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**In This Issue:**

- 1. Historic Defense Bill Signed Into Law**
- 2. Europe Fact-finding Trip**
- 3. Forever GI Bill 1-year Anniversary**
- 4. VFW's National Veterans Service Hosts Annual Service Officer Training**
- 5. VA Updates Skin Conditions Disability Rating**
- 6. Army Credentialing Assistance Program**
- 7. Combat Controller to Receive Medal of Honor Posthumously**
- 8. VFW National Home for Children**
- 9. MIA Update**

**1. Historic Defense Bill Signed Into Law:** On Monday, President Donald Trump signed the *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019*. The VFW thanks the conferees and the more than 7,000 veterans and supporters who responded to the VFW Action Alert opposing a provision that would have dramatically increased TRICARE fees for current retirees. The final bill does not include the misguided proposal, but does include several provisions to improve the financial viability of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, such as authorizing the home to accept financial gifts, and expanding eligibility to disabled veterans and spouses who are not currently eligible. The bill will postpone the fee increase that was scheduled to be implemented in October 2018, but applies only to those who were residents as of April 9, 2018, and authorizes gradual fee increases over the next three years. The bill will also authorize a 2.6 percent pay increase for America's service members, the highest pay raise in nearly a decade; grant disabled veterans access to commissaries and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation facilities; require DOD to design, produce and award a certificate for veterans exposed to radiation (Atomic Veterans); improve reporting, investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases; expand eligibility for Military OneSource to one year after discharge; and require DOD to conduct an assessment on ways to enhance and reform Taiwan's military forces. [Watch the signing ceremony.](#)

**2. Europe Fact-finding Trip:** VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief Hal Roesch conducted his initial fact-finding trip to Europe from Aug. 1-10. The itinerary included meetings with U.S. military and diplomats assigned to NATO headquarters, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Air Forces Europe/Africa, and U.S. Army Europe. The firsthand look at the situation in Europe

provides invaluable insight into the challenges our service members, retirees, and their families are facing there and helps the VFW shape its advocacy efforts.

**3. Forever GI Bill 1-year Anniversary:** This week the VFW celebrated the 1-year anniversary of the Forever GI Bill which brought much needed changes to the education benefits provided to veterans, service members, and their families. The VFW championed many of the upgrades in the law for years and thanks Congress for passing this important bill. Many of the changes are being implemented for this upcoming fall school semester. [Learn more](#) about the Forever GI Bill.

**4. VFW's National Veterans Service Hosts Annual Service Officer Training:** More than 130 service officers from across the nation and world attended the VFW's National Veterans Service training conference in Annapolis, Md., this week to continue developing the skills they need to successfully help U.S. military veterans obtain their earned benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The training is one of four basic and advanced courses the VFW holds annually to improve the skills of VFW Service Officers and those from other veterans service organizations, and state and county agencies who are accredited through VA. In fiscal year 2017, the VA reports that the VFW's global network of 2,000 service officers helped more than 500,000 wounded, ill and injured veterans recoup nearly \$7.7 billion in disability compensation and pension, a number that included 158,000 new claims. [Read more about this week's training.](#)

**5. VA Updates Skin Conditions Disability Rating:** VA is currently updating multiple categories of the Schedule for Rating Disabilities, including conditions related to the skin. No conditions have been removed from the skin rating, though several were restructured. Claims that were pending before Aug. 13 will be considered under both the new and old rating criteria. The more favorable criteria for the veteran will be used for claims pending before Aug. 13. Claims filed after Aug. 13 will be rated under the new schedule. [Read more information.](#) For assistance with filing a claim, contact a professional, accredited, and highly trained [VFW Service Officer near you.](#)

**6. Army Credentialing Assistance Program:** On Tuesday, the Army announced that it will begin piloting its Credentialing Assistance Program beginning this fall, with full implementation set for FY20. The program will provide soldiers up to \$4,000 per year to pay for certifications and credentials that will help prepare them for gainful employment after their transition from the military. Upon full implementation, the program will give soldiers the ability to choose from more than 1,600 programs offered through the Army's Credentialing Opportunities Online website, and better prepare them for jobs in industries such as health care, information technology, and aviation repair. This new pilot expands on the current Army Credentialing Program, but gives soldiers the ability to gain certifications that are outside their military occupational specialties. [Lean more.](#)

**7. Combat Controller to Receive Medal of Honor Posthumously:** The White House announced that an Air Force combat controller killed in a battle with al-Qaida militants in the early months of the war in Afghanistan will be awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions during that 2002 fight. The president will present the nation's highest military honor to Tech. Sgt. John A. Chapman's spouse, Valerie Nessel, in a ceremony on Aug. 22. The award is an upgrade of the Air Force Cross that Chapman initially received posthumously for his

actions on Roberts Ridge in March 2002. Chapman was part of an elite special operations team charged with locating and targeting al-Qaida fighters entrenched on Takur Ghar mountain in eastern Afghanistan along the Pakistan border. He will become the first airman to receive the Medal of Honor since the Vietnam War, and just the 19th in the service's history. [Read more.](#)

**8. VFW National Home for Children:** Please help connect families in your community that need a fresh start to the VFW National Home for Children. If your VFW Post or District runs a newsletter, website or Facebook page, please share [their webpage.](#)

**9. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced four new identifications, and burial dates and locations for five previously identified servicemen.

Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Machinist's Mate 1st Class Arthur Glenn**, 43, of Fort Wayne, Ind., whose remains were previously accounted for, will be buried Aug. 21 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. On Dec. 7, 1941, Glenn was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Glenn. [Read about Glenn.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Robert K. Holmes**, 19, of Wichita, Kan., whose remains were previously accounted for, will be buried Aug. 20 in Salt Lake City. On Dec. 7, 1941, Holmes was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Holmes. [Read about Holmes.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Capt. George Van Vleet, Jr.**, 35, of Fresno, Calif., whose remains were previously accounted for, will be buried August 18 in his hometown. Van Vleet was a member of the 38th Bombardment Squadron, (Heavy), 30th Bombardment Group, stationed at Hawkins Field, Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands. On Jan. 21, 1944, the B-24J bomber aircraft he was aboard crashed shortly after takeoff, killing all six crewmembers, including Van Vleet. [Read about Van Vleet.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Herman W. Mulligan, Jr.**, 21, of West Greenville, S.C., whose remains were previously accounted for, will be buried Aug. 21 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. On May 30, 1945, Mulligan was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 22nd Marine Regiment, 6th Marine Division, engaged in heavy fighting against Japanese forces on Hill 27. A large cache of ammunition exploded during the battle, wounding dozens and killing Mulligan. [Read about Mulligan.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Joe S. Elmore**, 20, of Seminary, Ky., whose remains were previously accounted for, will be buried Aug. 18 in Albany, Ky. Elmore was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was assembled with South Korean soldiers in the 31st Regimental Combat Team on the east side of the Chosin River, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by Chinese forces. Elmore was among more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory and was declared missing on Dec. 2, 1950. [Read about Elmore.](#)

-- **Navy Aviation Chief Ordnanceman Otis E. Ingram** was a turret gunner aboard a torpedo bomber from U.S. Navy Torpedo Squadron Fifty One (VT-51). On July 27, 1944, Ingram's aircraft was the lead of four Avengers on a mission targeting the Japanese base at Malakal Harbor when it went missing. All three crewmembers, including Ingram were reported missing

in action, and subsequently reported killed in action on Feb. 4, 1946. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ingram.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Leo J. Duquette** was a member of Company L, 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. Duquette could not be accounted for and was declared missing in action on July 11, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Duquette.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Mathis O. Ball, Jr.** 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. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ball.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. George L. Spangenberg** was a member of Company E, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. On Nov. 2, 1950, Spangenberg was reported as missing in action following a battle in Unsan, North Korea. Interment services are pending. [Read about Spangenberg.](#)

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](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).