



September 20, 2019

In This Issue:

- 1. National POW/MIA Recognition Day**
- 2. VFW Testifies on Hearing to Review VA Debt Collection Process**
- 3. VFW Testifies at Disability Assistance & Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Hearing**
- 4. WWP Renews VFW Service Officer Grant**
- 5. 2020 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship Application is Open**
- 6. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020**
- 7. MIA Update**

1. National POW/MIA Recognition Day: The VFW is attending National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremonies at the Pentagon today to remember more than 82,000 missing and unaccounted-for Americans from our nation's wars going back to the beginning of World War II. The number includes 72,000 from World War II, 7,600 from Korea, nearly 1,600 from the Vietnam War, 126 from the Cold War, and six from post-Vietnam operations that include one from Operation Eldorado Canyon, two from Operation Desert Storm, and three civilian contractors from Operation Iraqi Freedom. Today the nation also salutes the more than 140,000 Americans captured in battle. Most would return home, but with physical and emotional scars that would last their lifetime. [Learn more](#) about our nation's ongoing efforts to return missing and unaccounted-for Americans.

2. VFW Testifies on Hearing to Review VA Debt Collection Process: Yesterday, the House Veterans' Affairs Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee held a hearing to discuss why VA overpays benefits to veterans and to improve the collection process to prevent veterans from facing financial hardships due to VA administrative errors and processing delays. VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes urged the subcommittee to pass bills that prevent VA from collecting debt that is created because of VA errors and to eliminate the requirement for VA to withhold benefits to offset drill pay. [Read the testimony](#). [Watch the hearing](#), which starts at the 40:30 mark.

3. VFW Testifies at Disability Assistance & Memorial Affairs Subcommittee Hearing: This week, State Adjutant for the VFW Department of Virginia and accredited Veteran Service Officer Kenneth Wiseman testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee regarding contracted compensation and pension (C&P) exams. Contracted exams allow VA to complete a greater number of C&P exams while ensuring that VA physicians and staff remain focused on treating veterans. While this program is important, many veterans have experienced issues related to their contracted C&P exams, especially if they live in a rural area. At the hearing, Wiseman recommended that VA allow veterans the opportunity to use telehealth for their C&P examinations, partner with other federal agencies to

use their doctors to provide the exams, or partner with medical schools. [Read the VFW's testimony.](#) [Watch the hearing](#), which starts at the 16:30 mark.

4. WWP Renews VFW Service Officer Grant: The VFW is proud to announce that [Wounded Warrior Project](#)[®] has renewed a service officer grant in the amount of \$410,000 that will continue to help more transitioning military to receive their earned disability compensation benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. WWP has now provided grants totaling more than \$2.2 million to support VFW's Pre-Discharge Claims Program, an effort that last year enabled the VFW to file thousands of claims on behalf of transitioning military servicemen and women on two dozens of America's largest military installations. Collectively, VFW's nationwide cadre of 2,100 VA-accredited service officers helped more than 525,000 veterans to secure \$8.3 billion in earned disability benefits in fiscal year 2018. Membership in the VFW is not required to receive its free, professional claims assistance. "Connecting veterans with their benefits has been a cornerstone of the VFW's mission for more than a century, and our work with Wounded Warrior Project allows us to build on this legacy of service to others," said VFW National Commander William J. "Doc" Schmitz. If you are within 180 days of discharge from the military, you can [contact a VFW Pre-Discharge representative](#) for more information and to get the VA claims process underway. [Learn more.](#)

5. 2020 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship Application is Open: The 2020 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship is now accepting applications! The program, which is in its sixth year, is for VFW-eligible members who attend an accredited institute of higher learning. Ten student veterans will be selected for the semester-long program that focuses on real policy issues faced by veterans, service members, and their families. The highlight of the program is participation in the VFW Legislative Conference, which in the past has included meetings with senior officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress. Those selected also spend time with their VFW Department members on Capitol Hill pushing the VFW's legislative priorities. Alumni of the program have become more active in all levels of the VFW and have changed laws to improve care and benefits for veterans. [Learn more and apply for the fellowship.](#)

6. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020: On Thursday, the Senate and House conferees for the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020* (NDAA) began meeting to resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the defense authorization bill. The conferees are mostly members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees. No specific deadline has been set, but since many of the authorities provided by the NDAA expire at the end of the fiscal year, significant efforts are being made to reconcile the bills by Oct. 1. Once the conferees complete their report, the House and Senate will vote on the final NDAA, which Congress has passed for 58 straight years. Once complete, the NDAA will be presented to the president for final approval.

7. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of seven servicemen who had been missing in action from World War II and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Herschel H. Mattes**, 22, of Pittsburgh, will be buried Sept. 23 in Avon, Conn. Assigned to the 525th Fighter-Bomber Squadron, 86th Fighter-Bomber Group, Mattis was piloting an A-36A Apache on March 6, 1944, when it crashed near Lake Bracciano,

Italy, after being struck by ground fire. His remains could not be recovered immediately following the crash. [Read about Mattes.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Henry L. Phillips**, from Tennessee, was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950, as the result of enemy action 50 miles south of the Yalu River in North Korea. It would be later learned he had been captured, but would die in captivity on March 17, 1951. [Read about Phillips.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Lloyd B. Odom**, from Missouri, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, 31st Regimental Combat Team. He was reported missing in action Dec. 2, 1950, as the result of enemy action in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. It would be later learned he had been captured, but would die in captivity of pneumonia on Jan. 31, 1951. [Read about Odom.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Wilfred K. Hussey Jr.**, from Hawaii, was a member of Company K, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, who would be reported missing in action on Dec. 12, 1950, following an engagement with enemy forces. [Read about Hussey.](#)

-- **Coast Guard Lt. j.g. Thomas J.E. Crotty**, from New York, served aboard the USS Quail in the Philippines as part of the 16th Naval District-in-Shore Patrol Headquarters, during the onset of World War II. Crotty was among those reported captured after the surrender of Corregidor and held at the Cabanatuan POW camp, where he died on July 19, 1942. [Read about Crotty.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Asa E. Vance**, from Illinois, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, who would be reported missing in action Dec. 2, 1950, following an engagement with enemy forces in North Korea. [Read about Vance.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. William J. Winchester**, from Alabama, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, who was captured during combat operations in the vicinity of Unsan, North Korea. He was reported to have died in captivity in February 1951. [Read about Winchester.](#)

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>.