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was more than a flag maker

Why VA matters

Involuntary discharge battle

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When Kelly Kundinger started her new job at USAA five years ago, she cried tears of joy.

After a long career in retail sales, the USAA Survivor Relations Team (SRT) representative knew she’d found her niche — serving members who have lost a loved one.

“I’ve spent my whole life around the military,” she says of her father, a former prisoner of war during the Korean War and her spouse, Bob, an Air Force veteran and member of The American Legion. “I told my husband, ‘I’m home.’”

That personal experience enables her and other SRT representatives to better serve grieving members as they deal with financial paperwork, investment accounts and insurance policies following a death. Last year, SRT served more than 76,000 USAA members.

“I look at what I’m going to do to help surviving military family members with the legacy of USAA. How can I transfer things and make it easier?” Kundinger says. “I tell them, ‘What an honor to be able to help you through this.’”

This commitment is one reason The American Legion designated USAA as the provider of choice for Legionnaires. USAA’s long history of support for servicemembers and veterans, as well as veteran organizations like The American Legion, is well known.

It helps make possible the Legion’s compassionate service for those who grieve every day of the year, not just Memorial Day.

Learn more about how USAA pays tribute to those who served at usaa.com/memorialday.

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The American Legion Magazine, a leader among national general-interest publications, is published monthly by The American Legion for its 2.2 million members.

These wartime veterans, working through 14,000 community-level posts, dedicate themselves to God and Country and traditional American values; strong national security; adequate and compassionate care for veterans, their widows and orphans; community service; and the wholesome development of our nation’s youth.

June 2016 • Vol. 180, No. 6

5 Vet Voice
8 Commander’s Message
10 I Am The American Legion
12 Big Issues
14 Living Well
18 Veterans Update
46 Rapid Fire
62 Comrades
64 Parting Shots

20 Booted After Battle
Thousands of combat veterans have been kicked out of the military for misconduct without regard to PTSD, TBI or their right to medical retirement. By Ken Olsen

28 More Than Medicine
A past national commander of The American Legion says the VA system is still the best option for veterans. By Joe Frank

32 Citizen Seamstress
The life behind the legend of Betsy Ross, craftswoman and entrepreneur. By Marla R. Miller

38 Discover Cincinnati
With food, sights and shark rays, Ohio’s third-largest city welcomes visitors to The American Legion’s 98th National Convention. By Henry Howard

42 Know Before You Go
Financial readiness is the key to a successful military transition. By Chris Figueroa

ON THE COVER
Revolutionary War icon Betsy Ross rose to celebrity in the 19th century for her part in the making of our first flag of stars and stripes. Her history is often disputed, but her role in the battle for liberty cannot be forgotten. Photo courtesy Library of Congress

SILENT TRIBUTE
Nine thousand sand silhouettes dotted France’s Arromanches beach in 2013 to commemorate military and civilian lives lost in the historic D-Day invasion of 1944. British artists Andy Moss and Jamie Wardley created the project for the International Day of Peace in 2013. Photo courtesy Sand In Your Eye
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‘Spirits Aligned’
I thoroughly enjoyed the inspiring article by Mark Seavey (April), I hope the veterans who participated were told that the leader of the first group of Americans to navigate the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon was Union Civil War veteran John Wesley Powell in 1869 – and that he did so with only one arm.
– Stephen Siemsen, Orcutt, Calif.

‘Target Pablo’
Keith Nightingale’s article (April) was gripping like nothing I’ve read in a long time. That said, I have a question. If U.S. Southern Command is seeing streaks of aircraft going north with drugs and streaks going south with money, why are they sitting there watching and not shooting them down?
– Anthony A. Bullard, Thonotosassa, Fla.

‘Big Decisions’
After reading J.J. Montanaro’s article (April), I’d like to ask a question of those who have advocated a change in military retirement pay for all these years since the implementation of the all-voluntary force: if it’s too generous, then why do we still have recruiting offices all across the land?
I stayed on and earned retired pay. Even though military pay was increased significantly for the all-volunteer force, my family qualified for public assistance because I was a lieutenant. And that was long before Bill Clinton’s “workfare” and the current frenzy in public assistance that goes out to anyone, including foreigners.
Believe me, upon retirement, my former school chums and my peer group as a whole were earning far more than I was as an officer on active duty.
Another argument, and a much better one, is that the public can no longer afford it. Ain’t that the truth! I’ll accept less than my promised pay when the government stops handing out foreign aid and public assistance to foreigners within our borders, and reduces the public assistance rolls.
– Bill Smith, Dixon, Ky.

This article was informative. I am wary, though, as every time DoD changes the military retirement system it is to benefit DoD and not necessarily servicemembers. And it’s always about how to save DoD money on the backs of retirees. My concern with this new system is the reliance on...
servicemembers to essentially fund a portion of their own retirement through the TSP in exchange for a smaller pension percentage (40 percent vs. 50 percent of base pay) at 20 years of service. The problem with this premise is that not many E-1s or even E-5s with families can afford to contribute to TSP. Therefore, TSP contributions will not happen and thus neither will matching funds – saving DoD even more money. My solution: leave well enough alone.


VA accountability
I just read the article written by National Commander Dale Barnett (Commander’s Message, April). This article has such an important and inspirational message for all. I have been so impressed by the way Barnett writes, and the depth and thought that obviously goes into each one. I am a life member of VVA and the VFW, and am now considering a membership with The American Legion.

– James Paul, Fuquay-Varina, N.C.

Women and the draft
After reading many views on women in combat, I have come to a few conclusions (Veterans Update, April). First, look at the rest of the world: many nations have standing armies with women doing the same things as men; the last I heard, Israel and other countries have mandatory service for every citizen. Second, as a person in combat, would you really care who pulled the trigger that saved your life?


As a female Marine Corps veteran (1973-1976), I have long believed in equal pay for equal work – including work risks and dangers. Gaining promotions requires competitions based on a set of measurements that should be equal but is not. Men and women do offer complementary skills, but they are not the same in type. In all but rare cases, there is a wide gulf in physical strength and endurance.

However, in my view, women have made major strides in the services – considering the classes on how to apply makeup that were part of my military classroom training.

– June M. Helligrath, Georgetown, Ky.

Women are capable of being good leaders, and a girl should be able to strive for whatever occupation she wants, with pay equal to a man. However, I feel the fairer sex should be treated differently than boys. I may be old-fashioned, but I try to hold a door open for a lady or give her my seat if no other is available. If a girl wants to do SEAL training, let her if she qualifies. But don’t make my granddaughters subject to the draft.

– James R. Hopper, Branson, Mo.

‘Bogus Benefit’
Great article by Ken Olsen on USAJOBS (March). When I left the Coast Guard I tried for many months, unsuccessfully, to use the site. It was a laborious application process with no contact at all after submission. This article mirrored my own experience to a T.

– Jeff Dow, Waterloo, Iowa

I am not sure USAJOBS is fully to blame. Many announcements contain experience surveys written directly from the position description, which then values experience exactly like that of the job to be filled – i.e., you almost have to be doing it to be considered qualified.

My experience is that a failure to prepare and unrealistic expectations are significant contributing factors. At 15 years of service, I realized my Army job had no direct translation to a civilian career, and the recruiter pitch of security clearance and leadership opening doors wasn’t exactly so. I decided to get an advanced specialized degree in a career field that I wanted to explore upon retirement so that I could make up for lack of direct experience with education and then sell my Army skills at the interview. You need to think about developing specific qualifications through education or volunteerism well in advance.

My strategy landed me a USAJOBS job in a new career field that matched my degree. Yes, I started well below my Army pay, but it was far above entry level. I have advanced at a fair pace, and after only three years I am approaching my previous level of responsibility.

– Lewis Doyle, Portland, Ore.

Sergeant photo error
The caption on page 54 (Rapid Fire, April) is incorrect. It says “Army Sgt. 1st Class Norberto Badillo.” His rank as worn is first sergeant. His hash marks show at least 24 years of service.

– Thomas McHugh, Hackettstown, N.J.
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Help pass flag amendment legislation

Flag Day is June 14. Communities across our nation will celebrate with public observances and displays, many involving The American Legion. Ceremonies and activities are certain to include local dignitaries, including members of Congress. This presents an opportunity.


The American Legion has been leading the fight to protect Old Glory since a 5-4 U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1989 defined flag desecration as protected speech. Subsequent rulings made clear that the only way to protect the flag is to pass a constitutional amendment, which requires a two-thirds supermajority in both houses of Congress.

The amendment has massive public support. Polls by the Citizens Flag Alliance, a coalition of 140 organizations, show that much more than a supermajority of Americans favor it – up to 80 percent of the public. Fifty state legislatures have passed resolutions supporting a flag protection amendment, which is no surprise when one considers that the 1989 ruling invalidated laws against flag desecration that were already on the books in 48 states and the District of Columbia.

Even more important than carrying out the will of the majority are the values we instill in young people by demonstrating respect for our nation’s colors. My experience as a young man at Hoosier Boys State inspired me to attend the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, pursue an Army career and later serve as an active member of the Legion. None of the mentors who helped guide my formative years would ever have dreamed of engaging in an act so insulting to our nation’s identity and to those who have sworn with their lives to protect the freedoms symbolized by our flag. Young people today need to understand that flag respect, not desecration, is worthy of constitutional protection.

Opponents of the flag amendment tell us that acts of desecration are rare. Yet we regularly see news footage and social media videos of demonstrations that include stomping, burning and other forms of disrespect. Patriotic Americans are also sometimes discouraged from displaying the flag by overzealous homeowner associations or school officials who see U.S. flag likenesses on T-shirts as controversial.

It’s worth noting that red, white and blue neckties, towels, shirts and other gear may resemble our flag, but unless they were cut from an actual flag, they aren’t the flag. Just as you would never put a beach towel over a war hero’s coffin, the flag protection amendment would not threaten your favorite patriotic apparel.

Allegiance is the loyalty of a citizen to his or her government or of a subject to his or her sovereign. It is a safe assumption that virtually every member of Congress has at one time pledged allegiance to the U.S. flag. Let’s remind them what that means.

Dale Barnett
National Commander

MEMORANDA

FLAG DAY RESOURCES

The American Legion has several resources to help posts and members promote Flag Day, including a suggested speech to download online at www.legion.org/publications. For a copy of the U.S. Flag Code, “Let’s Be Right on Flag Etiquette” and other flag literature, go to emblem.legion.org. Finally, go to www.legion.org/flag for flag FAQs and more. Pause for the Pledge will take place at 7 p.m. EDT June 14.

The Legion’s Flag Alert e-newsletter is sent whenever the president calls for the flag to be flown at half-staff. Sign up for the e-newsletter online. www.legion.org/newsletters

NEW CENTENNIAL ITEMS AVAILABLE

American Legion Emblem Sales has rolled out more merchandise for the Legion’s upcoming 100th anniversary, including a centennial coin with the Legion emblem on one side and the centennial logo on the other. A centennial patch is also available, specially sized to fit on Legion caps.

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“We want to be a veterans service organization that takes care of our veterans, brings the message of what we are to veterans, and is a leader in our community.”

Greg Gabry likens his post’s flag etiquette program to growing a garden. “How do you start a tomato? You have to plant a seed,” says Gabry, commander of Post 116 in Fuquay-Varina, N.C. “How do you get flag etiquette? You have to get to the youth. As veterans, we are here to help and support the youth of our country. The American Legion plants seeds as an investment in the future—our children.”

Post 116 members routinely bring their flag etiquette program to elementary and middle schools in their community. It’s especially helpful to fourth-graders, who as fifth-graders will lower and raise the U.S. flag each day.

The Legion program is part history lesson, part Q&A and demonstration. Legionnaires show students how to properly hold, fold, raise and lower the flag. When they ask for volunteers, hands quickly go up.

The impression lasts well past the ringing of the school bell.

“I remember back 10 or 12 years ago as we marched the colors at the Christmas parade,” Gabry says. “About 20 to 30 percent of the people would stand as the flag would go by. As of 2015, there were more than 70 percent. You can see the children we inspire; it starts with them. They stand up and have their hands over their hearts. You can see the ones you have touched and helped educate about the flag. It is starting to catch on.”

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• District commander (2012-2013)
• Department membership chairman (2013-2014)
• Department vice commander (2014-2015)
• National Security Council member (2013-2016)

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Act on Supreme Court nominee

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Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn.

- Franken is a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

**OPPOSE**


- Perdue is a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The Constitution is clear about what must happen in the wake of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia’s passing: the president “shall nominate, and by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, shall appoint” a replacement. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has said that Senate Republicans will refuse to do their constitutional duty to consider, or even meet with, President Obama’s nominee. There is absolutely no precedent for this stunning display of partisanship.

Each of the 55 nominees put forward since the Senate Judiciary Committee began conducting hearings in 1916 has received one, with just 10 exceptions. Of those, one withdrew, and nine were confirmed within 11 days of being nominated.

Never has the Senate simply refused to act on a Supreme Court nominee or announce in advance that it will refuse to act on a particular president’s nomination.

The demand that Scalia’s seat remain vacant until after a new president is elected in November – under the guise of giving the American people a “voice” in the selection process – is dangerous and misleading, and only further politicizes the court.

The American people have already spoken, twice, electing and then re-electing Obama. The president does not lose the power to fulfill some of his duties at a certain point in a four-year term. Nor does it absolve the 34 senators in the final year of their terms from their responsibilities.

This partisan gamesmanship threatens more than the court’s day-to-day operations. The Supreme Court, as the final arbiter of enormously consequential issues that affect every American, must remain above politics in order to retain its credibility.

**THE HEART OF THE ISSUE**

Supporters of President Obama’s nomination of Merrick Garland for the Supreme Court say he deserves a Senate vote. Opponents argue that the next president should be the one to nominate a new justice.

Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution is clear. A president may nominate judges to the Supreme Court, but the power to grant or withhold consent rests exclusively with the Senate.

Nowhere does it say that the Senate should hold hearings or votes on these nominees. In fact, senators of both parties have said this for years, regardless of who was in charge.

In 2005, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., declared, “Nowhere in the Constitution does it say the Senate has a duty to give presidential appointees a vote.” And Vice President Joe Biden, former chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, made a similar argument in 1992 when he said, “Once the political season is underway, and it is, action on a Supreme Court nomination must be put off until after the election campaign is over. That is what is fair to the nominee and is central to the process.”

Reid and Biden were right then, and my Republican colleagues are right now. Despite Democrats previously making these same points, we are hearing them now tell us to do our job.

I respectfully say that we are doing our job. The ideological balance of our nation’s highest court is in jeopardy, and we should ensure that this balance remains as a check against efforts by the government to bypass the will of the people. This is about the principle, not the individual.

As a member of the Judiciary Committee, I believe we should allow the American people to have a voice in this process. The upcoming presidential election will not only determine the direction of our country but also serve as a referendum on the presidency, Congress and now the Supreme Court.

**CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

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Liver cancer trends have health experts focusing on hepatitis C.

BY JUDITH HURLEY

While death rates for most cancers are declining, one type is bucking the trend: liver cancer.

According to recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the rate of liver cancer in the United States shot up 38 percent between 2003 and 2012 (the most recent year for which data is available). During the same period, deaths from liver cancer rose by 56 percent. From 2008 to 2012, liver cancer rates increased an average of 2.3 percent each year, and rose faster among men.

The sharp increase in liver cancer worries experts. Liver cancer is difficult to cure. It is often caught too late for surgery to help, and there aren’t good chemotherapy options. To stem the rise, the CDC and other health experts are focusing on hepatitis C, a viral infection that causes at least 20 percent of common liver cancers.

About 3.5 million people in the United States have hepatitis C. The virus is transmitted primarily through contact with infected blood or blood products, so the likelihood of contracting it is small. But most people with hepatitis C don’t become ill in the weeks after exposure. In those who do, symptoms are usually mild. Once in the body, the virus can go into “stealth” mode, hiding out but producing no symptoms. In fact, most people don’t know they are infected. The silent infection can last for a lifetime, quietly damaging liver cells year after year.

“We need to do more work promoting hepatitis testing, treatment and vaccination,” said CDC Director Tom Frieden in March (while there is no vaccination available for hepatitis C, there is one for hepatitis B, which is also linked to liver cancer). A key target of such efforts is baby boomers, who have a six-times-greater risk of hepatitis C infection compared with other adults.

The virus was not discovered until 1989, and routine screening of

See LIVER CANCER on page 16
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Healthy friendships

“Staying socially active by joining book clubs or church groups may add years to your life after retirement,” WebMD reports, citing a new study by Australian researchers.

According to the research team, the more groups to which a person belongs in early retirement, the lower their risk of premature death.

“The chance of dying within six years of stopping work was 2 percent for people who were members of two social groups before retiring and stayed in both,” the team reports. “If they left one group, their risk of death increased to 5 percent, and it rose to 12 percent if they left both groups.”

The study surveyed 424 retirees, all 50 or older.

Lead researcher Niklas Steffens of the University of Queensland says the sense of belonging that social groups provide help people “sustain a meaningful and healthy life.”

The study suggests that “social planning” could be as important to health as financial and health-care planning.

Go Greek

Americans could eat the same number of calories they currently do on average but trim their waistlines and lower their body mass index (BMI) scores, simply by adopting the diets of the Greeks, Finns, French or Japanese.

As The Washington Post reports, citing a new study conducted by agricultural economists at the University of Nebraska, Americans could cut 2.57 points off their average body mass index score by adopting a Greek (Mediterranean) diet, 2.13 points by eating like Finns (the Nordic diet), 1.96 by adopting a French diet, and 1.48 by eating like the Japanese.

Those lower BMI scores translate into a lot of weight. “The study listed the average BMI in the United States at 28.45 in 2009,” the Post reports. “Finland was at 26.25, Greece at 25.75 and France at 25.35. All those qualify as overweight (25 to 29.9), though not obese, which is a BMI of 30 or more. Only the Japanese, at 22.7, had an average BMI in the healthy range.”

The reason they can consume equal amounts of food but have lower BMI scores is that plant-based diets are correlated with lower scores than animal-based diets. “Switching to the Japanese diet, for example, would mean eating 82 fewer calories from beef and 273 fewer calories from dairy, but 22 more calories from eggs and 115 more calories from seafood,” the Post explains.

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- You are on long-term hemodialysis treatment
- You have abnormal liver tests or liver disease
- You have HIV
- You work in health care or public safety and were exposed to blood through a needlestick or other sharp object

LIVER CANCER continued from page 14

blood and blood products for the virus did not begin until 1992. John Ward, director of the Division of Viral Hepatitis at the CDC, says getting tested is crucial because “many baby boomers living with hepatitis C may have been exposed before it could be detected and diagnosed and may now be living with advanced-stage liver disease requiring immediate care.”

The blood test checks for the presence of antibodies of the virus. A positive test result means the person was exposed to the virus. A second test can then determine if the virus is still present. Once diagnosed, treatment can greatly reduce the risk of liver cancer.

Many state and county public health agencies have been screening high-risk individuals for hepatitis C. By tackling this major risk factor for liver cancer, health experts hope to improve the troubling statistics for a cancer that’s been moving in the wrong direction.

Judith Hurley is a freelance writer specializing in health and medicine.
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Congress has received a lot of nasty feedback from disappointed veterans over the past two years after passing the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 and then wildy touting the results.

It was soon apparent that the law wasn’t living up to promises of easy access to private health-care providers for veterans who live far from VA health care or have to wait longer than 30 days for a VA care appointment.

The Veterans’ Affairs committees, which rushed to shape and pass the law, surprised veterans service organizations and VA with final legislation that set unreasonable deadlines and mandates and raised false expectations. By last fall, VA officials had the attention of Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., who assumed chairmanship of the Senate committee after the law passed, on ideas to reform it by streamlining integration of VA medical care with civilian care providers and consolidating the existing hodgepodge of non-VA health-care authorities.

With Isakson’s support, two committee members, Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., and Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., took their cue from the department’s plan and wrote separate reform bills by March. Then they began negotiating a bipartisan reform package that could pass this year.

In an interview, David Shulkin, VA undersecretary of health, reviewed what went wrong in the wake of the wait-time scandal that shook confidence in VA and spurred Congress to pass the Choice Act at breakneck speed.

“The crisis happens in April 2014. The country is outraged. The president and Congress say we have to do something. Congress comes forth with the Choice Plan,” Shulkin recalled. It then “gave VA and its third-party administrators 90 days to get a system up and running.” Yet the Choice plan is still not meeting veterans’ needs, he said. Too many still aren’t getting timely access to civilian care.

Shulkin identified two major problems with the Choice Act. One, it directed VA to outsource customer service to third-party contractors.

“Veterans used to work with VA to identify doctors in their community who they could go to. We had relationships with these doctors. We had relationships with the veteran. This put a third party in the middle of that, so we lost customer contact ... Any business would tell you their No. 1 asset is contact with their customer. We need to get that back.”

A second problem is the Choice Act’s financial complexity, he said. “How the dollars have to move around to get a veteran an appointment and to get the provider paid is so complex that it’s getting in the way. So we’ve asked for the monies to be streamlined into a single account for paying for care in the community.”

Both bills would consolidate existing VA community care programs into a single program that would be easy for veterans and care providers to navigate. Both would allow VA to bypass third-party administrators and begin working more directly with community providers to ensure that veterans get connected faster to care. Both would also give VA spending flexibility to more quickly pay for care in communities when VA is unable to provide it, and creating one funding account for non-VA care.

Burr also wanted language to make the Choice program permanent, to enhance eligibility criteria so no veteran loses eligibility for non-VA care, and to prohibit VA from imposing a “tiered network” on community care, restricting a veteran’s ability to choose among providers. It was unclear whether these ideas would survive final negotiations.

A spokesman for Tester said the senator expected to complete negotiations with Burr on a bipartisan bill and have it through committee in time to be voted on by the full Senate before Memorial Day. The vehicle for final passage was likely to be a larger omnibus bill of veterans initiatives, he said. The House was also interested in Choice reform, making it likely that Congress acts soon to ease frustrations for veterans seeking care.

Tom Philpott has been covering military personnel and veterans issues for nearly 40 years.
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Thousands of combat veterans have been kicked out of the military for misconduct without regard to PTSD, TBI or their right to medical retirement.

Max Fernandez was arrested for a bar fight the first weekend after he came home from Iraq. The Marine Corps machine gunner didn’t think twice about the altercation. “Coming back, my mindset was so aggressive,” he says. “I thought it was funny.”

No one pressed charges and Fernandez’s commanders ignored the incident, he says. He and his buddies continued partying and fighting until Fernandez was booted out of the military, without getting treatment for an IED blast that damaged his vision and hearing – or the nightmares that followed him home from combat.

Today Fernandez is living in a homeless shelter in Los Angeles, undergoing treatment for addiction, pursuing a VA claim for PTSD and TBI, and trying to rebuild his life under the shadow of a bad discharge. It’s the story of thousands of former servicemembers who don’t get help when their combat injuries fuel misconduct. Instead, they are discarded with involuntary discharges that prevent them from receiving military retirement, medical care, disability and GI Bill benefits – all in the interest of speed and cost savings.

“According to current DoD and service branch regulations, it’s permissible to separate servicemembers who have committed misconduct, even if they are suffering from a mental disorder that makes them unfit to serve,” says Thomas Moore, manager of the Lawyers Serving Warriors project at the National Veterans Legal Services Program. “I believe this is a big problem.”

There’s a cultural issue at work, too, says Kathleen Gilberd, executive director of the Military Law Task Force. Sick or injured troops are considered troublemakers simply because they are not fit to deploy. “That means getting rid of them, usually without medical benefits, for misconduct or other designated mental and physical conditions,” she says.

**LIFE SENTENCE** Being dismissed from the military leaves an indelible stain on a veteran’s pride – and his or her future.

“An other-than-honorable discharge usually means something went awry with you in the service,” says Waldo Tapia, an attorney who recently left the Inner City Law Center on Skid Row in Los Angeles and is representing Fernandez. “It’s a difficult stigma to overcome, particularly if it’s tied to PTSD.”

Civilian jobs are often unavailable once a prospective employer sees a problem discharge on a veteran’s DD-214.

“If you get caught using drugs at a warehouse job, you might get fired,” Tapia says. “If you get caught using marijuana in the military, the other-than-honorable discharge follows you forever.”

Many of these veterans end up homeless. Many have no access to health care even though VA has the discretion to provide medical benefits on a case-by-case basis. Veterans who are kicked out of the military for misconduct related to PTSD, TBI and other invisible wounds are also excluded from receiving help from many nonprofits, says Kristina Kaufmann, executive director of the Code of Support Foundation.

In other words, the people who most need help often are the least likely to receive it.

**HISTORIC PRACTICE** Involuntary discharges have been a volatile issue since at least the Vietnam War. A 1980 Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation recommended that servicemembers have the right to a hearing before being tossed out of
the military. But the boards that review these cases are usually sympathetic to the wishes of commanders eager to get rid of servicemembers, and the servicemembers are often convinced that they are better off if they waive their right to a hearing, Gilberd says. There is also a persistent myth that other-than-honorable discharges are automatically upgraded if servicemembers stay out of trouble for six months after leaving the military, which may give them an incentive not to pursue a hearing that would help their case.

It’s unfair to just blame commanders, who are dealing with the realities of fighting long wars with an all-volunteer force.

“I get it,” Kaufmann says. “I was a commander’s wife during the surge from ’06 to ’08. I remember the pressure on my husband to have a battalion that is at full strength and ready to deploy.” And similar pressure to get rid of people who aren’t.

Involuntary discharges again became an issue during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. A litany of negative media prompted Congress to order the military to carefully review the combat experiences of servicemembers before discharging them for misconduct. Yet another 22,000 soldiers have been involuntarily discharged since that 2008 legislation was passed, according to an investigation by National Public Radio. Today the Army Inspector General is conducting its own investigation, again under pressure from Congress.

Involuntary discharges for misconduct are only part of the problem. A significant number of U.S. servicemembers who are discharged for personality disorders or adjustment disorders are also diagnosed with combat-related mental health issues such as PTSD during military medical exams.

“We’ve reviewed cases where servicemembers have been consistently diagnosed with PTSD, yet one diagnosis of personality disorder results in their administrative separation,” Moore says. “Many are then consistently diagnosed with PTSD by VA examiners after discharge from service.”

Servicemembers separated for personality disorders may receive honorable discharges, but they do not have access to key benefits associated with medical retirement.

“The most valuable retirement benefit is access to the military’s health-care program, TRICARE, which provides medical care for the veteran and the veteran’s dependents,” Moore says.

ATTITUDE PROBLEM Servicemembers are reluctant to seek help, even when they know they’ve been injured – particularly when it comes to mental health issues. “There’s a kind of attitude that PTSD is a weakness – that a good soldier, a strong soldier, just works through it,” Gilberd says.

Fernandez is but one example of that attitude. The physician who examined his squad after their armored cargo carrier was hit by an IED near Fallujah in February 2006 recommended they spend a week on light duty as part of their recovery. They refused. “None of the Marines I was with or knew wanted to leave the field,” Fernandez says. “Any injury I had, I had to push out of my mind.”

That attitude is pervasive, Tapia says. “A lot of guys don’t want to report an illness or injury because they worry they will be viewed as holding their unit back.”

As a result, many aren’t diagnosed until they get out of the service, Kaufmann says.

Once back in the United States, Fernandez continued to deny he’d been injured. “I was having nightmares and intrusive thoughts,” he says. “I had the option of seeing people (medical staff), but that would have been frowned upon.”

Instead, Fernandez self-medicated. He and his buddies “drank day and night.” He flunked a random drug test and was stripped of a promotion. But the Marines allowed him to stay after he pleaded his case to a non-judicial punishment board. That is, until he got in yet another fight that left one man in a coma. He went from proud Marine to homeless addict with an other-than-honorable discharge in a matter of months.

“I was bitter,” he says. “Instead of looking at the paperwork – drug abuse – what about the two years that I served? They need to reform the rules and regulations to deal with the epidemic of psychological issues people are coming back with.”

Society shares the blame for the military’s attitude. “I think it’s a complete misunderstanding of PTSD and TBI,” Kaufmann says. “But it’s not just the military. We’re terrible with mental health in this country. We have such a lack of understanding and fear anything mental health-related.”

HAZING THE INJURED Fernandez might not have fared any better if he had sought help for his injuries. Servicemembers who seek treatment for PTSD and other mental health issues are often harassed to the point of career-ending misconduct, Gilberd says.

Michael Wells knows this territory firsthand. He says he encountered hostility at Fort Gordon, Ga., when he sought help for PTSD and TBI following his second tour in Iraq in 2008. His acting first sergeant tried to prevent him from getting mental health

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treatment; he sneak off to his psychiatric appointments anyway, he adds. The repercussions escalated.

“He tried to take away my security clearance,” Wells says of the first sergeant. “He threatened me with physical harm.”

Amber Wells, who met her future husband at Fort Gordon during this ordeal, worried Michael would kill himself. “They wouldn’t let him go to the hospital,” he says. “They would say, ‘Real men don’t get PTSD.'”

The first sergeant also blocked his attempts to apply for medical retirement, Wells says. He reported the harassment to a command sergeant major from another unit and the Army Criminal Investigation Command (CID) without result, he says. Then, finally, he just left Fort Gordon.

“He had actually gone to his psychiatrist – it’s in his records – and said, ‘If you don’t help me, I’m going AWOL,’” Amber says. “His psychiatrist basically laughed at him.”

Fort Gordon referred questions about Wells’ case to U.S. Army Medical Command, which did not respond. However, the office of Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., confirmed that it is working on the case.

DISAPPEARING ACT Once he reached the point that he couldn’t look at his uniform, Wells left Fort Gordon and traveled the country until he was certain his unit had dropped him from the rolls. He then turned himself in at Fort Knox, Ky., where he was given an other-than-honorable discharge. He spent the next three years scraping by with Social Security disability and low-income housing while fighting to get help for PTSD, TBI, and neck, back and hip injuries. An Idaho employer fired him when it discovered he had PTSD, on his third day on the job. Other help was off-limits. “There were a lot of outreach programs and veterans services I couldn’t use because I had an other-than-honorable discharge,” Wells says. “We survived on just over $1,000 a month for a couple of years.”

Amber filed VA disability claims on his behalf and scoured the Internet for help. She connected with Reno, Nev., radio host Boone Cutler and his wife, who raised the money to bring the Wells family and their two children to Reno. There, Michael finally got his first treatment at the local VA, but only after threatening to kill himself.

“It took me getting hospitalized for PTSD, survivor’s guilt and suicidal thoughts,” he says.

Cutler also connected Michael with Heller, whose staff was instrumental in getting his discharge upgraded to general under honorable conditions because of his PTSD. And VA eventually granted Wells a 90 percent disability rating for PTSD and hip problems. Today, he and his family are living in Texas, where he is undergoing a series of hip surgeries. Heller’s office is helping him pursue a 100-percent disability rating.

It’s been an arduous and dispiriting journey, Amber says. “Even after you fight for your country, you have to come home and fight for your benefits,” she says. But they believe Michael’s case shows that with persistence and the right advocate, other servicemembers can overcome a bad discharge.

“It took five years,” he says. “But I want other soldiers to know that it’s possible. No matter what, keep trying.”

Ken Olsen is a frequent contributor to The American Legion Magazine.

Where to get help

The American Legion offers free assistance to those wishing to upgrade their characterization of discharge and make corrections to their military records. Legion experts help by explaining the process, filling out applications, gathering supporting documentation and, if applicable, providing representation during hearings.

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The Legion also has a corps of trained service officers who can assist veterans with everything from VA claims to information on upgrading discharges.

www.legion.org/serviceofficers

The Code of Support Foundation provides one-on-one support for servicemembers, veterans and families, and connects them to veterans service organizations, community resources and other support services.

www.codeofsupport.org

The Lawyers Serving Warriors Project of the National Veterans Legal Services Program partners with the nation’s largest law firms to provide pro bono legal assistance to veterans with disability issues.

www.nvlsp.org

The Inner City Law Center is the sole provider of legal services on Skid Row in Los Angeles, which has the largest concentration of homeless veterans in the United States.

www.innercitylaw.org

The Military Law Task Force publishes a discharge-upgrade guide for attorneys:

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Want to correct an unfair discharge or remove an erroneous mental health diagnosis from your service record? The Army or Navy board of last resort will spend five minutes on your case. Maybe less.

“The deck is really stacked against servicemembers at these boards,” says Thomas Moore, manager of the Lawyers Serving Warriors project and a former Army JAG officer. “They go to great lengths to deny meritorious claims,” adds Raymond Toney, a former Army reservist and private attorney who specializes in these cases. “They see their role as defending the government.”

In other words, if a combat veteran with PTSD is wrongly discharged for a personality disorder, he or she has almost no chance of setting the record straight – a record that makes all the difference as to whether they receive medical care and retirement benefits or are able to make a career outside the military.

A personality disorder discharge is often also a significant blow to a servicemember’s personal pride. “They feel like they have served honorably, gone to war, and then have been improperly booted without acknowledging the wounds they received as a result of combat,” Moore says. “They feel like it’s an indelible stain on their military record.”

A Board for Correction of Military Records was established for each service branch following World War II. Board members are civilian volunteers who also often work full-time jobs. They consider a wide range of issues, from promotion and pay to whether a servicemember should have received a particular commendation such as a Purple Heart. The boards also decide whether a servicemember should have been medically retired for combat injuries such as PTSD and TBI, rather than simply declared unfit for duty due to developmental issues such as personality disorders and adjustment disorders and cut from the ranks. They are the board of last resort for discharge upgrades.

However, the correction boards are overwhelmed with cases and do not have the resources to do the job Congress charged them to do. Toney analyzed the work of three boards after noticing that the Army and Navy boards often avoided addressing potentially meritorious claims, or simply dismissed such claims on the grounds that “the applicant has presented no evidence” when it was clear the applicant had, he says. He discovered that the Army board spent fewer than five minutes reviewing each case. The Navy board, which also considers Marine Corps issues, spent an average of two minutes. Only members of the Air Force board take cases home a week in advance so they have ample time to review the record.

In other words, “these cases are predetermined by staff,” and board members are simply signing off on those decisions, Moore says.

Mistakes are common. If key documents are missing from the applicant’s military personnel file, the boards assume that the service branches properly followed procedures and did the right thing. In situations where a servicemember was discharged for a personality disorder, for example, the National Veterans Legal Services Program often discovers that the mental status evaluation was not done properly, or the document that shows the doctor actually diagnosed PTSD instead of a personality disorder is missing from the file.

Veterans can appeal corrections board decisions to the Court of Federal Claims or a U.S. district court. Yet only a small percentage of cases reach the federal courts – most former servicemembers don’t have the means to appeal, Toney says. And while the court has severely chastised the boards, little has changed.

What’s the solution? A 1996 DoD report to Congress outlined recommended that all service branches follow the example set by the Air Force corrections board, Toney says. “Twenty years later, none of the recommendations have been implemented.”

The boards also need more resources in order to be able to take the time to make thoughtful decisions, as well as more oversight.

“There’s no consequences to the board or the board staff for these decisions,” Toney says. “You have a system of impunity for bad decision-making. It’s going to take (action by) Congress and the secretary of defense. It’s going to take people getting pissed off about it.”

– Ken Olsen
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MORE THAN MEDICINE
Past national commander of The American Legion explains why the VA system is still the best option for veterans.

BY JOSEPH J. FRANK

Until the land mine went off, it was a pretty routine assignment. I was directing a truck loaded with sandbags to a bridge site at Tam Ky, in what was then South Vietnam. The road from base camp to the river had been swept for mines, but the truck swerved left, off the main path. There was an explosion, but I didn’t hear it. The next thing I remember is lying flat on the ground, sensing my legs were still in the air. A medic was immediately upon me, pushing painkillers through my skin, to go along with numbing shock. Strange thoughts entered my mind. Someone was giving me last rites. Was I dead? No, I did not think I was dead. Then I heard the beat of Huey blades in the tropical air.

I will never forget the date. It was Jan. 14, 1968, 48 years ago – the height of the Vietnam War. I had begun that day as a strapping young soldier in the Army’s 39th Engineer Battalion (Combat). It was the last morning I would rise and feel my feet hit the ground beneath me.

I came back to the United States paralyzed from the chest down, a T4-5 paraplegic. The hardest part of a spinal injury, for many of us, is psychologically accepting the reality that no matter how hard we try, we’re never going to get up and walk again. The human brain is not easily convinced of this and continues, almost involuntarily, to attempt to solve a problem for which there are not yet any medical answers.

For me, this new and different life began at the Hines VA Spinal Cord Center in Chicago. There, I had doctors and counselors who understood not only my condition but my context. Healthy soldier one day and paralyzed veteran the next, I had suddenly returned to the United States to begin the yearlong rehabilitation from an injury in a war that most Americans misunderstood or hated. Some would look at me and see an illustration of political viewpoints I did not necessarily share with them.

In a ward with 32 other paralyzed veterans I learned to get dressed in the morning, take care of myself, operate my wheelchair, keep my upper-body muscles strong and drive a vehicle without the use of lower limbs. I also learned what it means to have health-care services specific to my status as a veteran, delivered in the company of others who have served in uniform. As a young veteran in need, I realized that VA care is a cherished benefit reserved only for those of us who pledged our lives to defend our nation. It’s something we get in return for what we have given.

As the VA privatization movement rattles through Washington heading into the fall elections, I think back to that year I spent at Hines. After I got used to my wheelchair, I started helping other paralyzed veterans in the ward as some had done for me when I arrived. I made several discoveries that first year of major adjustment, and those discoveries have guided my career as a champion for veterans and people with disabilities alike.

I discovered, for instance, that veterans need caregivers who understand the post-military journey, whether we are looking for relief from post-traumatic stress disorder, trying to figure out a new prosthesis, hunting for a job, filing a claim, buying a house or getting checked for hepatitis C. As an American Legion member, and later as a counselor and service officer in the St. Louis VA system, I also discovered why it’s important to be both a constructive critic and a tireless advocate of VA health care. We address the system honestly and demand improvements when needed because VA health care belongs to us, the veterans who use it. Too often today, I find that the biggest supporters of VA privatization are not VA patients at all. Many are not even veterans.

Too often, veterans’ criticism of VA has been misinterpreted as condemnation. And our calls for change and reform within the system have been erroneously translated into a perceived demand for its transfer to the private sector. The American Legion has supported the 2014 Choice Act and its provisions only as a temporary measure for veterans whose VA facilities are unreasonably distant or overbooked. The Legion opposes permanent use of non-VA providers, as well as expansion of vouchered care to the private sector, for a number of relevant economic reasons, including lower average cost per patient – but there’s much more to it than that.

More importantly, VA consistently outperforms other providers in terms of patient satisfaction and
quality. That was certainly the case for me in VA’s spinal cord program, which is superior. A VA healthcare provider is far more likely to know where to turn for answers on claims applications, disability ratings adjustments, or college and career help. VA healthcare is more than medicine. It’s a network of people – providers and patients alike – who care about veterans in ways non-VA medical practitioners can’t be expected to understand, let alone provide. Why would we ever want to take this benefit – a healthcare system that understands the context of our lives as veterans and can help us in multiple ways – and hand it off to private providers whose quality probably ranks lower and cannot fully understand our needs and the services available to meet them? Outsourcing is only preferable when veterans have no other choice, such as those who live in rural areas distant from VA facilities.

I was honored to serve on the presidential committee of people with disabilities that brought into existence the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which improved the lives of millions and continues to do so. Not only did the ADA open doors and make upper floors accessible to people who use wheelchairs, it changed perceptions. I remember vividly that, in 1968, children were often frightened by wheelchairs. Today my grandkids want to ride on mine. My work on the ADA, and its success, proved that revolutionary positive changes can be accomplished even when dealing with the federal government, and greater understanding can be achieved on a bigger scale about people outside the average U.S. demographic, like those of us who use wheelchairs and military veterans.

The year I was elected national commander of The American Legion, Congress passed the Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996, which opened up VA to all who honorably served our nation. Priority groups were established to ensure that those with the greatest needs and service-connected conditions would move to the front of the line should demand exceed capacity. As demand grew and capacity did not, today’s access problem understandably arose. The movement to expand privatization because we haven’t solved the access-demand problem seems to suggest that veterans don’t deserve the quality care we fought to achieve in our VA system. Now that quality is great, we will need to go someplace else. That’s pretty hard to accept, regardless of your service-connected disability rating.

A couple of years ago, I went back to the Hines VA center, where this journey began. This time, I was on a completely different mission, conducting an American Legion System Worth Saving site visit. The chief of the center met our group there, and he brought with him a yellowed file from 1968. It was mine. In it was a written chronicle from my arrival as a frightened, young and newly discharged soldier whose future was irreversibly changed, through my wheelchair training, weightlifting, psychological counseling and driving lessons. I was carried into that VA facility and I drove away from it, back to my family in Missouri where I would start a new life. I have been independent, happy and productive ever since, with the benefit of great family support. I knew then, from my experience at Hines, that what lay ahead for me wasn’t always going to be easy, but there are ways to solve almost any problem.

Joseph J. Frank served as national commander of The American Legion from 1996 to 1997. He also worked as a benefits officer for Paralyzed Veterans of America and as a peer counselor in the Robert Woolsey Spinal Cord Center, attached to the St. Louis VA Health Care System. He often speaks at schools and veterans events about his career in advocacy.
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any people know at least a little about Betsy Ross, the supposed maker of the nation’s first flag. Ever since Ross’ grandson, William Canby, first related his family’s story of the flag’s origins in an 1870 talk to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, generations of Americans have heard how George Washington stepped into her Philadelphia shop on the eve of independence, a sketch in hand for a new flag to represent the colonies united in the rebellion against England – 13 red and white stripes alongside a blue canton with a “new constellation” of 13 stars.

Most memorable is the story’s climax, in which the seamstress – looking at the six-pointed stars in the general’s drawing – folds a piece of paper just so and, with one snip of her scissors, reveals (and proposes) a perfect five-pointed star. In the legend of our flag’s origins, Washington is convinced and an important element of our national identity is confirmed.

If millions of American children have since observed and replicated that moment in elementary school classrooms and holiday pageants, comparatively few people know much about the real woman behind the legendary Betsy Ross. Twenty-four-year-old upholstery seamstress Elizabeth Griscom Ross was, in spring 1776, an experienced craftswoman. One of 17 children born to house carpenter Samuel Griscom and his wife, Rebecca James, she had worked since a teenager in shops that fabricated the city’s most stylish and comfortable domestic interiors.

As an employee of the London-trained artisan John Webster, she had worked alongside an older sister and several other women to produce curtains, slipcovers, bed hangings and mattresses, as well as a range of decorative elements, including the fringes and tassels essential to the high-style design desired by the city’s most affluent residents. In that shop, she met the man who would become her husband, apprentice John.
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Ross; the two married in November 1773 and established their own shop, enjoying just over two years together before John died and left her a widow in the same month that Thomas Paine’s “Common Sense” transformed the colonial protest movement into a full-on revolt.

Betsy Ross’ life as a craftswoman in the epicenter of rebellion is essential to understanding not only the flag legend as we know it today, but the revolution itself. Whatever her role in the creation of the first U.S. flag – and that story is a complex one – the life behind the legend is worth knowing for the light it sheds on the little-known contributions of working women – particularly those in artisanal trades – to the American Revolution.

The crisis over imperial tax policy hit artisans like John and Betsy Ross especially hard. When leaders of the colonial resistance effort urged consumers to boycott imported goods as a show of their collective strength, craftswomen like Ross, whose livelihoods depended on the consumption of luxury goods, watched with apprehension. In fact, it seems likely that her whole family – which included artisans in other cloth and clothing trades as well as the building trades – held its breath as they waited to see how this series of crises would shake out.

In spring 1775, Anne King – Betsy’s onetime supervisor in the Webster shop – sought to appeal to the “Buy American” impulse by boasting in the columns of The Pennsylvania Gazette that she was the “first American tossel maker [sic] that ever brought that branch of business to any degree of perfection,” inviting readers to browse her stock of fringes, cord and mattresses “of every sort” that she now offered. In emphasizing her status as the first American tassel maker, she was surely trying to distinguish herself from George Richey, the Edinborough upholsterer whose Front Street shop – the “Crown and Tassell” no less – offered “lines and tassels to answer any furniture or chariots,” as well as “all sorts of upholstery work in the newest fashions, and at the lowest prices, such as beds, chairs, easy chairs, French chairs, sofas, couches and settees; likewise all sorts of window curtains, in the newest fashion, such as festoon, Venetian, long and short drapery, with or without cornices.”

Craftswomen necessarily navigated the boycott movement carefully. On one hand, directing consumer spending toward American-made goods could prove a boon for women like King and Ross, who had the skills to satisfy at least some of that demand (provided they were able to find suitable materials). On the other, consumers nervous about the implications of their purchases could choose to put off any shopping until this latest crisis blew over. Where would that leave the city’s artisans? Ross, recently widowed and without access to a husband’s support, may well have been especially worried about her future when the prospect of orders from the new wartime governments of both Pennsylvania and the Continental Congress arose in the form of a request for a flag.

Ross had already committed to the political cause. Despite her Quaker upbringing, which would have encouraged the young Philadelphian to steer clear of any violent protest, she and her husband had embraced the rebellion. An inventory of John’s estate after his death shows the couple had spent some of their hard-won earnings on two prints documenting the clash between British regulars and colonists in Massachusetts. Now, as the demand for ships and the suites of flags they required expanded, she could help advance both political and financial security, turning her skill and contacts to profit by supplying these military goods. The flag tale is often told as a story of design, but it is not. It is a story of construction, production and entrepreneurship. If the government was going to need a lot of these, and quickly, the five-pointed star – as Ross demonstrated with that snip of her shears – was a more efficient choice.

But how did the rebellion find Betsy Ross? A recent discovery in Washington’s papers confirms that he met her when she and John fabricated new bed hangings for Washington’s household. In 2014, as the curatorial staff at Washington’s home at Mount Vernon was preparing to refurnish the estate’s second- and third-floor bedchambers, they carefully reviewed the papers in hopes of uncovering new
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information about how those rooms looked. Associate curator Amanda Isaac found in Washington’s cash memoranda, held by the Huntington Library, these entries:

- September 23, 1774 – Memr. Left with Mr. Ross the upholsterer (that is, upholsterer) 5 half Joes to buy furniture with and to be accounted for 15.0.0
- September 30, 1774 – By 2 ps. Callico Bed furniture 9.0.0
- September 30, 1774 – By 7 yds of Muslin at 5/1.15.0
- October 10, 1774 – By Mr. Ross’s acct. exclusive of ye 15£ advanc’d ye. 23d of Sepr. 29.17.2

Apparently, on Friday, Sept. 23, Washington – in Philadelphia as one of Virginia’s delegates to the First Continental Congress – stopped into the Ross shop and gave John Ross five “half-Joes” (Portuguese coins bearing the portrait of King Johannes V) as a down payment toward three sets of new bed hangings. A week later, Washington had secured and supplied some of the necessary fabrics, and by Oct. 10 John’s and Betsy’s work was completed, the firm then billing Washington an additional 29/17/2 for labor and materials.

One might rightly wonder how the Virginia planter and politician came to choose this young couple, just starting out in their own shop, to make a bed for his home. It seems likely that Benjamin Chew (chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania) recommended Ross’ upholstery shop to Washington. Chew knew John and Betsy since their days in Webster’s shop, and in those same weeks had hired them to help outfit the home of his daughter Elizabeth on the occasion of her marriage to Edward Tilghman, commissioning bed furniture, curtains, chair covers and other goods for his daughter’s new home.

Washington dined with Chew on Sept. 22, the day before he commissioned his own bed furniture, so it is easy to imagine, as they talked over dinner, Chew recommending the Ross enterprise to Washington. The project was finished in October 1774, just 10 days before the Continental Congress adopted its plan to boycott British goods beginning Dec. 1.

Some 18 months later, as the Revolution began in earnest, legend has it that Washington returned to Ross’ shop, in the company of Robert Morris and George Ross (John’s uncle), and commissioned what would become the first flag as we know it today.

As I explain in my book “Betsy Ross and the Making of America,” there is much to quibble with in this tale as it has come down to us, as various family members through the years repeated elements that cannot be confirmed in the archival record. But the presence of George Ross and the prior acquaintance with Washington certainly lend credence to the story as it was handed down by Betsy’s children, nieces and grandchildren.

Importantly, in their tale, the emphasis is not Ross having made the first flag; rather, it is having met the man she and others recognized as the father of the country – and, what’s more, having taught him something. What resonates most persuasively from that story is the snipping of those shears, as the experienced artisan angled to improve the emblem’s design, and hence its production, and in so doing secure some much-needed business for herself as well.

Whatever the truth of this story, Betsy Ross did go on to a long career as a flagmaker for the U.S. government, particularly in the years just before the War of 1812, when she – now the wife of Revolutionary War veteran and retired customs official John Claypoole, her third husband – secured a number of contracts to make garrison flags for the U.S. Army and diplomatic flags for the Indian Department. Dozens of flags made by her can be found in archival records headed to military posts up and down the East Coast, the Mississippi Valley and into the West. Ross continued to sew for the government into her 60s and 70s, until her eyesight failed. Several daughters, nieces and granddaughters would aid and follow her into what became a multi-generational flag-making enterprise.

If much about the woman behind the Betsy Ross of legend seems elusive, there is much to be discovered as well. As one of 17 children in a family of artisans, a young woman who weathered the rebellion and a second war to secure national sovereignty, and a craftswoman who spent six decades fabricating domestic interiors and military goods as well as a family enterprise in the early republic, her life helps us contemplate the Revolution and its aftermath in new ways. She is important to our understanding of U.S. history not because she made any one flag – however iconic that moment may have become – but because she was a young craftswoman who embraced the resistance movement with vigor, celebrated its triumphs and suffered its consequences. Her story is important for what it tells us about the working women and men who built early America’s cities, furnished its rooms and clothed its citizens – and because she helps us imagine more ordinary times, the familiar cares of everyday life, and the pleasure taken in the simple comforts of beautiful and functional things made by capable hands.

Marla R. Miller is the author of “Betsy Ross and the Making of America,” which was a finalist for the Cundill Prize in History in 2010.
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DISCOVER CINCINNATI

With food, sights and shark rays, Ohio’s third-largest city is ready to welcome visitors to The American Legion’s 98th National Convention.

BY HENRY HOWARD
PHOTOS BY LUCAS CARTER AND CLAY LOMNETH

In late August, members of the American Legion Family will gather in Cincinnati for the 98th National Convention.

Cincinnati will be the second “Queen City” in recent years to host the national convention, following Charlotte, N.C., in 2014. Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow gave Cincinnati its longtime nickname in his 1854 poem “Catawba Wine,” writing, “And this Song of the Vine, This greeting of mine, The winds and the birds shall deliver, To the Queen of the West, In her garlands dressed, On the banks of the Beautiful River.”

While visiting the downtown area, look up and you will see that the city even has its own crown – atop the 41-story, 665-foot Great American Tower at Queen City Square, inspired by and designed to resemble Princess Diana’s tiara.

Downtown Cincinnati is easily navigated by foot or car, with plenty of restaurants and shops near the Duke Energy Convention Center and hotels. Nine bridges connect Cincinnati and Newport, Ky., including the 2,670-foot Newport Southbank Bridge (called the “Purple People Bridge”) for pedestrians and bicyclists. After crossing the Ohio River into Newport, visitors will find additional restaurants, shops and the Newport Aquarium. It’s about a 1.5-mile walk one way from the convention center to Newport entertainment, but there are ample parking spots there.

For those eager to make the most of their down time during the convention, The American Legion Magazine suggests a few options (all locations are in Cincinnati, unless otherwise indicated).
FOOD AND DRINK

BREWERIES  Cincinnati was the third-largest U.S. producer of beer in the 1890s. Today, the region is home to the largest collection of pre-Prohibition breweries in the nation. There are some modern breweries, too, including Rhinegeist, located in the Over-the-Rhine district and named one of the top 10 new breweries in the world by Ratebeer.com in 2014. Rhinegeist does not serve food, but patrons can bring it in or have it delivered. Located at 1910 Elm St.  © www.rhinegeist.com

GRAETER’S ICE CREAM  For nearly 150 years, Graeter’s has produced and sold ice cream in Cincinnati and other locations. The handcrafted ice cream mix is made and frozen two gallons at a time, without fake sweeteners, colorings or trans fats. Graeter’s has several locations in downtown Cincinnati.  © www.graeters.com

CINCINNATI CHILI  The region’s best known food, Cincinnati chili can’t be confused with any other. If you feel adventurous, grab a fork – not a spoon. This chili is coupled with spaghetti or hot dogs, and loaded with toppings such as cheese, onions and beans. Across the region, more than 250 places serve it.

ENTERTAINMENT

NEWPORT AQUARIUM  Take 1 million gallons of fresh and salt water, add thousands of animals from around the world and mix in interactive exhibits, and you have the Newport Aquarium. It is the first aquarium to breed shark rays – which are neither sharks nor rays, but fish. Visitors can also meet Mighty Mike, a 14-foot-long, 800-pound alligator, and travel through a half-dozen tunnels where sharks and other creatures swim above and beside visitors. Located at 1 Aquarium Way in Newport, the aquarium is wheelchair-accessible.  © www.newportaquarium.com

CINCINNATI ZOO  Opened in 1875, the nation’s second-oldest zoo is home to nearly 1,900 animals on 75 acres of land. It is known for its successful breeding program, which includes California sea lions, South African cheetahs, Sumatran rhinos, tigers, gorillas and more. Located at 3400 Vine St.  © www.cincinnatizoo.org

DISTILLERY TOUR  Free tours are offered at New Riff Distilling in Newport. (A 90-minute in-depth tour is offered on the last Thursday of each month for $15 per person.) Located at 24 Distillery Way in Newport, New Riff is open to the public Thursday through Sunday.  © www.newriffdistilling.com

HISTORY

AMERICAN SIGN MUSEUM  This nearly 20,000-square-foot museum displays signs of all kinds, including restaurants, roads, hotels and more. There’s a shop where neon signs are created on weekdays. Guided tours are included in admission. Located at 1330 Monmouth Ave., the museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays.  © www.americansignmuseum.org

FIRE MUSEUM OF GREATER CINCINNATI  The nation’s first professional and fully paid fire department was created in Cincinnati on April 1, 1853. It was also the first to use horses to pull fire engines. The museum, at 315 W. Court St., is closed Sundays and Mondays.  © www.cincyfiremuseum.com
NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREEDOM CENTER
Cincinnati played a major role in the Underground Railroad as slaves crossed the Ohio River to find freedom. The museum educates visitors about the Underground Railroad’s history as well as modern-day struggles for freedom. The museum, at 50 East Freedom Way, is closed Sundays and Mondays. www.freedomcenter.org

EXPLORE
FINDLAY MARKET This eclectic market offers a range of eating options, including Mexican, seafood, Greek and more. There are also sandwiches, fresh fruits and vegetables. Indoor and outdoor seating are available. Weekends are the busiest times, as a farmers market and street performers draw crowds. Adjacent parking is free for the first hour on weekdays, and 50 cents per hour beyond that; weekend parking is slightly higher. Located at 1801 Race St. www.findlaymarket.org

QUEEN CITY UNDERGROUND TOUR Discover Cincinnati’s history and landmarks, including the revitalized Over-the-Rhine district, hidden crypts under the city streets, and a tour of the Christian Moerlein bottling plant and tap room. Tours begin at 1332 Vine St. and last between 90 minutes and two hours. Parking at Washington Park, a 450-space underground garage, is recommended. Visitors should arrive 20 to 30 minutes early. www.americanlegacytours.com/queen-city-underground

JUNGLE JIM’S INTERNATIONAL MARKET This supersized grocery store has two locations: 4450 Eastgate South Drive and 5440 Dixie Highway, both about 30 miles from downtown Cincinnati. They feature exotic foods from 75 countries and unusual décor. www.junglejims.com

Henry Howard is deputy director of media and communications for The American Legion.

Military aviation history on display in nearby Dayton
The National Museum of the United States Air Force is located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, about an hour’s drive from Cincinnati. The 19-acre museum has various galleries chronicling aviation history, from the early years of aerial combat through the Vietnam War era to today. More than 360 aerospace vehicles and missiles are on display, as well as hundreds of artifacts, photographs and other documents.

The museum opens its fourth building June 8, focusing on space exploration and global reach. Visitors will be able to board a space shuttle.

Plan several hours to visit the museum. Admission is free, but there is a fee to ride the simulators and see a movie. Open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. www.nationalmuseum.af.mil
Do you get discouraged when you hear your telephone ring? Do you avoid using your phone because hearing difficulties make it hard to understand the person on the other end of the line? For many Americans the telephone conversation — once an important part of everyday life — has become a thing of the past. Because they can’t understand what is said to them on the phone, they’re often cut off from friends, family, doctors and caregivers. Now, thanks to innovative technology there is finally a better way.

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KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Financial readiness is the key to a successful military transition.

BY CHRIS FIGUEROA

In 2012, after serving about a decade in the Army Reserve, I took off my uniform for the last time, embarking on a full transition from military to civilian life.

While it was the most permanent transition I’d made out of uniform, it certainly wasn’t the first. Like a lot of others who have served in the reserves or Guard, I made my fair share of shifts between the Army and civilian world. Looking back at that fast-paced time period, it’s not much of a surprise that I did not spend a full calendar year at my civilian job during the first six years of my career, due to the needs of the Army. Added up, between mandatory military schools and deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, I spent more time working for the Army than I did my civilian employer.

My experience isn’t unique. I’m just one of many in the generation known as post-9/11 veterans, a group that’s all too familiar with the concept of an all-expense-paid vacation – at least as it applies to garden spots like Iraq and Afghanistan. By 2012, I felt like a professional at dealing with all the intricacies of military transition.

Unfortunately, there was a lot I didn’t know or even consider. As the saying goes, “You don’t know what you don’t know.” But to a large degree, that’s where I was during the transition. Thankfully, I wasn’t alone. Most of the advice I received was from more experienced soldiers who had “been there and done that.” To those who helped me, thank you – your advice and guidance helped pave the way for a relatively smooth move into a full-blown civilian life.

Today, I’m lucky enough to work at USAA, a great company that provides me an opportunity to pay it forward. The cornerstone of our mission at USAA is to facilitate the financial security of our members and their families. Those aren’t just words; they are a philosophy that drives all we do as a company. That’s pretty cool, especially having had a front-row seat as USAA has rolled out a variety of new tools and services for its members, ones specifically designed to help those leaving the military. (As an aside, I hope you know that USAA membership is free and available to those who have honorably served. USAA is also the preferred provider of financial services for The American Legion.)

TIME TO GET SERIOUS Speaking of helping the military, I recently reviewed the 2015 Blue Star Families Annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey. Blue Star Families is a nonprofit formed by military spouses to create a platform where military family members can join with civilian communities and leaders to address the challenges of military life. More than 6,000 survey respondents highlighted two areas of concern to them: the difficulty of transition from the military and financial readiness. These findings reflect what I observed in the military and continue to see as problem areas for my fellow post-9/11 veterans. They’re also areas in which USAA has focused on making a difference. Let’s start with transition.

Most of us enter the military at a young age and don’t realize all the good things that come as a result of our service. From medical insurance and health care to allowances for housing and food, the list is long and often taken for granted. When we look to transition out of the military, we sometimes forget to fill some of the gaps created by the change, leaving us financially unprepared for the future.

I often receive calls asking for transition advice. Everyone who calls has different reasons for
transitioning and a different set of circumstances. On top of that, each person has unique knowledge, skills and abilities that will translate into the civilian world. Too often, though, servicemembers separate from the military with no job, little savings and no plan, only to end up on their parents’ doorstep. Transitioning out of the military is a serious life event and requires serious planning and preparation. That’s my message, and USAA has free online resources to help in the transition process at www.usaa.com/militarylife.

Some of the many tools available include:
- **USAA Separation Checklist.** Customize your own separation checklist and get started on a to-do list with a suggested timeline.
- **USAA Military Separation Assessment.** This will help you determine what your civilian pay will need to be in a specific area to be equivalent to what you are earning currently in the military.
- **USAA Real Estate Rewards.** Get help finding, financing and insuring a home.
- **Life insurance.** This is designed to continue after military service.

In the military, we were focused on readiness. We would spend months ensuring we had the correct personnel, equipment and training to succeed down range. However, when it came to financial readiness, that was our personal responsibility. Sure, the military provided us with classes and seminars to promote healthy financial behaviors and a balanced budget, but ultimately we were the ones responsible for our own finances. And sometimes it didn’t turn out well.

I’m sure many of us had those friends who blew everything they saved during a deployment while out on their two-week leave, partying in a place like Las Vegas. Those free-spending pals had crazy stories to tell later, but they ended up regretting squandering away an entire deployment’s worth of savings for a few days of fun. They worked too hard and too long, and put their lives in danger, only to see what they earned disappear in a blink of the eye or roll of the dice.

Remember that buddy who bought a new car with the rims and sound system that was way over his budget? His joy ride didn’t last long after he realized that the new car payment came with additional costs such as higher insurance, gas and maintenance. The story often ended with no car and bad credit.

I’m sure you agree with the Blue Star Families survey respondents who said they consider financial readiness to be a challenge. However, it’s not all bad news.

I was excited to see that according to the survey, 86 percent of post-9/11 servicemembers say they follow a personal budget. That’s great, but truth be told, there’s so much more to financial readiness than a balanced budget.

Last October, USAA rolled out a new digital tool designed to make it easier for servicemembers and veterans to view, act on and track their overall financial well-being. Called the Financial Readiness Score (FRS), it identifies financial risks in areas such as budgeting, insurance, debt, retirement savings and certain life events that could negatively affect a member’s financial well-being. FRS also analyzes a member’s financial readiness in four key areas: protecting, saving, spending and planning.

Finally, FRS summarizes a member’s financial readiness environment based on personal information, such as life stage, household and income into one score, from 1 to 100. The tool provides a personalized, prioritized action plan to help improve financial wellness and reduce finance-related risks.

I recently used the FRS, and although I didn’t score as high as I would have liked, it did give me good advice to prepare for my future and increase my financial stability. USAA members can obtain their free FRS score and action plan online at www.usaa.com/myfinancialscore.

None of us joined the military to become rich. We joined simply to protect our country, our families and everything we hold dear. We knew that our chances of fighting in war were high, but like the generations of warriors before us, we stepped up to the plate. Even so, we need to be aware of any resources that can help us maximize our situation once we’re out.

As Legionnaires, we’re part of the group that has “been there and done that,” and we are always looking for ways to help our fellow veterans. Each of us has unique challenges and obstacles, but what we have in common is our service to our great country and an opportunity to share our learned experiences with those still on the journey. 🇺🇸

Chris Figueroa is a lead account manager at USAA, The American Legion’s preferred provider of insurance and financial services.

**HAVE QUESTIONS? CALL USAA**
For each new USAA member who purchases any product, the company contributes funds to American Legion programs. Join online at www.usaa.com/legion or call toll-free 1-877-699-2654.
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E94902
RAPID FIRE

WASHINGTON STATE YOUTH WINS 79TH ORATORICAL CONTEST

First-time contestant Benjamin Crosby emerged from a competitive field of 52 high school orators to win first place in The American Legion’s 79th Annual High School Oratorical Scholarship Program on April 17.

Crosby, a homeschooled sophomore and Eagle Scout from Burlington, Wash., is the first from the state to win the contest. He is sponsored by Memorial Post 91 in Burlington.

“The competition has taught me to look further than a cursory glance at the Constitution and to go in depth into every sentence, every word that’s written in the Constitution,” Crosby said.

In his oration, Crosby drew attention to a 2013 survey conducted by the National Constitution Center, which found that “only 5 percent of Americans can correctly answer 10 rudimentary questions about the Constitution. When it comes to citizenship, and our nation’s most important document, our citizens lack literacy.”

As the 2016 National Oratorical Contest winner, Crosby will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to the Legion’s 98th National Convention in Cincinnati in August and an $18,000 college scholarship.

Solomon Brown, a senior at Amanda Elzy High School in Greenwood, Miss., sponsored by Thompson-Clemons Post 200, earned second place and a $16,000 scholarship.

Cheyenne Mathews, a senior at Ketchikan High School in Ketchikan, Alaska, sponsored by Joseph T. Craig Post 3, finished third and earned a $14,000 scholarship.

Watch the finalists’ orations: www.legion.org/legiontv

“Today, our elected officials, military personnel, judges and immigrants seeking citizenship all pledge an oath. Though each is slightly different, the oaths all sound something like this: ‘I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, so help me God.’ I believe it is high time for every citizen to make the same solemn oath, and to truly take it to heart.”

– Oratorical champion Benjamin Crosby of Burlington, Wash.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Women Veterans Survey online at Legion.org

The American Legion invites all women veterans to participate in a new survey to assess their experiences with accessing healthcare, transitioning to civilian life and using education benefits.

“Women veterans don’t want any special treatment from VA,” said Verna Jones, executive director of the Legion’s Washington office and an Army veteran. “Women don’t want a separate VA. They want what all veterans want and deserve: the resources and benefits we earned through our service to country.”

The confidential Women Veterans Survey will be available through at least the end of July and takes about 15 minutes to complete. The Legion will not distribute or share personal information, and will compile, assess and report on the results.

www.legion.org

Page 46
GOVERNMENT

Font failure

After more than a decade of trying to implement a new font style for highway signage, the federal government has scrapped the effort because “it turns out the new font actually made sign legibility worse,” the website Jalopnik reports.

The new font, called Clearview, had been phased in on select highways across the nation. It was planned to replace the Highway Gothic font that has been standard on the nation’s green highway signs for decades.

“While initial tests back in the early 2000s did prove that the new signs with the new font were more legible to drivers... it is now being realized that this was due to the new signs simply being, well, new.”
Corrine King pauses to take in “Above and Beyond,” an art exhibit of more than 58,000 dog tags – one for each American who died in the Vietnam War. Each dog tag lists a servicemember’s name, military branch and date of death.

The 410-square-foot exhibit greets visitors from above the escalator at the Harold Washington Library Center in Chicago, now through April 2020. With the exception of the Wall in Washington, “Above and Beyond” is the only memorial that lists every individual who died in the war.

“The monument in Washington, D.C., is black and reflective, of course, and is on the ground,” says King, who is studying at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago. “The sense that you get is that the military is supporting or holding up the nation. With this one, it’s hanging above us so you can feel the weight of it with the dog tags coming down. You feel the pressure on the country of the promises we made when they enlisted. It makes you think, ‘Are we making sure their kids are taken care of?’”

King also points out a single black dog tag representing veterans whose deaths are linked to service in Vietnam, such as those with diseases related to Agent Orange exposure.

“For the veterans who are alive, are we taking care of them with the best services possible?” wonders King, whose family tree includes a great-grandfather who served in the Navy during World War II and a grandfather who served during the Vietnam era.

“Above and Beyond” is on loan from the National Veterans Art Museum, located in Chicago. It went on display at the library Feb. 20 due to space limitations at the museum, says executive director Brendan Foster.

When Foster joined the museum about a year ago, he quickly realized the dog tags’ importance to visitors. “We fielded about 10 calls a day,” he recalls. “Almost everyone who came to visit asked about the dog tags.”

Foster made it a priority to return “Above and Beyond” to public view, and the library seems like a perfect fit. “It allows an opportunity for people to see it from every angle,” he says. “It’s also a quiet space where people can reflect and learn about their loved ones and the impact of Vietnam.”

At a multimedia kiosk, visitors can search, by name or hometown, the names of those memorialized. Information includes full names, dates of death, hometowns and, in most cases, a photograph. “It has a massive impact on people who are coming to look up loved ones, neighbors, family, friends,” Foster says. “When they see that photo, it’s a very powerful moment for them. They are very thankful.”

Created by veteran artists Rick Steinbock, Ned Broderick, Joe Fornelli and Mike Helbing, “Above and Beyond” was dedicated May 26, 2001. Every dog tag was stamped by hand using an old military Graphotype machine.

Just like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, the exhibit adds names each year as verified by DoD. “We create new dog tags with the original machine we used because we wanted to respect the integrity and vision of the artist, but also respect the dignity of the fallen,” Foster says.

The hope is that every visitor will gain a deeper understanding of the Vietnam War’s effect on the nation. “Ultimately I think that our mission is to demonstrate and show the impact of combat through art,” Foster says. “This is 58,000 dog tags. How can you really not understand the impact that had on our nation during that time? It’s a place to honor, respect, reflect and learn.”

– Henry Howard

View the “Above and Beyond” photo gallery online:
www.legion.org/honor/photos
RAPID FIRE

FLAG ADVOCACY

Hoosier Legionnaire finds historic 39-star U.S. flag

An Indiana Legionnaire is now in possession of one of the most mysterious U.S. flags, found at a rummage sale.

In February, Paul Norton and his wife, Jennifer, were visiting friends at a military retirement community in Englewood Beach, Fla., when they decided to visit the homeowner association’s community sale at a nearby church. On a table near the back, Norton spotted a U.S. flag in a plastic bag for sale for $15. When he took it out to look at it, he realized the flag had 39 stars.

An Air Force and Air National Guard veteran, Norton currently serves as vice commander at Fort Benjamin Harrison Post 510 in Indianapolis. Flag history and etiquette are two of his passions; Norton teaches flag etiquette in local low-income schools, and last winter he purchased several copies of the Legion’s “Indivisible: The Story of Our Flag” bookazine to distribute.

After doing a quick web search on his smartphone and seeing that 39-star flags are so rare they can sell for up to $489,000, Norton snapped it up before showing his phone to the cashier. Given the community’s size, there is “no way to know who donated it for sure,” he says. One sale worker told him it may have been stored in the drawer of an elderly woman. Many sale items come from younger relatives cleaning out the houses of loved ones who pass away.

Determining the flag’s age will be a challenge. Norton says he plans to take it to an expert appraiser. One possibility is that it dates to 1875-1876, when Colorado was admitted as a state and many expected Utah to join – leading to advance printings of 39 stars to reflect both, only for Utah to be denied. It may also date to 1889, when many expected the Dakota Territory to be admitted as one state – again leading to advance printings of 39 stars, only for the territory to be split into North Dakota and South Dakota.

Whatever its origin, Norton’s 39-star U.S. flag is a reminder of the nation’s rapid growth in the 19th century.

– Laura Edwards

CENTENNIAL

Post 42, Grand Canyon, Ariz.

On May 30, 1928, officials dedicated Pioneer Cemetery at Grand Canyon Village, and the National Park Service and members of John Ivens Post 42 were assigned as co-caretakers, responsible for upkeep and maintenance.

That year, the post created a rustic gate at the cemetery entrance. On Nov. 11, 1948, it erected a monument to three Grand Canyon residents who died in World War I and five who died in World War II. Present were, from left, Department Commander Lawrence Carr, Post 42 Commander Jack Verkamp, Arizona National Executive Committeeman Ray Prochnou and District 7 Commander Jeff Ferris.

Share your post’s legacy
Upload stories, photos and videos of your post’s history on the Legion’s Centennial Celebration website.
www.legion.org/centennial

BY THE NUMBERS

250 Tickets to a Montgomery Biscuits-Mississippi Braves baseball game given to Vietnam War veterans who receive treatment at the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System, courtesy of the Legion’s Department of Alabama and Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW)

$50,567 Amount raised by American Legion Post 64 in Indianapolis at its annual OCW fundraiser, surpassing last year’s total by nearly $20,000

$8,000 Total OCW donation to the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System from the Department of Nevada and Reno Post 1, including clothing, toiletries, DVD players, portable ping-pong tables, dartboards, wheelchair gloves, art supplies and more
Secret heroes

“Nearly 20 percent of the military’s most treasured medals have been awarded for classified missions since the Sept. 11 terror attacks,” USA Today reports. These include the Distinguished Service Cross and the Silver Star. The high percentage of classified medals “reflects the reliance on Special Operations forces” in the post-9/11 campaigns.

According to the USA Today review of military records, 216 of the 1,090 Distinguished Service Crosses and Silver Stars awarded since 9/11 were awarded in secret “for missions that cannot be publicly discussed.”
- One Distinguished Service Cross and three Navy Crosses have been awarded for heroism during classified operations.
- The Navy has awarded 112 Silver Stars.
- The Army has awarded 100 Silver Stars.

Hidden radar

The Army is developing a new secure “waveform” that will allow military transmissions “to become entirely anonymous to radar detectors,” London's Daily Mail reports. “The encrypted system allows radar transmissions to look like noise, making it difficult to intercept and exploit.”

Dubbed “Advanced Pulse Compression Noise,” this new encrypted radar system is being designed by the Army Materiel Command’s Communications-Electronics Research, Development and Engineering Center.

But what’s good news for our soldiers is bad news for speeding drivers: the new encrypted radar system could be used by police to allow them to cloak their radars from detection.

Fighter pilot shortage

The Air Force is an estimated 500 fighter pilots short of its current needs, Defense News reports. The deficit is expected to grow to more than 800 by 2022, according to the report, which cites Air Force testimony submitted to the Senate.

The shortfall is largely a function of sequestration-related budget reductions. Since 2012, the Air Force has slashed its fighter force by 100 aircraft.

“There are currently 54 squadrons in the Air Force, significantly less than the 134 fighter squadrons that existed during the Gulf War in the early 1990s,” Defense News explains. “The remaining active-component fighter squadrons do not produce enough experienced fighter pilots to meet all the Air Force’s requirements.”
RAPID FIRE

The first week of June, tens of thousands of visitors pour into Normandy, France, to gaze across the storied beaches and battlefields of the 1944 Allied Invasion that led to victory in Europe during World War II. A few dozen veterans of the invasion also return each year, to pay respects and share memories. Occasionally mingling among them are two women with a unique appreciation of the Normandy experience: granddaughters of Gens. Dwight D. Eisenhower and George S. Patton.

In 2015, Susan Eisenhower, granddaughter of the Supreme Allied Commander of the European campaign, and Helen Patton, granddaughter of the U.S. 3rd Army commanding general from Normandy to Germany in 1944 and 1945, were recognized by Amis des Vétérans Américains (AVA) and Ste. Mère-Église, the first French town liberated after D-Day.

For Eisenhower, those who fought for her grandfather always provide inspiration. “What’s remarkable about Normandy is it’s an opportunity to really study how leadership emerges as people try to resolve tenuous situations they are in,” she said as planes dropped parachutists at a re-enactment in a field nearby. “This happens at all echelons during war. I think many people don’t think they have leadership capability, but I would argue they won’t know until they are tested.”

For Patton, commemoration and creativity go hand in hand; for the 70th anniversary of the invasion, she organized two concerts on the Normandy beaches with music of multiple eras. The Patton Alliance, which includes her family’s foundation, also makes available Patton Houses, including one in Normandy, as venues for study, rest and reflection about the war and its effects. “I’m looking for creative ways of allowing us to remember – fun ways where we are physically engaged and immersed,” she said.

“We are, in a way, practicing the feminine invasion now,” Patton said in Ste. Mère-Église. “Nobody really compares us to our grandfathers, but they see resemblances. They see a certain streak, or a twinkle in the eye, or a grimace.”

“I think about him all the time,” Eisenhower said of her grandfather, the 34th U.S. president of the United States. “He was a towering figure in my youth.” As for her understanding of the invasion, “I had the opportunity to hear it straight from him. So that was pretty special.”

– Jeff Stoffer

Colmery Memorial Park honors GI Bill architect

American Legion Past National Commander Harry Colmery assembled into one proposition what has been described as the most important social legislation of the 20th century: the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill.

On June 22, his contributions to American society will be immortalized with the dedication of Harry Colmery Memorial Park in Topeka, Kan., where he lived, worked and served veterans for most of his life. The setting, one block from the Kansas State Capitol building, includes a statue of Colmery, a World War I veteran who served as American Legion national commander from 1936 to 1937, along with one bronze panel that depicts U.S. military personnel in World War II uniforms. Another bronze panel shows the same World War II servicemen as they transition to civilian lives with help from the GI Bill. On the back of each panel is an inscription, one describing the GI Bill and its legacy and another telling Colmery’s story as a veteran, Legionnaire and community servant. Six benches are positioned in the area, which is designed to serve as a venue for ceremonies.

The GI Bill is credited for lifting the United States out of the Great Depression, preventing economic catastrophe upon the return of troops from World War II, democratizing higher education, improving health-care services and benefits for disabled veterans, and launching thousands of small businesses across the country.

The American Legion’s Department of Kansas worked with volunteers and the Colmery family to raise funds, design and construct the memorial park. It occupies much of the 900 block of South Kansas Avenue in Topeka.
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Legionnaires take message of hope to top of Everest

Six Ohio American Legion members who have known the depths of post-traumatic stress disorder and the threat of suicide are sending a message in the opposite direction, to the highest point on the planet: Mount Everest.

“You can go, as a veteran who struggles with mental health issues, from lying in a bed with a gun in your mouth to taking on the biggest challenges that come your way,” says former Navy corpsman Mike Fairman of Columbus, an Afghanistan war veteran who tried to take his own life three years ago.

Today, Fairman has a tattoo of four figures: 22 for the number of U.S. veterans who commit suicide daily, 60-80 for the minutes that pass between each self-inflicted death, 8,000 for the annual tally of such tragedies, “and the minus-1 is for me,” he explains, studying the ink on his forearm.

Fairman and other post-9/11 veterans have built a growing network called Summit for Soldiers, with sponsorship help this year from The American Legion Department of Ohio. The group’s purpose is to encourage healthy outdoor activity and provide veteran-to-veteran support for those who suffer and those who may be at risk. Activities have included winter treks through national parks, bicycle rides, hikes, fishing trips and other experiences in central Ohio and across the country. The group has conducted about 30 major outdoor adventures at such places as Yellowstone National Park and Alaska’s Mount Denali, along with dozens of smaller outings, since 2009.

Five Summit for Soldiers Legionnaires who describe themselves as “re-abled” planned to trek to the 17,565-foot Everest Base Camp in the Himalayas in late May, delivering supplies to Nepalese earthquake victims along the way. Fairman, as part of a separate team, will climb beyond that in advance of the Legion group to reach the 29,029-foot summit, carrying a flag bearing the names of veterans he calls the “silent fallen” – those who took their own lives after wartime service. A member of Post 276 in Columbus, Fairman will make the ascent wearing The American Legion emblem on his parka.

“As Legionnaires, we’re all here to make a difference,” Fairman says. “We care about getting things done.”

Dietrich Stallsworth came to Columbus to start college three years ago after PTSD and TBI, along with a suicide attempt, forced an unexpected early medical retirement from the Army. An outdoorsman who had found PTSD relief as a recreational climber around Fort Campbell, Ky., when he was on active duty, he was drawn to a Summit for Soldiers flyer he saw in an outdoors store. He emailed the address on the flyer and that evening had a three-hour phone conversation with Fairman.

“Up until that point, I didn’t know what I was going to do,” Stallsworth says.

In April, he was packing for the Himalayas, where he and four others – Steve Downey, Andrew Oakes, Rick Amoroso and Anna Pelino – planned to hike to Everest Base Camp and deliver supplies to villagers who have endured a major earthquake and a deadly avalanche in recent years. Fairman’s first attempt to climb Everest was ended by the 2014 ice fall that claimed the lives of 16 Sherpa guides. The 2015 earthquake there suspended his plans for another climb until this year.

The Summit for Soldiers American Legion team is working with local guides and relief groups to determine the most useful supplies for the villagers. The ability to provide support for them is cathartic to the veterans, Stallsworth says.

“We want to fully show that you can reintegrate into society. How you do that is not just how you help people at home but how you help people outside your home. So, the Nepalese are like our neighbors. If we lived in a subdivision, the United States is our house. I can help people in my house every day. How do I show I can be a good neighbor to those outside my home? This is a way to do that.”

“The most dangerous place for a person with PTSD to be is alone,” co-founder Steve Redenbaugh explains. “How important is it? It’s the difference between living and dying.”

– Jeff Stoffer

Follow the group’s trek throughout June at www.legion.org and the Legion’s social media channels.

www.summitforsoldiers.org
Rev Up Your Style... with a ’50s American Classic

Back in the ’50s, no car combined good looks with a great ride like the “Hot One”, the Chevy Bel Air. The full size Bel Air models of 1955, 1956, and 1957 were considered among Chevrolet’s finest and are still coveted by collectors today. Now, you can cruise in style once more when you gear up in our “Chevy Bel Air®” Twill Jacket. This new apparel exclusive is crafted of 100% cotton twill in a sharp two-toned navy blue and black design, with chrome-color piping across the front, back and down the sleeves. Custom art on the back showcases the classic ’55, ’56 and ’57 Bel Air along with a vintage speedometer, while the front sports an embroidered ’50s Chevrolet logo. The jacket also features a full fabric lining in red, rib knit trim in black on the cuffs and bottom, two front pockets, an inside slip pocket and full zip closure. Imported.

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*Plus $17.99 shipping and service. Please allow 2 weeks after the first payment for shipment. All sales are subject to product availability and order acceptance.
HUMBLE HERO

Senior Chief Edward Byers Jr. of the Navy’s Special Warfare Development Group – commonly known as SEAL Team Six – received the Medal of Honor in a White House ceremony on Feb. 29.

Byers is the sixth SEAL to receive the award and the third since 9/11. He joins Lt. Michael Murphy, awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for events recounted in the book and movie “Lone Survivor,” and Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Monsoor, who also received his award posthumously for throwing himself on a grenade in Ramadi, Iraq.

Byers, 36, of Toledo, Ohio, was honored for actions taken during the rescue of Dilip Joseph, a Colorado doctor who was abducted in Afghanistan while working with a nonprofit outside Kabul. Joseph wrote a book about his experience, “Kidnapped by the Taliban.”

On the evening of Dec. 8, 2012, Byers and a hostage rescue team assaulted the compound where Joseph was held. As they approached, an enemy sentry alerted his fellow captors. The lead assaulter attempted to neutralize him as Byers and his team sprinted to the door.

As the primary breacher, Byers stood in the doorway fully exposed to enemy fire while ripping down six layers of heavy blankets fastened to the inside ceiling and walls to clear a path for the rescue force. The first assaulter, Petty Officer 1st Class Nicolas Checque, pushed his way through and was grievously wounded by enemy small-arms fire. Byers, completely aware of the imminent threat, fearlessly rushed into the room and engaged an enemy guard. He then tackled another adult male who had darted toward a corner. During a hand-to-hand struggle, Byers confirmed the man was not the hostage and engaged him.

As other rescue team members called out to the hostage, Byers heard a voice respond in English and raced toward it. He jumped atop the hostage and shielded him from the high volume of fire within the small room. Meanwhile, Byers immobilized another guard with his bare hands and restrained the guard until a teammate could eliminate him.

During a 40-minute helicopter ride back to Bagram Airfield, Byers performed CPR to try to save Checque’s life, but he passed away from his injuries.

“If it wasn’t for that team, I wouldn’t be standing here today,” Byers said. “Specifically for me, my teammate, brother, friend, Nic Checque, the award is truly his. He was an American hero. He died to bring back another American. I believe our nation owes him a debt of gratitude. He lived his life as a warrior, and he carried out the toughest missions selflessly and fearlessly. He made the ultimate sacrifice that day.”

– Mark Seavey

VERBATIM

Ed is defined by a deep sense of humility ... He’s the consummate quiet professional. Today’s ceremony is truly unique – a rare opportunity for the American people to get a glimpse of a special breed of warrior that so often serves in the shadows.

President Obama, on Medal of Honor recipient Edward Byers Jr.
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Unlike questionable testosterone “boosters”, Enrichment™ is a ground-breaking formula that actually disrupts the binding process to RELEASE greater levels of crucial FREE and ACTIVE testosterone.

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* This statement has not been evaluated by the FDA. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. Individual results may vary. Jan 2016.
Plan now to avoid chaos in time of loss

One of the biggest privileges I’ve had since I’ve been at USAA was working hand in hand with our Survivor Relations Team (SRT), which acts as a single point of contact for members who have lost loved ones. Our team members help transfer accounts, update policies and, when appropriate, set up consultations with an adviser or planner.

That’s where I entered the picture. I’ve had thousands of conversations with our members over the years, but few have been as meaningful and difficult as those with spouses or children who had recently suffered a tremendous loss. This month, when deciding to highlight SRT’s efforts, I reflected on my experience and the lessons I learned.

Here are four recurring themes that stood out to me during my time with SRT. They may help you as you chart the road ahead or face a significant loss.

- **Take a strategic pause.** Many of the survivors to whom I spoke were, understandably, going through the motions. They may have sounded OK, but they probably weren’t ready to make well-thought-out financial decisions. In fact, I remember several times when a few weeks after my initial conversation with a survivor, he or she could not recall a point we had discussed in detail. If you or someone you love is dealing with a recent loss, avoid making big decisions until you’ve had time to adjust to what’s happened and begin coping.

- **Delaying decisions can create discord.** Over the years, I have worked with many families who intended to complete their estate planning but didn’t take the time. Wills, powers of attorney, beneficiary updates and letters of instruction provide guidance and can help avoid chaos. Taking care of them now may help prevent confusion, headaches and potential infighting later.

- **The little stuff is big.** Recently, my wife and I talked with our kids about who would inherit a vase we bought in Italy several years ago. Ultimately, we decided to hold some sort of drawing to prevent arguments. Too often when talking with survivors, I’ve heard about conflict and heartache over items that could have been avoided with a little direction.

- **Make money a team game.** Every couple divides responsibilities differently, and that’s not necessarily bad. During many of my SRT counseling sessions, it was clear that the deceased spouse was the family’s chief financial officer. If that’s how it is in your family, make sure the other partner has at least a basic understanding of your financial situation so that he or she isn’t left clueless.

I’m lucky to be part of an organization whose concern for its members includes the SRT team. Based on my experience working with them, I didn’t want to miss out on the chance to encourage you to prepare your own plan.

J.J. Montanaro is a certified financial planner with USAA, The American Legion’s preferred provider of financial services. Submit questions for him online.

**www.legion.org/usaa/focusonfinances**

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**VA GI Bill Feedback System**

**Q:** I am currently attending school using the Post-9/11 GI Bill. When I was recruited to attend the school, they promised me equipment that I have not received. As a result, I am failing my class. I have already spoken to the president of the college. What is my next step?

**A:** VA has a website called the VA GI Bill Feedback System. This will allow you to file a complaint if your school is failing to follow the tenets of the Principles of Excellence program. VA will review the following types of complaints: recruiting/marketing practices, quality of education, accreditation, grade polity, financial issues (e.g. tuition and fee charges), release of transcripts, student loans, transfer of credits, post-graduation job opportunities, refund issues, and change in degree plan/requirements, among others. The website for the compliance system is [www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/feedback.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/feedback.asp).

Valerie Heffner is a Marine Corps veteran and member of American Legion Post 27 in Arizona. [askvalerie@legion.org](mailto:askvalerie@legion.org)

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**VERBATIM**

We were just making his wish come true.

**Marine 1st Lt. Ernesto Gaudio** of the 7th Engineer Support Battalion at Camp Pendleton, Calif., which gave 12-year-old Nathan Aldaco his own combat uniform and a tour of an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) compound March 24. Aldaco has a rare congenital heart defect, and when contacted by the Make-a-Wish Foundation, his family said he wanted to become a Marine.

[U.S. Marine Corps photo](http://example.com)
We've all had nights when we just can't lie down in bed and sleep, whether it's from heartburn, cardiac problems, hip or back aches – it could be a variety of reasons. Those are the nights we'd give anything for a comfortable chair to sleep in, one that reclines to exactly the right degree, raises feet and legs to precisely the desired level, supports the head and shoulders properly, operates easily even in the dead of night, and sends a hopeful sleeper right off to dreamland.

Our Perfect Sleep Chair® is just the chair to do it all. It's a chair, true – the finest of lift chairs – but this chair is so much more! It's designed to provide total comfort and relaxation not found in other chairs. It can't be beat for comfortable, long-term sitting, TV viewing, relaxed reclining and – yes! – peaceful sleep. Our chair's recline technology allows you to pause the chair in an infinite number of positions, including the Trendelenburg position and the zero gravity position where your body experiences a minimum of internal and external stresses. You'll love the other benefits, too: It helps with correct spinal alignment, promotes back pressure relief, and encourages better posture to prevent back and muscle pain.

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H.C. ‘Ted’ Kelley, national chaplain, passes away

American Legion National Chaplain Rev. Dr. H.C. “Ted” Kelley passed away April 10. Kelley was appointed national chaplain of The American Legion on Sept. 3, 2015, during the 97th National Convention in Baltimore.

A Legionnaire for 55 years, Kelley also served as the Department of Pennsylvania’s chaplain and a member of the Department Religious Emphasis Committee. During the Vietnam War, Kelley was a Navy chaplain with the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean Sea and a regimental chaplain at Great Lakes Naval Training Center.

Kelley is survived by his wife, Linda, two sons and five grandchildren.

“As a Navy chaplain during the Vietnam War, Chaplain Kelley dedicated himself to delivering the message of God and country around the world,” National Commander Dale Barnett said. “He continued a life of service as a minister in his community and as the national chaplain of The American Legion. The Legion has lost a true friend.”

Past National Commander Ron Conley, a fellow Pennsylvania Legionnaire, said that Kelley “always had a smile on his face and always tried to bring joy to people. When he spoke at our Legion meetings ... he wanted people to feel good about themselves.”

A military service for Kelley was conducted April 15 at Fort Indiantown Gap in Annville, Pa.

Cards can be sent to Linda Kelley, 72 Fairway Drive, Camp Hill, PA 17011. In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be given to Camp Hill Presbyterian Church of Camp Hill, Market Square Presbyterian Church of Harrisburg, Pa., or The Legion.

Past National Chaplain Tierian “Randy” Cash will fulfill Kelley’s duties during the 98th National Convention in Cincinnati.

McCreery, others to perform at Legion World Series

Three nationally recognized music artists will kick off the 90th American Legion World Series in Shelby, N.C., in August. Scotty McCreery, who won the 10th season of “American Idol” in 2011, will perform at the Celebration of Champions on Aug. 10 at Keeter Stadium. The concert will follow the Parade of Champions, which honors all eight regional winners (players and coaches) before the World Series begins the next day.

McCreery, a Garner, N.C., native, is the youngest male singer to win the hit TV singing competition; his debut album, “Clear as Day,” went platinum in just 13 weeks. In 2013, he was named Breakthrough Artist of the Year at the American Country Awards.

Shelby native Caroline Allen will open for McCreery. Tickets are $25 and go on sale June 1; they can be purchased online at www.americanlegionworldseries.com. Tickets will also be sold at Keeter Stadium the day of the concert.

Singer, songwriter and guitarist Uncle Kracker will headline the fourth annual 7th Inning Stretch Festival on Aug. 6 in Shelby. He will take the main stage at 8:30 p.m., following performances by several local musicians.

The Oak Ridge Boys will perform at the National Commander’s Reception Aug. 9, an invitation-only event. The group, which received The American Legion’s Patriot Award, has helped raise awareness of the mental health needs of returning veterans and assistance the Legion provides. A televised Christmas special featuring The Oak Ridge Boys and the Legion aired nationally in 2014 and 2015.

Tickets for the 90th American Legion World Series, Aug. 11-16, are on sale now.

7thinningstretch.cc
www.americanlegionworldseries.com
Letters and the job search

Most job seekers use multiple types of letters during their search campaigns. Here’s an outline of your best options:

- **Traditional cover letters** are written in response to job ads and postings, sent directly to hiring managers or forwarded to HR professionals. They are generally uploaded when applying online or attached to an email as a separate document with your résumé.
- **E-notes** are modern and shorter cover letters used as the actual content of your email messages. E-notes are my No. 1 recommendation for most job seekers when contacting potential employers via email.
- **Recruiter letters** are written as cover letters or e-notes, but often include additional information (e.g., salary requirements, geographic preferences) that you would not typically share at the onset with a prospective employer.
- **Thank-you letters** are a must after every interview to ensure that you stay “front of mind.” Few people actually send these letters, so give yourself a competitive edge.
- **Networking letters** make connections with direct network contacts and referrals, and are generally not written in response to specific job opportunities.
- **Job proposal letters** propose a specific job opportunity with a specific company to meet a specific need. You’d be surprised by the results these letters can generate when you contact the right companies that look for candidates with your qualifications.

Wendy Enelow is co-author of “Modernize Your Résumé: Get Noticed ... Get Hired” and “Expert Résumés for Military-to-Civilian Transitions.”

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**The Diaper Dilemma**

Urinary incontinence affects more than 4 million men in the United States of all ages. Diapers trap moisture, causing UTIs, discomfort and injury rates up to 38%.

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How to submit a reunion

The American Legion Magazine publishes reunion listings for veterans. Send notices to The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Reunions, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206, fax (317) 630-1280, e-mail reunions@legion.org or submit information via our website, www.legion.org/reunions.

Include the branch of service and complete name of the group. No abbreviations, with your request. The listing also should include the reunion dates and city, along with a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Listings are published free of charge.

Your notice will appear on our Web site within a week and will remain available online until the final day of your reunion. Upon submission, please allow six months for the listing to appear in print. Due to the large number of reunions, The American Legion Magazine will publish a group’s listing only once a year.

AIR FORCE / ARMY AIR FORCES

2nd Avn Field Depot Sqdn (1950-1954), Chattanooga, TN, 10/13-15, Ron Butcher, (231) 223-4056, buttch@avangroup.com; 3rd Bde LRRPs, 101st Abn Div (Vietnam), Fort Benning, GA, 9/10-12, Barbara Donny, (972) 803-6134, Barbara.denny@ogletreedekins.com; 3rd Bde Bn 4th Arty, Ft. Drum, NY, 9/14-21, Kenneth Knafel, (260) 244-3864, Jamesknafel@gmail.com; 4th Bomb Div, Fort Benning, GA, 10/5-9, Barbara Donny, (972) 803-6134, Barbara.denny@ogletreedekins.com; 3rd Bde Bn 3rd Arty, Ft. Drum, NY, 9/14-21, Kenneth Knafel, (260) 244-3864, Jamesknafel@gmail.com; 5th Bmp Grp, (Vietnam), Seattle, WA, 7/19-22, Susan labinski@gmail.com; 6th Bmp Grp, Fort Worth, TX, 8/16-21, Joe Vile, (315) 289-8234, tadpolebrg@fmda.us.

NOTICE

In Search Of

A means of getting in touch with people from your unit to plan a reunion. We do not publish listings that seek people for interviews, research purposes, military photos or help in filing a VA claim. Listings must include the name of the unit from which you seek people, the time period and the location, as well as a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Send notices to The American Legion Magazine, Attn: In Search Of, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206, fax (317) 630-1280 or e-mail reunions@legion.org.

The magazine will not publish names of individuals, only the name of the unit. Listings are published free of charge. Life Membership notices are published for Legionnaires who have been awarded life memberships by their posts. This does not include a member’s own Paid-Up-For-Life membership. Notices must be submitted on official forms, which may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Life Memberships, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206. "Comrades in Distress" listings must be approved by the Legion’s Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation division. If you are seeking to verify an injury received during service, contact your Legion department service officer for information on how to publish a notice.

To respond to a "Comrades in Distress" listing, send a letter to The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Comrades in Distress, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206. Include the listing’s CJD numbers in your response. "Taps" notices are published only for Legionnaires who served as department commanders or national officers.

JOINT


MARINES

1st Bn 3rd Mar (All Eras), San Antonio, TX, 8/23-28, Don Bumgamer, (502) 897-2437, dbumg13usmc@verizon.net; 1st Mar Div (All Eras), Huntington Beach, CA, 8/24-27, Eli Whitney, (757) 481-6196, jcdonnelly1@cox.net.

NAVY

Bears DD 654, Rapid City, SD, 10/2-6, Charles McCollin, (225) 698-6585, Caliente AO 53, Boston, MA, 9/8-11, Jeff Sturgis, (207) 782-8232, jsturgis@roadrunner.com; Caloosasatchee AO 98, Mobile, AL, 10/13-16, Mark Zien, (504) 899-2914, mbenitez@aol.com; Chilton APA 38, Mobile, AL, 10/6-11, Bill Seymour, (813) 944-4241, oldmrbill@twcmail.com; Coral Sea CV 43, San Diego, CA, 8/16-21, Doug Mack, (858) 452-0161, mlthilll@aol.com; Diabolo SS 479, South Portland, ME, 9/14-17, Tim Calvert, (410) 592-6696, tmc47@gmail.com; Dover AU 9, Warwick, RI, 9/11-14, Bill Mervine, (302) 796-9094, ggy09e@aol.com; Fox Island SS 55, Aransas Pass, TX, 9/24-27, Don Finet, (813) 637-4325, finetj@usa.net; Francis Marion APA/LPA 249, Myrtle Beach, SC, 10/9-14, Brian Martin, (781) 665-6622, stampmaster@verizon.net; K. MacKenzie DD 836, San Diego, 9/7-11, Stan
Astrology was invented so that economics would seem like a more precise science.

A LITTLE GIRL complained, “Mommy, I’ve got a stomachache.”
“That’s because your stomach is empty,” the mother replied. “You would feel better if you had something in it.”
That afternoon, her father came home, saying he had a severe headache. The girl perked up.
“That’s because your head is empty,” she said. “You’d feel better if you had something in it.”

A MEAN OLD managing partner passed away, but his firm kept receiving calls for him. “I’m sorry, he’s dead” was the standard answer.
The receptionist came to suspect that it was the same person calling over and over again. The next time the call came in, she asked who it was and why he kept calling.
“I used to be one of his junior associates,” the caller said. “I just like to hear you say it.”

HOW IS A UKELELE like a nuclear bomb? By the time you hear it, it’s already too late.

TWO CUSTOMERS sat in a shabby restaurant.
“What can I get you to drink?” the waiter asked.
“A Coke, please,” one customer said.
“Me, too,” the other customer added. “And make sure I get a clean glass.”
A couple of minutes later, the waiter came back with the drinks and asked, “Now which one wanted the clean glass?”

HOW DID the tree feel in the spring? Re-leaved.

ONE FISHERMAN asked another, “Hey, is this a good stream for fish?”
“It must be,” the other answered. “I haven’t been able to coax a single one out of it yet.”

“THE NEW YORK TIMES published a quote calling millennials lazy, narcissistic and obsessed with social media. Meanwhile, millennials have called The New York Times, ‘What’s a New York Times?’” – Conan O’Brien
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

ATTENTION: MILITARY WIVES and WOMEN IN MILITARY
The Use of Talc Body Powder (Baby Powder) Increases the Risk of Ovarian Cancer

- **WebMD.** “The use of talc may increase the risk of ovarian cancer. Talcum powder dusted on the perineum (the area between the vagina and the anus) may reach the ovaries by entering the vagina.”
- **Journal of Cancer Prevention Research.** “Genital powder use has been associated with risk of epithelial ovarian cancer in some...epidemiologic investigations, possibly reflecting the carcinogenic effects of talc particles found in most of these products.”
- **Daily Mail.** “Women who use talcum powder every day to keep fresh are 40 percent more likely to develop ovarian cancer”

If you, a family member, or a loved one has ovarian cancer or died of ovarian cancer and used talcum powder on a regular basis for over five years, you may be entitled to compensation. Please contact the Branch Law Firm, a well-known national law firm that has been in business over 45 years, for a free initial interview and consultation. 1-800-828-4529

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**Action is Required to Receive Compensation. Call Now For Your Free Consultation.**

Retrievable IVC (inferior vena cava) Filters manufactured by C.R. Bard and Cook Medical have been known to be faulty, causing punctured veins, fracture, or migration to other parts of the body. These filters were implanted in the veins of patients who are unable to take blood thinners to prevent blood clots from moving into the lungs. In 2014, the FDA issued a Safety Communication stating that most IVC filters should be removed between after the 29th day but before the 54th day after implantation because of the risks involved. Unfortunately, this warning came too late for many people. The products with the highest incidents are:

- The Bard G2 filter; The Bard G2 Express filter; The Bard Recovery filter
- The Cook Celect filter; The Cook Gunther Tulip filter

If you or a loved one received a C.R. Bard or Cook Medical IVC Filter and have experienced complications as a result of having the filter, please contact us immediately. We will conduct a confidential interview with you regarding your possible case. You may also visit our website at www.branchlawfirm.com. Your case will be handled on a contingency fee basis, which means: No Recovery, No Fee, Guaranteed! 1-800-828-4529

Turner W. Branch, a principal and senior partner of the Branch Law Firm, retired as a 1st Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps in 1968. He served on active duty in Camp Pendleton, California and at the Marine Corps Air Facility (MCAF) in Santa Ana, California. While at Camp Pendleton he served with the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, First Marine Division (FMF) USMC.
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**Adjustable MagicCling Closure!**

No-Slip Traction Tread!

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*EEE Widths* (just $4 more per pair):

8  8.5  9  9.5  10  10.5

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