



**September 14, 2018**

**In This Issue:**

- 1. VFW Fall Legislative Conference**
- 2. VFW National Commander Meets Top Leaders**
- 3. VFW and VA Participate in Facebook Live Event on Suicide Prevention**
- 4. Hurricane Florence Makes Landfall**
- 5. TRICARE Issues Disaster Alert for Hurricane Florence**
- 6. VA Receives Full Year Appropriations**
- 7. North Korean MIA Recovery Talks Continue**
- 8. MIA Update**

**1. VFW Fall Legislative Conference:** This past week, VFW National Legislative Committee members from nearly every state traveled to Washington to meet with their members of Congress and advance the VFW's [2018 Legislative Priority Goals](#). Committee members asked their Senators to swiftly pass H.R. 299, which would provide long overdue benefits for Blue Water Navy, Korean DMZ and Thailand veterans, and H.R. 5649, which would significantly improve the transition from military service to civilian life. Improving health care for veterans, ending sequestration, and establishing full concurrent receipt were also top talking points for committee members. [Read the talking points](#) and see how your members of Congress voted on the VFW's [Key Votes](#).

**2. VFW National Commander Meets Top Leaders:** While in town for the Fall Legislative Conference this week, VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence was able to meet with a number of top Department of Veterans Affairs and military leaders, to include VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, Army Secretary Dr. Mark Esper, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley, Air Force Director of Staff Lt. Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost, Under Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly, and Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Greg Slavonic. He thanked each for their continued service to the nation, as well as communicated the VFW's numerous advocacy and support programs for veterans, service members and their families.

**3. VFW and VA Participate in Facebook Live Event on Suicide Prevention:** Executive Director of VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Dr. Keita Franklin and VFW National Veterans Service Associate Director for Health Policy James Moss participated in a Facebook Live event on Thursday to talk about mental health and suicide prevention. September is Suicide Prevention Month and Franklin and Moss discussed ways to help prevent suicide and shared several resources available to any veteran and their friends and families who needs mental

health care or are in crisis. “I would like to encourage everyone out there that’s having issues to please get in touch with someone or if you know someone that’s having some issues, please reach out to them, find someone that can help them and encourage them to seek help because we all are responsible for suicide prevention,” said Moss, who served as a corpsman in the U.S. Navy. Watch the [Facebook Live video](#). Learn more about [VA’s mental health and suicide prevention resources](#) and the [VFW’s Mental Wellness Campaign](#).

**4. Hurricane Florence Makes Landfall:** The Department of Veterans Affairs has been monitoring Hurricane Florence closely as it made landfall in North Carolina on Friday morning. VA has evacuated the VA Medical Center in Hampton, Va., which is in a mandatory evacuation zone. It has also closed 22 community-based clinics in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia. The Veterans Benefits Administration said September benefits have already been processed, but any service members who need assistance with receiving benefits checks can call 1-800-827-1000. Also, service members and veterans who have homeowners or renters insurance with USAA can call 1-800-531-8722 or visit the USAA mobile app for assistance. Several VA national cemeteries have also been closed due to the hurricane. Any veterans needing assistance during the storm should call 1-800-507-4571. [Learn more](#).

**5. TRICARE Issues Disaster Alert for Hurricane Florence:** On Thursday, the Defense Health Agency announced that all TRICARE beneficiaries under mandatory evacuation orders in North Carolina, South Carolina, or Virginia may see a provider at any location without a referral from their primary care physician. This waiver applies to beneficiaries in more than 40 counties where the state Governor has ordered evacuations as a result of Hurricane Florence, and extends through Sept. 21. All TRICARE beneficiaries not on active duty can receive urgent care from any TRICARE-authorized urgent care center or provider without a referral. Additionally, beneficiaries in these affected areas, to include Washington D.C., may obtain emergency refills of their prescriptions through Sept. 20. [Learn more](#).

**6. VA Receives Full Year Appropriations:** Yesterday, Congress completed the first appropriations package of the year. The \$147.5 billion package includes full year appropriations for VA to start implementation of the VFW-supported *VA MISSION Act of 2018*, streamline the process for appealing decisions on benefit claims, reduce the rate of suicide among veterans, fight the opioid epidemic, and modernize its electronic health care record. The VFW remains concerned that the current dysfunctional budget process may impact VA’s ability to receive the resources it needs in 2020 and 2021 for IT improvements required by the Forever GI Bill and to properly implement the *VA MISSION Act of 2018*. That is why the VFW has joined forces with a broad coalition of organizations to propose [common sense reforms to the federal budget process](#). Read the [Statement of the Independent Budget Veterans Service Organizations](#) or the [Joint Explanatory Statement for H.R. 5895](#).

**7. North Korean MIA Recovery Talks Continue:** Negotiators are moving forward with efforts to bring home the remains of more American troops killed in the 1950-53 Korean War, according to a [Stars and Stripes article](#) published Sunday. U.S. and North Korean generals met last week in the truce village of Panmunjom to discuss the next step after 55 cases of remains believed to be missing Americans were repatriated in late July. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency currently lists 7,683 Americans missing from the Korean War, with an

estimated 5,300 of them in North Korea. Also missing in the vicinity of the Korean Peninsula are 111 Cold War MIAs. American-led recovery teams operated in North Korea from 1996 to 2005, returning some 229 remains, but that mission was suspended due to team safety and security reasons. “The return of our missing is a humanitarian mission that transcends politics,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence, whose organization urged President Trump to include the return of American remains as a discussion point when he met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore on June 12. “The VFW is grateful to the president for acting on our recommendation and to the North Korean leader for following through on his part of the summit agreement,” he said. “The VFW will continue working toward the fullest possible accounting of missing Americans on the Korean Peninsula and elsewhere because we leave no one behind. We owe it to their families and we owe to their battle buddies.”

**8. MIA Update:** This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced eight new identifications, and the burial date and location for two previously identified servicemen.

Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Army Master Sgt. Leonard K. Chinn**, 34, of Idaho Falls, Idaho, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Sept. 19, 2018, in Silver Creek, Neb. Chinn was a member of Company D, 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, when his unit was fighting off persistent Chinese attacks in North Korea. Chinn was reportedly captured by enemy forces on Dec. 1, 1950, and was held at several temporary prisoner of war camps before being marched northwest to POW Camp 5 Complex, North Korea. [Read about Chinn.](#)

-- **Navy Chief Machinist’s Mate Dean S. Sanders**, 38, of Lima, Ohio, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Sept. 19 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Sanders was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Sanders. [Read about Sanders.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Eugene G. McBride** was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 311th Infantry Regiment, 78th Infantry Division. On Jan. 30, 1945, while engaged in an attack against enemy forces near Huppenbroich, Germany, McBride was killed by a blast from an enemy artillery shell. His remains were not identified by American forces after the battle. Interment services are pending. [Read about McBride.](#)

-- **Army Tech. Sgt. Robert J. Fitzgerrell** was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 311th Infantry Regiment, 78th Infantry Division. On Jan. 30, 1945, while engaged in an attack against enemy forces near Huppenbroich, Germany, Fitzgerrell stepped on an anti-personnel mine and was killed. His remains were not identified by American forces after the battle. Interment services are pending. [Read about Fitzgerrell.](#)

- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Leonard A. Tyma** was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th 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. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Tyma died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943, during the first waves of the assault. Interment services are pending. [Read about Tyma.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Fred W. Ashley** was a member of Troop C, 2nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Group, on a reconnaissance in the town of Paseka, Czechoslovakia. On May 4, German soldiers attacked Ashley’s platoon. Ashley’s unit reported him missing in action. Following the war, when Ashley was not among the American prisoners liberated from German

captivity, the War Department amended his status to killed in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ashley.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Robert J. Bennett** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Bennett. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bennett.](#)

-- **Navy Water Tender 2nd Class Clarence M. Lockwood** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Lockwood. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lockwood.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class James W. Holzhauser** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Holzhauser. Interment services are pending. [Read about Holzhauser.](#)

-- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Bruce H. Ellison** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Ellison. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ellison.](#)

**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).**