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CAMP LEJEUNE TOXIC EXPOSURE Update 05: Nearly 12 years ago, a federal report told Marines and their families that adults faced little or no increased cancer risk from drinking and bathing in chemical-tainted water at North Carolina's Camp Lejeune. That report, long challenged by skeptical veterans, no longer stands. Federal health officials on 28 APR said they were withdrawing their 1997 assessment of health effects from the water contamination because of omissions and scientific inaccuracy. "We can no longer stand behind the accuracy of the information in that document, specifically in the drinking water public health evaluation," William Cibulas, director of health assessment for the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, said at a meeting in Atlanta. "We know too much now." The agency, charged with protecting public health around toxic sites, said some parts of the document (dealing with lead, soil pesticides and fish contamination) remain accurate in characterizing the past environmental hazards. But the water section, analyzing toxins that seeped into wells from a neighboring dry cleaner and from Camp Lejeune industrial activity, contained troublesome information, said Cibulas.

As many as 1 million people may have been exposed to water toxins over 30 years before the bad wells were closed in 1987, health officials now say. The Marines estimated the number at 500,000. When former Marines took their stories last year to Congress, they were dubbed "poisoned patriots." Some people have interpreted the 1997 report as, "No way, no how, would any person who drank contaminated water at Camp Lejeune be expected to suffer any adverse health effects, be they cancerous or non-cancerous," said Cibulas. "The science is just not that good for us to make that determination." Problems in the document included omission of the cancer-causing chemical benzene, despite high levels found in a well in 1984, said Cibulas. Additionally, the contaminating solvents the report focused on have been characterized in newer science as even more potent, he added. Levels of one solvent, called TCE, measured higher than in any known public water supply, an ATSDR scientist said. Cibulas also noted the report underestimated the extent of the contamination in base housing areas. The mistake, due to inadequate information from the Marines, was reported by The Associated Press in a 2007 investigation of the toxic water.

The health agency did not make any new conclusions, but pulled its flawed document from the Internet to redo its analysis with new science. People who want the still valid parts of the report now have to contact the agency in Atlanta. The health officials are continuing a separate study into whether fetuses might have been harmed by the water. Agency scientists are conducting elaborate water models to get to the bottom of the contamination. The unusual about-face came at a meeting of the health agency, part of the Health and Human Services Department, with its community advisory panel that works on follow-up to Camp Lejeune's past water problems. It comes at a sensitive time, after congressional investigators last month accused the agency of obscuring or overlooking potential health hazards at toxic sites. The agency's director, Howard Frumkin, assured Congress he was working to improve on any shortcomings. The Camp Lejeune report ambiguously stated both that adults faced no increased cancer risk from the water, and that cancer was not likely but that more study was needed. It said children's cancer risk was unknown, but it raised concerns about fetuses exposed to the water, citing studies elsewhere on leukemia and birth defects.

Rep. Brad Miller (D-NC) said he hoped the development signaled "that the leadership of ATSDR is now willing to acknowledge their past mistakes and to take measures to protect the public's health in the future." The reversal was cold comfort for some former Marines. Allen Menard believes his rare non-Hodgkin's lymphoma is linked to his time at Camp Lejeune in the early 1980s. "They knew about the benzene," he said. "Why didn't they tell us?" According to the Navy's legal office, which handles claims, 1,500 former Camp Lejeune residents have filed claims for \$33.8 billion in damages. The military is waiting for conclusions from the study of fetal effects before deciding the claims. [Source: AP Rita Beamish article 29 Apr 09 ++]

AMERICAN AMICABLE REFUNDS Update 01: A new search tool will help current and former service members determine if they are owed some of the \$2.3 million that is still unclaimed as a result of a 2006 multi-state settlement agreement concerning life insurance sales practices to the military. The tool, located at <https://eapps.naic.org/restitution> was launched 23 APR by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, allows a simple search by first and last name. More than 14,000 service members who purchased life insurance products from American Amicable Life Insurance Company of Texas, or its two affiliates — Pioneer American Insurance Company and Pioneer Security Life Insurance Company — are still owed more than \$2.3 million, according to the NAIC. Refund amounts vary according to type of policy and other factors. There is no deadline for claiming the funds, said NAIC spokeswoman Vanessa Sink. Unclaimed money will stay in the state where the service member bought the policy, in whatever fund is required by the state's laws.

The 2006 settlement agreement was signed by 46 states, Guam and the District of Columbia. Service member policyholders, or a named beneficiary of a "Horizon Life" policy issued from 1 JASN 00 to 28 JUL 06, may be eligible to receive compensation and/or increased policy benefits. Those who have been paid a death benefit or who have received a full refund are not eligible. At the time the agreement was announced, officials said more than 70,000 current and former service members were expected to get about \$70 million in refunds or potential policy enhancements. Information was not immediately available on how many people have actually received refunds or policy enhancements from the settlement. The settlement agreement was the result of a 20-month investigation led by the Texas and Georgia insurance departments, the Department of Justice and the Securities and Exchange Commission. State insurance regulators and federal agencies alleged that American Amicable often targeted its sales pitches at young trainees, and instructed its agents to market the "Horizon Life" policy as a savings plan rather than an insurance policy. The settlement did not require American Amicable to admit to or deny the allegations. Those who use the search tool must agree to "Terms of Use" stating that they have a legitimate reason for using the lookup system and understand that using the system for fraudulent activity is prohibited. [Source: NavyTimes Karen Jowers article 23 Apr 09 ++]

BURN PIT TOXIC EMISSIONS Update 07: Lawyers filed seven class-action lawsuits in seven states on behalf of service members and civilians who say they were sickened by the open-air burn pits on U.S. military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan. The lawsuits, including a wrongful death suit, were filed against contractor KBR Inc., as well as its parent company, Halliburton, after a Military Times story that ran last October showed that the burn pit at Joint Base Balad, the biggest U.S. base in Iraq, burned everything from petroleum products to dioxin-releasing plastic water bottles to amputated limbs. Two more lawsuits are expected to be filed 29 APR. More than 150 people contacted Military Times with similar sets of symptoms ranging from respiratory problems to lymphoma and leukemia. Kerry Baker, associate national legislative director for Disabled American Veterans, put out a call to all service members and veterans who believed they had been sickened by the burn pits so that he could see if DAV should push for automatic service-connected disability benefits for veterans who had been exposed, just as is done with Vietnam vets who were exposed to Agent Orange.

Baker worked with lawyer Elizabeth Burke of Burke O'Neill LLC to connect veterans who wanted to be included in a class-action lawsuit. The lawsuits, filed in Alabama, California, Georgia, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina and Wyoming name 21 plaintiffs. "KBR knew or should have known that operating vast open-air burn pits jeopardized the health and safety of thousands of Americans," Burke said in a statement. "KBR showed an utter disregard for the safety of the troops when they chose to use open-air burn pits and failed to use incinerators and other safer methods of waste disposal." The Defense Department contracted out waste disposal to

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KBR. However, service members operate some of the burn pits at smaller bases, and military field manuals offer guidance about how to operate those burn pits, calling them a “short-term” solution in a war zone.

In an interview, Burke said that environmental health experts who looked at possible chemical exposures were astonished by how the symptoms matched up. “These for-profit corporations callously exposed and continue to expose soldiers and others to toxic smoke, ash and fumes,” the lawsuits state. “These exposures are causing a host of serious diseases, increased risk of serious diseases in the future, death and increased risk of death.” Several service members have died since returning from Iraq, and their family members believe their illnesses were caused by the burn pits. The lawsuit accuses the defendants of negligence, battery, nuisance, emotional distress, willful and wanton conduct, negligent training and hiring, breach of duty to warn and breach of contract. In two cases, the lawyers accuse KBR of wrongful death. The suits ask for monetary damages for physical injuries, lost wages, emotional distress, pain and suffering. It asks that KBR lose all revenue and profits it gained in the waste-disposal contract, and it also asks for legal expenses. Baker and Rep. Tim Bishop D-NY) have set up an online clearinghouse for burn-pit information at <https://sites.google.com/site/burnpits>. [Source: NavyTimes Kelly Kennedy article 28 Apr 09 ++]

MOBILIZED RESERVE 28 APR 09: The Department of Defense announced the current number of reservists on active duty as of 28 APR 09. The net collective result is 6,174 more reservists mobilized than last reported in the Bulletin for 24 MAR 09. At any given time, services may mobilize some units and individuals while demobilizing others, making it possible for these figures to either increase or decrease. The total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization of the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 103,709; Navy Reserve, 6,750; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 14,892; Marine Corps Reserve, 7,575; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 697. This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been activated to 133,623, including both units and individual augmentees. A cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve personnel who are currently activated can be found at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Apr2009/d20090428ngr.pdf>. [Source: DoD News Release No. 284-09 29 Apr 09 +]

PTSD Update 26: A House bill aimed at making it easier for support troops to qualify for veterans disability benefits for post-traumatic stress disorder has the Veterans Affairs Department worried it would create a loophole for fraudulent claims. The bill, H.R.952, sponsored by Rep. John Hall (D-NY) would expand the definition of “combat with the enemy” to include anyone who was in the combat theater, regardless of whether they engaged in combat. The idea, according to its chief sponsor is to make it easier for people in administrative and support jobs to receive disability benefits without having to prove a specific service-related cause. John Wilson of Disabled American Veterans, a supporter of the bill who appeared with other witnesses at a 23 APR hearing of the House Veterans’ Affairs disability assistance panel, which Hall chairs, said there are many situations where a service member could have trouble presenting evidence of the cause of PTSD: traumatic events never entered in official records, incidents during temporary attachments to other units or minor injuries that only later became significant. “This is one of the most vexing problems in the VA disability system,” said Barton Stichman of the National Veterans Legal Services Program.

Bradley Mayes, director of VA’s compensation and pension service, acknowledged at the hearing that some veterans are having such problems, but he said the administration prefers to address this with a change in regulations rather than a change in law. He said some changes already are being made. For example, those diagnosed with

PTSD while still in service are no longer required to provide evidence that they faced a traumatic event. But Mayes said just being in a combat zone “does not necessarily equate to engaging in combat with the enemy and does not, in many cases, present the same difficulties encountered by combat veterans when later pursuing compensation claims.” Mayes also said that if the relaxed evidence standard were applied to physical injuries incurred in or aggravated by combat, it would sweep away safeguards against false claims. “A veteran who witnesses a traumatic event may show no immediate observable signs of the mental trauma,” he said. “A physical injury is more readily observable to lay witnesses and more likely to have been documented, even in a combat theater.” The fate of the bill is not clear. The House Veterans’ Affairs Committee passed a similar Hall bill last year but the measure never became law because of VA objections and concerns about funding the new disability claims. Budget problems remain the chief obstacle. [Source: NavyTimes Rick Maze article 4 May 09 ++]

OBAMA VA OFFICIALS Update 03: The Department of Veterans Affairs has a new, high-profile chief messenger: disabled Iraq war veteran Tammy Duckworth. Duckworth, who lost both legs in 2004 in Iraq when her helicopter was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade, was confirmed by the Senate as VA’s assistant secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs. She will deal with Congress, veterans and their families, the news media, and the public. Duckworth will report to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, a retired four-star general and former Army chief of staff who is a disabled Vietnam veteran. Veterans’ Affairs Committee chairman said Duckworth “can begin the long and hard work of improving the department’s reputation and relations across the country.” Iraq veteran Jon Soltz, who heads the group VoteVets.org, called the appointment a milestone: “We now have one of our own — a veteran of the wars we are now in — in a top administration position. [Source: NavyTimes article 4 MAY 09 ++]

Overview

SWINE FLU: Swine flu is an influenza virus, like the strains that cause such misery to people during the winter months. Flu viruses also infect many other species of mammals, as well as birds, and this strain causes a respiratory disease in pigs. It is related to human viruses, but influenza tends to stay in its own "host" species. It can pass from pigs to people through farming, with humans handling infected pigs. The flu can then move on to other people through coughing, sneezing, or touching infected people or surfaces and then touching your mouth or nose. Such infections are rare because swine flu viruses do not easily attach to human cells of the throat and lungs. However, recent studies have shown human infections may be more common than once believed. The Mexican government and the World Health Organization (WHO) have ruled out any risk of infection from eating pork. The Mexican government reports seeing symptoms of sudden fever above 100 degrees Fahrenheit; Dry cough and/or sore throat; Headache; Joint pain; Nasal congestion; and general fatigue. These are simniliar to seasonal flu symptoms. Swine flu may cause more severe vomiting and diarrhea. In rare cases, flu virus attacks the lungs, a complication that can be fatal. This strain also differs because it is so new. As a result, no one has natural immunity to it, unlike with seasonal flu.

WHO has confirmed 84 cases in U.S. to date and on 27 APR raised its pandemic threat level from 3 to 4, two levels below a full-scale pandemic. The WHO tally has lagged behind national counts of swine flu cases because of the Geneva-based organization's reporting requirements. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says it does not yet know yet if this is a very infectious disease. Occasionally a swine flu virus in a person mutates in a way that makes it more easily transmitted from person to person. People are usually contagious for as long as they are symptomatic -- typically four to five days for adults and longer for children. Tests of last fall's seasonal vaccine and the new virus show no cross-reaction, suggesting that people who got the shot have no added

protection against this flu strain. Mexico's government is recommending surgical masks for its citizens, but the CDC says the general U.S. public does not need them. Young adults appear most at risk. If you have no symptoms, be preventive:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 15 minutes.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze, and discard used tissues immediately.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- If you feel sick, stay home from work and school.
- Go to the hospital if you experience severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing.

As the illness continued to spread, President Obama asked Congress to approve an additional \$1.5 billion to fight swine flu. In a letter to congressional leaders, he requested inclusion of the funding in an existing supplemental appropriation now before Congress. If you know you have been exposed to swine flu, get lots of rest, and talk to your doctor about the antiviral drugs oseltamivir (trade name Tamiflu) or zanamivir (Relenza). These drugs may make the illness milder and work best if started within two days of getting sick. [Source: AP/Reuters/CDC/Washington Post/LA Times 27 Apr 09 ++]

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FTC KELLOGG COMPLAINT: Kellogg Company, the world's leading producer of cereal, has agreed to settle Federal trade commission (FTC) charges that advertising claims touting a breakfast of Frosted Mini-Wheats as "clinically shown to improve kids' attentiveness by nearly 20%" were false and violated federal law. According to the FTC complaint, Kellogg claimed in a national advertising campaign that a breakfast of Frosted Mini-Wheats cereal had been shown to improve children's attentiveness by nearly 20%. The complaint also challenges the claim, made in a different television ad that a breakfast of Frosted Mini-Wheats was clinically shown to improve children's attentiveness by nearly 20% when compared to children who ate no breakfast. In fact, the study showed that the children who ate the cereal for breakfast averaged just under 11% better in attentiveness, by comparison, and that relatively few were nearly 20% more attentive. The clinical study to which the ads referred found that only about half the cereal-eaters showed any improvement in attentiveness, and only about one in nine improved by 20% or more. Based on the clinical study results, the complaint alleges that both of the challenged claims are false and violate the FTC Act.

"We tell consumers that they should deal with trusted national brands," said Chairman Jon Leibowitz. "So it's especially important that America's leading companies are more attentive to the truthfulness of their ads and don't exaggerate the results of tests or research. In the future, the Commission will certainly be more attentive to national advertisers." The proposed settlement would bar Kellogg from making comparable claims about Frosted Mini-Wheats unless the claims are true and not misleading. It requires that claims about the benefits to cognitive health, process, or function provided by Frosted Mini-Wheats or any morning food or snack food be substantiated and true. The settlement would prohibit Kellogg from misrepresenting the results of tests, studies, or research regarding any morning or snack food product. Finally, the settlement contains standard record-keeping provisions to allow the agency to monitor compliance.

The settlement contains no admission of wrongdoing or financial penalty. Noting that Kellogg's 2007 sales exceeded \$11 billion co-founder of the National Council Against Health Fraud (NCAHF), Dr. Stephen Barrett, submitted the following public comment to the FTC: "I believe that Kellogg should be required to pay a fine because its advertising was unconscionable. The fact that the ad misrepresented the numbers in the study was only part of the problem. The study itself was deliberately designed to be misinterpreted because it compared children who were hungry (no breakfast) to children who were fed. A real study to determine the value of Mini-Wheats would compare children who had various types of breakfast. Your failure to press for a fine signals other companies

to do the same. If you really want to deter wrongdoing, you should also insist that Kellogg issue a corrective ad stating that the study itself was poorly designed." [Source: FTC news release 20 apr 09 <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2009/04/kellogg.shtm> ++]

MOAA ANNUAL AWARDS: At a packed-house Capitol Hill ceremony on 21 APR, the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) presented its top annual awards to the following eight individuals for their support of the military and veterans' community:

- MOAA's Arthur T. Marix Award for **Congressional Leadership** was presented to:
 - Sen. Jim Webb (D-VA) for spearheading last year's successful effort to enact major Post-9/11 GI Bill upgrades. The new program, which takes effect on Aug. 1, covers the full cost of tuition at any public college or university and pays a stipend for books and housing.
 - Rep. John McHugh (R-NY) was honored for his long-standing leadership and activism as past Chairman and Ranking Member of the Military Personnel Subcommittee, and now as the Ranking Member of the full committee. In winning enactment of the FY2009 Defense Authorization Act, he had a lead role in protecting against steep TRICARE fee increases, improving the military pay raise, increasing military manpower levels to ease deployment stress, and much, much more.
 - Rep. Susan Davis, Chair of the Personnel Subcommittee, has been a champion of much-needed manpower increases, wounded warrior protections, and family support programs to help those serving on the home front. She and her subcommittee led the charge to defeat proposals for unfair TRICARE fee increases.

- MOAA's **Distinguished Service** Award was presented to:
 - Mr. Toby Keith, a country music star and songwriter who has participated in six previous USO Tours, entertaining nearly 120,000 troops and making innumerable hospital visits and individual meetings with service men and women. Immediately after the MOAA ceremony, he departed his seventh USO tour, including sites in Afghanistan.
 - Union Pacific, for its service as a model Guard/Reserve employer. The company continues pay and benefits for the more than 530 employees deployed since 9/11, and has four full-time staff dedicated to recruiting military people.
 - Mr. Tom Day, who in 2000, after learning that many veterans were being provided only recordings of "Taps" at their funerals, started Bugles Across America to ensure that every veteran possible had a live bugler at his or her last service. Bugles Across America now has more than 5,000 bugler volunteers located in all 50 states, and Mr. Day has personally participated in 4,000 veterans' funerals.

- MOAA's Colonel Paul W. Arcari **Meritorious Service** Award for congressional staff members was presented to Ms. Jeanette James and Mr. Dave Kildee, minority and majority professional staff members, respectively, for the House Military Personnel Subcommittee. Their bipartisan work was essential to prevent adverse TRICARE fee increases, reduce Guard/Reserve TRICARE premiums, restore military medical manning, protect special-needs children, and much more.

[Source: MOAA Leg Up 24 Apr 09 ++]

NEW MEXICO VET TUITION: Military veterans and their families will be able to save a little money on college tuition or to attend a vocational school in the New Mexico, even if they don't live in the state. Senate Bill 136, which establishes in-state tuition rates for veterans, regardless of where they live, will go into effect on 1 AUG 09 just in time for the start of the 2010 school year. The legislation was approved by both the state Senate and House of Representatives by a combined vote of 104-0. For a copy of the bill refer to http://extras.mnginteractive.com/live/media/site557/2009/0421/20090421_111709_0422SB136.pdf. "Gov. Bill Richardson said, "I'm proud of this tremendous bipartisan effort from our state legislators. Signing this bill into law is a way of thanking our veterans for their service to our country, and thanking their families for their sacrifice when sending a spouse or parent to war." Raymond Harper, a retired Army veteran, said the new law will have an effect on soldiers' decisions of where they will retire. "A lot of active duty soldiers will probably consider something like this when they decide to get out," said Harper, who now lives in Oklahoma City, but was stationed for two years at White Sands Missile Range. "I left (New Mexico) because I was from Oklahoma and that's where I had to go to qualify for in-state tuition. I liked being in New Mexico and would've stayed there. But I knew I was going to go to college after I got out of the Army, and I would have had to then go through all that stuff of establishing residency in New Mexico to get their tuition."

Any veteran of the U.S. armed forces will be able to pay the same tuition as people who have established residency in New Mexico. Tuition rates for in-state residents are notably less than what people who live outside of the state would pay. Tuition rates vary among state universities and trade schools. There are more than 100 certified institutions across the state where veterans will be able to use their federal G.I. education benefit. "This is a win-win situation," said state Veterans Affairs Secretary John Garcia. "Veterans and their dependents can attend our fine educational institutions, and the state can be the beneficiary of a G.I. benefit which could be worth up to \$30,000 apiece, depending on where they choose to attend." Ray Seva, spokesman for the state Department of Veteran Affairs, said the intent of the bill was to help make New Mexico become a destination state for veterans who want to pursue higher education. There are about 180,000 veterans living in New Mexico of which 30,000 served in Iraq or Afghanistan. [Source: Silver City Sun-News Steve Ramirez article 22 Apr 09 ++]

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VA SUICIDE PREVENTION Update 06: The federal government has decided to settle a lawsuit filed by the widow of a veteran who hanged himself about 12 hours after being admitted to a mental health ward. The \$390,000 settlement paid to Ingrid Keller ends all possible claims against the government in connection with the 29 OCT 06, death of Maynard E. Keller Jr. The settlement specifically states there is no admission of liability. Mr. Keller, 55, retired from the Army after 24 years. He worked as a truck driver until his death. The lawsuit filed last year in U.S. District Court alleged the Uptown Division of the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center was negligent in ensuring a safe environment. Mr. Keller was able to use the privacy curtain around his bed to fashion a noose. The curtain should have been designed to break away when pressure was applied, said the Kellers' attorney Andrew Tisdale. "It was like leaving a razor blade in a day-care center," Mr. Tisdale said. According to the lawsuit, Mr. Keller was seen at the Uptown Division on 28 OCT 06. He was suffering from depression, adjustment disorder and anxiety. He also had thoughts of suicide. Mr. Keller was admitted to the center's locked mental health ward. About 12 hours later he was found dead.

A report on Mr. Keller's death prepared by the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General noted that there are about 30,000 suicides in the United States every year. About 5% take place in hospitals and 70% of suicides on hospital wards are from hanging. The Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, the National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems and the Veterans Health Administration all have guidelines on suicide prevention strategies for hospitals. Included is the requirement to eliminate or mitigate environmental risk factors. The Inspector General's report noted the VA Medical Center should have had the

required low-weight breakaway hardware on the mental health ward. After Mr. Keller's death the center's staff immediately modified its mental health wards to remove private curtains and towel bars, which also posed a possible danger for suicidal patients. Also in response, the National Center for Patient Safety sent out a safety alert on the privacy curtains in FEB 07. [Source: Augusta Chronicle Sandy Hodson article 23 Apr 09 ++]

DHS REPORT TRASHES VETERANS: On 7 APR 09 a controversial Department of Homeland Security (DHS) intelligence assessment warned law enforcement officials about the risk of domestic terrorism from returning combat veterans. The report was directed to federal, State, local, and tribal counterterrorism and law enforcement officials as a means to effectively deter, prevent, preempt, or respond to terrorist attacks against the United States. In the report, titled "Right-wing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment," returning war veterans are singled out as vulnerable to joining extremist groups in attacks against the government. The report on right-wing extremists cites the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing by military veteran Timothy McVeigh as one instance of a veteran becoming a domestic terrorist. In gthis section it further stated, "The willingness of a small percentage of military personnel to join extremist groups during the 1990s because they were disgruntled, disillusioned or suffering from the psychological effects of war is being replicated today." The report has received much attention for its inclusion of veterans as potential terrorists.

At first when some VSOs and politicians objected to the report, Secretary Janet Napolitano continued to stand by the report. "We are on the lookout for criminal and terrorist activity but we do not—nor will we ever—monitor ideology or political beliefs. Representative Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) responded: "The department is engaging in political and ideological profiling of people who fought to keep our country safe from terrorism, uphold our nation's immigration laws, and protect our constitutional right to keep and bear arms." When veterans organizations condemned the report, DHS tried to explain away the report as being initiated during the previous administration and that there had been a report on "Left-wing" radicals released in January and that the reports were only "assessments" not accusations. In response to growing criticism, Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano gave a "Washingtonese" apology: "We do not mean to suggest that veterans as a whole are at risk of becoming violent extremists ... the last thing we want to do is to offend or castigate all veterans."

Subsequently, Secretary Napolitano issued an explanation and apology saying, "To the extent veterans read it as an accusation... an apology is owed. This was an assessment, not an accusation. It was limited to extremists; those who seek to commit violence within the United States. And all this was meant to do was give law enforcement what we call 'situational awareness'. The last thing I wanted to do is offend or castigate all veterans. On the contrary, let's meet and clear the air." The National association for Uniformed Services (NAUS) among others is deeply concerned that an official document issued by our government would cast returning war heroes, sworn to uphold the Constitution, as a danger to the country they served and the freedom they defended. They will be pressing the administration to clear the air, set the issue to rest and ensure that future reports not dishonor veterans.

A resolution passed by the Oklahoma Senate on 22 APR calls the DHS report a blatant attempt to marginalize the mainstream views of tens of millions of Americans. Resolution author and retired Army colonel Sen. Steve Russell said at a news conference that the DHS report was profiling a group unfairly. 'We have fought terrorists; we have not become them,' Russell said." Rep. John Carter, secretary of the U.S. House Republican Conference compared Napolitano's statements to the actions of dictators in Venezuela and China. Three Washington political publications are reporting on urging from conservative Republicans on the House floor 22 APR for their leaders to call for the resignation of DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano over the release of the report on concerns about right-wing

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extremism. House Minority Leader John Boehner and Minority Whip Eric Cantor are reportedly going to bring the subject up in a scheduled meeting 23 APR with President Obama at the White House.

The Department of Homeland Security announced 23 APR that the White House intends to replace the previous head of the DHS intelligence assessment unit with Philip Mudd, a 24-year FBI veteran as Undersecretary for Intelligence and Analysis. Mudd would replace Roger Mackin who previously headed the DHS agency responsible for the controversial report. Mackin was reassigned to the cyber security section at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. A DHS spokesperson said that the personnel moves had been planned for weeks and predated the 7 APR release of the denigrating report.” According to DHS officials, the replacement of Mackin was categorically not related to the release of the intelligence analysis report.”

[Source: NAUS Weekly Update 17 Apr 09 ++]

TRICARE4U: TRICARE4u.com website is the online resource for Tricare for Life (TFL) and Overseas beneficiaries and providers. The site allows both the beneficiary and provider to view claim status, their explanation of benefits, contact customer service in a secure environment and view patient eligibility. Those who have not logged onto their TRICARE4U account recently will be prompted to change their password the next time they visit the site. The requirement to change passwords is due to recent system upgrade, and all registered TRICARE4U users (beneficiaries, providers and government users) will receive the automatic prompt. To start the password change process, sign-in at <http://www.tricare4u.com> with your username and latest password.

- Beneficiaries should select “update security information” on their personal profile page;
- Providers should select “update my account” on their homepage and then “update security information;”
- Government users should select “update security” in the left hand navigation of their homepage.

The guidelines for creating that password are:

- Passwords must be at least 8 characters long, but not longer than 20 characters.
- Passwords must include at least one of each of the following:
 - A capital letter.
 - A lowercase letter.
 - A number,
 - A special character such as an asterisk *, pound sign #, dollar sign \$, exclamation point !, @ symbol or plus sign +.
- Passwords must not contain spaces, brackets [] or {}, caret ^, back slash \, tilde ~ or vertical bar |.
- Do not repeat any particular character more than twice in a row.
- Do not repeat a password you have used before.
- Do not include your Username or your first or last name in your password.

If you have any further questions or need additional assistance, contact TRICARE Overseas customer service at 1-608-301-2310 (Europe/Pacific), 1-608-301-2311 (Virgin Islands/Canada), or 1-877-616-5963 (Puerto Rico).

[Source: Tricare News release 14 Apr 09 ++]

RETIREE SEMINAR SCHEDULE: Retiree seminars are periodically scheduled at military and civilian facilities throughout the U.S. and around the world. The following seminars are currently scheduled for 2009 with DFAS Retired and Annuity Pay participation. Representatives will be on hand to provide attendees with

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information on a variety of pay issues. Contact the RSO or RAO serving your area for more information on seminar details.

- April 20, 2009 Ramstein AB, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- April 20, 2009 Mannheim, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- April 21, 2009 Kaiserslautern, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- April 22, 2009 Weisbaden, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- April 23, 2009 Heidelberg, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- April 24, 2009 Grafenwoehr, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- April 25, 2009 Schweinfurt, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- April 25, 2009 Fort Jackson, SC 803-751-6715
- April 25, 2009 Malmstrom AFB, NJ 406-866-0683
- April 25, 2009 NAS Millington, TN 901-874-5147
- April 25, 2009 McGuire AFB, NJ 609-754-2459
- May 2, 2009 West Point, NY 845-938-4217
- May 7, 2009 RAF Lakenheath, UK
- May 15, 2009 Fort Lewis, WA 253-966-5882
- May 16, 2009 Camp Zama, Japan DSN: 263-3940
- May 16, 2009 Fort. Eustis, VA 757-878-3648
- May 23, 2009 NAS Everett, WA 425-304-3721
- June 6, 2009 Ansbach, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- June 8, 2009 Garmisch, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- June 9, 2009 Hohenfels, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- June 10, 2009 Bamberg, Germany DSN: 379-6080
- June 12, 2009 Vicenza, Italy DSN: 379-6080
- June 13, 2009 Fort Ord, CA 831-242-6691
- June 20, 2009 Tinker AFB, OK 405-739-2795
- August 15, 2009 Fort Lewis, WA 253-966-5882
- August 16 - 19, 2009 AFSA Conv, ATL, GA 301-889-3500
- August 20, 2009 Des Moines, IA 515-283-7013
- August 22, 2009 Augusta, ME 207-921-2609
- August 28, 2009 Rosemount, MN 763-566-2219
- August 29, 2009 Camp Ripleg, MN 763-441-2630
- August 29, 2009 Ft. Huachuca, AZ 520-533-5733
- September 11, 2009 NAS Fallon, NV 775-426-3338
- September 11, 2009 Fort McCoy, WI 608-388-3716
- September 12, 2009 Fort Dix, NJ 609-562-2666
- September 12, 2009 Little Rock AFB, AR 501-987-6095
- September 12, 2009 Fort Leonard Wood, MO 573-596-0947
- September 12, 2009 Little Rock AFB, AR 501-987-6095
- September 18, 2009 Duluth, MN 218-722-0071
- September 18, 2009 Naval Base Bangor, WA 360-315-3055
- Sept 17 - 19, 2009 Fort Sill, OK 580-442-2645
- Sept 18 - 19, 2009 Fort Bragg, NC 910-396-8591
- September 19, 2009 Fort Drum, NY 315-772-6434

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- September 19, 2009 Seymour Johnson, NC 919-722-1119
- September 19, 2009 NAS Whidbey IS, WA 360-257-8058
- September 19, 2009 NAS Lemoore, CA 559-998-4410
- September 26, 2009 Selfridge ANGB, MI 586-239-5580
- September 26, 2009 Minneapolis, MN 952-854-4110
- September 26, 2009 Nellis AFB, NV 702-652-9978
- September 26, 2009 Fort Bliss, TX 915-569-6233
- October 2 - 3, 2009 Redstone Arsenal, AL 256-876-2022
- October 3, 2009 Whiteman ABF, MO 660-687-6457
- October 3, 2009 Fort McCoy, WI 414-258-9195
- October 17, 2009 Fort Monmouth, NJ 732-532-4673
- October 17, 2009 NAS Willow Grove, PA 215-443-6033
- October 17, 2009 Aberdeen, MD 410-306-2303
- October 17, 2009 NAS Pensacola, FL 850-452-5990
- October 23-24, 2009 Fort Hood, TX 254-287-8100
- October 24, 2009 Bolling AFB, DC
- October 24, 2009 Fort Polk, LA 337-531-0363
- October 30, 2009 Fort Rucker, AL 334-255-9124
- October 30-31, 2009 Fort Knox, KY 502-624-1765
- October 31, 2009 Rock Island, IL 563-322-4823
- October 31, 2009 Fort Leavenworth, KS 913-684-2425
- November 7, 2009 McChord AFB, WA 253-982-1955
- November 7, 2009 Little Creek, VA 757-322-9105
- November 7, 2009 San Diego, CA 619-556-7412
- November 7, 2009 Ft. Richardson, AK 907-384-3500
- November 7, 2009 Moody AFB, GA 229-257-3209
- November 7, 2009 Robins AFB, GA 478-327-4707
- November 12, 2009 Fort Detrick, MD 301-619-3138

[Source: DFAS Retired Pay Newsletter for 2009 ++]

MEDICARE ADVANTAGE PLANS Update 05: Seniors are paying considerably higher costs for their drug or Medicare Advantage plans since Part D started in 2006. Now, both the Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) say that Medicare beneficiaries and taxpayers are getting overcharged. According to the Inspector General, some 80% of participating drug plans owe the program an estimated \$4.4 billion for 2006 alone. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) doesn't even know how much money insurance companies owe taxpayers since 2006 because it hasn't begun most of the audits. Seniors enrolled in Part D and Medicare Advantage plans pay a monthly premium, and the plans are subsidized through tax revenues. The government contracts with private insurance companies to provide coverage. Each plan offers an estimate of the average payment it would need to provide coverage. CMS is required to audit at least a third of all insurance companies that offer the coverage every year in order to determine that seniors and taxpayers got what they paid for. The Inspector General says that of the 165 audits required for 2006, the first year of the program, Medicare had completed or begun only seven as of APR 08. The Inspector General further estimated that problems found in the first year of the program are unlikely to get fixed until 2010. The Senior Citizens League Executive Director Shannon Benton contends, "Part D drug plans and Medicare

Advantage have received tens of billions from seniors and taxpayers since the program began and nobody is minding the store. CMS must perform required audits and Congress should consider adjustments that will ensure that seniors and taxpayers will not be overcharged in the future.” [Source: TSCL Social Security and Medicare Advisor Apr 09 ++]

SSA COLA Update 01: Now that our federal budget deficit is the only major economic indicator that’s roaring upward, Social Security benefits may be next to go through the wringer. The policy experts are quietly considering a number of ways to “fix” Social Security’s solvency, and Cost-Of-Living Adjustment (COLA) cuts appear high on a short list of remedies. Late last year, the Social Security Administration released a policy paper examining the financial impact of COLA cuts. The paper looks at how the benefits of a number of different demographic groups of beneficiaries would be affected, as well as the effect such a change would have on Social Security’s solvency. The analysis found that cutting COLAs by one-half of a percentage point (0.5%) would take care of almost 40% of Social Security’s long-range imbalance. If COLAs were cut a full point (1.0%), that would fix almost 78% of Social Security’s long-range imbalance. Either would be a huge single fix, the cost of which would be borne entirely by people who have already started benefits and least able to afford it.

In the past, reducing the growth rate of COLAs has appealed to lawmakers because the change looks deceptively tiny, especially in the first year or two. But don’t let tiny numbers fool you. The cuts compound over time like interest. The Social Security Administration’s policy brief notes that “COLA reductions would be cumulative over time causing benefit reductions to increase the longer benefits are received.” Certain groups who receive benefits longer than average would experience larger reductions, and those groups include some of the sickest and oldest beneficiaries, women, widow(er)s and retired disabled people. For example, cutting the COLA by 1% cost for somebody who retires in 2009 with an average benefit of \$1,153 in the first couple of years would amount to only about a \$12 monthly difference. However, by the end of a 20-year retirement, that monthly difference builds up to an astounding \$369 and would cost that retiree a total \$40,030 in benefits. For those retiring in later years the impact would be equal to if not greater than this. This is because of improvements in diet and medical care younger people are Senior citizens are encouraged to stay up to date on upcoming efforts to "fix" Social Security and Medicare. To learn more, visit the TSCL website at www.seniorsleague.org or call 1-800-333-8725. [Source: TSCL Social Security and Medicare Advisor Mary Johnson article Apr 09 ++]

SSA EARNINGS RECORD ERRORS: All types of Social Security benefits are based on earnings, but sometimes payroll taxes are not properly credited to your earnings record. This can be a particular problem for women, especially those who co-owned businesses with their husbands. When it happens, you can wind up with lower benefits than you otherwise would be entitled to. Even though you have already started benefits, you may be able to correct your earnings record. The Social Security Administration requires proof of earnings like your audited tax returns. Other documents include W2 forms, wage stubs or pay slips, your own wage records. After you have gathered your documents contact Social Security. A customer service representative will assist you in correcting your record. There are certain rules restricting the revision of your original determination for benefits, particularly after 4 years have passed. Regulations appear to rule out your receiving revised benefits retroactive to when you first became entitled after a certain amount of time has elapsed. However, you may still be entitled to a revised increased benefit effective with the month you first questioned the amount of your benefit in writing. Thus, it will be important to keep careful records of your request for revised benefits. Ask Social Security to correct your record and revise your benefit based on the corrected earnings. For more information, get the publication “How to

Correct Your Social Security Earnings Record," Publication No. 05-10081, by visiting the Social Security website at www.socialsecurity.gov, or call 1-800-772-1213. [Source: TSCL Social Security and Medicare Advisor Apr 09 ++]

MEDAL OF HONOR Update 01: A Pennsylvania congressman is pushing for legislation to honor some of America's most heroic men and women. Congressman Christopher Carney (D-PA), has proposed the Medal of Honor Commemorative Coin Act of 2009. The bill would require the minting of two commemorative coins (one gold and one silver) in 2011 with designs that recognize the three Medals of Honor. The Army, Navy and Air Force each have separate Medal of Honor designs. "The congressman is in the Navy Reserve. He is committed to pushing military service," said Vincent Rongione, director of communications and special projects for Carney's office. "Proceeds from the sale of the coins will go to educate people about the (Medal of Honor) recipients." Carney is a commander-select with a Navy Reserve unit based in northeast Pennsylvania, Rongione said.

The congressman's bill notes that the Medal of Honor was established in 1861 and is the nation's highest award for valor in action against an enemy. And it has been presented to the recipients by the president in the name of Congress to fewer than 3,500 servicemembers. Carney's legislation calls for recognizing the Medal of Honor with 100,000 \$5 gold coins and no more than 500,000 \$1 silver coins. Those coins would be legal tender. The gold coin cost would include a surcharge of \$35 and the silver coin a surcharge of \$10. Another purpose of the bill would be to raise funds for initiatives that promote the Congressional Medal of Honor Society's purpose, the bill indicated. Officials with the Congressional Medal of Honor Society said they had not seen the legislation and could not comment, but they did hear that something to recognize the Medal of Honor had been proposed.

Officials with the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation, which was started by the society, said they were aware of Carney's bill. Retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Nicholas Kehoe, the foundation's president, said, "2011 is the 150th anniversary of the Medal of Honor, and I think it would create a lot of awareness. I think it is totally appropriate." Kehoe noted that recipients are aware of the proposed legislation and they support it. The foundation started the move to get a coin minted, and Carney must have heard about it, he said. But Rongione admitted that getting Congress to approve the bill is far from being a done deal. Every year the U.S. mint makes two commemorative coins. One of the slots is already taken for 2011 and Carney's legislation is competing against six other bills to print commemorative coins in 2011. "We are really excited about it and we certainly hope that our coin is selected as the second coin because it is a great message to send," Rongione said. [Source: Stars and Stripes Mark Abramson article 25 Mar 09 ++]

GULF WAR SYNDROME Update 08: A new study of veterans of the 1991 Gulf War suggests that exposure to neurotoxins such as anti-nerve agent pills, insect repellent and Sarin caused neurological changes to the brain. However, brain imaging shows those changes appear to differ depending on what and how much each person was exposed to. The changes also correspond to different sets of symptoms. Researchers at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Southern Methodist University, and the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Dallas performed digital brain scans on 21 chronically ill Gulf War veterans from the same Naval Reserve construction battalion, all of whom had symptoms of "Gulf War syndrome." According to a study published in *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging Journal*, previous studies defined three categories of symptoms associated with Gulf War veterans. The three complexes suggest "an overall syndrome with variants," according to the researchers. But they also found the variants depended on what the vets had been exposed to:

- Complex 1: mild cognitive problems, such as distractibility, forgetfulness, feeling depressed, and excessive daytime sleepiness. [Associated with troops who had worn flea collars to ward off sand fleas].

- Complex 2: a more debilitating state with confusion and a gross lack of muscle coordination. [Associated with low-level Sarin exposure and anti-nerve agent pills].
- Complex 3: continuous joint and muscle aching. [Associated with insect repellent and anti-nerve agent pills].

In new study, researchers wanted to see how brain blood flow in the veterans changed if they were exposed to a cholinesterase-inhibiting chemical. All the Gulf War exposures (insect repellent, anti-nerve agent pills (pyridostigmine) and Sarin) are such cholinesterase-inhibiting chemicals, and the researchers wanted to see if the previous exposure permanently damaged the way the brain works. Previous studies also had found that some people are genetically less able to process such chemicals out of their bodies, which could explain why some troops exposed to the same chemicals have no symptoms. Research has shown that vets exposed to Sarin gas had a lower volume of white matter than people who had not been exposed, and that their fine motor skills were comparable to someone 10 years older than the exposed veterans.

The new study, which the researchers were quick to point out was small, included 11 men with Complex 2 symptoms, five with Complex 1 symptoms, and five with Complex 3 symptoms. For the study, they injected each veteran with saline solution through an IV, then performed a digital brain scan to check cerebral blood flow. Two days later, they used an IV to send 2 milligrams of physostigmine, another cholinesterase-inhibiting chemical, into their systems. Robert Haley, lead researcher on the study, wrote that they expected the brain activity of the exposed veterans to respond differently to the chemical than a control group of civilians did, and they were correct. But they were surprised that the veterans' brains responded differently to the saline, as well as to the physostigmine, based on which symptom complex they fell into. They differed significantly on baseline blood flow after the saline, with the Complex 2 group having significantly less than the control group. But after the injection of physostigmine, both the Complex 1 and 3 groups had a slight reduction in blood flow in some regions of the brain, while the Complex 2 group had an increase. There were differences in the areas of the deep brain where the researchers saw reductions of blood flow based on which group they were looking at.

The findings seem consistent with the “impaired cognition, attention deficits, reduced intellectual functioning, audiovestibular dysfunction and emotional changes” in Complex 1 and 2 veterans, versus the “primary pain and sensory dysfunction” of Complex 3 veterans, the study states. The Complex 2 patterns were similar to those found in Alzheimer’s disease, but were obviously not the same because of the pattern of the symptoms, they wrote. “Our findings further suggest that milder-symptom Complexes 1 and 3 involve different neuropathologic mechanisms from those underlying the more severe-symptom Complex 2,” the study states. “This condition might be appropriately referred to as an encephalopathy — a term for any diffuse disease of the brain that alters brain function or structure.” They said the brain scans could provide an “objective diagnostic test” for war-related chronic encephalopathic illnesses. [Source: ArmyTimes Kelly Kennedy article 1 Apr 09 ++]

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RESERVE GI BILL Update 09: The Senate voted 31 MAR in favor of more GI Bill education benefits for National Guard and Reserve members — but that doesn’t mean benefits will increase. By voice vote and with no substantive debate, the Senate approved an amendment to the 2010 budget resolution that adds reserve education benefits to a list of other possible pay increases for service members, veterans and survivors that might be funded by a proposed deficit-neutral reserve fund. The budget plan, S. Con. Res. 13, also says that expanded benefits for disabled veterans in rural areas, as well as concurrent receipt of full military and veterans benefits for disabled retirees and the survivors of people who die of service-related causes, could be covered by the reserve fund.

The catch is that the reserve fund does not exist, and there is no guarantee it would be created. Instead, its creation is proposed as a way to keep open the possibility of benefit improvements even when there is no money set aside for them in the Senate's version of the 2010 budget.

Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR), chief sponsor of the GI Bill amendment, said she is trying to find a way to reset monthly education benefits for Guard and Reserve members because the value, compared to GI Bill benefits for active-duty members, has eroded since 1984, while reservists' role in military operations has greatly expanded. "Selected Reserve GI Bill benefit rates are simply not reflective of the critical role Guard members and reservists play in today's military," she said, noting reserve benefits have increased just 3% a year since the 2001 terrorist attacks. In 1984, when the Montgomery GI Bill was established as the post-Cold War veterans' benefits plan, Guard and Reserve members received monthly benefits that were 48% of the active-duty rate. Today, Guard and Reserve members using the Montgomery GI Bill receive a maximum monthly benefit of \$329, about 25% of the \$1,321 a month paid to those with three or more years of active service. The disparity will soon become larger, with active-duty members and veterans of active duty due to get a big boost 1 AUG when the Post-9/11 GI Bill takes effect. The new GI Bill promises to cover full tuition plus offer stipends for living expenses and books that should fully cover the cost of attending a four-year public college or university at in-state rates.

Guard and Reserve members are covered by the new program if they have been mobilized for 90 days or more since the 2001 terrorists' attacks, but benefits are prorated based on the amount of service. Full benefits are available only for those who have three or more years of service, or were forced to leave the military because of a service-connected disability, if they are full-time students. Reduced benefits for the Guard and Reserve "sends a very poor message," Lincoln said. "The rising price of higher education increases, the interest rates on student loans, and the limited earnings ability of those with only high school credentials make educational benefits a primary means of investing in our future," Lincoln said. "We want to encourage our Selected Reservists to really take advantage of educational opportunities to further their positions in the Guard and Reserve and to ... further their positions in business, in industry and where they are going to be working in our communities." By getting the amendment approved, Lincoln may have the chance to offer an amendment later this year to other veterans or defense legislation to increase GI Bill payments and be able to say there is money available to cover the costs if the Senate Budget Committee creates a reserve fund with money that is not spent on other benefits. [Source: NavyTimes rick Maze article 1 Apr 09 ++]

VA CLAIM DENIAL Update 03: The Supreme Court has made it harder for veterans to challenge the denial of medical claims by the Veterans Affairs Department. The high court, in a 6-3 decision on 21 APR, said veterans who contend the VA failed to tell them what information was needed to justify their claims must prove that the VA's mistakes made a difference in the outcome of their cases. A federal appeals court in Washington earlier ruled that the burden was on the VA to prove the errors were not harmful to the veterans. The case involved two veterans who said their injuries were related to their military service. Woodrow Sanders, a World War II Army veteran, said a bazooka explosion in 1944 damaged the vision in his right eye. Decades later, he went to a VA hospital seeking cost-free treatment. A VA board denied his claim, saying it could not be proven now that the injury was service related. Patricia Simmons said she suffered hearing loss when she was on active duty from 1978 to 1980. The case is *Shinseki v. Sanders*, 07-1209. [Source: Google AP article 22 Apr 09 ++]

EMERGENCY ROOM TIPS: You hope an illness or injury never sends you to a hospital emergency room (ER) but if you must go it's best to be prepared. These emergency room tips will help to make your trip to an ER as safe as possible--while reducing your out-of-pocket expenses:

Before You Go to an Emergency Room:

- It's important to keep your medical records in one location, so you can access them in an emergency. Create a folder that includes records of your doctor visits, medical tests, a list of your allergies, and a current list of the medications you are taking, including vitamins and herbal dietary supplements. Grab this on the way to the emergency room, because if you are in pain or afraid when you get to the emergency room it will be harder to answer even these simple questions. You can save money by eliminating unnecessary testing if you have the records with you.
- Before a medical emergency arises and you need to visit an emergency room, call your health insurance company to find out which hospital emergency rooms are covered under your plan, and keep list with the names, addresses and phone numbers.
- Most people who go to an emergency room do not use an ambulance (as many as 80%, according to some reports), so if you get to choose which emergency room you go to, pick the one recommended by your health insurance company because this will reduce your out-of-pocket costs.
- Before you need an emergency room, call the emergency rooms at your local hospitals to find out if they are staffed by board-certified emergency room doctors. This will help to ensure that you are treated by a doctor that is experienced in emergency room procedures.
- To find out how well your local hospital emergency rooms provide the types of critical care that often affect older adults, refer to How Well Does Your Hospital Provide Critical Care? at <http://seniorliving.about.com/od/healthnutrition/a/criticalcare1.htm>

Emergency Room Visit: What to Bring with You

- Don't forget the folder you created that includes all of your medical information.
- Bring paper and a pen to document the treatment you receive in the emergency room.
- Bring comfort items to the emergency room. Bottled water, hand sanitizer, tissues, and cash for vending machines or the pay phone (most hospitals ban the use of cell phones).
- Bring something to read when you go to an emergency room. It will help the time pass and may relieve some anxiety by taking your mind off your surroundings.

While You Wait in the Emergency Room (and chances are you will)

- Document everything that happens to you in the emergency room. Keep a detailed log of every treatment you receive, the name of the person providing that treatment, any medications given, and the time you received each service. This information will be useful if there are billing or treatment errors related to your emergency room visit.
- Get the business card (or ask for a phone number) for every doctor you see in the emergency room, in case your insurance company requires it, or if you have question later. If you are not able to keep this log during your emergency room visit, ask a family member or friend to help you.
- Alert your insurance company that you are in an emergency room.
- Ask to see the case worker on duty in the emergency room or the hospital. Many people don't know that hospitals offer case management services. A case worker can be very helpful and reassuring during admittance or transfer to another hospital, or when you're being discharged.

Avoid Additional Illness at the Emergency Room

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- Refer to the list of allergies you brought with you to the emergency room, and remind everyone who treats you.
- When you are about to receive a new service, have that person confirm your name and your diagnosis to avoid being given the wrong treatment or medication.
- Make sure anyone who touches you is wearing clean gloves or has washed their hands.

Before You Leave the Emergency Room

- Make sure that you are given clear discharge instructions when you leave the emergency room or hospital, read them immediately, and ask questions.
- Avoid buying prescriptions or medical supplies (including crutches, canes, and bandages) from the hospital. To save money, get a written prescription and purchase medication and medical supplies from your pharmacy, medical supply company, or online if you know and trust the vendor.
- Ask for a copy of your emergency room report, and ask to have an itemized copy of your medical services and charges mailed to you. Don't assume they will be sent to your primary doctor.

When You Get the Bill for Emergency Room Services

- Check the bill against the log you created while you were at the emergency room. Make sure you are not charged for services or medication you didn't receive.
- If there is an error on your emergency room bill, write to your insurance company and include a copy of record you made of the services you received.
- If your health insurance company refuses to pay for emergency room services or medication you received, don't be afraid to file a claim. People make mistakes, and many claims are paid when people take the time to question a decision by the insurance company

[Source: ARRP About.com: Senior Living 21 Apr 09 ++]

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VET JOBS Update 09: The Military Order of the Purple Heart launched a new website at www.vetsjobs.net to assist Veterans in obtaining Federal employment. The website offers a video, "How to Get a Federal Job," that walks Veterans through the process of applying for federal employment. The site also includes links to USAJOBS, the official website for federal jobs, the Department of Labor and the Office of Personnel Management. An additional source is the largest veteran job board in the world at the Military.com Career Center website www.military.com/Careers/Home/0,13373,,00.htm. [Source: Military.com article 20 Apr 09 ++]

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VET GUN CONTROL Update 01: The Nebraska Supreme Court ruled 17 APR 09 that an Omaha man who once expressed homicidal and suicidal thoughts was wrongly denied a state handgun buyer's permit by the Douglas County sheriff. Joseph D. Gallegos had never been "committed" to a mental institution under the definition of the 1968 federal gun law, according to the court's unanimous opinion. He should not, therefore, have been denied a handgun permit in 2007, the court said. In 2001, Gallegos, a veteran, sought voluntary treatment at the VA hospital in Omaha for post-traumatic stress syndrome and depression. A doctor there asked the Douglas County Board of Mental Health to determine whether Gallegos was mentally ill and dangerous, and he was admitted to a hospital for three days under emergency protective custody. The doctor said Gallegos had homicidal and suicidal thoughts related to a marital breakup, although he stated he would not follow through on those thoughts because of his religious beliefs. The board allowed Gallegos to enter a 90-day treatment program, which he completed, then dismissed his case.

But in 2007, when Gallegos sought to register his guns with the Omaha Police Department, his application was initially denied because of the 2001 treatment. OPD reversed its decision after Gallegos' doctor said he was not a danger to himself or others. But when he sought a state handgun buyer's permit from the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, he was denied, based on the 2001 treatment. Douglas County District Court Judge James Gleason upheld the sheriff's ruling. The Supreme Court reversed the lower court's ruling, saying the hospital stay was observational in nature and that Gallegos was never found to be mentally ill and dangerous. Deputy Douglas County Attorney Renee Mathias said the ruling will affect only a few cases. The biggest issue surrounding denial of gun permits, she said, involves previous convictions for domestic violence. People are banned from obtaining the state permit if they have such a conviction. [Source: World-Herald Bureau Paul Hammel article 17 Apr 09 ++]

VET GUN CONTROL Update 02: A bill aimed at protecting the gun rights of some veterans is under Senate consideration. The Veterans 2nd Amendment Protection Act, pending before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, would limit the circumstances in which a veteran's name could be added to a federal database used to do instant background checks for gun purchases. By law, anyone "adjudicated as a mental defective," such as people found to be a danger to themselves or others or who lack the mental capacity to manage their affairs, must be registered in the database. The bill, S.669, which has 15 co-sponsors, would prohibit VA from submitting names to the National Instant Criminal Background Check database unless a judicial authority finds the individuals to be a danger to themselves or others. VA has been turning over the names of veterans who have had someone else appointed to handle their financial affairs. Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), ranking Republican on the veterans committee and sponsor of the bill, said VA has sent names of more than 117,000 veterans to the Justice Department since 1998 under the policy. Burr said his bill would not be needed if the Justice Department changes its regulations. But the department refused to do so during the Bush administration and has shown no inclination to change course under the Obama administration.

The Justice Department declined to provide a witness for an 22 APR hearing at which Burr hoped his bill would be discussed. Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America is one of several veterans groups backing Burr's bill because questions about gun ownership have interfered with other legislation, such as a veterans suicide prevention bill approved two years ago. "Although there is still no danger a veteran will lose their right to carry a firearm for seeking treatment for [post-traumatic stress disorder], we offer our support for this legislation in the hopes it will quell any fears veterans might have about seeking treatment for mental health injuries," said Patrick Campbell, IAVA's chief legislative counsel. Campbell was referring to rampant rumors that VA might begin providing the Justice Department with names of veterans who seek help for PTSD or other mental health issues. "Our veterans are being unfairly targeted," Burr said, noting that the Social Security Administration has no similar rules. "The current process doesn't even assess whether these individuals pose a danger to themselves or others." [Source: NavyTimes Rick Maze article 27 Apr 09 ++]

VA RETURNING VETERANS WEBSITE: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched its new "Returning Veterans" Web site -- www.oefoif.va.gov -- to welcome home Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts with a social, Veteran-centric Web site focusing on their needs and questions. The site will feature videos, Veteran stories, and a blog where Veterans are encouraged to post feedback. The site also will restructure the traditional index-of-benefits format found on other VA pages into question-based, categorized, and easily navigated links by topic. This will allow Veterans to find benefits of interest easily and discover related benefits as they explore. Dr. Cross, VA's Principal Deputy Undersecretary for Health, said, "We hope our returning

Veterans find this site easy and helpful, but also engaging. As the site grows, we will be linking to Veterans' blogs and highlighting more of their own stories from their own views. We are their VA, so we are eager to provide a forum for Veterans to discuss their lives." [Source: VA News Release 20 Apr 09 ++]

TRICARE USER FEE Update 36: Defense Secretary Robert Gates' prescription for what ails the military health care system includes replacing aging hospitals, and raising Tricare fees for working-age retirees, which Congress has kept frozen since 1995. "Health care is eating the [Defense] Department alive," Gates told officers attending the Air War College on Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ala., following a speech on the budget there 15 APR. The defense chief is visiting each service war college to explain in more depth plans for "rebalancing" defense spending, starting with the fiscal 2010 budget request to be sent to Congress soon. Goals are to take care of warriors and their families, enhance U.S. capabilities to fight current wars, and reform weapons procurement, acquisition and contracting. "I want to give you some more insight into the thinking and analysis behind my budget recommendations and then give you a chance to ask questions and share your views," Gates told the officers.

One question came from a lieutenant colonel in the Louisiana Air National Guard who complained that active duty health services were worse than those given Medicaid recipients. He told Gates, "Tricare does not even require professional board certification for its physicians. Two pediatricians in the Tricare network serving the Maxwell-Gunter community, for example, were not board-certified. It occurs to me that Tricare takes advantage of a community that is unwilling and unused to complain," the officer said. He asked Gates what initiatives might be in the works to make uniformed health care providers the norm again or at least to raise standards for Tricare providers that would be deemed acceptable for civilian government employees. Gates conceded that reports he received on Tricare seem to run in parallel universes. In one, "Defense health officials present him with survey data showing how well Tricare is doing and how popular it is and how well it compares with private HMOs ... And I leave the room feeling gratified. He gets a very different story from every soldier, sailor, Marine and airman that I talk to" and from military spouses, Gates said. Common complaints range from delays in getting appointments to routine bureaucratic hassles to difficulties getting referred to medical specialists. Meanwhile, Gates said, the department is to spend \$47 billion in health care in 2010, costs that are eating the Department alive.

The economic stimulus package passed in February includes money for new hospitals at Fort Hood, Texas, and at Camp Pendleton, Calif. "But I also want the services to try and find the money ... to upgrade the hospitals at other posts," Gates said, because more "world-class hospitals" on base to will relieve pressure on the Tricare network of civilian physicians. It also might persuade more retirees "to come back on post or base" if the care again is what "people expect and want," Gates added. Many retirees likely would tell the secretary they've been denied access to base care and forced to use Tricare. "Another part of the problem," Gates said, "is we cannot get any relief from the Congress in terms of increasing either [Tricare] co-pays or the premiums. Tricare is now about a dozen years old. There has not been a single premium increase allowed since the program was founded. What medical plan in the nation has not had a single increase in the premium or co-pays in the last dozen years?" Gates said the department doesn't seek fee increases for the active duty force or their families or retiree beneficiaries old enough for Medicare. The targeted, he said, are fees for younger retirees, "mostly working another job. And employers will influence them to stay on Tricare because it saves the employer money.

"But the department also has learned a lesson", Gates said. For 2010, the defense health budget will not assume again \$1.2 billion in savings from Congress approving Tricare fee increases. Bush administration budgets did so the last three years to force Congress either to approve higher fees or to find ways to fill the funding hole. Those tactics only made lawmakers angry. "You know, hit us over the head with a two-by-four three times, and we're beginning

to get the message,” Gates explained to Pentagon reporters last week. “We figure maybe we'll have a better chance of having a serious dialogue with [Capitol] Hill if we go ahead and fund it and then begin the conversation. So we'll keep our fingers crossed.” Congressional staffers on key committees are divided on whether the Obama 2010 budget request will call for any Tricare fee increases. With wars being fought on two fronts, some argue the politics of such a move remain unacceptable. Others note that Sens. Ben Nelson (D-NE) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC), chairman and ranking member on the military personnel subcommittee, have said they could support modest Tricare fee increases for working age retirees.

Even some retiree associations have said they wouldn't protest some fee increases as long as they didn't exceed the annual percentage increase in retiree cost-of-living adjustments, and that Defense officials first exhausted all other reasonable ways of curbing health care costs. “Our main objection,” said a senior congressional staffer, “is that the department hasn't done any thoughtful analysis of what fees should be. They've just gone with that massive 10-years-worth of inflation adjustment” to bring relative out-of-pocket costs for retirees back to 1995 levels quickly. What also upset Congress was that most of the projected savings from fee increases were based on assumptions that many thousands of younger retirees would stop using Tricare, or would be discouraged from using their earned benefits and remain under civilian employer health insurance. [Source: Stars and Stripes Tom Philpott article 18 Apr 09 ++]

GI BILL Update 43: The Department of Veterans Affairs' final rules for the Post-9/11 GI Bill remove some proposed restrictions on current service members sharing the educational benefits with family members, but the regulations reject requests that the same transfer rights be given to veterans. VA officials, who received many letters asking for veterans to have the same GI Bill transfer rights as current service members, said they could not allow veterans to share benefits with family members because transfer rights for the new benefits program are, by law, limited to people who are in the service on 1 AUG 09, when the new GI Bill program begins. Also rejected in the final rules were living stipends for people using the new GI Bill for distance learning and special rules for veterans suffering traumatic brain injuries that would provide them with full payments even if they are not fulltime students. For veterans who plan to attend private colleges or universities, the final rules revise procedures that could reduce tuition for some students under a matching fund program. Colleges or universities will have more flexibility in deciding which categories of students would be eligible for reduced tuition, which VA officials expect will encourage more institutions to participate.

The new GI Bill educational benefits program features monthly benefits to fully cover the cost of tuition and fees at a four-year public college or university, plus a \$1,000 annual book allowance and a monthly living stipend pegged to the cost of renting a two-bedroom town house in the campus ZIP code. Jurisdiction over the Post-9/11 GI Bill is divided between two agencies: VA is responsible for payment of benefits — tuition payments directly to the school, and stipends paid to the student; and the Defense Department is responsible for setting rules for how current service members will be able to share earned benefits with a spouse or children. The VA is done with its part of the rule-making, but the Defense Department has yet to announce details on how service members will be able to transfer benefits, although some basic eligibility guidelines are established by law and by VA rules. In three ways, the final VA rules set the stage for more generous policies involving the transfer of benefits:

- Kickers — extra GI Bill benefits sometimes earned as enlistment bonuses — can be transferred to a spouse or children along with basic benefits, VA officials said in the final rule.
- When benefits are transferred, a spouse's divorce or a child's marriage will not terminate benefits. This is a 180-degree change from rules proposed in December. Benefits can be transferred — if a service member meets eligibility rules, still to be announced — to a current spouse and to an unmarried child. A

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subsequent divorce from a spouse or marriage of a child does not automatically cancel benefits, although a service member can reduce or rescind the transfer of benefits at any time, without reason.

- A military s spouse who earned GI Bill benefits in his own right, and used them, also can use transferred benefits. The only limitation is that only one GI Bill benefit may be used at a time.

While making transfer rights more liberal, the rules make it clear that educational benefits are not marital property that could be divided in a divorce settlement. One new feature of the Post-9/11 GI bill is the Yellow Ribbon Program, in which the VA will match, dollar for dollar, a reduction in tuition at private institutions. Initially, VA officials proposed that institutions providing reduced tuition would have to make it available to all veterans using the GI Bill, although this could be on a first-come, first-served basis. Revised rules allow institutions to target reduced tuition to students by status and by their enrollment. Reduced tuition could be offered to people attending a university's school of medicine but not to its law school students, for example. VA did not waiver on one point: Reduced tuition has to be guaranteed for a full academic year. VA officials hope to have a list of institutions offering Yellow Ribbon reduced tuition later this year. [Source: NavyTimes Rick Maze article 27 Apr 09 ++}

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GI BILL Update 44: Applications for the new Post-9/11 GI Bill will be accepted by the Veterans Affairs Department beginning 1 MAY, according the VA and Defense Department officials. The application process for the new program that takes effect 1 AUG will be fully electronic over a secure Internet connection that can be accessed through VA's education benefits Web site. Early enrollments will allow VA to work out kinks in a process that is expected to have more than 450,000 people apply for college benefits in the first year of the program. Calculating payments will be complicated by factors such as the length of active military service since 9/11, the number of credits, the location of the institution of higher learning, and in the case of private institutions, whether the college or university is taking part in a tuition-reduction program.

Stakes are high for VA to implement the new program that promises to cover full tuition and fees for attending public colleges and universities, plus provide a monthly living expense, book allowance and other benefits. Congress, veterans' service organizations and people wanting to use the new benefits program are all concerned after VA warned of the difficulty of launching such a sweeping program less than one year after it was signed into law. The VA had about three years to fully implement the Montgomery GI Bill, the last major change in veterans education benefits that took effect in 1986. VA officials, including Keith Wilson, who heads the department's education service, have expressed confidence that the program will launch successfully. "I am personally committed to ensuring the success of this program, as is every employee working tirelessly on this project," Wilson said 25 MAR at a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing. All active-duty service members are expected to receive e-mail notifications that the application process has started, VA officials said. Being pre-certified as eligible for the Post-9/11 GI Bill would make it easier to complete the enrollment process later this summer when the program is fully launched.

While applications are being accepted, some details of the new program remain unknown. The Defense Department has yet to announce how service members will qualify for a key part of the new GI Bill, transferring unused benefits to a spouse or children. VA sources, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said they had hoped transferability rules would be announced before the application process began so active-duty service members would know if they were interested in enrolling even if they were not personally going to use their benefits in the fall. An unexplained holdup in the Pentagon left a big hole in the benefits plan, but VA officials decided to press ahead with accepting applications, and will simply tell applicants that full details are still to come. Defense Department sources said transfer rights rules have been approved by the services but final approval has not been

received from the White House's Office of Management and Budget, which reviews regulations. Sources were reluctant to predict when final rules might be announced. [Source: NavyTimes Rick Maze article 22 Apr 09 ++]

MILITARY RETIREE TAX RELIEF Update 01: If state tax laws aren't high on your list of things to consider when you choose where to live after retirement, they should be. How states interpret the terms "military pension," "military retirement income" and "military retired pay" can vary based on their tax codes' legal definition of a "defined pension." According to retired Army Col. Warren Enos, president of the California Council of Chapters of the Military Officers Association of America, the tax codes of 42 states recognize military service with some form of tax exemption for military retirement pay. But his home state of California — which ranks a close third behind Florida and Texas among states with the most military retirees — is not all that tax-friendly. Enos, representing 39,000 members and 45 MOAA chapters, is trying to change that. He is urging other military associations and groups in California to throw their weight behind Assembly Bill 1077, which would "provide an exclusion from gross income for retired pay and survivor annuities received by an individual as a result of active service of a member of the Armed Forces of the United States."

In a letter to California state Sen. Joel Anderson, who introduced AB 1077 in February, Enos noted that almost 43% of California's 170,000 military retirees are under age 65 and still working. "California would do well to attract more military retirees ... individuals who would place few demands on the support services of a community and would come with paid health care, a stable source of income, and at an age to start a second career," he wrote. "At retirement, the retiree would often contribute as a productive volunteer in service clubs, community affairs, and civic activities. The economic benefits derived from military retirees would be significant. Assembly Bill 1077 will be an incentive for more military retirees to move to California and live as productive citizens." Military retirees are not looking for a handout or a free ride, Enos said. Rather, they "represent a vital demographic to the state, men and women who bring diversity, life experiences, work ethic, discipline and high technology skills to the work force and to the community," he wrote. "Veterans represent a high-technology, young, ethical and dedicated population that is highly beneficial to the state's economy, and should be more actively encouraged to come to California and remain here."

As Enos sees it, military retirees should gravitate to states that express appreciation and recognition of their long years of service to the nation — as well as their skills, knowledge and experience — not just in words, but in a tangible way. A hearing on AB 1077 is scheduled for 11 MAY in the state assembly. You can track the bill's progress on the California Legislative Counsel's Web site at www.leginfo.ca.gov. Click on "Bill Information" and plug "AB 1077" into the search field. For more information, contact Enos at warren@cal-moaa.org. Military retirees should gravitate to states that express 'appreciation and recognition' of their long years of service to the nation. [Source: NavyTimes Alex Keenan article 27 Apr 09 ++]

VA SUICIDE PREVENTION Update 05: Several branches of the US military are reporting significant spikes in the number of suicides committed by both active-duty troops and veterans returning from duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Experts are calling the number of military-related suicides sweeping the country an epidemic. In addition, survivors of veterans who committed suicide are starting to file lawsuits, accusing the Department of Veterans Affairs of medical malpractice. The agency has come under attack by lawmakers and veterans' groups charging that it failed to treat injured veterans for post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury, the signature wounds of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The VA also has been accused of manipulating suicide statistics to downplay the problem and systematically misdiagnosing returning combat soldiers who suffer

mental illness because their resources are tapped. "We are murdering our own children here," said the chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Rep. Bob Filner (D-CA) in an interview with The Detroit News. "The tragedy is we could have predicted this, what with multiple deployments, the type of urban warfare and the almost inevitable killing of innocent people. Now we have an epidemic on our hands. This is a national disgrace." Veterans groups say they are bracing for a flood of soldiers coming home from Iraq to a Veterans Affairs system that is ill-equipped to treat them and a country in the grips of a recession with few or no jobs to offer soldiers. [Source: The Detroit News Rich Keenan article 17 Apr 09 ++]

VA RECORDS: The Veterans Benefits Administration, which has stored tens of millions of pages in veteran's files, closed a fast-track procurement on 15 APR that will digitize the paper forms to improve the way it processes and manages benefits. The contract is part of a push by Eric Shinseki, secretary of the Veterans Affairs Department, who said at his January confirmation hearing that he wanted to make the department as "paperless as possible." The paper claims that one veteran file to receive compensation can fill four or five cardboard boxes, said Gerald Manar, deputy director of national veterans' services for the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Shinseki in testimony before the House Veterans Affairs Committee described an almost Dickensian atmosphere in VBA offices that process disability claims. "Walk into one of our rooms where . . . decisions are being made about disabilities for veterans [and you'll] see individuals sitting at a desk with stacks of paper that go up halfway to the ceiling," he said. "As they finish one pile, another pile comes in."

The five-year contract, valued by industry sources at more than \$150 million, calls for scanning and indexing 25 million images a year from veterans' records, which are stored at more than 250 military and VBA locations nationwide. Scanning, digitizing and indexing VBA files will be a daunting and labor-intensive task for the company that wins the contract, because each record, which can contain medical documents, might be hundreds or thousands of pages, said Harold Gracey, a consultant with Topside Consulting who served as VA chief of staff from 1994 to 1998. Manar said the veteran's files include pieces of paper stapled or held together with paper clips, which the contractor will have to remove before scanning. He said indexing the files will be a central element for success in the digitization project, and the winning contractor will have to take care to ensure that the files are indexed correctly and each piece of paper matches up with the correct digital record.

The digitization contract is one step in resolving VBA's paper problems, Manar said. While 25 million documents seems like a significant amount of paper to scan in one year, it is a small number when one considers VBA processes claims for 800,000 veterans. Manar said it is likely the winning contractor will focus on digitizing the records of the 200,000 veterans the agency anticipates will leave the service within the next several years. VA intends to award the contract to one bidder as a broad purchase agreement on a General Services Administration contract. GSA lists 90 companies that have schedule contracts for document scanning and conversion. [Source: www.nextgov.com/nextgov/ng_20090416_5914.php Bob Brewin article 16 Apr 09 ++]

DOD DISABILITY RETIREMENT Update 03: The Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report in APR 09 that scrutinizes the military's Temporary Disability Retired List (TDRL) caseload, management, and impact on servicemembers. The services use the TDRL when a servicemember is determined to have a disability that won't permit continued service but the condition is not yet stable. The disabled member may be put on the TDRL for as long as 5 years or until the condition stabilizes. GAO found that TDRL caseloads grew by 43% between 2003 and 2007 - no surprise given the increased wartime deployments. But the GAO says the services do not do a good job of informing the servicemembers about the TDRL process, as fact

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sheets provided to disabled servicemembers were incomplete and inconsistent between the services. Disabled members who participated in GAO focus groups expressed dissatisfaction with limited access to information and the lack of specific TDRL points of contact. In particular, the GAO found that:

- Only 1% of people placed on the TDRL between 2000 and 2003 ever returned to duty.
- More than 80% of those placed on the TDRL were ultimately found to be permanently disabled.
- Of those, nearly 60% received a disability retirement, 25% received a disability severance, and 9% were separated without any benefits (because the condition existed prior to entering service or involved misconduct).
- The services had difficulty making required follow-up assessments, and said one answer might be shortening the maximum time on the TDRL to four years, since so few ended up returning to active duty anyway.
- Nearly 10% of those who ended up with a permanent disability retirement experienced a gap in benefits between being removed from the TDRL and permanently retired, some lasting more than 6 months

[Source: MOAA Leg Up 17 Apr 09 ++]

COLA 2010 Update 05: The Bureau of Labor Statistics announced the monthly consumer price index for March this week. The CPI is the measure used to make adjustments to military retired pay, survivor benefits, Social Security and other federal pensions. The CPI rose 0.2% March. That still leaves cumulative inflation at -3.8% since October. Even with that small gain, the CPI is still down 3.8% so far for this fiscal year. Unless the CPI gains about 4% or more over the next six months, there won't be any retired pay COLA for 2010. This will impact on all federal, military and social security retirees or about one in every six Americans. [Source: MOAA Leg Up 17 Apr 09 ++]

VA HEADSTONES & MARKERS Update 04: The Attorney General's Office is now investigating two state employees for taking home 77 gravestones from the Southern Nevada Veterans Cemetery. Those employees admitted they turned the stones into a patio. The investigation is now trying to decide if taking the stones is considered a crime. But now, Tami and Kevin Jenicke are taking the stones back where they belong. The view from above their house said it all. Seventy-seven gravestones, memorials of the heroes who gave so much, now turned into a patio. Tami Jenicke is a spokesperson for the state veterans home. Kevin Jenicke actually works at the cemetery. They took home stones meant for destruction. Normally spouses can be buried together and that requires replacing the current headstone. Those old headstones ended up in the Jenickes backyard. Now, with the plan exposed, the Jenickes had to pull the stones up. "We have to step back and say, 'How have we failed?'" said Carole Turner with the Nevada Office of Veterans Services. Turner is the regional boss for the Veterans Department. She says the patio is a mistake that never should have happened. "Our veterans deserve a respectful, peaceful final resting place," she said.

Turner says the actions of the Jenicke's should not reflect on her entire agency and says this was an isolated case. "This does not define who we are. We're much better than this," she said. Tuner's internal inquiry promises results, "At the conclusion of our investigation, we will, as appropriate, take sanctions against the Jenicke's and whomever, quite frankly." The state has no policy on how the old stones should be destroyed, but the federal government does. The stones should be ground down and broken apart so they cannot be recognized -- the most honorable option available -- according to the government. While the agencies continue their investigations and possible sanctions,

the Veterans Department is still finalizing state rules to keep this from happening again.[Source: LasVegasNow Eye witness news Jonathan Humbert report 14 Apr 09 ++]

VA MEDICAL CARE HARDSHIP PROGRAM: A sign of the current state of the economy is that more and more military veterans are asking for help with their health care. The staff at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in La Jolla [San Diego] CA say more veterans are calling since they are finding it tougher to pay for health care because they either cannot afford it or they lost a job and their benefits. Richard Randolph of the VAMC said, "Just talking to veterans every day, it's rough out there." Hospital administrators said the vets are looking for a hardship waiver, which would allow them to qualify for extra medical coverage from the VA. Last year, only 42 waiver requests were made. However, in the first four months of 2009, VAMC La Jolla has already received more than 120 requests, and officials said there might be a lot more out there. "And a lot of them are embarrassed about it and they don't want people to know," said Linette Baker, chief health administrator at the VAMC. "They're used to being the bread-winner and doing what they need to do for our country and for their families and now they're coming in and they have to admit they can't do it anymore." The VA said it could help but only after a vet comes to grips with the tough economy. "Don't be afraid to come and ask the basic question, 'Hey, what am I entitled to?'" said Randolph.

Veterans who have put off applying for VA enrollment because they thought their income was too high may want to reconsider applying if their projected current year's income is lower. Hardship may be approved if the veteran's current year income is substantially reduced from the prior year. Personal circumstances such as loss of employment, sudden decrease in income or increases in out-of-pocket veteran or family health care expenses factor into VA's hardship determination. If your projected year income is below the Means Test Threshold or Geographic Means Test Threshold indicated at www.va.gov/healtheligibility/Library/pubs/VAINcomeThresholds/VAINcomeThresholds.pdf & www.va.gov/healtheligibility/Library/pubs/GMTIncomeThresholds, you may qualify for cost-free VA medical care. For additional information and qualifications for this assistance program, veterans should contact their local VA Medical Center Enrollment Coordinator. You can find your local medical facility with the Facilities Locator at <http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isFlash=1>. Veterans may also contact VA's Health Benefits Service Center at 1-877-222 VETS (8387). Check the VA webpage on Copays and Charges at www.va.gov/healtheligibility costs for further information on costs for VA health care services. [Source: www.va.gov & 10News.com article 13 Apr 09 ++]

HUD-VASH: The HUD-VASH program for homeless veterans with severe psychiatric or substance abuse disorders is a national initiative sponsored by the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Veterans Affairs (VA). The goal of the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program is to provide Section 8 rental assistance vouchers combined with case management services and clinical services to enable homeless veterans to lead healthy, productive lives in the community and avoid remaining homeless. Veterans Affairs identifies the homeless veterans with severe psychiatric and/or substance abuse disorders through outreach efforts. The participating veterans receive treatment and become medically stabilized prior to issuance of the rental assistance voucher. Complications unique to the plight of homeless veterans have long been recognized by the VA and the HUD. Intensive case management, timely long-term therapeutic interventions, and stable housing are the essential elements in providing services to this population. Services provided to participants include:

- In-patient hospitalization for stabilization
- Assistance in locating appropriate housing
- Section 8 rental assistance subsidies to participants

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- Outreach and case management services
- Stabilization, clinical, and vocational services
- Continuing follow-up to avoid relapses
- Opportunity to participate in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program

Eligibility for the VASH program is determined by the following criteria for veterans:

- Are homeless (30 days living on the street or in a shelter)
- Have a severe substance abuse or psychiatric diagnosis
- Have been discharged (any type but dishonorable)
- Are willing to sign a treatment agreement and fully participate in the clinical component of the program
- Demonstrate a period of stabilization prior to consideration for placement
- Demonstrate an absence of suicidal, homicidal, or threatening behavior
- Have any outstanding warrants resolved
- Are mentally competent and physically able to live in the community
- Demonstrate an interest in changing his or her lifestyle and in returning to work or other socially productive activity.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act (Public Law 110-161) enacted 26 DEC 07, provided \$75 million dollars of funding for the HUD-VASH voucher program. The VA identified 132 Veteran Affairs Medical Centers (VAMCs) to participate with the program. In doing so, the VA took into account the population of homeless veterans needing services in the area, the number of homeless veterans served by the homeless programs at each VAMC during FY 2006 and FY 2007, geographic distribution and VA case management resources. There is at least one site in each of the 50 states and in the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Generally, the HUD-VASH housing choice voucher (HCV) program is administered in accordance with regular HCV program requirements. However, the Act allows HUD to waive or specify alternative requirements for any provision of any statute or regulation that HUD administers in connection with this program in order to effectively deliver and administer HUD-VASH voucher assistance. HUD awarded funding for approximately 10,000 HUD-VASH vouchers in MAY 08. If you or someone you know is interested in the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program, call (202) 745-8338 and ask about the "Homeless Outreach" programs. [Source: www.hud.gov/offices/pih/programs/hcv/vash Apr 09 ++]

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DEERS FACTS Update 01: DEERS is a worldwide, computerized database of uniformed services members (sponsors), their family members and others who are eligible for military benefits. If you find that you are not eligible in DEERS, contact the Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office at 1-800-538-9552. TRICARE uses the information in DEERS to verify TRICARE eligibility. For an overview on DEERS, visit TRICARE's eligibility Web page <http://www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/ProfileFilter.do?purI=%2Fhome%2Foverview%2Feligibility>. Keeping all of your family's information up-to-date in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) is essential for maintaining your TRICARE benefit coverage and prevent you from losing it. Updating your information is simple. While keeping DEERS current is simple, it is ultimately your responsibility. When you should do it is any time you or your family experiences a life-changing event. Examples include:

- Retiring or separating from active duty
- Activating or deactivating from National Guard or Reserve
- Changing your service status (enlisting to officer, changing branch, etc.)
- Getting married or divorced
- Having a baby or adopting a child

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- Moving
- Becoming eligible for Medicare (sponsor or family member)
- Losing a family member

There are a number of ways to update your information. When doing so note that addresses must be a physical address; P.O. boxes cannot be used. Additionally, if both parents are service members, then either parent (must choose one) may be listed as the child(ren)'s sponsor in DEERS. Following are your options:

- To add or remove family members, visit a local ID card office. You can search for an office near you by ZIP code, city, state or country by visiting the ID card office locator on the DEERS website <http://tricare.mil/mybenefit/ProfileFilter.do?purI=%2Fhome%2Foverview%2Feligibility%2FDEERS>. Call the office first to verify address and business hours.
- Call the Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office at 1-800-538-9552 to update your home address, e-mail and phone numbers. (TTY/TDD for the deaf: 1-866-363-2883).
- Fax home address, e-mail or phone number changes to the Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office at 1-831-655-8317.
- Mail changes to the Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office, Attn: Change of Address, 400 Gigling Road, Seaside, CA 93955-6771 . You must include supporting documentation if you are updating a family member's status:
- Online refer to the DEERS Web site and follow the steps to update your home address, e-mail and phone numbers.

[Source: Tricare Blog Major General Elder Granger article 16 Apr 09 ++]

POW DESIGNATION Update 02: Under federal law, only the Secretary of Defense — through the heads of the various military service branches — is authorized to declare someone a prisoner of war — “and until the service reports a person as a POW, then he is NOT one,” says Larry Greer, spokesman for the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, which maintains a database of officially recognized POWs for most wars. A separate list for the Vietnam War is called Personnel Missing — Southeast Asia, or PMSEA. Critics say the VA could use the lists, which are accessible online, to identify red-flag cases, but doesn’t. Until APR 09, the VA had claimed on its Web site that it also had the authority to confer POW status. But after the AP pointed out the federal law, that language was struck “in light of your observations,” spokesman Jemison says. Mike McGrath, historian and past president of Nam-POWs, Inc., which represents most Vietnam war prisoners, has sent letters to two successive VA secretaries offering to compare the Defense list with the VBA’s list of POW beneficiaries.

McGrath, a retired Navy captain who was shot down over North Vietnam in 1967 and was not repatriated until 1973, says he was either ignored or told that the VA’s computers simply couldn’t isolate the names of POWs who were receiving disability money. “In one hour I could give the list ... back to them (and say) these are the people you should look at as possible errors or, in extreme cases, as possible fraud,” says McGrath, who once exposed a phony who not only had a POW card but was working as a trauma counselor for the VA in Denver. “The bureaucracy is so huge that no one has the time or interest to give a damn.” The VBA, citing the federal Privacy Act, refused AP’s requests to even confirm whether a particular beneficiary is listed as a POW in its files.

The P.O.W. Network, made up of veterans and civilians, says it has copies of VA documents conferring POW status on people who never even served in the military. When confronted, some have claimed their names aren’t on the Defense list because they were on a secret, CIA-sponsored mission that remains classified, but that doesn’t wash. While a person’s military record might not say what he or she was doing when captured, it would still reflect the captivity, McGrath says — whether in a notation in a muster roll or a telegram to family back in the States. Even

people who were captured and freed the same day are included on the DPMO-PMSEA lists. "If a man's missing from a unit in any type of action, a whole series of things happen that start documentation that still exists today," he says. "The military is responsible for a human being." [Source: MarineCorpsTimes Allen G. Breed article 12 Apr 09 ++]

POW DESIGNATION Update 03: There are far more POW claimants than actual POWs. It's surprisingly easy to fake a record of being a war prisoner. P.O.W. Network co-founder Mary Schantag has purchased stacks of surplus military separation forms on the Internet, where she says everything someone would need to create his own service file is available. "These guys are way too good at it," says Schantag, who formed the group with her husband, "And the people at the VA are NOT good enough at it." Take the case of retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Barr Cayton. For years, the Texan told stories about how he and another member of his Ranger squad were taken prisoner during a JAN 71 firefight in Vietnam. Cayton told of regaining consciousness and finding his arms tied to a branch across his shoulders, and of being marched from village to village with a leash around his neck as a propaganda tool. "They did degrading, inhumane things to us," he told a Texas newspaper, adding that finally, after 20 days in captivity, he managed to escape.

It was all a lie. Records from the National Archives show that Cayton was accounted for during the entire period he cited — Jan. 1-21 — and that no one from his unit was ever taken prisoner. In fact, Cayton received a Silver Star medal for an action that occurred on 10 JAN 71 midway through his alleged captivity. A falsified copy of an official form was placed in his file at the St. Louis repository, the source to which all other agencies turn for documentation of a veteran's service. "PRISONER OF WAR, CO G, 75TH INF (ABN RGR), VIETNAM, 710101-710121," the forged document says. After years of prodding by P.O.W. Network members, the Army's Criminal Investigation Command looked into Cayton's case. In the end, Cayton was placed in a federal pretrial diversion program and ordered to correct his records in St. Louis. However, when the AP filed a Freedom of Information Act request recently for Cayton's file, the documents that came back appeared unchanged — still reflecting 20 days in captivity. Cayton did not respond to AP calls seeking comment, but in a letter to the Schantags, he apologized "if my statements and representations have misled or offended any of my fellow service members, past and present." The VA refused to comment on the case. But in response to the Army's inquiry, the agency maintained that Cayton, as a combat veteran, "would have received the same amount of compensation without claiming he was a POW, and accordingly there was no loss to the U.S. Government."

Larry Greer, a spokesman for the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office, which maintains a database of officially recognized POWs for most wars says cases like this illustrate the painstaking research involved in verifying someone's POW status. It often requires checking unit rosters, roll calls, payroll records and after-action reports, something for which the VA has neither the personnel nor the mandate. "On behalf of the United States government and the taxpayer, I would do a lot of verifying before I would lay the POW label on him," says Greer. The VA is under fire for a huge backlog in disability applications, which the agency says is partly due to its own diligent fact-checking. Veterans groups have sued the agency, saying the long wait and VA's questions have driven some deserving vets to suicide. On 10 APR President Obama announced a more efficient record system to ease delays in health care for wounded veterans. While mindful of VA's challenges Mike McGrath, historian and past president of Nam-POWs, Inc., says every dollar that goes to a phony is one that's not available for those who've earned it. Burkett, the "Stolen Valor" author, says people who make up these stories are doing more than just taking money from fellow veterans. "It's stealing from the dead," he says. "It's a form of sacrilege." [Source: MarineCorpsTimes Allen G. Breed article 12 Apr 09 ++]

URBAN LEGENDS Update 01: If you are left wondering about something newly arrived in your inbox, you can check it out at the Urban Legends website www.snopes.com/search. Following are emails that continue to cycle on the internet:

- Computer virus warnings: Postcard (or Greeting Card), Life is Beautiful, Mail Server Report.
<http://www.snopes.com/computer/virus/postcard.asp>
<http://www.snopes.com/computer/virus/lifeisbeautiful.asp>
<http://www.snopes.com/computer/virus/mailserver.asp>
- Various rumors about the U.S. Social Security system.
<http://www.snopes.com/politics/socialsecurity/socialsecurity.asp>
- No, entering one's PIN in reverse at any ATM will not summon the police.
<http://www.snopes.com/business/bank/pinalert.asp>
- Warnings about scammers' running up long-distance charges by asking victims to press #-9-0 on their telephones or luring phone users into returning calls to numbers within the 809 area code.
<http://www.snopes.com/fraud/telephone/jailcall.asp>
<http://www.snopes.com/fraud/telephone/809.asp>
- Are thieves armed with "code grabbers" breaking into your automobiles?
<http://www.snopes.com/autos/techno/lockcode.asp>
- No, the new dollar coin doesn't omit "In God We Trust" - that phrase has been stamped into its edge. <http://www.snopes.com/politics/religion/dollarcoin.asp>
- E-mail warns that cell phone numbers are being sold to telemarketers. <http://www.snopes.com/politics/business/cell411.asp>
- No, Swiffer WetJet does not pose a danger to pets. <http://www.snopes.com/critters/crusader/swiffer.asp>
- E-mail describes woman who evades a rapist posing as a policeman by calling #77 (or *677) on her cell phone. <http://www.snopes.com/horrors/mayhem/fakecop.asp>
- Photographs show a New Jersey monument to the victims of 9/11 which was donated by Russia.
<http://www.snopes.com/rumors/tributes/teardrop.asp>
- Petition protests an upcoming film said to portray Jesus as gay.
<http://www.snopes.com/politics/religion/gayjesus.asp>
- No, criminals are not incapacitating potential victims with business cards soaked in burundanga.
<http://www.snopes.com/horrors/mayhem/burundanga.asp>
- No, a serial killer/rapist is not luring women with \$5 bills they've "dropped."
<http://www.snopes.com/crime/warnings/rapisttrick.asp>
- Ingestion of hand sanitizer by children can result in alcohol poisoning.
<http://www.snopes.com/medical/toxins/sanitizer.asp>
- Warning that water boiled in a microwave oven can suddenly "explode."
<http://www.snopes.com/science/microwave.asp>
- As part of the 2009 pre-inaugural festivities, Tiger Woods gave a speech in thanks of the military.
<http://www.snopes.com/politics/obama/tigerwoods.asp>
- Protest against federal spending encourages Americans to mail teabags to the White House.
<http://www.snopes.com/politics/taxes/teaparty.asp>
- Untapped oil reserves in the Bakken Formation? <http://www.snopes.com/politics/gasoline/bakken.asp>
- Items about Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. <http://www.snopes.com/politics/pelosi/pelosi.asp>
- Hoax asserts cell phones can pop popcorn or cook eggs. <http://www.snopes.com/science/cookegg.asp>

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- Drug products containing PPA (phenylpropanolamine) were pulled from the market due to FDA concerns over a possible connection to strokes. <http://www.snopes.com/medical/drugs/ppa.asp>
- The warship USS New York is being built using steel from the World Trade Center. <http://www.snopes.com/photos/military/ussnewyork.asp>
- Kathy Griffin's controversial 2007 Emmy Awards speech denigrating Jesus. <http://www.snopes.com/politics/religion/griffin.asp>
- Medical ailments caused by the sweetener Aspartame? <http://www.snopes.com/medical/toxins/aspartame.asp>
- Long-running hoax claims Bill Gates, Microsoft and AOL are giving away cash and merchandise to those who forward an e-mail message. Or that Ericsson is giving away free laptop computers to children. Or that Applebees is giving out free \$50 vouchers. <http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/nothing/microsoft-aol.asp>
<http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/nothing/ericsson.asp>
<http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/nothing/applebees.asp>
- Appeals to find missing children: Ashley Flores, Reachelle Marie Smith, and Evan Trembley. <http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/missing/ashleyflores.asp>
<http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/missing/reachelle.asp>
<http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/missing/trembley.asp>
- No, gangs of carjackers have not been luring victims from their vehicles by placing flyers on cars. <http://www.snopes.com/crime/warnings/carjack.asp>
- Longstanding hoax: Amy Bruce, a terminally ill young girl, writes "Slow Dance" poem. <http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/medical/slowdance.asp>

[Source: www.snopes.com Update #409 5 Apr 09 ++]

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

State Sales Tax: The state currently does not have a sales and use tax. However, some jurisdictions impose local sales taxes that range up to 7%. Anchorage does not have a sales tax.

Fuel & Cigarette:

- Gasoline Tax: 0 cents/gallon
- Diesel Fuel Tax: 0 cents/gallon
- Cigarette Tax: \$2.00/pack of 20 (Anchorage - add \$1.32)

Personal Income Taxes:

- No state income tax.
- Retirement Income: Not taxed.

Property Taxes

- Alaska is the only state in the United States where a large part of the land mass is not subject to a property tax. Although property tax is the primary method of raising revenues for most of the larger municipalities

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in the state, smaller municipalities favor a sales tax. This is due primarily to the fact that the smaller incorporated areas lack a tax base large enough to support the property tax. The unincorporated areas of the state do not have the legal authority to levy a tax. Twelve of the the 16 organized boroughs levy a property tax. Only 13 cities outside of organized boroughs levy a property tax. These 25 municipalities can be found on the Directory of Taxing Jurisdictions www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/osa/assessor.cfm .

- Alaska taxes both real and personal property. There are several municipalities that have chosen to exempt some or all categories of personal property. For a listing of those municipalities and categories, see the Alaska Taxable information website above. Homeowners 65 and older (or surviving spouses 60 and older) are exempt from municipal taxes on the first \$150,000 of the assessed value of their property. This also applies to disabled veterans. Intangible personal property is exempt from taxation. Call 907-269-6620 (Anchorage) or 907-465-2320 (Juneau) for details.

Inheritance and Estate Taxes - There is no inheritance tax and the estate tax is limited to federal estate tax collection.

For further information, visit the Alaska Department of Revenue website www.revenue.state.ak.us. [Source: www.retirementliving.com Apr 09 ++]

MILITARY HISTORY ANNIVERSARIES:

- Apr 16 1945 - WWII: American troops enter Nuremberg Germany
- Apr 16 1953 – Korean War: Battle of Pork Chop Hill (Hill 255) began .
- Apr 17 1961 - Bay of Pigs Invasion: A group of CIA financed and trained Cuban refugees lands at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba with the aim of ousting Fidel Castro.
- Apr 18 1775 - American revolutionaries Paul Revere and William Dawes ride though the towns of Massachusetts warning that "the British are coming."
- Apr 18 1942 - WWII: James H. Doolittle bombs Tokyo and other Japanese cities.
- Apr 18 1943 - WWII: The mastermind of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto) is shot down by American P-38 fighters while traveling in a bomber.
- Apr 19 1775 - The American Revolution begins as fighting breaks out at Lexington Massachusetts.
- Apr 20 1861 - Civil War: Robert E. Lee resigns his commission in the United States Army in order to command the forces of the state of Virginia.
- Apr 20 1945 - World War II: US troops capture Leipzig, Germany, only to later cede the city to the Soviet Union.
- Apr 21 1836 - General Sam Houston defeats Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto. Texas wins independence from Mexico
- Apr 21 1918 - WWI: German fighter ace Manfred von Richthofen, known as "The Red Baron", is shot down and killed over Vaux sur Somme in France.
- Apr 22 1898 - 1st Spanish-American War action: The United States Navy begins a blockade of Cuban ports and the USS Nashville captures a Spanish merchant ship.
- Apr 22 1915 - WWI: The use of poison gas in World War I escalates when chlorine gas is released as a chemical weapon in the Second Battle of Ypres.
- Apr 22 1945 - WW II: Fuehrerbunker - After learning that Soviet forces have taken Eberswalde without a fight, Adolf Hitler admits defeat in his underground bunker and states that suicide is his only recourse.
- Apr 22 1951 - Ticker-tape parade for General MacArthur in NYC
- Apr 24 1805 - U.S. Marines attack and capture the town of Derna in Tripoli from the Barbary pirates.

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- Apr 24 1918 - WWI: First tank-to-tank combat, at Villers-Bretonneux, France, when three British Mark IVs met three German A7Vs.
- Apr 24 1944 - 1st Boeing B-29 arrives in China "over the Hump"
- Apr 24 1948 - Cold War: The Berlin airlift begins to relieve surrounded city.
- Apr 24 1967 - Vietnam: American General William Westmoreland says that the enemy had gained support in the U.S. States that gives him hope that he can win politically that which he cannot win militarily.
- Apr 24 1980 - A rescue attempt of the U.S. hostages held in Iran fails when a plane collides with a helicopter in the Iranian desert.
- Apr 25 1915 – WWI: 78,000 ANZAC troops land at Gallipoli
- Apr 25 1951 - Korean War: After a three day fight against Chinese Communist Forces, the Gloucestershire Regiment is annihilated on Gloucester Hill in the Battle of the Imjin River.
- Apr 26 1945 - WWII: Battle of Bautzen - last successful German tank-offensive of the war and last noteworthy victory of the Wehrmacht.
- Apr 27 1813 - War of 1812: United States troops capture the capital of Upper Canada York (present day Toronto, Canada).
- Apr 27 1975 - Vietnam: Saigon is encircled by North Vietnamese troops.
- Apr 28 1942 – WWII: As result of a Gallup Poll the war is titled WWII
- Apr 28 1965 - The U.S. Army and Marines invade the Dominican Republic.
- Apr 28 1965 - US marines invade Dominican Republic, stay until October 1966
- Apr 28 1970 - Vietnam: U.S. President Richard M. Nixon formally authorizes American combat troops to fight communist sanctuaries in Cambodia.
- Apr 29 1945 - WWII: The German Army in Italy surrenders unconditionally to the Allies.
- Apr 29 1975 - Vietnam War: Operation Frequent Wind: The U.S. begins to evacuate US citizens from Saigon prior to an expected North Vietnamese takeover. U.S. involvement in the war comes to an end.
- Apr 29 1990 - Cold War: Wrecking cranes began tearing down Berlin Wall at Brandenburg Gate
- Apr 30 1945 WWII: Adolf Hitler commits suicide in his bunker. Karl Donitz becomes his successor.
- Apr 30 1972 - Vietnam: The North Vietnamese launch an invasion of the South.
- Apr 30 1975 - Vietnam: North Vietnamese troops enter the Independence Palace of South Vietnam in Saigon ending the Vietnam War.

[Source: Various Apr 09 ++]

Where we Stand

VETERAN LEGISLATION STATUS 28 APR 09: Refer to the Bulletin's Veteran Legislation attachment for or a listing of Congressional bills of interest to the veteran community that have been introduced in the 111th Congress. Support of these bills through cosponsorship by other legislators is critical if they are ever going to move through the legislative process for a floor vote to become law. A good indication on that likelihood is the number of cosponsors who have signed onto the bill. Any number of members may cosponsor a bill in the House or Senate. At <http://thomas.loc.gov> you can review a copy of each bill's content, determine its current status, the committee it has been assigned to, and if your legislator is a sponsor or cosponsor of it. To determine what bills, amendments your representative has sponsored, cosponsored, or dropped sponsorship on refer to <http://thomas.loc.gov/bss/d111/sponlst.html>. The key to increasing cosponsorship on veteran related bills and subsequent passage into law is letting our representatives know of veteran's feelings on issues. You can reach their Washington office via the Capital Operator direct at (866) 272-6622, (800) 828-0498, or (866) 340-9281 to express your views. Otherwise, you can locate on <http://thomas.loc.gov> your representative and his/her phone number, mailing address, or email/website to communicate with a message or letter of your own making. Refer to

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http://www.thecapitol.net/FAQ/cong_schedule.html for dates that you can access your representatives on their home turf. [Source: RAO Bulletin Attachment 28 Apr 09 ++]

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Five cannibals were employed by the Navy as translators during one of the island campaigns during World War II. When the Commanding Admiral of the task force welcomed the cannibals he said, "You're all part of our team now. We will compensate you well for your services, and you can eat any of the rations that the Sailors are eating. So please don't indulge yourselves by eating a Sailor." The cannibals promised.

Four weeks later the Admiral returned and said, "You're all working very hard, and I'm very satisfied with all of you. However, one of our Chiefs has disappeared. Do any of you know what happened to him?" The cannibals all shook their heads no.

After the Admiral left, the leader of the cannibals turned to the others and said, "Which of you idiots ate the Chief?"

A hand raised hesitantly, to which the leader of the cannibals replied, "You fool! For four weeks we've been eating Ensigns, Lieutenants, Lieutenant Commanders, Commanders, and even one Captain and no one noticed anything, then YOU had to go and eat a Chief!"

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