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1. Secretary of the Navy Relieved of Command: On Sunday, the Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer was fired at the request of Defense Secretary Mark Esper. The president announced that he will nominate Kenneth Braithwaite, the Ambassador to Norway, to replace Mr. Spencer. In the meantime, the Under Secretary of the Navy, Thomas B. Modly, will assume the position as acting Secretary of the Navy until Braithwaite is confirmed by the Senate. [Learn more.](#)

2. VFW-Supported Burn Pit Legislation Introduced: On Friday, Senator Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska) and Senator Joe Manchin III (D-W.Va.) introduced VFW-supported S. 2950, the *Veterans Burn Pit Exposure Recognition Act of 2019*. This important bipartisan legislation would recognize that veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates were exposed to more than 45 toxins, chemicals, and airborne hazards. Although this bill would not grant a presumption of service-connection, it would help veterans prove that any disability or illness resulting from exposure to these environmental hazards occurred during military service. The VFW thanks Sen. Sullivan and Sen. Manchin for introducing this legislation and for their continued efforts to expand disability benefits for veterans. [Learn more.](#)

3. John Lowry III Confirmed as Assistant Secretary of DOL-VETS: Last week, John Lowry III was confirmed by the Senate to be assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS). Lowry's nomination passed the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs by a voice vote on March 13. His nomination has also been approved by the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Lowry will be responsible for a range of programs that should help veterans in the civilian workplace. [Learn more about Lowry.](#)

4. State Programs and Benefits for Veterans: The Veteran Benefit Finder – and corresponding Center for a New American Security (CNAS) report “State-Level Benefits for Veterans,” is a new online tool catalogue that displays benefits offered by each state across the U.S. According

to CNAS, a total of 1,814 unique benefits exist across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, but there is significant variation across states in terms of available benefits, who is eligible to access them, and their value. For more information or to locate benefits that may pertain to you, visit the [Veteran Benefit Finder](#).

5. TRICARE Open Season: TRICARE Open Season will run from Nov. 11 to Dec. 9, 2019. It is important to note that new retirees have only one year to enroll for TRICARE Prime. If they forget to enroll in TRICARE Prime, individuals are no longer going to be automatically enrolled into TRICARE Select and will have to wait for the next Open Season enrollment period. Individuals already enrolled can change their TRICARE coverage. [Learn more](#).

6. Holiday Overseas Mail Deadlines Approaching: Military and U.S. Postal Service officials have issued suggested mailing deadlines for holiday packages and letters to military locations overseas in time for Christmas. To get them there in time for Hanukkah, which starts on Dec. 22 this year, subtract three days from the deadlines. According to Military Times, the deadlines for various methods of shipping are the same for most APO/FPO/DPO (diplomatic post office) ZIP codes, with the exception of some mail going to APO/FPO/DPO Zip code 093, which covers overseas contingency areas. The Postal Service has also created a “military care kit,” which consists of the items most often requested by military families and it is free. [Learn more](#) about mailing deadlines.

7. Bring the Joy of Christmas Through Toys for Tots: Every holiday season, the U.S. Marine Corps helps bring the joy of Christmas and send a message of hope to America’s less fortunate children. In order to achieve this goal, the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation was created in 1991. The objectives of the Toys for Tots Foundation are to help less fortunate children experience Christmas, to play an active role in the development of one of our nation’s most valuable resources – our children, to unite all members of local communities to give back, and to contribute to improving communities in the future. [Learn more](#).

8. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced one new identifications, and six burial updates for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII and the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Air Forces Tech. Sgt. Charles G. Ruble**, 20, of Parker City, Indiana, was a member of the 99th Troup Carrier Squadron, 441st Troup Carrier Group, serving as an aerial engineer aboard a C-47A aircraft. On Sept. 17, 1944, his aircraft was carrying a crew of five and transporting 10 paratroopers, approaching a drop-zone near Groesbeek, Netherlands. The plane was seen taking direct anti-aircraft fire to the wing. The paratroopers successfully exited the plane; however, only three crewmembers survived. The remaining two, including Ruble, could not be accounted for. Ruble will be buried March 2, 2020, at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. [Read about Ruble](#).

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 3rd Class Adolph J. Loebach**, 22, of Peru, Illinois, 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 Loebach. Loebach will be buried Dec. 19, 2019, in LaSalle, Illinois. [Read about Loebach](#).

-- **Army Cpl. Gerald N. Wilson**, 19, of Camden, Missouri, was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was last seen July 25, 1950, while participating in the defense of Yongdong, South Korea. His remains could not be recovered. Wilson will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Wilson.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. William D. Hedtke**, 28, of Iola, Wisconsin, was assigned to Battery B, 319th Glider Artillery Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division. Army officials reported he died of injuries sustained in a hard glider landing near Groesbeek, Netherlands, during Operation Market Garden on Sept. 18, 1944. His remains were not recovered after the war. Hedtke will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Hedtke.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman First Class Bethel E. Walters**, 25, of Bellevue, Texas, was killed during World War II. On Dec. 7, 1941, Walters was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS West Virginia sustained multiple torpedo hits, but timely counter-flooding measures taken by the crew prevented it from capsizing, and it came to rest on the shallow harbor floor. The attack resulted in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Walters. The funeral date and location have yet to be decided. [Read about Walters.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Lawrence E. Woods**, 28, of Greenwood, Texas, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Woods. The funeral date and location have yet to be decided. [Read about Woods.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Rex E. Wise**, 21, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which capsized after sustaining multiple torpedo hits as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Nielsen. Interment services are pending. [Read about Wise.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <https://votervoice.net/VFW/register>.

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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