



Happy Birthday U.S. Army!

June 14, 2019

In This Issue:

- 1. Congress Passes VFW-Championed Blue Water Navy Legislation**
- 2. House Advances Defense Authorization Bill**
- 3. OIG Finds Veterans Overcharged on VA Home Loan Funding Fees**
- 4. VA to Make Health Care Facilities Smoke-Free**
- 5. Fallujah Veteran to Receive Medal of Honor**
- 6. Posthumous DSC Awarded at VFW Post Named in Recipient's Honor**
- 7. Army Picks Alabama Native as Next SMA**
- 8. Saipan 75th Remembered Saturday**
- 9. Recruit Training Gender Integration**
- 10. Happy 244th Birthday to the Army**
- 11. MIA Update**

1. Congress Passes VFW-Championed Blue Water Navy Legislation: On Wednesday, the Senate unanimously passed H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019*. “We now urge the president to quickly sign the bill into law so that tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans can have their disability benefits restored, as well as an expansion of benefits to military dependents, veterans of the Korean DMZ, and those exposed to toxic hazards in Southwest Asia,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. The bill was previously passed by the House with a vote of 410-0. The VFW thanks veterans and advocates who contacted their members of Congress in support of this important bill. Stay tuned to the VFW Action Corps Weekly for updates as the bill is enacted into law and implemented. If you need help filing a VA claim for disability compensation, please [contact a VFW Service Officer in your state](#).

2. House Advances Defense Authorization Bill: On Thursday, the House Committee on Armed Services approved H.R. 2500, the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020* (NDAA) that authorizes \$733 billion in defense spending, a 3.1 percent pay increase for all military personnel, and an end strength of 1.3 million for the Armed Forces – an increase of 6,215 for active-duty. The legislation includes a number of VFW-supported provisions that improve the quality of life for our service members and military families – \$9.2 million for construction and improvement of military family housing, a \$1,000 reimbursement increase for military spouse to obtain professional certifications and licenses after a PCS change, and authorizes financial assistance to civilian child care providers who care for the children of members who die in the line of duty. The VFW is pleased the legislation would also direct DOD to review the service records of World War I minority service members who were appropriately recognized for their valorous service, but denied the highest service medal because of racial bias.

3. OIG Finds Veterans Overcharged on VA Home Loan Funding Fees: The Office of the Inspector General released a report this month finding that VA charged exempt veterans approximately \$286.4 million in funding fees from calendar years 2012 through 2017, which affected about 72,900 veterans. The \$286.4 million is broken into “avoidable” charges, when the veteran was eligible at the time of the loan, and “unavoidable” charges, when the veteran became eligible after the origination of the loan, with the majority \$220.6 million in “unavoidable” charges. Veterans who believe they were overcharged should contact VA Regional Offices with Loan Guaranty operations at 1.877.827.3702.

4. VA to Make Health Care Facilities Smoke-Free: Starting October 2019, VA will implement a new policy restricting smoking by patients, visitors, volunteers, contractors and vendors at its health care facilities. The smoke-free policy applies to cigarettes, cigars, pipes, any other combustion of tobacco and non-Federal Drug Administration approved electronic nicotine delivery systems, including but not limited to electronic or e-cigarettes, vape pens or e-cigars. [Learn more.](#)

5. Fallujah Veteran to Receive Medal of Honor: The president will award the Medal of Honor on June 25 to a soldier who fought through a nest of insurgents during the second Battle of Fallujah in 2004, according to a Stars & Stripes article. Then-Staff Sgt. David G. Bellavia originally received the Silver Star for his actions, but his citation was revisited as part of a review of valor awards and determined worthy of the nation’s highest combat award. A squad leader at the time with 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, Bellavia, now 43 with his own talk radio program in Buffalo, N.Y., was clearing a block of buildings when his platoon was pinned down on Nov. 10, 2004, in Fallujah, Iraq. The first nine buildings were found to be unoccupied, but not the 10th, according to [his Silver Star citation](#). Bellavia becomes the seventh but first living Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran to receive the Medal of Honor; the other six medals were presented posthumously. [Read the Stripes article.](#)

6. Posthumous DSC Awarded at VFW Post Named in Recipient’s Honor: The Army last weekend awarded a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross to the family of Staff Sgt. Michael H. Ollis, who blocked a suicide bomber's blast with his own body to save a Polish Army officer in Afghanistan on Aug. 28, 2013. Ollis, who originally received a posthumous Silver Star for the action, was serving in Company B, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment, 10th Mountain Division, when enemy forces attacked Forward Operating Base Ghazni with "vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, suicide vests, indirect fire, and small-arms fire," according to [his Silver Star citation](#). Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville, confirmed to be the service's next chief of staff, presented the second highest award for valor to Ollis' family members during a June 8 ceremony at VFW Post 9587 on Staten Island, which was renamed after the staff sergeant in 2014. The DSC is an upgrade to the Silver Star Ollis posthumously received in 2013. [Read the Army release.](#)

7. Army Picks Alabama Native as Next SMA: Secretary of the Army Dr. Mark T. Esper and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Milley announced Tuesday that Command Sgt. Maj. Michael A. Grinston will assume responsibilities as the 16th Sergeant Major of the Army (SMA). He is expected to be sworn in Aug. 16, 2019, to succeed SMA Dan Dieley, who is retiring after

-serving in the position since January 2015. According to an Army press release, Grinston, a native of Jasper, Ala., currently serves as the senior enlisted leader for U.S. Army Forces Command — the service’s largest command and provider of expeditionary land forces. He is a combat veteran who has served in every leadership position from team leader to division command sergeant major with two tours each to Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, as well as Desert Shield, Desert Storm and to Kosovo. Grinston also served as the senior enlisted leader for the Army's first deployment of a division headquarters, with 1st Infantry Division, in support of Operation Inherent Resolve from October 2014 to June 2015. Among his numerous awards and decorations are five Bronze Star medals (two with combat ‘V’ devices), and the Combat Action Badge. [Read more.](#)

8. Saipan 75th Remembered Saturday: Visitors to Washington, D.C., this weekend are invited to help commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of Saipan at the National World War II Memorial tomorrow at 11:30 a.m. The ceremony will include WWII veterans, family members, and representatives of the Mariana Islands and Military District of Washington. A wreath will be laid at the Memorial’s Pacific Arch in honor of the 71,000 Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines who liberated the island, and to remember the nearly 3,500 killed and more than 10,000 wounded. [Read more.](#)

9. Recruit Training Gender Integration: On Wednesday, the House Committee on Armed Services voted along party lines to fully integrate women into Marine Corps recruit training at Parris Island and Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. Introduced as an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 by Rep. Jackie Speier, the language prohibits gender-segregated training at all Marine Corps recruit depots. Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, would have five years to become fully integrated; and Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego would have eight years. In order for this provision to become law, it must first be approved by the full House before moving onto the Senate, where it could face opposition and be removed.

10. Happy 244th birthday to the Army: Since June 14, 1775, United States soldiers have been defending the freedoms and way of life of our great country. The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. salutes the men and women who have sacrificed and defended our nation from the American Revolution through today’s War on Terrorism.

11. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identifications of three American servicemen who had been missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam and Korean Wars, and WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Air Force Col. Roy A. Knight, Jr.** was a pilot with the 602nd Tactical Fighter Squadron, assigned to Udorn Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. On May 19, 1967, Knight’s aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire, severing the right wing. No parachute was observed prior to the aircraft crashing and bursting into flames. The Air Force declared Knight deceased in September 1974. Interment services are pending. [Read about Knight.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Robert L. Bray** was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Regiment. He was reported missing in action on July 20, 1950, when he

could not be accounted for following his unit fighting in a defensive action against enemy forces near Taejon, South Korea. The Army declared him deceased on Dec. 31, 1953. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bray.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Ballard McCurley** was a member of Company M, 3rd Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division, during the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest. On Nov. 29, 1944, his battalion went to a reserve position in the woods west of the town of Hürtgen. According to witnesses, while clearing out a tree stump, McCurley inadvertently set off an enemy anti-personnel mine and he was killed instantly. His remains were not recovered or identified immediately after his loss. Interment services are pending. [Read about McCurley.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <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>.