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In This Issue:

- 1. VFW Pays Its Respects to the Fallen During Memorial Day**
- 2. Memorial Day Ceremonies in D.C. Virtual This Year**
- 3. VA Begins to Reopen Selected Medical Centers**
- 4. Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs' Chairman Pens Letter to Veterans**
- 5. HVAC Women Veterans Task Force Holds Online Forum**
- 6. Legislation Introduced to Preserve 48-Hour Claims Review**
- 7. Legislation Introduced to Expand Survivors' Benefits**
- 8. CARES Act Extends VA Home Loan Pre-Foreclosure Options**
- 9. GAO Report Finds Women More Likely to Leave the Military Than Men**
- 10. MIA Update**

1. VFW Pays Its Respects to the Fallen During Memorial Day: In recognition of Memorial Day, the VFW honors the legacy of the men and women who served in our nation's military and made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of freedom. While many Americans signal Memorial Day as the start of the summer, the less than one percent who have donned the uniform, and military families worldwide, understand the true meaning and significance of this sacred day. "Comrades, many of you have walked the hallowed grounds of our national veterans' cemeteries solemnly laying eyes on the headstones of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen who honorably served and placed the freedom of their nation before their very own safety," said VFW National Commander William "Doc" Schmitz. "We have lost hundreds of thousands of men and women since the founding of our nation in 1775, and unfortunately, as the global fight on terror continues today, we will lose more protectors of freedom." This Memorial Day will be different considering the physical distancing and stay-at-home orders issued across the nation because of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. While many Americans will be unable to physically visit loved ones or traditionally gather to memorialize their sacrifice, the VFW encourages the nation to make this Memorial Day as significant as any other in our nation's history. "On this Memorial Day, like all others before, I'm asking all Americans to spend this day solely on reflecting and remembering the service men and women we have lost over the course of history," said Schmitz. "Today, and every day, we honor and salute every man and woman -- and the remarkable families of these heroes -- who gave their lives for our nation. Hence, Memorial Day will forever be a day that means everything to the VFW because our warriors decided we meant everything to them."

2. Memorial Day Ceremonies in D.C. Virtual This Year: This year, the normal ceremonies commemorating Memorial Day will be held virtually. The 152nd National Memorial Day Observance to honor America's fallen military service members at Arlington National Cemetery will be [livestreamed](#) Monday, May 25. The U.S. Army Military District of Washington will conduct a

Presidential Armed Forces Full Honor Wreath-Laying Ceremony at 9 a.m. EST at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, hosted by Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper. Also, on Monday, Friends of the National World War II Memorial will host a virtual Memorial Day observance on their [Facebook page](#), beginning at 9 a.m., and a private wreath-laying ceremony will follow at 9:30 a.m. The National Memorial Day Concert will not be held in person this year. However, there will be a special presentation with new performances and tributes, including a special tribute to all the men and women in uniform who are fighting against COVID-19. The 2020 National Memorial Day concert will be live on your local PBS station, on Sunday, May 24, at 8 p.m. EST, as well as [PBS.org](#), [YouTube](#), and [Facebook](#). You can also enjoy [The National Memorial Day Parade: America Stands Tall](#), an original television special featuring the story of our shared history, that will air on American Forces Network on Monday, May 25, at 2 p.m. EST, and on ABC, CBS, FOX, and NBC affiliate stations nationwide.

3. VA Begins to Reopen Selected Medical Centers: This week, VA reopened 20 medical centers as part of a three-phase timeline. The speed of the phases will depend upon the VA medical center's ability to minimize and control exposure to COVID-19. Even though these VA medical centers are not fully open, certain non-emergency in-person appointments and some elective procedures may be permitted. Physical distancing, mandatory face masks, screening processes, and other rigorous safety measures remain in place for now. Telework, telemedicine, phone consults, and wellness checks will continue whenever possible. VA continues to strongly suggest that a veteran contact their local VA medical center before arriving at a facility. The initial sites will indicate how other VA medical centers reopen in the coming weeks and months. [Read more.](#)

4. Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs' Chairman Pens Letter to Veterans: This week, Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) wrote a letter to America's veterans thanking them for their courage, commitment, and sacrifice. He also calls on veterans to share their stories, continue serving those around you, and reach out to fellow veterans during this unprecedented time to check-in. The VFW appreciates the chairman's commitment, and looks forward to working with him to fulfill our promise to take care of our service members, veterans, and their families. [Read the letter.](#)

5. HVAC Women Veterans Task Force Holds Online Forum: On Tuesday, members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Women Veterans Task Force, VA, women veterans, and VSOs discussed the mental health and wellness of women veterans and the impact of COVID-19. VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Tammy Barlet, a Coast Guard veteran, said department officials are behind in providing data on women's usage, complaint rates at medical facilities, and communication with VSOs. "This is the time to over-communicate, not go radio silent," she said. Telemedicine, women veteran peer specialists, sexual harassment, inconsistent services at different locations, and VA outreach were other critical issues discussed. [Watch the forum.](#)

6. Legislation Introduced to Preserve 48-Hour Claims Review: On Tuesday, Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) introduced VFW-supported S. 3761, the [Veterans Claim Transparency Act](#). This important legislation would reinstate VA's former policy of permitting VSOs to review claims decisions within the 48-hours preceding promulgation to ensure all claims were properly

evaluated and are error-free prior to a veteran receiving notification of a ratings decision. “The 48-hour review period is an essential feature of the VA claims process,” said VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Matthew Doyle. “It functions as an independent quality review check on claims decisions before final ratings are sent to veterans.” The VFW thanks Senator Tester and all cosponsors for introducing this important legislation. [Read more.](#)

7. Legislation Introduced to Expand Survivors’ Benefits: On Tuesday, Rep. TJ Cox (D-CA) introduced VFW-supported H.R. 6933, the [Caring for Survivors Act of 2020](#). This important legislation would increase Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments to an amount equal to 55 percent of the permanent and total disability monthly compensation rate, and would make survivors eligible for DIC after a veteran has consistently held a permanent and total disability rating for five years. This idea was put forth in the [Independent Budget Report](#), co-authored by the VFW, Disabled American Veterans, and Paralyzed Veterans of America. The VFW thanks Rep. Cox and all cosponsors for their efforts to expand survivors’ benefits. [Learn more.](#)

8. CARES Act Extends VA Home Loan Pre-Foreclosure Options: The [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act](#), or CARES Act, was signed into law to help Americans economically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic avoid home foreclosure. VA’s [Loan Guaranty Service](#) is focused on ensuring veterans and their families facing temporary or more long-term difficulty paying their monthly mortgage understand their options. If you experience financial hardship caused directly or indirectly by COVID-19, you should immediately [contact your loan servicer](#) and explore [options to avoid foreclosure](#) on your VA home loan. [Read more.](#)

9. GAO Report Finds Women More Likely to Leave the Military Than Men: This month, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report, [Female Active-Duty Personnel - Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts](#). This report was in response to congressional concern over recruitment and retention of female service members. The report found that women were 28% more likely to separate from the military than men, and that female enlisted promotion rates are lower than their male counterparts. GAO found that there are six main reasons women leave the military: work schedules, organizational culture, family planning, dependent care, deployments, and sexual assault. The authors of the report noted that it was not just sexual assault, but the way the military handled the assault that contributed to some women leaving service. The report found that while the services have female recruitment and retention listed as priorities, they have failed to develop plans that include goals, performance measures, and timeframes to guide their efforts. DOD concurred with the recommendations.

10. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced four new identifications 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 Cpl. R.B. Cherry**, 19, was a member of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 27, 1950, near Anju, North Korea. Using information provided by returned POWs after the war, it was determined that Cherry had been a POW in Camp 5 and died of pneumonia sometime in the

winter of 1950. His remains were reportedly buried in a cemetery near the camp and were not recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cherry.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. William E. Cavender**, 20, was a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cavender.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Mervin D. Galland**, 24, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Galland died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. He was reported to have been buried in Row D of the East Division Cemetery, later renamed Cemetery 33. Interment services are pending. [Read about Galland.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Louis J. Tushla**, 25, was assigned to the battleship 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 sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Tushla. Interment services are pending. [Read about Tushla.](#)

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.

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

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