



# ACTION CORPS WEEKLY



August 9, 2021



**VFW Elects New National Commander:** Mathew M. “Fritz” Mihelcic, of Sparta, Illinois, was installed as the VFW’s 113th Commander-in-Chief at the organization’s 122nd national convention in Kansas City, Missouri. Mihelcic served in the U.S. Air Force Air National Guard from 1989 to 1999 with the 131st Tactical Fighter Wing. He earned his VFW eligibility when he was activated for federal service in Desert Shield and Desert Storm as a security policeman. “It matters not what war or conflict you were in, what branch, or where you were deployed. If you served and are eligible we want you to be part of us. Everyone wants to be part of something bigger than themselves. The VFW offers you that,” said Mihelcic during his acceptance speech. He commended the remarkable community service of VFW members during the COVID crisis. “If there are those that can do it in the Dark Ages, during the plague of the modern era, think of what we can all do, working together, in the coming Renaissance. When it comes to taking action in spite of our circumstance, I say “The Time Is Now!” [Watch](#) or [read](#) Mihelcic’s speech.



**Take Action Now on VFW-Supported Toxic Exposure Bills:** In June, the House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs introduced comprehensive legislation on toxic exposure addressing the VFW’s top legislative priority. The House bill is the *Honoring our PACT Act* and the Senate bill is the *COST of War Act*. If you haven’t already done so, we encourage all veterans, family members, friends, and supporters to [Take Action Now](#). Spread the word so that as many people as possible will contact their senators and representatives to support these important pieces of legislation!



**VA Begins Processing New Presumptive Conditions for Toxic Exposures:** VA has announced that starting Aug. 2, 2021, it began processing disability claims for asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis based on presumed particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia and other areas. The Southwest Asia theater of operations refers to Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and the airspace above these locations. Additionally, this includes veterans who served in Southwest Asia beginning Aug. 2, 1990, to the present, or Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Syria or Djibouti beginning Sept. 19, 2001, to the present. These conditions must have manifested within 10 years of a qualifying period of military service. Veterans and survivors should [contact a VFW Service Officer](#) for assistance in applying or reapplying for service-related benefits. [Read more](#) on the new presumptive conditions.



**Major Medical Facility Bill Signed into Law:** President Biden signed into law the *Major Medical Facility Authorization Act of 2021*. This change will authorize VA to carry out specific major medical facilities projects and also increase the amount of money that can be spent on each project. The VFW applauds the passage of this legislation and calls on Congress and the Administration to continue rigorous oversight of VA's infrastructure needs. The VFW has testified numerous times on VA infrastructure and the need for proper attention to aging VA facilities. This new law will be a step in the right direction. [Read more.](#)



**DUMP Opioids Act Becomes Law:** In 2019, almost 70,000 Americans died from drug overdoses. Properly disposing of unneeded and unused opioids is one way to battle the opioid epidemic. President Biden has signed [S. 957, DUMP Opioids Act](#), into law. This law expands on VA's program to dispose of controlled substances introduced in the [Isakson Roe Act of 2020](#). It will make VA's drop boxes accessible to the general public with a community information campaign announcing designated times for disposal in an effort to improve medication safety in homes.



**MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced two burial updates and 11 new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from World War II and Korea:

-- **Army Pvt. Charles Andrews, 25**, of Rochester, New York, was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division. His unit was engaged in battle with German forces near Brandenburg, Germany, in the Hürtgen Forest, when he was declared missing in action on Dec. 4, 1944. Andrews could not be recovered because of the ongoing fighting, and his status was changed to killed in action on Jan. 29, 1945. He will be buried on Aug. 28, 2021, in his hometown. [Read about Andrews.](#)

-- **Navy Fireman 2nd Class William K. Shafer, 20**, of Alhambra, California, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Shafer. He will be buried on Oct. 14, 2021, in Marana, Arizona. [Read about Shafer.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Dale W. Wright, 19**, of Flint, Michigan, was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Wright.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Sgt. Fred Farris, 19**, of Hillsboro, Texas, was a member of Company I, 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, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Farris died on the first day of battle, Nov. 20, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Farris.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Harold W. Hayden, 19**, of Norwood, Ohio, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th 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 an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Hayden died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Hayden.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Royal L. Waltz, 20**, of Cambria, California, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 18th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Waltz died between the first and second day of the battle, Nov. 20-21, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about Waltz.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. William E. Cavender, 20**, of Leslie, Michigan, was a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cavender.](#)

-- **Army Staff Sgt. Gerald R. Helms, 29**, was assigned to Company E, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. In 1944, he was reported missing in action near Katerbosch, Netherlands, during Operation Market Garden after he failed to return from a lone scouting mission. His body was never found by his unit, and there was no evidence he had ever been captured. A presumptive finding of death was issued Oct. 3, 1945. Interment services are pending. [Read about Helms.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Emmet W. Schwartz, 24**, was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division. His unit was part of an effort to capture Obermauch, Germany, near the town of Hürtgen, when he was reported killed in action by an artillery blast on Dec. 27, 1944. His body was unable to be recovered. Interment services are pending. [Read about Schwartz.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Glenn F. White, 19**, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th 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 an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. White died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. [Read about White.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Tech. Sgt. Frank A. Norris, 23**, of Quinlan, Texas, was a pilot assigned to the 345th Bombardment Squadron, 98th Bombardment Group (Heavy), 9th Air Force. On Aug. 1, 1943, the B-24 Liberator aircraft on which Norris was serving crashed as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire during Operation Tidal Wave, north of Bucharest, Romania. His remains were not identified following the war. Interment services are pending. [Read about Norris.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Capt. Nando A. Cavalieri, 24**, was assigned to 324th Bombardment Squadron, 91st Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force in the European Theater. On Feb. 3, 1945, the B-17G Flying Fortress bomber on which he was serving was flying a mission over Berlin when it was struck by enemy anti-aircraft fire. It was one of 21 bombers to be lost during the mission. Interment services are pending. [Read about Cavalieri.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Biacio Casola, 26**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Casola. Interment services are pending. [Read about Casola.](#)

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