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**1. VFW Elects New National Leadership:** Vincent “B.J.” Lawrence from Alamogordo, N.M., was elected Wednesday as the new VFW national commander by delegates attending the 119th VFW National Convention in Kansas City, Mo. Lawrence served in the U.S. Army from 1983 to 1986 and earned his eligibility by serving in South Korea, where an armistice, or cease-fire agreement, has existed since July 27, 1953. He joined VFW Post 7686 in Alamogordo in 2000, and immediately began moving the organization forward into the new millennium. He has proven to be a highly effective and dynamic leader, serving in a myriad of critical leadership positions, to include being elected commander at every level of the organization. His theme for the year and challenge to the \$102 million nonprofit organization is to “Make It Happen” even more in every community across the nation and world, from veterans service work to legislative advocacy and increased program activities both locally and nationally. Our new “Chief” is also putting a new focus on supporting the 6,400 existing VFW Posts, on creating new Posts, and on recruiting and retention of new members, as well as remaining focused nationally on ending sequestration, fixing VA, and recovering missing and unaccounted-for service members from all wars. Also elected were Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief William J. “Doc” Schmitz of Corning, N.Y., and Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Hal J. Roesch II of Hampton, Va. Appointed as the new VFW Adjutant General is Kevin Jones of Smithville, Mo., and reelected as VFW Quartermaster General is Debra Anderson of Kansas City, Mo. [Read more.](#)

**2. North Korea Begins Returning MIA Remains:** “The VFW is incredibly encouraged by news that North Korea returned 55 boxes of remains believed to be U.S. service members who have been missing in action since the Korean War,” said VFW National Commander Vincent “B.J.” Lawrence. “This is a huge step in the right direction that we hope will finally bring peace

to the peninsula and closure to American families who have been waiting more than six decades for their loved ones to return home.” The [Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency](#) lists 7,699 missing Americans from the Korean War, with some 5,300 believed to be in North Korea. DPAA also lists 111 Cold War losses in the vicinity of the Korean peninsula. “The return of our missing is a humanitarian mission that transcends politics,” said Lawrence. The United States government, specifically DPAA search and recovery teams, has not operated in North Korea since 2005 due to team safety and security concerns. The VFW sent a [letter to President Trump](#) in advance of the June 12 Singapore summit to urge him to include the return of American remains as a discussion point with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. “The VFW is grateful to the president for acting on our recommendation and to the North Korean leader for following through on his part of the summit agreement. This is a top priority to the VFW and we thank President Trump for making this issue his priority, too.” [Read more.](#)

**3. More Korean and Cold War Family DNA Sought:** Now that North Korea is returning remains, VFW National Commander Vincent “B.J.” Lawrence is urging the families of Korean and Cold War missing to ensure the Defense Department has a DNA reference sample on file to help speed the identification process. Family reference samples currently on file only account for 91 percent of Korean War missing and 85 percent of Cold War losses. “We have to do better than that,” he said, and is now calling on more than 1.6 million VFW and VFW Auxiliary members to canvas their neighborhoods and urge every MIA family — even distant relatives — to provide a family reference sample in the hope that the next identification announcement is their long-lost loved one. All immediate family members, as well as maternal and paternal relatives, are eligible to donate a family reference sample, which is essentially a cotton cheek swab. “Identifications can be made through strong circumstantial evidence, but nothing says proof-positive better than an actual DNA match,” he said. [Learn more.](#)

**4. Senate Confirms Wilkie as Secretary of Veterans Affairs:** On Monday, the Senate confirmed Robert Wilkie to be become the secretary of veterans affairs with a vote of 86-9. Wilkie will now be responsible for directing the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is charged with providing veterans and their families the care and benefits they have earned. The VFW looks forward to working with Secretary Wilkie to ensure VA is able to accomplish its mission. [Watch the confirmation hearing.](#)

**5. NDAA Conference Report Includes VFW Priorities:** Yesterday, the House passed the negotiated conference report for the *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2019*. The VFW thanks the conferees and the more than 7,000 veterans and supporters who responded to the Action Corps Action Alert opposing a provision that would have dramatically increased TRICARE fees for current retirees. The final bill does not include the misguided proposal. The final bill does include several provisions to improve the financial viability of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, such as authorizing the home to accept financial gifts, and expanding eligibility to disabled veterans and spouses who are not currently eligible. The bill would postpone the fee increase that was scheduled to be implemented in October 2018, but applies only to those who were residents as of April 9, 2018, and authorizes gradual fee increases over the next three years. The bill would also authorize a 2.6 percent pay increase for America’s service members; grant disabled veterans access to commissaries and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation facilities; require DOD to design and produce a medal or award for

veterans exposed to radiation (Atomic Veterans); improve reporting, investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases; expand eligibility for Military OneSource to one year after discharge; and require DOD to conduct an assessment on ways to enhance and reform Taiwan's military forces. The Senate is expected to consider and pass this important bill before departing for its August state work period. [Read a summary of the bill.](#)

**6. House Passes Important Veterans Legislation:** This week, the House passed nine bipartisan veterans bills. The various bills would improve protections for service members and veterans, transition to civilian life, programs for medical students at VA, and provide relief for Gold Star families. The VFW is especially thankful for Rep. Julia Brownley's bill, H.R. 5452, *Reduce Unemployment for Veterans of All Ages Act of 2018*, which would eliminate the 12-year limit on use of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program. This has been a VFW priority for many years and we are glad to see this bill being advanced. The VFW applauds the House for making veterans, service members, and their families a priority, and urges the Senate to keep up the momentum to swiftly pass these bills which would greatly impact our country's heroes and their families. [Read more.](#)

**7. Take the VFW's VA Accountability and Whistleblower Survey:** Last year, Congress passed the *Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017* to make sweeping changes within VA. This important law was intended to ensure VA employees who endanger the lives of veterans are quickly held accountable, and to protect whistleblowers who expose fraud, waste and abuse within VA. The VFW needs your help to better inform Congress and VA about the situation on the ground at VA facilities around the country. Please take the [VFW's VA Accountability and Whistleblower Survey](#).

**8. VA Requests Public Comments for Health Access Standards:** To assist in the implementation of the *VA MISSION Act of 2018*, VA is requesting public comments until July 30 regarding access standards for furnishing hospital care, medical services, and extended care to veterans who use VA. This information will be used to develop metrics to determine whether veterans receive timely access to high-quality care. VA requests comments on how it should measure appointment wait times, use of travel distance, and comparing VA performance to federal and state standards. [Learn more or submit a comment.](#)

**9. FTC Cracks Down on Fraudulent Veterans Charities:** The Federal Trade Commission recently launched Operation Donate with Honor, a federal-state education and enforcement initiative to combat fraudulent and deceptive charitable solicitations claiming to help veterans and military members. "Not only do fraudulent charities steal money from patriotic Americans, they also discourage contributors from donating to real veterans' charities," said Peter O'Rourke, VA's acting secretary. "The FTC's Operation Donate with Honor campaign will help educate citizens on how to identify organizations that misrepresent themselves as legitimate veterans' charities, and those who, by contrast, truly help our nation's heroes. I commend the FTC and its state partners for taking strong action on this important issue." The FTC has already filed more than 90 legal actions against charities and fundraisers that lied about helping veterans and military service members or otherwise broke the law. [Learn more](#) about how to donate wisely and make your contributions count.

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

-- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Vincent L. Politte**, 19, of Leavenworth, Kan., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried July 30 at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. Politte served as a gunner with the 345th Bombardment Squadron (Heavy), 98th Bombardment Group (Heavy), 9th Air Force. During a raid north of Bucharest, Romania, Politte's B-24 Liberator aircraft was hit by machine gun fire and crashed. Following the war, his remains could not be identified. [Read about Politte.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Eugene W. Wicker**, 20, of Coweta, Okla., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried August 4 in Fort Gibson, Okla. Wicker 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 Wicker.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Albert E. Mills** was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, blocking the Korean People's Army from advancing along a corridor linking the cities of Taejon and Taegu, South Korea. On July 23, 1950, enemy forces attacked his unit and Mills was reported missing in action on July 25, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Mills.](#)

-- **Navy Aviation Radioman 3rd Class Walter E. Mintus** was aboard a torpedo bomber from U.S. Navy Torpedo Squadron Fifty One on a mission targeting the Japanese base at Malakal Harbor. Witnesses observed an object, believed to be an aircraft, on fire in Malakal Harbor. All three servicemen on board, including Mintus, were reported missing in action and subsequently presumed dead on Feb. 4, 1946. Interment services are pending. [Read about Mintus.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Ottaway B. Cornwell** was a member of the 4th Fighter Squadron, 52nd Fighter Group, Twelfth Air Force, piloting a Supermarine Spitfire aircraft, which was shot down over Pierrefeu-du-Var, France, on Jan. 27, 1944. Cornwell could not be reached through radio contact following the attack. Because southern France was occupied by enemy forces, an immediate search could not be conducted. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cornwell.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. John B. Cummings** was a member of Company A, 276th Infantry Regiment, 70th Infantry Division, along the France and Germany border. On Dec. 31, 1944, German troops crossed the Rhine River into France. As darkness fell, two members of Cummings' company passed him in a foxhole near the riverbank. U.S. troops heard German machine gun fire and maneuvered their way back to the foxhole, but were unable to locate Cummings. Despite extensive recovery efforts, Cummings' remains were unable to be located. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cummings.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Robert K. Holmes** 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 Holmes.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Millard C. Pace** 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 Pace.](#)

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](mailto:yfwac@vfw.org).