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In This Issue:

- 1. Blue Water Navy Act Awaits Vote by House of Representatives**
- 2. VFW Participates in Air Force Leadership Roundtable**
- 3. Shanahan Picked to Lead Defense Department**
- 4. House Advances Fiscal Year 2020 VA and Military Construction Appropriations**
- 5. House Advances Bills on Suicide Prevention and Economic Opportunity**
- 6. House VA Subcommittees Hold Joint Hearing on the GI Bill**
- 7. D-Day 75th Anniversary Commemorations**
- 8. Bills Introduced to End the Kiddie Tax**
- 9. Bill to Repeal Feres Doctrine Introduced**
- 10. Thailand Agent Orange Bill Introduced**
- 11. MIA Update**

1. Blue Water Navy Act Awaits Vote by House of Representatives: The VFW is saluting the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs for unanimously passing H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019*. The VFW-supported bill, which must still be approved by the full House and Senate before going to the president, would restore VA benefits to thousands of Vietnam veterans, expand inclusive dates to those who served along the Korean DMZ, and benefit children born with spina bifida due to a parent's exposure to Agent Orange in Thailand. "Toxic exposure is toxic exposure, and denying benefits to any veteran just because of time or location denigrates their service and marginalizes their suffering," said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. "I'm urging every veteran, family member and advocate to contact their respective members of Congress to get this bill passed and signed into law now!" Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates on this important bill. [Contact your members of Congress here.](#)

2. VFW Participates in Air Force Leadership Roundtable: On Tuesday, VFW National Security and Foreign Affairs Director John Towles joined the Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson and Chief of Staff of the Air Force General David Goldfein for a MSO/VSO leadership roundtable. The three-hour meeting allowed for an intimate in-depth conversation with senior Air Force leaders on the current status of recovery efforts at Tyndall Air Force Base and Offutt Air Force Base, military readiness and acquisition program improvements. During the meeting, Air Force leadership expressed grave concerns about cuts that are being made to ongoing Air Force wide programs, such as reconstruction and hurricane recovery operations, due to the lack of resources. Additionally, it was stated that if Congress fails to pass a supplemental spending bill for natural disaster recovery, the Air Force will have no choice but to implement sequestration-era austerity measures such as deferring aircraft and facility maintenance, and cutting flight training hours.

3. Shanahan Picked to Lead Defense Department: President Trump has selected Deputy Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan to be the new Secretary of Defense. Shanahan, a senior Boeing executive before he was picked in April 2017 to serve as deputy secretary, has been acting secretary since Jan. 1, 2019, and he has remained focused on implementing the national defense strategy developed by his predecessor, which includes a shift in tactics and resources from fighting small wars against extremist groups to what Shanahan calls "great power" competitions with China and Russia. In a statement, he wrote "If confirmed by the Senate, I will continue the aggressive implementation of our National Defense Strategy. I remain committed to modernizing the force so our remarkable Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines have everything they need to keep our military lethal and our country safe." A confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Armed Services is pending.

4. House Advances Fiscal Year 2020 VA and Military Construction Appropriations: On Wednesday, the House Committee on Appropriations conducted a markup of the [fiscal year 2020 VA, military construction, and related agencies bill](#), which includes a 9 percent increase in resources for VA to increase access to care for veterans, improve oversight, and complete more construction projects. It also includes \$2 billion for urgently needed repairs to military installations that were impacted by recent natural disasters. An amendment by Congressman Jeff Fortenberry (R-Neb.) was adopted to add \$300 million in emergency funding to repair natural disaster damage at Offutt Air Force Base. The bill provides more resources than was requested in the president's budget, but is still less than [recommended by the Independent Budget](#). The Senate, House, and White House are engaged in discussions on how to address the draconian budget control act (BCA) spending caps, which are set to revert back to sequestration-level limits that were established nearly a decade ago. Service members, veterans, and their families will suffer if BCA caps are not adjusted. [Read a summary of the bill.](#) [Watch the Markup.](#)

5. House Advances Bills on Suicide Prevention and Economic Opportunity: On Wednesday, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs advanced 18 bills to the full House of Representatives. In addition to Blue Water Navy, the bills would address the crisis of veteran suicides and improve employment, education, and transition assistance programs. The committee also advanced the annual cost of living adjustment, which would ensure veterans disability compensation keeps pace with the rising cost of living. All 18 bills now await consideration by the House and Senate. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates on these bills. Read the [bills](#) or a [summary of each bill.](#) [Watch the markup here.](#)

6. House VA Subcommittees Hold Joint Hearing on the GI Bill: This week the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity and the Subcommittee on Technology Modernization held a joint hearing regarding the implementation of the Forever GI Bill. This past fall almost 200,000 student veterans received delayed payments for housing and tuition. Many student veterans waited up to 90 days for this critical payment. In his opening remarks at the hearing Chairman Mike Levin stated the importance of congressional oversight in making sure VA gets it right this time around. The VFW thanks the two subcommittees for their oversight and attention to this important benefit for student veterans. [Watch the hearing here.](#)

7. D-Day 75th Anniversary Commemorations: Two events will be held at the National World War II Memorial to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the D-Day landing on the Normandy

coast of France. The first, at 5 p.m., June 5, 2019, will be a Remembrance Ceremony and Candlelit Vigil to honor all who died during Operation Overlord (June 6-Aug. 30, 1944). As part of the ceremony, the names of 9,380 Americans who died and are buried at the Normandy American Cemetery in France will be read aloud. [Click here to volunteer to read names](#). The second event starts at 10 a.m., June 6, 2019, and it will include a tribute to all WWII veterans, as well as the allied nations who also took part in the landing. If you are a World War II veteran or know of one who would like to participate in the 75th Anniversary Commemoration, please email hrotondi@wwiimemorialfriends.org. Visitors to Washington, D.C., should know the World War II Memorial has no public parking and very limited handicap parking. The closest two Metro stops (Federal Triangle and Smithsonian) are about a half mile walk, and taxis and other hired conveyances are plentiful.

8. Bills Introduced to End the Kiddie Tax: This week, Congresswoman Elaine Luria (D-Va.) and Senator Bill Cassidy (R-La.) introduced bills to address the “Kiddie Tax,” which was created when the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act more than doubled the amount of the tax burden on the children of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. While these bills would provide retroactive relief to military survivors with tens of thousands of tax debt, it would not solve the underlying issue. Known as the “Widow’s Tax,” military spouses who are eligible for VA benefits because of the death of their loved ones are required to forfeit their DOD Survivor Benefits Plan. More than 65,000 surviving military spouses and dependents are unjustly penalized because their loved ones made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. [Take action and tell Congress to end the Widow's Tax and Kiddie Tax now](#). Learn more about [Sen. Cassidy’s bill](#). Learn more about [Congresswoman Luria’s bill](#).

9. Bill to Repeal Feres Doctrine Introduced: Last week, Congresswoman Jackie Speier (D-Calif.) introduced H.R. 2422, the *Sergeant First Class Richard Stayskal Military Medical Accountability Act of 2019*. The bill would allow military service members to sue DOD for instances of medical malpractice that are not related to combat activities. Read a [summary of the bill](#) or [the full text](#).

10. Thailand Agent Orange Bill Introduced: This week, Senators John Boozman (R-Ark.) and Jon Tester (D-Mont.) introduced VFW-supported legislation to expand benefits for all veterans who were stationed in military bases in Thailand during the Vietnam War. Currently, presumptive disability compensation benefits for Agent Orange-related health conditions are only afforded to veterans who served in Thailand who had certain military occupations or were required to work along the parameter of the base. Read the [bill](#) or a [summary of the bill](#).

11. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identifications of two American servicemen who had been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Marine Corps Platoon Sgt. George E. Trotter** was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. In November 1943, his unit 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, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Trotter died on

the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Trotter here.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Wesley L. Kroenung** was a photographer with Headquarters Company, Headquarters and Service Battalion, Fifth Amphibious Corps, temporarily assigned to the 2nd Marine Division. In November 1943, the unit he was assigned to 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, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Kroenung died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. He was reportedly buried in the 2nd Marine Division Cemetery #4. Interment services are pending. [Read more about Kroenung here.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <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.

To view this week's and previous editions, visit: <http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>.