



December 20, 2019

This is the last edition of the Action Corps Weekly for 2019. The next edition will be on Jan. 10, 2020. We wish you a wonderful holiday season!

In This Issue:

- 1. VFW Hosts Wounded Warriors Dinner**
- 2. Congress Passes NDAA Conference Agreement**
- 3. Congress Axed the Widow's Tax**
- 4. Congress Strikes Budget Deal, Avoids Shutdown**
- 5. Legislation Introduced in Senate to Expand the Veterans Legacy Program**
- 6. Three-Digit Suicide Prevention Number Approved**
- 7. National Guard Border Duty to Count Toward GI Bill Benefits**
- 8. Air Force Awards \$50K Grant to Help Treat Infertility**
- 9. Potential Tobacco Sales Ban for People Under 21 Will Affect the Military Too**
- 10. MIA Update**

1. VFW Hosts Wounded Warriors Dinner: Last Friday, the VFW hosted 60 wounded warriors, their families and caregivers and staff from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center at The Capitol Hill Club for the yearly Aleethia Foundation's Friday Night Dinner. The VFW-hosted event gives VFW members an opportunity to connect with service members and help the healing process of service members who are receiving treatment at Walter Reed. "This is an event that I truly look forward to and cannot miss," said VFW Washington Office Executive Director B.J. Lawrence. "The bonds built – the conversations shared – nothing beats the feeling you receive when you dine with these patriots and their families." [Read more.](#)

2. Congress Passes NDAA Conference Agreement: This week Congress passed the finalized version of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020* (NDAA). The Conference Report includes a 3.1 percent pay raise for troops and improving occupational license portability for relocated military spouses. Other important VFW-supported provisions include expanding Arlington National Cemetery, granting full military honors for Medal of Honor and 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 members' medical records. The bill now goes to the president's desk, who has indicated he will sign it. [Read the summary of the bill.](#)

3. Congress Axed the Widow's Tax: On Tuesday, the Senate joined the House in voting to pass the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020*, which included the elimination of the Survivor Benefit Plan-Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset. The VFW would like to thank Congress and all the individual advocates who joined the Axe the Widow's Tax

movement and worked vigorously to terminate the unjust Survivors Benefits Plan-Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset.

4. Congress Strikes Budget Deal, Avoids Shutdown: This week, Congress reached an agreement to fund the federal government for Fiscal Year 2020. [H.R. 1865](#), which passed the House on Tuesday and the Senate on Thursday, is a bipartisan agreement that provides \$91.9 billion in discretionary funding for VA. It would provide \$153.6 million for VA for implementation of the VFW-championed *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019*, increase VA medical care funding to implement the VFW-supported *VA MISSION Act of 2018*, fund additional oversight and management of privatized housing contractors, and support disaster relief efforts in response to recent natural disasters. H.R. 1865 would also eliminate the Kiddie Tax, which would reduce the tax burden on surviving children of service members, first responders, and Native Americans. [H.R. 1158](#), which also passed the House and Senate this week, appropriates funds for a 3.1 percent pay increase for service members. If signed by the president, the two bills would avoid a government shutdown that was set to begin on Nov. 20, 2019. [Read more.](#)

5. Legislation Introduced to Expand the Veterans Legacy Program: Last Thursday, Senator Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) introduced VFW-supported S. 3058, a bipartisan bill to establish a grant program to conduct cemetery research and produce educational materials for [the Veterans Legacy Program](#) (VLP). Under the current program, the VLP awards contracts to universities, colleges, and institutions to develop educational programs to teach students and others about the veterans interred in national, state, or tribal cemeteries in their communities. Transitioning to a grant-based program would broaden the reach of the VLP beyond large universities to smaller groups that wish to engage with VA in memorializing veterans. “Perpetuating the memory and history of our dead is one of the VFW’s founding principles,” said VFW National Legislative Service Director Carlos Fuentes. “The Veterans Legacy Program ensures the memories and stories of the brave men and women who have worn our nation’s uniform are preserved in perpetuity.” The VFW thanks Sen. Tester and Sen. Rounds for their support of this important program that promotes civic engagement and fosters respect for service and sacrifice. [Learn more.](#)

6. Three-Digit Suicide Prevention Number Approved: The Federal Communications Commission has been approved to move ahead with a new three-digit phone number, 988, that will connect callers with the National Suicide Prevention Hotline. A report released this year, showed that creating a three-digit number, similar to 911, would improve access for people in crisis. Once 988 is working, calls to 988 will be routed to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, where veterans can already call 1.800.273.TALK, and press 1 for specialized support. [Read more.](#)

7. National Guard Border Duty to Count Toward GI Bill Benefits: Last week, Defense Secretary Mark Esper signed a memorandum stating that the National Guard troops who are stationed at the U.S. border will have their time there counted toward their GI Bill benefit. Currently National Guardsmen need 90 days of active-duty time to qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill at forty percent of the full benefit, and they need three years of active-duty time to qualify for the full 36-month benefit. [Read the memo.](#)

8. Air Force Awards \$50K Grant to Help Treat Infertility: The Air Force is investing \$50,000 in a progesterone-testing kit company that could help service members who are trying to conceive. One year after [a study](#) estimated 37 percent of women currently serving report fertility issues, the Air Force awarded a Small Business Innovation Research grant to Proov, a company that makes \$40 kits for women to test their hormone levels. With the grant, Proov will provide free kits to Air Force couples who request them, and connect them with doctors specializing in fertility who may help them conceive naturally. The company said this five-minute at-home test is used by women to self-diagnose low progesterone levels and gain information about possible infertility factors. Progesterone is a necessary hormone for pregnancy, causing women to ovulate. [Read more.](#)

9. Potential Tobacco Sales Ban for People Under 21 Will Affect the Military Too: A bipartisan congressional plan to [raise the federal minimum age to purchase tobacco](#) from 18 to 21 was included in a sweeping budget bill, which passed this week. Contrary to previous comments from lawmakers, there is no exception in the law for members of the military. [Read more.](#)

10. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced three new identifications, and three 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 2nd Lt. George M. Johnson**, 23, was a member of the 38th Bombardment Squadron, 30th Bombardment Group, stationed at Hawkins Field, Betio Island, Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands, when the B-24J bomber aircraft he was co-piloting crashed into Tarawa lagoon shortly after takeoff. Johnson and the nine other servicemen aboard the aircraft were killed. Interment services are pending. [Read about Johnson.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Lowell S. Twedt**, 27, Twedt was a pilot assigned to the 71st Fighter Squadron, 1st Fighter Group. On Oct. 20, 1944, he piloted a P-38J "Lightning" aircraft as part of an escort for a B-17 "Flying Fortress" bombing mission targeting oil storage tanks in Regensburg, Germany. The mission encountered enemy anti-aircraft fire around Bolzano, Italy. Three P-38Js, including Twedt's, went down as a result. An eyewitness account saw Twedt's aircraft falling to the ground in flames, and did not see him eject. Twedt's remains were never recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Twedt.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. John V. Phillips**, 25, was a member of Headquarters Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, when Japanese forces invaded the Philippine Islands. Intense fighting continued until the surrender of the Bataan peninsula on April 9, 1942, and of Corregidor Island on May 6, 1942. Thousands of U.S. and Filipino service members were captured and interned at POW camps. Phillips was among those reported captured after the surrender of Corregidor and held at the Cabanatuan POW camp. More than 2,500 POWs perished in this camp during the war. Interment services are pending. [Read about Phillips.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Jackey D. Blosser**, 21, of Randolph County, West Virginia, was a member of Dog Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action Dec. 2, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Blosser will be buried April 24, 2020, in Grafton, West Virginia. [Read about Blosser.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. Maximiano T. Lacsamana**, 37, of Macabebe, Pampanga, Philippines, a veteran of the Philippine Scouts during World War II, was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team, 7th Infantry Division. His unit was engaged in intense fighting with the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces near Hagaru-ri, North Korea. He was reported missing in action Dec. 3, 1950. Lacsamana will be buried in the spring of 2020 in the Philippines. The exact date and location have yet to be determined. [Read about Lacsamana.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Jerome V. Hummel, 23**, of St. Louis, Missouri, was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action Nov. 30, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces. Hummel will be buried May 7, 2020, in his hometown. [Read about Hummel.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <https://votervoicenet.org/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.

[Click here to view this week's edition.](#)

For past editions of the VFW Action Corps Weekly, please visit:
www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweeklyarchive