



November 30, 2018

In This Issue:

- 1. Blue Water Navy Bill Continues to be Stalled in the Senate**
- 2. VA Responsibility for Making Student Veterans Whole**
- 3. VFW Testifies on How VA Implements New Systems, Processes, and Forms**
- 4. US-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs**
- 5. Generational Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War**
- 6. VA Researchers Named TIME Magazine's 50 Most Influential People**
- 7. MIA Update**

1. Blue Water Navy Bill Continues to be Stalled in the Senate: In July, the House unanimously passed H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018*, to end the injustice of denying Vietnam, Korean DMZ, and Thailand veterans who suffer from life-threatening health conditions related to exposure to Agent Orange the care and benefits they deserve. This important bill continues to be stalled in the Senate and the VFW needs your help to make sure this bill is passed before the end of the year. Contact your senators to demand that the Senate passes H.R. 299. [Contact your senators by email](#) or call (202) 224-3121 and ask to be transferred to your senators' offices.

2. VA Responsibility for Making Student Veterans Whole: The [VA released a statement](#) this week regarding the implementation of Forever GI Bill changes that were supposed to have been enacted this past August. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie has now directed the Veterans Benefits Administration to cease attempting to implement the changes and instead reset the entire effort in order to get the job done correctly. The reset begins this Saturday, with the full implementation date now shifting to December 2019. VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence said "The VFW was disappointed to learn about the 12-month delay in implementing this amazing benefit, but we recognize why hitting the reset button was necessary in order for the VA to get this right." The Forever GI Bill changed student housing allowances to reflect the ZIP codes where students attend the majority of their classes. This change was required to go into effect on Aug. 1, 2018, but the VA admits that its antiquated computer system was unable to simultaneously handle individual ZIP code changes and the influx of students registering for the fall semester. "Shifting the implementation deadline a year isn't a free pass for the VA to arbitrarily pay student veterans less than they are due simply because it was unable to correct internal problems in time," said Lawrence in a [press release](#). "I appreciated hearing the VBA undersecretary in testimony address the need to make student veterans whole, and I pledge that the VFW will continue to push for the proper implementation of the Forever GI Bill so that all student veterans receive the prompt and full benefits they earned and deserve."

3. VFW Testifies on How VA Implements New Policy Initiatives: On Thursday, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held a hearing to

evaluate VA's ability to develop and implement new policies to improve how it administers veterans benefits and processes claims. VA Under Secretary for Benefits Dr. Paul R. Lawrence testified that VA has dramatically transformed and modernized its claims processing in the past several years. Subcommittee members expressed concerns with IT delays and deficiencies which impede VA's ability to properly administer benefits, including the recent IT challenges which impacted the implementation of the Forever GI Bill. VFW National Veterans Service Deputy Director Michael Figlioli acknowledged that VA is slowly heading in the right direction, but veterans and their family members cannot fully benefit from new policies if VA fails to ensure changes are implemented accurately and consistently at all VA Regional Offices and affected business lines. VA cannot sacrifice quality for speed or rush to develop imperfect platforms such as the National Work Queue. [Read VFW's Testimony.](#) [Watch the hearing.](#)

4. US-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs: Representing the interests of the veterans' community, VFW Washington Office Executive Director Bob Wallace attended the 22nd meeting of the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs here in Washington, D.C., this week. It was his second consecutive appearance, having traveled to Moscow to attend last year's conference. The Joint Commission was established in 1992 by Presidents George H.W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin as a forum through which both nations seek to determine the fates of their missing service personnel. Since then, U.S. analysts have had access to many important Russian governmental archives for research on past conflicts ranging from the Korean and Vietnam Wars to the Cold War, as well as World War II losses during lend-lease operations. With international tensions high due to Russia's four-year involvement in the Ukraine, it is hoped that the humanitarian aspect of the Joint Commission will be able to keep some diplomatic doors open between our two countries. Leading the U.S. side of the commission is retired Air Force Gen. Robert H. "Doc" Foglesong, a member of VFW Post 4725 in Red Lodge, Mont. [Learn more.](#)

5. Generational Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War: This week, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine published a new report entitled [*Gulf War and Health, Volume 11: Generational Health Effects of Serving in the Gulf War*](#). The report is a review of more than 4,000 scientific studies on how toxins that Gulf War veterans, including post-9/11 veterans, have been exposed to impact their reproductive health and the health of their descendants. The report found that several toxins and diseases prevalent in Iraq and Afghanistan have reproductive effects on exposed veterans and birth defects in their children. The report also makes suggestions on how to improve research and health care. Read [a summary of the report](#) or [the full report](#).

6. VA Researchers Named TIME Magazine's 50 Most Influential People: Two scientists conducting research with VA, Dr. Ann McKee and Dr. Tony Wyss-Coray, were named to TIME Magazine's list of the [50 most influential people in health care](#). McKee works at the VA Boston Healthcare System as chief of neuropathology and is the director of VA's brain bank. Her research is focused on identifying and understanding chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) — a degenerative condition caused by repeated brain injuries. Wyss-Coray works in Palo Alto, Calif., as a senior research scientist and associate director of the Center for Tissue Regeneration, Repair and Restoration. He is also a professor of neurology and neurological sciences at Stanford University. His research focuses on the effects of aging and immune responses on the brain and the role of Alzheimer's in brain degeneration and memory loss. [Learn more about VA Research.](#)

7. MIA Update: This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced 13 new identifications. Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Army Cpl. DeMaret M. Kirtley** was a member of Battery A, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 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. Kirtley was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when he could not be accounted for after the withdrawal. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kirtley.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Sgt. Meredith F. Keirn** was a light machine gun section leader for Company F, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. In late November 1950, he was reported to have been killed while defending a hill overlooking the Toktong Pass, a critical main supply route between the villages of Hagaru-ri and Yudam-ni, North Korea. His remains were reportedly buried at the base of "Fox Hill," in the Toktong Pass, but they could not be recovered following the war. Interment services are pending. [Read about Keirn.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Sgt. Johnson McAfee** was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. In late November 1950, his unit was engaged in heavy fighting against units of the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces in North Korea. McAfee was reported to have been killed in action in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir. His remains were buried at the base of "Fox Hill," in the Toktong Pass, but they could not be recovered following the war. Interment services are pending. [Read about McAfee.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Floyd A. Fulmer** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. On Nov. 14, 1944, he was reported as missing in action after fierce combat in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest, near the village of Simonskall, in Germany. On Nov. 15, 1945, the War Department declared him deceased. Interment services are pending. [Read about Fulmer.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Harry W. Wilder** was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. On Nov. 25, 1944, his company was deployed as direct fire support for American infantrymen attacking the town of Grosshau. Two tank destroyers and six tanks, including the M10 tank destroyer Akers was on, were destroyed in the fighting. He was killed during the battle, though his status was initially listed as missing in action. On Dec. 21, 1944, his status was amended to killed in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Wilder.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Joseph Akers** was a member of Company C, 803rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, participating in intense fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. On Nov. 14, 1944, he was reported as missing in action after fierce combat in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest, near the village of Simonskall, in Germany. On Nov. 15, 1945, the War Department declared him deceased. Interment services are pending. [Read about Akers.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Capt. Lawrence E. Dickson** was a pilot with the 100th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group, in the European Theater. On Dec. 23, 1944, Dickson departed Ramitelli Air Base, Italy on an aerial reconnaissance mission and sustained an engine failure during his return flight. According to witnesses, Dickson's plane had rolled over with the canopy jettisoned. He was not observed ejecting from the plane. Dickson's remains were not recovered and he was subsequently declared missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Dickson.](#)

-- **Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Charles H. Harris** 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, including Harris. Interment services are pending. [Read about Harris.](#)

-- **Navy Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Marvin B. Adkins** 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, including Adkins. Interment services are pending. [Read about Adkins.](#)

-- **Marine Corps 2nd Lt. Harry H. Gaver, Jr.** 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, including Gaver. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gaver.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Walter C. Foley** 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, including Foley. Interment services are pending. [Read about Foley.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Willard I. Lawson** 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, including Lawson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lawson.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Kenneth H. Sampson** 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, including Sampson. Interment services are pending. [Read about Sampson.](#)

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.