May 6, 2019

VETERANS

MONTHLY INFORMATION PACKAGE

FLAGLER COUNTY

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Feel free to make copies and distribute throughout your organization.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 22, 2019

VA’s improvements to Veteran community care under MISSION Act on track for June 6 implementation

As the one-year anniversary of President Trump’s signing of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act of 2018 approaches on June 6, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is making significant strides in implementing major improvements to community care for Veterans.

“The Veteran is at the center of everything we do,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said. “Through the MISSION Act, Veterans will have more choices than ever in getting timely, high-quality care. Most important, Veterans will be able to decide what is important and best for them.”

The MISSION Act will strengthen VA’s health care system by improving both aspects of care delivery and empowering Veterans to find the balance in the system that is right for them,

A key aspect of the MISSION Act is the consolidation of VA’s community care programs, which will make community care work better for Veterans and their families, providers and VA employees. When this transition is complete, the following will occur:

- Veterans will have more options for community care.
- Eligibility criteria for community care will be expanded, including new access standards.
- Scheduling appointments will be easier, and care coordination between VA and community providers will be better.
- Eligible Veterans will have access to a network of walk-in and urgent care facilities for minor injuries and illnesses.

“Transitioning to the new eligibility criteria for community care should be seamless for Veterans,” Wilkie said. “Veterans will continue to talk to their care team or scheduler as they have been doing to get the care they need.”

VA also has been working closely with community providers to ensure Veterans have a positive experience when receiving community care. For example, VA has developed education and training materials to help community providers understand some of the unique challenges Veterans can face.

Going forward, community care will be easier to use, and Veterans will remain at the center of their VA health care decisions.

In addition to information VA has made available digitally, Veterans enrolled in VA health care can expect to receive a letter in the mail providing details on where to go for more information.

For more information about community care under the MISSION Act, visit https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/58621/new-eligibility-criteria-a-major-improvement-over-existing-rules/

###
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 8, 2019

VA increases contracting with Service-Disabled and Veteran-Owned Small Businesses

WASHINGTON — Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Robert Wilkie today announced an increase to the department’s goals for contracting with Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB) and Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (VOSB).

For fiscal year (FY) 2019, VA seeks to award at least 15% of its total contract dollars to SDVOSBs and at least 17% to VOSBs, representing a 5% increase in both goals, a significant change not noted since 2010.

This increase reflects the department’s heightened emphasis on contracting with such firms after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Kingdomware Technologies v. United States (2016), Wilkie said.

“Three years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court underscored our mandate to do business with service-disabled and other Veteran entrepreneurs,” Wilkie said. “We have increased the dollars awarded each year, but now it’s time to update the goals to reflect this new commitment. We need to lock in the gains we have made and continue to build for the future.”

In FY 2017, the last year for which official data is available, VA awarded $5.1 billion in contracts to SDVOSBs and $5.4 billion to VOSBs. These figures represent 19.5% and 20.6%, respectively, of VA’s total procurement of $26.1 billion.

The law directs VA to consider SDVOSBs first and VOSBs second, before considering other small business program preferences. Other federal agencies are covered by a SDVOSB program administered by the Small Business Administration, with a goal of only 3% for SDVOSBs. At these agencies, the government-wide SDVOSB program has equal priority with other small business socioeconomic programs.

In FY 2017, VA awarded more than one-fourth of the dollars given to SDVOSBs by the federal government, more than all other federal civilian agencies combined. Previously, the SDVOSB and VOSB goals were 10% and 12% established by former VA Secretary Eric Shinseki in FY 2010.

FY 2018 data on federal contracting is still under review by the Small Business Administration and is considered unofficial until final figures are officially released.

###
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 15, 2019

VA National Cemetery Administration partners with Carry The Load to honor Veterans and their families

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced that its National Cemetery Administration (NCA) is partnering with Carry The Load, a nonprofit organization that provides active ways to connect Americans to the sacrifices made daily by the U.S. military, Veterans, first responders and their families.

NCA will participate in Carry The Load’s Memorial May awareness campaign, which covers 40 states, leading up to Memorial Day 2019. Participants will march or ride bicycles in an 11,500-mile national relay along three routes — East Coast, West Coast and Midwest — handing off an American flag every few miles. Each participant walks or rides to “carry the load” for a deceased military service member or Veteran, remembering them and honoring their sacrifice. Twenty-six VA national cemeteries in 17 states will serve as relay points for Carry The Load memorial marches.

“The VA is delighted to partner with Carry The Load in this important initiative of honoring those who sacrificed for our freedom to ensure no Veteran ever dies,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It’s a mindset that every one of VA’s employees emulates. And nowhere is the sacrifice made by our Veterans more evident than in our national cemeteries.”

In conjunction with the Carry The Load national relay, each VA national cemetery along the three routes will host a brief ceremony unveiling a commemorative plaque dedicated to America’s fallen Veterans and their families. To view the list of the 26 participating VA national cemeteries and the dates and times they will host the Carry The Load relay and “Tribute to the Fallen and Their Families” plaque dedication ceremonies, download the calendar.

VA operates 136 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers’ lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico. For Veterans not buried in a VA national cemetery, VA provides headstones, markers or medallions to commemorate their service. Information on VA burial benefits is available from local VA national cemetery offices, online at https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/ or by calling VA regional offices toll-free at 800-827-1000.

To make burial arrangements at any open VA national cemetery at the time of need, call the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at 800-535-1117.

###
Obesity cannot be considered a service-connected disability, according to a new ruling by
the Department of Veterans Affairs General Counsel expected to be published in the April 8,

The new ruling, among several precedent opinions set to be included, reinforces the VA's long-
standing opinion that obesity isn't a disease or injury according to the law for wartime or
peacetime compensation and can't be considered directly related to military service for
compensation purposes.

So why does the VA reject obesity as a service-connected disability if Medicare covers obesity
treatment and the Centers for Disease Control and National Institutes of Health both say obesity
is a disease?

While the VA treats obesity as a disease for which treatment is warranted, the distinction is in the
words "service-connected." The VA simply does not see it as a condition that was a result of
military service, and therefore for which compensation is payable.

The VA estimates that 78% of veterans are obese, and it does offer several treatment programs
for obese vets. However, the new opinion means it won't pay compensation for it anytime soon.

But the determination could be a good thing, at least for the current force. We all have heard of
people getting kicked out of the military for being overweight. This ruling by the VA means that
obesity can't be considered willful misconduct when making line-of-duty determinations for other disabilities.

And blocking it as a service-connected disability doesn't mean that it isn't what's known as an "extra-schedular rating," or a rating that can be tagged onto an existing disability, the General Counsel has ruled.

For example, you may be rated 40% because of Agent Orange related diabetes but the diabetes may cause obesity so you may be able to get an extra-schedular rating and increase your disability to 50%.

Also, obesity may be so bad that it has life-altering consequences. That may be considered when determining an overall rating if there are other qualifying disabilities. It may be considered an "intermediate step" between a non-service-connected and service-connected disability when considered with other disabilities.

In their ruling, the lawyers said that since obesity "occurs over time and is based on various external and internal factors, as opposed to being a discrete incident or occurrence, or a series of discrete incidents or occurrences," the condition may be reversed by treatment before it becomes disabling.

So while obesity can, and should, be considered a disease since it is a treatable condition that results in other, more serious health conditions, it shouldn't be considered a disease when you are trying to blame it on your military service.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 1, 2019

VA launches digital campaign encouraging mental health conversations
Website features more than 600 stories of Veteran resilience and recovery

WASHINGTON — In recognition of Mental Health Month in May, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is launching “The Moment When” campaign, a nationwide effort starting May 1 that will feature Veterans’ personal experiences with mental health treatment and recovery.

The campaign aims to demystify mental health treatment, build awareness of available mental health resources, and encourage family members and friends to start the conversation with a Veteran going through a hard time.

“VA continues to be the nation’s vanguard in reshaping the conversation around mental health treatment and recovery,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Since May is Mental Health Month, make this the moment you start the conversation with a loved one or reach out for support if you need it.”

The Moment When campaign will highlight many moments in the broader mental health recovery process: from the moment when a Veteran reached out for support, to the moment when the Veteran realized treatment was working.

Throughout the month of May and beyond, VA encourages Veterans and their families to visit www.MaketheConnection.net/MHM to explore stories of recovery and find local resources.

Veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a Veteran in crisis, can call VCL for confidential support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and press 1, send a text message to 838255 or chat online at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat.

###
VA Now Has Shorter Wait Times Than Private Clinics, AMA Study Claims

23 Jan 2019
Military.com | By Richard Sisk

Wait times at Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals and clinics have gone down significantly from recent years and are now shorter on average than those in private-sector health care, at least in big cities, according to a new study from the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

Critics of the study pointed out that main contributors to the JAMA report were current and former VA executives, including Dr. David Shulkin, who was fired as VA secretary last year by President Donald Trump.

In a statement, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said the JAMA report published Jan. 18 showed that the VA "has made a concerted, transparent effort to improve access to care" since 2014, when wait-times scandals and doctored records led to the resignation of former VA Secretary and retired Army Gen. Eric Shinseki.

"This study affirms that VA has made notable progress in improving access in primary care, and other key specialty care areas," Wilkie said.

The cross-sectional JAMA study of wait-time data from VA facilities and private-sector hospitals focused on primary care, dermatology, cardiology and orthopedics in 15 major metropolitan areas.

The findings were that "there was no statistically significant difference between private sector and VA mean wait times in 2014" and, in 2017, "mean wait times were statistically significantly shorter for the VA," the JAMA report said.
"In 2014 the average wait time in V.A. hospitals was 22.5 days, compared with 18.7 in the private sector," the study said, but in 2017, "mean wait time at V.A. hospitals had gone down to 17.7 days, while rising to 29.8 for private practitioners."

The study, titled "Comparison of Wait Times for New Patients Between the Private Sector and Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers," relied on wait-time data provided by the VA and calculated private-sector data from a survey conducted by a physicians' search firm, Merritt Hawkins, using the so-called "secret shopper" method in nearly 2,000 medical offices in metropolitan areas.

"For the secret shoppers method, the research associates at MH [Merritt Hawkins] called physicians' offices asking to be told the first available time for a new-patient appointment," the JAMA study said.

"This earliest availability was recorded as the wait time. However, the VA data record scheduled wait times, which may not reflect the earliest available appointment," the study said.

The JAMA report also noted that rural areas and follow-on care were excluded from the analysis and said that "follow-up studies are critical to analyze access to the entirety of VA health care," since nearly one-quarter of veterans live in rural areas.

The overall conclusion of the report was that "access to care within VA facilities appears to have improved between 2014 and 2017 and appears to have surpassed access in the private sector for 3 of the 4 specialties evaluated," with the exception of orthopedics.

In 2014, the VA was rocked by wait-time scandals and allegations of manipulated data at the VA medical center in Phoenix, Arizona. "This incident damaged the VA's credibility and created a public perception regarding the VA health care system's inability to see patients in a timely manner," the JAMA report said.

The VA has since worked to improve access and reduce wait times.

"There is evidence suggesting that these efforts have improved access to care, including reports that 22% of VA patients are now seen on the same day as the requested appointment," the report said. However, "Despite, these efforts, the adequacy of access to VA care remains unclear."

As a result of the 2014 scandals, the VA initiated the Choice program to expand private-care options for veterans. Last year, Congress passed and President Trump signed into law the VA Mission Act to consolidate and streamline the Choice program, which has been riddled with inefficiencies.

In June, the Government Accountability Office issued a report stating that many veterans who opted for the Choice program to avoid wait times still faced delays that could stretch for months before seeing a doctor.
In response to the JAMA report, a posting on the Disabled American Veterans website came under the heading: "Veterans Affairs Spins 'JAMA Study' It Authored On VA Wait Times."

In addition to Shulkin, the posting noted that another contributor to the JAMA study was Dr. Carolyn Clancy, the former acting head of the Veterans Health Administration. She was replaced in July by Dr. Richard Stone as acting head of the VHA and has now taken the position at the VA of deputy under secretary for discovery, education and affiliate networks.

Stone, the former deputy surgeon general of the Army, has yet to receive Senate confirmation. The VHA has not had a permanent head since Shulkin left the position in January 2017 to become VA secretary.
DeSantis Announces Governor’s Initiative on Lawyers Assisting Warriors (GI LAW)

APRIL 18, 2019

EGLIN AFB, Fla. – Gov. Ron DeSantis announced today the Governor’s Initiative on Lawyers Assisting Warriors (GI LAW), an initiative to leverage the talent of Florida’s leading law firms to provide pro bono services to military members.

Joined by Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs Executive Director Danny Burgess, Enterprise Florida President and CEO Jamal Sowell, U.S. Coast Guard Chief of Legal Assistance Chris Dunne and several of the state’s most prominent legal professionals, Governor DeSantis unveiled the new program as well as its leadership.

To spearhead the initiative, the Governor announced Chuck Faircloth, General Counsel of the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs, will serve as Executive Director. Steering Committee members include: Maj. Gen. James O. Eiftert, Adjutant General of the Florida National Guard, Danny Burgess, Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs’, Bruce Grant, Vice President of Military and Defense Programs at Enterprise Florida, partners from Greenberg Traurig, partners from Holland & Knight, partners from Shutts & Bowen and partners from the Gunster law firm.

“I’m proud to be able to lead this remarkable effort to provide our active duty service members free legal services from some of the best law firms in our state,” said Governor DeSantis. “This is a big win for our service members and our military here in Florida and I commend all those involved for their commitment to our military.”

Through GI LAW, our state’s men and women in uniform will receive free legal counsel in a variety of civil manners, including actions in local courts. Participating attorneys will dedicate time and expertise to ensure prompt and fair resolution of the legal matters of our service men and women. The Governor also announced GI LAW has secured the commitment of four of Florida’s top law firms: Greenberg Traurig, Holland & Knight, Shutts & Bowen and Gunster.

The application process will be housed on a soon-to-be live webpage through Enterprise Florida’s website. Military members looking for local legal counsel will contact a JAG officer in their area, who will then work to fill out the application. The leadership of GI LAW will then work with participating firms to coordinate legal services on their behalf.
Nominations Open for Florida Veterans’ Hall of Fame Class of 2019

APRIL 24, 2019

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Veterans’ Hall of Fame Council is accepting nominations for the next class of inductees into the Florida Veterans’ Hall of Fame. The nomination period for the Class of 2019 is open until May 31, 2019. Anyone is permitted to nominate a military veteran.

The Florida Legislature established the Florida Veterans’ Hall of Fame to honor and recognize veterans for their post-military service to the state.

Those nominating a veteran will need to complete a nomination packet that can be downloaded from www.floridaveteranshalloffame.org. Nominations are based on established selection criteria including recognizing veterans who, through their works and lives during or after military service, have made a significant contribution to the State of Florida through civic, business, public service or other pursuits. Posthumous recommendations are also welcome.

The Florida Veterans’ Hall of Fame Council, a seven-member advisory panel, is responsible for accepting nominations to be considered for induction into the Florida Veterans’ Hall of Fame. In selecting its nominees for submission, the council gives preference to veterans who were either born in Florida or adopted Florida as their home state. Each year, the council transmits its recommended list of nominees to the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs, which submits the nominations to the Governor and Cabinet, who select the nominees to be inducted.

For more information, visit http://www.floridaveteranshalloffame.org.
April 18, 2019

In This Issue:
1. VFW Hosts Roundtable on Elimination of Widow’s Tax
2. Webinar on TRICARE Pharmacy Program
3. Trump Picks Navy’s Next CNO, VCNO
4. Retired General is New US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia
5. MIA Update

1. VFW Hosts Roundtable on Elimination of Widow’s Tax: On Tuesday, the VFW hosted veterans service organizations, survivor organizations, and congressional staff to discuss the demeaning Survivor Benefits Plan (SBP) and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset. The roundtable focused on joining forces to secure passage of S. 622, the Military Widow’s Tax Elimination Act or H.R. 553, the Military Surviving Spouse Act, which would eliminate the SBP/DIC offset. The group discussed raising awareness of the offset and encouraging members of Congress to co-sponsor the bills. Join the effort by contacting your members of Congress and asking them to co-sponsor S. 622 or H.R. 553. Join the conversation on social media by using the hashtag #AxeWidowsTax. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates.

2. Webinar on TRICARE Pharmacy Program: Join the "Make the Most of Your TRICARE Pharmacy Benefit" webinar on April 25, 2019, from 1 to 2 p.m. ET. The webinar will focus on how to fill and manage prescriptions, as well as pharmacy-covered services, costs, and more. A pharmacy expert will provide detailed information about the TRICARE Pharmacy Program and answer questions. Learn More.

3. Trump Picks Navy’s Next CNO, VCNO: The president has selected Adm. Bill Moran to replace retiring Adm. John Richardson as the Navy’s 32nd chief of naval operations, and Vice Adm. Bob Burke for promotion to full admiral and assignment as the Navy’s new vice chief of naval operations. Moran, a native of the Hudson Valley town of Walden, N.Y., currently serves as the Navy’s VCNO. He is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and National War College, and is a P-3 Orion pilot by trade. Moran previously served as the Navy’s top personnel officer, a position the newly selected VCNO currently occupies. Burke, a submariner by trade, is a native of Portage, Mich., and a graduate of Western Michigan University and the University of Central Florida. Both selectees require Senate approval.

4. Retired General is New US Ambassador to Saudi Arabia: The Senate last week overwhelmingly confirmed retired Army Gen. John Abizaid as the new U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Abizaid, who commanded U.S. Central Command from 2003 to 2007, was also the recipient of the VFW Armed Forces Award at the 108th VFW National Convention in
Kansas City, Mo., in 2007. The 34-year Army veteran served in Grenada, the Persian Gulf, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.

5. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced one burial update and four new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from World War II and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Cpl. Carlos E. Ferguson**, 20, of Dawson, W.Va., will be buried May 18 in nearby Grassy Meadows. Ferguson, whose identification was announced in February, was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, engaged against North Korean and Chinese forces near Kangye, South Korea, from May 16-20, 1951. Ferguson was reported missing in action on May 18, 1951. Read about Ferguson here.

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Richard J. Thomson**, 19, of League City, Texas, was stationed aboard the battleship USS Oklahoma when it sustained multiple torpedo hits and capsized as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmembers, including Thomson. Interment services are pending. Read about Thomson here.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Ernest R. West**, 22, of Runnells, Iowa, was stationed aboard the battleship USS Oklahoma when it sustained multiple torpedo hits and capsized as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including West. Interment services are pending. Read about West here.

-- **Army Pfc. Raymond H. Middlekauff**, of Baltimore, Md. In late 1944, Middlekauff was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, which was engaged against German forces near the town of Grosshau in Germany’s Hürtgen Forest. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 4, 1944. Interment services are pending. Read about Middlekauff here.

-- **Army Capt. Rufus J. Hyman**, 23, of Memphis, Tenn., was an infantry officer with Company A, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, which was engaged against the North Korean People’s Army in the vicinity of Kwonbin-ni, South Korea. He was declared missing in action on July 30, 1950. Interment services are pending. Read about Hyman here.

To sign up new veterans’ advocates, visit: [http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm](http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm).

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.

To view this week’s and previous editions, visit: [http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly](http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly).
April 26, 2019

In This Issue:
1. Joint Hearing on Student Veteran Protections
2. AMA Video from Board of Veterans' Appeals
3. New JCS Vice Chairman Nominated
4. VA Provides Adoption, IVF
5. MIA Update

1. Joint Hearing on Student Veteran Protections: This week, the House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Investment and the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a joint field hearing at Grossmont College in El Cajon, Calif., to address student veteran protections and their success on college campuses. House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Chairman Takano and Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Chairman Levin both spoke about the importance of protecting the earned benefits veterans use to attain their education goals. The return on investment of student veterans can be incredibly valuable. The VFW thanks Chairmen Takano and Levin for making this issue a priority. Watch the hearing.

2. AMA Video from Board of Veterans' Appeals: In February, the VFW-championed Appeals Modernization Act (AMA) was fully implemented to provide veterans who disagree with their VA rating decision expedited options when appealing their claim to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals. This week the Board of Veterans’ Appeals released a video summarizing the AMA options. Watch the video.

3. New JCS Vice Chairman Nominated: The president has nominated Air Force Gen. John Hyten as the next vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, replacing Air Force Gen. Paul Selva, who is retiring after serving out his second two-year term. Hyten was commissioned in 1981 after graduating from Harvard University. He currently serves as commander of U.S. Strategic Command, and previously headed Air Force Space Command. If approved by the Senate, he will join current Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley at the top of the Joint Chiefs. Milley was previously nominated as the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Read Hyten’s bio here.

4. VA Provides Adoption, IVF: Veterans who lost their ability to reproduce due to a service-connected disability may be eligible for their adoption-related expenses to be reimbursed through VA or to receive coverage for in vitro fertilization (IVF). VA also provides infertility evaluation, management, and treatment services to veterans enrolled in VA health care — regardless of service connection. Veterans interested in infertility services should contact their VA provider or their local VA Women Veteran Program manager. Learn more about VA adoption reimbursement. Learn more about IVF.
5. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identifications of five American servicemen who had been missing and unaccounted-for since World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Harold K. Costill** was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which sustained multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack resulted in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Costill. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Costill here.](http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Ray H. Myers** was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Myers. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Myers here.](http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm)

-- **Army Pfc. Dale W. Ross** was a member of Company E, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, who was reported missing in action on Jan. 14, 1943, following a patrol on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. A search was conducted but his remains were not found. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Ross here.](http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm)

-- **Army Pfc. Dewey W. Harris** was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, who was reported missing in action on Nov. 14, 1944, after fierce combat in the Hürtgen Forest, near the German village. Due to ongoing combat operations and extensive land mines throughout the forest, American forces were unable to search for him. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Harris here.](http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm)

-- **Army Pfc. John W. Hayes** was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 335th Infantry Regiment, 84th Infantry Division, who was killed in action on Jan. 4, 1945, when a German tank round struck his foxhole near Mâgôster, Belgium. Following the war, American graves registration teams had no record of Hayes’ remains being recovered or buried. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Hayes here.](http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm)

To sign up new veterans’ advocates, visit: [http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm](http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm).

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.

To view this week’s and previous editions, visit: [http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly](http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly).
Legionnaires help raise suicide awareness with campus walk

By Andy Proffet
MAY 01, 2019

More so than most, Daryll Mauder can speak firsthand on the dark emotions that can lead one to contemplate suicide.

“I’ve actually had four attempts from the span of 2010 to 2019. Recently I was just in the hospital — not as an attempt, but had some really dark thoughts, and I just needed to get myself checked in to get a mental break,” said Mauder, the commander of American Legion University of Akron Post 808 in Ohio.

“I struggle daily, and that’s my whole goal, because I’m in these boots, I’ve walked these boots and I can maybe help a fellow brother or sister out or even a civilian at this point, if they’re struggling, I just want to be there to help because I’ve been right there with them.”

Mauder spoke about his struggles before the Out of the Darkness Campus Walk on April 28 at the University of Akron, one of some 150 such suicide awareness walks taking place this spring across the country. This was the fifth year for the event at Akron, where the Legion post, Student Veterans of America (SVA) and the university’s Veterans and Military Service Center are co-chairs of the walk.

“As a community advocate, our main goal is to reach out and build bridges, not barriers,” said Past Post Commander Ashley Gorbulja-Maldonado. “So when it comes to suicide awareness and prevention, and changing the language, this was a no-brainer. Especially having a post commander who is actively working through the struggles.”

Sunday’s walk took place a day before a veteran died by suicide outside Cleveland VA Medical Center, the latest in a series of such incidents.

“I think one of the things we can do as individual posts is get into our CBOCs and our hospitals and get a presence known, show them, ‘Hey, we’re here for you. You need something, we’re here for you. You want my phone number, you want my email?’ Whatever we can do to help in our local communities, our local areas, that’s what we need to do,” Mauder said.

The mile walk around the University of Akron campus included students, student veterans and others hoping to raise awareness. In the opening ceremony, Miss Ohio 2018 Matti-Lynn Chrisman talked about choosing mental health awareness and suicide prevention as her cause as Miss Ohio, noting that “depression has controlled 90 percent of my life.”

Mauder pointed to the 20 sets of combat boots lined up nearby to represent the 20 veterans a day who die by suicide, according to the most recent statistics from the Department of Veterans Affairs.
“We need to get that number down further, we need to bring that down to zero,” Mauder said.

Maurice Pelkey, veteran engagement director for Team RWB, attended the walk because he’s known people who have tried to kill themselves.

“I know as a veteran that it is an epidemic in our society. We need to let other veterans know that we are there for them, and there’s always a reason to fight,” Pelkey said.

Post 808 and SVA member Timothy Jones echoed that sentiment, saying, “We all struggle with things differently, and it’s good to know that there’s always a brother or sister you can talk to, and committing that act does not have to be the answer that resolves your situation. There’s always other ways to resolve it.”

SVA chapter president Nick Peterson said the event “lets people know that they’re not alone, especially veterans. I know when I got out (of the service on a medical discharge), I was skeptical about reaching out, I didn’t think anything was wrong. It took a hospitalization before I was like, ‘Okay, I need to do this.’”

Army veteran Jonathan Davis agreed. The vice president of the university’s rocket design team, the Akronauts, Davis walked with fellow team members Matthew Stanko, the team’s president, and Matthew Reppa, the team’s chief engineer.

“For me, when I got out of the Army in February 2018, I was going crazy,” Davis said. “Didn’t know what it was I was supposed to be doing, I couldn’t figure out what was wrong. So I went to the VA and sat down with a therapist and talked through it, and the issue was that I had lived the past six years of my life with a mission. And now there was no mission. So the flowerbed was my mission. Painting the living room was my mission. Housework became the mission, and that wasn’t fulfilling. And so it took a lot of introspection to really think about and not be in that dark place that I was in my mind, because it just felt like everything was pointless.

“And that can spiral out of control quickly. It came to kind of defining purpose and accepting responsibility and trying to give back to the community, getting involved in rocketry, coming here to the University of Akron to pursue a degree in aerospace engineering so I can be involved in rocketry, kind of rekindle that flame of purpose in my life. So I want to reach out and help other people who are in similar situations, other veterans that need that and show them there are resources, there are things you can be doing, you don’t have to be in that dark space. There are other missions,” Davis said.

The walk raised $11,885 and included 130 participants.
Military Spouse Appreciation Day 2019

National Military Spouse Appreciation Day is celebrated on the Friday before Mother’s Day in May. This year it will be observed on Friday, May 10th, 2019.

On Military Spouse Appreciation Day we honor the contributions and sacrifices made by military spouses. Their commitment and support help to keep our country safe. America’s military spouses are the backbone of the families who support our troops during mission, deployment, reintegration and reset. Military spouses are silent heroes who are essential to the strength of the nation, and they serve our country just like their loved ones.

In celebration of Military Spouse Appreciation Day, the armed forces have special events and programs to inform, honor, and recognize military spouses around the world. Events range from spouse appreciation luncheons to educational workshops, and spouse employment fairs that pay tribute to military spouses.

History

In 1984, President Ronald Reagan recognized the profound importance of spousal commitment to the readiness and well-being of military members with Proclamation 5184, dated April 17, 1984. Congress officially made Military Spouse Appreciation Day part of National Military Appreciation Month in 1999. Subsequently, the Department of Defense standardized the date by declaring the Friday before Mother’s Day every year as “Military Spouse Appreciation Day” to show appreciation for the sacrifices of military spouses.
Month of the Military Caregiver

The Month of the Military Caregiver is observed in May each year to honor more than five million caregivers in the United States. Paying tribute to the people who care for more than two million veterans is an important part of supporting troops and military families. But for some, it’s also about recognizing the work they do that qualifies them as caregivers even if they don’t think of themselves that way.

A Rand Corporation report on military caregivers reflects this sentiment. “Those caregivers often toil in relative obscurity, and they are challenging to count or describe.” They are spouses, parents, children, and relatives of the wounded veteran, but many coworkers, neighbors, and friends also take on responsibilities. They provide care and assistance, promoting faster recovery for their loved ones and thus saving our nation millions of dollars in health care costs.

Read more: https://militarybenefits.info/military-caregiver-month/#ixzz5khYxBLMv

Month Of The Military Caregiver: What Is It?
Unlike some other military-themed observances, Month of the Military Caregiver is not a federal holiday, military bases do not give their contractors and military members time off, etc. It is an observance that primarily acts as a way to raise awareness of both wounded warriors and the people who care for them.
Much like observances such as Month of the Military Child, Asian-Pacific Heritage Month, and others, the activities and events during the observance remind us of the sacrifices others have made with and for our fellow Americans.

Not To Be Confused With…
It is a good thing to pay respect to those who provide much needed care for wounded warriors, veterans with service-connected and non-service connected disabilities, etc. And that’s one reason why there are multiple observances each year for those who offer their time and effort to provide care.
Month of the Military Caregiver, which is observed in May, should not be confused with the equally important National Family Caregivers Month, which is observed in November. During the Month of November, the Department of Veterans Affairs “takes time to honor and thank” the millions of family caregivers and those they serve. It is a very important time for these under-recognized people, and they deserve their own special recognition. Month of the Military Caregiver and National Family Caregivers Month share the goal of raising awareness, sharing resources, and reminding us that this vital community needs support.

**Honoring Month Of The Military Caregiver**

There may be no ticker-tape parades or major league sporting event half-time ceremonies dedicated to military caregivers, but there are plenty of ways to show your support for military caregivers in May and the rest of the year. One particularly helpful way to show support is to volunteer with the Department of Veterans Affairs, or by helping a caregiver in your circle of friends and family.

Assisting an existing military caregiver isn’t just about giving a few days of rest and time away from the daily responsibilities required; it’s also about morale of all involved and fostering a sense of community with the patients and care providers.

Even if you have no training in medical needs, you can make a difference for a caregiver since many tasks don’t require medical skills or training. Does a military caregiver you know need to grocery shop for their client? Drive the veteran to medical appointments or to the bank? Is meal prep needed?

There are many ways to help out and reduce the daily to-do list for someone who provides these critical services.

If you want to participate in the care of a veteran, no matter what level of training, available time, and awareness of the level of need in your community, it’s a very good idea to contact the Department of Veterans Affairs via the nearest field office or medical center near you to learn what volunteer opportunities may be available.

**Military Caregiver Statistics**

Locating and counting military caregivers-especially for the purposes of offering support programs or other assistance-can be challenging, but knowing their tasks and the critical services they provide is well known.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, family caregivers spend over 24 hours a week providing care. Approximately 25% of these people will spend more than 40 hours each week providing care.

**Military Caregiver Resources**

There are plenty of government resources available for caregivers; you may not be one yourself at the time you read this, but knowing the needs and services available may be a source of motivation to get involved-the need is great, and every volunteer effort helps.
The VA Caregiver Support Line
The VA Caregiver Support Line is 1-855-260-3274, and is designed to help with resources, advice, and networking. All care providers are welcome to dial in to monthly telephone education groups, ask questions, and get help with self-care.

VA Peer Support Mentoring
Caregivers are invited to take part in the VA’s peer support mentoring outreach; you may take part as either a mentor or as someone in need of one. This kind of support generally lasts approximately six months, but there are one-time mentoring opportunities under this program, too. Communication between mentor and learner is facilitated by whatever method works best for all involved—you can discuss care giving issues by phone, email, even regular mail.

Caring For Seriously Injured Post-9/11 Veterans
Some VA caregiver support programs are open to all regardless of what era their clients have served in, but the VA Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers program offers support for those providing care for veterans with serious injuries who have served on or after 9/11. Through VA Comprehensive Assistance, the government provides approved caregivers support options including a monthly stipend, respite care, payment of approved travel expenses, health insurance, and mental health services.

Read more: https://militarybenefits.info/military-caregiver-month/#ixzz5khZ5Y91a
Know the Signs

Find the Words

Reach Out

Pain isn’t always obvious

KNOW THE SIGNS

Warning Signs: Immediate Risk
Some behaviors may indicate that a person is at immediate risk for suicide.

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

Warning Signs: Serious Risk
Other behaviors may also indicate a serious risk—especially if the behavior is new; has increased; and/or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

VISIT
• Your Primary Care doctor
• Mental health Professional
• Emergency Department
• Urgent Care Center
• In Flagler, anyone in crisis can go to SMA Healthcare’s CTTU at 301 Justice Lane in Bunnell for assistance with a mental health crisis (8 am-midnight Monday through Friday and noon until midnight on weekends). SMA staff can help deescalate a crisis and/or assist with transportation to a Baker Act facility in Daytona Beach.

FIND A BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDER
• www.flaglerlifeline.com
• findtreatment.samhsa.gov
• psychologytoday.com
• Call SMA Healthcare’s Access Center at 800-539-4228 (24/7)
• Call LSF’s Access to Care Line at 877-229-9098 (24/7)

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Veterans Press 1
Text HOME to 741741
CALL 911 FOR EMERGENCIES

SUICIDE is PREVENTABLE

1-800-273-TALK (8255) or Text “HOME” to 741-741
www.flaglerlifeline.com
Man Ordered to Pay $1 Fine in Scheme to Bilk Veterans out of Pensions

A man accused of misleading veterans to turn over much of their military retirement or disability benefits has been ordered to stop engaging in the illegal scheme of pension poaching.

But he'll only have to pay a $1 fine and cooperate in an ongoing investigation. Despite finding that Mark Corbett's acts were deceptive and unfair and likely caused "substantial injury" to veterans, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau handed Corbett a monetary penalty of just $1, according to Monday's consent order.

In announcing the settlement with Corbett on Wednesday, the bureau said the $1 fine accounts for Corbett's inability to pay more based on sworn financial statements that he provided to the bureau and his ongoing cooperation with the agency's investigation.

Corbett is also named in a separate federal lawsuit filed in 2017 by three veterans who claim Corbett and others illegally bilked veterans desperate for cash out of millions of dollars from their military pensions and benefits, according to court documents.

It wasn't immediately clear how the bureau's order would affect that case.

Corbett, according to the bureau's consent order, brokered contracts for the so-called Doe Companies. He marketed to veterans online who searched the internet for loans to veterans or for pension sales. In turn, he sought investors interested in buying veterans' income streams. Veterans would receive a payment ranging from a few thousand to tens of thousands of dollars; in
exchange, they would repay a much larger amount by signing over to investors all or part of their monthly pension or disability payments, typically for five to 10 years.

Veterans often experienced funding delays and were not informed of the interest rates or the commission earned by Corbett.

The contracts required veterans to go into their Department of Veterans Affairs or Defense Finance and Accounting Service online portal and route their benefits directly into a bank account controlled by the investors. If the contract was only for a part of a pension, the companies would receive the veterans' entire direct-deposit or monthly allotment and then remit a portion of it back to the veterans' bank accounts.

Veterans were also required to purchase life insurance policies as collateral. Federal law prohibits agreements under which another person acquires the right to receive a veteran's pension payments, the bureau's consent order notes.

It appears Corbett tried to skirt the law by telling veterans "that this is not a loan, you are selling a product for a set price," according to the consent order. That lines up with what Corbett told the American Association of Retired Persons in 2014: "We buy income streams. Everything we do is completely legal and legitimate. We're completely transparent," he was quoted in an AARP online article.

He said business was booming and he received 30 to 50 calls a day from people who want cash for their pensions.

"The first thing I do is try to talk them out of it," Corbett was quoted in the AARP article. "It's expensive money. I tell them: 'Don't sell your pension unless you have a really good plan for the money.'"

As part of the bureau’s settlement with Corbett, he must help the agency identify other veterans affected by his scheme.

In the case currently before a district court judge in South Carolina, the veterans maintain defendants extracted commissions as high as 40 percent of the sum received by veterans, without disclosing this to the investors or the veteran, according to court documents. A federal judge in April rejected a motion for dismissal.