



JEWISH WAR VETERANS POST #373

ALBERT ARONOWITZ CHAPTER, Tampa, Florida

Commander Larry Jasper
lmjasper@reagan.com • (813) 404-5616

CONNECTIONS

MAY 2020 EDITION

OUR NEXT MEETING

Sunday, May 17th
10:00 am Meeting
via FreeConferenceCall.com

Phone-In (Audio Only) —
(617) 829-6417

To Join Via Videoconference —

1. Download and launch the

FreeConferenceCall.com
desktop application

2. Click Join and enter your name, email address,
and the host's online meeting ID:

stevefalk



UPCOMING IMPORTANT DATES*

Date	Time	Event
Sunday May 10		Mother's Day
Saturday May 16		Armed Forces Day
Sunday May 17	1000***	Post Meeting
Wednesday May 20		Distribute Flags at Cemeteries
Sunday May 24		Virtual Collections
Monday May 25		Memorial Day
		Virtual Collections
Saturday June 6		D Day
Sunday June 7	0900	Department of Florida Convention
Sunday June 14		Flag Day and Army's Birthday
Sunday June 21	1000***	Post Meeting and Father's Day
July and August		NO POST MEETINGS

* Dates and Times are subject to change

** Meeting begins at 1000

*** No Breakfast Provided for the May Meeting due to COVID-19 outbreak.

A full Participant's Guide to joining the phone and/or videoconference will be made available on the Post's website at www.jwvtampa.org.

Please remember to distribute the Memorial Day Collection flyers throughout the community.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Commander's Corner.....	2
VA Modernization Failing.....	8
US Arctic Fighter Buildup.....	10
Pandemic Weakness.....	11
Regain the Advantage.....	13
Alaska Schools Ban Books.....	19



For the latest updates:

Check out all of our websites:

Post 373 — www.jwvtampa.org
Dept of FL — www.jwv-fl.org
JWV National — www.jwv.org



COMMANDER'S CORNER

A caisson team from the Old Guard at Arlington National Cemetery (*Mike Morones/Staff/ Air Force Times*)



This Memorial Day will be different from most. Due to the novel Coronavirus, we will not have parades or barbecues with friends and neighbors or go shopping for the “holiday sales.” We will most likely spend it at home keeping safe.

I feel it is important to share with you a bit more about the real meaning and history behind this day of significance. The historical reason for the holiday signifies much more than just a three-day weekend.

Memorial Day is a solemn day of remembrance for everyone who has died serving in the American armed forces. The holiday, originally known as Decoration Day, started after the Civil War to honor the Union and Confederate dead.

In January 1866, the Ladies’ Memorial Association in Columbus, Georgia, passed a motion agreeing that they would designate a day to throw flowers on the graves of fallen soldiers from the Civil War at the local cemetery.

However, the ladies did not want this to be an isolated event, so Mary Ann Williams, the group’s secretary, wrote a letter and sent it to newspapers all over the United States. It was republished everywhere in the country.

In the letter, the ladies asked people to celebrate the war’s fallen soldiers on April 26 — the day the bulk of Confederate soldiers surrendered in North Carolina in 1865.

On that day, four women of the Ladies Memorial Association in Columbus gathered to decorate the graves of the Confederate soldiers. They also felt moved to honor the Union soldiers buried there, and to note the grief of their families, by decorating their graves as well. The story of their gesture of humanity and reconciliation is held by some writers as the inspiration of the original Memorial Day.

Many Southern women repeated the practice on April 26 in 1866, 1867, and in 1868, Poet Francis Miles Finch lived in Ithaca, New York and had read accounts of the women’s gesture. He was so moved by this account that in 1867 he wrote “The Blue And the Gray,” a poem that says, “They banish our anger forever/ When they laurel the graves of our dead!”

The story was just so strong and so well known that the authorities in the North decided to make it national. However, there were few if any flowers blooming in the North in April. On May 5th, 1866, General John A. Logan (Commander in Chief of the grand Army of the Republic, an organization of and for Union Civil War Veterans founded in Decatur, IL.) issued a proclamation calling for “Decoration Day” to be observed annually nationwide.

In May 1868, the day became a federal holiday with the date set as May 30 so that people could decorate the graves of fallen soldiers with wildflowers.

By 1890 every northern state had officially made Decoration Day a state holiday.

The name Decoration Day remained until unofficially called “Memorial Day” in 1882.

In 1915, following the Second Battle of Ypres (Belgium), Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a physician with the Canadian Expeditionary Force wrote the poem “In Flanders Fields.” Its opening lines refer to the fields of poppies that grew among the soldiers’ graves in nearby Flanders. As the poem became known, the poppy became a symbol of Memorial Day.

The name Memorial Day was made official by federal law in 1967.

On June 28, 1968, Congress passed the Uniform Monday Holiday Act which moved four holidays, including Memorial Day, from its traditional May 30th date to the last Monday in May. The law took effect at the federal level in 1971.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War advocated returning to the original date. In 2002 the VFW stated: “Changing the date merely to create three-day weekends has undermined the very meaning of the day. No doubt, this has contributed a lot to the general public’s nonchalant observance of Memorial Day.”

On December 28, 2000, the National Moment of Remembrance Act became law. One of the primary provisions of the act was to ask Americans to pause and observe a National Moment of Remembrance at 3:00 P.M. local time.

One additional observance is to have the American Flag at half-mast until noon. The proper way to do this is to quickly raise it to the top of the pole and then slowly lower it to half-mast. At noon, it is then raised back to the top for the rest of the day.

This year Memorial Day will be observed on May 27th. I hope it will be more than a weekend of backyard barbecue and shopping (for those areas where stores have re-opened).

Let us never forget the price of our freedom and honor those who gave their all for our freedom. As Veterans, we well know that freedom is not free. **And lastly, let us not forget those who have not been accounted for – the POWs and MIAs.**

Stay safe, and please join the conference call on Sunday, May 17th at 10 am.

A FINAL SALUTE



Editor's Note: A special Thank You goes to Colonel (Retired) Barry Lischinsky, Jewish War Veterans of the USA, National Chief of Staff (2019-2020), for allowing us to reprint this tribute.

On Friday, April 10, 2020, I learned that World War II Army veteran Lillian Aronson had passed. At 102, she was just three months shy of her 103rd birthday. Lillian was born in Salem and at the age of 26 she volunteered for the military and was assigned to the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), later known as Woman's Army Corps (WAC).

Lillian was a pioneer in the WAC, leading the charge for women in the military. Lillian continued to serve 20 years of active federal service in the Army, and achieved the rank of Sergeant First Class prior to her retirement. She then started her next career, serving the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the Department of Unemployment for 30 years before retiring once again. Lillian then served as a career volunteer. She became a state and national icon for the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America, the Disabled American Veterans and the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital in Bedford.

On the morning of Sunday, April 12, family members, guests and veterans attended her private memorial service under the strict guidelines for the prevention of the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The attending funeral representative informed us of the guidelines; "shelter in place" was defined as, stay in your car and do not come out of your vehicle. "Social distancing" was defined as, you can observe the memorial service from your car. The distance from my car to Lillian's burial site was about 36 feet. We were sad to learn that military burial honors are not available to Veterans who pass during this public health crisis.

Upon the completion of Lillian's memorial service, I deliberately waited and was the last car to leave the cemetery. I was able to leave my car, place an American flag and a memorial medallion signifying that Lillian was a member of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America at the head of Lillian's grave site. I recited the Mourner's Kaddish and rendered a final slow-motion hand salute to Sergeant First Class, U.S. Army (Retired) Lillian Aronson.

'THAT CHARISMA:' SON OF MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT BENNIE ADKINS REMEMBERS HERO FATHER



Retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins tells a joke before Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel inducts him into the Hall of Heroes during a ceremony at the Pentagon, Sept. 16, 2014. (Sean Hurt/U.S. Navy)

19 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By Richard Sisk

Medal of Honor recipient Bennie Adkins faced his last battle against an invisible enemy called COVID-19 with the same resilience and determination that had seen him through three tours of combat as a Green Beret in Vietnam, his son said Saturday.

His father had other ailments before he was taken ill with coronavirus, "and the fact that as sick as he was at age 86, [he] lasted three weeks was pretty remarkable," Keith Adkins said in a phone interview with Military.com.

Adkins, a retired Army command sergeant major, had spent all but his final two days intubated in an intensive care unit, said Keith Adkins, a doctor at the East Alabama Medical Center (EAMC) in Opelika, Alabama, where his father died Friday afternoon of complications from coronavirus.

Bennie, as he was known to all, began to feel ill after returning from a visit to family in his native Oklahoma, Keith Adkins said. He checked into EAMC, but his chest X-ray looked good and he was released. Two days later, the symptoms worsened. He re-entered EAMC on March 26, and was alone and isolated from family, as were other patients seriously ill from COVID-19 at the hospital, until the last two days.

Even though he had been on staff at EAMC for more than 20 years, Keith Adkins said he did not visit his father "out of respect to everyone else" suffering from the infection and in isolation. "I tried to honor everyone else" who was in the same circumstances, he said.

In the last two days, he and his older brother, Michael, and younger sister, Mary, were able to visit Bennie and say their farewells, Keith said.

There are no immediate plans for services during the current restrictions on large gatherings.

"We're not sure what's going to happen with all the quarantining and social distancing," he said. "Right now, we're just going to put things on hold."

Adkins said he had already heard from several other Medal of Honor recipients who wanted to share their condolences over the loss of a beloved comrade but declined to disclose their names out of concern for their privacy.

Eventually, when the restrictions lift, Bennie Adkins and Mary Adkins, his late wife of more than 60 years, will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery, Keith said.

Bennie Adkins was awarded the Medal of Honor in 2014 by President Barack Obama, 48 years after his heroic actions in a three-day battle against swarming North Vietnamese regulars in Vietnam's A Shau valley.

OFFICIALS MULL OPENING ARLINGTON CEMETERY TO THE PUBLIC FOR MEMORIAL DAY

6 May 2020 | Military.com | By Richard Sisk

The Defense Department has yet to decide whether the traditional wreath-laying and other ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery will be open to the public for Memorial Day, cemetery officials said Wednesday.

Decisions on the possible lifting of restrictions in place at the cemetery to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus will be “conditions-based” and up to Defense Secretary Mark Esper, a cemetery spokeswoman said.

The cemetery, where more than 390 recipients of the Medal of Honor have their final resting place, has been closed to the public during the pandemic, with the exception of family members who are permitted entry to visit gravesites but must wear face masks.

During the shutdown, soldiers from the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, known as “The Old Guard,” have continued their solemn 24-hour vigil and changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the spokeswoman said.

The traditional planting of U.S. flags at each of the more than 400,000 gravesites by troops from all the services will continue ahead of the May 25 holiday, the spokeswoman said.

On Memorial Day, the president usually presides at Arlington ceremonies, laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown



In this Thursday, March 28, 2019, file photo, a military bugler plays taps during a funeral at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va. (AP Photo/Steve Helber)

Soldier and giving a speech to an audience of thousands in the cemetery’s amphitheater.

Last year, President Donald Trump was on a state visit to Japan, so Vice President Mike Pence filled in for him. Prior to leaving for Japan, Trump and first lady Melania Trump visited Arlington and placed flags at several gravesites.

HERO FATHER *(Continued from page 3)*

He displayed at the White House ceremony the innate sense of humor he used to put others at ease, and sometimes deployed as a shield against disclosing details of battles too painful to remember.

His Green Beret buddies had lobbied for years to have Adkins' Distinguished Service Cross upgraded to the Medal of Honor. Congress ultimately passed a bill to lift the statute of limitations for the award.

"He was at the point where he didn't think it would ever happen. He was proud of his Distinguished Service Cross and what he did while he was in Vietnam, and never really looked back on it," Keith said.

In Appreciation...

"There is nothing stronger than the heart of a volunteer."

— Gen. James H. Doolittle

"No man is entitled to the blessings of freedom unless he be vigilant in its preservation."

— Gen. Douglas MacArthur



find us on
facebook

JWV National:

<https://www.facebook.com/JewishWarVeterans>

State of Florida:

<https://www.facebook.com/floridajwv>

Post 373:

<https://www.facebook.com/jwvtampa>

CORONAVIRUS SURVIVORS MAY BE BARRED FROM JOINING THE US MILITARY

6 May 2020 | Military.com | By Patricia Kime

A diagnosis of the COVID-19 coronavirus may keep prospective recruits out of the U.S. military, according to a memo from U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command making the rounds on Twitter.

U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command issued the missive to recruit processing stations saying a history of COVID-19, confirmed by a laboratory test or a clinician diagnosis, is permanently disqualifying.

And “during the pre-screen process, a reported history of confirmed COVID-19 will be annotated ‘Considered disqualifying,’ “ the memo adds.

Pentagon spokeswoman Jessica Maxwell confirmed the memo’s authenticity but said it has been updated to clarify the guidance. She declined to disclose the update.

But a Department of Defense official with knowledge of the change said hospitalization for COVID-19 will be considered medically disqualifying. Any potential recruit with such a history, however, could apply for a waiver.

The guidance also spells out the process at MEPS for handling new applicants during and after the pandemic. Currently, all entrants to MEPS receive a temperature check and answer a questionnaire about symptoms and any contact with anyone confirmed with the coronavirus.

Applicants who fail screening will be asked to return to MEPS after a minimum of 14 days if they remain symptom-free. If they develop symptoms and are diagnosed, they must wait at least 28 days after diagnoses to report to MEPS.

There, they may be designated as medically disqualified, depending on the severity of their cases.



The Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Glenn M. Walters visits U.S. Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) Honolulu to speak with Marine Corps Recruiters, poolees and poolee applicants, Honolulu, Hawaii, Nov. 4, 2017. *(Hailey D. Clay/Marine Corps)*

While very few viral infections are medically disqualifying for military service, active human immunodeficiency virus cases and an eye condition caused by the herpes simplex virus are disqualifying. Respiratory illnesses such as asthma, a history of pneumonia and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease also preclude people from serving in the U.S. military.

In Appreciation...

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

— John Quincy Adams

“This will remain the land of the free so long as it is the home of the brave.”

— Elmer Davis

“When the will defies fear, when duty throws the gauntlet down to fate, when honor scorns to compromise with death -- that is heroism.”

— Robert Green Ingersoll

**Help support the JWV with a
USAA Visa Credit Card.**



Go to JWV.org or USAA.com to apply.

FOREIGN SHELL COMPANIES TRYING TO INFILTRATE US DEFENSE INDUSTRY, TOP WEAPONS BUYER SAYS

1 May 2020 Military.com | By Richard Sisk

Without naming China, the Pentagon's acquisitions chief warned Thursday of foreign adversaries using shell companies to buy into struggling small defense firms during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We see a lot of shell companies coming in where the beneficial owner ends up being one of our adversaries," Ellen Lord, the undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment, said in a Pentagon teleconference. "I'm particularly concerned about that."

Some of the targeted firms manufacture critical components for the Air Force and Navy, but face financial stress during the COVID-19 crisis that makes them susceptible to unscrupulous foreign investors seeking access to company secrets, Lord said. The major problems with so-called "adversary capital" are in "some of the smaller manufacturers who, maybe from a dollar volume don't do huge numbers, but they are providing critical components across aircraft and naval sort of applications," Lord said.

"That's where my biggest concern is: sort of the weakest link" in the defense industrial base, Lord said.

She said she was working with Congress to strengthen the interagency Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) to give the Defense Department additional tools to block questionable investors.

She said "we have to be very, very careful about the focused effort some of our adversaries [have made to wage] economic warfare with us, which has been going on for some time."

Lord did not name any of the adversaries Thursday. But she has long warned of China's attempts to gain U.S. intellectual



Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment Ellen M. Lord briefs the press about the Defense Department's efforts to fight COVID-19, the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., April 30, 2020. (DoD photo/Lisa Ferdinando)

property.

In a May 2019 news conference, Lord said that China was "increasingly attempting to erase research and developments gains by leveraging and manipulating economic tools, like investment in U.S. companies with technology critical to our national security."

At the teleconference Thursday, Lord said she was counting on major defense contractors to push money faster down the supply chain to aid smaller firms who might be susceptible to foreign capital.

"I encourage all of those companies to be as transparent and forthcoming as they can be, because we have a responsibility to the taxpayer, as well as the mid-tiers and the small companies, to make sure that actions we take at the prime level do go down all the way through the chain," Lord said.

MAY IS JEWISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH



In 2006, President George W. Bush proclaimed May as Jewish American Heritage Month. This was a result of a concerted effort by American Jewish leaders to introduce resolutions in both the U.S. Senate and the House urging the President to proclaim a

month specifically recognizing Jews in America and their contributions to the United States.

One way to celebrate Jewish American Heritage Month is to view our exhibitions and collections at the National Museum of American Jewish Military History For additional information, please go to:

https://www.jwv.org/who_we_are/our-museum/

MORE THAN 2,000 VA EMPLOYEES NOW HAVE COVID-19



A medical worker wearing a single protective glove and a face mask walks past a COVID-19 testing tent set up outside the main entrance to the

Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Monday, March 23, 2020, in New York. (AP Photo/John Minchillo)

29 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By Patricia Kime

The number of confirmed COVID-19 coronavirus cases among Department of Veterans Affairs employees rose to 2,153 as of Tuesday, an 11% increase in less than a week. But the number of deaths remains unchanged, at 20, a bit of good news for employees at the nation's largest health care system.

According to figures released by the department, the cases span 114 VA facilities, but with infections affecting less than 1% of the VA's total workforce, the rate is lower at VA than at several large health care systems, including a 4.4 percent infection rate at University of Washington Medicine and 2.1

percent of the Detroit-based Henry Ford Health System, said VA spokeswoman Christina Noel Tuesday.

"VA's personal protective equipment practices have helped limit Veterans Health Administration COVID-19 employee infection rates," Noel said in a release.

VA locations with 100 or more staff members diagnosed with the coronavirus include Jamaica Plain, Mass., the Bronx and Manhattan, New York, VA medical centers, East Orange, N.J., and New Orleans.

Those locations are among the highest treating veterans with COVID-19. On Tuesday, 7,481 VA patients had been diagnosed since the start of the epidemic and 461 had died. As of Wednesday, 7,925 VA patients had been diagnosed since the cases and 482 deaths had been reported, an increase of more than 400 new cases in a single day. Locations with the most cases include the Bronx, with 471 cases, New Orleans, with 466 cases and New York Harbor Health System, with 560 cases. Locations surpassing more than 200 cases include Washington, D.C., Chicago and Boston.

Last month, the American Federation of Government Employees sued the Department of Veterans Affairs as well as the Bureau of Prisons seeking hazardous duty pay for the agencies' federal workers. They are seeking a hazard pay 25% differential.

LAWMAKERS CRITICIZE VA FOR CHANGING BENEFITS PROCESS AMID PANDEMIC

24 Apr 2020 | Stars and Stripes | By Nikki Wentling

WASHINGTON — A change to the Department of Veterans Affairs claims process set to take effect Friday will cause delays, create confusion and erode veterans' right to competent representation when applying for VA benefits, lawmakers and veterans groups argue.

The VA is ending a decades-old practice of allowing veterans service representatives to review benefits decisions for accuracy before those decisions are finalized and sent to veterans. As outlined in a VA manual, representatives accredited by the VA have 48 hours to review new rating decisions on behalf of their clients. The decisions determine the level of compensation for service-connected injuries and illnesses.

New Hampshire's congressional delegation was the latest group of lawmakers to urge VA Secretary Robert Wilkie to reconsider the change. Sens. Maggie Hassan and Jeanne Shaheen and Reps. Ann Kuster and Chris Pappas, all Democrats, asked Wilkie to postpone the change until there can be more discussion about its effects on veterans.

"We are deeply concerned that the VA is phasing out this quality review mechanism in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19

pandemic," the lawmakers wrote to Wilkie. "Our country is facing an unprecedented emergency, and confusion during this crisis only leads to further frustration."

The Veterans of Foreign Wars was the first to criticize the decision to remove the 48-hour review. The VFW said Paul Lawrence, the VA undersecretary of benefits, announced the change at a meeting with veterans groups in March. They were told it would take effect April 24.

During the 48-hour review period, representatives check for inadvertent errors that could save veterans from having to file appeals or to request VA reviews. VFW representatives find errors in 5% to 7% of claims, said Ryan Gallucci, a director at the VFW's office in Washington.

Over the past two weeks, 13 lawmakers have sent letters to Wilkie and asked him to reconsider. Eight groups wrote to President Donald Trump on April 15, urging him to intervene.

"During these uncertain times, VA should not implement broad policy changes to veterans' claims adjudication," the groups

VA's \$16 BILLION ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS MODERNIZATION PLAN IS FAILING, IG SAYS

28 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By Richard Sisk

A \$16 billion effort to give veterans lifetime electronic health records that meshed with the Pentagon's has been marked by repeated delays and oversight failures that could have put patients at risk, according to reports from the VA Inspector General.

The IG reports released Monday detailed confusion in the overall implementation of the plan and failures to train staff and put in place adequate equipment for the pilot program, such as new laptops.

The first IG report, titled "Deficiencies in Infrastructure Readiness for Deploying VA's New Electronic Health Record [EHR] System," looked at how the Department of Veterans Affairs went about implementing the initial \$10 billion, 10-year contract with Cerner Corp. of Kansas.

The VA now estimates that the contract, awarded in May 2018 by then-Acting VA Secretary Robert Wilkie without competitive bidding, will now cost at least another \$6 billion for management and equipment.

The second report focused on delays and failures in the pilot program, even after it was scaled back from three test sites to one at the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Spokane, Washington.

One of the main findings of the second report was that patient safety at the Spokane facility could have been put at risk due to poor preparation for the planned switchover to the Cerner system in the pilot program. The IG's report found that the VA and the Spokane leadership failed to hire and train adequate staff to handle the transition, and overlooked the impact on how the hospital would continue to function while the inevitable kinks in the system were worked out.

"For example, online prescription refills, the most popular form for refilling prescriptions at the facility, was identified as a capability that would be absent when going live," the IG's report said of the pilot program at the Mann-Grandstaff VAMC. "The OIG determined that the multiple work-arounds needed to address the removal of an online prescription refill process presents a patient safety risk." In addition, the IG found that the VA's expanded program to allow veterans to choose community care -- made policy by the Mission Act of 2018 -- had suffered as the Spokane facility focused on the switchover to EHR.

"The OIG identified that facility leaders addressed recent in-house access to care challenges within primary care, but a significant backlog of 21,155 care in the community consults remained as of January 9, 2020," the report said.



Claims piled up at the VA Regional Office in Winston-Salem, N.C. (VA Office of Inspector General)

VA CRITICISM *(Continued from page 7)*

wrote. "In light of VA's refusal to pay heed to previous requests, we call on you to direct Secretary Wilkie to maintain the 48-hour review policy."

The VA decided to make the change because its online claims system made the 48-hour review process "obsolete," VA Press Secretary Christina Noel said.

In 2013, the department turned all paper claims into digital records and transitioned to an all-online claims process. The agency created the Veterans Benefits Management System, an online database.

"Since all veteran records, documents and other materials are now scanned or transmitted electronically, Veterans Service Organizations and other accredited representatives have access to their clients' records throughout the claims process in real time," Noel said. "This is a marked improvement over the limited, 48-hour review period under the old system."

Veterans groups argued that veterans would prefer representatives take the 48 hours to check for errors "rather than litigate their claims in the lengthy appeals process."

In addition to the VFW, The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America, AMVETS, the Military Officers Association of America and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers wrote to Trump about the issue.

Reps. Mark Takano, D-Calif., and Phil Roe, R-Tenn., leaders of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, wrote to Wilkie on Monday, and seven Democrats on the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee wrote their own letter to the VA secretary last week.

— *Continued on Page 9*

OUTRAGE ON THE HILL

In May 2019, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie identified the transition to EHR as one of his top priorities, noting its potential “to change the way our veterans are treated, but also change the way we do business, to make the delivery of our services more efficient, make it more timely.” In that same month, then-acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan took a beating during a hearing of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee when he projected a possible four-year delay in implementing the transition. “I don’t ever recall being as outraged about an issue than I am about the electronic health record program,” Rep. Kay Granger, R-Texas, told Shanahan. “For 10 years we’ve heard the same assurances” that the electronic health records problem will be solved, Rep. Hal Rogers, R-Kentucky, said. “It’s incredible that we can’t get this fixed.” Veterans were suffering “because of bureaucratic crap,” he added.

Over the years, previous attempts to mesh the EHR systems of the VA and DoD have either failed or been abandoned, most recently in 2013 when then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and then-VA Secretary Eric Shinseki dropped an integration plan after a four-year effort and about \$1 billion spent.

The goal of the new effort to integrate the records was to overcome the track record of failure by the VA and the DoD to meet a congressional mandate to bring their separate medical records systems in line with one another, ensuring a seamless transition for service members to civilian life.

In its overview of the VA’s latest attempt, the IG report noted that “there are tremendous costs and challenges associated with this effort.”

THE MERGER

Under the current plan the VA’s legacy information system -- Veterans Information Systems and Technology Architecture (VistA) -- would be replaced by Cerner’s commercial off-the-shelf solution called “Millennium.” The plan was to have VA’s Millennium mesh with DoD’s electronic health record system -- Military Health System (MHS) GENESIS -- which at its core also consists of Cerner’s Millennium, the IG report said.

The ultimate connection of VA and DoD’s electronic health records “will result in a comprehensive, lifetime health record for service members,” the report said, improving health outcomes by giving providers more complete information.

However, the indefinite hold put on the pilot program in Spokane underlines the huge challenges ahead in implementing the transition as the nation seeks to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, the IG said.

The report found widespread failure in VA’s preparations to start up the new system in Spokane. “The lack of important

upgrades jeopardizes VA’s ability to properly deploy the new electronic health record system and increases risks of delays to the overall schedule,” the report said. “Until modifications are complete, many aspects of the physical infrastructure existing in the telecommunications rooms [such as cabling] and data center do not meet national industry standards or VA’s internal requirements.”

The VA’s response essentially concurred with the findings and recommendations of the IG’s overview and the separate report on the pilot program in Spokane.

In his response, Dr. Richard Stone, executive in charge of the Veterans Health Administration, said that the VA was working to correct the problems with infrastructure and staffing noted by the IG. “I appreciate the concerns regarding mitigation strategies and capabilities of the new electronic health records [EHR] system,” Stone said. He said that as the target date was approaching for the launch of the pilot program in Spokane, “Secretary Wilkie received feedback from clinical and technical staff.”

“He decided to postpone the Go-Live so that the system can provide the greatest functionality at Go-Live and VHA staff are confident in providing care with the new system with the least mitigation strategies,” Stone said.

SAFE TRAVELS —WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT MEDICARE WHEN TRAVELING ABROAD:



In general, Medicare will not pay for health care services or supplies if you travel outside the United States. Please go to the following website to see Medicare Traveling Rules:

<https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/travel?>

US INTENSIFIES ADVANCED FIGHTER BUILDUP NEAR ARCTIC AS 1ST F-35s ARRIVE IN ALASKA

23 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By Oriana Pawlyk

The U.S. Air Force has permanently stationed its first F-35A Joint Strike Fighter aircraft in the Pacific.

The 354th Fighter Wing at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, accepted its first two Lightning II aircraft Tuesday. The aircraft are already gearing up for joint training alongside their stealth fighter cousin, the F-22 Raptor, also stationed in the region, according to a service news release.

“When you station the F-35 at Eielson and you have the F-22 Raptor down at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, working together in the [Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex] with our 18th Aggressor Squadron and ground training assets, you have the perfect training field for the F-35 to develop,” said Col. Benjamin Bishop, commander of the 354th Fighter Wing.

Establishing the F-35s in Alaska has been a yearslong process, but marks the first step “in a journey that will continue at Eielson Air Force Base for decades to come,” Bishop said in the release.

A total of 54 conventional takeoff and landing versions of the F-35 are scheduled to arrive by December 2021. The base also has KC-135 Stratotankers and F-16 Fighting Falcons, which often serve as aggressor air or “red air” training aircraft to simulate air-to-air battles with jet fighter counterparts.

By 2022, Alaska will be home to one of the highest concentrations of fifth-generation aircraft operating in the Pacific theater and near the Arctic circle.

Adding more U.S. jets to the region also presents an opportunity for allied nations to integrate and learn from American pilots, officials have said.

For example, last year, Norway marked the first major exercise for its F-35A variant by participating in the biennial Arctic Challenge exercise in the “high north” -- a term used for the region encompassing the Nordic countries and the Arctic -- alongside U.S. F-16 pilots.

“The U.S. Air Force is a huge reinforcement or potential. We are not enough,” said Svein Efstjed, policy director for the



The first F-35A Lightning II fighter aircraft assigned to the 354th Fighter Wing lands at Eielson Air Force Base, April 21, 2020. (U.S. Air Force photo/Zade Vadnais)

department for security and policy operations at Norway’s Ministry of Defense.

Norwegian officials said they would welcome more interoperability flights with the U.S. to mix and match capabilities, especially when allied militaries could learn more about Russia’s expanding activities in the region, including GPS jamming and how to thwart or manage hostile action.

The Air Force deployed F-35s to the Pacific for the first time in 2017 during a rotation to Kadena Air Base in Okinawa.

What Is This???



This QR Code leads you directly to the online JWV National Membership Application. Open your camera app on your smartphone as if to take a picture of it. Your smartphone will automatically open the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) in the web browser. On the top of the screen you will

see a block that reads, “[Lead.me](#),” so go ahead and simply tap the worded block. Your smartphone will automatically scan the QR Code and take you to the Online JWV Membership Application. You can fill out the Online Membership Application and forward it within minutes to JWV USA. Also consider placing this QR code on the back side of your business card to use to sign up new members to your Post. As an alternative, you can store the URL on your phone, which will also take you to the online application. That URL is: www.jwv.org/online_membership/users/membership.

Thanks to the JWV USA Professional Career Staff for helping make this process easier.

In Appreciation...

“Word to the Nation: Guard zealously your right to serve in the Armed Forces, for without them, there will be no other rights to guard.”

— President John F. Kennedy

“The object of war is not to die for your country but to make the other bastard die for his.”

— Gen. George S. Patton

RUSSIA IS TESTING US MILITARY FOR WEAKNESSES AMID PANDEMIC, GENERAL SAYS

22 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By Gina Harkins

Russia is testing whether the U.S. military has developed any weaknesses during the novel coronavirus crisis, a top general said, noting three run-ins with that country's planes over a two-month period.

"We just want to make it very clear to them ... there are no vulnerabilities as a result of COVID-19," Air Force Gen. Terrence J. O'Shaughnessy, head of U.S. Northern Command, told reporters Tuesday. "We are postured and maintain that ability to respond at a moment's notice."

There is "no degradation in our ability to defend the homeland," O'Shaughnessy added.

Air Force F-22 Raptor fighter jets intercepted two Russian maritime patrol planes earlier this month approximately 50 miles from Alaska's Aleutian Islands. About a month earlier, a pair of Russian reconnaissance aircraft were intercepted by U.S. and Canadian jets 50 miles from the state's coast over the Beaufort Sea.

That was the second time in days Russian aircraft were spotted in the region. A Russian plane also flew within 25 feet of a Navy P-8A Poseidon reconnaissance aircraft last week. The aircraft was flying inverted at high speed, putting the Navy crew at risk, officials said.

O'Shaughnessy said Russia is likely to continue testing the U.S. -- including near the homeland. "That's why we're postured the

Video screengrab shows the April 19 "unsafe intercept" by a Russian fighter jet of a U.S. Navy P-8A Maritime Patrol Aircraft. (U.S. Navy video)



way we are and that's why we're always ready to respond," he said.

The Russian military isn't the only one appearing to test U.S. forces during the global pandemic.

A swarm of Iranian boats harassed U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships in the Persian Gulf last week. China also sent its aircraft carrier into disputed waters in the Pacific as its state media mocked the U.S. military's struggles with the coronavirus, Newsweek reported, as a ship remains docked in Guam with thousands of cases.

North Korea has also fired "more missiles than ever" during the coronavirus crisis, according to Reuters.

O'Shaughnessy also pledged to "defend the homeland with a ballistic capability."

The Veterans Administration (VA) offers Veterans Choice Program

It stipulates that Veterans who have to wait more than 30 days to see a doctor, or who live more than 40 miles from their closest VA site can receive health care from community providers. The provider must be part of the VA's network of community providers. Please go to the following website for further information:

<https://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact/documents/choice-act-summary.pdf>



COWBOY RUSSIAN PILOT BLAMED FOR 25-FOOT INVERTED BUZZ OF US NAVY RECON AIRCRAFT

16 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By Richard Sisk

The 25-foot buzzing of a Navy recon aircraft was more likely the result of the “unprofessional” conduct of the Russian fighter pilot acting on his own rather than a deliberate attempt by Moscow to provoke an incident, Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters said Thursday.

Wolters, who doubles as NATO Supreme Commander and head of U.S. European Command, said he had looked at the camera footage of the incident in international airspace over the Mediterranean Sea on Wednesday.

“My conclusion at this point is that it was probably something more along the lines of unprofessional as opposed to deliberate,” he said. He added that the U.S. Embassy in Moscow had lodged “our dissatisfaction” with the Russian government.

For the moment, however the dangerous flyby has “been characterized as unsafe, unprofessional, and that’s exactly what it looks to be at this point,” Wolters said in a telephone conference from Europe.

In a statement Wednesday, the Navy said the single-seat Russian Sukhoi Su-35 came within 25 feet of a Navy P-8A Poseidon reconnaissance aircraft while at high speed and inverted, causing wake turbulence and putting the U.S. “pilots and crew at risk.”

The Russian fighter, designated “Flanker” by NATO, also shadowed the Poseidon for about 42 minutes before breaking contact, the Navy said in a statement.

“While the Russian aircraft was operating in international airspace, this interaction was irresponsible,” the Navy statement said.

In his comments, Wolters also warned of a growing Russian disinformation campaign aimed at sowing discord among



A Russian Sukhoi SU-35 performs during the Dubai Air Show, United Arab Emirates, Monday, Nov. 13, 2017. (AP Photo/Kamran Jebreili)

NATO allies over the response to the coronavirus pandemic in Europe.

He said the Russians were seeking to “downplay the importance of one nation in NATO providing [personal protective equipment] to another,” and noted he was also concerned about reports that Russian intelligence agents were accompanying relief flights to Italy.

On Wednesday, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also charged that Moscow was trying to take advantage of the coronavirus crisis by “trying to sow division in the alliance and in Europe” and to “undermine our democracies.”

“We are countering these false narratives with facts, and with concrete actions,” Stoltenberg said in a virtual news conference. “We are also working even closer with Allies, and the European Union, to identify, monitor, and expose disinformation, and to respond robustly.”

In Appreciation...

“No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.”

— James Allen

“A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself.”

— Joseph Campbell

“The brave die never, though they sleep in dust: Their courage nerves a thousand living men.”

— Minot J. Savage

“We sleep safely at night because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would harm us.”

— Winston S. Churchill

The May meeting of Post 373, scheduled for Sunday, May 17th at 10:00 am will be held either by phone or videoconference. See page 1 for more details.



US MILITARY IN PACIFIC: OFFICIALS SEEK TO 'REGAIN THE ADVANTAGE' AGAINST CHINA, RUSSIA

29 Apr 2020 | The Honolulu Star-Advertiser | By William Cole

Amid complaints of Pacific neglect, efforts are underway to restore funding for a powerful \$1.9 billion defensive radar in Hawaii, potentially add two types of defensive missile capability in the Aloha State for North Korean threats and create an "Indo-Pacific Deterrence Initiative" modeled on a similar European effort.

A deputy assistant secretary of defense recently discussed the advantages of positioning a souped-up Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, battery in Hawaii. Defense officials previously indicated the state likely would be protected by a new defensive missile co-developed with Japan, the SM-3 Block IIA, as part of an "underlay" shield that still relies primarily on big ground-based interceptors in Alaska and California.

A test validating the capability of the SM-3 IIA to shoot down a simple intercontinental ballistic missile target planned for the spring was canceled due to the coronavirus outbreak but apparently has been rescheduled for the summer. That test is expected to be conducted at the Pacific Missile Range Facility off Kauai and likely will involve the Pearl Harbor-based destroyer USS John Paul Jones shooting the defensive missile.

Meanwhile, U.S. Rep. Mac Thornberry from Texas, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, added to a growing call to improve military capability in the Pacific to check China and Russia by proposing legislation chartering an Indo-Pacific Deterrence Initiative. "Senior officials from both parties, military commanders and international security experts have told us for years that the Indo-Pacific must be this country's priority theater. They are absolutely correct, and it is time to put our money where our mouth is," Thornberry said.

Thornberry's legislation calls for \$6.09 billion to be spent in the Pacific in fiscal 2021 on improvements including an air and missile defense system on Guam and the Homeland Defense Radar-Hawaii. Money for the radar, to be pointed at North Korea and China, was zeroed out in the Pentagon's 2021 budget request as part of a reexamination of land-and space-based sensor needs.

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the radar "represents the solution for the gap in our ability to detect, track, discriminate and defeat ballistic, cruise and hypersonic threats." Discrimination refers to the ability to differentiate rocket parts from warheads. An over-the-horizon radar also was pitched by the Hawaii-based command for Palau for air and surface targets.

Thornberry's bill also would enhance intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; maintain rotational forces and a rotational bomber

presence; invest in increased undersea warfare capability; and develop long-range missile systems and distribute them throughout the Pacific. This comes after Adm. Phil Davidson, head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command at Camp H.M. Smith, submitted a \$20 billion wish list to Congress for added defense improvements through 2026.

"Without a valid and convincing conventional deterrent, China and Russia will be emboldened to act in the region to supplant U.S. interests," said the "Regain the Advantage" report. The cost is 80% of that being spent on the European Deterrence Initiative, according to Indo-Pacific Command.

Randy Schriver, a former assistant secretary of defense for the Indo-Pacific, and Eric Sayers, with the Center for a New American Security, recently said in an opinion piece that when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, the Pentagon "moved swiftly to invest billions in near-term enhancements in Europe." Not so with the stated emphasis on "great power" competition in the Pacific.

The military has invested in needed platforms but shown "fleeting interest" in enabling capabilities that need "urgent investment," the pair wrote in *War on the Rocks*, a national security discussion platform. "Flashy new platforms will be needed, but so will the high-end munitions, runways and port infrastructure, deployable air bases, fuel and munition storage, command and control tools, and other joint capabilities" across the Pacific, they said.

Rob Soofer, deputy assistant secretary of defense for nuclear and missile defense policy, said Tuesday at a Hudson Institute forum that the ICBM intercept test for the SM-3 IIA missile probably will occur over the summer.

The interceptor could be used against enemy missiles "in the mid-late course terminal phase of flight," he said. "In other words, whatever you couldn't intercept" with a ground-based interceptor from Alaska or California, "you might get another shot with the IIA missile." THAAD missiles could provide a final shot.

Hawaii would have a ship-and /or shore-based ability to fire the SM-3 IIA missiles from Pearl Harbor destroyers and the Aegis Ashore Missile Defense Test Complex on Kauai.

Soofer added that extended range THAAD missiles also will be tested against long-range adversary missiles. "That's definitely in the mix," with the defensive missile expected to perform better against enemy missiles that can range Guam and Hawaii, he said.

Jim Miller, a former undersecretary of defense, said at the forum that "if you are looking at a shorter-range missile and a relatively small footprint of coverage, THAAD has a real chance to contribute to that. To me, that's certainly the case for Guam and Hawaii."



A THAAD interceptor is launched from the Reagan Test Site, Kwajalein Atoll in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, during Flight Test THAAD-23, August 30, 2019. (*Missile Defense Agency*)

MONTHS AFTER DEADLY ACCIDENTS, AFSOC RESUMES PARACHUTE, DIVE TRAINING

1 May 2020 | Military.com | By Oriana Pawlyk

After a hiatus of nearly five months, Air Force Special Operations Command has reinstated parachute, dive and mountaineering training for its operators. AFSOC spokeswoman Maj. Amanda Reeves said that as of Friday, all units can now resume the training, halted in the wake of two special tactics airmen deaths in the fall.

“AFSOC has now recertified all of its units to conduct parachute, diving, and mountaineering operations,” Reeves told Military.com in an email. “Due to operational sensitivities surrounding AFSOC’s capabilities and readiness status, we cannot provide an exact number of units affected by the recertification process.”

Reeves said that experts from across the Air Force and U.S. Special Operations Command assessed training operations at each AFSOC unit. Lt. Gen. Jim Slife, the AFSOC commander, then approved each recertification in concert with unit leaders and the AFSOC director of operations.

“Throughout this process, AFSOC maintained our ability to support our host nation, sister-service and cross-[major command] operations,” Reeves said. “Our obligation to our airmen has been to ensure our regulations, training, procedures and equipment are as safe as possible.”

She added, “We are confident resuming operations at our recertified units, knowing that we are mitigating as many risks as possible when conducting these critical mission sets.”

AFSOC ordered the suspension in December to allow officials to inspect associated equipment and review safety procedures. The move followed the deaths of Tech. Sgt. Peter Kraines, a pararescueman with the 24th Special Operations Wing, Hurlburt Field, Florida; and Staff Sgt. Cole Condiff, a Special Tactics combat controller with 23rd Special Tactics Squadron within the 24th Special Operations Wing.



An Airman assigned to the 57th Rescue Squadron begins a freefall jump from a 37th Airlift Squadron C-130J Super Hercules during exercise Ares Shadow, Aug. 11., 2017. (U.S. Air Force/ Airman 1st Class Eli Chevalier)

In October, Kraines died “from injuries sustained in an incident while performing mountain rescue techniques in Boise, Idaho,” officials said at the time. According to the Idaho Press, which cited the local county coroner’s office, Kraines, 33, died from blunt-force trauma sustained after he fell roughly 40 feet in the Black Cliffs area.

Then in November, Condiff fell out of a C-130 Hercules into the Gulf of Mexico during a planned static-line jump during training.

Rescue teams began search efforts immediately, and had canvassed roughly 700 square miles of the Gulf for four days before ending their recovery attempts.

Condiff, 29, was qualified as a static-line jumpmaster, military free-fall jumper, combat scuba diver, air traffic controller and a joint terminal attack controller, according to the command.

Reeves did not provide details on the status of the investigations into their deaths, which officials previously said are being conducted “separately.”

THE VETERANS HEALTH ID CARD FOR MILITARY BASE ACCESS

The Defense Department announced expanded Commissary, Military Service Exchange and MWR access as of January 1, 2020. Veterans who are eligible and want to take advantage of in-person benefits must have a Veterans Health Identification Card (VHID). Veterans must be enrolled in the VA health care system to receive a VHIC. To enroll, you can complete an application for enrollment in VA health care by telephone without the need for a signed paper application. Just call 1-877-222-8387 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. Eastern. You can also apply for VA healthcare benefits online at www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll, or in person at your local VA medical facility. Once your enrollment is verified, you can have your picture taken at your local VA medical center, and VA will mail you a VHIC.

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/68479/veterans-need-vhicfor-in-person-commissary-military-exchange-and-mwr-access/-for-in-person-commissary-military-exchange-andmwr-access/>

MEGADESTROYER ZUMWALT DELIVERED TO THE NAVY AFTER YEARS OF SETBACKS

24 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By Gina Harkins

The Navy has accepted delivery of a next-generation stealth destroyer more than three years after its commissioning, the service announced Friday.

The destroyer Zumwalt has a working combat system and will move onto a new phase of developmental and sea testing, according to a news release from Naval Sea Systems Command. The ship was commissioned in 2016 and broke down a month later while passing through the Panama Canal.

The \$4 billion ship has since faced other delays and cost overruns. Major Problems Persist With JLTV, Zumwalt Destroyer, GAO Finds

Navy officials are calling the delivery a “major milestone” for the Zumwalt, known as DDG 1000. “The combat test team, consisting of ... sailors, Raytheon engineers, and Navy field activity teams, have worked diligently to get USS Zumwalt ready for more complex, multi-mission at-sea testing,” Capt. Kevin Smith, a program manager with the Navy’s Program Executive Office, Ships, said in a statement. “I am excited to begin demonstrating the performance of this incredible ship.”

The Navy cut its original plans to buy more than two dozen of the new ships down to three. The Government Accountability Office last year slammed the Navy for ongoing problems with the 155mm deck guns that were planned for the Zumwalt-class destroyers. In development, the service found the cost for a single round for the guns was about \$800,000, leaving it essentially inoperable.

The Navy in 2018 changed the destroyers’ primary mission from land attack to offensive surface strike. Modifications needed to make that switch cost about \$1 billion, the GAO noted.



The guided-missile destroyer USS Zumwalt (DDG 1000) arrives at its new homeport in San Diego on Dec. 8, 2016. (U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Emiline L. M. Senn)

The Zumwalt is joining the U.S. Pacific Fleet and can officially count toward the Navy’s ship totals. Its shape, structure and antenna arrangements “significantly reduce radar cross section, making the ship less visible” to enemies, according to the release.

“Every day the ship is at sea, the officers and crew learn more about her capability, and can immediately inform the continued development of tactics, techniques, and procedures to not only integrate Zumwalt into the fleet, but to advance the Navy’s understanding of operations with a stealth destroyer,” said Capt. Andrew Carlson, the Zumwalt’s commanding officer.

The second of the Zumwalt-class destroyers, the Michael Monsoor, is homeported in San Diego and is undergoing combat systems activation. The third and final ship of the class, the future Lyndon B. Johnson, is under construction in Maine.

The May meeting of Post 373, scheduled for Sunday, May 17th at 10:00 am will be held either by phone or videoconference. See page 1 for more details.



In Appreciation...

“America without her Soldiers would be like God without His angels.”

— Claudia Pemberton

“War is too important to be left to the generals”

— Georges Clémenceau

What counts is not necessarily the size of the dog in the fight -- it's the size of the fight in the dog.”

— Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower

“For what avail the plough or sail, or land or life, if freedom fail?”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

PRESIDENT TRUMP ORDERS NAVY TO ‘DESTROY’ IRANIAN BOATS THAT HARASS US VESSELS

22 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By Gina Harkins

The commander in chief has issued a stark warning to Iran a week after 11 Iranian boats swarmed U.S. ships operating in the Middle East.

“I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea,” President Donald Trump tweeted Wednesday morning.

The Navy last week released photos and a video showing the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ navy boats making what the service described as repeated “dangerous and harassing approaches” near U.S. ships operating in international waters. The boats swarmed the Navy and Coast Guard ships for an hour.

Navy officials last week said the Iranian fast boats’ aggressive actions “increase the risk of miscalculation and collision.” The boats were traveling at high speeds near the four Navy ships and a pair of Coast Guard cutters.

The Iranian boats came within 10 yards of the Coast Guard’s Island-class cutter Maui and within 50 yards of the expeditionary mobile base Lewis B. Puller, officials said. That was despite repeated radio warnings and blasts from the ships’ horns.

Navy officials warned that its commanding officers “retain the



Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) vessels cross the bows and sterns of U.S. Military ships while operating in international waters of the North Arabian Gulf, April 15, 2020. (U.S. Navy)

inherent right to act in self-defense.”

Tensions remain high between the U.S. and Iran. Until earlier this month, the U.S. Navy had two aircraft carrier strike groups in the region to temper Iranian aggression. One of those strike groups remains.

IRAN’S GUARD SAYS IT LAUNCHED SATELLITE AMID US TENSIONS



In this image taken from video, an Iranian rocket carrying a satellite is launched from an undisclosed site believed to be in Iran’s Semnan province Wednesday, April 22, 2020. Iran’s Revolutionary Guard said Wednesday it put the Islamic Republic’s first military satellite into

orbit, dramatically unveiling what experts described as a secret space program with a surprise launch that came amid wider tensions with the United States. (IRIB via AP)

22 Apr 2020 | The Canadian Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran’s Revolutionary Guard said Wednesday it put the Islamic Republic’s first military satellite into orbit, dramatically unveiling what experts described as a secret space program with a surprise launch that came amid wider tensions with the United States.

There was no immediate independent confirmation of the launch of the satellite, which the Guard called “Noor,” or light. The U.S. State Department and the Pentagon, which contend that such launches advance Iran’s ballistic missile program, did not immediately respond to requests for comment. However, such a launch immediately raised concerns among experts on whether the technology used could help Iran develop intercontinental ballistic missiles.

As the world grapples with the coronavirus pandemic and historically low oil prices, the missile launch may signal a new willingness to take risks by Iran.

On its official website, the Guard said the satellite successfully reached an orbit of 425 kilometers (264 miles) above the Earth’s surface. The Guard called it the first military satellite ever launched by Tehran. The three-stage satellite launch took off from Iran’s Central Desert, the Guard said, without elaborating or saying when exactly the launch

took place.

The launch appeared to have happened at a previously unnamed Guard base near Shahroud, Iran, some 330 kilometers (205 miles) northeast of Tehran. The base is in Semnan province, which hosts the Imam Khomeini Spaceport from which Iran’s civilian space program operates.

The paramilitary force said it used a Ghased, or “Messenger,” satellite carrier to put the device into space, a previously unheard-of system. It described the system as using both liquid and solid fuel.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran’s first satellite by the Revolutionary Guard Corps was successfully launched into orbit,” a state television announcer said. “This honorable launch happened this morning.”

Wednesday marks the 41st anniversary of the founding of the Guard by Iran’s late leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. An image of the rocket that carried the satellite showed it bore a Quranic verse on overcoming adversaries.

The Guard, which operates its own military infrastructure in parallel to Iran’s regular armed forces, is a hard-line force answerable only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It wasn’t immediately clear if Iran’s civilian government knew the launch was coming. President Hassan Rouhani gave nearly a 40-minute speech Wednesday before his Cabinet that included no mention of the launch.

Iran has suffered several failed satellite launches in recent months. The latest came in February, when Iran failed to put its Zafar 1 communications satellite into orbit.

That failure came after two failed launches of the Payam and Doosti satellites last year, as well as a launchpad rocket explosion in August. A separate fire at the Imam Khomeini Space Center in February 2019 also killed three researchers, authorities said at the time.

MAN ACCUSED OF PAWNING KOREAN WAR VET'S BRACELET NOW CHARGED WITH MURDERING HIM



In this Sept. 19, 2016, file photo shows sculptures by Frank Gaylord at the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. (AP Photo)

3 May 2020 | The News & Observer | By Ashad Hajela

Almost a year after a Korean War veteran was found fatally stabbed in his Raleigh home, a man has been charged with his murder.

Benjamin Franklin Merritt was found dead June 13, 2019, after a family member called police to check on him.

A few weeks later, on July 5, police arrested Michael Nicholson, 54, of Maryland, saying he pawned a bracelet that belonged to Merritt, according to search warrant applications released last year. He was charged then of obtaining property by false pretense.

Now he has been charged with Merritt's death, Raleigh Police said Friday. Police did not provide any other details about the investigation. Merritt remains in Wake County Detention Center without bail.

When police found Merritt, he had wounds in his chest, back and neck. There were no signs of forced entry, according to search warrant applications released last year.

Nicholson was the "last person known to be with" Merritt two days before police found Merritt dead, warrant applications say. Police said June 24 that the stabbing "is not believed to have been a random act," according to a news release.

Nicholson was carrying a knife in a backpack when he was arrested, according to the warrant applications. The size and shape of the knife was "consistent with the stab wounds on Merritt's body," according to the medical examiner who performed Merritt's autopsy, warrants said.

Merritt went to school in Mount Olive and served in the Army during the Korea War. He received his bachelor's degree from Saint Augustine's College and a master's degree in counseling from N.C. Central, starting a career in education. He mentored at-risk male youth during his career, according to his obituary.

SOUTH KOREA PROTESTS BORDER GUNFIRE IT SAYS NORTH KOREA STARTED

Army soldiers walk up the stairs of their military guard post in Paju, South Korea, near the border with North Korea, Sunday, May 3, 2020. North and South Korean troops exchanged fire along their tense border on Sunday, the South's military said, blaming North Korean soldiers for targeting a guard post. (AP Photo/Abn Young-joon)



4 May 2020 | The Associated Press | By The Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea said Monday it protested to North Korea over the exchange of gunfire inside their heavily fortified border that it says the North started.

South Korea said several bullets fired from North Korea hit one of its front-line guard posts on Sunday before South Korean troops fired 20 rounds of warning shots in response. It was the first shooting inside the Demilitarized Zone in about 2 ½ years, but there were no known casualties on either side, according to South Korean defense officials.

Defense Ministry spokeswoman Choi Hyun-soo told reporters Monday that South Korea sent a message of strong protest and urged North Korea to explain the shooting and avoid similar incidents. Choi said North Korea hasn't responded to the message.

The 248-kilometer (155-mile)-long Demilitarized Zone bisects the Korean Peninsula and is guarded by mines, barbed wire fences and combat troops on both sides. It was formed as a buffer after the end of the Korean War and officially is jointly overseen by North Korea and the American-led U.N. Command.

The U.N. Command said in a statement Monday that it was investigating if there was a violation of an armistice that ended the Korean War. South Korean military spokesman Kim Joon Rak declined to comment on the U.N. Command investigation.

The gunfire exchange happened two days after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made a public appearance that ended a three-week absence that prompted intense rumors about his health. It also came amid deadlocked U.S. diplomatic efforts to rid North Korea of its nuclear weapons.

South Korea's military said Sunday that a preliminary analysis showed North Korea's firing was probably not a calculated provocation. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also said it was believed that North Korea's firing was not intentional.

Some observers doubt it was accidental and said North Korea could plan more provocation to try to wrest diplomatic concessions.

MARINES' TOP GENERAL OPENS UP ABOUT DECISION TO BAN CONFEDERATE FLAG DISPLAYS

23 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By Gina Harkins

The Marine Corps' top general has issued a rallying cry for leathernecks to unite around symbols that bring them together, rather than those that divide, as he moves to prohibit the Confederate flag on all installations.

Commandant Gen. David Berger issued a letter to Marines on Thursday explaining his reasoning for banning all public displays of Confederate paraphernalia. It is a leader's responsibility, he said, to address anything that threatens unit cohesion head-on.

"I am focused solely on building a uniquely capable warfighting team whose members come from all walks of life and must learn to operate side-by-side," Berger wrote. "This symbol has shown it has the power to inflame feelings of division. "I cannot have that division inside our Corps."

Berger's intent to bar Confederate flags and other items on base was included in a February memo on his top priorities. He told Military.com last month that anything that divides Marines needs attention.

The decision to remove Confederate displays on base is "about focusing on how we can get better, how we can get better as an organization," he added.

Berger's not alone in weighing the issue. Whether Confederate flags, statues and other items should remain has spurred a national debate in recent years, prompting state and local leaders to take down flags, change street names and remove statues from government buildings and property.

The debate ramped up after a self-described white supremacist drove his car into a crowd of protesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, killing a woman in 2017. That followed photos of a gunman who carried out a 2015 attack on a South Carolina church posing in front of a vehicle with Confederate license plates.

Many see the flag as a point of pride in their southern heritage, which Berger acknowledged in his letter.

"I am also mindful of the feelings of pain and rejection of those who inherited the cultural memory and present effects of the scourge of slavery in our country," the commandant wrote. "My intent is not to judge the specific meaning anyone ascribes to that symbol or declare someone's personally held view to be incorrect."

Instead, he said he's focused solely on creating a warfighting team in which members from all walks of lives can operate alongside one another. "I must identify symbols or subcultures that degrade the cohesion that combat demands of us," Berger wrote.



Gen. David Berger, the U.S. Marines commandant, speaks during a press conference in Tokyo, Wednesday, Aug. 21, 2019. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)

The military has struggled in recent years to address racist and extremist beliefs in the ranks, prompting members of Congress to require command climate surveys to start addressing the issue. Lawmakers have also held hearings on the problem, asking experts what more needs to be done to combat it.

Berger on Thursday encouraged every Marine to see things through one another's eyes and to walk in each other's shoes.

"We train, eat, sleep, sweat, succeed, or fail, together," he said. "... Team over self: That is how we must operate to fight and win."

"THE JEWISH VETERAN"

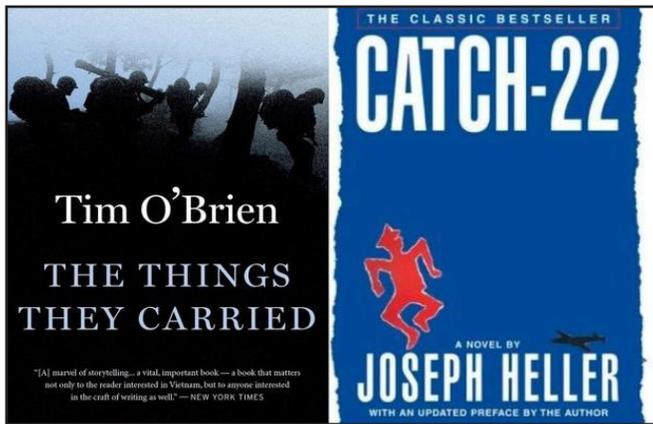
Here is a link for the current issue – it is formatted as a PDF. Please feel free to email the link to a member of

our faith who might be a potential JWV member. Also, ask you Shul/Temple/Synagogue/JCC to post a copy of "The Jewish Veteran" on their bulletin board. It serves as an ideal way to market the JWV USA and what we represent.

<https://www.jwv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/The-Jewish-Veteran-2020-Issue-1.pdf>

CONTENTS	
Cover	1
Message From the National Ladies Auxiliary	12
On The Hill	20
Membership Corner	22

ALASKA SCHOOL DISTRICT VOTES TO BAN 2 ICONIC MILITARY BOOKS



27 Apr 2020 | Military.com | By James Barber

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District school board, headquartered in Palmer, Alaska has banned teachers from assigning Tim O'Brien's Vietnam War classic "The Things They Carried" and Joseph Heller's World War II satire "Catch-22" for their high school English classes.

The books are included on a somewhat random-seeming list of dangerous books that also includes F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" and Ralph Ellison's "The Invisible Man."

The vote was not even close, with the board voting 5-2 to rid the curriculum of the offending literature. The books will remain in the school library, and Mat-Su School Board President Tom Bergey defended the action as "not a full ban," according to local news reports.

The district includes the town of Wasilla, Alaska, home of Sarah Palin, the former Alaska governor and one-time candidate for vice president. The borough covers a land mass approximately the size of Vermont and includes about 110,000 residents, about 15% of the state's population. Alaska's governor, Mike Dunleavy, served as the school board president from 2010 and 2012.

Let us talk about "The Things They Carried." Tim O'Brien's 1990 collection of short stories about troops on the ground in Vietnam is one of the great works of 20th century fiction, a book that perfectly captures the brotherhood and sacrifice of military service and the contradictions introduced when troops are asked to fight without a clear objective. It is those contradictions that make "The Things They Carried" such important reading for high school students. In addition to being a brilliant portrayal of collective enterprise and sacrifice, the book lets young adults know that not every problem has a solution and that most situations are not black-and-white choices.

The book has (thankfully) replaced Stephen Crane's "The Red Badge of Courage" on most reading lists and gives young people a war story that might connect to their own lives. So, what is the problem with "The Things They Carried," according to a description provided by the school district? "Profanity and sexual references."

Yes, please. Let us protect the young men and women we are trying to recruit to military service from reality. Does the book include more than a few MF-bombs? Well, yeah. But, seriously, there are not many 16-year-olds who will be surprised by that word and every single future

veteran (and cop and first responder) will come to know that word like they know their own names.

"Catch-22" is written by a veteran and, admittedly, does not treat the Greatest Generation with the same reverence that Tom Brokaw made a million dollars selling to America back in the 1990s. But Joseph Heller's 1961 book takes the absurdities built into the military's chain of command and inflates them into a satire that's both hilarious and discomfiting. Were WWII troops plagued by more than a few nonsense orders from clueless officers who had been selling cars or teaching chemistry before the war started? Definitely.

"Catch-22" is a great book for teaching kids about satire, social commentary and the basic concept of learning greater respect for an institution through critical evaluation. The book has survived as a classic and spawned both a 1970 movie and a 2019 Hulu TV series. So, what is the problem with "Catch-22," according to the school district? "There are a handful of racial slurs, the characters speak with typical 'military men' misogyny and racist attitudes of the time. There are scenes of violence both hand to hand and with guns, and violence against women."

Who could imagine a military novel should not feature both violence and guns? And, leaving aside the fact that the racism and misogyny in "Catch-22" is used to negatively portray the characters who display those traits, why deny students the opportunity to learn how attitudes have evolved since World War II. Let us be real: The actual issue here is that both books portray authority figures as flawed and often downright wrong. A mature reading of each author teaches the idea that institutions can be respected despite (and even because) of their weaknesses and that loyalty and clear thinking can be their own rewards.

The teachers' union in Alaska feels pretty much the same way, according to local news reports. "This is a blatant effort to curtail critical thinking, stifle discussion, and deprive our students of the opportunity to share, as a class, the experience of studying some of the most classic American literature," Matanuska-Susitna Education Association President Dianne K. Shibe said to the Anchorage Daily News. And since the ban, a Palmer city council member has started publicly reading her way through "The Things They Carried" each day via Facebook live.

Just for reference, the district also removed "The Great Gatsby," "a book taught for generations without incident in even the most conservative backwaters of the United States, for its "language and sexual references."

Still, let us focus on the real outrage here. "The Things They Carried" is a book that teaches respect for military service in general and the sacrifices of Vietnam veterans in particular. Do its stories explore the ambiguities of that era? Absolutely, but it is through those ambiguities that Tim O'Brien truly honors the spirit of the men who fought that war.

Alaska's population has the largest percentage of veterans per capita in the country at about 12%. Let us hope they can rise and educate the educators and get these books returned to the curriculum ASAP.