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1. Updated List Identifying Agent Orange Sites Omits 40 Locations: VA released an updated Department of Defense list of locations outside of Vietnam where tactical herbicides were used, tested or stored by the U.S. military. The Military Times reported that the new list [omits 40 previously identified locations](#), such as Thailand, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides during service may be eligible for a variety of VA benefits, including an [Agent Orange Registry health exam](#), health care, and disability compensation for diseases associated with such exposure. VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci indicated that “the new list was a result of a GAO report which compelled DOD to come up with a more comprehensive list, not go back and revise what they already confirmed. We’re more than half a century since many of these incidents occurred and the government keeps changing its story. We know these chemicals harmed our veterans and VA has the obligation to deliver care and benefits regardless of DOD’s ongoing revisions.” The VFW implores VA to “grant benefits if a veteran has any evidence demonstrating that spraying may have occurred, regardless if the veteran uses the new list or old list where DOD confirmed that there was storage or spraying,” Gallucci said. [Learn more.](#)

2. VA Delays New Presumptive Conditions Related to Agent Orange Exposure: On Monday, VA sent a report to the House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs detailing VA’s concern with the scientific evidence behind the link between bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, parkinsonism, and hypertension and exposure to Agent Orange. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie stated that the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine did not identify any “definitive causal links” between Agent Orange and the diseases. VA is now waiting on the results of its own study. “The National Academy of Medicine has already established an association between Agent Orange exposure and these four diseases,” said VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Matthew Doyle. “There is no reason to wait for the results of a new study and delay providing care and benefits to veterans in need.” [Learn more.](#)

3. Senate Advances VFW-Supported Mental Health Bill: On Wednesday, the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a markup to discuss and advance the VFW-supported [S.785, Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019](#), which would improve VA mental health care programs and services for veterans. The bill would also establish two grant programs, one to enable nongovernment entities to provide supportive mental health care services and another to expand telehealth programs such as [Project ATLAS](#). The committee also advanced legislation to improve health care for women veterans, expand transportation grants for veterans who live in rural areas, expand veterans preference for reserve component members, and confirm Judge Grant Jaquith to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. The bills and Judge Jaquith's nomination now await consideration by the full Senate. [Watch the markup](#), which begins at the 21:45 minute mark.

4. Hearing on Expansion of Emergency Mental Health Options: On Wednesday, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing to talk about emergency mental health care options in VA. At the hearing, Chairman Mark Takano (D-Calif.) introduced a bill that would allow veterans in need of emergency mental health care services to receive them free of charge through VA or civilian providers. The bill also contains language that significantly expands the population of veterans who are eligible to receive emergency mental health care. The VFW will work with members of the committee and their staffs to make sure veterans who need care are not left without aid but that veterans who are currently eligible maintain priority access to VA services. [Watch the hearing](#).

5. TRICARE Expands Coverage for Breast Cancer Screenings: To improve preventive health care services for women, on Jan. 1, 2020, TRICARE expanded coverage for breast cancer screenings to include 3-D mammography (also known as digital breast tomosynthesis). TRICARE will cover 3-D mammography as a population-based, preventive health care service through the provisional coverage program, which requires pre-authorization. TRICARE covers annual screenings for all female beneficiaries age 40, and older and those age 30–39 who are high-risk and have either a 15 percent or greater lifetime risk of breast cancer as determined by a screening instrument or who meet a risk factor. In a 3-D mammogram, an X-ray source moves over the breast to obtain cross-sectional images of the tissue and this has the potential to improve accuracy in detecting abnormalities and reduce imaging problems due to overlapping tissue and dense breast tissue. [Learn more](#).

6. Update Your Information on the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry: Service members and veterans who have already signed up for the registry should make sure that their contact information is up-to-date. Participation in the registry is very important as it will allow VA to track burn pit exposure and possibly draw inferences regarding adverse health effects. If you have not already signed up for the registry and you have served in one of the eligible areas, please [learn more about the registry](#).

7. New PTSD Coach Mobile App Released: VA has released PTSD Coach, its first mobile app that features tools to help you manage stress symptoms, information about post-traumatic stress disorder and treatments that work, improved graphics to help track your progress, and new ways to personalize your app with the ability to turn on or off daily quotes and the distress meter. The

PTSD Coach app is available for download at Google Play for Android users and iTunes for iPhone users. [Read more.](#)

8. Veterans Needed for VA Study: A group of researchers are working on a study designed to learn about the health and life experiences of veterans from all different backgrounds. This study has been approved by the VA Puget Sound Health Care System. The study will consist of four web-based questionnaire, no in-person visits are required. [Learn more.](#)

9. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced six new identifications, and one burial update 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:

-- **U.S. Army Cpl. Arthur C. Ramirez, 19, of Pima, Arizona,** was a member of Battery B, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 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. Ramirez will be buried March 19, 2020, in Marana, Arizona. [Read about Ramirez.](#)

-- **U.S. Navy Seaman 2nd Class Cecil H. Thornton, 21,** was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Thornton. Interment services are pending. [Read about Thornton.](#)

-- **U.S. Navy Seaman 1st Class Warren C. Gillette, 21,** was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Gillette. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gillette.](#)

-- **U.S. Navy Fireman 2nd Class Martin D. Young, 21,** was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Young. Interment services are pending. [Read about Young.](#)

-- **U.S. Navy Fireman 2nd Class Joseph W. Carroll, 20,** was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Carroll. Interment services are pending. [Read about Carroll.](#)

-- **U.S. Navy Fireman 1st Class Dan E. Reagan, 20,** was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly

capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Reagan. Interment services are pending. [Read about Reagan.](#)

-- **U.S. Seaman 1st Class Joe R. Nightingale, 20**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Nightingale. Interment services are pending. [Read about Nightingale.](#)

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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