



February 2, 2018

In This Issue:

- 1. VFW Participates in Military to Civilian Transition Roundtable**
- 2. House Hearing on Appeals Modernization**
- 3. TRICARE Retiree Dental Plan Ending**
- 4. VFW-Supported Veteran Debt Fairness Act Introduced**
- 5. VA Resumes Applications for New Veterans ID Card**
- 6. VA to Celebrate African American History Month**
- 7. Arlington National Cemetery Update**
- 8. Vietnam Wall *In Memory* Program Accepting Applications**
- 9. MIA Update**

1. VFW Participates in Military to Civilian Transition Roundtable: On Tuesday, the VFW participated in a House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity roundtable discussion on the transition of service members out of active duty into civilian life. Subcommittee Chairman Jodey Arrington hosted the roundtable that included members of the subcommittee, representatives from the Departments of Labor, Veterans Affairs, Defense, and other veterans organizations. The VFW encouraged the subcommittee to improve Transition Assistance Program (TAP) courses and to ensure transitioning service members are given enough time to attend TAP classes. This was the first in a series of planned meetings to discuss ways to improve the entire transition experience for service members. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates on this important topic.

2. House Hearing on Appeals Modernization: On Wednesday, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing to discuss VA's progress implementing a pilot program called the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) to test the new appeals framework created by the VFW-championed *Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017*. Committee members questioned why VA lacks a concrete plan to implement the new streamlined appeals process. VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director John Towles submitted a statement expressing the VFW's desire to see more data from RAMP before recommending it to veterans. [Read the VFW's testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#). If you receive a RAMP letter from VA, please contact the VFW by email at vfw@vfw.org or call (800) VFW-1899, (800) 839-1899.

3. TRICARE Retiree Dental Plan Ending: The TRICARE Retiree Dental Plan (TRDP) will sunset on Dec. 31, 2018. The program will not be replaced by a TRICARE alternative. However, retirees currently using or eligible for TRDP will have the option to secure dental coverage through the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP). Eligible retirees and active-duty family members will also be eligible to obtain vision care through FEDVIP. In order to have dental or vision coverage in 2019, interested individuals must enroll during the open season — Nov. 12-Dec. 10, 2018. There are 10 dental and four vision carriers from which to choose. [Read more information or sign up for updates on the program.](#)

4. VFW-Supported Veteran Debt Fairness Act Introduced: Last week, Senators Tester, Brown, and Blumenthal introduced the [Veteran Debt Fairness Act of 2018](#). This legislation is the result of countless news and media reports over the last few years that shed light on the harmful debt collection policies that VA employs. During an Oct. 25, 2017, hearing before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, the [VFW highlighted](#) several issues with the current system and explained to lawmakers some of the steps that need to be taken in order to correct the most egregious problems. This bill would require VA to take those steps by limiting VA's ability to collect debts that occur as a result of an error or fraud on the part of a veteran or their beneficiary; requiring that VA garnish no more than 25 percent of a veteran's monthly payment when recouping an overpayment or debt; and preventing VA from collecting debts incurred more than five years prior. The VFW applauds Senators Tester, Brown, and Blumenthal for their support and leadership on this often overlooked topic.

5. VA Resumes Applications for New Veterans ID Card: After temporarily suspending applications for the recently created veterans identification (ID) cards due to high demand, VA is once again accepting applications. The new veterans ID card was created by the *Veterans Identification Card Act of 2015* so veterans who do not have a Veterans Health Identification Card are able to prove their veteran status without having to carry their DD-214. The cards are valid only for proving military service and cannot be used for VA or military benefits. [Apply for a new veterans ID card.](#)

6. VA to Celebrate African American History Month: Throughout the month of February, VA's Center for Minority Veterans is planning events in commemoration of this year's theme for African American History Month — "African Americans in Times of War." There will be a roundtable discussion and reception held at Washington, D.C.'s African American Civil War Memorial and Museum, Feb. 21, from 5-8 p.m. Later in the month VA will honor African American women veterans at the Women in Military Service to America Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery, Feb. 27, from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. The VFW and other veterans organizations will be participating and encourage interested members to participate as well. [Learn more](#) about VA's Center for Minority Veterans and events being held this month.

7. Arlington National Cemetery Update: On Tuesday, VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director John Towles attended a roundtable discussion hosted by the Honor Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery (ACANC) to discuss the results of the recent National Dialogue Survey, hear feedback from veterans service organizations regarding the survey process, and discuss plans for a second survey concerning the future of Arlington National Cemetery. The survey had more than 28,000 respondents and

included veterans, service members, and survivors from all generations and branches of service, many of whom are members of the VFW. The VFW appreciates the support of all its members who participated in this important process and will provide updates regarding the second survey as soon as it becomes available. [Read a summary of the survey results.](#)

8. Vietnam Wall *In Memory* Program Accepting Applications: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund created the *In Memory* program in 1999 to honor Vietnam veterans whose lives were cut short as a result of their service such as illnesses associated with Agent Orange exposure, PTSD, and other causes. A plaque dedicated near The Wall in 2004 reads: *In Memory of the men and women who served in the Vietnam War and later died as a result of their service. We honor and remember their sacrifice.* Applications for an *In Memory* Day ceremony this June are now being accepted. The application deadline is March 9. [Learn more.](#)

9. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identification and burial updates of seven American servicemen who had been missing in action from WWII and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Pfc. Lloyd J. Lobdell**, 23, of Elkhorn, Wis., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Feb. 2, in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Lobdell was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands on Dec. 8, 1941. After months of intense fighting, Corregidor fell and American forces surrendered on May 6, 1942. Lobdell was one of the thousands of U.S. and Filipino service members taken prisoner and eventually moved to Cabanatuan POW camp. More than 2,500 POWs perished in this camp during the remaining years of the war. According to prisoner records, Lobdell died on Nov. 19, 1942, and was buried along with fellow prisoners in the local Cabanatuan camp cemetery. [Read about Lobdell.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Richard G. Cushman**, 18, of Springville, Utah, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Feb. 3 (rescheduled from Nov. 11, 2017) in Cypress, Calif. Cushman was assigned to Company A, 72nd Medium Tank Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division. On Dec. 5, 1950, his unit withdrew to the village of Kunu-ri, on the western side of the Korean Peninsula, under heavy attacks by Chinese forces. While in the village, a task force comprised of Cushman's company and an infantry platoon were ordered to destroy a roadblock and eliminate enemy troops. Cushman could not be accounted for after the battle and was declared missing in action. Later, two returning American POWs reported that Cushman had died while being held by the Chinese. The Army subsequently declared him deceased as of March 31, 1951. [Read about Cushman.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Ollie E. Shepard**, 22, of Hugo, Okla., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Feb. 7 in Bradley, Okla. Shepard was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 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. Shepard was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 3, 1950. Shepard's name did not appear on any prisoner of war lists and no repatriated American POWs reported him as such. The Army declared him deceased Dec. 31, 1953. [Read about Shepard.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Donald G. Keller** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941.

Keller was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Keller.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Leonard R. Geller** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Geller was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Geller.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Jack H. 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. Interment services are pending. [Read about Krieger.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Eugene P. Ford** was a member of the 765th Bombardment Squadron, 461st Bombardment Group, 15th Air Force. On Dec. 17, 1944, Ford's B-24J, known as the Tulsamerican, led a group of six B-24s on a bombing mission targeting oil refineries at Odertal, Germany. After emerging from a cloud bank near the target, the aircraft were attacked by more than 40 German Me-109 and FW-190 fighters. Three of the six aircraft were shot down and the other three suffered damages. Ford's plane was heavily damaged, forcing him to abort the mission and crash land in the Adriatic Sea near the Isle of Vis in present-day Croatia. Seven crewmembers survived and were rescued, but Ford and two others were killed in the crash. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ford.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, click here: <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 yfwac@vfw.org.