



ACTION CORPUS WEEKLY



July 6, 2021



Rural Mental Health Bill Becomes Law: On Wednesday, the president signed into law VFW-supported [S.1468](#), the *Sgt. Ketchum Rural Veterans Mental Health Act of 2021*. Sgt. Brandon Ketchum served in the Marine Corps, completing tours in both Afghanistan and Iraq. In his first tour alone, he cleared 92 roadside bombs in 7 months – service that earned him a Combat Action Ribbon. In 2016, Sgt. Ketchum died by suicide after he was denied access to mental health services at a VA facility in Iowa, related to his battle with post-traumatic stress disorder. This law will require VA to report an assessment of health needs for rural and highly rural veterans and provide an account of VA’s outpatient mental health care, residential programs, and VA’s Rural Access Network for Growth Enhancement (RANGE) program cost savings.



National Park Access for Veterans Bill Introduced: On Thursday, Rep. Miller-Meeks introduced the VFW-supported *Veterans in Parks Act*, which would provide free access to national parks and public lands for service members, veterans, and their families. This bill would codify the existing benefits of the annual [America the Beautiful Pass](#), ensuring that those who qualify for the pass would have a lifetime of free access to more than 2,000 of our nation's parks and federal recreation areas. [Read more.](#)



Women Veterans Needed for Million Veteran

Program: The world's largest medical research biobank, Million Veteran Program, is [seeking women veterans](#). There are 2 million women veterans in the United States, but only 75,000 have participated in the Million Veteran Program so far. In general women are often under-represented in biomedical research which can leave gender-specific health questions unanswered. By contributing a blood sample to the biobank, women veterans can help ensure that the research is more comprehensive. [Sign up today.](#)



Blood Donation Need Still Critical: The American Red Cross currently has a severe shortage alert in regards to lifesaving blood products. Hospital demand continues to outpace donations, so the Red Cross strongly urges healthy, eligible individuals who are feeling well to give blood, platelets, or plasma to help maintain a sufficient supply for those battling COVID-19, cancers, other infections, or trauma victims. Those who donate July 7-31, 2021, will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card via email and be automatically entered for a chance to win gas for a year. Please schedule an appointment using the Red Cross Blood Donor app, visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.redcrossblood.org), or calling 1.800.RED.CROSS (1.800.733.2767).



MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced four burial updates and two new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from World War II and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Marine Corps Sgt. Donald D. Stoddard, 22**, of Boulder, Colorado, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th 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, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Stoddard died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. He was buried June 26, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Stoddard.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Alphard S. Owsley, 23**, of Paris, Kentucky, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Owsley. He will be buried Aug. 5, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Owsley.](#)

-- **Navy Pharmacist's Mate 3rd Class George L. Paradis, 23**, of Yelm, Washington, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Paradis. He will be buried on Oct. 7, 2021, at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. [Read about Paradis.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class George M. Gooch, 22**, of Laclede, Missouri, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 2021. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Gooch. He will be buried Oct. 9, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Gooch.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. J.L. Hancock, 21**, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th 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, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Hancock died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hancock.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Walter A. Smead, 24**, was a member of Battery A, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, after his unit was attacked by enemy forces as they attempted to withdraw near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his

remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Smead](#).

[Click here to view this week's edition.](#)

[Click here for past editions of the VFW Action Corps Weekly.](#)

[Click here to sign up new veterans' advocates.](#)

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.