



September 4, 2020

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1. VFW Participates in VA Tele-Town Hall: This week, VFW Washington Office Executive Director B.J. Lawrence cohosted a VA Tele-Town Hall with VA Under Secretary for Benefits Dr. Paul R. Lawrence. The town hall focused on the VBA's COVID-19 pandemic response, Solid Start, Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, and the Veterans Benefits Banking Program (VBBP).

2. September is National Suicide Prevention Month: The VFW encourages everyone this month to learn more about mental health and to reach out to fellow veterans who may be struggling, especially with the social distancing aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Military Health System has information in its [toolkit](#) to assist people with suicide awareness and [tools for prevention](#). The PREVENTS Taskforce has released a survey to gather feedback that will be used to in the taskforce's roadmap for ending veteran suicide. [Take the survey](#).

3. VA Introduces New AI Platform: VA announced a new artificial intelligence (AI) platform, an electronic Virtual Assistant (e-VA), for veterans in the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program. The new platform will provide efficient customer service support for veterans and automated administrative tasks for VR&E counselors and staff. Veterans receiving services through VR&E must opt in to e-VA when they receive an email or text introducing this new function. It is important to note all correspondence through e-VA will be included in veterans electronic VA files.

4. New VA Clinical Trial for Veterans with COVID-19: VA announced a new clinical trial to study COVID-19 convalescent plasma in the treatment of seriously ill patients. This trial is the first of many studies in the VA Coronavirus Research and Efficacy Studies (VA CURES), which is a standardized framework for studying potential treatments for COVID-19. "This trial will go a long way toward helping in the fight against COVID-19," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "VA CURES will provide valuable information that will benefit our veterans who are battling COVID-19, as well as other patients and the medical community in general." [Learn more](#).

5. VFW Commemorates 75th Anniversary of V-J Day: On Sept. 2, 1945, the Empire of Japan signed formal documents of surrender officially ending WWII and officially designating the day as Victory Over Japan Day (V-J Day). Although hostilities ceased on Aug. 15, 1945, the formal surrender occurred aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay two weeks later. The VFW and its Auxiliary will always be thankful for the service and sacrifice of all veterans of WWII. [Learn more.](#)

6. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced one burial update for American servicemen who have been missing and unaccounted-for from WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors is:

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Thomas F. Johnson**, 18, of San Jose, California, as 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. Johnson died on the fourth day of battle, Nov. 23, 1943. Johnson will be buried in Igo, California. The date has yet to be determined. [Read about Johnson.](#)

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