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1. North Korea Returns Presumed U.S. Remains: “The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is incredibly encouraged by the news that North Korea has returned 55 boxes of remains believed to be U.S. service members who have been missing in action since the Korean War,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. “This is a huge step in the right direction that we hope will finally bring peace to the peninsula and closure to American families who have been waiting more than six decades for their loved ones to return home from their war.” The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency lists 7,691 missing Americans from the Korean War, with some 5,300 believed to be in North Korea. DPAA also lists 111 Cold War losses in the vicinity of the Korean peninsula. The VFW sent a letter to President Trump in advance of the June 12 Singapore summit to urge him to include the return of American remains as a discussion point with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. “The return of our missing is a humanitarian mission that transcends politics,” Lawrence said.

2. Senate Hearing on Blue Water Navy, Korean DMZ & Thailand Vets: Retired VFW National Veterans Service Director Gerald Manar, a Blue Water Navy veteran, testified on behalf of the VFW in support of several important bills being considered at a Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs hearing on Wednesday. The primary focus of the hearing was H.R. 299, which would expand Agent Orange-related benefits to Blue Water Navy veterans who served in the coastal waters of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. The VFW-supported bill would also expand benefits to Korean DMZ veterans who were exposed to harmful toxins in 1967, and children born with spina bifida due to a parent’s exposure during service in Thailand. While H.R. 299 faced strong opposition by VA, committee members expressed overwhelming support and urged the Senate to pass it soon. H.R. 299 has already cleared the House with a unanimous vote of 382-0. Manar also offered the VFW’s support for legislation to expand VA dental care benefits, improve the Transition Assistance Program, increase burial plot allowances for veterans buried in private cemeteries, and a bill to require VA to manage and improve the Mare Island

Naval Cemetery, which has fallen into disrepair since the Mare Island Naval Shipyard was closed. [Read the VFW's testimony](#) or [watch the hearing](#), which begins at the 17:30 mark.

3. Defense Authorization Bill Heads to President's Desk: Yesterday, the Senate passed the *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2019*. The VFW thanks the conferees and the more than 7,000 veterans and supporters who responded to the VFW Action Alert opposing a provision that would have dramatically increased TRICARE fees for current retirees. The final bill does not include the misguided proposal, but does include several provisions to improve the financial viability of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, such as authorizing the home to accept financial gifts, and expanding eligibility to disabled veterans and spouses who are not currently eligible. The bill would postpone the fee increase that was scheduled to be implemented in October 2018, but applies only to those who were residents as of April 9, 2018, and authorizes gradual fee increases over the next three years. The bill would also authorize a 2.6 percent pay increase for America's service members; grant disabled veterans access to commissaries and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation facilities; require DOD to design and produce a medal or award for veterans exposed to radiation (Atomic Veterans); improve reporting, investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases; expand eligibility for Military OneSource to one year after discharge; and require DOD to conduct an assessment on ways to enhance and reform Taiwan's military forces. This important legislation now heads to the president who is expected to sign it.

4. GI Bill Changes Are Coming: Last year, the Forever GI Bill was signed into law, revamping veteran education benefits. Some of the changes that will take place this upcoming semester affect the Dependents Education Assistance program, some Purple Heart recipients, students attending classes and internships that are in different zip codes, among others. Please reach out to your individual schools to find out if any changes will impact your enrollment status. Early action could help mitigate effects on tuition or BAH payments. If you have any issues or need assistance with your education benefits, the VFW is here to help. Contact our 1 Student Veteran program by emailing 1studentveteran@vfw.org. Read the latest [Forever GI Bill updates](#).

5. VFW Looking for Feedback from VA Employees: Last year, Congress passed the *Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017* to make sweeping changes within VA. This important law was intended to ensure VA employees who endanger the lives of veterans are quickly held accountable, and to protect whistleblowers who expose fraud, waste and abuse within VA. The VFW needs your help to better inform Congress and VA about the situation on the ground at VA facilities around the country. Please take the [VFW's VA Accountability and Whistleblower Survey](#).

6. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced five new identifications, and burial dates and locations for three previously identified servicemen. Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Chester E. Seaton**, 20, of Omaha, Neb., accounted for last year, will be buried Aug. 8 in Tacoma, Wash. On Dec. 7, 1941, Seaton was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship sustained multiple torpedo hits and quickly capsized, resulting in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Seaton.

[Read about Seaton](#).

-- **Army Sgt. William A. Larkins**, 20, of Pittsburgh, accounted for last year, will be buried Aug. 10 in nearby Bridgeville, Pa. In late November 1950, Larkins was a member of A Battery, 503rd Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, fighting in the Ch'ongch'on River region of North Korea. On Dec. 1, his battalion began moving under continuous fire toward the town of Sunchon. Larkins was reported as missing in action. It would be later learned he had been captured and died at a POW camp in January 1951. [Read about Larkins.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Terrell J. Fuller**, 20, accounted for this spring, will be buried Aug. 11 in his hometown of Toccoa, Ga. In February 1951, Fuller was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, fighting in an area known as the Central Corridor in South Korea. During a unit withdrawal to Wonju, Fuller was reported missing. [Read about Fuller.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Leslie Shankles**, 34, of Vernon County, Mo., was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 60th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, when he was killed Oct. 14, 1944, by enemy fire in the Raffelsbrand sector of the Hürtgen Forest in Germany. Shankles' name is recorded on the Tablets of the Missing at the Netherlands American Cemetery, along with the others missing from World War II. A rosette will now be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Shankles.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Cpl. Claire E. Goldtrap**, 21, of Hobart, Okla., was assigned to Company A, 2nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Goldtrap died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. His name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, more commonly known as the Punchbowl, in Honolulu, along with others who are missing from World War II. A rosette will now be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Goldtrap.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Robert L. Zehetner**, of Brooksville, Fla., was a member of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Zehetner died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. His name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the Punchbowl, in Honolulu, along with others who are missing from World War II. A rosette will now be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Zehetner.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Merton R. Riser**, of Sanborn, Iowa, was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll. Riser died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. His name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the Punchbowl, in Honolulu, along with the others who are missing from World War II. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Riser.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Capt. Lawrence E. Dickson**, 24, from Bronx, N.Y., was a P-51D Mustang pilot with the 100th Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group, the famed Tuskegee Airmen. On Dec. 23, 1944, while on an aerial reconnaissance mission, his aircraft suffered massive engine failure and was seen crashing near the mountainous border of Italy and Austria. His remains were unrecoverable at the time and he was subsequently declared missing in action. Dickson's name is recorded on the Tablets of the Missing at the Florence American Cemetery in Italy,

along with other MIAs from World War II. A rosette will now be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for. Interment services are pending. [Read about Dickson.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, click here: <http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm>.

As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to yfwac@vfw.org.