



**June 22, 2018**

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**1. Desert Storm Memorial Site Picked:** By a vote of 4-2 yesterday, the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts finally agreed with the National Park Service and the National Capital Planning Commission that the new National Desert Storm Memorial will be located at the intersection of Constitution Avenue and 23rd Street, NW, Washington, D.C. This VFW-supported location is within eyeshot of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the yet-to-be-built Vietnam Veterans Education Center and the Lincoln Memorial. Joining the VFW in public comment were House Committee on Veterans Affairs Chairman Phil Roe, M.D. (R-Tenn.), and Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces Ranking Member Joe Donnelly (D-Ind.). Said VFW Public Affairs Director Joe Davis, “No one could have envisioned an American-led international coalition defeating the then-fourth largest standing army in the world in six weeks from the air and 100 hours on the ground. But we did, and we did so magnificently, all because of our equipment, our training and our leaders — all of whom honed their teeth in Vietnam, where they learned how not to fight the next war.” The VFW has pledged \$500,000 toward the construction of the Desert Storm Memorial, with three payments of \$100,000 each already made. [Learn more](#) about the National Desert Storm Memorial.

**2. DHA Executive Council Meeting:** On Wednesday, the VFW participated in the quarterly Defense Health Agency (DHA) MSO/VSO Executive Council meeting led by DHA Director Vice Adm. Raquel Bono. She was joined by Program Executive Officer for the Defense Healthcare Management Systems Stacy Cummings, Director of the Department of Defense/Veterans Affairs Collaboration Office Michael Odle, and research personnel from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Also in attendance were

the presidents of both Humana Military and Health Net Federal Services that currently hold the TRICARE contracts for the East and West Regions, respectively. The briefing included an overview and update of the TRICARE implementation in the East and West service regions, a discussion regarding copay calculations for TRICARE recipients, the priorities that the Joint and Health Executive Committees have for this upcoming year and an update regarding Military Health System Genesis. Also discussed was the upcoming change to the TRICARE Retiree Dental Plan, which is scheduled to end on Dec. 31, 2018. Eligible beneficiaries will instead be eligible to enroll in the Federal Employee Dental and Vision Insurance Program. [Learn more](#) about how this change may impact you.

**3. Senate Defense Authorization Bill Would Increase TRICARE Fees:** This week, the Senate passed its version of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019. Similar to the House version, it would provide a 2.6 percent pay raise for service members and includes many VFW priorities, such as expansion of Military OneSource eligibility to ease the military to civilian transition; preventing the Armed Forces Retirement Home from increasing fees of its residents; requiring DOD to conduct burn pits outreach; and authorizing programs to improve treatment for military sexual trauma. However, the bill would increase cost shares for certain TRICARE beneficiaries, which the VFW opposes. The provision would increase the enrollment fees up to \$900 for certain beneficiaries. The Senate and House must now resolve the differences between their versions of the bill. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates on this important bill.

**4. Hearing on VA Staffing Shortages:** On Thursday, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health held a hearing to review the large number of staffing shortages within VA. Currently there are approximately 38,000 vacancies, most of which are related to direct care for veterans. The fields with the most critical shortages are psychiatry, primary care, nursing and human resources. Some of the major issues facing VA in recruiting and retention are non-competitive wages and low morale leading to high turnover. The VFW has advocated for many years to fill the vacancies at VA and offer fair market wages in order to attract and retain the best and the brightest to properly serve our veterans. The VFW thanks Chairman Neal Dunn and Ranking Member Julia Brownley for making this a priority. [Watch the hearing](#).

**5. Hearing on Military Health System Reform:** On Wednesday, the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel held a hearing to discuss recent changes in the Military Health System (MHS) to address the opioid epidemic. DHA Director Vice Adm. Raquel Bono informed the committee that the MHS has reduced opioid prescriptions by 15 percent and plans to expand non-pharmacologic therapies at military treatment facilities to reduce the reliance on high dose pain medication. Chairman Coffman expressed his desire for DOD to ensure service members are weaned off opioids instead of being taken off high dose medications without proper alternatives. [Watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 11:20 mark.

**6. VA Releases Report on Veteran Suicides:** VA released its annual report on veteran suicides on Monday. This data, which includes the number of suicides from 2005-2015, also includes the number of suicides from DOD. In 2016, VA released data that found the average number of veterans who die by suicide each day to be 20. The average daily toll remains at 20 per day, but also includes the numbers of those who died by suicide while on active duty, as well as in the

Guard or Reserve. The average number of those currently serving is reported to be 3.8 suicide deaths per day. The data shows that the number of veterans who are actively enrolled in VA is six veterans per day. The remaining 10 per day either have not used VA within a year, are not enrolled in VA or were still serving in uniform. Women veterans and older male veterans who never deployed are still at the highest risk for death by suicide. [Read the study.](#)

**7. DHA PTSD Care Webinar:** On Friday, June 29, 2018, from 1-2 p.m. EDT, the Defense Health Agency (DHA) will host the "PTSD Care and Support: Real Warriors Campaign Resources" webinar. This webinar will discuss post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) signs, symptoms and treatment options, as well as how to overcome barriers to seeking care. An overview of Real Warriors Campaign resources for service members, veterans, and families who are coping with PTSD will also be provided. Following the presentation, a Q&A session with an expert from the Psychological Health Center of Excellence will take place and representatives from the Real Warriors Campaign will be available to answer any questions you may have. [Register for the seminar.](#)

**8. VFW Convention to Host Women Veterans Information Fair:** The VFW will host a women veterans information fair entitled "Women Veterans: Strong & Growing" during this year's 119th VFW National Convention. The fair will be held on July 24 at 2 p.m. Information pertinent to the veterans' community with a focus on women veterans will be provided, and all veterans are encouraged and welcome to attend. Participants will include the VFW's Women Veterans Advisory Committee; representatives from the Department of Veterans Affairs' offices of women's health, women veterans, research and development, and veteran experience; the Department of Labor; the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans; and congressional staff from the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. There will be a raffle with prizes, as well as other giveaways. Learn more about the [119th VFW National Convention.](#)

**9. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced identification and burial updates for 12 American service members who had been missing in action from Korea and WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Pfc. Felipe A. Champion**, 19, of Brownsville, Texas, whose identification was previously announced, was buried on June 21 in his hometown. Champion was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, when he was reported missing in action following a battle with Chinese forces on Feb. 12, 1951, in an area known as the Central Corridor, South Korea. [Read about Champion.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. David Baker**, 18, of Gary, Ind., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 23 in Hobart, Ind. Baker was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. On Nov. 25, 1950, his unit was attacked by Chinese forces while positioned near Yongbyong, North Korea. The battalion suffered heavy casualties and Baker was listed as missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950. Later reports indicated that Baker was likely captured by the enemy. [Read about Baker.](#)

-- **Army Staff Sgt. Leo J. Husak**, 21, of West, Texas, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 23 in his hometown. Husak was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 309th Infantry Regiment, 78th Infantry Division, serving in the European theater. On Jan. 30, 1945, Husak was killed while out on patrol in Germany's Hürtgen Forest. The offensive in the forest was one of the longest battles the United States fought during World War II, lasting

for nearly five months. [Read about Husak.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Roy F. Davis**, 26, of Peterborough, N.H., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 23 in Ashby, Mass. Davis was a member of the 13th Bombardment Squadron, 3rd Bombardment Group. On March 12, 1944, he was one of two crew members aboard an A-20G Havoc bomber that failed to return to base in northeastern New Guinea after attacking enemy targets on the island. Attempts to locate the aircraft and crew during and after the war were unsuccessful and the remains were listed as non-recoverable on June 30, 1949. [Read about Davis.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Tech Sgt. John F. Brady**, 26, of Taunton, Mass., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 27 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Brady was a member of the 323rd Bombardment Squadron, 91st Bombardment Group (Heavy), Eighth Air Force. On Nov. 2, 1944, their nine-man aircrew was on a mission to Merseburg, Germany, when their plane was hit by flak during the bomb run. As the B-17 fell out of formation, German fighters attacked and their plane crashed two kilometers southwest of the town of Barby. [Read about Brady.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Tech Sgt. Allen A. Chandler**, 23, of Fletcher, Okla., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 27 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Chandler was a member of the 323rd Bombardment Squadron, 91st Bombardment Group (Heavy), Eighth Air Force. On Nov. 2, 1944, their nine-man aircrew was on a mission to Merseburg, Germany, when their plane was hit by flak during the bomb run. As the B-17 fell out of formation, German fighters attacked and their plane crashed two kilometers southwest of the town of Barby. [Read about Chandler.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. John H. Liekhus**, 29, of Anaheim, Calif., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 27 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Liekhus was a member of the 323rd Bombardment Squadron, 91st Bombardment Group (Heavy), Eighth Air Force. On Nov. 2, 1944, their nine-man aircrew was on a mission to Merseburg, Germany, when their plane was hit by flak during the bomb run. As the B-17 fell out of formation, German fighters attacked and their plane crashed two kilometers southwest of the town of Barby. [Read about Liekhus.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Robert O. Shoemaker**, 23, of Takoma Park, Md., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 27 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Shoemaker was a member of the 323rd Bombardment Squadron, 91st Bombardment Group (Heavy), Eighth Air Force. On Nov. 2, 1944, their nine-man aircrew was on a mission to Merseburg, Germany, when their plane was hit by flak during the bomb run. As the B-17 fell out of formation, German fighters attacked and their plane crashed two kilometers southwest of the town of Barby. [Read about Shoemaker.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Tech Staff Sgt. Bobby J. Younger**, 19, of McKinney, Texas, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 27 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Younger was a member of the 323rd Bombardment Squadron, 91st Bombardment Group (Heavy), Eighth Air Force. On Nov. 2, 1944, their nine-man aircrew was on a mission to Merseburg, Germany, when their plane was hit by flak during the bomb run. As the B-17 fell out of formation, German fighters attacked and their plane crashed two kilometers southwest of the town of Barby. [Read about Younger.](#)

-- **Marine Pfc. John W. Mac Donald**, 19, of Somerville, Mass., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 22 in Bourne, Mass. Mac Donald was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. Mac Donald's unit

landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943, against stiff Japanese resistance. Mac Donald was killed on the first day of the battle. [Read about Mac Donald.](#)

-- **Navy Pharmacist's Mate 1st Class John H. Schoonover**, 39, of Port Edwards, Wis., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried June 26 in Pensacola, Fla. Schoonover 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 Schoonover.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Morris Meshulam** was a member of Battery D, 82nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (Automatic Weapons,) 2nd Infantry Division. The Division suffered heavy losses to units of the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces between the towns of Kunu-ri and Sunchon, North Korea. Meshulam was reported missing in action on Dec. 1, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Meshulam.](#)

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).