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1. VA Rolls Out GI Bill STEM Scholarship Application: If you are a student veteran studying certain courses in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM) related fields, you could be eligible for additional months of Post 9/11 GI Bill eligibility. The Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship is designed to assist student veterans with obtaining highly competitive and sought-after degrees in STEM fields by providing up to an additional nine months of Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to qualifying student veterans. The VFW-championed STEM scholarship provision was included in the historic Forever GI Bill package passed in 2017, and it is finally available for student veterans to utilize. [Learn if your program is eligible or apply for the scholarship.](#)

2. Legislation Introduced for Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits: VFW-supported H.R. 4137, *Jennifer Kepner HOPE Act*, has been introduced. This important legislation would make individuals eligible for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care provided the individual served as a member of the Armed Forces in support of a contingency operation and was based or stationed at a location where an open air burn pit was in use after Jan. 1, 1990. The eligibility for care would be open even for those who have insufficient medical evidence to conclude that a disease or disability is associated with burn pit exposure. [Learn more.](#)

3. VA Updates the Schedule for Rating Disabilities: VA has updated three portions of the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities: infectious diseases, immune disorders, and nutritional deficiencies. VA started to rewrite all of the fifteen regulations in 2017 in order to reflect modern medicine as the regulations have not been updated since the original code was written in 1945. Any claims in these three areas pending on Aug. 11, 2019, will be considered under both the new and old rating schedule with the more favorable rating result going to the veteran. All claims filed on or after Aug. 11, 2019 will be rated on the new standards.

4. National Defense Authorization Bill: The House and Senate passed their respective versions of the *National Defense Authorization Act* (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020. The next step is for Senate and House members to meet in conference to settle on a finalized bill. Both versions include a 3.1 percent pay raise for troops and increasing reimbursement rates for military spouse

occupational licenses. Other important VFW-supported provisions include expanding Arlington National Cemetery's southern border, granting full military honors for Medal of Honor or Prisoner-of-War Medal recipients, directing DOD to conduct post-deployment medical assessments for burn pits, toxic airborne chemicals, and other airborne contaminants, and incorporating blast exposure history into service member's medical records.

5. Senate Confirms Gilday as New CNO: The Senate voted this month to promote Vice Adm. Mike Gilday to the rank of admiral and confirm his presidential nomination to be the next chief of naval operations. Gilday, the current director of the Joint Staff, is a native of Lowell, Mass., the son of a career sailor, and a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy. According to his [Navy bio](#), Gilday is a surface warfare officer by trade, having deployed aboard the USS Chandler, USS Princeton and USS Gettysburg, commanded the destroyers USS Higgins, USS Benfold and Destroyer Squadron 7, and was the sea combat commander for the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group. As a flag officer, he served as commander of Carrier Strike Group 8, embarked aboard USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, and as commander, U.S. Fleet Cyber Command and U.S. 10th Fleet, among many others. Gilday is expected to be sworn in once the current CNO, Adm. John Richardson, retires next month after serving out his four-year tour.

6. Afghanistan Peace Talks: On Monday, U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, announced that the most recent round of negotiations between the U.S. and the Taliban had been unsuccessful. The overall deal includes provisions that would guarantee the withdrawal of approximately 20,000 U.S. and NATO troops, as well a proposal that would ensure that follow-on negotiations would take place between Taliban and Afghan leaders over a future power-sharing agreement and a permanent cease fire. Despite this deal being favorable to the Taliban, they have indicated that they will only negotiate with the Afghan government after the withdrawal of all foreign troops.

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

-- **Army Pfc. Jasper V. Marquez** was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near the Kunu-ri, North Korea. Repatriated American prisoners of war reported that Marquez had died at Hofong Camp while a prisoner of war, in January 1951. Interment services are pending. [Read about Marquez.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Billy J. Maxwell** was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950, when his unit engaged against enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the battle. Interment services are pending. [Read about Maxwell.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Walter H. Tobin** was a member of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, 31st Regimental Combat Team. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Tobin.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Jerry M. Garrison** was a member of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Garrison.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Ysabel A. Ortiz** was a member of Battery D, 15th Anti-aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Ortiz.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Ralph L. Cale** was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cale.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Wilbur T. Tackett** was a member of Battery B, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Tackett.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Lawrence E. Worthen** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Sept. 17, 1944, after his unit was attacked by enemy forces near Wettlingen, Germany. His remains could not be recovered after the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Worthen.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Joseph E. Finneran** was a bombardier assigned to the 345th Bombardment Squadron, 98th Bombardment Group. On Aug. 1, 1943, the B-24D aircraft that Finneran served on crashed as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire during Operation Tidal Wave. Of the Americans killed, only 27 could be identified, not including Finneran. Interment services are pending. [Read about Finneran.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pvt. Edwin F. Benson** was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 2nd 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. In November 1943, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed, and more than 2,000 were wounded during the fighting. Benson was killed on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Benson.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Hubert P. Hall** 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 USS Oklahoma was hit multiple times which caused it to capsize quickly and caused the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Hall. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hall.](#)

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 1st Class Robert L. Corn** 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 USS Oklahoma was hit multiple times which caused it to capsize quickly and caused the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Hall. Interment services are pending. [Read about Corn.](#)

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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.

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