



December 21, 2018

This is the last edition of the Action Corps Weekly for 2018. The next edition will be on Jan. 4, 2019.

In This Issue:

- 1. Secretary of Defense Resigns**
- 2. Utah Senator Stops Blue Water Navy Bill**
- 3. Blue Water Navy Bill Press Conference**
- 4. End of 115th Congress Legislative Roundup**
- 5. Secretary of VA Testifies on State of VA**
- 6. Temporary Moratorium on Discharges Issued for the Caregiver Program**
- 7. Survey Shows Increased Trust from Veterans in VA Hospitals**
- 8. DPAA Year in Review**
- 9. MIA Update**

1. Secretary of Defense Resigns: Secretary of Defense James Mattis announced yesterday that he will be stepping down from his position at the end of February. His resignation comes in the wake of an announcement by the administration to completely withdraw U.S. forces from Syria, and to reduce troop numbers in Afghanistan by approximately half. “Secretary Mattis, who received the VFW’s Dwight D. Eisenhower Award in 2015, has ensured America’s military remains the best, that our intelligence resources remain clear-eyed, and that our elected officials hear the unvarnished truth,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. “In his short, two-year hitch at the Pentagon, he’s restored military readiness, built a more lethal force, changed the department’s business practices to get more bang for the buck, strengthened overseas alliances, and took care of our troops and their families. This great American made things happen, and on behalf of the entire VFW family, I salute him for his near five decades of dedicated service to our nation.” [Read the resignation letter.](#)

2. Utah Senator Stops Blue Water Navy Bill: An objection by Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) to passing H.R. 299, the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2018*, by unanimous consent on the Senate floor Wednesday has effectively doomed any chance of the bill being passed in the 115th Congress. Lee now joins Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.), who objected last week due to the bill’s overall cost. Lee’s objection was because he wants to wait and see more sufficient evidence. “We don’t need more sick veterans to prove sufficient evidence,” said VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence. “Agent Orange made Vietnam veterans sick, and science agrees that there isn’t any reason to treat so-called Blue Water Navy veterans any different than their peers who served ashore or on the inland waterways of Vietnam,” he said. “What both senators have done is fail thousands of veterans — many of whom reside in their home states. Their obstruction to this bill’s passage forsakes our nation’s promise to take care of those who were injured or made ill due to their military service. Their objections put cost above faithful and

honorable service.” [Read more](#). The VFW is again calling on all members and advocates to demand that the Senate pass H.R. 299 before the end of the year. [Make your voices heard](#).

3. Blue Water Navy Bill Press Conference: The VFW showed up in force to a Blue Water Navy Bill press conference in the Cannon House Office Building yesterday. House VA Committee Chairman Dr. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.) and incoming Chairman Mark Takano (D-Calif.) hosted the bipartisan event to urge the Senate to pass H.R. 299, The *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act 2018*, which the House passed unanimously 382-0 back in June, has been held up twice in the Senate over the past two weeks by Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) and Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), who either objected to the bill’s cost or wanted to wait for more sufficient evidence. VFW Legislative Director Carlos Fuentes said, “If America can’t afford to take care of her veterans, then America should quit creating us.” [Watch the press conference](#).

4. End of 115th Congress Legislative Roundup: While the Senate failed to pass the VFW-supported *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act*, Congress was able to send several VFW-supported bills to the president before it concluded the 115th Congress. This includes [S. 2248](#), a miniature omnibus package, which improves programs for homelessness veterans, transition assistance, veteran-owned small businesses, student veterans, and also includes the *SIT-REP Act*, which would protect student veterans from penalties due to delayed GI Bill payments. Congress also passed the VFW-supported [S. 3777, Forever GI Bill Housing Payment Fulfillment Act of 2018](#), which will require VA to set up a team to plan and schedule dates for when student veterans who were impacted by GI Bill payment problems will receive their corrected housing payments. The VFW is also glad Congress passed [S. 3661](#), which requires DOD to conduct a program to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of WWII and support programs sponsored by veterans organizations and local governments, and [S. 2679, Veterans Small Business Enhancement Act](#), which enables veteran-owned small businesses to participate in the Federal Surplus Property Donation Program.

All bills that were not passed this year must be re-introduced in the 116th Congress. The VFW applauds efforts of the 115th Congress to improve the quality of life of veterans, service members, and their families and survivors. More than two dozen VFW-supported bills have been enacted into law over the past two years, or are awaiting the president’s signature. Among them are: the [Forever GI Bill](#), which removes the 15-year use-or-lose window for veterans discharged after January 2013, grants full eligibility to all Purple Heart recipients, adds additional months of eligibility for veterans pursuing STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) degrees, and restores benefits to veterans whose schools abruptly closed. The [VA MISSION Act](#) expands caregiver benefits to pre-9/11 veterans, consolidates access to private sector doctors into one simplified and improved program. The VA MISSION Act also improves the VA’s ability to hire and retain high quality health care professionals, and established a process to evaluate and improve VA facilities across the country. The [Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act](#) improves accountability at the VA and protects the rights of whistleblowers. The [Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act](#) ensures veterans receive faster decisions on their claims appeals, easier to understand rating decisions, new claims resolution options at VA Regional Offices, and hiring more staff to oversee claims appeals. The VFW will work to make certain its [2019 Legislative Priority Goals](#) are reflected in bills that are reintroduced and passed in the 116th Congress.

5. Secretary of VA Testifies on State of VA: On Wednesday, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie testified before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs. The VFW thanks Secretary Wilkie for reaffirming that VA will make whole all veterans who were impacted by issues with the implementation of the Forever GI Bill. He also discussed how VA health care has improved in recent years and responded to recent stories regarding Veterans Choice Program spending, mishandling of the caregiver program, and suicide prevention. The hearing focused on implementation of the landmark and VFW-supported *VA MISSION Act of 2018*. Members of the committees and the VFW's written statement expressed concerns with VA's lack of transparency, which can impede its ability to ensure veterans have timely access to the high-quality care they have earned. [Watch the hearing.](#) [Read the VFW's testimony.](#)

6. Temporary Moratorium on Discharges Issued for the Caregiver Program: In response to the high number of veterans being wrongfully discharged from the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers, known as the Caregiver Program, VA has announced it will temporarily halt discharges and decreases in level for current enrollees. Veterans are still able to apply and those wishing to leave the program may continue to do so. [Learn more about the VA Caregiver Program.](#)

7. Survey Shows Increased Trust from Veterans in VA Hospitals: Between fall 2017 and September 2018, VA surveyed more than 1.6 million veterans regarding their trust of VA health care. Eighty-six percent of veterans indicated they trust VA, which is a 2.4 percent increase. Veterans expressed concerns with access to specialty care, lack of parking and long wait times to receive medications. Learn more about the [VA customer experience feedback survey.](#)

8. DPAA Year in Review: This past week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) released its annual report which provides an overview of the past year's accomplishments and missions. In FY18, the agency accounted for 203 formerly missing service members, which is the highest yearly total reached to date, and made substantial progress in identifying remains who were previously accounted for as a part of group burials. Broken down by conflict, 10 were accounted for from the Vietnam War, 37 from the Korean War, and 156 from World War II. [Read the report.](#)

9. MIA Update: This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced 36 new identifications, including 20 from the USS Oklahoma. Returning home with full military honors are:

-- **Air Force Col. Richard A. Kibbey**, was a member of Detachment 5, 38th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron. On Feb. 6, 1967, he, along with three others, were aboard a HH-3E helicopter on a rescue and recovery mission over North Vietnam. After rescuing the pilot of a downed aircraft, Kibbey's helicopter was hit by enemy ground fire resulting in an internal explosion and crash. Kibbey was subsequently reported missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kibbey.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class James L. Boyce** was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, engaged in combat operations against the North Korean People's Army south of Chonui, South Korea. Boyce could not be accounted for and was declared missing in action on July 11, 1950. Interment services are pending. [Read about Boyce.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Frederick E. Coons** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division. On July 29, 1950, Coons was declared missing in action in the vicinity of Geochang, South Gyeongsang Province, South Korea, when he couldn't be accounted for after a unit withdrawal action to set up a roadblock against North Korean Forces. Interment services are pending. [Read about Coons.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. William H. Jones** was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, engaged in attacks against the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces near Pakchon, North Korea. On Nov. 26, 1950, after his unit made a fighting withdrawal, he could not be accounted for and was reported missing in action. Interment services are pending. [Read about Jones.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. George L. Spangenberg** was a member of Company E, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 2, 1950, following a battle in Unsan, North Korea. Spangenberg's name was never included on lists of American soldiers being held as prisoners of war by the Korean People's Army or the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces and no returned American prisoners of war had any information on his status. Based on a lack of information regarding his status, he was declared deceased on Dec. 21, 1953. Interment services are pending. [Read about Spangenberg.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. James P. Shaw** was a member of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, when enemy forces invaded the regiment's positions and forced them to withdraw in North Korea. During the withdrawal, U.S. forces were under constant heavy enemy pressure and were hampered by icy roads and heavy equipment. Shaw was reported missing following an engagement which lasted through the night on Dec. 3, 1950. On June 23, 1951, he was declared deceased. Interment services are pending. [Read about Shaw.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Sgt. Vernon L. Hamilton** a member of the 642nd Bombardment Squadron, 409th Bombardment Group, 9th Bombardment Division, 9th Air Force. On March 23, 1945, he was aboard an A-26B, when the aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and went missing during a combat mission from Couvron, France to Dülmen, Germany. Hamilton, his pilot, 2nd Lt. Lynn W. Hadfield, and the other crewman, Sgt. John Kalausich, had been participating in the interdiction campaign to obstruct German troop movements in preparation for the Allied crossing of the Rhine River. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hamilton.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Lynn W. Hadfield** a member of the 642nd Bombardment Squadron, 409th Bombardment Group, 9th Bombardment Division, 9th Air Force. On March 23, 1945, he was aboard an A-26B, when the aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and went missing during a combat mission from Couvron, France to Dülmen, Germany. Hadfield, and his two crewmen, Sgt. Vernon Hamilton and Sgt. John Kalausich, had been participating in the interdiction campaign to obstruct German troop movements in preparation for the Allied crossing of the Rhine River. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hadfield.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Hulen A. Leinweber** was a member of 40th Fighter Squadron, 35th Fighter Group. On June 10, 1945, the P-51 aircraft he was piloting was reportedly struck by anti-aircraft fire, causing the right wing to break off. Leinweber's aircraft crashed just south of Ilap village, in Infugao Province, Republic of the Philippines. The American Graves Registration Service searched the area south of Ilap village, locating wreckage but recovering no remains. In October 1947, Leinweber's remains were declared non-recoverable. Interment services are pending. [Read about Leinweber.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. James R. Lord** a member of the 66th Fighter Squadron, 57th Fighter Group, 12th Tactical Air Command, 12th Air Force. On Aug. 10, 1944, the P-47D

aircraft he was piloting crashed due to a navigational error a mile off the coast of Anghione, Corsica. No witnesses reported seeing any parachute sightings. Interment services are pending. [Read about Lord.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. William A. Boegli** was a member of Company L, 332nd Infantry Regiment, 81st Infantry Division, invading Angaur Island in the Palau Island chain. After Boegli's regiment successfully captured Red Beach on the northeastern shore, they pushed westward across the island. On Sept. 30, 1944, Boegli was killed while attempting to lead a group of litter bearers to evacuate wounded servicemen. His remains were not recovered following the war. Interment services are pending. [Read about Boegli.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Nicholas J. Gojmerac** was a member of Company Q, 4th Raider Battalion, 1st Marine Raider Regiment, when his unit assaulted a Japanese stronghold at Bairoko Harbor, New Georgia Island, Solomon Islands. He was reported missing in action on July 20, 1943, after he was last seen crawling through heavy fire to provide medical care to an injured Marine while he was mortally wounded himself. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gojmerac.](#)

-- **Navy Reserve Pharmacist's Mate 3rd Class William H. Blancheri** was a member of Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and Sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Blancheri died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Blancheri.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Michael L. Salerno** was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Salerno died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Salerno.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. Fred E. Freet** was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Freet died on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Freet.](#)

-- **USS Oklahoma:** The following personnel were stationed aboard the USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The battleship sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including:

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Wilbur C. Barrett.** Interment services are pending. [Read about Barrett](#)

-- **Navy Storekeeper 2nd Class Gerald L. Clayton.** Interment services are pending. [Read about Clayton.](#)

-- **Navy Storekeeper 1st Class John W. Craig.** Interment services are pending. [Read about Craig.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 3rd Class Warren H. Crim.** Interment services are pending. [Read about Crim.](#)

-- **Navy Musician 2nd Class Francis E. Dick.** Interment services are pending. [Read about Dick.](#)

- Navy Seaman 2nd Class **George T. George**. Interment services are pending. [Read about George.](#)
- Navy Seaman 2nd Class **Charles C. Gomez**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gomez.](#)
- Navy Fireman 1st Class **Claude O. Gowey**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Gowey.](#)
- Navy Seaman 1st Class **Daniel L. Guisinger**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Guisinger.](#)
- Navy Seaman 1st Class **Robert W. Headington**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Headington.](#)
- Navy Seaman 2nd Class **Challis R. James**. Interment services are pending. [Read about James.](#)
- Navy Seaman 1st Class **Wesley V. Jordan**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Jordan.](#)
- Navy Radioman 3rd Class **Howard V. Keffer**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Keffer.](#)
- Navy Seaman 2nd Class **Joe M. Kelley**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Kelly.](#)
- Navy Fireman 1st Class **Elmer D. Nail**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Nail.](#)
- Navy Fireman 1st Class **Frank E. Nicoles**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Nicoles.](#)
- Navy Storekeeper 3rd Class **Eli Olsen**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Olsen.](#)
- Navy Fireman 1st Class **Millard C. Pace**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Pace.](#)
- Navy Electrician's Mate 3rd Class **Merle A. Smith**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Smith.](#)
- Navy Reserve Fireman 1st Class **Lewis F. Tindall**. Interment services are pending. [Read about Tindall.](#)

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.