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1. VFW National Commander to Visit Army's National Training Center: VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence will be visiting the National Training Center (NTC) at Fort Irwin, Calif., on Tuesday and Wednesday next week to learn more about the live-fire training required of armored brigades before they deploy overseas. He is especially interested in troop training, readiness and morale. The NTC is the only U.S. military training facility that supports brigade-level, live-fire exercises. The more than 460-square-mile facility supports joint and combined team operations expending live munitions ranging from small arms to 2,000-pound aircraft-launched bombs. The NTC visit is part of a larger initiative that will have the VFW national commander meeting up with an armored brigade combat team in their deployed overseas location after the New Year. "Meeting the troops where they train, and especially where they deploy, is essential to maintaining the close relationships the VFW has nurtured with our armed forces for more than 119 years," said Lawrence. "I look forward to meeting them, learning of their mission, and hearing of any concerns they might have, which will enable us to better advocate for them and their families on Capitol Hill."

2. VFW Continues to Assist with GI Bill Payment Problems: The VFW staff is still continuing to assist student veterans who are facing a financial hardship due to non-payments of their GI Bill benefits. The VFW is greatly concerned with the high number of students who have gone without payments for the entire semester and could potentially face disenrollment from classes, eviction, or loss of childcare services. If this situation applies to you, there are steps you can take to remedy the payment problem. First contact 1-888-GIBILL-1 (888-442-4551) and ask VA to process your education benefit claim immediately due to a financial hardship. If VA does not resolve this issue quickly, then we encourage veterans to contact the VFW

at 1studentveteran@vfw.org, at which point the VFW's casework team has the authority to intervene on their behalf with VA Education Service. We have called on Congress to hold oversight hearings in order to rectify the current problems so students in the future don't face these same unnecessary hurdles while pursuing their educational goals.

3. Make Sure Your Voice is Heard on Nov. 6: The VFW encourages all its members and supporters to participate in the upcoming elections. With continued threat of sequestration, deficit reduction, and budget cuts that affect veterans, the military, and their families, it is important to support members of Congress who support us. In addition to voting on Nov. 6, it is also important to assist the elderly and disabled get to the voting booth. Here are some useful resources: [voter registration information](#), [voter assistance for military and families](#), [VFW Priority Goals](#), and the [VFW's Veterans Vote brochure](#).

4. VA Prioritizing Pending Appeals for Victims of Recent Natural Disasters: VA announced this week that they are prioritizing pending appeals claims for benefits of veterans impacted by recent hurricanes Florence, Michael, Maria and Super Typhoon Yutu. VA's Board of Veterans' Appeals determined that the effects of these natural disasters were sufficient enough to advance the appeals for veterans who live in areas determined to be disaster areas by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). "Accelerating the decision process on pending appeals claims for those Veterans and their families affected by hurricanes Florence and Michael is the right thing to do," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. The advancement on docket (AOD) for these storms is expected to last for six months from the date of the events. [Read more about AODs](#) at the Board of Veterans' Appeals or [see the list of affected areas](#).

5. Number of Homeless Veterans Decreased in 2018: Yesterday, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie and the Department of House and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Ben Carson announced a decrease of 5.4 percent in the number of homeless veterans in the past year. "We've made great strides in our efforts to end Veteran homelessness, but we still have a lot of work to do to ensure those who wore our nation's uniform have access to stable housing," said HUD Secretary Carson. The annual Point-in-Time report estimates that 37,878 veterans experienced, or will experience homelessness in 2018, compared to 40,020 in 2017. The number of women veterans experiencing homelessness declined by 10 percent over the same time period. The VFW encourages homeless or at-risk veterans who need assistance to call 1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838). Learn more about [VA Programs for Homeless Veterans](#). [Read more about the Point-in-Time Count](#).

6. November is National Veterans and Military Families Month: This week, President Trump declared November 2018 the second annual National Veterans and Military Families Month to "salute the brave and dedicated patriots who have worn the uniform of the United States, and ... celebrate the extraordinary military families whose selfless service and sacrifice make our military the finest in the world." More than 300 national, regional, and local events are planned at VA hospitals, benefits offices, and cemeteries across the country. [See the full list](#) of VA's national events for Veterans and Military Families Month.

7. November is National Family Caregivers Month: VA is honoring the estimated 5.5 million family members and friends who provide much-needed care for chronically ill, injured, or

disabled veterans during National Family Caregivers Month. “Caregivers make tremendous sacrifices to address the daily needs of veterans who served our nation,” VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said in a statement. “These mothers, wives, fathers, husbands and other loved ones deserve our recognition and support for all they do to care for veterans.” The recent passage of the VFW-championed [VA MISSION Act of 2018](#) will expand eligibility for [VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers](#) to veterans of all eras of service. The expansion will occur in two phases, starting with eligible veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975, with further expansion to follow.

8. TRICARE Prime and Select Open Season: Beginning on Nov. 12, TRICARE will kick off its first open season where Prime and Select beneficiaries can enroll in or change their health care coverage plan for 2019. The open season period will last until Dec. 10 and any changes made during this period will become effective on Jan. 1, 2019. If you are satisfied with your current plan then your coverage will continue automatically for 2019, as long as you remain eligible for coverage. [Find out more](#) about the open season and how to modify your existing health plan.

9. VA Video Appointments: Veterans who use VA can now book appointments with their providers to be seen on the [VA Video Connect](#) app in lieu of face-to-face appointments. The app provides a secure video connection through a camera phone, computer or tablet and gives direct, real-time access to health care teams. VA Video Connect has successfully allowed thousands of veterans to receive services while reducing their travel and wait times. [Learn more](#).

10. MIA Update: This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced four new identifications, and the burial date and location for 14 previously identified servicemen.

Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Army Cpl. Edward M. Jones**, 20, of Lake Charles, La., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 9 in his hometown. Jones was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, supporting Republic of Korea Army attacks against units of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Forces near Hoengsong, South Korea. On Feb. 12, 1951, Jones was reported missing in action when he could not be accounted for by his unit. [Read about Jones](#).

-- **Army Cpl. Albert E. Mills**, 20, of Dallas, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 12 in his hometown. 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. [Read about Mills](#).

-- **Army Pfc. Mathis O. Ball**, 20, of Collin County, Texas, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 18 in Bokchito, Okla. Ball was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. In July 1950, his unit was engaged in combat operations against North Korean forces near Choch’iwon, South Korea. Ball could not be accounted for and was declared missing in action on July 12, 1950. [Read about Ball](#).

-- **Army Pvt. Charles G. Kaniatobe**, 21, of Idabel, Okla., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 17 in his hometown. Kaniatobe was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. In July 1950, his unit was engaged in combat operations against the North Korean People’s Army near Chonui, South Korea.

Kaniatobe could not be accounted for and was declared missing in action on July 10, 1950. [Read about Kaniatobe.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Eugene G. McBride**, 20, of Lincoln, Neb., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 14 in his hometown. McBride was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 311th Infantry Regiment, 78th Infantry Division. On Jan. 30, 1945, while engaged in an attack against enemy forces near Huppenbroich, Germany, McBride was killed by a blast from an enemy artillery shell. His remains were not identified by American forces after the battle. [Read about McBride.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Martin F. O'Callaghan, Jr.**, 22, of Memphis, Tenn., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 5 in his hometown. O'Callaghan was a pilot with the 96th Fighter Squadron, 82nd Fighter Group. In February 1945, during a mission to strafe targets near Maribor, Yugoslavia, O'Callaghan's P-38 Lightning aircraft was struck by anti-aircraft fire. As he was attempting to land, the aircraft inverted, crashed and burst into flames. Because Yugoslavia was an occupied territory at the time, no immediate search for his remains could be conducted. [Read about O'Callaghan.](#)

-- **Navy Aviation Radioman 3rd Class Walter E. Mintus**, 22, of Portage, Penn., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 10 in his hometown. 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. [Read about Mintus.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Joe Lukie**, 19, of Harvey, W.Va., whose remains were previously identified, was buried Oct. 27, in Oak Hill, W.Va.. Lukie was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. On Nov. 20, 1943, Lukie's unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll against stiff Japanese resistance. Lukie died on the first day of the battle, one of approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors killed in the intense fighting. [Read about Lukie.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Morris R. Worrell**, 20, of Lincoln, Neb., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 10 in his hometown. Worrell was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment. Worrell was among those reported captured after the surrender of Corregidor Island on May 6, 1942, and one of the thousands who were eventually moved to the Cabanatuan POW camp. More than 2,500 POWs perished in this camp during the remaining years of the war. [Read about Worrell.](#)

-- **Army Staff Sgt. Karl R. Loesche**, 22, of Monroeville, N.J., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 17 in Elmer, N.J. Loesche was a member of the 3rd Pursuit Squadron, 24th Pursuit Group. On Dec. 8, 1941, Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands and forced the surrender of the Bataan peninsula on April 9, 1942. Loesche was among those reported captured, and one of the thousands who were eventually moved to the Cabanatuan POW camp. More than 2,500 POWs perished in this camp during the remaining years of the war. [Read about Loesche.](#)

-- **Navy Carpenter's Mate 3rd Class William L. Kvidera**, 22, of Traer, Iowa, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 16 in his hometown. Kvidera 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, including Kvidera. [Read about Kvidera.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Carl Nichols**, 20, of Glen Alum, W.Va., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 14 in Bland County, Va. 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, including Nichols. [Read about Nichols.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Gerald H. Pirtle**, 19, of El Dorado, Kan., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 17 in Wichita, Kan. Pirtle 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, including Pirtle. [Read about Pirtle.](#)

-- **Navy Steward Mate 1st Class Ignacio C. Farfan**, 21, of Agana, Guam, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Nov. 8 in the Guam Veterans Cemetery. Farfan 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, including Farfan. [Read about Farfan.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Frederick E. Coons** was declared missing in action in the vicinity of Geochang, South Gyeongsang Province, South Korea, on July 29, 1950, when he couldn't be accounted for after a unit withdrawal action to set up a roadblock against North Korean Forces. Interment services are pending. [Read about Coons.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Robert J. Sipes, Jr.** was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was killed in action on Nov. 30, 1950, during heavy fighting between the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces (CPVF) and the 7th Cavalry Regiment near the village of Unsan, North Korea. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sipes.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. William E. Brandenburg** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Brandenburg died on the third day of the battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Brandenburg.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. Fred E. Freet** was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Freet died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943, during the first waves of the assault. Interment services are pending. [Read about Freet.](#)

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 vfwac@vfw.org.

