



September 21, 2018

National POW/MIA Recognition Day

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1. Senate Must Pass Blue Water Navy Bill: On Wednesday, the VFW joined other veterans service organizations in sending a [letter to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs](#) urging the Senate to pass H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018*, which would provide long-overdue benefits to Blue Water Navy and Korean DMZ veterans. It would also expand benefits to the children of veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange in Thailand and commission more research on Gulf War Illness. The VFW calls on its members and supporters to [contact their Senators](#) and urge them to pass this important bill. [Read the letter.](#) [Contact your Senators.](#)

2. National POW/MIA Recognition Day: The VFW is attending ceremonies at the Pentagon this afternoon to honor our nation's former prisoners of war and to remember more than 82,000 Americans who remain missing and unaccounted for going back to World War II, as well as their families. The nation sets aside the third Friday in September to recognize and remember former POWs and our MIAs, yet for the 700 military and civilian men and women assigned to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), every day is another opportunity to recover, identify, and return a fallen American home to a loving family who still waits. [Learn more about DPAA here.](#)

3. Korean War Flag Presentation: The VFW was onsite yesterday at the Korean War Veterans Memorial to witness Vice President Mike Pence present an American flag to the Korean War Veterans Memorial Foundation. The flag was one of 55 flags that draped the 55 transfer cases of American remains when they were repatriated from North Korea to American soil. Even more poignant is that two soldiers have already been identified from that transfer — Pfc. William H. Jones of North Carolina and Master Sgt. Charles H. McDaniel of Indiana (more details below in the MIA update). The vice president, who participated in the Aug. 1 repatriation ceremony at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii said, “When I was presented this flag ... I knew where it belonged. It belonged here on this hallowed ground, the Korean War Veterans Memorial.” He continued, “We will never relent in our effort to bring our missing fallen home.” [Read the vice president’s full remarks.](#)

4. VA, VFW Hold Facebook Live Event Showcasing VA Video Connect: VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci and VA’s Chief Officer for the Office of Connected Care Dr. Neil Evans hosted a Facebook Live event on Tuesday to talk about the Veterans Health Administration’s telehealth service called VA Video Connect. The service connects veterans with their health care team from anywhere, using encryption to ensure a secure and private session. It makes VA health care more convenient and reduces travel times for veterans, especially those in rural areas with limited access to VA health care facilities. Veterans can access the service from any mobile or web-based device. Watch the [Facebook Live video](#). [Learn more](#) about VA Video Connect. Get the [VA Video Connect app](#).

5. VFW Participates in Army Partnership Conference: On Thursday, VFW National Security and Foreign Affairs Director John Towles was at the Pentagon with Army senior leadership for their quarterly partnership conference. The conference allowed for one-on-one conversation on military personnel program improvements, recruitment and retention, community engagement, and future Army media and marketing updates. Also in attendance were: Chief of Army Public Affairs Brig. Gen. Omar Jones; Senior Army Retention Operations Non-Commissioned Officer MSG Gerardo Godinez; Soldier for Life Director Col. Prescott Farris; Sergeant Major of the Army Daniel Dailey; and Assistant Surgeon General for the Army National Guard Brig. Gen. Jill Faris.

6. VFW Supports Relief Efforts for Hurricane Florence: The VFW is accepting donations to help veterans, service members, and military families impacted by Hurricane Florence. From hurricanes to raging wildfires, each year natural disasters leave many in desperate need of assistance. The VFW’s Disaster Relief Fund provides our organization the opportunity to react quickly with immediate relief to those in the affected areas. Find a list of [VFW Posts](#) acting as staging areas in North Carolina for hurricane relief, view a [list of needed supplies](#), or [donate to the VFW Disaster Relief Fund](#). [Learn more](#) about the hurricane’s impact on your respective VA facility.

7. Trump Signs Bill to Fund Veterans Programs: Today, President Trump signed the first appropriations bill 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, and modernize its electronic health care record. Full year appropriations for veterans programs was

one of several important issues the VFW National Legislative Committee urged members of Congress to finish before the end of the year, during the VFW's Fall Legislative Conference. Read the [Joint Explanatory Statement for H.R. 5895](#).

8. VA to Hire 50 Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists: The Department of Veterans Affairs will hire 50 additional Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists as part of the *Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act of 2018*, which was recently signed by President Donald Trump. The law requires VA to hire these specialists within one year at eligible VA Medical Centers. "By signing this bill into law, President Trump is demonstrating VA's commitment to supporting America's veterans, particularly those who may be navigating difficult chapters in their lives," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Since incarceration is often linked to homelessness, mental health issues and substance abuse, the VJO specialists will help facilitate these veterans' access to numerous VA programs and resources." Created in 2009, the program currently funds 314 VJO specialists across the United States. [Read more](#).

9. Senate Passes Defense Appropriations and VA Extenders Bills: On Tuesday, the Senate passed H.R. 6157, the *Department of Defense and Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Act, 2019*, which would provide full year funding for the Department of Defense, and the Department of Health and Human Services. The bill includes VFW-supported provisions to ensure death gratuity benefits are never delayed because of a government shutdown and to fund DOD research on Gulf War Illness and Burn Pits. The bill provides funding for DOD to implement the VFW-supported *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019*. The Senate also passed S. 3479, the *Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2018*, which will ensure the continuation of important veterans programs to provide child care, homelessness assistance, and travel reimbursement for veterans, and authorize VA to continue operations of the regional office in the Philippines. H.R. 6157 and S. 3479 await passage by the House of Representatives. Read a [summary](#) or the [text](#) of the defense appropriations bill. Read a [summary](#) or the [text](#) of the *Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2018*.

10. Gold Star Families Remembrance Week: On Sept. 6, 2018, the Senate passed S. Res. 522, which designates Sept. 23 through Sept. 29, 2018, as Gold Star Families Remembrance Week to honor and recognize "the sacrifices made by the families of members of the Armed Forces who have made the ultimate sacrifice," and to encourage all Americans to observe Gold Star Families Remembrance Week by performing acts of good will and celebrating the families of those who gave their lives for our freedom. [Read the resolution](#).

11. VA Nominees Advanced for Full Senate Vote: This week, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs advanced the nominations of two potential candidates for VA's leadership. Dr. Tamara Bonzanto is nominated for Assistant Secretary for the Office of Accountability & Whistleblower Protection (OAWP), and Mr. James Paul Gfrerer is nominated for Assistant Secretary for the Office of Information and Technology (OIT). If confirmed, both would serve in critical roles within offices that have been under scrutiny in recent months. The OAWP was responsible for implementing the Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act last year, and overseeing the discharge and disciplinary actions against senior VA officials who failed veterans and VA employees. The OIT is tasked with overseeing the new Electronic Health

Records program, a 10-year modernization of VA's records system which is considered one of the more substantial changes to VA's operating procedures in decades. The two candidates will now go before a full Senate vote for approval of their respective nominations.

12. VA-enrolled Veterans Eligible for Free Flu Shot: Now through March 31, 2019, all VA-enrolled veterans are eligible for free annual flu shots at their local Walgreens or Duane Reade pharmacy. While this immunization program is limited to VA patients, Walgreens offers flu shots to most VFW members and their families through other coverage programs, such as TRICARE, Medicare, and many health care plans. [Locate your closest Walgreens or Duane Reade.](#)

13. MIA Update: This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced six new identifications, and the burial date and location for three previously identified servicemen. Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Roger Gonzales**, 20, of San Pedro, Calif., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Sept. 21 in Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif. Gonzales was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. On Nov. 27, 1950, Gonzales' unit moved northwest from Hagru-ri to Fox Hill at the Toktong Pass. In the early hours of Nov. 28, the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces attacked and Gonzales' company sustained heavy casualties. Gonzales was reported to have been killed in action on Nov. 29, 1950, and was buried at the base of Fox Hill. [Read about Gonzales.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Morris Meshulam**, 19, of Indianapolis, whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Sept. 23 in his hometown. 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. [Read about Meshulam.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Willard Jenkins**, 27, of Scranton, Pa., whose remains were previously identified, will be buried Sept. 26 in his hometown. Jenkins was a member of Company C, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division near Nijmegen, Netherlands. On Sept. 20, 1944, while participating in Operation Market Garden, his unit was ordered to cross the Waal River to make an amphibious attack. Jenkins was wounded in the chest by enemy fire. Because of the enemy activity in the area, a search could not be conducted and he was declared missing in action on Sept. 20, 1944. [Read about Jenkins.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Charles G. Kaniatobe** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. In July 1950, his unit was engaged in combat operations against the North Korean People's Army near Chonui, South Korea. Kaniatobe could not be accounted for and was declared missing in action on July 10, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kaniatobe.](#)

-- **Army 1st Lt. Seymour P. Drovis** was a member of Company A, 105th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Division. In July 1944, his unit was engaged against enemy forces in Achugao Village, Saipan Island, Northern Mariana Islands. The division sustained heavy casualties during one of the largest Japanese "banzai" attacks of WWII. A soldier reported seeing Drovis fatally shot on July 7, 1944. Interment services are pending. [Read about Drovis.](#)

-- **Army Staff Sgt. Karl R. Loesche** was a member of the 3rd Pursuit Squadron, 24th Pursuit Group. On Dec. 8, 1941, Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands and forced the surrender

of the Bataan peninsula on April 9, 1942. Loesche was among those reported captured, and one of the thousands who were eventually moved to the Cabanatuan POW camp. More than 2,500 POWs perished in this camp during the remaining years of the war. Interment services are pending. [Read about Loesche.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Robert W. Headington** 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 Headington. Interment services are pending. [Read about Headington.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. William H. Jones**, of Nash County, N.C., was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. In November 1950, his unit engaged in attacks against the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces near Pakchon, North Korea. On Nov. 26, 1950, after his unit made a fighting withdrawal, he could not be accounted for and was reported missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Jones.](#)

-- **Army Master Sgt. Charles H. McDaniel**, of Vernon, Ind., was a medic with the 8th Cavalry Regiment Medical Company supporting the regiment's 3rd Battalion. In November 1950, his unit was engaged with enemy forces of the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces (CPVF) southwest of the village of Unsan, and east of Hwaong-ri, North Korea. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 2, 1950, when he could not be accounted for by his unit. Interment services are pending. [Read about McDaniel.](#)

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.