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1. VA Making Adjustments to MISSION Act During COVID-19 Pandemic: VA is not pausing the MISSION Act. The department is ensuring the best medical interests of veterans are met by adhering to the law in a manner that takes into account whether referrals for community care are clinically appropriate during the COVID-19 outbreak. VA is taking the following steps in order to ensure the safety of veterans as they access care:

--VA community care referrals for emergent or urgent clinical needs will continue as necessary.
--Veterans with care currently scheduled in the community should continue with this care as clinically appropriate and if available.

-- Referral requests for non-emergent care with community providers will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis for immediate clinical need and with regard to the safety of the veteran when being seen in-person, regardless of wait time or drive time eligibility.

-- VA is expanding the use of c telehealth and telephone sessions to address many of veterans routine medical needs.

“We understand the need for community providers to halt in-person, non-emergent care to veterans, and all patients for that matter, in order to lessen the curve of this virus sweeping our nation,” said VFW Washington Office Executive Director B.J. Lawrence. “Many private health care providers around the country are being forced to make similar difficult decisions, but ultimately decisions that keep the overall safety of all patients in mind. Vigilance is required in slowing this coronavirus pandemic. The Department of Veterans Affairs is taking the correct approach in handling this matter but it remains vital that many of our veterans are able to still receive the care they require. Telehealth and telephonic medical sessions are good adjustments to

current conditions but VA must make accommodations for veterans who are unable to access these means of care.”

2. Senate Passes Legislation to Expand Access to Tele-Hearings: On Wednesday, the Senate passed VFW-supported H.R. 4771, the [VA Tele-Hearing Modernization Act](#). This important legislation would permit appellants in disability compensation cases before the Board of Veterans’ Appeals (BVA) to appear remotely by picture and voice transmissions, also known as “tele-hearings,” from locations other than VA facilities. Currently, veterans may appear via tele-hearing from one of roughly 65 locations in BVA cases. This legislation would undoubtedly improve access for veteran appellants in disability compensation cases and would permit a greater number of veterans to attend their own hearings. The bill passed the House in November and now heads to the president. The VFW urges the president to swiftly sign this important legislation. [Learn more](#).

3. Share Your Story: S. 3393 or H.R. 5995, the [Major Richard Star Act](#), would enable Chapter 61 veterans who have been medically discharged due to combat-related injuries to rightfully receive retirement pay and disability compensation without offset. In FY18, there were 42,163 disabled veterans affected by this offset. An [Action Corps Action Alert](#) was launched this week. For veterans who are affected by this offset, [please share your story](#) by writing a short essay detailing your years of service, DOD/VA disability percentages, and how the offset has impacted your standard of living. The VFW will use these stories to build support for the passage of the *Major Richard Star Act*. If you are interested in participating, please send your story to vfwac@vfw.org. [Learn more](#) and/or [take action](#).

4. National Vietnam War Veterans Day to Be Honored Virtually: This coming Sunday, March 29, 2020, is National Vietnam War Veterans Day. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, VFW Posts have been forced to cancel their events commemorating this day. In response, the VFW will be hosting a [virtual event](#) on the VFW Facebook page, where the VFW will pay tribute to Vietnam veterans across America. Organizations such as VA, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, Vietnam Veterans of America, and others will also be holding virtual events. [Learn how to participate](#).

5. Retired VA Health Care Workers Are Called to Serve: With the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) approval, VA announced this week that they are inviting retired physicians, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, respiratory therapists, and other medical professionals to consider coming back to VA during the COVID-19 pandemic. Opportunities are available in Tele/Virtual Care, the National Call Center, and Direct Patient Care/Support. VA is asking that interested individuals [register online](#) so that the individual can be matched with a VA location according to the individual’s profession, location, and interest. [Read more](#). Share the stories of those medical professionals who are [#StillServing](#).

6. U.S. Army Gauging Interest of Retired Personnel to Assist with COVID-19 Response: On Wednesday, the U.S. Army sent emails out to retired personnel trying to gauge the interest of retired officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers who would be willing to assist in the COVID-19 response should their skills and expertise be needed. The Army is looking for those who are still qualified as 60F: Critical Care Officer; 60N: Anesthesiologist; 66F: Nurse

Anesthetist; 66S: Critical Care Nurse; 66P: Nurse Practitioner; 66T: ER Nurse; 68V: Respiratory Specialist; 68W: Medic. The Army did note that they want to know if the interested individual is already working in a civilian hospital or medical facility as they do not want to take people away from the work they are already doing. Interested persons should contact Human Resources Command, Reserve Personnel Management Directorate, at usarmy.knox.hrc.mbx.g3-retiree-recall@mail.mil or call 502.613.4911, and provide your phone number, address, email, and MOS/Branch.

7. U.S. Navy to Allow Enlistment Extensions and Veteran Re-Entry Due to COVID-19: On Thursday, the Navy released a memo authorizing enlistment extensions and re-entry opportunities. In an effort to keep the fleet manned, the Navy is offering waivers and monetary incentives for many enlisted and officers to extend their careers. The Navy is also opening up for separated enlisted and officers to return to active duty. While the Navy would like recently separated sailors, they encourage all former sailors who are interested to contact a prior enlisted or officer recruiter. [Learn more.](#)

8. VA Suspends Committal Services: As of March 23, 2020, the VA has suspended all committal services, including honors, until further notice at all National Cemeteries. Additionally, volunteer hours are discontinued. However, National Cemeteries are open, and families can still choose to have a burial and witness it from a distance (the 10 or fewer people rule applying) but without honors and without a committal service. Families can also have a committal service at a future time if they choose to go with immediate burial at a National Cemetery. [Learn more.](#)

9. Intimate Partner Violence Cases Rise with COVID-19 Pandemic: VA recently updated their VHA Social Work — Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program (IPVAP) website to include information on staying safe during the COVID-19. Early reports from across the globe indicate domestic violence and child abuse cases are on the rise as families become isolated along with fear, uncertainty, anxiety, depression, and stress. For some individuals staying home may not be the safest option. An IPVAP Coordinator at each VA Medical Center can assist with resources such as; shelters, health care, clinical intervention within and outside the VA, safety planning, and related legal assistance. [Learn more.](#)

10. Red Cross Urges Healthy Individuals to Give Blood Amid COVID-19 Pandemic: The American Red Cross strongly urges healthy, eligible individuals who are feeling well to give blood or platelets to help maintain a sufficient blood supply and prevent shortages as the numbers of COVID-19 infected patients rise in the U.S. Cold and flu season has already impacted the nation's ability to maintain its blood supply. As the number of COVID-19 cases grows in the U.S., the number of people eligible to give blood for patients in need could decrease further. "We're asking the American people to help keep the blood supply stable during this challenging time. As communities across the country prepare for this public health emergency, it's critical that plans include a readily available blood supply for hospital patients," said President of the Red Cross Blood Services Chris Hrouda. "As fears of the coronavirus rise, low donor participation could harm blood availability at hospitals, and the last thing a patient should worry about is whether lifesaving blood will be on the shelf when they need it most." Please make an appointment to donate blood now by using the Red Cross Blood Donor app,

visiting [RedCrossBlood.org](https://www.RedCrossBlood.org) or calling 1.800.RED.CROSS (1.800.733.2767). Type O and platelet donations are especially needed right now.

11. Navy, Marine Corps Leaders Brief on COVID-19 Response: Acting Navy Secretary Thomas B. Modly, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David H. Berger and Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Troy E. Black discussed the Navy and Marine Corps' role in the latest coronavirus response efforts during a briefing at the Pentagon. [Watch the video.](#)

12. DOD Modeling for COVID-19 Helps with Response Planning: Though Defense Department modeling of the COVID-19 virus isn't quite robust enough yet to determine where the next outbreak will happen, the modeling is good enough now for general planning efforts, the Joint Staff surgeon said. Gen. (Dr.) Paul Friedrichs told reporters at the Pentagon today that, "we've not tried to predict that we're going to see a hotspot here, or we're going to see X number there. We used it for broad planning. Like in the community, if the outbreak occurs and X percent of people are infected over time, what does that mean as far as health care requirements?" [Learn more.](#)

13. Thousands of Guardsmen Called Up for COVID-19 Response: Nearly 10,000 National Guardsmen called up across the United States, with more expected soon, are performing a variety of missions in response to COVID-19 pandemic response efforts. Some are even federally funded, though they remain under the control of their respective state governors, but none of those Guardsmen are involved in law or quarantine enforcement, the chief of the National Guard Bureau said. [Learn more.](#)

14. Switch to TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery During COVID-19 Outbreak: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 virus guidance includes the recommendation to have a supply of necessary medications on hand. TRICARE offers beneficiaries the option to get a 90-day supply of their prescriptions at military pharmacies, via [TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery](#), or at retail network pharmacies. During this outbreak receiving prescriptions at home will help lessen the spread of COVID-19 for vulnerable populations. [Learn how to switch to home delivery.](#)

15. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced one new identification, and four 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:

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Earl W. Smith**, 22, was a pilot assigned to the 80th Fighter Squadron, 8th Fighter Group, 5th Air Force. On Aug. 20, 1943, Smith was piloting a P-38 Lightning fighter on a test flight near Port Moresby, Australian Territory of Papua (current day Papua New Guinea), when he crashed into the harbor off of Paga Point. Smith did not eject and his body was not recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Smith.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Earl F. Ferguson**, 26, of Philip, South Dakota, was a pilot assigned to the 329th Bombardment Squadron, 93rd Bombardment Group (Heavy), 8th Air Force. On Aug. 1, 1943, the B-24 aircraft on which Ferguson was the co-pilot crashed as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire during Operation Tidal Wave, the largest bombing mission against the oil fields and refineries at Ploiesti, north of Bucharest, Romania. His remains were not identified

following the war. The remains that could not be identified were buried as Unknowns in the Hero Section of the Civilian and Military Cemetery of Bolovan, Ploiesti, Prahova, Romania. Ferguson will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be decided. [Read about Ferguson.](#)

-- **Army Maj. Harvey H. Storms**, 34, of McAllen, Texas, was a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, which was part of the 31st Regimental Combat Team. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 1, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Storms will be buried June 12, 2020, at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. [Read about Storms.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Ralph L. Cale**, 19, of Covington, Virginia, 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 his unit was attacked by enemy forces in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. His remains could not be recovered following the attack and he was not reported as a prisoner of war. Cale will be buried Aug. 14, 2020, at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. [Read about Cale.](#)

-- **U.S. Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. George M. Johnson**, 23, of Seaford, Delaware, 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 he was co-piloting crashed into Tarawa lagoon shortly after takeoff. Johnson and the nine other servicemen aboard the aircraft were killed. Johnson will be buried May 8, 2020, in his hometown. [Read about Johnson.](#)

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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