



# ACTION CORPS WEEKLY



April 4, 2022



**Senate Hearing on Toxic Exposure:** VFW National Legislative Associate Director Kristina Keenan testified before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on the comprehensive toxic exposure bill, [H.R. 3967](#), the *Honoring our PACT Act of 2021*. "The *Honoring our PACT Act* is THE comprehensive solution for toxic exposures," said Keenan. "To the members of this committee, you have the opportunity to be leaders in this historic moment. All eyes of the veteran community are on you right now." During the hearing, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough pledged his support for the PACT Act. He commented on technical aspects of the bill and said he shared the overall goal to bring more veterans into VA. [Watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 18:15 mark or [read the testimony](#).



**Toxic Exposure Press Conference:** The VFW participated in a press conference organized by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) regarding [H.R. 3967](#), the *Honoring our PACT Act*. The event was attended by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Rep. Raul Ruiz (D-CA), veteran advocates Jon Stewart and John Feal, representatives of veteran organizations, and family and friends of burn pit victims. VFW National Legislative Associate Director Kristina Keenan expressed, "Toxic exposures have affected every generation of service members, in all conflicts, in all eras. The *Honoring our PACT Act* would help veterans who have been waiting far too long for benefits. Let's work to provide VA the resources it needs to implement the PACT Act and not delay any longer." [Watch the press conference](#).



**House Subcommittee Holds Bill Hearing:** VFW National Legislative Deputy Director Tammy Barlet testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs on several pieces of pending legislation. She spoke about the importance of VA improving the PTSD claims process according to Office of Inspector General (OIG) recommendations, as well as addressing benefits automation, the definition of marriage, and expanding outreach concerning benefits to survivors of veterans and active duty members. Barlet explained the VFW has long echoed OIG concerns about VA's overdevelopment of PTSD claims, including those related to military sexual trauma. [Watch the hearing](#) or [read the testimony](#).



**House Subcommittee Hearing on Pending Legislation:** VFW National Legislative Director Pat Murray testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations. He discussed the importance of strengthening the Office of Inspector General authorities, and the necessity to collect important information on benefits usage and the VA patient population. "The VFW believes collecting basic demographic information of veterans is necessary and could save lives," said Murray. "Veteran suicide numbers have decreased slightly, but we don't fully know why. This information could help us understand who needs help the most." Murray also expressed support for other draft bills that include supply chain upgrades, whistleblower protections, and expanding resources for LGBTQ veterans at VA. [Watch the hearing](#) or [read the testimony](#).



**MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced four burial updates and two new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from World War II. Returning home for burial with full military honors are: -- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Wilbur F. Newton, 29**, of San Leandro, California, 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

Newton. He will be buried in Mound City, Missouri, on May 28, 2022. [Read about Newton.](#)

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 2nd Class George Gilbert, 20**, 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 Gilbert. He will be buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl) in Honolulu, on Jun. 6, 2022. [Read about Gilbert.](#)

-- **Army Staff Sgt. Gerald R. Helms, 29**, of Chicago, was assigned to Company E, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. In 1944, he was reported missing in action near Katerbosch, Netherlands, during Operation Market Garden after he failed to return from a lone scouting mission. His body was never found by his unit, and there was no evidence he had ever been captured. A presumptive finding of death was issued on Oct. 3, 1945. Helms will be buried in Elwood, Illinois, on a date yet to be determined. [Read about Helms.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. William L. Groh, 22**, of Tiffin, Ohio, was assigned to Company F, 12th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. He was reported killed in action on Nov. 20, 1944, when his unit was engaged in battle with German forces near Hürtgen, Germany. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Groh will be buried in Phoenix, on a date yet to be determined. [Read about Groh.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Sanford K. Bowen, 26**, was assigned to Company I, 157th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division. He was reported killed in action on Jan. 20, 1945, when Company I and four other companies were engaged in battle with German forces near Reipertswiller, France. Bowen could not be recovered because of the ongoing fighting. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bowen.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Louis V. Girard, 20**, was assigned to 68th Bombardment Squadron, 44th Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force. On Aug. 1, 1943, the B-24 Liberator aircraft on which Girard was piloting crashed as a result of anti-aircraft fire during Operation Tidal Wave. Following the war, his remains could not be identified. Interment services are pending. [Read about Girard.](#)

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