

# RAO BULLETIN

## 1 April 2021

### PDF Edition



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1. The page number on which an article can be found is provided to the left of each article's title
2. To read the articles open the website and slew to the page number of the article you are interested in.
3. Numbers contained within brackets [ ] indicate the number of articles written on the subject. To obtain previous articles send a request to [raoemo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:raoemo@sbcglobal.net) 'or' [raoemo77@gmail.com](mailto:raoemo77@gmail.com)
4. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin are articles to other vets or veteran organizations

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- Attachment – Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 APR (Updated)
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**\* DoD \***



## **Pentagon Reimbursements**

### **U.S. Failed to Collect \$773M from Afghan Coalition Partners**

For four years, the Pentagon failed to charge partner nations for use of American rotary-wing aircraft in Afghanistan, and the department has no way of knowing how many millions of dollars has been lost, according to a new report from the department’s inspector general. During that time period, American and coalition costs for rotary-wing transportation hit \$773 million. How much of that should be reimbursed is effectively impossible to know, according to the auditors. For the 38 members of the Resolute Support coalition, American air transportation is vital for moving from the central hub in Kabul and Bagram Airfield to four outposts located in Mazar-e-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Laghman. But auditors discovered that the Department of Defense “did not request reimbursement for air transportation services provided to Coalition partners” between September 2017 and September 2020, despite a standing requirement to do so.

When it comes to transportation, coalition partners in Afghanistan are divided into two categories. “Lift and Sustain Coalition partners” have their costs covered by the DoD, as those partners would be unable to participate in the Resolute Support mission without the U.S. paying those expenses. There are 21 members in this category. The “Pay-to-Play” category contains 17 members: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. They are supposed to reimburse the U.S. for the costs associated with using American transportation capabilities in Afghanistan. (Iceland no longer participates in the mission, but did during the time period studied by auditors.)

However, auditors **place no blame on the coalition members** for the unpaid funds. Instead, they found breakdowns in the two Pentagon offices that are supposed to track the information: U.S. Forces-Afghanistan Multinational Logistics (USFOR-A-MNL) and the logistics division of U.S. Army Central (ARCENT). “USFOR-A MNL did not obtain flight data, determine rates, or establish an agreement with Coalition

partners for air transportation services. In addition, the ARCENT Logistics Directorate did not have internal controls in place to identify if orders were initiated” inside a government system, the auditors found. “We confirmed that ACSA coordinators did not initiate any orders for air transportation services for any of the 17 Pay-to-Play Coalition partners. Furthermore, in September 2020, the ACSA program manager stated that USFOR-A MNL personnel had never billed Coalition partners for air transportation services.”

Put simply, those offices never set up a way to track who was using American assets, where they went and how much those nations should be charged; there was also no system to allow the U.S. to ask for a monetary refund. And because no tracking was done, American taxpayers have no way of knowing how much money partners should have been paying. “The DoD paid \$773 million for air transportation services provided to U.S. personnel, Pay-to-Play Coalition partners, and Lift and Sustain Coalition partners from September 2017 through September 2020,” auditors found. While the 17 Pay-to-Play countries only make up part of that, “because USFOR-A did not receive or track Coalition partner flight usage data, the exact cost of air transportation services provided to Pay-to-Play Coalition partners cannot be determined.”

As a result of the IG’s findings, new procedures are being implemented:

- The IG recommended that USFOR-A-MNL begin gathering flight usage data, determine a per-person unit cost for moving partners around the country and sort out how to bill the partner nations. Army Col. Michael Scarpulla, the chief of staff for the deputy commanding general for operations in Afghanistan, concurred with both recommendations and pledged work would begin quickly, with the first bills submitted in the second quarter of 2021; a quarterly format will follow.
- The IG also recommended that ARCENT “conduct a review of all reimbursable services provided in Afghanistan to Coalition partners and establish internal controls” for tracing such information going forward. Army leadership agreed, with plans for monthly checkups on the information to ensure it is correctly tracked and billed.

Overall, the IG seems satisfied that these issues will be resolved, declaring concerns either closed or closed pending the results of billing efforts. [Source: DefenseNews | Aaron Mehta | March 25, 2021 ++]

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## **DFAS myPay System**

### **Update 19: Two-Factor Authentication Soon for Access to Your Pay Account**



The Defense Finance and Accounting Service is implementing **mandatory** two-factor authentication to increase the security of online financial and personal information, providing more protection from

fraudsters. That means that each time you access myPay, you'll be sent a one-time personal identification number through either email or text message, and you'll enter that PIN as an extra verification. You choose your preference for receiving that PIN the first time you log in to myPay after the change takes effect.

The requirements are different for those with a smart card, such as a Common Access Card, or CAC, or personal identity verification, PIV. In that case, you won't have to enter the random PIN each time you log in to myPay. But the first time you use myPay after the new requirement takes effect, you'll see an entry screen that asks you to choose your preferred method for receiving one-time PINs when you need to log in to myPay while away from your work computer. Officials haven't yet determined the day that the requirement goes live, said DFAS spokesman Steve Burghardt. Through myPay, users can view leave and earnings statements, view and print documents such as tax statements and travel vouchers, change federal and state tax withholding, change addresses, and manage other functions.

Last fall, DFAS introduced the two-factor authentication on a voluntary, test basis, and 1.2 million people, including 400,000 retirees, have already been participating in the program, Burghardt said. Two-factor authentication is becoming more common across government, educational and commercial online environments as an extra layer of protection from criminals who want to steal bank account numbers, names, address and other information to create fraudulent accounts, requesting loans or credit cards using stolen identities. Criminals could even redirect deposits to their fraudulent accounts to steal pay. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | March 16, 2021 ++]

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## **Arlington National Cemetery**

### **Update 91: Congress Needs to Designate A Replacement**



A recent Congressional Research Service (CRS) publication may add to the confusion some lawmakers face regarding the future of Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) – yet another reason to make your voice heard at this critical stage. CRS updated its defense primer on ANC in March, highlighting proposed eligibility changes under legal review as part of the federal rule-making process. Of concern is a potentially misleading entry for lawmakers that indicates those who have scheduled ANC to be their final resting place will not be impacted. Per the report, “According to the Army, revised eligibility at ANC will not affect previously scheduled burial services.”

Some lawmakers and their staffs could interpret this statement incorrectly, thinking those who have long planned for ANC as their final resting place would be grandfathered under the old rules. Unfortunately, with no current reservation system, this statement only applies to those who have passed and are awaiting their scheduled date for interment or inurnment. In other words, if the proposals are implemented, many 20-year retirees and other veterans will need to change their long-held end-of-life plans. But there is a way to continue the honor and prestige of ANC as it reaches capacity: Congress can designate a new national cemetery as part of the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

While the proposed eligibility changes are under review, current eligibility standards remain. Reaching out to your members of Congress today is key, as members and staffers develop their NDAA recommendations and finalize the House and Senate drafts. With no change to eligibility, even with the planned southern expansion, ANC will reach capacity by 2050. A 2017 report to Congress presented options, other than reducing eligibility, to maintain current operations. Option 3.2.2.3 in the report would require legislation to establish a new DoD national cemetery in a new location:

“ANC, as it operates today, cannot endure forever in its current space. Looking 100-200 years into the future, how and where will we honor our Nation’s heroes? Another option, which the Army recognizes would represent a significant change, is establishing a new Department of Defense-run national cemetery in another location. This would mean building a new cemetery in a suitable place that would offer the same burial honors as ANC. While it is impossible to recreate the aesthetic appeal and history of ANC, this new cemetery could grow to become iconic over time, in the same way that ANC has gradually evolved over the past 150 years. Operating ANC as an active burial ground for as long as possible would allow a phase of overlap and continuity while establishing the new space.”

It’s not too late for Congress to intervene. And the path forward may be clearer with a new Defense Advisory Council on Arlington National Cemetery – Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin released all of the council’s members as part of a zero-based review of DoD advisory boards. The old board had supported the eligibility changes. Readers are requested to contact their legislators and ask a replacement for Arlington be designated. This can easily be done by utilizing the MOAA TAKE Action prepared editable message at <https://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/app/write-a-letter?0&engagementId=511221>. Make your voice heard today. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Mark Belinsky | March 24, 2021 ++]

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## **NPRC Military Records**

### **Update 08: VA to Vaccinate NPRC Employees to Reduce Backlog**



During testimony before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee on 25 MAR, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said he is using his federal authorities to schedule vaccines for staffers at the NPRC's Maryland and Missouri sites in an effort to "get them back to work." The agency has been operating at severely reduced staffing levels — as low as 10 percent of normal — for the last year. That has led to a backlog of more than 500,000 records requests, many of which are needed for a host of veterans' transition issues, including updating medical files, verifying disability claims and filing other benefits requests. "It struck me as crazy that we haven't gotten the [records administration] folks vaccinated," McDonough said. "We have the vaccine to do that now. We have signed all that paperwork, and hopefully we'll be getting some set shots in arms here within the next couple of days."

NPRC is part of the National Archives and Records Administration, independent of the Department of Veterans Affairs. However, VA officials have been charged by federal officials with delivering vaccines to a host of federal employees outside their own workforce, and McDonough said he would use that responsibility to speed efforts to get NARA employees vaccinated. Committee members praised the news. Earlier this week, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) and ranking member Jerry Moran (R-KS) had asked for action from the White House to address the growing backlog problem in the agency.

"The NPRC facility located in St. Louis, Missouri, holds over two million cubic feet of military personnel and medical records. These records only exist in paper form and cannot be accessed electronically by veterans or their families," the pair wrote. "Veterans need these records to access VA-administered programs, including health care, education, disability, pension, and burial benefits." McDonough said that while vaccine distribution will help reopen the NRPC offices, the recent problems highlight the need for transferring those military records to a computerized system, a process that will likely take significant time and resources. "We have to get those records digitized, so we're not stuck in this place again," he said. "[Congress] has given us some money, both in omnibus last year and in the American Rescue Plan [this month] to allow us to get this stuff digitized, so that we can move it more quickly."

The VA secretary did not offer a timeline for when that project may be finished. McDonough said he is reviewing a series of backlog issues through VA related to pandemic closures and delays, in an effort to return the department to pre-pandemic operation levels as soon as possible. VA has administered about 3.3 million doses of vaccines since mid-December, and about 1.5 million veterans have received both doses of the two-shot coronavirus regimen. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 25, 2021 ++]

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## **DoD Fraud, Waste, & Abuse**

### **Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2021**

**Iraq** -- A woman who worked as a contract linguist for the U.S. military in Iraq pleaded guilty 25 MAR to sharing classified information with a romantic interest linked to the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. **Mariam Taha Thompson** was arrested last year in an espionage case that investigators said put the lives of American military members and confidential sources at risk and represented a significant breach of classified information. Thompson, 63 and formerly of Rochester, Minnesota, pleaded guilty to a single count of delivering national defense information to aid a foreign government. She admitted as part of a



deal that she shared the names of U.S. government assets with a Lebanese man with connections to Hezbollah.



**Mariam Thompson as seen in federal court in Washington on Wednesday, March 4, 2020**

Assistant Attorney General John Demers, the Justice Department's top national security official, said in a statement that the actions represented "a disgraceful personal and professional betrayal of country and colleagues." Sentencing was scheduled for June 23. A lawyer for Thompson, who faces up to life in prison, did not immediately return a phone message seeking comment. Thompson began communicating with the man, whom she never met in person, in 2017 after being connected via social media by a family member, and she ultimately developed a romantic interest in him, prosecutors said.

After a January 2020 U.S. strike that killed Iran's top general, Qassem Soleimani, the Lebanese man — who is not named in court papers — asked Thompson to provide "them" with information about the human assets that had helped the U.S. target Soleimani. Investigators say Thompson accessed dozens of files about human sources, including their names, photographs, background information and operational cables that described the information they had gathered. She agreed to provide the classified information to the man; officials say she had planned to marry him, and was afraid he would end her relationship if she did not cooperate. [Source: The Associated Press | Eric Tucker | March 26, 2021 ++]

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## **Jetpacks**

### **Pentagon Finally Wants To Make Jetpack Soldiers a Reality**



Forget hypersonic missiles and AI drones, the Pentagon is finally looking into the real future tech we've always wanted: jetpacks! In a bid for research proposals released earlier this month, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) requested ideas for a "portable personal air mobility system" that could be used for special operations, search and rescue, urban combat, maritime interdiction, and even logistics missions. Jetpacks are definitely what this reporter wants to see, but DARPA said proposals could also include powered gliders, powered wingsuit, and powered parafoils; just as long as they can be carried easily by one or a few people; have a range of at least 3.1 miles; can take off anywhere; and can be assembled in less than 10 minutes with minimal tools.

“Systems may be air deployed to allow for [infiltration] to hostile territory, or ground deployed to allow for greater off-road mobility,” DARPA wrote in its pre-solicitation, which was posted on the U.S. government’s business [contracting website](#) on 2 MAR. The system could be powered by electric batteries, hydrogen fuel cells or conventional heavy fuel propulsion systems, DARPA wrote, as long as the system doesn’t need environmental factors like wind or elevation to get going. It would also be an extra treat if the system were quiet with a low infrared signature but still simple enough that a user could learn how to operate it with “relatively little training,” DARPA said.

The pre-solicitation is by no means a guarantee that future operators will soon rocket into battle like the Mandalorian. It is meant to just help DARPA start considering the feasibility of such a system, and to potentially demonstrate it. But it comes five months after the British Royal Navy announced it would test jet packs for [swarming and boarding](#) ships, and U.S. Special Operations Command said it would evaluate a jetpack that could fly at more than 200 miles per hour. Yet the history of the U.S. military’s flirtations with jetpacks goes even further back. Bell Aerosystems whipped up several different flying contraptions for the Army in the late 1950s, as [War Is Boring](#) reported in 2015. Among them was a Jet Belt controlled with joysticks that could fly at more than 100 miles per hour, and a two-man rocket-powered “Pogo.” “It’s all very sci-fi,” wrote Joseph Trevithick at the time. “Troops with Jet Belts could launch hit and run raids or rush to break up an ambush. Soldiers and Marines might zoom to dry land from ships offshore without having to plod along in landing craft or amphibious vehicles.”

Jet Belt troops could also serve as spotters for fire support; hover in the rear as military police; pick up injured troops or downed pilots; or haul around heavy weapons or supplies, Trevithick wrote. Bell’s promotional materials included some pretty cheesy doodles of Jet Belt-wearing soldiers hopping over Vietnam-esque jungles and rivers. But the program never got off the ground: Trevithick said Jet Belts and Pogos could not compete with the range of helicopters, and the idea was eventually shelved. However, a new wave of jetpack entrepreneurs such as Richard Browning, the former Royal Marine who founded Gravity Industries and flew a lap around the HMS Queen Elizabeth in a jet suit in 2019, could pave the way for renewed development of the technology.

Could DARPA’s pre-solicitation mark a new hope for our jetpack dreams? We’ll have to stay tuned, but even if DoD turns them down, the systems being considered could still be a huge opportunity for civilian first responders, including police, search and rescue, and ambulance response, DARPA wrote. Or they could be the Segways of the sky for tourists trying to see the sites in cities everywhere. Either way, bring on the fuuuuture. [Source: Task & Purpose | David Roza | March 15, 2021 ++]

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## **MCRD Paris Island**

### **In Peril | Rising Sea Levels Threaten Historic Marine Base**

There is nothing visible to suggest that Marine Corps Recruit Depot on Parris Island, South Carolina, is in peril. Rows of quaint pastel painted clapboard cottages and white-picket fences, military housing, line the main road into base. Young recruits, rifles in hand, often quietly train on the mowed lawns near the base’s history museum. Even a pandemic did not halt training for too long, as the base learned to “adapt and overcome” with new procedures and protocols to try to keep budding Marines from catching COVID-19.

Traditionally, a visit to the 105-year-old depot — hallowed ground to Marines both active and retired — brings with it a sense of weighted history. The approach begins on a narrow, two-lane, earthen causeway connecting the edge of the tiny -hamlet of Port Royal, South Carolina, to the base’s guarded entrance. An early morning drive to the -marsh-encircled island showed a road sitting barely a few feet above the water at low tide. “It’s the only roadway on or off the island,” then Beaufort, South Carolina, Mayor Bill Keyserling told Marine Corps Times in an exclusive interview in 2019. The water lapping at the grassy lined causeway has been a concern to several people Marine Corps Times has spoken with.

Former Marine Corps Assistant Commandant Gen. Glenn M. Walters, now retired, first raised the alarm at a Senate Armed Services Committee readiness hearing in early 2018 by informing the committee that floodwaters at Parris Island, South Carolina, were the Marines’ greatest threat to military readiness. He also stated he was privy to several Department of Defense and intelligence briefs that led him to believe it was not a matter of if the base would flood, but when. At the time, Walters was a rare and candid military voice regarding a scenario often linked to climate change, a topic that was then, more so than now, fraught with political and logistical implications. Walters retired soon after his statements. The Union of Concerned Scientists, a D.C. based think tank of climate scientists, predicted in 2016 that due to rising tides the famed Marine training post could likely experience seas projected to rise between 4.0 feet and 6.4 feet by the end of the century.

More worrisome, in a worst-case scenario, in less than 30 years the base could be underwater more than a quarter of a year. “Tidal flooding affects low-lying locations around MCAS Beaufort and MCRD Parris Island, including extensive wetland areas, 10 times per year on average,” the group’s 2016 case study said. “By 2050, the currently flood-prone areas within both bases could experience tidal flooding more than 300 times -annually and be underwater nearly 30 percent of the year given the highest scenario.” Despite reports of danger to the base, a seawall has not been in the plans for the Marine Corps. The military budgets for fiscal years 2018, 2019 and 2020 show no requests for federal funding to begin plans or construction of floodwalls to protect the island. Military construction funds for Navy and -Marine Corps projects in the fiscal 2021 appropriations bill, signed into law in December 2020, total \$1.7 billion but do not include a specific line item that mentions a seawall or water intrusion mitigation plan for Parris Island, South Carolina.

Parris Island has said it has its own contingency plan. The depot’s official line on readiness?: “We continue our mission of making Marines while -remaining prepared to respond to a potential significant weather event,” Capt. Bryan A. McDonnell, spokesman for Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina, said in 2019. “If an evacuation was deemed necessary, we are well trained in the procedure and have an established evacuation site at Albany, Georgia, where recruit training can continue with minimal disruptions,” he said. Inquiries to the Marine headquarters near the- nation’s capital resulted in a similar response. “There are no plans to build a seawall at Parris Island,” spokesman Capt. Joseph Butterfield had said in 2019, in 2021 pointing to the Parris Island, South Carolina, office for updates. Repeated requests for an updated statement from Parris Island went unanswered.

Recent Congressional mandates for gender integration at Marine boot camp will put a strain on Marine recruit infrastructure as it is. The Corps currently does not have the facilities to integrate genders at the platoon level at both recruit depots, as the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act will require. “Nothing the way we’re organized right now lends itself to integrated recruit training,” Marine Commandant Gen. David Berger said at Defense One’s state of the Marine Corps event in September 2020. “We have to get

to a place where on both coasts or at a third location, or whatever we end up with that every recruit male, female, there's all there's male and female around," he added. Maybe it would be easier if the Marine Corps -abandon Parris Island altogether. The Corps is still too early in the gender-integration planning process to give details on what exactly is being considered, a Marine Corps spokesman said.

### **Can Parris Island survive?**

The 8,095 acre island is positioned across the water and just north of Hilton Head, South Carolina. A five-minute drive inland leads to the tiny community of Port Royal, South Carolina, with the picturesque town of Beaufort tucked behind it. The eastern-most edge of Parris Island abuts the Atlantic Ocean about an hour south of Charleston — a city constantly battling tides and flooding. Keyserling said it is hard to imagine that the military is not having private meetings to figure out the future of Parris Island, South Carolina, and other bases threatened by rising water. He just wishes they would announce those plans, whether they mention climate change or not. "I don't care what's causing the water to rise, it's here," said Keyserling. "I simply want protection and a plan to stop it."

Without intervention, says another retired Marine general, rising tides and sea levels eventually will submerge the majority of the island. "The island routinely floods, and certainly has tremendous tides," said retired Marine Brig. Gen. Stephen A. Cheney, base commander of Parris Island, South Carolina, from 1999–2001. "When flooding happens on a routine basis, you have to prevent that, that's called adaptation," said Cheney. "Parris Island is currently not adapting. They will have to build a seawall, at least in parts, it has got to be done."

Cheney described a military wary of the controversial topic of rising sea levels due to the President Donald Trump White House, reiterating several times that the administration completely removed the entire section on climate change section from the National Defense Strategy in 2018. Cheney said he knows for a fact that then-Defense Secretary James Mattis had tried to insert climate change back into the NDS plan, but was unsuccessful. "The Marine Corps was running backward as fast as they can to stay out of all of that back then, the politics; it turned into a political hot potato," said Cheney. "That might change with Biden, we're hoping for tremendous change in this particular area." Still, two years on, even after Marine Corps leadership warned that water eventually would render the depot unusable, there's little evidence that the Defense Department has taken action.

In order for the Marines to create a plan to address flooding of the islands low-lying areas, a consensus has to be reached on a timeline and a budget that Congress will approve, funds have to be requested, and planning has to begin. So far it has not. At present it appears to be an "if it's not broken, don't fix it approach," said Cheney. But even though no money has been set aside to prepare to stop the waters encroaching on Parris Island, South Carolina, the military has taken steps to address environmental damage elsewhere. The 2020 Department of the Navy budget, which included the Marine budget, set aside \$49 million for a protective seawall near a Norfolk, Virginia, shipyard for the Navy's pivotal nuclear submarine -maintenance facility, which also faces flooding from rising waters.

If that is an example, Parris Island will require millions of dollars, if not billions, to stay afloat and build a seawall or levee system around pivotal training areas, Cheney said. This lack of action runs counter to adjacent municipalities such as nearby Beaufort, Port Royal and even Charleston, South Carolina, which have been addressing the issues head on by forming committees, and initiating flood plans, seawall design and building. The timetable to secure funding for Parris Island, South Carolina, is now, said retired Army Brig. Gen. Gerald Galloway, an engineer and consultant on coastal and military construction.

Galloway worked extensively on the reconstruction of the levee systems in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. “The challenge will be to develop a program, that takes time, to get a plan to work and a stream of money over some years, were talking about billions of dollars,” said Galloway in 2019. To even begin a flood mitigation project, let alone complete construction, would take years, he said.

In November of 2020 the Low country Council of Governments, which represents surrounding Beaufort County, including the city of Beaufort and the town Port Royal, South Carolina, secured a \$475,000 grant from the Department of Defense’s Office of Economic Adjustment. The grant is to implement an 18-month military installation resiliency review -focusing on sea-level rise and natural disasters effecting Parris -Island, South Carolina, nearby Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort, and the surrounding areas. The council says the study aims to create an implementation plan to mitigate water intrusion and protect resources necessary to maintain military installations in relation to natural hazards.

The study is scheduled to be completed at the beginning of 2022, with the military cooperating and intending to incorporate the results in its own plans, said Stephanie Rossi, planning director at the council. At present, Marines on the island are prepared to continue training recruits. In all, about 20,000 recruits graduate as Marines from the depot each year, the Marine Corps says. McDonnell called that “a number that has remained relatively consistent.” In 2020 alone, there were 36 recruit graduations scheduled, according Parris Island’s website. There are 32 graduation ceremonies scheduled in 2021. That’s almost half of the Corps’ total annual recruits who leave training as full-fledged Marines. On the West Coast, Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego trains and graduates an almost equal number.

The question is how long the military can wait. “The fact that Walters, the No. 2 Marine at the time was saying that the island was critical was very telling,” said John Conger, the director of the Center of the Climate and Security, and former assistant secretary of defense for energy, installations and environment. “Despite the current budget numbers; Marine leaders are thinking about it. Sea level rise is a threat to the critical military installations in North and South Carolina. We need to focus on these problems now, before it becomes a crisis.” [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Kristine Froeba | March 1, 2021 ++]

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## **Marine Corps Base Hawaii**

### **Shore Sinking At Pu’uloa Range Training Facility**



Rising sea levels has put the Pu’uloa Range Training Facility on Marine Corps Base Hawaii at risk of going underwater — and has the Marine Corps weighing its options. A 14-year study on potential shoreline erosion laid out three potential erosion rates based on three projected sea level rise scenarios. The lowest amount of sea level rise over the next 14-years was projected at 0.25 feet, which would result in the loss

of between 1.4 feet and 2.1 feet of the shoreline, Marine spokesman Capt. Eric Abrams told Marine Corps Times. The highest projected rise was projected at 2.03 feet, which would result in a potential loss of 11.8 feet to 19 feet of the shoreline.

“Given the significant coastal erosion along the shoreline, MCBH is exploring multiple stabilization options to ensure PRTF continues to operate as a vitally important piece to Marine Corps readiness in the Pacific,” a statement from the base about the change said. The risks if the Corps does nothing include “erosion of the earthen berms along the seaward boundaries of the ranges, seawater intrusion into the ranges rendering them unusable, and increased potential for erosion and lead contamination of the beach and water,” an environmental report said. To stop the erosion the Corps laid out a three-phase plan.

- First it will attempt to revegetate the available land between the range and the highwater mark of the shore.
- The second phase will see the Corps move the range up to 100 feet back from the shore.
- The final phase would see the Corps construct a wall 1,500 feet long and up to 20 feet deep just above the high-water mark and below the range, the release said.

There is no timeline currently for when the shore stabilization project will kickoff, as no money has been budgeted yet for the change. The Hawaii range is just one Marine property forced to consider construction projects in the wake of rising sea levels. In 2018 then-Marine Corps Assistant Commandant Gen. Glenn Walters warned lawmakers in the Senate Armed Services Committee that a seawall would need to be constructed onboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina, to prevent inevitable flooding as the sea continues to rise. In fewer than 30 years the historic recruit depot will partially be underwater for up to a quarter of the year, Marine Corps Times previously reported. [Source: MarineCorpsTimes | Philip Athey | March 16, 2021 ++]

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## **POW/MIA Recoveries & Burials**

**Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2021 | Eighteen**

“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 as of FEB 2019 are: World War II 73,025 of which over 41,000 are presumed to be lost at sea, Korean War 7665, Vietnam War 1589 (i. e. VN-1,246, Laos-288, Cambodia-48, & Peoples Republic of China territorial waters-7), Cold War 111, Iraq and other conflicts 5. 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 missing or unaccounted for personnel to date refer to <http://www.dpaa.mil> and click on ‘Our Missing’. Refer to <https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories> for a listing and details of the 141 accounted for in 2005. If you wish to provide information about an American missing in action from any conflict or have an inquiry about MIAs, contact:

== Mail: Public Affairs Office, 2300 Defense Pentagon, Washington, D. C. 20301-2300, Attn: External Affairs Call: Phone: (703) 699-1420

== Message: Fill out form on <http://www.dpaa.mil/Contact/ContactUs.aspx>



Family members seeking more information about missing loved ones may also 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 names, photos, and details of the below listed MIA/POW's which have been recovered, identified, and/or scheduled for burial since the publication of the last RAO Bulletin are listed on the following sites:

- <https://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>
- <http://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases>
- <http://www.thepatriotspage.com/Recovered.htm>
- <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org>
- <https://www.pownetwork.org/bios/b/b012.htm>
- <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>

### **LOOK FOR**

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Robert Parker**, 23, as a pilot assigned to the 35th Fighter Squadron, 8th Fighter Group. On Nov. 15, 1943, he was piloting a P-40N Warhawk fighter on a patrol mission with seven other P-40s over the Markham River Valley, New Guinea, when his formation encountered a swarm of enemy aircraft on the southern edge of the Finisterre Range. After shooting down one enemy aircraft, Parker collided with another, the impact shearing a wing off of each. The P-40 crashed near Sagarak, and it was reported that he did not eject. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Parker.](#)

-- **Army Chaplain (Capt.) Emil J. Kapaun**, of Pilsen, Kansas, returned to active duty in the U.S. Army after serving during World War II and served in the Korean War with the 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. On Nov. 2, 1950, his unit was near Unsan when they came under heavy fire from Chinese forces and received orders to withdraw. Approximately a quarter of the unit's soldiers made their way back to friendly lines. The others, including many wounded soldiers, became trapped. Kapaun volunteered to stay with the wounded and was soon captured and taken to a Chinese-run prison camp on the Yalu River's south bank known as Camp 5. Due to prolonged malnutrition, he died on May 23, 1951, after which the other POWs buried him in one of the camp's cemeteries. At a White House ceremony on April 11, 2013, President Barack Obama posthumously awarded Kapaun the Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism and selflessness. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Kapaun.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Walter A. Smead**, 24, was a member of Battery A, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, after his unit was attacked by enemy forces as they attempted to withdraw near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Smead.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Lyle W. Reab, 22**, of Phillips, Nebraska, was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action as of Nov. 9, 1944, after his unit engaged German forces at Vossenack, Germany, in the Hürtgen Forest. His body was not recovered. Reab will be buried June 8, 2021, in Aurora, Nebraska. [Read about Reab.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas J. Valentine, 22**, was a member of Battery B, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, after his unit was attacked by enemy forces as they attempted to withdraw near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Valentine.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. John F. Middleswart, 19**, of San Diego, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Middleswart. He will be buried on June 8, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Middleswart.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Leslie P. Delles, 21**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Delles. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Delles.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Denis H. Hiskett, 20**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Hiskett. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Hiskett.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Harold E. Bates, 27**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Bates. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bates.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class Carl M. Bradley, 19**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Bradley. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Bradley.](#)

-- **Navy Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Shelby Treadway, 25**, of Manchester, Kentucky, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Treadway. He will be buried on June 2, 2021, at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. [Read about Treadway](#)

-- **Navy Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Everett R. Stewart, 22**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Stewart. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Stewart.](#)

-- **Navy Pharmacist's Mate 3rd Class George L. Paradis, 23**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese



aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Paradis. Interment services are pending. [Read about Paradis.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Elmer P. Lawrence, 25**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Lawrence. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lawrence.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Wilbur F. Ballance, 20**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Ballance. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ballance.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Michael Malek, 17**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Malek. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Malek.](#)

-- **Navy Signalman 1st Class Eugene M. Skaggs, 33**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Skaggs. Interment services are pending. [Read about Skaggs.](#)

-- **Navy Signalman 3rd Class Austin H. Hesler, 21**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Hesler. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Hesler.](#)

-- **U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Jack E. Hill, 21**, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, to secure the island. Hill died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment Services are pending. [Read about Hill.](#)

[Source: <http://www.dpaa.mil> | March 2021 ++]

\* VA \*



## Coronavirus Vaccines

### Update 32: New Law Allows All Vets, Spouses & Caregivers to Receive from VA

All veterans, their spouses and caregivers regardless of their VA health care enrollment status will be able to receive a coronavirus vaccine through the Department of Veterans Affairs once doses are made available under Saves Lives Act H.R.1276 signed into law by President Joe Biden on 24 MAR. Veterans Affairs leaders had supported the move, saying they did not want to turn away any veteran from receiving the shots if they were available. But under former rules, department medical centers were permitted to administer vaccines only to veterans already eligible for VA health care services, and for certain caregivers registered in VA support programs. That totals just under 7 million individuals.

Under the new bill, that number is expected to jump to more than 20 million. It would make vaccines eligible “to all veterans, veteran spouses, caregivers, and Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) recipients to the extent that such vaccines are available.” The measure also for the first time makes veterans living abroad and enrolled in VA’s the Foreign Medical Program (FMA) eligible to receive the vaccine through department facilities. The legislation passed without objection in both the House and Senate. The SAVE LIVES Act increases the number of individuals who are eligible to get lifesaving COVID-19 vaccines from VA from 9.5 million to more than 33 million.

VA is providing COVID-19 vaccinations to Veterans and employees per its COVID-19 Vaccination Plan. As of 24 MAR, VA has fully vaccinated 1,594,812 individuals, including Veterans, VA employees and federal partners. The next steps in VA’s prioritized expansion efforts are to offer the vaccine to all enrolled Veterans – approximately 9.5 million – followed by those outlined in the bill, as vaccine supply permits:

- Non-enrolled Veterans as defined in the new legislation, including those without service-connected disabilities and who have incomes above VA’s threshold.
- Overseas Veterans who rely on the Foreign Medical Program.
- Veteran caregivers who are enrolled in either the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers or the Program of General Caregiver Support Services.
- Veteran caregivers enrolled in certain Geriatrics and Extended Care Programs, such as Veteran Directed Care, Bowel and Bladder, Home Based Primary Care and VA’s Medical Foster Home Program.
- Civilian Health and Medical Programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs recipients.
- Veteran spouses.

“We’re one step away from ensuring that every veteran, spouse, and caregiver in this country has access to a vaccine from VA,” said Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT). “This legislation is a critical step in reaching our common goal of saving more lives and getting our economy back on track as quickly and safely as possible.” That one step, however, is still a formidable challenge. In an interview with CNN on 18 MAR, VA Secretary Denis McDonough acknowledged that his department’s ability to vaccinate the entire veteran population will depend on supplies provided by federal partners. “All of us face a limited supply challenge,” he said. “When we have the supply to do it we will be in a position to really ramp that up.” As part of the legislation, Congress will urge Department of Health and Human Services officials to increase VA’s vaccine allocation “as much as the supply chain allows.”

Department staff are currently administering about 250,000 vaccine doses a week. Acting VA Under Secretary for Health Richard Stone told Military Times earlier this month that he believes VA could do more than 300,000 if given enough supplies from federal partners. The legislation does not require veterans or their family members to get a vaccine through VA facilities, but allows them the option to receive it when doses are available. VA officials have said they will continue to prioritize elderly veterans and individuals with other existing health conditions that may make them more vulnerable to coronavirus complications.

Interested Veterans, their caregivers and Veteran spouses who qualify under the legislation can go to <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine> to get more information about COVID-19 vaccines at VA. Updates will be provided regarding the availability of vaccine supply and other resources.

[Source: MilitaryTimes & VA News Release | Leo Shane III | March 19 & 24, 2021 ++]

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## **VA EHR**

### **Update 28: Review Ordered amid Legislator's Project Size and Scope Concerns**

Veterans Affairs officials on Friday announced a full review of the department's \$16 billion electronic medical records overhaul amid growing concerns from lawmakers about the size and scope of the project. The review, expected to last 12 weeks, is not expected to delay the deployment of the new system to the Columbus, Ohio, VA medical center this summer. But department officials acknowledged that "the order of subsequent deployments may be revised as a result of this strategic review." Last month, officials from the Government Accountability Office recommended postponing further expansion of the project until lingering issues with the system are resolved. They said as of last fall, "VA was at risk of deploying a system that did not perform as intended and could negatively impact the likelihood of its successful adoption."

Department officials framed the new review as an assessment by the new administration to ensure that project timelines and requirements are realistic. "A successful electronic health records deployment is essential in the delivery of lifetime, world-class health care for our Veterans," VA Secretary Denis McDonough said in a statement. "After a rigorous review of our most-recent deployment at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center [in Washington], it is apparent that a strategic review is necessary. VA remains committed to the Cerner Millennium solution, and we must get this right for veterans." VA officials separately emphasized that the review is not aimed at looking whether the entire project should be reconsidered, but instead only at the pace of deployment and advance requirement needs for that work.

Sign up for the Retirement Report

The 10-year health records project — heavily touted by former President Donald Trump's administration as a transformation effort for VA — is designed to bring veterans and military medical software into alignment, allowing lifelong medical records to follow service members from through Defense Department clinics, VA medical appointments and even health visits outside the federal systems. But deployment of Cerner's Millennium software, already in use at the Defense Department, has had a difficult start. Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill have promised close scrutiny on the new records system in the coming year, both because of the scope of the project and the reports of uneven progress in the initial stages.

Earlier this week, Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) sent a letter to McDonough complaining of “new stress on the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center” — the first site to use the new system — because of shortcomings with the new records implementation. “I am hearing from some [employees] who are deeply frustrated with the system and are not getting the support they need,” she wrote. “Nurses who go to work every day to serve our veterans should not be driven to tears because software, which was intended to be an improvement, makes their jobs more difficult.” She also raised concerns about patient safety, citing multiple reports of prescription delays linked to the new system. Officials from Cerner have disputed whether that is a widespread problem. They have also said that many of the initial challenges with deploying the new system were expected, and technical experts from their company and VA built space into their deployment timelines to account for improvements needed as those problems have arisen.

“Cerner supports the decision by VA to conduct a strategic program review,” said Brian Sandager, general manager of Cerner Government Services, in a statement. “We are proud of the significant milestones we have achieved, including one of the largest health data migrations in history and the deployment of a new joint Health Information Exchange between DOD, VA and their community partners. As committed partners we welcome and value the opportunity to review the program and share lessons learned.” VA officials have already moved more than 24 million veteran health records into the new system. All VA facilities are expected to be using the system by the end of 2028. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 19, 2021 ++]

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## **PTSD Marijuana Treatment**

### **Update 03: Short-Term Use of Cannabis Safe | No More Effective than Placebo**



Early results of a long-awaited study on marijuana as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder show that veterans who smoked two components of cannabis -- tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, and cannabidiol, or CBD -- saw decreases in their symptoms. But those who received a placebo during the study did just as well, according to data published 17 MAR in the journal PLOS One. The research, sponsored by the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, or MAPS, in Santa Cruz, California, aimed to determine whether inhaled cannabis or its components were safe and effective for treating PTSD.

For the study, 80 participants were divided into four groups: those who received cannabis containing high levels of THC, those who received hemp with high levels of CBD, those who received cannabis containing an even mix of THC and CBD, and those who got a placebo. The participants, who did not know what treatment they'd been given, used the cannabis or placebo for three weeks. They then rested for two weeks and were given one of the four options for three more weeks. According to the results, all four treatment groups, including those who received the placebo, achieved "significant reductions" in their

PTSD assessment scores at the end. Specifically:

- Participants who received marijuana with high levels of THC in the first phase saw a mean reduction in PTSD assessment scores of 15.2 points.
- Those who received a placebo reported a reduction of 13.1 points
- Those who got a treatment containing high levels of CBD or the mix saw reductions of 8.4 points and 8.5 points, respectively.

In patients' personal assessments of their PTSD symptoms, there were no significant differences in scores between treatment groups through Stage 1. But after Stage 2, those who received the mix containing an even amount of THC and CBD reported larger reductions in their PTSD symptoms than those who used CBD only. "Even though it was not as robust a response that we had hoped to achieve, we learned a lot that will shape future studies," lead researcher Dr. Sue Sisley told Military.com. Among the lessons learned: Cannabis use was well tolerated by patients in the study. The most common adverse effects reported were cough, sore throat and anxiety. Thirteen participants dropped out after experiencing adverse medical issues related or unrelated to the study.

The research, which has been in the works since 2010, is the first in the U.S. to study whole plant marijuana as a PTSD treatment. Berra Yazar-Klosinski, chief scientific officer at MAPS, described the study as a success because it laid the groundwork for larger studies, demonstrating that marijuana doesn't pose a risk to human subjects and exposing methodological flaws that will be addressed. "The main issue with the study was that it was not really intended to get a statistically significant difference. ... While it seems like a large study, because we didn't exactly know what types of cannabis would work best for this population, we had like 19 people in each group," Yazar-Klosinski said.

The road to the early results was anything but easy for those who spent years getting the research approved, including Sisley, a former professor at the University of Arizona who fought to get federal approval for the study, which revolved around a controlled substance. After winning approval in early 2014 from the Health and Human Services Department, the study was set to get underway at the University of Arizona and other locations when Sisley's contract with the school was terminated. Then, the Department of Veterans Affairs slow-rolled her efforts to recruit veteran patients. When she finally received a grant in 2016 for the research, she sought to recruit at least 76 military veterans and enrolled her first in early 2017. At that point, the federally supplied cannabis Sisley was required to use for the research was found to be of low quality and moldy. She sued the Drug Enforcement Agency to reconsider the Schedule I status of marijuana. MAPS also has sued to compel the DEA to process marijuana producer and manufacturer licenses for researchers who want to cultivate medical-grade cannabis.

Although the research did not show a large "effect size," the researchers have submitted plans to the Food and Drug Administration for a larger, more comprehensive study to demonstrate whether cannabis can be used as an effective treatment for PTSD. They plan to have more participants, a longer study period and high-quality cannabis sourced from the U.S., if licenses are issued, or Canada, according to Sisley. Among the issues with the research, Yazar-Klosinski said, was that participants got only three weeks of dosing, which may not have been enough time for those who received THC or CBD to reach a "steady state" similar to what is achieved when a patient takes prescribed medication for a mental condition. She added that the PTSD assessment, which asks patients to describe their feelings in the past 30 days, may reflect disease fluctuations or natural decline in symptoms over time. "We have a lot of really rich

information that came out of this trial that is going to inform the design of the new study," Yazar-Klosinski said.

The researchers included Sisley; Marcel Bonn-Miller with the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania; and Paula Riggs, with the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Sean Kiernan, president of the Weed for Warriors Project, an advocacy group that raises awareness of cannabis in the veteran community, said MAPS and Sisley "deserve a medal for the absolute intentional dysfunction they overcame to complete this study and publish its findings." **"The positive that came from this study is cannabis is safe. The negative is the anti-science prohibitionist mindset is still blocking beneficial research into cannabis,"** Kiernan said. If the new research is approved, the researchers will establish a webpage to recruit volunteers, Yazar-Klosinski said. [Source: Military.com | Patricia Kime| March 17, 2021 ++]

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## VA FMP

### Update 02: Medical Claims | Philippines

For eligible Veterans living or traveling abroad, VA offers medical services through the Foreign Medical Program (FMP). Through this program, FMP will pay for health care services, medications, and durable medical equipment for service-connected conditions and conditions associated with and held to be aggravating a service-connected condition. VA may authorize foreign medical services for any condition if you are participating in the VA Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

FMP is currently opening mail received on 01/09/2021, processing claims received on 9/2/2020 and processing registrations received on 12/16/20. To receive a faster FMP reimbursement, consider e-mailing [hac.fmp@va.gov](mailto:hac.fmp@va.gov) instead of faxing or mailing your claim. Include the VAF 10-7959F-2 claim form and all associated documents, as indicated on the claim form, as attachments. You will receive a confirmation email quickly. E-mail or Fax (1-303-331-7803) your claim in one complete package. Submitting an incomplete FMP form WILL result in denial and need to be resubmitted. Any Veteran with new service-connected ratings can request an upgraded FMP letter, email them. DAV Ch#3 Office at 315 Pinatub0 St., Rm 101, Angeles City, Pampanga can email it for you.

#### TIPS FOR FAST FMP REIMBURSEMENT

- Submit a completed VAF 10-7959F-2, Foreign Medical Program (FMP) Claim Cover Sheet using a permanent address where mail will always reach you. The form can be completed online and downloaded at <https://va-form-10-7959f-2.pdfFiller.com>.
- Any Veteran currently registered with FMP, with new service connected ratings, can request an upgraded FMP letter by emailing [hac.fmp@va.gov](mailto:hac.fmp@va.gov). Include:
  - A diagnosis or nature of illness or injury
  - Doctor's name and medical title
  - Doctor's office address and office telephone number.
  - Doctor's billing address if different from office address.
  - Include claim information. Especially the Diagnosis Treated and narrative description of each service and/or drug (This determines if the condition is Service Connected) and each service's billed charge and date(s) of service.

## **In Country VAMC Services Currently Available**

For vets living in the Philippines Primary and some Specialty Doctor's appointments are being scheduled at the Manila VA Clinic. Phone interviews are allowed for Veteran's unable to travel to the Manila Clinic. You can receive your annual flu shot at the VA Manila Clinic. If you aren't physically going to any VA appointments, contact Dr. Sugay at TMCC, Secretary Wheng 0935-939-8046 for flu shots. You can take one other person with you age 18-65 during your appointments to assist you. You can schedule at <https://v2.waitwhile.com/welcome/vamanila> an appointment and choose the date and time with them. They will call you back to confirm. Manila VA telephones are now operating from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. VAMC is also providing an option to schedule a telephonic or video interview utilizing the 'wait while' scheduling application

[Source: VFW Post 9892 | Rhett O. Webber | March 9, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Claims Backlog**

### **Update 167: Skepticism Surrounds VA Promise to Draw It Down**

Veterans Affairs officials are confident they will be able to reduce the backlog of hundreds of thousands of compensation and pension exams by this fall, but watchdog groups are expressing more skepticism that such a goal is realistic. "Yes, they have increased examiners across the nation, but the new alternate methods tend not to be as impactful as Veterans Benefits Administration officials had hoped," Brent Arronte, deputy assistant at the VA Office of the Inspector General, told lawmakers during a House hearing on 23 MAR. "My fear right now in watching these numbers every month is that we might be getting into a situation where they're just treading water."

Compensation and pension exams are a key part of the process for veterans to receive disability benefits. In most cases before payouts begin, VA requires some type of review by a medical expert to confirm a veteran's injuries and the severity of its impact. All compensation and pension exams were suspended for two months in spring 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Veterans Affairs officials said that pause alone added about 200,000 exams to the backlog of unmet requests. At the start of March 2021, about 357,000 exam requests were pending, nearly three times the 130,000 pending at the end of February 2020. Veterans Affairs officials have repeatedly promised that veterans awaiting exams will not be punished for the delays, and will receive appropriate back benefits once their cases are approved. But outside advocates have noted that still means months of waiting for veterans to have their cases finalized before those payouts begin.

David McLenachen, executive director of the Veterans Benefit Administration's Medical Disability Examination Office, said officials hope to bring down the backlog to pre-pandemic levels by the end of this fiscal year, Sept. 30. He said exam operations are returning to normal, and outside contractors have dramatically ramped up their workload in recent months. However, the department still needs to process about 8,000 more exams a week than they are today in order to reach the fall goal. On 23 MAR, Arronte said that online health meetings and other alternatives to in-person exams have helped efforts to address the backlog. But they still make up only a small fraction of total exams, meaning their impact thus far has been limited. And officials from the Government Accountability Office this week released a new analysis of the backlog and chastised VA leaders for not developing a clear, long-term plan to address the issue.

McLenachen dismissed that criticism. “I would love to do ordinary business planning and forecast out when certain events would happen and when we can achieve the goal,” he told lawmakers. “But simply stating that we need to plan for when exactly certain events will happen between now and the goal that we’ve established is a very difficult thing to do during the pandemic.” However, members of the House committee said they have concerns about that approach. “There should be a written plan,” said Rep. Elaine Luria (D-VA), chairwoman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee’s panel on disability assistance. “You can always use it as a planning tool and deviate from it as needed. But I think a written plan would help all of the stakeholders and the veterans understand the timeline for reducing this backlog.”

Veterans groups said the challenge facing VA isn’t just the immediate backlog total, but the potential of what it can become. The department already has about 30,000 new cases enter the system each month. But with new changes mandated by Congress in recent years to presumptive conditions for tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans, those numbers could increase. Future approval of other toxic exposure benefits issues like burn pit exposure could lead to even higher levels. “The moment VA suspended all exams an unavoidable backlog began building,” said Ryan Gallucci, director of the National Veterans Service at the Veterans of Foreign Wars. “Rebuilding from this pandemic will present challenges to everyone involved in the VA claims process, and we must all work to ensure veterans do not slip through the cracks.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 23, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Audiology Care**

### **Update 01: Free Captioned Telephone Service**



Veterans and others with hearing loss can receive free assistive technology for captioned telephone service from participating providers on their home phones, mobile phones and other communication apps. Real-time transcriptions of communication are a vital service for those who rely on their phones to stay connected with family and friends, and to communicate with health care professionals and emergency responders. Veterans of all ages can benefit from captioned telephone service, as they are disproportionately affected by hearing loss. Hearing loss is not just due to degeneration from aging; Veterans are 30% more likely than non-Veterans to have a hearing impairment.

Captioned telephone service enables people with hearing loss to speak during a phone call and then read the other person’s response in real time as transcriptions appear directly on their telephone or an app. This service is known as Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS), and it uses a combination of automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology and skilled transcribers, or ASR technology. ASR is the same technology that systems like Alexa and Siri use to translate voice commands. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that captioned telephone service be “functionally equivalent” to



communication technology used by individuals without hearing loss. This service is overseen by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Click [HERE](#) to learn more about how captioned telephone service works.

This technology service is free to service members and Veterans, including their loved ones and anyone with hearing loss. Vietnam Veteran Robert Richardson agrees, saying, “This technology, above all others, has had a major impact on my quality of life. I’d say it’s a lifesaver. I use it to communicate with my children, and I use it to communicate with my friends and my doctors and other healthcare providers. I use it to stay engaged in my community. I may be retired from work, but not from life.” To listen to stories of those who have benefited from hearing assistance technologies click [HERE](#). Several providers offer captioned telephone service. When registering for this service with providers, the FCC requires individuals to self-certify that they have hearing loss necessitating telephone captioning. Some providers may require professional certification from a physician, audiologist or other hearing-health professional. For a list of captioned telephone service providers click [HERE](#).

The Clear2Connect Coalition, comprised of disability advocacy and Veterans Service Organizations, advocates on behalf of the deaf and hard of hearing communities to have access to quality, accurate communication technology. For more information on how to access free captioned telephone service, to learn about Clear2Connect Coalition’s advocacy efforts, and to sign up for their updates, visit the Clear2Connect Coalition website <https://clear2connect.org> or email them at: [info@clear2connect.org](mailto:info@clear2connect.org). [Source: Vantage Point Blog | March 19, 2021 ++]

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## VA Dental Care

### Update 09: New Technology | CEREC Process



When Marine Veteran James Evans arrived at the Birmingham VA Dental Clinic to have a crown installed, he expected the process to take weeks. To his surprise, the crown’s design, fitting and delivery were done the same day. The dental clinic has implemented same-day crown technology using the Sirona/Dentsply’s Chairside Economical Restoration of Esthetic Ceramic (CEREC) process. The system is equipped with CEREC software, a Primescan scanner for taking digital impressions and a Primemill grinding and milling unit. With CEREC, restorations are created using computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing or CAD/CAM.

The CEREC Primescan and Primemill system is equipped with a smart pixel sensor that processes more than 1 million 3D points per second from a wand scanner. This creates a color realistic scan of the prepped tooth and adjacent teeth. A computer is then used to design an accurate crown that is sent to the milling machine. The crown is milled from a high strength block of ceramic materials. The final product is a strong and natural looking crown. By utilizing the CAD/CAM process, the crown requires very little adjustments after it is placed. In the past, crown placements required a minimum of two visits. The first appointment

consisted of the Veteran’s tooth being prepared, a conventional tray impression being taken, and a temporary crown being fabricated and temporarily cemented. The second appointment would be scheduled for the permanent crown placement. Typically, that interval could be up to two months.

“The big winners are our Veteran patients,” said Dr. Frederick Bisch, Chief of Dental Services. “They can have natural looking, high-quality crowns started and completed in one day, eliminating the need to return and have the crown cemented. This will greatly increase access to dental care by eliminating that second appointment. “Our dental clinic is excited to be a part of implementing this groundbreaking technology. It will enable our team to continue to deliver the best dental care to our Veterans and much quicker than in the past. “This monumental leap forward is the future of dentistry. It will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the delivery of dental care to our Veterans.” Check out the videos at <https://youtu.be/bTzkM6BE41s> & <https://youtu.be/Lww8zxsuiZ8> to see the process in use.

**Editor Note:** Last month I was scheduled for a crown using this procedure. Amazingly in 2 hours my jaw tooth was ground, imaged, a new one made, and installed with no discomfort. [Source: Vantage Point Blog | March 11, 2021 ++]

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## VA Vibration Care

### Claims for Problems Related To Exposure during Military Service



Veterans who worked with machinery on a regular basis during military service may be exposed to hand-arm vibration from using power hand tools and/or whole-body vibration from operating heavy equipment such as trucks, helicopters, and ships. Health problems associated with vibration exposure can affect the body in various ways:

- Continuous exposure may cause serious damage to the body.
- Regular exposure to hand-arm vibration may cause Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome. Symptoms include tingling, numbness, and pain in the fingers and hands.
- Regular exposure to whole body vibration may cause low back pain.

In the U.S. alone about 2.5 million workers are exposed daily to Hand-Arm Vibration (HAV) from the power tools they use on-their-jobs. It is well known and documented since 1918 that daily occupational exposure from many, but not all, pneumatic, electric, hydraulic, or gasoline powered vibrating hand-tools, have been causally linked to an irreversible medical condition of the fingers/hands (originally called Raynaud’s Phenomenon of Occupational Origin; later called Vibration White Finger disease) now called Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome (HAVS). Documented workplace prevalence of HAVS range from 20-50% in the U.S. for power tool users depending on the tools used, daily vibration exposure levels, work practices, etc. The common signs and symptoms of HAVS in the fingers and hands include:

- Pins and needles feeling.
- Tingling, numbness.
- Loss of finger sensation and dexterity.
- Nightly awakening with painful fingers and hands.

Advanced symptoms (typically during cold weather) are painful attacks lasting 5-15 minutes where one or more fingers turn “white or blanch”. It is well known and documented that vibration, cold, and nicotine (from smoking) can each alone constrict blood vessels. Thus cold temperatures and/or smoking can worsen symptoms for those diagnosed with HAVS. Current medical treatment can only reduce the pain and suffering associated with HAVS attacks since HAVS is irreversible and without a cure. Thus the watchwords are vigilance and prevention to minimize the medical effects of HAV.

Note that HAVS is not Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (CTS) although in some instances a person can have both occurring simultaneously in one or both hands. The Department of Defense has published guidance for medical evaluation of personnel with exposure to hand-arm vibration and other occupational exposures, available at [http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/Documents/6260\\_NMCPHC\\_TM.pdf](http://www.public.navy.mil/surfor/Documents/6260_NMCPHC_TM.pdf) (see Exam 508-segmental vibration, page 223). Non-DOD personnel may wish to use this material as an information resource to share with health care providers. You can learn more about vibration exposure and its health effects at [https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/Hand-Arm\\_Vibration\\_Syndrome\\_01-06-2016.pdf#](https://www.gsa.gov/cdnstatic/Hand-Arm_Vibration_Syndrome_01-06-2016.pdf#) from the Naval Safety Center

If you are concerned about health problems associated with vibration exposure during your military service, talk to your health care provider or contact your local VA Environmental Health Coordinator via <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/coordinators.asp> to help you get more information from a health care provider. VA offers a variety of health care benefits to eligible Veterans. Not enrolled in the VA health care system? Go to <https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility> to find out if you qualify for VA health care. Veterans may file a claim for disability compensation for health problems they believe are related to vibration exposure during military service. VA decides these claims on a case-by-case basis. File a claim online at <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage>. [Source: Keeping Veterans Informed | Ed Ruckle | March 15 2021 ++]

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## VA VEText

### Appointment Scheduling via Text Messaging



Veteran Bruce Gardner was taken by surprise one day – in a good way: VA texted him asking if he’d like to be scheduled for a COVID vaccine at his local clinic in Colorado Springs. Within minutes of his reply, a second text arrived, inquiring about availability the following week. A few

minutes later, a third text arrived: “I was now scheduled for the vaccine at one of my chosen times,” he said. He calls the whole experience “helpful, easy, convenient and timely,” and concludes: “Amazing!”

### **Vaccinations through VEText**

Gardner obtained his vaccination appointment through [VEText](#), an interactive digital solution from VA that automatically reminds Veterans of upcoming appointments via text messaging. He’s hardly alone: more than 150,000 COVID-19 vaccination appointments have been scheduled through VEText. How does it work? If you’re a Veteran enrolled in VA and you have a cell phone number listed in your health record, you literally don’t have to think about enrolling because it happens automatically. (You can easily opt out by replying “STOP” to any message.)

Once you’re in, you’ll receive regular text messages reminding you about appointments. You can use the system to confirm or cancel appointments. You can even get notified of appointment slots that open up earlier than your scheduled appointment via VEText’s Open Slot Management feature.

### **Designed for scheduling appointments**

It’s a system that’s literally designed for speedy and efficient scheduling of COVID-19 vaccination appointments – as shown by these comments from Veterans on VA social media:

- “Because of their excellent planning, we were in and out in about an hour for the second dose.”
- “Thanks to VA for their handling of COVID vaccine program... they kept me ‘in the loop’ about plans, availability, progress and when I’d be scheduled... and ultimately getting me scheduled for this morning.”
- “My appointment was @ 1130. Got there @ 1115, checked in via text & was on my way home @ 1150.”

So keep an eye out for that text from VA inviting you to make a vaccine appointment. As one Veteran put it, “What a great job they are doing with the COVID vaccine. Sign up, wait for a text or call, get appointment and receive shot. Thank you VA.” To learn more about VEText, read the VEText FAQs at [https://www.va.gov/HEALTH/VEText\\_FAQs.asp](https://www.va.gov/HEALTH/VEText_FAQs.asp). [Source: Vantage Point | Steve Tokar | March 26, 2021 ++]

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## **VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse**

**Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2021**

**San Antonio, TX** — On 17 MAR a federal grand jury in San Antonio, Texas, returned an indictment charging the former owner of several companies in the construction industry for his role in a long-running scheme to defraud the United States. According to court documents, **Michael Angelo Padron** was charged with one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and to defraud the United States and eight counts of wire fraud. Padron, along with co-conspirators **Michael Wibracht** and veteran **Ruben Villarreal**,

allegedly conspired to defraud the United States in order to obtain valuable government contracts under programs administered by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) for which neither his nor his co-conspirators' companies were eligible. Villarreal and Wibracht pleaded guilty to the scheme on Nov. 20, 2020, and March 4, 2021, respectively. Wibracht pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit wire fraud and defraud the United States. Villarreal pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to defraud the United States.

The indictment alleges that Padron, Wibracht, and Villarreal conspired to defraud the United States by interfering with the function of the SBA and fraudulently obtaining money from as early as 2004 continuing through at least 2017. As part of the scheme, Padron is charged with conspiring to install Villarreal, a service-disabled veteran, as the ostensible owner of a general construction company held out as a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB). However, Padron, along with his co-conspirator and business partner Wibracht, allegedly exercised disqualifying financial and operational control over the construction company. According to court documents, the conspirators concealed that control in order to secure over \$250 million in government contracts that were “set aside” for SDVOSBs in order to benefit their larger, non-qualifying businesses. The SBA administers the SDVOSB program, which is designed to increase the number of government contracts awarded to small businesses owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans. To qualify as an SDVOSB, a company, among other things, must be owned and controlled by a service-disabled veteran.

For conspiracy to commit wire fraud and to defraud the United States, Padron faces a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. For each wire fraud count, Padron faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$250,000. The maximum fine for an individual may be increased to twice the gain derived from the crime, or twice the loss suffered by victims of the crime, if either of those amounts is greater than the statutory maximum fine. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors. Anyone with information in connection with this investigation is urged to call the Antitrust Division’s Washington Criminal II Section at 202-598-4000, or visit <https://www.justice.gov/atr/contact/newcase.html>.

In November 2019, the Department of Justice created the Procurement Collusion Strike Force, a joint law enforcement effort to combat antitrust crimes and related fraudulent schemes that impact procurement and grant and program funding at all levels of government — federal, state, and local. For more information, visit <https://www.justice.gov/procurement-collusion-strike-force>. An indictment is merely an allegation and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. [Source: DoJ | Justice News | March 17, 2021 ++]

**\* Vets \***



## LGBT Veterans

### Update 01: Difficulty Obtaining Benefits

While gay service members can now serve openly in the military, veterans kicked out for only their sexual orientation under past policies still face hurdles to access benefits due to “less than honorable” discharges. Some states are pushing to enact laws this year to provide immediate recourse for these veterans, rather than waiting for federal laws to change. A bill in New Jersey is expected to be signed into law as soon as next week. It would give veterans kicked out of the military solely due to sexual orientation access to state benefits. It would also direct the state-run Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to streamline the upgrade process at the federal level.

“Under the Trump administration, nothing’s happened ... in fact, we went backwards in the last four years on many equal rights issues,” New Jersey State Sen. Vin Gopal said in an interview mid-March. That’s why he, along with lawmakers in Colorado and Connecticut, are pushing for changes. More than 100,000 service members were expelled from the military between World War II and the 2011 repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” the policy that barred gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military, because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, according to a 2020 report from Harvard Law School. A “less than honorable” discharge -- an informal term for all discharges that are not honorable -- can bar gay service members from state and federal benefits.

Complicated forms, processing delays and bureaucratic red tape make it challenging for veterans to get an upgrade to their discharge status under the Department of Defense and Department for Veterans Affairs. Upgrading a discharge status can take years. New York, Rhode Island and Nevada have all enacted legislation in recent years that restored state military benefits. Hanna Tripp, policy adviser for Minority Veterans of America, applauded state efforts. “Removing the barriers for these people to get benefits that they might need, especially emergency benefits like housing, like [Supportive Services for Veteran Families] funding, or access to health care, that’s huge,” she said.

Service members separated without an honorable discharge can face difficulty getting a job, going back to school or obtaining a home loan. Under a “general with honorable” discharge, one of the most common administrative discharges, a veteran is eligible for all benefits, except for the GI Bill. A notch below that is an “other than honorable” discharge, the harshest administrative discharge, which disqualifies you from all benefits. “An other than honorable is terrible. That means you can’t get regular VA benefits and other benefits - housing benefits, unemployment benefits are all pegged to having at least a general,” Rochelle Bobroff, director of the pro bono program at Lawyers Serving Warriors, an organization that gives veterans free legal help with different disability claims.

**Mike Mudd**, an Air Force veteran, was given an “other than honorable” discharge in June 1989 after his roommate outed him as gay. Mudd, 53, had served for less than two years when he was told to pack up and leave Homestead Air Base near Miami. He was handed \$91 for a bus ticket home to Louisville, Ky. The thriving gay community in Miami, where he had been sent after basic training, helped him realize that he was gay, and he came out during his time there. But that came at a high price. “Because of that one thing that you can’t control, now you aren’t qualified. It just destroys you,” said Mudd, now a realtor in Kentucky, after working for 25 years as a paramedic.

His discharge prevented him from tapping into any VA benefits. Mudd was also denied a VA home loan since he was under the two-year service mark to be eligible. In 2004, he petitioned for a hearing to

upgrade his discharge. After about a year, he got it changed on a new document, but the discharge characterization, or reason why he was discharged, remained “homosexual conduct” on his original DD-214 form. “It was a relief to get my honorable discharge, but it still hangs on me because the reason why is still on my discharge,” he said. Now that it’s legal to serve openly in the military, he can request to strip the “homosexual conduct” label from his DD-214, something he didn’t know was possible until his interview with Stars and Stripes.

It took decades after leaving the military for Navy veteran **Dave Lara** to find out he could upgrade his DD-214, thanks to a veterans’ advocacy group. Lara received a general under honorable conditions after a service member outed him in 1969. The discharge form characterized him as “unfit for any kind of military service duty, ever,” Lara, now 73, said. “And that hurt, because I was in combat, because I had to save many lives.” After being homeless and battling symptoms of PTSD, including suicidal thoughts, he struggled to find employment. Lara eventually found success in the telecommunications industry and retired in 2003, but his discharge status continued to take a toll on his mental health.

“The self-esteem that I struggled with was 80 percent because I always had that discharge. And that haunted me my whole life until I got it fixed five years ago,” said Lara, who lives in Los Angeles. The help of a local veterans’ service organization and a pro bono lawyer, his DD-214 was reissued and he received an honorable discharge. The process took about four years. When he received the upgrade in 2019, he said he cried alone in his room for five hours from relief. He had that harsh discharge “always on me, always telling me that I was no value.” Lara urged other veterans to find support through the complex process. “You cannot do it alone,” he said.

Jennifer Dane, executive director of the Modern Military Association of America, said her organization has seen more veterans reach out for help with discharge upgrades, especially amid the coronavirus pandemic. When COVID-19 hit, “I had so many veterans come to me to say, ‘I want to use my VA health care because I’ve lost my health care,’ ” she said. Yet, upgrading a discharge can take from six months to three or four years. The pandemic has caused even longer delays, veterans’ advocates say. On the other hand, Bobroff said some veterans are reluctant to jump into the process and engage with lawyers. They also might not want to focus on a traumatic experience in their life. “You have to engage with the military, and these veterans may not want to do so because it was such a painful and unpleasant period of their life the way they were treated,” she said.

Rep. Mark Takano, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, introduced legislation H.R.1596 on 3 MAR that would establish a commission to investigate the historic and ongoing effects of discriminatory military policies on LGBTQ service members and veterans. Takano, the first openly gay person of Asian descent in Congress, said in a statement to Stars and Stripes in mid-March that the commission would provide a road map for Congress to “rectify injustices.” “The full extent of the harm caused by anti-LGBTQ military policies is still not known,” Takano said. “No veteran should face barriers to care or benefits they’ve earned — that’s why we must look back to document how veterans were denied benefits, remediate that disparity and ensure we equitably disburse future benefits to all who have served,” he said.

Takano also urged the Senate to make this issue a priority: “The longer we wait to rectify this injustice, the longer LGBTQ veterans will have to wait for their earned benefits.” Air Force veteran Mudd and some advocates argue that current legislation does not go far enough. Mudd wants the government to automatically change the status of all gay veterans discharged due to sexual orientation to honorable, and

to remove the petition process. Better outreach and resources would also help. “Just go back and do the right thing and treat people fair,” he said. Text of the Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2020 can be found at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/s3444/text/is>. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Sarah Cammarata | March 22, 2021 ++]

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## Homeless Vets

### Update 105: HUD Reports Numbers Increased in 2021



The number of veterans experiencing homelessness increased in 2020 even before the effects of the coronavirus pandemic damaged employment prospects and financial resources for the community, according to a new report released by the Department of Housing and Urban Development on 18 MAR. The increase is a concerning backslide from improvements in the last decade, since then President Barack Obama announced a federal effort to address the issue. From 2010 to 2019, the number of veterans without stable housing decreased by more than 50 percent. However, the figure increased slightly in 2020, rising to 37,252 in HUD’s annual point-in-time estimate, up by a few hundred individuals.

The totals mean that of every 10,000 veterans in the United States, 21 were experiencing homelessness at the start of last year. Veterans make up about 6 percent of the population of the United States but 8 percent of the country’s homeless population. The estimate released 18 MAR is based on surveys conducted in January 2020, about two months before business closures and other financial impacts of the coronavirus pandemic began. In a statement, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia Fudge called the results “very troubling, even before you consider what COVID-19 has done to make the homelessness crisis worse.” Officials won’t know the full impact of the pandemic on the number of veterans experiencing homelessness until later this year, when the results of the January 2021 point-in-time count are released. The 2020 numbers were scheduled to be unveiled last fall, but were kept hidden for months by President Donald Trump’s administration for unspecified reasons.

In a statement, Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough said the newly-released numbers indicate that more needs to be done to help veterans facing crisis that could lead to homelessness. “Even a slight pre-pandemic uptick in veteran homelessness after significant declines since 2010 is extremely concerning,” he said. “The Biden Administration’s recommitment to Housing First — a proven strategy and dignified way to help Veterans and others achieve stable, permanent housing — will help accelerate



progress in preventing and eliminating veteran homelessness.” Across all groups, the number of Americans experiencing homelessness increased about 2.2 percent from 2019 to 2020. HUD estimates about 580,000 individuals were without stable housing as of January 2020.

More than 90 percent of veterans experiencing homelessness were men, according to the HUD survey. Black veterans made up about one-third of all veterans dealing with unstable housing, even though they make up just 12 percent of the total veterans population in America. California alone accounted for nearly one-third of all of the veterans experiencing homelessness in America, with 11,401. California, Florida, Texas and Washington — four states with the highest total number of veterans among their residents — together had about 70 percent of all of the homeless veterans in American. The HUD report notes that 28 states actually saw decreases in their total number of veterans experiencing homelessness, a positive trend. North Carolina, Oregon and Utah all saw double-digit percentage decreases in their homeless veterans population.

Officials from the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans said that any increase in veteran homelessness should be unacceptable. “People across the country are suffering due to (the pandemic’s) economic fallout, making it much more critical to work diligently to ensure veterans can access housing as we continue our mission to end veteran homelessness,” they said in a statement. “We are also hopeful that having new national leadership in place that has prioritized ending homelessness and focusing on racial equity and building a system of care that works for all veterans will also have a positive effect. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | March 18, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Fraud & Abuse**

**Reported 16 thru 31 MAR 2021**



**Iran** -- After **Amir Hekmati** was released from Iranian custody in a 2016 deal trumpeted as a diplomatic breakthrough, he was declared eligible for \$20 million from a special U.S. government fund as compensation for years of imprisonment that included brutal torture. But payday never arrived, leaving Hekmati to wonder why. The answer has finally arrived: Newly filed court documents reviewed by The Associated Press reveal decade-old FBI suspicions that he traveled to Iran with the goal of selling classified secrets to the government. Hekmati vigorously disputes the allegations, has never faced criminal charges and is challenging a special master's conclusion that he lied about his visit to Iran and is therefore not entitled to the money.

The FBI suspicions help explain the government's ongoing refusal to pay Hekmati for his ordeal and muddy the narrative around a U.S. citizen, Marine and Iraq war veteran whose release was championed at the U.S. government's highest levels, including by Joe Biden, then the vice president, and John Kerry, then the secretary of state. The documents offer radically conflicting accounts of Hekmati's purpose in visiting Iran and detail the simmering behind-the-scenes dispute over whether he is entitled to access a fund that compensates victims of international terrorism. Hekmati said in a sworn statement that allegations he sought to sell out to Iran are ridiculous and offensive. His lawyers say the government's suspicions, detailed in FBI documents and letters from the fund's special master denying payments, are groundless and based on hearsay. "In this case, the U.S. government should put up or shut up," said Scott Gilbert, a lawyer hired to recover damages. "If the government believes they have a case, indict Amir. Try Amir. But you, the U.S. government, won't do that because you can't do that. You don't have sufficient factual evidence to do that."

FBI records show an investigation was opened 10 years ago and that Hekmati was interviewed by agents after his release from Iran. Yet prosecutors have brought no case. Years after the FBI scrutiny had begun, Hekmati was awarded payment from the fund — money he expected to receive until the fund's special master revoked his eligibility in January 2020. Gilbert declined to make Hekmati available for an interview while the lawsuit seeking payment is pending. But in a lengthy internet post published 16 MAR, Hekmati accused the FBI of having "abused its authority" and said the Justice Department had failed to respond to evidence he'd presented contradicting the allegations. The FBI and the Justice Department declined to comment, but details from the investigation emerge in hundreds of pages of documents filed in the case.

The documents show the FBI opened an espionage investigation into Hekmati as far back as 2011, the year he was detained in Iran on suspicion he was spying for the CIA. Hekmati, who was raised in Michigan and served as an infantryman and interpreter in Iraq before being honorably discharged from the Marines in 2005, says he went to Iran to visit an ailing grandmother after a brief, unsatisfying stint as a Defense Department contractor conducting intelligence analysis in Afghanistan. But the FBI concluded that he went there intent on selling Iran classified information, according to an unsigned five-page summary of its investigation. The unproven assessment is based partly on accounts from four independent but unnamed sources who say Hekmati approached Iranian officials offering classified information, as well as the fact he abruptly resigned his contracting position and left for Iran without notifying supervisors, the FBI says. An FBI computer forensics search concluded that while in Afghanistan, he accessed hundreds of classified documents related to Iran that agents believe were outside the scope of his job responsibilities, the documents say.

Hekmati, the son of Iranian immigrants, says he researched Iran openly to cultivate an expertise on Iranian influence in Afghanistan. "Everyone knew" about the work he was doing, he said at a hearing last year, and supervisors didn't place restrictions. He says he'd already quit his job when he left for Iran and wasn't obligated to tell supervisors of his trip. At no point in Iran, he said, did he meet with any Iranian officials or try to sell secrets. Hekmati also produced correspondence that he says showed he planned to travel to Iran before learning of the Afghanistan opportunity. Hekmati's lawyers say the FBI's suspicions are impossible to square with the treatment he endured in prison, which included torture such as being whipped, struck with batons and chained to a table. Were he actually spying for Iran, Gilbert said, "You'd think the guy would have been a valuable asset, they actually would have wanted to do something with

him" rather than abuse him. He was initially sentenced to death, but the punishment was ultimately cut to 10 years.

Hekmati enjoyed support from senior-level officials, including Kerry, who demanded his release, and Biden, who met with his family in Michigan. In January 2016, after four and a half years behind bars, he was freed with several other American citizens, including Washington Post journalist Jason Rezaian, as the Obama administration entered its final year eager for signs of improving relations after the nuclear deal with Iran. Months later, Hekmati sued Iran over his torture. A federal judge in Washington entered a \$63.5 million default judgment after Iran failed to contest the claims. Hekmati subsequently applied to collect through a Justice Department-run fund for terror victims financed by assets seized from U.S. adversaries. He was awarded the statutory maximum of \$20 million, his lawyers say.

The fund's special master then was Kenneth Feinberg, renowned for overseeing payments to victims of the Sept. 11 attacks. In December 2018, he authorized an initial payment of more than \$839,000. But for months, no money came. After Hekmati's lawyers warned they'd have to sue, the Justice Department cryptically indicated it was seeking a reconsideration of the award. When Feinberg formally revoked Hekmati's eligibility for the fund in early 2020, Feinberg said the application contained errors and omissions and that information from the Justice Department supported the conclusion that Hekmati visited Iran with the intent of selling classified information. A second letter last December didn't repeat that precise allegation but said Hekmati had given "evasive, false and inconsistent statements" during three FBI interviews, failed to "credibly refute" that most of the classified information he accessed related to Iran and "traveled to Iran for primary purposes other than to visit his family." Feinberg declined to comment, saying his decision "speaks for itself."

The correspondence had been secret until January when Hekmati's lawyers filed it in the Court of Federal Claims in Washington as part of a lawsuit. Hundreds of pages of documents have since been filed outlining the investigation. The documents include summaries of FBI interviews from 2016 in Germany, on Hekmati's way home from Iran, and in Michigan that show FBI agents grilling him with increasing suspicion. One summary says Hekmati refused to answer when asked if he'd ever accessed classified information on Iran and replied the FBI could figure it out itself. In a follow-up interview, an agent confronted Hekmati with the FBI's assessment that he went to Afghanistan to obtain classified information that he could sell to Iran. The FBI says he initially deflected or failed to respond before finally saying that he accessed the material to become a subject matter expert.

Hekmati and his lawyers state the FBI interviews shouldn't be considered credible in part because he was suffering from the effects of post-traumatic stress at the time. The status of any investigation is unclear, as are Hekmati's prospects of being paid. But Gilbert, Hekmati's lawyer, says he hopes the decision gets a fresh look by the new Justice Department. "I am hopeful that we will see the appropriate outcome here and be able to put this saga to bed," Gilbert said. [Source: Associated Press | Eric Tucker | March 16, 2021 | March 4, 2021 ++]

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**Washington D.C.** -- The man that District of Columbia police arrested with a semiautomatic rifle near the vice president's residence this week is a U.S. Army veteran. Former Spc. **Paul Michael Murray** served as an unmanned aerial vehicle operator from March 2010 to April 2014, Army spokesman Gabriel Ramirez said in a statement. Police found an AR-15 style rifle, 113 rounds of ammunition and five 30-round magazines in Murray's car, which was parked about a block away, according to a CBS story detailing the

police report. Vice President Kamala Harris and her husband have not moved in yet because of renovations to the home in Northwest D.C., near the U.S. Naval Observatory.

Murray was seen on Massachusetts Avenue and detained by Secret Service officers stationed near the residence. Police charged Murray, of San Antonio, Texas, with carrying a large-capacity ammunition-feeding device, a dangerous weapon, a rifle and unregistered ammunition. CBS News reported that Murray "had been experiencing paranoid delusions of the government and military being after him." Police said Murray's mother received a text from him 17 MAR saying "he was in Washington and would be taking care of his problem," CBS reported.

On 10 MAR, police in Texas issued a bulletin about Murray that said he had told authorities he had been medically discharged from the Army for schizophrenia and that he owned an AR-15, according to Task & Purpose. Ramirez would not confirm the reasons behind Murray's discharge because of privacy concerns. Murray had no combat deployments during his time in the Army, Ramirez said in the statement. Murray's awards and decorations include the Army Good Conduct Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Non-Commissioned Officer Professional Development Ribbon, Army Service Ribbon and Aviation Badge. [Source: Military.com | Matthew Cox | March 19, 2021 ++]

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## **U.S. Capitol Riot**

### **Update 12: Army Reservist & Nazi Sympathizer Timothy Hale-Cusanelli Charged**



An Army reservist charged with taking part in the riots at the US Capitol on 6 JAN wore a "Hitler moustache" to his work at a Naval base, but has denied to prosecutors that he is a white supremacist. Timothy Hale-Cusanelli, 30, was employed as a contractor at a Navy base in New Jersey at the time of the riots, in which five people died and several more were injured when a mob of pro-Trump supporters breached the US Capitol. Federal prosecutors said on 12 MAR that Mr Hale-Cusanelli has been charged with seven criminal counts including civil disorder and disorderly conduct in the Capitol for allegedly breaching the building alongside hundreds of others on 6 JAN.

In court filings released alongside his charges, prosecutors revealed that a Navy investigation following his arrest uncovered several incidents where Mr Hale-Cusanelli promoted racist views at work, particularly towards Jewish people. Of the 44 employees interviewed as part of the investigation, 34 of his colleagues claimed that Mr Hale-Cusanelli held "extremist or radical views pertaining to the Jewish people, minorities

and women”. The colleagues claimed that the 30-year-old espoused negative comments about Jewish people on a near-daily basis and advocated for the killing of newborn babies with disabilities. One supervisor told investigators that Mr Hale-Cusanelli would walk up to people and ask: “You’re not Jewish, are you?”, while a petty officer claimed to hear him say: “Jews, women, and Blacks were on the bottom of the totem pole”.

Prosecutors also revealed that Mr Hale-Cusanelli came to work at the base last year with a “Hitler moustache”, and an officer claimed that he heard him say: “Hitler should have finished the job.” However, in an interview with FBI agents following his arrest, Mr Hale-Cusanelli denied being a white supremacist or a Nazi sympathiser, as his attorney Jonathan Zucker argued that he should be released from custody. “Mr Hale-Cusanelli is charged with crimes stemming from entering and remaining on Capitol grounds, principally offences analogous to trespass,” Mr Zucker wrote in a court filing. “He is not charged with crimes of violence nor destruction. He never assaulted nor threatened anyone,” the attorney added. One of his supervisors, sergeant John Getz, also defended Mr Hale-Cusanelli, arguing that he is not a white supremacist because “he would frequently buy breakfast” for a Black colleague.

Prosecutors claimed that Mr Getz’s defense contradicts comments he made to Navy investigators, who said that he described Mr Hale-Cusanelli as a Holocaust denier. Mr Getz personally confronted Mr Hale-Cusanelli about his behavior, according to prosecutors, who said that he told them that he was not personally offended by the contractor’s remarks. Assistant U.S. Attorney James Nelson said that after the Capitol breach Hale-Cusanelli expressed hope for a “civil war, at a time when we’re having concerns about that in this country,” Mr Hale-Cusanelli had a detention hearing scheduled for 16 MAR, after the Justice Department convinced a senior judge in Washington, DC, to block his release in January.

At the hearing U.S. District Judge Trevor McFadden of Washington ordered Hale-Cusanelli detained, saying it was a “close case” given that the defendant is not accused of hurting anyone or associating with a violent group 6 JAN. “We don’t typically penalize people for what they say and think,” the Trump appointee said, and “hateful conduct” is not the same as “violent conduct.” But he added, “I am concerned about all the violent language.” Following his arrest and alleged involvement in the Capitol riots, Mr Hale-Cusanelli has been discharged from the Army Reserves, which he had been part of since 2009, and has been barred from the Navy base. [Source: Independent & Washington Post | James Crump | March 15 & 23, 2021 ++]

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## **U.S. Capitol Riot**

### **Update 13: Green Beret Retiree Jeffrey McKellop Charged**



A former Army Green Beret with more than two decades of service was arrested 17 MAR and charged with using a flag as a spear against a police officer during the Capitol riot, according to an FBI criminal complaint unsealed 18 MAR. Retired Sgt. 1st Class Jeffrey A. McKellop donned a helmet and gas mask and moved toward D.C. Metropolitan Police lines as officers attempted to prevent a mob of rioters from breaching the Capitol building at about 2:30 p.m. on 6 JAN, the complaint alleged. Police body cameras caught McKellop pushing officers, trying to grab a riot control spray canister from one and throwing a flagpole like a spear at another, causing a laceration to that officer's face, the complaint alleged. Screenshots included in the document showed McKellop wearing the same helmet and ballistic vest that he used in an overseas combat zone in 2018, according to one of two witnesses who came forward to identify him to FBI agents.

After McKellop's military service ended in 2010, he worked as a contractor in Iraq, a person familiar with the case but who declined to be named told Army Times. It was not immediately clear whether that was the only country in which McKellop worked as a contractor. McKellop enlisted in 1987 as an infantryman, according to Army officials. He later went through the Army's Special Forces Qualification Course and served as an 18 Echo — a Green Beret radioman. McKellop deployed to Afghanistan from January through May in 2002 and again from June through December in 2004. He also deployed to Iraq from September 2003 to February 2004 and again from May 2005 to January 2006.

Other military veterans have been charged in connection to the Capitol riot, but McKellop appears to be the first Green Beret. The person familiar with McKellop's case said he's currently in police custody in D.C. and had a detention hearing 22 MAR. At that hearing Greg Hunter and Seth Peritz, two defense attorneys for McKellop, cited his 22 years in uniform and his three Bronze Star medals as they argued in favor of his release from jail until trial. However, he was denied bond by a Washington, D.C., judge. U.S. Magistrate Judge Zia M. Faruqui of Washington called the decision "very difficult." McKellop faces a range of charges, including assaulting, resisting or impeding officers with a dangerous weapon; obstruction of law enforcement during civil disorder; violent entry and disorder on Capitol grounds; and engaging in physical violence in a restricted building. Hundreds of charges have been lodged against people involved in the Capitol breach, but McKellop's assault charge is one of the more severe cases.

McKellop's face was obscured by his gas mask during his altercations with police, but the patches and clothing he wore were recognizable from pictures taken of him earlier that day, according to the complaint. McKellop wore a patch resembling the country of Georgia's flag on the front of his kit, and an Army Special Forces patch on his backpack that appears to read, "de oppresso liber," which means, "to liberate the oppressed" in Latin. Footage from social media gathered by FBI agents also showed McKellop carrying a flagpole that has two flags attached — a "Blue Line" flag intended to show support for police and a thirteen-star "Betsy Ross" flag with the words, "Trump. Keep America Great," printed on it. The same social media video captures close ups of McKellop's face.

More than 300 people have been charged in connection to the Capitol riot. At least 33 rioters who were identified have military backgrounds, and a third of those also had "concrete ties to various extremist organizations," such as the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, according to George Washington University's Program on Extremism. The arrests of such troops and veterans, especially ones who held positions of considerable responsibility during their service, have led some military officials to realize there may be a problem brewing in the ranks.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced in early February plans for a one-day stand-down across the armed services to address the issue of extremism among troops. During a press briefing in mid-February, Austin also noted that there are plans to begin gathering data on extremism, which has so far been lacking, to understand the extent to which it is actually an issue among troops. “I expect for the numbers to be small. But, quite frankly, they’ll probably be a little bit larger than most of us would guess,” Austin said. “I would just say that small numbers in this case can have an out-sized impact.” [Source: AmyTimes | Kyle Rempfer | March 19 & 24, 2021 ++]

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## **U.S. Capitol Riot**

### **Update 14: Proposal to Deny Veteran Benefits to Vet Participants**



A Marine-turned-congressman wants federal officials to deny veterans benefits to any current or former military members involved with the attack on the U.S. Capitol building earlier this year, saying they “no longer deserve” the payouts. In letters to the Veterans Affairs secretary and attorney general made public Friday, Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) said eligibility for education and vocational training should be stripped from those individuals, as well as disability compensation and VA health care access.

“The behavior of these individuals tarnishes the image of American veterans and service members who have given so much to this country,” he wrote. “Yet, many of the veterans and service members who attacked their own government actively and enthusiastically enjoy benefits not available to their fellow citizens.” “This situation is unjust. Any retiree or servicemember who stormed the Capitol on 6 JAN forfeited their moral entitlement to the support of the people of the United States.” Gallego did not specify whether veterans should be charged or convicted of a crime to lose their benefits. In the letter, he encourages officials to “use your discretion” to make that decision. Whether such punishment is possible is unclear. Gallego asked both agencies to review rules regarding VA officials’ ability to revoke benefits, and whether such a move can occur under administrative action or would require congressional intervention.

According to an NPR report earlier this year, about 20 percent of individuals charged in the violent attack on the Capitol building on 6 JAN had some past military service. One of the four attackers who died in the assault — Ashli Babbitt, shot by Capitol Police as she tried to force her way into the House chamber — served 12 years in the Air Force. Earlier this month, VA Secretary Denis McDonough was asked during a White House press conference about the disproportionate number of veterans involved in the attack,

which came as supporters of former President Donald Trump attempted to disrupt congressional certification of the November presidential election results. He promised to look into the link between veterans and extremist ideology in the coming weeks but added that “I also saw veterans on that day, including members of Congress who were veterans and members of [local police] who were veterans, doing remarkable things ... people taking concrete action and supporting democracy on the ground that day, they were vets too.”

A few days later, leaders on the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee launched an investigation into the targeted recruitment of veterans by extremist organizations, citing numerous reports that hate groups have stepped up efforts to attract disenfranchised military members and veterans. In separate letters, Gallego also requested that Defense Department and Homeland Security officials help “identify, investigate and prosecute” any current or former military members involved in the event. Gallego served six years in the Marine Corps, including a combat deployment to Iraq. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III March 19, 2021 ++]

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## **Locating Overseas Kids**

### **DNA Databases Unite American Vets with Their Long-Lost Children**

David Clark traveled the world as an Army noncommissioned officer, serving in South Korea, Germany, Iraq and Vietnam in support of President Bill Clinton’s historic visit in 2000. At the time, he never would have guessed that he had Vietnamese family living nearby. Clark, 50, a civilian employee of Military Sealift Command living in Norfolk, Va., got a surprise after sending a DNA sample to Ancestry.com in December. In addition to finding out he is 44% French and has Scottish, English, Irish and Jewish blood, he discovered a Vietnamese cousin.

Phan Thi Nuoi, was born Nov. 15, 1971, and had her DNA sent to Ancestry.com in September 2017, in an effort to track down her father, an American GI who served there during the war. That man turned out to be Clark’s late uncle, Donald Pelkey, of Fort Fairfield, Maine, who served three tours with the Army at Cam Ranh Bay and Pleiku, Vietnam, between 1968 and 1971. Pelkey had been in love with Phan’s mother, Phan Thi Loan, but lost touch after he came home from the war, Clark said in a recent telephone interview. “Nowadays finding people is easy, but in the 1970s it was just letters and telephone calls,” he said. “And I’m sure the telephone system wasn’t that good.” When Clark saw that he had a long-lost cousin, he sent an email to the address listed with her name on Ancestry.com. He got a response from Brian Hjort, 50, an antique furniture repairman from Copenhagen, Denmark, who has been helping Amerasians in Vietnam and the Philippines find their fathers since the early 1990s.

Hjort first traveled to Vietnam as a 21-year-old in 1992 and was interested in meeting people his age who called themselves Americans, he said in a phone interview. Once back home in Denmark, he got a request from one of his Vietnamese friends to help find the American father of a person in her village. Hjort filed a military records request with the help of the U.S. Embassy and received a name and address. “The first father I found was in 1995,” he said. “After that, people started writing to me.” Hjort estimates he has reunited dozens of GI dads with their Vietnamese and Filipino children. But it has gotten easier in recent years thanks to the internet – he operates a website called [www.fatherfounded.org](http://www.fatherfounded.org) – and DNA. Hjort said he has been sending samples from Amerasians looking for their American fathers to services such as



- <https://www.ancestry.com>
- <https://www.myheritage.com>
- <https://pub.23andme.com>
- Y-DNA @ <https://www.thoughtco.com/y-dna-testing-for-genealogy-1421847>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family\\_Tree\\_DNA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_Tree_DNA)

Vietnam veteran Jim Reischl, 73, of St. Cloud, Minn., hopes DNA will help him find the daughter he left behind after serving as an Air Force clerk from 1969-70 at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam. Reischl shared an off-base apartment with the woman who became the girl's mother. "Her name was Hoa, which means flower in Vietnamese," he said in telephone interview early this year. He keeps a photograph of Hoa, whose real name is Nguyen Thi Hanh, and a friend singing Vietnamese nursery rhymes in their apartment. "I told her in late April of 1970 that I was probably going to be leaving," he said. "I told her I would be with her another month, but I don't think she understood me. She didn't speak a lot of English."

A week later, Hoa told Reischl she was pregnant. "It scared me at the time," he said. "[The Air Force] had told us that women would tell us a lot of things, but it doesn't mean it's true." Hoa told Reischl she wanted to come back to America with him, he recalled. "The military told me, if I get to know a woman and want to bring her back expect to be there longer than my original term," he said. Reichl left his pregnant girlfriend behind in Vietnam but wrote to her soon after arriving in the United States. He never heard back, he said. He eventually married in the States, and it wasn't until he divorced in 2001 that he started searching for his child, making a trip to Vietnam every year, he said.



**Air Force veteran Jim Reischl is pictured (left) with his then-girlfriend Nguyen Thi Hanh, during his tour to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam, from 1969-70 and reunited (right) with her in 2016**

Reichl found Hoa online and, after a decade long search, contacted Hoa, who responded to an advertisement placed in a Vietnamese newspaper, he said. Hoa, who declined to be interviewed for this article, was living in the Mekong Delta, and the pair met for the first time since the war when Reichl visited in 2016. "She said our daughter was born Dec. 18, 1970, in Vinh Long at a clinic," he said. "A lady who was with her offered to watch the baby and the lady took her and never came back. She had talked about taking her to an orphanage." It seems like DNA is the only hope of finding their daughter, said Reichl, who plans to return to Vietnam once the pandemic recedes.

Meanwhile, Clark has been in touch with his cousin, communicating through Facebook with her adult son, Nguyen Van Anh. In a Facebook message, the son said he's interested in meeting his newly found relatives and would travel to the U.S. to visit them if possible. Nguyen Chi, a U.S. Consulate worker in Hồ Chí Minh City, has been helping Clark communicate with his Vietnamese relatives and said they're excited by the news of their American cousins. "I spoke with [Phan] on the phone and she seems very happy to find her father's relation," Nguyen Chi said in a recent email.

If Clark’s Vietnamese relatives want to move to the U.S., they must submit evidence that Pelkey is Phan’s father, said Clark, who is attempting to obtain his uncle’s service records to show that he was in Vietnam at the time she was conceived. Pelkey, who has no other known children and served as commander of the Paul Lockhart Veterans of Foreign Wars Post in Fort Fairfield, would have welcomed his daughter and grandson with open arms if he was still alive, Clark said. But, he added, the rest of their American family won’t be able to help much. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Seth Robson | March 25, 2021 ++]

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## **SBP & Divorce**

### **Update 01: How a Divorce Affects Your SBP**

Have you divorced since retiring? If so, take a moment and carefully check your Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) participation status. Under the law, SBP coverage for a spouse ends with a divorce. Coverage for a former spouse does not continue after the divorce unless certain actions are taken. To continue SBP coverage for a former spouse, either (a) the retiree must voluntarily request coverage be continued for the former spouse, or, (b) the former spouse must request the coverage (but she/he may do so only if a court order requires the coverage). Certain time limits and other conditions apply.

If those actions were not taken, the coverage for the former spouse has ended. This could have important consequences for your survivors. To check your SBP coverage status, review your Retiree Account Statement (RAS) carefully. Make sure that the “SBP Coverage Type” properly reflects “former spouse” or “spouse” (as applicable to your individual circumstances). DFAS has seen multiple instances of spouse SBP premium deductions that were continued after a divorce but because required actions were not taken, the former spouse was not properly covered, preventing payment of an SBP annuity.

If your RAS looks like this, coverage for a former spouse is in place:

SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN (SBP) COVERAGE			
SBP COVERAGE TYPE SPOUSE ONLY COST	FORMER SPOUSE 342.12	ANNUITY BASE AMOUNT SPOUSE DOB	5.2017 JUL 18 19

If your RAS looks like this, your former spouse is NOT being covered by the SBP even if her/his DOB is listed:

SBP COVERAGE TYPE SPOUSE ONLY COST	SPOUSE ONLY 342.12	ANNUITY BASE AMOUNT SPOUSE DOB	5.2017 JUL 18
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There is more information on the DFAS website on the SBP Changing or Stopping Coverage

webpage: <https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/provide/sbp/change>. [Source: Navy Base Ventura County RAO Newsletter | Edward Pagliassotti | April 2021 ++]

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## WWII Vets 252

**Lee Grover | New Guinea B-25 pilot**



Born in January 1921 in Logan, Utah, Roy Lee Grover lived on a farm until he was 5. His family then moved to Salt Lake City, Utah. Grover's interest in the military and serving his country began early. In elementary school, he played the bugle while the flag was raised every morning. In high school, he was part of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps program. During the summer of 1940, Grover attended ground school through the Civilian Pilot Program at the University of Utah, his alma mater. He applied for pilot training in the Army upon the completion of his sophomore year of college.

After joining in November 1941 and going to basic training at Bakersfield Army Air Field in California, Grover began flight training at Visalia Army Air Field in California. He received his wings and became a second lieutenant in May 1942. The following August, he deployed with the 38th Bombardment Group to prevent a Japanese invasion in Australia during World War II. During the war, Grover served as a B-25 pilot and flew 57 combat missions in New Guinea. Many of Grover's missions involved flying from Charters Towers to Port Moresby, where the pilots would load up with ammunition and fuel before flying across the island to bomb the Japanese.

In October 1943, he returned to the U.S. to train combat crews and fly transport missions in the United States, Europe and North Africa. After the war, Grover continued his service at North American Aerospace Defense Command in Colorado as a pilot, comptroller, deputy base commander and management analyst. During his time in the service, he received the Distinguished Flying Cross and three Air Medals among other awards.

Grover retired from the Air Force as a lieutenant colonel and began working in the aerospace industry. In 2006, Grover published a book titled "Incidents in the Life of a B-25 Pilot," a recollection of his experiences during World War II. Thank you for your service! [Source: Vantage Point | Katherine Berman | January 25, 2021 ++]

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## WWII Vets 253

### Armand Jolly | USS Emmons (DD-457) Survivor



Armand Jolly enlisted in the Navy in 1942 after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and registered in Boston, Massachusetts. He completed his basic training at Newport Naval Base in Rhode Island, before attending gunnery training at Naval Station Great Lakes outside Chicago. Jolly then transferred back to Boston to USS Emmons, a minesweeper. Jolly would serve as a gunner's mate, which is a position that involved coordination, maintenance, operation and performance of small arms and mount guns of a naval vessel.

USS Emmons served as an escort ship for convoys that traveled across the Atlantic and provided support against enemy ships, primarily U-boats. While serving aboard USS Emmons, Jolly saw five invasions: Operation Torch in the North Atlantic, Operation Overlord in Normandy, the invasion of Italy, the invasion of Southern France and the invasion of Okinawa. USS Emmons was the first naval vessel to fire shots into Normandy. During these invasions, the ship provided supporting fire.

Jolly was aboard USS Emmons April 6, 1945, during the Invasion of Okinawa, which was the last major battle of World War II. During this battle, five kamikazes slammed into USS Emmons. Thrown from the ship, Jolly sustained severe burns that he carried for the rest of his life. He also was cast into the freezing waters of the Pacific Ocean. USS Emmons sank, but Jolly survived, ending up in a hospital in Guam. His face and hands were badly seared from the fires of the ship. Jolly received a Purple Heart for his injuries and ended his service as a gunner's mate third class.

After the war, Jolly married and had two kids. Even with his injuries, he remained active and attend the 75th Anniversary of the Normandy Landings. Jolly passed away Dec. 26, 2020. We honor his service. [Source: Vantage Point | Alexander Boucher | January 26, 2021 |++]

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## Korean War Vets

### Robert L. Moore | War Survivor But COVID Victim



In 1946, Robert L. Moore was stunned to see two Black Marines in uniform walking down the street near his home in North Carolina. Those men were Montford Point Marines, who were the first Black men to serve in the U.S. Marine Corps. Beginning in August 1942, about 20,000 Black men — including Moore, who rushed to enlist after seeing the men — trained at the segregated Camp Montford Point in Jacksonville, N.C. The camp was decommissioned in 1949 when President Harry Truman desegregated the armed forces. Today, fewer than 400 of these men are believed to survive, and last month their number fell by one more with Moore's death.

In the early morning hours of Feb. 25, the 91-year-old Moore passed away peacefully at his Oceanside home following a weeklong hospitalization for COVID-19. He died surrounded by family members, including his granddaughter Trina Lloyd, who said Moore stopped breathing just a few minutes after family members prayed with him, told him they loved him and said if he was tired it was OK for him to let go. "All I can say is that he lived a good life, full of adventure," Lloyd said. "My grandfather was very modest. He didn't think he was anything special, but he really was an extraordinary man."

Moore, who served in both the Korean and Vietnam wars, was the last surviving Montford Point Marine in San Diego County. His death followed that of J.T. Inge of San Diego, who died last year on 24 OCT, according to Gerald Hampton, who is president of Chapter 44 of the National Montford Point Marine Association. Hampton, who served in the Marines from 1976 to 1996, said he had great respect for Moore, who he will remember for his sense of humor, his spryness and independence and his non-nonsense, straight-shooting way of talking. Before the pandemic arrived, Moore drove himself to all of the chapter's monthly meetings and was always the first to arrive. "As an African-American Marine myself, I'm very cognizant of the fact that we stand on the shoulders of giants," Hampton said. "I can only imagine all of the things those Montford Point Marines would have gone through, so I personally hold them in high esteem."

In 2011, at the request of then-Marine Commandant James F. Amos, President Barack Obama authorized the award of a collective Congressional Gold Medal for all Montford Point Marines. Fewer than 10 percent of the original Montford Point Marines have received their bronze replica medal. Moore was a proud recipient. Robert Lee Moore was born in 1929 at a Catholic hospital in Queens, N.Y., to a White, possibly immigrant mother. When the nuns at the hospital saw the baby's dark skin, they quietly gave him away to a Black domestic worker named Mary Grace Moore who had recently moved to New York from North Carolina, looking for work. No birth certificate or adoption papers were ever filed. Mary Grace named her son, Robert, and gave him her own birthday, Aug. 13.

To keep her son out of trouble in his teens, Mary Grace sent Robert to live with her mother in North Carolina, where, in 1946, he enlisted in the Marines. In a 2019 interview, Moore said the enlistees in boot camp at Montford Point were often subjected to racist attacks by White Marines from nearby Camp Lejeune. Because of his light skin, Moore said he was often the odd man out with colleagues. "The white guys saw me as Black but the Black guys thought I was too White," he said. "There was a lot of racism but I let that roll off my back. The guys I worked with were fine, but some of the brass didn't like me much." After finishing basic training, Moore was assigned to food service operations at Camp Lejeune and a year later, he was transferred to Camp Pendleton near Oceanside, where he would spend more than four decades.

In 1951, Moore was shipped to Korea for 16 months, where he ran a field kitchen near the battle lines in the Korean War. He cooked by day and slept with a rifle by night because the North Korean and Chinese

soldiers always attacked after dark. Every evening, he would load sticks of explosives into the camp stoves to turn them into makeshift bombs if the enemy ever got too close. "My grandfather said sometimes he'd be breaking down the mess hall after a long shift and a soldier who had just come off duty would wander in hungry," Lloyd said. "They'd set everything back up again to fix him a fresh meal and stay there until he drank his last cup of coffee. They wanted him to have good home cooking that would stick to his ribs, since nobody knew when they'd get their next meal, or if it would be their last."

Moore later served in Sasebo, Japan, before returning to Southern California where he became a trainer for Marines in food service. He spent three years in the 1960s running a mess hall on the Navy amphibious assault ship USS Princeton. His final tour of duty was in Vietnam. Moore retired from the Marine Corps at the rank of gunnery sergeant in 1972. Then, after earning a degree at Palomar College, he returned to Camp Pendleton where he worked another 20 years as a dietetic technician at the base hospital. Before moving to Camp Pendleton in 1948, Moore married his sweetheart Willie Mae Miles, who was a secretary. They had 11 children and were married 56 years before she died in 2004. Lloyd said Moore was a loving husband, father and grandfather who often worked two to three jobs to ensure his family wanted for nothing.

Besides his wife, Moore was preceded in death by his son Michael V. Moore. He is survived by his children Gwendolyn F. Hardy; son Robert L. Moore; Phoenita E. Moore; Juana L. Moore; Larry D. Moore; Valerie L. Moore; Gregory L. Moore; Kimberly A. Bolden; Narda E. Moore; and Shawn R. Moore, as well as 19 grandchildren, 47 great-grandchildren and 10 great-great grandchildren. A wake for Moore was held at Oceanside Mortuary in Oceanside, CA prior to his 25 MAR burial in Riverside National Cemetery. [Source: The San Diego Union-Tribune | Pam Kragen | March 16, 2021 ++]

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## **Obit: Henry LaBonte**

**17 March 2021 | WWII Dive Bomber**

During World War II, Brockton native Henry LaBonte was a dive bomber at the Battle of Midway who was awarded two medals for heroism and achievement during flight. To his family, he was a golfer at the D.W. Field course and a traveler who had a good personality and liked to have a good time. "Henry could get along with everyone," said his daughter, Irene Patak, of Walpole. "He could find a way to relate to everyone." LaBonte died March 17 at the age of 97 and was buried at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne.

LaBonte fought in the Battle of Midway as a dive bomber on the naval plane Douglas SBD Dauntless. From 1942 to 1946, he was part of 33 missions. The plane helped earn a victory in the battle by sinking four Japanese carriers. Last year, as part of a multimedia project for school, LaBonte's grandson Conor Patak interviewed him about his military service and was able to review mission plans, flight records, pictures and other documents LaBonte saved. LaBonte told his grandson that he lied about his age and entered the service at the age of 17 after attending Brockton High. At the time, 18 was the minimum age to enlist or be drafted into the armed forces. "He didn't have much thought," Conor Patak said. "He wanted to do his part."

Before the project, LaBonte didn't talk with grandson much about his military service. It was something that was pretty personal and private to him, Conor Patak said. Lillian LaBonte said her husband spoke

with her about his military service, but didn't talk about details. In 1994, LaBonte was awarded the physical medals for his service during World War II: the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal. A photo of him when he received the honors hangs in LaBonte's living room and it was displayed at his funeral service. Military service has carried on in the family. LaBonte's great-granddaughter, Samantha McDonough, graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point and is stationed in Iraq. The LaBontes have a framed picture of her at their Brockton home.

Born and raised in Brockton on Court Street, LaBonte attended the former French elementary school and graduated from Brockton High in 1942. LaBonte was in the car business for 25 years and worked as a manager and salesperson. His family said his connections in Brockton and the way he liked to be around others made him a good salesman. In the 1960s, LaBonte met his wife Lillian. Both of them were divorced and each had a child from their previous marriages. They married about a decade later and were together for a total of 60 years. "He was wonderful and that's why I married him," said Lillian LaBonte. They stayed in Brockton and built a life together. She said they went dancing and listened to live music weekly. Sometimes they would drive to Cape Cod after he got out of work to go dancing and they would return home in the early morning. They liked to go on cruises and trips, including to Hawaii where LaBonte was stationed and where they married. He enjoyed returning there and visiting the Pearl Harbor National Memorial, Lillian LaBonte said.

Irene Patak, Lillian's daughter from her first marriage, was 10 years old when her mother first met LaBonte and 21 when they got married. When they married, she and LaBonte's daughter, Cheryl Davis, of Hanson, were grown up, so the couple didn't really need to blend their families, but Patak got to know LaBonte's family. Lillian and Henry LaBonte didn't have children together. Through their children, their family grew to five grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren and one great-great grandchild. LaBonte was the youngest of eight siblings who have all died.

Gail Kubek, auxiliary president of VFW Post 1046 in Brockton, took LaBonte to see "Midway" in November 2019. The movie was based on the Battle of Midway and experiences of soldiers like LaBonte. During the ride to the theater, Kubek and LaBonte talked and she learned that her mother and he were classmates at Brockton High. LaBonte remembered her by name, and later Kubek's mother said she remembered him. "It was such a small world," Kubek said. Watching the movie with LaBonte felt like she was reliving the battle with him, Kubek said. When the Dauntless came on the screen, he said that was his plane and put his hands up in the air, she said. As it got more into the war scenes, she saw some tears roll down his face. Later, he cried. When the film ended, Kubek told people in the movie theater that the Dauntless was the one LaBonte flew on and that he served in WWII. People said thank you to him for his service, including a younger veteran, she said.

LaBonte also showed pride in other ways, like wearing his veterans cap and having plates that showed he was a veteran on his car, his wife said. LaBonte was sick for the past several years and was treated off and on at the Brockton VA, his family said. They fought to get him a room at the campus' palliative care and hospice program unit in March 2020. "The only place he wanted to go was the VA," Irene Patak said. Lillian LaBonte said the day he went there, LaBonte said that he felt like he was in Las Vegas because of how nice the unit was. One time when the Pataks went to visit LaBonte at the VA, there was a volunteer who sat with him and played Dean Martin songs. William Patak, LaBonte's son-in-law, said it was nice to see that care and attention. The day LaBonte went to the unit, the policy stated that one designated visitor could come to visit for a maximum of two hours.

Toward the end of his life, family were able to visit more often. The Pataks visited him the day before he died on March 17, St. Patrick's Day. LaBonte's funeral service was held March 21 at Club National of Brockton, the civic association for Franco Americans where he was a lifetime member. He was buried at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne. Cape Cod was one of his favorite places to be and where the family vacationed, Irene Patak said. He liked to go in the water and play with the children at the beach, she said, and the family tradition was to meet up at Giardino's Restaurant in Yarmouth. "He knew how to make people feel welcomed and loved," Irene Patak said. [Source: The Enterprise | Mina Corpuz | March 28, 2021 ++]

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## **Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule**

**As of 01 APR 2021**

The Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is intended to serve as a one-stop resource for retirees and veterans seeking information about events such as retirement appreciation days (RAD), stand downs, veterans town hall meetings, resource fairs, free legal advice, mobile outreach services, airshows, and other beneficial community events. The events included on the schedule are obtained from military, VA, veterans service organizations and other reliable retiree/veterans related websites and resources.

The current Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule is available in the following three formats. After connecting to the website, click on the appropriate state, territory or country to check for events scheduled for your area.

- HTML: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.html](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.html).
- PDF: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.pdf](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.pdf).
- Word: [http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs\\_and\\_Other\\_Retiree-Veterans\\_Events.doc](http://www.hostmtb.org/RADs_and_Other_Retiree-Veterans_Events.doc).

Note that events listed on the Military Retirees & Veterans Events Schedule may be cancelled or rescheduled. Before traveling long distances to attend an event, you should contact the applicable RAO, RSO, event sponsor, etc., to ensure the event will, in fact, be held on the date/time indicated. Also, attendance at some events may require military ID, VA enrollment or DD214. Please report broken links, comments, corrections, suggestions, new RADs and/or other military retiree/veterans related events to the Events Schedule Manager, [Milton.Bell126@gmail.com](mailto:Milton.Bell126@gmail.com) [Source: Retiree/Veterans Events Schedule Manager | Milton Bell | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Hiring Fairs**

**Scheduled As of 01 APR 2021**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's (USCC) Hiring Our Heroes program employment workshops are available in conjunction with hundreds of their hiring fairs. These workshops are designed to help veterans and military spouses and include resume writing, interview skills, and one-on-one mentoring. To participate, sign up for the workshop in addition to registering (if indicated) for the hiring fairs which are shown on the Hiring Our Heroes website <https://www.hiringourheroes.org> for the next month. For details



of each you should click on the city next to the date Listings of upcoming Vet Job Fairs nationwide providing location, times, events, and registration info if required can be found at the following websites. Note that some of the scheduled events for the next 2 to 6 weeks have been postponed and are awaiting reschedule dates due to the current COVID-19 outbreak. You will need to review each site below to locate Job Fairs in your location:

- <https://events.recruitmilitary.com>
- <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/events/hiringfairs>
- <https://www.legion.org/careers/jobfairs>

### **First Civilian Job**

Forty-one percent of veterans surveyed indicated they left their first post-military job within one year. Another 31% indicated said they left their first civilian job to make ends meet and never intended to stay. Another 30% left as the result of finding a better job, while 19% left because the job did not align with their expectations. Only 12% left because the position was terminated or they were laid off. The reasons for staying at a job depend greatly on financial and long-term opportunities in the company. Sixty-five percent of veterans say they will stay at a company for better pay, while 55% stay for a clear path of career growth. Other activities, like veteran resource groups and volunteer activities, seem to have less impact on whether veterans remain or leave their jobs. [Source: Recruit Military, USCC, and American Legion | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Employment Opportunities**

### **Listings from Companies Looking For Vets**

Military Times has listings from companies looking for vets to hire which is updated daily. Anyone interested can check them out by clicking on <https://jobboard.militarytimes.com> which will open a daily listing by job title such as posted below. Clicking on the job title will reveal the company and location offering the position, the job summary and description, its core responsibilities, what employees are expected to do, plus prerequisite education and relevant work experience requirements. Also a tab to click on to apply for the job.

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Mar 30

#### **[92G Food Service Specialist](#)**

- Army National Guard
- Marysville, WA, United States

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Job Board | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## **State Veteran's Benefits**

### **Idaho 2021**

The state of Idaho provides a number of services and benefits to its veterans. To obtain information on these refer to the attachment to this Bulletin titled, “**State Veteran's Benefits – ID**” for an overview of those in

the below areas. They are available to veterans who are residents of the state. For a more detailed explanation of each of the below plus the state's current position on veteran issues refer to <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/idaho-state-veterans-benefits.html>, <https://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard>, and <http://veterans.idaho.gov> :

- Housing
- Financial Assistance
- Employment
- Education
- Recreation
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing
- Burial
- Taxation

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/idaho-state-veterans-benefits.html> | MAR 2021 ++]

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## Vet Jobs

### Update 272: Solar Ready Vets Network Looking for Applicants



Harnessing the power of the sun can dispel even the gloomiest economic outlook. That can lead to a bright career in clean energy for transitioning service members and Veterans, says Solar Ready Vets. The solar industry ranks as one of the fastest-growing sectors in the U.S. economy, due to federal policies, technological innovations, competitive installation costs, and increasing demand from the private and public sectors for clean electricity. This demand means the solar industry needs skilled workers in many areas, such as installation, production, manufacturing, sales and management.

Military service provides skills in leadership, teamwork, ingenuity and persistence that can easily be applied to a career in the solar industry. There are several solar training programs designed for service members and Veterans to provide the practical knowledge, skills, and experience needed for working in the solar industry. The programs also include tips for translating skills gained from military service to be competitive in the solar job market. To get you started, the [Solar Ready Vets Network](#) offers solar energy training and credentialing programs focused especially on helping service members and Veterans transition into a career in the solar industry.

The [Solar Ready Vets Network](#) is comprised of several solar workforce development programs that provide transitioning military service members and Veterans with career training, professional development and employment opportunities in the solar industry. Funded by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Solar

Energy Technologies Office (SETO), the Network expands upon DOE’s Solar Ready Vets pilot program launched in 2014 to now offer new solar programs:

- [Solar Ready Vets Fellowship Program](#): Active-duty military service members who are transitioning are placed in 12-week work-based learning programs with solar employers. These opportunities are primarily management and professional positions, such as technical sales, system design, supply chain logistics, project development, operations and installation. Participants from select military bases in regions with high demand for solar workers receive valuable on-the-job training and experience to help them transition to a civilian career in the solar industry. [The Solar Foundation](#) leads this program, in partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s “Hiring Our Heroes” program and the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA).
- [Solar Opportunities and Readiness \(SOAR\) Initiative](#): Veterans are provided with solar training, credentialing, professional development and employment opportunities. The goals are to establish an apprenticeship recognized by the Department of Labor, expand the eligibility of solar training for GI Bill benefits, and define expedited pathways to solar certifications based on military experience and qualifications. [The Solar Foundation](#) leads this program, in partnership with the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP), and the Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) is establishing a Department of Labor-recognized apprenticeship, expanding GI Bill benefits to include solar training and expediting solar certifications based on military experience and qualifications.

**What to expect with Solar Ready Vets programs** -- Skilled instructors, usually affiliated with accredited community colleges, deliver coursework in practical skills. Students benefit from in-person training and internships, interviews with leading solar companies and other job search assistance. Solar Ready Vets programs are currently offered at more than 400 community colleges in 49 states. Students also have the opportunity to become certified with the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP), a respected and recognized certification organization for renewable energy professionals. [CLICK HERE](#) to learn more about the NABCEP solar credentialing.

**Who is eligible for the Solar Ready Vets programs?** -- Active-duty military, transitioning service members and Veterans are eligible for these programs. Service members participating in the Solar Ready Vets Fellowship Program are paid by the military, and Veterans can use their GI Bill benefits to cover the cost of tuition and materials. [CLICK HERE](#) to join the Solar Training Network for resources on solar industry training, certifications, career pathways, and employment opportunities.

[Source: Vantage Point Blog | Kiran Dhillon | March 23, 2021 ++]

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**\* Vet Legislation \***



## Handicapped Vet Travel

### H.R.855: VETS Safe Travel Act

On February 5, 2021, Representative Paul Gosar (R-AZ) re-introduced H.R. 855, the **Veterans Expedited TSA Screening (VETS) Safe Travel Act**. This bill would provide expedited security screening under the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) TSA Pre✓® program to severely injured or disabled veterans. Veterans with prostheses or wheelchairs know how difficult it can be to get through airport security. Some have been asked to remove prostheses, transfer from wheelchairs or give up canes that help visually impaired veterans safely navigate their surroundings. Specifically this bill would apply to any veteran who is enrolled in the patient enrollment system of the Department of Veterans Affairs who has:

- Lost, or lost use of, a limb;
- Become paralyzed or partially paralyzed; or
- Incurred permanent blindness; and
- As a result of a loss, paralyzation or partial paralyzation, or blindness requires the use of a wheelchair, prosthetic limb, or other assistive device to aid with mobility.

As of this writing the bill has only gained 26 cosponsors in the House. Readers are encourage to go to <https://dav.quorum.us/campaign/31798/> and send their legislators the DAV Commanders Action Network prepared editable letter or draft their own letter to ask their Representatives to actively support and pass the VETS Safe Travel Act. To track this bill in Congress refer to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/855>. [Source: <https://dav.quorum.us> | DAV Take Action | March 16, 2021 ++]

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## Tricare Select

### Update 11: S.265 | TRICARE Select Restoration Act

A bipartisan bill would provide a partial fix for the new TRICARE Select enrollment fee, which took effect 1 JAN. The TRICARE Select Restoration Act (S.625), introduced by Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), protects the military retiree health care benefit by eliminating the TRICARE Select enrollment fee for those who retired prior to 2018 and their dependents plus some TFL holders despite previous announcements that they would not be affected.

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) appreciates the efforts of both senators and supports this partial fix for the TRICARE Select enrollment fee. “MOAA fought the new TRICARE Select enrollment fee years ago when it was proposed as part of military health system reform, because it fundamentally devalues the benefit and reduces health care protections for military retirees,” said MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret). “We appreciate Sen. Tester and Sen. Murkowski’s efforts to eliminate the enrollment fee and reinstate full health care protections for those who retired before 2018. We thank Sen. Tester and Sen. Murkowski for taking this step to reverse the unacceptable move of cutting TRICARE benefits after servicemembers have fulfilled the obligations of a full career.”

The new TRICARE Select enrollment fee was passed into law with the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) as part of a package of military health system (MHS) reforms. It went into

effect Jan. 1, 2021, and has led to a significant number of retirees and their families being disenrolled from TRICARE coverage for failure to pay the fee. Disenrolled families have until the end of June to request reinstatement of TRICARE coverage. (Note: This editor's 66 year old wife's TFL was cancelled effective 1 Jan. As her sponsor I since 1988 I had to sign her up 17 MAR and pay retroactive fees for TRICARE Select to restore her Express Scripps and medical care entitlements despite her having a Medicare Part A&B card effective 11-1-2019).

During the FY 2017 NDAA process, MOAA opposed the Select enrollment fee and successfully fought for current servicemembers and retirees to be grandfathered into lower fees -- \$150 individual/\$300 family for grandfathered retirees, instead of \$450 individual/\$900 family for retirees who enter service on or after Jan 1, 2018. The S.625 bill language repeals the Select enrollment fee only for those who retired before 2018 – a partial fix. MOAA still advocates for a full fix repealing the fee for all Group A beneficiaries (whose sponsors entered service before 2018), but this partial fix has a lower cost associated with it and a high likelihood of passage.

In a press release, the bill's sponsors explained the importance of this legislation. "No military retiree should ever be at risk of losing their health care coverage -- especially during a global pandemic," said Tester. "Our bipartisan bill will ensure that retired veterans aren't burdened by costly enrollment fees that put themselves and their family's health care in jeopardy. This legislation is a critical step in supporting more folks during these tough times, and I'll keep fighting until every man and woman who has selflessly served our nation has access to affordable, high-quality care." Murkowski said the fees came as a surprise to many of her constituents, and she was "glad to join Senator Tester in support of legislation to eliminate unnecessary annual enrollment fees for certain retired veterans and reduce those fees for individuals and families." "COVID-19 has had significant impacts on America's veterans and their families," Murkowski added. "We must guarantee their hard-earned medical benefits are protected throughout this public health crisis, and beyond."

Readers are requested to TAKE ACTION and contact their senators and ask them to cosponsor this important bill. This can be easily accomplished by going to <https://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/app/write-a-letter?0&engagementId=511147> and using the available prepared editable letter. [Source: MOAA Newsletter| March 18, 2021 ++]

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## **AUMF**

### **Update 01: H.R. 2014 | Repeal Outdated Presidential War Authorizations**

A bipartisan group of House lawmakers with military or national security backgrounds introduced H.R.2014 on 18 MAR to repeal three decades-old war authorizations. It would repeal the 1991 authorization for the use of military force (AUMF) for the Gulf War, the 2002 AUMF for the Iraq War and a 1957 resolution authorizing military action in the Middle East. The bill's sponsors described it as a first step toward reclaiming Congress' constitutional authority to declare war.

"Congress has abdicated its Article 1 authority for too long. By taking these outdated authorizations off the books, we can start to reclaim our constitutional war powers," Rep. Mike Gallagher (R-WI) said in a statement. "The 1957, 1991 and 2002 AUMFs are no longer relevant and their repeal would not impact

ongoing operations. War powers are this institution’s most important constitutional responsibility, and it’s critical we take this small but significant step forward to reassert congressional authority.”

Gallagher, a Marines veteran, introduced the bill with Marines veteran Rep. Jared Golden (D-ME), former CIA officer Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-VA), and Army veteran Rep. Peter Meijer (R-MI). “Congress after Congress has been content to sit back while presidents of both parties send young Americans into battle without an honest discussion or accountability to the public. Enough is enough,” Golden said in a statement, adding the bill is an “opening salvo to prevent the forever wars that have come to characterize the past two decades.”

The introduction of the bill is the latest sign new momentum is building toward reining in existing war authorizations after President Biden ordered an airstrike on Iran-backed militias in Syria last month in retaliation for militia attacks on U.S. personnel in Iraq. The Biden administration cited as its legal justification for the strike his constitutional authority to defend U.S. personnel, not an AUMF. But the strike has still sparked renewed efforts by lawmakers to repeal and replace existing AUMFs. Earlier this month, Sens. Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Todd Young (R-IN) led a bipartisan group of senators in introducing a bill to repeal the 1991 and 2002 AUMFs. And House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY) said last week his panel would take up a bill from Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA) to repeal the 2002 AUMF in “the coming weeks.”

The House voted last year to repeal the 2002 AUMF, but it was never taken up by the Senate, which was controlled by Republicans at the time. The Trump administration in part cited the 2002 AUMF in its legal justification for the 2020 drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani. The 2002 authorization has also occasionally been cited to bolster legal arguments in the fight against ISIS, though the main authorization cited for that war has been the 2001 AUMF. It is the 2001 AUMF that is likely to pose the most difficulty in renewed congressional efforts on war powers. The 2001 AUMF authorized military action against the perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks but has since been used to justify military action in more than a dozen countries against disparate terrorist groups.

The White House has signaled it is willing to work with Congress on crafting a more narrow war authorization. But while there is bipartisan agreement the 2001 AUMF is outdated, past congressional efforts on a replacement have all stalled amid partisan fights over the details, including whether to impose limits on time, geography and types of forces. [Source: The Hill | Rebecca Kheel | March 18, 2021 ++]

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## **Vet Toxic Exposure Legislation**

### **Update 12: S.927 | TEAM Act of 2021**

Sens. Thom Tillis and Maggie Hassan have reintroduced a bill to reform how veterans exposed to toxins receive health care and benefits and requires the use of new scientific evidence to establish whether some health problems are connected to toxic exposures. The **Toxic Exposure in the American Military (S.927)**, or TEAM, Act improves access to health care by providing consultation and testing through the Department of Veterans Affairs for eligible veterans exposed to toxic substances, expanding training on toxic exposure issues for VA health care and benefits personnel, and by requiring VA to develop a questionnaire for

primary care appointments to help determine whether a veteran might have been exposed to toxic substances during service.

It was first introduced in 2020. “It’s just that we ran out of time at the end of the Congress,” said Tillis, a Republican from North Carolina. “There was another component that [had] differing opinions on the House side about what the priorities needed to be, so we’ve spent the intervening time to really try to get everyone to coalesce around some of the key tenants of the TEAM Act and I think we’re making good progress on the House.” Speaking together 23 MAR to announce the reintroduction of the bill, Hassan and Tillis said the impacts go beyond veterans of a specific conflict or generation and includes those exposed to toxins while serving in the United States. They were joined on the call by seven veteran service organizations, many of which noted the importance of the bill to post-9/11 veterans exposed to toxic pits of burning trash while deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries associated with the Global War on Terror.

More than 30 groups support the bill in its current form, Tillis said. Aleks Morosky, government affairs specialist for the Wounded Warrior Project, said the breadth of veterans impacted is what is “groundbreaking” about this bill. “It would finally provide health-care eligibility and put that process in place for VA to respond to the scientific data for all veterans of all areas who were exposed foreign and domestic, regardless of era location, now and in the future,” he said. “Veterans who have already been exposed will be covered, but we can also ensure that the next generation of veterans aren’t starting from square one anymore.” The TEAM Act also requires VA to respond to new scientific evidence regarding diseases associated with toxic exposure within an established time, establishes a scientific commission to research the health effects of toxic exposure in veterans and report the commission’s findings to the VA and Congress, and ensures VA enters into agreements with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to conduct scientific studies regarding associations between diseases and exposure to toxic substances during military service.

“It’s critically important that we bring the best science we can to establish these connections. Obviously individual veterans would have a really difficult time doing this, but the [VA] and the scientific community can come together and do that,” said Hassan, a Democrat from New Hampshire. “Once the connection is established, because the TEAM Act would also ensure that the VA keeps track of who was stationed where and what kind of exposures they may have had, it will help develop an expertise within the VA for treatment.” Hassan and Tillis are members of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee. Also sponsoring the bill are Sens. Jerry Moran (R-KS), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI).

“Veterans who are experiencing negative health effects of toxic exposures need to be able to rely on VA for answers and a Congress that is attentive to their needs,” Moran said in a statement. “I am committed to working with my colleagues to make certain veterans who experience negative health consequences following exposure to dangerous chemicals where they were living and working while serving have access to an enduring framework, supported by science, to identify, research and address cases of toxic exposure in a timely manner.”

As debate and discussions begin for the bill, Tillis said he anticipates some additional amendments and provisions will be attached, but the veterans organizations are needed to help support the bill in both parties. “I believe in the last administration, the real question was making sure that when we provide all of the authorities under the TEAM Act is that we also make sure that it’s properly funded,” Tillis said. “That’s

what we'll continue to work on with our colleagues in the Senate and the House.” Once it’s through, he said he has “high expectations” that President Joe Biden will sign it into law. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Rose L. Thayer | March 23, 2021 ++]

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## WWI Hello Girls

### Update 01: S.0000 | Hello Girls Congressional Gold Medal Act



A bipartisan group of U.S. Senators has introduced legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the female military telephone operators who kept American and French GIs connected during World War I. The **Hello Girls Congressional Gold Medal Act**, previously introduced in the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress as H.R.1953 and the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress as S.3136, would award the medal to the women of the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Also known as the Hello Girls, the bilingual female switchboard operators connected more than 150,000 calls per day during the war, doing so at a rate six times faster than their male counterparts. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT), Ranking Member Jerry Moran (R-KS) Sens. Maggie Hassan (D-NH), and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) introduced the legislation this week.

“The Hello Girls were faster and more accurate than any enlisted man at connecting men on the battlefield with military leaders, and blazed a new path for women on the front lines in France during WWI,” said Tester. “They took the Army oath, helped our allied forces win the war, but were still denied the veteran status and benefits they earned. This Congressional Gold Medal will honor their service and provide them with long-overdue recognition.” Despite their service, the Hello Girls fought for 60 years to be recognized as being among the nation’s first women veterans. “The Hello Girls were true patriots who answered America’s call to action by serving as crucial links between American and French forces on the front lines during World War I,” said Hassan.

Often under combat conditions, the Hello Girls enabled time-sensitive command and control, critical to operations on the front lines during WWI. They were recruited after male infantrymen struggled to connect calls quickly or communicate with their French counterparts. The Hello Girls were deployed to France to serve at military headquarters and command outposts in the field alongside the American Expeditionary Forces. Despite their outstanding service and the military oath they took, they were denied veteran status and benefits when they returned home.

“I am so proud of my grandmother, Grace Banker, and the women of the Signal Corp with whom she served in WWI,” said Carolyn Timbie, granddaughter of Grace Banker, who was the Chief Operator of the



Hello Girls. “They fought for 60 years to get their recognition as veterans, and I only wish my grandmother had lived to see this day. I’m excited knowing the world will now hear their story, with the distinction of a Congressional Gold Medal, along with the children, grandchildren and other descendants of these heroic women whose recognition is long-overdue!” The full text of the bill can be found [here](#). The full list of the Hello Girls kept in the National Archives can be read [here](#). [Source: VVA Web Weekly | Julia LeDoux | March 12, 2021 ++]

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## VA Presumptive AO Diseases

### Update 37: S.810 | Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2021

In his continued push to provide Vietnam-era veterans their earned benefits and care, Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester is leading 16 Senators in introducing bicameral legislation to expand the Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) list of medical conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure to include Hypertension and MGUS (Monoclonal Gammopathy of Undetermined Significance). “Last Congress, we brought long-overdue relief to Vietnam-era veterans dealing with Hypothyroidism, Bladder Cancer, and Parkinsonism—but our fight is far from over,” said Chairman Tester. “This bicameral legislation will put an end to decades of veterans wrestling with bureaucratic red tape by expanding VA benefits and care to vets suffering from Hypertension and MGUS as a result of their service. These folks are suffering while their government makes them wait, and they can’t wait any longer.”

Tester’s **Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2021 (S.810)** would recognize the overwhelming scientific evidence provided by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine that places both *Hypertension and MGUS* in the “sufficient evidence of an association” category for scientific association with Agent Orange exposure—the only illnesses in this category not included on VA’s list of presumptive conditions. Adding Hypertension and MGUS to the list of presumptive conditions would provide relief for more than 490,000 Vietnam veterans who have waited decades for scientific evidence to support their claims for health care and benefits.

“Decades after the Vietnam War, there are veterans still waiting for the care and benefits they deserve,” said Kristina Keenan, Associate Director, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). “In 2018, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine found that ‘sufficient evidence of an association’ exists between Agent Orange exposure and hypertension and MGUS, or monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance. VA has yet to add these to the list of presumptive conditions even though the science shows they meet a stronger evidentiary standard than some of the previously approved conditions. The VFW supports the Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act which would finally provide relief for hundreds of thousands of Vietnam veterans.”

- “DAV applauds the introduction of the Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act and its focus on justice for nearly a half-million Vietnam veterans affected by hypertension and MGUS who have waited far too long for access to VA health care and other benefits earned through their service to our nation,” said Disabled American Veterans (DAV) National Commander Stephen “Butch” Whitehead. “We thank Senator Tester and his Senate colleagues for their leadership on this issue and look forward to seeing the bill signed into law.”

- “As the leading national nonprofit organization caring for all those grieving the death of a military loved one and as staunch advocates for the families of those who died as a result of illnesses connected to toxic exposure while serving in the military, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is grateful to Senator Tester for introducing the Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act,” said Bonnie Carroll, TAPS President and Founder. “We strongly support this important legislation, which adds two diseases to the list of Agent Orange presumptive conditions, and honors our nation’s commitment to our veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors.”

This bill represents the latest effort in Tester’s ongoing fight for Vietnam-era veterans. Last Congress, he successfully secured his landmark bill as part of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act establishing a presumption of service-connection for thousands of veterans suffering from Bladder Cancer, Hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism. Chairman Tester recently joined Ranking Member Jerry Moran in urging ‘decisive action’ from VA Secretary McDonough to include Hypertension to the list of presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange. Tester also called on VA to recognize and address the long-term health consequences of military toxic exposures after hearing powerful stories from veterans who served in the Vietnam and Iraq Wars on their experiences living with Hypertension and chronic lung disease—conditions associated with their exposure to Agent Orange and Burn Pits.

Text of the Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act of 2021 can be found [HERE](#). Read more on Tester’s toxic exposure efforts [HERE](#). [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | March 22, 2021 ++]

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## **National Guard Tricare Coverage**

### **Update 01: S.829/H.R.1997 | TRICARE Fairness for NG/Reserve Retirees Act**

Bipartisan, bicameral legislation would extend TRICARE benefits to reserve component retirees who receive retirement pay before age 60 due to deployment credits but don’t get retiree TRICARE coverage until they reach age 60. The **TRICARE Fairness for National Guard and Reserve Retirees Act** (S. 829), introduced by Sens. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Elizabeth Warren (D-MS) and the House companion bill (H.R.1997), introduced by Reps. Bill Johnson (R-OH) and Dean Phillips (D-MN) would ensure these “gray area” retirees who qualify for retirement pay before age 60 are eligible for the TRICARE retiree benefit. Under current law, gray area retirees who want TRICARE coverage must purchase TRICARE Retired Reserve (TRR), an expensive premium-based plan, even if they are receiving retired pay.

MOAA supports this legislation ensuring all uniformed services retirees who receive retired pay are also covered by the TRICARE health care benefit. Reserve component members who have earned early retirement pay through deployment credits should receive the full retirement package, including health care coverage. “Our nation asks a lot from the reserve component, both abroad and at home. The least we can do after a career of service and sacrifice is to ensure fair health care access for all retirees who are drawing retirement pay,” said MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret). “MOAA strongly supports the TRICARE Fairness for National Guard and Reserve Retirees Act and urges swift passage.”

Eligibility for retiree TRICARE translates into significant savings for reserve component retirees under age 60 who are receiving retired pay. For 2021, TRR monthly premiums are \$484.83 for the member only or \$1,165.01 for the member plus family. Heavy reliance on the National Guard and Reserve over the past

year underscores the need to fix this TRICARE parity issue. Reserve component members played key roles in wildfire rescues, national disaster emergency management, and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and civil disturbances. In 2020, the National Guard mobilized more members, for a longer time period, than any time since World War II, Lt. Col. Devin Robinson, USAF, director of public affairs for the Air National Guard, told Military Times in December.

MOAA appreciates lawmakers' efforts to bring parity to health care coverage for gray area retirees receiving retired pay. In a press release, Sens. Portman and Warren explained the importance of this legislation. "We owe our servicemembers a great debt of gratitude for the safety and freedom we enjoy every day. We must continue to correct the disparities in how they receive their benefits," Portman said. Warren added: "Our servicemembers make enormous sacrifices for us and our reservists and National Guardsmen and women who retire early shouldn't be denied access to affordable health care at the time of their retirement."

Reps. Phillips and Johnson also underscored their support in a press release for the House companion bill. "As a Gold Star Son, I know that our service members deserve our utmost respect and unbending support," Phillips said. "Providing affordable, high-quality health care should be the minimum standard of support afforded to our service members, especially those in the National Guard and Reserve who have earned early retirement." Johnson said that "with everything our National Guard and Reserve members do for us, the least we can do is ensure that when they finish their service to our country and retire, they are not forced to wait up to 10 years before being eligible for the less costly TRICARE health care plans they have earned. We owe it to them to get this legislation across the finish line."

Readers are requested to contact their elected officials and ask them to cosponsor this important legislation to bring health care coverage parity to gray area retirees receiving early retirement pay. This they can easily do by utilizing and forwarding the TAKE ACTION prepared editable message found at <https://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/app/write-a-letter?2&engagementId=511196>.

[Source: MOAA | Karen Ruedisueli | March 22, 2021 ++]

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## **Gulf War Syndrome**

### **Update 47: S.1039 | Improving Benefits for Gulf War Veterans Act**

U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ) on 25 MAR introduced comprehensive legislation that will expand and improve access to essential benefits for veterans who served in the Gulf War and other wars in the region. Gulf War veterans often suffer from unexplained chronic symptoms known as the "Gulf War Illness", which can include symptoms of fatigue, joint pain, memory loss, insomnia, and respiratory disorders. Exposure to pesticides and other toxins have been linked to these symptoms.

"Our military veterans have made invaluable sacrifices and served our country with honor and dignity. Our appreciation and gratitude must go beyond a single holiday and the occasional parade – we must show it by ensuring our veterans have access to the benefits and resources they need to live a healthy and successful life beyond their line of duty when they return home," said Sen. Menendez. "This bill ensure more veterans qualify to receive critical VA benefits and that VA medical staff have the training to care for

and examine veterans suffering from the Gulf War illness. I urge my colleagues to pass this bill quickly so that our country's veterans receive the benefits they deserve.”

"Although US military operations in the Persian Gulf are currently ongoing, the authorization to provide benefits will expire on December 31, 2021. The Improving Benefits for Gulf War Veterans Act would permanently extend VA's authority to grant benefits for Gulf War Illness and would broaden the definition of Persian Gulf Veteran to include those who served in Afghanistan, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, and Jordan," said Kristina Keenan, Associate Director of Veterans of Foreign Wars. "Additionally, since Gulf War Illness is difficult to identify, the bill S.1039 **would create a single Gulf War Disability Benefits Questionnaire** (DBQ) for the associated symptoms and would provide training to VA medical examiners for Gulf War disability claims. The VFW thanks Senator Menendez for introducing this bill which would improve access to care and benefits for Persian Gulf War veterans." [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | March 29, 2021 ++]

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## VA Caregiver Program

### Update 70: H.R.110 | Care for the Veteran Caregiver Act

Rep. Richard Hudson (R-NC) and Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY) successfully reintroduced of **HR 110, The Care for Veteran Caregivers Act**, which requires VA to extend stipend payments and CHAMPVA eligibility for caregivers, eliminates unnecessary and redundant re-evaluation requirements, and standardizes the initial and annual eligibility evaluation process. This bill updates the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), including by requiring the VA to continue to provide assistance to a family caregiver for at least six months after the death of a veteran participating in the program. Additionally, the bill requires:

- The VA to establish a process by which veterans who are determined to have the most significant need for caregiver assistance are permanently eligible for such assistance.
- The VA to standardize the criteria used across all facilities in its required evaluations of the needs of the veterans and the skills of the family caregiver.
- The VA must also standardize criteria used in accepting and evaluating applications for participation in the program across all facilities.

[Source: TREA | Washington Legislative Update | March 26, 2021 ++]

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## Vet Jobs

### Update 273: S.894/H.R.2151 | Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021

On 23 MAR, U.S. Senators Mike Braun (R-IN) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) introduced bipartisan legislation that helps the Department of Veterans Affairs actively recruit and hire separating Department of Defense medical department personnel to help fill its more than 45,000 open positions. The **Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021** directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a program that will help actively recruit medical personnel, who are within one year of completing their military service, to remain

in federal health care in departments like Veterans Affairs. Representatives Robert E. Latta (OH-05) and Kathleen M. Rice (NY-04) introduced companion legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives. Go to <https://www.braun.senate.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/HEY21205.pdf> to read the full text of the bill.

- “The VA Inspector General has reported that staff shortages are a challenge for solving problems in Veteran care. This bill will empower the VA to proactively recruit active duty medical personnel who are separating from the military at the conclusion of their contract or at retirement to improve health care services for Veterans,” said Senator Braun.
- “This commonsense, bipartisan bill will help address two critical issues: It will expand opportunities to recruit VA health care providers, as well as help increase veteran employment by recruiting newly separated veterans to work in VA Medical Centers,” Senator Hassan said. “I will continue to advocate for innovative solutions like these in order to support our veterans’ health and job opportunities.”
- “During my time in Congress, I have worked to make sure veterans are provided with the resources they need to successfully reintegrate into civilian life,” said Congressman Latta. “I’m honored to join my colleagues in the Senate to reintroduce the bipartisan Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act, which will make it easier for veterans to use the skills they learned in the service to help other veterans. At the same time, the VA will benefit from employing qualified and hardworking professionals who have already proven their love and dedication to this nation. Moving this legislation should be a no-brainer.”
- “The Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act will help the VA finally fill lingering employment vacancies and provide veterans with quality job opportunities after completing their military service,” said Rep. Kathleen Rice. “I’m proud to co-lead this bipartisan legislation with Representative Latta, and I thank Senators Braun and Hassan for leading it in the Senate. We must work to push this common-sense bill through both chambers of Congress and get it signed into law.”

## **Background**

In November 2019, the VA Inspector General stated that staff shortages are a root cause of many of the problems in Veterans’ care. The Department of Defense has robust medical departments in the Army, Navy, and Air Force totaling 111,462 Active Duty and 67,951 Reserve personnel in 2020. All or part of the medical education and training has been paid for by the Federal government. Their Military Occupation Specialties (MOSSs) span the full spectrum of the medical professions from primary care physicians, to neurosurgeons, nurse practitioners, health care administrators, physical therapists, pharmacists, radiology technicians, medical logistician, biomedical maintenance, etc. All of these medical specialties can be utilized in the VHA, and their knowledge of the new electronic health record will also be invaluable.

Currently, an average of 13,000 active duty medical department members separate from the military each year at the end of enlistments/contracts or through retirement. There is no formal program in place to actively recruit them to remain in federal health care in departments like Veterans Affairs (VA). We feel this must change.

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | March 29, 2021 ++]

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## Vet Legislation Submitted to 117th Congress

### Pending Passage

[H.R.1273](#) - 117th Congress (2021-2022). To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to study and report on the prevalence of cholangiocarcinoma in veterans who served in the Vietnam theater of operations during the Vietnam era, and for other purposes. **Sponsor:** [Rep. Zeldin, Lee M. \[R-NY-1\]](#) (Introduced 02/23/2021) **Cosponsors:** (5) **Committees:** House - Veterans' Affairs **Latest Action:** House - 02/23/2021 Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

[S.657](#) - 117th Congress (2021-2022). A bill to modify the presumption of service connection for veterans who were exposed to herbicide agents while serving in the Armed Forces in Thailand during the Vietnam era, and for other purposes. **Sponsor:** [Sen. Boozman, John \[R-AR\]](#) (Introduced 03/10/2021) **Cosponsors:** (7) **Committees:** Senate - Veterans' Affairs **Latest Action:** Senate - 03/10/2021 Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

[H.R.1972](#) - 117th Congress (2021-2022). To amend title 38, United States Code, to expand the list of diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents for which there is a presumption of service connection for veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam to include hypertension, and for other purposes. **Sponsor:** [Rep. Harder, Josh \[D-CA-10\]](#) (Introduced 03/17/2021) **Cosponsors:** (1) **Committees:** House - Veterans' Affairs **Latest Action:** House - 03/17/2021 Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

[S.810](#) - 117th Congress (2021-2022). A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand the list of diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents for which there is a presumption of service connection for veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam to include hypertension, and for other purposes. **Sponsor:** [Sen. Tester, Jon \[D-MT\]](#) (Introduced 03/17/2021) **Cosponsors:** (18) **Committees:** Senate - Veterans' Affairs **Latest Action:** Senate - 03/17/2021 Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

[H.R.234](#) - 117th Congress (2021-2022). Korean American VALOR Act **Sponsor:** [Rep. Takano, Mark \[D-CA-41\]](#) (Introduced 01/06/2021) **Cosponsors:** (0) **Committees:** House - Veterans' Affairs **Latest Action:** House - 02/17/2021 Referred to the Subcommittee on Health.

[H.R.342](#) - 117th Congress (2021-2022). PFC Garfield M. Langhorn Memorial Semipostal Stamp to Benefit our Veterans Act of 2021 **Sponsor:** [Rep. Zeldin, Lee M. \[R-NY-1\]](#) (Introduced 01/15/2021) **Cosponsors:** (3) **Committees:** House - Oversight and Reform; Veterans' Affairs **Latest Action:** House - 03/08/2021 Referred to the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

[H.Con.Res.13](#) - 117th Congress (2021-2022) Recognizing the difficult challenges Black veterans faced when returning home after serving in the Armed Forces, their heroic military sacrifices, and their patriotism in fighting for equal rights and for the dignity of a people and a Nation. **Sponsor:** [Rep. Beatty, Joyce \[D-OH-3\]](#) (Introduced 02/01/2021) **Cosponsors:** (53) **Committees:** House - Veterans' Affairs **Latest Action:** House - 02/01/2021 Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

[H.Res.49](#) - 117th Congress (2021-2022) Expressing the sense of the Congress that a commemorative postage stamp series should be issued honoring women veterans, and that the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee should recommend to the Postmaster General that such a stamp series be issued. **Sponsor:** [Rep. Brownley, Julia \[D-CA-26\]](#) (Introduced 01/19/2021) **Cosponsors:** (12) **Committees:** House - Oversight and Reform **Latest Action:** House - 01/19/2021 Referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Reform

[Source: VVA Government Affairs Newsletter | March 22, 2021 ++]

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**Note:** To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 116th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole. To read the text of bills that are to be considered on the House floor in the upcoming week refer to <https://docs.house.gov/floor>.

**\* Military \***



## Navy Salvage Ops

### MH-60S Helicopter More Than 3.6 Miles Underwater Recovered



Navy MH-60S helicopter lies upside down on the deck of a contracted salvage vessel (left) after recovery by Navy CURV 21 (right), a 6,400-pound remotely operated vehicle used for deep ocean salvage

The Navy has recovered an MH-60S Seahawk helicopter that crashed into the Philippine Sea in January 2020 off the coast of Okinawa — and set a record while doing so. The helicopter, assigned to the 7th Fleet command ship Blue Ridge, had been conducting routine operations at the time of the accident. Though all five crewmembers were rescued, the helo sank to the bottom. The aircraft was hauled from a depth of 19,075 feet of sea water 18 MAR, the Navy said in a news release 23 MAR.

That depth of the recovery — more than 3.6 miles below the surface — established a new aircraft recovery record for Naval Sea Systems Command’s Supervisor of Salvage and Diving, the Navy said. During North Pacific operations last spring, the Navy team located the Sea Hawk using side-scan sonar and photographs of the wreckage on the ocean floor. At the request of the Navy Safety Center, which is investigating the cause of the accident, SUPSALV returned in March with CURV 21, a deep-water, remotely operated vehicle capable of conducting salvage operations at depths up to 20,000 feet. After bringing it aboard a contracted salvage vessel in Guam, they made the five-day voyage to the crash site. The recovery operations were launched 17 MAR. Using the CURV’s deep-lift take-up reel, the aircraft was successfully recovered the following day. The salvage vessel is bringing the helicopter to Fleet Activities Yokosuka in Japan so it can be returned to the United States.

“As a whole, this operation was fast-paced and entirely successful,” said Bryan Blake, SUPSALV’s deep ocean program manager, in the news release. “Our efforts validated the Navy’s deep ocean search and recovery requirements. The capability to recover the airframe and make it available to determine the cause of the accident is a huge plus, helping to ensure Naval Aviation safety.” [Source: NavyTimes | Diana Stancy Correll | March 24, 2021 ++]

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## **Navy Mothball Fleet**

### **Hints of Future in Ships Near Bremerton**



The mothballed ships sit there, hulking, looming ghostlike in their gray and rusty coats, sometimes emerging from the water suddenly on a foggy day to surprise new eyes. Though the silent fleet is dwindling, it remains a powerful testament to the Navy’s deep roots in the region and hints of what’s to come. Where once the ships were packed in along the edge of Sinclair Inlet at Naval Base Kitsap, the fleet consists now of a half-dozen surface ships, 11 nuclear-powered submarines and one cruiser, according to a Naval Sea Systems Command spokesperson.

Earlier this month, the USS Kitty Hawk, the last of four great aircraft carriers once moored at the Naval Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility in Bremerton, was moved into dry dock, where it will be scraped of barnacles and sent south for scrap. The USS Bremerton — commissioned 40 years ago (March 28, 1981) — is in the long process of being deactivated and defueled at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, the only location in the country where a nuclear sub can be put to rest. If it’s lucky, the fast-attack, Los Angeles-class submarine will get to be a monument in its namesake city, arguably one of the noblest fates that can befall a decommissioned vessel.



Alan Beam, a retired Navy captain, former commanding officer of the USS Bremerton and a board member of the organization that is trying to preserve a portion of the sub, said he's among those lobbying to see the sail and rudder placed near the Kitsap 9/11 Memorial at Bremerton's Evergreen Rotary Park. If placed as envisioned, it would appear to be sailing up Dyes Inlet, providing a physical reminder of the relationship between the military base, the city that grew up around it and the sailors who've served through the years. "It's like coming home," said Beam.

According to Megan Churchwell, curator of the Puget Sound Navy Museum in Bremerton, the reserve fleet ebbs and flows, expanding as wars ended and ships were no longer needed and contracting when ships were scrapped or reactivated to fight, such as during the Korean War. It was at its official peak in 1965 with 77 vessels, according Alan Baribeau of Naval Sea Systems Command. The most famous example from the local reserve fleet was the battleship USS Missouri (BB-63 — which means it was the 63rd battleship built by the U.S. Navy), where the Japanese signed the surrender that ended World War II. It was reactivated for the Korean War, then was decommissioned in Bremerton in 1955, entering what was then known as the Bremerton Group, Pacific Reserve Fleet.

The ship was intentionally moored at the end of the reserve fleet because it was opened as a tourist attraction, Churchwell explained; it remained in Bremerton's reserve fleet until it was reactivated in 1984 due to President Reagan's 600-ship Navy plan, serving through the Gulf War. The Missouri then came back to Bremerton in the 1990s, rejoining the reserve fleet until it was transferred to Pearl Harbor to be a museum ship near the ill-fated, sunken USS Arizona, where Japan's war with the U.S. began.

In the present era, the most visible ships of Bremerton's reserve fleet have been some of the last pre-nuclear-era aircraft carriers. Churchwell said by email that when she arrived at the museum in 2014 there were four: USS Kitty Hawk, USS Constellation, USS Independence and USS Ranger. "One by one they have been towed away for scrapping, leaving USS Kitty Hawk as the last remaining aircraft carrier in Bremerton's reserve fleet," she wrote. There are five fates possible for decommissioned vessels, according to the U.S. Navy: They can be donated as a museum or memorial, sunk to create an artificial reef for fish, used in the middle of the ocean for target practice, sold to a foreign government or cut into scrap and recycled.

Port Orchard native Ed Friedrich recalls climbing on the vessels as a child and also, like most locals, not thinking about them too much as an adult. That is, until he became the military reporter for the Kitsap Sun and wrote regularly about the mothball fleet. What sticks out to him mostly now is how intensely many vets felt about the ships on which they served: "People really get their hearts into the ship they served on and when one of them is being hauled off, it's an emotional time. They get together in Bremerton and reminisce with their old mates." What usually happens, he said, is there is a rush of interest to raise money and persuade the Navy to donate it as a museum ship, but it's rarely enough money. And ultimately, the efforts fizzle out.

Once the Navy decides that an old ship will be deactivated and removed from the Inactive Fleet in Bremerton, it's moved into dry dock, where its Pacific Ocean barnacles will be scraped off before it's towed to other waters. Most aircraft carriers these days will be hauled down around the tip of South America (because they're too big to fit through the Panama Canal) and up to Brownsville, Texas, where they'll be cut into scrap, Friedrich said. The Navy used to send divers down to scrape the hull in the inlet, but a lawsuit

brought by the Suquamish Tribe and the state forced the change to dry dock. The lawsuit claimed the copper in the anti-barnacle paint used by the Navy is bad for the environment.

To deactivate an old sub, the nuclear-reactor core is cut out in Bremerton, the only location in the world authorized to do such work, and shipped by barge up the Columbia River to the Hanford nuclear reservation, where it is laid in an open pit for 1,000 years. The two ends of the sub are welded together and then placed into holding in the mothball fleet where, eventually — and this usually takes about five years — it will be cut up and recycled, according to Beam, the retired Navy captain who's working to preserve a part of the USS Bremerton. The USS Bremerton will be manned with a skeleton Navy crew until the fuel is gone, he said, and then the crew will turn it over to the Puget Sound Navy Shipyard, where it will be decommissioned and will no longer be a Navy ship.

The Navy appears to be moving fast toward the newer technology of unmanned systems. Think of it as "who wants an old TV with smart televisions all around?" U.S. Naval Institute News reports that the U.S. Pacific Fleet will host its most complex exercise to date involving unmanned systems, including a Zumwalt-class destroyer. Next month's Fleet Battle Problem exercise will include unmanned aircraft on the water's surface and in the air with the USS Michael Monsoor (DDG-1001) commanding and controlling the missions. "The Unmanned Campaign Framework states it is imperative that we understand what our future force will need to operate both in day-to-day competition as well as high-end combat. The event being held in the 3rd Fleet operational area, under the guidance of U.S. Pacific Fleet, is exploring elements of that future force that will have the greatest impact on increasing the fleet's lethality," U.S. Navy spokesman Lt. Tim Pietrack told USNI News.

Beam said those who look to the size of the mothball fleet for hints about the future will be watching to see what happens with the USS Enterprise (the first nuclear powered aircraft carrier). The Navy is currently studying to determine if the ship comes to Bremerton for dismantling, or if it should go to another, private shipyard. If the Enterprise comes to Bremerton for dismantling, the rest of the nuclear carriers would likely follow, including the Navy's nuclear-powered Nimitz class aircraft carriers. The USS Nimitz just returned to Bremerton and is due for decommissioning in 2025. That means Bremerton could be in line for a whole lot more work — 11 Nimitz-class carriers in all — and more gray ships with their rusty coats, peering through the fog on Sinclair Inlet, for years to come. [Source: The Seattle Times | Christine Clarridge | March 28, 2021 ++]

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## **Wright-Patterson AFB**

### **Adding Self-Serve Beer Taps To Its Arsenal**



Those stationed at Ohio’s Wright-Patterson Air Force Base soon won’t have to crack open a cold one from the comfort of home to enjoy a hand-selected beverage. Instead, patrons of Wings Grille & Lounge will soon be able to play bartender. In an attempt to “augment its current draft beer capabilities,” Wings put out an official request to acquire a system of up to 20 additional taps that can be connected directly through the bar wall to beer in the walk-in freezer. If that’s not the definition of lethality, I don’t know what is. Those 20 do-it-yourself taps can be enjoyed in addition to the 12 the establishment already has, making for “32 self-serve and self-pay draft beer taps”.

The equipment solicitation also asks beer-enthusiasts to purchase prepaid swipe cards. Like Dave & Busters, but instead of dispensing funds for arcade games, you’ll get a swipe card for a frosty beverage. So, once this whole COVID-19 nightmare releases us from its vice grip, go out and drown your sorrows at a classy, vibrant on-base establishment that enables the opening and closing of your tab on your own terms, because aim high. Beer funnels, helmets, and other accessories are not included, however. You’ll have to bring your own. [Source: MilitaryTimes Observation Post | Sarah Sicard | March 16, 2021 ++]

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### **3M Earplug Lawsuit**

#### **Update 07: Trials Begin for Veterans in Massive Lawsuit**



A lawsuit involving more than 229,000 veterans with hearing problems that they claim are linked to faulty earplugs issued by the military begins its first trial 29 MAR in a Florida federal courtroom. The multidistrict litigation claims the companies that made the earplugs -- 3M and its predecessor Aearo -- knew from testing that the equipment it designed in coordination with the military did not fit properly into an ear canal and could loosen in a way that was imperceptible to the wearer. The suit also claims some of the testing results shown to the military before the purchase were done with a modification to the earplug that the military was not told was required to achieve optimal protection.

Jury selection began in Pensacola, Fla., for the cases of three veterans who were selected as “bellwether” trials in the U.S. District Court Northern District of Florida under Judge M. Casey Rogers. Bellwether trials can be used in multidistrict litigation to present a representative of the cases before a jury to gain useful information for potentially reaching a settlement for all cases. It can help both parties determine the costs of subsequent litigation. Two of the veterans in the bellwether trials have hearing loss and tinnitus, according to court documents. The third veteran suffers hearing loss and conditions related to it. Combat Arms earplugs as manufactured by Aearo Technologies. The plugs, which were standard issue in Iraq and Afghanistan, were found to be defective and allowed "damaging sounds to enter the ear canal."

Hearing loss and tinnitus, described as a ringing or buzzing in the ears, are the two most common conditions of veterans who are suing, and are also two of the most prevalent service-connected disabilities identified by the Department of Veterans Affairs. In 2017, the VA compensated about 1.79 million veterans for tinnitus and about 1.16 million for hearing loss, according to the Hearing Health Foundation, a nonprofit funder of hearing research in America. The lawsuit focuses on 3M’s combat arms earplug, version 2. Work began on the product in the late 1990s, when the military tasked the St. Paul, Minn.-based company to design an earplug that could block loud gunfire while allowing the wearer to hear low-level sounds, such as speech. The resulting product, a dual-sided earplug, was sold to the military until 2015.

No recall was ever issued on the product and version 4 of the earplug remains in use by the military, according to 3M. “We deny this product was defectively or negligently designed and caused injuries, and we will vigorously defend ourselves against such allegations,” the company said in a statement on its website.

In July 2018, the Justice Department announced 3M agreed to pay \$9.1 million to resolve allegations that it knowingly sold the earplugs to the military without disclosing defects that hampered effectiveness. That lawsuit was filed through the whistleblower provision of the False Claims Act, according to the Justice Department. In settling the claim, 3M did not admit to wrongdoing, according to the company. Following that decision, a series of lawsuits were filed by veterans who wore the earplugs and now suffer from hearing loss. Those claims were combined into the multi-district mass tort case now churning through the legal system. In a mass tort case, each plaintiff is treated as an individual instead of as a group, such as in a class action lawsuit. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Rose L. Thayer | March 29, 2021 | ++]

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## USS Constitution

### Update 03: Names Cannon After Navy’s First Woman CPO



The USS Constitution named one of its cannons in honor of the first woman to serve as a chief petty officer in the Navy. The 24-pound long gun was named Perfectus after Loretta Perfectus Walsh during a ceremony in Boston on 21 MAR marking Women’s History Month, the Navy said in a statement. Walsh was sworn in as the Navy’s first chief petty officer on March 21, 1917. “Loretta Perfectus Walsh has made it possible for all women to serve in the military,” Command Senior Chief Angela Collins said. “I get to be here because of the women who have gone before me, and I get the honor to serve with amazing women every single day.” Four of the warship’s female crew members gave a presentation on the significance of Walsh’s service. “To talk about Loretta Perfectus Walsh’s life holds great meaning for me and everyone around us,” Seaman Katrina Mastrolia said. “It gives me hope and determination to face the boundaries that I have in my life today.”

The USS Constitution, also known as Old Ironsides, is the world’s oldest commissioned warship afloat, and played a crucial role in the Barbary Wars and the War of 1812, actively defending sea lanes from 1797 until 1855. The ship was undefeated in battle and destroyed or captured 33 enemy vessels. It earned its nickname during the War of 1812 when British cannonballs were seen bouncing off its wooden hull. Early sailors frequently named the guns on their ships. And although there are no records for the original names of the USS Constitution’s guns, some have been given names based on records from her sister ships. These include Brother Jonathan, True Blue, Yankee Protection, Putnam, Raging Eagle, Viper, General Warren, Mad Anthony, America, Washington, Liberty for Ever, Defiance, and Liberty or Death. The USS Constitution’s modern cannons are replicas dating to 1920. [Source: Associated Press | March 21, 2021 ++]

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## **Servicemembers Charged**

**16 thru 31 MAR 2021**



### **PFC Cole Bridges | Plotting Attacks on NYC Landmarks**

A U.S. Army soldier pleaded not guilty 15 MAR to plotting terrorist attacks on city landmarks with an undercover FBI employee posing as a member of the Islamic State militant group. Cole Bridges faces a maximum of 40 years in prison for attempting to provide material support to Islamic State and attempted murder of U.S. military service members. Prosecutors say Bridges, 20, shared his disenchantment with the military in online chats with the undercover FBI employee starting in 2019. The radicalized soldier eventually began advising the fake Islamic State sympathizer on how to thwart U.S. military attacks in the Middle East and “provided advice” on potential targets in New York City, including the 9/11 Memorial, according to a complaint.

Bridges, a resident of Stow, Ohio, and member of the 3rd Infantry Division, was arrested in January at the Army base at Fort Stewart, Georgia. He even recorded a video of himself in body armor in front of an Islamic State flag and narrated another video hyping what he believed was an imminent Islamic State ambush of U.S. troops, authorities say. Bridges’ attorney Sabrina Shroff said during the Manhattan federal court hearing that she expected to discuss a “disposition” of the case before it goes to trial — meaning the soldier could soon plead guilty. [Source: New York Daily News | Stephen Rex Brown | March 15, 2021 ++]

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**A1C Erland Injerd | Desertion, Assault, Resisting apprehension ++**

An airman who spent 16 days as a fugitive after he assaulted police and fled a Texas base last spring was found guilty at a court-martial and sentenced to 30 months confinement earlier this month. Airman 1st Class Erland Injerd, 38, was convicted of desertion, resisting apprehension, assault of a superior noncommissioned officer, failure to obey an order or regulation, carrying a concealed weapon, assault upon law enforcement and two counts of disorderly conduct, Air Force officials said. He was given a dishonorable discharge and reduced in rank to airman basic during the March 6 court-martial at Dyess Air Force Base.

Injerd went on the run after he scuffled with three Air Force officials outside his on-base home April 22, then fled through the house, scaled a base perimeter fence and evaded a police search in the neighboring woods. Several law enforcement agencies, including the FBI, U.S. Marshals Service and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations worked to find Injerd. He was arrested 7 MAY about 200 miles from the base at a Dallas apartment, and was transported to a county jail in Taylor County outside Dyess, records showed. A criminal complaint the FBI filed in federal court said the altercation outside his house began when Senior Master Sgt. Klexton Jett, Master Sgt. Derek L. Krahn and Security Forces officer John Breed visited to order him to surrender his firearms after he sent a threatening email to his chain of command.

Injerd began cursing at the men and refused to comply before Breed ordered him to turn around and put his hands behind his back, the complaint said. He resisted, punching the patrolman in the face, and when the two other men tried to restrain him, they all wound up on the ground. “Injerd intentionally poked his finger in Officer Breed’s right eye and struck SMSgt. Jett in the knee,” knowing that Jett had recently had knee surgery, the complaint alleged. When his wife opened the front door to the house, Injerd fled inside and then out through a basement window. Officials warned in the hours afterward that he may have armed himself before escaping over the base fence and disappearing in a wooded area of Abilene. The base heightened security while he was on the lam, “just in case” he posed a threat, officials said at the time. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Chad Garland | March 15, 2021 ++]

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**Military Operation Names  
How They Are Picked**

The tradition of naming major operations with an inspiring name is relatively new considering the long history of warfare. Battles and conflicts before 1918 are titled after a city or territory: The Battle of this, The Siege of that, or The Third battle of this and that. In 1918, the central powers launched Operation Fist Punch and were able to capture the Baltics, Belarus and Ukraine from the Russian Bolsheviks. Over the course of 11 days the Russians surrendered and highlighted the merits of naming offensive operations with

a name. From this point forward commanders around the world contemplated giving operations proper names.

During World War I Germany favored naming operations over radio communications to maintain secrecy. When we fast forward to World War II the naming of operations had evolved. The Nazi empire, armed with the newly forged weapon of propaganda, blazed across Europe with the intent of intimidating allied forces and inspiring support for the war in Berlin. However, the allies had their own champions such as Frank Capra, to counter the Nazi's Leni Riefenstahl's Triumph of the will. While the media giants battled on the silver screen to win the hearts of the civilians at home, allied commanders debated, agreed, and named operations to maintain operational security and motivate the troops conducting them. For example, the British launched Operation Chronometer in 1941 to capture the port city of Assab on the west coast of the Red Sea. On the American front, operations follow a color code prior to 1943.

The turning point for the Pentagon on the subject of operational names came when Winston Churchill petitioned a better way of naming them. He convinced allied high command that they should change the name of Operation Soapsuds, the bombing raid of Romanian oil fields, to Operation Tidal Wave. At the time British commanders were vulnerable to committing their troops to comical names he outlined three clear guidelines:

- 1) Operations in which large numbers of men may lose their lives ought not to be described by code words which imply a boastful or overconfident sentiment or, conversely, which are calculated to invest the plan with an air of despondency. They ought not to be names of a frivolous character. They should not be ordinary words often used in other connections, names of living people, ministers and commanders should be avoided.
- 2) After all, the world is wide, and intelligent thought will readily supply an unlimited number of well-sounding names which do not suggest the character of the operation or disparage it in any way and do not enable some widow or mother to say that her son was killed in an operation called "Bunnyhug" or "Ballyhoo."
- 3) Proper names are good in this field. The heroes of antiquity, figures from Greek and Roman mythology, the constellations and stars, famous racehorses, names of British and American war heroes, could be used, provided they fall within the rules above.

The U.S. adapted to use nouns and adjectives for operations consistently afterwards. With success gaining momentum in both the European and Pacific theaters, the importance of good sounding names grows as well. America did have some proper sounding names that obscured the mission such as the Manhattan Project in 1941. America had parallel thinking with Britain, it just needed a little nudge to cross over.

The allies had Operation OVERLORD for the D-Day invasion and Operation Downfall, the proposed invasion of Japan. Among the sea of operational names that sprouted from the war, it had become an American tradition to pick awe inspiring names for operations of future wars. Operation Rolling Thunder, Operation Desert Storm, Operation Enduring Freedom – Americans are the best at it. Our secret ingredient is a little computer system, NICKA. It that tracks the names of code words, exercises, and nicknames to ensure they are not duplicated. The task of new names falls upon commanders at the highest levels. The pentagon chooses first and second words for an operation dictated by [OPNAVINST 5511.37D](#) in three steps:

- **First**, Permanent First Word Assignment. Major users are permanently assigned first words in enclosure (1) to avoid duplication. Applicable activities shall use these for all originating nicknames/exercise terms. Authorized Navy first words are chosen from blocks of letters assigned to Navy, listed in enclosure (1). All nicknames which are exercise terms will follow the criteria for propriety given in subparagraph 7d.
- **Second**, Requests for first word assignments will be made in writing by the initiating activity (see paragraph 9a) to CNO (N30P), who will ensure its validity. Nicknames/exercise terms must be approved before use. CNO (N30P) is the approving authority.
- **Third**, Second Word Assignment. The second word is used in combination with the permanently assigned first word to identify a specific nickname/exercise term. Users with first, word assignments can suggest a second word to CNO (N30P) in writing. All second words must be approved by CNO (N30P) before use. Unlike first words, second words are not restricted by alphabet. The first and second words combined must meet criteria in subparagraph 7d.

For decades the U.S. has had names that get the juices flowing. Operation Red Dawn was the prelude to the toppling of Iraq and capture of Saddam Hussein. Operation Urgent Fury served to make an example of the island nation of Grenada. It was getting too close for comfort with the Soviet Union. The millennial generation has Operation Phantom Fury, the Battle for Fallujah. There are still more blank pages in the book of history with room for future wars. Rising tensions in the South China Sea may call upon the pentagon once again to come up with a name. This time to liberate the pacific, only time will tell what it may be. [Source: We Are the Mighty | Ruddy Cano | March 23, 2021 ++]

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## Navy Terminology, Jargon & Slang

### ‘Sippers’ thru ‘Slammer

Every profession has its own jargon and the Navy is no exception. Since days of yore the military in general, and sailors in particular, have often had a rather pithy (dare say ‘tasteless’?) manner of speech. That may be changing somewhat in these politically correct times, but to Bowdlerize the sailor’s language represented here would be to deny its rich history. The traditions and origins remain. While it attempted to present things with a bit of humor, if you are easily offended this may not be for you. You have been warned.

Note: ‘RN’ denotes Royal Navy usage. Similarly, RCN = Royal Canadian Navy, RAN = Royal Australian Navy, RM = Royal Marines, RNZN = Royal New Zealand Navy, UK = general usage in militaries of the former British Empire

**Sippers** - (RN) Drinks, usually containing alcohol.

**Situational Awareness** - Especially in aviation, one’s awareness of the surroundings, circumstances, and tactical situation, though it is used in all warfare communities. Loss of situational awareness is often fatal in combat, and can be fatal at other times as well.

**Skate** - (RCN) One who avoids work. See BANDIT. Also, to get out of something, e.g. work.

**Skimmer** - A surface ship, or officers/crew of same. Frequently modified with the adjective “fucking” by members of the submarine community.



**Skipper** – Commanding Officer. Apparently from the Dutch "Schipper," which means, essentially, "he who ships."

**Skive Artist** - (RCN) One who avoids work.

**Skivvy Waver** - See BUNTING TOSSER.

**Skivvy Folder** - Parachute rigger.

**Skosh** – Pronounced with a long 'o'. From the Japanese sukoshi, literally 'small' or 'little'. The F-5 was long known as the Skoshi Tiger. (1) Little or low, as in "They better get that foul deck cleared; Dave's coming in skosh fuel." (2) Fast, or quickly, as in "We need to get this job done most skosh."

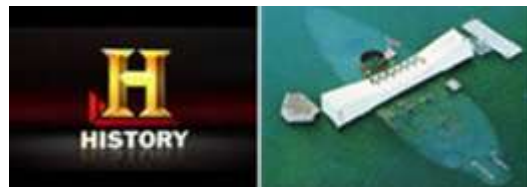
**Skunk** – The name label used for surface radar contacts. "Skunk Alpha" refers to the first new radar contact of the day, "Skunk Bravo" the second, etc.

**Skylarking** – Horsing around, goofing off, etc.

**Slammer** - The AIM-120 AMRAAM missile, which is in service but has not been assigned an official name, although 'Bounty Hunter' appears in some early Hughes Missile Systems documents.

[Source: <http://hazegray.org/faq/slang1.htm> | March 31, 2021 ++]

**\* Military History \***



**Medal of Honor Awardees**

**Jose Valdez | WWII**



*The President of the United States takes pride in posthumously presenting the*

**MEDAL OF HONOR**

*To*

**PFC Jose Valdez**

**Organization:** U.S. Army, Company B, 7th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division

**Place and date:** January 25, 1945 near Rosenkrantz, France

**Entered service:** June 1944

**Born:** Jan. 3, 1925 in Gobernador New Mexico



Army Pfc. Jose F. Valdez knew the odds were stacked against him when he volunteered to hold off 200 Germans so his fellow soldiers could escape an onslaught during World War II. The role cost him his life, but his bravery, tenacity and devotion to duty earned him a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Valdez was born in the small, northern New Mexico town of Gobernador. He was Mexican-American and came from a large family. According to the National Infantry Museum, his family moved in the early 1940s to Pleasant Grove, Utah, to help build the new Geneva Steel mill, which produced products to support World War II's shipbuilding industry. In June 1944, Valdez decided he wanted to do more for the effort, so he joined the Army. He was assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division, which had already fought its way through North Africa and was working its way through Italy. By January 1945, Valdez had joined the division as it pushed its way into France and prepared to take back the Alsace region from German control.

On Jan. 25, the 20-year-old Valdez and five other soldiers from Company B, 7th Infantry Regiment, were on patrol duty near Rosenkrantz, France. They were about 500 yards beyond American lines when the Germans launched a counterattack. As an enemy tank came into view about 75 yards away from them, Valdez raked it with automatic rifle fire until it backed off. Soon after, three enemy soldiers slowly started toward them through the woods and opened fire about 30 yards out. Valdez fired back at the Germans until he'd killed all three.

That was only the beginning, though. The Germans then launched two full companies of infantrymen in their direction, blasting the patrol with heavy gunfire. When it appeared that the Germans were planning to surround the patrol, their leader ordered the team to withdraw. Sticking around was almost certainly a death sentence, but Valdez volunteered anyway so he could provide cover fire as his teammates fled, one by one, through a hail of enemy gunfire back toward American lines. Three of the soldiers were injured, but all of them made it back to safety. Valdez was hit, too. The bullet went through his stomach and came out his back, paralyzing him from the waist down, according to an article in *The Salt Lake Tribune*. He didn't quit, though.

Despite the intense pain, Valdez got himself together enough to continue firing from his position until all of the other members of the patrol were back behind friendly lines. While trying to stay conscious, he then used a field telephone to call for artillery and mortar fire to be dropped on the enemy. He corrected the firing range until shells were falling within 50 yards of his position. Thanks to those actions, Valdez was

able to hold off about 200 enemy soldiers for 15 minutes until they finally gave up and withdrew. The injured soldier then dragged himself back to American lines. Valdez's wounds were too severe to survive. He died three weeks later, on Feb. 17, 1945 — less than three months before the end of the war in Europe.

His actions, however, made it possible for the rest of his comrades to escape, and they were directly responsible for pushing back a force that could have easily overwhelmed them. For that, he posthumously earned the Medal of Honor in February 1946. His mother accepted it on his behalf. Valdez was buried with full military honors in New Mexico's Santa Fe National Cemetery, since he'd spent most of his life in the state. However, he's also considered the first Hispanic Utah resident to earn the Medal of Honor.

In the decades since his death, Valdez's sacrifice continues to be remembered. In 1947, a Navy ship was renamed the USNS Private Jose F. Valdez. In 1998, the National Guard building in Pleasant Grove, Utah, was renamed for him, while a highway in New Mexico was named in his honor in 2004. The National Infantry Museum's Hall of Valor also hosts a tribute to the fallen soldier. [Source: DOD News & <https://www.cmohs.org> | Katie Lange | January 25, 2021 ++]

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## Etymology of 'F\*Ck' WWII | The War That Popularized It



U.S. Army Gen. George Patton, left, employed the F-word with great enthusiasm.

You're dashing around, running a bit late perhaps, and your pinky toe just happens to connect with the corner of an inanimate object that seemingly just popped up on you despite its relatively permanent and solitary position in your home. Through watering eyes and an emanating pain that doesn't seem natural for such a small appendage, you let out an anguished "F\*CK!" It's practically muscle memory. And yet, most remain unaware of their favorite word's origins, or the notion that, for many, the F-word became part of the daily lexicon due in large part to service members in World War II.

The etymology of the word itself is murky, but the epithet appears to have hit its stride in the 16th century after famed English lexicographer John Florio published "A Worlde of Wordes," an Italian-English dictionary intended to teach people these languages as they were really "f\*cking" spoken. F\*ck, however, remained in the shadows of polite society largely until the onset of World War II, according to historian Tom Harper Kelly. "One new recruit James Nichol recalled that in basic training he 'was still very nervous of the F-word (frig being the current substitute, but I avoided that, too),' " Kelly wrote. But a sergeant in Nichol's training company impressed the young recruit with the word's "repetition, if not invention. I lay in my bunk one evening and counted the number of times 'f\*ck' occurred in his

conversation. It occurred every four and a half words, though I was counting mentally and might have missed some.”

In combat, the predilection for using the expletive naturally only grew. In “Helmet for My Pillow,” Marine Robert Leckie described the word as a “handle, a hyphen, a hyperbole; verb, noun, modifier; yes, even conjunction. It described food, fatigue, metaphysics. It stood for everything and meant nothing ... one heard it from the chaplains and captains, from Pfc’s and PhDs...” The frequency in which f\*ck was employed in the Marine lexicon had Leckie theorizing that any Japanese soldier who overheard an American conversation must have thought, “by measurement and numerical incidence that this little word must assuredly be the thing for which we were fighting.”

Profanity wasn’t just touted by Marines in the Pacific, however. The F-word became such a notable part of the GI vocabulary that British soldiers on the Western Front identified American soldiers of the 84th Infantry Division as friendlies due to their incessant swearing. In this instance, “f\*ck” happened to save their lives. Johnny Freeman, a sergeant in the 84th, recalled being fired upon near their lines when he yelled “you f\*ckers turn that thing off.” “Is that a Yank out there?” a British soldier replied. “Who the f\*ck you think it is?” came Freeman’s retort. The American later commented, “Well, I guess the way we were swearing he knew we had to be okay, so he let us on through.”

Some, like legendary war correspondent Ernie Pyle, lamented the linguistic crutch. “If I hear another f\*cking G.I. say ‘f\*cking’ once more,” Pyle reportedly remarked, “I’ll cut my f\*cking throat.” The F-train, however, had already left the station. From privates all the way up to the top brass, the word’s usage was firmly inculcated into the minds and mouths of millions of American service members, so much so that it turned out to be a hard habit to kick upon returning home — eventually spreading through the civilian masses and remaining entrenched within military culture. “I want to see them raise up on their piss-soaked hind legs and howl, ‘Jesus Christ, it’s the Goddamned Third Army again and that son-of-a-f\*cking-bitch Patton,’” General George Patton once quipped. From WWII on down to the Millennial with a stubbed toe, the rampant use of f\*ck is here to stay.

[Source: MilitaryTimes Observation Post | Claire Barrett | March 12, 2021 ++]

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## **USS Skate**

### **First Submarine to Surface at the North Pole**

USS Skate (SSN-578) hung below the Arctic ice like a matchstick suspended an inch from the ceiling of a large room. A knot of sailors in the control room stared intently at an instrument inscribing patterns of parallel lines on a rolling paper tape. The pattern looked like an upside down mountain range. “Heavy ice, ten feet,” said one of the sailors. Suddenly the lines converged into a single narrow bar. “Clear water!” the sailor called out.



Commander James Calvert, the skipper, studied the marks on the paper closely. He stopped the submarine, ordered “up periscope,” and peered into the eyepiece. The clarity of the water and the amount of light startled him. At this same depth in the Atlantic—180 feet—the water was black or dark green at best, but here in the Arctic, it was pale blue like the tropical waters off the Bahamas. The crew laughed nervously as Calvert reported seeing nothing but a jellyfish. Calvert turned toward the man in charge of the ice-detecting instrument. “How does it look?” The sailor flashed him the okay sign. “Bring her up slowly,” Calvert said. The three-thousand ton sub began drifting upward like a giant balloon. The diving officer called the depth as the Skate rose.

Otherwise the room was deathly quiet. A wrong move or a miscalculation would endanger the mission or even the ship. Calvert continued to peer through the eyepiece. When the top of the periscope came within sixty feet of the surface, he spotted heavy ice to the side. He flipped the prism to look straight up, but saw nothing except the same blurred aquamarine. Sweat appeared on his forehead as he felt all eyes in the control room bear down upon him. If the sub rose too slowly, it could drift away from the opening. If it rose too quickly and struck ice, the collision could tear open the pressure hull and send the sub and all ninety men on board to the bottom.

Calvert, one of the most decorated naval officers of World War II, had survived eight war patrols in the submarine Jack and later became the third naval officer selected by Admiral Hyman Rickover to command a nuclear powered submarine. It was one of the Navy’s most demanding jobs, for it required the intellect and the courage to operate the Navy’s most sophisticated and dangerous propulsion system. This success of this mission would help Navy planners determine whether submarines could navigate safely under Arctic ice, a question with grave implications for national security, given the emerging Soviet submarine threat.

Calvert ordered the ballast tanks blown. The roar of high pressure air seemed earsplitting after the tense silence of the last few minutes. Upon surfacing, Calvert ordered the hatch opened, then climbed up to the bridge. The sky was slightly overcast and the damp air felt like an unseasonably warm February day in New England, with the temperature hovering near freezing. The submarine’s black hull stood out in stark relief against the deep blue of the calm lake in which the ship now floated. Beyond the lake, stretching to the horizon in every direction, was the stark white of the permanent polar ice pack. The officer who had climbed to the bridge with Calvert called the skipper’s attention to the port side of the ship. There a full grown polar bear was climbing slowly out of the water and up onto the ice. The date was 11 August 1958 and the Skate had just become the first submarine to surface at the North Pole.

[Source: U.S. Naval Institute | Naval History Blog | August 11, 2011 ++]

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## Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 APR

Significant events in U. S. Military History over the next 15 days are listed in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, "**Military History Anniversaries 01 thru 15 APR**".

[Source: This Day in History [www.history.com/this-day-in-history](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history) | March 2021 ++]

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## Legends of WWII Paul Tibbets | B-29 Enola Gay Pilot



Paul was the pilot of the Enola Gay B-29 Superfortress on its secret mission during World War II. What you might not know is that he was heavily involved in the development of the B-29, and the training of the first bomber group. Check out his 21 minute interview and get the scoop directly from General Tibbets at <https://youtu.be/qG2n3EmNtqY>. The Enola Gay was a Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber, named after Enola Gay Tibbets, the mother of the pilot, Colonel Paul Tibbets. On 6 August 1945, piloted by Tibbets and Robert A. Lewis during the final stages of World War II, it became the first aircraft to drop an atomic bomb in warfare. The bomb, code-named "Little Boy", was targeted at the city of Hiroshima, Japan, and caused the near-complete destruction of the city. Enola Gay participated in the second atomic attack as the weather reconnaissance aircraft for the primary target of Kokura. Clouds and drifting smoke resulted in a secondary target, Nagasaki, being bombed instead.

In the 1980s, veterans groups engaged in a call for the Smithsonian to put the aircraft on display, leading to an acrimonious debate about exhibiting the aircraft without a proper historical context. The cockpit and nose section of the aircraft were exhibited at the National Air and Space Museum (NASM) on the National Mall, for the bombing's 50th anniversary in 1995, amid controversy. Since 2003, the entire restored B-29 has been on display at NASM's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center. The last survivor of its crew, Theodore Van Kirk, died on 28 July 2014 at the age of 93.

[Source: Legends of WWII | October 5, 2020 ++]

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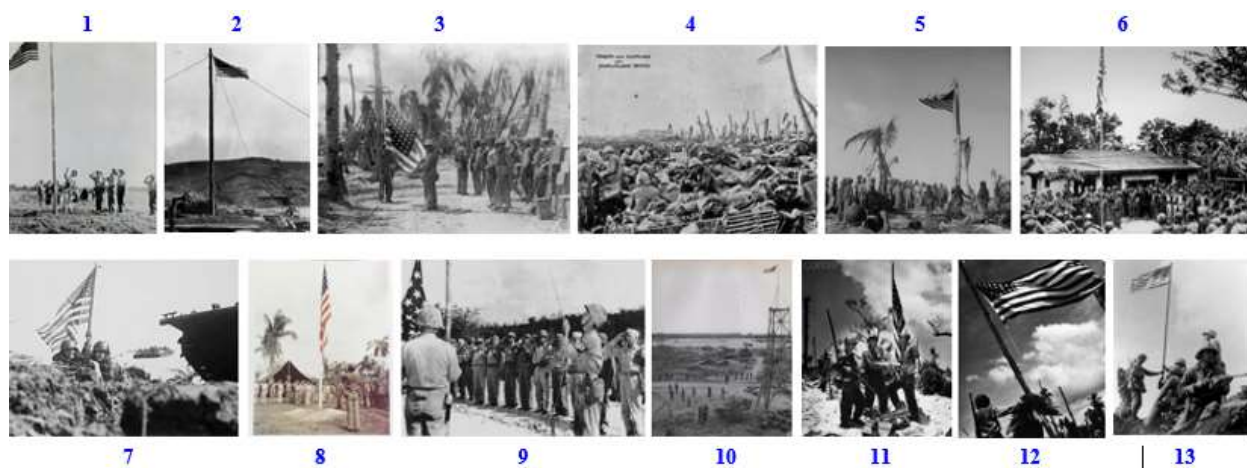
## Flag Raisings

### 'Other' Flag-Raising Photos from the War in the Pacific

When photographer Joe Rosenthal pointed his camera at a group of men atop of Mount Suribachi and quickly snapped the above shot, he did not think he captured anything special. It was not until the film was developed at a lab on Guam that a photo editor noted that the image was “one for all time.” Within a day of the photo being taken, Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima was distributed over the wire to hundreds of newspapers and became an immediate sensation. The image earned the Pulitzer Prize for Photography and has become one of the most reproduced and parodied images in history, but not without its share of controversy. With a composition resembling a Renaissance painting, the photo was deemed as too perfect by some observers who believed it must have been posed. Even today, a persistent misconception is that the event was staged and the men were meticulously positioned by Rosenthal.



The dramatic circumstances, visual power, and historic context of that one image has understandably overshadowed the other U.S. flag raisings that took place across the Pacific as U.S. forces hopped islands toward Japan. Each flag raising represented an important victory that brought the war closer to an end. Each one also came after tremendous sacrifice. The following images celebrate many of those “other” flag raisings.



1. Raising the flag during the first few days of the Battle of Guadalcanal, August 1942
2. In August 1943, the U.S. flag flies over Kiska in the Aleutian Islands after 14 months of Japanese occupation.

3. With the trunk of a palm tree serving as a flagpole, U.S. Marines prepare to raise the Stars and Stripes over Tarawa Atoll's Betio Island on 24 November 1943. The Corps suffered 3,110 casualties wresting control of the heavily defended island from the Japanese.
4. Kwajalein, February 1944. U.S. forces suffered relatively light casualties compared to the 8,000 Japanese defenders who were almost completely wiped out.
5. Vice Admiral Harry Hill raises the flag on Eniwetok, February 1944. The Japanese on the atoll were without support after U.S. forces destroyed 39 of their warships during Operation Hailstorm.
6. Saipan, 10 July 1944. The capture of the largest island in the Northern Marianas put mainland Japan within range of B-29 bombers.
7. Planting the flag with a boat hook minutes after landing on Guam, 21 July 1944.
8. Later in July, this official first official raising of the U.S. flag took place on Guam, where fighting would continue until 10 August.
9. Tinian, July 1944. A year later, the B-29 Enola Gay would take off from the Mariana island and drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima
10. Peleliu, September 1944. The U.S. faced bitter resistance while taking the island, suffering the highest casualty rate of all amphibious operations in the Pacific.
11. Angaur, Palau Islands, September 1944. As with several other battles in the Pacific, historians question whether the cost in lives was worth taking an island of little strategic value.
12. Leyte, October 1944. General Douglas MacArthur kept his promise to the people of the Philippines and returned after being driven out by the Japanese in 1942.
13. The first flag raised on Iwo Jima, 23 February 1945. The famous photo by Rosenthal was of the second, larger flag raised.
14. Richard P. Ross of the 1st Marines braves sniper fire to place the division's colors on a parapet of Shuri Castle on Okinawa, 29 May 1945.
15. Raising the U.S. flag at Yokosuka, 30 August 1945, after U.S. Marines and sailors took over the mainland Japan naval base.
16. The Japanese surrender on Wake Island, 4 September 1945. The commander of Japanese forces on the island would be executed for war crimes involving the massacre of American POWs.
17. Wotje Atoll in the Marshall Islands, September 1945. At the time of the surrender, less the half of the Japanese garrison was still alive after being battered by the U.S. Navy throughout the war.
18. The first U.S. flag to fly over Tokyo, 3 September 1945. General MacArthur reportedly was livid because he was supposed to have the honor of raising the first flag at an official ceremony.
19. Seoul, Korea, 9 September 1945. Raising the U.S. flag following the surrender of Japanese forces in southern Korea



[Source: U.S. Naval Institute | Naval History Blog | February 23, 2019 ++]

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## Spanish-American War

### How It Evolved and Ended

On April 25, 1898, the United States declared war on Spain following the Battleship Maine's sinking in Havana harbor on February 15, 1898. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Paris on December 10, 1898. As a result, Spain lost its control over the remains of its overseas empire - Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines Islands, Guam, and other islands.



Beginning in 1492, Spain was the first European nation to sail westward across the Atlantic Ocean, explore, and colonize the Amerindian nations of the Western Hemisphere. At its greatest extent, the empire that resulted from this exploration extended from Virginia on the eastern coast of the United States south to Tierra del Fuego at South America's tip, excluding Brazil and westward to California and Alaska. Across the Pacific, it included the Philippines and other island groups. By 1825 much of this empire had fallen into other hands. In that year, Spain acknowledged the independence of its possessions in the present-day United States (then under Mexican control) and south to the tip of South America. The only remnants that remained in the empire in the Western Hemisphere were Cuba and Puerto Rico and across the Pacific in the Philippine Islands and the Carolina, Marshall, and Mariana Islands (including Guam) in Micronesia.

Following the liberation from Spain of mainland Latin America, Cuba was the first to initiate its own struggle for independence. During the years from 1868-1878, Cubans personified by guerrilla fighters known as "Mambises" fought for autonomy from Spain. That war concluded with a treaty that was never enforced. In the 1890s, Cubans began to agitate once again for their freedom from Spain. The moral leader of this struggle was José Martí, known as "El Apóstol," who established the Cuban Revolutionary Party on January 5, 1892, in the United States. Following the Grito de Baire, the call to arms on February 24, 1895, Martí returned to Cuba and participated in the first weeks of armed struggle when he was killed on 19 MAY

The Philippines, too, was beginning to grow restive with Spanish rule. José Rizal, a member of a wealthy mestizo family, resented that his upper mobility was limited by Spanish insistence on promoting only "pure-blooded" Spaniards. He began his political career at the University of Madrid in 1882, where he became the leader of Filipino students there. For the next ten years, he traveled in Europe and wrote several novels considered seditious by Filipino and Church authorities. He returned to Manila in 1892 and founded the Liga Filipina, a political group dedicated to peaceful change. He was rapidly exiled to Mindanao. During his absence, Andrés Bonifacio founded Katipunan, dedicated to the violent overthrow of Spanish rule. On August 26, 1896, after learning that the Katipunan had been betrayed, Bonifacio issued the Grito de Balintawak, a call for Filipinos to revolt. Bonifacio was succeeded as head of the Philippine revolution by Emilio Aguinaldo y Famy, who had his predecessor arrested and executed on May 10, 1897. Aguinaldo negotiated a deal with the Spaniards, who exiled him to Hong Kong with 400,000 pesos that he subsequently used to buy weapons to resume the fight.

During the 1880s and 1890s, Puerto Ricans developed many different political parties, some of which sought independence for the island while others, headquartered like their Cuban counterparts in New York, preferred to ally with the United States. Spain proclaimed Puerto Rico's autonomy on November 25, 1897, although the news did not reach the island until January 1898, and a new government was established on February 12, 1898.

U.S. interest in purchasing Cuba had begun long before 1898. Following the Ten Years War, American sugar interests bought up large tracts of land in Cuba. Alterations in the U.S. sugar tariff favoring home-grown beet sugar helped foment the rekindling of revolutionary fervor in 1895. By that time, the U.S. had more than \$50 million invested in Cuba, and annual trade, mostly in sugar, was worth twice that much. The fervor for war had been growing in the United States, despite President Grover Cleveland's proclamation of neutrality on June 12, 1895. But sentiment to enter the conflict grew in the United States when General Valeriano Weyler began implementing a policy of Reconcentration that moved the population into central locations guarded by Spanish troops and placed the entire country under martial law in February 1896.

By December 7th, President Cleveland reversed himself, declaring that the United States might intervene should Spain fail to end the crisis in Cuba. Inaugurated on March 4, 1897, President William McKinley was even more anxious to become involved, particularly after the New York Journal published a copy of a letter from Spanish Foreign Minister Enrique Dupuy de Lôme criticizing the American President on February 9, 1898. Events moved swiftly after the explosion aboard the U.S.S. Maine on 15 FEB. On 9 MAR, Congress passed a law allocating fifty million dollars to build up military strength. On 28 MAR, the U.S. Naval Court of Inquiry finds that a mine blew up the Maine. On 21 APR, President McKinley orders a blockade of Cuba, and four days later, the U.S. declares war.

Following its declaration of war against Spain issued on April 25, 1898, the United States added the Teller Amendment asserting that it would not attempt to exercise hegemony over Cuba. Two days later, Commodore George Dewey sailed from Hong Kong with Emilio Aguinaldo on board. Fighting began in the Philippine Islands at the Battle of Manila Bay on May 1st, where Commodore George Dewey reportedly exclaimed, "You may fire when ready, Gridley," and the Spanish fleet under Rear Admiral Patricio Montojo was destroyed. However, Dewey did not have enough manpower to capture Manila, so Aguinaldo's guerrillas maintained their operations until 15,000 U.S. troops arrived at the end of July. On the way, the cruiser USS Charleston stopped at Guam and accepted its surrender from its Spanish governor, who was unaware his nation was at war. Although the two belligerents signed a peace protocol on 12 AUG, Commodore Dewey and Maj. Gen. Wesley Merritt, leader of the army troops, assaulted Manila the very next day, unaware that peace had been declared.

In late April, Andrew Summers Rowan made contact with Cuban General Calixto García who supplied him with maps, intelligence, and a core of rebel officers to coordinate U.S. efforts on the island. The U.S. North Atlantic Squadron left Key West for Cuba on 22 APR following the frightening news that the Spanish home fleet commanded by Admiral Pascual Cervera had left Cadiz and entered Santiago, having slipped by U.S. ships commanded by William T. Sampson and Winfield Scott Schley. They arrived in Cuba in late May.

War actually began for the U.S. in Cuba in June when the Marines captured Guantánamo Bay, and 17,000 troops landed at Siboney and Daiquirí, east of Santiago de Cuba, the second-largest city on the island. At that time, Spanish troops stationed on the island included 150,000 regulars and 40,000 irregulars

and volunteers, while rebels inside Cuba numbered as many as 50,000. Total U.S. army strength at the time totaled 26,000, requiring the passage of the Mobilization Act of April 22nd that allowed for an army of at first 125,000 volunteers (later increased to 200,000) and a regular army of 65,000. On June 22nd, U.S. troops landed at Daiquiri, where Calixto García and about 5,000 revolutionaries joined them.

U.S. troops attacked the San Juan heights on July 1, 1898. Dismounted troopers, including the African-American Ninth and Tenth cavalries and the Rough Riders commanded by Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt, went up against Kettle Hill while the forces led by Brigadier General Jacob Kent charged up San Juan Hill and pushed Spanish troops further inland while inflicting 1,700 casualties. While U.S. commanders were deciding on a further course of action, Admiral Cervera left port only to be defeated by Schley. On 16 JUL, the Spaniards agreed to the unconditional surrender of the 23,500 troops around the city. A few days later, Major General Nelson Miles sailed from Guantánamo to Puerto Rico. His forces landed near Ponce and marched to San Juan with virtually no opposition.

Representatives of Spain and the United States signed a peace treaty in Paris on December 10, 1898, which established the independence of Cuba, ceded Puerto Rico and Guam to the United States, and allowed the victorious power to purchase the Philippines Islands from Spain for \$20 million. The war had cost the United States \$250 million and 3,000 lives, of whom 90% had perished from infectious diseases. [Source: Together We Served | March 2021 ++]

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## **Every Picture Tells A Story**

### **WWII Soldiers of the Swiss Armed Forces**



Soldiers of the Swiss Armed Forces resting during a maneuver at some point during World War II. While the thought on Switzerland during the war is that they remained neutral, the fact is that they had to be constantly ready for invasion. When World War II broke out in 1939, Switzerland mobilized and prepared for possible action within three days. The country was never attacked, although they were surrounded by territory controlled by Axis Powers. Switzerland remained independent through a combination of good luck, military deterrence, and economic concessions to Germany, although the leaders of the Nazi party weren't happy with Swiss leaders. The country gets a bad rap for being "buddy-buddy" with the Germans, but they were a country that served as a mediator for members of the Axis and Allies.

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## WWII Bomber Nose Art [72] Executive Sweet 1



\* Health Care \*



## Medicare Payments

Pending Cuts Will Impact Patients Negatively

Passage of legislation in Congress is more complicated than most people realize. The Constitution allows each chamber of Congress to set its own rules for getting it done. Because the House of Representatives

has 435 members its rules are much less complicated than the Senate's, which has 100 members. If the House had the same rules as the Senate, nothing would ever be accomplished. Last week TSCL advised that unless Congress passed new legislation soon, there would be significant cuts in Medicare payments to health care providers, such as doctors and hospitals. And if that happened it is quite possible those patients covered by Medicare would likely face negative consequences with regard to their health care.

The House of Representatives did pass the needed legislation H.R.1868 in mid-MAR so now it moves to the Senate, where passage is not certain. That's because the Senate is equally divided 50-50 and no Republicans said they would support President Biden's Covid relief bill, which resulted in a 50-50 vote on the legislation. When a Senate vote is tied, the Vice President, who the Constitution designates as the President of the Senate, can cast the tie-breaking vote, which is exactly what happened.

The uncertainty of Senate passage of the new legislation to waive the cuts to Medicare comes about because of the **2010 Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act**, which [requires](#) across-the-board cuts, known as sequestration, to "mandatory" programs if any new legislation increases the deficit. Mandatory programs are those, like Medicare, that are automatically funded every year without passage of annual legislation to pay for them. Congress can, however, waive the PAYGO rules to avoid the payment cuts. However, if a waiver would have been included in the Covid relief bill Senate rules would have required there that 60 votes in favor of passage would be needed instead of a simple majority of 51. Because there was no waiver in the Covid relief bill, new legislation to waive the mandatory cuts is needed. Congress passed a similar waiver for Republicans' 2017 tax overhaul, which was passed in the same manner as the Covid-19 relief bill.

Without passage of the waiver legislation the Office of Management and Budget will impose the Medicare payment cuts at the end of the current congressional session. While Social Security, low-income programs such as Medicaid, and veterans' benefits are exempt from sequestration, Medicare payments can be reduced up to 4%. While there is no estimate of how large the cuts would be under the legislation that just passed, the Congressional Budget Office estimated that a previous version of the Covid relief bill would have triggered about \$36 billion in cuts to Medicare in fiscal 2022 and between \$80 and \$90 billion from other mandatory programs. TSCL strongly supports passage of the waiver legislation because of the potentially severe negative consequences they would eventually have on Medicare patients.

The good news is that there was progress last week in moving the needed legislation forward. The Senate passed its own version of H.R.1868, which would postpone the cuts for another nine months. However, it differs from the House version which means it must go back to the House to see if it will agree with the changes that were made. The House passed H.R. 1868 by a vote of 246-175 on 19 MAR, with 29 Republicans voting in favor of the bill. The Senate amended and passed the bill 90-2 on March 25, with two Republican Senators voting against it.

If the bill is going to reach the President's desk for his signature the House will have to agree to the changes the Senate made and pass it one more time. It may take a couple of weeks if that is to happen, however, because the House will not be back in session until the week of 12 APR. This is not the end of the story, however. More legislation will be needed to stop additional Medicare payment cuts that are scheduled in 2022. [Source: The Senior Citizens League Weekly Update | Jessie Hellmann | March 22 & 29, 2021 ++]

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## MHS Nurse Advice Line

Update 02: Available 24/7 to Help You



When it comes to staying healthy, TRICARE knows having health and safety resources you can count on matters. One of those resources is round-the-clock health care advice? If you ever have health-related questions or concerns, the Military Health System (MHS) Nurse Advice Line is available 24/7 and at no cost to you. “Minor injuries can happen anywhere and at any time,” said U.S. Public Health Service Lt. Bobby Taylor, MHS Nurse Advice Line program manager. “Whether you have sick child or need health care advice while traveling, the MHS Nurse Advice Line connects you to a registered nurse who can help you safely treat a non-emergency injury or illness from wherever you are.”

Depending on the severity of your injury or health concern, the nurse you speak with may help you get care at a nearby urgent care or emergency care facility. Your nurse can also:

- Provide evidence-based instructions to treat minor ailments at home
- Answer your health care questions
- Assess your symptoms and recommend the level of care you need
- Help you schedule an appointment within 24 hours at a military hospital or clinic (if you’re enrolled to one and were recommended by the nurse)

Nurses are available 24/7. Your options for connecting with one include starting a secure web chat or video chat on the MHS Nurse Advice Line website <https://mhsnurseadvice.com>. You can also call and speak to a nurse by phone. If you’re in the U.S., Guam, or Puerto Rico, call 1-800-TRICARE (**1-800-874-2273**) and choose option 1. For other country-specific numbers, you can find them on the website. Keep in mind, there’s no cost to use the MHS Nurse Advice Line. You just need to be a TRICARE beneficiary living or traveling in the U.S. or in a country with a military hospital or clinic. However, if you’re enrolled in the US Family Health Plan, you have a separate nurse advice line you can use. Remember, the MHS Nurse Advice Line isn’t for emergencies that threaten your life, limb, eyesight, or safety. If you reasonably think you have an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Did you know that the MHS Nurse Advice Line can help if you think you’re experiencing COVID-19 symptoms? A nurse will assess your condition and recommend [steps to take](#) based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Keep in mind, you should only use the advice line if you think you’ve been exposed to COVID-19 or you think you have symptoms. For general COVID-19 information, such as updates on the COVID-19 vaccine, visit TRICARE’s COVID Guidance website at <https://www.tricare.mil/coronavirus>. “The MHS Nurse Advice Line is committed to providing you with health care advice you can trust,” Taylor added. “So, take command of your health, and use this benefit whenever you need it. [Source: TRICARE Communications | March 22, 2021 ++]

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## Coronavirus Vaccines

### Update 33: Investigational AstraZeneca Vaccine Prevents COVID-19



Colorized scanning electron micrograph of a cell (blue) infected with SARS-CoV-2 virus particles (pink), isolated from a patient sample.

Results from a large clinical trial in the United States and South America indicate that AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine, **AZD1222**, is well-tolerated and protects against symptomatic COVID-19 disease, including severe disease or hospitalization. The independent Data and Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) overseeing the trial identified no safety concerns related to the vaccine. The United Kingdom-based global biopharmaceutical company AstraZeneca developed the vaccine and led the trial as regulatory sponsor.

The placebo-controlled trial began in August 2020. The analysis is based on results from 32,449 adult volunteer participants enrolled across 88 sites in the United States, Chile and Peru. One participant received a placebo for every two participants who received AZD1222, resulting in approximately 20,000 people receiving the investigational vaccine. The vaccine was administered as two doses of  $5 \times 10^{10}$  viral particles four weeks apart. AZD1222 demonstrated statistically significant vaccine **efficacy of 78.9%** in preventing symptomatic COVID-19 and 100% efficacy in preventing severe or critical disease and hospitalization. In participants 65 years and older, who comprised 20% of the trial population, vaccine efficacy against symptomatic COVID-19 was 79.9%.

The DSMB conducted a review of thrombotic events (blood clots) and cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) among participants and found no increased risk of these conditions in vaccinated participants. Approximately 79% of participants were white, 22% were Hispanic, 8% were Black or African American, 4% were Native American, including American Indian/Alaska Native participants residing in the U.S., and 4% were Asian. Vaccine efficacy was consistent across ethnicity. Approximately 60% of participants of any age had underlying health conditions associated with an increased risk of developing severe COVID-19, such as diabetes, severe obesity or cardiac disease.

Authorization and guidelines for use of the vaccine in the U.S. will be determined by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) after thorough review of the data by independent advisory committees. The 22 MAR results build on data from multiple clinical trials of AZD1222 conducted worldwide. The World Health Organization has recommended use of the vaccine for prevention of COVID-19 in adults and it is currently available for use in more than 70 countries. The European Commission has granted a conditional marketing authorization for the vaccine in the European Union.

The current trial defined symptomatic COVID-19 as having SARS-CoV-2 infection and at least one respiratory symptom (pneumonia, shortness of breath or low oxygen requiring supplemental oxygen) or at

least two of the following symptoms: fever, new or worsening cough, muscle pain, fatigue, vomiting and/or diarrhea, and loss of smell and/or loss of taste. Severe or critical COVID-19 was defined as having SARS-CoV-2 infection and any of the following: clinical signs of severe systemic illness, respiratory failure (defined as needing high-flow oxygen, noninvasive ventilation, mechanical ventilation or extracorporeal membrane oxygenation, known as ECMO), evidence of shock, significant acute renal, hepatic or neurologic dysfunction, or admission to an intensive care unit or death.

AZD1222 was developed by Oxford University's Jenner Institute and Oxford Vaccine Group and then licensed to AstraZeneca for further development. It is a viral vector-based vaccine that uses a safe, non-replicating chimpanzee adenovirus to deliver the genetic code of a protein found on the surface of SARS-CoV-2 (called the spike protein) to human cells so that the cells can make the protein. Adenoviruses can cause the common cold in humans, but the virus has been modified so that **it cannot replicate and cause disease**. The technology is based on a vaccine that Oxford previously was developing for Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV). AZD1222 can be stored, transported and handled at 36 to 46 degrees Fahrenheit (normal refrigeration temperatures) for at least six months.

A DSMB formed by NIH monitored the trial to ensure participant safety and the validity and integrity of the data. The same DSMB is overseeing other ongoing Phase 3 vaccine clinical trials as part of the federal COVID-19 response effort. Representatives from AstraZeneca, NIAID and BARDA receive recommendations from the DSMB. Participants will continue to be followed as part of the trial for approximately two years following their second injection. More details about the trial are available at:

- <https://www.coronaviruspreventionnetwork.org>; and
- <https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT04516746?term=azd1222&draw=2&rank=2>

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Late 22 MAR, the Data and Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) notified NIAID, BARDA, and AstraZeneca that it was concerned by information released by AstraZeneca on initial data from its COVID-19 vaccine clinical trial. The DSMB expressed concern that AstraZeneca may have included **outdated information** from that trial, which may have provided an incomplete view of the efficacy data. We urge the company to work with the DSMB to review the efficacy data and ensure the most accurate, up-to-date efficacy data be made public as quickly as possible. Authorization and guidelines for use of the vaccine in the United States will be determined by the Food and Drug Administration and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention after thorough review of the data by independent advisory committees. [Source: NIH News Release | March 22 & 23, 2021 ++]

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## Soda Consumption

### Update 01: Long Term Health Effects of Drinking Too Much





Soft drink the silent killer: Soda, or popularly referred to as soft drinks manufacturing, has become a multi-billion dollar industry, with people worldwide enjoying drinking it. One can't resist when someone offers you a Coke. As per a recent study, Soda drinker in France drinks an average of 207 liters Coca-Cola per year while an American, on average, drinks 995 liters and a Mexican 1059 liters. Many individuals prefer it more than having milk and fruit juice as it's pretty inexpensive in their comparison. Coca-Cola Company, renowned amongst soda drinkers and the global market leader in Sugar-sweetened beverage manufacturing, sells close to 1.9 billion soda drinks per day in Coca-Cola, i.e., more than 200 countries! Twelve thousand six hundred people purchase a Coca-Cola product every second.

Coca-Cola is the world's largest Soda making company. With more than 500 sparkling and still brands and close to 3900 beverage choices. They have the world's most extensive beverage distribution system. Atlanta Company is having a world of Coca-Cola, where visitors can get the opportunity to sample over 100 Coca-Cola products from around the world. When in the world of Coca-Cola, one can witness its closely guarded vault of the secret formula. The recipe for making these sodas varies from Brand to Brand. However, there are certain common ingredients that every mixer includes: Carbonated water, sweeteners, added sugar, Acids (citric, malic, phosphoric, etc.), color (carotenoids, anthocyanins, and caramels), Artificial flavor, preservatives, caffeine.

To quench your thirst for having soda does not necessarily cause a higher risk. However, if you are in the habit of chugging one or two sodas per day, then probably chicken will come home to roost because of the long term effects of drinking too much soda. Suppose you are a fan of Coca Cola, aka Coke. Here is the list of some problems one may face due to the long term effects of drinking too much soda:

**Vitamin Deficiency:** Considered to be safe when the carbonated drinks were invented, subsequent laboratory experiments show that it contains phosphoric acid that can exacerbate dental erosion. It also raises the case of kidney stones. It also increases the risk of weakening of bones, osteoporosis, as well as hypertension. According to U.S. Researchers, if someone consumes two glasses of Coca Cola, his chances of kidney failure multiplied by 2.

**Obesity:** Over the years, obesity in youngsters has risen due to the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. As per a recent study, 1 in 4 Americans has 200 calories per day from soda. It's astonishing that children ages 5 to 12 drink at least one soda or energy drink per day. A 20 ounce bottle of Coca-Cola contains about 17 teaspoons of sugar. In addition to this, the Intake of sugary beverages strongly allied with the fat around the abdominal area. There is also widespread disbelief among people that consuming Diet Coke or Coke zero will not result in weight gain; then, this is a big misconception. Studies proved that sugar-free soda contains sugar substitutes like aspartame, cyclamate, saccharin, acesulfame-k, or sucralose. These Diet versions were first introduced to the market in 1950 for individuals with diabetes. However, later the same was marketed to people trying to reduce weight gains or sugar consumption.

**Dental Decay:** Daily intake of these sweetened or sugar-free beverages increased the risk of causing cavities due to the high sugar and fructose syrup content. Also, this makes teeth vulnerable to enamel erosion due to its highly acidic nature. Sugar in soda combines with bacteria in your mouth to form acid, which attacks the teeth. Both types of soda can erode your teeth as well. Even if one does regular brushing and flossing of teeth, you are still in danger of this problem. Make sure to visit your dentist frequently and reduce your Intake of these sugary beverages.

**Caffeine Addiction:** Caffeine is highly addictive, whether taken with tea, coffee, chocolate, or soda. A can of Coca Cola contains about 46 mg of caffeine. Although many youngsters gulp down the coke for the energy they feel from caffeine. Due to the spike, our blood pressure rises and cause wooziness, heart problem, vision problem, and much more.

**Chronic Disease:** According to research done By U.S. Cardiologist, the Intake of these carbonated sodas is a risk factor for metabolic syndrome, increased waist size, impaired sugar levels, high blood pressure, and higher cholesterol levels a higher risk of a heart attack. Also, it leads to the development of the chronic cardiovascular disease.

**Increased risk of Type 2 Diabetes:** Regular consumption also leads to a higher risk of Type 2 Diabetes, which means that individual blood glucose and blood sugar levels are too high. Also, it means that your body is not capable of make and uses insulin well. And thus, too much glucose stays in your blood without insulin. In a layman's language, it is elevated blood sugar due to insulin deficiency. The scientist also proves that being obese is a risk factor for type 2 diabetes. If you think that substituting a regular coke with coke zero, you are in the wrong way. A recent study in 180 countries states that every 150 calories of sugar intake per day by individual increases the risk of type 2 diabetes by 1.2 %. So if we compare it with the total population of the United States, this would be 3.6 million people.

**Cancer:** Your chugging down these Coke Cans can be a risk factor as it contains benzene, a chemical known to cause Cancer. It is formed when ascorbic acid comes in contact with benzoic acid and metals like iron or copper. Therefore, the FDA's strict recommendation (Food and Drug Administration) states that one should not intake more than one coca-cola can a week.

**Reduce Sperm Count:** Consuming these carbonated sugary beverages can also impact your intimate performance. A study suggests that if you are consuming one can a day. Consumption of these sugary beverages results in hampering fertility and reducing sperm count by 30%, resulting in erectile dysfunction. The average sperm count of a soda drinker was 35 million per milliliter, and the one who drinks it less often was 56 million per milliliter. Research also proved that sweetener in these sugary beverages damages arteries in the penis, which prevents blood from flowing through it, and hence one cannot get a proper erection.

**No Nutritional Benefits:** Drinks like Coca Cola and other soft drinks have no essential nutrients – no vitamins, no minerals or fiber, and only refined sugar, artificial flavor, etc. Soft drinks add nothing to your diet except added sugar and unnecessary calories.

**Causes Leptin Resistance:** leptin is a hormone produced by body fats cells. It controls the number of calories you eat and burn. Its level changes in response to both obesity and starvation. The resistance of this hormone in the human body can impact body resistance to fat and leads to weight gain.

**Higher Risk to Dementia:** It's a term associated with the decline in brain function. The most common form is Alzheimer's disease. Research shows that any incremental increase in blood sugar is strongly related to an increased risk of dementia. The high amount of Intake of these soft drinks can lead to impair memory and decision-making capabilities.

**Risk Factor for Premature death:** Regular Intake also leads to a higher risk of premature death due to cardiovascular disease. Comparing these with infrequent drinkers, those who drank two or more serving per day had a 35 % higher risk of untimely death.

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Now that we have discussed the causes of drinking too much soft drink may impact your life in the long term. One can quickly figure out that it's a risk factor, and hence we should replace it. Consider limiting your Intake to prevent risk from having a chronic disease such as heart disease or metabolic disorders like type 2 diabetes. But if you are a frequent soda drinker, then it is easier said than done. There are numerous ways to shed off this habit of drinking soda and try other substitutes.

- Have some sparkling water to have a similar feel to that of a soft drink.
- Flavor your regular water with cucumber, kiwi, or berries.
- Try detox water.
- Enjoy a cup of Espresso, cappuccino, café doppio, café frappe.
- Go for Gourmet Teas like Silver Needle, Apple Strudel, Rooibos Tiramisu, etc.
- Drink chamomile, valerian, or lemon balm tea.
- Try Unsweetened Iced Tea and Fruit Infused Iced Tea.
- Add fruit juices to sparkling water or seltzer.
- Try fresh fruit juices or drink coconut water.

It's a famous saying that old habits die hard, or quitting a habit is never easy. But as the experts recommend kicking off this addiction of chugging these sweetened drinks out of your diet, one can have a profound effect on life. [Source: Aging Healthy Today | December 14, 2020 ++]

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## **Rubbing Alcohol**

### **Health Uses You Probably Never Knew About**



Rubbing alcohol normally is made up of seventy percent isopropyl alcohol, however the percentage could range anywhere between sixty percent and ninety-nine percent. This variety of alcohol is distinctive from the other types like ethyl alcohol or ethanol in wine, beer and liquor. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rubbing alcohol has a look very similar to that of water. Because of COVID-19 being so widespread, many household now have a bottle or two of rubbing alcohol at an arm's reach away for disinfecting reasons, as rubbing alcohol is considered an extremely potent germicide, specifically at concentrations of sixty percent and over. This popular household product has numerous uses in the home for disinfecting and cleaning purposes, and is the chief ingredient in hand sanitizer, as stated by the Food and Drug Administration, however, how does it match up as it relates to health ailments? Following you will find what the medical world would like you to know about the use of rubbing alcohol.

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## **Nausea**

According to emergency medical professionals, inhaling the strong, sharp fumes of the rubbing alcohol could resolve nausea. It was proven that inhalation of rubbing alcohol was more effective with compared to the standard anti-nausea medicines during some studies. This could be completed by breathing in the vapor from the alcohol preparation pads. This process could be attempted at home quite easily however it is not recommended to repeatedly do so.

## **Removing Splinters**

Before attempting to remove a splinter from your skin, rubbing alcohol could be used as a disinfectant around the area. In cases such as these, pour the rubbing alcohol on a cotton swab and lightly and gently dab the area that has the splinter. Individuals could also disinfect and clean the tweezers with the same rubbing alcohol prior to trying to take the splinter out.

## **Daily Insulin Injections for Diabetes**

Individuals that suffer from diabetes and require insulin injections to assist in controlling the blood glucose levels ought to clean and disinfect the area with a cotton swab that has been soaked in rubbing alcohol or an alcohol swab prior to injecting. It is also vital to wait until the alcohol has dried prior to injecting. There have been many concerns regarding shortages of rubbing alcohol impacting the care of diabetes during the COVID-19 pandemic, which might happen as a result of individuals making their own hand sanitizer.

## **Trimming Nails**

Clean off the scissors or nail clippers with the rubbing alcohol prior to giving yourself a pedicure or manicure or trimming the nails of a child. It may be applied to a cotton ball or swab and then wipe the clippers or scissors down or they could be submerged in the rubbing alcohol. It would only take approximately thirty to forty-five seconds for this method to get rid of the germs.

## **Blister Popping**

IN the event that someone has a blister, clean off the skin and all the tools that are to be used in popping it with rubbing alcohol. This process will assist in staving off any infections. However, blister popping is not a recommended procedure by medical professionals.

## **Ear Piercing**

Ears that have been newly pierced could suffer infection, as stated by the American Academy of Dermatology or AAD. Rubbing alcohol, when it is applied to cotton swabs or balls could be utilized to disinfect or clean the area around the piercing two to three times each day, could assist in staving off infection. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends utilizing a thin layer of petroleum jelly around the area of the opening as well.

## **Tick Removal**

There are several diseases that ticks transmit and so it is very vital to remove and handle any ticks that are discovered on a person's body as safely and quickly as possible in order to decrease the chances of developing an illness that is spread by the tick. Rubbing alcohol could assist by firstly, cleaning the affected area and the hands with rubbing alcohol, soap and water or an iodine scrub subsequent to the individual removing the tick with some sort of tweezers. Discard of the tick by placing it in the rubbing alcohol, wrapping it tightly in taper, flushing it down the toilet or putting it in a sealed bag.

## **Disinfecting a Thermometer**

Thermometers can be disinfected by using rubbing alcohol between each use of the thermometer, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. This holds true for both oral and rectal thermometers. It is noteworthy to allow the alcohol to dry completely prior to reusing the thermometer.

### **Astringent.**

Alcohol is a natural astringent that can help to tighten pores and leave your skin feeling refreshed. Apply after cleansing your skin and before applying moisturizer or sunscreen. Unfortunately, rubbing alcohol can be very drying to skin so don't use on any dry areas. Also, applying it after shaving or to open acne areas can cause a burning sensation.

### **Deodorant**

Rubbing alcohol can be a quick helper if you're out of deodorant. You can spray directly on your armpit, but avoid after shaving since it can sting. Some people also mix essential oils such as lavender with the alcohol for a skin-soothing scent.

### **Evaporating water from the ear.**

If you've got water in your ears from a pool, mix a solution of 1/2 teaspoon rubbing alcohol and 1/2 teaspoon white vinegar. Pour or place the solution using a dropper into your ear while your head is to the side. Allow the solution to drain out. Don't apply it if you have an ear infection or tear in your eardrum as the solution could go deeper into your ear.

**Liniment for muscle aches.** Applying a cloth soaked in rubbing alcohol on aching muscles can create a cooling sensation and stimulate blood flow to aching areas. Only apply to a small area. Putting alcohol on your entire body could cause harmful neurological effects because your skin can soak it in.

**Shapeable ice packs.** Ice packs can become shapeable thanks to rubbing alcohol. To make, combine one part alcohol with three parts water in a well-sealed plastic bag and place in the freezer. Before using, wrap a soft cloth around the bag and apply to any areas that need icing.

### **What not to use rubbing alcohol for**

Despite what the internet might say, the following aren't great uses for rubbing alcohol.

- **Acne.** Use rubbing alcohol with caution on acne-prone skin. The rubbing alcohol can be very drying, which could cause your skin to overproduce oil and worsen blemishes. If you have any open skin areas, the rubbing alcohol could also burn when applied.
- **Fever.** Parents used to use rubbing alcohol applied to a child's skin to give off a cooling sensation. However, this method is potentially dangerous because a child's skin can absorb the alcohol and become toxic. Even adults can have neurological and heart problems from applying alcohol-soaked towels to bare skin.
- **Baths.** Alcohol baths are dangerous for the same reason as applying alcohol to the skin for fevers. The body may absorb the alcohol and cause toxic symptoms.
- **Lice.** Although rubbing alcohol can help to kill lice, it can also cause chemical burns on the scalp. Avoid this method in favor of more proven treatments, such as medicated lice shampoos.

[Source: Healthline & Outdoor Wear | March 2021 ++]

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## Soft Belly Breathing

### Benefits & Instructions

Did you know that human beings are born with the ability to practice deep breathing? Between your two lungs are five sections called lobes. The left lung has two and the right has three. The right lung is shorter than the left to accommodate your diaphragm, which rises higher on the right. But, we rarely use all five lobes to breathe. Do you know who does? Babies. You can see the rise and fall of a sleeping baby's tummy. As our bodies mature into adulthood, we no longer take full breaths, much to our disadvantage. Runners, singers and meditators practice and re-learn full-belly breathing – to great effect.

Soft belly breathing has many benefits. It offers our bodies a full exchange of oxygen, which helps us to slow down our heartbeat, lower and stabilize our blood pressure and reduce our stress. Further, this full diaphragmatic breathing can help people cope with symptoms of PTSD, improve muscle stability, improve the body's ability to exercise intensely, and it allows the body to expend less energy. If you want to learn how this feels in your body, go to <https://youtu.be/YGnLFDS-jQU> and practice this 5-minute soft belly breathing technique, guided by Dr. James Gordon, founder and executive director of the non-profit Center for Mind-Body Medicine. [Source: Vantage Point | Andrea Young / March 8, 2021 ++]

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## Fiber

### Impact on Digestive System & Poop



Fiber, a crucial component of a healthy diet, is a carbohydrate that the body is unable to digest. It is found in many of the plants that we eat, including fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes. Getting adequate fiber in your diet can help to:

- Reduce your risk of developing colon cancer and diverticulitis.
- Keep your digestive system clean and healthy.
- Ease bowel movements.
- Flush cholesterol and harmful carcinogens out of the body.

Unfortunately, most people don't get enough in their diet. The average American only consumes about 10-15 grams each day. As you can see from the table below, this is far below the recommendations!

Age	Men	Women
50 years old and younger	38 grams/day	25 grams/day
51 years old and older	30 grams/day	21 grams/day

Now you may be wondering what you can do to increase your fiber intake. A few simple steps to take include:

- Eating 2 servings of fruits each day.
- Eating 3-4 servings of vegetables each day.
- Including beans in diet a few days each week.
- Adding nuts and seeds as snacks or to salads, yogurts, or desserts.
- Choosing grains that contain fiber – oatmeal, whole grains, quinoa, etc.

Following those tips, be sure to make a list of items you need for your weekly menu – it helps to stick to your list. Find more helpful hints on planning a weekly menu in MOVE Module 7, Menu planning, shopping, and cooking. In order to avoid GI distress, you will want to gradually increase your fiber intake until you reach your goal. It is also very important to increase your water intake, too. This can help you bulk up your stool, but the water is necessary to flush it all out! For more on ‘Fiber’ and some helpful recipes to aid in increasing your daily fiber intake check out the 10 minute audio clip at <https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/85712/fresh-focus-22-fiber>. [Source: VAntage Point | Tori Stewart | March 13, 2021 ++]

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## **Sickle Cell Disease**

### **Update 02: Battling Bent Blood Cells**



With every beat of your heart, blood carries oxygen from your lungs throughout your body. This life-sustaining process happens automatically, whether you’re awake or asleep. But for people with sickle cell disease, it often goes awry. People with this disease have an abnormal type of hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying molecule in red blood cells. Normally, red blood cells are flexible and shaped like a disc. But the hemoglobin in people with sickle cell disease causes abnormally shaped red blood cells. Most commonly, they’re a crescent (or sickle) shape. These inflexible, bent cells can stick to the blood vessel walls. The resulting clumps slow or stop the flow of blood. This may lead to pain and organ damage.

“Sickle cell disease can potentially block blood supply to any organ in the body,” explains Dr. Swee Lay Thein, a blood disorder expert at NIH. Most people with sickle cell disease used to die before reaching adulthood. But with modern treatments, people in the U.S. now live into their 40s, 50s, or even 60s. And researchers are working on cutting-edge therapies, such as fixing the broken gene that causes the disease. “I think treatment is going to look very different in the next 20 years,” says Dr. Allison King, an expert on sickle cell disease in children at Washington University in St. Louis.

## **One Gene, Many Symptoms**

Sickle cell disease is caused by changes in a single gene. But everyone has two copies of the gene. You inherit one copy from each parent. More than two million people in the U.S. carry one abnormal copy, called sickle cell trait. They don't usually have any symptoms. But if you inherit two copies, the result is sickle cell disease. About 100,000 people in the U.S. live with sickle cell disease. Most are African American. But every baby born in the U.S. is tested for sickle cell disease at birth. This helps doctors start treatment as early as possible.

Children don't usually show symptoms until they're between six and 12 months old, Thein explains. Babies' red blood cells have a different type of hemoglobin, called fetal hemoglobin. As they grow, the body switches to producing adult hemoglobin. Then, the sickling cycle begins. A normal red blood cell lives for around three to four months. But in people with sickle cell disease, the cells usually live for just two to three weeks. This leads to anemia, a condition in which your blood has low amounts of red blood cells or hemoglobin. Anemia lowers oxygen in the body, which can cause fatigue, dizziness, and headaches. Pain is another common symptom. It can be so severe that people end up in the hospital. These pain episodes are called a "sickle cell crisis."

"People's lives are disrupted by these episodes," says Thein. "For children, that means missing school. Adults might miss a lot of work." Blocked blood flow to the brain can cause strokes, even in children. Strokes and clogs in the blood vessels in the lungs are some of the most dangerous complications of the disease, Thein says.

## **New Drug Options**

The most common treatment for sickle cell disease is a drug called hydroxyurea. It coaxes the adult body to make fetal hemoglobin. This increases the number of functional red blood cells. Hydroxyurea doesn't work for everyone. But three new treatments have been approved in the last few years. Some of the newer drugs prevent sickled cells from sticking to the blood vessels. Thein's team is testing a drug to stop blood cells from bending in the first place. "That would be the most effective thing—to stop the sickling process," she explains. Even though drugs help many people, taking medication daily can be hard, King explains. Low levels of oxygen in the brain in people with sickle cell disease can affect memory. King and her colleagues are testing ways to use technology, such as smartphone apps, to help people take their drugs as prescribed. Some people with sickle cell disease may need to have regular or emergency blood transfusions, in which they receive donated blood.

## **Fixing the Blood Cells**

Currently, the only cure for sickle cell disease is a bone marrow transplant. Bone marrow is the spongy tissue containing the stem cells that give rise to blood cells. In a bone marrow transplant, the stem cells in the patient's bone marrow that produce blood cells are first destroyed. Then, stem cells from a donor without sickle cell disease are transferred into the patient. These new stem cells will produce blood cells that don't sickle. The procedure is risky. It's considered too dangerous for adults. But the main problem, explains Dr. Matthew Hsieh, a transplant researcher at NIH, is that most children don't have a matched donor. If certain proteins on the donor's cells are different than the child's, the transplant can fail.

Hsieh and others have developed new methods to transplant bone marrow from people who aren't a perfect match. They're also developing ways to prepare the bone marrow for a transplant that could make the procedure safer for adults. Researchers are also testing an approach called gene therapy. In gene therapy,



a patient's own stem cells are collected. Then, they're altered in the lab to fix a gene. Finally, they're given back to the patient. A recent gene therapy study at NIH successfully added a working copy of the hemoglobin gene into stem cells. Another study will see if adult cells can be altered to produce fetal hemoglobin. If you're living with sickle cell disease, talk with your health care provider to develop a care plan that's right for you. Some tips for those suffering from sickle Cell are:

- Check in with your doctor regularly. Most people with sickle cell disease should see their doctor every three to 12 months.
- Get recommended vaccinations. People with sickle cell disease have a higher risk of infection. You can learn more from the CDC at [https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/parents-adults/index.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fvaccines%2Fschedules%2Feasy-to-read%2Findex.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/parents-adults/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fvaccines%2Fschedules%2Feasy-to-read%2Findex.html).
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle. Getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and avoiding alcohol and tobacco can make you feel better and reduce pain.
- Manage pain. Work with a pain specialist to come up with an individual treatment plan.
- Know and avoid your triggers. Many things can set off pain. Common ones include exhaustion and dehydration.

If you're interested in joining a clinical trial, call 1-800-411-1222 or visit [www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov). [Source: NIH News in Health | September 2020 ++]

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## Sepsis

### Life-Threatening Infection that Leads to Organ Dysfunction



Your immune system is on patrol every day. It protects your body from bacteria, viruses, and other germs. But if something goes wrong, it can also cause big problems. Sepsis happens when your body's response to an infection spirals out of control. Your body releases molecules into the blood called cytokines to fight the infection. But those molecules then trigger a chain reaction. "Sepsis is basically a life-threatening infection that leads to organ dysfunction," says Dr. Richard Hotchkiss, who studies sepsis at Washington University in St. Louis. The most dangerous stage of sepsis is called septic shock. It can cause multiple organs to fail, including the liver, lungs, and kidneys.

Septic shock begins when the body's response to an infection damages blood vessels. When blood vessels are damaged, your blood pressure can drop very low. Without normal blood flow, your body can't get enough oxygen. Almost 1.7 million people in the U.S. develop sepsis every year. Even with modern treatments, it still kills nearly 270,000 of those. Many recover. But some have lifelong damage to the body

and brain. “We can get many people over that first infection that caused the sepsis,” Hotchkiss explains. “But then they’re at risk of dying from a second infection because of their weakened condition.” Bacterial infections cause most sepsis cases. But sepsis can also result from other infections, including viral infections, such as COVID-19 or the flu (influenza).

Anyone can get sepsis. But certain people are at higher risk, including infants, children, and older adults. The early symptoms of sepsis are similar to those of many other conditions. These can include fever, chills, rapid breathing or heart rate, a skin rash, confusion, and disorientation. It’s important to know the symptoms. Sepsis is a medical emergency. If you or your loved one has an infection that’s not getting better or is getting worse, get medical care immediately. Researchers are now looking for better ways to diagnose sepsis. One strategy is to use artificial intelligence to predict a patient’s risk of sepsis when they have an infection. There are few medicines that help treat sepsis. Doctors try to stop the infection and support the functions of vital organs. This usually includes giving oxygen and fluids.

Hotchkiss and other researchers are exploring new treatments for the condition. His team has been testing ways to measure which immune cells are affected by sepsis. The traditional understanding of sepsis, he says, is that the body responds too strongly to an infection. But his group has found that the body also makes too few of some important types of immune cells. This makes it hard for the body to effectively fight the infection that first triggered sepsis. It can also cause a lot of collateral damage, and make you more vulnerable to other germs.

Hotchkiss’s team is now testing ways to boost the immune cells that are vital for fighting infections using drugs. They’ve found they can increase these cells in patients with sepsis. Next, they will be testing whether this new approach can improve survival. Tips to avoid sepsis include:

- **Prevent infections.** Take good care of chronic conditions. Get recommended vaccines.
- **Practice good hygiene.** Wash your hands. Keep cuts clean and covered until healed.
- **Know the symptoms.** Symptoms can include any one or combination of these: confusion, disorientation, shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, fever, shivering, chills, extreme pain, and clammy or sweaty skin.
- **Act fast.** Get medical care immediately if you suspect sepsis or have an infection that’s not getting better or is getting worse.

[Source: NIH News in Health | January 2021 ++]

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## TRICARE Divorce Impact

### What Happens to You Benefit



If you're getting divorced, the future may seem uncertain. One question in your mind may be whether you'll still be eligible for TRICARE. The answer depends on your sponsor status, length of your marriage, and other factors. "After a divorce, the sponsor and both the sponsor's biological and the sponsor's adopted children remain eligible for TRICARE," said Mark Ellis, chief of the Policy Programs Section of the TRICARE Health Plan at the Defense Health Agency. "The former spouse only remains eligible for TRICARE if he or she meets certain criteria, and any stepchildren of the sponsor which the sponsor did not adopt lose eligibility."

### **I'm the sponsor. What do I do?**

After the divorce is final, you must bring a certified copy of the divorce decree or annulment to a local [ID card office](#). This way, information in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility System (DEERS) can be updated. Because getting divorced is a TRICARE Qualifying Life Event (QLE), you and your eligible children may make changes to your TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select health plans. You have 90 days after the divorce to do so, if you choose to do so. Check out the TRICARE Qualifying Life Events [Fact Sheet](#) to learn more about QLEs. And you can learn more about plan options with the [TRICARE Plans Overview](#).

### **I'm the former spouse. How do I know if I remain eligible?**

You remain eligible for TRICARE only if you meet certain criteria. Your sponsor's military Service Component is responsible for determining your continuing eligibility. If you and your sponsor are separated or living apart, but not divorced, you keep TRICARE benefits. After a divorce, you may be eligible for TRICARE coverage if you fit into one of the following scenarios:

**20/20/20:** Under the 20/20/20 rule, you keep TRICARE health care benefits for as long as you remain eligible if:

- You were married to the service member for at least 20 years,
- The service member served in the armed forces for at least 20 years, and
- The marriage and the period of service overlapped for at least 20 years.

**20/20/15:** Under the 20/20/15 rule, you keep TRICARE health care benefits for one year if:

- You were married to the service member for at least 20 years,
- The service member served in the armed forces for at least 20 years, and
- The marriage and the period of service overlapped for at least 15 years.

If you don't meet these criteria, you stay eligible up until the day the divorce is final. If the sponsor didn't adopt his or her stepchildren, they also lose eligibility once the divorce is final.

### **I'm a former spouse who is still eligible based on criteria above. What do I do next?**

To establish eligibility, bring your marriage certificate, divorce decree, and proof of service (DD Form 214 or Statement of Service from the applicable Service Personnel Component) to your local ID card office. "If you meet the former spouse requirements, you'll be listed in DEERS under your own Social Security number or Department of Defense Benefits Number, not your sponsor's," said Ellis. When you qualify for TRICARE as a former spouse, you have the same benefits as a retired family member, and your health plan [options](#) depend on where you live. Keep in mind, you'll lose TRICARE benefits if you remarry or enroll in an employer-sponsored health plan.

### **I'm the former spouse and don't qualify to keep TRICARE. What are my options?**

If you don't meet the requirements, you stay eligible up until the day the divorce is final. After that, you still have health care options. You may:

- Purchase temporary transitional coverage through the Continued Health Care Benefit [Program](#) (CHCBP). You must apply for CHCBP within 60 days from the date of the divorce. CHCBP coverage isn't available to you if your sponsor served in NATO or Partners for Peace. Certain former spouses who haven't remarried before age 55 may qualify for an unlimited duration of coverage.
- Search the Health Insurance [Marketplace](#) to find a civilian health plan or check eligibility for Medicaid in your state.
- Get coverage through your employer, school, or university.

### **Continuing Eligibility for Children**

The sponsor's biological and adopted children remain eligible for TRICARE after divorce. However, the sponsor's children will lose eligibility when they turn age 21 (or 23 if in college), marry, or serve on active duty. Once no longer eligible due to age, children up to the age of 26 may qualify to purchase [TRICARE Young Adult](#). If the sponsor didn't adopt his or her stepchildren, they lose eligibility once the divorce is final. In that case, you may want to explore other health care coverage options available through an employer or the Health Insurance Marketplace.

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Going through a divorce is hard. But you have health plan options for the road ahead. Learn more about [TRICARE coverage after divorce](#). [Source: <https://www.tricare.mil/divorce> | March 26, 2021 ++]

**\* Finances \***



## **Surprise Medical Bills**

### **Update 03: Surprise Billing Issues Still Not Settled**

At the end of 2020, Congress included the **No Surprises Act** in the omnibus spending bill that was passed and signed into law by President Trump on December 27, 2020. The legislation bars surprise billing for out-of-network emergency care as well as out-of-network care provided at in-network facilities. It also institutes an arbitration system for insurers and the provider to negotiate payment. The Senior Citizens League (TSLC) actively supported ending the practice of surprise billing and while the legislation wasn't perfect, we felt it was a good start. While modifying the practice of surprise billing to include more financial safeguards will help protect Americans from unexpected costs after an illness or accident, the issue hasn't disappeared.

According to a report from ModernHealthCare.com, "... providers and insurers will continue their fight over surprise billing as federal officials figure out how to put the No Surprises Act into practice, according

to experts. “The new law protects consumers from receiving unexpected medical bills resulting from out-of-network emergency care delivered by an out-of-network facility or out-of-network providers at an in-network facility. It also blocks out-of-network providers at in-network facilities from balance billing patients for non-emergency care unless they get patient consent. But patients will still be responsible for paying the in-network cost-sharing amount.” However, there are still lots of details to work out and there will be fights over what those final details will be.

In the legislation that was passed Congress' decided to go with baseball-style arbitration to settle payment disputes between providers and insurers. Now, policymakers must recruit entities to carry out the arbitration process and provide them with guidance about how to consider a range of factors during arbitration. Again, from the ModernHealthCare.com report, “The No Surprises Act bans arbitrators from considering provider charges during the arbitration process. Congress had worried that healthcare costs would rise faster if providers' settlement amounts were significantly higher than the amounts insurers paid to in-network providers. The legislation also bars arbitrators from considering how much public payers like Medicare and Medicaid pay for comparable services. That's a win for providers since those payers often have much lower reimbursement rates than commercial plans.

“But lawmakers allowed arbitrators to mull over several other factors when making payment decisions, including the median in-network rate paid by an insurer, any good faith effort by a provider to join an insurer's network, providers' and insurers' market share, and previously contracted rates from the last four years, among other considerations. Congress left it up to HHS [Department of Health and Human Services] to figure out how to calculate qualified payment amounts, which are tied to the median in-network rates paid by insurers.” The report concludes with this: “*With the No Surprise Act set to take effect on Jan. 1, healthcare executives should expect HHS and other federal agencies to start issuing their proposed rules in the coming months. The details of those rules will significantly affect what cards they'll be able to play at the negotiating table.*” [Source: TSCS Weekly Update | March 22, 2021 ++]

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## **GI Bill**

### **Update 311: Phase Out of ‘Rounding Out’ Rule Impact**

The Department of Veterans Affairs is set to remove a relatively obscure GI Bill rule, which could cost beneficiaries thousands of dollars. But Congress is poised to act if the agency doesn't reverse course before a critical deadline this summer. The so-called "rounding out" rule will be phased out 1 AUG, according to the VA. Currently, a GI Bill student can round out a college schedule with non-required classes to bring their course load to a full-term schedule once per program. This allows students to continue to receive full-time benefits, such as a larger housing allowance.

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For example, if a student needs 60 hours to obtain a degree and completed all the required courses in 57 hours, they could add a 3-credit-hour course unrelated to their major to their schedule, which would be covered under the GI Bill and prevent them from missing out on any full-time benefits. When asked about the move during a congressional hearing last week, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said he had never heard about rounding out or the Trump administration's decision to scrub it. He added that he would follow up with lawmakers. Rep. Mike Levin, D-Calif., who chairs the VA committee subpanel on economic

opportunity, said he hopes the VA simply reverses the decision to sunset rounding out. "It impacts a whole lot of student veterans later this year if we don't get out in front of it," Levin said in an interview with Military.com. "It's a policy that will hurt a lot of veterans."

Yet lawmakers might have to step in with legislation if the VA lets the rounding out rule die in August. Either the VA will need to make a decision before then, or Congress will have to fast-track legislation so as not to impact students in the fall semester. "Hopefully, that won't be necessary, but we'll look at whatever alternatives there are," Levin added. "I hope it will be as simple as reversing the decision. I hope Secretary McDonough reconsiders what the past administration decided to do." It is unclear how many students have used the rounding out rule, but it is difficult to perfectly map out four years of schooling. Dropping just one class from a schedule could be detrimental to a GI Bill student's income, costing them thousands of dollars in a single semester.

Texas has the largest number of GI Bill beneficiaries in school, with 67,578 students, according to VA data. The University of Texas at San Antonio has one of the state's largest populations of GI Bill students, with 3,260 enrollees. Right now, a full-time GI Bill student eligible for full post-9/11 benefits will earn \$7,452 in housing allowance per semester at the school. Getting rid of a single course would reduce that to \$5,962. The housing allowance is much larger in parts of the country with high costs of living. In Manhattan, students bring in \$14,553 per semester. Dropping to part-time status would bring in a maximum of \$11,642 per semester.

The VA is the second largest government agency in terms of size and budget. Its budget has ballooned over the years, and the department might be seeking to cut costs partly by not paying for what are ultimately unnecessary college courses. In 2001, the VA budget was \$48 billion; now, it's over \$250 billion. The housing allowance is largely seen as one of the biggest benefits and sharpest economic tools for veterans to be successful after the military. Gutting a major benefit with virtually no warning could have serious consequences for students and would likely draw the immediate ire of advocates and lawmakers. "That full-time status ensures their housing allowance remains steady, consequently helping them complete their post-secondary education," said Tanya Ang, vice president of advocacy group Veterans Education Success. "VA has been able to adequately address this situation for years, so it only makes sense they continue to do so without the intervention of Congress." [Source: Military.com | Steve Beynon | March 29, 2021 ++]

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## **Uncommon State Tax Laws**

### **Strange but True Tax Laws | AL - GA**

The United States tax code is anything but simple. The instructions for the standard 1040 tax form alone are more than 100 pages long, and good luck getting through them in one sitting. Tax rules and regulations at the state level provide no relief, riddled as they are with strange fees and exemptions, some of them decades out of date. Every state has odd and sometimes unbelievable state tax laws — including a number of regulations that could save consumers money.

#### **Alabama: Taxing Illegal Drugs**

Alabama taxes the proceeds from the sale of illegal drugs by requiring sellers to have tax stamps. Anyone caught with large quantities of drugs and no stamps would face not only jail time but also prosecution for tax evasion unless they paid up. Though this brought in sizable revenue in the '90s, so little money comes in through the stamps now that the Revenue Department no longer includes it as a line item in the agency's books.

#### **Alaska: Whaling-Related Expenses**

Whaling captains recognized by the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission can deduct up to \$10,000 for whaling-related expenses. The deduction is considered a charitable contribution, even if the money isn't paid to a charitable organization.

#### **Arizona: Ice Blocks and Ice Cubes**

Several states, including Arizona, tax ice blocks and ice cubes differently. Since ice cubes are used in mixed drinks, and considered food, they aren't taxed by the state. Ice blocks, however, are subject to sales tax.

#### **Arkansas: Odd Jobs**

What do pet grooming, gutter cleaning, and body piercing have in common? In Arkansas, each of these services is subject to a 6.5% gross receipts sales tax — a tax to the business providing the service.

#### **California: Vending Machine Fees**

There is plenty of fresh fruit to be found in the Golden State and there's a 33% tax if it is bought from a vending machine. The tax applies to other food items, as well, including hot drinks, although there is an exception for vending machines operated by educational institutions when the items are sold to students.

#### **Colorado: The Cost of Safety**

Consider this when taking a full cup to go and driving down a bumpy road in Colorado. Retailers in the Centennial State aren't taxed on the purchase of cups, but they are taxed when they buy lids and straws. Other items, such as toothpicks, portion dividers, cup sleeves, and bibs, are taxed as well.

#### **Connecticut: Exemptions for Safety Items**

The Constitution State promotes public safety through its tax code by making numerous items tax exempt. Bicycle helmets, child car seats, firearm safety items like trigger locks and lock boxes all qualify as tax exempt.

#### **Delaware: Corporate Bargains**

Delaware is one of five states with no sales tax. The state has a low 8.7% flat income tax on corporations, and if a business doesn't conduct its operations in Delaware, the corporate income tax might not even apply. Add to that the state's business-friendly laws and its non-jury chancery court known for impartial decisions, and incorporating in Delaware is a no-brainer. About half of all publicly traded companies in the country do just that.

#### **Florida: The Farmer Exemption**

Many states have tax exemptions for farmers and ranchers, but Florida's "greenbelt law" was vaguely worded and notoriously open to abuse — at least, until being strengthened over the past couple of legislative terms. Property developers had rented cows to avoid paying taxes while preparing their land for building. Even Disney World took advantage of the loophole.

#### **Georgia: The Tax Cap**

In 2014, Georgia became the first state to cap its income tax rate through a ballot measure. The tax rate cap of 6% is now part of the state's constitution. In 2017, a bill was introduced in the state legislature that could replace the state's six income tax rates with a flat 5.4% tax, but failed to pass. The current top rate in Georgia is 5.75%.

[Source: Cheapism Info | March 15, 2021 ++]

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## Gasoline Savings

### Update 07: Ways You Can Increase



The population of the United States has a thing for gas-guzzling, specifically during the summer season, as the increase in demand and the market uncertainty drive the price up by ten to twenty cents on average per gallon. Even though the previous recession helped in reducing the demand for gasoline in recent years, the heat of summer, in association with unanticipated variables, could still wreak havoc on the prices of gas at the pumps. However, regardless of if you are planning on taking a cross-country trip or simply attempting to avoid spending all your salary on commuting, there are several ways that money can be saved on gasoline. The method for doing this is to just not drive as much, however, do not lose hope if this is not an option.

#### **Slow and Steady**

As the old adage goes, slow and steady wins the race. The mileage on gasoline falls off in the majority of vehicles once the speed exceeds roughly sixty miles per hour. For every five miles per hour driven in excess of sixty miles per hour, an individual would be spending an additional twenty-four cents for each gallon of gasoline. Attempt using cruise control when traveling on the interstates and other highways in order to maintain a relatively consistent speed. This could also assist in allowing the individual to use the vehicle's overdrive gears, which could save on fuel and the wear and tear on the engine by decreasing the speed.

#### **Be Cool In Traffic**

Driving aggressively such as sudden acceleration and braking, swerving, and speeding, is not just a dangerous practice, it could also reduce the mileage on gas by as much as thirty-three percent on highways and five percent when traveling on city streets. Revving the engine while parked or stationary in traffic is even more wasteful.

#### **But Not Too Cool**

Constantly running the air conditioning could also be a massive drain on the fuel tank, therefore ensure that it is not being left on unconsciously, and definitely avoid leaving it on while the windows are down, even if the windows are cracked just a little. Fuel efficiency could be enhanced during stop-and-go traffic by switching the air conditioning off and instead rolling the windows down, however, this is not always the



best option. While driving around fifty-five miles per hour, specifically for a prolonged period of time on the highways, the opposite is true, keeping the windows open allows for the vehicle to have reduced aerodynamics as the air continues to flow in, which then increases the amount of resistance and reduces the efficiency of the fuel. During extended road trips, the use of air conditioning could very much improve the mileage by as much as twenty percent.

### **Avoid Just Sitting There**

Besides the senseless pumping out of greenhouse gases without actually taking you anywhere, the idling of vehicles also adds to the airborne particulate matter, ground-level ozone, and other close to the surface air pollution. The emissions from the vehicles could exacerbate asthma and at times hamper breathing in individuals that are otherwise considered healthy, in particular the elderly and children. If during the winter, is when you are idling the vehicle in order to warm it up, it only needs to be idling for roughly one minute, as anything beyond that minute is simply gas wasting.

### **Stay In Tune**

Fixing a vehicle that requires a tune-up or has failed a test on emissions could enhance the fuel efficiency by as much as four percent. Further severe issues, such as a faulty oxygen sensor, could decrease the mileage by as much as forty percent. Additionally, always remember to get frequent oil changes depending on the manufacturer's recommendations.

### **Stay Inflated**

Maintaining a vehicle's tires and keeping them inflated properly could improve fuel efficiency by roughly three and a half percent. Doing this could also make it safer and extend the lifespan of the tires, as underinflated tires have a tendency of losing their threads faster in addition to wasting gasoline. Frequent checkups for the alignment of the tires and the balancing are pretty good ideas as well.

### **Take A Load Off**

Although this mainly impacts smaller vehicles, carrying additional weight means burning additional gasoline, regardless of how large the vehicle is. A vehicle on average might be reducing the fuel efficiency by as much as two percent for each one hundred additional pounds it carries.

### **Develop Motor Skills**

Utilizing the recommended grade of motor oil from the manufacturer could enhance gas mileage by one or two percent. Also attempt to use the lowest grade of gasoline, which is approved for the vehicle that you own, as high-octane grades are more expensive per gallon. Search the owner's manual to be safe, however, once the engine does not begin to knock, it should be good. The switch from premium to regular gasoline would result in saving hundreds of dollars each year.

### **Cover It Up**

If it is able to find an opening, gasoline would evaporate from the fuel tank of the vehicle, which is definitely not good for the lungs and the wallet. Ensure that the gas tank has its appropriate cap and that it is secured tightly after each fill-up, also if the threading for the cap is stripped or it has a loose fit, it is recommended that a new one is purchased and the old one replaced.

### **Call A Friend**

Try carpooling, or what is even better, do not use a vehicle at all, ride a bicycle, take a walk or try public transit. It saves more money, enhances the health of the individual and assists the world by not adding to the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

[Source: The Outdoor Wear Team | March 23, 2021 ++]

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## Shopping Inducements

### Ways Companies Trick You into Spending More Money



Most of us know on some level that retailers are doing everything they can to get us to spend big. After all, their bottom lines depend on it. But many of the tactics companies use involve a surprising level of consumer psychology. [Whether you're shopping online](#) or in bricks-and-mortar stores, here are ways — some surprisingly sneaky — that you're being primed to spend more.

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**Free Samples --** Ever gone to Costco on a weekend just for the samples? Our favorite warehouse club may seem generous with the freebies, but there's an ulterior motive: You're more likely to buy something when you get a free sample, largely because of [reciprocity](#) — the idea that you buy a product as a "thank you," whether out of gratitude or even guilt for being given the sample in the first place.

**No Dollar Signs --** It might seem sleek and chic for that high-end restaurant to omit dollar signs on its menu, or for that little boutique not to include them on price tags. But there's something more at play: Researchers theorize that we're likely to spend more when we don't see the dollar signs, likely because it helps reduce the psychological "pain of paying."

**One-Click Ordering --** Being able to order everything from clothing to groceries with just one click is all about making shopping convenient, right? Sure, but it comes with a huge upside for retailers such as Amazon. One-click ordering makes us much less likely to abandon those [virtual carts](#), meaning we spend more than we otherwise might if we had to — ugh — click a few more times or enter payment information.

**Charm Pricing--** This one's for anyone who ever wondered why that bottle of shampoo isn't \$5 instead of \$4.99. In a strategy called ["charm pricing."](#) researchers have found that we're more likely to think we're getting a deal at \$4.99 because we associate the price more closely with \$4 instead of \$5. That, of course, makes us more likely to buy. In the flip side, called "prestige pricing," high-end retailers are better off using rounded prices shoppers are more likely to associate with quality and luxury.

**Subscription Services --** There's a reason other than convenience that subscription boxes and similar services suddenly seem so common. Inertia — namely, the hassle of canceling a subscription, even one that we don't often use — keeps companies' pockets [nicely lined](#). It's true even though we're also unlikely to consume enough of something to justify the fixed price, and researchers find we would be better off giving in to the occasional splurge than signing up for a flat recurring rate — even if it "seems" like a great value.

**Supersized Carts --** It turns out shoppers don't like pushing around empty carts — and marketing experts say a cart that's double the size can lead shoppers, on average, to buy [40% more](#) than they may actually

need. So while no one likes to run out of room, next time you head to the store, consider opting for a basket or a smaller cart to avoid supermarket overspending.

**Liberal Return Policies** -- Common sense tells us that customers return more purchases when retailers have liberal return policies. True — but retailers have also found that shoppers are more likely to buy in the first place when such policies are in effect. Interestingly, longer return windows also correlate with [fewer returns](#), possibly because shoppers become more attached to their buys and feel less urgency to decide whether to take them back.

**Creative Merchandising** -- Those end caps at grocery stores may indeed display great deals, but that's unlikely to be true for every product. Grocery stores often pair a loss leader — a product sold at a deep discount — with a premium product with a price to match, hoping you'll also get the latter while assuming it's also a deal. It's a good strategy, because experts say highly visible end-aisle displays can [boost sales](#) by 30%.

**Clustering Products at Eye Level** -- You find name-brand items staring you right in the face in grocery aisles, with cheaper store brands closer to the floor. Those companies [pay big](#) for premium product placement, betting you're too lazy to look up or down to find a better deal. And if you've noticed that your kids always throw a fit in the cereal aisle, there's a reason for that: Flashy boxes festooned with cartoon characters are likely to be placed at a lower height where they can see (and beg) for them.

**Limited-Time Deals** -- "Don't wait!" "Order now!" "Sale ends tomorrow!" Whether you're shopping in store or online, chances are you see this kind of urgency everywhere. Some online retailers, including Amazon, even use [countdown timers](#) that tell shoppers exactly how long they have to make a purchase at a certain price. This tactic is among the more transparent ways retailers get you to spend, in the hopes you'll be more likely to buy if you think a sweet deal may pass you by.

**Carefully Chosen Colors** -- Red at Target, blue at Walmart: Far from random design choices, colors can affect how we feel about a company and even prime us to [buy more](#) than we otherwise would. Target shoppers who feel they spend way too much there can partially blame all the red, which experts say can make us more likely to buy quickly, without too much thought. Walmart's blue is chosen carefully to appeal to the masses.

**'Social Proof' and Peer Pressure** -- There's a reason that brand you've never heard of is trumpeting all its five-star reviews in a stream of Facebook ads. You'll probably be a lot more curious about a product — and more likely to buy, of course — if "everyone" is raving about it. This simple concept, called ["social proof"](#) in marketing circles, also applies when companies bring in expert testimonials or include sales numbers in their advertising.

**Sneaky Upselling** -- "Would you like to add a bakery item for 99 cents?" If you've eaten a meal at Panera Bread, you've no doubt heard this casual attempt at upselling. And if you've shopped on Amazon, you've no doubt been shown items related to the product you're checking out, or [bundles](#) of related items (such as a camera, a case, and a memory card) sold for less than what they would cost if bought separately. A deal? Only if you were planning to buy all three to begin with.

**Strategic Store Layouts** -- Even the most ardent Ikea devotees will admit how hard it is to navigate the maze-like store. Want to sound smart? Call it the ["Gruen effect"](#) — the simple idea that exposing you to more products will encourage you to buy more products. You can also see it in action at the supermarket,

where you'll have to traverse as much of the store as possible just to get that gallon of milk tucked away in the back corner.

**Decoy Pricing** -- Many people would balk at shelling out \$50 for a T-shirt. But what if you were also shown a \$30 T-shirt and a \$100 T-shirt? Suddenly the \$50 T-shirt doesn't seem so expensive anymore — and if you want to balance price and quality, it seems downright reasonable. This [tactic](#) is rampant online, where shoppers are often shown a few choices at checkout. Chances are the retailer wants you to choose a certain one, and will price one of the other options — the "decoy" — in a wild, overblown way that will steer you back to the preferred option.

**Deals Requiring Multiples** -- Grocery stores love to dangle deals such as "10 for \$10" or "3 for \$6." The reason is obvious: Shoppers usually buy more, sometimes much more, than they need to maximize this "deal." This often holds true even when the store doesn't require shoppers to buy 10 cartons of yogurt, for instance, to get them for \$1 each — simply because of the [power of suggestion](#).

**Vanity Sizing** -- Is a size 8 really an 8? Or is it closer to a 10, or even a 12? Many clothing brands have been putting smaller-size labels on larger-cut clothes for a while now, and while it can make figuring out what size you really are a headache in any given store, the practice shows little sign of slowing. Simply put, fitting into a smaller size makes shoppers [feel good](#), and shoppers who feel good are more likely to buy.

**Loyalty Programs** -- Far from a good-faith effort to reward frequent customers, loyalty programs are all about [reinforcement](#). Shoppers who buy more — exactly what the retailer wants, of course — are rewarded with some sort of discount or deal, and that reinforces the behavior (buying more) that got them the reward. So the cycle repeats itself, lining the retailer's pockets even more as shoppers pursue their next reward.

**Buy One, Get One Free** -- BOGO! Everyone loves a good BOGO sale because they get more, more, more. But so does the store. That's because retailers can clear inventory more quickly and make more money doing it. If you buy a \$16 T-shirt and get a second shirt free, you've still spent \$16 — \$8 more than you would have spent on the one shirt you actually needed if it had simply been half off. Stores can cash in even more by making the free or discounted item one with a much [lower profit margin](#) than the full-price item.

[Source: Cheapism | March 13, 2021 ++]

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## Veteran Discounts

### Listing of Whats Available Year Round



The list of Veteran and military discounts at [https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/85765/veteran-discounts-available-year-round/?utm\\_source=VRfeature&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=VetResources](https://blogs.va.gov/VAntage/85765/veteran-discounts-available-year-round/?utm_source=VRfeature&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=VetResources) is good year round and is updated as VA learns of more. Saving for veterans, military members, their families, caregivers and survivors are listed by store/services name in alphabetical order in the following categories:

- Automotive
- Car Rentals
- Clothing/Shoes
- Computer/Electronics/Gaming
- Education
- Entertainment
- Eyewear
- Financial & Insurance
- Fitness
- Flowers/Gifts
- Health & Beauty
- Home and Garden
- Miscellaneous
- Restaurants
- Retail
- Service
- Shipping & Storage
- Sporting Goods and Equipment
- Travel and Lodging
- Wireless and Internet

Veterans can benefit from discounted goods and services with the **Veteran ID Card (VIC)**, even if they are not yet enrolled in VA. Veterans only need to carry the wallet-sized VIC as proof of Veteran status, rather than other documentation, such as their DD-214 form. VA can also connect VIC-holding Veterans to other benefits and services for which they may be eligible. You can apply for a VIC card at <https://www.va.gov/records/get-veteran-id-cards/vic>. [Source: Vantage Point | March 19 ++]

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## **Basic Allowance for Housing**

### **Update 08: Survey Reveals \$200+ Monthly Out of Pocket Cost to Families**

Many active-duty military families who live outside installations are paying more than \$200 a month out of pocket for housing costs above what they're getting in their Basic Allowance for Housing, according to a newly released survey. "For military families, finding housing that fulfills both location and family needs can be a costly balancing act," stated researchers in the 2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, conducted by Blue Star Families in collaboration with Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families. And with greater out-of-pocket housing costs comes increased financial stress, the researchers found in their analysis.

By law, Basic Allowance for Housing is designed to cover, on average, 95 percent of service members' housing rental and utility costs in the private sector, and varies by location, rank and whether there are dependents. Those living in the local community have varying costs that may be more or less than their BAH. So theoretically, military families are left to pick up 5 percent of their housing costs, which according to the Defense Department, should range between \$70 to \$158 a month in 2021. The majority of the families in the survey reported they're paying more than \$200 a month extra in housing costs.

The survey is a snapshot of a variety of topics related to military life, and not a random sample. About 10,926 people chose to participate in the online survey, which was fielded in September and October of 2020. Of those, 6,767 people completed it. About 45 percent of participants, or more than 3,000 people, were spouses or domestic partners of active-duty members, 17 percent were active-duty members (including Guard and Reserve); 20 percent were veterans/retirees; and 10 percent were spouses of veterans. The demographics of those who chose to take the online survey aren't representative of the military community as a whole; for example, only 6 percent of active-duty family/service member participants were junior enlisted, compared with the 43 percent in the current military population. There was also a larger proportion of female service members — 50 percent — than in the current active-duty population, where about 17 percent are female.

Researchers also noted that impacts from the pandemic may have put additional constraints on the housing market, which may have affected service members' costs. Generally, about two-thirds of active-duty service members and military families live in the local community. About one-third live in privatized housing projects or government-owned housing. A report earlier this year by the Government Accountability Office found flaws with the way rates are set for Basic Allowance for Housing, and stated defense officials need to do a better job collecting and monitoring the data used to set the rates — to make sure the rates accurately reflect the cost of suitable housing for service members.

According to this Blue Star Families survey, 83 percent of active-duty family participants reported varying levels of out-of-pocket costs. And of those, more than three-quarters reported their costs exceeded the DoD expected range, going above \$200 a month out of pocket. These out-of-pocket costs also correlated with increased stress. For example, 62 percent of active-duty families paying \$200 to \$299 out of pocket above their BAH reported "some" or "a great deal of" financial stress, according to the researchers. And 74 percent of those paying \$700 to \$799 out of pocket reported "some" or "a great deal" of the stress. Researchers also parsed out the effects based on different factors that are important to families in choosing where to live. For example, among families who listed "desirable school for children" as one of their important factors, 76 percent pay more than \$200 a month in costs above their BAH.

Pets are also important to military families; about 41 percent in this survey said the ability to have a pet is an important factor in their housing decision. Pet-friendly housing is more limited, and can also be significantly more expensive. Researchers recommend that Congress restore the Basic Allowance for Housing to 100 percent of the average housing rental costs in the private sector. They also recommend commissioning a report on the costs associated with, and barriers to, pet ownership for military families, including examining implications for permanent change of station (PCS) moves and leasing housing on base or off base. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | March 30, 2021 ++]

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## Pet Adoption Scams

### Update 03: Watch out for phony fees



During COVID-19, so many people adopted dogs that they emptied local shelters. If you are looking to rescue a furry friend, watch out for scams. Puppy scams are targeting people who want to adopt a dog from a shelter or rescue, by impersonating real animal shelters or posing as individuals wanting to rehome an animal.

#### How the Scam Works

- You are looking to adopt a dog, and you find an animal shelter or individual online wanting to rehome a puppy. You message them for more information and receive a convincing, heart-tugging backstory. In one recent BBB Scam Tracker report, a scammer claimed to be finding a new home for her poodle after a car accident left her unable to care for the dog. In other cases, scammers impersonate real animal shelters.
- In this version of the puppy scam, the scammer may not charge for the dog. Instead, they ask for a refundable deposit to “hold” the pup or request payment to ship the pet to your home. Most scammers ask you to pay through a digital wallet (Zelle was mentioned in several reports) or use a pre-paid debit card or gift card. Although this scam mostly involves dogs, it can also include cats and other pets.
- After you pay, the problems start. One victim reported driving to the “shelter” to pick up their new dog, only to find no such address existed. “I called, and they texted me that they are coming down with the puppy. I asked them where and no answer. Finally, after 10 calls the phone was NOT accepting any calls! By then it was quite clear I am not getting the puppy AND I'm out \$300.”
- In other versions of the scam, the con artists offer to ship the dog. But first you need to pay up for emergency vet visits, additional shipping fees, or even a COVID-19 test. The scammers ask for more money to resolve the problem, often promising to refund it after the pet is delivered. They may even claim that the pet will be euthanized if you don't pay up. Once they've gotten your money, scammers disappear. The dog never existed.

#### How to Avoid Pet Adoption Scams

- Never buy or adopt a pet without seeing it in person. This is the best way to ensure you aren't caught in a con.
- Do an internet search of the pet's image. If you do find a puppy online, upload the pet's photo to a reverse image search. If you find multiple pet adoption sites using the same picture, it's probably a scam.

- Use money transfer with friends: Protect yourself from scams by only using money transfer apps for their intended purpose -- sending money to people you personally know.

### **For More Information**

For more information on puppy scams, see BBB's [full report on puppy scams](#). Learn more about how scammers [impersonated a dog rescue in San Francisco](#). If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Find more information about scams and how to avoid them at [BBB.org/AvoidScams](#). [Source: BBB Scam Alerts | March 19, 2021 ++]

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## **Contractor Scams**

### **Update 01: Home Improvement**

Spring is Here! Time for Contractor Scams. Use caution when hiring a home improvement contractor. Scams abound following major storms, flooding, or other weather events. Be wary of high-pressure sales tactics, upfront fees, and fly-by-night businesses. Con artists will take your money and deliver slipshod work... or no work at all.

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

- Home improvement scams can start with a knock on the door, a flyer, or an ad. The contractor may offer a low price or a short timeframe. One common hook is when the scammer claims to be working in your neighborhood on another project and has leftover supplies.
- Once started, a rogue contractor may "find" new issues that significantly raise the price. If you object, they threaten to walk away and leave a half-finished project. Or they may accept your upfront deposit and then never return to do the job. Following a natural disaster, scammers persuade homeowners to sign over their insurance payment.

#### **Tips to avoid contractor cons:**

- Watch out for "red flags." Say no to cash-only deals, high-pressure sales tactics, high upfront payments, handshake deals without a contract, and on-site inspections. Not all "storm chasers" are con artists, but enough are that you should be cautious any time a home contractor contacts you first... especially after a natural disaster.
- Ask for references and check them out. Bad contractors will be reluctant to share this information and scammers won't wait for you to do your homework. Get references from past customers, both older references to check on the quality of the work and newer references to make sure current employees are up to the task. Check them out at [BBB.org](#) to see what other customers have experienced. And always get a written contract with the price, materials, and timeline. The more detail, the better.
- Know the law. Work with local businesses that have proper identification, licensing and insurance. Confirm that your vendor will get related permits and make sure you know who is responsible for what according to your local laws and that your vendor is ready to comply.

### **For More Information**



Find trusted, vetted home improvement contractors [near you](#) and read tips on hiring a home improvement contractor. For more information, check out this BBB tip on [storm chasers](#). And before you hire anybody, read these tips on [hiring](#) a contractor. If you have been the victim of a phony website scam, help others avoid falling prey to similar scams by reporting your experience at [BBB.org/ScamTracker](http://BBB.org/ScamTracker).

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## State Tax Tips

### Hawaii thru Michigan

Paying taxes may be a fact of life, but depending where you live, you may be able to keep a little extra money in your pocket thanks to some state-specific tax breaks. From socking away money in a college savings fund to [donating](#) to a charitable cause, there are plenty of ways to save money with available tax credits and deductions — if you qualify. While heading into tax season, shoebox of receipts in hand, keep in mind these money-saving tax tips from each state. Note: Be sure to consult a tax adviser to confirm benefits that might be available based on your state or individual status.

**Hawaii** -- While most of us just daydream about a trip to Hawaii, those lucky enough to live there can save money at tax time if they help care for the island's lush landscape. Taxpayers may deduct up to \$3,000 for each tree on their property deemed "exceptional" by a certified arborist who establishes the tree worthy of preservation based on rarity, age, location, size or aesthetics. The deduction goes toward maintaining the tree, but can be taken only once every three consecutive tax years.

**Idaho** -- To help offset sales tax and help families buy groceries, Idaho introduced a grocery credit in 1965. The grocery credit goes up to [\\$120 per person](#), based on income and age, and can go toward stocking up on Idaho spuds or anything else on the grocery list. Taxpayers who don't wish to get the credit can donate it to the Cooperative Welfare Fund, a state trust fund for public assistance.

**Illinois** -- Another retiree-friendly state, Illinois offers full deductions for pension income, Social Security, and retirement savings account income. Taxpayers with children in kindergarten to 12th grade at a public or private [school](#) may also qualify for a tax credit for a portion of expenses. Low- and some middle-income families and individuals may also qualify for the state's Earned Income [Tax Credit](#), which can equal 18% of their federal EIC.

**Indiana** -- Small-business owners may be able to claim numerous business-related expenses as deductions or write-offs, but must file [additional schedules](#). One of the most common is the Schedule C Business Deductions, which includes things such as promotional materials, office supplies, and [home office deductions](#). They can also claim adjustments to gross or total income on federal taxes, including half of the self-employment taxes paid, retirement accounts, and health plans.

**Iowa** -- Iowa taxpayers can deduct the first \$3,439 they [contribute](#) to college savings, per person rather than per child, from taxable income — so a married couple with two children could deduct up to \$13,756 in College Savings Iowa contributions on their state taxes by having four accounts.

**Kansas** -- Social Security income is exempt for retirees with an Adjusted Gross Income below \$75,000, and public pension income. (Other forms of retirement income, such as a 401(k) or IRA, are not.) To help lower-income seniors, the state offers tax relief programs such as the [homestead refund](#) for individuals

born before Jan. 1, 1965, with a total household income of \$36,300 or less. The [Safe Seniors](#) program also refunds 75% of paid property taxes for those over 65 with a household income of \$20,300 or less.

**Kentucky** -- New as of 2020 for filers who have a "micro-business" or take part in the "gig" economy by (for example) driving for Lyft or delivering for Instacart: You no longer need to file "tangible personal property" tax returns for stuff with a value of \$1,000 or less.

**Louisiana** -- Got kids? Taxpayers with children in kindergarten through 12th grade in qualifying public and nonpublic schools — and even those that are homeschooled — could save a bundle on tuition, textbooks, uniforms, and other school expenses. Residents may be able to deduct half of the associated costs up to \$5,000 for each [dependent](#). Tax credits are also available for child care [expenses](#), as well as child care providers and businesses donating to those organizations. And a break for [virtual education coaching](#) was added for 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

**Maine** -- Renters and property owners may be eligible for tax relief by meeting certain requirements for the Property Tax [Fairness Credit](#) — though many don't realize they qualify. Replacing the more limited Circuit Breaker credit, it is available to residents with adjusted gross income up to \$42,000 if single or \$67,000 if married filing jointly, head of household or qualifying widow(er). If real estate taxes were more than 5% of total income or total rent was more than 33.3%, you may be entitled to up to \$750 or \$1,200 if 65 years or older.

**Maryland** -- Residents can use part of their state refund to donate to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund, the Developmental Disabilities Services and Support Fund, or the Maryland Cancer Fund (or all three), and deduct the amount from their federal tax the following year.

**Massachusetts** -- Taxpayers may be eligible for numerous tax [exemptions and deductions](#). Some of the more common include \$700 for each taxpayer age 65 or older, and \$1,000 for each dependent; less common ones include \$2,200 for each legally blind taxpayer or spouse.

**Michigan** -- To help offset heating costs for low-income residents, there's a home [heating credit](#). Eligible residents may get a credit anywhere from \$492 to upward of \$1,355 depending [their income level and exemptions](#). It's important to submit the required form before Sept. 30.

[Source: Cheapism | Danny Jensen | March 09, 2021 ++]

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## **Target** **Secrets for Savings**

**Target Circle** -- Target recently replaced its Cartwheel savings program with [Target Circle](#). Like Cartwheel, it allows access to hundreds of discounts, both from Target itself and individual manufacturers — just check the Target app to see what's on sale and have the clerk scan your barcode at checkout to apply any savings. You'll also earn 1% back on all purchases, redeemable later, unless you're shopping with a RedCard.

**Red Card** -- Like many retailers, Target has its own credit card. But you can also apply for a [RedCard](#) that links to your existing debit card, helpful for shoppers who might be tempted to overspend with a

traditional credit card. Red Card use gives you a 5% savings every time you shop which replaces the 1% Target Circle cash back and receive benefits like free two-day shipping and exclusive RedCard savings.

**Price Match** -- If you buy something at Target and then see it on sale somewhere for less in the next two weeks, Target will reimburse you for the difference upon request through its [price-matching program](#). This is true whether you see the cheaper item in a competitor's local print ad, on the website of competitors including Amazon or Walmart, or on Target.com.

**Rain Check** -- If a sale item you want is out of stock, you can request a [rain check](#), which is good for 30 to 45 days, depending on your state. There are some exclusions, but rain checks are good at any Target store, and Target will offer substitutes whenever possible if the original item never comes back.

**Coupons** -- Target will accept online coupons, including those from a manufacturer and other valid sites, that its customers can print at home as long as they have a barcode that can be scanned and they're not for free items that don't require a purchase. Also coupon/discount stacking is allowed. Shoppers [may use](#) a manufacturer's coupon, Target coupon, and Target Circle offer on the same item.

**Red/Yellow Stickers** -- These are reserved for clearance items. When you see one, look in the lower right hand corner to see what the price is, the lower left hand corner to see what it was, and check the upper right hand corner if you don't want to do math — that's where the tag states the percentage you'll save.

**Shopping Days** -- [Different days](#) bring different clearance discounts. Shop for electronics and accessories on Monday, women's clothing, and pet food on Tuesday; men's clothing, health and beauty items on Wednesday; housewares and sporting goods on Thursday; and auto goods, cosmetics, jewelry, and hardware on Friday.

**Birthday/Anniversary Discounts** -- Target Circle members will get 5% off a shopping trip when it's their birthday, and RedCard holders will be emailed a coupon for 10% off a shopping trip on the anniversary of opening their account (fine print: you must be signed up for Target marketing emails, and the RedCard account must be in good standing).

[Source: Cheapism | March 13, 2021 ++]

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## Car Tires

### Tire Installation Cost Comparison and More

Shopping around for the best deal on dependable, quality tires isn't as simple as comparing advertised prices. Most do not include installation as part of the deal, and it can easily add from \$50 to more than \$100 to the "out the door" cost of new tires. Cheapism compared prices and service packages at seven top nationwide chains that sell and install tires: Walmart, Pep Boys, Discount Tire (America's Tire), NTB (Tire Kingdom), BJ's Wholesale Club, Costco, and Sam's Club. Their roundup also takes into account how each shop rates for additional services, selection, scheduling convenience, and opportunities for extra savings.

If you want the cheapest tire installation, Walmart appears to be the way to go, with the absolute lowest prices for the service — if you purchase your tires directly from the retailer. But they found that warehouse clubs provide the best bang for the buck. Their winner for best value tire installation service, Sam's Club, edges out both sibling Walmart and longtime rival Costco by offering not only an expansive set of services

for a low price but also a generous 24/7 roadside assistance program — nice peace of mind for drivers who don't already belong to AAA or another automobile club.

<b>Tire Installation Cost Comparison</b>		
<b>Chain</b>	<b>Installation Price</b>	<b>Installation Package &amp; Optional Services</b>
<b>BJ's</b>	\$80 for 4 wheels (\$20/tire) TPMS kit fees may vary. Tire disposal included	- New valve stems - Lifetime rotation and balancing - Flat repairs - Inflation checks - 3 yr. road hazard warranty
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<b>Costco</b>	\$80 for 4 wheels (\$20/tire) TPMS kits \$3 per wheel. Tire disposal included	- New valve stems - Lifetime rotation and balancing - Flat repairs - Inspection & Inflation checks
-----		
<b>Discount Tire</b>	\$84 for 4 wheels (\$21/tire) TPMS kits included Tire disposal \$2.75 per wheel.	- New valve stems - Lifetime rotation and balancing - Flat repairs - Inflation checks - 5 yr. road hazard warranty
-----		
<b>NTB</b>	\$68 for 4 wheels (\$17/tire) TPMS kits \$8 per wheel Tire disposal \$3 per wheel.	- Lifetime rotation and balancing <u>Optional:</u> - Wheel alignment (\$90) - Road hazard warranty (varies by tire)
-----		
<b>Pep Boys</b>	\$118.40 for 4 wheels (\$29.60/tire)	- New valve stems - Balancing - Vehicle inspection - Treadwear mileage warranty - Free rotation w/ any service - 1 yr. roadside assistance <u>Optional:</u> - Wheel alignment (\$100 for 3 mo.) - Road hazard warranty (varies by tire)
-----		
<b>Sam's Club</b>	\$80 for 4 wheels (\$20/tire) TPMS kit: \$5/wheel Tire disposal included.	- New valve stems - Lifetime rotation and balancing - Flat repairs - 4 yr. road hazard warranty - 3 yr. roadside assistance

- TPMS reset

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<b>Walmart</b>	\$60 or \$100 for 4 wheels (\$15/tire; \$25 for non-Walmart tires) TPMS kits included. Tire disposal: \$1.50/wheel	- New valve stems - Lifetime rotation and balancing - 50-mile lug retorque <u>Optional:</u> - Road hazard warranty (\$10/wheel)
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\*Prices may vary by location and are subject to change.

The quotes came from installation services in western Ohio, but online searches showed that base prices at other locations as far afield as California and New Jersey were usually comparable, give or take a dollar or two. Still, there's no guarantee they'll be the same at your local store. Disposal fees, in particular, may vary, and you can expect state-specific environmental taxes. As suggested, more important than the base price for discount tire installation is what's included in the package and what carries an extra fee. They found wide variation among installers, and the a la carte items at some chains certainly add up. While some installers cover disposal of old tires, others charge extra. Basic parts needed to get tires mounted, like rubber valve stems and tire pressure monitoring system service kits, can also carry additional fees, charged per tire.

Although these extra costs can seem small, taken together for four wheels, they can make a supposedly cheap tire installation much pricier than anticipated. NTB's fairly low base rate of \$17 per tire jumps to \$28 once disposal and TPMS kit fees are factored in, pushing the total cost for installing four tires to \$112 (excluding taxes and state environmental fees, if required) — a far cry from that original quote of \$68. At Pep Boys, the installation price of nearly \$30 seems pretty hefty at first glance, but there are no hidden fees, so customers pay only about \$7 more than NTB in total. They also get a year of 24/7 roadside assistance, which NTB doesn't provide.

### Extra Services

Packages that include freebies like lifetime rotation and balancing, road hazard coverage, and roadside assistance can save on future maintenance bills and prove absolutely priceless in a pinch. Take Walmart, for instance, where lifetime balance and rotation services purchased a la carte would cost \$14 per tire, or \$56 — nearly the price of a full install package. And, while the complimentary roadside assistance that comes with installation at Pep Boys may not offer all of the perks of a service like AAA, it's an attractive inclusion nonetheless, considering that AAA memberships start at \$56 per year for 4 calls only. At Sam's Club, where shoppers get not only a four-year road hazard warranty but also three years of roadside assistance free of charge, the extras more than offset the price of the initial installation relative to competitors.

If you want the same shop to handle all your tire maintenance, it's good to find out in advance whether an installer also offers wheel alignment, which can extend the life of your tires while keeping you steering straight. Many of the chains on the above list don't provide this service. Others, like NTB and Walmart, are full-service shops that not only offer wheel alignment but also can help with a host of other vehicle maintenance and repair needs — from oil and fluid changes to battery installation and brake and engine checks.

## **Convenience**

The range of tires available, the size of the inventory, and the convenience of scheduling an appointment also factored into their ranking. For example, it might be worth spending a tiny bit more at a vendor like Discount Tire, which is known for stocking many cheap tires and even has its own Road Hugger house brand. Costco customers get a lower price on installation but won't find any discount-brand tires — the club deals only in big names and features just three major brands.

When they searched online for a set of Michelin Defender T+H 205/55R16 tires (one of the most popular sizes) for a hypothetical 2013 Honda Civic EX sedan, only the dedicated tire shops — Discount Tire, NTB, and Pep Boys — showed that type and size in stock and ready to install right away. Big-box king Walmart and the warehouse clubs all indicated that these tires would have to be ordered, and there was a typical wait of from one to three days for them to come in. Costco required the longest wait, with an estimate of five to 10 days for the tires to be special-ordered, then shipped and available for pickup.

While most of these stores are happy to try to accommodate walk-ins for in-stock tires installed today, only a few allow customers to schedule appointments for same-day service. General operation hours can also make a difference if you need to plan your workday or other responsibilities around having your car serviced. The local Walmart Auto Care Center was open only between 12 p.m. and 6 p.m. On the other hand, Pep Boys, NTB, and Discount Tire opened their doors at 8 a.m. and remained open for service until 6 p.m., although NTB and Discount Tire were closed on Sundays. They found that BJ's Wholesale Club and Costco were friendliest to the after-work crowd, with tire service centers operating until 8 p.m. and 8:30 p.m., respectively, on weekdays. It's worth noting, however, that BJ's locations are relatively scarce: Our closest BJ's was more than 160 miles away, hardly "convenient," no matter the hours of operation.

These days, many car owners are also interested in limiting contact when having their cars serviced, and some shops now offer basic maintenance — and more — off-site. NTB and partner store Tire Kingdom, for example, have mobile tire installation services in limited markets. Car owners in West Palm Beach, Florida, and Dallas can pay an extra \$25 fee to have technicians come out to their homes to do the job; they'll even schedule Saturday appointments. Pep Boys caters to particularly cautious customers by offering "Touchless Drop-Offs" that include disinfection of vehicle surfaces and sanitization of car keys.

## **Tire Prices**

It may be surprising, but one thing that shouldn't necessarily factor too much into your choice of installer is tire prices. Barring special sales or coupons offered at each retailer, it was found that if you've got a specific brand and type of tires in mind for your vehicle, you may find that differences in installers' "available today" inventories are more glaring than disparities in what it costs to buy tires. They found that you'd pay nearly the same amount for that Michelin Defender T + H tire which was used as a basis for comparison no matter where you shopped. The typical asking price was \$129.99, even at the wholesale clubs and online vendors like Tire Rack and Amazon. The two outliers were Discount Tire, which had rounded up its price by a penny, and NTB, which charged just \$2 more per tire.

Consumers who prefer to buy tires online from sites like Tire Rack or Amazon, either for quick-click convenience or a wider selection, should keep in mind that not every shop will install tires purchased elsewhere. None of the warehouse clubs will accommodate tires that aren't bought directly from their stocks, and you'll pay an additional \$10 per tire to take advantage of Walmart's installation services if you buy tires from an outside vendor, or even a seller on Walmart's marketplace.

Pep Boys will install tires purchased at both Amazon and Tire Rack, but expect potential discrepancies in what is included in these third-party install packages as compared with the services that come standard with installation of tires purchased on-site. For example, when we searched for our tires on Amazon, the price we were quoted for a Pep Boys installation was just \$20 — significantly lower than Pep Boys' "official price" — but a glance at the fine print suggests that only tire installation and balancing are included, and there may be surcharges for amenities and guarantees that are complimentary when buying directly from the shop. Other independent shops and larger chains, like Sears Auto Centers, also work with Amazon on tire installations. The once-popular Sears tire centers are rapidly dwindling in number, however. We left the brand out of this comparison after reading numerous reviews from consumers aggrieved that promises of lifetime service were rendered worthless when a local Sears store closed.

### **Know Before You Go**

How often should tires be replaced? The official consensus is that tires have a lifespan of about six years (although some manufacturers say tires can last as long as 10 years). The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends tires should be replaced when the tread depth reaches 2/32 inch, regardless of age. This is the legal limit in most states. Go to [NHTSA.gov](http://NHTSA.gov) for safety information, tutorials on measuring tire wear and determining the age of your tires, and tips on proper maintenance.

Is it okay to replace two tires at a time? That depends on whether your car is AWD, 4-wheel drive, front-wheel drive, or rear-wheel drive. It is always recommended that you replace all four tires on an AWD or 4-wheel-drive vehicle. Driving on tires with differing degrees of wear can cause serious problems with AWD systems, especially, and can damage the drivetrain. Many experts suggest you replace the tires on all four wheels of a front- or rear-wheel-drive car, as well. At the very least, you should replace at least two at a time, and the new set should always be mounted on the rear axle, where steady traction and braking is most important.

How long does it take for tire installation? Experts say that it should take about an hour to change all four wheels, but expect some variance. For example, Pep Boys claims it can do a full install in about 45 minutes to an hour. With Costco, we read several reviews from customers who claimed to have had installations completed within the time it took to take a shopping trip through the store, while others said there can easily be a wait of two hours or more at the club.

What does "TPMS service" mean? All cars manufactured after 2008 are equipped with a tire pressure monitoring system. Sensors in the tires monitor the air pressure and transmit a signal to alert drivers when the pressure is too low and may present a safety hazard. It's recommended (and often required) that these sensors be replaced when new tires are installed. The parts needed for the replacement are referred to as TPMS service kits, TPMS repair kits, or TPMS rebuild kits. Some TPMS systems may also need to be reset when the tires are changed (or after rotations). [Source: Land Line | Keith Goble| March 9, 2021 ++]

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## **Tax Burden for Missouri Vets**

### **As of MAR 2021**

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 other ways including sales taxes, excise taxes, license 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 the state of Missouri:

### **Sales Taxes**

The state sales tax rate is **4.225%**, and the average MO sales tax after local surtaxes is 7.81% which is lower than 73.1% of states.

- Counties and cities can charge an additional local sales tax of up to 5.125%, for a maximum possible combined sales tax of 9.355%
- Missouri has 1090 special sales tax jurisdictions with local sales taxes in addition to the state sales tax
- Counties and cities in Missouri are allowed to charge an additional local sales tax on top of the Missouri state sales tax. You can find local sales tax rates on the list of Missouri local sales taxes by county, city, and zip code at <http://www.tax-rates.org/missouri/sales-tax-calculator> All sales of tangible property and some services are subject to Missouri's sales tax, but there are several exemptions including purchases made by nonprofit organizations.
- As an incentive to comply with sales tax collection requirements, merchants are allowed to keep 2% of all taxes collected on the behalf of the government each quarter. If the merchant does not collect the sales tax from the end consumer, they are responsible for paying it themselves.
- Missouri does not exempt any types of purchase from the state sales tax. Groceries, plants and seeds for gardens are subject to special sales tax rate of 1.225% under Missouri law. Prescription drugs, hearing aids and hearing aid supplies are exempt. In most states necessities such as groceries, clothes, and drugs are exempted from the sales tax or charged at a lower sales tax rate.
- Some items may not be eligible for these reduced sales tax rates, such as expensive clothing, unhealthy food or drinks like soda, and certain non-essential pharmaceuticals. Unlike many states, Missouri treats both candy and soda as groceries for sales tax purposes. Other items including gasoline, alcohol, and cigarettes are subject to various Missouri excise taxes in addition to the sales tax.
- Missouri has four sales tax holidays, during which certain items can be purchased sales-tax free. For more details, see the Missouri sales tax holiday calendar.

### **Excise Taxes**

An excise tax is a tax directly levied on certain goods by a state or federal government. The most prominent excise Taxes collected by the state government are the fuel tax on gasoline and the so-called "sin tax" collected on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Missouri's excise tax is not the same thing as their Sales Tax which is collected as a percentage of the final purchase price of all qualifying sales, and is collected directly from the end consumer of the product. The excise taxes, on the other hand, are flat per-unit taxes that must be paid directly to the state government by the merchant before the goods can be sold. Merchants may be required to attach tax stamps to taxable merchandise to show that the excise tax was paid. Even though excise taxes are collected from businesses, virtually all merchants pass on the excise tax to the customer through higher prices for the taxed goods. An average of \$386 in yearly excise taxes per capita is collected, one of the highest in the country.



- **Alcohol:** Beer: \$0.06 per gal | Wine: \$.42 per gal | Liquor \$2.00 per gal. The excise tax on beer is one of the lowest beer taxes in the country and is ranked 48th lowest of the 50 states. The excise tax on wine is lower than 78% of the other 50 states and is ranked 37th highest of the 50 states. The excise tax on Spirits is one of the lowest in the country and is ranked 47th lowest of the 50 states.
- **Cannabis Tax:** none
- **Cellphone:** The average tax collected on cell phone plans in Missouri is **\$14.23 per phone** service plan, one of the highest cellphone taxes in the country. Missouri's average cellphone tax is ranked #7 out of the 50 states. The Missouri cellphone tax is already included in the service plan price you pay to your service provider, and may be listed as "Misc. taxes and Fees" or "Other" on your
- **Cigarettes:** The Missouri excise tax on cigarettes is \$0.17 per 20 cigarettes, one of the lowest cigarettes taxes in the country. Missouri's excise tax on cigarettes is ranked #50 out of the 50 states. The Missouri cigarette tax of \$0.17 is applied to every 20 cigarettes sold (the size of an average pack of cigarettes). If a pack contains more than 20 cigarettes, a higher excise tax will be collected.
- **Fuel:** The Missouri excise tax on gasoline is **17.00¢ per gallon**, one of the lowest gas taxes in the country. Missouri's excise tax on gasoline is ranked #46 out of the 50 states. The Missouri gas tax is included in the pump price at all gas stations in Missouri. The federal tax was last raised in OCT 1993 and is not indexed to inflation, which has increased a total of 77% from 1993 to 2020. Refer to <https://www.salestaxhandbook.com/maine/gasoline-fuel> for all state and federal taxes by type of fuel
- **Vehicle:** Missouri collects a registration fee and a title fee on the sale or transfer of cars and motorcycles, which are essentially renamed excise taxes. Unlike standard excise taxes, however, the end consumer must pay the tax directly to the Missouri Department of Transportation and receive documentation (registration and title papers) proving the fees were paid.

**Personal Income Taxes**

The average family pays \$1,696 in income taxes which is ranked as 17<sup>th</sup> highest of all states. To assist in preparation of your state tax forms for Missouri refer to the 2020 Missouri Income Tax Reference Guide at [https://dor.mo.gov/forms/4711\\_2020.pdf](https://dor.mo.gov/forms/4711_2020.pdf).

**Tax Rate Range:** 1.5% to 5.4% in 0.5% increasing increments

**Income Brackets:** Nine

<b>If the Missouri taxable income is...</b>	<b>The tax is...</b>
\$0 to \$106	\$0
At least \$107 but not over \$1,073	1.5% of the Missouri taxable income
Over \$1,073 but not over \$2,146	\$16 plus 2.0% of excess over \$1,073
Over \$2,146 but not over \$3,219	\$37 plus 2.5% of excess over \$2,146
Over \$3,219 but not over \$4,292	\$64 plus 3.0% of excess over \$3,219
Over \$4,292 but not over \$5,365	\$96 plus 3.5% of excess over \$4,292
Over \$5,365 but not over \$6,438	\$134 plus 4.0% of excess over \$5,365
Over \$6,438 but not over \$7,511	\$177 plus 4.5% of excess over \$6,438
Over \$7,511 but not over \$8,584	\$225 plus 5.0% of excess over \$7,511
Over \$8,584	\$279 plus 5.4% of excess over \$8,584

**Personal Exemptions:** Single – \$2,100; Married – \$4,200; Dependents – \$1,200

**Standard Deduction:** \$12,400 single or \$24,800 married plus additional \$1650 per person who is over 65 and/or blind. Head of Household \$18,650 plus additional \$1650 if over 65 and/or blind. Limits if AGI is greater than \$197,850

**Personal Exemptions:** Single – \$2,100; Married – \$4,200; Dependents – \$1,200

**Standard Deduction:** Single – \$12,400; Married filing jointly – \$24,800, Head of Household \$18,650

**Medical/Dental Deduction:** Taxpayers who itemize deductions on their federal tax return may itemize deductions on the Missouri income taxes. Taxpayers can take the state standard deduction if the benefit is greater compared to itemized deductions. However, if you itemize on the federal return, you must also itemize on the Missouri return.

**Federal Income Tax Deduction:** Residents can deduct a percentage of federal income tax based on adjusted gross income. Percentages range from 5% to 35% and phase out completely at \$125,001 AGI or greater. For individual filers the amount cannot exceed \$5,000. For joint filers the ceiling is \$10,000.

**Retirement Income Taxes:** Missouri resident taxpayers are allowed a state income tax deduction for Social Security benefits received by individuals 62 years of age or older, Social Security disability benefits, and non-private retirement system benefits received by individuals 62 years of age or older, to the extent these benefits are included in federal adjusted gross income. To view the Social Security/Social Security Disability deduction chart and the public pension exemption eligibility chart for tax year 2020 go to <http://dor.mo.gov/personal/whatsnew/index.php#ssd>

**Public Pension Exemption:** Married couples with Missouri adjusted gross income less than \$100,000 and single individuals with Missouri adjusted gross income less than \$85,000, may deduct up to 65 percent of their public retirement benefits, to the extent the amounts are included in their federal adjusted gross income. The deductible percentage of their public retirement benefits will increase each year. Married couples with Missouri adjusted gross income greater than \$100,000 and single individuals with Missouri adjusted gross income greater than \$85,000, may qualify for a partial exemption. Taxpayers who also qualify for the Social Security or Social Security Disability Deduction, must reduce their public pension exemption by the amount of the Social Security or Social Security Disability Deduction.

#### **Reserves and Inactive Duty Military Deduction**

Beginning with tax year 2020, Military personnel may deduct a portion of their income earned from the following sources from their Missouri adjusted gross income:

- National Guard Inactive Duty Training (IDT)
- National Guard Annual Training (AT)
- Reserve components of the Armed Forces.

The following reflects the percentage of Military reserve or inactive duty income that may be deducted in each applicable tax year: 2020 - 20%, 2021 - 40%, 2022 - 60%, 2023 - 80%, and 2024 - 100%

**Retired Military Pay:** The state allowed 15 percent of military pension income to be exempt from Missouri state tax. This tax deduction increased 15 percent annually until January 1, 2016, when all military pension income will be tax free.

**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.

**Tax Credits:** Refer to pages 15 thru 17 of [https://dor.mo.gov/forms/4711\\_2020.pdf](https://dor.mo.gov/forms/4711_2020.pdf).

**Delinquent Fee:** Interest is due on tax not paid on time. For calendar year 2021, interest is computed at 5 percent per annum from the date due until the date paid. Additions to tax for failure to pay on time is assessed at 5 percent of the tax due. For failure to file on time, additions to tax of 5 percent per month, not to exceed 25 percent, is assessed. Refer to <https://mytax.mo.gov/rptp/portal/Calculate-Delinquent-Interest>

**Website:** Missouri Department of Revenue <https://dor.mo.gov>

#### **Tax Forms:**

- [https://dor.mo.gov/forms/MO-1040%20Instructions\\_2020.pdf](https://dor.mo.gov/forms/MO-1040%20Instructions_2020.pdf) Individual Income Tax Long Form Instructions
- [https://dor.mo.gov/forms/MO-1040A%20Fillable%20Calculating\\_2020.pdf](https://dor.mo.gov/forms/MO-1040A%20Fillable%20Calculating_2020.pdf) Individual Income Tax Return Single/Married (One Income)
- <https://mytax.mo.gov/rptp/portal/home/tax-form-selector> All Tax forms

#### **Property Taxes**

The median property tax is **\$1,065 per year** for a home worth the median value of \$139,700. Counties collect an average of **0.91%** of a property's assessed fair market value as property tax per year. Missouri has one of the lowest median property tax rates in the United States, with only fifteen states collecting a lower median property tax than Missouri. The state's median income is \$56,517 per year, so the median yearly property tax paid by residents amounts to approximately 1.88% of their yearly income. Missouri is ranked 32 of the 50 states for property taxes as a percentage of median income.

The exact property tax levied depends on the county the property is located in. St. Charles County collects the highest property tax in Missouri, levying an average of \$2,377.00 (1.2% of median home value) yearly in property taxes, while Shannon County has the lowest property tax in the state, collecting an average tax of \$348.00 (0.48% of median home value) per year.

Property taxes are collected on a county level, and each county has its own method of assessing and collecting taxes. As a result, it's not possible to provide a single property tax rate that applies uniformly to all properties in the state. For more localized property tax rates refer to the county list at <http://www.tax-rates.org/missouri/property-tax#Counties>. Your county's property tax assessor will send you a bill detailing the exact amount of property tax you owe every year.

**The Missouri Property Tax Credit Claim** gives credit to certain senior citizens and 100 percent disabled individuals for a portion of the real estate taxes or rent they have paid for the year. The credit is for a maximum of \$750 for renters (Note: If renting from a facility that does not pay property taxes, you are not eligible for a Property Tax Credit) and \$1,100 for owners who occupied their home during the period being claimed. The actual credit is based on the amount of real estate taxes or rent paid and total household income.

- If a Veteran is 100% disabled (NOT due to military service) payments and benefits are included into Property Tax Credit household income. Veteran payments and benefits include education or training allowances, disability compensation, grants, and insurance proceeds. A letter from the Veterans Administration detailing the amount of your benefits needs to be attached to the Property Tax Credit form.

- If a Veteran is 100% disabled as a result of military service, you are not required to include your veteran payments and benefits on the Property Tax Credit form. A letter from the Veterans Administration indicating the disability is 100% from military service needs to be attached to the Property Tax Credit form.
- People needing proof of their Social Security or Supplemental Security Income benefits can get verification letters online instantly through a *my* Social Security account at [www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount). You can also get one mailed to you by calling toll-free, 1-800-772-1213.

To see if you are eligible go to <https://dor.mo.gov/personal/ptc/documents/proptax.pdf>.

### ***Inheritance and Estate Taxes***

Since the IRS will no longer allow a state death tax credit for deaths occurring on or after January 1, 2005, no Missouri estate tax is imposed. Therefore, no estate tax return must be filed for deaths occurring on or after January 1, 2005.

### ***Other State Tax Rates***

To compare the above sales, excise, income, and property tax rates to those accessed in other states go to:

- Sales Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/sales-tax-by-state>.
- Excise Taxes (i.e. gasoline, cigarettes, cellphones, automobiles, beer, wine, and liquor): <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/excise-tax-by-state>.
- Personal Income Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/income-tax-by-state>.
- Property Tax: <http://www.tax-rates.org/taxtables/property-tax-by-state>.
- Income Tax: <https://taxfoundation.org/state-individual-income-tax-rates-brackets-2019>
- State Tax Comparisons <https://www.moaa.org/content/state-report-card/statereportcard>

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For questions consider searching <https://dor.mo.gov/faq/personal> for answers or you may call (573) 751-3505. Correspondence and packages may be mailed to the address provided on any notice received or return filed. If no return address was provided, mail to Missouri Department of Revenue, Harry S Truman State Office Building, Taxation Division, 301 West High St. PO Box 3366, Jefferson City, MO 65101”.

The drop off location for mail in the Truman Building in Jefferson City is Room 330, Truman Building is only available from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The mailing address for Express/Overnight packages is 301 West High St, Room 102, Jefferson City, MO 65101. Do not enclose cash with mail delivered to the Missouri Department of Revenue. For more contact information including e-mail addresses, visit <http://dor.mo.gov/contact>. Assistance with individual income tax preparation may be available from a volunteer program in your area. You may also contact the Department to inquire about your refund at 573-751-3505 or by e-mail at [income@dor.mo.gov](mailto:income@dor.mo.gov). For further information on the state of Missouri income tax requirements visit <http://dor.mo.gov/new2mo.php>

[Source: <http://www.retirementliving.com/taxes-kansas-new-mexico#Missouri> | March 2021 ++]

**\* General Interest \***



## Notes of Interest

March 16 thru 31, 2021

- **Vietnam Vets.** Check out ‘Thank You for Your Service – A moment of Truth’ by clicking on <https://youtu.be/QRaxBGUSUvw>
- **Shark Fins.** While shark fins have been considered a delicacy for hundreds of years, the practice of obtaining them is unbelievably cruel. Fishermen will catch sharks, remove their fins, and then release the sharks back into the water. Only in 2019 did the House of Representatives pass a bill banning the commercial trade of shark fins in the U.S.
- **Spouse Death Reporting.** Submit a Form DD 2656-6 to DFAS which can be completed and downloaded at <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/forms/dd/dd2656-6.pdf>.
- **Stimulus Payment.** Go to <https://www.irs.gov/coronavirus/get-my-payment> and click on “Get My Payment” to check on the status of your third payment. For the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> payment go to <https://www.irs.gov/payments/view-your-tax-account> and click on “Create or view your account”.
- **Vaccines.** The Federal Bureau of Prisons has extended the COVID-19 vaccine to every employee, but just 49% of the workforce has accepted the offer, agency leadership told Congress last week.
- **Acrophobia.** If you suffer from this DO NOT check out the 5 min video at <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/512003051386872158>.
- **Nuclear Subs.** The U.S. Navy on 19 MAR sealed the deal on a 10th ship in its latest iteration of the Virginia-class attack submarine, issuing a \$2.4 billion adjustment on a contract initially awarded in December 2019 for nine ships.
- **Covid-19 Shots.** Don’t forget to let your provider know you’ve received your vaccine! This information will be added to your health record for future verification use.
- **Vaccines.** New VA research shows immunity from current vaccines may only last seven to nine months, and that the virus could spawn different variations in coming months requiring booster shots for vaccinated veterans and their spouses this fall.
- **Vaccines.** Pfizer said 31 MAR its COVID-19 vaccine was well tolerated and 100 percent effective in preventing COVID-19 in a phase 3 clinical trial involving 2,260 adolescents ages 12 to 15. Eighteen COVID-19 cases were observed in the 1,129 trial participants who received a placebo, while none were observed in the 1,131 participants who were vaccinated.

[Source: Various | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## Vaccine Passports

### On The Way but Developing Them Won't Be Easy

The Biden administration and private companies are working to develop a standard way of handling credentials — often referred to as "vaccine passports" — that would allow Americans to prove they have

been vaccinated against the novel coronavirus as businesses try to reopen. The effort has gained momentum amid President Joe Biden's pledge that the nation will start to regain normalcy this summer and with a growing number of companies — from cruise lines to sports teams — saying they will require proof of vaccination before opening their doors again.

The administration's initiative has been driven largely by arms of the Department of Health and Human Services, including an office devoted to health information technology, said five officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the effort. The White House this month took on a bigger role coordinating government agencies involved in the work, led by coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients, with a goal of announcing updates in coming days, said one official. The White House declined to answer questions about the passport initiative, instead pointing to public statements that Zients and other officials made this month. "Our role is to help ensure that any solutions in this area should be simple, free, open source, accessible to people both digitally and on paper, and designed from the start to protect people's privacy," Zients said at a 12 MAR briefing.

The initiative has emerged as an early test of the Biden administration, with officials working to coordinate across dozens of agencies and a variety of experts, including military officials helping administer vaccines and health officials engaging in international vaccine efforts. The passports are expected to be free and available through applications for smartphones, which could display a scannable code similar to an airline boarding pass. Americans without smartphone access should be able to print out the passports, developers have said. Other countries are racing ahead with their own passport plans, with the European Union pledging to release digital certificates that would allow for summer travel.

U.S. officials say they are grappling with an array of challenges, including data privacy and health care equity. They want to make sure all Americans will be able to get credentials that prove they have been vaccinated, but also want to set up systems that are not easily hacked or passports that cannot be counterfeited, given that forgeries are already starting to appear. One of the most significant hurdles facing federal officials: the sheer number of passport initiatives underway, with the Biden administration this month identifying at least 17, according to slides obtained by The Washington Post. Those initiatives — such as a World Health Organization-led global effort and a digital pass devised by IBM that is being tested in New York state — are rapidly moving forward, even as the White House deliberates about how best to track the shots and avoid the perception of a government mandate to be vaccinated.

One of the teams working on vaccine passports is the Vaccination Credential Initiative, a coalition endeavoring to standardize how data in vaccination records is tracked. "The busboy, the janitor, the waiter that works at a restaurant, wants to be surrounded by employees that are going back to work safely — and wants to have the patrons ideally be safe as well," said Brian Anderson, a physician at Mitre, a nonprofit company that runs federally funded research centers, who is helping lead the initiative. "Creating an environment for those vulnerable populations to get back to work safely — and to know that the people coming back to their business are 'safe,' and vaccinated — would be a great scenario." Anderson's team is aiming to release its free software standards in April, hoping developers will use them to help build digital vaccine records that allow people to show they have been inoculated. The Vaccination Credential Initiative includes the Mayo Clinic, Microsoft and more than 225 other organizations, many of which have pledged to use the code when administering shots.

Biden administration officials privately acknowledge the high stakes of the effort. Proof of vaccination "may be a critical driver for restoring baseline population health and promoting safe return to social,

commercial, and leisure activities," according to the 2 MAR slides prepared by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology and obtained by The Post. But officials at the session — attended by more than 150 staff from the health, defense, homeland security and other departments, and even far-flung agencies such as NASA — warned of the "confusing array" of efforts underway to create credentials. "A chaotic and ineffective vaccine credential approach could hamper our pandemic response by undercutting health safety measures, slowing economic recovery, and undermining public trust and confidence," one slide reads.

Micky Tripathi, whom Biden tapped as the national coordinator for health IT, recently said federal officials are concerned with a variety of health-tech challenges, including protecting the credentials against fraud, ensuring data security and making certain that low-income populations aren't squeezed out. "How do we make sure that whatever is available is accessible to everyone so no one is left behind or feeling like they can't participate in the return of their day-to-day activities?" Tripathi asked at a virtual meeting hosted by the Health IT Leadership Roundtable on 11 MAR. Tripathi told the group he didn't like the term "vaccine passports," adding that "passports are something that are issued by governments. ... I think of them as vaccine credentials or certificates." Tripathi did not respond to a request for comment.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which is participating in the WHO's effort to create "digital vaccination certificates," also is preparing to help advise on the passport rollout. The health agency says it is expecting to play a role in determining which organizations will credential and issue the certificates, in addition to informing the public, according to CDC documents reviewed by The Post. The Biden administration has promised to release more information about its efforts. Asked by Hawaii Gov. David Ige on 23 MAR about the state of the passport initiative, Zients told governors he would provide a more detailed briefing this week, according to two people on the call, speaking on the condition of anonymity to describe the private conversation.

Taking time to get the credentialing project right "is very, very important because this has a high likelihood of being either built wrong, used wrong or a bureaucratic mess," said one official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss the effort. The official said some of the considerations include how to adjust for the spread of variants, how booster shots would be tracked and even questions about how long immunity lasts after getting a shot. There's "a lot to think through," the official said. "Many people see this as a key aspect to getting things closer to normal," said Kristen McGovern, a partner at health care consultancy Sirona Strategies and former chief of staff at the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT. But the technical challenges are significant and given that so many separate efforts are underway, "it would be an almost herculean task to come up with a single standard" for all the vaccine credentials to follow, McGovern said.

There is evidence vaccine passports could motivate skeptical Americans to get shots. Several vaccine-hesitant participants at a recent focus group of Trump voters led by pollster Frank Luntz suggested their desire to see family, go on vacation and resume other aspects of daily life outpaced fear of the shots, particularly if travel companies and others moved to require proof of vaccination. "We love to travel. We love to take cruises. I would get it to travel," said Debbie of Georgia, who like others in the focus group was identified only by her first name. Some attendees dissented and warned that requiring a credential would backfire. "I would change my travel plans," said a man identified as Patrick of Tennessee.

Public health and ethics experts agreed that the Biden administration needed to strike a careful balance: Encourage shots and support the private-sector initiatives but don't put too much federal emphasis on the

looming passports. "If it became a government mandate, it would go down a dark road very quickly," said Brian Castrucci, who leads the Bethesda, Md.-based de Beaumont Foundation, a public health group funding Luntz's research into why some Americans are balking at the vaccine. "It becomes a credential. It becomes a 'needing your papers,' if you will. That could be dangerous — and it could turn off people."

"It has to be that everyone can get it, and it's their choice, as it were," said Ezekiel Emanuel, a University of Pennsylvania bioethics expert who co-authored a Journal of the American Medical Association article last year about the ethics of such certificates and advised Biden's transition team on the coronavirus. "The one thing I am concerned is that some people won't be able to get vaccinated for a variety of reasons." Emanuel added that the passports will be an element of global travel — not just domestic policy. Key aviation and travel associations on March 22 called on the White House to finalize its vaccine credential plan by May, saying it was essential for the safe resumption of international travel.

Donald Rucker, who led the health IT office during the Trump administration, said myriad technical issues await the rollout of vaccine credentials, including how they are tracked, whether they are enforced and who pulls together the initial records of which Americans have gotten shots. Rucker said keeping vaccine credentials could help officials better understand coronavirus vaccination, including possible long-term side effects, if the data is connected with the health information exchanges that states maintain. "The tracking of vaccinations is not just simply for vaccine passports," Rucker said. "The tracking of vaccinations is a broader issue of 'we're giving a novel biologic agent to the entire country,' more or less." [Source: The Washington Post | Dan Diamond, Lena H. Sun & Isaac Stanley-Becker | March 28, 2021 ++]

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## **Minoru Yasui Day** **Equality and Justice for All**



March 28<sup>th</sup> was Minoru Yasui Day in Oregon. Despite this annual honor, enacted by the Oregon Legislature five years ago, the late **Minoru Yasui** is not particularly well-known in his native state. But his impact has been widely felt. President Barack Obama awarded Yasui a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015, pointing out that “Min never stopped believing in the promise of his country” despite facing dire injustices. “He never stopped fighting for equality and justice for all.”



Minoru Yasui first came to public attention on March 28, 1942, when he decided to step out into the streets of Portland after dark. With the United States newly at war with Japan, a curfew had been established for everyone of Japanese descent. From 8 p.m. to 6 a.m., Japanese “aliens” and Japanese-American citizens had to be in their residences. At all other hours, they could not be more than five miles from their homes. Yasui, a 26-year-old University of Oregon law-school graduate, knew this new law was unconstitutional. He was determined to create a test case in court. So he strolled the streets late on that Saturday night. A couple of beat cops spotted him but did nothing. Finally, just before midnight, Yasui barged into the downtown police headquarters waving his birth certificate, demanding that officers do their duty. “Run along home, son, or you’re going to get into trouble,” an officer told him. But Yasui refused to go home, and so he was arrested.

“It was not an intelligent thing to do,” he’d later say of his curfew challenge. “It was a matter of idealism.” The consequences proved extreme. Yasui had his citizenship temporarily stripped from him, and he served nearly a year in solitary confinement at the Multnomah County Jail. (The jail cell that held him recently has been donated to the Japanese American Museum of Oregon.) When Yasui finally was freed, he still wasn’t free. The military transported him to an Idaho concentration camp, where he joined thousands of other Americans imprisoned because of their Japanese ancestry. He would spend the rest of his life fighting for civil rights for all Americans. “We are born into this world for a purpose: to make it a better place for our having been there,” he would say.

Born in Hood River in 1916 to Japanese immigrants, Yasui earned bachelor’s and law degrees from UO. In 1939 he became possibly the first Japanese-American lawyer admitted to the Oregon bar. Prejudice against Japanese-Americans didn’t suddenly appear in the U.S. with the advent of World War II. It had been around since the first Asian immigrants arrived in the country. In Feb. 1940, nearly two years before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Yasui made his case for acceptance in his community. The headline in *The Oregonian*: “We, Too, Please, Are 100 Per Cent Americans.” “We ‘nisei’ are American citizens, and we think of ourselves only as Americans,” he felt compelled to state.

As an example of his Americanness, he said he had visited Japan for the first time only a few years earlier. “It was all strange to me, and I must have seemed strange to the Japanese,” he said in the article. “Anyway, they thought I was Chinese.” Two years later he was back in the local newspapers. “Alien in Toils For ‘After Hours,’” *The Oregonian* titled its article this time. *The Oregon Journal* used a racial slur in its headline about the young lawyer testing the curfew law. Yasui, as he had pointed out in the 1940 article, was not an alien, but most Americans now considered that hair-splitting. The *Journal* argued that Yasui had been “a paid agent of Japan until the day of Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor.” The *Journal* was referring to a clerk position he’d held at Chicago’s Consulate General of Japan, after he’d found Portland-area legal jobs closed to him. Yasui resigned from the consulate the day after Pearl Harbor and reported for duty at the nearest Army induction center.

But even though Yasui was an Army Reserve officer in good standing (via the Reserve Officer Training Corps program in college) and the military was desperate for officers, he was turned away. He reported again — and again and again — at various Army bases and offices between Chicago and Portland, and each time he was immediately rejected. Back in Hood River, he discovered that the FBI had arrested his father, a fruit farmer, as an “enemy alien.” Locals were now boycotting the family’s long-standing business. The little town on the Columbia River, the journalist Alan K. Ota later wrote, “would earn a reputation among

Japanese-Americans for one of the most virulent strains of ‘haiseiki’ — hatred of Japanese — in the United States.”

Yasui set up a one-man law practice in Portland (in the lobby of a rundown building in “Japantown”), where he focused on helping fellow Japanese-Americans protect themselves and their property as anti-Japanese prejudice spiked in the region and increasingly was codified. Then came Yasui’s arrest and subsequent conviction for flouting the military curfew. After his appeals failed (Oregon federal district court Judge James Alger Fee ruled that the Portland lawyer brought the test case “to embarrass the military authorities of the United States”), Yasui landed at the Minidoka War Relocation Center, one of 10 concentration camps housing tens of thousands of prisoners during World War II.

Japanese-Americans had started arriving at the isolated Idaho camp when only the barbed-wire fencing had been finished. They stepped onto the train platform, choking on dust, stunned by the nothingness rolling out before them. “I know people who got off the train and cried,” Yasui said in 1985 when he returned to the Minidoka site. He remembered “row after row of tarpaper shacks.” Looking around at what was left 40 years later, he noted that government officials now said the internment policy had been wrong. “Yes indeed it was wrong!” he bellowed. He was still outraged, four decades later. He never would get over it. But he also was proud, he said, that the men, women and children imprisoned solely for their ancestry had not been broken by the experience. “The resiliency of the people [held at Minidoka] could not be overcome by this harsh environment,” he declared.

After the war, Yasui moved to Denver, where he set up a law office that his daughter Holly would recall as “a proverbial hole-in-the-wall in the heart of downtown Denver’s Skid Row.” Early on, many of his clients were Japanese-Americans who had lost everything during their wartime imprisonment. One client gave him a live turkey as payment. Yasui took on leadership positions with the Japanese American Citizens League and became a founding member of the Urban League of Denver. He later served as executive director of the Denver Commission on Community Relations. “Because he had such strong relationships with other minority groups,” writes the National Park Service-backed *Densho Encyclopedia*, “he was credited with preventing race riots [in Denver] during the turbulent civil-rights era of the late ‘60s.”

“There are few great men in our country who are totally unselfish in their commitment to fairness and justice,” another Denver activist, Helen L. Peterson, would say after his death. “He was one.” Yasui’s civil-rights work was an obsession that took up much of his time for decades, but Holly Yasui has called him “a great dad: loving, attentive and generous.” Min and his wife True raised three daughters. (Holly has admitted that during the Vietnam War she and her father disagreed about “draft dodgers.” He believed every American should serve when their government called on them; he had encouraged his fellow internees to volunteer or register for the draft when, late in World War II, the Army launched an all-Japanese unit, a test case of its own.)

Minoru Yasui never did put his World War II experiences behind him, because he didn’t want to. “This shall never happen again,” he would declare time and again in speeches. His advocacy helped lead to the 1988 bipartisan Civil Liberties Act, which provided \$20,000 in reparations to surviving internees and declared that the wartime camps had been the result of “race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership.” Yasui also spent years fighting to overturn his 1942 conviction after he discovered the government had invented evidence that called into question the loyalty of Japanese-Americans. In 1984, two years before Yasui died at 70, the federal district court in Portland vacated his conviction. The Japanese American Museum of Oregon is co-sponsoring a Zoom event on Saturday to celebrate Minoru Yasui Day.

The featured speaker will be U.S. Sen. Mazie Hirono of Hawaii. The event will include a short documentary about Yasui. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Douglas Perry | March 26, 2021++]

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## Map Comparisons Poland vs. Texas



You Can Fit the Entirety Of Poland Into Texas And Still Be Able To Drive Around It

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## Veteran Halls COVID Pandemic Impact



Paul Guilbeault knew the writing was on the wall for the last Veterans of Foreign Wars post in this city south of Boston when businesses across Massachusetts were ordered to close as the coronavirus pandemic took hold last March. Within six months, the 90-year-old Korean War vet was proven right. VFW Post 3260 in New Bedford, a chapter of the national fraternity of war vets established in 1935, had surrendered its charter and sold the hall to a church. “The economic shutdown is what killed us,” said Guilbeault, who has overseen the post’s finances for years. “There’s no way in the world that we could make it. A lot of these posts are barely hanging on. Most don’t make a huge profit.”

Local bars and halls run by VFW and American Legion posts — those community staples where vets commiserate over beers and people celebrate weddings and other milestones — were already struggling when the pandemic hit. After years of declining membership, restrictions meant to slow the spread of COVID-19 became a death blow for many. The closures have added to the misery from a pandemic that's hit military veterans hard. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently estimated the death toll in its facilities alone was approaching 11,000. In many states, veterans posts were ordered to close like other bars and event halls last spring. Their supporters argued that the spaces serve a greater community purpose than their for-profit counterparts and should have been allowed to reopen sooner.

They say many posts quickly pivoted their community service efforts to respond to the pandemic. In Lakeview, Michigan, VFW Post 3701 made hundreds of masks for workers and operated blood drives with the Red Cross. In Queens, New York, American Legion Post 483 ran a food pantry that fed thousands. And posts from Connecticut to North Carolina have been hosting vaccine registration drives and clinics. The closure of some halls and bars also means vets dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder and other wartime trauma have lost a critical safe space amid an isolating pandemic, leaders say.

“They can talk about things here that happened to them in the war that they'd never say to their psychiatrist or even their families,” said Harold Durr, commander of American Legion Post 1 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Like a number of posts nationwide, Durr says his facility qualified for federal and local pandemic relief, though most of it could only be used to cover employee salaries, not utilities and other expenses. He says the shuttered post, which includes a bar and hall, has largely relied on donations to pay monthly costs. “We've had a rough go,” says the 75-year-old Navy vet, who served in the Vietnam War. “But we've got to stay open. We've existed for 100 years. There's no way we can let it close.”

How many vets halls and bars have permanently shuttered or risk closure because of the pandemic is hard to quantify. The national VFW and American Legion organizations say the number of posts that dissolved completely last year was at or lower than prior years. But the organizations say they do not track bars and halls because they are locally controlled. Many posts, they say, do not run halls or bars. Still, both organizations launched emergency grant programs last fall, doling out thousands of dollars to hundreds of posts to help cover facility costs and other expenses. “A post could conceivably lose these things and still continue as a post,” said John Raughter, spokesman for the Indianapolis-based American Legion.

Some facilities have found workarounds to keep bringing in money, which goes to a wide range of community work, from hosting free lunches for disabled veterans to sponsoring high school ROTC programs and offering free gathering space for Scout troops and other groups. Members of the VFW Post 2718 on Long Island, New York, have been dipping into reserves and organizing fundraisers until they can fully reopen their hall. Their next effort is a first-time Mother's Day plant sale, said John McManamy, a former post commander. In Massachusetts, the New Bedford post is the only one that's dissolved for pandemic-related reasons so far, but the state risks losing some 20% of its VFW buildings if they are forced to remain closed into the crucial summer months, said Bill LeBeau, head of the VFW Massachusetts, which oversees local posts.

Closing VFW Post 3260 in the historic fishing port city some 60 miles (97 kilometers) south of Boston has been bittersweet for longtime members. Dennis Pelletier, a 75-year-old Marine who served in Vietnam, had his wedding reception at the hall in 1967, the year it opened. He's been a dues-paying member pretty much ever since. “It's been a part of my whole adult life,” Pelletier said. “It's been a second home at times.”

But like VFW posts nationwide, the New Bedford hall struggled to draw new members. In the '60s, it had more than 1,000 paying members; by last year, it had roughly 100, the majority in their 70s and 80s.

“The stigma of just being a bar is hard to overcome,” said Delfino Garcia, the post’s last commander. “Younger vets want something different. You’ve got to be more family-oriented. You’ve got to make it more hospitable. VFWs are struggling to adapt to that new reality.” Guilbeault, who joined the post in 1956 after serving in the Air Force, has no regrets about winding things down. With mortgage payments and other bills mounting, he had put in more than \$5,000 of his own savings in those final days. He eventually recouped the money when the building’s sale was finalized in September, and the remaining profits went to the state VFW. [Source: The Associated Press | Philip Marcelo | March 22, 2021 ++]

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## DPRK-U.S. Relations

### Update 02: Impact of Latest Ballistic Missile Launches



North Korea fired two ballistic missiles into the sea off its eastern coast, according to reports from U.S., South Korean and Japanese officials 24 MAR. South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff announced the launch of a single “unidentified projectile” at 7.06 a.m. and a second at 7.25 a.m. They traveled about 280 miles, reaching an altitude of about 37 miles. The South Korean government convened an urgent meeting of the country’s National Security Council at 9 a.m. in response to the launches.

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga described the projectiles as “ballistic missiles” in a tweet that morning. An unnamed U.S. official quoted by the New York Times also referred to them as ‘ballistic missiles’. “It threatens the peace and security of Japan and the region, and is a violation of UN resolutions,” Suga wrote, referring to the U.N. Security Council ban on North Korea developing and testing ballistic missiles. “I strongly protest and strongly condemn it. The government has confirmed that it has fallen into the Sea of Japan outside Japan's exclusive economic zone.” Japan’s coast guard has warned vessels in that body of water, which is known in South Korea as the East Sea, to steer clear of any fallen objects and pass on their location, Nikkei Asia magazine reported.

U.S. Forces Korea has been consulting closely with South Korea and Japan and will continue to monitor the situation, spokesman Col. Lee Peters told Stars and Stripes in an email 24 MAR. “This activity highlights the threat that North Korea's illicit weapons program poses to its neighbors and the international

community,” he wrote. “The U.S. commitment to the defense of [South Korea] remains ironclad.” Recent launches by North Korea have been a serious issue for the international community, including Japan, said a statement Thursday from Japan’s defense ministry. “We will do everything we can to collect and analyze information and to monitor the situation in order to protect the lives and properties of Japanese citizens,” it said.

The launches come less than a week after Pyongyang fired multiple short-range missiles in the wake of a visit to Seoul by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin. North Korea topped a list of issues they tackled during two days of talks with their South Korean counterparts. The allies’ goals are clear, Blinken said: the denuclearization of North Korea, reducing the threat that country presents and “improving the lives of all Koreans, including North Koreans who suffer systematic abuses at the hands of their leaders.” Last week North Korea, in its first statement geared toward the Biden administration, **warned the U.S. not to ruffle any feathers. "If [the U.S.] wants to sleep in peace for coming four years, it had better refrain from causing a stink at its first step,"** North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s sister, Kim Yo Jong, said in a statement published 16 MAR in the state-run Rodong Sinmun newspaper.

This month’s computer-simulated military drills between U.S. and South Korean forces drew Kim’s wrath. “The South Korean government yet again chose the ‘March of War,’ the ‘March of Crisis,’” she said. President Joe Biden, speaking to reporters Tuesday at the White House, said he didn’t consider last weekend’s missile tests to be a provocation. “No, according to the Defense Department it’s business as usual,” he said. “There’s no new wrinkle in what they did.” Asked if the tests affect diplomacy the president laughed.

The latest missile launch is most likely a reaction to Biden’s downplaying of the weekend missile tests, Harry Kazianis, senior director of Korean studies at the Center for the National Interest said in emailed comments 24 MAR. The North, just like during the Trump administration, will react to even the slightest of what it feels are any sort of loss of face or disparaging comments coming out of Washington, he said. “While Biden’s comments and chuckle were clearly not meant to trigger a reaction, the North Koreans will use any pretext that is offered to raise the ante — moving us closer and closer to the dark days of 2017,” he said.

In the months ahead, it’s likely the North Koreans will test bigger and more advanced missiles, he said. “We should also expect a fiery response when the Biden North Korea policy is announced, which likely will be a pressure strategy to get the Kim regime to give up its nuclear weapons,” Kazianis said. The stage is set for another round of North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile and potentially even nuclear testing — and another U.S.-North Korea showdown, he said.

Biden in his admonishment of North Korea for the launches, which were a violation of U.N. sanctions against the North, was restrained “We’re consulting with our allies and partners,” Biden said at the first news conference of his presidency on 25 MAR. “And there will be responses if they choose to escalate. We will respond accordingly. But I’m also prepared for some form of diplomacy, but it has to be conditioned upon the end result of denuclearization.” North Korea on 27 MAR snapped back at President Joe Biden’s criticism of its ballistic missile tests, calling his comments a provocation and encroachment on the North’s right to self-defense and **vowing to continuously expand its “most thoroughgoing and overwhelming military power.”** In comments carried by Pyongyang’s official Korean Central News Agency, Ri said the North expresses “deep apprehension” over Biden’s remarks that were “openly revealing his deep-seated

hostility toward the DPRK. [Source: Stars & Stripes /AP | Seth Robson & Yoo Kyong Chang / Kim Tong-Hyung | March 24 & 27, 2021 ++]

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## Afghan Withdrawal

### Update 04: Arguments for Leaving | Opinion

In February 2020, the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump concluded a deal with the Taliban that would require the last 2,500 American troops to leave Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. That deadline is fast approaching, but President Joe Biden is facing pressure on multiple fronts to reverse course. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has called on Biden to “reconsider.” Zalmay Khalilzad, the top U.S. envoy to Afghanistan, has proposed a peace summit similar to the 2001 conference in Bonn after the fall of the Taliban, a move that would essentially scuttle the existing deal. The administration has yet to choose its path forward.

Prolonging the United States’ longest war might seem a politically parlous gambit. Not only would doing so extend the war into an exhausting third decade but it would also commit billions more to overseas military operations at a time of intense demand for domestic spending. The war has already directly **cost more than \$1 trillion**, and its broader costs at least double that figure—exceeding the total cost of the administration’s American Rescue Plan, widely considered one of the largest and boldest antipoverty measures since the Great Society legislation of the 1960s.

Democratic publics are supposed to punish politicians whose policies cost them dearly in blood and treasure. And some polls do suggest a war-weary public. As early as 2019, 59% of Americans believed the war in Afghanistan was not worth fighting, and earlier this year, a survey found more than two-thirds of military families supporting a full withdrawal. But there are reasons to doubt that voters would punish President Biden for keeping U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Simply put, the war, despite its costs and duration, has largely failed to attract, let alone sustain, political salience, suggesting that the public should neither constrain nor inform policy on the issue.

Foreign Affairs Magazine’s research suggests that one of the most striking aspects of public opinion about the war in Afghanistan is public apathy. They conducted a pair of nationally representative surveys in October 2020 and February 2021, each of 1,000 adult Americans, to explore how much the public knows about the Afghanistan war and whether it supports a withdrawal consistent with the May 1 deadline. Their polls, echoing previous research, found evidence of a decidedly ambivalent public: in their February survey, 36 percent of Americans opposed withdrawal, exactly the same percentage that supported withdrawal. Almost 30 percent reported that they did not know whether to withdraw from Afghanistan, indicating that many Americans are simply not in a position to have a determinate opinion about the deal at all.

The latter figure may be surprising with regard to a 20-year-old conflict. However, it tracks the significant percentages of Americans who lack even basic information about the war. For example, the October survey found that many Americans significantly underestimated the conflict’s costs. Just under half of our sample, 49%, believed the war has cost less than \$1 trillion. In fact, the direct costs exceed that threshold and the indirect costs more than double it. A quarter of our sample did not even know that the war was still ongoing. While public ignorance of political issues is not in and of itself surprising, that a

quarter of Americans believed the war had already ended is notable given that the future of the war in Afghanistan and the new administration's looming decision on keeping or withdrawing troops received extensive media coverage, fueled by the release of the Afghanistan Study Group report in the two weeks leading up to our survey.

Perhaps more telling, when asked whether, considering the costs and benefits to the United States, the war in Afghanistan has or has not been worth fighting, 30%—after 20 years of war—indicated that they were unsure. By contrast, throughout the Iraq war similar questions routinely showed the percentage of Americans unsure about the merits of that conflict was in the single digits. A bare majority of the sample, 52%, judged the war not worth fighting. But almost the same percentage either supported the war or was unsure. What are the political implications of this ambivalence? To some, such as General H. R. McMaster, it suggests an opportunity for policymakers to build support for a continued American military presence in Afghanistan by clearly communicating the stakes involved for U.S. national security.

But Foreign Affairs research suggests there may be important limits to elite opinion leadership at this stage. Their February survey querying attitudes toward withdrawal contained an embedded experiment. All subjects were informed about the basics of the peace deal and the 1 MAY deadline. However, some subjects were also told about Biden's past support for retaining a small residual force in the region, while others were told about former President Donald Trump's publicly expressed desire to withdraw all U.S. forces. Neither prompt significantly moved public opinion in the aggregate. And—particularly striking in the contemporary era of intense partisan polarization—neither the Biden nor the Trump cue even succeeded in significantly moving the opinions of Democrats or Republicans, respectively.

Should the administration opt to keep U.S. forces in Afghanistan, it will likely catch only limited public blowback. But the White House should not overestimate its ability to build public support for the war. That Americans are ambivalent toward and not terribly well informed about the conflict in Afghanistan is perhaps unsurprising, given structural realities that insulate most Americans from direct exposure to the costs of war. The war's extraordinary duration, combined with its low visibility—thanks both to an all-volunteer military, in which relatively few Americans serve, and to a heavy reliance on drone strikes and debt finance—shields the continuing engagement from scrutiny and makes it appear relatively costless. As a result, leaders from both parties have presided over the nation's longest war without paying a political price for failing to win it or end it.

But simply because political elites can get away with continuing the war because of public indifference does not mean that they should. The Biden administration must weigh the risks to American troops and citizens and consider whether there is actually any way to finally make progress on a two-decade war or whether the path to victory instead runs through troop withdrawals. Can a credible case be made that maintaining a small U.S. troop presence will achieve America's goals in the region, despite the failure of years of large deployments to do so? In the absence of a convincing answer, it is time to bring the United States' longest war to a close.

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Time is running out for Washington to choose whether to keep to a deal with the Taliban and pull out of Afghanistan by 1 MAY, a defense official and several security analysts said. The deadline to leave Afghanistan set out in a U.S.-Taliban agreement last year means U.S. troops must begin their withdrawal by the beginning of April, or risk a chaotic and dangerous exit from America's longest war, said Jonathan Schroden, special operations program director at the Center for Naval Analyses. It will take at least three



to six weeks to turn over or close the dozen or so bases in the country, pack and ship tons of equipment, and transport tens of thousands of troops and contractors, Schroden said. A rushed withdrawal, or retrograde, may resemble an evacuation, evoking images of U.S. helicopters hastily escaping Saigon at the end of the Vietnam War. “If we haven’t already passed the line for responsibly closing the bases the U.S. is on, we’re probably going to pass it in the next week or so,” Schroden said Monday. “If we are still aiming for May 1, we’re either past or very near the point where it will no longer be a methodical, orderly, by-the-book retrograde.” [Source: Foreign Affairs / Stars & Stripes | Sarah Kreps /Douglas Kriner (Opinion) + J.P. Lawrence | March 22 & 23, 2021 ++]

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## Iraq War

### Update 04: Coalition Aircraft Batter ISIS with 133 Airstrikes Over 10 Days



U.S.-led coalition aircraft recently conducted a major offensive against the Islamic State group in northern Iraq, conducting 133 airstrikes over 10 days targeting a cave complex that served as a safe haven for terrorists. That’s more than any monthly airstrike total in Iraq and Syria since 2019. The offensive, in support of Iraqi ground forces, destroyed 61 hideouts, 24 caves, and eliminated “a number of terrorists,” said Col. Wayne Marotto, spokesman for Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve. Iraqi Ministry of Defense spokesman Yehia Rasool said the mission was aimed at drying up the sources of terrorism. The Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service led the ground effort.

The strikes focused on an area called Qarachogh Mountain, about 50 kilometers southwest of Erbil. Video of the strikes posted by [Kurdistan 24](#) shows large plumes of smoke rising from a mountainous area. Coalition airstrikes have largely slowed in Iraq and Syria since ISIS lost its self-proclaimed caliphate and the group has largely moved underground. According to the most recent information posted by OIR, there were a total of 25 strikes in both Iraq and Syria in December 2020. The U.S. government estimates that between 8,000 and 16,000 ISIS fighters remain in Iraq and Syria, with the group operating as a “low-level” insurgency in rural areas, according to a February report by the Defense Department’s Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve. [Source: Air Force Magazine | Brian W. Everstine | March 22, 2021 ++]

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## RP~China Dispute

### Update 26: China Tells U.S. to Keep Its Nose Out of It



Whitsun Reef, also known as Julian Felipe Reef, is part of the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

The U.S. State Department is standing by the Philippines in its latest run-in with China over disputed sea territory. The Philippines protested the presence earlier this month of over 220 Chinese fishing vessels spotted by the Philippine coast guard near Julian Felipe Reef in the Spratly Islands. The two countries are at odds over their respective claims to the Spratlys. The Chinese Embassy in Manila says the ships are fishing vessels taking shelter from rough seas. But, in a diplomatic protest 22 MAR, the Philippine Foreign Ministry complained that “their swarming and threatening presence creates an atmosphere of instability,” and infringes the nation’s sovereignty, the Reuters news agency reported the next day.

Also called Whitsun, the boomerang-shaped reef lies about 175 nautical miles west of the Philippine province of Palawan, and inside the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone. The ships’ presence is a “clear provocative action of militarizing the area” and China should recall them, Philippines Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said, according to Reuters. State Department spokesman Ned Price added the U.S. view in a tweet 24 MAR: “The U.S. stands with our ally, the Philippines, regarding concerns about the gathering of [Chinese] maritime militia vessels near Whitsun Reef. We call on Beijing to stop using its maritime militia to intimidate and provoke others, which undermines peace and security.” Chinese fishing vessels frequently assist the coast guard and navy in asserting China’s maritime claims, according to The Associated Press.

The U.S. does not recognize China’s claims and conducts frequent freedom-of-navigation patrols in the disputed waters. China’s claim to most of the South China Sea was rejected by an international tribunal in 2016; however, Beijing has ignored the ruling and built military facilities on seven of the disputed Spratly sites, according to the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. Meanwhile, the Chinese Embassy in Manila tweeted to the U.S. Embassy twice 23 MAR.

- The first read: *“The United States is not a party to the South China Sea issue. Fanning flames and provoking confrontation in the region will only serve the selfish interests of individual country and undermine the regional peace and stability.”*
- The second said: *“Both China and the Philippines are sovereign and independent countries. We have the will, wisdom and ability to properly handle relevant issues through bilateral channels.”*

The Chinese presence on the reef looks like an effort to expand territorial claims, Patricio Abinales, a Philippines expert at the University of Hawaii, told Stars and Stripes in an email 24 MAR. “They know they can do it because they know the Philippine navy cannot do anything about it, and the U.S. will not move,” he said. [Source: Stars & Stripes | Seth Robson | March 24, 2021 ++]

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## **Agent Orange Laos Victims**

### **Those the U.S. Has Never Acknowledged**

America has never taken responsibility for spraying the herbicide over Laos during the Vietnam War. But generations of ethnic minorities have endured the consequences. A nongovernmental organization called the War Legacies Project is attempting to bring the plight of these victims to the attention of the American public. The core of the organization's staff are Susan Hammond, Jacquelyn Chagnon and Niphaphone Sengthong. Hammond, a self-described Army brat whose father was a senior military officer in the war in Vietnam, founded the group in 2008. Chagnon, who is almost a generation older, was one of the first foreigners allowed to work in Laos after the conflict, representing a Quaker organization, the American Friends Service Committee. Sengthong, a retired schoolteacher who is Chagnon's neighbor in the country's capital, Vientiane, is responsible for the record-keeping and local coordination.

The main focus of the War Legacies Project is to document the long-term effects of the defoliant known as Agent Orange and provide humanitarian aid to its victims. Named for the colored stripe painted on its barrels, Agent Orange — best known for its widespread use by the U.S. military to clear vegetation during the Vietnam War — is notorious for being laced with a chemical contaminant called 2,3,7,8-Tetrachlorodibenzo-P-dioxin, or TCDD, regarded as one of the most toxic substances ever created. The use of the herbicide in the neutral nation of Laos by the United States — secretly, illegally and in large amounts — remains one of the last untold stories of the American war in Southeast Asia. This story is told in the attachment to this Bulletin titled, **“Agent Orange Laos Victims”**. [Source: New York Times | George Black | March 16, 2021 ++]

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## **Car Longevity**

### **Update 02: On Average Just 1% of All Vehicles Last At Least 200,000 Miles**

If you are looking for a bulletproof car that will last 200,000 miles or more, Toyota is the brand to buy. That is the obvious conclusion after the automaker's models dominated this year's [iSeeCars ranking](#) of the vehicles that most commonly reach 200,000 miles. Toyota models took the top two slots, and comprise fully half of the 16 vehicles that made iSeeCars' 2021 list. Just 1% of all vehicles last at least 200,000 miles, on average. But all the 16 models on the iSeeCars list had from 2.6% to 16.3% of their cars last at least that long. The models on the list are:

- Toyota Land Cruiser: 16.3%
- Toyota Sequoia: 11.2%
- Chevrolet Suburban: 5.1%
- Ford Expedition: 4.9%
- Toyota 4Runner: 4.1%
- Toyota Avalon: 3.9%
- Chevrolet Tahoe: 3.9%
- Toyota Highlander Hybrid: 3.8%
- Toyota Tundra: 3.7%
- GMC Yukon XL: 3.6%

- Honda Ridgeline: 3.4%
- GMC Yukon: 3.3%
- Honda Odyssey: 2.9%
- Toyota Tacoma: 2.8%
- Lincoln Navigator: 2.6%
- Toyota Prius: 2.6%

Truck-based SUVs make up much of the list, with just one sedan — the Toyota Avalon — cracking the top 16. In addition, just a single crossover — the Toyota Highlander Hybrid — earned a place in the rankings. In compiling its list, iSeeCars looked at more than 11.8 million cars sold in 2020. The top two models — the Toyota Land Cruiser and the Toyota Sequoia — led all others by a large margin. In a press release, Karl Brauer, iSeeCars executive analyst, says: “The iconic and indestructible Toyota Land Cruiser is engineered to last at least 25 years, even under the harshest of driving conditions, as it is relied upon in many developing countries where off-road driving is the norm. And like the Land Cruiser, the truck-based Toyota Sequoia has the durability of a pickup chassis with three full rows of seating for up to eight passengers, making it a capable family hauler that is able to endure high mileage and tow heavy loads.”

Overall, about 2% of all Toyota models make it to the 200,000 mark, iSeeCars says. That also places Toyota first among automakers. The percentage of automakers’ vehicles that last at least 200,000 is as follows:

- Toyota: 2%
- Honda: 1.6%
- Chevrolet: 1.5%
- Cadillac: 1.5%
- GMC: 1.4%
- Ford: 1.4%
- Ram: 1.1%

Longevity is not the only issue to consider when purchasing vehicles. Safety is another important consideration. Toyota which is not considered unsafe, did not fare as well in this category as it did in longevity. To view the 2021 top safety pics go to <https://www.iihs.org/news/detail/choices-expand-for-safety-conscious-consumers-as-90-vehicles-earn-iihs-awards>. [Source: MoneyTalksNews | Chris Kissell | March 3, 2021 ++]

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## **Unrefrigerated Foods** **When to Toss Them**



We've all been guilty of letting perishable foods sit out perhaps a bit too long, then wondering what dishes or ingredients are still safe to eat. Luckily, there's a wealth of information available on food safety, so that you can be sure you're not wasting good leftovers, or accidentally ingesting spoiled, bacteria-laden ones that you really should avoid. Here are 8 everyday foods and how long you have to eat them while unrefrigerated before they present a danger to your health and should be tossed. Go to [https://cdn.cheapism.com/images/013118\\_food\\_danger\\_zone\\_slide\\_0\\_fs.max-784x410.jpg](https://cdn.cheapism.com/images/013118_food_danger_zone_slide_0_fs.max-784x410.jpg) if you had rather view a slide show of all 25 foods discussed in this series:

**Fresh, Cooked, or Boiled Eggs** -- Time: Around two hours

As with most meat products, raw, scrambled, or hard-boiled eggs should be tossed for your own safety if left to sit at room temperature for two hours or longer, as they'll begin to sweat, facilitating bacterial growth. This rule will vary in the U.K. and most of Europe, where safety procedures permit chicken eggs to be sold unrefrigerated.

**Butter** -- Time: One to two days

Most refrigerated sticks of butter will last up to one month after the sell-by date on the package. Unlike most dairy products, however, butter is a food that can also survive at room temperature without spoiling for one to two days, thanks mostly to its low lactose levels and high saturated fat content.

**Cheese** -- Time: Varies, around two to 12 hours

Leaving cheese out overnight can affect quality, but isn't typically dangerous or a safety risk, the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board says. In fact, all but fresh or shredded cheeses such as feta or mozzarella should be given an hour on average to come to room temperature with no risk of developing dangerous bacteria levels, when hard cheeses become easier to cut and soft ones easier to spread. Be more careful about the latter after several hours, as soft cheeses are a more perishable food that more easily encourages bacterial growth.

**Cooked Food/Leftovers** -- Time: Around two hours

If you get distracted and leave cooked food out after dinner or for a party buffet at home, have a policy to take care to refrigerate the leftover foods after roughly two hours, when the danger of contracting sickness from perishable food begins to increase fast. If the ambient temperature is over 90 degrees, especially in the sun, the food shouldn't be left unrefrigerated for longer than an hour.

**Lunch Meats** -- Time: Around two hours

According to [www.FoodSafety.gov](http://www.FoodSafety.gov) recommendations, which err on the side of caution, cold cuts and other sliced deli meats used for wraps or sandwiches won't last any longer out of the fridge than raw or regular cooked meat. To avoid the danger of bacterial growth, it's best to discard these foods either after two hours in temperatures of from 40 to 140 degrees.

**Fruit Pies** -- Time: Two days

Apple and other fruit pies need not be refrigerated right after baking — instead, leave them on the counter or in the pantry for about two days before storing in the fridge. From there, the pie should be eaten or discarded within four to five days to avoid bacterial growth, during which time individual slices can sit at room temperature (though perhaps avoid leaving them directly in the sun) two to three hours without risk.

**Lettuce and Greens** -- Time: Around two hours

Precut or prewashed greens won't survive safely at room temperature for much longer than two hours (and will wilt if placed directly in the sun); raw spinach, kale, or romaine lettuce are only slightly heartier, with

outer leaves of intact heads of lettuce or cabbage spoiling first. All of these greens can last from seven to 10 days when refrigerated.

**Yogurt --** Time: Around two hours

Yogurt and other dairy products can be left to sit for two hours before bacteria begin to grow, making them potentially unsafe to eat before long. This process is accelerated at temperatures over 90 degrees (read: keep your Yoplait out of the sun), or in yogurts with added fruit and sugars, as most milk-based products (with the exception of butter) are quick to spoil and taste better cold, anyway.

[Source: Cheapism | Daily Update | March 8, 2021 ++]

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## News of the Weird

MAR 16 thru 31, 2021

**Education** – Concordia University student Aaron Asuini wanted to ask a question in the online art history class he was taking, but when he tried to reach out to the lecturer, Francois-Marc Gagnon, he couldn't find any contact information in the school's portal. So he Googled the professor's name -- and found an obituary. The Verge reported Gagnon passed away in March 2019, and although the course syllabus listed someone else as the class's official instructor, it also noted that Gagnon would be the lecturer. A Concordia spokesperson expressed regret at the misunderstanding, but Asuini is still unsettled about it: "I don't really even want to watch the lectures anymore. ... I think it lacked tact and respect for this teacher's life." [The Verge, 2/4/2021]

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**It's a Dog's Life** – Bill Dorris, a successful Nashville, Tennessee, businessman, was 84 years old when he passed away late last year, WTVF-TV reported, leaving \$5 million to his beloved 8-year-old border collie, Lulu. Dorris, who was unmarried and traveled frequently, often left Lulu in the care of his friend Martha Burton, 88, who will continue to keep the dog and will be reimbursed for reasonable monthly expenses from the trust established for Lulu by the will. Burton was chill about the whole thing: "I don't really know what to think about it to tell you the truth," she said. "He just really loved that dog." [WTVF 2/12/2021]

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**Desperate Times** – Police in the Ukrainian village of Hrybova Rudnya determined that the unnamed man who called them 13 FEB and confessed to seriously injuring his stepfather, made the call in order to get the road in front of his house cleared of snow. Police spokeswoman Yulia Kovtun told the BBC the man insisted that officers would need special equipment to get to him because of the snow, but when police arrived, they found no assault or murder, and the road had already been cleared by a tractor. The man was charged with filing a false report and fined. [BBC, 2/15/2021]

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**Alarming Headlines** – Shannon Stevens, along with her brother Erik and his girlfriend, snowmobiled to Erik's yurt in the backcountry near Haines, Alaska, on 13 FEB and got the scare of a lifetime when she was attacked from below by a bear in an outhouse, the Associated Press reported. Erik heard his sister's screams and went out to investigate, opening the toilet seat to find "a bear face ... just looking right back up through the hole, right at me," he said. He shut the lid and ran back to the yurt, where they treated Shannon's wound

with a first aid kit and determined it wasn't serious. Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Management biologist Carl Koch said the bear probably swiped at her with its paw, rather than biting her. "She could be the only person on Earth that this has ever happened to," Koch speculated. [Associated Press, 2/19/2021]

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**Serial Pooper** – Mr. Friendly Auto Service in Warren, Michigan, is one of two auto repair businesses in the area targeted by a serial pooper, police say. The man, seen on surveillance video, entered parked, unlocked vehicles to do his business, leaving his deposit behind for workers to find the next day, Fox 2 reported. The man first struck in November and returned in January, said Chris Phillips, manager of Mr. Friendly. In February, police said, the man struck at nearby Twin Tire, going from car to car until he found one left unlocked because of an electrical problem. "Now we've got double padlocks on the gate," said Phillips. "The guy needs to be caught. There is something wrong with him." [Fox 2, 2/16/2021]

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**Entrepreneurial Spirit** – Good Fortune Burger in Toronto has renamed some of its menu items as office supplies as a not-so-underhanded way to help customers get reimbursed for lunch, the National Post reported, and perhaps boost sales. The restaurant's Fortune Burger is now the Basic Steel Stapler, and Parm Fries will appear on a receipt as CPU Wireless Mouse. Director of operations Jon Purdy said the restaurant "just wanted an opportunity to put a smile on some people's faces and have them have a little bit of a giggle." [National Post, 3/4/2021]

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**Devil in the Details** – An unnamed teenager in Thailand was excited by the surprisingly low price he found online for an Apple iPhone, and even though the shipping seemed a little high, he went ahead and ordered it, Oddity Central reported. The surprise came when he received a box nearly as tall as he was and found inside a coffee table shaped like an iPhone. The teen posted photos of his acquisition on social media and admitted he had been so anxious to snag the bargain that he didn't read the listing carefully. [Oddity Central, 3/23/2021]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/news-of-the-weird> | March 31, 2021 ++]

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## Have You Heard or Seen?

### Little Johnny 1 | Military Humor 18 | Satirical Cartoons

#### Little Johnny 1

One day little Johnny was digging a hole in his back yard. The next-door neighbor spotted him and decided to investigate. "Hello Johnny, what are you up to?" he asked. "My goldfish died and I'm gonna bury him," Johnny replied.

"That's a really big hole for a goldfish, isn't it?" asked the neighbor. "That's because he's inside your cat!"

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Little Johnny was sitting in class doing math problems when his teacher picked him to answer a question, "Johnny, if there were five birds sitting on a fence and you shot one with your gun, how many would be left?" "None," replied Johnny, "cause the rest would fly away." "Well, the answer is four," said the teacher, "but I like the way you're thinking." Little Johnny says, "I have a question for you. If there were three women eating ice cream cones in a shop, one was licking her cone, the second was biting her cone and the third was sucking her cone, which one is married?" "Well," said the teacher nervously, "I guess the one sucking the cone." "No," said Little Johnny, "the one with the wedding ring on her finger, but I like the way you're thinking."

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While playing in the backyard, Little Johnny kills a honeybee. His father sees him killing the honeybee and angrily says, "No honey for you for one month!"

Later that afternoon, Johnny's dad catches him tearing the wings off a butterfly. "That's it! No butter for you for one month!" says his dad.

Later that evening as Johnny's mother cooks dinner, a cockroach run across the kitchen floor. She jumps and stomps on it, and then looks up to find Little Johnny and her husband watching her.

Little Johnny looks at his father and says, "Are you going to tell her, Dad, or do you want me to?"

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A stranger was seated next to Little Johnny on the plane when the stranger turned to the Little Johnny and said, "Let's talk. I've heard that flights will go quicker if you strike up a conversation with your fellow passenger."

Little Johnny, who had just opened his book, closed it slowly, and said to the stranger, "What would you like to discuss?" "Oh, I don't know," said the stranger. "How about nuclear power?"

"OK," said Little Johnny. "That could be an interesting topic. But let me ask you a question first." "A horse, a cow, and a deer all eat grass. The same stuff. Yet a deer excretes little pellets, while a cow turns out a flat patty, and a horse produces clumps of dried grass. Why do you suppose that is?"

"Jeez," said the stranger. "I have no idea." "Well, then," said Little Johnny, "How is it that you feel qualified to discuss nuclear power when you don't know shit?"

o-o-O-o-o-

The first grade teacher was starting a new lesson on multi-syllable words, she thought it would be a good idea to ask a few of the children examples of words with more than one syllable. Jane, Do you know any multi-syllable words? After some thought Jane proudly replied with Monday.

Great Jane that has two syllables, Mon.....day Does anyone know another word. I do, I do, me me me replied Johnny. Knowing Johnny's more mature sense of humor she picks Mike instead. Ok Mike, what is your word. Saturday says, Mike. Great, that has three syllables.



Not wanting to be outdone Johnny says "I know a four syllable word, pick me....." Not thinking he can do any harm with a word that large the teacher reluctantly says, "O.K. Johnny what is your four syllable word?" Johnny proudly says, "Mas...tur...ba...tion." Shocked, the teacher, trying to retain her composure says, "Wow, Johnny, four syllables, that certainly is a mouthful" No Maam, your thinking of blow job, and that's only two syllables.

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A teacher asks her class, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Little Johnny says "I wanna be a billionaire, going to the most expensive clubs, take the best bitch with me, give her a Ferrari worth over a million bucks, an apartment in Hawaii, a mansion in Paris, a jet to travel through Europe, an Infinite Visa Card and to make love to her three times a day". The teacher, shocked, and not knowing what to do with the bad behavior of the child, decides not to give importance to what he said and then continues the lesson.

"And you, Susie?" the teacher asks. Susie says "I wanna be Johnny's bitch."

### **Military Humor 18**

1. What's the Marines' main mission?

To make sure the Army never gets their feet wet.

2. An Airman, Soldier, and Marine are sitting around talking about hardships they faced on their last deployment.

Airman: "The worst was when the air conditioner in our tent broke and it was 110 outside!"

Soldier: "WTF, you had air conditioners?"

Marine: "Wait, stop. You had tents?"

3. A Captain halted a Corporal and asked why his stripes weren't on his sleeves.

He replied, "They hurt my nose when I wiped."

4. A morning radio announcer on the AFES station in Anchorage was giving the time one morning at 8 AM.

He said, for those of you in the Air Force, it is 8 AM.

In the Army, it is 0800 hours.

In the Navy, it is 8 bells.

For the Marines, the little hand is on the 8 and the big hand is on the 12.

5. What do you call a Marine who can read and write? "Sir! Yes, Sir!"

6. Three Marines are walking down the sidewalk and see a large pile of brown matter.

One scoops some of it up in his hand and says, "It feels like poop."

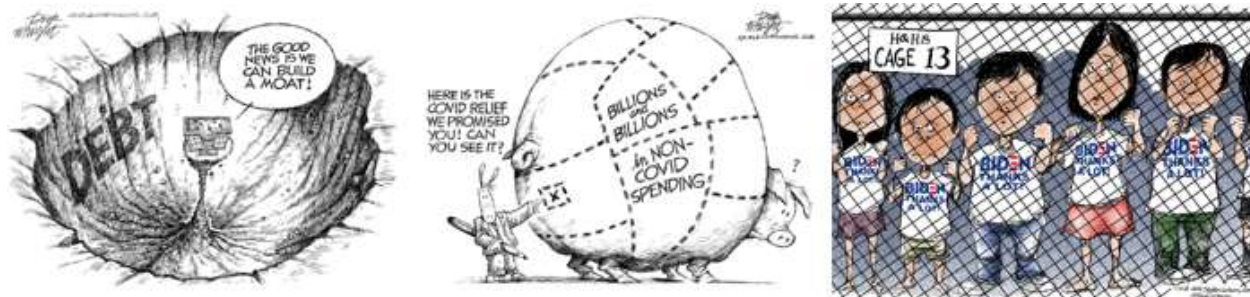
The other picks some up, puts it in his mouth, and says, "It tastes like poop, too."

The last marine picks some up and sniffs saying, "It smells like poop, as well."

The trio walks way, happy that none of them stepped in it.

7. What do you call a Marine with an IQ of 160? A platoon.
8. During deployment on the Aircraft Carrier Midway, there was an inspection by a visiting Admiral. All Navy and Marine personnel lined up in formation for the Admiral. While walking past several Sailors asking questions and receiving appropriate answers the Admiral stopped in front of a Marine and asked “What’s the first thing you do after hearing “Man Overboard?” Without hesitation, the Marine asked “Officer or Enlisted?”
9. I tried out for the Marines but fell just short of their requirements So they put me in the Navy since I was a sub-marine.
10. What do you call a Marine with a head wound? Ajar head.

**Satirical Cartoons**





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## Thought of the Week

“Everything is funny, as long as it’s happening to somebody else”

--- Will Rogers

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3. Bulletin recipients with interest in the Philippines, whether or not they live there, can request to be added to the Bulletin’s Philippine email directory for additional receipt of notices on U.S. Embassy Manila, TRICARE in the RP, and Clark Field Space 'A' if it is ever reinstated.

4. Past Bulletin articles are available on request. Bear in mind that the articles were valid at the time they were written and may have since been updated or have become outdated. To request provide original article title. If unknown provide a brief description of what the article was addressing.

5. The Bulletin is normally published on the 1st and 15th of each month. It is provided as a website accessed document vice email direct access. If you do not receive an email Bulletin Availability notice check to see if it is posted on the website [www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html](http://www.nhc-ul.org/rao.html) before sending me an email asking if one was published. If you can access the Bulletin at the aforementioned site it indicates that something is preventing you from receiving my Availability notices. Either your server considers it to be spam or I have somehow incorrectly entered or removed your addee from the mailing list. Send me an email so I can verify your entry on the mailing list and modify its transmission path if necessary as I have had to do for about 500 other subscribers.

6. Note that some email servers (especially SBCGLOBAL & lately COX and Roadrunner) allow many, but not all, of their users to receive the Bulletin if sent to them in its normal fashion via my mailing list provider (MLP). For those subscribers adversely impacted by this I maintain a separate direct mailing list (DML) to send in an alternate manner for those not allowed by their servers to receive their Bulletin Availability notices. If you are impacted by this let me know so I can add you to that mailing list.

7. Articles within the Bulletin are editorialized information obtained from over 100 sources. At the end of each article is provided the primary source from which it was obtained. The ++ indicates that that the information was reformatted from the original source and/or editorialized from more than one source. Because of the number of articles contained in each Bulletin there is no why that I can attest to their validity other than they have all been taken

from previously reliable sources. Also, just because an article appears in the Bulletin it does not necessarily mean I support its content. If an article is based on the author's opinion vice a government entity I try to note that after the author's name. Readers who question the validity of any article's content are encouraged to go to the source provided to have their questions answered or express their opinions. I am always open to comments but, as a policy, shy away from anything political. Too controversial and time consuming.

8. Recipients of the Bulletin are authorized and encouraged to forward the Bulletin or its articles to other vets or veteran organizations. This Bulletin Availability notice was sent to the 18,363 subscribers.

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