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**1. Memorializing Veterans Act Now Law:** Last Friday, the president signed the VFW-supported *Memorializing Veterans Act* into law. The new law permits VA to establish a grant program to conduct cemetery research and produce educational materials for [the Veterans Legacy Program](#) (VLP). Under the current program, the VLP awards contracts to universities, colleges, and institutions to develop educational programs to teach students and others about the veterans interred in national, state, or tribal cemeteries in their communities. Transitioning to a grant-based program would broaden the reach of the VLP beyond large universities to smaller groups that wish to engage with VA in memorializing veterans. “Perpetuating the memory and history of our dead is one of the VFW’s founding principles,” said Carlos Fuentes, Director National Legislative Service. “The Veterans Legacy Program ensures the memories and stories of the brave men and women who have worn our nation’s uniform are preserved in perpetuity.” The VFW thanks Rep. Connor Lamb (D-Calif.), Senators Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) for introducing this legislation, and for their efforts to promote civic engagement and foster respect for service and sacrifice. [Learn more.](#)

**2. Legislation Introduced to Add New Presumptive Diseases for Agent Orange Exposure:** Last Wednesday, Representatives Josh Harder (D-Calif.) and Pete Stauber (R-Minn.) introduced VFW-supported H.R. 5610, the [Fair Care for Vietnam Veterans Act](#). This important bipartisan legislation would expand the list of presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure to include parkinsonism, bladder cancer, hypertension, and hyperthyroidism. In October 2019, it was revealed that White House officials impeded the inclusion of these diseases as presumptive conditions despite a recommendation from former Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin that they be added. In a press release, Representative Harder stated, “No more studies. No more excuses. Everyone seems to think this is the right thing to do except for some Washington bureaucrats – it’s time to stop playing games and give our vets the benefits they earned.” The VFW has long advocated for the inclusion of these diseases on the list of presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure, and thanks Rep. Harder and Rep. Stauber for introducing this legislation. [Read more.](#)

**3. DPAA Family Meeting in Las Vegas:** Tomorrow, The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) will hold a family meeting in Las Vegas to meet with families whose loved ones are unaccounted for from our modern conflicts. DPAA will bring personnel from their agency and be joined by the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System and Service Casualty Offices so that they can brief the families on their efforts to bring the family's loved ones home. "Keeping in touch with family members and letting them know what we are doing to find their loved ones is a critical element of our mission at DPAA," said Todd Livick, DPAA Outreach and Communications director. "Family member updates are one of the most effective ways to communicate with large numbers of families at one time. It also gives us all that personal one-on-one time to connect that you just can't get on the phone or internet." Family members who are interested in attending can register at [www.dpaa.mil/Families/Family-Events](http://www.dpaa.mil/Families/Family-Events) or call 703.699.1420, ext.1193. [Learn more.](#)

**4. Join the TRICARE Webinar:** Do you have questions about your TRICARE benefits? Here's your chance to get some answers. Please join TRICARE on Thursday, Jan. 30, from 1-2 p.m. EST for the "Ask TRICARE" webinar. The Q&A webinar will include a panel of subject matter experts to answer your stateside and overseas questions about TRICARE health care, pharmacy and dental programs. You must be registered and in the webinar platform to submit a question electronically. If you call in by phone, you'll only be able to listen to the webinar. Don't miss this unique opportunity to ask questions directly to TRICARE experts. [Register](#) for the webinar.

**5. VA Inspector General Finds Long Wait Times for Community Care:** Last Thursday, the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General (OIG) released a report that addressed the consult process for community care appointments in VISN 8. VISN 8 is composed of the seven VA Medical Centers (VAMC) in Florida and one in Puerto Rico. The report found that the average wait time in VISN 8 for community care appointments under MISSION Act authority is 106 days. VA OIG found that while contributing factors included staffing shortages and a higher community care workload than VAMC directors had planned, the average time to forward a community care consult between offices within the VAMC itself was 10 days and an additional 18 days were spent waiting for VA to authorize the care. The report cites an example of ophthalmology care at the James A. Haley VAMC in Tampa where of the 66 days it took on average to receive treatment, 34 of those days were spent "waiting for community care staff to create an authorization for care." Wait time goals under the MISSION Act are 20 days for primary care and 28 days for specialty care. Recommendations to remediate the issues identified in the report include hiring to fill staffing shortages, adjusting assignments to cover the workload, and better monitoring of staff processing time. [Read the report.](#)

**6. New Navy Aircraft Carrier to be Named After Doris "Dorie" Miller:** On Monday, the Navy announced that it will be naming a new aircraft carrier after Mess Attendant 3rd Class Doris Miller. Miller was the first black service member to receive the Navy Cross for valor. On Dec. 7, 1941, during the attack on Pearl Harbor, Miller got his mortally wounded officer to a safer location and manned a machine gun to fire at the Japanese aircraft until he was ordered to leave, even though he had never been trained to operate the machine gun. Miller continued his service in the Navy after the Pearl Harbor attack, he died when the carrier he was serving on was sunk by a Japanese torpedo. [Read more.](#)

**7. Army Holds Town Hall on Housing Issue:** On Tuesday, military leadership hosted a town hall meeting with residents of Fort George G. Meade to address housing concerns and questions regarding mold issues. Maj. Gen. Omar J. Jones stated that, “until we get to the point where every resident in Fort Meade is satisfied, you have to tell us and use any of those means of communication that are out there and let us know until we get it right.”

**8. Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Information:** The VR&E program commonly known as Voc Rehab is an excellent benefit offered by VA that is not utilized by as many eligible veterans who may need it. VR&E services can assist eligible veterans with resume development skills, job search training, employment accommodations, and education in order to keep employed through different avenues. The VR&E program offers individual counselors to accommodate the different needs of the clients they serve. We encourage all veterans to learn more about VR&E services to see if you may be eligible for this great benefit. [Learn more](#) about VR&E.

**9. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced one new identification, and five burial updates for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII and the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Cpl. Arthur C. Ramirez, 19**, was a member of Battery B, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ramirez.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Horace H. Middleton, 20**, of Northumberland, Pennsylvania, was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), also known as Merrill's Marauders. After taking the airfield in Myitkyina, Burma, from the Japanese on May 17, 1944, Middleton's battalion was tasked with holding the airfield and taking part in the siege of Myitkyina. Middleton was reported to have been killed during fighting on July 12, 1944. Middleton will be buried April 18, 2020, in Milton, Pennsylvania. [Read about Middleton.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. John V. Phillips, 25**, of Cassville, Missouri, was a member of Headquarters Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands in December 1941. Intense fighting continued until the surrender of the Bataan peninsula on April 9, 1942, and of Corregidor Island on May 6, 1942. Phillips was reportedly captured after the surrender of Corregidor and held at the Cabanatuan POW camp, where records show he died July 27, 1942. Phillips will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Phillips.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Roy Brown, Jr., 22**, of Des Moines, Iowa, was a member of Company I, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division, when his unit was forced into intense engagement with Japanese forces in the vicinity of Sopotia-Sanananda Track in the Australian Territory of Papua (present-day Papua New Guinea). Brown was reported missing and presumed dead when he could not be accounted for by his unit. Brown will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Brown.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Charlie M. Waid, 26**, of Chico, California, was a member of the Medical Detachment of the 31st Infantry Regiment when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands. Intense fighting continued until the surrender of the Bataan peninsula on April 9, 1942, and of Corregidor Island on May 6, 1942. Waid was among those reported captured after the surrender

of Corregidor and held at the Cababatuan POW camp, where records show he died on Nov. 19, 1942. Waid will be buried in Hollywood Hills, California. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Waid.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. William L. Brown, 18**, of Sesser, Illinois, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action Dec. 2, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Brown will be buried in Mound City, Illinois. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Brown.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <https://votervoicenet.org/VFW/register>.

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](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).

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