our Benefit Update 01: Last year, there were no fewer than five frontal assaults on Military Shopping Benefits. These threats included a Congressional Budget Office proposal to defund the Defense Commissary Agency, converting it into a Non-Appropriated Fund activity, raising prices and eliminating benefits for entire classes of current beneficiaries, including retirees. Recently MilitaryTimes wrote an editorial calling for a dramatic cut of commissaries throughout CONUS. ‘The Coalition to Save our Military Shopping Benefits’ responded to that editorial with the below letter:

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The Coalition to Save our Military Shopping Benefits

Compass Without a Bearing

I always enjoy the Times editorials for their thought provoking approach to issues. I never find them too far from the heartbeat of current discussions and for the most part guided by a compass honed by accurate information...until your recent editorial, “Excess commissaries in the market for a cut” and I realize that your usually reliable compass has for once steered you badly off course.

First, if you are going to use historical facts to form the foundation of an argument, you should do a better job of researching the issue in order to get them right. Your premise is that “the commissary system was created in the 19th century to serve troops at remote outposts with no nearby commercial stores.” There is a published and easily accessible reference document on the subject “The Illustrated History of the American Military Commissaries.” The commissary benefit is not a recent innovation. The modern era of sales commissaries actually began in 1867, when enlisted men received the same at-cost purchasing privileges officers had already enjoyed for four decades. No geographic restrictions were placed upon these sales; the commissary warehouse at every Army post could become a sales location, whether they were located on the frontier or near a large city.

Second, there are no excess commissaries. Excess commissaries have been closed. In fact, 170 have been closed since 1991 leaving 248 stores to serve these patrons.

Of course we are not saying that commissaries shouldn’t tighten their belts just like everyone else in DoD must do these days. They have. Annual costs have been reduced by \$700 million from where they would have been without store closures and efficiencies. This does not include \$500 million that was saved when inventory was outsourced in 1996.

What about the fact that commissary shoppers have contributed nearly \$6 billion over the past 20 years to their own facilities? Not only did shoppers build the stores, they lost this investment as a result of strategic decisions such as

the drawdown in Europe. Then, they paid again when they had to pay to build stores stateside to accommodate the troops coming home.

Let's take a look at the shopper demographics. Yes, 51 percent of commissary users are retired. Most retirees are married and live on fixed incomes. Many retirees located near military bases because of commissary and exchange benefits, benefits they earned through their 20 plus years of service. Your echoing the Congressional Budget Office concept to disenfranchise entire groups of beneficiaries is a dangerous path to embark upon. The retirees were once the active force, they are a critical part of the makeup of the military community. The active force watches very closely how their retired brethren are treated when they make their decisions to stay or leave the service.

Using the survey information to make your case on the percentages of shoppers that use the commissary benefit is not a complete picture. The store survey consists of 25,000 respondents. It would have been better to go to the source data repository for authorized benefits and use the Defense Data Manpower Center (DMDC) which provides independent assessments through their surveys of active duty, reserve, and retired personnel. As an example, DMDC's Active Duty Survey indicates that 90 percent of active duty or family members have used the commissary in the past 12 months, and 82 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with their commissary.

Authorized commissary shoppers total, 12,278,534. Active duty and family members make up 3,574,165 or 29%. Retirees and family members are 5,068,729 or 41%. National Guard and Reserve and their family members are 2,885,833 or 23%. Other authorized commissary shoppers include disabled veterans, surviving spouses, Medal of Honor recipients, and civilians overseas to the tune of 749,141 or 6%...the remaining 1% is in rounding. So, if it seems strange that there is a higher number of retirees shopping than active duty, it is a math issue not an authorized shopper issue.

Then there's the reality of the supply chain economics. Big stores support small stores and stores in high-density metropolitan areas support small stores and overseas. It's just simple economics - volume creates economies of scale. It would also be naïve to think that commercial grocers wouldn't cherry pick the plums and leave the marginal operations to fend for themselves.

Also, I call your attention to an article in your own newspaper that shows that redemption of food stamps in the military has tripled since 2007. Joyce Raezer, Executive Director of the National Military Family Association said that National Guard and Reserve members returning from mobilization may find their jobs gone, or retirees may have trouble finding jobs after leaving the service. You conveniently left these populations out of your equation.

You suggest we should use the "food desert" criteria of the Agriculture Department to decide where to put commissaries. USDA study uses census tracts as its geographic units. It defines a food desert as "a low-income census tract where a substantial number or share of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store." Does this really fit the United States Military?

Finally, the commissary benefit should remain intact based on the fact that our military service members have earned it. It provides a valuable form of non-pay compensation. We should not cut benefits for our military service members and their families, especially after more than a decade of war. Unfortunately, some have chosen to ignore these reasons for this benefit and instead focus on what it costs. Indeed, dollars and cents are the only arguments that resonate in some sectors. That's why we were compelled to produce an exhaustive economic analysis of commissary and exchange benefits. Take a look at some impactful numbers from the recently released study, "The Costs and Benefits of the Defense Retail System." The report is available in its entirety at www.resaleresearch.org.

The modern commissary system reflects exactly the purpose for which it was intended. It is a model of efficiency and return on investment to the taxpayer. It represents the model of fiscal responsibility that is sought after by the

Department of Defense but not yet attained. It is part of a military resale system that is a powerful economic engine for the nation, and one that must be preserved. If your readers want to know more about their benefits and see the entire economic analysis, I invite them to visit www.saveourbenefit.org.

Sincerely,

Candace Wheeler
Vice President of Strategic Communications & Marketing
The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits

The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits Valued Associates
American Logistics Association (ALA)
Armed Forces Marketing Council (AFMC)
National Industries For The Blind (NIB)
Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)
National Military Family Association (NMFA)
Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)
The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)
Association of the US Army (AUSA)

113th Congress Military Vets: Senator Daniel Inouye was at the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941 as a medical volunteer. In 1943, when the U.S. Army dropped its enlistment ban on Japanese Americans, Inouye curtailed his premedical studies at the University of Hawaii and enlisted in the Army. He volunteered to be part of the all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team. This army unit was mostly made up of second-generation Japanese Americans from Hawaii and the mainland. He was promoted to the rank of sergeant within his first year, and he was given the role of platoon leader. He served in Italy in 1944 during the Rome-Arno Campaign before his regiment was transferred to the Vosges Mountains region of France, where he spent two weeks in the battle to relieve the Lost Battalion, a battalion of the 141st Infantry Regiment that was surrounded by German forces. He was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant for his actions there. At one point while he was leading an attack, a shot struck him in the chest directly above his heart, but the bullet was stopped by the two silver dollars he happened to have stacked in his shirt pocket. He continued to carry the coins throughout the war in his shirt pocket as good luck charms until he lost them shortly before the battle in which he lost his arm.

On April 21, 1945, Inouye was grievously wounded while leading an assault on a heavily-defended ridge near San Terenzo in Tuscany, Italy called Colle Musatello. The ridge served as a strongpoint along the strip of German fortifications known as the Gothic Line, which represented the last and most unyielding line of German defensive works in Italy. As he led his platoon in a flanking maneuver, three German machine guns opened fire from covered positions just 40 yards away, pinning his men to the ground. Inouye stood up to attack and was shot in the stomach; ignoring his wound, he proceeded to attack and destroy the first machine gun nest with hand grenades and fire from his Thompson submachine gun. After being informed of the severity of his wound by his platoon sergeant, he refused treatment and rallied his men for an attack on the second machine gun position, which he also successfully destroyed before collapsing from blood loss.

As his squad distracted the third machine gunner, Inouye crawled toward the final bunker, eventually drawing within 10 yards. As he raised himself up and cocked his arm to throw his last grenade into the fighting position, a German inside the bunker fired a rifle grenade that struck him on the right elbow, severing most of his arm and

leaving his own primed grenade reflexively "clenched in a fist that suddenly didn't belong to me anymore". Inouye's horrified soldiers moved to his aid, but he shouted for them to keep back out of fear his severed fist would involuntarily relax and drop the grenade. As the German inside the bunker reloaded his rifle, Inouye pried the live grenade from his useless right hand and transferred it to his left. As the German aimed his rifle to finish him off, Inouye tossed the grenade off-hand into the bunker and destroyed it. He stumbled to his feet and continued forward, silencing the last German resistance with a one-handed burst from his Thompson before being wounded in the leg and tumbling unconscious to the bottom of the ridge. When he awoke to see the concerned men of his platoon hovering over him, his only comment before being carried away was to gruffly order them to return to their positions, since, as he pointed out, "nobody called off the war!"

The remainder of Inouye's mutilated right arm was later amputated at a field hospital without proper anesthesia, as he had been given too much morphine at an aid station and it was feared any more would lower his blood pressure enough to kill him. Although Inouye had lost his right arm, he remained in the military until 1947 and was honorably discharged with the rank of captain. At the time of his leaving the Army, he was a recipient of the Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart. Inouye was initially awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his bravery in this action, with the award later being upgraded to the Medal of Honor by President Bill Clinton (alongside 19 other Nisei servicemen who served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and were believed to have been denied proper recognition of their bravery due to their race). His story, along with interviews with him about the war as a whole, were featured prominently in the 2007 Ken Burns documentary *The War*.

While recovering from war wounds and the amputation of his right forearm from the grenade wound (mentioned above) at Percy Jones Army Hospital, Inouye met future Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole, then a fellow patient. While at the same hospital, Inouye also met future fellow Democrat and Senator Philip Hart, who had been injured on D-Day. Dole mentioned to Inouye that after the war he planned to go to Congress; Inouye beat him there by a few years. The two remained lifelong friends. In 2003, the hospital was renamed the Hart-Dole-Inouye Federal Center in honor of the three WWII veterans. Due to the loss of his arm, Inouye abandoned his plans to become a surgeon, and returned to college to study political science under the G.I. Bill. He graduated from the University of Hawaii at Manoa in 1950 with a Bachelor of Arts in political science. He earned his law degree from The George Washington University Law School in Washington, D.C. in 1953 and was elected into the Phi Delta Phi legal fraternity.

In 1953, he was elected to the Hawaii territorial House of Representatives, and was immediately elected majority leader. He served two terms there, and was elected to the Hawaii territorial senate in 1957. Midway through his first term in the territorial senate, Hawaii achieved statehood. He won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives as Hawaii's first full member, and took office on August 21, 1959, the same date Hawaii became a state; he was re-elected in 1960. In 1962, he was elected to the U.S. Senate, succeeding fellow Democrat Oren E. Long. He was reelected eight times, usually without serious difficulty. His closest race was in 1992, when state senator Rick Reed held him to 57 percent of the vote—the only time he received less than 69 percent of the vote. In 2010, Inouye announced his decision to run for a ninth term. He easily won the Democratic primary—the real contest in this heavily Democratic state--and then trounced Republican state representative Campbell Cavasso with 74 percent of the vote. Prior to his death, Inouye announced that he planned to run for a record tenth term in 2016, when he would have been 92 years old. [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Inouye Dec 2012 ++]

113th Congress Military Vets Update 01: When members of the House and Senate filed past the casket of Daniel Inouye as he lied in state in the Capitol Rotunda on 20 DEC, they were mourning more than the death of a dear friend and historic colleague. They also were grieving the passing of an era in which veterans of

World War II dominated American politics. In 1963, when Inouye joined the Senate, more than half of his colleagues shared an important bond with him: The distinguishing fact of their lives had been their service in that war. But, with Inouye's passing this week at age 88, that era quietly comes close to its final moment. Inouye's death and the retirement of his Hawaii colleague, Sen. Daniel Akaka, means the Congress that takes office in January will have only three World War II veterans—one in the Senate and two in the House. The lone survivors are Democratic Sen. Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey, who turns 89 next month; Republican Rep. Ralph Hall, 89, of Texas; and 86-year-old Democratic Rep. John Dingell of Michigan. Lautenberg served in the Army Signal Corps from 1942 to 1946. Hall flew planes off aircraft carriers from 1942 to 1945. Dingell joined the Army when he turned 18 in 1944 and was in the invasion force poised to attack Japan when the war ended.

It would be difficult to overstate the influence of World War II veterans on governance through most of Inouye's remarkable 53-year Capitol Hill career, during which Hawaiians elected him twice to the House and nine times to the Senate. Numbers compiled for National Journal Daily by the National World War II Museum in New Orleans show that 697 veterans of the war were elected to Congress. Some, including Inouye and former Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas, continued to wield power even half a century after the end of the war. But, for most, their greatest decades of influence were the 1960s and 1970s. The Senate that Inouye entered when he moved over from the House was very much a veterans' chamber. He was but one of 69 veterans in that Senate, according to the Senate Historian's Office. A National Journal Daily analysis found that Inouye served with 25 senators who had fought decades earlier in World War I—and even with one, Arizona's Carl Hayden, whose service began eight years before America entered that war. Another 39, including Inouye, had fought in World War II.

Ten years later, by 1972, the number of World War I veterans in the Senate had dropped to eight, while the ranks of World War II vets had grown to 55. That war had an even stronger grip on Washington's politics than had the Civil War in the previous century. Every presidential election from 1952 to 1996 featured a World War II veteran heading one of the two tickets—from Dwight Eisenhower to Dole, over 12 elections. Eight presidents, from Eisenhower to George H.W. Bush, were in uniform during the war. (Jimmy Carter's was that of a midshipman at the Naval Academy.)



Inouye as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army

Few, of course, were as decorated for valor or left as much on the battlefield as Inouye did. As a member of an Army regiment of Japanese-Americans, he led a singular charge on three machine-gun nests in Italy in 1945, was struck repeatedly by enemy bullets, and lost his right arm to a hand grenade. For his bravery, he was awarded the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, and the Distinguished Service Cross, which was later upgraded to the Medal of Honor. But Inouye rarely talked about his war service or record. In that, he was typical of most of his fellows. Almost to a man, they believed that those days in combat put an emphasis on teamwork, not the individual. It was a

philosophy that served Congress well for decades, but one much less apparent on today's Capitol Hill. With the presence of veterans shrinking, even the highly respected Inouye, the second longest serving senator in history, was in danger of being viewed as an anachronism in an increasingly partisan chamber.

The Senate that opens in JAN will have the fewest veterans since the Senate Historian started tracking them in the 79th Congress, 1945-47. The number of veterans in the body peaked at 81 in 1977 and never fell below 50 until 1997. But as the veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam age and retire, the decline has been rapid. The 113th Senate will include a record-low 18 veterans. Veterans' shrinking influence was also evident in the 2012 presidential race. The Barack Obama-Joe Biden and Mitt Romney-Paul Ryan tickets included no veterans, the first time that has happened since 1932. Critics have also suggested that the vanishing number of veterans in politics has affected the way members approach issues and their willingness to work with others. Certainly, the mind-set is different from that of earlier generations, in which military service was either expected or—because of the draft—feared. No American born after 1952 has ever been subject to a military draft, and 30 of the 80 male members of the incoming Senate were born in 1953 or later. Combined with the 20 women in the Senate, that means fully half of the senators never had to worry about being drafted and were never exposed to the lessons of military cohesion, teamwork, and selflessness championed by Inouye, Dole, and other vets. They are lessons that might be recalled as Inouye lied in the Rotunda, resting upon the catafalque first constructed in 1865 for Abraham Lincoln. Inouye is the 31st person to be granted that honor, but only the seventh to be honored solely for his Senate service. [Source: National Journal | George E. Condon | 20 Dec 2012 ++]

VA Eligibility Verification Report (EVR): The Department of Veterans Affairs announced 20 DEC it is cutting red tape for Veterans by eliminating the need for them to complete an annual Eligibility Verification Report (EVR). VA will implement a new process for confirming eligibility for benefits, and staff that had been responsible for processing the old form will instead focus on eliminating the compensation claims backlog. Historically, beneficiaries have been required to complete an EVR each year to ensure their pension benefits continued. Under the new initiative, VA will work with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) to verify continued eligibility for pension benefits. "By working together, we have cut red tape for Veterans and will help ensure these brave men and women get the benefits they have earned and deserve," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. VA estimates it would have sent nearly 150,000 EVRs to beneficiaries in January 2013. Eliminating these annual reports reduces the burden on Veterans, their families, and survivors because they will not have to return these routine reports to VA each year in order to avoid suspension of benefits. It also allows VA to redirect more than 100 employees that usually process EVRs to work on eliminating the claims backlog.

"Having already instituted an expedited process that enables wounded warriors to quickly access Social Security disability benefits, we are proud to work with our federal partners on an automated process that will make it much easier for qualified Veterans to maintain their VA benefits from year to year," said Michael J. Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security. "The IRS is taking new steps to provide critical data to help speed the benefits process for the nation's Veterans and Veterans Affairs," said Beth Tucker, IRS Deputy Commissioner for Operations Support. "The IRS is pleased to be part of a partnership with VA and SSA that will provide needed data quickly and effectively to move this effort forward." All beneficiaries currently receiving VA pension benefits will receive a letter from VA explaining these changes and providing instructions on how to continue to submit their unreimbursed medical expenses. More information about VA pension benefits is available at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/pension> and other VA benefit programs on the joint Department of Defense—VA web portal eBenefits at <http://www.ebenefits.va.gov>. [Source: VA News Release 20 Dec 2012 ++]

DFAS myPay System Update 10: New myPay Password Reset Process. Beginning in mid-December, Defense Finance and Accounting Service customers will be able to reset their myPay passwords online by answering a few security questions. Before this new feature, myPay users received new passwords by email or mail. After logging in to their accounts in mid-December, users will be given a list of 17 possible security questions to answer. Users need to answer eight of those 17 questions to set up their online password reset capability. In the spring of 2013, however, all myPay users, including those who use Army Knowledge Online, the Air Force Portal and smart cards, will be required to answer eight security questions. Until then, those who choose to bypass the questions will not be able to reset their passwords online until they have answered the questions. For more information, contact the DFAS Customer Care Center at 888-332-7411 (Source: Military.com Week of 10 Dec 2012 ++]

DFAS Direct Deposit Update 01: The Department of the Treasury has announced that all payments from the federal government must be made electronically and not by paper check beginning March 1, 2013. This means most military retirees and annuitants receiving paper checks will be required to sign up for direct deposit. This will save the American taxpayers about \$120 million every year. Each check costs \$1.04 while each electronic payment only costs 8 cents. With direct deposit, DFAS sends your payment straight to your bank account. Direct deposit gives you immediate access to your money on pay day, and it eliminates the risk of lost or stolen checks, forged signatures and identity theft. There are three ways to start direct deposit. Before you enroll, you'll need to gather information including your financial institution's routing transit number and account number. Then do one of the following:

- Send a signed Fast Start Direct Deposit Form available at <http://www.fms.treas.gov/eft/2231.pdf> to Defense Finance and Accounting Service, U.S. Military Retired Pay, P.O. Box 7130, London, KY 40742-7130;
- Use your myPay account at <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx> to set up a direct deposit to your checking or savings account; or
- Call the DFAS Retired and Annuitant Pay Customer Care Center at 800-321-1080.

Don't have a bank account? Find a bank or credit union in your area that is reputable and provides the services you need at little or no cost. And make sure they offer FDIC coverage of your account and accept direct deposit. Military members or civilian employees paid by DFAS should contact their base finance office, employer's Customer Service Representative (payroll liaison) or human resources office to start direct deposit if they're unable to access myPay. Those needing additional assistance can call DFAS customer service at 1-800-321-1080 (for retirees and annuitants) or 1-888-332-7411 (for military and civilian employees). It can take 30 to 60 days from the day we receive your enrollment for direct deposit to start. If after enrolling you receive a paper check, cash or deposit it as you normally would. DFAS will send you a notification when we process your enrollment. [Source: DFAS Newsletter 19 Dec 2012 ++]

DFAS Direct Deposit Update 02: New DFAS policy effective 13 MAR requires recipients of paper checks to sign up for direct deposit. The no paper check policy applies to all retirees and annuitants with the following exception of those who are over 90 years of age as of 1 May 2011 and those who have a mental impairments which have been substantiated by a physician. Payees who do not already have an account to receive the direct deposit in will have to open an account either at a U.S. financial institution, an overseas financial

institution with a stateside affiliate, or an overseas financial institution located in a country approved for international direct deposit (IDD).

To open an account in the states it is U.S. banking policy that it be done in person with a signature card signed by the account holder in their presence. This is not practical for those residing overseas unless they travel to the U.S. One way to avoid having to do this is to complete an International Direct Deposit form SF1119-I and submit it to DFAS for approval. It can be downloaded at <http://www.dfas.mil/dfas/retiredmilitary/manage/idd.html>. This option is only available to payees living in nations chosen for IDD eligibility IDD electronically deposits funds on the first business day of the month. Your payment will be converted from U.S. dollars to local currency two business days prior to the U.S. payment date, using a wholesale exchange rate. IDD puts your money directly into your local overseas bank in local currency. If you reside in Canada, and have a U.S. dollar account, you may elect to receive your payment electronically in U.S. dollars. This option is only available in Canada. If you currently have your pay sent via direct deposit to a stateside financial institution, do not close that account until you have verified receipt at your international bank. Otherwise, your pay will be returned to DFAS, causing additional delays.

Nations chosen for IDD eligibility have met the requirements of the Federal Reserve Bank. Simply put, the banks and other financial institutions in those countries provide secure and trustworthy services and have systems compatible with transferring funds from the U. S. to your account. As more countries become eligible, affected retirees will be notified. If you reside in a country that is not on International Electronic Fund Transfer and would like to participate, please send a written inquiry to: DFAS Cleveland - Retired & Annuitant Pay Services, 1240 East 9th Street, Room 1579C, Cleveland, OH 44199.

IDD is not available to Philippine residents. DFAS is still working on a solution for Philippine payees which will be posted on their web page when determined. In the interim what they can do is open an account with a local PI bank that has an affiliate in the states. They can then provide DFAS with the routing number of the affiliate stateside bank and the account number of their local PI bank using either the Fast Start Direct Deposit Form at <http://www.fms.treas.gov/eft/2231.pdf> or myPay at <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx>. DFAS will then forward payments to the affiliate U.S. bank who in turn will forward funds (for a fee) to the account holder's local PI bank account. There are a number of Philippine banks that have affiliates in the U.S. Using PNB as an example:

- 1) DFAS would forward funds to the Los Angeles Branch of PNB whose routing number is 122038756.
- 2) LA PNB would electronically forward funds the same day to the local PI bank after deducting their reimbursement fee. Funds should be available for withdrawal the next day.
- 3) Depending on the type of local account (peso or dollar) LA PNB would withhold a fee for the service that is based on the amount of funds transferred. At present their charges are -
 - a. Peso account: \$7 up to \$500 worth of pesos and \$9 over \$500.
 - b. Dollar account: \$10 up to \$1,000, \$20 for \$1001 to \$2000, etc.

[Source: DFAS customer service and Los Angeles PNB 20 Dec 2012 ++]

Wreaths Across America Update 08: As thousands of volunteers fanned out at Arlington National Cemetery in mid-DEC, placing holiday wreaths at the white headstones as part of the "Wreaths Across America" tribute, Sheila Patton kept vigil at one particular gravesite. Patton and her daughter stationed themselves at the grave of their son and brother, Army Staff Sgt. James R. Patton. Twenty-three-year-old "Jimmy" was serving his seventh overseas deployment since 9/11 with the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, when he was killed in a helicopter crash in Tikrit, Iraq, on April 18, 2010.



Sheila Patton, mother of Army Staff Sgt. James R. Patton, who was killed in Iraq in 2010,

Patton said she travels here from Fort Campbell, Ky., as often as possible. Patton felt a special calling, she said, to participate in the largest single venue of the nationwide "Wreaths Across America" tribute. "This was something very important to me," she said. "I really wanted to be here, to be a part of all this, and to be able to honor Jimmy and all the others who are buried here." Arriving at the cemetery early Saturday, Dec. 15, Patton and her daughter were in good company. They were among more than 25,000 volunteers who converged here in the early hours to lay an estimated 110,000 balsam fir wreaths, each adorned with a festive red bow. "It's amazing to see all this," Patton said. "It's really inspiring to see all these volunteers come out and [to] realize how much they care."

This year's turnout was the largest since the annual "Wreaths Across America" tradition started in 1992. Morrill Worcester, president of the Worcester Wreath Company from Harrington, Maine, began donating holiday wreaths to decorate veterans' graves. The gesture caught on like wildfire, expanding every year to more military cemeteries nationwide. This year, thousands of volunteers laid an estimated 400,000 evergreen wreaths at almost 800 cemeteries in all 50 states and 24 overseas sites. At Arlington, the largest venue, a convoy of 34 trucks traveled from Maine to transport the donated wreaths. Worcester and his wife, Karen, recognized a milestone in the "Wreaths Across America" effort as he presented the 1 millionth wreath since the program's inception to a Gold Star family and wounded warrior. Looking out over the sea of volunteers as they gathered for opening ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery's Amphitheater, Karen Worcester challenged them to live up to the spirit reflected in Byers' last words as he told his fellow soldiers to "keep moving forward." Worcester spoke about the deadly shooting in Connecticut the previous day and called on the group to take inspiration from Byers and the others buried at Arlington as they deal with life's challenges. "We need to take some advice from Josh and 'keep moving forward' with what they've taught us," she said. "And we need to teach our kids about the character of America, which is to take care of each other. By taking care of each other we take care of our country and share the lesson that our heroes have taught us."

Among the hundreds of school, church, community and veterans groups participating in this year's "Wreaths Across America" were men and women in uniform, many of whom placed wreaths at the graves of friends killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Marine Gunnery Sgt. Brian Evans, assigned to the Combat Service Support Company at The Basic School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va., said he felt moved to see so many people take time out of their busy holiday schedules to honor the fallen. "This is a chance to recognize and show others we remember those that

went before," he said. "And it really does show that the majority of the public still remembers and appreciates what we do." "You know the public appreciates what you do and when you see all this, it proves that they really do care," echoed Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Andrew Boehmer from the Wounded Warrior Regiment at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va. Air Force Staff Sgt. Dominique Purvis, among about 50 members of the 579th Medical Group based at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, Washington, D.C., who journeyed to Arlington to participate in the tribute, struggled for words to describe her emotions. "It's a beautiful, beautiful thing," she said. "You just can't really understand this kind of outpouring until you see it for yourself. It's overwhelming." [Source: AFPS | Donna Mills | 17 Dec 2012 ++]

Gasoline Savings Update 01: Ford has been making some eye-opening claims about the fuel economy of the redesigned 2013 Fusion Hybrid sedan and new C-Max Hybrid wagon: "47 city/47 highway/47 combined mpg." After running both vehicles through Consumer Reports (CR) real-world tests, some very good results were obtained. But they are far below Ford's ambitious triple-47 figures. In CR tests, the Fusion Hybrid delivered 39 mpg overall and 35 and 41 in city and highway conditions, respectively. For the C-Max Hybrid, they got 37 mpg overall, with 35 and 38 for city and highway. These two vehicles have the largest discrepancy between our overall-mpg results and the estimates published by the EPA that CR has seen among any current models. Yes, the disclaimer on EPA fuel-economy labels notes that your results may differ. But the overall mpg for these C-Max and Fusion models is off by a whopping 10 and 8 mpg, respectively, or about 20 percent.

CR's overall-mpg results are usually pretty close to the EPA's combined-mpg estimate. Among current models, more than 80 percent of the vehicles they tested were within 2 mpg. The largest discrepancy previously seen was 7 and 6 mpg for the Toyota Prius C subcompact and Prius hatchback, respectively. And while CR's highway test results almost always meet or exceed the EPA highway numbers, their highway figures for these cars fell far below. Make no mistake; both the Fusion Hybrid and C-Max Hybrid still deliver excellent fuel economy. The Fusion Hybrid's 39 mpg is the best of any family sedan they tested, edging out the Toyota Camry Hybrid by 1 mpg. And the C-Max Hybrid's 37 mpg is second only to the Prius V's 41 mpg in its class. But tests show that buyers shouldn't expect the stellar 47 mpg that Ford is promoting.

How does CR measure the real-world fuel economy? Like every car they test, they first put 2,000 break-in miles on the Fusion and C-Max hybrids after buying them from local dealerships. Then, they installed a precision fuel meter in the fuel line. To measure the city mpg, the cars are run through the standard course on CR's test track, which consists of regimented speeds, multiple stops, and predetermined idle time. For the highway mpg, the cars are driven twice each way on a specific section of a local highway at 65 mph. Tests are run by multiple drivers on each vehicle, conducted only under certain weather conditions, and corrected for ambient temperature. EPA fuel-economy estimates are the result of testing on a dynamometer. It's worth noting that automakers mostly self-certify their cars. Then, the EPA spot-checks about 15 percent of them with its own tests in a lab. CR has reported their fuel-economy results to the EPA. They are not alone in these findings. Some Fusion Hybrid and C-Max Hybrid owners have reported fuel economy below the EPA estimates and other media outlets have experienced a similar shortfall.

Make & model	CR overall mpg	EPA combined mpg	Difference
Ford C-Max SE	37	47	10
Ford Fusion Hybrid SE	39	47	8
Toyota Prius C Two	43	50	7

Toyota Prius	44	50	6
Honda Civic Hybrid	40	44	4
Infiniti M35h	25	29	4
Lexus ES 300h	36	40	4
Buick LaCrosse (4-cyl., eAssist)	26	29	3
Honda Insight EX	38	41	3
Hyundai Sonata Hybrid	33	36	3
Lexus RX 450h	26	29	3
Lexus CT 200h	40	42	2
Toyota Camry Hybrid XLE	38	40	2
Chevrolet Tahoe Hybrid	19	20	1
Toyota Highlander Hybrid	27	28	1
Toyota Prius V Three	41	42	1
Chevrolet Malibu Eco	29	29	0
Honda CR-Z EX (manual)	35	34	-1

Consumer Reports Test Results

In response to CR’s results, a Ford representative said in an email, "Early C-Max Hybrid and Fusion Hybrid customers praise the vehicles and report a range of fuel economy figures, including some reports above 47 mpg. This reinforces the fact that driving styles, driving conditions, and other factors can cause mileage to vary." Earlier this month, the EPA forced Hyundai to restate fuel-economy estimates for 27 models after overstating their estimates. The company is spending an estimated \$100 million a year to refund buyers for the extra fuel they burn. "Most buyers won't get anything near 47 mpg in the real world," says Jake Fisher, Consumer Reports' director of auto testing. "Even though these two Ford hybrids are very efficient, this big discrepancy may leave customers disappointed." Those fuel-economy results come as CR is testing three versions of the 2013 Fusion, as well as the C-Max Hybrid. Initial findings indicate the sleek, sophisticated Fusion is a solid, well-rounded package. With a very composed ride and sharp handling, it drives more like an upscale sport sedan than a mundane family hauler. The C-Max is a very practical package that also drives well. [Source: Consumer Reports article 6 Dec 2012 ++]

Ammunition Hall of Fame: The U.S. Army is seeking nominations for the Ammunition Hall of Fame, which was established in October 2011 to honor and memorialize former civilian and military personnel who have made significant, lasting contributions to the U.S. Army ammunition mission. Nominees must be retired, reassigned, separated, or positively discharged from a military or civilian service ammunition position (using the nominee's official retirement/separation date) for at least two years from date nomination package is submitted. If deceased, the nominee is eligible immediately without regard to years of service or retirement/separation status. Nominations are due no later than 30 January 2013. Mail or email nominations to HQ, U.S. Army Joint Munitions Command, ATTN: (AMSJM-PA - Hall of Fame), 1 Rock Island Arsenal, Rock Island Arsenal, IL 61299 or usarmy.ria.jmc.mbx.ammo-halloffame@mail.mil. Once submitted, the nomination will remain active for two consecutive years. After two consecutive reviews by the selection board, the nomination will be placed in an inactive status. The nominee may be nominated for three consecutive two year consideration periods. After that the nominee can be considered again if re-nominated after a one year waiting period. If an individual is re-nominated during the waiting period the nomination will be effective when the waiting period is over. For more information

and to download a nomination form, refer to <http://www.jmc.army.mil/Historian/HallOfFame.aspx>. [Source: Ammunition Hall of Fame | Webpage | 17 Dec 2012 ++]



VA Medical Foster Home Update 02: Amarillo’s Thomas E. Creek VA Health Care System is developing a Medical Foster Home program that offers veterans who can’t live independently an alternative to living in a nursing home. Medical Foster Care Coordinator Teresa Maib said the program gives veterans important options. “The point of giving a veteran a choice between living in a community living center, assisted living or an institution is to give them some more freedom than they have in the community living center,” Maib said. The program, which is now in place at 78 VA hospitals and is expanding to 102 more, is expected to lower costs because it can operate at half the cost of a nursing home, according to the VA. Patients still are seen by their doctors and other health care personnel, and they reap the benefits of living outside of a nursing home while still getting the assistance they need, VA officials said.

VA approved homes will be subject to inspections by the VA. VA Home Based Primary Care staff will make routine visits, including some that will be unannounced, to ensure Veterans are receiving quality care. Caregivers and their homes must meet a variety of criteria, including but not limited to: must be at least 21 years of age; must own or rent a home which must be their primary residence; must have experience as a caregiver (formal or informal), and must have a willingness to provide a safe and therapeutic home environment. There will be other criteria reviewed by VA staff. The Veteran and/or the Veteran's family will operate from a signed agreement that will define the services that will be provided. Veterans receiving care pay the medical foster home provider directly. A NBC Nightly News clip on vets living in a VA foster home in Florida can be viewed at <http://video.msnbc.msn.com/nightly-news/49934637#49934637>



“When (patients) are in a home environment, they’re happier, they’re not as depressed and they have a better quality of life, which prolongs their lives,” said Waine Eagleson, Medical Foster Care program assistant coordinator. The VA is seeking caregivers for the program who will be paid based on the patient’s needs and level of care. Potential caregivers in the program must pass a criminal background check and a home inspection. Veterans who qualify for home-based primary care are eligible for the program. “We’re literally looking for angels to take care of heroes, and that is one of our mottoes, because these people have served,” Maib said. “We would not be free and we would not have the standard of living that we have without these people who served us.” Anyone interested in offering their residence as a foster home in the 63 counties serviced by the Thomas E. Creek VA Health Care can call Teresa Maib at (806) 355-9703 ext. 4036. Those in the Los Angeles area can call Josie Thompson at (310)-235-6048 or Kimberly Martin-Butler at (310)-235-7209. [Source: VA Inquiry: 121217-000551 & Amarillo Globe News | Mollie Bryant | 15 Dec 2012 ++]

VA In Vitro Fertilization Update 02: Wounded veterans and their spouses who want to have children could get the government to pay for treatments such as in vitro fertilization under legislation beginning to move through Congress in the waning days of the session. By voice vote, the Senate passed a bill on 13 DEC to update the Veterans Affairs Department’s medical coverage for one of the signature wounds of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: trauma to a soldier’s reproductive organs. Nearly 2,000 service members suffered such wounds between 2003 and 2011. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office has a higher estimate, suggesting up to 3,500 people a year would be eligible to receive fertilization assistance if the bill becomes law. Presently when wounded veterans go to the VA for medical help in starting a family, they are told the VA doesn’t provide that kind of care. A similar bill is pending in the House. Supporters said the Senate’s action increases its chances of becoming law before Congress adjourns.

The chief sponsor, Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., said she has heard from veterans whose marriages have dissolved because of the stress of infertility, in combination with the stresses of readjusting to civilian life after severe injury. “Any service member who sustains this type of serious injury deserves so much more,” she said. With both chambers deadlocked on budget issues, even Murray was surprised the bill didn’t raise a single objection in the Senate. Any objection would have quashed it for the year. As Murray spoke, Tracy Keil of Parker, Colo., watched from the gallery. Her husband, Staff Sgt. Matt Keil, was paralyzed from the chest down after he was shot in the neck in Iraq. The Keils were able to afford the nearly \$32,000 it cost for in vitro fertilization and now have 2-year-old twins, Matthew and Faith. But knowing that many families cannot afford that on their own, the Keils have been lobbying Congress to expand the VA’s coverage. “It made us feel like we were back on track, that our marriage was where we wanted it to be and that our family was where we wanted it to be,” she said of having children. “Even though we had the injury disrupt the timeline of our expectations, it’s everything we’ve always dreamed of and it makes Matt feel whole again.” “We wake up to the joys of our kids every day and I can’t picture my life without them now,” Matt Keil added in a telephone interview.

The legislation is estimated to cost \$568 million over five years, to be covered through savings from scaling down military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee chairman, said he supports the thrust of the Senate-passed bill but wants to take it up next year. “I am anxious to do the same on this issue in the 113th Congress,” Miller said, referring to the next session of Congress that starts on Jan. 3. Matt McAlvanah, a spokesman for Murray, said any notion that the funding for fertility treatments would impact troops in the field is false. Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA) is spearheading efforts in the House to get the legislation passed. [Source: Washington Post | AP | 13 Dec 2012 ++]

Gulf War Syndrome Update 20: Reviving a 20-year debate over illnesses of veterans of the 1991 Persian Gulf war, a new scientific paper presents evidence that nerve agents released by the bombing of Iraqi chemical weapons depots just before the ground war began could have carried downwind and fallen on American troops staged in Saudi Arabia. The paper, published in the journal *Neuroepidemiology*, tries to rebut the longstanding Pentagon position, supported by many scientists, that neurotoxins, particularly sarin gas, could not have carried far enough to sicken American forces. The authors are James J. Tuite and Dr. Robert Haley, who has written several papers asserting links between chemical exposures and gulf war illnesses. They assembled data from meteorological and intelligence reports to support their thesis that American bombs were powerful enough to propel sarin from depots in Muthanna and Falluja high into the atmosphere, where winds whisked it hundreds of miles south to the Saudi border. Once over the American encampments, the toxic plume could have stalled and fallen back to the surface because of weather conditions, the paper says.

Though troops would have been exposed to low levels of the agent, the authors assert that the exposures may have continued for several days, increasing their impact. Chemical weapons detectors sounded alarms in those encampments in the days after the January 1991 bombing raids, but they were viewed as false by many troops, the authors report. A significant number of medical experts have cast doubts on the sarin gas theory over the years, and several said 13 DEC that the new paper did little to change their minds. Dr. John Bailar, an emeritus professor at the University of Chicago who led a group that studied gulf war illnesses in 1996, said there was still no clear evidence that troops might have been exposed to levels of sarin significant enough to have a biological effect. Dr. Bailar said that the stress of war rather than chemical agents might be a more likely cause of the veterans' problems. "Gulf war syndrome is real," he said, using the term for a constellation of symptoms. "And the veterans who have it deserve appropriate medical care. But we should not kid ourselves about its causes or about the most effective means of treatment."



Nearly half of the 700,000 service members who were deployed in 1990 and 1991 for the gulf war have filed disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs, and more than 85 percent of those have been granted benefits, the department has reported. Many of those veterans have reported long-lasting problems, including chronic pain, memory loss, persistent fatigue and diarrhea, some of which had no clear causes. Many veterans insist that their problems are not the result of stress but have a biological basis. Paul Sullivan, a gulf war veteran who has advocated for more research into the illnesses, said the new paper provided "overwhelming scientific evidence" that exposure to chemical agents sickened those troops and that the Department of Veterans Affairs should ensure that all receive health care and benefits. Panels of medical experts have come down on both sides of the issue, with one group in 2000 questioning whether low levels of sarin could cause long-term health problems and another in 2004 concluding that toxic chemicals had caused neurological damage in many troops.

The Pentagon has acknowledged that the postwar demolition of a chemical weapons depot at Kamisiya, in southern Iraq, may have exposed 100,000 troops to nerve gas. But the military has said it was unlikely that nerve gas caused long-term illnesses in troops, a position it reiterated 13 DEC. Many Gulf War veterans have been fighting for years to get Veterans Administration benefits for their medical conditions and have refused a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnosis to qualify. Instead, they insist their problems are physiological. U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, (R-TX), who has helped secure funding for research over the years, praised Haley and Tuite for their work to pin down the causes of Gulf War Illness. "Now that we know the probable cause of {the sickness}, we need to find effective treatments," she said. "I also call on the U.S. Department of Defense to study these findings to protect against chemical weapons fallout in future conflicts." An abstract of the paper is available on the Journal of Neuro-Epidemiology website at

<http://content.karger.com/ProdukteDB/produkte.asp?Aktion=ShowAbstract&ArtikelNr=345124&Ausgabe=257603&ProduktNr=224263>. [Source: New York Times | James Dao 13 Dec 2012 ++]

VA Transplant Program: The VA National Transplant Program started providing solid organ transplants to Veterans in 1961 when Thomas E. Starzl, M.D. performed VA's first kidney transplant in Denver. Since then, the Program has expanded services to provide Veterans with heart transplant services in 1980, bone marrow 1982, liver in 1989, and lung in 1991. Most transplants are performed in specific VA medical centers across the country. VA also utilizes several VA sharing agreements with University affiliates and local emergency contracts for critical heart and liver cases. Locations where transplants are performed include (* indicates VHA approved but not yet operational):

- Bone Marrow Transplant - Seattle WA, Nashville TN, and San Antonio TX
- Heart Transplant - Palo Alto CA, Salt Lake City UT, Madison WI, Nashville TN, and Richmond VA
- Kidney Transplant - Portland OR, Iowa city IA, Nashville TN, Pittsburgh PA, Birmingham AL *, and Miami FL *
- Liver Transplant - Portland OR, Madison WI, Nashville TN, Houston TX, Pittsburgh PA, Miami FL *, and Richmond VA
- Lung Transplant- Seattle WA, Madison WI, and Baltimore MD *

Transplant candidates must undergo detailed physical, laboratory and psychological evaluations to ensure proper selection and therapy. Tests are done to confirm the diagnosis, and to assess the candidate's ability to tolerate surgery. For more information regarding the VA National Transplant Program, contact your VA specialist, primary care provider, or nearest VA medical facility. For a list of VA medical facilities, refer to http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/division_flash.asp?dnum=1. [Source: VA Star | Vol 12 No. 1 | Jan/Feb 2013 issue ++]

Fiber: You have probably read lots of articles about the benefits of eating more fiber. But, why is fiber good for your health? Fiber is the part of plant-foods our body cannot break down. Dietary fiber helps to prevent and treat many disorders and diseases. Dietary fiber can help to prevent or treat obesity because it helps you feel full longer and does not add calories. There are two main categories of fiber: soluble and insoluble.

- **Soluble** fiber dissolves part way in water making a gel. That gel coats the colon and helps with carrying food through your body. Soluble fiber can help lower low-density lipoprotein, or "bad," cholesterol which prevents heart disease. It also helps to regulate blood sugar by slowing digestion so sugar enters your body slowly. This is helpful for diabetics. Foods high in soluble fiber include oat bran, fruits, vegetables, brown rice, nuts, flax seeds, legumes, and barley

- **Insoluble** fiber does not dissolve in water; therefore, it passes through our body unchanged. This aids in keeping your body “regular” by creating bulk and helping to move food through the digestive tract. Insoluble fiber prevents diarrhea and constipation. It also lowers your chances of colon cancer, diverticular disease, hemorrhoids, and colitis. Foods high in insoluble fiber include skins of fruit and vegetables, as well as wheat, bran, whole grain breads, and cereals.

Dietary recommendations are 21-25 grams daily for women and 30-38 grams daily for men. However, the majority of Americans consume only half of the recommended amount. The majority of foods have both kinds of fiber, but rarely in equal amounts. Do not be concerned about which type of fiber you are eating, and focus on the fiber intake. Selecting tasty foods that provide fiber is not difficult.

- Add an apple, banana, orange, or pear to every meal. Leave the skin on fruits and vegetables, because removing the skin decreases the fiber content.
- Eat a variety of beans; for example, kidney, pinto, navy, garbanzo, or black-eyed peas. Replace your “white” foods with “brown” ones.
- Avoid white pasta and breads. These are made with only part of the grain called the endosperm. The bran and germ (the rich vitamin and fiber containing outer lining of the grain) has been removed during processing. Instead choose “brown” products that list 100 percent whole wheat, rye, oats and bran as the first or second ingredient on your food label.
- For breakfast, choose a high-fiber breakfast cereal and choose cereals with “bran” or fiber in the name.
- Some high fiber snacks are fresh and dried fruit, raw vegetables, low-fat popcorn, and wholegrain crackers.
- Add pre-cut fresh or frozen vegetables to soups and sauces. For example, mix chopped frozen broccoli into your prepared spaghetti sauce.
- Add kidney beans to canned soup or a green salad.
- Another good idea for a meal is to make nachos with refried beans, fresh vegetables, whole-wheat tortilla chips, and salsa.

High-fiber foods are good for your health, but adding too much fiber too quickly can cause intestinal gas, abdominal bloating, and cramping. Therefore, you will need to increase your water intake as you increase your fiber intake. Drink at least eight glasses of water a day. Check with your health care provider if you feel you need fiber supplements. Whole foods rather than fiber supplements are generally better. To learn more, contact a VA Registered Dietitian at your local medical center. In Houston that would be MEDVAMC Dietetic Intern P. Kalyn Layton at 713-791-1414 ext. 3976, 4295, or 6166. [Source: VA Star | Vol 12 No. 1 | Jan/Feb 2013 issue ++]

PTSD Update 124: For a decade, troops returning from war with mental and physical trauma have been dosed with cocktails of numbing drugs and corralled into talk-therapy sessions, often with civilian clinicians who have no experience in combat and its aftereffects. But alarmingly high suicide rates among veterans, as well as domestic violence, substance abuse and unemployment, suggested to some military doctors, combat commanders and researchers that conventional treatments aren't always enough. Now, one proven, effective treatment is gaining wide acceptance within hard-core military circles: yoga. Once dismissed as mere acrobatics with incense, yoga has been found to help ease the pain, stiffness, anger, night terrors, memory lapses, anxiety and depression that often afflict wounded warriors. "It's cleansing -- I really feel refreshed," Marine Sgt. Senio Martz said after finishing a recent yoga session.

A stocky 27-year-old, Martz was leading his nine-man squad on a foot patrol through the lush poppy fields and rock outcroppings of the Kajaki district of southern Afghanistan 20 months ago when a roadside bomb knocked him unconscious and killed or wounded the Marines under his command. The blast put an end to his plans for a career in

the Marine Corps. It also left him hyper-vigilant, a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, and carrying the joint burdens of guilt and shame: As a squad leader, it had been his responsibility to bring his nine Marines home safe. "It's a feeling of regret -- failure -- that really affects me now," he said. "I didn't see the signs that could have alerted me to warn them to get away." He stared at the floor and then looked up with a tight smile. "I go on living where their lives have ended. I can't help them now." Yoga gives him relief from the acute anxiety that forces him to listen to and sight-sweep everything around him, constantly checking the doors and windows, always on alert, poised for danger, with no break. It is hard for him to let go. "I gotta push myself to try some of these techniques," he admitted. "But last night after yoga, I had a good sleep. That's a place I haven't been in a long, long time."

Martz's experience is backed up by reams of scientific studies, including research funded by the Pentagon and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Researchers have demonstrated that trauma-sensitive yoga, which focuses on stretching, breathing techniques and meditation, can help patients regain their inner balance, calming that part of the brain that has become hyper-aroused under severe stress. Trauma or prolonged stress can cause a malfunction of the parasympathetic nervous system, researchers say. That's the part of the brain which enables the body to relax, easing pain and even helping unblock digestive systems -- often a problem for wounded troops who get high doses of medication and not enough exercise. In war zones, researchers have found, this parasympathetic nervous system often becomes "frozen" as the body gears up for danger by injecting adrenaline into the bloodstream, causing rapid breathing and pulse and hyper-vigilance -- the "fight or flight" response. That's good and necessary self-preservation in times of peril that helps keep troops alert and alive. Back home, however, that hyper-vigilance is out of place and can cause insomnia, anxiety and outbursts of anger. Returning warriors with PTSD become dependent on drugs or alcohol "because they have no other way to calm themselves down," said Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, a clinician and researcher who has studied PTSD since the 1970s.

Not all yoga helps. Some forms of yoga are used by special forces, for instance, to build muscle power and flexibility. But yoga teachers working with wounded troops have developed trauma-sensitive forms of yoga, including a technique called iRest. This adaptation uses meditation techniques in a soft and secure setting to reactivate the parasympathetic nervous system by drawing the patient's attention and consciousness inward, rather than focusing on stress and the terrors that dwell outside, said yoga teacher Robin Carnes. In 2006 Carnes, a veteran yoga practitioner and teacher, began working with wounded troops at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, now located outside Washington, D.C. There, she led a Pentagon-funded program to develop trauma-sensitive yoga, and pioneered the techniques now called iRest. She later established an organization called Warriors at Ease to train and certify teachers to use the techniques with the military. Drawing from traditional yoga, iRest teaches patients to firmly plant their feet and activate their leg muscles in poses that drain energy and tension from the neck and shoulders, where they naturally gather, causing headaches and neck pain. "The goal here is to move tension away from where it builds up when you are stressed, and focus it on the ground so you feel more balanced and connected," Carnes said.

When she started at Walter Reed, she said, she was working with eight wounded troops with physical and mental health injuries. Some hadn't slept for more than two hours at a time, for years, she said. "They were immediately like, 'I can't do this, it won't work, you have no idea what's going on in my brain.' I'd say, 'Just try it, it's helped others.' And probably because they were desperate -- nothing else had worked, including drugs -- they did try it. And I saw, sometimes within the first day, they started to relax. Snoring! They'd tell me, 'I don't know what happened, but I feel better.'" Practices like iRest and other forms of yoga are so clearly effective that now they are taught and used at dozens of military bases and medical centers -- even at Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base in Norfolk, Va., home of the Navy SEALs. "I knew anecdotally that yoga helped -- and now we have clinical proof of its impact on the brain, and on the heart," said retired Rear Adm. Tom Steffens, a decorated Navy SEAL commander and yoga convert. Within the military services and the Department of Veterans Affairs, he said, "I see it growing all the time."

Steffens, an energetic man with a booming voice, first tried yoga to deal with his torn bicep, an injury that surgery and medication hadn't helped. He quickly became a convert, practicing yoga daily. Visiting with wounded SEALs a decade ago, he noticed that "the type of rehab they were doing was wonderful, but there was no inward focus on themselves -- it was all about power as opposed to stretching and breathing." Before long, Steffens had helped start a foundation, Exalted Warrior, that holds yoga classes for wounded troops and their families at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Virginia, the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa, Fla., and elsewhere. The military's embrace of yoga shouldn't be a surprise. After all, yoga -- a Sanskrit word meaning to "join" or "unite" -- dates back to 3,000 B.C., and its basic techniques were used in the 12th century when Samurai warriors prepared for battle with Zen meditation. Still, some old-timers are shocked to find combat Marines at Camp Lejeune, N.C. and amputees at James A. Haley VA Medical Center practicing their Downward Dog and deep breathing techniques.

A study published earlier this year of 70 active-duty U.S. troops, then-based at Forward Operating Base Warrior, in Kirkuk, Iraq, found that daily yoga helped relieve anxiety, reduced irritability and improved sleep -- even amid daily "gunfire and helicopter sounds." Progressive relaxation, calming breathing and relaxation techniques "reduce physical, emotional, mental and even subconscious tension that characterizes PTSD," according to retired Air Force Maj. Nisha N. Money, a physician who recently served as chief of fitness policy for the Air Force. "Guys with trauma -- their center is out there," said Annie Okerlin, flinging her arm outward. She's a yoga expert who works with wounded warriors, families and staff therapists at the VA hospital in Tampa, Walter Reed and elsewhere. "What we do is gently and sweetly bring them back to their center, here," she said, touching her chest. Much of her work is with amputees. "I always tell the guys, 'Your brain still thinks your leg is there, so we are going to speak to your brain as if your limb IS still there,'" she said. "I tell them to flex the foot -- spread your toes! -- and the brain goes, ahhh, that feels good, I'm stretching -- even though that limb is no longer there. It settles the brain down, because it's doing its job, the blood flow increases, guys can feel their body again, the trauma fades. It's beautiful!" With partially-paralyzed patients, Okerlin often has them lie on their back, put their hands on their rib cage and feel their breathing. One patient told her he was amazed to find he could feel a rush of energy toward his legs even though he still had no sensation in his legs.

Okerlin recently spent several days at a Semper Fi Odyssey retreat, teaching yoga and iRest to Marines with physical wounds, PTSD or traumatic brain injury. She has a warm and engaging style and works to establish a non-threatening environment in her sessions. "People who've been traumatized have lost their ability to feel secure," she said. As the wounded Marines settled onto floor mats, she told them, "You can close your eyes if that feels comfortable, but I will have my eyes open all the time watching," emphasizing that they are safe and can relax. "There's no wrong way to do this," she said. "Are there any head injuries here?" she asked, and a wiseguy in the class called out, "We're ALL head injuries!" to general chuckles. At one point she had them on their backs, knees drawn up and held by their arms, a posture she tells them "massages the descending colon." "This will help ensure you have that morning constitutional," she told them cheerfully as they gently rocked back and forth. Soon she had them focusing all their attention on their breathing, urging them to feel how each inward and outward breath lightly traces their spine. "Now I'm going to turn the lights out," she said softly, "in three, two ... one. If you fall asleep, that's fine. If you're snoring too loudly, I will come by and touch you on your right shoulder." [Source: Huffington Post | David Post | 14 Dec 2012 ++]

PTSD Update 125: The use of trained dogs has been accepted therapy since the 1960s for persons with visual, hearing and mobility impairments. Only recently, however, have service dogs been trained to assist men and women suffering from mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite only limited scientific research in the area, many Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have reported that being paired with one of these specially trained animals has substantially improved their quality of life. The dogs not only act as companions to

veterans dealing with traumatic events, they also are trained to identify symptoms and react when their owners are exhibiting signs of stress. That's why VA's decision to limit benefits to animals assisting with visual, hearing, and mobility impairments, excluding those trained to assist solely with mental health problems, created such an outcry. The new rule went into effect this fall.

"This restriction is based on a lack of evidence to support a finding of mental health service dog efficacy," explained a VA statement published in the Federal Register this fall. "Although we do not disagree with some commenters' subjective accounts that mental health service dogs have improved the quality of their lives, VA has not yet been able to determine that these dogs provide a medical benefit to veterans with mental illness." The American Humane Association called on the VA to reverse the policy ending assistance dog reimbursement for veterans suffering from PTSD. "American Humane Association's focus on animal-assisted therapy dates back to 1945 when we promoted therapy dogs as a means to help World War II veterans recover from the effects of war," said American Humane Association President and CEO Robin Ganzert. "We know from years of experience that the human-animal bond is a source of powerful healing, whether they are children suffering from cancer or military men and women who have suffered the stress of battle. Service dogs, in particular, are an amazing, positive resource for assisting our nation's best and bravest through their physical pain and mental anguish."

Despite those objections, the VA's statement noted that it was possible to provide benefits covering service dogs trained to assist with visual, hearing and mobility impairments because of the department's national experience directly observing positive clinical outcomes. Those observations were bolstered by the existence of nationally established training protocols for the dogs. "We are unaware of similarly vetted and accepted training protocols for mental health service dogs or how assistance from such dogs could be consistently helpful for veterans to mitigate mental health impairments," VA stated.

When the new rule was proposed, opponents argued that VA's exclusion of mental health service dogs contradicts the definition established by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) to include animals trained to help people with psychiatric, intellectual or other mental disabilities. VA noted that the ADA was not applicable in this case. The new rule was even controversial for disabled veterans eligible for the assistance animal benefit, because the VA said it will provide coverage only in the future if the service dog and veteran have successfully completed a training program accredited by Assistance Dogs International or the International Guide Dog Federation. In written comments about the proposed rule, John Ensminger, a New York attorney and author of *Service and Therapy Dogs in America*, expressed his concern for the accreditation requirement and for whether there were enough ADI and IGDF accredited training programs to meet the growing demand for service dogs in the military. "The ADI approach is destined to produce a very small number of dogs," Ensminger said.

The benefits would cover travel expenses associated with obtaining the dog and the cost of an insurance policy for medically necessary treatment and prescription medications. The policy cannot exclude service dogs with pre-existing conditions. Expenses not covered include license tags, nonprescription food, grooming, insurance for personal injury, nonsedated dental cleanings, nail-trimming, boarding, pet-sitting or dog-walking services and over-the-counter medications. The language of the rule makes it clear that VA is willing to reconsider its regulations once research has been completed demonstrating a positive clinical outcome from use of service dogs for mental health issues. The department has been working to bolster that research base but has hit numerous roadblocks in recent months. The one VA study examining service dogs and PTSD located at the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa, FL, was put on hold in September following allegations of poor animal treatment by one of the companies providing dogs for the study. Approved in 2009, the study was slated to provide as many as 200 veterans with service animals trained to assist them with symptoms of PTSD. The study had placed 17 animals prior to being suspended. The study was also temporarily suspended for several months this past spring after a young girl was bitten by one of the service dogs. The study was scheduled to end in 2014.

Sen. Charles Schumer (D- NY) was one of the most vocal advocates for VA beginning its research into PTSD and service dogs several years ago. After VA announced its new regulations in September, he and several other legislators called on VA to throw out the new policy. If VA waits until 2014 before reconsidering, an unknown number of veterans will suffer while the science catches up to the anecdotal evidence, Schumer said, adding in a statement, “Sadly, the horrors of war mean that many veterans come home with PTSD and other mental and emotional ailments. That’s why we owe it to these vets to provide them with every recovery option possible, including service dogs, prescribed by a doctor, to help them heal. Man’s best friend can be a vet’s best friend, and that’s why, as the wars are winding down and with the ranks of those suffering mental and emotional trauma remaining skyhigh, the VA should not deny benefits to veterans that will help them to access service dogs. “With the ranks of those suffering mental and emotional trauma remaining sky-high, the VA should not deny benefits to veterans that will help them to access service dogs.”

VA is not the only avenue for veterans suffering from PTSD to acquire a service dog, however. Several nonprofit agencies have formed in recent years to fund the training of animals and pairing them up with veterans. One of these, the New Mexico-based Paws and Stripes, was founded by Lindsey Stanek and her husband Jim, who served three tours in Iraq with the 82nd Airborne before being medically retired in 2008. Suffering from injuries that included TBI and chronic PTSD, he came into contact with therapy dogs while a patient at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio and said he found great comfort in their presence. After being discharged, the couple tried to find someone to train their rescue dog, Sarge, to assist Jim Stanek with mobility issues, as well as symptoms from PTSD and TBI. When they discovered how expensive the process can be — \$10,000 to \$30,000 to cover the many hours of extensive animal training — they began the process of creating Paws and Stripes. The organization does not simply provide veterans with a pretrained animal. Instead, veterans entering the program choose their own dogs — either one they already own or one obtained from a shelter — and help train the animal themselves. Over a six-month course, trainers work with the veterans on a weekly basis in a group or in private classes. The goal is not only to train the animal but also to forge a bond between animal and owner that will create a more therapeutic relationship.

Since its creation in 2010, Paws and Stripes has had no want of veterans in need. “We have never had to push any sort of advertising for veterans,” explained Lindsey. “Word of mouth and any media we received have flooded our enrollment request account.” As of October, the program, currently located only in New Mexico, has a waiting list of 700. They only accept requests from veterans, and only those who have incurred PTSD or TBI. While they have had VA staffers refer veterans to the program, VA as an entity has never provided Paws and Stripes any assistance. Asked about VA’s recent decision to no longer cover costs of PTSD service dogs and whether she had any doubt about the dogs’ efficacy, Lindsey said, “Service dogs may not be the best fit for every veteran diagnosed with PTSD or TBI. But it is clear from our work so far that service dogs provide a tremendous benefit for veterans that complete our program.” [Source: U.S. Medicine | Stephen Spotswood | 12 Dec 2012 ++]

PTSD Update 126: The Veterans Affairs Department has undercounted the number of Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans seeking care over the past decade for post-traumatic stress disorder by 10,299 cases or roughly 4 percent, the VA acknowledged in a revised June 2012 report. The department posted the revised report 12 DEC on a public health website not linked to its main website. The revised report said the department relied on an improperly constructed patient data file that omitted three months of data in the original report. The new report shows 256,820 Afghanistan and Iraq veterans sought care for PTSD at VA hospitals and veterans centers from 2002 through 2012 based on an underlying, revised report of 834,467 Afghanistan and Iraq veterans who obtained health care from the VA for a variety of conditions over the past 10 years. This puts the number of veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars seeking care for PTSD at roughly 30 percent of the total number who sought health care. The overall, revised

health care report shows 444,451 or 53.3 percent of the total sought mental health care, which includes treatment for PTSD, depression, psychoses, alcohol and drug abuse, over the past 10 years. This ranks mental health disorders third behind musculoskeletal disorders (476,763 or 57 percent) and ill-defined conditions (437,209 or 52 percent).

The 10 DEC PTSD report also appears to contain errors, based on adding the undercounted cases to an archived copy of the original June 2012 report retained by Bergman and Moore, a Bethesda, Md., law firm that specializes in veterans' cases. That report showed 247,243 Afghanistan and Iraq veterans sought care for PTSD over the past decade, and when 10,299 undercounted cases are added to this number, the total number of PTSD cases for the decade is 257,532, not the 256,820 cases VA cited in the Dec. 10 revised report. VA bases its Afghanistan and Iraq veteran health care reports on pay records provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center and operational records provided by the military services, which collect data on individual veterans who have left the service after deployments. VA then correlates this data with inpatient and outpatient electronic files to identify Afghanistan and Iraq veterans who sought care from the VA. [Source: NextGov | Bob Brewin | 26 Dec 2012 ++]

VAMC Jacksonville: Medical care provided by the Veterans Administration is always a hot issue and an area of concern among veterans and legislators. Recently the Florida Times Union asked a few of the veterans in their Email Interactive Group to share their experiences on how they have been treated at the Veteran Affairs' Medical Center (VAMC) in Jacksonville Florida. A sampling of inputs were then posted in the Sound Off section of their newspaper and appear below. You be the judge on how this VAMC treats their vets and if you are getting the same treatment at the facility you use:

GOOD PROGRAMS HERE - I have received good care at the VA clinic in Jacksonville. I was assigned to a team of veterans that were examined periodically by doctors, and vision, hearing and other specialized care needs were examined and treated very well. It takes an hour or so to get treated, but the wait is well worth it. The clinic staff often is interns or recent teaching hospital graduates and up to date on medical improvements. Good program here!

Arden Brey, Orange Park

STUNNINGLY GOOD - As an older (58) combat veteran (Southeast Asia and Afghanistan) the care I have received at the Daytona Beach VA clinic has been outstanding. I was stunned by the outpouring of real attention and care given to me by the folks at the VA. They truly care and have given me excellent care and treatment, both physically and mentally. Everyone from the doctors, nurses, lab techs, clerks — even the cleaning staff — go to the limit and beyond to make me feel that I am their first priority. I will hurt at times for the rest of my life, but stuff happens, but I know the my team at the VA will be there for me.

Mike Evans, Flagler Beach

NOT THE BEST - My experience with the Veterans Administration has not been very good at all. I first ask for help on my hearing loss and an knee injury that I got while on the USS Coral Sea (43) back in 1956. I have been trying to get them to give me some help since 2003. I received tons of correspondence but no help. I found this to be typical behavior for the VA. However, I have other friends that swear that the VA is the greatest thing for them.

Joe Ferranti, Middleburg

GOOD AS PRIVATE CARE - Here in the Jacksonville outpatient clinic, I have been very satisfied. The VA prescription drug program is handled very efficiently and the twice a year physical and lab work is excellent. Care at this facility is as good or better than most private clinics.

Harold Dickinson, Jacksonville

LABORIOUS PROCESS - I have just recently attempted to acquire an ID card. It has been a difficult laborious process and I still do not have my card some two months on. I have no experience regarding care but the lower level, front end people are just terrible. Unmotivated, sullen and seemingly not very knowledgeable. I would probably be ballistic if I actually needed help.

Bob Harris, Neptune Beach

NO COMPLAINTS - I'm so glad that you are addressing this. I am a 25-year Navy veteran and I have been receiving all of my needed health care services through the VA for the past several years. I am happy to report that the medical care I have received through the VA has been superb in all respects. I receive a thorough physical exam from my primary care doctor annually. Prior to that visit, I visit the VA lab and the complete results are reviewed with me by my doctor. He thoroughly examines me and any problems are either addressed by him or I am referred to a specialist in any one of the three VA treatment facilities in this area. The care is the most thorough I have ever received. My opinion is shared by almost everyone I ask in the waiting rooms of the VA facilities.

Keith Schnier, Fleming Island

Red Tape - It's just the norm to have problems with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Like his compatriots, he says, he's had his share. Quality of health care isn't the issue, he says. The care he's received from VA medical professionals has been stellar. ... The challenges of dealing with the VA are in the bureaucracy. The result has meant delays - big delays - in critical treatment and financial assistance."

C.B. 'Cork' Motsett of Jacksonville

[Source: Florida Times Union article 12 Dec 2012 ++]

VA for Vets Update 02: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veteran Employment Services Office (VESO) celebrated a new partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that will extend career readiness services to Veteran job seekers nationwide. VA and USDA came together to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the Feds for Vets program on 6 DEC. This partnership connects talented Veterans to federal career opportunities. Feds for Vets is a government-wide solution that provides comprehensive tools to help Veterans successfully transition to civilian careers. Under the MOU, USDA will leverage the Feds for Vets online Career Center to recruit and hire Veterans to its workforce. VESO launched its flagship initiative, VA for Vets, offering comprehensive online career tools and coaching services in 2011. This year, VESO is expanding VA for Vets by joining federal agencies, like USDA and the Department of Defense, in Feds for Vets partnerships that will ensure more Veterans have the resources they need to start careers in public service. Since its inception, VESO has set the standard for Veteran hiring and exceeded the Office of Personnel Management's Veteran hiring goals. VESO has broadened the awareness and usage of veterans preference and special hiring authorities, enabling VA to hire Veterans in record time. VESO also pioneered large-scale career hiring fairs that connected more than 12,000

Veterans with resume writing, interview training and coaching services. [Source: http://vaforvets.va.gov/Pages/NEWS_USDA.aspx 14 Dec 2012 ++]

TRDP Update 12: In late November a new TRICARE Retiree Dental program (TRDP) was awarded to the current contract holder Delta Dental of California. If no protests were filed by Dec. 17 the new contract would have gone into effect on Jan. 1, 2014. However, a protest has been filed against the award (actually 2 protests but 1 was then withdrawn) so we don't know when the new contract will start. When a protest is filed everything freezes. The new contract has some good changes:

- Annual maximum increased to \$1,300 from \$1,200
- Lifetime orthodontic maximum increased to \$1,750 from \$1,500
- Annual Accident coverage maximum increased to \$1,200 from \$1,000
- Option to substitute a periodontal maintenance (specialized cleaning for one of the two yearly dental cleanings)
- Most enrollees will see a lower monthly premium

[Source: NAUS Weekly Update 14 Dec 2012 ++]

World War I Memorial Update 05: On 12 DEC the House of Representatives passed the Frank Buckles World War I Memorial Act. The bill, which was introduced by Congressman Ted Poe (R-TX), Congressman Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO) and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), would designate the Liberty Memorial at the National World War I Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, as the National World War I Museum and Memorial; and would authorize the World War I Memorial Foundation to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia to serve as the National World War I Memorial. The Memorial could not exceed 0.5 acres in size. The bill would also authorize the Centennial Commission to accept, use, and dispose of gifts for the purpose of covering the costs incurred by the Centennial Commission to carry out its duties under this Act. The total cost of the World War I Memorial could not exceed \$10 million. Under the bill, no federal funds may be obligated to carry out this Act. It would also establish the World War I Centennial Commission to:

- Plan, develop, and execute programs, projects, and activities to commemorate the centennial of WWI.
- Encourage private organizations and state and local governments to organize and participate in such activities;
- Facilitate and coordinate such activities throughout the United States;
- Serve as a clearinghouse for the collection and dissemination of information about centennial events and plans; and
- Develop recommendations for Congress and the President for commemorating the centennial of WWI

The bill was named after Frank Buckles, the last remaining veteran of WWI, who died in February of 2011 at the age of 110. In a statement issued when he introduced the bill, Congressman Poe said, "The centennial of World War I is quickly approaching. Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and France already have plans in place to commemorate the Great War, but what is America going to do to honor the heroes of World War I? More soldiers died during World War I than in Korea, Vietnam, both Iraq Wars and Afghanistan combined. Those warriors should not be forgotten in our nation's capitol. Corporal Frank Buckles was the last living World War I veteran. It was his wish to see a National World War I Memorial in Washington, D.C. I hope that we do the honorable thing and salute Corporal Buckles and the rest of the Doughboys who fought over there." The bill now needs action by the Senate before it become law but with time running out and many major issues still needing Senate action, it is not clear

whether the Senate will have time to deal with this non-controversial legislation before it adjourns by the end of the year. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted 14 Dec 2012 ++]

NDAA 2013 Update 14: Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta sent a letter to House and Senate Armed Service Committee leaders warning he would recommend a Presidential veto if they don't remove certain provisions from the defense authorization bill that the administration finds objectionable. Among the four-page list of complaints were a couple of personnel issues. Panetta urged removal of House-passed limits on annual Army and Marine Corps force cuts. He also urged the committee leaders to reverse their refusal to let DoD impose large TRICARE fee hikes on military beneficiaries. Will the President really veto the defense bill over those issues? No. Similar provisions have been included in many previous defense bills. The specific wording of such letters gives a better idea of what the big objections are. The four-page list of complaints includes only a few issues to which the Pentagon "strongly objects." These typically refer to major operational issues, limits on White House powers to conduct international affairs, etc. On TRICARE fees, Panetta's letter expresses "hope the conferees will reconsider." In any event, Armed Services Committee leaders have largely dismissed the veto threat, noting "They say that every year." The last defense bill to be vetoed was President Bush's pocket veto of the FY2008 Defense Authorization Act which was quickly passed after a minor provision was deleted. The last one before that was the FY1996 Defense Authorization Act, vetoed by President Clinton. [Source: MOAA Leg Up 14 Dec 2012 ++]

NDAA 2013 Update 15: The conference report for the annual defense authorization bill totals more than 1,600 pages, but it still doesn't include everything that defense advocates were hoping for. Here's a look at a few of the key items left on the negotiation-room floor:

- **A new Stolen Valor Act:** Veterans groups were hoping for new legislation making it illegal to falsely claim military honors, to replace the law struck down by the Supreme Court earlier this year. But concerns over the penalties for such lies and the constitutionality of new proposals scuttled the idea.
- **More base closures:** The White House and Pentagon officials had advocated another BRAC round as a long-term cost savings measure, but lawmakers soundly rejected the idea as too costly in the short term and too traumatic for local communities dependent on their military neighbors.
- **Protection from indefinite detention:** Senators inserted language in their draft designed to limit the military's use of indefinite detention of terrorism suspects who are U.S. citizens, in reaction to the open-ended imprisonment of some foreign fighters. But the language was largely tossed out in the final version.
- **The full request for military construction:** The proposed budget bill includes \$633.3 billion in defense funding and more than \$10 billion for base construction and military family housing projects. But lawmakers cut about \$660 million from the president's total request for those accounts, which could trim some projects.
- **Purple Hearts for Fort Hood victims:** House Republicans have pushed for years to recognize the victims of the 2009 shooting at Fort Hood, Texas, in the same way as casualties of the battlefield in Afghanistan, because of the nature of the attack. But that idea was watered down to a report on the issue in the Senate version, and left out of the final draft.

[Source: Stars and Stripes | Leo Shane | 19 Dec 2012 ++]

NDA 2013 Update 16: On 20 DEC the U.S. House of Representatives passed the conference version of the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act (NDA) by a vote of 315 to 107 and sent it on to the Senate for its consideration. The Senate then approved it by a vote of 81 to 14 on 21 DEC. The NDA authorizes \$633.3 billion in defense spending. It includes numerous provisions that the Military coalition worked hard for and also fails to include several items they desperately wanted. But on the whole it is a success for the presently serving and retired military members and their families. The final version of the Conference Report is over 1600 pages. Among the most important provisions for you and your families are:

- **TRICARE Retail Pharmacy Co-Pays.** The House refused to agree to the Administration's and Senate provisions that would have allowed DoD to triple the drug co-pays in the next 5 years. Instead of the proposed raising of the present \$12 Brand name retail co-pay up to \$26 this year and up to \$36 the NDA limits this year's retail Brand name co-pay to \$17 in FY2013 and any future increases can be NO MORE than the yearly COLA. The Generic Retail prescriptions will remain the present \$5 co-pay for this year instead of the proposed yearly \$1 increases.
- **TRICARE 3rd tier/Non-Formulary retail availability and co-pays.** The Administration wanted to end all availability of 3rd tier/non-formulary drugs from retail pharmacies. Presently they are available with \$25 co-pay. The final version keeps them available in the network pharmacies but at a \$44 co-pay.
- **TRICARE home delivery/mail order Co-Pays.** In the final version the mail order generic drugs still have NO CO-PAY. The conferees refused the Administration's plan to raise the generic co-pay to \$9 in 2017. The brand name drug co-pay goes from \$9 to \$13 in FY2013 and then only increases at the COLA rate rather than the Administration's proposal to go from \$9 to \$26 in FY2013 and then to \$34. And while the mail order would still provide third/ non-formulary drugs the present co-pay will go from the present \$25 to \$44 and then only COLA increases rather than the proposed increase to \$51 this year and then up to \$66
- **TFL mail order /base pharmacy refills.** As we have written about several times to replace the money the Administration said it would get from their proposed drug co-pay increases the conference report requires that there be a test to require TFL maintenance drug refills be filled through the mail order program for 1 year. (After the year anyone can go back to retail if they prefer.)
- **Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission.** The Administration's proposal (which was in the Senate version of the NDA included a BRAC like commission and reconfiguration of the full military retired system. The Administration would have gotten to choose all the Commission members (which could not include anyone who had worked for a VSO or MSO for the last year.) They would submit a report that Congress would have to vote up or down; yea or no; without allowing them to add any amendments or changes ('a la BRAC). The final provision passed by the House and accepted by the Senate permits the President to appoint one commissioner, with two each to be appointed by the Republican and Democratic leaders of the House and Senate, in consultation with Armed Services Committee leaders. And any recommendations developed by the Commission would be treated like any other proposed law. This was a real danger and stopping it is a real success.

- **Concurrent Receipt.** There was a small but important improvement in the current concurrent receipt law. Presently the complicated statute often underpaid combat injured military retirees under the Combat Related Special Compensation. The correction will go into effect on 1 January.
- **Space-Available Travel.** The new law authorizes (but does not require) the Secretary of Defense to expand eligibility to "gray area" Guard/Reserve retirees under age 60 and to other categories of individuals the Secretary deems appropriate. The Secretary has authority to establish relative travel priorities among eligible groups.
- **Autism Treatment.** The new law establishes a one-year pilot program making active duty and retired family members diagnosed with autism eligible for applied behavioral analysis (ABA) therapy under TRICARE. MOAA is pleased the provision includes all uniformed services (the original House and Senate bills excluded some or all Coast Guard, NOAA, and USPHS beneficiaries). But we're disappointed it excludes family members with other diagnoses for which ABA therapy is helpful. The one-year limit means another battle to continue eligibility beyond FY2013.
- **Survivor Benefit Plan.** Repeals requirement for payment of SBP premiums when a retired service member employed as a federal civilian waives military retired pay to provide a survivor annuity under the Federal Retirement System. No military SBP annuity will be paid in that case. Unfortunately, once again the push to end the SBP/DIC offset and end the offset of military retired pay and VA disability pay for those retirees who still are not getting both payments failed. The fight begins all over again in 2013.
- **Mental Health Counselors.** Directs the VA and DoD to recruit more mental health professionals to provide service to veterans and servicemembers.

The National Defense Authorization act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2013 is the key mechanism to provide necessary authorities and funding for America's military. This is the fifty-first consecutive NDAA. Refer to the following for more information on the final 1600 page Conference Report that was passed by both chambers of congress:

- 1) <http://capwiz.com/trea/utr/1/JJHOSKTZOZ/GIOASKTZSU/9078543186> Armed Forces Committee's summary of the bill's highlights.
- 2) <http://1.usa.gov/V5T42w> full Conference Report.
- 3) <http://1.usa.gov/TwVTHR> Summary from SASC Chairman Carl Levin's office.
- 4) <http://1.usa.gov/UJ3fGW> Summary from HASC Chairman Buck McKeon.

The bill now goes to the president to signed into law. He had previously said he would veto the bill if given to him in its present form. But both the House and Senate passed the bill with a veto-proof majority, so an Obama veto would likely be easily overridden. A controversial part of the bill relates to detainee policy. The House-passed bill affirmed that U.S. citizens have habeas corpus rights on U.S. soil, while the Senate bill said U.S. citizens could not be held under military detention indefinitely. The compromise language says nothing in last year's NDAA or the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) would prevent the constitutional rights of those captured on U.S. soil from being infringed upon. The bill also includes controversial language providing reproductive healthcare to female service members, including abortion in the cases of rape and incest. Source: TREA News for the enlisted 21 Dec 2012 ++]

Tricare Pharmacy Copay Update 09: With Congress finally agreeing on an NDAA, the TRICARE Management Activity wasted little time in announcing the rate increases agreed upon. These are all contingent on the NDAA being signed by the President. The new pharmacy fee plan includes a requirement that beneficiaries 65 and older have all maintenance drugs for chronic conditions refilled, for at least one year, through TRICARE mail order or at base pharmacies, rather than through retail outlets where the cost to TRICARE is a third higher. After a one year period beneficiaries could opt out of the program. TMA will need to publish a draft regulation, solicit public comment and launch an education effort for elderly beneficiaries before it begins to enforce home delivery for seniors. That most likely could delay starting that portion of the pharmacy plan until April or later.

While the mandatory home delivery will take a bit longer to implement, TMA expects that once beneficiaries see how convenient the service is they will stay with it and not switch, which will continue to save many dollars in the future. Starting 1 FEB the costs at TRICARE retail outlets will rise to \$17 for brand name drugs from the current \$12 co-pay for brand name drugs. The \$25 co-pay for non-formulary drugs will jump to \$44. The co-pay for generic drugs at retail will stay at \$5. Drugs will stay free at military pharmacies. For mail order, the current \$9 co-pay for brand names on formulary will increase to \$13. The \$25 co-pay for brand names non-formulary will jump to \$43. Generic drugs will continue to be dispensed by mail at no cost. The bill also contains a provision that starting in 2014 will limit any increases in drug copays to no more than the same percentage in any Cost of Living Adjustment. This is a very big win as DoD had wanted to base increases on Medical Inflation which is normally much higher than the normal COLA. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 28 Dec 2012 ++]

Mobilized Reserve 18 DEC 2012: The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 18 OCT 2012. The net collective result is 910 fewer reservists mobilized than last reported in the 15 DEC 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 40,732; Navy Reserve 5,098; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve 8,020; Marine Corps Reserve 2,368; and the Coast Guard Reserve 647. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 56,865 including both units and individual augmentees. Since 911 there have been 807,531 reservists deactivated. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found online at <http://www.defense.gov/news/MobilizationWeeklyReport121812.pdf>. [Source: DoD News Release No. 994-12 dtd 19 Dec 2012 ++]

Vet License Plates MASSACHUSETTS: If you are serving, or have served, during peacetime or war, and are a resident of Massachusetts you qualify for a Massachusetts veteran specialty license plates for your vehicle. In the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Vet License Plates MA**" can be viewed what is offered along with the special requirements to obtain each. In addition, Veteran Service Decals for passenger cars and motorcycles plus Veteran War Time Decals for passenger cars only will be issued. War time Decals read:

- Grenada Rescue Mission
- Iraqi Freedom Campaign Ribbon
- Korea
- Lebanese Peace Keeping Force
- Operation Enduring Freedom

- Panamanian Intervention Force
- Persian gulf
- Vietnam
- WDDC
- World War II

Different plate types require different application forms and procedures to obtain. All plates require some type of documentation to verify eligibility. Plates and decals are no charge except for Veteran and National Guard plates which initially cost \$50 for registration and \$40 for the specialty plate. Proceeds from the Veteran special plate fee go to the Chelsea and Holyoke Soldier's Homes. A list of RMV (Registry of Motor Vehicles) offices with hours of operation and location info can be found at <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/rmv/main/BranchInfo/Map.aspx>. [Source: <http://www.mass.gov/rmv/veteran/index.htm> Dec 2012 ++]

OBIT ~ Ralph Sherman Parr Jr: Ralph Sherman Parr Jr., one of the most decorated military pilots in U.S. history, has died, joining the ranks of other legendary aviators who shaped today's Air Force. Parr, a double ace in the Korean War, had undergone treatment for cancer prior to his passing at an assisted living facility in New Braunfels, where he died 7 DEC at 88. Parr was among the last survivors of an era of gutsy, instinctive flying before remotely piloted aircraft and technology changed the way wars are fought in the air. Bob Laymon, a friend and military historian, said Parr “inspired and motivated combat aviators and future Air Force leaders,” sharing his knowledge of flight theory and thermodynamics at speaking engagements and Friday night gatherings at the Randolph AFB officers' club. “Nothing brought more joy to Col. Parr than to sit down next to a young captain in a Nomex flight suite and discuss energy-maneuverability during a dogfight,” Laymon said.



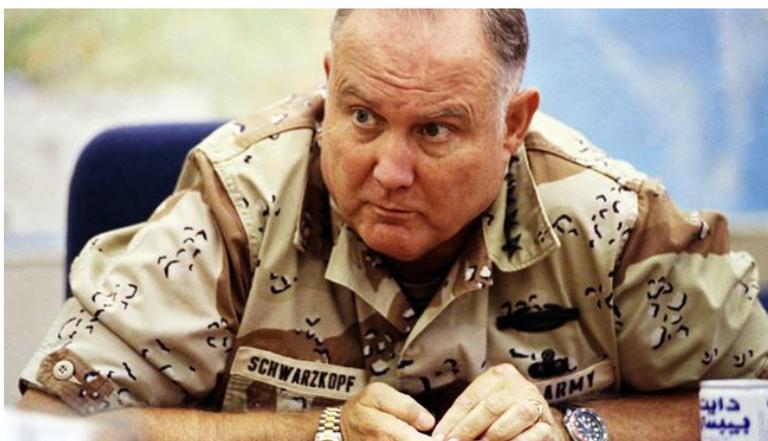
Ralph Sherman Parr Jr

Ken Murray, a retired lieutenant colonel who spent months interviewing Parr for a biography set for release in 2013, called him an “amazing man” who often talked about camaraderie, covering your wingman and the spirit of flight. “A steely-eyed true American patriot, fighter pilot and leader, he was the epitome of the greatest aviators and military officers this world will ever know,” Murray said. In one of his last interviews with the San Antonio Express-News, Parr recalled his first flight as a boy; the downing of a Russian transport on the last day of the Korean War; and lessons he taught young pilots in Vietnam, even while being scolded by commanders for flying too much. “I enjoyed flying whatever airplane I was sitting in,” he told the Express-News in October. Parr, a retired colonel and one of only a few fighter aces still living in the San Antonio area, flew more than 640 combat missions in three wars, and received more than 60 citations. He's the only person awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the medal that replaced it in 1960: the Air Force Cross.

Parr was born July 1, 1924, in Portsmouth, Va. He enlisted in 1942 and flew in the Pacific during World War II. His actions in Korea, where he was often outnumbered by enemy aircraft, made him a legend. Parr and longtime friend and flying companion Frederick "Boots" Blesse trained together at Nellis AFB, Nev., in quick, agile F-86 Sabres. Both of them became double aces, each shooting down 10 enemy aircraft in the war. Parr was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross after he confronted 10 MiGs, destroying two before escorting a distressed friendly aircraft back to his base. While being treated for cancer, Parr kept a framed copy of a painting of Blesse shooting down a MiG in his room. Blesse, 91, died Oct. 31 near his home in Florida. Parr said he was proud that he "stayed in fighters and tried to teach" young pilots in Vietnam. He received the Air Force Cross for protecting a supply route to Khe Sanh, destroying mortar and heavy-caliber weapons positions in spite of battle damage to his F-4C Phantom II.

Parr retired in 1976 and moved to New Braunfels. In 2008, the Randolph officers' club, now called the Parr O'Club, was renamed in his honor. The local "River Rat" chapter of the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association was named the Ralph Parr Pack in his honor. "He came to every monthly River Rat party until he became too ill to travel," said Gary Baber, a friend and former Vietnam pilot. Murray said he recorded 100 hours of conversations with Parr that including "awe-inspiring stories of his journey." "Col. Parr, my hero, won't be missed by many. He will be missed by all," Murray said. Parr is survived by his wife Margaret and three step children. He is buried at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery. [Source: Express News | Scott Huddleston | 8 Dec 2012 ++]

OBIT ~ H. Norman Schwarzkopf: The seemingly no-nonsense Desert Storm commander's reputed temper with aides and subordinates supposedly earned him that rough-and-ready moniker. But others around the general, who died 27 DEC in Tampa, Fla., at age 78 from complications from pneumonia, knew him as a friendly, talkative and even jovial figure who preferred the somewhat milder sobriquet given by his troops: "The Bear." That one perhaps suited him better later in his life, when he supported various national causes and children's charities while eschewing the spotlight and resisting efforts to draft him to run for political office. He lived out a quiet retirement in Tampa, where he'd served his last military assignment and where an elementary school bearing his name is testament to his standing in the community. Schwarzkopf capped an illustrious military career by commanding the U.S.-led international coalition that drove Saddam Hussein's forces out of Kuwait in 1991 -- but he'd managed to keep a low profile in the public debate over the second Gulf War against Iraq, saying at one point that he doubted victory would be as easy as the White House and the Pentagon predicted.



Norman Schwarzkopf: 1934 - 2012

Schwarzkopf was named commander in chief of U.S. Central Command at Tampa's MacDill Air Force Base in 1988, overseeing the headquarters for U.S. military and security concerns in nearly two dozen countries stretching across the Middle East to Afghanistan and the rest of central Asia, plus Pakistan. When Saddam invaded Kuwait two years later to punish it for allegedly stealing Iraqi oil reserves, Schwarzkopf commanded Operation Desert Storm, the coalition of some 30 countries organized by President George H.W. Bush that succeeded in driving the Iraqis out. At the peak of his postwar national celebrity, Schwarzkopf -- a self-proclaimed political independent -- rejected suggestions that he run for office, and remained far more private than other generals, although he did serve briefly as a military commentator for NBC. While focused primarily on charitable enterprises in his later years, he campaigned for President George W. Bush in 2000, but was ambivalent about the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In early 2003 he told *The Washington Post* that the outcome was an unknown: "What is postwar Iraq going to look like, with the Kurds and the Sunnis and the Shiites? That's a huge question, to my mind. It really should be part of the overall campaign plan."

Initially Schwarzkopf had endorsed the invasion, saying he was convinced that Secretary of State Colin Powell had given the United Nations powerful evidence of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. After that proved false, he said decisions to go to war should depend on what U.N. weapons inspectors found. He seldom spoke up during the conflict, but in late 2004 he sharply criticized Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and the Pentagon for mistakes that included erroneous judgments about Iraq and inadequate training for Army reservists sent there. "In the final analysis I think we are behind schedule. ... I don't think we counted on it turning into jihad (holy war)," he said in an NBC interview.

Schwarzkopf was born Aug. 24, 1934, in Trenton, N.J., where his father, Col. H. Norman Schwarzkopf Jr., founder and commander of the New Jersey State Police, was then leading the investigation of the Lindbergh kidnap case. That investigation ended with the arrest and 1936 execution of German-born carpenter Richard Hauptmann for murdering famed aviator Charles Lindbergh's infant son. The elder Schwarzkopf was named Herbert, but when the son was asked what his "H" stood for, he would reply, "H." As a teenager Norman accompanied his father to Iran, where the elder Schwarzkopf trained the Iran's national police force and was an adviser to Reza Pahlavi, the young Shah of Iran. Young Norman studied there and in Switzerland, Germany and Italy, then followed in his father's footsteps to West Point, graduating in 1956 with an engineering degree. After stints in the U.S. and abroad, he earned a master's degree in engineering at the University of Southern California and later taught missile engineering at West Point.

In 1966 he volunteered for Vietnam and served two tours, first as a U.S. adviser to South Vietnamese paratroops and later as a battalion commander in the U.S. Army's Americal Division. He earned three Silver Stars for valor -- including one for saving troops from a minefield -- plus a Bronze Star, a Purple Heart and three Distinguished Service Medals. While many career officers left military service embittered by Vietnam, Schwarzkopf was among those who opted to stay and help rebuild the tattered Army into a potent, modernized all-volunteer force. After Saddam invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Schwarzkopf played a key diplomatic role by helping persuade Saudi Arabia's King Fahd to allow U.S. and other foreign troops to deploy on Saudi territory as a staging area for the war to come. On Jan. 17, 1991, a five-month buildup called Desert Shield became Operation Desert Storm as allied aircraft attacked Iraqi bases and Baghdad government facilities. The six-week aerial campaign climaxed with a massive ground offensive on Feb. 24-28, routing the Iraqis from Kuwait in 100 hours before U.S. officials called a halt.

Schwarzkopf said afterward he agreed with Bush's decision to stop the war rather than drive to Baghdad to capture Saddam, as his mission had been only to oust the Iraqis from Kuwait. But in a desert tent meeting with vanquished Iraqi generals, he allowed a key concession on Iraq's use of helicopters, which later backfired by enabling Saddam to crack down more easily on rebellious Shiites and Kurds. While he later avoided the public second-guessing by academics and think tank experts over the ambiguous outcome of the first Gulf War and its

impact on the second Gulf War, he told The Washington Post in 2003, "You can't help but ... with 20/20 hindsight, go back and say, 'Look, had we done something different, we probably wouldn't be facing what we are facing today.'"

After retiring from the Army in 1992, Schwarzkopf wrote a best-selling autobiography, "It Doesn't Take A Hero." Of his Gulf War role, he said: "I like to say I'm not a hero. I was lucky enough to lead a very successful war." He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II and honored with decorations from France, Britain, Belgium, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain. Schwarzkopf was a national spokesman for prostate cancer awareness and for Recovery of the Grizzly Bear, served on the Nature Conservancy board of governors and was active in various charities for chronically ill children. "I may have made my reputation as a general in the Army and I'm very proud of that," he once told The Associated Press. "But I've always felt that I was more than one-dimensional. I'd like to think I'm a caring human being. ... It's nice to feel that you have a purpose." Schwarzkopf and his wife, Brenda, had three children: Cynthia, Jessica and Christian. [Source: FocNews.com | Associated Press | 27 Dec 2012 ++]

VA Fraud Waste & Abuse Update 63:

- On 12 DEC, **Charles C. Kaczmarczyk**, 59, of Knoxville, Tenn., was sentenced by the Honorable Thomas W. Phillips, U.S. District Judge, to serve 30 months in federal prison for fraudulently obtaining disability payments from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Social Security Administration. In addition to the 30-month prison sentence, Kaczmarczyk was ordered to pay \$457,986 in restitution to the VA and Social Security Administration. As part of the scheme, Kaczmarczyk obtained disability payments based on a false claim of combat-related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He supported his false claim of combat-related PTSD by creating counterfeit U.S. Air Force records showing that he had received various medals for his service, including two Purple Hearts and two Silver Stars. During the course of his criminal conduct, Kaczmarczyk repeatedly lied to the VA and Social Security Administration regarding his participation in combat missions as a member of the U.S. Air Force's Special Operations Group. U.S. Attorney William C. Killian said, "Those who would dishonor our veterans by perpetrating fraud for personal gain will not be tolerated in the Eastern District of Tennessee. We will work with the Department of Veterans Affairs and others to quickly and decisively prosecute appropriate cases to the fullest extent of the law." [Source: US Attorney's Office Press Release 12 Dec 2012 ++]
- The elderly Houston couple responsible for the largest scam ever uncovered in a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' program meant to protect vulnerable veterans will be going to federal prison for 46 months after conspiring to carry out a \$2.3 million rip-off of 49 disabled military men. Houston **lawyer Joe B. Phillips**, 73, stood in federal court 19 DEC to receive an identical punishment to that of his legal assistant and wife of four decades, Dorothy, who has claimed a casino gambling addiction first compelled her to siphon funds from veterans' bank accounts years before a VA audit finally detected the losses. "I did not personally do it myself, but I accept responsibility because it happened in my office. It happened on my watch," Phillips told the court. He asked to serve out his sentence in a cell near his 72-year-old spouse. prosecutors unsuccessfully urged U.S. District Judge Lee H. Rosenthal to give a longer sentence to Joe Phillips, who was legally responsible for safeguarding disabled veterans' funds as a VA-approved fiduciary and as a guardian appointed by Texas probate judges. They pointed out that on Phillips' watch, 46 different fraudulent bank accounts were concocted to conceal long-term and ongoing thefts from veterans' accounts.



Attorney Joe Phillips

On Wednesday, Phillips unexpectedly turned over veterans' bank statements for an estimated \$45,000 in apparently previously unreported assets to government investigators. Phillips' attorney, Robert Jones, said Phillips continued to receive those statements nearly five years after being removed as a VA fiduciary. The VA first uncovered irregularities in 2007 after auditing Phillips' accounts for first time in 25 years. The findings of that audit were "shocking to me," Phillips said, though prosecutors claimed in court records that about \$1 million in funds were transferred to an account Phillips shared with his wife. A Houston Chronicle/Hearst investigation this year of similar scams nationwide showed that many large-scale thefts in the VA guardianship program went undetected for years. Some were carried out by VA-approved "fiduciaries" with financial, personal or criminal problems, including gambling addictions, bankruptcies and felony convictions. Federal legislation to reform the VA's fiduciary system and tighten oversight passed the U.S. House this year but has not cleared the Senate.

In the past decade, twice as many Texans have been prosecuted for stealing from their disabled veteran charges as in any other state, a related review of court and VA Inspector General records by the Chronicle shows. More than 20 veterans' family members and trusted members of the community have been criminally convicted for taking the disabled vets' assets - including a former police officer, a federal employee, an optometrist and now Phillips - a longtime Houston attorney and former VA employee. Phillips, who first became a fiduciary in the early 1980s, told the court the government assigned him 54 veterans simultaneously - about twice as many cases as he could manage. Phillips said he got so "caught up in seeing these veterans ... had clothing and places to stay" that he failed to properly supervise "people in my office" who were handling funds.

Some of the 49 veterans who lost money under Phillips complained to the Chronicle that the VA never provided a full accounting of losses, though others said they're satisfied with compensation provided by the VA or by insurance companies that backed Phillips' work in probate courts. Phillips and his attorney both argued that the VA's appalling lack of oversight contributed to the veterans' losses. "We have to learn something from this," Jones said. "Is there a mechanism from keeping this from happening?" VA and court officials annually reviewed the Phillipses' financial reports but failed to spot irregularities that began at least a decade ago, according to documents reviewed by the Chronicle.

Phillips faced a maximum eight-year sentence after pleading guilty in September to charges of conspiracy and income tax fraud, admitting he and his wife conspired to take \$2.3 million and concealed thefts with fake reports, imaginary bank accounts and a bogus income tax return. Instead, Rosenthal gave Phillips a slightly shorter sentence, praising him for his early public service and his accomplishments as a man who lost his mother at age 6 and went on to earn a law degree, though his career ended in disgrace after four decades. Rosenthal said evidence suggested that Dorothy Phillips, though only a legal assistant, had unusual oversight and control over accounts. Rosenthal ordered the Phillipses, who previously declared

bankruptcy, to repay \$2.35 million to the VA, which claims to have compensated most victims, and an additional \$282,112 to the IRS. The judge is allowing the couple to spend Christmas together and wrap up Phillips' legal practice before reporting to prison. "This is a very sad case," Rosenthal said. "Sad because of the lives so changed ... the victims of course were in a sad place to start with and that's why they needed Mr. Phillips. He did not serve them." [Source: Houston Chronicle | Lise Olsen | 19 Dec 2012 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 95: The US Chamber of Commerce, partnered with various other organizations, continues to sponsor veteran and spouse job fairs. If you want more information click on the website below for the city you want to know more about:

- 17 January - Tampa Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/tampa-veteran-job-fair-january-17-2013#registration>.
- 24 January Nashville Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/nashville-veteran-job-fair-january-24-2013#registration>.
- 31 January Oklahoma City Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/oklahoma-city-veteran-job-fair-january-31-2013#registration>
- 31 January Richmond Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/richmond-veteran-job-fair-january-31-2013#registration>.
- 07 February Orlando Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/orlando-veteran-job-fair-february-7-2013#registration>.
- 14 February San Antonio Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/san-antonio-veteran-job-fair-february-14-2013#registration>.
- 21 February New Orleans Veteran Opportunity Expo <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/new-orleans-veteran-opportunity-expo-february-21-2013#registration>.
- 21 February Washington, D.C. Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/washington-d-c-veteran-job-fair-february-21-2013#registration>.
- 21 February New York Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/new-york-veteran-job-fair-february-21-2013#registration>.
- 07 March Dallas Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/dallas-veteran-job-fair-march-7-2013#registration>.
- 14 March Philadelphia Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/philadelphia-veteran-job-fair-march-14-2013#registration>.
- 14 March Louisville Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/louisville-veteran-job-fair-march-14-2013#registration>.
- 21 March Raleigh Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/raleigh-veteran-job-fair-march-21-2013#registration>.
- 28 March Phoenix Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/phoenix-veteran-job-fair-march-28-2013#registration>.
- 28 March San Diego Veteran Job Fair <https://events.recruitmilitary.com/events/san-diego-veteran-job-fair-march-28-2013#registration>

[Source: NAUS Weekly Update 14 Dec 2012 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 96: A security clearance is often essential to landing a technology job with a government contractor or federal agency handling sensitive information. If you want to work at an organization

serving the national interest, you may find your path slowed considerably, if not blocked entirely, by the lack of a security clearance. To obtain a clearance, you need an employer's backing and patience. Delays are common, given the government's backlog of clearance applications. Following is a Q&A guide provided by Allan Hoffman of <http://www.monster.com> that covers most of what job seekers need to know about security clearances:

What is a security clearance? A security clearance is a government authorization for you to view classified information as your job requires. The information can be as varied as reports about border security or details on how spy satellites work. A clearance is not a blanket authorization to view all classified information; it simply allows you to view the information you need to know to do your job. Dave Underwood, president of TAC Secured, a TAC Worldwide subsidiary that places IT professionals with active security clearances, stresses the importance of a clearance to work at defense contractors, homeland security firms and in other government-related positions. He likens the clearance to “a secret handshake” — once you get it, it's transferable, meaning it will help you find other jobs that require a clearance.

Are there different types of clearances? Yes. The most common are labeled “confidential,” “secret” and “top secret,” corresponding to the sensitivity of the information you are allowed to handle on the job. Top-secret clearances may also give you authorization to view “sensitive compartmented information” — specific information that's deemed particularly sensitive. Your employer will work with government officials to determine the appropriate clearance.

Can I apply for a clearance on my own? No. Sponsorship from a company or government agency is necessary to apply for a clearance. “The challenge for most candidates is that you can't obtain a security clearance on your own without having a government contractor or agency sponsor you for the background investigation,” says Michael Fitzgerald, principal consultant at staffing firm Winter, Wyman and Company. “Such investigations also take time and money, which means obtaining your clearance requires patience and planning, as they can often take many months to finish.” Employers pay the cost of the clearance process.

How does the government evaluate clearance applications? The process varies depending on the type of clearance being sought, the information involved and the urgency of the project. A lower-level clearance may entail a background check into your education, job history, criminal record, credit history and residences. If you're applying for a job involving more sensitive information, expect government or private investigators to interview you personally and delve into various areas of your personal and professional life. Investigators will also interview neighbors and friends and possibly have you take a polygraph test. Falsehoods and omissions in an application can disqualify you from receiving a clearance.

Does a clearance last a lifetime? No. If you need to continue to view sensitive information on the job, you will have to undergo a reinvestigation every five years for a top-secret clearance, every 10 years for a secret clearance and every 15 years for a confidential clearance. A clearance becomes inactive when your job no longer requires you to view sensitive information.

Is it worth applying for a job requiring a clearance even if I don't have one? Lack of a clearance shouldn't stop you from seeking a job that requires one. If you don't have a clearance, the company may hire you, start the clearance process and have you work on other projects until your clearance is approved.

Vets interested in pursuing jobs with or without a security clearance prerequisite are advised to check out <http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs>. Here can be found essential data pertinent to writing your resume, occupational fields and titles to pursue, and a search engine where you can browse for jobs by company, location or categories & industries. [Source: Mil.com Newsletter 17 Dec 2012 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 97: After Dave Carter retired from the Air Force, he started driving an 18-wheeler. When Carter is on the road (which is most of the time now) he sleeps behind the steering on a twin bed in the small cab of the truck, and it reminds him of his time in the military, “A lot of veterans are attracted to this line of work, because the living conditions, sometimes are austere, Spartan in some degree, and for vets, it’s like being deployed,” Carter said. Carter drives a distinctive big-rig emblazoned with symbols of patriotism for one of the largest trucking companies in the country, Schneider National. Carter pointed to a spot on his fender where the words ‘In Memoriam to Deceased Veterans’ were printed, “It’s called the ‘Ride of Pride.’ There are four of them in the U.S., one in Canada,” Carter said, “They are commemorating active duty folks and veterans.”



Air Force veteran Dave Carter drives a truck called the 'Ride of Pride' for Schneider National, Inc.

The mobile-memorial is also a rolling-advertisement geared to make former military members aware of jobs at Schneider National. Despite the fact that millions of Americans are looking for work, ninety percent of trucking companies say they can’t find enough drivers. Long hours and many nights spent away from home make the driver’s seat difficult to fill, so trucking companies are targeting a group they believe has the skill-set to handle a tough job—veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Like other large trucking companies, Schneider National has ramped-up its efforts to recruit veterans since 2001. Vice President of recruiting at Schneider Mike Hinz says close to 15 percent of his approximately 13,000 drivers are veterans and he still wants more. “They’re fit, drug-free, well-experienced, typically very emotionally mature, wake up on time and work their tails off to do a great job,” Hinz said.

Many former soldiers also have experience driving big vehicles. Thirty two states waive the driving portion of the commercial driver’s license test for veterans who operated large vehicles in the military, but most military vehicles have automatic transmissions, whereas most commercial vehicles have manual transmissions, so even an experienced military driver may need a few lessons before heading across the Rocky Mountains with a full trailer. The Swift Transportation Company, another trucking giant, runs its own truck-driving school. Civilians pay about \$4,000 for this instruction, but in April Swift started offering their training free to veterans. There are five Swift academies across the country, but the largest one is located on Veterans Parkway in Millington and abuts the Navy base there. Vets who obtain a commercial license and stick to trucking can make upwards of \$50,000 annually by the end of their first year. [Source: NPR WKNO 91.1 | Eleanor Boudreau | 19 Dec 2012 ++]

WWII Vets: World War II and Korean War veteran Richard C. Kirkland’s life reads like a historical novel, replete with famous characters such as Charles Lindbergh, Howard Hughes, Douglas MacArthur and Dwight D. Eisenhower. So, it is quite fitting that — in addition to having been a decorated fighter pilot in World War II’s Pacific theater, a helicopter rescue pilot in Korea and an artist his entire life — he now also has written a novel. Kirkland, 89, of Vienna has written four nonfiction books highlighting his experiences in the U.S. Air Corps and U.S. Air Force from 1942 to 1963. He describes his fifth book, this one fiction, a great generation love story. “Tom Brokaw called us the greatest generation,” he said. “In my book ‘Wide Place in the Road,’ I try to convey the ambiance, jargon and human interaction of that generation as they mature during the Great Depression and endure the disruption and agony of World War II. I tried to make it the ‘Gone With the Wind’ of my own war-ravaged time.”

In the book, the fictional protagonist, fighter pilot Jessie Rascoe, lives Kirkland’s real-life experiences, interspersed with some of those of his childhood and wartime pals. The “fictional” name actually was that of his great-grandfather, a U.S. marshal in New Mexico territory during the 1880s. In the book, Kirkland through Rascoe describes the emotional and logistical upheaval in the United States after Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor. “This book is very autobiographical,” he said. “I lived much of this story. So after years went by and the bad memories faded, I realized it had to be told. But only someone who lived it could write it, and I may be the only one left to do it. There are only two of us from the squadron left.” Rascoe is assigned to a P-38 fighter squadron, the famous “Flying Knights,” with real-life World War II fighter ace Richard Bong, with whom Kirkland served. The book documents Rascoe’s life as a fighter pilot, including the deadly game of aerial combat with Japanese Zeros, also from Kirkland’s personal firsthand experience.

As a fighter pilot, Kirkland flew 103 missions during World War II, mostly over the Philippines, Dutch East Indies and New Guinea. “I flew 71 missions in a Lockheed P-38 Lightning and 42 in a P-47 Thunderbolt,” he said. “As fighter pilots, we had a saying that when we left the ground, we were ‘dead men’ until our wheels landed safely back on the ground again.” Lining the walls of his personal museum in the basement of his Vienna home are paintings Kirkland created from the memories of some of those missions. One depicts a P-38 flying directly above a flaming Japanese Zero. “That was over Manokwari, New Guinea,” he said. “I lit him up, but then overshot my return and flew right over him as he was on fire. As I was passing over, I looked down and the Japanese pilot was looking up, and we made eye contact for a few seconds. I’ll never forget it.”



Richard C. Kirkland’s personal museum

Kirkland said fighter pilots only got confirmed kills if their plane’s cameras caught the enemy exploding or going down in flames. “I once chased a Zero into a cloud,” he said. “I couldn’t see him in there, but I shot at where I thought he was. A few seconds later, I saw the cloud light up with an explosion. I got him. But later, my plane’s

camera stopped short of the explosion and only showed me shooting into the cloud. All my buddies razzed me by saying, 'You sure taught that cloud a lesson.' ”Another of the dozen or so paintings in Kirkland’s basement depicts him in battle with a Japanese kamikaze pilot over the Battle of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, generally considered the largest naval battle in World War II — and famously known for MacArthur’s triumphant return there. By his own account, during his service, Kirkland met MacArthur, as well as Lindbergh, Hughes and future president Eisenhower. “Eisenhower was coming to inspect our base, and I was sent to the supply room to clean it in a hurry,” Kirkland said. “While I was doing that, he walked in and introduced himself to me.”

After World War II, Kirkland was assigned to a top-secret project of testing atomic bombs in the Marshall Islands. When the project was declassified, he wrote his first book, “The Ultimate Game,” the story of his experiences with atomic bombs. During the Korean War, Kirkland traded his wings for rotors and flew 69 helicopter missions, rescuing downed pilots from behind enemy lines and snatching wounded soldiers from the battlefield at the 8055 MASH, home of Dr. Sam Gilfand. Gilfand was a surgeon “MASH” author Richard Hooker based the character Hawkeye on, Kirkland said. Through his career, Kirkland was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, five Air Medals, the Air Force Commendation Medal and the U.S. and Korean Presidential Unit citations for his service, he said. After his military service, he joined Hughes Aircraft Division and subsequently worked at McDonnell Douglas Aircraft and Boeing. “I have led a very full life,” Kirkland said. “And I know I don’t have all that much time left, so I wanted to write this book before it was too late.” [Source: Washington Post Gregg MacDonald article 25 July 2012 ++]

POW/MIA Update 34: "Keeping the Promise", "Fulfill their Trust" and "No one left behind" are several of many mottos that refer to the efforts of the Department of Defense to recover those who became missing while serving our nation. The number of Americans who remain missing from conflicts in this century are: World War II (73,000+), Korean War (7,900+), Cold War (126), Vietnam War (1,655), 1991 Gulf War (0), and OEF/OIF (6). Over 600 Defense Department men and women -- both military and civilian -- work in organizations around the world as part of DoD's personnel recovery and personnel accounting communities. They are all dedicated to the single mission of finding and bringing our missing personnel home. For a listing of all personnel accounted for since 2007 refer to http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/accounted_for . For additional information on the Defense Department’s mission to account for missing Americans, visit the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (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:



Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may call the following Service Casualty Offices: U.S. Air Force (800) 531-5501, U.S. Army (800) 892-2490, U.S. Marine Corps (800) 847-1597, U.S. Navy

(800) 443-9298, or U.S. Department of State (202) 647-5470. The remains of the following MIA/POW's have been recovered, identified, and scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin:

Vietnam

- None

Korea

DPMO announced 18 DEC that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. Army Sgt. 1st Class **Harold M. Brown**, 20, of Winston-Salem, N.C., will be buried Dec. 22, in Hamptonville, N.C. In late November 1950, Brown 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 reservoir. Brown was reported missing in action on Dec. 12, 1950. In 1953, a returning American who had been held as a prisoner of war reported that Brown had been captured by Chinese forces and died shortly thereafter as a result of exposure to the elements. His remains were not recovered by American forces at that time, nor were they repatriated by the Chinese or North Koreans in "Operation Big Switch," in 1954. Between 1991 and 1994, North Korea gave the United States 208 boxes of remains believed to contain the remains of 200-400 U.S. service members. North Korean documents, turned over with some of the boxes, indicated that some of the human remains were recovered from the area where Brown was last seen. In the identification of the remains, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory (AFDIL) used circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, such as radiograph and mitochondrial DNA—which matched Brown's aunt and cousin. Using modern technology, identifications continue to be made from remains that were previously turned over by North Korean officials. Today, more than 7,900 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Korean War.

World War II

- None

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

World War II Posters (01)





Saving Money: Tires are the only part of your car that actually touches the road - at least, if you're doing it right. Tires matter most when it comes to safety. Before you replace yours consider the following:

1. **Not all tire manufacturers are the same.** Each year J.D. Power and Associates releases an Original Equipment Tire Customer Satisfaction study. The 2012 study can be found at <http://www.jdpower.com/content/press-release/AH5T5EZ/vehicle-tire-satisfaction-influences-vehicle-brand-and-dealership-service-loyalty.htm> . While J.D. Power is best known for its annual Vehicle Dependability Study <http://autos.jdpower.com/content/press-release-auto/Q5wPftR/2012-u-s-vehicle-dependability-study.htm> , it spends the rest of the year measuring customers' attitudes on dozens of other products - in this case, the tires that come with your new car. Hence, the first lesson...

Don't know the difference between Goodrich and Goodyear? Then you might want to know who won the J.D. Power customer satisfaction survey. Out of 1,000 possible points, "Michelin ranks highest in three of the four segments: luxury (777), passenger car (726) and truck/utility (740). Pirelli ranks highest in the performance sport segment with an index score of 788." Look for the best deals these two manufacturers have to offer in their highest-rated specialties. There's no guarantee you'll be as pleased as the 27,000 customers J.D. Power surveyed, but as Michelin itself likes to boast, it has "more awards than any other tire manufacturer since the study launched in 1989." But this isn't a commercial for Michelin. Consider you may be able to get a better deal (including coupons) with your local tire dealer. Whatever your choice you can always get conflicting opinions on the internet at sites such as

http://www.epinions.com/reviews/Firestone_Destination_LE_Tire?sb=1. So if you've had good luck with one brand, consider sticking with them.

2. **Check for recalls.** Before you decide if you need new tires, see if the ones you already own are defective. When cars are recalled, it makes big headlines. (Who can forget Toyota's troubles a few years ago?) But tire recalls can pass you by. The National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration has an interactive recall page at <http://www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/recalls/recallsearch.cfm>. You can click "Tires" and search by brand name. The site is updated every night. If you have recalled tires, contact the manufacturer directly. The government says, "The manufacturer is then required to remedy the problem at no charge to the owner."

3. **Make sure you really need new tires.** How can you tell? First, just look at them. Is the tread worn? Perform the penny test - place a penny between the treads, with Lincoln's head facing down. If you can see the top of his head, time for new tires. Also look for cracks and punctures. Finally, if your tires are old, you should replace them - because rubber breaks down over time. How old? Says Firestone: "Vehicle manufacturers generally recommend you replace your tires at six years. Most tire manufacturers recommend you replace your tires at 10 years. Check the manufacturer's recommendations on your specific tires."

4. **Buy the right tire.** There are all-season tires and all-terrain tires, ultra-performance and run-flats. How to choose? Consumer Reports has a handy and painless Tire Buying Guide at <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/tires/buying-guide.htm> that defines the basic types. But your owner's manual has the specs for your vehicle. Want to know what all those letters and numbers mean on the sidewalls of your tires? The NHTSA has this handy Tire Rating Lookup at <http://www.safercar.gov/Vehicle+Shoppers/Tires/Tires+Rating> that explains it all and offers a search tool for more than 2,400 lines of tires. Finally, before you buy, search the database of customer complaints filed with the NHTSA at <http://www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/complaints>. These tires aren't necessarily recalled, but you can learn what customers reported (and regretted) about their purchases. find the right tires and get a baseline price – which lets me know if I'm being quoted a good price locally.

5. **Buy the right tires at the right price.** Before deciding where to buy get an idea of the right tires for your needs and a baseline price so you know if you are being quoted a good price locally or online. A couple of places place to this info are <http://discounttires.com> and <http://www.tirerack.com>. Then check out the websites of your local dealers to compare prices. However, keep in mind that those prices might not be locked in. Calling and speaking to a salesman could disclose information on a sale that starts in a few days, or a coupon you might have missed. Also, local managers have the authority to cut deals. One word of warning: Wherever you go for new tires, buy only tires. Many of these places seem to use tires as a break-even proposition to sell you on larger repairs or lifetime rotating and balancing contracts you don't need.

6. **Don't buy used tires.** There's no way to tell if used tires were in good shape or bad in their previous life. Read what Consumer Reports has to say about their safety at <http://news.consumerreports.org/cars/2011/04/buying-used-tires-can-save-you-money-but-are-they-too-risky.html>. While you may get enough miles out of them to actually save some money, it's a lottery-like gamble. And you could be risking your life. For more on tires, check out How Winter Tires Offer Both Safety and Savings at <http://www.moneytalksnews.com/2011/10/17/how-winter-tires-offer-both-safety-and-savings>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews Michael Koretzky article 23 Apr 2012 ++]



Notes of Interest:

- **CPI.** On a seasonally adjusted basis, the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers decreased 0.3 percent in November after rising 0.1 percent in October. The index for all items less food and energy rose 0.1 percent in November after increasing 0.2 percent in October.
- **CPI.** A joint letter was sent to Congress opposing the proposal to substitute a chained CPI calculation. This change could have significant potential reductions in benefits especially over the long term. A copy of the letter can be seen in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Joint VSO/MSO CPI Letter**"
- **DoD.** Department of Defense announced military families on average will receive a 3.8 percent increase in their housing allowance. That translates to between \$55 and \$60 a month for military with dependents depending their rank.
- **Vet Benefits.** The Military.com Benefit Calculator at <http://benefits.military.com/reg/Veterans-Benefits.do?ESRC=mrvr.nl> will quickly and easily connect you with your benefits information based on service and status. Find Federal Benefits, State Benefits, National Guard State Benefits, Special Military Discounts and more.
- **Vet Benefits.** The President of NAUS has posted a video message regarding the ongoing assault on military retirees and veterans benefits at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCIUM9nX13Y>.
- **Entitlement Programs.** CNN Money reports 55% of Americans have been on at least one of the six largest government safety net programs: unemployment benefits, Social Security, Medicare, food stamps, Medicaid and welfare. When factoring in veterans' benefits and federal college loans and grants as well, the number rises to 70% of Americans receiving government aid.
- **USAF Thunderbirds.** Tickets are on sale for the Father's Day Weekend 15-16 JUN 2013 Thunder Over Michigan Air Show featuring the United States Air Force Thunderbirds! More performers and special events are being scheduled to ensure that the Air Show will be Michigan's premier family fun event this summer. For more info refer to <http://www.yankeeairmuseum.org/airshow/purchase-tickets>.
- **Bravo to VA.** On 25 DEC veteran Mike Eberlein said in the Salt Lake Tribune, "I never thought I would write a letter praising the VA health care system, but Salt Lake's George E. Wahlen VA Medical Center is as good as any hospital I have ever visited. If the care we give our recent vets is as good as I received with my hip and knee replacements, our vets from the wars in the Middle East will be well-served. Super bravo to the folks who work and practice medicine there. Thanks to all.

[Source: Various 15-31 Dec 2012 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 108:



- **Los Angeles CA** - Federal prosecutors say a Los Angeles-area pastor has pleaded guilty to conspiring with doctors, shady clinic operators and others to defraud Medicare of more than \$11 million. Assistant Attorney General Lanny Breuer says 58-year-old **Charles Agbu** of Carson pleaded guilty Monday to one count each of conspiracy to commit health fraud and money laundering. Prosecutors said Agbu and his co-conspirators submitted nearly \$11 million in false claims to Medicare and received nearly \$5.8 million on those claims. Some of the claims dealt with expensive medical equipment, such as power wheelchairs. Agbu, a pastor at Pilgrim Congregational Church in Los Angeles, faces up to 20 years in prison and a \$500,000 fine at sentencing on May 16, 2013.
- **Brooklyn NY** - The owner and manager of a Brooklyn, New York, health care clinic **Irina Shelikhova** pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering 18 DEC in federal court for her role in a \$71 million Medicare fraud and money laundering scheme. She was an owner and manager of a clinic in Brooklyn that operated under three corporate names: Bay Medical Care PC, SVS Wellcare Medical PLLC, and SZS Medical Care PLLC (Bay Medical Clinic). Owners, operators, and employees of Bay Medical paid cash kickbacks to Medicare beneficiaries and used the beneficiaries' names to bill Medicare for more than \$71 million in medical services and procedures that were medically unnecessary or never provided, including physician office visits, physical therapy, and diagnostic tests. The co-conspirators allegedly paid kickbacks to corrupt Medicare beneficiaries in a room at the clinic known as the "kickback room," in which the conspirators paid approximately 1,000 kickbacks totaling more than \$500,000 during a period of approximately six weeks from April to June 2010. Shelikhova and her alleged co-conspirators used various companies to launder the proceeds of the health care fraud and to generate the cash needed to pay the kickbacks. At sentencing, Shelikhova faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison. Sentencing is scheduled for March 20, 2013. In total, 16 individuals have been charged in the Bay Medical scheme, including two doctors, nine clinic owners/operators/employees and five external money launderers. To date, 12 defendants have pleaded guilty for their roles in the conspiracy. Four defendants await trial before Judge Gershon on January 22, 2013. As to those defendants, they are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.
- **Westminster CA** - A Southern California doctor has been sentenced to prison for an \$11 million Medicare scheme that paid kickbacks to patients recruited on Skid Row. Federal prosecutors say 61-year-old **Dr. Kenneth Thaler** will spend a year in jail. He can no longer practice medicine. The Orange County doctor admitted about 60 people a month into Tustin Hospital Medical Center even though many didn't require hospitalization. The patients recruited on Skid Row in Los Angeles were coached to recite false symptoms. Prosecutors said Thaler had faced a longer prison sentence but he cooperated with investigators. Another defendant, 68-year-old **Estill Mitts**, has pleaded guilty to conspiracy, money laundering and tax evasion. He will be sentenced next month. [Source: Fraud News Daily 1-14 Nov 2012 ++]

- **San Diego CA** - Victory Pharma Inc., a specialty pharmaceutical company headquartered in San Diego, agreed 27 DEC to pay \$11.4 million to resolve federal civil and criminal liability arising from its marketing of the pharmaceutical products Naprelan, Xodol, Fexmid and Dolgic, the Justice Department said. Under the agreement, Victory Pharma entered into a deferred prosecution agreement and paid a criminal forfeiture of \$1.4 million to resolve federal Anti-Kickback Statute accusations, and paid \$9,938,310 to resolve False Claims Act allegations. The company is accused of engaging in a scheme to promote its drugs by paying kickbacks to doctors to induce them to write prescriptions for Victory’s products, including prescriptions for patients covered by Medicare and other federal health insurance programs. The kickbacks included tickets to professional and collegiate sporting events; tickets to concerts and plays; spa outings; golf and ski outings; dinners at expensive restaurants; and numerous other out-of-office events. Kickbacks included giving a doctor money to help make a house payment; paying for a doctor’s staff’s outing to a strip club, including “lap dances” for the female staff; and offering a doctor and his staff an all-expense paid trip to Las Vegas. The settlement resolved a False Claims Act lawsuit filed in California by Mr. Miller, a former sales representative for Victory. The False Claims Act allows whistleblowers to obtain a portion of the proceeds obtained by the federal government. As part of Thursday’s resolution, Mr. Miller will receive \$1.7 million.

State Veteran's Benefits: The state of Indiana provides several benefits to veterans as indicated below. To obtain information on these refer to the “**Veteran State Benefits – IN**” attachment to this Bulletin for an overview of the benefits listed below. Benefits are available to veterans who are residents of the state.

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

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/indiana-state-veterans-benefits.html> Dec 2012

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GI Bill Update 135: Many policymakers are touting college education as the best way to help American veterans. The extensive federal money available for veterans to attend college at low (or no) cost offers the promise of a better life to those who serve their country. Some 600,000 veterans spent around \$9 billion in federal money this year for education. So veterans are going to college in record numbers. The trouble is no one knows if they’re graduating. According to a piece by Larry Abramson at NPR’s Morning Edition: There are no national statistics on veterans’ graduation rates, and that lack of data recently led to a slight panic among supporters. Some press accounts cited information that said only 3 percent of vets were getting degrees. Veterans’ advocates quickly debunked that number, but it just pointed to a need for data. Michael Dakduk, executive director of Student Veterans of America, is working to develop a database to show what nearly 1 million new vets are doing with the \$24 billion and counting that they’ve received.

Because most education statistics only track “first-time, full-time students” most veterans don’t count in official statistics. And even when veterans are included, it’s hard to draw out specific veteran information. Advocates argue that it’s important to try to get veteran information “in an era of budget cuts” because it’s important to be able to prove that GI Bill money is effective. Still, it’s hard to know what “effective” would mean here. Would a 20 percent

completion rate indicate that the program works? How about a 50 percent completion rate? Critics suggest that the veteran college completion rate is low because veterans are simply not like regular students and often benefit from additional supports (like the specific veteran centers many schools operate and pay for on their own). Of course, not many non-veterans graduate from college either. Only 60 percent of full-time college students earn a bachelor's degree in 8 years. Only 26 percent of part-time college students earn a bachelor's degree in 8 years. It's possible tracking veteran success will give colleges a better idea what programs and supports are most effective, perhaps even for students with no military experience. [Source: Washington Monthly Editorial | Daniel Luzer | 26 Dec 2012 ++]

GI Bill Update 136: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

A landmark veterans bill aimed at protecting valuable GI Bill benefits from being wasted passed the Senate late 19 DEC and is on its way to final passage in the House. The compromise bill prevents schools that receive veterans' education benefits from paying bounties for recruiting students and requires the VA to provide more consumer-oriented information to help veterans pick which schools to attend. Called the Improving Transparency of Education Opportunities for Veterans Act, the measure was first introduced in the House by Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee who is concerned that veterans lack information to make wise choices when it comes to choosing schools. "As our nation's heroes make the transition from the battlefield to civilian life, we must do everything we can to arm veterans with the information they need to make informed decisions about their educational benefits, and ultimately ensure they remain competitive in today's market," Bilirakis said in a statement about the bill, HR 4057.

Although Bilirakis is the sponsor, the final bill is the result of negotiations between the House and Senate veterans' affairs committees, which had their own separate legislation. Sen. Jim Webb, D-Va., the lawmaker behind creation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, was chief sponsor of the Senate's similar legislation. Some of the consumer-related information is being collected by the VA under an executive order signed earlier this year by President Obama. Part of the purpose of the bill is to have information available in one place. Veterans' advocates have said that would make it easier for a person who has spent years in the service and doesn't know much about higher educational institutions to discover facts that would help her decide which school to attend. A provision of the compromise bill tells the VA to avoid duplication with other programs as much as possible, suggesting the VA needs to have a only single website that contains links to information outside the VA, such as Education Department guides for non-veterans.

Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), the House Veterans Affairs' Committee chairman, said one of the reasons for pushing the bill is to try to prevent veterans, who generally have only 36 months of GI Bill benefits, from wasting them on courses or institutions that don't meet their long-term goals. "This bipartisan legislation will provide much needed tools for student veterans to make better informed decisions on how to use their educational benefits," Miller said in a statement. "By empowering veterans with more information for post-secondary educational options, their hard-earned benefit will go further to put them on a path to meaningful employment in the civilian sector."

The list of what the VA would be required to have available is quite long, but it includes common facts such as tuition and fees, graduation and dropout rates, whether the schools have academic and technical support available, if there are job counseling and placement services, and information about accepting credits transferred from other schools. The VA would not have to provide information about whether a school's credits are transferable because the school might not know and, in some cases, would prefer not to admit that that its credits often cannot be transferred to major four-year colleges or universities, according to congressional aides. Less common information,

such as the name and contact information of the academic body that accredits a school; information about the state approving agency that cleared the school to receive veterans' education benefits; and who to contact with complaints about a school also would have to be available, under terms of the bill transferring credits from one school to another.

The anti-bounty provision is aimed at aggressive recruiting by some for-profit schools eager to sign up veterans whose GI Bill payments would go directly to the institution. In some cases, veterans attending these schools also end up with large student loan debts because the schools cost more than the GI Bill pays. Under the bill, the VA is barred from paying for any course offered by any educational institution that pays a commission bonus or any incentive pay for enrolling veterans. Direct or indirect payments lead to an institution being denied veterans' education payments. Lawmakers expect quick action by the VA. The prohibition on using inducements for recruiting would take effect 90 days after the bill is signed into law. Also within 90 days, the VA would have to provide Congress with a plan for providing the required consumer information on schools. While tough on some for-profit schools, the bill is endorsed by the Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities. The group's president, Steve Gunderson, called it "important legislation" that creates a formal process to look at schools. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Rick Maze | 20 Dec 2012 ++]

VA Claim Denial Update 13: (Note: Military Times Copyrighted material - Not authorized for reproduction on any publicly accessible website or website accessed newsletter . Forwarding via email in personal communications is authorized.)

A new report on an old problem contains some sad statistics about veterans' benefits claims:

- Thirty-one percent of claims filed with the Veterans Affairs Department are likely to be denied — and 60 percent of those denials will be erroneous.
- Sixty percent of claims will take longer than 125 days to be processed, more than 7 percent of claims will be misplaced, and 4 percent will be completely lost.
- A veteran calling VA's benefits hotline has just a 49 percent chance of being connected to someone and receiving a correct answer.

The report, "The Veterans Disability System: Problems and Solutions," was released 12 DEC by the nonprofit National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA). Based on a review of the 870,000 benefits claims pending before VA in 2011 — a number that has climbed to about 900,000 pending claims today — the report says the pile of pending claims has grown despite the fact that VA is processing more claims than ever before and using a variety of new efforts to work faster and more accurately. Even faster claims processing might be possible by contracting out administrative services or transferring claims processing from the federal government to states, the report says. It recommends expanded pilot programs to test those ideas. The nonpartisan National Center for Policy Analysis, which specializes in retirement and health care programs, is skeptical about VA's stated goal of eliminating the claims backlog by the end of 2015. VA "is barely able to process current claims," the report says, "and has exhibited little to no progress toward their stated goal of 125 days and 98 percent accuracy for processed claims by 2015." The federal government, in general, does a poor job of administering disability benefits and services, the report says, as evidenced by the state of Social Security Disability. But the Veterans Benefits Administration appears to be far worse. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Rick Maze | 13 Dec 2012 ++]

VA Claim Denial Update 14: (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 Veterans Affairs Department is fighting back against an independent study that concluded 60 percent of disability benefits claim denials were done in error. A report by the nonprofit and nonpartisan National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA) released last week says 31 percent of VA claims are likely to be denied and that 60 percent of those denials are likely be erroneous. VA officials, however, said Monday that only 10 percent of veterans filed notices of disagreement last year and that only 1.2 percent of all VA decisions were reversed on review. In a statement, VA said the report’s errors are the result of using outdated data and reaching “inaccurate conclusions” based on very small samples. That does not mean VA isn’t worried about the state of claims. “We know that too many veterans have to wait too long to get the benefits they have earned and deserve,” the statement says. “That is unacceptable, and we are implementing a robust plan to fix the problem.”

VA is on track to finish calendar year 2012 with about 900,000 pending claims, with slightly more than two-thirds of those claims being older than 125 days. This is about 20,000 more claims than VA had on hand at the start of the year, and the number of claims older than 125 days —VA’s processing goal — climbed from about 560,000 at the start of the year to about 607,000 by year’s end. While the pile of claims is growing, the VA statement expressed confidence that improvements were coming. “VA is aggressively building a strong foundation for a paperless, digital disability claims system — a lasting solution that will transform how we operate and eliminate the backlog. We are 100 percent confident that this plan will ensure we achieve the secretary’s goal of eliminating the backlog by the end of 2015,” the statement said. VA says the estimation that 60 percent of claim denials are in error appears to have come from a “flawed” 2009 study of the appeals process. [Source: AirForceTimes | Rick Maze [18 Dec 2012 ++]

Military History: The Battle of Crucifix Hill was a World War II battle that took place on 8 October 1944, on Crucifix Hill (Haarberg) (Hill 239), next to the village of Haaren in Germany. It was a part of the U.S. 1st Division's campaign to seize Aachen, Germany. The Battle of Aachen was part of the Drive to the Siegfried Line, a defence system stretching more than 630 km (390 mi) with more than 18,000 bunkers, tunnels and tank traps. It went from Kleve on the border with the Netherlands, along the western border of the old German Empire as far as the town of Weil am Rhein on the border to Switzerland. More with Nazi propaganda in mind than for any strategic reason, Adolf Hitler planned the line from 1936 and had it built between 1938 and 1940. Hill 239 was named after a large crucifix mounted on the top of the hill.



The objective of the battle was to gain control of the hill, which was laced with a maze of pillboxes and bunkers, so that the main objective of encircling Aachen could be completed. The hill was held by units of the German 246. Volksgrenadierdivision. The 18th Infantry Regiment, U.S. 1st Infantry Division, commanded by Col. George A. Smith Jr., directed its 1st Battalion (commanded by Lt. Col. Henry G. Leonard, Jr.) to take the hill employing special pillbox assault teams equipped with flamethrowers, Bangalore torpedoes, and demolition charges. A battery of tank destroyers and self-propelled guns were to provide supporting direct fire at the pillboxes.



American assault and German Type 10 Limes programme bunker seen from the back.

As the leading rifle platoon of C Company assaulted the first pillbox, flanking fire from a nearby pillbox gun emplacement took the platoon in crossfire. The pinned-down soldiers also experienced an intense artillery barrage on their exposed positions. Capt. Bobbie E. Brown was the company commander of C Company, a former boxer who had earned a battlefield commission in Normandy. During the onslaught of the nearby pillbox, Capt. Brown grabbed a pole charge and ran 100 yd (91 m) with bullets whipping by him, and placed the charge in the pillbox, destroying it. He did this twice more to two other pillboxes, each time successfully destroying the pillbox; only on the third one was he wounded by a mortar round. Although he was wounded, he refused medical attention and continued up the hill. After the hill was secure, he went by himself on a reconnaissance mission to locate enemy troops beyond the hill. He deliberately drew the enemy fire to find out where enemy emplacements were. While doing this, he was wounded twice more. The information he discovered about German emplacements allowed his company to repel two German counterattacks. Only after the position was completely secure did he allow treatment for his wounds. For his actions during the Battle of Crucifix Hill, Capt. Brown received the Medal of Honor.



Bobby Brown

The 1st Battalion seized the hill in approximately an hour's time, and after consolidating its positions oversaw the destruction of the crucifix, which the Americans suspected of having been the position of German artillery observers. [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Crucifix_Hill 8 Oct 2012 ++]

Military History Anniversaries: Significant January events in U.S. Military History are:

- Jan 00 1944 – WW2: USS Scorpion (SS–278). Date of sinking unknown. Most likely a Japanese mine in Yellow or East China Sea. 77 killed
- Jan 00 1945 – WW2: USS Swordfish (SS–193) missing. Possibly sunk by Japanese Coast Defense Vessel No. 4 on 5 January or sunk by a mine off Okinawa on 9 January. 89 killed
- Jan 01 1945 – WW2: In Operation Bodenplatte, German planes attack American forward air bases in Europe. This is the last major offensive of the Luftwaffe.

- Jan 02 1777 – American Revolution: American forces under the command of George Washington repulsed a British attack at the Battle of the Assunpink Creek near Trenton, New Jersey. Casualties and losses: US 7 to 100 - GB 55 to 365.
- Jan 02 1791 – Big Bottom massacre (11 killed) in the Ohio Country, marking the beginning of the Northwest Indian War.
- Jan 02 1904 – Latin America Interventions: U.S. Marines are sent to Santo Domingo to aid the government against rebel forces.
- Jan 02 1942 – WW2: In the Philippines, the city of Manila and the U.S. Naval base at Cavite fall to Japanese forces.
- Jan 02 1966 – Vietnam: American forces move into the Mekong Delta for the first time.
- Jan 03 1920 – WWI: The last of the U.S. troops depart France.
- Jan 03 1777 – American Revolution: American general George Washington defeats British general Charles Cornwallis at the Battle of Princeton. Casualties and losses: US 55 to 84 - GB 240 to 450.
- Jan 03 1944 – WW2: Top Ace Major Greg "Pappy" Boyington is shot down in his Corsair by Captain Masajiro Kawato flying a Zero.
- Jan 03 1945 – WW2: Admiral Chester W Nimitz is placed in command of all U.S. Naval forces in preparation for planned assaults against Iwo Jima, Okinawa and Japan.
- Jan 04 1944 – WW2: Operation Carpetbagger, involving the dropping of arms and supplies to resistance fighters in Europe, begins.
- Jan 04 1951 – Korea: Chinese communist forces recapture Seoul from United Nations troops
- Jan 05 1781 – American Revolution: Richmond, Virginia, is burned by British naval forces led by Benedict Arnold.
- Jan 05 1904 – American Marines arrive in Seoul, Korea, to guard the U.S. legation there.
- Jan 05 1942 – WW2: U.S. and Filipino troops complete their withdrawal to a new defensive line along the base of the Bataan peninsula.
- Jan 05 1951 – Korea: Inchon, South Korea, the sight of General Douglas MacArthur's amphibious flanking maneuver, is abandoned by U.N. force to the advancing Chinese Army.
- Jan 06 1941 – WW2: President Franklin D. Roosevelt asks Congress to support the Lend-lease Bill to help supply the Allies.
- Jan 06 1967 – Vietnam: United States Marine Corps and ARVN troops launch "Operation Deckhouse Five" in the Mekong River delta. KIA: US 7 - Vietcong 21
- Jan 08 1967 – Vietnam: Operation Cedar Falls . Over 16,000 U.S. and 14,000 Vietnamese troops start their biggest attack on the Iron Triangle, northwest of Saigon. Casualties and losses: US/ARVN 428 - NVA/VC 1030 (US Claim)
- Jan 07 1944 – WW2: The U.S. Air Force announces the production of the first jet-fighter, Bell P-59 Airacomet.
- Jan 07 1975 – Vietnam: Vietnamese troops take Phuoc Binh in new full-scale offensive.
- Jan 08 1815 – War of 1812: Battle of New Orleans – A rag-tag army under Andrew Jackson defeats the British on the fields of Chalmette in the Battle of New Orleans. Casualties and losses: US 333 - UK 2,459.
- Jan 08 1863 – Civil War: Second Battle of Springfield ends with a Confederate withdrawal. Casualties and losses: US 231 CSA ~290.
- Jan 08 1877 – Crazy Horse and his warriors fight their last battle with the United States Cavalry at Wolf Mountain (Montana Territory).
- Jan 09 1861 – Civil War: The "Star of the West" incident occurs near Charleston, South Carolina. It is considered by some historians to be the "First Shots of the War".
- Jan 09 1863 – Civil War: the Battle of Fort Hindman begins in Arkansas.

- Jan 09 1918 – Battle of Bear Valley: The last battle of the American Indian Wars. Casualties and losses: US 0 - Yaqui 10
- Jan 09 1945 – WW2: U.S. troops land on Luzon, in the Philippines, 107 miles from Manila.
- Jan 10 1847 – Mexican War: General Stephen Kearny and Commodore Robert Stockton retake Los Angeles in the last California battle of the war.
- Jan 10 1920 – WWI: The Treaty of Versailles takes effect, officially ending World War I.
- Jan 10 1923 – WWI: The United States withdraws its last troops from Germany.
- Jan 10 1943 – WW2: USS Argonaut (APS-1) sunk by aircraft (582d Kokutai) and Japanese destroyers Isokaze and Maikaze southeast of New Britain in Solomon Sea. 104 killed
- Jan 11 1863 – Civil War: The Battle of Fort Hindman (i.e. Arkansas Post) Arkansas ends with a Union victory and capture of the Arkansas River. Casualties and losses: US 1,061 CSA ~5,500
- Jan 11 1863 – Civil War: CSS Alabama encountered and sank the USS Hatteras (1861) off Galveston Lighthouse in Texas. Casualties and losses: US 125 CSA 2.
- Jan 11 1940 – Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., becomes the U.S. Army's first black general, his son would later become a general as well.
- Jan 11 1967 – Vietnam: Operation Deckhouse Five, a combined USMC and ARVN troop effort in the Mekong River delta ends in failure.
- Jan 12 1991 – Gulf War: An act of the U.S. Congress authorizes the use of military force to drive Iraq out of Kuwait.
- Jan 12 1846 – Mexican War: President James Polk dispatches General Zachary Taylor and 4,000 troops to the Texas Border as war with Mexico looms.
- Jan 13 1815 – War of 1812: British troops capture Fort Peter in St. Marys, Georgia, the only battle of the war to take place in the state.
- Jan 13 1847 – The Treaty of Cahuenga ends the Mexican–American War in California.
- Jan 13 1893 – U.S. Marines land in Honolulu from the U.S.S. Boston to prevent the queen from abrogating the Bayonet Constitution
- Jan 13 1968 – Vietnam: U.S. reports shifting most air targets from North Vietnam to Laos.
- Jan 14 1911 – The USS Arkansas, the largest U.S. battleship, is launched from the yards of the New York Shipbuilding Company.
- Jan 14 1943 – WW2: Operation Ke, the successful Japanese operation to evacuate their forces from Guadalcanal during the Guadalcanal campaign, begins.
- Jan 14 1943 – WW2: Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill begin the Casablanca Conference to discuss strategy and study the next phase of the war.
- Jan 15 1865 – Civil War: Fort Fisher North Carolina falls to the Union, thus cutting off the last major seaport of the Confederacy.
- Jan 15 1944 – WW2: The U.S. Fifth Army successfully breaks the German Winter Line in Italy with the capture of Mount Trocchio.
- Jan 15 1973 – Vietnam: Citing progress in peace negotiations, President Richard Nixon announces the suspension of offensive action in North Vietnam.

[Source: Various Dec 2012 ++]

Military Trivia 65: The Battle of Mogadishu (more commonly referred to as Black Hawk Down or, for Somalis, the Day of the Rangers) was part of Operation Gothic Serpent and was fought on October 3 and 4, 1993, in Mogadishu, Somalia, between forces of the United States and Somali militiamen loyal to the self-proclaimed

president-to-be Mohamed Farrah Aidid who had support from armed civilian fighters. Following is a check on how much you remember about this incident:

1. What type of helicopter was used to deploy the Rangers? UH60 Blackhawk | MH60 Blackhawk | AH40 Blackhawk | AK47 Blackhawk
2. Which Special Operations unit captured the hostages? _____
3. What is the nickname for the 160th SOAR? _____
4. What was the name of the hotel involved in the mission? _____
5. Nineteen soldiers were killed in the battle. True or False
6. How many Navy SEALs were wounded in the mission? 2, 4, 6 or none
7. What is Shawn Nelson's rank? Spec. | Master Sgt. | Sgt. First Class | Lt.
8. Who were all the Delta operators that died in the battle?

Gordon, Busch, Rierson, Martin | Shughart, Gordon, Busch, Fillmore, Rierson | Shughart, Gordon, Busch, Fillmore, Martin | or Shughart, Gordon
9. In the Super 64 crash at Mogadishu everyone on board lost their lives upon impact. True or False
10. Which two soldiers led Ranger Chalk One? _____ and _____ .
11. Who led Ranger Chalk Two?
12. Who led Ranger Chalk Three?
13. Who led Ranger Chalk Four?
14. What is the name of the small rocket launcher some rangers carried with them? NOD, SAW, LAW or M203
15. Who flew Super 62? Durant, | Jones | Wolcott | Goffena
16. Who was driving a truck when an RPG hit the door and killed him? Martin, Smith, Ruiz, or Kowalewski
17. Staff Sgt. William Cleveland was a crew chief on Super 61. True or False
18. What is the term used for dropping from a Blackhawk? _____
19. Kilo was the radio call sign for which unit? Command | SOAR | Delta | Rangers
20. What is the full name of the SAW? _____

Answers

- 1) **MH60 Blackhawk** - The "M" designates the Black Hawk as a Special operations chopper, which is what the Nightstalkers used in this case. Two Blackhawks went down in the city, and 2 others came within inches of crashing, but at the last second both started to fly again.
- 2) **Delta Force** - Delta, which are officially named 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment - Delta, are highly trained in the technique of clearing a building. They were inserted by the Little Birds.
- 3) **Nightstalkers** - The 160th SOAR specialize in night missions, hence the nickname "Nightstalkers."
- 4) **Olympic.**
- 5) **False** - Eighteen soldiers were killed during the battle. The movie states nineteen soldiers losing their lives in the battle, but the 19th, Sgt. First Class Matt Rierson was hit by mortar fire while having a conversation with the head surgeon at the barracks a few days later.
- 6) **Two** - Homer Nearpass was injured in both legs on the lost convoy and John Gay, whose knife deflected a bullet saving his life.
- 7) **Spec** - U.S. Army junior enlisted rank just above Private First Class and equivalent in pay grade to Corporal Nelson was later reinstated in the armed forces, but in the Navy this time. He was hoping to become a SEAL. He had lost his hearing temporarily after a fellow Rangers' SAW was fired by his head. His weapon was an M-60.
- 8) **Shughart, Gordon, Busch, Fillmore, Martin.** Sgt. First Class Matt Rierson was killed a couple days later at the barracks.
- 9) **False** - Most of the crew was still alive after the crash, but were killed by the angry Somali mob. CWO Mike Durant was captured, but was later released.
- 10) **Steele and Perino** - Captain Mike Steele and his second in command, Lt. Larry Perino held the southeast corner of the target building.
- 11) **DiTomasso** - Lt. Tom DiTomasso led the chalk holding the northeast corner of the hotel.
- 12) **Watson** - First Class Sean Watson led the chalk at the southwest corner of the target house.
- 13) **Eversmann** - Staff Sgt. Matt Eversmann led Chalk 4, where Private Blackburn fell from the Blackhawk. They were supposed to watch northwest corner of the target house, but ended up one block north.
- 14) **LAW** - The light anti-tank weapon is a disposable plastic rocket launcher that weighed only 3pounds. SAW stands for Squad Automatic Weapon (M249), NOD stands for Night Operation Device, or Night vision goggles and the M203 is an attachable grenade launcher that can be attached to an M-16.
- 15) **Goffena** - CWO Mike Goffena was hit and nearly went down, but managed to fly his damaged Blackhawk back to the hangar. He received a Silver Star.
- 16) **Kowalewski** - Pfc. Richard Kowalewski was hit by an RPG, which pierced his torso, and amazingly did not detonate. He still had vital signs when he got back to base, but was missing his right arm and eventually passed away.
- 17) **False** - Staff Sgt. Will Cleveland was a crew chief on Super 64, which was piloted by Mike Durant. He sadly lost his life, and was one of the soldiers shown on CNN being dragged through the street by the angry Somali mob.
- 18) **Fast rope**
- 19) **Delta**
- 20) **Squad Automatic Weapon** - SAWs are generally carried by the highest ranking junior enlisted officer who is not in a team leader role, though some squads don't always follow this rule, giving it to the "new guy". The SAW, or M249, can fire up to 1,000 RPM and fires the standard 5.56x45mm round.

[Source: <http://www.funtrivia.com/playquiz/quiz132147f22cf0.html> Dec 2012 ++]

Tax Burden for South Carolina 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 South Carolina:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 6% (prescription drugs and unprepared food items exempt); 25 counties impose an additional 1% local option sales tax; a number of counties impose a 2% sales tax. Seniors 85 and older pay 5%.

Gasoline Tax: 16.8 cents/gallon

Diesel Fuel Tax: 16.8 cents/gallon

Cigarette Tax: 57 cents/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low – 3.0%; High – 7%; No tax on the first \$2,630 of taxable income in tax year 2007.

Income Brackets: Six. Lowest – \$2,740; Highest – \$13,701

Personal Exemptions: Single – \$3,700; Married – \$7,400; Dependents – \$3,700 (State allows personal exemption or standard deductions as provided in the Internal Revenue Code).

Standard Deduction: Single – \$5,700; Married filing jointly – \$11,400

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: None

Retirement Income Taxes: Retirement income is taxed. Social Security is exempt. Under age 65, \$3,000 in pension income is exempt. If you are 65 or older you may exempt \$15,000 of retirement income. You can take this deduction for income received from any qualified retirement plan. If both spouses receive retirement income, each spouse is entitled to an individual deduction. The \$15,000 deduction must be offset by any other retirement deduction that is claimed. A surviving spouse may continue to take a retirement deduction on behalf of the deceased spouse. Some taxpayers age 65 and older may not have to file a tax return if they meet certain conditions. For more information refer to http://www.sctax.org/Tax+Information/Individual+Income+Tax/IIT_FAQs.htm#Retirees.

Retired Military Pay: Retirees with 20 or more years of active duty can deduct up to \$3,000 annually until age 65 and up to \$10,000 per year after age 65. This deduction extends to the surviving spouse. Pension or retirement income received for time served in the National Guard or Reserve components is not taxable. 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

Property tax is assessed and collected by local governments. Both real and personal property are subject to tax. The market value of a legal residence and up to 5 acres of surrounding land is assessed at 4%. For homeowners 65 and older, the state's homestead exemption allows the first \$50,000 of their property's fair market value to be exempt from local property taxes. South Carolina imposes a casual excise tax of 5% on the fair market value of all motor

vehicles, motorcycles, boats, motors and airplanes transferred between individuals. For more information refer to <http://www.sctax.org/NR/rdonlyres/697481DB-B8B7-4FF2-93E0-3DC59231B700/0/HomeownersGuidetoPropertyTaxes.pdf>

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

There is no inheritance tax or estate tax..

For further information, visit the South Carolina Department of Revenue site <http://www.sctax.org/default.htm> or call 800-763-1295. If you are planning to move to South Carolina, the link at <http://www.sctax.org/NR/rdonlyres/97C756AC-940A-4400-B889-A2B1BD1E33C1/0/MovingtoSC.pdf> will provide you with some helpful information. [Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com> Dec 2012 ++]

Veteran Legislation Status 30 DEC 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/bss/d111/sponlst.html> 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.

There are 12,251 bills and resolutions currently before the United States Congress. Of those, only about 5% will become law. They must be enacted before the end of the 2011-2012 session (the "112th Congress"). Here is a docket breakdown of all 12,251 bills and resolutions currently before Congress:

- **Enacted Laws** - There are 211 enacted bills and joint resolutions so far in this session of Congress.
- **Passed Resolutions** - There are 713 passed resolutions so far in this session of Congress (for joint and concurrent resolutions, passed both chambers).
- **At the President** - There are 31 bills that are awaiting the president's signature.
- **Active Legislation** - There are 412 bills and joint/concurrent resolutions that had a significant vote in one chamber and are likely to get a vote in the other chamber.
- **Inactive Legislation** - There are 10,853 bills and resolutions that have been introduced, referred to committee, or reported by committee and await further action.
- **Failed Legislation** - There are 31 bills and resolutions that failed a vote on passage and are now dead or failed a significant vote such as cloture, passage under suspension, or resolving differences.

[Source: <http://www.loc.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> Dec 2012 ++]

Aviation Art (29):



Scaling the Alps by Robert Bailey

The "Bloody" 100th. Bomb Group on their North African shuttle mission of August 17th. 1943. [Source: <http://www.brooksart.com/Alps.html> Dec 2012 ++]

Have You Heard? The Nail

A blonde city girl named Amy marries a rancher.

One morning, on his way out to check on the cows, the rancher says to Amy: 'The insemination man is coming over to impregnate one of our cows today, so I drove a nail into the 2 by 4 just above where the cow's stall is in the barn. Please show him where the cow is when he gets here, OK?'

The rancher leaves for the fields. After a while, the artificial insemination man arrives and knocks on the front door.

Amy takes him down to the barn. They walk along the row of cows, and when Amy sees the nail, she tells him, 'This is the one right here.'

The man, assuming he is dealing with an airhead blonde, asks, 'Tell me lady, 'cause I'm dying to know how would YOU know that this is the right cow to be bred?'

'That's simple," she said. "by the nail that's over its stall,' she explains very confidently.

Laughing rudely at her, the man says, 'And what, pray tell, is the nail for?'

The blonde turns to walk away and says sweetly over her shoulder, 'I guess it's to hang your pants on.'

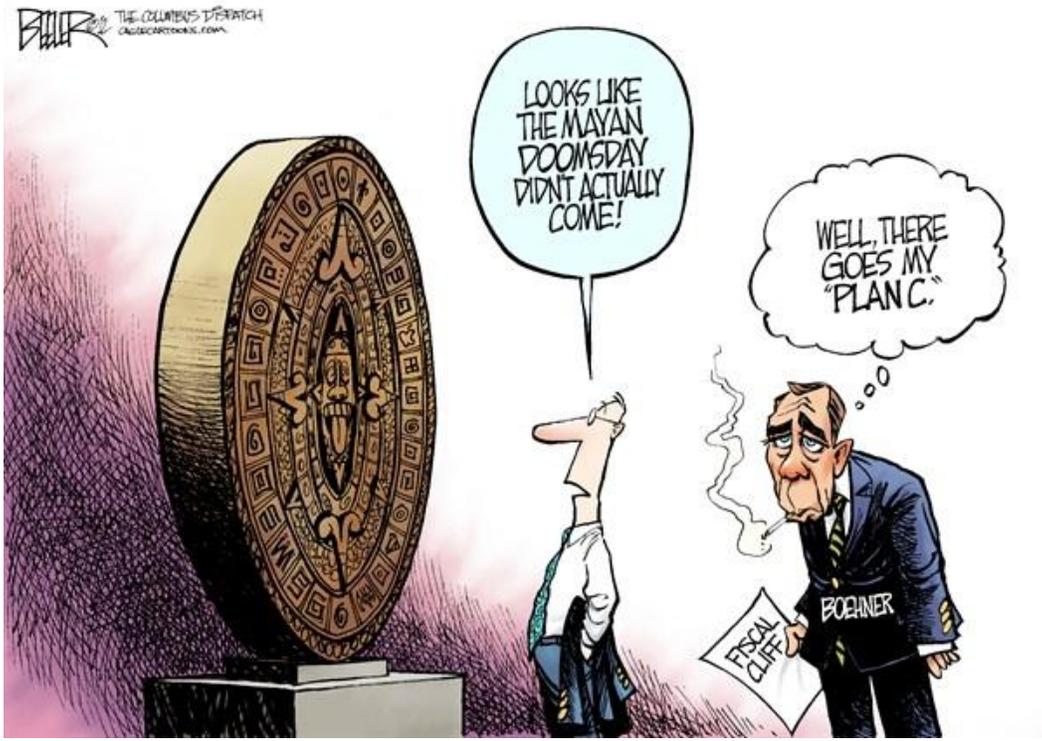
(It's nice to see a blonde winning .)

Naval Lingo: Chewing the Fat. God made the vittles, but the devil made the cook was a popular saying used by seafaring men in the last century when salted beef was the staple diet aboard ship. This tough cured beef, suitable only for long voyages when nothing else was as cheap or would keep as well, required prolonged chewing to make it edible. Men often chewed one chunk for hours, just as if it were chewing gum and referred to this practice as Chewing the fat

Government's view of the economy could be summed up in a few short phrases: If it moves, tax it.. If it keeps moving, regulate it. And if it stops moving, subsidize it.

--- **Ronald Reagan** (1911-2004 U.S. 40th President)







Annual Reminder Notice: This notice is to remind you of the Baguio Retiree Assistance Office (RAO) mission; the availability of informational assistance to fellow veterans; and the purpose of the associated RAO Bulletin and other notices. Our service provides a POC for anyone who has queries on Veteran issues and/or residence in this Geographic area. It also provides a means for Veterans to keep abreast of benefit changes and/or pending Veteran related legislation. Bulletin Updates are sent twice a month -- on the 1st & 15th. Twice a month allows time for readers to digest the info and make any inquiries they may have. It is understood that not every article that goes out is applicable to every reader but over a period of time every reader will find some article(s) of interest to him or her personally. Anyone with interest in the Philippines who would like to also be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and Tricare in the RP notices can make their request to raoemo@sbcglobal.net.

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The Baguio Retiree Assistance Office [RAO] is an "answer place" for all Veterans and Expats in addition to providing FPO mail services; Forms; U.S. & RP Government Services; etc. There are no longer any bases in the Philippines and the Embassy is 180 km away, so over the last 18 years it has become the unofficial source for just about everything related to Government Programs impacting on those residing in this geographic area. Because of our remote location the majority of Veterans' assistance is provided by email. All questions received via email are responded to with either an answer or a source of where to obtain an answer. If you do not receive an answer within 72 hours, your inquiry was probably never received and you should re-transmit it. The variety of questions, and subsequent research to answer them, has resulted in the development of a Library of articles on over 5,000 subjects and a 115+ page alphabetical index of article titles available for recall upon request. As of 1 JAN 2013 the bulletin is being sent to 92,000+ email addressees for dissemination of the newsletter to other RAO/RSO's, military fraternal organizations and interested veterans worldwide. The objective is to provide veteran related information to at least one member of every Veteran Group worldwide who can act as a point of contact to pass on any information felt germane to that Organization's membership. Through their involvement, the Bulletin info reaches approximately half a million veterans and/or dependents.

Our RAO meets the criteria, and is recognized as an "Independent RAO" and source of Veteran related info. The Bulletin is not an "Official" DoD sanctioned publication. The articles provide items taken from a wide variety of sources that have been edited or editorialized for retransmission. They also include info to ease transition into the Philippines for those who may be considering relocating there. The information contained therein is just that -- informational (FYI). The objective is only to PASS THE WORD in order to keep our Military Community informed. It is the responsibility of readers to verify exactly how information applies to them if they intend to expend funds or time in following up on the data provided in the articles. Unless you have questions concerning veteran's issues to be answered, there is no need for comments. Although it's nice to get the occasional "thanks for the info", it's not necessary, and just adds to the 50+ emails I receive daily. I do not send out prayers, religious material or music, chain letters, photos, etc., so please reciprocate by not sending these to me. Nor do I normally participate in 'political' stuff unless it is essential to an article being presented in the Bulletin. I would greatly appreciate that you not forward personal political comments/beliefs/prejudices, but I am always open to anything that could benefit other veterans.

Updates are sent Bcc via a Mailing List Provider so recipients are not bothered with large headers nor have their email addree revealed to others. If you want to know if anybody else in your organization is receiving the Bulletin just ask. Articles contain subjects of interest to all veterans regardless of geographic location. Over 99% of subscribers reside outside of the Philippines. The Bulletin content is for use in any way you see fit and retransmit is encouraged by email. If you intend to post the Bulletin or any articles to a website or a website assessed newsletter you need to request to be switched to the "Website Edition" directory so you will not have a problem with Military Times enforcement of their copyright. Sources are provided wherever possible to allow readers to re-validate info if they desire. The primary source is always listed first and if multiple sources are used it is indicated by "++" after the primary source in the source line.

Unfortunately, the Bulletin cannot be sent to many users of AOL or their subsidiaries. It does not conform to the prerequisites of their spam policies that establish what their readers are and are not allowed to receive. This also applies to all Netscape, WmConnect, and Cyberspace users. A few other servers such as Juno & NetZero allow some of their readers to receive the Bulletin but not all. I can receive messages from all servers but some like AOL will not always allow me to respond. To verify if a Bulletin was published go to <http://sjcvets.zymichost.com/index.html> (PDF format) or <http://www.veteransresources.org/rao-bulletin/> (Website Edition in Word format) to see a copy of the latest issue. If you did not get yours first ensure I am in your address book and/or on your white list. Then:

1. Call your server and ask how to bypass their spam filters or adjust your computer settings which are blocking your Bulletin.
2. When done request a Test Bulletin. If I do not respond within three days it means your server is preventing you from receiving my response
3. If you do not receive the Test Bulletin send me an alternate email addree that you can be reached at; or
4. Go to the above websites on the 2nd and 16th of each month to read/download the Bulletin.

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format) you can also view past Bulletins. Bear in mind that the articles shown in these Bulletins were only valid at the time they were written (normally indicated in the source line) and may have since been updated. At this site, you can also find the Bulletin Index to identify any articles you may want to recall. They will be provided upon email request.

Lt. James "EMO" Tichacek, USN (Ret)
Editor/Publisher
RAO Baguio Bulletin

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AL/AMVETS/DAV/NAUS/NCOA/MOAA/USDR/VFW/VVA/CG33/DD890/AD37/TSCL member

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2. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines can request to be added to the RAO's Philippine directory for receipt of Clark Field Space 'A', U.S. Embassy Manila, and Tricare in the RP notices.

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