

Bugle Blasts

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Vienna VA 22181
Cell: 703-861-0726 Email: bugleblasts@gmail.com

This Newsletter is dedicated to serving and former members of the Armed Forces of the United States and to their families and friends.

Do what's right, no matter what the cost. It always costs. Do what's right anyway.

Editor/Publisher/s Notes – Mike Berger

If you know others who may enjoy the BB please forward it to them. If you wish to be removed from the distribution list

please advise by email, and **please let me know if your email address changes – email “bounces” are deleted.**

Random Thoughts – this was inspired by similar comments from a friend of the BB

My parents were born in 1908 and 1909. They were 4 and 3 when the Titanic sank. When they were 10 and 9 World War I began. When it ended in 1918, 22 million people were dead.

The year the War ended a global pandemic (the 'Spanish Flu') struck and by the time it had run its course it had killed 50 million people world-wide. My parents survived. They were 11 and 10.

When they were 21 and 20 a global economic crisis started with the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange causing inflation, unemployment, and hunger.

Four years later (1933), the Nazis came to power. Six years after that (my parents were 31 and 30) World War II began and by the time it ended (they were 37 and 36 - I was 6) six million Jews had died in the Holocaust with over 60 million total deaths world-wide.

The War in Korea began when they were 43 and 42. My brother, then 22, was drafted into the U.S. Marine Corps. I was 12.

My parents were 56 and 55 when the Vietnam War began (they were 61 and 60 when man first walked on the moon) and 65 and 64 when that War ended. I was an active-duty US Army Lieutenant when it began, a Major in the Reserve components when it ended.

Children born in 1985 (now 35) may believe their grandparents had no idea how difficult life could be, but they survived wars and medical and economic disasters. Children born in 1995 (now 25) think it the end of the world if an Amazon package takes over three days to arrive, they don't get more than 15 likes for a photo posted on Facebook or Instagram, or, heaven forbid, they forget a password.

Today most of us (there are exceptions) live comfortably, often with more than we need, and have access to a wide variety of home entertainment even while in “quarantine.” But people complain about everything despite the fact they have electricity, cellphones, food, hot water, a roof over their heads, Facetime, NetFlix and more.

Items such as telephones (the first patent was filed in 1876), light bulbs (patented in 1879) and automobiles (the first Model T rolled out in 1908) existed when my parents were born – great technology for the time - but what we think of as technology was a long way in the future.

I'm 82, so add a few more wars and the COVID pandemic to things I've experienced. Mankind has survived far more disastrous circumstances than we are now going through and never lost the joy of living. It's time to be less self-centered, to stop whining and complaining, to eliminate biases and prejudices and look forward to a better tomorrow.

Wow!

In the Army you are a **Soldier**, in the Marine Corps a **Marine**, in the Navy a **Sailor**, and so forth for Air Force and Coast Guard. Members of the new Space Force will be called. . . wait for it. . . **Guardians**.

Calendar and Upcoming Events

January 2021

National Blood Donor Month

1 – New Year's Day

3 – Fruitcake Toss Day

17 – Ditch New Year's Resolutions Day

18 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

20 – Inauguration Day

23 – National Pie Day

26 – Australia Day

29 – National Puzzle Day



February 2021

National Bird Feeding Month

2 – Groundhog Day

3 – The Day the Music Died

7 – Superbowl Sunday

12 – Abraham Lincoln's Birthday

14 – Valentine's Day

15 – President's Day

22 – George Washington's Birthday

28 – National Tooth Fairy Day

Reminder

Still time to get your flu shot, and COVID vaccine as soon as you can.

Cold? Flu? COVID? Here's How to Tell

How can you tell if you have a cold, the flu, or COVID-19? An expert offers advice for those worried sick about their symptoms. You wake up one morning feeling under the weather. While in previous years you may have chalked up a sore throat or body aches to a run-of-the-mill cold or flu, this year's COVID-19 pandemic adds a new element of concern to getting sick. "There is significant overlap between symptoms of influenza and COVID," says Laraine Washer, medical director of infection prevention and epidemiology at Michigan Medicine. "Both can present with fevers, chills, cough, muscle/body aches, fatigue, and headache." Here, Washer offers advice to follow during this unique cold and flu season.

Know the Symptoms. Cold symptoms are mild, and the common cold tends not to be associated with fever or headache. Congestion/runny nose is common for the common cold and would be uncommon to be the only symptom for influenza. Congestion/runny nose can be a symptom of a COVID infection and might be the only symptom in mild cases. Flu symptoms are often of rapid onset. COVID symptoms can be of rapid or more gradual onset. One symptom that is more unique to a COVID infection is the loss of taste or smell, Washer says.

Should you get a test? Washer says that in many settings, the only way to tell the difference between COVID and in-

fluenza is by testing. "The differentiation can be very important as there are isolation requirements to prevent transmission of COVID and antivirals that can be used for influenza," she explains. If you have fever/chills, new cough or new shortness of breath, you should stay home and arrange to be tested for COVID. If you have two or more of the following symptoms: headache, new muscle aches, new upper respiratory symptoms (congestions, runny nose, sore throat), new loss of taste or smell, new nausea/vomiting/diarrhea, or new rash, you should consider COVID testing. If you have had a known close contact exposure to someone with COVID, you should be tested even if you have one mild symptom. There is a low threshold for COVID testing given risk of transmission to others. Once influenza season begins, your doctor may also wish to test you for flu.

Should you call the doctor? If you have any chronic medical conditions or are over the age of 65, you are at higher risk of getting a severe COVID infection and should call your doctor. Call your doctor for a fever that does not go down with fever reducing medicine (do not use aspirin as it is contraindicated in influenza) or any severe symptoms or symptoms that get worse over time.

Should I go to the emergency room? Go the emergency department if you have chest pain or pressure, confusion, difficulty breathing or blue discoloration to your lips or face

Thoughts as we go in to 2021 – source a friend of the BB

- The dumbest thing I ever bought was a 2020 planner.
- I was so bored I called Jake from State Farm just to talk to someone. He asked me what I was wearing.
- In 2019 we said stay away from negative people.
- In 2020 it changed to stay away from positive people.
- The world turned upside down. Old folks began sneaking out of the house and their kids yelled at them to stay indoors.
- **One day** I saw a neighbor talking to her dog. It was obvious she thought her dog understood her. I went into my house and told my cats. We had a good laugh.
- Every few days we'd try on jeans just to make sure they fit.
- Does anyone know if we can take showers yet or should we just keep washing our hands?

- This virus did what no woman has been able to do; cancel sports, shut down bars and keep men at home!
- I never thought the comment, "I wouldn't touch him with a 6-foot pole", would become a national policy.
- I need to practice social-distancing from the refrigerator.
- I hope the weather is good **tomorrow** for my trip to the backyard. I'm getting tired of the living room.
- Appropriate analogy: "The curve is flattening so we can start lifting restrictions now", is like saying, "The parachute has slowed our rate of descent, so we can take it off now."
- I never could have imagined I would go into a bank wearing a mask and ask for money.

VA Health - Ask Not Get Not | What Do You Need? – source Together We Served

Many veteran's that have VA benefits may not know that VA provides complementary treatment items such as CPAP machines, hearing aids, custom fit orthotic shoe inserts, prescription eyeglasses, and many other items to help provide injury relief. Sometimes veterans have to ask for such equipment. A veteran who is struggling to fall asleep due to ringing or buzzing ears can ask a VA audiologist for a Masona sound conditioning machine that may help mask the tinnitus enough to fall asleep. A veteran with sleep apnea will have to participate in a sleep clinic and be tested. If sleep apnea is determined VA will hand the veteran a high-quality modern CPAP machine that is much smaller than the older versions and easier to keep clean.

Also, some VA clinics offer Chronic Pain Management and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which may be

helpful for some veterans that are struggling to maintain relationships and experiencing declining work performance. VA will supply a veteran who has been diagnosed with vitamin D deficiency-free vitamin D supplements if asked. Many veterans are vitamin D deficient. Vitamin D is extremely important for good health. Some veterans struggle with joint pain, and VA will provide Voltaren topical gel for relief if asked. Some clinics provide ultrasound physical therapy for plantar fasciitis relief if asked.

Veterans with VA benefits sometimes have to ask. There's no harm in asking for relief products. The harm comes when veterans don't ask for relief items. You are not taking away from another veteran if you ask for relief items. These items are stockpiled and do no good for anyone if they are not distributed and providing relief. Ask not. Get not.

Navy Unlawful Disability Retirement Benefits Denials - source NVLSP News Release

In November, [Dechert LLP](#), in coordination with the National Veterans Legal Services (NVLSP), filed a class action complaint in the U.S. Court for the District of Columbia, on behalf of former members of the Navy and Marine Corps who were subject to an unlawful Navy practice that resulted in denial of military disability retirement benefits to more than 16,000 Navy and Marine Corps veterans for more than 15 years. The complaint, brought under the Administrative Procedure Act, seeks declaratory and injunctive relief to correct these veterans' military records to accurately reflect their full disability rating as required by law.

"In this filing we seek to address the Navy's failure to fully recognize and afford benefits to veterans for service-connected disabilities that contributed to their medical discharge," said Phillip Garber, Dechert associate and former hospital corpsman second class. "This filing reflects the continued commitment of NVLSP and Dechert, through the

New SECDEF Senior Advisor Formerly Proposed USMC Elimination - source Military.com

Retired Army Col. Douglas Macgregor, appointed as a senior adviser at the Pentagon, has a track record of making controversial statements. But his most provocative of all might be a proposal to do away with the U.S. Marine Corps. In a 2012 opinion piece for Time Magazine, Macgregor, a decorated veteran of the Gulf War, argued that the Corps was living on its past glories and was unsuited for combat on today's battlefield, with the possible exception for pushover enemies. He went further, too, suggesting the acronym "USMC" should really stand for "Under-utilized Superfluous Military Capability."

"Most of today's Marine force consists of airmobile light infantry," Macgregor wrote. "This Marine force is designed for use in the developing world against incapable opponents from Haiti to Fiji, but not much else." He took exception to previous remarks from then-Marine Corps Commandant Gen. James Amos on the future of the Corps as "America's shock force" of agile and adaptable units vital to the nation's defense against evolving threats. Macgregor summed up Amos' assessment this way: "Rah, rah, the Marine Corps is awesome, and all we have to do is make sure they have the equipment & training & facilities they need so they can always be awesome Marines, rah, rah!" "Wrong," said Macgregor. "The Marines as currently organized and equipped are about as relevant as the Army's horse cavalry in the 1930s."

Macgregor, who has a reputation as an iconoclastic thinker on military strategy and tactics, was brought on as a senior adviser at the Pentagon by Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller. The Pentagon announced that Macgregor

Something you didn't want to know

DIY meal kit -- The Design Museum in London has included a "DIY meal kit" featuring steaks that could be grown from a diner's own human cells among the nominees in its Beazley Designs of the Year exhibit. Developers of the Ouroboros Steak envision that an individual will be able to harvest cells from their own cheek and feed them with serum derived from donated blood that has expired, Dezeen

activities of its veteran affinity group, Dechert Heroes, to assisting the veteran community by making sure that veterans receive the benefits they have earned through military service and are entitled to under the law."

"When they enter the military, every service member takes a solemn oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. The government also pledges to provide them with certain rights and benefits if they are injured or become sick due to their military service. Unfortunately, the Navy has disregarded the men and women in the military by systematically and illegally denying the benefits to which thousands of servicemembers and their families are rightfully entitled," said National Veterans Legal Services Program Executive Director Bart Stichman. "The Navy's denial of benefits is not simply a bureaucratic matter. A denial can have negative repercussions in the lives of servicemembers and their families for many years."

"will be serving as a Senior Advisor to the Acting Secretary of Defense. Mr. MacGregor's decades of military experience will be used to assist in the continued implementation of the president's national security priorities." Macgregor, a frequent guest on Fox News, has argued for the imposition of martial law at the U.S.-Mexico border with orders for troops to "shoot people" if necessary to stop illegal immigration. He has also criticized European countries for being too welcoming to "Muslim invaders."

There is a historical precedent for arguing to disband the Marine Corps. Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower both attempted to do away with the amphibious service. But these arguments have always been brushed aside by furious pushback from the Marines and their allies in Congress. The enduring future of the Marine Corps was seen from a Navy ship offshore of Iwo Jima by then-Navy Secretary James Forrestal in February 1945. When he saw the flag go up atop Mount Suribachi, Forrestal said that "means a Marine Corps for the next 500 years."

Retired Marine Lt. Col. Dakota Wood, senior fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation think tank, said Macgregor's Pentagon assignment is likely a non-issue for the Marine Corps. "I do not think it will cause any notable problems," Wood said. In the short time before the inauguration of the next president, "there isn't any opportunity to make significant changes to the [National Defense Authorization Act] or any key documents that would materially affect the Corps," Wood said. "Plus," he said, "the Corps is well-supported in Congress and any big changes in role, funding or programs would be driven from there."

reported. After about three months, the steaks would be fully grown. "People think that eating oneself is cannibalism, which technically this is not," said Grace Knight, one of the designers. Researcher Orkan Telhan added, "Our design is scientifically and economically feasible but also ironic in many ways," he added.

Code Platoon Offers Vets Software Development Training – source www.vvmf.org

Veterans and their spouses can train to become professional, certified software developers with Code Platoon’s Coding Bootcamp, an immersive, hands-on training program with opportunities for paid internships (in Chicago only) and job placements as a web developer upon graduation. The Code Platoon Coding Bootcamp covers everything needed to work as a “full-stack developer,” which means Veterans and spouses can get hands-on experience in building front-facing websites and behind-the-scenes databases. Over the 14-week full-time training course, students will learn about today’s web development tools, programming languages, industry best practices, and even some soft skills to help them become well-rounded professionals prepared for finding a job.

There are also evening and weekend courses available, which run for 28 weeks and cover the same curriculum as the 14-week course. And there is a self-paced coding program that is free to Veterans, active-duty service members, and military spouses. For students new to coding, Code Platoon offers Intro to Coding and Bootcamp prep classes. Currently, Coding Bootcamp classes are all online for safety reasons.

Anyone who has served at least one day in the military (or is married to someone who has) is eligible to apply to Code Platoon, including National Guard and Reserve. The Code

Platoon team works individually with each incoming student, providing a personal connection right from the start. Code Platoon accepts the GI Bill for in-person students, VET TEC, VR&E, and Skillbridge. For students who do not want to use VA benefits or have exhausted their benefits, Code Platoon offers scholarships, including full scholarships for women, Transgender, and Black and Hispanic students. Contact Code Platoon for more information on program costs.

According to Rod Levy, Code Platoon Executive Director and Founder, “Code Platoon has a long-standing partnership with the Department of Veteran Affairs. Their team works tirelessly to ensure Veterans and spouses can utilize their educational benefits to participate in our programs. We are grateful VA recognizes the importance and impact of coding boot camps in helping fill the increasing need for technical talent in our country. To Apply check out Code Platoon’s program site, www.codeplatoon.org/the-program/ to learn more about the program, eligibility, training curriculum, costs, and other important information. When you’re ready to apply, click the “apply-now” link at the website to start your application. For more information on the program, eligibility, and application process, Contact Code Platoon at info@codeplatoon.org.

Are Phoneless Deployments the Future for Marines? – source MarineCorpsTimes

Cellphones have become everywhere in the modern U.S. military. It is how word is passed and how Marines pass time after hurrying up to wait. But against a sophisticated enemy, the signals given off by cellphones could give away a unit’s position and cause them to be targeted by long-range weapons. When 3,500 paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne Division deployed to the Middle East in early 2020 as tensions rose between Iran and the U.S., the soldiers were barred from bringing their cellphones.

The Marine Corps likely would copy in future deployments, Lt. Gen. Brain Beaudreault, commander of II Marine Expeditionary Force, told reporters November. “I will put out a MEF order on an actual deployment that provides absolute control,” the commander said while discussing the MEF level exercise his unit just completed. The exercise simulated an attack from a “near-peer” adversary against an ally in Northern Europe, Beaudreault said. A large part of the exercise was avoiding detection by the enemy by using

distributed operations and hiding the electronic signals a large modern force is bound to be emitting. During the exercise cellphones were banned within the operating space as the MEF attempted to avoid detection by the near-peer, Beaudreault said.

“We can absolutely crack down,” the commander said. “It’s harder to do than say, but it requires discipline, and it requires education and understanding that this is no joke when we’re facing a peer adversary who’s looking for those exact signals,” Beaudreault added. In 2018 the military banned Fitbits and other fitness tracking apps from deployed service members who were deploying after a fitness app revealed the details of life on base for deployed service members. Ever since the military has considered restricting the use of cellphones in places like the Pentagon and on deployment. Eventually then Defense Secretary Jim Mattis opted to allow cellphones in the Pentagon.

DAV Offers Free Prescription Card – source DAV.org

DAV is offering a prescription savings card available to you and your family to help lower prescription drug costs. It is pre-activated and ready for immediate use at over 68,000 pharmacies nationwide. The DAV program discounts both brand and generic prescription medications for those individuals without prescription coverage. Additionally, individuals who have prescription drug coverage may use this program but may not combine it with their other coverage on the same prescription.

There’s no application to complete, no membership restrictions, no income requirement and no age limitations. The program uses LOWEST PRICE LOGIC to guarantee that you get the best deal on your prescriptions (you pay the lower of a discount off Average Wholesale Price-AWP, discount off MAC Pricing, or Pharmacy Promotional/Retail price). Copy and paste the long URL below to print, text, save or email your card today. There’s even a link to order printed cards for your friends.

https://www.dav.org/membership/members/member-advantages/prescription-savings/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=DecENL&s_src=2020decemberENL&s_subsrc=member

YOU KNOW YOU ARE LIVING IN 2021 WHEN – source friend of the BB

1. You accidentally enter your PIN on the microwave.
2. You haven't played solitaire with real cards in years.
3. You have a list of 15 phone numbers to reach your family of three.
4. You e-mail the person who works at the desk next to you.
5. Your reason for not staying in touch with friends and family is that they don't have e-mail addresses.
6. You pull up in your own driveway and use your cell phone to see if anyone is home to help you carry in the groceries.
7. Every commercial on television has a web site at the bottom of the screen.
8. Leaving the house without your cell phone, which you didn't even have the first 20 or 30 (or 60) years of your life, is now a cause for panic and you turn around to go and get it.
- 10 You get up in the morning and go online before getting your coffee.
11. You start tilting your head sideways to smile. :).
- 12 You're reading this and nodding and laughing.
13. You were too busy to notice there was no #9 on this list.
14. You actually went back up to check that there wasn't a #9 on this list.
15. Now you are laughing at yourself.
16. Even worse, you know exactly to whom you are going to copy and email this list.

Army veteran gets 12 months prison time for stolen valor – source Army Times

About 1.8 million Purple Hearts have been awarded in America's history. An Army veteran who lied about receiving the Purple Heart and Silver Star medals received the maximum prison sentence of 12 months according to the Justice Department. **Gregg Ramsdell**, 61, of Columbus, GA, also received three years of supervised release and was ordered by the court to repay \$76,000 to VA. Ramsdell pleaded guilty to lying about serving in Afghanistan between 2008 and 2009. He also admitted to falsely claiming to have suffered from PTSD when he applied for disability payments through VA in 2014. Ramsdell said he saw “men, women and children being executed. Women holding babies while detonating themselves. IED explosions causing severe bodily injuries and death. Retrieving body parts and bagging them. Having blood and body excrements being blown onto my uniform.” Those experiences made him “unable to live a normal life,” he said.

But Ramsdell was not in Afghanistan during the years he claimed, according to VA and FBI investigators. His claims were in violation of the Stolen Valor Act which makes it a crime for people to pass themselves off as war heroes “in order to claim money, employment, property or other tangible benefits,” the Justice Department said. “Anyone who lies about serving our

country to illegally take taxpayer money from federal programs that help deserving veterans must be held accountable to the full extent of our laws,” said Chris Hacker, special agent in charge of FBI’s Atlanta office.

Ramsdell did serve in various Army components, including the National Guard and the Reserve, beginning in 1981. He was honorably discharged in 2014. VA gave Ramsdell PTSD benefits retroactive to his 2014 discharge date totaling \$76,000. He also received a civilian job at Fort Benning in 2017, in part because his resume listed that he was both a Silver Star and Purple Heart with oak leaf cluster recipient, the court records stated. But he never received those awards, the documents added. “The sentence imposed on Ramsdell sends a clear message that anyone who falsely claims to have received our nation’s most valorous medals earned through combat and service will be held accountable,” said David Spilker, special agent in charge at the VA Office of Inspector General, in a prepared statement.

[Did you know that in Britain persons accused of stolen valor or who impersonate real military personnel are called “Walts”? That’s short for James Thurber’s fictional character, *Walter Mitty*.]

New Virginia Law

As of **January 1, 2021**, it is illegal to hold a handheld personal communications device (e.g., a smart phone) while driving a moving motor vehicle on the highways in Virginia. There are exceptions if:

- The operator of any emergency vehicle while he is engaged in the performance of his official duties;
- An operator who is lawfully parked or stopped;
- Any person using a handheld personal communications device to report an emergency;
- The operator of any Department of Transportation vehicle or vehicle operated pursuant to the Department of

Transportation safety service patrol program or pursuant to a contract with the Department of Transportation for, or that includes during the performance of traffic incident management services.

Violating the law is punishable, for a first offense, by a fine of \$125 and, for a second or subsequent offense, by a fine of \$250. Breaking the law in a highway work zone is punishable by a mandatory \$250 fine.

Covid-19 Reduced Operations at NPRC – source MOAA News Article

The National Personnel Records Center's Military Personnel Records facility is operating at less than 10% of normal capacity because of worsening COVID-19 conditions in the St. Louis area – a status that limits records requests to emergency needs only. The facility's on-site staff will continue its work to accommodate veterans or family members who need records in relation to: burial honors, life-threatening medical emergencies, homeless veterans seeking entry to shelters, and any "comparable emergencies."

The center entered this emergencies-only status in March, but began a gradual reopening in June as COVID-19 cases slowed. This reopening process allowed a 20% operational

capacity for most of October, but "on-site exposures to staff" led to a regression to emergency-only levels in November.

Individuals with emergencies can submit a Standard Form 180 via fax to (314) 801-0764. Even emergency requests face delays under this process. Families seeking records to confirm burial eligibility in a VA national cemetery can visit <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility> for detailed information. Casketed interments will be prioritized over cremated interments. The majority of burial requests can be approved without access to National Personnel Records Center materials. MOAA Premium and Life members can download *Your Guide to Military Burials*.

Did you know? The SBP-DIC Offset is going away – source DFAS

As you may know, Congress enacted changes to the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) that will eventually eliminate the offset for surviving spouses who are also receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The changes will take place in three phases.

January 1, 2021 begins the first phase. In 2021, surviving spouse SBP annuity payments issued by DFAS will be reduced (offset) by no more than two-thirds of the amount of DIC (issued by VA) rather than by the entire amount of DIC, even though eligible surviving spouses will continue to receive the full amount of DIC from VA.

Beginning **January 1, 2022**, the second phase, surviving spouse SBP annuity payments will be reduced (offset) by no more than one-third of the amount of DIC (issued by VA) rather than by the entire amount of DIC, even though eligible surviving spouses will continue to receive the full amount of DIC from VA.

On **January 1, 2023**, the SBP-DIC offset will be fully eliminated. That means, beginning in 2023, SBP payments will no longer be offset by DIC. Spouses will receive full SBP (issued by DFAS) and full DIC (from VA).

For more details and frequently asked questions, see our special SBP-DIC News webpage: <http://go.usa.gov/xGfqd>

VA Solid Start - Transition to Civilian Life Assistance – source Vantage Point

Since its launch in December 2019, the VA Solid Start program has reached nearly 70,000 Veterans to help them connect with VA benefits and services – from education and career counseling to disability compensation and home loan guaranty. Transitioning to civilian life can be challenging. While transitioning service members learn about VA benefits and services during the Transition Assistance Program, they may have more or different questions after they actually leave the military. Through VA Solid Start, newly separated Veterans will receive three phone calls in their first-year post-separation – around 90, 180, and 365 days. Veterans can use these calls to get answers to their questions to better understand and connect with the VA benefits and services that can help them, such as secure housing, identify education opportunities, and/or gain access to health care.

What's more, the Solid Start VA representatives provide a consistent, personal interaction that centers on the individual Veteran's needs for a successful transition. "In the past, the onus was on Veterans to contact VA about their benefits," said Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits Margarita Devlin. "Solid Start's proactive model of caring, consistent contact is a game changer in the way VA interacts with Veterans. This program serves a critical component in VA's overall goal to support Veterans in their first year of transition." Getting started is often the hardest part of the journey. From helping you understand your benefits to connecting you with career resources, VA is here to help you get a solid start. When you see this number, 1-800-827-0611, take the call! To learn more about Solid Start, please visit <https://benefits.va.gov/solid-start>.

AT&T Added to VA Video Connect – source VA News Release

Veterans using the VA Video Connect app on their mobile phones through AT&T's cellular network will no longer incur data charges when using this video telehealth technology to connect and meet with their VA health care providers and teams. AT&T joins T-Mobile, TracFone by Safelink and Verizon in supporting Veterans' ability to video conference with their VA care providers on their smartphone, tablet or computer from any location with an internet connection. "More Veterans are increasingly utilizing VA telehealth services," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "VA and AT&T are working together to ensure health care continues

to be accessible and convenient for Veterans regardless of where they live."

The agreement between VA and AT&T was facilitated by the [VA Secretary's Center for Strategic Partnerships](#) and is part of the VA's Anywhere to Anywhere initiative ensuring Veterans have the best telehealth experience. In fiscal year 2020 Veterans attended more than 3.8 million video telehealth appointments from their homes, representing an increase of more than 1200% when compared to fiscal year 2019. For more information on VA's telehealth services, visit connectedcare.va.gov.

Fraud, Waste and Abuse – source Department of Justice and AP

Cleveland, OH – U.S. Attorney Justin Herdman announced a grand jury sitting in Cleveland returned a 28-count indictment charging **William H. Precht** of Kent, Ohio, with theft of government property, conspiracy to commit wire fraud and honest services fraud, wire fraud, and false statements relating to health care matters. According to the indictment, from October 5, 2010, through January 4, 2019, the defendant is accused of using his position with the Cleveland VA Medical Center to engage in a scheme to enrich himself and co-conspirators.

The indictment alleges the defendant fraudulently used his VA-issued purchase card and facilitated the use of other VA employees' purchase cards to make purchases from a company controlled by the defendant for approximately \$1,066,348. In addition, the defendant is accused of conspiring with a medical supplies company located in South Euclid, Ohio, to devise a scheme in which the defendant would receive kickbacks and other items of value, in exchange for steering VA business and other monetary awards to the medical supplies vendor.

Allegedly, it was part of the conspiracy that the defendant would solicit and accept items of value from the medical supplies vendor such as money, sporting event tickets and future business interest. The defendant would then provide favorable actions for the benefit of his co-conspirators and the medical supplies vendor when the opportunities arose. He is accused of concealing this activity from the Cleveland VA by providing false and misleading information to VA employees about reasons for ordering medical supplies. The defendant also allegedly falsified some patient records to make it appear patients had implants in their electronic

health record that did not correlate to any actual surgical or medical procedure, to justify the purchase of implants.

An indictment is only a charge and is not evidence of guilt. A defendant is entitled to a fair trial in which it will be the government's burden to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. If convicted, the defendant's sentence will be determined by the Court after review of factors unique to this case, including the defendant's prior criminal record, if any, the defendant's role in the offense and the characteristics of the violation. In all cases, the sentence will not exceed the statutory maximum and in most cases it will be less than the maximum.

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New Britain, Connecticut – A former Connecticut lawyer was charged by state authorities with embezzling nearly \$1 million from a charity for military veterans and their families, just two weeks after he was sentenced to more than three years in prison on a federal charge for the same crimes. The chief state's attorney's office said **Kevin Creed** of Litchfield was charged with felony larceny and was released on a \$250,000 bond following a court appearance.

In November, Creed was sentenced on a federal fraud charge to the prison time and ordered to pay \$1.4 million restitution to Fisher House Foundation in Connecticut, a chapter of a national charity that builds homes near veterans medical centers where families can stay for free while their loved ones undergo treatment. State prosecutors said Creed stole \$985,000 from the charity and used the money for his own purposes. He has not yet reported to federal prison. Creed, An Army veteran and former State Trooper, gave up his right to practice law in Connecticut in 2019.

3 States Approved Vet Tax Breaks in 2020 Elections – source Military.com

Voters in three states moved decisively to approve measures aimed at offering support and appreciation - in the form of tax breaks - to veterans.

Florida - Amendment 6, will extend a property tax discount for combat-disabled veterans to their surviving spouses in the event of their death. The Associated Press reported 89.7% of voters supported the measure, making it the most popular of the six issues Florida considered this election cycle. The homestead property tax discount applies only to veterans over age 65 with permanent combat-related disabilities. The measure will continue that discount for the veteran's surviving spouse in perpetuity, unless the widowed spouse remarries or sells or otherwise disposes of the property.

New Jersey - Public Question 2 will make veterans who served in peacetime eligible for a \$250 property tax deduction currently available only to combat veterans. This measure passed with 76.3% of counted votes, making it the most-supported of the three referendum issues New Jersey voters took up. The property tax deduction is also available to the surviving spouses of deceased wartime veterans, and the measure would make spouses of peacetime veterans eligible for it as well. In addition to the deduction, New Jersey offers

a 100% property tax exemption for disabled wartime veterans or their surviving spouses. Voters moved to extend that as well to disabled peacetime veterans. For both policies, an honorable military discharge is a prerequisite for eligibility. The measure will take effect January 1, 2021.

Virginia - Ballot Question 2 created a vehicle tax exemption for disabled veterans -- a measure designed to ease the cost burden for vets whose disabilities require them to purchase specially modified vehicles. The tax break would apply to one vehicle or pickup truck for any veteran who has a 100% service-connected, permanent disability documented by VA. This measure passed with 85.9% of voter approval. It was the most popular of two referendum issues Virginia voters considered this cycle.

As with the New Jersey ballot question, opposition to the Virginia tax exemption focused on cost. Virginia Association of Counties noted that the measure followed a previous series of tax exemptions for disabled veterans and spouses of the fallen. All those breaks, the organization said, cost localities roughly \$53 million in 2018 - lost revenue that was not offset by the state. The measure is now set to become policy January 1, 2021.

Operation September Freedom: Free Vintage Flight for 1,000 WWII Vets – source Stars & Stripes

About 1,000 World War II veterans will have the opportunity to fly in a 1930s-era aircraft during a two-month span in 2021, according to the nonprofit group conducting the campaign. Dreams Flights announced that its Operation September Freedom campaign will send its fleet of six open-cockpit Stearman biplanes to cities across the country to take veterans on a free, 20-minute flight. “It literally is life changing for them,” said Darryl Fisher, founder and president of Dream Flights, formerly known as the Ageless Aviation Dream Foundation. “This is like a time machine.”

The flights will take place between Aug. 1 and Sept. 30, and a World War II veteran can be registered for a flight until June 1, Fisher said. Then the group will coordinate its fleet to go to that veteran’s town and take them on a flight. “It’s very difficult for them to travel long distances,” he said. “That also means that something like this is really meaningful to them, so we have to go to them.” Fisher, who works in the senior living facility industry, founded Dream Flights in 2011 to combine his passion for caring for the elderly with his passion for flying. A third-generation aviator, one of the Stearmans in his fleet was purchased by Fisher’s grandfather after the end of World War II to help support his farm. Stearman biplanes had a rugged construction that made them ideal for training new pilots for the Army Air Corps and Navy, according to the website for Boeing, whose Stearman Aircraft Division out of Wichita, Kan., first introduced the aircraft in 1934. In the case of Fisher’s grandfather, the planes were also popular as crop-dusters because of its ability fly low and slow.

VA Completes Colmery Act Vet Education Changes – source Vantage Point

VA has successfully completed all necessary updates to process education benefits in accordance with the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017. Their completion means faster processing times, allowing VBA to deliver benefits more quickly to GI Bill students. Since being signed into law in 2017, 31 education-related provisions have been implemented. The provisions include restoration of entitlement, removal of the delimiting date to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and full benefits to eligible Purple Heart recipients.

Implementation of the Colmery Act has been a joint undertaking across VBA and OIT, alongside partnerships with MITRE and systems integrator Accenture Federal Services. Updates represent important benefits changes for GI Bill students expanding opportunities under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. They include:

To communicate these changes and provide updates throughout the implementation process to GI Bill students, VA conducted extensive communication and outreach cam-

Since 2011, Dream Flights has flown 4,204 veterans and seniors living in retirement and long-term care communities. Operation September Freedom is the first tour dedicated to honoring a group of veterans who served during a particular war. The oldest flight participant flown by Dream Flights was 104, Fisher said. Pilots for the nonprofit primarily fly for major airlines and are active-duty or retired service members who volunteer their time. As part of the campaign, Dream Flight crews will rendezvous at the 50th National Stearman Fly-in in Galesburg, Ill., on 6 SEP to fly in formation for the crowd. “[Operation September Freedom] will be the largest barnstorming event in history,” Fisher said. “Wherever World War II veterans are located, we’ll find our way to their nearest airport and create a moment of magic they can relive until their last days.”

Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, an estimated 100,000 will be alive in 2021 -- the youngest will be 95 years old, according to Dream Flights. While next year’s event has sponsors, including SportClips, American Health Care Association/National Center for Assisted Living, Argentum, DirectSupply, Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Airlines, the group is seeking donations to help with the upkeep of its Stearman fleet and pay for travel for its volunteers, Fisher said. “We’re asking all Americans to join our effort to locate members of the Greatest Generation so we can thank them one last time for their service,” he said. Dream Flight requests for World War II veterans are accepted at <http://dreamflights.org/honor>.

paigns. This included email, toolkits and focus groups, as well as social media campaigns reaching more than 910,000 stakeholders, and a nine-state, 24-stop nationwide School Tour. Through these efforts, VA met GI Bill students, school administrators, and other stakeholders to not only communicate changes, but gather feedback on how to improve the GI Bill experience.

The “go-live” of Colmery Act IT updates ultimately changes the way VBA interfaces with Veterans by delivering accurate and accessible benefits. As VA Chief Information Officer James Gfrerer said, “This milestone is an important step in our digital transformation journey, merging people, process, and technology to provide better customer service for our nation’s Veterans.” Through improved processing times, rapid response to legislation, and fewer manual work arounds, this integrated solution allows VA to better serve Veterans in pursuit of their education and career goals

Incompetent Criminal

Daniel M. Rizza, 20, of McKeesport, Pennsylvania, driving a gray Audi SUV, ran out of gas on Nov. 27 and called state police to ask for help, but when he was told a trooper would be responding, he abruptly said he’d changed his mind and hung up, according to court documents. WTAJ reported the

trooper responding to the call learned en route that a gray Audi had been reported stolen nearby earlier in the day, and after a check of the SUV’s make, model, identification number and registration, he arrested Rizza, who was charged with a felony count of receiving stolen property.

Army issues face mask, and the official name is so long it requires an acronym, because of course – source Military Times

The Army’s latest uniform addition is the Combat Cloth Face Covering (CCFC), also known in simple terms as a face mask. Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged the country for about nine months, the Army finally decided to get an official face mask, right on the heels of the announcement that vaccines have begun being distributed.

The branch, in developing the nomenclature for its tactical face fabric, has opted to officially name it the “Combat Cloth Face Covering” - although “face mask” is probably still the most time-efficient name for it. Though a long name, it certainly does adhere to the typical naming conventions used by DoD, which often comes up with contrived or outright ridiculous acronyms like the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School Dining Facility, called USAJFKSWCSDFAC, or the Maneuver Advanced Non-commissioned Officers Course, known as MANCOC.

And while you might think that it seems a little late in the game to start issuing face masks, “the CCFC was

designed, developed, and produced along an expedited timeline,” according to an Army release. “This past summer, the Army Uniform Board recommended and General James C. McConville, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, approved issuing CCFCs to Soldiers at Initial Entry Training (IET) as part of their clothing bag,” the release notes. “At the 152nd AUB, Army officials said that the Defense Logistics Agency will begin issuing two CCFCs to each new Soldier during the second quarter of FY2021.”

Ah yes, because soldiers will certainly have the most need of new face coverings at what is projected to be the beginning of the end of the pandemic.

Perhaps a more accurate acronym would be WITAYTGTFCANIBOGA, short for “Wow It Took A Year To Get This Face Covering And Now It’s Basically Obsolete, Go Army.” Hooah, now you can hide your face.

Zoom Invite Scam: Don't Click on Suspicious Zoom Meeting Invites – source BBB Scam Alerts

Thanks to the global pandemic keeping people at home, the popular video conferencing platform Zoom has seen usage grow exponentially in 2020. Naturally, this has attracted the attention of hackers and scammers. With a huge user base to target, con artists are using old tricks in new scams to try to steal your information.

How the Scam Works - Out of the blue, you receive an email, text, or social media message that includes Zoom’s logo and a message saying something like, “Your Zoom account has been suspended. Click here to reactivate.” or “You missed a meeting, click here to see the details and re-schedule.” You might even receive a message welcoming you to the platform and requesting you click on a link to activate your account.

Scammers registered more than 2,449 Zoom-related domains from late April to early May in 2020 alone. Con artists use these domain names, which include the word “Zoom,” to send you an email that looks like it’s coming from the official video conferencing service.

No matter what kind of phishing message you receive, scammers hope you will click on the link they’ve included in their email. These links can download malware onto your computer or lead you to a page where you are prompted to enter your login information. Entering your username and

password gives scammers access to your account and any other account that uses a similar login and password combination.

Avoid Online Phishing Scams - Double check the sender’s information. Zoom.com and Zoom.us are the only official domains for Zoom. If an email comes from a similar looking domain that doesn’t quite match the official domain name, it’s probably a scam.

Never click on links in unsolicited emails. Phishing scams always involve getting an unsuspecting individual to click on a link or file sent in an email that will download dangerous malware onto their computer. If you get an unsolicited email and you aren’t sure who it really came from, never click on any links, files, or images it may contain.

Resolve issues directly. If you receive an email stating there is a problem with your account and you aren’t sure if it is legitimate, contact the company directly. Go to the official website by typing the name in your browser and find the “Contact Support” feature to get help.

For more advice on how to protect yourself, see the BBB Tip: Phishing Scams and visit [BBB.org/AvoidScams](https://www.bbb.org/AvoidScams). If you’ve been a victim of this scam, help out your fellow consumers by filing a scam report at [BBB.org/ScamTracker](https://www.bbb.org/ScamTracker).

Did you know?

Use WD 40 in Your Bathroom Faucets

For most people they deal with hard water which over time can cause things to become harder to do. For example, your shower or bath faucets, as hard water build-up, turning the hot water knob can become increasingly more difficult. Or the same can happen with the shower/bath diverter spout (that little thing you pull that will make the water come out of the faucet or showerhead). Instead of taking apart your

faucet or paying a plumber to come to fix it, you can use WD40. Just take a can of WD40 (preferably one with a long flexible hose) and spray it inside of your faucet. The WD40 will loosen up the hard water and make the diverter work as smoothly as day 1. The same goes for a hard to turn shower knob, a spritz of WD40 and it will work like brand new.

CRDP/CRSC Open Season - source DFAS

The 2021 Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP)/ Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) Open Season is January 1-31, 2021. Retirees who are eligible for both CRDP and CRSC have received an Open Season Letter with the amount of their entitlements. Follow the <https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/disability/CRDP-CRSC-FAQs/>

instructions on the letter. Only return the letter to DFAS to change your current election for 2021. Your election change must be postmarked by January 31, 2021.

We have a new, helpful set of Frequently Asked Questions about CRDP/CRSC Open Season on our website.

New Surviving Spouses Organization Looking for Members – source MOAA Newsletter

Are you wondering where to go to get information about issues affecting surviving spouses and families? Are you looking for a supportive, nonjudgmental group to assist you in learning and keeping up to date on benefits and legislation impacting our surviving families? Need a pick-me-up or to connect with others who share similar interests as you? Join the MOAA Surviving Spouses and Friends Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/581427115240904>.

Who can join? Membership has been recently expanded to include not only surviving spouses but also our families, military spouses, council and chapter surviving spouse liaisons, advocates, and others with an interest in issues that impact the survivor community, regardless of MOAA membership. Particularly in these times of COVID-19 restrictions, we all need a way to connect with others whom which we have common interests.

Is this a public or private group? This is a private group, and there are no fees or dues. You are required to

answer a couple of brief questions and be approved by the administrators of the group to join. These questions are designed to ensure we provide a safe place to share information and connect with other like-minded people as well as protect the group from those who do not have a legitimate interest in our issues. The group’s rules are simple, and members may be removed at the discretion of the administrators.

If you are a member of the group, you might have noticed more activity recently and even posts that are not benefit or surviving family specific. It is intended this page to be not only an efficient way to disseminate information on benefits, proposed legislation, advocacy efforts, etcetera, but also a way for all of us to connect and uplift one another. Feel free to share an encouraging or funny meme and pictures of your loved ones and pets and post comments supporting each other. The group is expanding, and would be happy to welcome more members.

And Finally . . .

Name Change

After more than 1,000 years, the Austrian town of F--king is getting a new name, The Local reported. English-speaking tourists have had a field day snapping selfies with city signs, even stealing them, and the 100 residents of modern-day F--king have had enough. According to the minutes of a munic-

ipal council meeting published on Nov. 16, the town will change its name to Fugging as of Jan. 1. "I can confirm that the village is being renamed," said Andrea Holzner, mayor of the surrounding municipality. "I really don't want to say anything more."

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Something to Enjoy – source a friend of the BB

A Lexophile is someone with a love for words such as "you can tune a piano, but you can't tuna fish," or "to write with a broken pencil is pointless" Here are the results of the annual New York Times competition to create the best.

- No matter how much you push the envelope, it'll still be stationery.
- If you don't pay your exorcist, you can get repossessed.
- I'm reading a book about anti-gravity. I can't put it down.
- I didn't like my beard at first, then it grew on me.
- I stayed up all night to see where the sun went, and then it dawned on me.
- I changed my iPod's name to Titanic. It's syncing now.
- Haunted French pancakes give me the crepes.
- I know a guy who's addicted to drinking brake fluid, but says he can stop any time.
- A thief who stole a calendar got twelve months .
- When the smog lifts in Los Angeles, U.C.L.A.
- The batteries I got were given out free of charge.
- A dentist and a manicurist married. They fought tooth and nail.

- He had a photographic memory, but it was never fully developed.
- When she saw her first strands of gray hair, she thought she'd dye.
- Acupuncture is a jab well done. That's the point of it.
- Those who get too big for their pants will be totally exposed in the end.
- Venison for dinner again? Oh deer!
- I tried to catch some fog, but I mist.
- They told me I had type-A blood, but it was a typo.
- I did a theatrical performance about puns. It was a play on words.
- What do you call a dinosaur with an extensive vocabulary? A thesaurus.
- I dropped out of communism class because of lousy Marx.
- I got a job at a bakery because I kneaded dough.
- Velcro - what a rip off!
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