June 4, 2018

VETERANS
MONTHLY INFORMATION PACKAGE

FLAGLER COUNTY

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Feel free to make copies and distribute throughout your organization.
Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick M. Shanahan has directed that a task force be formed by July 1 to develop a business case for consolidating the military’s three separate exchange services, and the Defense Commissary Agency, into a single resale enterprise to oversee and streamline all on-base store operations.

In a May 29 memorandum to the department’s Chief Management Officer John H. Gibson II, as well as to the service secretaries, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other top defense executives, Shanahan said he recognizes the planned merger can’t happen without the approval of Congress.

“The Department will pursue such authority as soon as practicable,” Shanahan wrote. Meanwhile, he wants Gibson to assemble a “cross-functional task force…to perform financial due diligence, a business case
analysis and begin planning for the consolidation of the defense resale enterprise.”

Gibson is to name a task force director by June 15.

Shanahan noted that military resale has been studied “repeatedly since 1990 with little or no implementation of recommendations for change.” Consequently, on-base stores are “experiencing many of the same industry, generational and demographic trends negatively impacting private-sector grocers and retailers.”

Some exchange service executives have argued against consolidation.

“I considered the respective views and responses of the Military Departments on this approach,” Shanahan said, and decided “a single consolidated organization offers the greatest potential to achieve the economies and efficiencies necessary for the survivability of the defense resale enterprise and the continued availability of these benefits to our Total Force, their families and other authorized patrons.”

Whether Congress grants the department authority to consolidate resale operations, Shanahan also wants the task force to “begin standardizing and optimizing” at least all store systems and processes, “beginning with supply chain and procurement as soon as practicable.”

To sharpen focus on these efforts, Shanahan said, he is ordering a freeze, effective immediately, on resale executive hiring and on acquisition of new information technology to support store operations. In a nod to service concerns, the deputy secretary said task force plans for consolidation should consider “retaining service-unique identities on the front end of resale activities.”

Once complete, Shanahan said, if the business case doesn’t persuade Gibson on the merits of consolidation, “the task force will be disestablished immediately and the reform initiative closed.”

“The Department should make it clear to all,” he closed, “that our intentions are to make [base] services better for our members and their families, to improve our support to commanders, to be exceptional stewards of our
appropriated funds, and to exhibit fiduciary responsibility of our non-appropriated funds.”

To comment, write Military Update, P.O. Box 231111, Centreville, VA, 20120 or email milupdate@aol.com or twitter: @Military_Update.
President Trump’s Executive Order Supporting Mental Health Care for Transitioning Service Members Now Underway

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that the White House has approved an interagency plan to implement President Trump’s executive order supporting Veterans with mental health care and suicide-prevention resources during their transition from uniformed service to civilian life.

Signed by the president in January 2018, the executive order directs VA, the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to collaborate to provide, to the extent consistent with law, seamless access to mental health care and suicide prevention resources for Veterans, with a focus on the first year after separation from military service.

“This collaborative effort represents a critical first step for ensuring that service members transitioning from active duty to Veteran status understand that VA, DOD and DHS are committed to easing the stress of transition by providing the best mental health care possible,” said Acting VA Secretary Peter O’Rourke. “Transitioning to civilian life is difficult and, ultimately, this effort will make it easier for our Veterans.”

Research has shown that service members in transition to Veteran status are at higher risk of mental health challenges and suicide. The president acted to ensure that new Veterans will receive access to VA mental health care and other services to the extent they are eligible.

Implementation of the Joint Action Plan by the three departments includes 16 important services. Below are three examples:

- Expanding peer community outreach and group sessions in the VA Whole Health initiative from 18 Whole Health Flagship facilities to all facilities. Whole Health includes wellness and establishing individual health goals.
- Extending DOD’s “Be There Peer Support Call and Outreach Center” services to provide peer support for Veterans in the year after separation from the uniformed services.
- Expanding DOD’s Military One Source, which offers resources to active-duty members, to include support to separating service members up to one year after separation.

The White House will closely monitor the outcomes of the Joint Action Plan.

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House Passes Major Overhaul of Veterans Choice Program

This article by Richard Sisk first appeared on Military.com, the premier resource for the military and veteran community.

The House Wednesday passed by a vote of 372-70 major veterans legislation to extend and reform the Veterans Choice Program to allow more private care options.

The "VA Mission Act," would also lift the restrictions on family caregiver benefits, which are now limited to post-9/11 veterans, and extend them to the caregivers of veterans of all eras.

The bill will now go to the Senate, where Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Georgia, chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, and Sen. Jon Tester, the ranking member of the Committee, have already expressed their support.

President Donald Trump has said he will sign the bill quickly when it reaches his desk.
In a statement last week, the White House said the bill would "transform the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) into a modern, high-performing, and integrated healthcare system that will ensure our veterans receive the best healthcare possible from the VA, whether delivered in the VA's own facilities or in the community."

Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), which previously had expressed concerns that a rapid expansion of community care options could lead to the "privatization" of VA health care, had lined up to back the new bill.

Denise Rohan, national commander of the two-million member American Legion, said in a statement that "I applaud the passage of the VA Mission Act." She said the bill "will streamline and fund the Department of Veterans Affairs' many community care programs" and also "expand caregiver benefits to pre-9/11 veterans and their families."

Keith Harman, national commander of the 1.7 million member Veterans of Foreign Wars, said the bill "will help improve services throughout the VA health system while utilizing private sector resources when needed, striking the right balance to make sure we provide veterans with the best care possible."

A similar bill offered last year by Isakson was left out of the omnibus $1.3 trillion spending package signed by Trump in February for all government agencies, forcing the House and Senate to begin anew on reforming choice.

Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tennessee, the chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee who was instrumental in gaining bipartisan support for the new legislation, said that "Over the last several months, we've taken great, bipartisan steps to reform the department, and this legislation is yet another strong step in the right direction."

Roe said the provisions in the bill would keep "our promise to give veterans more choice in their health care while building on our strong investment in VA's internal capacity."

The bill would authorize $5.2 billion to extend the current Veterans Choice Program, whose funding was set to expire on May 31, for one year while the VA enacts reforms to expand private care options.

Rep. Tim Walz, D-Minn., the ranking member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, voted against the bill.
"There is little debate that the VA Mission Act is better than the current Veterans Choice Program," Walz said, but he questioned whether there would be sufficient funding in the long run to sustain it.

"Voting against this bill is not something I take lightly," he said. "While I have serious concerns with regard to long term sustainability and implementation, the bill does take steps to consolidate VA's various care in the community programs while providing much needed stop gap funding for the ailing Veterans Choice Program."

Former VA Secretary David Shulkin last year said that about one-third of VA medical appointments were being handled in the private sector, but the Trump administration had argued for more private care options for veterans who face long waits for appointments or have to travel long distances to VA facilities.
TAMPA – With a veteran population of more than 1.5 million in Florida, Crisis Center of Tampa Bay is pleased to announce the Florida Veterans Support Line, 1-844-MyFLVet, has expanded to every county in Florida.

Florida has the third largest veteran population in the nation. Through a simple phone call to 1-844-MyFLVet, Florida veterans who are struggling with issues like PTSD, substance abuse, relationship troubles and personal finances can connect confidentially to emotional support and community resources, 24 hours a day.

As part of the statewide expansion of the Florida Veterans Support Line, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay created a revolutionary billboard appearing near MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa. “Stitches of Duty” was stitched entirely of actual military gear donated by veterans. Watch the complete story here.

“For service members, the billboard lets us know there are people who understand our struggle and there is somewhere we can reach out to for help,” said U.S. Army Combat Medic and billboard contributor, Kari Padilla. “The donated items are so important to us as service members, and parting with them is our way of showing the community we’re still here and we still need help.”

When a veteran calls 1-844-MyFLVet, they will speak with someone who is trained to provide immediate emotional support. Calls are answered by a network of local, non-profit organizations throughout the state, including those that also answer calls for the 2-1-1 system in Florida. Veterans can also be referred to both VA and non-VA resources, including non-profit organizations, community programs and local government services. Help is available regardless of discharge status. A list of the organizations answering calls to the Florida Veterans Support Line can be found at: https://flvetsupportline.squarespace.com/about.

“We are proud to have piloted the Florida Veterans Support Line in Tampa Bay, and now, based on the statewide need and positive impact of this service on our veteran community, we are thrilled to expand the resource statewide. Thanks to funding by the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs, we will be able to more broadly serve those who have so bravely served our country,” said Clara Reynolds, President & CEO of Crisis Center of Tampa Bay.

“We pride ourselves on being the most veteran-friendly state through our support of the more than 1.5 million veterans that reside in Florida. We are honored to support this initiative as part of our goal to ensure Florida veterans receive their earned services, benefits and support,” said Steve Murray, communications director of the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs.

For more information about the Florida Veterans Support Line, visit www.MyFLVet.com.

About Crisis Center of Tampa Bay

The mission of the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay is to ensure that no one in our community has to face crisis alone. The organization is the community’s gateway to help, hope, and healing, and is Tampa Bay’s elite provider of crisis and trauma services. Responding to more than 160,000 requests for
help each year, the nonprofit agency offers a range of evidence based programs designed to meet community needs:

- Gateway Contact Center (2-1-1: suicide prevention, crisis counseling, and information and referral services)
- Corbett Trauma Center (trauma counseling and sexual assault survivor services)
- TransCare (9-1-1 emergency and mental health ambulance services, medical van transportation)

For more information regarding the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, please visit [www.crisiscenter.com](http://www.crisiscenter.com).
May 25, 2018

In This Issue:
1. Congress Sends Historic VA MISSION Act to President
2. VFW Visits US Naval Academy
3. DHA MSO/VSO Working Group
4. Memorial Day Weekend Activities in Washington
5. Congress Makes Progress on Defense Authorization Bill
6. VFW-supported Legislation on Mare Island Naval Cemetery
7. Legislative Wrap-up
8. Hearing on Creation of VA Administration on Economic Opportunity
9. Hearing on VA VISN Restructuring
10. Military Appreciation Month Discounts
11. MIA Update

1. Congress Sends Historic VA MISSION Act to President: On Wednesday, with a vote of 92-5, the Senate overwhelmingly passed S. 2372, the VA MISSION Act of 2018. The VFW thanks the Senators who put veterans first and voted in favor of this important bill, which is the result of bipartisan and bicameral work by members of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans’ Affairs to improve VA health care, expand caregiver benefits to pre-9/11 veterans, fix the Choice Program, consolidate VA’s confusing community care programs and improve VA’s infrastructure to better serve veterans. The bill now heads to the White House. President Trump has announced he will sign it. The VFW thanks its members and supporters who wrote and called their members of Congress. See how your senators voted, See how your representative voted.

2. VFW Visits US Naval Academy: On Thursday, VFW Sr. Vice Commander Vincent “B.J.” Lawrence and VFW National Security and Foreign Affairs Director John Towles attended an awards ceremony at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. The VFW recognized Midshipman 1st Class Christopher Cantillo for his hard work and dedication by presenting him with a sword on behalf of the organization. The VFW thanks the U.S. Naval academy for the opportunity to attend the ceremony and wishes to extend our sincerest congratulations to the entire graduating class of 2018.

3. DHA MSO/VSO Working Group: On Wednesday, the VFW participated in the monthly Defense Health Agency (DHA) MSO/VSO Working Group led by DHA Deputy Director Guy
Kiyokawa. The meeting provided updates on pediatric services at Womack Army Medical Center, medical treatment records for dependents and an implementation update concerning last year’s National Defense Authorization Act. Also discussed was the importance of ensuring that beneficiaries who pay their premiums and fees by credit card have contacted their new regional contractor to ensure that their payment information is correct. Beneficiaries who fail to authorize or update their payment information with their new TRICARE contractor before May 31, 2018, will lose coverage, must wait a full year to re-enroll and will also incur additional enrollment fees. As of May, there were still approximately 16,000 beneficiaries who have failed to update their payment information. If you are unsure of your current payment authorization status, please contact your regional TRICARE contractor.

4. Memorial Day Weekend Activities in Washington: There are a host of activities and events planned for Memorial Day weekend in our nation’s capital, May 25-28. The VFW-supported and USAA-sponsored Poppy Wall, located on the southwestern side of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, will be open to the public from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., May 25-28. Those unable to visit the Poppy Wall can visit www.poppyinmemory.com to dedicate a digital poppy to a fallen loved one or as a gesture of appreciation for those who made the ultimate sacrifice. The VFW will also have a benefits information tent set up just east of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, May 26-28. On Monday, VFW Senior Vice Commander Vincent “B.J.” Lawrence will lay a wreath during the National Memorial Day Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery at 11 a.m. and at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Day Ceremony on the National Mall at 1 p.m. Other Memorial Day weekend events include:
-- The dress rehearsal for Sunday’s National Memorial Day Concert is on Saturday at 8 p.m. on the west lawn of the Capitol. The concert will be held Sunday evening at 8 p.m. and will air on PBS stations nationwide.
-- Rolling Thunder XXXI begins at noon on Sunday and will travel from the Pentagon past the National Mall to West Potomac Park.
-- National Memorial Day ceremonies will also be held Monday at the National WWII Memorial at 9 a.m. and the Korean War Veterans Memorial at 5 p.m.
-- The National Memorial Day Parade begins Monday at 2 p.m. along Constitution Avenue.

5. Congress Makes Progress on Defense Authorization Bill: This week, the House overwhelmingly passed its version of the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The bill would provide a 2.6 percent pay raise for service members and includes many VA priorities, such as:
-- Requires DOD to report and conduct outreach on exposure to burn pits.
-- Grants disabled veterans access to commissaries and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation facilities.
-- Authorizes DOD to issue the Vietnam Service Medal to veterans who participated in Operation End Sweep.
-- Requires DOD to design and produce a service medal for veterans exposed to radiation (Atomic Veterans).
-- Requires DOD to publish information regarding the housing market around military installations.
-- Prevents new mothers who are on active duty from being deployed.
-- Requires an independent review of prosecutions and punishments that target sexual assault survivors, and many more.

The Senate also began consideration of its version of the NDAA under closed hearings. The NDAA now awaits consideration by the full Senate. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates on this important bill.

6. **VFW-supported Legislation on Mare Island Naval Cemetery:** Senator Dianne Feinstein introduced legislation recently that would require VA to perpetually maintain and care for the Mare Island Naval Cemetery, which has fallen into disrepair since the Mare Island Naval Shipyard was closed in 1996. S. 2881 is a companion to H.R. 5588, which was introduced last month by Representative Mike Thompson who is a Life member of VFW Post 768 in Windsor, Calif. Read Thompson's bill.

7. **Legislative Wrap-up:** On Monday, the House passed more than a dozen veterans bills, including several VFW-supported bills, such as H.R. 1972, *VA Billing Accountability Act*, which authorizes VA to waive copayment requirements when the veteran is not billed in a timely manner; H.R. 4958, *Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2018*, which would provide a cost-of-living adjustment for VA compensation benefits; and H.R. 4334, *Improving Oversight of Women Veterans’ Care Act of 2017*, which would require VA to submit reports on access to gender-specific care in the community and environment of care standards for women veterans. Read other bills passed by the House. In addition to the VA MISSION Act, the Senate passed the *Tribal HUD-VASH Act* which would ensure Native American veterans are able to access federal rental and housing assistance for homeless and at-risk veterans. The Senate also passed H.R. 4910, the *Veterans Cemetery Benefit Correction Act*, which would require the Department of the Interior to provide grave liners for veterans buried in National Park Service cemeteries. H.R. 4910 heads to the president’s desk. All other bills must be considered by the other chambers of Congress.

8. **Hearing on Creation of VA Administration on Economic Opportunity:** On Wednesday, the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing to review a proposed restructuring of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Currently, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) oversees all economic opportunity benefits, such as the GI Bill, the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program, the Transition Assistance Program and the Home Loan Guarantee program. The proposed restructuring would keep the compensation and pension portion of VBA as is, and create a new division within VA that would oversee economic opportunity and transition programs. Subcommittee Chairman Jodey Arrington sees the value in exploring this restructuring if it would highlight and expand on certain benefits and programs that do not get enough attention within VA. The VFW supports H.R. 5644, the *VET OPP Act*, which would transfer critical benefits programs into the new Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration. Watch the hearing or read the bill text.

9. **Hearing on VA VISN Restructuring:** The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs held a hearing on Tuesday to assess the governance structure of VA’s Veterans Integrated Services Networks (VISN). VA currently has 18 VISNs which were designed in 1995 to decentralize the Veterans Health Administration’s budgetary, planning and decision-making functions to promote
Chairman Phil Roe, M.D., discussed the alarming failure by the VISNs and VA’s Central Office to resolve problems at local medical facilities. Watch the hearing or read the VA Inspector General's testimony.

10. **Military Appreciation Month Discounts:** Walgreens will be offering a 20 percent discount for military service members, veterans, and their families on May 28. Other stores, restaurants and attractions are also offering free meals and discounts throughout the month of May. Check here for a list of just a few.

11. **MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced identification and burial updates for 11 American service members who had been missing in action from Korea and WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Pfc. Willie E. Blue,** 19, of New Orleans, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 29 in Dallas. Blue was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. In August 1950, his unit was defending the Naktong Bulge portion of the Pusan Perimeter. Blue was admitted to the 2nd Clearing Station, 2nd Medical Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division in Yong-san, South Korea. After admission, Blue could not be accounted for. When no additional records could be found showing his disposition and the 8076th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital could not provide any information, the Department of the Army declared him deceased on March 3, 1954. Read about Blue.

-- **Navy Reserve Pharmacist's Mate 2nd Class Thomas J. Murphy,** 22, of Greencastle, Ind., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 28 in Hamilton, Ohio. Murphy was assigned to Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, Fleet Marine Force. On Nov. 20, 1943, Murphy's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Murphy was killed on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Read about Murphy.

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Jack H. Krieger,** 28, of Larned, Kan., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 28 in his hometown. Krieger was assigned to Company A, 1st Battalion, 18th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. On Nov. 20, 1943, Krieger's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Krieger died on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. Read about Krieger.

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Francis E. Drake Jr.,** 20, of Framingham, Mass., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 25 in Springfield, Mass. Drake was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division. On Oct. 9, 1942, Drake’s unit participated in the main offensive action in the Battle of Guadalcanal. Drake was killed during the two-month long battle and buried atop Hill 73 with two other Marines. Read about Drake.

-- **Navy Radioman 2nd Class Walter H. Backman,** 22, of Wilton, N.D., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried May 28 in Batavia, Ill. Backman was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Read about Backman.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Edward F. Slapikas,** 26, of Wanamie, Pa., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 2 in his hometown. Slapikas was stationed aboard the
USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Read about Slapikas.

-- Army Sgt. Eugene W. Yost was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. In September 1950, his unit participated in a defense of the Pusan Perimeter, a large defensive line west and north of Pusan, South Korea. Yost was reported to have been killed in action on Sept. 3, 1950, but his remains could not be located following the battle. Interment services are pending. Read about Yost.

-- Army Sgt. John W. Hall a member of Headquarters Battery, 503rd Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. In late November 1950, Hall’s unit received orders to move from Kunu-ri to Sunchon, North Korea through an area known as “The Gauntlet.” Hall was reported missing in action on Dec. 1, 1950, in the vicinity of Somindong, North Korea. Interment services are pending. Read about Hall.

-- Army Cpl. DeMaret M. Kirtley was a member of Battery A, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Kirtley was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 6, 1950. Interment services are pending. Read about Kirtley.

-- Army Sgt. Joseph Akers was a member of Company C, 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, participating in intense fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. On Nov. 25, 1944, his company was deployed as direct-fire support of American infantrymen attacking the town of Grosshau. The M10 tank destroyer Akers occupied was knocked out in the fighting. He was killed during the battle, though his status was initially listed as missing in action. On Dec. 21, 1944, his status was amended to killed in action. Interment services are pending. Read about Akers.

-- Navy Seaman 2nd Class Carl Nichols was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. Read about Nichols.


As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to vfwac@vfw.org.
For the second time this year, the U.S. Air Force awarded two A-10C Thunderbolt pilots the Distinguished Flying Cross for separate close-air support missions in support of the fight against Islamic State in Iraq and Syria militants.

The missions included a danger-close strike and strikes in an anti-aircraft artillery zone to protect American-backed Syrian Democratic Forces during Operation Inherent Resolve.

Maj. Matthew "Chowder" Cichowski and Capt. William "Archer" Dana of the 74th Fighter Squadron at Moody Air Force Base, Georgia, received the award during a ceremony May 23, Air Combat Command said in a recent release.
Dana and Cichowski had been stationed together at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, and were recognized for their actions to stave off the enemy in various locations in the Middle East.

On Aug. 14, 2017, Dana and his wingman received a call from a Joint Terminal Attack Controller that more than eight positions were being overrun and casualties were mounting, the release said.

"There was a sense of urgency felt. I needed to get out there quickly because good guys were dying," Dana said in the release.

Covering the battlefield for more than three hours, Dana dropped 11,000 pounds of weapons, "killing 37 enemies and destroying 10 enemy defensive fighting positions with no friendly loss," the release said.

During that mission, his A-10 was tracked by pro-regime aircraft. The Air Force did not disclose whether the aircraft belonged to Syria, Iranian-backed militia, or Russian air forces operating in the area.

Low on fuel and almost out of munitions, Dana at one point "elected to conduct an airstrike on enemies attacking friendly forces from a four-story building" nearly 100 feet away, the release said.

The skilled pilot knew that the danger-close attack could amount to fratricide. But "at the point of weapons release, I trusted my training," he said. "I had to account for the wind, because that affects where the ordnance drops. And with friendlies being that close, I wanted to take responsibility for everything. This is my weapon, from my jet, and the effects are on me."

No friendly forces were killed or injured in Dana's efforts, the Air Force said.

On a separate mission earlier this year, Cichowski and his wingman were called by a JTAC to boost forces outnumbered three-to-one by enemy combatants.

Their A-10 was also tracked -- this time by surface-to-air missiles.

"We'd been diving a lot and had already been shot at once," Cichowski said. "We started to realize this is a coordinated attack and not a random fight like
we originally thought. At this point, neither of us were strangers to combat with
friendlies close. We knew what to do and how to correctly do it."

Cichowski worked with the JTAC and a drone operating overhead to gauge
the scope of the operation, identifying 25 enemy fighters about 500 feet away
from U.S.-backed forces, the release said. He dropped a 2,000-pound Joint
Direct Attack Munition and then used the tank-shredding GAU-8 gun "to wipe
out the rest of the enemy" while encountering more anti-aircraft artillery
strikes, it said.

Cichowki’s mission thwarted "the largest coordinated attack of enemy fighters
seen in that region without a single friendly loss," officials said.

"DFC nominations are scrutinized very carefully, and every detail is validated
to ensure facts are accurate," said Maj. Gen. Scott J. Zobrist, Air Combat
Command's 9th Air Force commander.

"It was an honor for me to present them with the DFC. They are very rare
decorations, and it reflects highly on them and the entire 23rd Wing for their
amazing accomplishments in supporting their nation," Zobrist said.

It was the second presentation of the Distinguished Flying Cross to A-10 pilots
this year.

Maj. Tyler Schultz and Capt. Samantha Harvey, with the 354th Fighter
Squadron at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, were presented with the
military's fourth-highest medal by ACC commander Gen. Mike Holmes on
March 2 for an air assault on Islamic State fighters last year.

-- Oriana Pawlyk can be reached at oriana.pawlyk@military.com. Follow her
on Twitter at @Oriana0214.
White House Approves Interagency Plan on Suicide Prevention: President Donald Trump recently approved an interagency plan to implement an executive order offering support to veterans with mental health care and suicide prevention resources for one year during their transition from military to civilian life. VA, DOD, and the Department of Homeland Security were required to develop the plan by an executive order signed by President Trump in January, which directed the agencies to collaborate in efforts to reduce the rate of suicide among recently discharged veterans. Research has shown that veterans are at a higher risk of suicide and mental health crisis during the first year of their transition to civilian life. Learn more about the Executive Order Supporting Mental Health Care for Transitioning Service Members.

Medical Images Available on MyHealtheVet: Medical images such as mammograms, CT scans, MRIs and X-rays can now be viewed, downloaded, and printed through MyHealtheVet, under VA Medical Images and Reports. Learn more.

Certain Adoption Expenses Reimbursable: VA has amended its regulation to provide reimbursement of qualifying adoption expenses incurred by veterans with a service-connected disability that results in infertility. Covered veterans may request reimbursement for qualifying adoption expenses incurred for adoptions finalized after Sept. 29, 2016. With this rulemaking, funds are authorized to provide reimbursement for qualifying adoption expenses incurred by a covered veteran in the adoption of a child under 18 years of age. More information is available here. VA Form 10152, Reimbursement Request for Qualifying Adoption Expenses, can be downloaded and printed here.
**GI Bill Comparison Tool**: For any service member or veteran looking to pursue their educational goals through the use of the GI Bill, there is an important tool offered by VA. The GI Bill Comparison Tool allows users to compare different programs and institutions that accept the GI Bill. In the past few years, some student veterans have been impacted by the abrupt closures of the schools they were attending. These schools were using predatory business practices and had numerous complaints against them. The GI Bill Comparison Tool gives users the ability to check on the schools they wish to attend, and provides up-to-date data received from current and past students, helping GI Bill users make better, more informed decisions about where to attend school, and hopefully avoid programs that offer little to no value. For help choosing a school, click here.

**D-Day Commemoration**: On Wednesday, June 6 at 11a.m., the Friends of the National World War II Memorial will host a ceremony at the World War II Memorial in Washington D.C., to recognize the service of the some 160,000 Allied troops that landed on the beaches of France 74 years ago. In attendance will be approximately 10 D-Day and WWII veterans who will place wreaths to honor the sacrifice of the 9,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who were killed during the invasion. Find more information about the ceremony here.

**MIA Update**: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced identification and burial updates for one American service member who had been missing in action from WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors is:

--- **Gunner’s Mate 3rd Class Marvin B. Adkins** was stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen. Interment services are pending. Read about Adkins.
USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor Closed Indefinitely

The Associated Press 27 May 2018

HONOLULU -- Damage to the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu was worse than expected and it will remain closed indefinitely, officials said.

Boat transportation to the attraction was suspended May 6 after one of the vessel operators noticed a crack on the outside of the memorial, Hawaii News Now reported.

Tourists were allowed to disembark at the memorial after crews completed interim repairs. But the cracks reappeared hours later, indicating a more serious issue.

"There is a brow or an edge where the visitor ramp meets the memorial, and at that point, there's been some fissures located on the exterior," said Jay Blount, a spokesman for the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument. "After further investigation on the interior, it was determined that the structure is not supporting the loading ramp the way that we need."

Engineers are working to figure out possible long-term solutions.
"The amount of time needed to implement the repairs is unknown, but the (National Park Service) will continue to provide information to the public as our team of specialists works together to restore access as soon as possible," memorial staff said Friday in a news release.

Other areas of the Pearl Harbor Visitor Center remain open.

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SAVE-THE-DATE

FLORIDA VETERAN-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES SYMPOSIUM
Improving Outcomes for Veterans in our Communities

Co-hosted by United Way’s MISSION UNITED
Presented as a public - private - nonprofit partnership

Orlando, Florida
Hilton Orlando - 6001 Destination Parkway, Orlando, FL 32819

Thursday-Friday, August 2 - 3, 2018

A forum for participants to learn, network, discuss, and build consensus on collaborative community initiatives serving Veterans and their families.

Designed to improve services and support for Veterans and their families by bringing community experience and practice to the forefront.

Symposium is facilitated to:
* Share resources
* Expand knowledge
* Advance best practices
* Increase community awareness
* Promote stronger partnerships
* Cultivate collective impact

Symposium includes:
* Inspiring keynote speakers
* Relevant seminar topics
* Regional breakout sessions
* Local action planning

Plenary and breakout seminars focus on Veteran community transition, which includes housing, education, employment, legal, health, and wellness.

Attendance is open to Veteran support organizations, community Veteran groups, MISSION UNITED initiatives, and other partners and stakeholders.

Creating public - private - nonprofit partnerships so Veterans reach their full potential

Sponsorship and partnership opportunities are available.

For more information, please contact Ken Juede, United Way of Broward County’s MISSION UNITED Director at kjuede@unitedwaybroward.org

Interested in Community Collaboration & Veteran Engagement - this is the event for YOU!