

RAO BULLETIN

15 December 2011

PDF Edition

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Wreaths Across America Update 05: The Defense Department's top enlisted service member, Marine Corps Sgt. Maj. Bryan Battaglia, said that placing 100,000 holiday wreaths at the graves where veterans "lie in rest and peace on the hallowed grounds" of Arlington National Cemetery is a tribute to their sacrifices for the nation. "Our veterans deserve nothing but the best," emphasized Battaglia, senior enlisted adviser to Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and to Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta. Now in its 20th year, "Wreaths Across America" makes sure veterans' graves at national cemeteries are adorned during the holidays with large, evergreen wreaths bearing bright red bows. Thousands of volunteers -- veterans, family members, Boy Scouts and others place the wreaths on the headstones. "Isn't it great to see that?" Battaglia asked. "It's very refreshing as a service member, but also as an American, [to see] our veterans held in such high regard that [people] would volunteer their time to come out here in the cold, as a matter of fact, to perform work in service and honor of our veterans."

"Wreaths Across America not only gives citizens the chance to pay their respects, it allows for the spirit of the holidays for the fallen and their family members," he said. "To have this privilege and honor in such a dignified way, to spread holiday cheer and spirit," Battaglia said, "shows even though they may have gone before us, our veterans are still a part of our team and family." This year's largest wreath delivery, at three times its average size, began its six-day journey from Maine to the cemetery in a convoy of more than 20 tractor trailers and other vehicles, also bringing veterans and families. The parade of vehicles made stops at schools, veterans' homes and national cemeteries along its way. 10 DEC began with the wreaths arriving before dawn at the cemetery, amid a parade of backed-up vehicular and foot traffic, creating an early crowd of people vying to attend the ceremonies. Battaglia said the event spoke for itself. "You could see by the audience gathered in the amphitheater for the opening ceremony with standing room only," he said, "the number and mixture of folks here, ... who came here on these hallowed grounds to give their respects," he said.

The wreaths covered many sections of the cemetery's grave sites, touching on dignitaries such as President John F. Kennedy, and winding its way from Civil War veterans' grave sites to service members just buried. The day concluded with the wreath laying at the Tomb of the Unknowns. "Regardless of conflict, our veterans have given and sacrificed much," he said. "[The least we can do] is what we're doing today." Battaglia said the family of Morrill and Karen Worcester who began Wreaths Across America made sacrifices, too, to make the annual event possible. "You really have to admire their motto of 'Remember, Honor and Teach,'" Battaglia said. "Even though a lot of the focus is placed on the children to grow up in the true American spirit, I've learned some very valuable lessons today." [Source: AFPS Terri Moon Cronk article 11 Dec 2011 ++]



For the 20th year, Wreaths Across America is laying holiday wreaths on headstones at Arlington and in 500 other cemeteries throughout the United States and overseas



A line of headstones at Arlington National Cemetery displays its colorful holiday wreaths designed by "Wreaths Across America"

Burn Pit Toxic Emissions Update 17: Open-air burn pits have operated widely at military sites in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many returning Veterans are concerned about their exposure to smoke from burning trash and human waste. The most recent Institute of Medicine report on burn pits, “Long-Term Health Consequences of Exposure to Burn Pits in Iraq and Afghanistan” [<http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/Long-Term-Health-Consequences-of-Exposure-to-Burn-Pits-in-Iraq-and-Afghanistan.aspx>] was released on 31 OCT. VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of report but is currently is assessing the report and is sponsoring several other studies on possible health effects which include:

- Asking the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences to conduct an in-depth review of the existing literature on the potential adverse health effects of exposure to smoke from burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. The report, “Long-Term Health Consequences of Exposure to Burn Pits in Iraq and Afghanistan”, was released on October 31. VA currently is assessing the report.
- Conducting the National Health Study for a New Generation of U.S. Veterans. The study group includes 30,000 Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Veterans and 30,000 Veterans who served elsewhere during the same time period. The study covers a wide spectrum of health effects, including those that may be associated with exposure to smoke from burn pits.
- Participating in the Millennium Cohort Study, a Department of Defense epidemiological study begun in 2001 that has almost 150,000 participants. The study is designed to evaluate how military service may affect the long-term health of service members. Data are being collected on respiratory health.
- The VA/Department of Defense Pulmonary Health Working Group is looking at pre- and post-deployment health and also reviewing the health records of military working dogs that receive the same exposures that the troops do. These dogs may serve as sentinels for human health.
- Sponsoring additional studies by individual VA researchers and tracking other studies by non-VA researchers.

Smoke produced by the burn may spread a variety of pollutants through the air that blows into working and living areas. These toxins can include dioxin, particulate matter, hydrocarbons, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, hexachlorobenzene, and ash. The make-up of the smoke depends on what is being burned, which is not consistent from one burn pit to another, or from one time period to another at the same burn pit. Health effects depend on a number of factors, such as the kind of waste being burned, individual susceptibility, duration of exposure, air flow patterns, and closeness to the pit. You may be at greater risk if you burned waste at the pit

compared to those were only in the vicinity of the smoke. Waste products in burn pits include, but are not limited to: Chemicals, Paint, Medical and human waste, Metal/aluminum cans, Munitions and other unexploded ordnance, Petroleum and lubricant products, Plastics and styrofoam, Rubber, Wood, and Discarded food .



Exposure to toxins may affect the skin, eyes, respiration, kidneys, liver, nervous system, cardiovascular system, reproductive system, peripheral nervous system, and gastrointestinal tract. At this time, research has not shown long-term adverse health effects from exposure to the burn pits. VA takes this issue seriously which is why it has undertaken the above mentioned studies on possible health effects. Most of the irritation related to solid waste burning exposure is temporary and resolves once the exposure is gone. These include:

- Eye irritation and burning
- Coughing and throat irritation
- Breathing difficulties
- Skin itching and rashes

You may find out more about your exposure by getting an exposure assessment offered by VA's War Related Illness and Injury Study Centers. Exposure assessments are provided upon request to all combat veterans, veterans who participated in military Atmospheric Nuclear Weapons Tests, and veterans who participated in Project 112 or SHAD (Shipboard Hazard and Defense). The War Related Illness and Injury Study Centers (WRIISCs) provide clinical expertise for Veterans with deployment health concerns or difficult-to-diagnose illnesses. WRIISCs are in three locations: Washington, DC; East Orange, NJ; and Palo Alto, CA. For an appointment at a WRIISC, a VA primary care doctor must make a referral. For guidance on obtaining a referral refer to <http://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/clinical/national-referral.asp>. Veterans who were exposed to toxins released by burn pits during military service may be eligible for:

- Health care benefits, including a free Gulf War Registry health exam for Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn Veterans
- Disability compensation benefits for disabilities that VA determines are associated with exposure to burn pits during military service
- Other benefits, including home loans, vocational rehabilitation, and education

[Source: <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/index.asp> Dec 2011 ++]

Tricare Data Breach ~ SAIC Update 04: Officials with the military's health care program have verified that a mass mailing informing beneficiaries they are eligible for free credit reports in the wake of a September data breach is not a scam. The letter from contractor Science Applications International Corp (SAIC), has aroused suspicions on an Air Force Facebook page and in retiree and military spouse Internet forums. It offers free

credit monitoring and restoration services for one year to TRICARE beneficiaries whose personal information was exposed when backup computer tapes with health records of 4.9 million people were stolen from an SAIC employee's car.

- Postings on the official Facebook page of Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany not only called the letter a scam, but said one squadron at the base "sent out an email saying it was a scam and to turn all letters into them as they had opened an investigation" with the Office of Special Investigation."
- The Scam Checker website contains numerous posts depicting the message as a fake, and others deeming it authentic.
- One recipient even called the FBI to determine if the letter was legitimate, which the bureau confirmed.
- CinchHouse, a website for military women and wives, confused the issue even more with posts that looked at different parts of the SAIC letter and came to the conclusion that there were two letters in circulation: a real one and a scam.
- An online forum at Military.com also mixed up parts of the SAIC letter and determined there were two versions floating around.

The SAIC letter signed by Walter P. Havenstein, the company's chief executive officer, is "NOT a hoax," TRICARE spokesman Austin Camacho told Nextgov in an email. "Please remind your readers to double-check the letter they receive from SAIC to ensure contact information matches the toll-free phone numbers as these are the ONLY valid phone numbers to verify authenticity and obtain assistance," Camacho said in his email. Concerned beneficiaries in the United States should contact the SAIC Incident Response Call Center toll-free at 1-855-366-0140. Those abroad can call collect: 1-952-556-8312. "We understand that some recipients of the letter are concerned that it may be a scam," SAIC spokesman Vernon Guidry said. "They may reassure themselves that the letter is genuine by accessing the TRICARE Management Activity website" (at <http://www.tricare.mil/breach/>). [Source: NextGov.com Bob Brewin article 8 Dec 2011 ++]

DoD-VA Pharmacy: According to Bob Brewin of the NextGov newsletter, the TRICARE Management Activity (TMA) in DEC kicked off the process to develop a joint electronic pharmacy system for the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments with a Request for Information to industry for commercial products that could handle the task. The joint system would manage 190 million prescriptions a year. TMA, which manages Military Health System (MHS) information technology projects, asked for a single solution to track prescription and medication orders and improve patient safety by flagging drug interactions. MHS annually fills 50 million prescriptions while VA fills 140 million -- 32 million a year in hospitals and clinics and 108 million through seven mail order pharmacies. Industry sources said the ability to handle this scale of transactions, which would make the program the largest pharmacy system in the world, will be a key criteria as the procurement process moves forward.

TRICARE wants a pharmacy system with links to other systems, including electronic health records, automated pill dispensing machines and drug company systems. The joint pharmacy system will need to track medications tagged with both bar codes and radio frequency identification chips and support an interface to package tracking systems used by the U.S. Postal Service and United Parcel Service. The pharmacy system is the first project under a joint electronic health record project approved earlier this year, and is formally called the integrated Electronic Health Record (iEHR) Pharmacy initiative. Both MHS and VA have unique functions that will be handled as separate applications. These include battlefield care, obstetrics and pediatrics for MHS and nursing home, long-term care and nursing homes for VA.

Computer Sciences Corp. currently runs the MHS pharmacy data transaction service under a 51-month contract awarded in October 2010. VA developed its pharmacy systems internally in its Veterans Health Information

Systems and Technology Architecture and it includes 13 applications that gather, process and store data pertaining to prescriptions and orders written and filled. VA and MHS have failed so far in their efforts to develop a small-scale joint pharmacy system at the Capt. James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in North Chicago, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has reported. GAO said deployment of the prescription order system at Lovell also has been delayed pending high-level review at the two departments. As a result, the Lovell joint VA/DoD hospital had to hire five full-time pharmacists to manually check individual patient records in each of the departments' electronic health record systems to identify possible harmful interactions between drugs prescribed in the two separate systems. At present any civilian drug store can check on drug interactions which raises the question why is it taking VA and MHS so long to be able to do this? [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 9 Dec 2011 ++]

Homes4WoundedHeroes Program: The nonprofit Military Warriors Support Foundation (MVSF) is giving away free homes to veterans who qualify and are now accepting Open Applications for their Homes4WoundedHeroes program. If you are a combat wounded hero, injured during the Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts, and do not currently have a mortgage, you are eligible to apply. The homes are donated by banks and are renovated to be fully accessible. The website <http://www.militarywarriors.org/> has the listed inventory of homes that are currently available and instructions for applying . For the first three years of occupancy, the nonprofit holds the deed to the house. Veterans selected for homes have to show they can adapt, are financially responsible, substance free, crime free, and so on. They also must participate in monthly financial counseling in order to learn how to budget and be aware of how to be a homeowner. At the end of the three years, if successful, they will be given the deed to the house. Requirements include:

- Purple heart (preferred)
- Medically retired
- OIF/OEF veteran
- Currently Does Not Have A Mortgage

If a home is not available in the veteran's area, the veteran can put in a "wish list" and if selected the nonprofit will try to find one in their preferred location. Applicant's are encourage to designate as many areas, within the United States, as possible that would work for them. Applicants will still undergo our typical review process. MVSF tries to place veterans not only by their preference but by access to medical facilities, good schools, and veteran friendly environments. In total, MVSF has given away over 100 homes this year. A great achievement for this organization and a great benefit to our military servicemen and families that have given so much. For more information call the MVSF Communications Coordinator Jana J. Wyze at (210) 615-8973 (Office) (907) 854-1340 (Cell) or send an email to support4ww@militarywarriors.org. [Source: Director, Nevada Office of Veterans Services 7 Dec 2011 ++]

GI Bill Update 108: According to recent reports the DoD's new Voluntary Education Partnership Memorandum of Understanding policies and procedures are forcing several schools to reconsider accepting military students who wish to use their TA (Tuition Aid) benefits. The schools complain that the MOU forces participating colleges and universities to subject themselves to increased DoD inspections, payment procedures, and new rules for transferring credits between schools, granting academic credit for military training and residency requirements for servicemembers. Many schools feel that the MOU restricts their academic authority. While the institutions of higher learning may be rightfully concerned that the MOU infringes on their academic authority, the DoD MOU also has revenue impacts that some schools may be concerned about. For example, the MOU requires schools to accept credit card payments from the DoD for tuition. Considering the costs associated with such a large balance, the impact

could reduce the school's revenue. In addition, accepting more military experience credit (ACE) recommendations and relaxing residency requirements can also hurt the bottom line.

School's – whether for-profit or non-profit — count on their revenue to pay administrative salaries, operational expenses, and reinvest in their schools. Not to mention that it also covers student support programs such as veteran centers, counseling services, and the added cost of processing the additional federal paperwork. It is important to note that the DoD released a clarifying policy statement to try to soften the restrictive legal language of the MOU's less popular restrictions and policies. However, many schools are wary of the policy statement because they fear it is non-binding. Many see the MOU as the DoD overstepping their authority. To varying degrees many of the schools that are pushing back, already accept transfer credits, military experience (ACE) credits, take credit cards, and adhere to the Servicemembers Opportunity College (SOC) consortium guidelines and the Military Student Bill of Rights. For many smaller schools the issue is also about not being staffed to evaluate the ACE credit recommendations or send the DoD the required information such as degree plans and course registrations in a timely manner, making it nearly impossible for them to meet the DoD's requirements. Many current military students stand to be hurt if the DoD cannot come to a compromise with the schools. [Source: Military.com Terry Howell article 6 Dec 2011 ++]

2967 Decrease :

Mobilized Reserve 6 DEC 2011: The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 6 DEC 2011. The net collective result is 2967 fewer reservists mobilized than last reported in the 1 NOV 2011 RAO Bulletin. At any given time, services may activate some units and individuals while deactivating others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty from the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 68,440; Navy Reserve 4517; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 9778; Marine Corps Reserve, 5904; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 792. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 89,431 including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated may be found at <http://www.defense.gov/news/d20111206ngr.pdf>. Reservists deactivated since 9/11 total 744,475. [Source: DoD News Release No. 1005-11 dtd 8 DEC 2011 ++]

SBA Vet Issues Update 17: In the latest turn of the screw in an ongoing battle between the Department of Veterans Affairs and members of the small business community, a non-profit association sued the agency and its secretary for alleged failure to comply with existing laws that require veteran-owned small businesses to receive priority in all contract awards. Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business Network Inc. in Pleasanton, Calif., filed a 6 DEC complaint on behalf of its members in a California district court, claiming that the VA violated the 2006 Veterans, Benefits, Health Care and Information Technology Act and the Veterans First Contracting Program, both of which mandate that the agency set aside contract opportunities for veteran-owned small businesses when at least two such businesses are qualified to meet the requirements. The complaint pointed to the VA's refusal to comply with recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office in an 11 OCT protest decision, which stated that the agency violated the law when it failed to set aside two contract solicitations for service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses. The watchdog agency recommended that the veterans agency cancel and reissue the solicitations as set-aside contracts, a move the VA opted to ignore — claiming the requirement did not apply to acquisitions made under the General Service Administration's contract schedules. "The president of the association has been leading a grass roots movement to challenge the VA's application of the Veterans First program for over a year," said Timothy Power, the attorney representing the association, in an email

to Washington Business Journal. His firm, Power Law Office in Sonoma, Calif., provides legal services to small business contractors. "Recently she has been raising money to support the filing of a suit in California to enjoin the VA from ignoring the program." The lawsuit comes one week after two House subcommittees held a hearing on the topic, questioning VA officials about the decision to ignore the GAO recommendations. [Source: Washington Business Journal Jill R. Aitoro article 7 Dec 2011 ++]

Purple Heart Update 02: Lawmakers from Texas and Arkansas have been pushing the Army for years to award Purple Hearts to the victims of domestic terrorist attacks such as the 2009 Fort Hood shooting, but have seen little success. Now, Senate Homeland Security Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman (I-CT) said he'll take up the cause, too. At a hearing 7 DEC, Lieberman said he will try to insert an amendment in the annual defense authorization bill (currently in conference committee) to award a posthumous Purple Heart to Army recruiter Pvt. William Long, who was killed in a brazen 2009 shooting by a radical Islamic adherent. The case drew national headlines but was not technically classified as an international terrorist attack, preventing Long's family from collecting the military honor. For the last three years, Texas Republican Rep. John Carter has pushed for similar combat status recognition for the victims of the Fort Hood shooting, where Army psychiatrist Maj. Nidal Malik Hasan killed 13 base personnel and wounded 43 others in an attack officials believe to be motivated by his radical religious beliefs. So far, those efforts have been unsuccessful, in part because of controversy surrounding Carter's bill language dubbing the attack a case of "radical Islamic terrorism." Lieberman did not offer any specifics on the wording of his amendment, and whether it would also cover the Fort Hood victims. Lawmakers at Wednesday's hearing heard testimony from Daris Long, the father of the soldier killed in Arkansas. He said his family felt disrespected and disheartened by the military decision not to fully honor their son's death with the Purple Heart. Military officials said they sympathized with Long's family, but the law as written prohibits awarding medal in this case. [Source: Stars & Stripes Leo Shane article 8 Dec 2011 ++]



Purple Heart

DoD: Lawsuit ~ Human Testing: Jacksonville resident Frank Rochelle says he still has nightmares about being used as a human guinea pig for military drug testing more than 40 years ago. He considers himself one of the luckier ones. Rochelle, 63, is one of six former "test vets" suing the Department of Defense, U.S. Army, CIA and Department of Veterans Affairs for healthcare and notification about the risks they face as a result of human testing undergone at Edgewood Arsenal in Edgewood, Md., between the years of 1950 and 1976. First filed in 2009, the case is expected to go to trial in the Northern District of California next year.

Rochelle was drafted into the Army in 1968, at the age of 20. He volunteered for a temporary duty assignment in Edgewood Arsenal, he said, when he was told he would be testing military equipment and be entitled to a few perks, such as not having to wear a military uniform during the workday. He signed a confidentiality waiver and then began a course of testing that included atropine, an anticholinergic drug with hallucinogenic properties. During the two-and-a-half days of hallucinations that resulted from inhaling the drug, Rochelle alleged seeing animals come out of the walls, and trying to cut the freckles out of his arm with a razor, thinking they were bugs underneath his skin. He attributes residual memory loss, breathing disorders and anxiety to the days he spent in testing at Edgewood. Another plaintiff, William Blazinski, said he was dosed with varieties of tear gas, experimental nerve gas antidote scopolamine and physostigmine during his time at the testing facility. He believes his 2008 diagnosis of chronic lymphocytic leukemia and ulcerative colitis may be connected to the experiments he underwent. In addition to notification and health care, the plaintiffs are asking for release from the oaths of secrecy they took to participate in the project.

Gordon Erspamer, the San Francisco-based attorney with law firm Morrison and Foerster who is representing the veterans and two veterans' support organizations in the class-action suit, said in all up 400 different chemical agents were tested on humans at Edgewood, including LSD and mustard gas, and at least 7,800 American troops were used in testing at that facility alone. "Some of these were the most diabolical experiments you could possibly imagine," he said. After a series of motions to dismiss the suit by the U.S. Attorney General based on jurisdictional claims and other legal objections, Morrison and Foerster won the right to proceed with the case in early 2010. Notably, the Defense Department does not deny that human experimentation was conducted at military facilities. "Since the end of World War II, DoD periodically evaluated the (chemical and biological) threat and the ability of U.S. forces to fight on a chemical and biological battlefield," an OSD web page on the subject reads. "In some programs service members were present but not test subjects and in other programs they were volunteer human subjects. Testing of biological agents on human subjects ended in 1969; testing of chemical agents on human subjects ended in 1975. DoD is investigating these exposures that occurred as far back as 30 to 60 years ago." According to information on the page, the department plans to complete its investigation into the exposures by the end of this year.



Frank Rochelle

While the defendants allege they made efforts to notify those involved in the experiments through the Department of Veterans Affairs, the plaintiffs say only a token number of veterans received letters, and these letters assured them they would face no adverse health effects from the testing. "It stands to reason, if you were given chemical warfare agents, you would have adverse health effects," Erspamer said. The lawsuit is now entering the final weeks of discovery, and Erspamer said he was still fighting for the release of important records, including magnetic tapes documenting nine years of U.S. and CIA involvement in the experiments and documents recording exposures and testing prior to 1953. "We've been given a song-and-dance about it for the past two-and-a-half years," he said. Rochelle is hopeful that the suit will result in more people learning about the health risks they may face from the experiments. "We want to be released from our secrecy oaths, along with the medical care that we've been denied for years," he said. "We'd like to correspond or talk to some of the other people that have been involved

with the testing. Through this lawsuit we've located a lot more." The agencies named in the lawsuit do not comment on ongoing litigation. [Source: Jacksonville Daily News Hope Hodge article 6 Dec 2011 ++]

DoD: Lawsuit ~ Human Testing Update 01: Human testing was conducted at Edgewood Arsenal in Edgewood, Md., between the years of 1950 and 1976. A class action lawsuit was filed against the Department of Defense, U.S. Army, CIA and Department of Veterans Affairs for healthcare and notification about the risks service personnel face as a result of human testing with up to 400 different chemical agents. The lawsuit filed by six Edgewood "test vets" and the veterans' service organizations Vietnam Veterans of America and Swords to Ploughshares includes the following alleged purposes for which the Defense Department conducted human testing of chemical and biological agents on service members. "In short," the suit concludes, "under this program of human experimentation, the roles of military doctors were reversed from healing to purposely exposing their patients to harm in violation of their Hippocratic oaths." with the purpose:

- To develop non-lethal but incapacitating agents that could be disseminated by airplanes in all environments;
- To explore what levels of various chemicals would produce casualties (the so-called "man-break" tests);
- To research techniques to impose control over the will of an individual, including neuron-surgery, electric shock, drugs, and hypnosis;
- To design and test septal electrodes that would enable direct control of human behavior;
- To produce a "knockout" pill that could surreptitiously be dropped into drinks or added into food;
- To develop a substance that could produce "pure euphoria" with no subsequent let-down;
- To derive an undetectable substance that would lower the ambition and general working efficiency of humans;
- To develop a substance that would cause mental confusion and make it more difficult to fabricate answers under questioning;
- To create a substance that would alter personality structure and induce dependency on another person;
- To develop a substance that would promote weakness or temporarily compromise hearing or eyesight;
- To perfect a substance that could be administered surreptitiously, which would prevent someone from performing any physical activity;
- To identify a substance that would promote illogical thinking or impulsiveness;
- To develop a substance that would increase, prevent or counteract the intoxicating effects of alcohol;
- To create materials that would facilitate the induction of hypnosis or enhance its usefulness;
- To identify substances that would enhance an individual's ability to withstand torture, privation, interrogation or brain-washing;
- To derive substances that would produce physical disablement, paralysis, or acute anemia; and
- To find a substance capable of producing extended periods of shock, mania and stress, and confusion or amnesia.

[Source: Jacksonville Daily News Hope Hodge article 6 Dec 2011 ++]

Military Benefit Upgrades Update 04: Federal authorities from the Justice, Veteran's Affairs and Defense departments asked for and were granted an extension to FEB 2012 to respond to a federal lawsuit alleging discrimination against same-sex members of the military. Rye's Charlie Morgan, a lesbian member of the N.H. National Guard, and her wife Karen, are two of 16 same-sex plaintiffs named in the federal suit seeking "the same recognition, family support and benefits" for same-sex couples that the U.S. military provides for heterosexual

couples. The suit alleges gay and lesbian service members and their families are victims of discrimination because of the Defense of Marriage Act, and asks a judge to find DOMA “is unconstitutional as applied to military spousal benefits.” In a 5 DEC motion to the U.S. District Court of Mass., attorneys for the federal agencies say they need more time to respond to the lawsuit because coordination is required among the defendant agencies. The court complied and set a 28 FEB deadline for federal authorities to respond to the allegations.

The suit alleges same-sex military spouses can't be designated to receive next-of-kin notices of the service members' deaths, won't receive surviving spouse benefits, are denied family health benefits and can't be buried in a military cemetery next to their spouses. Named as defendants are U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki. Charles Miller, a spokesman for the U.S. Justice Department's civil division, told the Herald the government has no comment prior to filing its answer with the court. In their latest court motion, the same-sex couples cite case law stating DOMA “fails to pass constitutional muster.” They tell the court DOMA “is irrational in the context of military benefits” because when it was enacted, same-sex marriage was prohibited in all 50 states. Attorney John Goodman of the Washington-based Servicemembers Legal Defense Network filed the suit on behalf of “current and former active duty members of the United States Armed Forces seeking equal benefits for equal work.” Goodman told the court Charlie and Karen Morgan have been together since 1997, and that Charlie, a chief warrant officer, has served in Kuwait, Qatar and Iraq.

Charlie, who was diagnosed with breast cancer, is “especially concerned with obtaining all the death benefits and burial rights that opposite-sex couples receive,” according to the litigation. The couple has been in a legally recognized civil union for 11 years, are the parents of a 4-year-old and were married Oct. 24, 2011. Also named as plaintiffs in the lawsuit are active and retired homosexual members of the military from Boston, California, Arizona, Ohio, Wyoming and Virginia. All of them applied for and were denied federal military benefits for their spouses in the wake of the repeal of “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” on Sept. 20, according to the suit. Charlie Morgan made national headlines when, hours after the repeal of the “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” law, she went on national television and declared, “I'm finally proud to announce that I'm a lesbian.” [Source: Seacoastonline.com Elizabeth Dinan article 6 Dec 2011 ++]



U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer Charlie Morgan

PTSD Update 80: The family of an Iraq war veteran who hanged himself has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the hospital that discharged him just hours before he died. The lawsuit filed 6 DEC in U.S. District Court, Davenport, claims Patrick J. Gibbs Jr. was not admitted to the psychiatric unit at Genesis Medical Center-West Central Park Avenue, Davenport, Iowa after a suicide attempt the afternoon of 23 JAN 2010. The lawsuit also claims Gibbs was not given a psychiatric screening before a nurse discharged him after making her own evaluation that he was no longer a risk to himself. Gibbs hanged himself in the basement of his boyhood home in Davenport

seven hours after he was discharged from the hospital, the lawsuit says. Defendants named in the lawsuit include Genesis Health System and medical personnel at Genesis West, including Georgiann Hignight, Kathleen Versluis, Jessica Wasson, Vanessa Zaehringer and Richard L. Vermeer. Davenport Emergency Physicians P.C. also is listed as a defendant. Genesis spokesman Craig Cooper said he could not comment on pending litigation.



Patrick J. Gibbs Jr.

Former Davenport Mayor Patrick J. Gibbs Sr. filed the lawsuit on behalf of the estate of his son. His son Patrick served in Operation Iraqi Freedom from 2007-08. He achieved the rank of U.S. Army sergeant at age 20, the youngest in his company to do so. "It makes you wonder how many kids are over there in that same situation," his father told the Times about his son's battles with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. He wondered then if the Army could have provided more help for his son during and after his service. The lawsuit documents Gibbs battle with mental illness while in the military and in the weeks leading up to his death. According to the lawsuit:

- He first attempted suicide while still in Iraq upon learning that his wife, Kayla Gibbs, had left him.
- He made another suicide attempt in August 2009 and was hospitalized for two weeks for treatment of anxiety and depression. He was honorably discharged later that year after it was determined his condition made him unfit for command.
- His psychological problems continued after returning home. On Dec. 2, 2009, a domestic disturbance with his fiancée, Savannah Huelsman, in their home in Ohio resulted in criminal charges and a restraining order against him.
- He moved into a motel on 3 DEC, where he wrote a suicide note, drank liquor and ingested over-the-counter cough syrup and sleeping pills. Early the next morning, police found Gibbs wandering by the side of the road, calling out the names of friends killed in an explosion in Baquba, Iraq.
- That month, Gibbs was diagnosed with PTSD and major depression at a Cincinnati VA hospital. He also was diagnosed with possible traumatic brain injury, or TBI, stemming from head injuries suffered in combat. During this time, he was tormented by repeated disturbing memories, nightmares and insomnia. He also reported having increased guilt feelings because of the loss of friends under his leadership as sergeant.
- He traveled to Davenport with Huelsman on Jan. 22, 2010, to finalize his divorce from Kayla Gibbs. Following an upbeat supervised visit with his 3-year-old son on Jan. 23, Gibbs and Huelsman argued, and Gibbs, threatening to kill himself, swallowed an entire bottle of his anti-depressant.
- His father called 911 to report the suicide attempt around 1:15 p.m., and Gibbs was taken to Genesis West. His father asked that Gibbs be admitted to the psychiatric unit. That request was refused by the defendants. His father asked the nurses on duty to call his son's psychiatrist in Cincinnati. That request also was refused.

- Genesis West had a psychiatrist on staff at the time who was an Iraq veteran and a specialist in PTSD. None of the defendants consulted this psychiatrist on Gibbs' case.
- He was discharged about two hours after his admission to the hospital. He killed himself that night.

The lawsuit contends that hospital regulations did not permit the psychiatric screening of a patient like Gibbs to be done by a registered nurse alone without the direct supervision of a physician. Nurse Georgiann Hignight told Gibbs' father that she had made her own evaluation and determined that Gibbs was no longer a risk to himself, the lawsuit states. The plaintiffs, including the estate, Huelsman and Kayla (Witt) Gibbs, make claim for judgment against the defendants for loss of parental consortium, plus unknown interest and costs, and for any other relief the court deems just. [Source: The Quad-City Times Brian Wellner article 6 Dec 2011 ++]

PTSD Update 81: A skirmish has been brewing between U.S. Army brass and a seemingly unlikely interlocutor -- the American Psychiatric Association (APA) -- over a possible name change for combat-related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the mental illness that has afflicted hundreds of thousands of American soldiers. But now indications of a possible compromise have emerged, even as the issue has triggered a wide-ranging debate among mental health professionals. Some Army officers and mental health advocates have been calling for a change in the "PTSD" moniker on the basis that calling it a "disorder" is stigmatizing soldiers and preventing them from getting the help they need. Initial indications were that the 167-year-old APA -- which is in the process of updating diagnostic standards for PTSD and other conditions -- felt the affliction should continue to be termed a disorder, based on traditional medical definitions and precedents. However, Dr. John Oldham, the group's president, said in an interview last week that he would be open to the suggestion of changing the name if it would help encourage those who have it to seek help. "If it turns out that that [the word 'injury'] could be a less uncomfortable term and would facilitate people who need help getting it, and it didn't have unintended consequences that we would have to be sure to try to think about, we would certainly be open to thinking about it," Oldham told the NewsHour in a telephone interview last week.

Oldham's comments come six weeks after Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Chiarelli sent the APA a letter requesting that the group consider dropping the word "disorder" from the diagnosis and simply call it Post Traumatic Stress. In an October interview with the NewsHour, the four-star general said using the term "disorder" perpetuates a bias against the condition and "has the connotation of being something that [was] a pre-existing problem" for an individual before entering the Army. In the eyes of some troops, it "makes the person seem weak," Chiarelli said. The number of combat veterans diagnosed with PTSD has skyrocketed over the past decade as hundreds of thousands of troops have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, some multiple times. Rates of PTSD within the Army are estimated at 10 to 20 percent for combat infantry soldiers who experienced direct combat. In some units that experienced high combat, the rates of PTSD affliction are as high as 25 to 30 percent, according to military surveys. The Army has come under fire for not doing enough to identify and treat soldiers with PTSD, compounding the stigma problem. Forty-nine percent of junior enlisted soldiers who tested positive for mental health problems said that seeking help would be seen as an indication of weakness. A comparable number -- 42 percent -- thought that other members of their unit might have less confidence in them if they received mental health services, according to the most recent survey.

Chiarelli told the NewsHour that "it seems clear to me that we should get rid of the 'D' if that is in any way inhibiting people from getting the help they need." Calling it an injury, "for example, instead of a disorder" would have a huge impact, "making soldiers suffering from the condition more likely to seek help, he said. Oldham had rejected the notion of just dropping the word "disorder" from the name of the diagnosis, which would leave it simply called "stress." He said, though, that calling the phenomenon an "injury" -- at least when it pertains to combat

veterans -- could be worth discussing. "The suggestion to consider whether Post Traumatic Stress Injury might be a desirable term to introduce is an interesting one," Oldham wrote in an email to the NewsHour. He indicated that while he was "not certain that the word 'injury' would convey the right meaning for all forms of what we now call Post Traumatic Stress Disorder," nevertheless "it seems to me it would be relevant to think carefully about whether it might be useful for specified groups or circumstances."

Dr. Matthew Friedman, another leader at the psychiatric association, takes a slightly different view and told the NewsHour he saw "no useful purpose" in changing the name of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Friedman is the chairman of a committee currently updating the definition of PTSD in the American Psychiatric Association manual on mental illness. But Friedman, who heads the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Center for PTSD, said "we would consider" changing the name if the Army requested it. "The Army is part of the field. And they obviously are a very important constituent," he said. The leaders of the American Psychiatric Association and Chiarelli are scheduled to meet in the next couple of weeks. Oldham said that even after he and his colleagues consider a change in terminology, they will not necessarily "have a consensus that it makes sense." "I want to listen to General Chiarelli, I want to listen to these ideas, and I want the troops who need help to get help. And it's an intriguing idea and I think it's worth thinking about.," he said. [Source: PBS Newshour article 6 Dec 2011 ++]

Online Purchasing

Sales Tax Update 01: Buy a product at a local store and, in most states, you'll pay sales taxes of as much as 10 percent. Buy that same product online from an out-of-state company, and it'll normally be shipped to your door without that merchant adding sales taxes. But you knew that, right? Here's what you probably didn't know: In many states, you're supposed to be paying those taxes anyway, either by sending in the appropriate sales tax to your state, or its closely-related cousin, a use tax (essentially, a tax levied by the state on any item not subject to sales tax). Of course, legal or not, virtually nobody pays sales or use taxes to their state for out-of-state purchases. But that sales tax holiday might finally be coming to an end.

Businessweek recently reported that a bipartisan group of U.S. senators has introduced what they're calling the Marketplace Fairness Act [PDF], which will make it easier for states to require online, out-of-state businesses to charge and remit state and local sales taxes. While many online retailers are obviously against this bill, Amazon.com feels that some form of online taxes is inevitable, and the company is looking for a solution like this bill that creates a uniform system and controls the administrative costs of collecting taxes for every city, county, and state. You can read their press release expressing their support of the bill at <http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=176060&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=1628503&highlight=>.

While the letter of the law may currently rely on consumers to voluntarily remit uncollected sales and use taxes, there is at least one thing that consumers can do to save money: Make sure retailers don't apply sales tax to pre-discount totals. We all have made purchases with coupons and other discounts, only to find that the merchant calculated sales tax on the original price. Yet in every state that researched, this is simply wrong: Iowa's Department of Revenue is clear on this issue, as is Florida's, Colorado's, and New York's. The exceptions are typically rebates and vouchers for reimbursement issued by manufacturers or the government. In most cases this happens when you use coupons at restaurants, but it also occurs on discounted items by other retailers. In these cases, it is hard to say if an unscrupulous merchant is padding its bottom line under the guise of sales tax or if their poorly programmed computers are actually collecting and paying extra taxes. Either way, it makes sense to learn the laws of your state and make sure your retailer is not collecting more sales tax than they should.

Today's consumers can still enjoy ordering goods through the mail without having the merchant collect taxes – but that may change. In the meantime, you can at least be sure that you are still being charged the appropriate taxes

when you save money by using coupons and other discounts. [Source: MoneyTalksNews Jason Steele 8 Dec 2011 ++]



Dover Air Base Mortuary: The Air Force dumped the incinerated partial remains of at least 274 American troops in a Virginia landfill, far more than the military had acknowledged, before halting the secretive practice three years ago, records show. Air Force officials said the landfill dumping was not disclosed to families who had authorized the military to dispose of the remains in a dignified and respectful manner. There are no plans, they said, to alert those families now. The Air Force had maintained that it could not estimate how many troops might have had their remains sent to a landfill. The practice was revealed in NOV by The Washington Post, which was able to document a single case of a soldier whose partial remains were sent to the King George County landfill in Virginia. The new data, for the first time, show the scope of what has become an embarrassing episode for vaunted Dover Air Base, the main port of entry for America’s war dead. The landfill disposals were never formally authorized under military policies or regulations. They also were not disclosed to senior Pentagon officials who conducted a high-level review of cremation policies at the Dover mortuary in 2008, records show.

Air Force and Pentagon officials said in NOV that determining how many remains went to the landfill would require searching through the records of more than 6,300 troops whose remains have passed through the mortuary since 2001. “It would require a massive effort and time to recall records and research individually,” Jo Ann Rooney, the Pentagon’s acting undersecretary for personnel, wrote in a 22 NOV letter to Rep. Rush D. Holt (D-N.J.). Holt, who has pressed the Pentagon for answers on behalf of a constituent whose husband was killed in Iraq, accused the Air Force and Defense Department of hiding the truth. “What the hell?” Holt said in a phone interview. “We spent millions, tens of millions, to find any trace of soldiers killed, and they’re concerned about a ‘massive’ effort to go back and pull out the files and find out how many soldiers were disrespected this way?” He added: “They just don’t want to ask questions or look very hard.” Senior Air Force leaders said there was no intent to deceive. “Absolutely not,” said Lt. Gen. Darrell D. Jones, the Air Force’s deputy chief of staff for personnel.

This week the Air Force produced a tally based on information contained in the Dover mortuary’s electronic database. It showed that 976 fragments from 274 military personnel were cremated, incinerated and taken to the landfill between 2004 and 2008. An additional group of 1,762 unidentified remains were collected from the battlefield and disposed of in the same manner, the Air Force said. Those fragments could not undergo DNA testing because they had been badly burned or damaged in explosions. The total number of incinerated fragments dumped in the landfill exceeded 2,700. A separate federal investigation of the mortuary in NOV, prompted by whistleblower complaints, uncovered “gross mismanagement” and documented how body parts recovered from bomb blasts stacked up in the morgue’s coolers for months or years before they were identified and disposed of. The problems also transpired at a time when the mortuary was shielded from public scrutiny. News coverage of the return of fallen

troops to Dover was banned by President George H.W. Bush in 1991 before the first Persian Gulf War. The ban remained until APR 09, when the Obama administration lifted it.

The Air Force said it first cremated the remains and then included those ashes in larger loads of mortuary medical waste that were burned in an incinerator and taken to a landfill. Incinerating medical waste is a common disposal practice but including cremated human ashes is not, according to funeral home directors, regulators and waste haulers. Air Force officials said they do not know when the landfill disposals began. Their first record of it is Feb. 23, 2004. The mortuary database became operational in late 2003. Mortuary leaders decided to end the practice in May 2008 because "there was a better way to do it," Jones said. The remains are cremated and placed in a sea-salt urn. The mortuary arranges with the Navy to have the retirement at sea. Jones said the Air Force did not need to inform relatives of troops whose remains ended up in the landfill because they had signed forms stipulating that they did not wish to be notified if additional remains were identified. The forms authorized the military to make "appropriate disposition" of those subsequent remains. Asked if the landfill was a dignified final resting place, Jones said: "The way we're doing it today is much better."

Jones said the mortuary mission is to treat all remains with dignity, honor and respect. Mortuary employees also stand ready to help the families of the fallen. In 2008, mortuary employees were the ones who pushed for the change once they realized how the remains were being disposed of. "It was employees at the Dover Port Mortuary who, on their own volition, came up with that suggestion, that recommendation, to make that policy change back in 2008," Pentagon spokesman Navy Capt. John Kirby told reporters 8 DEC. "That wasn't something imposed upon them. It wasn't the result of some [inspector general] report. They came up with this on their own." The Air Force has set up a hotline for families who have questions about the processes the mortuary used. It is 1-855-637-2583. Or families with questions can e-mail officials at dover.pm@pentagon.af.mil. "We will be forthright, we will tell them everything we know about the disposition of their loved one," Jones said. [Source: Washington Post Craig Whitlock | Mary Pat Flaherty article 7 Dec 2011 ++]



The coffins of four U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq arrive at Dover Air Force

VA RTLS: The Veterans Affairs Department views a planned \$550 million Real-Time Location System (RTLS) as a way to ensure its hospitals properly sterilize medical instruments, improve efficiency and track equipment. VA unions view it as a Big Brother system that could monitor employees. The department is scheduled

to release on 9 DEC a draft request for proposals for RTLS, which will use signals from Wi-Fi networks already installed in its hospitals to track equipment -- and potentially employees -- within a meter or better. VA has referred to plans to track employee Wi-Fi tags with the system in a notice in September and a briefing in November, although the department said 5 DEC it did not have an official plan in place to tag and track employees. Tracking equipment will help solve one of its most vexing problems -- lack of sterilization of medical equipment, VA Chief Information Officer Roger Baker said in a media call last month.

In June 2009, the department's inspector general reported that VA hospitals in Georgia and Florida failed to properly sterilize endoscopes used for colonoscopies before reuse, potentially exposing thousands of veterans to HIV and other infections. Baker said RTLS tags on medical equipment would ensure they would not be used before they were sterilized. VA, in a "sources sought" notice released to industry in September, said RTLS equipment will interface with cleaning and sterilization equipment for strict adherence to cleaning standards. Baker said he viewed RTLS as a technology that could support "at least 15 business cases" in VA, including tracking of equipment such as computers. The September notice to industry said the system could follow veteran case file folders used by examiners in the Veterans Benefits Administration and track the remains of soldiers for the National Cemetery Administration. VA also said in the September notice it wanted to tap RTLS to "locate staff in real time" through 2-inch wide Wi-Fi tags on their badges in the 152 hospitals run by the Veterans Health Administration. The department also briefed its staff tracking plans to potential bidders on 8 NOV. Staff tracking information -- as well as all the other information gathered by the system -- would be stored in a National Data Repository accessible at the local, regional or national levels.

VA said staff tracking by RTLS will help improve hospital workflow and efficiency and this will be done with the "explicit knowledge" of employees. The department added that data collected from the system will not be used for employee performance assessment or disciplinary purposes, and "will have the support of VHA labor union partners." That's news to three of the four unions representing roughly 250,000 VHA employees.

- Susan Anderson, president of National Association of Government Employees local at the Martinsburg, W. Va., Veterans Affairs hospital, and a member of the labor-management VA National Partnership Council, said she received a briefing from the department in July about RTLS and was assured it would be used to track equipment only, not employees. Anderson said VA did not furnish her with the information contained in its industry briefings or procurement documents. Anderson called the \$550 million price tag for RTLS "a staggering amount of money that could be used to care for vets." She also is concerned about the privacy implications. "I really don't want anyone to track how long I spend in the bathroom," Anderson said.
- Elaine Gerace, vice president of the Service Employees International local for the VA hospital in Syracuse, N.Y. -- and another member of the National Partnership Council -- said the last RTLS briefing she had from VA was a year ago, and the department said the technology would be used to track equipment only. Gerace views any plans by VA to use RTLS to track employees as "the beginning of Big Brother . . . an invasion of privacy."
- Oscar Williams Jr., second executive vice president for the American Federation of Government Employees National VA Council, also had the impression that the department planned to use RTLS to only track equipment, and if VA wants to use it to electronically monitor employees then "we're not going to let it happen." AFGE, Williams said, represents 207,000 VA employees.

Josephine Schuda, a VA spokesman, said 5 DEC that as of now there was no official plan for staff tagging with RTLS. She said the new contract will "buy technology that will allow a wide range of capabilities for use over five years." Before VA asks a vendor to develop a particular application, there would be discussions with the unions, Schuda said. [Source: NextGov.com Bob Brewin article 5 Dec 2011 ++]

VA Homeless Vets Update 25: In an effort to keep veterans from turning to the streets, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced 5 DEC that it will offer \$100 million in grants to local agencies that help returning troops in need. The VA estimates that 107,000 veterans are without a place to stay on any given night and has committed to eliminating the mounting problem by 2015. The VA's most recent program will enable community agencies to apply for grants from a \$100 million pot, so that they can intervene before former servicemen and servicewomen are forced to give up their homes. "The problems that lead to homelessness begin long before veterans and their families are on the streets," Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said in a statement. "By putting more resources into prevention services for people at risk of becoming homeless, we will continue to help veterans and their families get back on their feet and turn their lives around." The program aims to help more than 35,000 veterans and families. Offering veterans training, education and counseling -- among other services -- is critical before returning troops resort to living in cardboard boxes. Homeless veterans are more likely to develop life-threatening diseases -- and remain on the streets longer -- than non-veteran homeless people, according to a study conducted by the 100,000 Homeless Campaign released in November. "Those who have served this nation as veterans should never find themselves on the streets, living without care and without hope," Shinseki said.



[Source: Huff Post Impact article 7 Dec 2011 ++]

Iowa Veterans Home Update 04: Iowa's nursing home for veterans has ended a program in which residents transported other residents who use wheelchairs around the campus, following a bloody accident in which an elderly woman fell face-first into concrete and broke her nose, its top administrator said. The Iowa Veterans Home in Marshalltown reported the 29 SEP fall by a resident who suffered from arthritis and dementia to state regulators and took responsibility for failing to train her escort. That incident and another in which a patient fell out of bed after being left unattended led the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals to cite the home for a major safety violation last month and fine it \$3,000. State records show it is the second fine for a serious violation in two years for the home, which is Iowa's largest nursing home and among the biggest in the nation for veterans and their spouses. The home is made up of two separate facilities: one that provides nursing care for about 500 residents, and a residential care facility where 100 more people live mostly independently.

Under the home's resident employee escort program, Commandant David Worley said 2 DEC that about a dozen residents of the residential care facility were employed a few hours per week at minimum wage transporting nursing home residents in wheelchairs. He said the program had been in place for years but was discontinued after the Sept. fall exposed a lack of training among employees and raised questions about safety. "We hope we never, ever are the cause of a resident getting injured. That's always our biggest concern," he said. "We want that to never happen

again." Asked why the escorts did not have training, Worley said the program was there when he took over as nursing home administrator 16 months ago "and we just hadn't followed up on it."

On Sept. 29, a male employee was transporting the woman back from a beauty shop down a ramp on the home's grounds when she put her feet down, tried to stand up and fell face-first onto cement, records show. The woman taken to an emergency room, where doctors found her nose was broken and a major cut on her forehead that required 14 stitches. The male employee told investigators he'd been doing the job for three months, but had no training on the proper use of wheelchairs. "At the time of the fall, the wheelchair pedals were not being used and the resident escort employee transferring the resident had no training," according to the state citation, which is dated 2 NOV. "The facility and/or director of nursing had not provided training to ensure residents' needs were met." After the fall, Worley said employee escorts were reassigned to other jobs such as delivering mail and folding laundry. Residents in wheelchairs will now only be transported by staff employees or volunteers who go through training, he said. David Werning, a spokesman for the Department of Inspections and Appeals, said the wheelchair escort program "may well have been a case of good intentions that went awry." He said it was understandable to try to have residents feel good about helping others, but the lack of training was problematic.

In the second case, regulators faulted the home for failing to prevent a patient who had chronic kidney disease and other ailments from slipping off the end of a bed on 25 SEP and hitting his or her head on the floor. That resident bruised the area around his or her eye so badly that it swelled shut and suffered abrasions to the elbow and knees. Veterans home employees blamed a nurse for briefly leaving the resident sitting on the end of the bed while looking for another employee to help adjust the patient's sling. The patient's care plan had warned the resident was at high risk for falls. Regulators cited the home for a single major violation as a result of multiple lesser infractions that constituted "an imminent danger or a substantial probability of resultant death or physical harm to the residents of the facility."

The home paid the fine on 15 NOV and its size was reduced by 35 percent to \$1,950 under a policy rewarding violators who do not contest citations, Werning said. He said home administrators had also submitted an acceptable plan to address the problems, and regulators would check whether the measures are in place during a surprise visit. "Anytime you get a Class 1 violation it signifies there is a significant issue to be corrected," he said. "Considering the size of the facility, they jumped on it quickly." The home was cited and fined \$4,500 last year for inadequate supervision after a resident with dementia left the grounds during a recreational activity, walked four blocks away and was spotted trying to hitchhike. [Source: Associated Press Ryan J. Foley article 5 Dec 2011 ++]

WWII Vets Update 09: Time, to be sure, is catching up with the 1.7 million living American veterans of history's greatest conflict. Many are frail or ill. But on the 70th anniversary of the U.S. entry into that war - at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941 - the remarkable story is how well so many veterans are doing.

- Henry Heim, who survived the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and later flew bombing missions over Europe, recently crawled through brush and briars while on a hunting trip to get in position to shoot "the biggest buck I ever killed." He's 90.
- Ted Paluch, who played dead to escape a German massacre of U.S. troops in World War II, moved not long ago from South Jersey to Center City to be more in the thick of things. He recently got back from a four-day speaking trip to Michigan. He's 89.
- Sam Ballinger, who fought in the Battle of the Bulge, still loves ballroom dancing and is a fitness freak who works out daily. He's 86."Everybody says I look good for a World War II veteran," Ballinger said. "They expect to see an old man with a mustache and a cane."

This is the wealthiest, healthiest generation of older Americans, ever. "It might very well be that these guys, who have seen everything and are now late in life, might become centenarians," said Carolyn Aldwin, a professor of human development at Oregon State University who has studied the life span of veterans. "The ones who are left are probably pretty hardy individuals." Seven decades after the Civil War, fewer than 1 percent of Union veterans were living, according to data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. At a similar distance from the First World War, 2.5 percent of veterans were alive. Thanks to medical advances and the blessings of a prosperous post-war America, World War II veterans are doing far better. More than 10 percent of the 16 million who served in the Armed Forces are alive. Even by 2015, by the 70th anniversary of Japanese surrender on Sept. 2, 1945, more than 5 percent will remain, the VA estimates. The agency projects that 855,000 will still be around in 2015, 205,000 in 2021, and 57,000 in 2025. The last World War I veteran, Frank Buckles, of West Virginia, died Feb. 27 at age 110. Quite a few World War II veterans might do as well, or better. The VA estimates that 370 will be around in 2036 - a whole generation from now.

Veterans often live longer than other people because they had to be fit to get into the military, Aldwin said. Many grew up tough and strong on the farm, or worked in coal mines or steel mills. After the war, the educational opportunities afforded by the GI Bill gave many a safer workplace with medical insurance, pensions, and vacations - benefits unheard of by their parents. Penicillin and other antibiotics were among the first of myriad medical advances that saved millions of lives. Aldwin cites what she calls the "tough-old-bird" factor. These veterans survived some of the most dangerous years of life - their 50s, 60s, and 70s, when heart disease and lung ailments related to smoking often take a toll. Having made it until now, they're "apt to live for a very long time," Aldwin said.

Heim knows well the toll that time is taking. On Pearl Harbor Day last year, he spoke at a ceremony in the state Capitol, at which he counted just seven Pearl Harbor veterans. Not so many years ago, there might have been dozens. "We're dwindling fast," he said. "I wouldn't say there's a heck of a lot of us." Yet, Heim is feeling well. Heim, who was knocked unconscious by a bomb at Pearl Harbor, says he considers every day as a bonus. But he has always done so. "I remember when I was 19, I didn't think I was going to live another minute," he said. He left the military after World War II, but was recalled for duty in the Korean War. He ended up a major. He worked for Bell Telephone until retiring in 1976, more than 35 years ago. He and his wife, Kay, have been married 69 years. "I expect to be 105 or 110," he said. "Now, that's silly; but I have always exceeded expectations."

For decades after the war, veterans kept busy with work and family. As they retired, many became more interested in the historic events of their youth, and joined veterans groups. Many of the groups are now withering. Some have folded. Others have opened membership to the descendants of veterans, or others. Last week, at a meeting of the Delaware Valley chapter of the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge, 14 veterans were on hand. The group, which is one of the larger organizations still going, remembers a battle in the winter of 1944-45 in which 19,000 GIs were killed, 20,000 were captured, and 40,000 were wounded. Meeting monthly at the Coast Guard station in South Philadelphia, the group has \$10,000 in the bank and is planning a 2012 bus trip to Gettysburg or other historic destination. Stan Wojtusik, who helped organize the group 30 years ago, gave up the presidency last Wednesday, turning it over to 46-year-old Gary Lambert, son of Bulge veteran Ed Lambert, 86. The younger Lambert, an Iraqi war veteran, said he hoped to keep the group thriving indefinitely. In attendance for the turnover were:

- Matt Reluga, 92. A former sales rep who retired at age 62, who said he never expected to live this long. He had three brothers and a sister, all of them gone. "I think it's by being thin, by not being overweight," he said. Reluga, who was one of the first U.S. soldiers to enter Czechoslovakia during the Allied advance across Europe, attends the meetings "to have some activity" and enjoy the camaraderie. The veterans seldom talk anymore about combat, he said. It's enough just to know that the "other guy" has had similar experiences.

- Sam Ballinger, the fitness buff, agreed that keeping trim was key. A former mechanical engineer from Burlington, he has a full head of hair, stands 5-foot-11, weighs 160 pounds, and has "a lot of girlfriends," by his account. "I don't eat meat, I drink soy milk, and I get a lot of exercise," he said.
- Ted Paluch, at the meeting in a crisp fedora, said he felt lucky not to have died in his youth. On Dec. 17, 1944, the second day of the Battle of the Bulge, Paluch was in a field artillery unit that ran smack into a German heavy-tank battalion. After the Americans surrendered, they were stripped of belongings, grouped together in a field, and hosed with machine guns in the worst atrocity committed by the Nazis against U.S. troops. Paluch was hit in the hand, but hid silently among heaps of dead Americans, probably 80 at least. At the meeting, he carried two new books, both of which mentioned him prominently. One was about the battle as a whole, and the other focused on the massacre. He has found, in old age, that he is of interest to historians. He appears to enjoy it. "Will I live to be 100? I'll try," he said. "I've got a couple more years. I'm doing pretty good."

[Source: Philadelphia Inquirer Tom Infield article 7 Dec 2011 ++]

Postal Service Update 05: On 5 DEC the United States Postal Service said it planned to largely eliminate next-day delivery for first-class mail as part of its push to cut costs and reduce its budget deficit. Currently, more than 40 percent of first-class mail is delivered in one day. The agency said the slower delivery would result from its decision to shut about half of its 487 mail processing centers nationwide. The move is expected to eliminate about 28,000 jobs and increase the distance that mail must travel between post offices and processing centers. It would be the first reduction in delivery standards for first-class mail in 40 years. Current standards call for delivering first-class mail in one to three days within the continental United States. Under the planned cutbacks, those delivery times would increase to two or three days, potentially creating problems for clients of Netflix, the popular DVD-by-mail service, who hope that their next episodes of "Mad Men" will arrive in a day, or procrastinators who like to pay bills as late as possible.

The agency had announced on Sept. 15 that it would begin studying plans to close 252 of its mail processing centers. On 5 DEC, the Postal Service said it would "move forward" with that plan, with closings to begin as early as March. It also said it was seeking a nonbinding advisory opinion from the Postal Regulatory Commission about the closures, although agency officials said they were intent on closing the processing centers as part of a plan to save \$3 billion a year by 2015. "The bottom line is that in the last three years, we've lost almost 27 percent of our first-class volume," Patrick Donahoe, the postmaster general, said in a phone interview. "In 2000, 5 percent of people paid bills online. Now it's 60 percent. The problem is we've lost so much volume in blue-box mail, we can't hold out for next-day service anymore." The Postal Service lost \$5.1 billion last year. Mr. Donahoe has said that by 2015, he hopes to cut \$20 billion from the agency's annual costs, now about \$75 billion. He has called for closing up to 3,700 of the nation's 32,000 post offices, reducing deliveries to five days a week from six and cutting the agency's work force of 653,000 employees by more than 100,000.

Postal officials said they would not make definitive announcements on any post office closings before January. But many of the other proposed changes sought by the agency would require Congressional action. So far, lawmakers have been unwilling to grant Mr. Donahoe's requests or agree on an alternative plan of action. "What I need Congress to do is act now to help me on the things they can help me on," Mr. Donahoe said. In particular, he urged Congress to approve five-day-a-week delivery and to remove the post office's obligation to set aside about \$5.5 billion a year for 10 years to prefund retiree health care, a burden that has accounted for a large share of the agency's financial losses in recent years. If Congress takes those two actions, "it can help me save \$8.5 billion a year," he said. The Postal Service had previously announced a 1-cent increase in first-class postage, to 45 cents, starting 22 JAN. [Source: New York times Business Day Steven Greenhouse article 5 Dec 2011 ++]



USPS: Misunderstanding the "less is more" principle

TSP Update 24: The Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board reported last month that TSP participation rate for federal employees was strong at 85.4 percent, while participation for military members was 39.3 percent, despite fewer enrollees from the reserves. TSP returns, particularly for the C, S, and I funds, have been volatile throughout 2011. November was a fairly dismal month for Thrift Savings Plan returns with all but three funds posting in the red.

- After an above-average October in which the C Fund, invested in common stocks of large companies on the Standard & Poor's 500 Index, jumped 10.93 percent, November was a disappointment. The fund lost 0.21 percent last month and has gained 7.82 percent during the past 12 months.
- The stable government securities (G) fund increased 0.14 percent. The F Fund, which invests in fixed-income bonds, was in the black for the fifth consecutive month, edging up 0.01 percent. During the past year, the F Fund has increased 5.68 percent; the G Fund is up 2.51 percent and the L Income Fund rose 3.55 percent.
- The I Fund, invested in international stocks, dropped the most, falling 2.46 percent in November and is down 2.67 percent over the past year. Since January, the I Fund has decreased 9.98 percent, likely due to the ongoing debt crisis in Europe.
- L Income, the fund for federal employees who have reached their target retirement date and have started withdrawing money, rose 0.02 percent.
- The S Fund, which invests in small and midsize companies and tracks the Dow Jones Wilshire 4500 Index dipped 0.51 percent, after a big jump of 14.09 percent in October. The S Fund had posted positive returns in 2011 until this month.

All the life-cycle funds, designed to move investors to less risky portfolios as they get closer to retirement, saw losses in November. The L 2050 dropped 0.78 percent; L 2040 declined 0.62 percent; L 2030 lost 0.49 percent; and L 2020 decreased 0.34 percent. During the past year, however, all the life-cycle funds have posted positive returns. Year-to-date data and figures for the past 12 months of the L 2050 Fund were unavailable. [Source: GovExec.com Kellie Lunney article 6 Dec 2011 ++]

Day of Infamy: It was a quiet and beautiful Sunday morning at Hawaii's Pearl Harbor—home of America's Pacific Fleet. Many of the 60,000 Sailors and other military personnel stationed there were still in their bunks resting after a Saturday night on the town. Some were eating breakfast; a few were on duty, others just straggling in. What appeared to be another day in paradise would quickly turn into a nightmare. At five minutes before 8:00 AM on December 7, 1941, 183 Japanese aircraft raced across the mountains north of Pearl Harbor with a mission to destroy the U.S. Fleet. Bombs were dropped on fuel and ammunition dumps, buildings, and ships. Japanese pilots strafed the same with wing-mounted machine guns while others dropped torpedoes. The attack was a surprise. Some Sailors went down with their ships. Some were trapped only to drown inside as water replaced the air in the sinking ship. Some had to choose between staying aboard a doomed ship, or take a chance by diving into a harbor aflame with burning oil, littered with the dead bodies of their fellow service members. It was truly a living hell. But in American fashion, these brave men and women pulled together. Ammunition and weapons lockers were cracked open in order to fight back. Army pilots dodged bombs and machine gun fire to make it to their planes in attempt to take to the air and drive off the attackers. Some rendered aid to the injured and dying. Others put their comrades before themselves and risked their own lives to save a stranger.



Pearl Harbor Dec 7, 1941

Fifty minutes later, a second wave of 170 Japanese planes intensified the attack arriving almost simultaneously from three different directions. More than 1,100 Sailors were killed when the U.S.S. Arizona's forward magazine exploded from a direct bomb strike. In all, the assault claimed 2,403 American lives and left more than a thousand others wounded. Ninety minutes after it all began, the last Japanese plane headed away from Pearl Harbor and back to its carrier. America's entry into World War II was solidified. Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, who planned the attack on Pearl Harbor, would write in his diary, "I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve." Whether or not the Admiral actually wrote those words is debatable, however, there is no doubt the attack did awaken a sleeping giant. Sixteen million fighting Americans would go on to drive the Japanese and Germans into surrender—fighting in every corner of the globe to deliver a world free from tyranny.

Today, fewer than 3,000 Pearl Harbor survivors remain as our last living links with history and the beginning of America's greatest generation. Most of these brave Americans are now in their late 80s and 90s. Today, we salute their valor and sacrifice, and we honor their fighting spirit—a spirit that has motivated millions of Americans to follow their lead and live by their example. For most of us born several generations later, it's hard to relate to the devastation, the loss of life and the implications of those events that happened 70 years ago; and thousands of miles away. The horrific attack on Pearl Harbor was to the greatest generation what 9/11 is to most of us. Most of us weren't directly affected by the terrorist attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C., but we felt the horror, the overwhelming emotions and the desire to unite and take the fight to enemy. Those experiences and emotions must have been similar to what the greatest generation felt and it spurred them on to set a high standard for both future American service members and for how the world would view the United States and its military might.

Those of us who have worn the uniform, and those who will wear it tomorrow, are the legacy of the survivors of Pearl Harbor as well as the millions of brave Veterans who followed in their footsteps. They put country before self and are willing to risk all to save all—the American way of life. We owe all that we are today, to those who came before us. [Source: Vantage Point Gary Hicks article 6 Dec 2011 ++]



Sailors and Marines render honors as the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76) passes the USS Arizona Memorial

Day of Infamy Update 01: Lee Soucy, who lived to be 90 after surviving the attack on Pearl Harbor, passed away just last year. Seven decades after dozens of fellow Sailors were killed when the USS Utah sank on Dec. 7, 1941, Navy divers took a small urn containing his ashes and put it in a porthole of the ship. The ceremony was one of five memorials held the week of 7 DEC for servicemen who lived through the assault and wanted their remains placed in Pearl Harbor out of pride and affinity for those they left behind. "They want to return and be with the shipmates that they lost during the attack," said Jim Taylor, a retired Sailor who coordinates the ceremonies. The memorials happened the same week the country observed the 70th anniversary of the aerial bombing that killed 2,390 Americans and brought the United States into World War II. A larger ceremony to remember all those who perished was held 7 DEC just before 8 a.m. Hawaii time -- the same moment the devastating attack began.

Soucy, the youngest of seven children, joined the Navy out of high school so he wouldn't burden his parents. In 1941, he was a pharmacist mate, trained to care for the sick and wounded. He had just finished breakfast that Sunday morning when he saw planes dropping bombs on airplane hangars. He rushed to his battle station after feeling the Utah lurch, but soon heard the call to abandon ship as the vessel began sinking. He swam to shore, where he made a makeshift first aid center to help the wounded and dying. He worked straight through for two days. The Utah lost

nearly 60 men on Dec. 7, and about 50 are still entombed in the battleship. Today, the rusting hull of the Utah sits on its side next to Ford Island, not far from where it sank 70 years ago. Soucy's daughter, Margaret, said her parents had initially planned to have their ashes interred together at their church in Plainview, Texas. But her father changed his mind after visiting Pearl Harbor for the 65th anniversary in 2006. "He announced that he wanted to be interred on the Utah. And my mother looked a little hurt and perplexed. And I said, 'Don't worry, Daddy, I'll take that part of your ashes that was your mouth and I'll have those interred on the Utah. And you can then tell those that have preceded you, including those that were entombed, what's been going on in the world,'" Margaret Soucy recalled saying with a laugh. " 'And the rest of your remains we will put with mother in the church gardens at St. Mark's.' And then my sister spoke up and said, 'Yes, then mother can finally rest in peace,'" she said.



The family had long kidded Soucy for being talkative -- they called him "Mighty Mouth" -- so Margaret Soucy said her father laughed and agreed. "He just thought that was hilarious," she said. "So that is what we are doing. We're taking only a portion of his ashes. It's going to be a small urn," she said. Soucy's three children, several grandchildren and great-grandchildren -- 11 family members altogether -- attended the sunset ceremony on 6 DEC. His wife died earlier this year. Amid overcast skies, a Navy diver took the urn, protected by a mesh bag, and held it above water while swimming toward the Utah. The diver, who was accompanied by three supporting divers, went underwater to the porthole once reaching the ship. An urn carrying the ashes of Vernon Olsen, who was among the 334 on the Arizona to survive the attack, was interred in a gun turret on the ship Wednesday. Most of the battleship's 1,177 Sailors and Marines who died on Dec. 7 are still entombed on the ship. Five months after Pearl Harbor, Olsen was on the USS Lexington aircraft carrier when it sank during the Battle of the Coral Sea. "I used to tell him he had nine lives. He was really lucky," said his widow, Jo Ann Olsen. He passed away in April at the age of 91 after a bout of pneumonia.

Most of the 12 ships that sank or were beached that day were removed from the harbor, their metal hulls salvaged for scrap. Just the Utah and the USS Arizona still lie in the dark blue waters. Only survivors of those vessels may return in death to their ships. Pearl Harbor interment and ash scattering ceremonies began in the late 1980s, and started growing in number as more survivors heard about them. Taylor has helped 265 survivors return to Pearl Harbor. The vast majority have had their ashes scattered. He's arranged for the remains of about 20 Arizona survivors to be placed in the Arizona and about a dozen to be put in the Utah. "These guys are heroes, OK. Fact is, in my opinion, anybody that's ever served in the military and wore the uniform are heroes. That's why you and I can breathe today in a free country. So I just appreciate what they did," he said. [Source: Associated Press Audrey Mcavoy article 6 Dec 2011 ++]



Lee Soucy



Navy divers swim with the urn of Pearl Harbor survivor Lee Soucy during internment ceremony

Day of Infamy Update 02: On Dec. 7, 1941, in the infamous sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese naval aircraft sunk the battleship USS Arizona, killing 1,177 of its crew while they were preparing for a quiet Sunday morning. The mostly submerged wreck, sheltered by a graceful and distinctive white canopy, is a National Memorial, justifiably visited by the thousands who make the pilgrimage to its resting place. Nearly half of the 2,402 people who died at Pearl Harbor are entombed there. It may be one of the best known sights in Hawaii. On the other side of Ford's Island, almost directly across from the Arizona, is another National Memorial, if not exactly forgotten, certainly largely overlooked. The battleship USS Utah was sunk by torpedo, some say three torpedoes, and, despite a couple of unsuccessful attempts to move it, the rusty orange remains of the Utah remain where the it rolled over on its side at 8:01 that Sunday morning.



The USS Utah society objects that the Memorial "is not mentioned in tourist brochures." And, indeed, the small memorial on the shore and that part of Pearl Harbor is off limits to visitors without special permission. The isolation and the quiet — no parking lot, no tour buses, no crowds, the isolation — somehow make it more poignant than the Arizona, even though the periodic oil bubbles create the odd sensation that some small part of the ship is still alive. The 521-foot Utah was commissioned in 1911. The Utah spent World War I covering convoys from a base in Ireland and postwar had brief stints as a flagship in Europe and South America. In a curious sidelight, during sea trials in the 1930s it was successfully operated by remote control from another ship, presaging the modern era of the

drone. It was in its capacity as a target ship that the Utah arrived in Hawaii in early September 1941. Some think that the heavy wooden planking intended to protect the Utah from the practice bombs might have misled the Japanese into thinking it was a carrier.

The Utah, too, had its tales of heroism. Electricians and engine room crew who remained at their posts to give their shipmates a chance to escape. The senior officer aboard, Lt. Cmdr. Solomon Asquith, went through the ship trying to ensure that his crew escaped was himself trapped and had to be pulled out through a porthole. Even as the Japanese were strafing the wrecked ships, the crew climbed onto the wreck and cut a hole in the hull, freeing six trapped sailors. The Utah carried a crew of 371. Fifty-four of them died that day. Periodically they are rejoined by the ashes of their old shipmates. In remembering Pearl Harbor, we should not forget the Utah. Nor should we forget the 4,148 others who perished during the attack, or the more than 400,000 who died during the war that for America began with the raid. Sixteen million men and women served in the armed forces during World War II, and they comprised a generation that changed our world during and after the conflict. We honor the dead, and salute the survivors. [Source: Knoxville News Sentinel article 7 Dec 2011 ++]

Photo # 80-G-266626 USS Utah capsizing at Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941



NORAD Santa Tracking Update 01: For the 56th year running, the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) will add the job of tracking the global flight of Santa on Christmas Eve to its mission of North American aerospace warning and control. NORAD stands the watch protecting the skies of North America 365 days a year, but on Christmas Eve the children of the world look to NORAD and our trusted partners to make sure that Santa is able to complete his mission safely," said Army Gen. Charles H. Jacoby, Jr. Jacoby commands NORAD, as well as U.S. Northern Command, both based at Peterson Air Force Base in Colorado. The NORAD Tracks Santa mission "is a duty to the children of the world," he added, "and a privilege we've enjoyed for 56 consecutive years."

This year, the NORAD Tracks Santa website went live 1 DEC and features a Countdown Calendar, a Kid's Countdown Village with holiday games and activities that change daily, and video messages from students and troops from around the world. The website is available in English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Japanese, Brazilian, Portuguese, and Chinese. For the first time, using free apps in the Apple iTunes Store and in the Android market, parents and children can use their smart phones to count down the days until Santa and his reindeer take off from the North Pole to deliver presents to kids everywhere. Facebook, Google+, YouTube, and Twitter also offer tracking opportunities. Santa followers can type "@noradsanta" into each search engine to get started. And that's not the only technology that goes into the Santa tracking mission. To track the big man in red, NORAD uses radar, satellites, Santa cams, and fighter jets. A NORAD radar system called the North Warning System consists of 47 installations strung across the northern border of North America. On 24 DEC, NORAD monitors the radar systems continuously for indications that Santa Claus has left the North Pole. The moment radar indicates a lift-off, satellites positioned in geo-synchronous orbit at 22,300 miles from the Earth's surface are equipped with infrared sensors, which enable them to detect heat. Rudolph's bright red nose gives off an infrared signature that allows the satellites to detect Santa's sleigh.

NORAD started using the Santa cam network in 1998. Santa cams, according to NORAD, are ultra-cool, high-tech, high-speed digital cameras prepositioned at many locations around the world. They use the cameras once a year to capture images and videos of Santa and his reindeer. In the air, Canadian NORAD pilots flying the CF-18 fighter will intercept and welcome Santa to North America. In the United States, American NORAD fighter pilots in F-15s, F-16s, or F-22 Raptors will fly alongside Santa's airborne sleigh pulled by his famous reindeer: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen, and Rudolph. Once data is collected on December 24, it is pushed into Google Maps and Google Earth so families all over the world can follow Santa. Thanks to these systems and technologies, starting at midnight Mountain Standard Time on 24 DEC, visitors to the NORAD Santa website can watch Santa's progress around the globe.

It all started in 1955 when a Sears media advertisement directed kids to call Santa Claus but printed a telephone number that rang through to the crew commander on duty at the Continental Air Defense Command Operations Center. The colonel on duty told his staff to give all children who called in a "current location" for Santa Claus. The tradition continued when NORAD replaced CONAD in 1958. To track Santa, go to <http://www.noradsanta.org>. [Source: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=66357> Dec 2011]

Clark Veterans Cemetery: As of DEC 2011 use the following quick reference when providing VFW Post 2485 information regarding burials at the Clark Veterans Cemetery (CDC) in Angeles City Philippines:

ELIGIBILITY - Current agreement with the Clark Development Corporation (CDC), limits burial strictly to Veterans of U.S. military service, with the approval of CDC. This includes Philippine Scouts.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS:

- DD Form 214 or earlier documents. Discharge Certificate for Philippine Scouts.
- Death Certificate registered with date stamp.
- For cremation burials, a copy of the cremation certificate will also be required.
- A permit to transfer remains from point of death to the Angeles City area (funeral home responsibility).

COST:

- Full Body burial - P9,000
- Cremation burial - P1,500
- Receipt will be provided for possible VA reimbursement

SCHEDULING - CDC requires 2 business days for processing of burial requests. (Example – for Thursday service, request must be to CDC Tuesday AM). NOTE: Philippine Holidays will impact on scheduling.

- Full Body burials and service can be conducted Tuesday through Saturday.
- Cremation burials and service can be conducted Monday through Saturday.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS:

- Graveside services are conducted promptly at 10 AM on date scheduled.
- It is the responsibility of the Family to insure on-time arrival of the deceased, guests, etc.
- VFW Post 2485, or other Veterans organization, will conduct the Graveside service commencing at 10 AM. Other Speakers or Clergy may, at family option, speak following this service.

SERVICES AT OTHER LOCATIONS - Graveside services can be conducted locally at locations other than Clark Veterans Cemetery pending availability of personnel.

POINTS OF CONTACT - Ask Family representative for a contact name and number. Have them contact one of the below for appointment to coordinate services:

- John Gilbert 0919-928-0984
- Carl Burke 0920-836-5588

[Source: *Chairman, Clark Veterans Cemetery* 6 Dec 2011 ++]

VA Cardiac Rehabilitation: Cardiac rehabilitation/secondary prevention services are recognized as providing significant benefit for persons with heart disease. Cardiac rehabilitation is a professionally supervised program that includes exercise training, education on heart healthy living, and counseling to reduce stress with the goal of significantly reducing the risk of future heart problems, including heart attacks. Although post-hospital rehabilitation programs are an important component of care for patients with heart disease, few VA medical centers provide comprehensive cardiac rehabilitation (CR) services on site. This is particularly problematic for rural Veterans who must travel long distances to receive care and may find it difficult to access rehabilitation services in general. This ORH-sponsored project grew out of a desire to bring services, such as CR, closer to rural Veterans and their homes.

The purpose of this demonstration project was to implement and evaluate a telephone-based outpatient cardiac rehabilitation program, and to estimate program costs. Forty-eight Veterans chose to participate in the demonstration project. Each Veteran received an individualized exercise prescription at baseline and were contacted weekly by telephone for 12 weeks for education and assessment. Preliminary analyses of outcome data for the remote participants completing the 12-week program were promising. Participants showed significant improvements on several outcome measures. Specifically, improvements from baseline to 12-weeks were found for total lipids (171 mg/dl at baseline, 155 mg/dl at 12 weeks, $p < .01$) and for two of four Seattle Angina Questionnaire scales (Physical Limitations and Quality of Life, $p < .05$). There were no significant changes in tobacco use, blood pressure, HDL, LDL, triglycerides, weight, or medication adherence. Additionally, participants were very satisfied with the care they received in the remote program (mean 4.6 on a 1 to 5 scale). Remote participants remained engaged throughout the program; the majority (81%) completed at least 10 of 12 weekly sessions. Estimated costs for the remote program were similar to VA fee-basis costs for referring patients to local on-site programs.

The final product for this project will be an implementation toolbox for a remote CR program. The toolbox will include a Program Implementation Manual, including guidance for staff delivering the program (e.g., 12-week protocol, data collection forms, tips on successful program implementation and patient outcome measurement), a Patient Manual (providing tracking tools for self-monitoring and patient education information) and a cost analysis spreadsheet. This project has had a direct effect on Veterans. It is likely that many of the participants would not have been referred to CR without this program. If implemented widely, this service will not only fill an important gap in VA services, but will bring services closer to patients and their homes, a fundamental principal in the improvement of care for rural Veterans. [Source: The Rural Connection Bonnie Wakefield article Dec 2011 ++]

VA Rural Access Update 12: Did You Know -

§ Rural Veterans are, on average, older than their urban counterparts. Almost half of rural Veterans are between the ages of 55 and 74 and approximately 26% are over the age of 75.

§ Geriatricians have expertise in treating conditions that older individuals experience such as loss of mental sharpness, changes in mood, falls, sensitivity to medications, loss of vision and hearing, and incontinence.

§ The American Geriatrics Society says today there's roughly one geriatrician for every 2,600 people 75 and older. This ratio is projected to fall to one geriatrician for every 3,800 older Americans by 2030.

§ Just 56 percent of first-year fellowship slots in geriatrics were filled last academic year; Only 56 percent of medical students had clinical rotation in geriatrics in 2008.

§ Primary care physicians do not have training or experience to manage complex, older adults with multiple chronic diseases.

§ In order to improve provider training in geriatrics among rural VA providers, the VHA Office of Rural Health has supported the Geriatric Scholars program. This national VA in-service education program is leading the way to quality improvements in rural community-based outpatient clinics across the U.S. The program offers state-of-the-art education in geriatrics to primary care providers, social workers and pharmacists and culminates with each Scholar initiating a quality improvement project in his or her clinic.

[Source: VHA Newsletter The Rural Connection Dec 2011 ++]

VETS: The U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) offers employment and training services to eligible veterans through a non-competitive Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program. Under this grant program, funds are allocated to State Workforce Agencies in direct proportion to the number of veterans seeking employment within their state. The grants support two principal staff positions - DVOP (Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists) and LVEP (Local Veterans' Employment Representatives). This grant provides funds to exclusively serve veterans, other eligible persons, transitioning service members, their spouses and, indirectly, employers. The grant also gives the State the flexibility to determine the most effective and efficient distribution of their staff resources based upon the distinct roles and responsibilities of the two positions. DVOP and LVER staff provide services to all veterans that Title 38 indicates are eligible for their services, but their efforts are concentrated, according to their respective roles and responsibilities, on outreach and the provision and facilitation of direct client services to those who have been identified as most in need of intensive employment and

training assistance. DVOP and LVER staff, through outreach with employers, develop increased hiring opportunities within the local work force by raising the awareness of employers of the availability and the benefit of hiring veterans. Respective roles and responsibilities include:

- DVOP specialists provide intensive services to meet the employment needs of disabled veterans and other eligible veterans, with the maximum emphasis directed toward serving those who are economically or educationally disadvantaged, including homeless veterans, and veterans with barriers to employment. DVOP specialists are actively involved in outreach efforts to increase program participation among those with the greatest barriers to employment which may include but should not be limited to: outplacement in Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program offices; DVA Medical Centers; routine site visits to Veterans' Service Organization meetings; Native American Trust Territories; Military installations; and, other areas of known concentrations of veterans or transitioning service members. The case management approach, taught by the National Veterans' Training Institute, is generally accepted as the method to use when providing vocational guidance or related services to eligible veterans identified as needing intensive services.
- LVEP representatives conduct outreach to employers and engage in advocacy efforts with hiring executives to increase employment opportunities for veterans, encourage the hiring of disabled veterans, and generally assist veterans to gain and retain employment. LVER staff conduct seminars for employers and job search workshops for veterans seeking employment, and facilitate priority of service in regard to employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans by all staff of the employment service delivery system.

To meet the specific needs of veterans, particularly veterans with barriers to employment, DVOP and LVER staff are thoroughly familiar with the full range of job development services and training programs available at the State Workforce Agency One-Stop Career Centers and Department of Veterans' Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program locations. Applications for funds under the Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program will be accepted only from the designated administrative entity that operates the employment service delivery system within the state. For more information about Department of Labor employment and training programs for veterans, contact the VETS office nearest you, listed in the phone book in the United States Government under the Labor Department or visit our site: <http://www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/main.htm>.

[Source: VETS Employment Services Fact Sheet 1 Dec 2011 ++]

Vet Jobs Update 46: With close to 40,000 troops expected to return from Iraq by the end of 2011 and the recent passing of the VOW to Hire Veterans Act, a bipartisan-supported national bill to encourage businesses to hire military veterans, Sears Holdings is calling on all companies to do their part on an issue where the retail giant leads by example. Sears Holdings recently committed to increase its veteran hiring by 10 percent over the next year, and it has been living up to its word. To date in 2011, Sears has hired 1,636 military members – up more than 200 percent from 2010 — 927 of whom were hired between ` AUG and 7 NOV alone. “With so many military members returning home, the support need increases accordingly, especially during the holiday season,” said David Works, a Navy veteran and SVP and president, Human Resources at Sears Holdings. “Sears has long made supporting U.S. veterans a priority throughout the organization – from numerous hiring initiatives and military-friendly policies to our Heroes at Home program and holiday Wish Registry. We are committed to providing resources for as many of our returning heroes as possible, in order to empower them and help better their lives.”

Sears Holdings Corporation is the nation’s fourth largest broadline retailer with over 4,000 full-line and specialty retail stores in the United States and Canada. Consistent with its aggressive military hiring goals, Sears Holdings currently employs more than 30,000 U.S veterans, with more than 1,500 still serving in the National Guard and

reserves, and thousands of military spouses. The Sears Associate Military Support Group helps maintain a positive work environment for these employees. “Hiring veterans is not goodwill, it’s good business,” Works said. “Veterans provide our workforce with a high-level skill set built through brave service to America. They bring the advantages of being immersed in a training environment, and their technical skills, strengths in strategic thinking, and versatility are just a few of the very tangible talents that make them valuable to any employer.”

Another Sears Holdings policy – so military-friendly that it generates year-round inquiries about its validity – is the company’s offer of a military pay differential to its full-time associates who are reservists, serving on active duty. Reservists who are employed full-time are allowed to continue participating in life insurance, medical and dental programs. “We’re humbled by how many calls and emails we receive about the military pay differential policy,” Works said. “These people are amazing employees and it’s the right thing to do to retain them in our ranks.” Via its long-standing Heroes at Home program, Sears has supported U.S. soldiers, by rebuilding homes for veterans and providing gift cards to active service members during the holidays. Since its inception in 2007, the Sears Heroes at Home program has raised more than \$30 million to help renovate 1,000 homes and improve the lives of more than 62,000 families. Visit <http://www.searsholdings.com/> for more information and for ways to contribute to its vital efforts to support the country’s soldiers. For those seeking employment check out <http://www.searsholdings.com/careers/opportunities/military/> [Source: Military.com article 2 Dec 2011 ++]



Military Programs

Vet Jobs Update 47: The Department of Labor has announced a new partnership with Microsoft Corp. To provide veterans with vouchers for no-cost training and certifications that can lead to important industry-recognized credentials. The voucher program will serve veterans in five communities with the highest number of returning post-9/11 era veterans: Seattle, Wash.; San Diego, Calif., Houston, Texas; Northern Virginia; and Jacksonville, Fla. Additional information about this and other initiatives, including specific locations where the vouchers will be distributed, is available at the Department of Labor VETS website at <http://www.dol.gov/vets>. An audio file of a press call announcing this initiative is available to download at: <http://www.dol.gov/dol/media/audio/20111109-announcement-call.mp3>. For more information about Department of Labor employment and training programs for veterans, contact the VETS office nearest you, listed in the phone book in the United States Government under the Labor Department or visit our site: <http://www.dol.gov/vets/aboutvets/contacts/main.htm>.

A similar opportunity is available through the Syracuse University's School of Information Studies. They are hosting a non-credit online curriculum free of cost to veterans who have served on active duty post 9/11/01, which focuses on preparation for transition to corporate careers in IT or operations. This program is available to both employed and unemployed, post 9/11 veterans with a minimum of a high school diploma, and is comprised of two certificates, VET 1: Career Skills for Global Enterprises and VET 2: Applied Technology Education. By participating in this program, veterans have the ability to:

- Receive an overview of various information technology industries, including a number of career paths.
- Create a development plan specific to personal skill-sets, interests, and goals

- Gain an understanding and insight into the corporate culture of globally distributed companies – including effective communication, decision making, and conflict management.
- Learn to effectively prepare for and execute a job search including company research, resume and cover letter writing
- Receive a technical education in a specific concentration of their choice, and where applicable, acquire industry certification

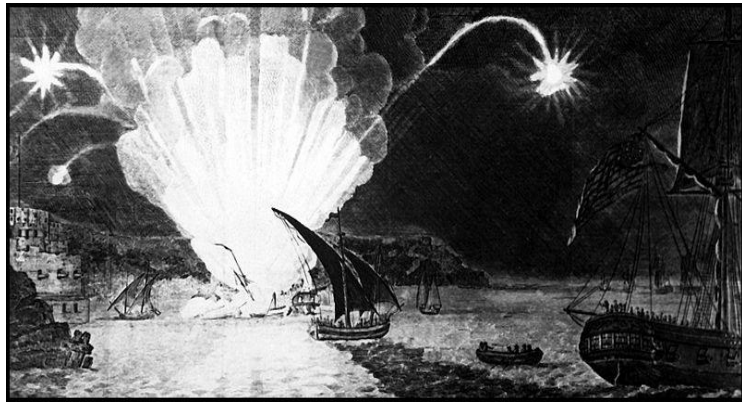
The program takes about 13 weeks, after which students have the opportunity to pursue industry certifications. The Veterans Technology Program is presently underwritten in its entirety by JPMorgan Chase & Co. Additional information regarding the application, including requirements, can be found at <http://get-vet.syr.edu/apply/>. [Source: Military.com Ho Lin article 5 Dec 2011 ++]

Intrepid Project: The U.S. Senate is scheduled to take up the issue of whether the remains of 13 American naval heroes – tossed into a mass grave more than 200 years ago – should be returned to their native land for proper burial with military honors. On Sept. 4, 1804, Master Commandant Richard Somers and his crew were killed in action during the Barbary Wars when their ship, the USS Intrepid, exploded in Tripoli Harbor off the coast of Libya. Their bodies washed ashore and were eventually buried by fellow sailors taken prisoner by the enemy. The issue of whether to remove the Intrepid crew from Libya is a contentious one. Descendants of Somers and his second-in-command, Henry Wadsworth, have been pressing Congress to do whatever is necessary to bring some of America’s earliest war heroes back home. Last spring, The American Legion passed a resolution in support of the move, and the U.S. House of Representatives recently passed an amendment calling upon the secretary of Defense to take action.

The U.S. Navy opposes the repatriation of the Intrepid crew’s remains, citing an official April 1949 ceremony at a Protestant cemetery where several – not all – of the sailors were buried. In a March 2010 document, then-Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead wrote, “Since these remains are associated with the loss of the Intrepid, Tripoli’s Protestant Cemetery has been officially recognized by the Department of the Navy as the final resting place for her crew.” According to Michael Caputo, coordinator of the grassroots group Intrepid Project, the entire Intrepid crew may not be interred at the Protestant cemetery. “Some of the enlisted crewmembers may still be buried adjacent to what is now called Martyr’s Square,” he said. “As for the cemetery itself, it is essentially in a shambles, with shattered markers and grounds that are not being maintained.” The current Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert confirmed the Navy’s stand on the issue in a 16 NOV memo that said the admiral “has reviewed and concurs with the previous Navy position of not supporting the proposed legislation.” The memo went on to point out that repatriating the Intrepid crew’s remains would cost between \$85,000 and \$100,000. “This does not include costs associated with DNA testing and analysis Nor does it include the cost for the Navy to contract out genealogical research....”

Sen. Dean Heller (R-NV) introduced a bill S.1497 on 8 NOV to bring Somers and his crew back home from Tripoli. The legislation would require DoD to exhume the remains, identify them and return them to the United States “for military burial.” Fang A. Wong, national commander of The American Legion, sent Heller a letter of support that said, “It is incumbent upon Congress to direct recovery of those remains of Americans within Tripoli. Given the turmoil in Libya, America must take the opportunity to repatriate these remains now.” Heller said that America, “has a duty to ensure that any fallen member of the armed forces is treated with utmost respect. The American Legion has always been a faithful advocate for their brothers and sisters in arms, and on this issue, it is no different. I appreciate their support as we work together to retrieve our heroes from foreign shores.”

In late NOV, descendants of Somers and Wadsworth, and other advocates, visited several senators in Washington to drum up support for Heller's legislation. Accompanying them was Dean Stoline, deputy director of the Legion's Legislative Division. Stoline said the group, "lobbied the Senate for two hard days to support their request to bring home the remains of their loved ones and other crew members of the USS Intrepid. I think their request was well received and several senators – such as Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. – have now signed on to help push the legislation introduced by Sen. Heller." Next week, the Senate will debate the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). An amendment supporting the return of the Intrepid crew may or may not be part of the final package. The American Legion will keep working with the Senate, urging it to act on the Intrepid crew issue. "Our strategy is simple," said Tim Tetz, director of the Legion's Legislative Division. "We must impress upon the Senate the importance of passing an amendment to NDAA that grants the wish of the Somers and Wadsworth families – return their relatives. The House unanimously agreed to this. Now the Senate must do so." [Source: AL Online Update 1 Dec 2011 ++]



Master Commandant Richard Somers

OEF/OIF Long-Term Costs: The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may be winding down, but the long-term costs of caring for those wounded in battle are on a path to rival the costs of the Vietnam War. While Vietnam extracted a far higher death toll — 58,000 compared with 6,300 so far in the war on terror — the number of documented disabilities from recent veterans is approaching the size of that earlier conflict, according to a McClatchy Newspapers analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) data. The data, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act and detailing all disability payments to veterans of all wars, show that veterans leaving the military in recent years are filing for and receiving compensation for more injuries than did their fathers and grandfathers. At the same time, McClatchy found, the VA is losing ground in efforts to provide fast, accurate disability decisions. And the agency has yet to get control of a problem that has vexed it for years: the wide variation in disability payments by state and region, even for veterans with the same ailments. For soldiers coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan, this ongoing variation means the size of monthly compensation checks might be a quirk of geography.

Given the nature of today's disabilities, it's difficult to calculate how much it all might ultimately cost. "We're in somewhat uncharted waters," said Linda Bilmes, a Harvard University professor who has conducted an exhaustive study on the long-term costs of the wars. Her most recent estimates, from 2010, indicate that providing disability payments to Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans could range from \$355 billion to \$534 billion over the next 40 years; on top of that, costs to the VA's medical system could range from \$201 billion to \$348 billion to treat veterans of the two wars. For the VA system, that means costs will grow for years to come — even as the country is entering a period of belt-tightening that could reduce the size of government and put a damper on the agency's ability to find

the money for these expenses. According to VA and Department of Defense information compiled by the advocacy group Veterans for Common Sense, 2.2 million service members have deployed to one of the wars since Sept. 11, 2001; 942,000 have deployed two or more times. Of those, 6,300 service members have died, and 46,000 have suffered nonfatal wounds in action. But more than 600,000 veterans have filed for VA disability benefits, and more than 700,000 have been treated in the VA's medical system.

"Right now, VA is getting about 10,000 new Iraq and Afghanistan claims and patients per month," said Paul Sullivan, executive director of the National Organization of Veterans' Advocates, which helps veterans file disability claims. "The numbers are devastating." McClatchy analyzed the VA's compensation database, which includes 3.2 million records documenting each veteran and his or her mental or physical disabilities; information that could identify a specific veteran was blacked out. The VA doesn't actually specify whether somebody was in Iraq or Afghanistan, instead lumping all veterans from the first Iraq war in 1990 into a "Gulf War" category. McClatchy zeroed in on veterans who left active duty in 2003 or later, an approximate cohort of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Among the findings:

- Recent veterans are filing claims at a far higher rate than veterans from previous wars or generations. That could make the eventual payout for the VA far higher than for previous wars.
- The VA's disability payments are still wildly uneven, despite years of attempts to improve consistency. That means, for example, that a veteran who lives in Kentucky is likely to have a higher disability payment than one who lives in South Dakota, often for the same ailment.
- The speed at which the VA processes disability applications has gotten slower, and the percentage of claims with an error has worsened as well. In fiscal 2011, 16 percent of VA disability decisions contained an error, the VA's own review shows.

The VA said that it is working to do better and that it has hired 2,700 new workers. "We think we've got the problem identified, and we think we have the right disciplines in place," said Thomas Murphy, who directs the VA's compensation program. The true cost of war can't be known for years and decades after the last bullet has been fired. A disability tied to military service might take years to emerge, and might steadily worsen after it does. Bilmes, the Harvard professor who co-wrote "The Three Trillion Dollar War" with Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, said the peak for paying out claims from World War II didn't come until the 1980s. The peak for the Vietnam War, which ended nearly four decades ago, hasn't yet been reached. "We expect to see the same kind of lag this time around," Bilmes said.

Veterans file disability claims with the VA if they've been injured during military service — whether in a combat zone or stateside. Based on the severity of the disability, the VA pays veterans compensation checks that range from \$127 to \$2,769 a month. Veterans today are applying with greater frequency and greater urgency than in years past. Part of that, Bilmes said, is the nature of these wars. In previous wars, a general seeing a brigade under stress might have pulled it back — putting the soldiers on kitchen duty for a while, she said. Now, those functions are being handled by contractors, eliminating that relief valve. "The guys who are out in the field are relentlessly out in the field," she said. Beyond that, far more soldiers in this all-volunteer military have been back for two, three, four or five tours, and the long-term impacts of hearing loss and traumatic brain injuries caused by improvised explosive devices will be felt for years. Other factors are at play: Better war-zone medical treatment means more injured soldiers come home alive. Veterans are more willing to claim their disabilities than were vets of previous generations, and the VA is more accommodating than it once was. According to VA data, the average Vietnam veteran in the system has 3.5 documented disabilities — more than those from the Korean War or World War II, but less than those in the Gulf War era. Veterans who have left military service since 2003 have an average of six disabilities on file, VA data show. These recent veterans have a combined total of 3.5 million disabilities on file, compared with 3.9 million from Vietnam, McClatchy's analysis shows. While the annual cost of those Vietnam disabilities is higher now, recent vets will see their monthly checks go up as they age.

As it deals with the rush of new veterans, the VA also is contending with an overwhelmed system that is getting slower and sloppier — despite years of promises and efforts to fix it. The VA received a record 1.3 million disability claims in fiscal 2011. The time it took to decide those rose to an average of 188 days. While some award decisions are relatively straightforward, McClatchy found that others — particularly those involving mental illnesses — are subject to wide variation among the VA's regional offices that decide claims. The VA first confronted this problem in 2005, when news organizations reported that veterans' monthly checks varied widely depending on where they lived. The VA pledged to improve its training to ensure consistency among its 57 regional offices. That wide variation still exists, McClatchy found — and particularly for post-traumatic stress disorder, one of the wars' costliest disabilities. For recent veterans who are part of the Louisville, Ky., regional office, 67 percent have a high PTSD rating; 17 percent have the highest rating of 100. For veterans who are part of the Sioux Falls, S.D., regional office, 42 percent have a high rating, and just 1 percent have the highest rating of 100. McClatchy's analysis shows little change in the regional-variation problem since 2005. The VA's Murphy said the agency put in place a new system to guide the regional offices through their disability decision process. That, he said, should help improve consistency. [Source: McClatchy Newspapers Chris Adams article 6 Dec 2011 ++]

Recall: Weight-loss and bodybuilding supplements containing a popular new stimulant were pulled off the shelves at Army and Air Force Exchange Service stores due to concerns they could be related to soldier deaths, according to the Defense Logistics Agency. The drug DMAA, which is an extract of the geranium plant with the chemical names 13 dimethylamylamine and methylhexanamine, triggered the recall of 18 athletic supplements sold worldwide in General Nutrition Centers shops by AAFES, the agency said Saturday in a recall alert. “Even though GNC believes DMAA is safe, it has complied fully with the Army’s precautionary request to remove products containing DMAA, as it is contractually obligated to do, from GNC stores on Army and Air Force bases,” GNC spokesman Greg Miller said. Miller said that the Food and Drug Administration has never questioned the safety of DMAA and that GNC officials have requested the opportunity to meet with the Defense Department to discuss the recall. An AAFES investigation of the drug was under way, the logistics agency said, but no additional information was immediately available on soldier deaths and any suspected connections to DMAA. DMAA was developed decades ago as a nasal decongestant but has recently become popular as a recreational drug and an additive in athletic supplements with names such as Hemo Rage Black, Muscle Warfare Napalm and Nitric Blast. Forms of the stimulant were recently banned by Major League Baseball and the World Anti-Doping Agency, the international body that regulates drug use in sports. [Source: Stars & Stripes article 5 Dec 2011 ++]

Denver VAMC: The Department of Veterans Affairs has awarded a \$580.2 million construction contract to build the Denver VA Medical Center (VAMC) replacement facility on the same campus as the University of Colorado Hospital complex in Aurora, site of the former Fitzsimons Army Medical Center. “This new medical center will not only help provide Veterans with the care they have earned, it will create good-paying jobs that benefit the local economy,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. The new 182-bed medical center will include inpatient tertiary care and ambulatory care, a 30-bed Spinal Cord Injury/Disorder Center, a 30-bed nursing home community living center, a research building, and parking structures. The medical center will employ approximately 2,000 people and serve approximately 82,700 veterans. The construction component of the contract totaling \$580.2 million was awarded to Kiewit-Turner Joint Venture from Englewood, Colo., on 17 NOV. The facility will be Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver certified, making the most of renewable energy initiatives. More than 6,300 jobs will be created during the construction of the medical center. The

completion date of the hospital is scheduled for early 2015. [Source:
<http://www.denver.va.gov/projecteagle/index.asp> Dec 2011 ++]



DoD Alternative Medicine: The Department of Defense has designated several billion dollars for research into healing techniques, once labeled, quackery which show promise for Veterans. The Pentagon has also dedicated five million dollars as grant money to research into some of these methods such as acupuncture and meditation in order to treat PTSD in veterans and the U.S. Army who gave four million dollars in grant money for research into alternative methods to treat and heal conditions such as PTSD, anxiety, substance abuse and depression. These unconventional healing methods have been showing promise among veterans and military personnel. Some examples of Dod's efforts to use alternative healing methods to date include:

- The Journal of the American College of Cardiology, 2010, notes research had been conducted on the effects reiki on Acute Coronary Syndrome. The results of the study had demonstrated it was a benefit to patients however, the long term effects are still unclear.
- This year meditation had been advocated by celebrities and a medical researcher to convince the Department of Defense that medication can aid the increasing number of military personnel from post-traumatic stress (PTSD). Dr. Norman Rosenthal, Georgetown Medical School clinical professor states that he has the facts, figures and testimonials showing meditation can be a low-cost, low-risk alternative to strong narcotics which are usually prescribed by government doctors. Dr. Rosenthal quotes one case in which a Marine gunner on a Humvee who witnessed heavy fighting in Iraq. The marine had written that the symptoms of PTSD disturbed his sleep and wrecked his family life upon returning to the United States. However, the marine had said "TM (transcendental meditation) has helped with organizing, prioritizing and just being calmer overall. I just feel better." The military has and is confronting a number of disputes over the use of powerful prescribed drugs for a variety of stress related illnesses which have increased risks and sometimes fatal results.
- Last year the drug Seroquel made the media due to many soldier's and veterans using this medication had died. There was an uncertainty as to how many soldiers died while using this drug or if it was the direct source of death. The Veterans Affairs Department immediately had stated that this drug was only being prescribed as a fourth option for patients suffering insomnia from PTSD.
- Since 2008, the pentagon had been seeking new ways to treat troops who suffered from combat stress or brain damage by looking into alternative methods such as meditation, acupuncture and yoga. There are currently some military hospitals and installations in which have already put into practice alternative methods such as acupuncture to relieve stress. Army Brigadier General Loree Sutton, head of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury had stated to USA today back in 2008, "it just makes sense to bring all potential therapies to bear".

- In 2009, 900 soldier's at Fort Bliss' William Beaumont Army Medical Center had been diagnosed with PTSD. Among the 900 soldier's, 700 had received regular treatment and had been doing fine according to Dr. John Fortunato, chief of behavioral health at the center, Vietnam veteran, psychologist and Benedictine monk. However, he stated that out of the 900 there was 200 soldier's who had severe symptoms were to be medically discharge. Half of those had opted for the Restoration and Resilience Program. This program offers psychological therapy along with spiritual guidance and alternative therapies such as meditation and acupuncture. The program lasts six months and two-thirds of the soldier's return to duty. Most of the other third who do not return is usually due to physical reasons such as chronic back pain.
- In Texas, Fort Hood offers the Warrior Combat Stress Reset Program for those soldier's with combat stress and PTSD. Soldier's participate each day for a period of three weeks in alternative therapies which are aimed at calming the mind, body and spirit. The therapies include group therapy, biofeedback, education in coping skills, acupuncture, massage and yoga. That is then followed by weekly group therapy for eight weeks.
- In June 2011, a pilot study published in Volume 176, Number 6, issue of Military Medicine had shown veterans of Iraq/Afghanistan had a fifty percent decrease in their symptoms of PTSD after a period of eight weeks practicing Transcendental Meditation.

This month the US Department of Veteran Affairs has announced the launch of the Congressionally mandated chiropractic services program. The following has been released by the DAV: Veterans can receive chiropractic care at 26 selected Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities beginning this fall, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi announced today. VA will hire or contract with doctors of chiropractic to provide the care. In consultation with VA primary care providers, doctors of chiropractic will offer patient evaluations and chiropractic care for neuromusculoskeletal conditions. "Today, VA makes another significant improvement to the world-class health care we provide for eligible veterans," said Principi. "Veterans who will benefit from chiropractic services will now have the opportunity to receive chiropractic care to restore them to good health." The locations of where chiropractic care will be provided include the following:

Locations where chiropractic care will be provided include Togus, Maine; West Haven/Newington, Conn.; Buffalo and the Bronx, N.Y.; Butler, Pa.; Martinsburg, W.Va.; Salisbury, NC; Augusta, Ga.; Tampa and Miami, Fla.; Mountain Home, Tenn.; Columbus, Ohio; Danville, Ill.; Iron Mountain, Mich.; Kansas City, MO.; Jackson, Miss.; San Antonio, Temple, and Dallas, Texas; Albuquerque and Phoenix, N.M.; Fort Harrison, Mont.; Seattle, Wash.; Martinez and Los Angeles, Calif.; and Sioux Falls, S.D. If you are an eligible veteran in areas distant from the above locations you also will be able to receive chiropractic care through the VA's outpatient fee-basis program after referral from a primary care provider and prior authorization from the department. With the outstanding results alternative medicine has been demonstrating the Veterans Administration continues to sponsor research into Complimentary and Alternative Medicine to treat service personnel who are suffering from these conditions. [Source: AllVoices Debbie Nicholson article 3 Dec 2011 ++]

Air Force Enlisted Village Update 02: The Air Force Enlisted Village (AFEV) was founded in 1967 to provide a safe, secure and dignified place for indigent surviving spouses of retired Air Force personnel. The Village's primary goal and focus is to "Provide a Home," and financial assistance to these women. The surviving spouse with the greatest need is cared for first and none are refused assistance due to financial status. Low pay and frequent military moves leave some spouses without careers, home equities, retirement plans or any significant assets. Surviving spouses requiring financial assistance live here among peers sharing memories of Air Force life without the stigma normally associated with subsidized housing facilities. Surviving spouses applying for long-term residence at Bob Hope or Teresa Villages must be at least 55 years of age, have a valid identification card and must

be able to live independently. Those who can no longer safely live on their own are now able to be at home in the Hawthorn House. Surviving spouse of enlisted members who served in other branches of the military are admitted on a space-available basis, but aren't eligible for financial assistance.

Officials at AFEV are offering a "New Year, New Beginning" move-in special for Bob Hope Village and Teresa Village. The special features no waiting time and no first-month service fee when a lease is signed for either community between Dec. 15 and Feb. 15. Located within minutes of Eglin Air Force Base, Hurlburt Field, a Veterans Affairs clinic, shopping, dining, fishing, golfing and the beaches of the Emerald Coast, Bob Hope Village and Teresa Village are exclusive communities for retired enlisted military widows and couples. Residents of Bob Hope Village and Teresa Village say that downsizing is liberating, and they enjoy the affordable, active, worry-free lifestyle that living at either community offers, according to Air Force Enlisted Village officials. Bob Hope Village and Teresa Village have spacious one- and two-bedroom apartments with carpeting, major kitchen appliances, storage areas and patio. The monthly service fee includes basic cable, water, sewer and trash; maintenance and grounds keeping; free laundry facilities; ample parking; and security.

Bob Hope Village and Teresa Village offer transportation; a café with delivery service; guest quarters; a convenience store; beauty salons; libraries; chapel program; banking; and RV parking. Activities have an emphasis on socializing, and there are swimming pools; fitness rooms and classes; special events, parties and community trips; a children's play park for visiting grandchildren; gardening plots; and social clubs. Residents have access to an on-site doctor office and preferred providers; on-site out-patient physical, occupational, and speech therapy; on-site mobile lab; prescription pick-up; medical-alert system (Bob Hope Village only); wellness seminars; blood pressure checks; hospice care; and when needed, assisted living and memory care at nearby Hawthorn House. For more information, call the admissions office at 800-258-1413 to discuss eligibility regarding this special offer. This special is available for a limited time and some restrictions may apply. People can learn more about Air Force Enlisted Village by visiting <http://www.afenlistedwidows.org/>. [Source: Air Force Retiree Services article 1 Dec 2011 ++]

VA Burial Benefit Update 10: A dispute over a veteran's last wishes has finally been settled -- by a judge. For nearly three weeks, his closest friend and stepdaughter have been fighting for what they believe he wanted after death. But with no family to back them up, a judge made a difficult decision. "You have brothers by blood and brothers by combat," Coyt Mangum said. Mangum says he is the closest thing to family Manual Maurice Walden had. "We all called him CW, and he's been living with me since Katrina," he said. Walden's stepdaughter, Christina Stouten, says the same thing. "He's been my step dad for 34 years," Stouten said. But when Walden died on 10 NOV, Mangum and Stouten found out they don't count as next of kin by state law, and therefore, the Galveston County Medical Examiner's Office couldn't release the body to either of them. Even though both of them say Mangum had told them he wanted to be cremated and buried in northern Michigan, where he was from. They say he didn't want the military funeral he is entitled to as a Vietnam veteran. "I think it's ridiculous that somebody can't take care of someone who has taken care of them," Stouten said. A search for blood kin turned up possible relatives, but not one of them replied. "He's been estranged from them for years. I don't even know who they are," Mangum said. Meantime, Walden's body sat unclaimed in the Galveston County morgue for three weeks, until a Galveston County probate judge made a decision on 30 NOV. Walden will be released to a funeral home, and he will have a VA military funeral, not a cremation. But those closest to him say it's better than where he's been the last three weeks. "My problem is it makes me feel really bad that he's been laying up there in that cold box," Mangum said. The probate judge told us off camera that if Walden had a will spelling out his wishes, this all would have been prevented. His step daughter says he had talked about doing just that, but had never gotten around to it.

If you do not have a will you should if you are concerned at all about your final disposition after you demise. Don't put yourself or your friends in the situation of Manual Maurice Walden in the above news clip. If you do desire a military burial VA offers the following benefits and services to honor our Nation's deceased Veterans.

- Headstones and Markers: VA can furnish a monument to mark the grave of an eligible Veteran.
- Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC): VA can provide a PMC for eligible recipients.
- Burial Flag: VA can provide an American flag to drape an eligible Veteran's casket.
- Reimbursement of Burial Expenses: Generally, VA can pay a burial allowance of \$2,000 for Veterans who die of service related causes. For certain other Veterans, VA can pay \$300 for burial and funeral expenses and \$300 for a burial plot.
- Burial in a VA National Cemetery: Most Veterans and some dependents can be buried in a VA national cemetery.
- Time Limits: There is no time limit to claim reimbursement of burial expenses for a service related death. In other cases, claims must be filed within two years of the Veteran's burial.

[Source: ABC13 KTRK Houston TX news clip 30 Nov 2011 ++]

Vet Abuse Update 02: A Glendale man faces felony abuse and drug charges after police say he failed to properly care for his 72-year-old father — leading to the veteran's death — and sold the man's prescribed painkillers for extra cash. The 72-year-old vet had several bedsores, was severely dehydrated and covered in dried feces when he was admitted to the George E. Wahlen Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center on 15 JUL, according to charges filed Thursday in 3rd District Court. He died the following day. The medical examiner determined that Moya Sr. died from dehydration, malnutrition, electrolyte abnormalities and decubitus ulcers — or bed sores — due to the complications of inadequate care, the complaint shows. The medical examiner also found that Moya Sr. had no medication in his system when he died. Alphonso Patrick Moya Jr., the man's 49-year-old son, was his primary caregiver. When police responded to Moya's home on July 16, they detected "a very strong odor of bleach, feces and decomposing tissue," according to charging documents. The bedroom Moya's father had occupied had been thoroughly cleaned. Police found the mattress the man had been using outside by the garbage can "saturated with urine and feces," the charges state. Moya told police his father had not had a bath or shower for about two weeks, the charges state. Police said Moya also had been filling his father's monthly Lortab prescriptions but was selling the pills. The 72-year-old man's bedsores — including one on his lower back approximately the size of a fist — would have required surgery to remove, charges state. When he arrived at the hospital, his legs, ankles and feet were swollen to twice their size. He was unable to talk or stand on his own, the charges state. When the father last visited the hospital, he was able to walk with assistance and speak, according to the charges. Moya is charged with aggravated abuse of a vulnerable adult and distribution of a controlled substance, both second-degree felonies. [Source: Desert News article 1 Dec 2011 ++]



Alfonso Patrick Moya Jr.

VA Women Advisory Committee Update 01: Six new members have been appointed to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Advisory Committee on Women Veterans, an expert panel that advises VA on issues and programs affecting women Veterans. “The Advisory Committee on Women Veterans’ significantly guides VA’s efforts to identify and address the ever changing needs of women Veterans,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. “VA welcomes the newest members.” Established in 1983, the advisory committee makes recommendations to the Secretary for administrative and legislative changes. The new committee members, who are appointed to two-year terms, are: Sherri Brown, Alexandria, Va.; Latoya Lucas, Rocky Mount, N.C.; Sara J. McVicker, Washington, D.C.; Delphine Metcalf-Foster, Vallejo, Calif.; Robin Patrick, Virginia Beach, Va.; and Felipe Torres, Helotes, Texas. “Women serving in the military are essential components of our Nation’s success,” Shinseki added. “In honor of their service, VA’s is committed to providing women Veterans with quality care and preparing for their evolving needs.”

Women Veterans are one of the fastest growing segments of the Veterans population. There are 23.4 million Veterans; approximately 1.8 million are women Veterans. They comprise nearly 8 percent of the total Veterans population and nearly 5 percent of all Veterans who use VA health care services. VA estimates that by 2020 women Veterans will comprise 10 percent of the Veteran population. VA has women Veterans program managers at VA medical centers and women Veterans coordinators at VA regional offices to assist women Veterans with health and benefits issues. Some background info on the new members follows:

- Sherri Brown, Alexandria, Va. A Veteran of the Coast Guard Reserves; currently serves as Senior Vice President for Service to the Armed Forces for the American Red Cross.
- Latoya Lucas, Rocky Mount, N.C. A retired Army specialist, with combat service in Iraq; currently works as a motivational speaker.
- Sara J. McVicker, Washington, D.C. A former Army Corps nurse, with service in Vietnam; currently serves as a member of Vietnam Veterans of America’s National Women Veterans Committee.
- Delphine Metcalf-Foster, Vallejo, Calif. A retired Army first sergeant, with service in Desert Storm/Desert Shield; currently serves as a member of Disabled American Veterans’ Department of California Women’s Committee.
- Robin Patrick, Virginia Beach, Va. A Veteran of the U.S. Navy and Army National Guard; currently serves as a Veterans’ advocate for women Veterans, homeless Veterans, disabled adults, and families.
- Felipe Torres, Helotes, Texas. A retired Marine Corps colonel, with service in Vietnam; currently serves as a women Veterans advocate.

[Source: VA Press Release 2 Dec 2011 ++]



Arlington National Cemetery Update 32: Arlington National Cemetery began its first major construction project in nearly eight years today with a ground-breaking ceremony for a 20,000-niche columbarium that will extend the life of the cemetery's inurnment space to 2024. A columbarium is a structure that holds urns containing cremated remains. Construction on the cemetery's ninth columbarium begins in January, with completion expected in June 2013, said Army Col. Victoria Bruzese, the cemetery's chief engineer. The new structure will dwarf the previous eight columbariums, she added, the largest of which contains 8,000 niches and the smallest 3,000. "This will be 540 feet long, 116 feet wide, and at its highest elevation about 11 feet tall," Bruzese said following the ground-breaking. "We'll have more than 20,000 niches, which gives us the ability to have three to four inurnments within each niche -- service member, spouse, children -- so we're looking at more than 60,000 inurnments, so that's significant." The new columbarium will be almost the length of two football fields.

Kathryn Condon, executive director of the Army National Cemeteries Program, told the audience of mostly cemetery grounds-keepers and staff workers that construction of the new columbarium would "extend the life of our inurnment space out to 2024." Officials also plan to expand the cemetery's grounds on two sides by another 70 acres. That will further extend the cemetery's ability to handle inurnments, burials and possibly mausoleums out to the 2050s, Bruzese said. She noted the biggest challenge to overcome will be the lack of attention paid to the infrastructure over the years. "There are two expansion opportunities here on the horizon -- our Millennium Project, which is a 30-acre combination of land we acquired from Fort Myer and the National Park Service, and already existing [cemetery] land that will increase our in-ground and niche burial capability," Bruzese said. The second expansion includes a 40-acre plot that's now occupied by the Navy Annex on the cemetery's south side. [Source: Army News Service J.D. Leipold article 30 Nov 2011 ++]



POW/MIA Update 08: The Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) announced 7 NOV that the remains of three servicemen, missing in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and returned to their families for burial with full military honors. Following is a synopsis of the events

that led to their death prepared by the P.O.W. Network and updated in 2008. It was compiled from one or more of the following: raw data from U.S. Government agency sources, correspondence with POW/MIA families, published sources, and interviews:

- By December 1971, U.S. troops in Vietnam had declined dramatically - from the 1968 peak of nearly 55,000 to less than 30,000. The enemy, temporarily on the defensive by the moves into Cambodia in 1970 and Laos in 1971, began deploying new NVA forces southward in preparation for another major offensive. In March 1972, the Vietnamese launched a three-pronged invasion of the South. One NVA force swept south across the DMZ, its goal apparently the conquest of the northern provinces and the seizure of Hue. A second NVA force drove from Laos into the Central Highlands, and a third effort involved a drive from Cambodia into provinces northwest of Saigon. Fierce fighting ensued on all three fronts, with NVA success the greatest in the northern provinces. Fighting continued until by June, the North Vietnamese began withdrawing from some of their advance positions, still holding considerable amounts of South Vietnamese territory in the northern provinces.
- On June 11, 1972, Capt. Arnold Holm, pilot, PFC Wayne Bibbs, gunner, and SP4 Robin Yeakley, observer, were aboard an OH6A Cayuse observation helicopter flying from Camp Eagle to the Northern Provinces of South Vietnam on a visual reconnaissance mission. The function of their "Loach" chopper was searching out signs of the enemy around two landing zones (LZ's). The OH6 joined with the AH1G Cobra gunship as "Pink Teams" to screen the deployment of air cavalry troops. On this day, Holm's aircraft was monitoring an ARVN team insertion. During the mission, Holm reported that he saw enemy living quarters, bunkers, and numerous trails. On his second pass over a ridge, at about 25' altitude, the aircraft exploded and burned. It was reported that before the aircraft crashed that smoke and white phosphorous grenades began exploding. After the aircraft impacted with the ground, it exploded again. Other aircraft in the area received heavy anti-aircraft fire. No one was seen to exit the downed helicopter, nor were emergency radio beepers detected.
- In another OH6A (tail #67-16275), 1Lt. James R. McQuade, pilot, and SP4 James E. Hackett, gunner, tried to enter the area of the crashed OH6A, but encountered heavy fire and their aircraft was also shot down. McQuade's aircraft was hit, and the intensity of the resulting fire caused white phosphorous and smoke grenades carried aboard their aircraft to explode prior to hitting the ground. The aircraft continued to burn after impact and no crewmen left the ship before or after the crash. No ground search was made for survivors or remains of either aircraft because of hostile fire in the area.



Holm, Arnold Edward Jr.

Army Capt. Arnold E. Holm Jr. of Waterford, Conn.; Spc. Robin R. Yeakley of South Bend, Ind.; and Pfc. Wayne Bibbs of Chicago, were buried as a group, in a single casket representing the entire crew, on 9 NOV in Arlington National Cemetery. Scientists from the JPAC used forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence to identify the crew. They recovered human remains, OH-6A helicopter wreckage and crew-related equipment including two identification tags bearing Yeakley's name. Today more than 1,600 American remain unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. More than 900 servicemen have been accounted for from that conflict, and

returned to their families for burial with military honors since 1973. There are unanswered questions remaining from Vietnam. Of the Americans who did not return alive or dead, experts venture that hundreds may still be alive. Thousands of reports have been received concerning them. The U.S. government continues to work closely with the governments of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to recover all Americans lost in the Vietnam War. For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO website at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call 703-699-1169. [Source: DoD Bulletin No. 937-11 Nov 07, 2011 ++]

POW/MIA Update 09: The following MIA/POW's have been identified. For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the Department of Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1420 :

Korea. DPMO announced 28 NOV that the remains of Army Cpl. Theodore A. Reynolds, 19, of Syracuse, N.Y., missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors in his hometown. In November 1950, Reynolds, who was serving in the Company B, 2nd Chemical Mortar Battalion attached to the 8th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division, went missing in action during a battle near Unsan, North Korea. In 1951, information obtained from the Chinese showed the Reynolds had been captured, and held as a prisoner of war. In 1953, American soldiers who were returned as part of a POW exchange confirmed that Reynolds had been captured by Chinese forces, and died in POW Camp 5, on the Yalu River of North Korea, from lack of medical care and malnutrition in 1951. In 1954, during Operation Glory, China turned over remains of U.S. servicemen who died in the Korean War. At the time, the Army was unable to identify Reynolds and the remains were buried as "unknown" at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. In 2009, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) re-examined the records and concluded that because of advances in identification technology, the remains could be exhumed and identified. Scientists from the JPAC were able to analyze the remains and identified Reynolds. Along with forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from the JPAC used dental records in the identification of Reynolds' remains.

WWII. DPMO announced 28 NOV that the remains Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. John J. Bono, 28, missing in action from World War II, have been identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors in his hometown. On Sept. 13, 1944, Bono and eight other crew members were on a B-17G Flying Fortress that crashed near Neustaedt-on-the-Werra, Germany. Only one of the crewmen is known to have successfully parachuted out of the aircraft before it crashed. The remaining eight crewmen were buried by German forces in a cemetery in Neustaedt. Following the war, U.S. Army Graves Registration personnel attempted to recover the remains of the eight men, but were only able to move the remains of one man to a U.S. military cemetery in Holland. In 1953, with access to eastern Germany restricted by the Soviet Union, the remains of the seven unaccounted for crewmen were declared Non-Recoverable. In 1991, a German national who was digging a grave in the cemetery in Neustaedt, discovered a metal U.S. military identification tag and notified officials. The U.S. Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) was not able to gain access to the site until 2007, and in 2008 excavated the area within the cemetery, and recovered human remains, and additional metal identification tags from three of the crewmembers, including Bono. To identify Bono's remains, scientists from the JPAC used forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, including dental comparisons. Additionally, the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used mitochondrial DNA—which matched that of Bono's cousin and niece—in the identification of his remains.

Vietnam. DPMO announced 28 NOV that the remains of two U.S. servicemen, missing in action from the Vietnam War, have been identified and will be returned to their families for burial with full military honors. Army Lt. Col. Glenn McElroy, 35, of Sidney, Ill., and Capt. John M. Nash, 28, of Tipton, Ind., will be buried as a group, in a single

casket representing the crew in Arlington National Cemetery. On March 15, 1966, the men were flying an OV-1A Mohawk aircraft that failed to return from a reconnaissance mission over southern Laos in Savannakhet Province. An American forward air controller, operating in the area, reported witnessing the OV-1A aircraft crash after encountering heavy enemy anti-aircraft artillery. He saw one parachute deploy shortly before the crash but he believed the crewman descended into the ensuing fireball. Immediate search-and-rescue teams flew over the crash site but were unable to locate any survivors. Twice in 1988, joint U.S./Lao People's Democratic Republic (L.P.R.D.) teams, led by the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), surveyed the crash site and found OV-1 aircraft wreckage and crew-related equipment—including an identification tag bearing Nash's name. Records indicate there was only one OV-1 loss within 18 miles of Savannakhet Province. Between 2005 and 2009, joint U.S./L.P.D.R. teams, interviewed witnesses, investigated, surveyed and excavated the crash site several times. They recovered human remains, more aircraft wreckage and crew-related equipment. Scientists from the JPAC used forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence to identify the crew.

WWII. DPMO announced 28 NOV that the remains of Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Stephen L. Pascal, 20, of Hollywood, Calif., a U.S. serviceman from World War II have been identified and returned to the family for burial with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery. On April 7, 1945, Pascal was flying a photo reconnaissance mission between Gottingen and Alfeld, Germany, when his P-38 Lightning aircraft, fitted for reconnaissance, went missing. An investigation conducted after the war determined Pascal's aircraft exploded over the town of Gottingen. Nearby, on the same day, 1st Lt. Newell F. Mills Jr., and his wingman, went missing in their P-51D aircraft. In 1947, the U.S. Army Graves Registration Service (AGRS) exhumed remains of an American pilot, buried by local residents, from a village cemetery in Varrigsen, Germany. The circumstantial evidence led AGRS to believe the remains belonged to be Mills since his aircraft was closer to that village, when it went missing, than Pascal's. The remains were buried in the Ardennes American Cemetery near Neuville-en-Condroz, Belgium. In 2004, a German civilian began excavating the crash site associated with the airman buried in Varrigsen. Aircraft parts recovered from the location were from a P-38 Lightning—Pascal's aircraft—not the P-51D flown by Mills. In 2007, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) excavated the crash site and recovered human remains, P-38 aircraft parts and military equipment. In 2008, JPAC exhumed the remains thought to be Mills and examined them with the remains recovered in 2007. It was determined that the remains were all Pascal's. Among forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC used mitochondrial DNA—which matched that of Pascal's cousin—in the identification of his remains.

Korea. DPMO announced 22 NOV that the remains of Army Pfc. Jimmie J. Gaitan, 21, of San Antonio, Texas, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and returned to his family for burial with full military honors in his hometown. Gaitan was serving with the Clearing Company, 2nd Medical Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, when he was reported missing in action in Feb. 1951, near Hoengsong, South Korea. The 2nd Infantry Division had been fighting to block Chinese advances in the area when Gaitan was captured. Gaitan, and other prisoners, were forced to march north in stages, covering over 300 miles before reaching Changsong on the south bank of the Yalu River in North Korea. Following the end of the Korean War, it was reported that Gaitan, along with more than 400 other servicemen had died in the Changsong prisoner of war camps. Interviews with returned prisoners of war confirmed that Gaitan had died of malnutrition in Camp 1 near Changsong, in late May, 1951. In the fall of 1954, during Operation Glory, China turned over remains they claimed to be those of U.S. servicemen who died in the Korean War. At the time the Army was unable to identify Gaitan and the remains were buried as "unknown" at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. In 2011, the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC) re-examined the records and concluded that because of advances in identification technology, the remains could be exhumed and identified. Scientists from the JPAC were able to analyze the remains and identified Gaitan. Along with forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from the JPAC used dental records and radiography in the identification of Gaitan's remains.

WWII. DPMO announced 14 NOV that the remains of three U.S. servicemen, from World War II, have been identified returned to their families for burial with full military honors. Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Wilson C. Cater, 24, of Jackson, Miss.; Master Sgt. Donald A. Mackey, 28, of Chambersburg, Pa.; and Staff Sgt. Glenn E. Webb, 20, of Wetumpka, Okla., will be buried as a group, in a single casket representing the entire crew in Arlington National Cemetery. On Oct. 16, 1942, Cater, Mackey, and Webb were on a C-47C Skytrain air drop mission to deliver food and supplies to U.S. units. The aircraft crashed into a mountainous location near Kagi, New Guinea. Shortly after the crash, all three men were buried by an Australian Army patrol near the Port Moresby-Kokoda Trail. In 1944, Army Graves Registration personnel moved the remains of Cater and Mackey to a nearby U.S. cemetery but were unable to locate the remains of Webb, which were declared nonrecoverable. In 1949, Cater was buried in Forest, Miss., and Mackey was buried in Honolulu, Hawaii. In 1982, villagers notified U.S. officials of a location containing aircraft wreckage. A team was sent to excavate the site where human remains were recovered along with remnants of a C-47C Skytrain with a tail number matching that of the crew's aircraft, however given the technology at the time, the remains could not be identified. A second excavation in 1999 recovered additional remains, and advances in technology allowed for identifications of some of the remains. Among forensic identification tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory used dental analysis and mitochondrial DNA—which matched that of some of the crewmembers' families—in the identification of their remains.

[Source: http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/news/news_releases/ Dec 2011 ++]

TSGLI Update 05: Troops who suffered injuries to their genitals – a type of wound that has increased in Iraq and Afghanistan with the enemy's use of IEDs – are now eligible for a one-time payment of up to \$100,000, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced 2 DEC. The payment, under Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection (TSGLI), will be in addition to VA health care for genitourinary problems and disability compensation for service-related injuries or illnesses involving genitourinary organs. "We recognize that these types of injuries are devastating and can have a long-lasting impact on the servicemember's quality of life," Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said in a statement. "It is for this reason that it is appropriate to include genitourinary injuries in the list of payable losses specified in the TSGLI program." Both men and women are eligible for the payments. Every member who has SGLI also has TSGLI effective 1 DEC 05

Adding genitourinary injuries to the schedule of covered losses under SGLI comes as military doctors are reporting an increase in these types of injuries, many the results of wounds sustained by improvised explosive devices, according to the VA. Earlier this year the U.S. Army Medical Command released data on genital injuries but would not discuss the wounds, according to a report in The Washington Post. The paper quoted the Army's chief of public affairs as saying discussing wounds or injuries to genitals "can potentially provide insights to our enemies into the effectiveness of their improvised explosive devices and other weapons they use." The Federal Register announcement on the change includes Defense Department reports indicating that from 2009 to 2010, the proportion of war casualties transported to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany with these types of injuries increased from 4.8 percent to 9.1 percent. DoD also found that approximately 570 servicemembers sustained genitourinary injuries between October 7, 2001, and May 2, 2011, the announcement states, citing a Joint Theater Trauma Registry report. The announcement also notes that the Army's Institute of Surgical Research at Fort Sam Houston found that 5 percent of servicemembers on the Joint Theater Trauma Registry who were admitted as a result of trauma in overseas contingency operations between October 2001 and January 2008 had one or more genitourinary injuries.

Under the compensation schedule for genitourinary injuries, physical loss or permanent loss of use of the penis will result in a \$50,000 one-time payment. Compensation for loss of a testicle is \$25,000; \$50,000 for loss of both,

according to the Federal Register. Physical loss or permanent loss of the use of the vulva, uterus or the vaginal canal carries a \$50,000 compensation payment. Compensation for loss – physical or permanent use – of ovaries is \$25,000 each. There is also a \$50,000 compensation provision for total and permanent loss of urinary system function. The VA said the first payments for genitourinary losses were going out 3 DEC , with eligibility for the losses retroactive to injuries incurred on or after Oct. 7, 2001, when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks. [Source: Military.com Brynt Jordon article 3 Dec 2011 ++]

NDAA 2012 Update 05: The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (S.1867) has finally been voted on by the Senate after the House passed its version back in late May. The Senate authorized defense spending that is \$27 billion less than the President requested and \$43 billion less than the amount Congress gave DoD last year. Since the House version was passed before the imposition of new spending limits in August, the Senate shifted a great deal of spending out of the basic defense budget into the separate war-spending bill. The bill now has to go to conference with the House and the differences worked out before it is sent to the President. The President has threatened to veto the bill over provisions it contains regarding the role of the military in handling terror suspects, but the betting is that he will sign the bill in the end. Here are some of the things known at this point:

1. **TRICARE Fee Increase** - Senator John McCain withdrew his Amendment which would have backtracked on the position previously approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee that the percentage increase in TRICARE Prime enrollment fee should not exceed the percentage increase in retiree COLAs. The McCain amendment would have deleted that provision and tie future increases to a DoD-generated index of health cost growth that would raise fees by an estimated 6.5% per year. This proposal would have quickly eaten into every TRICARE Prime beneficiary's military retired pay. The letters, e-mails and calls that we all wrote and made seem to have had an effect. Thank you all for responding so quickly.

2. **Amendments approved** - Many of the almost 400 amendments submitted were blocked when the Senate voted to limit debate and restrict amendments. Of those that survived were numerous important ones that the military community has been watching very closely. Even if they passed and were included in the Senate's version they will still have to survive conference with the House of Representatives. But this is a first critical step. Here are a few of them.

- Amendment submitted by Majority Leader Senator Harry Reid (D-NV) would end the remaining restrictions on receiving both military retired pay and veterans service connected disability. [1128]
- Amendment submitted by Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) would end the SBP/DIC offset. [1209]
- Amendment submitted by Senator James Webb (D-VA) would allow 3 years for submission of TRICARE claims outside of the U.S. Puerto Rico and possessions; 1 year for claims within U.S. Puerto Rico and possessions. [1298]
- Amendment submitted by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) that would require the consolidation of the commissaries and exchanges and abolish the commissaries' dedicated funding. [1370]
- Amendment submitted by Sen. Leahy (D-VT) to make the National Guard Bureau Chief a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff .
- Amendment submitted by Sen. Brown (R-MA) to bar reduction of the basic housing allowance for National Guard making the transition from active to full-time National Guard duty.
- Amendment submitted by Sen. Blunt (R-MO) to protect employment and re-employment rights for certain individuals ordered to full-time National Guard duty.
- Amendment submitted by Sen. Pryor (D-AR) to provide a death gratuity and related benefits for Reserves who die during an authorized stay at their residence during or between successive days of inactive duty training.

- Amendment submitted by Sen. Casey (D-PA) to direct a review of all current DoD military spouse employment programs.

2. Amendments not approved:

- Further expand concurrent receipt (Sen. Reid, D-NV)
- Provide servicemembers access to Flexible spending accounts to pay out-of-pocket health and dependent care expenses with pre-tax dollars (Sen. Boxer, D-CA)
- Authorize expanded voluntary retirement and separation incentives to ease the negative effects of significant force reductions (Sen. Levin, D-MI)
- Acknowledge in law that career military people pre-pay extraordinary premiums for their healthcare through decades of service and sacrifice (Sen. Lautenberg, D-NJ)
- Allow SBP payments into a Special Needs Trust for dependent children incapable for self-support (Sen. Webb (D-VA)
- Provide veteran status to retired career members of the Guard and Reserves (Sen. Pryor, D-AR)

But this may not be the final word on these and other provisions. Before bill passage, Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin (D-MI) stated he would offer separate legislation consisting of 71 pending amendments to the bill that had been agreed to by both sides of the aisle, but which had been blocked by a procedural issue. One that may be included in that group is a Levin amendment that would establish a DoD BRAC-style commission to recommend "modernizing" the military compensation and retirement systems. Although it may have been modified, the original amendment would require an up-or-down vote by Congress, without any amendments – a process the Military Officers Association of America adamantly opposes on issues of such vital concern to long-term retention and readiness. [Source: TREA News for the Enlisted 2 Dec 2011 ++]

NDAA 2012 Update 06: On 8 DEC The Military Coalition (TMC) sent House and Senate leaders a letter highlighting Coalition priorities for resolving differences between the House- and Senate-passed versions of the FY2012 Defense Authorization Bill. The House and Senate are in the process of ironing out their differences with the objective of passing a final defense bill this year. The Coalition letter urged Hill leaders to:

- Avoid manpower cuts that will impose greater deployment burdens on troops and families still bearing the strain of wartime operations;
- Retain House-approved language recognizing that the unique and extraordinary demands inherent in a multi-decade service career constitute a very large pre-paid premium for their career health benefits – over and above the cash fees paid in retirement;
- Retain a Senate-passed provision to end the deduction of VA survivor benefits from Survivor Benefit Plan annuities when the member's death is service-caused;
- Authorize voluntary retirement/separation incentives to reduce potential requirements for involuntary separation of servicemembers with substantial service, but less than 20 years;
- Retain various House and Senate provisions that would provide greater access to mental and behavioral health care for wounded warriors and their families; and
- Retain a Senate-passed provision prohibiting the services from barring reenlistment based on medical conditions that a Physical Evaluation Board had considered and found the servicemember fit for duty.

The Coalition letter also noted that Senate leaders had raised the possibility of including some from a package of 71 amendments that enjoyed widespread bipartisan support but could not be considered during Senate action because of a procedural issue. While it is unknown which amendments those were, the Coalition expressed hope that some action could prove possible on amendments offered by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) to further ease the disability offset to military retired pay. Subsequently, Congress decided there was not enough time to consider such a bill. Finally, the Coalition strongly opposed an amendment offered by Armed Services Committee Chair Carl Levin (D-MI) that originally entailed establishing a commission to make comprehensive recommendations on military compensation and retirement programs that would be considered in Congress under BRAC-type rules, requiring an up-or-down vote with no amendments and little debate. "The Coalition adamantly opposes using a BRAC-style process to short-circuit important legislative safeguards on issues of such vital concern to long-term retention and readiness," the letter said.

Both the Senate and House have now appointed their conferees. All are from the House and Senate Armed Services Committees. Preliminary negotiations began shortly after the nominations and the committee hopes to have a final bill by 16 DEC. Now is the time to call your members of Congress and urge them again to protect the crucial benefits you earned through a career of service to the nation. Your voice can be very effective especially if your Senators and House member are conferees.

- **Senate** - Senators Levin (D-Michigan), Lieberman (D-Connecticut), Reed (D-Rhode Island), Akaka (D-Hawaii), Nelson (D-Nebraska), Webb (Virginia), McCaskill (D-Missouri), Udall (D-Colorado), Hagan (D-North Carolina), Begich (D-Alaska), Manchin (D-West Virginia), Shaheen (D-New Hampshire), Gillibrand (D-New York), Blumenthal (D-Connecticut), McCain (R-Arizona), Inhofe (R-Oklahoma), Sessions (R-Alabama), Chambliss (R-Georgia), Wicker (R-Mississippi), Brown (R-Massachusetts), Portman (R-Ohio), Ayotte (R-New Hampshire), Collins (R-Maine), Graham (R-South Carolina), Cornyn (R-Texas).
- **House** - Representatives McKeon (R-California), Bartlett (R-Maryland), Thornberry (R-Texas), Akin (R-Missouri), Forbes (R-Virginia), Miller (R-Florida), LoBiondo (R-New Jersey), Turner (R-Ohio), Kline (R-Minnesota), Rogers (R-Alabama), Shuster (R-Pennsylvania), Conaway (R-Texas), Wittman (R-Virginia), Hunter (R-California), Rooney (R-Florida), Schilling (R-Illinois), Griffin (R-Arkansas), West (R-Florida), Smith (D-Washington), Reyes (D-Texas), Sanchez, Loretta (D-California), McIntyre (D-North Carolina), Andrews (D-New Jersey), Davis (D-California), Langevin (D-Rhode Island), Larsen (D-Washington), Cooper (D-Tennessee), Bordallo (D-Guam), Courtney (D-Connecticut), Loebsack (D-Iowa), Tsongas (D-Massachusetts), and Pingree (D-Maine.)

[Source: MOAA Leg Up 9 Dec 2011 ++]

Utah Veterans Homes Update 04: The stars — or at least bad economic conditions elsewhere in the country — aligned to allow the Utah Department of Veterans Affairs to launch two new nursing homes in December. Ground was broken 1 DEC in Ivins for an 108-bedroom home that will serve veterans in nine southern Utah counties. A second ground-breaking is planned 14 DEC in Payson, where a nearly identical home will serve veterans from throughout central Utah. Both are expected to be finished in the spring of 2013. "We just had all the stars align. That's the reason it's imperative we move ahead," says Terry Schow, executive director of the department.

The state submitted a request for federal Veterans Administration funding in 2004, and was far down on the list of proposed nursing home projects — 45 and 46 — before the bad economy walloped other states' ability to kick in

their share for such projects. Utah, however, had \$13.5 million set aside after finishing the veterans home in Ogden several years ago. At the time, the state fronted all the cost of that home's construction, and it was later reimbursed more than \$13 million from the VA. "If it weren't for the Legislature front-loading the costs for Ogden and allowing us to use those [reimbursed] funds, we would have been one of those [states] whistling in the wind," Schow said. The VA will provide \$18 million for each of the two new nursing homes, and Utah will kick in \$6.5 for each. Meanwhile veterans groups are raising money to furnish the veterans' rooms, which are fairly spartan. The Veterans Coalition of Southern Utah, which represents 11 veterans groups, has raised more than \$200,000 and wants to raise \$300,000 or \$400,000 more, said coalition chairman Bill Toole, a career Marine and transplant from California. The money will make resident veterans' lives more comfortable by providing such amenities as flat-screen televisions, he said. The nursing homes are wired for television, but none are provided with government funds.

The two nursing homes will share a floor plan with pods of rooms each modeled on a small home. Each room will have its own bathroom — a new VA concept that acknowledges a growing number of women veterans — and each will have at least a modest view of a green area. "It's not going to be a brick wall or car barn," Toole said. The city of Ivins donated the 10 acres for the nursing home, Schow said. In Utah County, the LDS Church's Farmland Reserves Inc. donated 10 acres on North Main in Payson for the veterans nursing home. Gary Schwartz, with the American Legion, is among a group of veterans organizing a coalition to raise money to furnish the rooms in the Payson nursing home. People who donate \$100 can get a plaque at the nursing home, and those who donate \$4,000 to furnish an entire room will be noted in a plaque outside the door, Schwartz said. "We're trying to get the word out," he said. To help add amenities to veterans rooms in the new homes, contact the Utah Department of Veterans Affairs at veterans.utah.gov or call 801-826-2372.

The Utah Department of Veterans Affairs bases its nursing home efforts on population, said executive director Terry Schow. Salt Lake County has 65,000 veterans and is served by a home built in the late 1990s. Constrained by its location on the VA Medical Center campus in Salt Lake City, it has 81 beds and a typical waiting list of 100. The Ogden home serves more than 40,000 veterans from Davis, Weber, Box Elder and Cache counties. It has 120 beds and is essentially full, Schow said. Utah County has 18,000 veterans and Washington County has 10,000, he said. [Source: The Salt Lake Tribune Kristen Moulton article 30 Nov 2011 ++]



An artist's rendering shows how the new 108-bed Utah State Veterans Home in Ivins will look when completed

SBA Vet Issues Update 16: Officials with the Department of Veterans Affairs faced harsh words from members of two House subcommittees who accused the VA of failure to comply with a law requiring veteran-owned small businesses to receive priority for contract awards, and throwing up obstacles that delay or deny the certification needed to bid on set-aside contracts. A joint hearing 30 NOV of the subcommittees on economic opportunity and oversight and investigations within the House Veterans Affairs Committee focused on two topics: the VA's interpretation of a law that requires veteran-owned small businesses to receive priority in all contract awards, and a process used by the VA to verify veteran-owned small businesses so that they can bid on contracts set aside by the agency.

In regard to the first topic, House members questioned the VA's refusal to comply with recommendations made by the Government Accountability Office in an 11 OCT protest decision, which stated that the agency violated a 2006 law when it failed to set aside two contract solicitations for service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses. The watchdog agency recommended that the veterans agency cancel and reissue the solicitations as set-aside contracts, a move the VA opted to ignore -- claiming the requirement did not apply to acquisitions made under the General Service Administration's contract schedules. "Please tell us how the VA considers itself exempt from the requirements? The federal government can't be sued for not meeting its goals [to set aside contracts], but it can be sued for not adhering the law, and that is what this committee is concerned about," said Rep. Bill Johnson (R-OH) who serves as chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee. "Obviously there is great disagreement with the VA's interpretation [of the law]. The GAO disagrees; I disagree. You've been told that your interpretation is wrong." The VA's Deputy General Counsel Jack Thompson noted that the GAO recommendations are "just that to federal agencies," but confirmed that the issue is still being discussed. Tom Leney, executive director of the VA's small and veteran business programs, explained the agency's decision to disregard the GAO recommendations by saying that "whenever [the VA] limits competition via set asides, we run the risk of increasing the cost to government."



Rep. Bill Johnson, R-Ohio, serves as chairman of the House Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee

Members of the subcommittees also questioned Leney about claims from veterans that they were wrongly denied verification, because of decisions by the VA that they did not maintain 100 percent control of their businesses, despite ownership of at least 51 percent. As noted by Leney, more than 90 percent of denials for verification were the function of business control, as defined by the VA, while less than 5 percent related to questions about ownership. "Are [the rules] too rigorous? You're telling me these are real veterans getting thrown out" out of the program, said Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN). "If they have the capability, why are they getting thrown out?" Added Rep. Marlin Stutzman (R-IN) "our veteran businesses are having to scrap. They shouldn't be the ones having to fight so hard." Leney confirmed that there are conflicting perspectives about the policies in place for verifying companies,

and that the "nature of the rules is such that it does make it difficult sometimes for a veteran to do business like he or she would like and still meet the requirements ... I've been focused on making sure we communicate, and implement the policy that exists —rather than focusing on how to change that policy," Leney added. "But there are those that would argue the policy should change, and there are also those that would argue it shouldn't."

VA Home Loan Update 37: The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs home-loan program is gaining in popularity among people eligible for it, mostly because its one of few remaining options for zero-down-payment, fixed-rate mortgages, lenders in the Spokane WA area say. Jackie Cardle, real estate manager at Spokane-based Global Credit Union, says she's seen a steep rise in the percentage of mortgages backed by the VA home-loan program. "Years ago, I might have seen one out of 100 loans going through the VA program," she says. "Now, 10 or 15 out of 100 are VA." The percentage of VA-backed loans also is trending upward nationwide, the VA says. VA loans accounted for 10.8 percent of all home loans originated nation-wide in 2010, up from 9.5 percent a year earlier. The agency estimates that rate will increase to 11.5 percent this year. Perhaps more telling, total VA loan originations in the first half of the year were almost triple what they were three years earlier, while loan originations in the rest of the mortgage industry was down more than 25 percent, the Washington Post reported in August.

Veterans, active-duty personnel, reservists, National Guard members, and some surviving spouses are eligible for the program. Mike Fredericks, real estate lending department production manager at Spokane Valley-based Horizon Credit Union, says the financial institution turns to the program as the primary option for veterans seeking home loans. "Some veterans depart from active duty not fully realizing what's available to them," Fredericks says. Cardle says one reason she's seeing a significant increase in the number of veterans contacting Global Credit Union is because the rental market is tight. "Veterans' access to good housing at low rental costs isn't what it used to be," she says. "A good percentage of borrowers we help put into modest housing get permanent homes for less than comparable rent." Conventional home loans usually require a borrower to buy private mortgage insurance when paying less than 20 percent down. During the foreclosure crisis, private mortgage insurance providers tightened restrictions by raising credit-score and down-payment requirements, compelling potential buyers to turn to government-backed options. Instead of mortgage insurance, the VA program charges a funding fee that most borrowers attach to the loan, says

Katie Marcus, residential sales manager at Coeur d'Alene-based Mountain West Bank. Marcus says more than 10 percent of Mountain West's loans are VA loans, and she would expect that only to increase as more troops are discharged and return home and as young veterans enter the home-buying market. Debra Goodrich, executive vice president of the home-loan division at Spokane-based Sterling Savings Bank, says corporatewide VA loan production so far this year totals \$141 million, which is just over 30 percent of Sterling's government-backed loan volume. Last year, VA loans made up 22 percent of the government-backed loan volume at Sterling, she says. Goodrich says the dollar volume of VA loans appears to be on track to hold steady at Sterling this year, while total government-backed loans are expected to drop in number, in part because the mortgage-insurance premiums on Federal Housing Administration-backed mortgages are scheduled to increase.

The FHA program offers an option that requires a 3.5 percent down payment. That program also requires an up-front mortgage insurance premium that can be spread over the life of the loan. FHA loans are attractive to low-income and young borrowers who don't have as much money for a down payment as borrowers in the conventional loan market, and such loans have grown into a major sector of the mortgage market, Fredericks says. About 35 percent of Horizon Credit Union's home loans that originated this year are government-insured FHA loans and up to 15 percent are VA loans, he says. While FHA loans have grown at the faster rate, VA loans have more advantages for most veterans, especially because they don't have to bring a lot of cash to the table, Fredericks says. In addition

to the zero-down option, VA loans usually are structured so that the seller pays closing costs and loan fees, which can save the borrower thousands of dollars and eliminate most up-front costs, he says. "We have veterans who can get into a home for as little as \$550 or \$600 out of pocket," Fredericks says. Also, the VA funding fee will drop on 18 NOV to 1.4 percent of the borrowed amount for veterans and to 1.65 percent for reservist and National Guard members, Marcus says. The fee currently is set at 2.15 percent for veterans, and 2.4 percent for reservist and National Guard members.

The VA program doesn't require a credit check, but it does try to determine that borrowers have enough income after other expenses to meet the loan payments, which generally means it encourages homebuyers to buy modest, afford-able homes, Marcus says. Unlike other government programs that are designed to increase housing access for people with low to moderate incomes, however, the VA home-loan program has no upper income limit. Depending on the buyer's income, the zero-down option can be used to buy homes valued at up to \$417,000 throughout the Inland Northwest, she says. Marcus says foreclosure rates are lower among borrowers with VA-backed loans than other types of home loans. "We don't hear as much about bank-owned VA homes," she says. "We don't see them too often around here." The Mortgage Bankers Association reported in its most recent mortgage delinquency survey results that 2.3 percent of VA loans were in foreclosure nationwide in the second quarter, compared with 4.4 percent rate of homes in foreclosure for all types of mortgages. Features of Veterans Affairs-backed home-loan program mortgages include:

- Qualified Veterans, active-duty personnel, reservists, National Guard members, and surviving spouses are eligible.
- No-money-down options for fixed-rate loans up to \$417,000 in most of Washington and Idaho.
- Funding fee acts as mortgage insurance and can be attached to the lifetime of the loan.
- Flexible process for allowing seller-paid closing costs and fees.
- No minimum credit score requirements. Loan qualifications are based on income after expenses.

[Source: Northwest Business Press Inc. Mike McLean article 1 Dec 2011 ++]

Home Ownership: Buying your first home looks pretty appealing right now. Interest rates are low, and for-sale signs are touting reduced prices in yards across the country. While it's tempting to compare a mortgage payment to rent, the price of home ownership is made up of additional home expenses that aren't so apparent. "Getting into a house is only the first step," says J.J. Montanaro, Certified Financial Planner practitioner with USAA. "You want to be able to stay in the house. You've got to be able to meet all costs." To do so, Montanaro recommends creating a monthly budget for any house you're considering buying. Use this guide to 10 homeownership costs to know what to expect when you're planning to make the move.

1. **Closing costs.** These average 3% to 5% of the value of a home loan, depending on the home's location and the type of financing you arrange. The totals typically include fees for title insurance, inspections, legal work and payments to your escrow savings account for property taxes and homeowners insurance premiums, says Greg Herb, former regional vice president for the National Association of Realtors and broker and president of Herb Real Estate Inc. of Pennsylvania. You may be able to save money by asking the seller to pay some of your closing costs, an increasingly popular practice known as a seller assist. Certain government-backed loans limit the amount a seller can pay, so ask your real estate agent or lender for specifics. "In this buyer's market, you have more leverage to ask the seller to cover your closing costs," says USAA Certified Financial Planner practitioner Scott Halliwell.

2. **Mortgage payments.** If you finance your home, you'll be responsible for a monthly mortgage payment. The payment will go toward the principal (the amount you originally borrowed) and the interest on that principal. The amount of your payment will depend on how much you borrow, the interest rate on your home loan and the amount

of time you have to pay off the loan. Use the Federal Housing Administration's handy mortgage calculator to estimate your payment. "But play it safe," warns Halliwell. "Just because the calculator says you can afford a home doesn't mean you really can. You've got to compare your cash flow to all the extra costs of homeownership." Added to your monthly mortgage payment could be a payment to build an escrow, or reserve, account. Lenders keep the money on deposit, and then pay local governments and insurance companies when their bills are due. Escrow accounts allow you to budget and save incrementally for the costs of private mortgage insurance, homeowners insurance and property taxes. "If these expenses aren't part of your monthly payment and included in an escrow account to the mortgage company, you'll need to budget for them and make sure they are paid on time. Having a lender handle them can ensure they are paid properly and on time," says Halliwell.

3. Private mortgage insurance. If your down payment is less than 20% of the home's price, you usually are required by the lender to take out a private mortgage insurance policy. This policy protects lenders in case you default on your loan. According to the trade group Mortgage Insurance Companies of America, for a \$200,000 home, the monthly premium costs between \$50 and \$100. The bigger your down payment, the lower your monthly payment for private mortgage insurance. Once you've paid off 20% of your home's original value, you can request removal of the PMI requirement in writing with the lender. If you're behind on your mortgage payments or have other liens on your home, you may not qualify.

4. Homeowners insurance. Homeowners insurance is critical to protecting your home against perils, like natural disasters and theft. "This coverage is critical in ensuring you're able to cover the rebuilding or repair costs in the event of a major catastrophe," says Halliwell. In addition to protecting the structure and its contents, homeowners insurance also provides liability and medical coverage if someone is injured on your property. If you borrow money from a mortgage lender, you're required to purchase homeowners insurance. According to the Insurance Information Institute, the average home insurance premium costs around \$800 per year. Before you buy a house, ask your insurance agent for a quote so you can budget accordingly, suggests Montanaro. Depending on where you live, you also should consider adding earthquake and flood coverage policies.

5. Property taxes. Local governments charge real estate taxes to pay for public expenses, such as schools, parks and sidewalks. Municipalities usually calculate a homeowner's annual tax by multiplying the local tax rate by the official assessed value of the home. You can find this public information on your tax assessor's website. The seller or seller's real estate agent can tell you the current annual tax on a property. Also ask when the next assessment is scheduled and whether it will be increased by the sale of the home, suggests Halliwell.

6. Utilities. Once you find the right house, Montanaro recommends asking the seller for a record of a year's worth of utility bills. This way, you can budget for heating, cooling, electricity, natural gas and water expenses. Be sure to account for any differences in family size. A single grandmother will use far less water, for instance, than a family of four.

7. Maintenance. Once you own a home, you can't call the landlord for repairs, which is why it's important to know the condition of a residence before you sign on the dotted line. A qualified home inspector can walk you through what to expect. "Based on the home inspection report, you'll get a pretty good snapshot of what to plan for — the life expectancy of major components, like the roof, heating, plumbing, electrical," says Herb. Even so, you should still have a line item in your budget for ongoing maintenance. Whether it's replacing furnace filters, staining or refinishing decks, painting exterior trim or refreshing the plants and mulch in your landscaping, there's a pretty high likelihood that something will regularly happen that will cost you money. Owning a home magnifies the importance of maintaining an emergency fund equivalent to at least three to six months of routine expenses, says Montanaro.

8. Making-it-mine expenses. "One of the biggest categories I've seen catch people off-guard is what I call 'making-it-mine,'" says Halliwell. You might fall in love with a house, but when you move in: Your furniture doesn't fit, you

don't like the kitchen counter, and you'd prefer wood floors to carpet. "You could easily spend thousands of dollars if you're not careful," he warns. Halliwell suggests making a list of what you might need to buy once you move in — furniture, rugs and window treatments, for example — and then creating a budget. Too often, says Halliwell, buyers struggle to make a down payment and then put their making-it-mine expenses on a credit card. "The next thing you know, they're buried in credit card debt, and what started out as a happy event turns quickly negative," he says.

9. **Landscaping.** Now that you have a yard, you have the expense of getting it in shape and maintaining it, such as planting flowers, trimming trees and sodding a lawn. You will need yard equipment — a lawn mower, weed wacker, rakes. It's easy to forget about those expenses."

10. **Other costs to consider.** "As rewarding as home ownership can be, it does seem to come with an endless stream of expenses that fall into the 'other' category on your budget," says Halliwell. Whether it's a new home security and monitoring system or weekly trips to the local home improvement store, ensure you've built some wiggle room into the budget for your new home. You'll also need to factor in homeowner association dues if you are purchasing a condo or townhome or live in a community with HOA fees. Finally, don't forget about the cost of purchasing extra life insurance. For many families, having enough coverage to pay off the mortgage at the death of the primary breadwinner is almost a necessity. "A new home is definitely a life event," says Montanaro, "and that requires a fresh look at your life insurance coverage."

[Source: https://www.usaa.com/inet/pages/advice_real_home_costs?EID=corp_usaahome_2011_09-04 Dec 2011 ++]

Credit Union Credit Cards: Bank of America's misstep with debit card fees has brought a lot of attention to credit unions. Even though Bank of America is "taking back" the fee in response to the outcry from the public, Bank Transfer Day still took place on 5 NOV. Even if you don't switch banks, you can still consider taking a look at credit cards offered by credit unions. In most cases, you'll need to have good-to-excellent credit, but if you're turned down, call and ask if they'll look at your application again. Credit unions have been known to take unusual circumstances into consideration. Here are a few things you need to know about credit union credit cards:

- **You have to become a member.** This isn't always easy because some credit unions serve only a select group. You can join the Pentagon Federal Credit Union with a one-time \$20 donation. But you can't join Navy Federal unless you're associated with the military. But there are many others out there that do allow a broader membership so you just have to do some research. You can start your search at A Smarter Choice <http://www.asmarterchoice.org>, which is associated with Credit Union National Association. You can search by location or even do an advanced search by occupation, school and more.
- **You usually get lower interest rates.** Credit unions are non-profit organizations that are owned by the members. According to the Credit Union National Association, federally chartered credit unions have an interest rate cap of 18 percent on all loans, including credit cards. This fact helps to keep rates low. But the rates are also low because you're not just a customer, you're an investor. So many credit unions funnel their profits back to you. This results in savings on various financial products. If you revolve a balance, a credit union credit card is a good choice because you'll save money on interest expense.
- **You still have to read the fine print.** Don't assume that since it's a credit union, you don't need to worry about protecting yourself. You still need to read the disclosure statements carefully. Shop around and

compare the terms to a similar card at a regular bank. When it comes to credit products, it's always buyer beware.

[Source: Business Insider Beverly Blair Harzog article 5 Nov 2011 ++]

DFAS End-of-Year Mailing: Retirees will be receiving some extra documents in their end of year mailing from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service. DFAS officials state that every piece of paper in the mailing is important and will help retirees manage their pay matters through the tax season and beyond. Included in the mailing will be:

- A Retiree Account Statement dated Dec. 2 show the new payment amount as of Dec. 30. This includes the cost-of-living allowance adjustment for 2012.
- A Retiree Account Statement dated Dec. 12 show the new payment amount as of Feb. 1. This includes any federal income tax adjustments caused by changes to the 2012 tax tables.
- Internal Revenue Service Form 1099-R reflecting all payments retirees received in 2011. DFAS officials remind retirees that because of the pay date change approved by Congress earlier this year, the 1099-R will reflect 13 payments rather than 12.
- DFAS retiree newsletter including important updates from retired and annuitant pay officials, as well as information about tools people can use to manage their retired pay account year round.

Data availability dates are:

- For people with online myPay accounts, the statements will be posted Dec. 4, and the 1099-Rs will be posted Dec. 15.
- For people who get these documents via the U.S. Postal Service, DFAS official will mail these documents to retirees Dec. 19 through Jan. 10.
- The Annuitant Account Statements and 1099-Rs will be available Dec. 14 on myPay. Annuitants who get these documents via mail can expect to receive them Dec. 19 through 31.

Retirees and annuitants must keep their contact information current, according to DFAS officials who say the top reason a retiree or annuitant doesn't receive their 1099-R is because it is sent to an old address. If a retiree or annuitant does not have their correct address on file with DFAS by Dec. 5, they will experience a significant delay in receiving their end of year documents, said official. People who do not have an active myPay account must call, mail or fax a written request to DFAS-Cleveland; processing a change of address and reissuing a new 1099-R takes at least 30 days, said officials. Retirees and annuitants with an active myPay account can decrease their wait time for an address change and new 1099-R by logging in and updating their own account. Changes take effect in three to five business days, and a copy of their 1099R can be printed directly from myPay. For more information about account maintenance, 1099-R requests, and logging in to myPay, visit the DFAS website at www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary.html, or myPay at <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx>. People without an online account can contact DFAS at 800-321-1080. [Source: AFRNS article 1 Dec 2011 ++]

Selective Service System Update 07: Under current law, all male U.S. citizens are required to register with Selective Service within 30 days of their 18th birthday. In addition, foreign males between the ages of 18 and 25 living in the United States must register. This includes permanent residents (holders of Green Cards), refugees, asylees, dual citizens, and illegal immigrants. Foreign males in the United States as lawful non-immigrants (international students, visitors, diplomats, etc.) are not required to register. Failure to register as required is grounds

for denying a petition for US citizenship. Currently, citizens who are 17 and 3 months old can pre-register so when they turn 18 their information will automatically be added into the system. In 1980, men who knew they were required to register and did not do so could face up to five years in jail or a fine up to \$50,000 if convicted. The potential fine was later increased to \$250,000. Despite these possible penalties, government records indicate that from 1980 through 1986 there were only 20 indictments, of which 19 were instigated in part by self-publicized and self-reported non-registration. As one of the elements of the offense, the government must prove that a violation of the Military Selective Service Act was knowing and willful. This is almost impossible unless the prospective defendant has publicly stated that he knew he was required to register or report for induction, or unless he has been visited by the FBI, personally served with notice to register or report for induction, and given another chance to comply.

The last prosecution for non-registration was in January 1986, after which many believed the government declined to continue enforcing that law when it became apparent that the trials were themselves causing a decline in registration. Routine checks requiring identification virtually never include a request for draft card. As an alternative method of encouraging registration, federal legislators passed laws requiring that to receive financial aid, federal grants and loans, certain government benefits, eligibility for most federal employment, and (if the person is an immigrant) eligibility for citizenship, a young man had to be registered (or had to have been registered, if they are over 26 but were required to register between 18 and 26) with Selective Service. Those who were required to register, but failed to do so before they turn 26, are no longer allowed to register, and thus may be permanently barred from federal jobs and other benefits, unless they can show to the Selective Service that their failure was not knowing and willful. There is a procedure to provide an "information letter" by the SSS for those in these situations, for example recent citizens who entered the US after their 26th birthday.

Most states, as well as the District of Columbia, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and Virgin Islands, have passed laws requiring registration in order for men 18–25 to be eligible for programs that vary on a per-jurisdiction basis but typically include driver's licenses, state-funded higher education benefits, and state government jobs. Alaska also requires registration in order to receive an Alaska Permanent Fund dividend. Eight states (Connecticut, Indiana, Nebraska, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming) as well as Puerto Rico have no such requirements, though Indiana does give men 18–25 the option of registering with Selective Service when obtaining a drivers license or an identification card. There are some third-party organized efforts to compensate financial aid for those students losing benefits, including the Fund for Education and Training (FEAT) and Student Aid Fund for Non-registrants. [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selective_Service_System Dec 2011 ++]

USS Midway Museum: The USS Midway Museum got an earful -- and a roomful - of San Diegans 29 NOV, eager to weigh in on the \$68 million plans for Navy Pier next to the retired aircraft carrier on the downtown waterfront. While most of the nearly 70 people at the first of three town halls planned at port headquarters liked the idea of a park on top of the existing parking lot and a new venue for the Summer Pops concerts, opinions were generally negative on the 500-foot-tall "Wings of Freedom" sculptural element proposed at the west end of the 989-foot-long pier. Some called the two sail-like wings -- one 500 and the other 400 feet tall and both made out of steel and titanium -- out of scale, a "monstrosity." Others said they would become a new icon for the region. Businessman Denny Sanford has pledged \$35 million to cover the cost of the wings. The balance of the project's cost is yet to be raised.

However, there are critics. Ian Trowbridge, who co-chairs the Navy Broadway Complex Coalition told 10News the project is not consistent with the California Coastal Act, especially since the sculpture will block the public view of the San Diego Bay. "I don't think that it is iconic," said Trowbridge. "I think that it's just ugly." McLaughlin

admits there are some people who do not like the project. "If you're standing right on the opposite side of it looking out, certainly, of course it will block the bay," he said. "But we like to say the same thing we said about the Midway when the Midway came. Everybody was complaining that it was going to block the views. All they say now is this is the view and we think if you build the right iconic structure out here, it would become the new view of San Diego and enhance the view by bringing more of the public down here to the bay." Midway President and CEO Mac McLaughlin said the plan is open to revision based on the public's input.

McLaughlin was pleased with the turnout for the 29 NOV meeting and promised to take the comments into consideration as plans progress. "I heard a more balanced approach than I anticipated," he said. "What we heard was a lot of support for the 5 acre Veterans Memorial Park on top of the Navy pier parking lot next to the carrier, the San Diego Symphony (amphitheater for the Pops) and some disagreement about the iconic symbol." One speaker called the scale of the twin, sail-like wing structures designed by Tucker Sadler Architects "excessive," while other audience members minced no words, calling them a "monstrosity." One of the few to praise the structures without reservation said, "I think the wings are fantastic ... I've been waiting for something like this in San Diego." Other speakers suggested changing the titanium sheets on the wings to make them transparent, adding stairs and elevators to reach the top for a bird's eye view or seeking different designs that would not compete with the iconic status of the Midway itself. Two other town hall meetings are planned . In a change of plans, the Midway staff said it won't present its final proposal until the 10JAN meeting of the San Diego Unified Port District board; 13 DEC was the original date for the presentation. The pier plan would be part of a larger port master plan amendment for the entire North Embarcadero, between Lindbergh Field and Seaport Village. It will undergo months of environmental impact analysis before the California Coastal Commission gets the final say. [Source: Sign On San Diego & 10News.com articles 29 & 30 Sep 2011 ++]



Wings of Freedom" with and without the sheets of titanium on the steel superstructure

VA Mental Health Care Update 07: Even with thousands of new veterans clamoring for mental health care each month, Veterans Affairs leaders haven't yet found ways to speed up appointment scheduling and appear unwilling to partner with outside counselors, critics say. The charges, leveled by mental health experts and irritated lawmakers at a Senate Veterans Affairs committee hearing 30 NOV, came as the department released new data showing that the number of veterans seeking mental health help jumped by more than 300,000 in recent years. That translates into more than 1.2 million veterans currently receiving mental health services, and likely tens of thousands more who will seek similar assistance the years to come. "As thousands of veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan, you can see the number of PTSD appointments steadily rise each quarter," said committee chairwoman Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) "This problem isn't going anywhere." According to a USA Today analysis of data, 10,000 veterans sought help for post-traumatic stress disorder at VA hospitals every three months this year.

Since the Iraq and Afghanistan wars began, more than 200,000 combat veterans from those fights have been treated for the disorder, roughly 16 percent of the 1.3 million troops who fought there.

VA officials said they have made significant progress in helping those veterans, hiring thousands more counselors and setting goals of getting new patients into treatment within 14 days. Dr. Michelle Washington, PTSD coordinator at the VA medical center in Wilmington, Del., said effective mental health treatment often requires weekly visits, but veterans rarely can schedule more than one session a month because of the demand on the department's mental health professionals. Scheduled appointments for returning patients are routinely bumped for new ones, she said. Long waits and frustrating rescheduling can scare away mentally unstable patients from seeking further help, or send them into an even worse state. Defense Department officials have worked to supplement their mental health care offerings by partnering with outside groups like Give An Hour, which provides free psychiatric counseling to veterans through private practices. But Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, founder of that charity, said VA officials have not been open to similar outreach efforts.

John Roberts, vice president at the Wounded Warrior Project, said a recent survey of his group's members found that one-third of veterans who sought mental health services through the department either could not schedule appropriate appointments or gave up trying. But he said officials still seem insistent on finding internal solutions to the issue, rather than allowing veterans to seek private practice help. "They're still so short-staffed," he said, "it's like trying to put a band-aid on an amputation." Dr. Mary Schohn, director of mental health operations at the Veterans Health Administration, said officials are committed to finding solutions and reducing those wait times. Leaders have established a new policy group to look at appointment flexibility issues, new staffing models and better reporting of wait-time data. But lawmakers said that work should have been completed years ago, before the problem grew to unacceptable levels. "We promised these veterans that we would take care of them when they came home," said Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC). "Then we're sticking them in a system where they're the first ones to lose confidence in it."

Senators gave a public scolding to the director of mental health operations for the nation's veterans, saying the federal government must speed up services for those with PTSD and other afflictions. Faced with a 34 percent increase in the number of veterans who have sought mental health services since 2006, the Department of Veterans Affairs has not kept pace, said Sen. Murray. Schohn said the department has made mental health care a high priority but added that 'we recognize we have much more to do.' The hearing was the latest in a yearlong series by the committee on mental health issues and VA care. Murray said the committee will continue that work into next year. [Source: Stars & Stripes Leo Shane article 30 NOV 2011 ++]

Commissary Magazine/Newspaper Sales: Starting in February, commissaries overseas will stop carrying magazines and most newspapers due to declining sales and the expense of airlifting the periodicals from the States, Defense Commissary Agency officials said this week. Commissaries in the United States will continue to sell magazines and newspapers, officials said. Overseas, those items will still be available at Army and Air Force Exchange Service retail stores. Over the last four years, magazine sales at overseas commissaries have steadily dwindled, from about \$1.98 million in fiscal 2008 to about \$1.46 million in fiscal 2011, according to information from DeCA. That is due in part to DeCA purchasing fewer magazines, but stores still only were selling about half the magazine inventory, said Kevin Robinson, a DeCA spokesman at the agency's corporate headquarters in Fort Lee, Va. Between January and March of last year, for example, 49 percent of magazines on commissary shelves overseas went unsold, according to DeCA. "No business model in the world could survive" with that type of sales rate, Robinson said. DeCA was also spending over half a million dollars on getting the magazines overseas,

officials said. In fiscal 2011, DeCA spent about \$673,000 in taxpayer dollars — money appropriated by Congress — to airlift magazines to commissaries in Europe and the Pacific, according to figures from DeCA.

With budget cuts looming across the Defense Department, agencies are scrambling to find ways to cut costs. While stopping magazine sales overseas will save money, Robinson said, it's also a decision that makes good business sense "regardless of the budget climate ... DeCA recognizes that it has an inherent responsibility to be a good steward of taxpayer dollars," he said in a written statement. "This was something we could do as an agency to drive down our costs and not impact the customer as much," added Leslie Brown, DeCA-Europe spokeswoman. She said customers can read magazines online or purchase them at the base exchange. Customers shopping at the Vogelweh commissary near Kaiserslautern on 29 NOV said being able to buy magazines with their groceries was convenient, but something they could live without. "I used to buy a lot of magazines (at the commissary) but stopped about three years ago," said Air Force spouse Niki Gould. "You can see everything online. It's kind of a waste of \$5 or more, depending on the magazine." Commissaries in Europe and the Pacific will continue to sell Stars and Stripes newspaper, which is published overseas and not shipped from the States, officials said. [Source: Stars and Stripes Jennifer H. Svan article 29 Nov 2011 ++]

Civil War: As the breeding ground for modern warfare, the Civil War has long been known for its "firsts." It has been credited with dozens like these:

- A workable machine gun
- A steel ship
- A successful submarine
- A "snorkel" breathing device
- A wide-ranging corps of press correspondents in battle areas
- American conscription
- American bread lines
- American President assassinated
- Aerial reconnaissance
- Antiaircraft fire
- Army ambulance corps
- Blackouts and camouflage under aerial observation
- Cigarette tax Commissioned
- American Army chaplains
- Department of justice
- Electrically exploded bombs and torpedoes
- Fixed ammunition
- Field trenches on a grand scale
- Flame throwers
- Hospital ships
- Ironclad navies
- Land-mine fields
- Legal voting for servicemen
- Long-range rifles for general use
- Medal of Honor
- Military telegraph
- Military railroads

- Naval torpedoes
- Negro U.S. Army Officer (Major M.R. Delany)
- Organized medical and nursing corps
- Photography of battle
- Railroad artillery
- Repeating rifles
- Revolving gun turrets
- The bugle call, "Taps"
- The Income tax
- The wigwag signal code in battle
- The periscope, for trench warfare
- Telescopic sights for rifles
- Tobacco tax
- U.S. Navy Admiral
- U.S. Secret Service
- Withholding tax
- Wire entanglements
- Wide-scale use of anesthetics for wounded

[Source: Rhode Island Veterans Sentinel May-Jun 2010 ++]

Veteran Support Organizations: Pets to Vets is an organization which features a veteran helping veterans, but in a different way. P2V (for Pets to Vets) matches veterans with animals-mainly dogs-from local animal shelters to help service members cope with their mental struggles. The founder suffered for eight years with depression and thoughts of suicide, but having a canine buddy helped him manage and begin the road to recovery. To make sure anyone who needs help receives it, P2V requires no diagnosis; the only qualification is having served. The program currently is active in the Washington, D.C. area, New York and San Diego with plans to expand to other cities. It partners with certain shelters, but if those lack the right animal for the veteran, "we go to any other shelter in the area and pay the adoption cost," explains Rebecca Forrest, the executive director. It also pays for a year's worth of veterinary care at PetSmart animal clinics and has deals for reduced-cost care after that. Though the dogs are not trained to official service dog level, they do have some training and certification allowing them to live in places with no-pet or size-restriction policies.

Forrest explains that "Our organization is founded on the belief that heroes should have a choice." Because of the philosophy, P2V says no to many well-meaning people who want to donate pet-care items. She says the organization instead gives each beneficiary a gift card so they can buy what they want. Making choices and the comfort of a pet can help veterans deal with the effects of PTSD, which can include fear, depression and violent outbursts. But P2V has a message for the public: "You shouldn't be afraid of these people," Forrest says. "That's the last thing you should be. These people need our help, and we should be there for them." In addition to pets, P2V offers a support network. The program checks up on participants one day, one week, three months, six months and one year after a pet adoption. The veterans are welcome to contact P2V at any time for any reason. Forrest explains that one veteran called because of a problem with her neighbor's dog. "They can call us for anything, not just their dog," she says. For additional information about Pets to Vets refer to <http://www.p2v.org> or contact them at (877) 311-4728| info@pets2vets.org. [Source: AFCRA Veterans Focus Rita Boland article Nov 2011 ++]

Vet License Plates NV: A new license plate honoring female veterans was unveiled 11 NOV by Gov. Brian Sandoval during Veterans Day ceremonies at the state Veterans Home in Boulder City. The plate won't be available for purchase until Dec. 7, but Assemblyman Elliot Anderson, D-Las Vegas, said it was displayed first on Veterans Day to bring greater attention to the plate. Anderson, a Marine Corps veteran of Afghanistan, introduced the enabling legislation for the special plate during the legislative session last spring in response to concern by female veterans. People would see their veterans license plates at gas stations and ask if their husbands or sons were veterans, he said. Nevada currently has nine special plates available for veterans. "A lot of women are veterans and inadvertently they were insulted by those questions," Anderson said. There are 24,000 female veterans in Nevada. Funds raised by the sale of the license plate will be given to the state Office of Veterans Affairs for a fund to help veterans. Buyers must be female veterans. When they first order the plate, they pay the regular cost of the plate plus an extra \$60 that goes to the veterans fund. Upon renewal, they will pay an extra \$30 annually to the fund. During hearings that led to passage of the bill, veteran Cheryl Gardner testified the Marines have a motto of the "few and the proud," but for women Marines it is "the fewer and prouder." She said several states already honor female veterans and Nevada should join them. "It is very disturbing women veterans are not recognized more," Gardner said. Nevada has 18 different veteran related license plates . Pictures of each plate and ordering information can be found at <http://www.dmvnv.com/platesveterans.htm#All> or in the attachment this Bulletins titled, "**Vet License Plates - NV**". Source: Vegas Review-Journal article 12 Nov 2011 ++]



Veteran Hearing/Mark-up Schedule: Following is the schedule as of 9 DEC of Congressional hearings and markups pertaining to the veteran community. Congressional hearings are the principal formal method by which committees collect and analyze information in the early stages of legislative policymaking. Hearings usually include oral testimony from witnesses, and questioning of the witnesses by members of Congress. When a U.S. congressional committee meets to put a legislative bill into final form it is referred to as a mark-up. Veterans are encouraged to contact members of these committees prior to the event listed and provide input on what they want their legislator to do at the event. Membership of each committee and their contact info can be found at <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/directory/committees.tt?commid=svete>:

- Hearing – December 15, 2011. HVAC, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, will hold an oversight hearing entitled “Reviewing the Implementation of the VOW to Hire Heroes Act” with an emphasis on progress toward completing the VA-Department of Labor agreement under Section 211(h). 10:00 a.m. (tentative), 334 Cannon HOB

Vet Toxic Exposure~TCE: As early as WWII, United States Air Force and other Military bases used and disposed of chemical degreasers and other toxic substances that were later determined to contaminate drinking water and pose multiple health risks including: Cancers, Reproductive disorders, Birth defects, and Multiple other serious difficulties. Countless military personnel, their families, and private individuals living and working in the near vicinity of the bases may have been affected by these contaminants, through drinking water, general water usage and exposure through vapor seepage. The four most alarming contaminants are: Trichloroethylene (TCE), Tetrachloroethylene (PCE), Vinyl Chloride, and Benzene. Scientific studies show that some or all of these chemical compounds have breached the ground water supply on several of our US Military Bases and in some instances, have affected civilian properties adjacent to the bases including churches, schools and private wells. Currently, on-going research is being conducted on military bases around the country and on properties directly adjacent to these bases to identify just how wide spread this contamination may be.

Wurtsmith Air Force Base (Wurtsmith) is a 5,223 acre site, located on the northeastern part of Michigan's lower peninsula about two miles west of Lake Huron. To the north and northeast of the site is Van Etten Lake, to the southwest is Allen Lake, and to the southeast and east is the village of Oscoda. Of the 5,223 acres, 1,943 acres are owned by the U.S. Air Force. The rest of the facility consists of 2,466 acres that are leased primarily from the state and 814 acres that are registered as easement tracts. Wurtsmith has operated since 1923 under several different names, beginning as a subsidiary of Selfridge Field, called Camp Skeel. Until World War II, Camp Skeel was used for gunnery practice, winter maneuvers, and aircraft landings. According to The Emergency War Order, the primary mission of the base was to maintain full readiness to conduct strategic bombing operations worldwide. Support activities at the base included aircraft and vehicle maintenance, bombardment crew and unit training, and air refueling support. The base was renamed Oscoda Army Air Field when the Continental Air Command began using it as a transient aircraft stopover. In 1953, the base was renamed back to Wurtsmith Air Force Base when it came under the command of the U.S. Air Force Strategic Air Command.

In November 1977 while collecting groundwater samples, the Air Force detected trichloroethylene (TCE) in three of the seven drinking water wells on the base. Additional samples collected in 1979 and 1980 also detected TCE. In 1985 during the early stages of base closure, the Installation Restoration Program Phase I records search for Wurtsmith identified 29 sources of concern including the Weapons Storage Area, two former 6,000-gallon tank trailers, the Northern Landfill Area, the Building 43 Area, and the Building 5008 Area. During the 1950s and early 1960s, the Air Force used the Weapons Storage Area as a jet fighter maintenance area, possibly using TCE for degreasing and deicing the jets. The U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS) identified a TCE-contaminated groundwater plume that appeared to be emanating from this area. In 1971, two 6,000-gallon tank trailers were buried in the center of the Northern Landfill Area to create a central depository for waste solvents. The tanks were removed in 1977. The Northern Landfill Area served as a disposal pit from 1960 to 1979 into which the Air Force disposed of domestic and industrial wastes, including solvents, metals, and paints. In 1987, the USGS sampled monitoring wells downgradient of the Northern Landfill area and identified TCE, 1,1-dichloroethane, 1,1,1-trichloroethane, and vinyl chloride. The Air Force used a 500-gallon underground storage tank in the Building 43 Area from 1962 to 1977 to store waste TCE, which it used as a degreaser for the maintenance of fire control equipment in the Building 5008 Area. After removing the tank, a leak was discovered near the fill pipe on the top of the tank. In addition, the Air Force apparently dumped solvents, including TCE, near buildings in the Building 5008 Area for weed control. Pumping drinking water wells in this area caused the contaminants to be drawn toward these wells, resulting in the contamination of additional drinking water wells with TCE. The Air Force officially closed the base in 1993.

The Air Force detected TCE in the drinking water and monitoring wells at the Building 43 Area and at the Building 5008 Area. The USGS identified a TCE-contaminated groundwater plume at the Weapons Storage Area. While sampling monitoring wells downgradient of the Northern Landfill Area where two 6,000 gallon tank trailers

were buried, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) also detected the volatile organic compounds TCE, 1,1-dichloroethane, 1,1,1-trichloroethane, and vinyl chloride. Since the soil at the site is primarily sand, any spills or leaks at the surface will move rapidly to the groundwater. Therefore, contaminated soil has not been frequently encountered at the site. A Consolidated Remedial Action Plan (C-RAP), which addresses the disposition of all areas of known or potential contamination, has been reviewed by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). The C-RAP provides a summary of 88 sites at Wurtsmith. They include 29 remedial action sites, 57 sites where no further RA is planned, and two sites closed under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Seven of the 88 sites have been deferred due to ongoing investigations.

The site contamination is being addressed by several long-term remedial actions. A groundwater pump and treat system was installed in 1981 to clean up a TCE spill near Building 43 and to halt its movement offsite. A second pump and treat system was installed in 1988 to clean up TCE and fuel spills, originating near the operational apron and Building 5008. A third pump and treat system began operation in 1992 to clean up spills at the POL Bulk Storage Area. In 1993, the Air Force connected residents, located between the base and Van Etten Lake, to a potable water supply. A low volume hydrocarbon skimmer operated from 1991 until 1992 to remove spilled jet fuel from the water table. Ex-situ bioremediation was used to clean up excavated soil contaminated with diesel fuel from a leaky underground storage tank in 1991. The Air Force removed all of the storage tanks from the site. The fuel hydrant system and the oil/water separators have been cleaned.

The soils at and near the petroleum, oil, and lubricant bulk storage yard are currently undergoing remediation through soil vapor extraction (SVE) and bioventing to remove organics. The SVE and bioventing systems were installed in November 1999. A biosparging system, installed to cleanup residual fuel from the groundwater in this area, also began operating in 1999. The air sparging/SVE systems were installed at the Strategic Air Command (SAC) Operational Apron area in November 1999 to treat groundwater contaminated with volatile organics. The system was shut down in November 2001 when cleanup objectives were met. Post-closure monitoring is being conducted to ensure the treatment remains effective. A SVE system was installed at the Fire Training Area to cleanup soil contaminated with volatile organic compounds (VOCs). The system began operating in May 2001. Bioventing and biosparging systems were installed at the Base Operational Apron in 2003 to treat soil and groundwater contaminated with petroleum constituents. These systems became operational in 2004.

Groundwater contaminated in the Northern Landfill Area discharges into Van Etten Lake at the YMCA property boundary. An 80-well barrier air sparging curtain was installed at the base boundary downgradient of the landfills and commenced full-time operations in May 2002. The primary intent of the system is to inject/add oxygen to the subsurface as a means to help restore groundwater table aquifer. In-situ stripping of VOCs is a secondary outcome of air sparging operations. A small groundwater and extraction treatment system was also installed at the base boundary north of the air sparging curtain to capture groundwater contaminated with chlorinated solvents in a narrow plume originating at the landfills that is traveling offsite. Monitoring is being conducted to measure the performance of the systems. Groundwater from the Northern Landfill area discharging to Van Etten Lake at the YMCA beachfront has caused aesthetic impacts (iron staining) at the beach. Remedial actions performed at the YMCA beach include one sand removal/replacement (April 1999), and three sand placements (January 2001, January 2002, and January 2003). Oxygen Release Compound (ORC) was injected slightly upgradient of the beach to increase the dissolved oxygen levels in the aquifer so that staining would not occur. 4,770 pounds of ORC were injected through 97 points in February 2001 and 4,860 pounds of ORC were injected through 109 points near the beach in October 2001. Monitoring is being conducted to determine the impacts of the ORC application. The Air Force is evaluating/investigating:

- Options for closure of the Landfill 30/Landfill 31 areas and is working with U.S. EPA and the Michigan DEQ on closure requirements. Although the air sparge system continues to operate downgradient of the landfill areas,

- Options to better address groundwater contamination that moves from the landfill area toward the YMCA beach. The Air Force is currently investigating groundwater contamination associated with the LF-27 area. LF-27 primarily contains non-hazardous fill. However, the MDEQ is concerned that low-level metal contamination (esp. manganese) in groundwater could pose a threat at the groundwater discharge point in Clark's March. MDEQ is also concerned about aesthetic impacts from "yellow boy" staining from elevated iron concentrations.
- The groundwater "pump and treat" systems in operation (Arrow Street, Benzene Plant, and Mission Street) to ensure that the systems are capturing plume areas and operating efficiently.

A base wide five-year review was completed in September 2004. A second base-wide five year review is planned for 2009. Studies of the nature and extent of contamination at a few sites are still underway. These investigations will result in the selection of remedies for final cleanup of the site. Cleanup actions, including the operation of groundwater pump and treat systems, the connection to the potable water supply, the operation of the hydrocarbon skimmer, and the ex-situ bioremediation of the soil, have reduced the threat to human health and the environment while site investigations are underway. [Source: <http://www.militarycontamination.com> Dec 2011 ++]

Saving Money: Federal law requires that credit card issuers allow their customers to request a transaction be reversed for fraud and billing errors, among other things. While most chargebacks are related to stolen credit cards and identity theft, disputing a merchant's transaction is your most potent weapon – and the merchant's worst nightmare. Goods and services that are charged to your credit card can be refunded if they weren't received – or if what the merchant provided wasn't what he said it was. In those circumstances, it's your right to contact your bank and request a reversal of those charges, a process known as a chargeback. For example, when an airline goes out of business, customers holding tickets for future flights can easily receive a refund, provided they used their credit card. But ticket holders who used other methods of payment rarely get reimbursed.

This is how it works: Assume you ordered something from a website. You enter your credit card information and receive a confirmation of the order, yet it never arrives or is defective upon arrival. Multiple attempts to contact the company go unanswered or fail to rectify the situation. At that point you call your credit card provider and request a chargeback. Normally, you will be asked to submit documentation supporting your claim. The merchant is contacted to get their side of the story. If the merchant cannot provide proof of shipment or other information substantiating they met their contractual obligation it will most likely be approved. Merchants try to avoid chargebacks. Each time a chargeback is requested, their account is debited and they have to defend themselves to their credit card processor. Furthermore, credit card transaction fees, which retailers hate, rise dramatically when a merchant has too many chargeback requests. A chargeback should never be your first course of action when you're having a problem with a merchant. You should always make multiple good-faith attempts to contact the merchant, speak to a supervisor, and give them the opportunity to "make it right." Additionally, informing a company's management that you intend to request a chargeback can maycause them to reconsider their unreasonable position.

Just because you requested a chargeback – and received a temporary credit – doesn't guarantee you'll prevail. You'll still need to produce supporting documentation to back up your claim. If you contend that the goods or services were never delivered, it will fall upon the merchant to prove otherwise. However, if you're claiming that the goods or services received weren't as described, you must show some significant deficiency. It can't just be buyer's remorse. Providing photographs or supporting documentation from a third party is a great way to win these disputes. When you encounter a merchant who has charged your credit card and not delivered the goods, you have recourse. Once the business has proven itself to be unresponsive, evasive, or just obtuse, only then should you pull out your

secret weapon in order to save the day. And this is one reason why you should always use a credit card for online and major purchases. [Source: MoneyTalksNews Jason Steele article 10/20/11 ++]

Notes of Interest:

- **Vet Cemeteries.** CENLA Veterans Cemetery has completed construction. New employees are currently being trained and materials and equipment are being purchased and received. Anticipated grand opening to held in February, 2012 - date should be set and announced by end of year.
- **Express Scripts.** TRICARE beneficiaries should use the address Express Scripts, P.O. BOX 52132, Phoenix, AZ 85082 to submit PAPER claims to Express Scripts. All other Express Scripts addresses remain the same.
- **McDonald's.** To keep kids healthy, San Francisco banned McDonald's from selling Happy Meals, which offer a free toy with its fast food. "McDonald's answer? It will charge 10 cents for the toy," MSNBC reports. "The proceeds will be donated to Ronald McDonald House, the company's charity for children with cancer." The clown wins.
- **Competition.** If you ever doubted that competition is good for consumers, check this out: "Right now, \$118 will buy you a round trip ticket on the 45-minute US Airways jaunt from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia," CNN reports. "Starting on Jan. 8, the price of that same ticket will skyrocket to \$698." Why? Because Southwest is dropping the route, leaving only US Airways as the only nonstop carrier. That's their new price.
- **Icelandic Phallogical Museum.** Would you pay to see a nearly 6-foot-long sperm whale penis that weighs about 120 pounds? You can at the Icelandic Phallogical Museum, which draws about 12,000 visitors a year, according to USA Today. "On the other end of the scale, a hamster penis is so tiny it requires a magnifying glass to spot." Admission 1000 KSL (~\$8.46)
- **TDP.** The TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) Benefit Booklet is an 88-page booklet that provides an overview of the TDP for active duty family members and National Guard and Reserve members and their families. The booklet includes information about service areas; benefits and exclusions; eligibility and enrollment; filing claims; and costs. Stateside and overseas contact information is included. This handbook is available for download at: <http://www.tricare.mil/tricaresmart/product.aspx?id=738&CID=152&RID=3>.
- **TRICARE.** The TRICARE Standard Handbook is an 80-page guide for beneficiaries using TRICARE Standard and TRICARE Extra. This handbook is available for download at: <http://www.tricare.mil/tricaresmart/product.aspx?id=430&CID=71&RID=3>.
- **TRICARE Pharmacy.** There are no ongoing negotiations between TRICARE's contractor ESI and Walgreens so it looks like there is not going to be an agreement. If there is no new contract on January 1, 2012 Walgreens will be out of the network.
- **Donations:** UNICEF CEO receives \$1,200,000 per year plus all expenses, including a Rolls Royce automobile! Less than 5% your donation goes to the cause! The American Red Cross President and CEO has a salary of \$651,957, plus expenses. The United Way President receives a \$375,000 base salary, along with numerous expense benefits. The Salvation Army's Commissioner receives a salary of \$13,000 per year, (plus housing) for managing this \$2 billion dollar organization! 96% of donated dollars go to the cause!! The National Commander's of: The American Legion; The Veterans of Foreign Wars; The Disabled American Veterans; The Military Order of Purple Hearts; and, The Vietnam Veterans Association . . . ALL receive \$0.00 zero salary per year. Your donations to any of these organizations go to help veterans and their families and youth!
- **Money.** The new U.S. currency bill real under ultraviolet light glows: \$5 bill glows blue, \$10 bill glows orange, \$20 bill glows green, \$50 bill glows yellow, and \$100 bill glows red.

[Source: Various 1-15 Dec 2011 ++]

Medicare Fraud Update 81:



- **Miami FL** - Patient recruiter Santiago Villa-Restrepo, 33, pleaded guilty 29 NOV to one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud for his participation in a Medicare fraud scheme operated out of three Detroit-area health care clinics. He faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. According to the plea documents, Villa-Restrepo recruited Medicare beneficiaries for three Detroit-area health care clinics owned by co-conspirators. In exchange for cash bribes paid by Villa-Restrepo and others, the beneficiaries agreed to attend the clinics where they provided their Medicare provider numbers and other information, which allowed the clinics to bill for diagnostic tests that were medically unnecessary, and in some cases, not provided at all. Medicare was billed \$5.4 million for medically unnecessary diagnostic tests by the clinics associated with the scheme.
- **Detroit MI** - Dora Binimelis, 53, of Miami, pleaded guilty 6 DEC to one count of conspiracy to commit health care fraud. At sentencing, Binimelis faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. According to the plea documents, Binimelis was an owner of Blessed Medical Clinic, which purported to be a medical clinic that specialized in diagnostic testing. Binimelis admitted that the clinic defrauded Medicare by billing for expensive and medically unnecessary tests. The owners and operators of Blessed paid patient recruiters, who paid cash bribes to Medicare beneficiaries. In exchange for the cash bribes, the beneficiaries agreed to attend the clinic where they provided their Medicare provider numbers and other information, which was used to bill Medicare for unnecessary tests and services. According to her plea, Binimelis knew that the purpose of the clinic was not to treat sick patients, but to make money by defrauding Medicare. Binimelis provided diagnostic testing equipment and the capital infusion to open Blessed. In exchange for her contributions, she received a share of the Medicare fraud proceeds. According to court documents, Blessed billed Medicare \$2.4 million for medically unnecessary diagnostic tests.
- **Miami FL** - The owner of a Miami-area mental health care company will be spending the next 35 years behind bars after she was sentenced in a \$205 million Medicare fraud scheme. Judith Negron, 40, was sentenced 8 DEC by U.S. District Judge James Lawrence King, who also ordered her to pay over \$87 million in restitution. Negron, along with two other owners and executives with American Therapeutic Corporation, was arrested in October 2010 in the scheme that prosecutors said billed Medicare for mental health treatments that patients didn't need. Prosecutors said dating back to 2002, Negron and fellow owners

Lawrence S. Duran and Marianella Valera paid bribes and kickbacks to owners and operators of assisted living facilities and halfway houses and to patient brokers in exchange for delivering ineligible patients to their facilities. Negron was found guilty of 24 felony counts in August, including conspiracy to commit health care fraud, health care fraud, conspiracy to pay and receive illegal health care kickbacks, conspiracy to commit money laundering, money laundering and structuring to avoid reporting requirements. Duran and Valera were also found guilty and sentenced in September to 50 and 35 years, respectively, for their roles in the scheme.

- **Minneapolis MN** - Medtronic Inc has agreed to pay \$23.5 million to settle allegations that it paid kickbacks to doctors to encourage them to use its pacemakers and defibrillators. The company was accused of seeking physicians to participate in studies and registries and paying doctors fees of between \$1,000 to \$2,000 per patient for information and data collected as long as they used Medtronic's devices, according to the Justice Department. Medtronic caused false claims to be submitted to the federal healthcare programs Medicare and Medicaid, the Justice Department said. The settlement resolves two whistleblower lawsuits against the company. The company previously disclosed the anticipated settlement and recorded a \$24 million expense in its 2011 fiscal year, according to its securities filings. "We are happy that the investigation is behind us so we can continue to design and execute clinical trials that generate evidence to improve patient care, outcomes and cost effectiveness," said Medtronic spokesman Chris Garland. The resolution comes as Medtronic is facing another probe by the Justice Department and the U.S. Senate over questions about whether doctors who were paid by the company failed to report significant side effects of its spinal surgical product called Infuse.



[Source: Fraud News Daily 1-15 Dec 2011 ++]

Medicad Fraud Update 53:

- **Cuba NM** - Officials at the Attorney General's Office say they recently made a huge Medicaid fraud bust involving a New Mexico eyeglass provider. Raymond Eichwald, operated an eyeglass business from his home in Albuquerque and from a shop in Cuba, New Mexico. He is facing 96 felony counts for allegedly swindling Medicaid by - among other things - billing 35 pairs of eyeglasses for just one person. The

attorney general's office says it is still investigating this case. If convicted, Eichwald faces up to 18 months in prison and a \$5,000 dollar fine for each count.

- **New York** - Suresh Hemrajani, 58, has been found guilty of \$ 700,000 Medicaid fraud in which he prescribed HIV medications to patients who did not have it. The internal medicine physician, was convicted by a jury on charges of grand larceny and 11 counts of falsifying business records. According to information at his trial, in 2008 Hemrajani wrote prescriptions for HIV medications for various individuals without determining whether they actually had HIV. He then billed the cost of the medications to Medicaid. He also created false records for his purported treatment of the patients, even though in most cases the individuals did not visit his office more than once. When some of these patients later tried to obtain prescriptions from a hospital, one of them was tested and found to be HIV-negative, which prompted an investigation by the Office of the Medicaid Inspector General, the Human Resources Administration Bureau of Fraud Investigation and the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. The investigation into the whereabouts of the HIV medications is ongoing.

- **Houston TX** - A woman will get 14 years in prison for an elaborate fraud scheme that scammed Medicaid out of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Christine Lee Jones, 47, was sentenced for aggregate theft over \$200,000 on Tuesday. Jones created "Center for Developing Healthy Minds" as a front for a Medicaid billing scheme, according to the Harris County District Attorney's Office. Jones told parents she provided after-school care for children and obtained their Medicaid numbers for "emergency information". She then billed Medicaid for bogus services and used her sister's (medical doctor) Medicaid number to perpetuate the scheme. After she was apprehended, she pleaded guilty.

[Source: Fraud News Daily **1-15 Dec** 2011 ++]

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

- Veteran Housing Benefits
- Veteran and Active Duty Financial Assistance Benefits
- Veteran Employment Benefits
- Veteran Dependent Education Benefits
- Other State Sponsored Veteran Benefits

[Source: <http://www.military.com/benefits/content/veteran-state-benefits/south-carolina-state-veterans-benefits.html>
Dec 2011 ++]

Military History: The tunnels of Cu Chi are an immense network of connecting underground tunnels located in the Cu Chi district of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam, and are part of a much larger network of tunnels that underlie much of the country. The Cu Chi tunnels were the location of several military campaigns during the Vietnam War, and were the Viet Cong's base of operations for the Tet Offensive in 1968. The tunnels were used by Viet Cong guerrillas as hiding spots during combat, as well as serving as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon caches and living quarters for numerous guerrilla fighters. The tunnel systems

were of great importance to the Viet Cong in their resistance to American forces, through which they secured American withdrawal from Vietnam and ultimate military success.

American soldiers used the term "Black echo" to describe the conditions within the tunnels. For the Viet Cong, life in the tunnels was difficult. Air, food and water were scarce and the tunnels were infested with ants, poisonous centipedes, scorpions, spiders and vermin. Most of the time, guerrillas would spend the day in the tunnels working or resting and come out only at night to scavenge for supplies, tend their crops or engage the enemy in battle. Sometimes, during periods of heavy bombing or American troop movement, they would be forced to remain underground for many days at a time. Sickness was rampant among the people living in the tunnels, especially malaria, which was the second largest cause of death next to battle wounds. A captured Viet Cong report suggests that at any given time half of a People's Liberation Army Force (PLAF) unit had malaria and that "one-hundred percent had intestinal parasites of significance". To read more about the Cu Chi tunnels and how the U.S. attempted to deal with them refer to this Bulletin's attachment titled, "**Cu Chi Tunnels**". [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cu_Chi_Tunnels Nov 2011 ++]

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

- Dec 16 1864 Civil War: Union forces under General George H. Thomas win the battle at Nashville, smashing an entire Confederate army.
- Dec 16 1950 - Korea: President Harry Truman declares a state of National Emergency as Chinese communists invade deeper into South Korea.
- Dec 16 1998 - Iraq: The United States launches a missile attack on Iraq for failing to comply with United Nations weapons inspectors.
- Dec 17 1777 - Revolutionary War: France recognized American independence.
- Dec 17 1862 - Civil War: General Ulysses S. Grant issues General Order No. 11, expelling Jews from Tennessee, Mississippi, and Kentucky.
- Dec 17 1943 - WWII: U.S. forces invade Japanese-held New Britain Island in New Guinea.
- Dec 17 1944 - WWII: The German Army renews the attack on the Belgian town of Losheimergraben against the defending Americans during the Battle of the Bulge. Within 5 days the 101st Airborne Division is surrounded at Bastogne Belgium.
- Dec 17 1944 - WWII: Battle of the Bulge Malmedy massacre - 90 American 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion POWs are shot by Waffen-SS Kampfgruppe Peiper.
- Dec 17 1944 - WWII: U.S. approves end to internment of Japanese Americans.
- Dec 17 1969 - The U.S. Air Force ended its "Project Blue Book" and concluded that there was no evidence of extraterrestrial activity behind UFO sightings.
- Dec 18 1916 - WWI: The Battle of Verdun ends with the French and Germans each having suffered more than 330,000 killed and wounded in 10 months. It was the longest engagement of World War I.
- Dec 18 1941 - WWII: Defended by 610 fighting men, the American-held island of Guam falls to more than 5,000 Japanese invaders in a three-hour battle.
- Dec 18 1944 - WWII: The Supreme Court upheld the wartime internment of Japanese-Americans.
- Dec 18 1972 - Vietnam: The Paris Peace talks temporarily fail and President Nixon orders a resumption of full-scale bombing of targets in North Vietnam.
- Dec 19 1777 - Revolutionary War: George Washington's Continental Army goes into winter quarters at Valley Forge PA.
- Dec 20 1941 - WWII: The Flying Tigers, American pilots in China, enter combat against the Japanese over Kunming.

- Dec 20 1989 - Operation Just Cause, the invasion of Panama, begins to oust General Manuel Noriega and replace him with Guillermo Endara.
- Dec 21 2004 - Iraq War: A suicide bomber killed 22 at the forward operating base next to the main U.S. military airfield at Mosul, the single deadliest suicide attack on American soldiers to date.
- Dec 23 1941 - WWII: Despite throwing back an earlier Japanese amphibious assault, the U.S. Marines and Navy defenders on Wake Island capitulate to a second Japanese invasion.
- Dec 23 2002 - Iraq War: A MQ-1 Predator is shot down by an Iraqi MiG-25, making it the first time in history that an aircraft and an unmanned drone had engaged in combat.
- Dec 24 1814 - War of 1812: Treaty of Ghent signed, ending the War of 1812 between the United States and England.
- Dec 27 1944 - WWII: General George S. Patton's Third Army, spearheaded by the 4th Armored Division, relieves the surrounded city of Bastogne
- Dec 29 1890 - The last major conflict of the Indian wars takes place at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota after Colonel James W. Forsyth of the 7th Cavalry tries to disarm Chief Big Foot and his followers.
- Dec 30 1813 - War of 1812: British soldiers burn Buffalo, New York
- Dec 30 1862 - Civil War: The USS Monitor sinks off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina.
- Dec 30 1972 - Vietnam: After two weeks of heavy bombing raids on North Vietnam, President Nixon halts the air offensive and agrees to resume peace negotiations with Hanoi representative Le Duc Tho.
- Dec 31 1942 - WWII: After five months of battle, Emperor Hirohito allows the Japanese commanders at Guadalcanal to retreat.

[Source: Various Dec 2011 ++]

Military Trivia Update 41: See if you can answer the following about the greatest commanders in history:

- 1) Pyrrhus of Epirus survived numerous pitched battles, only to be brought down in what way and where ?
 - a) Fall from his horse on campaign in Italy.
 - b) Trampled by a rampaging war elephant in Egypt.
 - c) Struck by a roofing tile in the city of Argos.
 - d) Drowned whilst crossing a defended river in Sicily.
- 2) This ancient Roman was hailed as the Sword of Rome, and the third and final recipient of the Spolia opima.

Marcus Ulpius Nerva Trajanus | Gaius Julius Caesar | Marcus Claudius Marcellus | Marcus Licinius Crassus

- 3) General George Patton is famous for his spectacular breakouts in WWII, but what was his greatest contribution to Operation Fortitude ?
 - a. Commander of a phantom army group tying down German divisions in the Pas de Calais.
 - b. He was the mastermind of the entire operation.
 - c. Overall ground forces commander for the invasion of Normandy.
 - d. George Patton did not play any part in Operation Fortitude.
- 4) Emperor Napoleon I was without a doubt a military genius, so at his greatest victory Austerlitz what was the name of the high ground he gave up which the Coalition eventually occupied falling right in to Napoleons' lap?

12 Meter Hill | Elsenborn Ridge | The Pratzen Heights | Santon Hill.

- 5) What was the name of Hernan Cortes' awful night of 30 June-1 July 1520, and what occurred ?
- The Night of the long Ships, Cortes and his men nearly all drowned in a storm in the Gulf of Mexico.
 - The night of Tears, where Cortes lost all his Spanish companions seizing Montezuma.
 - La Noche Triste, was a near calamity during the Spanish escape from Tenochtitlan as Cortes nearly drowned losing many men.
 - Buenas Noches, Cortes was repulsed in his attempt to storm Tenochtitlan.
- 6) John Churchill 1st Duke of Marlborough is remembered as the greatest general of the War of the Spanish Succession, due to four famous battles. Two of them were Blenheim, and Ramilles. What were the other two and what battles' aftermath led to his reputation being ruined back in England?
- Valmy and the defeat at Jemappes.
 - Oudenarde and the heavy casualties at Malplaquet.
 - Sedgemoor and heavy casualties at Walcourt.
 - Mollwitz and his conduct during Hohenfriedberg.
- 7) Lord Nelson crushed the French fleet at Trafalgar. What famous ship of the line was his flagship?

HMS Warspite | HMS Prince of Wales | HMS Victory | HMS Serapis

- 8) Frederick the Great is one of my heroes mainly because he fought so well for so long against so many foes. As the Seven Years' War was coming to an end what event took place which saved Prussia, and what has it been known as since?
- Czar Peter III declared war on Austria. "The Great Fortunate Betrayal".
 - Maria Theresa of Austria died. "Miracle of the House of Hohenzollern".
 - Russian Empress Elizabeth died. "Miracle of the House of Brandenburg".
 - France withdrew from the war. "Salvation Day of Prussia".
- 9) Scipio Africanus crushed Hannibal but at Ticinus what did young Scipio do that gained him first notice?
- Had a chance encounter face to face with Hannibal.
 - Saved the life of his father.
 - Rallied the Romans to victory.
 - He was captured but escaped.
- 10) Who was known to posterity as the Lion of the North and killed at his last battlefield victory at Lützen ?

Harald III of Norway | Charles XII of Sweden | Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden | Louis II of Hungary.

Answers

- c. Struck by a roofing tile** - It may seem amazing but the man who inspired the term "Pyrrhic victory" died after being hit in the head by a roofing tile in the streets of Argos. He and his men had entered the city by stealth, in the confusion an old woman hurled a roofing tile at Pyrrhus stunning him. An Argive soldier then finished the job in 272 BC.

2. **Marcus Claudius Marcellus** - Marcellus earned his name "Sword of Rome" in wars against the Gauls and the Carthaginians. As for the most prestigious award a Roman commander could attain, the Spolia opima was given for the Roman leader killing the enemy commander in single combat. The occasion for the final issue of the award was the killing of the Gallic king, Viridomarus, in 225 BC.
3. **a. Phantom army group** - The general was put in command of the fictitious First Army group slated to invade the Pas de Calais. This was one of the main deceptions of Fortitude, which in itself was a massive deception operation to the build up to Operation Overlord - the invasion of Normandy. It is a fact that the Germans held critical divisions back near Calais even after the invasion commenced in Normandy.
4. **The Pratzen Heights** - The Pratzen Heights were the centerpiece of the battle, the Russians and Austrians thinking that Napoleon was fearing facing the numerically superior Coalition seized the vacated Heights. And truth be told, the Pratzen Heights were about 12 meters high and Santon Hill actually overlooked the battle at 210 meters. or an detailed yet fairly short account of the battle Osprey Publishing Campaign series on "The Battle of Austerlitz" is what I read years ago for my info.
5. **c. La Noche Triste** - It was a near calamity during the Spanish escape from Tenochtitlan as Cortes nearly drowned losing many men. La Noche Triste translated as "the night of sorrows" occurred weeks after the Aztecs had besieged the Spaniards in Tenochtitlan. Cortes decided to risk a daring causeway escape during the night, though successful many Spaniards and gold were lost not to mention Tenochtitlan.
6. **b . Oudenarde and the heavy casualties at Malplaquet** - Churchill was victorious but the allied casualties were roughly double those of the French. In England this led to wild accusations about the Duke which eventually led to his recall.
7. **HMS Victory** - The 100 gun ship was also the ship Nelson died on the day of the battle. The ship, the oldest in commission, now sits in port at Portsmouth, England.
8. **c. Miracle of the House of Brandenburg** - When Elizabeth died her heir Peter III, infatuated with Prussia, withdrew Russia from the war. This relieved the immense pressure on Frederick II, and in turn put strain on Austria. Peter III was later deposed and support returned to Austria but it was too late as she was exhausted.
9. **b. Saved the life of his father** - At the skirmish of Ticinus Scipio, then only a 18 year old Consul, saved his father from certain death.
10. **Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden** - Gustavus' death at Lutzen in the Thirty Years' War actually inspired his men to victory during the battle. None of the others died during a victory.

[Source: http://www.funtrivia.com/quizzes/history/war_history.html Dec 2011 ++]

Tax Burden for IOWA Retirees: Many people planning to retire use the presence or absence of a state income tax as a litmus test for a retirement destination. This is a serious miscalculation since higher sales and property taxes can more than offset the lack of a state income tax. The lack of a state income tax doesn't necessarily ensure a low total tax burden. Following are the taxes you can expect to pay if you retire in **Iowa**:

Sales Taxes

State Sales Tax: 6% (food and prescription drugs exempt); local option taxes can add up to another 1%.

Gasoline Tax: 22.0 cents/gallon

Diesel Fuel Tax: 23.5 cents/gallon

Cigarette Tax: \$1.36/pack of 20

Personal Income Taxes

Tax Rate Range: Low - 0.36%; High - 8.98%

Income Brackets: Lowest - \$1,428; Highest - \$64,620

Number of Brackets: 9

Personal Tax Credits: Single - \$40; Married filing jointly - \$80;

Dependents - \$40; 65 years and older - \$20

Standard Deduction: (2010) Single - \$1,810; Married filing jointly - \$4,460

Medical/Dental Deduction: Federal amount

Federal Income Tax Deduction: Full

Retirement Income Taxes: If you receive a pension, annuity, self-employed retirement plan, deferred compensation, IRA or other retirement plan benefits, you may be eligible to exclude from Iowa income tax a portion of the retirement income that is taxable on your Federal return. The exclusion can be up to \$6,000 for individuals and up to \$12,000 for married taxpayers. Refer to <http://www.iowa.gov/tax/1040EI/101040Home.html> for details. Social Security benefits are not included. Iowa does not tax Social Security benefits in the same manner as the IRS. In calculating the taxable amount of Social Security, single persons can exclude \$25,000, married filing jointly can exclude \$32,000. The state is implementing a gradual phase-out of the tax on Social Security income. Refer to <http://www.iowa.gov/tax/1040EI/101040Home.html> for details. To qualify for the exclusion you must be either age 55 or older on December 31, disabled or a surviving spouse or a survivor having an insurable interest in an individual who would have qualified for the exclusion during the year. Out-of-state government pensions qualify for exemptions. More information is available at <http://www.iowa.gov/tax/1040EI/Line/10Line21.html>.

Retired Military Pay: Up to \$12,000 can be excluded for joint filers and up to \$6,000 for all other filing statuses for those 55 and older, disabled or surviving spouse of qualifying person.

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

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

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

Property Taxes

Iowa has more than 2,000 taxing authorities. All property is assessed at 100% of market value. Most property is taxed by more than one taxing authority. The tax rate differs in each locality and is a composite of county, city, school district and special levies. A property tax credit is available to residents whose total household income is less than \$19,503 and are age 65 or older, totally disabled or are a surviving spouse (not remarried) and born before 1934. A homestead tax credit is given to residents who live in the state for at least six months of each year and actually live on the property on July 1. Once a person qualifies, the credit continues. The current credit is the first \$4,850 of the actual value. Property taxes may be suspended or reduced if the property owner receives Supplemental Security Income or lives in a nursing home and the Department of Human Services is paying part or all of the costs. The suspended taxes will have to be paid when a property is sold or transferred. For more details, refer to <http://www.iowa.gov/tax/educate/78573.html>.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes

The Iowa inheritance tax ranges from 1% to 15% depending on the amount of the inheritance and the relationship of the recipient to the decedent. If all the property of the estate has a value of less than \$25,000, no tax is due. The surviving spouse's share, regardless of the amount, is not subject to tax. Currently annual gifts in the amount of \$12,000 or less are not taxable. For details refer to <http://www.iowa.gov/tax/educate/78517.html>. Iowa estate tax is not applicable for deaths on or after 1/1/05 due to changes in the IRS Code which replaced the state death tax credit with a state death tax deduction.

For further information, visit the Iowa Department of Revenue website <http://www.iowa.gov/tax/index.html> or call 515-281-3114. [Source: www.retirementliving.com Dec 2011 ++]

Veteran Legislation Status 12 DEC 2011: For a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community introduced in the 112th Congress refer to the Bulletin's "**House & Senate Veteran Legislation**" attachment. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication on that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At <http://thomas.loc.gov> you can review a copy of each bill's content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it. To determine what bills, amendments your representative has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on refer to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d111/sponlst.html>.

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

Have You Heard? Military Pilot Takeoffs

Naval/Marine Aviator

On a carrier, the Naval Aviator looks over at the Catapult Officer ("Shooter") who gives the run up engines signal by rotating his finger above his head. The pilot pushes the throttle forward, verifies all flight controls are operational, checks all gauges, and gives the Cat officer a brisk salute, continuing the Navy/Marine tradition of asking permission to leave the ship. The Cat officer drops to one knee while swooping his arm forward and pointing down deck, granting that permission. The pilot is immediately catapulted and becomes airborne.

Air Force Aviator

We've all seen Air Force pilots at the air force base look up just before taxiing for takeoff and the ground crew waits until the pilot's thumb is sticking straight up. The crew chief then confirms that he sees the thumb, salutes, and the Air Force pilot then takes off. This time-tested tradition is the last link in the Air Force safety net to confirm that the pilot does not have his thumb up his ass.

Army Aviator

If you've ever seen an Army helicopter pilot preparing for takeoff, you will note that the pilot gives the ground guy a thumbs up before he is given hover and takeoff signals. There are two theories about the origin of this gesture. One is that it is to show that the pilot has identified which of his fingers is the thumb so that he will be able to properly

operate his controls. The most compelling theory says that this is to show the ground crewman that the pilot indeed knows which direction is up.

There are two ways to conquer and enslave a nation. One is by the sword, the other is by debt."

-- John Adams (1735 - 1826)



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