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**1. Two U.S. Soldiers Killed in Afghanistan:** On Wednesday, a spokesperson for the NATO Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan announced that two American soldiers had been killed supporting combat operations in the country. Since 2001, more than 2,400 U.S. service members have been killed in Afghanistan, and according to the Defense Casualty Analysis System, these most recent losses bring the total number of U.S. deaths in Afghanistan this year to 16. These most recent deaths come just a week after the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation returned to Washington, D.C., following an unproductive round of negotiations with the Taliban, and a little more than a month before the country's next presidential election.

**2. Easier Student Loan Forgiveness for Disabled Veterans:** This week, the president directed the Department of Education to find easier ways to wipe out the federal student loan debt of 100 percent permanently & totally disabled veterans. "The debt of these disabled veterans will be entirely erased. It will be gone. They will sleep well tonight," said President Trump. Veterans who are 100 percent permanently & totally disabled are already eligible to have their federal student loan debt completely erased, but government officials have struggled to get all eligible veterans to take advantage of the program. Earlier this year, Rep. Connor Lamb (D-Pa.) and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.), each sponsored legislation to make loan forgiveness automatic, putting the impetus of clearing the debt on federal agencies instead of veterans. The president's announcement this week is aiming to fix the same issue. The VFW has called for automatic forgiveness of the student loan debt for these disabled veterans for years, and applauds the president and our members of Congress for making this a priority. [Read the Presidential Memorandum.](#)

**3. 2020 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship Application is Open:** The 2020 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship is now accepting applications! The program, which is in its sixth year, is for VFW members who attend an accredited institute of higher learning. Ten student veterans will be selected for the semester-long program that focuses on real policy issues faced by veterans, service members, and their families. The highlight of the program is participation in the VFW Legislative Conference, which in the past has included meetings at the White House and

with senior officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs and Congress. Those selected also spend time with their VFW Department members on Capitol Hill pushing the VFW's legislative priorities. Alumni of the program have become more active in all levels of the VFW and have changed laws to improve care and benefits for veterans. [Learn more and apply for the fellowship.](#)

**4. VA's Smoke-Free Policy Will Include Employees:** In June, VA officially publicized a new smoke-free policy for veterans, visitors, volunteers, contractors, and vendors at all VA health care facilities beginning on Oct. 1, 2019. This Wednesday, VA announced that they were able to work with union officials and will be extending the smoking ban to staff as well, however, not until January 2020. The smoke-free ban includes cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and e-cigarettes. The Veterans Health Administration has a number of programs to help veterans quit smoking. [Learn more.](#)

**5. AFSM Authorized for Southern Border Troops:** Thousands of U.S. service members assisting U.S. Customs and Border Protection along our southern border have now been authorized to receive the Armed Forces Service Medal, which was created in 1996 as a non-combat equivalent to the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal. Eligibility extends to troops operating within 100 nautical miles – roughly 115 miles – from the Mexico border in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, as well as those operating in San Antonio, where the mission headquarters is located, and those at sea within 24 nautical miles of the coast. In the order of precedence, the Armed Forces Service Medal falls below the Korea Defense Service Medal and above the Humanitarian Service Medal.

**6. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identifications of four American servicemen who had been missing and unaccounted for from the Korean War and WWII. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Billy E. Johnson** was a member of 1st Marine Division, attached to the U.S. Army's 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 30, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Johnson.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Phillip C. Mendoza** was a member of Battery D, 15th Anti-Aircraft Artillery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 31st Regimental Combat Team. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when enemy forces attacked his unit near Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Mendoza.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Junior C. Evans** was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 12, 1950, in the vicinity of the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. However, accurate accountability of troops was often difficult due to the chaotic environment and Evans likely went missing during a battle between Nov. 27 and Dec. 6, 1950. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Evans.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Raymond Warren** was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th 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. In November 1943, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed, and more than 2,000 were

wounded during the fighting. Warren died between the first and second day of battle, Nov. 20-21, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Warren.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, visit: <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 [vfwac@vfw.org](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).

To view this week's and previous editions, visit: <http://www.vfw.org/actioncorpsweekly>.