

July 1, 2022

HAPPY 4TH OF JULY

Nuclear Weapons Arsenal

Update 10: Nuclear-Armed Countries Spent \$82.4B Upgrading in 2021

The world's nine nuclear-armed countries spent \$82.4bn upgrading their atomic weaponry in 2021, eight percent more than the year before, a campaign group has said. The biggest spender was the United States, which accounted for more than half the total spending, followed by China, Russia, the United Kingdom and France, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) said in its annual report on nuclear spending.

“Nuclear-armed states spent an obscene amount of money on illegal weapons of mass destruction in 2021, while the majority of the world's countries support a global nuclear weapons ban,” the group said in its report. “This spending failed to deter a war in Europe and squandered valuable resources that could be better used to address current security challenges, or cope with the outcome of a still raging global pandemic. This corrupt cycle of wasteful spending must be put to an end.” Expenditures were:

- United States \$44.2bn
- China \$11.7bn
- Russia \$8.6bn
- UK \$6.8bn
- France \$5.9bn
- India \$2.3bn
- Israel \$1.2bn
- Pakistan \$1.1bn
- North Korea \$642m

ICAN noted that nuclear weapons producers also spent millions lobbying on defense, with every \$1 spent lobbying leading to an average of \$256 in new contracts involving nuclear weapons. “The exchange of money and influence, from countries to companies to lobbyists and think tanks, sustains and maintains a global arsenal of catastrophically destructive weapons,” the report said. On 12 JUN, the Stockholm International Peace Research (SIPRI) warned that all nine nuclear-armed countries were increasing or upgrading their arsenals, and that the risk of such weapons being deployed appeared higher now than at any time since the height of the Cold War.

Russia, which invaded Ukraine in February, has openly threatened to use its nuclear weapons. ICAN estimates North Korea spent \$642m on nuclear weaponry in 2021 even as its economy struggled under United Nations sanctions and the pandemic-linked closure of borders. Pyongyang walked away from denuclearization talks after the collapse of a summit with then-US President Donald Trump in 2019, and has carried out a record number of missile launches this year. There are concerns it is preparing for its first nuclear weapons tests since 2017. There is no official confirmation on the amount North Korea spends on nuclear weapons or its arsenal. SIPRI estimates it has as many as 20 warheads. [Source: Al Jazeera | June 15, 2022 ++]

DoD Climate Strategy

First Floating Solar Farm Launched At Ft. Bragg



The U.S. Army has launched a floating solar farm at Fort Bragg in North Carolina as part of the military branch's climate strategy to ramp up the use of clean energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Army officials last week unveiled the floating solar array that sits on Big Muddy Lake at Camp Mackall, a Special Forces training site overseen by Fort Bragg. Fort Bragg is the largest military base in the U.S. with about 49,000 military personnel, 11,000 civilian employees and 23,000 family members. The installation is now the largest of its kind in the Southeastern United States and is the first solar array deployed by the Department of Defense.

The 1.1-megawatt solar facility is equipped with a 2 megawatt-hour battery energy storage system and will provide power to Fort Bragg as well as provide electricity during outages. The array also includes an electronic recloser, which responds to events like a tree limb brushing against a power line, to reset the system and restore power. The project is a collaborative effort between Fort Bragg, utility Duke Energy and renewable energy company Ameresco.

“This project fulfills the commitment made in our Army Climate Strategy to increase resilience while delivering clean energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions,” Rachel Jacobson, assistant secretary of the Army for installations, energy and environment, said in a statement. “When we collaborate with local utilities and industry to promote energy resilience while powering the local grid, it is a winning solution across the board,” Jacobson said.

Solar panels built to float on the surface of a body of water, often referred to as floatovoltaics, offer several advantages, the largest being the panels do not take up valuable space on land like traditional solar farms. The project is part of the Army’s first-ever climate strategy released earlier this year that aims to reduce the military service’s greenhouse gas emissions by 50 percent by 2030 and attain net-zero emissions by 2050. The strategy is intended to direct the Army in how it responds to climate threats that affect soldier readiness, warfighting and installations. As part of the plan, the Army plans to install a microgrid on all of its installations by 2035 and have a fleet of all-electric vehicles by 2050. [Source: Changing America Newsletter | Joseph Guzman | June 15, 2022 ++]

Mine Warfare

Biden Changes U.S. Policy on Usage

President Joe Biden’s administration announced 21 JUN it would restrict the use of anti-personnel land mines by the U.S. military, aligning the country’s policy more closely with an international treaty banning the deadly explosives. The announcement reverses a more permissive stance by then-President Donald Trump, and it concludes a review that has lasted for more than a year. Bonnie Jenkins, the State Department’s undersecretary for arms control and international security, said the new policy fulfills “a commitment that President Biden made as a candidate,” when he described Trump’s decision as “reckless.”

Anti-personnel land mines are buried underground or scattered on the surface, and they can pose a lethal threat to civilians long after combat has ended. Under the new policy, the U.S. will restrict the use of these explosives outside of its efforts to help defend South Korea from a potential North Korean invasion. Although the U.S. does not currently have any minefields deployed there, Washington has pledged support for Seoul’s defense, which includes anti-personnel mines. The U.S. has a stockpile of 3 million anti-personnel land mines. Under the new policy, any that aren’t needed to protect South Korea will be destroyed. The Pentagon did not immediately respond to a question about whether any will be discarded.

The exception regarding the Korean Peninsula, which was also in place during President Barack Obama's administration, leaves the U.S. short of full compliance with the Ottawa Convention, the 1997 treaty intended to eliminate anti-personnel land mines. The announcement comes as Russia deploys such mines during its invasion of Ukraine. "The world has once again witnessed the devastating impact that anti-personnel landmines can have in the context of Russia's brutal and unprovoked war in Ukraine, where Russian forces' use of these and other munitions have caused extensive harm to civilians and civilian objects," National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said in a statement. [Source: The Associated Press| Chris Megerian | June 21, 2022 ++]

Defense Budget 2023

No Consensus yet On Military Spending Except For More of It

House lawmakers on 22 JUN offered new and conflicting plans for defense spending next year, teeing up intense congressional debate in the coming months over the right level of military funding for fiscal 2023. Lawmakers appear to agree the White House plan for military spending next year — about \$773 billion, roughly a 4% increase from current spending levels — will be the floor for the defense budget plan. But the figures could go much higher as centrist Democrats and Republicans push progressives and Democratic leaders to spend more because of inflation, increasing worldwide threats and lingering unmet military needs.

On Wednesday afternoon, lawmakers on the House Armed Services Committee agreed to increase defense spending by \$37 billion over White House plans as part of their debate on the annual defense authorization bill. Centrist Democrats and Republican representatives won out in a vote over Chairman Adam Smith (D-WA) and other administration supporters. At the same time, in a neighboring building on Capitol Hill, House Appropriations Committee members offered support for a more modest \$4 billion increase. Republicans and moderate Democrats there lost the fight for more money, but signaled they'll push for a bigger plus-up as the process moves along.

All of that comes less than a week after Senate Armed Services Committee officials backed a \$45 billion increase in defense spending above President Joe Biden's budget outline — almost 10% above this year's spending levels — as part of their annual authorization bill draft. Altogether, the jockeying appears to signal another significant boost in available money for defense personnel, equipment and training next year. The question is exactly how much more, and whether that will be enough to counter rising inflation.

The House Armed Services Committee funding increase was led by Reps. Jared Golden (D-ME) and Elaine Luria (D-VA). They heralded the 42-17 vote in favor of the additional money as a sign of bipartisan support for properly supporting the military. Their amendment includes \$7.4 billion to fight inflation, more than \$4 billion for ship procurement and maintenance, another \$1.6 billion for research and development and \$550 million for the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative — \$100 million more for the Ukrainian military aid account than in the draft legislation released 20 JUN.

Luria, who had strongly criticized Biden’s defense budget and had called for a 3% to 5% increase in spending over inflation, also praised the Senate Armed Services Committee for authorizing a \$45 billion increase when it marked up its version of the legislation last week. She said she expects the final defense budget to “land somewhere north” of the amendment’s \$37 billion increase when the House and Senate negotiate final legislation later this year.

Leaders on the House Appropriations Committee said they will fight that. In that panel’s markup, Democrats said their modest increase above Biden’s spending plan was sufficient for military needs, while still providing money to help Ukraine and replenish military equipment. “It does us no good to invest in high tech weapons if we cannot overcome basic logistical challenges like getting the right equipment to our troops when they are needed,” said Betty McCollum (D-MN), the chairwoman of the defense appropriations panel. “And it makes no difference how many ships we order for our Navy if we cannot build or maintain them in our existing shipyards.”

Republicans disagreed with that view. “These allocations do not adequately fund our military.” said the panel’s ranking member, Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX). With increasing threats from China, Russia, Iran and North Korea, underfunding our nation’s defense is completely misguided.” Democrats only hold a 12-seat majority in the House, meaning they can only afford a few defections when they hold floor votes on the defense appropriations and authorization bills later this year.

The margins in the Senate are even tighter, with a 50-50 split and rules that require 60 votes to advance most legislation. Without Republican support for a defense spending plan, the issue is likely to linger late into fall, past the start of the new fiscal year on 1 OCT. [Source: DefenseNews | Bryant Harris, Joe Gould and Leo Shane III | June 22, 2022 ++]

China’s Espionage

Update 01: Ex-Army Pilot Sold Aviation Secrets to China

A former Army helicopter pilot with more than 20 years of service has pleaded guilty to working as an agent for the Chinese government after he was caught selling information concerning defense and military aviation projects between 2017 and 2020. **Shapour Moinian**, 67, pleaded guilty 23 JUN to one count of acting as an agent on behalf of a foreign government and two counts of false statements for lying on security clearance documents. He faces a maximum of 10 years in prison for acting as an agent for China and up to five for the false statements, as well as fines of up to \$250,000.

Moinian was recruited in 2016 after messaging with a supposed recruiter at LinkTek Technical Services, in Zhejiang, China, court documents revealed. At the time, he was employed in San Diego by a defense contractor that was permitted to work on projects involving classified information. Court records did not state the company's name. Moinian first met with the Chinese recruiter and her associates in Hong Kong in March 2017, and again in September of that year in Shanghai during a layover on his way to visit his stepdaughter and wife's family in South Korea. It was during this September visit that Moinian handed over a flash drive with proprietary information from the defense contractor where he was employed.

Moinian agreed to provide information and materials related to multiple types of aircraft designed and manufactured in the U.S. in exchange for money, according to the Justice Department. Moinian also acknowledged in his plea agreement that he knew the individuals he met with were working on behalf of the Chinese government. Thousands of dollars in payments were made to Moinian through his stepdaughter's South Korean bank account, which were then transferred over to his U.S. accounts for what Moinian told his stepdaughter were "consulting" fees. During this time, court documents show Moinian may have also had a romantic relationship with the Chinese national — or Moinian was at least led to believe that was the case.

Messages were exchanged between the two stating that they missed each other and had plans to visit and have her "host him" in her city. Shortly following the discussion about visiting each other, Moinian emailed his contact to let her know he was divorcing his wife. Later, after returning from another trip to Hong Kong in 2018, Moinian made open source internet searches for "sabotage vs spying," "espionage vs sabotage," and "selling military information to foreign country is considered as," an affidavit revealed. Court documents also show that Moinian's now ex-wife claimed he had met with associates in Bali, Taiwan, China and South Korea multiple times between 2017 and 2019. On one occasion, Moinian and his wife smuggled approximately \$22,000 in cash back into the U.S., records stated.

In multiple questionnaires Moinian was required to fill out for his security clearance, he was asked, "do you have, or have you had, close and/or continuing contact with a foreign national within the last seven years with whom you, or your spouse, or cohabitant are bound by affection, influence, common interests, and/or obligation?" Moinian answered no. In a separate question, regarding "Foreign Business, Professional Activities, and Foreign Government Contacts,"

Moinian was asked if he “has any foreign national in the past seven years offered you a job, asked you to work as a consultant, or consider employment with them?” He again answered no. He later acknowledged in his plea agreement that both responses were false statements.

“Mr. Moinian sold information to the Chinese government, and lied repeatedly to cover up his crimes,” NCIS’s Office of Special Projects Special Agent in Charge Michelle Kramer said in a press release. “Now he is being held to account for his actions. NCIS and our partners remain unwavering in our commitment to protecting the U.S. military and rooting out criminality that threatens the superiority of the U.S. warfighter.” Moinian served in the Army in the U.S., Germany, and South Korea from approximately 1977 through 2000 before entering the defense contracting world.

He was a AH-64 pilot in the Army Reserve from November 1977 to December 1984 and the regular Army from November 1987 to October 2000, said Heather J. Hagan, an Army spokeswoman. He has no combat deployments, Hagan added. Moinian’s awards included two Meritorious Service Medals, five Army Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Humanitarian Service Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, three Overseas Service Ribbon and the Master Army Aviator Badge. Sentencing for Moinian has been scheduled for Aug. 29, 2022. [Source: ArmyTimes | Rachel Nostrant | June 24, 2022 ++]

DoD EHR

As VA’s Rollout Is Delayed DoD’s is Halfway Done

While Veterans Affairs officials have delayed the rollout of their new electronic medical records system amid ongoing problems, Department of Defense health officials are more than halfway to the finish line with the rollout of their own system. The two records systems use the same software platform and are designed to work together. On 11 JUN, DoD’s rollout passed the halfway mark, reaching 72 military treatment facility commands in about 1,590 locations. With the deployment of the system, called MHS Genesis, at William Beaumont Army Medical Center at Fort Bliss, Texas, and Eisenhower Army Medical Center at Fort Gordon, Georgia, the rollout is 52% complete, officials said.

The purpose is to have a single, common health care record for military members, veterans and their families. DoD and VA have been working together to ensure that as service members transition to veteran status, their electronic health record follows them whenever and wherever

they need health care. The DoD electronic health record allows health care providers to share information about patients with other health care providers, both inside and outside the military health system. And through the MHS Genesis Patient Portal, military health care beneficiaries have secure, 24/7 online access to their health information, including managing appointments and exchanging messages with their health care providers. The Genesis portal replaces the Tricare Online Secure Patient Portal.

The DoD and VA both use the Oracle Cerner software platform for their electronic health record systems. The VA has deployed its system, called Millenium, at three sites. But the VA rollout at some locations has been plagued by unanticipated outages and system problems. On June 17, VA officials notified Congress they were delaying implementation to additional sites until 2023. Meanwhile, defense health officials said during a media call Tuesday that they are on budget and on schedule to complete the worldwide rollout of Genesis by the end of 2023.

For DoD, procedures are in place to ensure health care operations can continue in the event there's any Genesis down time, said Holly Joers, program executive officer of Defense Healthcare Management Systems. Officials also continually monitor the quality of the system, looking at the metrics about what data is available. DoD has taken actions to avoid some of the problems the VA has had. For example, they haven't physically loaded patients' legacy health care information into the new Genesis system, but make it available separately going forward. Officials also took time to understand workflows, Joers said. "One person's job affects the next one down the line. ... We took some time to really appreciate that as we rolled out."

Beyond those initial growing pains, she said, "We're in a different place in terms of users we have and the maturity of the system," she said. There are more than 114,000 active users at these 1,590 locations, officials said. Genesis has had its growing pains over the years. As recently as May, the DoD Inspector General's Office issued a report citing health care providers' concerns about the accuracy and completeness of information. "While officials are closing in on deployments of Genesis over the next 18 months, this is not just about deploying a health IT system. It's about health care outcomes." Joers said

Army Maj. Gen. (Dr.) George "Ned" Appenzeller, director of staff at the Defense Health Agency, also holds the title of MHS electronic health record functional champion. "As a provider ... I've always expected all my electronic systems to go down" at some point, he said, noting that every facility has procedures in place to take care of patients in the event of that down time. "The electronic health record is an awesome system for helping us provide safe, standardized, effective patient care. ... "As medical providers we take care of patients no matter what the circumstances and we always take the best care of patients we can," he said.

"I love the tools, and I love having the electronic health record," he said. "I'm an emergency medicine physician, so being able to see what has gone on in someone's record is pretty

important to me.” That includes what’s happened in inpatient wards, outpatient clinics, in health care out in the community, in pharmacies and elsewhere. “This is a phenomenal improvement over what we had 20 or 25 years ago when I started taking care of patients,” he said. “As a provider, I really appreciate what this is doing for the safety of our patients and the outcomes of our patients.”

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 22, 2022 ++]

NDAA 2023

Update 04: Highlights from the House Subcommittee’s Markups/Hearings

The House Armed Services subcommittees have completed their work on the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) – annual legislation addressing all manner of defense-related topics, including several of MOAA’s legislative priorities. Work on the bill continues the Senate, and reconciliation in full committees of the House and Senate is pending. The subcommittee markups and hearings are good indicators of what the final NDAA likely will include. The following are some highlights from the House subcommittees:

End Strength

Service chiefs have described a very challenging recruiting and retention environment where the propensity to serve is in decline and only 23% of 18-to-21-year-olds can meet the physical and mental standards for service. The markup by the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel recommends the following active duty personnel authorizations for FY 2023 – all down from the previous year except for the Navy and new Space Force.

- Army: 473,000, down from 485,000.
- Navy: 348,220, up from 346,920. (The president’s budget called for reduction to 346,300),
- Air Force: 323,400, down from 329,220.
- Marine Corps: 177,000, down from 178,500.
- Space Force: 8,600, up from 8,400.

Pay Raise

The personnel subcommittee’s markup includes a 4.6% military pay raise, in line with the Employment Cost Index (ECI). This should be seen as the minimum relative to the statute; MOAA has heard concerns from both House and Senate leaders that 4.6% may not be enough.

MOAA has proposed including the 2.6% pay raise residual gap from 2014 through 2016 to boost the annual pay to 7.2%. We will continue to monitor the House and Senate to see if they will do more for our eight uniformed services. The bill also requires the secretary of defense to do a thorough assessment on military pay and compensation programs.

Military Health Care

As part of its continued oversight of the military health system, the personnel subcommittee recommends a three-year extension to the limitation of reductions and realignment of military medical personnel and a report on military medical workforce requirement, progress on filling persistent vacancies and the feasibility of increasing civilian positions to address shortages. The markup also includes several provisions to address mental health access challenges, including increased opportunities to grow the number of mental health professionals and expanded license portability for providers delivering nonmedical counseling, as well as requiring the Government Accountability Office to review TRICARE's alignment with mental health parity laws.

Military Housing

Calculation methods for the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) have proven unable to keep pace with the housing market, both for homeowners and renters, especially in the wake of the pandemic. This year's mark requires DoD to report on the efficiency and accuracy of the current system used to calculate BAH. A separate report is required to study barriers to homeownership for servicemembers, including down payments, concerns about home maintenance, and challenges selling a home.

Spouse Employment

As military spouse unemployment continues to hover in the 22% to 24% range, entrepreneurship remains a transportable option, allowing spouses to keep a career on the move. This year's NDAA introduces an expansion of the licensure reimbursement program to include expenses associated with business licenses and business-related fees incurred during PCS moves. The mark also directs DoD to convene a roundtable of private entities to discuss issues and barriers to hiring military spouses, as well as language to standardize performance measures of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership program.

Child Care

Finding affordable, accessible child care is a nationwide issue, and for military families, it's exacerbated by frequent moves. This year's mark directs the secretary of defense to conduct a study to determine if compensation for DoD and Coast Guard child development center employees is competitive with similarly trained and qualified public elementary school employees for areas with long waiting lists.

Additionally, the mark expands authorized assistance for providers of child care services, to include financial assistance and free or reduced-cost child care services, which may have a positive impact on military spouse employment. The mark also includes authorization of travel payments (up to \$500 for CONUS moves; \$1,500 for OCONUS moves) for servicemembers in need of child care support during a PCS move when unable to enroll their children within 30 days of arrival at the new duty station. A report on the feasibility of expanding the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) program, which is an effort to expand access to community-based and family child care, will ideally expand the number of accredited providers near an installation.

Military Hunger Prevention

The FY 2022 NDAA established the Basic Needs Allowance, which provides financial assistance to military families who fall below 130% of the federal poverty guidelines based on household size, to help combat food insecurity faced by thousands of junior enlisted families. However, the final NDAA language allowed the service secretaries to determine whether BAH should be included in the calculation of gross household income. This year's mark includes a provision to exclude BAH from the calculation for all.

Suicide Prevention

Suicide rates across the DoD continue to rise at an alarming rate. A shortage of personnel from reductions to end strength will likely exacerbate the problem where troops must do more with less. To help combat these concerns, the House personnel subcommittee included authorization for two weeks of temporary duty (TDY) each year for wellness to attend a seminar or retreat, including outdoor events with nonprofit organizations to improve resilience and psychological wellness.

Recent spikes in suicides such as those reported among the crew of USS George Washington (CVN-78) and a similar cluster in Alaska have drawn the attention of the media and Congress. The concerns in the Arctic over poor quality of life and morale contributed to the Army's decision to reorganize forces and reactivate the historic 11th Airborne Division in Alaska. The final NDAA likely will include provisions requiring the armed services to notify Congress on any further clusters or spikes in suicide. Although training, reorganization, and reporting can support some suicide prevention efforts, previous efforts have failed to reverse the trend.

Looking ahead, DoD will conduct an independent review commission to examine the suicide rates. As endless studies, reports, and training initiatives are proposed, MOAA will continue to advocate for improving the quality of life for servicemembers and their families, and to allow access to counseling and care.

Barracks Privatization Report

In an environment where the Military Privatized Housing Initiative has been plagued with scandals, lawsuits, and investigations, the mark calls for a report on the feasibility for privatizing barracks – a red flag that MOAA will follow closely.

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As the NDAA process continues towards full committee and conference you can follow developments at MOAA's Advocacy News page at <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/news-listing/?cat=107>. [Source: MOAA Weekly Newsletter | June 16, 2022 ++]

VA EHR

Update 38: Deployment to Additional Sites Delayed Until 2023

Veterans Affairs officials will delay deployment of their new electronic medical records system to additional sites until 2023 to ensure “adequate reliability,” officials confirmed to Military Times. The move comes after repeated concerns from Congress about ongoing problems with implementation of VA's Oracle Cerner Millennium software platform, the same records system being installed by the Department of Defense at its medical sites. Lawmakers were informed of the delay 17 JUN.

Department officials had planned to deploy the software at the Puget Sound VA Health Care System (American Lake and Seattle VA Medical Centers) this August, but will now delay that work until March 2023 instead. In addition, plans to deploy the platform to the VA Portland Health Care System (Portland and Portland-Vancouver VA Medical Centers) will shift from this November to April 2023. “In evaluating [the sites'] readiness for deployment, VA determined the system hadn't shown adequate reliability to support the current schedule,” officials said in a statement.

“The date was changed to allow Oracle Cerner to put important system enhancements in place and make the necessary improvements to ensure system stability ... as well as fix outstanding issues to address research workflow challenges.” Steps already underway to deploy the system to VA sites in Idaho next month will remain unchanged, officials said.

The 10-year, \$16-billion electronics health records overhaul has faced numerous delays in the past few years, both because of pandemic complications and implementation problems at initial rollout sites. When then-President Donald Trump announced the plan in 2017, the goal was to provide a seamless, lifelong medical record for service members starting from their day of enlistment through their post-military life. But putting the system into place at VA has proven challenging, with numerous problems and frustrations emerging from the initial rollout of the system at Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center in Washington in 2020.

Last summer, VA Secretary Denis McDonough ordered a halt to the work so officials could evaluate and correct challenges that emerged there. But three months ago, the VA Inspector General's Office said that serious safety issues regarding patient medications and mental health flags remained unresolved with the new system. VA planners deployed the system to the Central Ohio Healthcare System in May, the third site so far in the implementation process. Department leaders said that work has progressed on schedule, and the delay of the other sites is not indicative of problems there. But they acknowledged that "there have been unanticipated outages and system degradations from the onset of the new [health records] rollout" so far.

"The revised deployment schedule will enable Oracle Cerner to address these potential gaps in system reliability, particularly in the more complex sites that are upcoming," officials said. "Between major deployments VA will continue to work vigorously to ensure that the system has the capability enhancements and is optimized to support deployment [at future sites]." Department leaders also said they are committed to "safe and successful deployments" and the changes in deployment schedules are designed to prevent potential problems in the future. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 18, 2022 ++]

Long Covid

Update 01: Long and Uncertain Path Ahead for Veterans w/Lingering COVID

It began with mild congestion and the occasional sneeze. But soon came a loss of appetite, shortness of breath, chest pains and insomnia. The week of sleepless nights was especially difficult, leaving Isaiah Smith, 26, exhausted as wave after wave of COVID-19 symptoms washed over him.

Finally, at 2 a.m., with his heart practically beating out of his chest, the former senior airman from Merrillville, Indiana, called for an ambulance to get him to the hospital fast. "I was kinda scared because all you see on the news is what was going on if people caught it. I wasn't expecting to catch it. ... I was doing everything I could to avoid it," said Smith, who regularly wore a mask and kept hand sanitizer in his car.

It was early November 2020, before vaccines were widely available across the United States, and only a week after Smith, the young and otherwise healthy Air Force veteran, had tested positive for COVID-19 amid the surging Delta variant. "When they took me to the hospital, we actually waited outside in the ambulance because they had no room," said Smith, who spent a total of eight hours at the hospital before being discharged. Although doctors at the time told him there was little they could do because his case was "mild," he returned a few days later with a tightness in his chest.

Smith is one of more than a half million veterans the Department of Veterans Affairs believes have had COVID-19, and one of about 23,000 veterans confirmed with a long COVID diagnosis, according to VA press secretary Terrence Hayes. Long COVID, also known as long-haul COVID or post-COVID-19 condition, can be wildly different for patients. Symptoms may range from difficulty breathing to muscle aches to other serious conditions, including mental health disorders and suicidal thoughts, that may last weeks, months or longer. The VA has not yet declared that veterans are specifically more susceptible to poor health conditions developed from long COVID, but "their underlying medical conditions, their age and their risk factors ... might skew them from the general population," Dr. Elizabeth Brill, a VA COVID expert, told reporters during a VA press briefing 25 APR.

While the VA is still trying to figure out whether veterans will face a heavier burden, and whether toxic exposures or the toll of combat will add long COVID to the list of conditions exacerbated by service, thousands of former troops have participated in VA research that demonstrated veterans with long COVID are at an increased risk of other serious illnesses. They are subsequently receiving treatment through a patchwork of 17 VA long COVID care programs, which offer a range of treatment options that parallel disparate practices being used in non-military medical networks.

These diverse VA programs, some fully online and some entirely in-person, differ in part because medical researchers are still trying to solve the puzzle of the science behind long COVID. How successful they will be in helping combat the lingering effects of COVID among veterans is still very much in doubt in what are still the early stages of the fight against long COVID.

The VA Long COVID Program

Smith's long COVID symptoms developed shortly after he began his two-week quarantine, with chest pains and shortness of breath continuing into mid-2021. The headaches persist to this day. Even after he was finally able to get the vaccine, the doses did little to minimize his symptoms. Beginning in January 2021, Smith started to receive treatment for his symptoms at the Jesse Brown VA Medical Center in Chicago. He still gets treatment there, sometimes making the hour-long drive to the facility, while regularly messaging his care provider between visits. "They're pretty much trying everything in their power to get me to feel better," Smith said.

The Jesse Brown VA Medical Center is one of 17 VA facilities across the country with an established long COVID care program, according to VA officials, with at least an equal number more in the works. The program brings together specialists across medical fields, including cardiologists and psychologists, to help treat patients experiencing long COVID. "Patients pretty consistently tell me, 'My family doesn't believe what's going on; they think I'm making it up,'" Dr. Jacqueline Neal, a psychiatrist who specializes in physical medicine and rehabilitation at Jesse Brown and works with that facility's long COVID care program, told Military.com. "I get from

the patients ... an overwhelming sense of relief to be able to have a place to talk about what symptoms are going on."

The most common complaint she hears is fatigue, though some also have developed mental health problems. "We are seeing patients improve," Neal said. "The question that I have and the rest of us who are taking care of long COVID patients [have] is, is it because we're doing something ... or is this just the natural progression of long COVID? And we don't know yet, because we just don't have enough research done yet. We're still so early on in learning about this disease."

Long COVID patients at Jesse Brown must receive a referral from their primary care provider at least 12 weeks after their initial COVID diagnosis to visit the facility. They go through an interview that can last up to an hour and a half that helps the VA doctors figure out what their symptoms are and if they are changing. The facility has now seen nearly 150 patients since the program began in 2021, including telehealth referrals from other medical centers without long COVID programs. Other facilities that have long COVID programs are creating their own ad hoc approaches to combating the disease, trying to fill the vacuum left by insufficient research. "Each of the programs right now are quite different to be honest," said Neal. She added that each program can be led by various medical specialists, offer a range of in-person or telehealth appointments, and follow different patient referral patterns.

According to Hayes, the approximate number of veterans being seen for long COVID symptoms across all of these sites is only 4,300, a fraction of the roughly 23,000 veteran patients confirmed with the illness. Not all veterans with long COVID are even aware these programs exist. "In my mind, I have absolutely no idea that that was starting, let alone available. I certainly haven't been notified," said Ciel Downing, 63, an Army veteran from Oregon.

A Long Road to Resolving Long COVID

Downing first got COVID around the July 4th weekend in 2021 and almost immediately developed severe symptoms. Extreme fatigue, burning lungs and bile in her throat were the most prominent. "By November, I was still really struggling and was only getting about two good days a week ... and I thought, 'This is getting bad,'" she said. As a rural vet living alone, it became increasingly challenging for her to do even basic tasks like raking leaves or feeding her dog. After a second bout of COVID during the Omicron variant surge earlier this year, Downing decided to make a change. "I'm not a fatalist by any means at all. I'm an extraordinarily strong person normally," said Downing, who became overwhelmed trying to uncover what was going on with her body.

In March, she called her local veterans service officer, who drove her nearly two hours to the closest VA facility, the Portland VA Medical Center, for treatment. Downing thought that the

VA providers were very kind, but did not offer her any long-term solutions. The Portland VA is not one of the 17 VA facilities currently running a long COVID program. Downing attributes her preexisting conditions, which research suggests greatly increase the odds of getting long COVID, to her basic training in the 1980s at Fort McClellan, a former military base in Alabama, which closed in 1999 and has since been identified as a source of potential toxic exposure. "I can't possibly imagine any other reason. I know so many other people who have got it [COVID], and they are not going through this long, long experience," Downing said.

Outside of the VA, other facilities have also created post-COVID care centers as a way to help treat patients with the illness. Since long COVID affects all patients differently, facilities like the University of Chicago Medicine Post COVID Recovery Clinic and the Mount Sinai Center for Post-COVID Care offer patient's individual treatment plans to recover from the disease. There are roughly 218 post-COVID care centers in the United States, according to Survivor Corps, a grassroots patient advocacy group that serves as a comprehensive source of COVID-19 information. The map on its website at <https://www.survivorcorps.com/pccc> offers detailed state-by-state information on the network of existing long COVID care facilities available across the country, except in the Dakotas. But conclusions on the effectiveness of these treatment centers are still being formed.

"So, the best thing that seems to come out of these programs is the reassurance to people that they are indeed not crazy," said Survivor Corps founder Diana Berrent, who described the network of post-COVID care centers as inefficient with inherent equity issues. She is now pushing for the creation of new clinical facilities that would ensure accountability, collaboration and transparency among care centers, something President Joe Biden also discussed in an April statement on long COVID. The journey ahead for veterans to find answers to their countless remaining questions about long COVID remains uncertain, even as the VA touts its strong efforts to research the deadly virus.

"The VA has the largest integrated electronic health care records system in the U.S.," said Dr. Ziyad Al-Aly, chief of research and development for the VA St. Louis Health Care System and a lead researcher on many of the VA's long COVID studies. "That really enables us to do these large and well-powered studies involving a lot of patients with COVID, a lot of veterans with COVID." VA studies -- with mostly veterans as participants -- have found patients to be at an increased risk of long-term cardiovascular disease, diabetes and mental health disorders from long COVID. Research conducted by groups outside of the VA, on non-veteran populations, have found similar results. A new study by Al-Aly, published May 25, centers on breakthrough cases among vaccinated participants and found that vaccination alone will not reduce long-term health consequences of long COVID.

Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough, speaking during the April VA press briefing, pointed to that research as potentially yielding answers for the millions of Americans who are

and will continue to struggle with the long-term effects of COVID infections that seemingly won't go away. "The work we do at VA and the lessons we learn at VA will inform and improve how the whole country responds to long COVID," he said. "It will help the nation care for veterans and non-veterans alike." [Source: Military.com | Jonathan Lehrfeld | June 17, 2022 ++]

VA Hospitals

Update 15: Senators Vow to Block VA's Hospital Closure Commission

A bipartisan group of senators, including the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, on Monday announced plans to block the veterans Asset and Infrastructure Review Commission, saying the process is flawed and unneeded. The move all but ends more than five years of efforts to significantly cut back the Department of Veterans' Affairs footprint across America, and throws into question the long-term plans for what new facilities should be built to provide medical care to veterans.

But the opponents of the AIR Commission efforts — led by Jon Tester (D-MT), chairman of the veterans committee and one of the chamber's most influential voices on veterans policy decisions — said the slow pace of the work thus far coupled with the controversial recommendations put out by VA leaders earlier this year have made the process unworkable. "As senators, we share a commitment to expanding and strengthening modern VA infrastructure in a way that upholds our obligations to America's veterans. We believe the recommendations put forth to the AIR Commission are not reflective of that goal, and would put veterans in both rural and urban areas at a disadvantage," the group said in a statement. "That is why we are announcing that this process does not have our support and will not move forward. The commission is not necessary for our continued push to invest in VA health infrastructure."

The group includes Sens. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va.; Martin Heinrich, D-N.M.; Mike Rounds, R-S.D.; and Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va. Those four last month introduced legislation to completely eliminate the commission, saying the recommendations offered by VA leaders were too flawed to try and salvage. In addition to those senators, seven more senators also signed on to the new pledge to block the commission: Maggie Hassan, D-N.H.; John Thune, R-S.D.; Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio; Patty Murray, D-Wash.; Steve Daines, R-Mont.; Rob Portman, R-Ohio; and Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M.

The AIR Commission has been compared to the Defense Department's Base Closure and Realignment Commission, designed to reduce the military's footprint across America and return

public land to local communities for new use. But the VA asset review is more complicated. Congress passed language in 2018 mandating the commission meet, review thousands of VA facilities across the country and come up with a list of changes in the future. VA officials have said they have nearly 1,000 non-vacant but underused facilities spread across the country, creating a significant drain on department resources. Closing many of them would require an act of Congress.

When the law creating the commission was adopted, conservatives hyped the effort as a way to reduce wasteful spending on VA facilities and push more veterans services into private-sector care. But Democratic leaders insisted the language was written broadly enough so that VA could either reduce or increase the number of VA medical sites across the country, with the goal of better aligning facilities with veterans needs. In March, VA Secretary Denis McDonough unveiled his recommendations to the commission, which included hundreds of changes to facilities in every state.

Thirty-five Veterans Affairs Medical Centers in 21 different states would be closed or completely reconstructed under the nearly \$2 trillion infrastructure overhaul. Fourteen new major VA hospitals would be built along with 140 multi-specialty community-based outpatient clinics. The plan in total would add 80 new medical buildings to the department's existing inventory of more than 1,200 across the country. Many lawmakers and outside advocates hated it

- Conservatives said the Democratic administration's goals didn't go far enough to reduce VA's landholdings. Democratic lawmakers noted that many of the health care market assessments used in crafting the plan relied on pre-pandemic data, making them outdated.
- Officials from rural areas said the recommendations cut off services for too many veterans not living close to major U.S. cities. Staff in hospitals in New York and Ohio scheduled for eventual closure held rallies to protest the decisions.

Since March, the process has been stalled over commission nominees. The first eight were announced in the spring. The ninth, Thomas Harvey, wasn't announced until 22 JUN. That delayed confirmation work on the whole group by months. The delay is particularly problematic because commission members by law only have until early 2023 to present any revisions to the secretary's plan. With less than a year left to complete site visits, new market assessments and staff interviews, the commission's workload appeared unrealistic. Now, with 10 key senators promising to block those confirmations, the work may be impossible. Tester would be the one to schedule and lead confirmation hearings for the nominees, and he has no intention to do so.

The group said their decision is not an attack on the nominees but instead on the process itself.

“We remain dedicated to providing the department with the resources and tools it needs to continue delivering quality care and earned services to veterans in 21st century facilities, now and into the future,” the group said in a statement. Last week, when asked whether the delay of the commission nominees would make the work on the AIR Commission thus far worthless, McDonough insisted that the framework behind the recommendations could form the basis of future planning discussions by the department. “I define the entire project that the AIR Commission is designed around to be modernization,” he said. “We are bound and determined to do right by our veterans, and that means upgrading our physical infrastructure. We will not be deterred from that.” In a statement Monday, VA officials said they will continue that work.

“President Biden has insisted that our veterans in the 21st century should not be forced to receive care in early 20th century buildings,” said Melissa Bryant, acting Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. “The median age of VA’s hospitals is nearly 60 years old, and that’s why the president requested nearly \$20 billion in new VA infrastructure spending last year and it is why he has requested the largest ever investment in VA infrastructure in his FY23 budget. “Whatever Congress decides to do with the AIR Commission — which was called for in the 2018 Mission Act — we will continue to fight for the funding and modernization that our veterans deserve.” The Senate opponents said they are confident those kinds of changes can still be made without the AIR Commission itself moving ahead.

The ranking members of the Senate and House Veterans’ Affairs Committee condemned the announcement. “I am astonished by the announcement today that several senators, including the Chairman of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, are refusing to fulfill their responsibility under the law to confirm members of the AIR Commission,” said Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill.. “The MISSION Act was signed into law with broad support from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle and every major veterans service organization. It established an Asset and Infrastructure Review process ... [that is vital] for the future of modern, state-of-the-art VA care. “This decision does an immense disservice to veterans and VA staff who will feel its repercussions for years to come.”

Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kansas, echoed that sentiment. “I am disappointed that after more than a year delay, the committee will not be holding a confirmation hearing on the commissioners,” he said in a statement. “This commission was designed to assess the 7,500 buildings the VA owns, leases and operates to determine how the buildings are utilized, whether facilities need updating, the funding necessary to upgrade facilities, and how efficiently health care is being delivered to our veterans. Many of the VA’s facilities are empty, underutilized and severely outdated. “We passed the VA Mission Act to address these issues but by refusing to confirm commissioners, we are essentially shutting down the work of the AIR Commission and possibly our only opportunity to fix this long-standing issue.” [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 27, 2022 ++]

VA Claims Backlog

Update 172: Down Almost a Quarter in Last Four Months

The Veterans Affairs disability claims backlog has dropped by almost 25% in the last four months, indicating that hiring and overtime efforts are making a significant dent in the pending workload, department officials said. As of June 21, the total number of backlogged files — claims that have been pending for more than four months — was at 187,540. The figure had been as low as 70,000 claims before the start of the American coronavirus pandemic in early 2020. Since then, partial closures of benefits offices slowed processing of the disability claims. At the same time, the volume of new claims (particularly ones in recent years tied to the expansion of illnesses related to Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War) increased, putting additional pressure on the system.

The backlog reached as high as 264,000 last October. Last week's totals are 29% lower than that mark. Despite the rapid progress, officials have said it may take until mid-2024 to get the figure below the 100,000 case level again. VA officials credited new hirings and employee overtime with much of the recent improvement. Last fall, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said the Veterans Benefits Administration would hire and train 2,000 employees to assist with the increasing volume of disability benefits claims processing. As of last week, about 82% of those new workers have started working. Officials said they have paid for about \$100 million worth of overtime for existing employees through American Rescue Plan funds awarded by Congress in early 2021.

In a statement, department leaders also credited new automated claims processing systems with helping streamline the work, leading to additional decreases in the backlog. "Through these efforts, the claims development and decision making portion of the claims process is more efficient and improves decision accuracy," the statement said. "VBA continues to improve and expand this automated decision support process." The claims backlog has been a source of frustration and concern in past years, particularly before the department's processing systems were shifted to fully electronic files. It peaked in spring 2013 at more than 610,000 cases, prompting calls from lawmakers and advocates for wholesale changes in how the claims are handled.

From late 2015 to early 2020, the backlog hovered around 75,000 cases, a figure that department officials said was realistically the lowest level possible without forcing complex claims through the system too quickly, and risking mistakes. Reducing the caseload of overdue claims has been a priority for advocates as Congress considers sweeping toxic exposure legislation that could add hundreds of thousands of new claims to the benefits system, potentially driving the backlog even higher. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 27, 2022 ++]

VA Fraud, Waste & Abuse

Reported 16 thru 30 JUN 2022

Michigan – Bethann Kierczak of Southgate, a registered nurse at the John D. Dingell VA Medical Center in Detroit, pleaded guilty to charges related to COVID-19 vaccination record cards fraud. According to court records, Kierczak admitted to stealing or embezzling authentic COVID-19 vaccination record cards from the VA hospital—along with vaccine lot numbers necessary to make the cards appear legitimate—and then reselling those cards and information to individuals within the metro Detroit community. Kierczak began the scheme as early as May 2021 and continued through September 2021, selling the cards for \$150 to \$200 each. The VA OIG investigated this case with the VA Police and the Medicare Fraud Strike Force, a partnership among the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney’s Offices, and the US Health and Human Services OIG. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | June 22, 2022 ++]

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Georgia -- Melissa Flores was sentenced to two years in prison and \$110,000 in restitution for her role in a scheme to defraud VA. Flores and a codefendant allegedly created aliases and obtained or created fraudulent documents to make it appear they were the heirs of various individuals who had died. Between 2013 and 2019, the two codefendants defrauded VA out of more than \$430,000 and the Michigan Department of Treasury out of more than \$40,000 in unclaimed property. Flores pleaded guilty last May to two counts of false pretenses and one count of forgery. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | June 10, 2022 ++]

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California --American Financial Network, Inc., a mortgage lender based in Brea has agreed to pay more than \$1 million to resolve allegations that it improperly and fraudulently originated government-backed mortgage loans insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), a component of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Between December 2011 and March 2019, the mortgage lender knowingly underwrote and approved for insurance certain mortgages that did not meet FHA requirements or qualify for insurance, resulting in losses to the United States when the borrowers defaulted on those mortgages. The settlement further resolves allegations that the lender knowingly failed to perform quality control reviews that it was required to perform. The settlement was the result of a joint investigation conducted by the VA OIG, HUD OIG, and the US Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Washington. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | June 27, 2022 ++]

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Massachusetts -- Joshua Eisnor of North Reading pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute controlled substances. He conspired to distribute controlled substances, including oxycodone, suboxone, Klonopin, and Adderall to other members of the Malden, Massachusetts, Fire Department where he worked as a firefighter. The VA OIG, Food and Drug Administration OIG, and FBI conducted the investigation. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | June 27, 2022 ++]

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Texas -- Mark Williams Jr., an Army veteran receiving treatment at VA facilities, pleaded guilty to threatening employees at the Lake Jackson VA Outpatient Clinic. Beginning in June 2021, Williams began sending threats toward the staff at various VA facilities. These included calls to the Lake Jackson VA Outpatient Clinic, the White House VA Hotline, and the Veterans Crisis Line. As part of his plea, he admitted that during a call on October 25, 2021, he made repeated threats to kill employees at the Lake Jackson VA facility. The VA OIG conducted the investigation. [Source: DVA OIG | Michael J. Missal IG | June 27, 2022 ++]

California Veterans Home

Update 21: \$51 Million Settlement over Yountville Home Hostage Killings

California officials have agreed to pay out \$51 million to settle some of the claims stemming from the 2018 shooting at the Yountville Veterans Home, where a gunman and former patient killed three women staffers before shooting himself, according to state budget documents. The settlement “authorizes \$51 million one-time to pay for settlement costs at the Veterans Home of California, Yountville related to the 2018 shooting,” according to state budget documents approved by the legislature this week.

Ronald Foreman, the attorney for the family of Dr. Jennifer Golick, a 42-year-old therapist killed by the gunman, said the settlement “is the first step in a long journey” and that other lawsuits over the incident are pending. “That’s the first step in getting them compensation for the horrible tragedy they suffered on March 9, 2018, and continue to suffer,” Foreman said. Officials with the California Department of Veterans Affairs said they were working to respond to email queries from The Bee regarding which lawsuits the settlement covers.

The shooting has sparked wrongful death lawsuits, including at least two filed in federal court in San Francisco by the Golick family and the family of Christine Loeber, 48, a director at

the home who also was killed. Those suits are pending, according to court records, and Foreman said another case against the Napa County Sheriff's Department is pending in an appellate court. A third victim was Jennifer Gonzales Shushereba, 29, a clinical psychologist who was seven months pregnant.

Officials have said the March 9, 2018, shooting was conducted by Albert Cheung Wong, a 36-year-old former Sacramento resident and Army veteran who had served in Afghanistan and was suffering from severe mental health issues and PTSD. Wong became a patient at The Pathway Home, a residential treatment center at the state veterans home where Golick had been the clinical director for seven months, in April 2017, court papers say. About 1,000 aging and disabled veterans live at the home, which is ringed by wineries in scenic Napa County. It's considered the crown jewel among the state's eight veterans homes. Wong did not live there, but received treatment from the Pathway program.

On Dec. 20, 2017, Wong was hospitalized with a 5150 mental health hold at the San Francisco VA Medical Center, "where he expressed homicidal thoughts toward decedent Jennifer Golick," court papers say. Wong also "reported possession of multiple firearms immediately prior to his hospitalization and the ability to access firearms were he to be released from the hospital," court papers say. Despite that, he was released from the psychiatric ward after two days.

- On Feb. 14, 2018, Wong purchased a Stoeger double barrel shotgun from a Napa sporting goods store, waited the 10-day waiting period and picked up the weapon on Feb. 25, according to a California Highway Patrol investigation.
- While he was waiting, on Feb. 23, Wong bought a JP Enterprises Ultralite .308 caliber assault style rifle at a Burlingame gun shop, waited out the 10-day waiting period and picked it up March 5, four days before the shootings.

No one reported Wong's 5150 hold or his threats while he was on the 5150 hold to law enforcement, which could have prohibited him from purchasing weapons, court papers say. "At the time, Wong expressed homicidal thoughts toward specific individuals associated with the Pathway Program, including Jennifer Golick," court papers say. "Wong also expressed suicidal intent with a plan to shoot and kill himself. "To the Veterans Administration physicians and staff, Wong described a past altercation with a therapist named 'Jennifer' and a more recent altercation with a new therapist named 'Christine,' both of whom sparked homicidal thoughts for him."

A Napa County District Attorney's report found that Wong had been tossed out of the Pathway Home on Feb. 20 "due to his refusals to comply with program policies and treatment plan." "Wong had expressed extreme anger and frustration toward the clinical staff due to many prior disagreements and his recent discharge from the program," the report found. The CHP and

D.A.'s investigation of the shooting concluded that, after searching online for information on murder and suicide, Wong arrived at the home at 10:18 a.m. armed with both weapons, extra ammunition and 20-round magazines and ear and eye protection.

Law enforcement responded to 911 calls of an "active shooter" and Napa sheriff's Deputy Steven Lombardi confronted Wong as Wong took the women hostage in a group room, engaging in a gunfight. "Deputy Lombardi fired a total of 13 rounds from his .223 caliber rifle at Wong during the shooting sequence which lasted approximately 10 seconds," according to the D.A.'s report, which ruled the deputy's use of force to be "reasonable and lawful." "Wong fired a total of 22 rounds from his .308 caliber rifle toward Deputy Lombardi during the shooting sequence," the report added.

Wong then shot the victims with the rifle and shot himself in the head with the .12-gauge shotgun, the CHP report said. Lombardi survived the shootout. He retired in late 2020, according to the Napa County Sheriff's Office. Foreman said that by the time the deputy arrived the situation had become a hostage/barricade situation and that the suit against the sheriff that is pending stems from the claim that "the deputy shot blindly through the door" and sparked the killings of the victims. [Source: NavyTimes | Sam Stanton | June 14, 2022 ++]

Overseas Military Mail

Update 01: Service for Military Retirees to Stop 24 AUG

Military retirees, Red Cross workers and some government employees living and working overseas will lose access to the military mail service starting Aug. 24, a postal service superintendent said 15 JUN. The Defense Department in May directed the Military Postal Service Agency to end service for those customers, James Groff, the postal superintendent at Camp Humphreys, told Stars and Stripes by phone. He said he did not know what categories of government employees would also be affected.

The change is scheduled to affect all Air/Army Post Office, or APO, and Fleet Post Office, or FPO, addresses worldwide. Groff said his office received notice of the looming changes on 10 JUN and that the guidance could still change. Meanwhile, the reaction in the military postal service community, which employs dozens of military retirees, has been fierce, he said. "There's other retirees that are affected all over the place," Groff said. "I spoke to one retiree, and you wouldn't want to quote the language he used."

The overseas military post offices provide mail service for service members, civilian Defense Department employees and some contractors. Groff said he was unaware of any changes to service for those people. Mail sent to U.S. military bases overseas is handled exclusively by the U.S. Postal Service, which charges domestic postage rates regardless of its destination. Sunsetting mail privileges for overseas military retirees would force many of them to rely on their host nation postal services for their mail delivery. Some overseas retirees, for example, rely on the military mail service to provide timely delivery of medications from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Military Postal Service Agency, an extension of the Postal Service, was created in 1980 to consolidate postal operations from all military services, according to the U.S. Postal Service handbook. The agency operates in 63 countries and on 626 ships.

[Source: Stars and Stripes | David Choi | June 15, 2022 ++]

Overseas Military Mail

Update 02: A Final Decision on Ending It 24 AUG Is Still Up In the Air

Tens of thousands of military retirees overseas are waiting to see if they will lose their military postal service privileges in two months, as some have been told. The mixed messages they've received are causing confusion around the world about whether it's going to happen or not. But it is not a done deal. "The Defense Department's support to our military community is a top priority, and we are reviewing this issue to ensure authorized military postal service patrons are provided access worldwide," said DoD officials in a statement provided to Military Times.

Many retirees are questioning why this change is being considered in the first place, after decades of being able to use FPO/APO addresses overseas. A major concern among military retirees is that they would no longer be able to get their prescription medications through the Tricare Express Scripts mail-order pharmacy. Express Scripts Pharmacy can only mail prescriptions to U.S.-based addresses, State Department Pouch Mail and APO/FPO/DPO addresses. The Military Postal Service Agency provides postal services to DoD personnel and their families at locations around the world.

In May, Defense Department officials published a policy change that has been interpreted to mean that the only people authorized to use the FPO/APO system are military members and their

dependents, DoD civilians and their dependents, and contractors who are authorized to accompany the force. That leaves out military retirees and others, such as Red Cross employees. The possible change was first reported by Stripes.com. After the May DoD policy change, Military Postal Service Agency officials notified their overseas postal communities that affected patrons will be given 90 days advance notice that they will no longer be able to use FPO/APO service, according to a Military Postal Service Agency email obtained by Military Times.

According to DoD statistics, there are about 40,000 military retirees living overseas. That number doesn't include family members of retirees who would also be affected. Retirees who now work as DoD civilians overseas would not lose their privileges. Because postal service officials in different parts of the world have been putting out conflicting messages, confusion has run rampant, as well as speculation about the reasons behind the possible change. Some retirees have questioned whether it is driven by budget concerns; some have accused the Biden administration of "voter suppression" due to the impact the move could have on the absentee ballot process during this year's midterm elections. And some retirees are calling the whole thing a hoax, because of the mixed messages.

It's also not clear where the idea originated — the Military Postal Service Agency or someone higher up in the DoD chain. Agency officials "recognized the need to clarify authorized users of the [military postal system] after a legal review determined that some MPS patron categories included over time are either not authorized by law or not permitted by host nation agreement," according to the DoD statement to Military Times. Those officials also acknowledged that money is a factor. "The same review was also unable to locate established fiscal authority for seven of the listed categories" of patrons, DoD officials stated.

But the MPSA email stated that this was a DoD policy change, and that the Military Postal Service Agency doesn't make policy — MPSA just enforces it. The MPSA reports to the Army, and is the single mail manager for the Defense Department. Before the change was published, Military Postal Service Agency officials sent a memo to Army officials asking them to alert DoD officials about the impacts of the impending policy change, according to the MPSA email.

But there have been conflicting messages from official sources, with some stating that retirees will continue to be able to use the Military Postal Service and others the opposite. This is creating "massive confusion throughout the world," wrote Mark Favreau, volunteer director of the U.S. Military Retiree Support Services Office for Metro Manila, in a letter to the Military Postal Service Agency. He said he received a message Tuesday from Naval Supply Systems Command, Yokosuka, Japan, stating that the change would take effect Aug. 24, and those who are not authorized postal privileges would lose those privileges at the end of the day on Aug. 23.

In some countries, options are limited for receiving prescription drugs locally. For example, there are no U.S. military medical clinics in the Philippines, said Jack Walker, a retired Marine

first sergeant who serves as the volunteer director of the Retired Activities Office in Subic Bay. He said those who have service-connected conditions can use the VA's Foreign Medical Program, but that doesn't include everyone.

John Quinn, a retired Navy master chief with 30 years of service, has been living in the Philippines for 15 years. "I depend on the FPO here for my maintenance medications sent from Tricare Express Scripts," he said. Without access to an FPO box, he said, "I will now have to purchase my medications locally at a much higher price and with questionable quality." There's a limit of one pound for mail through the military mail system, Walker said. He said it may take FPO mail about a week to get to the Philippines, but mail takes several weeks or longer to get through the Philippines mail system. "If FPO goes away, we may or may not get mail," he said.

Some retirees and widows still get paper checks in the mail for things like Social Security payments, and they get mail from the Social Security Administration and the VA about scheduled appointments and other necessary information. If the letters don't get there in time and the veteran doesn't make the appointment — for an exam related to a disability claim, for example — their case may be closed. For retirees voting absentee in states that don't have the ability to send or receive absentee ballots online, this could affect retirees' ability to vote, Walker said.

In addition to the issues associated with absentee ballot voting by mail, Quinn listed other effects, such as no longer being able to receive government-supplied COVID testing kits. And he foresees problems getting replacements for expired debit or credit cards. "Some financial institutions won't send a card to a foreign address, while others insist on sending by DHL or FEDEX," he said, which is costly. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 23, 2022 ++]

Commissary & Exchange

Update 03: Made in China | Over 50% of Their Products Could Be Banned

Some military resale experts are warning that a proposal to ban the sale of Chinese-made products in military exchanges and commissaries would be "devastating," especially to exchanges. The proposal, an amendment introduced by Rep. Mark Green (R-TN) was approved by the House Armed Services Committee 23 JUN. "We cannot in good conscience fill post exchanges with products created with slave labor and sponsored by and benefiting financially the authoritarian regime of the Chinese Communist Party," Green said during the markup of fiscal 2023 defense policy bill. In addition, he said, "The Chinese Communist Party believes they can steal our military technology without consequence. We need to show them that isn't the case.

“The last thing we want to do is financially contribute to their tyranny. They’re laughing at the idea of American soldiers funding their schemes by filling the shelves of our PXs and BXs with their products.” The proposal would prohibit the sale of goods in commissaries and exchanges that are manufactured in China, assembled in China or imported into the U.S. from China. At least half of the products sold in exchanges, if not more, are made in China, noted Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-CA). While the idea of banning these products “sounds good and is patriotic,” he said, “it would have an adverse effect on our military families.” It would mean they would have to go out to stores in the civilian community to find the products they rely on that would no longer be sold in exchanges, he said.

The ban would affect only military stores, not stores in the civilian community. If a ban on Chinese-made products were to apply to civilian retailers outside the gate, industry figures indicate it would likely affect 80% to 90% of all retail goods sold, said Courtney Williams, spokeswoman for the Navy Exchange Service Command. Walmart spokesman Payton McCormick said nearly two-thirds of the products Walmart sells in the U.S. are made, grown or assembled domestically. The company doesn’t break out sourcing data by country, but Walmart sources from many countries around the world. It’s not clear whether the proposed legislation would ban any part of an item made in China — or only products made entirely in China.

Navy Exchanges “would face an impact of 50% in direct retail sales, strictly on those prohibited products alone,” said Williams. But in addition to that impact, there would likely be a far greater percentage of loss because the lack of those products would mean fewer customers. Sometimes there are just no acceptable alternatives to products made in China. The lack of alternatives would also mean the potential removal of entire categories of items from the exchanges, not just one brand, Williams said. “As a retailer, we offer freedom of choice for customers to purchase merchandise they want or need, and not all products desired by our customers are available from a U.S. manufacturer. The NEX serves a wide variety of military customers and we work very hard to carry a merchandise selection that appeals to this wide customer base,” Williams said.

“This practice of [lawmakers] doing to the exchanges and the troops what they don’t have the will or votes to do to the general citizenry has got to stop,” said Steve Rossetti, president of the American Logistics Association, an association representing companies that supply products to military stores. **The impact this proposal would have on military exchanges “isn’t significant, it’s devastating,”** Rossetti said. “We should be feeding this golden goose instead of killing it.”

- Rep. Kai Kahele (D-HI) and others said they support the concept of buying American products, but are concerned about the impact on the stores, especially making a move so quickly. Kahele said the move would negatively affect military families who depend on this benefit to purchase everyday household items, especially those in remote locations

where there are already supply chain issues. “I believe this would put our commissaries and exchanges at risk,” he said. “I’m all about buying American, but I don’t think we can flip the switch overnight.”

- Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA), chairman of the committee, described the concept as “unworkable,” given the number of products made in China, “even though I’m not unsympathetic to the sentiment behind it.”

It’s not clear what impact the proposal would have on commissaries, although it would affect any over-the-counter health items coming from China, Rossetti said. At Navy Exchanges, the ban would affect products across the board, especially clothing, footwear and baby items like strollers; housewares and home products made by Ninja, Cuisinart, Shark, Bissell, iRobot and Calphalon; home appliances like washers, dryers and refrigerators; entertainment electronics from Samsung; computers and phones from Apple; video game consoles by PlayStation and Xbox; bicycles and fitness equipment from Schwinn and Nordic Trak;, and seasonal merchandise like Christmas trees and Halloween costumes.

Navy Exchanges, like the other exchange systems, seek to provide quality goods and services at a savings to service members and their families. “Whenever possible, the NEX purchases goods made in America,” Williams said. “In fact, 40% of our Navy Pride products are purchased or assembled in America.”

The proposal will now have to be considered by the full House as part of the 2023 authorization bill. The House and Senate are expected to pass their separate authorization bill drafts sometime in the next month. They will then negotiate on a compromise authorization bill. “I’d argue it’s not that hard to fill the shelves of our PXs with American-made goods,” said Rep. Mike Walz (R-FL). “President Biden has put forward a Buy American provision. ... If DoD needs to lead the way and be a little more difficult, then let’s do it. “I’d be willing to bet they could do without some T-shirts or socks or other items if they know we have to stop funding our adversary,” he said. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | June 24, 2022 ++]

Toxic Exposure

Pact Act Vet Benefits & Hopefully Last Delay

As many as one in five veterans living in America today could see new health care coverage and disability benefits under the toxic exposure legislation advanced by the Senate 16 JUN, but some veterans will see help sooner than others. The package — which was advanced by the Senate in a bipartisan 84-14 vote and heads now to the House for final congressional approval — would cost

almost \$280 billion over the next decade and radically transform how the Department of Veterans Affairs analyzes and compensates victims of military chemical and radiation exposure incidents.

President Joe Biden has said he will sign the bill into law if it comes to his desk, and Veterans Affairs officials have already begun preparing staffing and implementation plans in anticipation of the new requirements. “America’s veterans and their loved ones will be better off as a result of this work today,” said Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT) just moments before the vote. “This will make the country a better place ... Today will show that we can put party politics aside and honor America’s bravest.”

The burn pit provisions of the **Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act** have received the most attention in recent months, in part because of the recency of those injuries. Tens of thousands of veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have developed rare respiratory conditions and cancers in the years following their deployments, believed caused by poisonous smoke from massive burn pits used to dispose of a host of military waste. But because scientific monitoring was not done at many sites, conclusively linking the smoke to veterans’ ailments has been a difficult task.

The PACT Act codifies recent changes in how the Department of Veterans Affairs approaches those kinds of health claims, lowering standards for proof and offering presumptive status for some rare illnesses believed caused by the burn pits. Advocates said those fundamental changes could have wide-ranging and positive impact on veterans for years to come, developing a more patient-friendly approach to how VA approaches any toxic exposure incidents. But they also say the direct benefits for groups that have been excluded in the past are more urgent. Those individuals include not only troops who recently separated but some who served more than five decades ago. Here are highlights from those provisions:

The benefit: Provides presumptive status for disability benefits for 23 conditions related to burn pit exposure. *Who gets it:* Most veterans who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars era are expected to be covered under the provision, although specifics of how to implement that still must be written by VA officials. Individuals would receive disability benefits if they contract any type of the following cancers: head, neck, respiratory system, gastrointestinal system, reproductive system, lymphatic system, kidney, brain, skin or pancreas.

Individuals would also receive disability benefits if they contract any type of the following ailments: asthma, chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, constrictive bronchiolitis, emphysema, granulomatous disease, interstitial lung disease, pleuritis, pulmonary fibrosis, sarcoidosis, chronic sinusitis, chronic rhinitis or glioblastoma. Most of the illnesses other than cancer would be eligible for benefits within the next year. The cancer benefits would be phased in from 2024 to 2025, except for individuals facing severe medical issues.

The benefit: Provides 10 years of health care coverage from VA upon separation from the military. Currently, all separating troops get five years of coverage. *Who gets it:* All veterans who left the ranks in summer 2017 or later will have their eligibility automatically extended. Veterans who left between summer 2014 and summer 2017 will be able to apply for additional years of health care coverage, ending at 10 years after the date they separated.

The benefit: Provides presumptive status for disability benefits related to Agent Orange exposure for veterans suffering from hypertension or monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS). *Who gets it:* All veterans currently eligible for disability benefits related to Agent Orange exposure. For MGUS, the presumptive status goes into effect as soon as the bill is signed into law. Veterans suffering from hypertension will be phased in. Those who age 85 and older, or those suffering extreme health or financial problems will receive immediate benefits status. For others, the presumptive status will start on Oct. 1, 2026.

The benefit: Provides presumptive status for disability benefits related to Agent Orange exposure for veterans who served in areas previously not recognized for the chemical defoliant use. *Who gets it:* For veterans 85 or older who qualify, the benefit goes into effect immediately. For younger veterans, the provisions will trigger on Oct. 1, 2022. The eligible groups include:

- Individuals who served in Thailand (or any Royal Thai base) from Jan. 9, 1962, to June 30, 1976;
- Individuals who served in Laos between Dec. 1, 1965, and Sept. 30, 1969;
- Individuals who served in Cambodia's Kompon Cham province between April 16, 1969, and April 30, 1969;
- Individuals who served in Guam or American Samoa (or their territorial waters) between Jan. 9, 1962, and July 31, 1980;
- Individuals who served on the Johnston Atoll between Jan. 1, 1972, and Sept. 30, 1977.

The benefit: Provides presumptive status for disability benefits for Persian Gulf War veterans. *Who gets it:* All veterans who served in the first Gulf War. The provisions remove rules regarding eligibility expiration.

The benefit: Provides presumptive status for disability benefits related to radiation exposure for veterans who served at the Enewetak Atoll. *Who gets it:* Individuals who served at the site from Jan. 1, 1977, to Dec. 31, 1980.

The benefit: Provides presumptive status for disability benefits related to radiation exposure for veterans who served in Palomares, Spain. *Who gets it:* Individuals who served at the site from Jan. 17, 1966, to March 31, 1967.

Another Holdup

Procedural issues again scuttled the planned vote the week of 20 JUN to finalize legislation that would dramatically expand benefits for veterans facing toxic exposure injuries from their time in the service, but congressional leaders insist the issues can be resolved and legislation passed in coming weeks. Leaders in the House and Senate had hoped to send the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act (or PACT Act) to President Joe Biden's desk for final signature by the Fourth of July, after the Senate advanced the measure by a bipartisan 84-14 vote one week ago.

It represents the culmination of years of work from advocates who have argued that current rules block many victims of on-duty toxic exposure injuries — in particular, smoke from burn pits used to dispose of waste in Iraq and Afghanistan — from getting the care they deserve. The House approved the measure in March. In response to Republican complaints about the cost of the new benefits and potential workload increase the measure would put on the Department of Veterans Affairs workforce, Senate leaders amended the bill to add phased-in implementation rules and more staff to help process claims.

But those changes ran afoul of rules that require new revenue requirements start in the House, not in the Senate. A planned House vote to finalize the measure on 22 JUN was postponed, and chamber leaders scrambled to make corrections to the measure before lawmakers began their two-week recess on 24 JUN. Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jon Tester (D-MT), attempted to push through a fix on the Senate floor late Thursday night, but the bid was blocked by Sen. Pat Toomey (R-PA), one of the 14 senators to oppose the measure last week.

Tester called that a disappointment. "There is a [technical] issue and we have to fix it," he said. "But in the process of our debates, we shouldn't be denying health care to veterans, which is exactly what [Toomey] is doing today." Congressional leaders emphasized that the procedural problems are not fatal for the future of the PACT Act, but instead represent a temporary delay.

House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) said he still intends to get a House vote on the measure "once the Senate resolves this procedural speedbump," getting the measure into law likely by mid-July. Comedian Jon Stewart, who has headlined numerous rallies around Capitol Hill over the last year in favor of the PACT Act, took to Twitter on 23 JUN to call the latest Senate delays "cynical nonsense that delays healthcare for veterans." Both chambers return from recess on July 11. Lawmakers will likely need several days after that to work out the procedural fixes and hold relevant floor votes. Biden has already indicated he will sign the measure into law when it is finalized by Congress. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 21 & 24, 2022 ++]

Vet Incarcerations

Army Vet Who Threw Molotov Cocktails at Oregon Police Sentenced

A federal judge has sentenced a 25-year-old man who threw Molotov cocktails at police in Portland, Ore., during mass protests against police brutality to 10 years in prison. U.S. District Judge Marco A. Hernandez in Portland sentenced Army veteran **Malik Fard Muhammad**, of Indianapolis, on 22 JUN. Prosecutors said Muhammad traveled from Indianapolis to Portland and on several days in September 2020 threw Molotov cocktails at police, broke windows in buildings, and provided bats to others so they could do the same.

One of the devices exploded when it hit the ground on 23 SEP, creating a fireball and setting the pant leg of an officer on fire, prosecutors said. On Oct. 11, prosecutors said he was seen smashing windows of the Oregon Historical Society, Portland State University and businesses with a metal baton before police arrested him. Police said he had ditched a loaded pistol before the arrest and was found with a loaded magazine in his pocket. Assistant Federal Public Defender Fidel Cassino-DuCloux said Muhammad has been diagnosed with bipolar and post-traumatic stress disorders and has been on medication since his federal arrest, The Oregonian/Oregon Live reported.

"I just regret my decisions, and if I could take them back, I would," Muhammad told the judge. "I'm here now to atone for them." He pleaded guilty in federal court to two counts of possessing unregistered destructive devices. In state court, he pleaded guilty in March to four counts of riot, two counts of attempted second-degree murder, four counts of criminal mischief, and one count each of manufacture of a destructive device, possession of a destructive device, possession of a firearm and second-degree assault. Muhammad's federal sentence will run concurrently with a 10-year sentence imposed in Multnomah County Circuit Court. Prosecutors said the sentencing deal was reached after negotiations between federal and state prosecutors and Muhammad's defense lawyer.

Prosecutors said they took into account Muhammad's past military service and history of abuse as a child. During a racial justice protest in Indiana in 2020, Muhammad was at the center of a dramatic moment in which he and a police lieutenant reached a compromise to turn a march away from the governor's residence. He will serve his sentence in Oregon state prison, prosecutors said. [Source: Associated Press | June 22, 2022 ++]

VET Legislation Progress

16-30 JUN 2022

As a reminder, the House of Representatives has already passed two pieces of legislation that would lower prescription drug costs.

- The first bill is the *Elijah Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act (H.R.3)*, which would save Medicare some \$450 billion over ten years, mainly by allowing the program to negotiate prices directly with Big Pharma.
- The second bill is the *Build Back Better Act*, a very large bill with many provisions, one of which would enable Medicare to negotiate the prices of up to 10 drugs per year starting in 2023, with that number eventually rising to up to 20 drugs per year. The Congressional Budget Office estimates federal budget savings from the drug pricing provisions would be \$297 billion over ten years.

However, the Senate has yet to act on either of these bills because there are not enough votes to pass them. The positive news is that Sen. Joe Manchin and Majority Leader Schumer have met to discuss a so-far elusive budget reconciliation bill that the pivotal West Virginia Democrat says must address high inflation with deficit reduction, energy production and lower drug prices. Schumer told reporters 22 JUN there are several issues still to work out with Manchin, whose support the Democrats need to get the 50 votes necessary in the evenly divided Senate. [Source: The Senior Citizen League | June 27, 2022 ++]

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New Public Laws – The following veteran related bills have been signed in to law:

- PL 117-154 - H.R.4591 - VA Electronic Health Record Transparency Act of 2021
- PL 117-138| - S.4089 - Veterans Rapid Retraining Assistance Program Restoration and Recovery Act of 2022
- PL 117-137 - S.3527 - A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to transfer the name of property of the Department of Veterans Affairs designated by law to other property of the Department.
- PL 117-136 - S.2687 - Strengthening Oversight for Veterans Act of 2021

- PL 117-135 -S.2533 - Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options for Veterans Act
- PL 117-134 - S.2514 - A bill to rename the Provo Veterans Center in Orem, Utah, as the "Col. Gail S. Halvorsen 'Candy Bomber' Veterans Center".
- PL 117-133 - S.2102 - Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas SERVICE Act
- PL 117-132 - S.1872 - United States Army Rangers Veterans of World War II Congressional Gold Medal Act
- PL 117-131) - S.1760 - A bill to designate the community-based outpatient clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs planned to be built in Oahu, Hawaii, as the "Daniel Kahikina Akaka Department of Veterans Affairs Community-Based Outpatient Clinic".
- PL 117-97 - S.321 "Six Triple Eight" Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2021
- PL 117-96 - H.R. 2545 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the role of doctors of podiatric medicine in the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

Insulin

Update 07: Bill to Reduce Insulin Costs Revealed in the Senate

Last week U.S. Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and Susan Collins (R-ME) – Co-Chairs of the Senate Diabetes Caucus – announced their new bipartisan legislation, the **Improving Needed Safeguards for Users of Lifesaving Insulin Now (INSULIN) Act**, to lower the skyrocketing costs of insulin. The new, bipartisan legislation builds on Shaheen’s and Collins’ previous efforts to reduce insulin costs by increasing measures to encourage insulin manufacturers to reduce list prices, while extending patient protections that will foster competition and broader access to desperately needed insulin products.

It is estimated that one in every three seniors lives with diabetes. The disease is one of the leading causes of death in the United States, claiming over 100,000 lives in 2021, and is also the most expensive chronic condition in the nation, costing a total of \$327 billion per year. The rising cost of insulin presents a barrier to care for a growing number of Americans living with diabetes. Out-of-pocket costs increase with list prices, and for people without insurance, the costs are untenable. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, Part D enrollees spent nearly \$1 billion out-of-pocket on insulin in 2019, four times the amount spent in 2007.

The bill would place a \$35 monthly cap on the cost of insulin for patients with private insurance as well as those enrolled in Medicare, though it would not afford the same protections to the uninsured. The bill also seeks to make insulin more accessible by cracking down on previous authorization requirements that can force patients to jump through hurdles to get insurers to help pay for medications. The legislation further aims to reduce the overall price of insulin, not just how much patients pay for it. The senators are targeting discounts that drug companies provide to insurers and middlemen that have been accused of driving up the costs of drugs at the point of sale. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) said he'll bring the bipartisan measure capping the out-of-pocket cost of insulin at \$35 per month to the Senate floor soon for a vote.

So far, the only Republican to announce support is Collins, well short of the 10 GOP votes that Democrats will need to avert a filibuster and pass the measure using the normal legislative process. Majority Leader Schumer and Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) are also discussing capping insulin costs in a partisan budget bill that would require just 50 Democrats to pass the Senate. That bill would block insurers and pharmaceutical benefit managers from collecting rebates on insulin products kept at their 2021 Medicare Part D net prices—effectively allowing drug makers to keep a larger share of revenue.

If you live in a state with at least one Republican Senator, TSCL urges you to contact them and urge them to support the Collins-Shaheen Insulin bill. [Source: The Senior Citizen League | June 27, 2022 ++]

Tricare Dental Program

Update 03: H.R. 8113 | Dental Care for Our Troops Act

A bipartisan House bill would waive premiums and co-payments for National Guard and Reserve Servicemembers under the TRICARE Dental Program, with the goal of improving military readiness by reducing the number of nondeployable servicemembers. Reserve component dependents would remain eligible to purchase premium-based TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) coverage. DoD-subsidized dental coverage would remain a unique benefit for active duty family members.

Reps. Andy Kim (D-N.J.) and Trent Kelly (R-MS) **introduced the Dental Care for Our Troops Act** (H.R. 8113) on June 16. The legislation is also part of the larger Healthcare for Our Troops Act of 2021 (H.R. 3512), which would grant reserve component members – more than 100,000 of whom do not have private health insurance – no-cost access to TRICARE Reserve Select. MOAA endorses both pieces of legislation as standalone bills, as well as potential additions to the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), now being assembled in both chambers.

“Without affordable dental coverage, National Guard and Reserve members face barriers to maintaining comprehensive health which is a prerequisite to readiness,” said Lt. Gen. Dana Atkins, USAF (Ret), MOAA president and CEO. “MOAA thanks Congressman Andy Kim and Congressman Trent Kelly for introducing this bill that would bring the reserve component dental benefit on par with active duty and facilitate access to care. Our nation counts on reserve component members to respond when our nation needs them – we must support them with affordable dental care to ensure their readiness.”

A study of reserve component servicemembers who served during Operation Enduring Freedom put their rates of dental health issues twice as high as their active duty compatriots. Kelly called the no-cost TRICARE option “key to military readiness,” saying it was the duty of Congress “to ensure [Guard and Reserve] members have access to preventative and continuous dental care – just as we do for active duty military personnel.” The National Guard Association of the United States and Reserve Organization of America (ROA) also endorsed the legislation.

Take action today: Ask your House member to support H.R. 8113 to help ensure the ongoing readiness of the reserve component. Click on <https://moaa.quorum.us/campaign/41234> to view a proposed editable letter for use in this endeavor. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | Kevin Lilley | June 21, 2022 ++]

Congressional Resources

Member’s Contact Info & Vet Bill Status

If in doubt as to your legislator’s online contact info or who they are, the below websites provide ALL legislator’s names with contact info to facilitate the copying and forwarding of suggested letters to them, asking them questions, or seeking their assistance:

- <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%7D> – **House**

- <https://www.congress.gov/search?q=%7B%22source%22%3A%5B%22members%22%5D%2C%22congress%22%3A%5B%22117%22%5D%2C%22chamber%22%3A%22Senate%22%7D> – **Senate**

To check status on any veteran related legislation go to <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress> for any House or Senate bill introduced in the 117th Congress. Bills are listed in reverse numerical order for House and then Senate. Bills are normally initially assigned to a congressional committee to consider and amend before sending them on to the House or Senate as a whole. To read the text of bills that are to be considered on the House floor in the upcoming week refer to <https://docs.house.gov/floor>. Note that anyone can sign up and use MOAA's Legislative Action Center at <https://moaa.quorum.us/issueareas>. You do not have to be a member.

House Counter Inflation Plan

Troops Would Get \$90 Monthly Bonuses

Troops could receive monthly bonuses to counter rising inflation costs under a proposal adopted by House lawmakers on 22 JUN, but a separate plan to guarantee service members a \$15-an-hour minimum wage was rejected by chamber appropriators. The moves signal further congressional support for keeping the military pay raise at 4.6% for next year while lawmakers look for other ways to help boost military families' finances amid increasing gas and grocery prices. The bonuses were included in an amendment by the House Armed Services Committee's annual authorization bill adding \$37 billion to the president's \$773 billion defense spending proposal.

That total includes about \$7.4 billion to counter inflation, with \$1.4 billion for personnel issues like housing stipend boosts, commissary support, and the monthly bonuses proposal. Under the plan, troops who receive less than \$45,000 in basic pay would be eligible for monthly payouts of 2.4% of their salary. That would mean up to \$90 extra each month for those service members.

The bonuses would only be available from January to December 2023. Senate lawmakers did not include the idea in their draft of the authorization bill, meaning it would have to survive negotiations between the two chambers before it could become law.

Military advocates in recent months have warned that even though the planned 4.6% pay raise would be the largest for troops in 20 years, it may not be enough to offset rising costs for troops and their families. But thus far, House and Senate lawmakers have rejected calls for a higher pay raise, saying in part that it could create a massive disparity with other federal civilian employees unless their salaries are also pulled higher, a costly budget proposition. In debate

before the House Appropriations Committee on Wednesday, Rep. Mike Garcia (R-CA) for the second year in a row offered a proposal to require a base pay of \$15 an hour — \$31,200 a year — for all troops, arguing that target should be the minimum for any individual serving in the ranks.

Junior enlisted service members can make as little as \$21,000 a year in basic pay, but that calculation does not include other stipends such as housing allowances, specialty pays and subsistence assistance. Depending on where troops are stationed, the housing and food payouts combined can effectively double younger troops' total military compensation. Garcia's measure would have boosted pay for about 23,000 troops, but it was defeated during the appropriations debate because of concerns about cost offsets and related accounting issues. He called that a disappointment. "No service member should be asked to defend our country and struggle near or even below the poverty line," he said in a statement. "If the government is paying for our servicemembers to live on food stamps, we may as well pay them through base pay on the front end instead."

For junior enlisted troops, the planned 4.6% pay raise would mean about \$1,300 more next year in take-home pay. For senior enlisted and junior officers, the hike equals about \$2,500 more. For an O-4 with 12 years' service, it's more than \$4,500 in extra pay. House Armed Services Committee members also included in their authorization bill language requiring a study into current military pay policies, and whether they are keeping pace with both the private sector and families' financial needs.

Lawmakers have said they are particularly concerned with junior enlisted pay and whether that is sufficient for military recruiting and retention goals. The House and Senate are expected to pass their separate authorization bill drafts sometime next month, and work on negotiations for a compromise bill through the rest of the summer. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | June 23, 2022 ++]

WWI Hello Girls

Update 02: Efforts Renewed for Congressional Gold Medal to Honor Them

A proposed Congressional Gold Medal to honor the "Hello Girls," the pioneering World War I Army Signal Corps Female Telephone Operators Unit, is receiving renewed bipartisan attention in the House and Senate. The medal push is the latest in a long effort to recognize the Hello

Girls, who provided critical communications as switchboard operators from WWI front lines, connecting 26 million calls.

The unit originated when Gen. John J. Pershing, USA, discovered early in the war that French women serving as switchboard operators spoke little or no English, making communications between American headquarters almost impossible. The War Department selected 223 American women who spoke French and had telecommunications experience to serve overseas, and this unit became known as the Hello Girls. Although they were hailed as heroes for their service, they were denied benefits when they returned home and waged a 60-year battle before winning recognition as veterans. An earlier Congressional Gold Medal effort stalled, but the bill was reintroduced in 2021 and is moving through Congress with support from lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest honor of appreciation awarded by Congress, and the bill must be co-sponsored by two-thirds of the members of both chambers. As of JUN 10, the bill had 22 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives and 43 in the Senate. The bill's passage is advocated by the World War I Centennial Commission. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver II (D-MO) -- whose district houses the National World War I Museum and Memorial, built in 1926 and the only national museum to commemorate WWI -- is working to pass the law.

“For far too long, the Hello Girls have failed to receive the recognition and honors they earned from their dedicated service to the nation at a time of grave need,” he said. “In an era when women couldn’t even participate in our democracy, these women swore oaths, put on the uniform and served alongside our servicemen during World War I, helping to send critical communications that were instrumental in the coordination of French and American forces that, ultimately, helped win the Great War.”

The story of the Hello Girls really hit home, Cleaver said. “As the nephew of a Tuskegee Airman who went to Europe to defend democracy and the values of freedom during WWII, only to return home with less benefits and recognition than his white counterparts, I can understand how these women must have felt after courageously serving their country, only to be told they couldn’t qualify as veterans simply because of their gender. While it’s disappointing that it took until 1979 for these women to gain veteran status, we can, and should, continue to honor them for their support of our country when that support was not fully reciprocated.”

Supporters of this legislation can help “by calling their representative and senators to tell them to cosponsor the Hello Girls Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2021 so that we can get the number of cosponsors needed to pass the bill into law,” Cleaver said. “By passing this legislation and shining light on their pivotal role in the war effort, it is my hope that we can lift up the story of the Hello Girls so that future generations will know of their heroism, ensuring

the tales of their service live on forever.” [Source: MOAA Weekly Newsletter | Judy Christie | June 16, 2022 ++]

China’s Carrier Program

Update 02: Third Aircraft Carrier Launches

China has launched its third and largest aircraft carrier to date at a shipyard in Shanghai, the first of its type there to feature a catapult aircraft launch system. The ship, which was indigenously designed and built, was christened as the **Fujian**, named after the Chinese province opposite Taiwan, according to state-run news agency Xinhua. It was launched Friday at the Shanghai shipyard where it had undergone construction since 2018.

The Fujian, which was previously known as the Type 003, has a flight deck that measures about 1037 feet long and is expected to have a displacement of about 100,000 tons when complete. The dimensions are roughly the same as the U.S. Navy’s Kitty Hawk-class carriers, although the new ship is longer than China’s two preceding carriers, the Liaoning and the Shandong. The installation of three catapults on its flight deck would allow the new ship to launch heavier aircraft such as the Xian KJ-600 turboprop airborne early warning aircraft, which is currently undergoing flight tests.

The KJ-600 is a twin-engine aircraft somewhat analogous to the U.S. Navy’s E-2 Hawkeye, and it features a distinctive disc on top of its fuselage housing a powerful radar. The People’s Liberation Army Navy has so far used the Shenyang J-15 Flying Shark as its main carrier-borne fighter. This is a Chinese version of the Russian-origin Sukhoi Su-33 Flanker, which China developed as its mainstay combat aircraft for its carriers. China is also developing a twin-seat electronic attack version of the J-15, meaning the type will likely continue serving on its carriers for the foreseeable future. The introduction of force-multiplier platforms like this and the KJ-600 would dramatically improve the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN’s) carrier air wing capabilities.

There are also signs China is about to deploy a version of the Shenyang FC-31 stealth fighter as its next-generation carrier-borne fighter, with several heavily modified airframes of what were previously a privately developed design for the export market currently undergoing flight testing in China. The PLAN has operated a refurbished ex-Soviet Kuznetsov-class vessel since it entered service in 2012, as well as an indigenously modified Kuznetsov design commissioned in 2017. Both are about 305 meters long and displace about 65,000-70,000 tons. Both ships,

which are named the Liaoning and Shandong, respectively, lack catapults. However, they are equipped with a ski ramp to launch fixed-wing aircraft, which has so far only included the J-15.

It's unknown which of the PLAN's three fleet commands will operate the Fujian. The Liaoning is assigned to the service's North Sea Fleet, while the newer Shandong is with the South Sea Fleet. [Source: DefenseNews | Mike Yeo | June 17, 2022 ++]

USAF PB&J Sandwich

The World's Saddest

Two slices of Wonder Bread, a dollop of chunky Jif peanut butter, and globs of Smucker's grape jelly meld together to create one of the most delicious and iconic meals in American history: The PB&J. However, the Air Force Medical Service challenged this timeless recipe, in an effort to encourage better nutrition, with a set of ingredients that would have any kid in the cafeteria wanting desperately to swap his sack lunch. In place of bread, they've substituted sweet potato toast. It's exactly as weird as it sounds. Instead of tasty bread, you slice a sweet potato, broil it, and slather it with peanut-only peanut butter and throw some fresh fruit on top.

It seems the service intends to Fly-Fight-Win against the real enemy: flavor. And while there's nothing wrong with wanting to be healthier, sometimes you have to ask, "At what cost?" This recipe doesn't have many of the qualities that make for a PB&J sandwich. Frankly, it sounds more like a fruit salad with peanut dressing. Destroying classic foods, and perhaps the average airman's will to eat, is part of a new campaign to instruct airmen about healthy food alternatives. The video series, called "Nutrition Kitchen," utilizes a graphics theme reminiscent of Super Mario Brothers, features ways to "level up," and illustrates the Air Force Medical Service's desire to seem like a cool mom, not a regular mom. For the PB&J edition refer to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-PIAJxvj3Ws>

The clips feature Senior Airman Quion Lowe as the enthusiastic host and guinea pig trying these less-than inspired dishes prepared by chef Tech. Sgt. Opal Poullard, an instructor at the Joint Culinary Center of Excellence at Fort Lee, Virginia. In subsequent episodes, he then breaks down the nutrition with Sahra Pak, a registered dietician at Travis Air Force Base, California. While an erstwhile attempt to capture the zeitgeist in an era where health food videos on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok reign supreme, this series has certainly not attracted a high volume of viewers. Each of the seven clips released so far has under 300 views.

It's unclear how long the branch will continue to butcher beloved recipes in the name of cutting calories. So far, other victims include cereal and pancakes. Perhaps they'll attack such American mainstays as the hot dog or apple pie next. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Sarah Sicard | June 20, 2022 ++]

Army Uniform & Grooming

Update 16: New Tattoo Policy

The military is struggling to find recruits right now, and the Army is no exception. With three months remaining in fiscal 2022, the service has only attained 40% of its enlisted recruiting goal, according to Army G-1 spokesperson Maj. Angel Tomko. And that's part of why Army Secretary Christine Wormuth issued a new policy authorizing troops to have small tattoos on their hands, ears and necks, Army officials explained 23 JUN. Wormuth signed a directive 22 JUN that expanded the service's acceptable tattoo policy. The changes will be incorporated in the next update to AR 670-1, the Army's appearance regulation. The following tattoos are now authorized, according to the directive:

- One visible tattoo on each hand less than one inch in measurement. This tattoo cannot be on the fingers, though one ring tattoo per hand is okay, as are “an unlimited number of tattoos between the fingers, as long as they are not visible when the fingers are closed.”
- One tattoo on the back of a soldier's neck, less than two inches in measurement.
- One tattoo behind each ear, no larger than one inch in measurement and not extending beyond the ear lobe.

Sgt. Maj. Ashleigh Sykes, who oversees uniform and appearance policy for the service's personnel directorate, cautioned that some ink still isn't okay. “Those that rest in the four categories of racism, sexism, extremism or indecent tattoos [are still prohibited],” said Sykes. “We still do not allow tattoos on the face or [elsewhere on] the head, inside the eyelid, [inside] the mouth or inside of the ears.” Sykes added that makeup tattoos, such as those that darken eyebrows or mimic eyeliner, remain authorized, and troops with existing waivers for larger tattoos will not be negatively affected by the new policy.

Even under the old policy, many recruits joined the service with tattoos that were technically not authorized — they just needed to get a waiver during their enlistment process. Easing tattoo restrictions are also a common way for military officials to access a broader recruiting pool. In 2006, the service drastically relaxed its tattoo policy in order to keep feeding more recruits into the training pipeline as the Iraq War moved into the surge era. They've been controversial, too — former Sergeant Major of the Army Raymond Chandler III drew ire when he spearheaded an

effort to restrict tattoos below the elbow and knee in 2014. The next SMA, Daniel Dailey, quickly rolled back that policy.

Instead, Sykes and senior officials responsible for accessions and manpower explained why now was the time to bring back neck, ear and hand tattoos. Sykes argued that good order and discipline is not affected by [the newly authorized] tattoos. “People First is allowing personnel to continue to serve and to join our military without a prohibition on certain tattoos that are now acceptable in society,” Sykes added. Lin St. Clair, who oversees accessions as an assistant deputy secretary, explained that in fiscal 2020, the service processed more than 1,400 tattoo waiver requests for prospective soldiers, ultimately approving roughly 1,100.

“[While] the driving force behind [the new policy] wasn’t necessarily to increase accessions, that’s going to be a positive byproduct of it,” said St. Clair. He thinks eliminating the need for a waiver will reduce attrition in the accessions process, and that aligning Army policy with societal norms can help combat a seemingly declining proportion of young Americans who are eligible and willing to serve. St. Clair said that recent Army research found that only around 23% of Americans age 17-24 are eligible to enlist without a waiver of some kind. Expanded medical records screenings have combined with increased childhood diagnoses of disqualifying conditions such as asthma or ADHD — many of which insurance companies require doctors to document to cover any services.

St. Clair also emphasized that the service is looking at “many” other policy changes to combat the recruiting slump, including well-worn moves like increased bonuses and more flexible contract options that have again come into play this year. He revealed that all of the branches and senior Pentagon officials have formed a medical accessions standards working group that is weighing a potential overhaul of military medical standards. “[The Pentagon] is running a couple pilots on certain medical conditions [for which] the services typically offer waivers to see if they can shorten that timeline for review, especially given that [the new medical screenings] can see back through history to any medical record in the applicant’s file,” St. Clair said.

Ultimately, added St. Clair, any moves made aren’t about “lowering” standards, as some contend. “The Army hasn’t lowered standards,” he said. “[We’re] just trying to keep pace with changes in society [and] more access to medical records, and then using all that information to make a more informed decision about the applicant.” [Source: ArmyTimes | Davis Winkie | June 2, 2022 ++]

Military Fraud & Abuse

Update 17: Private Admits Bizarre Plot to Attack His Unit on Deployment

A U.S. Army private assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade pleaded guilty 24 JUN to charges that he plotted to murder members of his unit in an attack that he planned to carry out in 2020 on behalf of a group that promotes extreme violence to bring about the demise of Western civilization, authorities said. **Ethan Phelan Melzer**, 24, of Louisville, Kentucky, entered the plea in Manhattan federal court. Sentencing was set for Jan. 6, when he could face up to 45 years in prison after pleading guilty to trying to murder U.S. military service members, seeking to support terrorists and illegally transmitting national defense information.

In court papers, federal authorities say Melzer was already a member of a radical violent group known as the Order of Nine Angles, or 09A, before joining the Army in December 2018. According to a criminal complaint, the group is an anarchist group founded in the United Kingdom and now operating around the world, including in the U.S. Authorities said he had sought to earn a self-initiation into 09A through violence as a street-level drug dealer after shooting a marijuana dealer in the arm in January 2017 near his Louisville apartment.

In one defense court filing, attorneys wrote that Melzer denies belonging to the group and told law enforcement after his arrest that his online claims of membership in the group were “bluster — falsities designed to impress the people he was communicating with online.” The defense filing said that although Melzer had some curiosity about 09A, he believed it was “weird” and “pretty much a cult” and its beliefs were “polar opposite” of his own. In a release 24 JUN, authorities said he joined the military to infiltrate its ranks on behalf of the group that espouses neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic and Satanic beliefs and encourages its members to infiltrate the military to gain training, commit acts of violence and identify like-minded individuals so they can try to subvert the military from within.

Although he had joined 09A in 2017 or earlier, he began consuming propaganda from multiple extremist groups including the Islamic State on encrypted online forums after he was deployed to Italy in October 2019 as a member of the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, the release said. It said his actions resulting in the charges occurred in part after the Army told him in early May 2020 that he would be reassigned to a unit that would be deployed overseas to guard an isolated and sensitive military installation.

After weeks of training including classified briefings in which he learned the importance and sensitivity of his new assignment, Melzer immediately began passing the information he learned to members of 09A as he proposed and planned a deadly attack on his fellow service members, authorities said. They said Melzer planned to join co-conspirators to carry out a “jihadi attack” that would cause a “mass casualty” event and had told others that an attack

would “essentially cripple” the unit’s “fire-teams.” In his communications, Melzer told his co-conspirators that he was willing to die for terrorist goals, concluding that he “would’ve died successfully,” according to court documents. [Source: The Associated Press | Larry Neumeister | June 25, 2022 ++]

Military Myths & Legends

Update 08: The Presidential Salute | No Such Thing

The hotly debated issue of the “presidential salute” is once again making the rounds online, except this time it has broadened in scope to include the “vice presidential salute.” Early on the evening of 21 MAR a video began making the rounds on social media showing Vice President Kamala Harris walking right past a line of saluting airmen as she made her way to the ramp of Air Force Two on 19 MAR at Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Georgia. As the vice president strolled by, she rendered no return salute to her honor guard, who were left standing ramrod straight on the flight line in the night air.

It’s hard to know exactly why Harris didn’t offer a salute in return: Maybe she was busy mulling things over in her mind, like how the presidential administration she’s a part of will handle the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic; how best to help the millions of Americans struggling financially due to the economic fallout brought on by said pandemic; how to ease divisions in a country whose capital still has a contingent of National Guardsmen deployed there following the 6 JAN riot; or perhaps she thought to herself ‘hey, I’m not in the military. I’m a civilian and this isn’t my place.’

Whatever reason Harris had for not returning the salute, there’s one indisputable fact: She didn’t have to anyway. And had the video shown President Joe Biden, or former President Donald Trump, or Vice President Mike Pence, they wouldn’t have been required to either, for that matter. Why? Because the presidential salute is not a real thing, and neither is the vice presidential salute. But that hasn’t kept people from losing their minds, from former New York Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik, to conservative talk show host Charlie Kirk, to Fox News anchor Sean Hannity.

And this isn’t the first time this topic has generated a digital uproar. Back in September 2014, then-President Barack Obama faced criticism for rendering what was, quite frankly, a very lazy latte salute. (In an earlier customs-and-courtesies-controversy, in March 2013 Obama passed right by a Marine without returning a salute. And though he quickly disembarked Marine One to shake the Marine’s hand, it inspired an unfounded rumor that the President of the United

States was ordered off the helicopter by the pilot because he snubbed a Marine.) However, as Brian Jones previously wrote for Task & Purpose, there is no regulation that requires presidents to salute the troops. In fact, for most of the country's history, "presidential salutes" weren't a thing, not even among those military leaders-turned-presidents, like Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ulysses S. Grant, or Teddy Roosevelt.

Instead, it was just something President Ronald Reagan decided to start doing one day. It's true. After taking office in 1981, Reagan started saluting service members he encountered during the course of his presidential duties and the tradition hasn't stopped since. Here's how Reagan explained it while speaking with military personnel and their families back in 1986:

I can't resist telling you a little story that I've just told the Marine guard at the embassy. The story has to do with saluting. I was a second lieutenant of horse cavalry back in the World War II days. As I told the admiral, I wound up flying a desk for the Army Air Force. And so, I know all the rules about not saluting in civilian clothes and so forth, and when you should or shouldn't. But then when I got this job and I would be approaching Air Force One or Marine One and those Marines would come to a salute and I — knowing that I am in civilian clothes — I would nod and say hello and think they could drop their hand, and they wouldn't. They just stood there. So, one night over at the commandant's quarters, Marine commandant's quarters in Washington, and I was getting a couple of highballs, and I didn't know what to do with them. So, I said to the commandant — I said, "Look, I know all the rules about saluting in civilian clothes and all, but if I am the commander in chief, there ought to be a regulation that would permit me to return a salute." And I heard some words of wisdom. He said, "I think if you did, no one would say anything."

So, if you see me on television and I'm saluting, you know that I've got authority for it now and I do it happily.

Nonetheless, the trend prompted concern from one of his military aides, John Kline, a Marine officer who went on to become a Republican congressman for Minnesota. As MSNBC's Rachel Maddow wrote in her 2011 book *Drift*, Kline was worried that the new tradition blurred the lines between civilian leadership and the military:

Soldiers were supposed to salute their president; the president was not supposed to salute the soldiers. No modern president, not even old General Eisenhower, had saluted military personnel. It might even be, well, sort of, improper. Reagan seemed disappointed at this news. Kline suggested he talk to the commandant of the United States Marine Corps and get his advice, and the commandant's advice ran something like this: You're the goddamn president. You can salute whoever you goddamn well please. So Ronald Reagan continued saluting his

soldiers, and he encouraged his own vice president and successor, George H.W. Bush, to do the same. And every president since has followed.

In terms of actual military orders and regulations, the only guidance involving the President of the United States and the word “salute” applies to service members being required to salute the president, not the other way around. For example, U.S. Army regulation stipulates that “the President of the United States, as the commander in chief, will be saluted by Army personnel in uniform.” The regulation goes on to note that “civilian personnel, to include civilian guards, are not required to render the hand salute to military personnel or other civilian personnel.”

The top spokesman for the Pentagon, John Kirby, provided some additional context on the regulation, noting that while each branch of the military has its own rules for customs and courtesies “there is no overarching instruction or regulation that requires the president or vice president to return hand salutes from members of the Armed Forces.”

“There is no specific requirement for personnel to salute the Vice President, though the Vice President does receive honors, including cannon firing, ruffles and flourishes, and specific music, when visiting military installations or participating in formal functions,” Kirby said. “Finally, the rendering of the hand salute by military personnel is a time-honored tradition and one of the first military lessons installed in new recruits. From their first days in the military, new recruits are taught to salute when they meet more senior leaders — a common phrase among drill instructors is ‘When in doubt, throw it out.’ Our troops demonstrate their respect for the nation’s senior leaders in many ways; [rendering] a hand salute is one of them.”

And so there you have it, there is no requirement that the President or Vice President of the United States return a salute. Nonetheless, given enough time and repetition, anything can become tradition, and traditions, especially those involving the military, quickly become sacred in America. So, although Vice President Harris did not salute those airmen standing at attention on the flight line, it was still expected because past presidents, and vice presidents, have done it before

But should it be? Really, how badly do we, as service members, veterans, and Americans in general, want to see a politician render what is likely to be a rather distracted and hasty salute to U.S. troops, or to military leaders of a totalitarian state, either with a cup of coffee in hand, or clutching a Scottish Terrier? No, the ‘presidential salute’ isn’t a thing — and neither is the ‘vice presidential salute’ Former U.S. Presidents Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and George W. Bush have all rendered awkward, or ill-advised, salutes.

It seems like a better use of everyone’s time, attention, and energy if the top leaders of the United States just dispensed with superficial pomp and circumstance altogether and focused on

the more meaningful aspects of their job as it pertains to civilian oversight of the military: Things like ending America's Forever Wars; pressuring members of Congress to update the use of force authorization that has allowed the Global War on Terror to expand under each new presidential administration over the last two decades; showing sound judgment and, when necessary, restraint when it comes to exercising military force; and ensuring that acts of valor are properly recognized, by awarding deserving heroes the Medal of Honor, like Sgt. 1st Class Alwyn Cashe; to name a just a few. [Source: Task & Purpose | James Clark | March 23, 2022 ++]

Madeline Blair Affair

USS Arizona Stowaway Wanting to Go to Hollywood and Become a Star

Whether they're ashore or at sea, sailors are some of the best in the military at smuggling contraband. However, just because they get something on board doesn't mean it always goes undetected. During the early 20th century, sailors aboard the USS Arizona (BB-39) succeeded in smuggling a most notable contraband aboard before being caught. In fact, it almost ruined the career of future Naval hero and Chief of Naval Operations Arleigh Burke.

In March 1924, the Arizona was anchored off Manhattan. During their shore leave, a group of sailors met a 19-year-old prostitute named Madeline Blair. Blair told the sailors of her dream to go to Hollywood and become a star. As it happened, the Arizona was due to sail for San Pedro, California and the sailors offered to smuggle her aboard. To disguise herself, Blair cut her hair short. Wearing a uniform, cap, and coat provided by the sailors, she boarded the warship amongst the sailors who pretended to be drunk to distract the officer of the deck from Blair's presence. Once aboard, the sailors hid Blair in an unused generator compartment. A deal was struck with the cooks to provide her with meals for \$10, or just over \$170 in 2022 adjusted for inflation, per day. Blair also practiced her trade from the generator compartment at a rate of \$3 per session, or just over \$51 in 2022.

As the Arizona sailed south towards the Panama Canal, the temperature rose and the belowdecks compartment became unbearable for Blair. At night, she snuck up on deck for a reprieve, usually wearing jeans and a work shirt. Blair even tested her disguise on deck during an evening movie screening. In the middle of the movie, the sailor next to her reportedly reached into her breast pocket seeking a match to light his cigarette as all sailors were known to keep matches there. Feeling Blair's breast, the sailor was shocked, but did not raise the alarm. Blair retreated belowdeck and the sailor reported the incident to an officer, but was dismissed as being ridiculous.

On April 12, after transiting the Panama Canal, the Arizona was off the coast of Balboa, Panama and making final preparations to sail for California. Blair, who was on deck throughout the evening, remained on deck into the break of dawn. While stopping at a scuttlebutt for a drink of water, she was spotted by the ship's chief radio operator who identified her as a woman and reported the presence of a female stowaway to the deck officer. A search was conducted and, despite her best efforts, Blair was apprehended.

Despite her capture, Blair refused to name the sailors who smuggled her aboard and assisted in her hiding. Attempting to delay further action and remain aboard until the ship sailed for California, she claimed that there were other women hiding on board. Another search was conducted but found no one and Blair was put ashore in Balboa. Panamanian authorities deported her back to New York aboard a passenger ship and billed the U.S. Navy for the fare.

The Madeline Blair Affair brought down severe punishments on the officers and crew of the Arizona. The ship's skipper, Captain Percy Olmstead, convened courts-martial for 23 enlisted men when the ship began her refit at Bremerton Navy Yard. Subsequent brig sentences of up to 10 years were imposed on them. The Battle Fleet Commander, Admiral Henry Wiley, issued letters of reprimand to all of Arizona's officers, including then-Ensign Arleigh Burke.

In 1928, Blair published her story in the American Weekly Magazine section of The San Francisco Examiner. Two years later, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral William Pratt, who thought Wiley's punishments were excessive, ordered the letters of reprimand be stricken from the officers' records. Unfortunately, he could not reverse the results of the courts-martial for the enlisted sailors. [Source: We Are * The Mighty | Miguel Ortiz | June 17, 2022 ++]

Port Chicago Mutiny

The Largest In U.S. Naval History

The generational impact of slavery led to one of the United States' most tragic incidents: the largest mutiny in U.S. Naval history and the deadliest incident on the homefront during World War II. Tucked away to the east of the San Francisco Bay Area, next to Clyde — a small community of fewer than 900 residents — sits a U.S. Army installation called Military Ocean Terminal Concord, or MOTCO, that is presently undergoing massive renovations. However before MOTCO became an Army installation, it was a Navy base known as Port Chicago Naval Magazine, serving as the main terminal for the shipping of general cargo and ammunition to troops in the Pacific during World War II.

In the segregated military, Black sailors were not allowed to serve in combat roles and instead were limited to support roles such as that of stevedore — someone who loads and unloads cargo. To many Black sailors who voluntarily enlisted to fight the Germans and Japanese, such forced assignments led them to perform dangerous jobs like handling explosive munitions. Even worse, the sailors were arbitrarily made stevedores at MOTCO without proper training. The working conditions did not provide a better environment for these sailors. While most sailors handling and loading dangerous explosives were Black, their supervisors were white officers, who raced their crews against each other to boost their load rate and win bets. This practice often violated safety measures such as loading two ships at the same pier in an attempt to improve their rate.

On July 17, 1944, two ships, S.S. Quinault Victory and S.S. E.A. Bryan were docked on the same pier when an explosion obliterated them both, along with 4,600 tons of ammunition, instantly killing 320 men and wounding hundreds more. The explosion was felt 30 miles away in San Francisco and registered a 3.4 on the Richter scale, leading to the highest number of deaths on U.S. soil during World War II (Hawaii did not become a U.S. state until 1959).

After the explosion, the Black sailors were given the order to return to duty while the white officers were granted leave to recuperate from the tragic incident. Fearing the return to an unsafe work environment, over 250 sailors refused their orders, only to be threatened by white officers that failure to obey orders was punishable by death. To many Black sailors who grew up in the Jim Crow era, a white man threatening to kill them provided a compelling reason to obey, even at the risk of one's own safety.

Over 200 sailors returned to work, but 50 of them refused to work and insisted that they be provided with a safe working environment. These 50 sailors were immediately imprisoned and charged as mutineers and found guilty, in what became the biggest mutiny in U.S. Naval history. The sailors were dishonorably discharged and sentenced to 8-15 years in prison. One sailor, Freddie Meeks, was later pardoned by President Clinton, but 49 others took their last breath while still branded as mutineers. The effects of that fateful day in July 1944 still reverberate, as unexploded ordinances have been unearthed in MOTCO as recently as November 2021. At the site of the explosion now lies Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Monument to remember the 320 victims who unnecessarily perished, and roads in MOTCO are named for the victims.

While the remnants of that day are visible within MOTCO, the incident has been all but forgotten by the public. The Port Chicago monument was the second least visited site in the National Park System in 2020, after the Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve in Alaska where it is only accessible by plane or boat. The comparison is truly disconcerting, considering

that not even 30 miles west of the Port Chicago monument lies the second most visited site in the National Park System, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Today, an American flag silently waves in the bay breeze at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Monument to serve as a reminder of our past that is slowly fading away from the American consciousness. A stop sign is next to the monument, forcing construction workers to slow down and hopefully observe the memorial, if only for a moment. [Source: History.com | History.com | Editors | January 5, 2021 ++]

TRICARE Telehealth Coverage

Update 01: New Rules for TRICARE Beneficiaries Making Telehealth Visits

Telephone-only telehealth appointments will become a permanent benefit under TRICARE next month at the same time a waiver removing copays for all telehealth visits will end. DoD issued a Final Rule addressing TRICARE telehealth expansions on 1 JUN, terminating the cost-sharing waiver and installing the permanent benefit as of 1 JUL. The waiver came in May 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, part of efforts by federal, state, and local governments to encourage individuals to stay home, avoid exposure, and to reduce possible transmission of the virus.

DoD will end the waiver given the availability of vaccines and the reduction of stay-at-home orders. Telehealth services remain a covered benefit, but TRICARE beneficiaries will have a copay or cost share for telehealth visits on or after 1 JUL. You can find cost shares for your specific TRICARE plan and sponsor status using the online tool. at <https://www.tricare.mil/comparecosts>

The rule change does not affect TRICARE for Life beneficiaries, who will continue to have zero cost share for telehealth visits (Medicare pays 80%, TRICARE picks up the remaining 20%). Medicare's telehealth policy remains connected to the COVID-19 national emergency, which was renewed in April by the White House; the administration said it would provide a 60-day notice before allowing it to expire, and Medicare's existing telehealth coverage will extend at least five months after that expiration. The Final Rule also makes permanent TRICARE coverage for telephone-only provider visits. Audio-only telehealth visits allow beneficiaries to consult with providers who typically don't offer telehealth services and expand access to beneficiaries who don't have access to technology needed for video telehealth visits.

As part of its COVID-19 response, DoD also expanded the number of providers available to offer telehealth services by allowing reimbursement for interstate care – that flexibility was not addressed by the Final Rule and remains in place for the time being. MOAA has advocated for telehealth licensure flexibility, and we look forward to seeing the results of a DoD feasibility study requested by the House Armed Services Committee in the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | June 16, 2022 ++]

PFAS Toxic Exposure

Update 23: Forever Chemicals' Are Unsafe at Any Level, EPA Warns

The "forever chemicals" that may have contaminated water at hundreds of military installations are more dangerous than previously thought and could be harmful in even minuscule amounts, according to a new warning by the Environmental Protection Agency released 15 JUN. The agency issued the new assessment that the chemicals known as PFAS, which were widely used in the military's firefighting foam as well as more broadly for non-stick commercial products, could cause health problems in drinking water at levels "near zero and below EPA's ability to detect at this time."

The warning ramps up the urgency of the potential widespread contamination the Pentagon is grappling with at 700 active bases, National Guard facilities, shuttered installations and other properties. In December, Congress ordered the agency to deal with the issue, but full testing and cleanup of PFAS groundwater pollution in military communities is expected to take years. "Today's decision underscores just how dangerous PFAS 'forever chemicals' are for local communities, including our service members, civilian personnel, and their families," House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith, D-Wash., said in a statement 15 JUN, adding that the Pentagon "must take action promptly and effectively in response to today's advisories."

PFAS have been linked to health problems including birth defects, cardiovascular issues, compromised immune systems and a variety of cancers. The chemicals never degrade in the environment -- or body, earning them the nickname "forever chemicals." In its updated health advisories Wednesday, the EPA warned that PFOA and PFOS, two of the most common types of PFAS, can cause health issues from as low as 0.004 and 0.02 parts per trillion, respectively. Previously, the agency said 70 parts per trillion could pose risks.

The Pentagon is currently investigating contamination at 337 facilities owned by the Army, 204 under the Air Force, 148 in the Department of the Navy, seven Defense Logistics Agency sites, and four defense facilities that are no longer in use, according to an update to Congress in April that was provided to Military.com. The chemicals were used in firefighting foam -- known as aqueous film forming foam, or AFFF -- and spilled onto the ground, seeping into the water, during incidents and training over the decades. Now, the military, federal government, and state and local governments are struggling with how to clean up the contamination -- and how it will be paid for. The science on the effects of PFAS is still developing, and standards for environmental cleanup are still being researched.

Many key military bases across the country could be affected. For example, the military is investigating or making plans for cleanup at Fort Benning, Georgia; Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Fort Bragg, North Carolina; Fort Bliss and Fort Hood in Texas; and Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state, according to the information provided to Congress. After initial assessments earlier this year, the department decided 80 of the installations would require no further action. But that was based on levels of contamination found to be lower than earlier EPA standards and did not take into account the new guidance released by the agency 15 JUN.

The Pentagon told lawmakers in April that it was "partnering with local regulatory and governmental organizations to reach stakeholders" affected by PFAS contamination in groundwater caused by military activity. In December, it said more than \$1.5 billion had been spent on research and cleanup. The military has pledged to phase out AFFF in firefighting and is searching for substitutes. When reached for comment the Pentagon pointed to the updates provided to lawmakers earlier this year.

Wednesday's action by the EPA was meant to spur local communities to notify residents of contamination or take mitigation steps such as filtering water, but it does not set enforceable limits on the amount of PFAS that can be present in drinking water. The agency previously announced plans to regulate PFAS in drinking water by 2023. Lawmakers for years have been pushing the Pentagon to gain a better understanding of the extent of PFAS contamination at military sites, phase out the foam and clean up contaminated installations. Under last year's annual defense policy bill, the Pentagon was required to create rules to prevent and clean up firefighting foam spills, test for PFAS substances at all National Guard facilities, and publicly disclose the results of Defense Department water tests for PFAS.

In the version of the National Defense Authorization Act now making its way through the House Armed Services Committee, lawmakers are also seeking to make the Pentagon give them regular briefings on its progress phasing out PFAS products, as well as justify the continued use of any PFAS items that have been "deemed an essential use." Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) vowed to use the version of the defense bill being worked on by the Senate Armed Services Committee to reauthorize an ongoing PFAS health impact study. "As numerous communities

and affected families in New Hampshire know all too well, the impact of PFAS exposure in our water supplies is frightening and wholly unacceptable," she said in a statement. "Every household should have confidence in the safety of the water coming out of their tap." [Source: Mil.com | Travis Tritten & Rebecca Kheel | June 15, 2022 ++]

Covid-19 Treatment

Update 14: Common Questions about COVID Antiviral Medications

While there is an ongoing need for people to get vaccinated — and boosted — against COVID-19, there are a few medications on the market available that can help keep high-risk patients from getting so sick that they need to be hospitalized. The medication proven to be the most effective is **Paxlovid**, an antiviral developed by Pfizer. This was the first oral treatment authorized by the FDA in December 2021 for high risk COVID-19 patients ages 12 and older. But who should take Paxlovid? How do you get a prescription? And what are the side effects? Here's what you need to know.

What is Paxlovid?

Paxlovid has been shown to be 88% successful in reducing severe illness, reduce hospitalization and death from COVID-19 if taken early on in the course of an infection. "If you meet criteria, it's important that you start taking Paxlovid within five days of experiencing symptoms for it to be effective," says Ghazala Sharieff, MD, MBA, Scripps Health chief medical officer, acute care and clinical excellence. "That means, if your doctor prescribes Paxlovid after a positive COVID-19 test, you should start your prescription as soon as possible. Paxlovid can give you a bad taste but it is important to continue the full course even if you feel better in a few days. This is important to avoid any incomplete effects. The sooner you start taking Paxlovid, the better." Paxlovid is prescribed as three pills taken twice a day for five days.

Who is eligible for Paxlovid?

"Patients are still confused about who is eligible for antiviral medication and how these treatments work," says Dr. Sharieff. Not everyone who tests positive for COVID-19 will get a prescription for antiviral pills, according to Dr. Sharieff. To be eligible, you must test positive and have symptoms that started within five days or fewer. You must also be at increased risk of developing severe COVID-19.

And while federal guidelines prioritize treatment for those who are unvaccinated or who are not fully vaccinated and boosted, your vaccination status will not affect your eligibility. Those who are asymptomatic, or who have symptoms but are not higher risk, are not eligible. "If you're

vaccinated and boosted, young and healthy, you likely won't need Paxlovid and the virus will clear itself on its own," says Dr. Sharieff.

How do I get antiviral pills for COVID-19?

First, you must test positive with a PCR or rapid test. This can be done at home, at a regular health care provider's office or at a testing site. If you test positive at "Test to Treat" location, you may be eligible to receive antiviral medication on the spot. If you test positive at a different testing site or through an at-home testing kit, you can schedule an online visit with your provider to possibly get a prescription as well.

What are the side effects of Paxlovid?

The most common side effects of Paxlovid are diarrhea, nausea, vomiting and an altered sense of taste. "Ironically, these can also be symptoms of COVID-19. The side effects of Paxlovid can sometimes outweigh the benefits of taking the medication, which is another reason why this medication is prescribed only to those at high risk," says Dr. Sharieff. Certain medications or supplements, including painkillers and even St. John's Wort, may have adverse interactions with Paxlovid. So, you may be advised to hold off on taking them for a week while being treated.

"There are certain medications, such as statins and other cholesterol-lowering drugs, where you need to consult with your physician regarding possible interactions," says Dr. Sharieff. "But for some medications, like drugs that regulate heart rhythm, Paxlovid is not indicated. In those cases, your doctor may recommend another antiviral medication, such as molnupiravir or monoclonal antibody treatment, for COVID-19 instead."

Can COVID-19 symptoms return after taking Paxlovid?

There have been reports that COVID-19 patients have improved or even tested negative after taking Paxlovid, only to have symptoms flare up again a few days later. The rebound may occur just four or five days after treatment, although symptoms appear to be milder the second time around. "There isn't enough data yet to understand why viral rebound after Paxlovid treatment happens. But I caution patients about discontinuing their medication before completing the entire course of treatment," says Dr. Sharieff. "It's important take Paxlovid as prescribed — at the right time, in the right way and the right frequency — in order to get the best results."

Is an antiviral a substitute for getting vaccinated or boosted?

"Prevention is always preferable to treatment, and antiviral medication is not meant to be a substitute for vaccination," says Dr. Sharieff. "Even though more breakthrough cases are occurring, this should not dissuade anyone from getting vaccinated or boosted if they haven't

already. Vaccines are still highly effective, and for people who have been infected already, vaccines are proven to give extra protection.”

[Source: <https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/189958> | June 10, 2022 ++]

First Aid Myths

Some You Should Always Ignore

It's important to know how to identify and treat minor accidents and injuries, but common knowledge in first aid isn't immune to myths — most of which have circulated for decades. While some myths are harmless, others can cause further injury or otherwise make things worse. Here are some of the most common first aid myths that must be unlearned and what you should do instead.

Alcohol Rubs Reduce Fever

Rubbing down a person with isopropyl alcohol to bring down a fever is unlikely to be recommended today — for good reason. It can not only induce shivering, which can raise body temp even further, but lead to serious medical complications, such as a coma. **Instead:** Use provider-approved over-the-counter medications, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

Drink Alcohol to Prevent Hypothermia

A shot of alcohol can help keep hypothermia at bay because it makes people feel warm — at least, that's what the old wives' tale wants you to believe. Actually, it can worsen hypothermia because it expands blood vessels, which leads to heat loss, and can reduce the body's ability to shiver. **Instead:** Move the person gently out of the cold, remove wet clothing, and layer them with dry, warm blankets. Seek emergency medical help, depending on the severity of the situation.

Urinate on Jellyfish Stings

Nobody wants to be stung by a jellyfish, but people also don't really want to urinate on a friend's jellyfish sting. Good news: Urine is definitely not recommended as a first aid treatment for stings, despite the plot device from that episode of “Friends.” **Instead:** Rinse the sting with salt water and try to remove the stinging cells by scraping them out with a credit card. If there are

signs of a severe allergic reaction or the affected area covers more than half of a limb, seek immediate medical attention.

Use Butter to Soothe a Burn

Putting butter on a burn may seem like a good idea, as it should help cool the skin, but it actually worsens the situation because its oily nature slows the release of heat. ***Instead:*** Run a burn under cool — not ice-cold — water as soon as possible to bring down the heat slowly.

Use Toothpaste to Soothe a Burn

Toothpaste has chemicals that can be dangerous for a wound, and the paste can seal in the heat of a burn instead of helping the burned area cool down. ***Instead:*** Again, use cool water over a burned area to bring the temperature down gently.

Lean Back to Stop a Nosebleed

Definitely do not lean back and look up to treat a nosebleed, even if you're pinching your nose. It can lead to blood running down the esophagus, which can accumulate in the stomach or, even worse, get inhaled. ***Instead:*** Sit down, lean forward, and pinch the area just beneath the bridge of the nose. Do it for at least 10 minutes. If the bleeding doesn't stop after 20, seek medical attention.

Induce Vomiting After Ingesting Poison

If household chemicals or other poisons are ingested, the natural inclination is to get it back out again immediately. But inducing vomiting can cause a host of additional problems, including serious damage to the esophagus. ***Instead:*** Resist the urge to give syrup of ipecac or something else that induces vomiting. Contact poison control and seek immediate medical attention.

Smother, Burn, or Twist a Tick

There are loads of old tales that instruct you to smother a burrowing tick with vaseline; hold a hot match to it; or twist it to get it out. All are huge no-nos and can lead to complications such as retained tick parts, or cause the tick to vomit or burrow even deeper, increasing the chances of a tick-borne illness such as Lyme disease. ***Instead:*** Grasp the tick as close to a victim's skin as possible with tweezers and use steady, even pressure to pull it out. Wash and dry the affected area with soap and water. Dispose of the tick by flushing it down a toilet or sealing it tightly in a plastic bag.

Suck Out Snakebite Venom

Don't bother trying to suck out snake venom from a bite (or cutting the wound) before seeking treatment. It's not effective, and could be dangerous. **Instead:** Move a safe distance from the snake, remain calm, avoid tourniquets, and seek immediate medical attention.

Apply Heat to a Sprain

Warmth can make an injury feel better, but forget about it for a sprain. It can actually increase swelling. **Instead:** Use ice on a sprain as part of the RICE treatment: Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation. The ice will help reduce swelling.

Breathe Into a Paper Bag for Hyperventilation

Don't take medical advice from cartoons. Breathing into a paper bag when hyperventilating can lead to hypoxia and death. Also, not all hyperventilation results from panic attacks, and getting less oxygen can worsen a medical condition. **Instead:** Try to calm the person, and get them to a medical facility to rule out serious concerns.

Use Coffee to Sober Up

Loads of caffeine may sound like a sure-fire way to get someone sober fast, but while it may wake them up, it won't sober them up. It will also dehydrate the drunk person even more, which can be dangerous. **Instead:** The only sure-fire way to reduce the amount of alcohol in the bloodstream is to wait it out — and then wait out the hangover.

[Source: Cheapism | Monica Beyer | June 16, 2022 ++]

Dental Care

Update 07: Seniors Also Struggle with Obtaining It

What we commonly think of as “health care” is not the only Issue Seniors grapple with. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), older Americans with the poorest oral health tend to be those who are economically disadvantaged, lack insurance, and are members of racial and ethnic minorities. Being disabled, homebound, or institutionalized (e.g., seniors who live in nursing homes) also increases the risk of poor oral health. Adults 50 years and older who smoke are also less likely to get dental care than people who do not smoke. Many older Americans do not have dental insurance because they lost their benefits upon retirement and the federal Medicare program does not cover routine dental care. Oral health problems in older adults include the following:

- **Untreated tooth decay.** Nearly all adults (96%) aged 65 years or older have had a cavity; 1 in 5 have untreated tooth decay.
- **Gum disease.** A high percentage of older adults have gum disease. About 2 in 3 (68%) adults aged 65 years or older have gum disease.
- **Tooth loss.** Nearly 1 in 5 of adults aged 65 or older have lost all their teeth. Complete tooth loss is twice as prevalent among adults aged 75 and older (26%) compared with adults aged 65-74 (13%). Having missing teeth or wearing dentures can affect nutrition, because people without teeth or with dentures often prefer soft, easily chewed foods instead of foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Oral cancer.** Cancers of the mouth (oral and pharyngeal cancers) are primarily diagnosed in older adults; median age at diagnosis is 62 years.
- **Chronic disease.** People with chronic diseases such as arthritis, diabetes, heart diseases, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) may be more likely to develop gum (periodontal) disease, but they are less likely to get dental care than adults without these chronic conditions. Also, most older Americans take both prescription and over-the-counter drugs; many of these medications can cause dry mouth. Reduced saliva flow increases the risk of cavities.

That's why Kaiser Health News and National Public Radio have teamed up and begun a yearlong investigative project that explores "the scale, impact, and causes of the health care debt crisis in the United States." About 4 in 10 adults report having medical or dental debt, a Kaiser Family Foundation poll has found, a share that roughly translates into an estimated 100 million adults. Many expect repaying the debt to take years, and about 1 in 5 say they do not expect to ever pay it all off. The problem drives millions of Americans from their homes or into bankruptcy, but the consequences are not just financial. About 1 in 7 people with health care debt say they have been denied access to a hospital, doctor, or other provider because of unpaid bills. The toll of medical debt tends to fall most severely on the poor, the sick, and people of color, the investigation reveals.

Besides cutting spending on food and other essentials, millions are being driven from their homes or into bankruptcy. And medical debt is piling additional hardships on people with cancer and other chronic illnesses. In addition, much of the medical debt is hidden as monthly installments paid via credit card, loans from family, and payment plans arranged directly with hospital and doctor's offices.

Seniors are also having difficulty in coping with all other health care. Towards alleviating this situation somewhat The Senior Citizens League will collect both online and print petitions and bring a collective voice to members of Congress urging them to issue a \$1,400.00 stimulus check to Social Security recipients. Readers are encouraged to sign on to TECL's Petition to Congress at the website <https://seniorsleague.salsalabs.org/emergencystimulus/index.html>.

[Source: TSCL Weekly Update | June 18, 2022 ++]

Credit Agencies

Screwing US Troops and Putting Their Security Clearances at Risk

If you've ever applied for a security clearance, or even just tried to rent a house off-post, you know that your credit history is important. Now imagine if you discover one day that your report shows that you owe money to a collections agency — all due to someone else's mistake. Sounds awful, right? Well, a report from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) shows that many U.S. service members are seeing their credit scores negatively impacted by faulty or inaccurate reporting procedures due to no fault of their own.

In 2021, service members reportedly submitted more than 42,700 complaints to the CFPB about inaccurate reports and their credit scores, a 5% increase from 2020 and a 19% increase from 2019. The complaints focused on topics ranging from consumer credit reports to debt collection to faulty medical bills. "Reporting errors result in distinct harms to servicemembers, including jeopardizing housing, transportation, and clearance status," the report says. "The risk of these distinct harms makes servicemembers particularly vulnerable to coercive credit reporting." In layman's terms: while service members especially need good credit to do their jobs, they now face distinct and unexpected challenges in maintaining that good credit that is caused by a simple reporting error.

Indeed, incorrect information on a credit report was the most commonly reported problem among service members, especially with regard to medical bills. "It is for a medical debt that I am not responsible for," according to one service member's experience cited in the report. "The hospital that it would have come from had full access to our insurance information and billed by our active-duty military insurance ... The insurance paid this debt. Now, [debt collector] is trying to get double paid by us as patients as well for the hospital." Another service member described a late payment by TRICARE to an ambulance company after a trip to a local emergency room resulting in notices being sent to a debt collection agency, even after the payments had been processed.

Unfortunately for those affected, there's little recourse, as removing these faulty reports can prove impossibly difficult. "Complaint analyses also suggest that servicemembers receive inadequate and incomplete responses to their consumer complaints," according to the report. So why do these faulty reports keep cropping up? Often, when service members have to use civilian medical care or are referred to third-party providers for special procedures, complications and confusion when it comes to billing can occur. "Healthcare providers who do not routinely treat active-duty military may not have sufficient policies to process TRICARE claims," the report

reads. “Service members reported that billing issues occurred because private medical providers failed to collect key information for their TRICARE claims, did not associate their coverage with their account, or failed to submit the claim to TRICARE for processing.”

The issue of faulty reports is even worse for reservists and National Guard members, who only have access to government-paid health insurance when serving on federal orders and generally rely on private insurance at other times. “The CFPB has heard from reservists that providers do not bill the correct entity due to the confusion that reservists are not full-time military members. Instead, they often send the bill directly to the servicemember or straight to a debt collector,” according to the report. This is also true for veterans receiving medical benefits from the VA. The CFPB received complaints of instances where “non-VA medical providers improperly refer bills that were paid or should have been paid by the VA to third-party collections agencies.”

The transitory nature of military service also contributes to the problem, according to the CFPB. Because service members are frequently moving and changing duty stations, they may miss billing notices that are sent to old addresses. “[Company 1] never reached out to me as they used an address I haven’t lived in since 2018,” wrote one service member of a billing agency. As the number of complaints flooding the CFPB has increased in recent years, there are some potential solutions in the works.

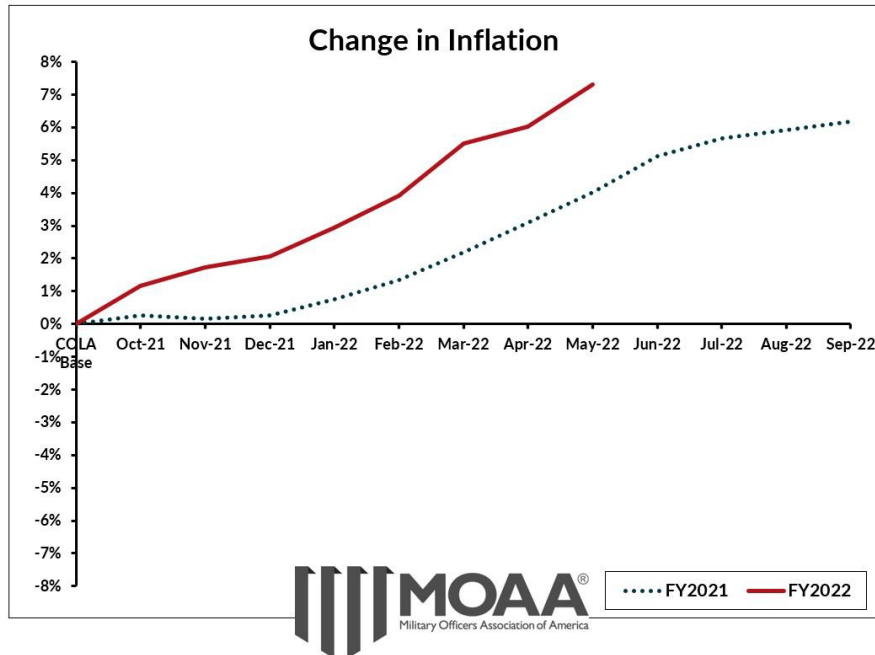
The Department of Veterans Affairs announced earlier this year that it would only report medical debt if all debt collection efforts had been exhausted and the agency has determined that a patient is not catastrophically disabled and the debt is more than \$25. This could reduce 99% of unfavorable debt reports stemming from VA medical care. The three largest credit reporting agencies, Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion, announced in March 2022 that they would no longer list paid medical bills on credit reports and would no longer include medical collection debt under \$500 on consumers’ reports.

A bad credit score can impact soldiers and civilians alike, but because service members are often dependent on a positive credit report to remain in good standing with the military, something like a paid debt not being removed or a medical bill being sent directly to a collections agency instead of to TRICARE can have an especially adverse impact. “Many service members, including all officers, are required to have national security clearance checks that include detailed reviews of their credit history,” says the CFPB. “Because of the reliance on a servicemember’s report, it is imperative that their reports are accurate.” [Source: Task & Purpose | Max Hauptman | June 17, 2022 ++]

Cola Watch 2022

CPI Increase as of May

The May 2022 CPI is 288.022, 7.3 percent above the FY 2022 COLA baseline. The Consumer Price Index for June 2022 is scheduled to be released July 13. The CPI baseline for FY 2022 is 268.421.



The calculation is made by comparing the average CPI from July through September of the current fiscal year to the average for the same months of the year prior. Remember, active duty pay raises are calculated differently. This information is calculated from the non-seasonally adjusted Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W). Calculation for monthly COLA change: $(\text{Monthly CPI} - \text{Yearly baseline CPI}) / \text{Yearly baseline CPI}$. Learn more about CPI on the BLS web page <https://www.bls.gov/cpi>. [Source: MOAA Newsletter | March 17, 2022++]

Get Rich Quick Scam

Uses Deepfake Technology to Impersonate Elon Musk

Scammers are taking advantage of new deepfake technology to create videos so convincing that people will hand over their money. This latest con looks like business magnate Elon Musk endorsing an investment plan, but the video is fake, and the investment is a scam.

How this scam works

- You come across a video of Elon Musk while scrolling through social media. Or perhaps a trusted friend sent you the video. In it, Elon Musk talks about ways to invest in cryptocurrency and how you can make a large amount of money in no time. This sounds like a get-rich-quick scheme, but the video looks so real! Musk is a famous business leader, so his advice must be credible, right?
- Think again! The video is a fake. Scammers used deepfake technology to create it from existing footage of Musk. If you follow the links and “invest,” you’ll lose everything.
- One consumer who lost all of his Bitcoin to this scam described the video he saw: “The spoofed video is an apparent live feed with many viewers and likes, and looks like a legit web broadcast... During the video, there are constant references by the participants to coin giveaways. It makes you believe that it is very real and a limited-time offer.”
- Also, watch out for more scams using similar deepfake videos. One victim reported to BBB Scam Tracker a similar scam targeting Canadians. In this video, Musk offered “poor families a chance to become rich in a few months” by instantly turning an initial \$250 CAD deposit into \$6,000 CAD.

How to spot viral video scams:

- Understand how deepfake technology works. Deepfake technology takes video clips and photos of a person and uses the imagery to create new videos and audio clips. See this BBB article for tips on spotting deepfakes.
- Know that celebrities are often impersonated. Politicians, actors, business leaders, and other celebrities are often “recreated” in deepfakes. That’s because plenty of public video clips and photos of them are available. Don’t assume a celebrity video is legitimate unless you can verify it came from an official source.
- Don’t “act immediately.” Most scams involve an element of urgency. Claims that you can get rich quickly, but only if you act now, are a red flag. Never give in to pressure to invest, wire funds, or give up your personal information to receive a gift, money, or an investment opportunity.

- Don't believe everything you see on social media. Never make financial decisions based on viral videos on social media. Before investing in something or donating to a charity, do plenty of research to ensure you do so through a legitimate channel.

For more information

Read BBB's tips on [investment scams](#) and [deepfakes](#) to avoid falling victim to similar scams. If you've spotted a scam (whether or not you've lost money), report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](#). [Source: Better Business Bureau | June 17, 2022 ++]

Scam Telephone Numbers

Avoid Answering Calls from These Area Codes

Scam phone numbers are used every day to trick unsuspecting people into giving away their private information. The good news is, you can identify certain area codes that could be tied back to a phone scam. Phone scammers are getting smarter with their tactics. And if you're not careful, they could make big bucks off of you, the unsuspecting caller. Aside from hanging up if you hear this four-word phrase, there's something else you can do to avoid becoming a victim and to keep up with your smartphone security and privacy.

Certain area codes can warn potential targets that the call isn't safe, according to Joseph Steinberg, CEO of SecureMySocial. Although scam callers once used a 900 number, they've changed their methods as the general public became aware of their tactic. Now, many scam phone numbers have different area codes, including 809, which originates in the Caribbean. Another area code to look out for may look like it's coming from the United States, but isn't. "Criminals have been known to use caller IDs with the area code 473, which appears to be domestic, but is actually the area code for the island of Grenada," Steinberg says. Watch out for these phone call scams that could steal your money, too.

By the way, those calls add up fast. You could be charged for taking a call from any of these foreign countries, according to AARP. Plus, scammers can swindle you out of your money through phony vacation scams and fake stories about danger or money problems. iPhone scams and Uber scams are also on the rise, making Apple fans and Uber users alike more wary. Make sure you know how to avoid Uber scams and how to stop spam texts on your phone. To play it extra safe, Steinberg recommends never answering or returning a call from a number you

don't recognize. If you actually know the person, they can always leave a voicemail. "Remember that it's unlikely that someone you do not know—who is in distress at a location with which you are not familiar—would dial a random number in another country and ask you to help them," he says. "They would call the police."

It can't hurt to be wary of possible scam phone numbers with the following international area codes. And watch out for these Facebook Marketplace scams before you go shopping. Scam phone numbers: International Area Codes with a +1 Country Code

- 232—Sierra Leone
- 242 — Bahamas
- 246 — Barbados
- 268 — Antigua
- 284 — British Virgin Islands
- 345 — Cayman Islands
- 441 — Bermuda
- 473 — Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique
- 649 — Turks and Caicos
- 664 — Montserrat
- 721 — Sint Maarten
- 758 — St. Lucia
- 767 — Dominica
- 784 — St. Vincent and Grenadines
- 809, 829, and 849 — the Dominican Republic
- 868 — Trinidad and Tobago
- 869 — St. Kitts and Nevis
- 876 — Jamaica

It's important to note that scammers can create scam phone numbers by spoofing numbers from many area codes, not just the ones listed above. Remember, a good rule of thumb is if you don't recognize the phone number, don't pick up your phone and let it go to voicemail. This can help you avoid falling for common phone scams, such as those pesky car extended warranty calls. By the way—if you are charged for picking up a scam call, the Federal Communications

Commission (FCC) recommends contacting your phone company to try and take care of the matter. You can also file a complaint about the scam call with the FCC. [Source: Reader's Digest | Brooke Nelson | February 18, 2022 ++]

Law Enforcement Impostor Scams

Spot This Scary New Twist

By impersonating law enforcement, scammers intimidate victims into giving up money or personal information. But once a scam becomes widely reported, con artists need to change up their tricks. Watch out for this new twist: scammers using official-looking credentials to gain trust.

How the scam works

- You receive a telephone call, email, text message, or a message on social media by someone alleging to be from a law enforcement agency. Scammers claim to represent agencies ranging from the local police to the Federal Bureau of Investigation to Canada Border Services.
- These impostors tell you there is a problem that you need to resolve immediately—usually by sending them a fee. In one recent version of this scam, the impostor claims to have seized a package with your name on it. Now, they need a copy of your driver's license and money to fix the issue. Scammers often threaten fines, arrest, or other penalties in an attempt to scare you into immediate action.
- Here's the new twist! If you are hesitant, the scammers will offer to text or email doctored credentials to you, to confirm their identity. The badge is either stolen or has been edited to include a different name. But no matter how convincing the “badge” or the impostor's story may be, always do your research before acting. If you send these scammers money, they will disappear, and you won't be able to get it back.

How to spot an imposter scam

- Don't give into pressure. Even if the threats scare you, do not take immediate action. Hang up or ignore the message. If you think there is a possibility you have been contacted by a real law enforcement agent, call the agency directly using a non-emergency number to confirm.

- Never send money to strangers. Scammers will probably ask you to wire funds or buy prepaid gift cards to pay the required “fines.” Scammers prefer to receive money this way because it is hard to trace. Plus, you won’t be able to get your money back.
- Guard your personal information carefully. Don’t share information like your address, social security number, or bank account information without first making sure you are speaking to a legitimate official – even if they already have some of your information.
- Get more tips in the [complete article on BBB.org](#)..

For more information

Learn more about this scam from the [Office of the Inspector General](#). Read more about a [similar government impostor scam](#) and visit [BBB.org/AvoidScams](#) for more ways to avoid getting scammed. If you’ve spotted a scam (whether or not you’ve lost money), report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](#). [Source: Better Business Bureau | June 10, 2022 ++]

Facebook Marketplace Scam

Be Wary Of Phony Buyers Who “Need” You to Upgrade Your Zelle

Watch out when selling big-ticket items on Facebook Marketplace. Scammers have a new trick up their sleeves! According to BBB Scam Tracker reports, be wary of phony buyers who “need” you to upgrade your Zelle or another digital wallet app to accept money from them.

How the scam works

- You list a big-ticket item worth several hundred dollars on Facebook Marketplace. You are quickly contacted by a buyer who wants to pay using a peer-to-peer payment app. Recent BBB Scam Tracker reports reference Zelle, but this scam could also work with CashApp, Venmo (a BBB Accredited Business), or another similar service.
- Shortly after receiving the payment, you get an email, supposedly from Zelle. Allegedly, the buyer paid via a Zelle “business account.” Now, you also need to upgrade your account to business status to accept the transfer. To do so, the buyer will need to send you another \$300. They are happy to do you a favor - if you promise to refund them.

- One scam victim reported this experience: “I received an email from zelle@bankconfirmedpayment.com explaining that the funds were waiting, but the buyer had to send an additional \$300 in order to upgrade my account because the transaction was over \$600, and I would need a business account.” The scammer then “sent” the extra funds and included screenshots of his Zelle app with the money deducted from his account. Then, he started pressuring the victim into repaying him: “He was very upset and persistent that I needed to pay him back for the fees that he incurred on my behalf.”
- If you refund the scammer, you’ll quickly realize that they never sent you any money in the first place. You’ll be out a few hundred dollars, and the scammer will disappear.

How to avoid Facebook scams

- *Don’t trust anyone willing to overpay you.* Unless your item is rare and you receive multiple offers, be wary of buyers offering you more than your asking price. Consider it a red flag if someone is quick to send you more money than you are asking.
- *Check email addresses carefully.* If you seem to have received an email from Zelle or another payment app, double-check the email address. Scammers use fake email addresses that are similar to official ones.
- *Get to know payment app policies before you use them.* If someone claims you need a business account to accept payments, check the app’s official website or contact customer service to find out if the claim is true. Scammers often make up fake policies to trick their victims.
- *Report scams to Facebook Marketplace.* If you spot a seller trying to pull off a scam, [report them](#). Your report can help protect other unsuspecting sellers.

For more information

Read the [BBB Tip: Selling used items online](#) and the [BBB Scam Alert on overpayment scams](#) for more ways to stay safe when selling items online. If you’ve spotted a scam (whether or not you’ve lost money), report it to [BBB Scam Tracker](#). Your report can help others avoid falling victim to scams. Learn how to spot a scam at [BBB.org/SpotAScam](#). [Source: Better Business Bureau | June 24, 2022 ++]

Notes of Interest

JUN 16 thru 30, 2022

- **CO License Plates.** Colorado Gov. Jared Polis signed a bipartisan bill into law funding commemorative license plates for the Space Force, honoring the newest military service branch's heavy presence in the state.
- **Diesel.** A flood of U.S. renewable diesel plants set to come online in the next three years will not be enough to offset the loss of petroleum diesel refining capacity from plant closings since 2019, a Reuters analysis of federal data shows.
- **Lawsuit.** A federal judge in Hawaii has approved a \$15 million settlement for an Army couple whose son suffered brain damage from lack of oxygen during his delivery at Tripler Army Medical Center in 2018

[Source: Various | June 15, 2022 ++]

Dental Floss

Alternate Uses

You may not know it, but dental floss is a very versatile and useful tool in your daily life. With just a few simple steps, you can turn that one flimsy string into something that will help you clean under the couch cushions, fix the zipper on your favorite jacket, or even tie two cans together to create an impromptu slingshot! This post will show you some of the many uses for dental floss outside of teeth care.

Makeshift Fishing Line

One such use for dental floss is to turn it into a makeshift fishing line. This can come in handy if you find yourself stuck somewhere with no access to a real fishing line. Just wrap some small weights onto each end of the string before knotting them together, so they don't slide off when cast out into deeper waters. Once you've done this, simply tie on any fish-friendly food item as bait and toss out your line. In a pinch, the string from an old pair of pantyhose is another good option for creating a fishing line as well!

Remove A Tick

If you find yourself out in nature and come across a tick on your skin, don't panic – just reach for some dental floss instead! By using a piece of floss to gently remove the tick, you'll avoid having to use potentially harmful chemicals or tools. Wrap the floss around your fingers so that the floss is between the tick and your skin, then pull upwards gently. The floss should be able to remove the tick without disturbing it too much – just make sure not to leave any of its body parts behind!

Make A Slingshot!

Who needs a pocket-sized catapult when you can just use some dental floss? With just a few wraps around the handles of two empty cans and then tying them together to create a sling, you'll have yourself an impromptu slingshot. The dental floss is strong enough to propel small

stones or even pebbles at your target with surprising force – so be careful not to aim it in anyone’s direction! You never know what might happen if that string snaps.

Tie Things Together

A very handy use for dental floss is to use it as a makeshift tie. This can come in handy if you find yourself without any rope or zip ties and need to secure something together quickly. All you need to do is wrap the floss around whatever it is that needs to be tied together and then tie a knot. When you’re out camping or hiking, there are often times when you need to tie things together to create a makeshift shelter or storage system. Instead of using bulky ropes or straps, try using some dental floss instead! It’s strong enough to hold items together without taking up too much space in your pack.

Tie Plants

Floss isn’t just for your teeth – you can also use it in the garden to help with various tasks. One such use is as plant ties. Just cut a piece of floss that’s about 18 inches long, and then tie it around the stem of the plant you want to support. The floss will help keep the plant upright and avoid any damage from wind or other elements. You can also use floss as a weed barrier by placing it around plants that you don’t want to get weeds growing in between them. The floss will act as a physical barrier and stop any unwanted plants from sprouting up!

Thread Substitute

You can use dental floss as a thread for sewing in a pinch. All you need to do is tie the two ends of the floss together and then use it as you would regular thread. Just be careful not to break the floss while you’re stitching! This tip is especially helpful if you find yourself without any other supplies and need to fix a quick rip in your clothes.

Fix Your Zipper

We’ve all been there before – our favorite jacket or pair of pants starts to wear down at the zipper, and before long, it’s completely busted. Instead of tossing them out and buying new ones, try fixing the zipper with a piece of dental floss instead! All you need to do is slide the dental floss in between the two teeth of the zipper and then pull it tight. This will create a temporary fix until you can get to a tailor or seamstress to have it properly repaired.

Cut Soft Food

If you’re looking for a way to cut soft food without making a mess, dental floss is the perfect tool. Just wrap the floss around your fingers, and then use it to slice through grapes, strawberries, or other soft fruits. You can also use dental floss to cube cheese or chocolate. It is also useful in slicing cakes to make a layered cake or cutting cinnamon rolls without squishing them. Tie the piece of floss around the baked good that you want to cut and pull tight! It will cut right through it.

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

Car Hidden Helpers

Little-Known Car Features You Should Know About

People buy cars for things such as fuel economy, safety, and reliability. They also, of course, want all the amazing new technology and features, many already becoming standard on some models. From driver-assist features to infotainment centers, there are plenty to choose from — but there are also some unsung, underrated, and in some cases, straight-up unknown features that have always been there. Here's a look at the hidden gems in your car that you probably look right past every day.

Gas Cap Locator

Mind-blowing to all who learn about it for the first time is the gas cap locator. That's the little arrow next to your fuel warning light that points to one side of the car or the other. Whichever direction it's pointing is the side of the car with the gas tank. It's a crucial feature for avoiding embarrassing K-turns in gas stations when driving an unfamiliar car.

Emergency Trunk Lever

About 20 people die inside car trunks every year, and sometimes many more. Most die from heat, most of them are kids, and almost all die in cars made before 2002. That year, the government mandated that all cars must come standard with an emergency release lever inside the trunk. No child has died while accidentally locked inside of a trunk made after 2002, according to an ABC-TV report in 2017.

Hidden Storage

Modern automakers do their best to make every cubic foot count when designing cars, trucks, and SUVs, and there's a good chance you have some sneaky storage hidden away just waiting to be stuffed. The Honda Ridgeline, for example, has a hidden trunk tucked away under its bed. The Chevy Traverse has a button that lifts the touchscreen to reveal a cubby underneath. The Volvo XC40 has clever storage hidden throughout.

Road Condition Indicator

Everyone knows the check-engine light and the light that tells you you're about to run out of gas — they're the last things any driver wants to see come to life on their dashboard. A snowflake, on the other hand, doesn't look ominous at all. Pay attention to it — it's not a decoration. That's the road condition indicator, and it lets you know if ice or frost is hiding between your tires and the road.

Electronic Stability Control Warning

Watch out if you see an image of a car with two squiggly lines pop up on your dashboard while driving. That means your stability-control system has kicked in because sensors picked up potentially dangerous conditions on the roadway. Your stability control system did its job, but if the indicator lights up over and over, you've hit an unforgiving stretch of road — slow down.

Tire Pressure Monitoring System

If you see an icon light up on your dashboard that looks like an exclamation point inside a flower vase with a ridged bottom, that's your tire-pressure monitoring system. (Sometimes the message is presented more clearly, depending on the car.) If it comes on, don't panic. Your tires just need some air until they're inflated back to the PSI level indicated in your manual. Do it soon, however, as driving on inflated tires reduces fuel economy, degrades performance and handling, and hastens tread wear.

Grab Handles

It's a common misconception that those little handles above car doors are meant for you to grab onto when a heavy-footed driver corners hot around a tight turn. There's even an expletive-laden nickname for them that translates (in G-rated language) to "oh no! handles." As simple as it sounds, the actual purpose of grab handles is for passengers to use to help themselves out of the vehicle — once it's stopped, of course. And no, they're not for hanging dry cleaning.

Garment Hooks

Next to your grab handles are usually another set of smaller plastic hooks — those are the ones for hanging dry cleaning. They're called garment hooks, and they're meant to hang suit jackets and other pieces of clothing that are likely to get wrinkled and rumpled if worn while driving.

Paint Code Stickers

If you ever need to touch up your own paint, you'll have to know your paint code to avoid making the problem worse. Automakers hide paint code stickers in all kinds of places. Ford sticks them on the driver's side door jamb, in the glove box, or on the B pillar, between the front and rear doors. With GM, it's either in the glove compartment or underneath the spare tire cover in the trunk.

Key Fobs

That little hunk of metal and plastic where your car key lives does more than just lock your doors and set the alarm. Automakers are cramming more and more functionality into fobs with every model year. You might have a mechanical key hidden inside and not even know it if you've

never done anything but buzz in and out. It might also be able to fold in your side mirrors automatically, roll down all your windows at the same time, engage a vehicle-summon feature, or do several other cool tricks.

[Source: Cheapism | Andrew Lisa | February 02, 2022 ++]

Vocabulary

Some Words to Enhance Yours | 220630

Which word best fits these example sentences?

1. (a) The Paris _____ was perfect to fit in my travel backpack.
(b) *Enchilada – Enchanter – Enclave - Enchiridion*
2. (a) “Deasil” refers to what kind of motion?
(b) *Circuitous – Circular – Circumventing - Circumpolar*
3. (a) What sort of sound does “wheuple” describe?
(b) *Whistling – Clapping – Gargling - Crying*
4. (a) What is another expression for “mononym”?
(b) *Single malt - Single payer - Single name - Single bill*
5. (a) Pigs are considered one of the most _____ mammals.
(b) *Satisfied – Sapient – Situated – Sacramental*
6. (a) What is a synonym for “apricate”?
(b) *Balk – Bark – Bask – Bank*
7. (a) Even the novel’s _____ was a dynamic, fleshed-out character.
(b) *Deuteragonist – Demagogue – Demographer - Democrat*
8. (a) What is a synonym of “lunate”?
(b) *Curious – Careful – Crescent - Creaky*
9. (a) The _____ of sea spray and clouds make the beach a dynamic setting.
(b) *Scoop – Scuttle – Scuds - Skittles*
10. (a) Geckos have _____ tails that grow back in a month.
(b) *Limbic – Limber – Autogenous - Aerodynamic*

Answers

1. Enchiridion [eng-kə-RID-ee-ən] - A book containing essential information on a subject.
 2. Deasil [DEH-səl] - In the direction of the sun's apparent course; clockwise; circular
 3. Wheeple [WEE-pəl] - To emit a shrill cry or whistle, sometimes feebly.
 4. Mononym [MAH-nə-nim] - A person's name consisting of one word, typically a first name without a surname.
 5. Sapient [SAY-pee-ənt] - wise, or attempting to appear wise.
 6. Apricate [AP-rə-keit] - to bask in the sun, or to expose to the sun
 7. Deuteragonist [doo-də-RAH-gə-nəst] - The person second in importance to the protagonist in a drama.
 8. Lunate [LOO-nayt] - Crescent-shaped
 9. Scud [skəd] - A formation of vapory clouds driven fast by the wind.
 10. Autogenous [ə-TAH-jən-əs] - Arising from within or from a thing itself.
- [Source: www.wordgenius.com | June 15, 2022 ++]

News of the Weird

JUNE 16 thru 30, 2022

Creme de la Weird --. In an effort to better educate the world about the human reproductive system, the "intimate wellness brand" Intimina has introduced Period Crunch, a breakfast cereal with uterus-shaped, raspberry-flavored pieces that will color the milk red, Oddity Central reported. Alongside the startling cereal shape and red milk, the cereal box will feature a diagram of the female reproductive system so that people can learn about its location and function. The company surveyed 2,000 adults and discovered that 48% of women are embarrassed to talk about their menstrual periods and 77% have never brought it up in their households. "Periods are a natural part of who we are," said Dr. Shree Datta, a gynecologist with Intimina, "so it's deeply concerning to hear that so many people remain uncomfortable discussing them when they are just another part of our health." [Oddity Central, 6/3/2022]

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Hot Mail -- Things got heated in a Pasadena, Maryland, community on May 31: As residents waited for their mail, WBAL-TV reported, two letter carriers got into a fight in the street. One witness said that one of the mail carriers "punched the window on the other one's mail truck," and that "one backed up and slammed into the other one like bumper cars." Another witness,

Brenda Rippetoe, said, "There was mail all over the street. They kept going around the block, and at one point, they were front-to-front, hitting their bumpers together." Residents called 911, and the postal service sent other carriers to pick up the mail, which was delivered by 7 p.m. People along the route said their regular carrier was on vacation, so the angry stand-ins were unfamiliar to them. [WBAL, 6/1/2022]

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Police Report --. Orwell, Ohio, police called the Ashtabula County Sheriff's Office to help them corral a drunk driving suspect on May 14 -- but it wasn't your typical "reckless operator," WOIO-TV reported. Twenty-one-year-old Nathan Miller was charged with OVI -- operating a vehicle while intoxicated -- for driving his horse-drawn Amish buggy on the wrong side of Hague Road. Officers were able to get in front of the horse and buggy, but the rig didn't stop; it turned out Miller was passed out in the driver's seat. While deputies tried to get control of the horse, it crashed into a patrol car. Miller was treated for injuries at the scene. [WOIO, 5/19/2022]

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Great Art --. In Parks, Louisiana, a rendering of the Last Supper in the St. Joseph Catholic Church has all the usual elements -- plus one regionally iconic extra: a bottle of McIlhenny's Tabasco hot sauce, conveniently placed in front of one of Jesus' disciples. Pastor Nicholas DuPre said after he arrived in the parish in 2019, he heard from Shane Bernard, a curator and historian from McIlhenny, who wondered if the "urban myth" about the painting was true. When DuPre confirmed the product placement, Bernard sent a large commemorative collector's bottle of Tabasco. Christie Hebert, the artist, told the Daily Advertiser that she was asked not to make the painting an exact replica of the DaVinci original; the priest at that time "wanted to make it unique to our area," she said. [Daily Advertiser, 5/31/2022]

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That Rule Doesn't Apply to Me -- After an unnamed 25-year-old woman from Gove City, Ohio, approached a bison on May 30 at Black Sand Basin in Yellowstone National Park, the National Park Service wasted no sympathy in its news release about the resulting incident: "Consequently, the bison gored the woman and tossed her 10 feet into the air." People.com reported that she was transported to a nearby medical center with a puncture wound and other injuries. "Wildlife in Yellowstone National Park are wild and can be dangerous when approached," the NPS reminded visitors. [People.com, 6/1/2022]

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Special Delivery -- When Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue responded to a crash on June 2, they found an SUV that had slammed into a FedEx truck, and it was quickly apparent what had caused the collision, WPLG-TV reported. Inside the SUV were a man and woman, both naked, and at the time of the crash, the woman was performing a sex act on the male driver, first responders reported. Two people in the FedEx truck sustained minor injuries; the male SUV driver had injuries to his "private area." [WPLG, 6/3/2022]

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The Litigious Society -- GEICO General Insurance Co. must pay a woman identified only as M.O. a \$5.2 million settlement, the Missouri Court of Appeals ruled on June 7, after she contracted the sexually transmitted disease HPV from an insured member during intimate relations in his automobile. The Kansas City Star reported that the Jackson County woman contacted GEICO in February 2021, and the company sent the case to arbitration. Four months later, the arbitrator found that the man was liable for not disclosing his infection status, and M.O. was awarded the large sum, to be paid by GEICO. The company appealed, but the three-judge panel upheld the decision. [KC Star, 6/7/2022]

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Adventures in Real Estate -- Danielle Cruz and her husband purchased and renovated a home in Chicago, but after listing it for sale, they found out someone was already living there. ABC7-TV reported that a contractor showed up to make a repair to the presumably vacant house and reported to Cruz that someone was inside the home. He also told her all the locks had been changed. "We honestly thought he was joking because we knew the house was vacant," Cruz said. "So we show up with the cops, and there's a young woman in there with all of her belongings." The woman said she had signed a month-to-month lease with a "landlord," and because she produced a lease, the police couldn't ask her to vacate. Real estate attorney Mo Dadkhah said the case would probably be referred to the Cook County eviction courts -- but they're very backed up. "The process could take six, 12, 18 months," he said. Cruz's other option is "cash for key" -- offering the renter money to leave. But so far, Cruz can't get her to respond. [ABC7, 6/7/2022]

[Source: <https://www.uexpress.com/oddties/news-of-the-weird/2022/06/10> | May 2022 ++]

Have You Heard or Seen?

A Little Test | Toons | Proofreading (a dying art)

A Little Test

Sergio was a very happy man. His wonderful girlfriend and he had been dating for over a year. So they decided to get married. There was only one little thing bothering the girlfriend's family. It was her beautiful younger sister, Sofia. Sergio's prospective sister-in-law was twenty-two, wore very tight miniskirts, and generally was Bra-less. She would regularly bend down when she was near him. He always got more than a nice view. It had to be deliberate. She never did it around anyone else.

One day Sophia called him and asked him to come over. 'To check my Sister's wedding-invitations' she said. She was alone when he arrived. She whispered to Sergio that she had feelings and desires for him. She couldn't overcome them anymore. She told Sergio that she wanted him just once before he got married. She said "Before you commit your life to my sister".

Well, Sergio was in total shock, and couldn't say a word. She said, "I'm going upstairs to my bedroom" she said. "if you want one last wild fling, just come up and have me". Sergio was stunned and frozen in shock as he watched her go up the stairs. He stood there for a moment. Then turned and made a bee-line straight to the front door. He opened the door, and headed straight towards his car.

Lord And behold, Sergio's entire future family was standing outside, all clapping! With tears in his eyes, his father-in-law hugged me. He said, 'Sergio, we are very happy that you have passed our little test. We couldn't ask for a better man for our daughter. Welcome to the family my son.'

And the moral of this story is: Always keep your condoms in your car.

Proofreading (a dying art)

- Man Kills Self Before Shooting Wife And Daughter. (Not possible)
- Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says. (Really? Ya' think?)
- Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers. (Now that's taking things a bit far!)
- Panda Mating Fails; Veterinarian Takes Over. (What a guy!)

- Miners Refuse to Work after Death (Nogoodfornothing' lazy soandso's!)
- Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant. (See if that works better than a fair trial!)
- War Dims Hope for Peace. (I can see where it might have that effect!)
- If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile. (Ya' think?!)
- Cold Wave Linked to Temperatures. (Who would have thought!)
- Enfield (London) Couple Slain; Police Suspect Homicide. (They may be on to something!)
- Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges. (You mean there's something stronger than duct tape?)
- Man Struck By Lightning: Faces Battery Charge. (He probably IS the battery charge!)
- New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group. (Weren't they fat enough?!)
- Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft. (That's what he gets for eating those beans!)
- Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half. (Chainsaw Massacre all over again!)
- Hospitals are sued by 7 Foot Doctors. (Boy, are they tall!)
- And the winner is... Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead

Thought of the Day

“Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword obviously never encountered automatic weapons.

-- Gen Douglas MacArthur.

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