The following monthly update for February 2019 is submitted by the Executive Director of the Korean War Veterans Association of the United States of America.

**IMPORTANT EVENTS IN 2019**

- Korean War Veterans Association Mid-Winter Board Meeting
  – March 13, 2019 – Arlington, VA

- Memorial Day at the Korean War Veterans Memorial – May 27, 2019 – Washington, DC

- Start of the War Commemoration – Korean War Veterans Memorial – June 25, 2019 – Washington, DC

- Maryland Honors and Welcomes Home Their Korean War Veterans - July 23, 2019 – Annapolis, MD


- Korean/Cold War Annual Government Briefing – August 1 – 2, 2019 -Arlington, VA
Mini Recruiting and Membership Report

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Recruiting Results - New Members</th>
<th>This Month (February)</th>
<th>This Year To Date</th>
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<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>93</td>
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<table>
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<th>LAST Year (2/22/2018) *</th>
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<td>31</td>
<td>74</td>
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*2018 Average: 40 New Members per Month

Current Count - Active Members

| 11471                            |

| LAST Year (2/22/2018)             | 12267                  |

252 Members reported as deceased this year
1432 Members reported as deceased in 2018
May they rest in peace.

2019 KWVA Revisit Korea Dates

The 2019 Korean War Veterans Association’s annual Revisit Korea dates have been received. The recap:

- 22-28 June               Annual "6/25" Commemoration
- 24-30 July               Armistice Commemoration
- 25 Sep-1 October         Chosin/Changjin Commemoration
- 20-26 October            UN Commemoration Seoul and Busan
- 8-14 November            Seoul and Busan ("Turn toward Busan" Commemoration)

* A change - Length of time between revisits reduced from five years to three.
* Those currently registered will soon get these dates to choose from.
* One veteran and one "companion".
* The widow or descendant of a deceased veteran or MIA eligible.
* All expenses in Korea paid for. 1/2 the veteran and 1/3 of the companion air paid for. (Reimbursed in Korea.)
* A doctors certificate of being able to travel is required.
* Death, disability, evacuation and cancellation insurance required.
* Those not registered should go to our web site miltours.com or KWVA.org, fill out and submit a registration form. We always select "First come first served!"

Note: Registration Forms are also in the current issue of all "Graybeards."

For additional information email Jamie Wiedhahn at: jwiedhahn@miltours.com, phone: 703-590-1295
Welcome to Washington

Korean War Veterans Association Annual Meeting

July 24 – 28, 2019
Sheraton Pentagon City Hotel
900 South Orme Street
Arlington, VA 22204

For Reservations Please call 703-271-6603 (Hanna), Monday through Friday before 3:30PM or Derron Magee, 703-271-6636, Monday through Friday before 6:30PM.

Ask for the Group Rate: KOREAN WAR VETERAN – JULY 2019

- Complimentary shuttle to Reagan National Airport, Pentagon City Metro, and Fashion Centre Mall
- Hotel near the Pentagon, National Air Force Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery
- Room Rate is $119.00 a night plus tax
- Annual Korean War Veterans Membership Meeting and Banquet
- Korean Armistice Day Ceremony at the National Korean War Veterans Memorial
- United States Army Twilight Tattoo and United States Marine Corps Evening Parade
Korean War Veterans Association Annual Meeting
Sheraton Pentagon City Hotel
Arlington, VA 22204
Agenda

**Wednesday, July 24, 2019**
- 9:00AM – 9:00PM  Registration: Hotel Foyer
- 6:00PM – 8:30PM  Twilight Tattoo ~ U.S. Army ~ Fort Myer, VA
- 8:00PM – 10:00PM Hospitality Room Open

**Thursday, July 25, 2019**
- 8:00AM - 5:00PM  Registration/Information Desk Open
- 8:00AM – 12:00PM  KWVA Board Meeting
- 10:00AM – 5:00PM  Interviews: Korean War Veterans
- 1:00PM – 5:00PM  Hospitality Room Open
- 6:30PM – 8:00pm  Welcome Reception - Hotel

**Friday, July 26, 2019**
- 9:00AM - 5:00PM  Registration/Information Desk Open
- 9:00AM – 12:00PM  KWVA Annual Membership Meeting
- 1:00PM – 5:00PM  Hospitality Room Open
- 5:30PM - 9:00PM  U.S. Marines: 8th and I (Eye) Sunset Parade

**Saturday, July 27, 2019**
- 9:00AM - 4:00PM  Information Desk Open
- 10:00AM – 11:00AM  Armistice Commemoration-Korean War Memorial
- 11:30PM - 3:00PM  “Reading the Names” – MOH Citations - KWVM
- 12:30 – 5:00PM  Hospitality Room Open ~ Free Time
- 6:00 – 7:00PM  KWVA Reception ~ Lobby of Ballroom
- 7:00 – 10:00PM  KWVA Banquet ~ Hotel Ballroom

**Sunday, July 28, 2019**
- 8:00AM – 9:00AM  Memorial Service/Buffet Brunch - Hotel
VA ENROLLED VETERANS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE FLU SHOT: Now through March 31, 2019, all VA-enrolled veterans are eligible for free annual flu shots at their local Walgreens or Duane Reade pharmacy. While this immunization program is limited to VA patients, Walgreens offers flu shots to most VFW members and their families through other coverage programs, such as TRICARE, Medicare, and many health care plans. Locate your closest Walgreens or Duane Reade.

VA BENEFITS FOR VETERANS’ SPOUSES, DEPENDENTS, AND SURVIVORS

Family members and dependents of Servicemembers who have died or were seriously injured in the line of duty may be eligible for many types of VA benefits. These benefits may be used to advance in a career, get an education, or provide supplementary income. Surviving spouses may benefit from VA-guaranteed home loans, too. Explore other VA benefits you may have earned as a spouse, child, or parent of a Veteran or Servicemember by visiting these pages:

- Disability Compensation

VA provides monthly benefits to eligible surviving spouses, parents, and dependent children. Click here to find out if you’re eligible.

- Education and Training

VA provides education and training opportunities for some eligible spouses, dependents, and survivors. Explore the programs and apply for benefits today.

- Employment Services

If you’re a spouse, dependent, or survivor looking for career guidance or training to increase your skills, check out VA benefits today.

- Health Care

Veterans’ spouses, dependents, and survivors may be eligible for VA health care benefits. Learn more about eligibility and apply for benefits today.
Home Loans and Housing-Related Assistance

VA offers home loan guaranty programs to eligible surviving spouses of Veterans. Learn more about the programs here.

Life Insurance

VA provides life insurance coverage to eligible Veterans and their families. Learn about eligibility and apply.

Memorial Benefits

VA offers burial services to spouses, dependents, and survivors. Apply for VA memorial benefits today.

Pension

VA offers pension benefits to the survivors of wartime Veterans who meet certain criteria. Learn more about the types of pension support here.

VA Publishes Interim Final Rule on Cash-Out Home Loans to Protect Veterans

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it has published an interim final rule relating to VA-guaranteed cash-out refinance loans to further protect Veteran home-loan borrowers from predatory lending practices.

This rule implements certain provisions of the Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief, and Consumer Protection Act, and provides new regulatory safeguards relating to VA-guaranteed cash-out refinance loans. Such loans generally allow borrowers to convert home equity into cash.

In many cases, the principal balance of the new refinance loan is larger than the payoff amount of the loan being refinanced. This means the Veteran will generally receive some amount of cash at closing. The cash can then be used at the Veteran’s discretion to pay off debt, fund education, make home improvements and more.

VA’s cash-out home-loan program can also be used to refinance a non-VA loan into a VA-guaranteed loan. Certain borrowers can use VA-guaranteed cash-out refinance loans to borrow up to 100 percent of the value of their home.
“VA has taken significant steps to make the home-loan benefit the most competitive loan program available to Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “We want to ensure the home-loan program remains strong, attractive and accessible to all who are eligible, while creating a framework for lender accountability to Veterans and taxpayers.”

The rule will help protect Veterans from predatory refinance practices and minimize risk to taxpayers and the secondary mortgage market. For example, the rule specifically requires that lenders disclose clearly, both at the time of application and again at closing, a plain comparison of the existing loan’s cost with that of the new loan. These disclosures will help Veterans understand the impact of the refinance loan. This is in line with VA’s current policy on Interest Rate Reduction Refinance Loans.

Further, the rule imposes loan seasoning and “net tangible benefit” standards. To meet the seasoning requirement, at least 210 days must pass and six monthly payments must be made prior to refinancing an existing loan. The cash-out refinance loan must also provide the Veteran with at least one of eight “net tangible benefits” defined by VA in the rule.

Since 1944, VA has guaranteed over 23 million home loans worth more than $2 trillion. Veterans with questions about the VA Home Loan Program should call 877-827-3702.

For more information on the VA Home Loan program, visit https://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/

- **HOW TO REPORT THE DEATH OF A RETIRED SOLDIER:** Contact the Department of the Army Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operations Center anytime by calling (800) 626-3317. You will be immediately referred to a local Casualty Assistance Center, who will report the death to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service to stop retired pay and initiate the survivor benefits process. When reporting the death, please provide as much of the information below as you have:
  - Full name
  - Next of kin information
  - Social security number and/or service number
  - Circumstances surrounding the death
  - Retirement date
  - Copy of the death certificate
  - Retired rank
  - Copy of the Statement of Service (Last DD Form 214)

- **LOCATIONS OF VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITALS AND MEDICAL CENTERS:**

  If you are looking for a VA Hospital or Medical Center near you, please click on to the attached site and each hospital and medical center is located under the state you line on. https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/allstate.asp

- **VA ON-LINE INFORMATION SITES:**
  - The Benefits Assistance Service (BAS) has a BAS also has a summary of VA benefits available here: https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/benefits_summary_materials.asp
  - Veteran Data Pocket Card: Attached and at the following link: https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/pocketcards/fy2018q1.pdf
  - VA Cemetery Factsheet on Weekend Burial: https://www.cem.va.gov/cem/docs/factsheets/NCA_Weekend_Burial_Program.pdf
VA PROVIDING UNPRECEDENTED TRANSPARENCY TO CONGRESS

WASHINGTON – Today VA announced that the department is providing a new and unprecedented level of transparency to lawmakers in Congress.

For years under previous administrations, Congressional critics have taken the department to task for not providing enough information to the legislative branch.

VA is setting new standards for cooperation with Congress, and that close working relationship has helped the department achieve more substantive reforms than at any other time in decades, including passage of the MISSION Act and electronic health record modernization.

As part of that cooperation, the department is providing more information to lawmakers than at any other time in recent history. In fact, during fiscal year 2018:

- VA witnesses participated in 71 congressional hearings and roundtables, a 20 percent increase over FY 2017
- VA conducted a total of 1,302 congressional briefings, a 66 percent increase over FY17
  - VA conducted 439 proactive congressional briefings, a 155 percent increase over FY17
  - Since the landmark MISSION Act became law in June 2018, VA has conducted 20 separate congressional briefings on its implementation status alone
- VA responded to 2,814 requests for information, a 28 percent increase over FY 2017
- VA responded to 369 letters from members of Congress concerning policy issues, an increase from 355 in FY 2017
- VA responded to 41,852 constituent letters and inquiries originating from congressional offices

“When it comes to transparency, VA is setting new standards, and the results are clear for our nation’s Veterans,” Secretary Wilkie said. “Under President Trump’s leadership, the department is now the first hospital system in the nation to post online its hospital wait times, opioid prescription rates, accountability and settlement info, and chief executive travel. All the while, we are keeping lawmakers informed through multiple means regarding the great reforms and progress across the department, and we will continue to do so.”

SECRETARY WILKIE STATEMENT ON THE PRESIDENT’S STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

WASHINGTON – Tonight VA Secretary Robert Wilkie issued the following statement on the President’s State of the Union address:

“President Trump gave a visionary and optimistic message in his State of the Union address to the nation. He challenged Americans to choose greatness.

“Under President Trump’s leadership, VA is tackling issues that have lingered for decades, with key advances in the areas of transparency, accountability and customer service.

“VA is giving Veterans more choice in their health care decisions with the historic MISSION Act and improving transparency by becoming the first hospital system in
the nation to post publicly wait times, opioid prescription rates, accountability, settlements, and chief executive travel.

“The department is also increasing accountability and protecting whistleblowers with the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act, and overhauling the disability claims and appeals processes to create a simplified system for filing to provide Veterans with clear choices and timely decisions.

“Additionally, VA is adopting the same electronic health record as the Department of Defense, helping ensure a seamless transfer of medical information for Veterans leaving the service, and improving customer service through integrated VA digital portals, contact centers, and databases so that Veterans can easily find the information they need.

“President Trump saluted D-Day soldiers, Private First Class Joseph Reilly, Staff Sergeant Irving Locker, and Sergeant Herman Zeitchik along with Navy Seaman Craig Wibberley, who was one of 17 sailors lost when terrorists attacked the USS Cole 18 years ago. We join him in recognizing and honoring those great Veterans and their fellow Veterans across the nation.”

• FISHER HOUSE PROGRAM

Overview of Fisher House™ Program

A Fisher House™ is, "a home away from home" for families and Caregivers of Veterans and Active Duty Military receiving treatment at major military and VA medical facilities. VA Fisher House accommodations are provided at no cost to guests, and located within walking distance of the treatment facility. VA Fisher Houses provide temporary accommodations at no cost for Veterans, Active Duty Military, their families and Caregivers while receiving treatment through a VA Medical Facility.

As of January 2019, there are 80 Fisher Houses internationally located on military installations and VA medical facilities. 38 of the Fisher Houses are located at VA medical facilities in Albany, New York; Augusta, Georgia; Bay Pines, Florida; Boston, Massachusetts; Chicago, Illinois; Cincinnati, Ohio; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Gainesville, Florida; Houston, Texas (3 houses); Las Vegas, Nevada; Long Beach, California; Los Angeles, California; Miami, Florida; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Minneapolis, Minnesota (2 houses); Murfreesboro, Tennessee; Palo Alto, California (2 houses); Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon (Vancouver, WA Campus); Richmond, Virginia; Salt Lake City, Utah; San Antonio, Texas; Tucson, Arizona; Seattle, Washington; St. Louis, Missouri; Tampa, Florida (2 houses); Washington, DC; and West Palm Beach, Florida.

New Fisher House construction is underway at: Bronx, NY (2 houses); Togus, ME. Cleveland, OH. (2 houses); Albuquerque, NM.; and Richmond (2nd House) VA medical facilities. A rapid expansion is planned from 38 to 64 VA Fisher Houses over the next several years. To learn more go to the Fisher House™ website

Fisher House Locations

Find a Fisher House and local contact information

Hero Miles

Fisher House Foundation administers the Hero Miles Program: a service that provides round-trip airfare to wounded, injured and ill service members and/or their families who are undergoing treatment at a military or VA
VA EXCEEDS 1 MILLION VIDEO TELEHEALTH VISITS IN FY2018

One-year achievement represents a 19% increase over previous year

WASHINGTON — Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it has reached a telehealth milestone, achieving more than 1 million video telehealth visits in one fiscal year (FY18), a 19 percent increase in video telehealth visits over the prior year.

Through video technology, VA health care providers are increasing access to care — diagnosing and managing care remotely for enrolled Veterans across the country.

“VA’s telehealth capabilities are bridging the care gap for many Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This technology gives Veterans access to the timely, quality care they deserve, without having to travel great distances to a VA facility. Time spent traveling is time away from Veterans’ jobs and families.”

Video technologies make it possible for Veterans residing in remote or rural areas to come to many of VA’s community-based outpatient clinics and interact in real-time, through video telehealth, with a specialist physician or another practitioner who may be hundreds or thousands of miles away.

From October 2017 through September 2018, Veterans received VA quality care during approximately 2.3 million episodes of telehealth care.

- About half (1,074,400) were video telehealth encounters, which allows real-time interaction between VA care teams and their Veterans in a clinic or at home.
- The other half of VA telehealth encounters were not real-time, interactive visits; instead, VA staff monitored, screened, assessed Veteran data (e.g., vital signs, sleep studies, etc.) or images (e.g., skin rash, eye disease, etc.) sent by other VA staff in another VA clinic, or sent by a Veteran or caregiver from home.

More than half (582,000) of those video encounters supported Veterans located in rural areas. Additionally, 105,300 of those 1 million-plus video visits were conducted using the VA Video Connect application on Veterans’ mobile devices or personal computers from their homes or locations of choice.

At more than 900 community-based outpatient facilities, clinicians and Veterans meet through these virtual, real-time visits, providing Veterans care in more than 50 specialties, ranging from mental health to rehabilitation.

For more information on VA’s telehealth programs, visit www.telehealth.va.gov.

Clinical Leadership & Infection Control

- VA HOSPITALS REPORT LOWER DEATH RATES THAN NON-VA FACILITIES, USA TODAY FINDS

Megan Knowles

As of June 30, most VA hospitals reported lower death rates than non-VA facilities, according to a USA Today analysis.

The analysis looked at how 146 VA medical centers compare to other healthcare facilities using a variety of factors.
The analysis is based on scores of spreadsheets the VA has published in recent years that contain comparisons of its medical centers to non-VA averages on emergency room wait times, infection rates, patient survey results and more.

In addition to reporting lower death rates, many VA medical centers also performed better on preventing certain post-surgical complications, including blood clots.

However, at about 70 percent of VA hospitals, the median time between arrival in the ER and admission was longer than at other hospitals, in some cases by hours, the analysis found.

Additionally, dozens of VA hospitals had higher rates of preventable infections and severe bed sores. Almost every VA performed worse than other medical providers on patient satisfaction surveys.

VA spokesperson Curt Cashour said certain veterans may have conditions that make them more susceptible to complications, and "caution should be exercised" when drawing conclusions from the comparisons.

The VA "does recognize the need to improve the speed by which it can admit veterans to the inpatient unit," but non-VA hospitals also struggle with long waits, Mr. Cashour said.

"VA provides some of the highest quality healthcare available today."

**VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES DISTRICT REALIGNMENT**

WASHINGTON — Today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) announced a geographic restructuring, from five districts to four, a change that will align regional offices and special missions more evenly.

The realignment closes the North Atlantic District Office in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and shifts states into more geographically similar areas. The District Office located in St. Louis, Missouri, will now be responsible for the newly realigned Northeast District.

“The VBA district realignment is part of our effort to modernize the organization and become more efficient,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This transition affects the management oversight and reporting structure for regional office directors, but will not affect day-to-day operations for employees or impact beneficiaries.”

The realignment does not affect the daily operations of any regional office.

After the restructuring, the four district offices will be:

- Northeast District: St. Louis
- Southeast District: Nashville, Tennessee
- Continental District: Denver, Colorado
- Pacific District: Phoenix, Arizona

More information on the VBA district structure is available at [https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/offices.asp](https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/offices.asp).
APPLICATIONS OPENING SOON FOR 2019 NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES
Anchorage, Alaska, event kicks off June 5

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it will begin accepting applicants on Feb. 25 for the 2018 National Veterans Golden Age Games, scheduled to take place June 5-10 in Anchorage, Alaska.

The National Veterans Golden Age Games is the premier senior adaptive rehabilitation program in the United States, and the only national multievent sports and recreational seniors’ competition program designed to improve the quality of life for all older Veterans, including those with a wide range of abilities and disabilities.

The annual competition is one of the most progressive and adaptive rehabilitative senior sports programs in the world, and hundreds of Veterans from across the country are expected to take part.

Veterans ages 55 and older who receive VA health care may complete applications at www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov. Registration will close once the maximum number of applicants are reached.

“We encourage every Veteran to embrace an active and healthy lifestyle, and this annual event encourages participants to make physical activity a central part of their lives,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “The National Veterans Golden Age Games is a VA rehabilitation event for our senior Veterans who have dedicated themselves to remaining active, healthy, and living the Games’ motto – ‘Fitness for Life.’”

Competitive events include the following: air pistol, air rifle, badminton, basketball, blind disc golf, boccia, bowling, cycling, golf, horseshoes, nine-ball, pickleball, powerwalking, shuffleboard, swimming, table tennis, and track and field.

The games encourage participants to continue in local senior events in their home communities, and every other year serve as a qualifying event for competition in the National Senior Games. The Alaska VA Healthcare System, host of this year’s games, provides care for more than 80,000 Veterans across the state’s 586,400 square miles.

For more information, visit www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov; follow VA Adaptive Sports on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook at @Sports4Vets.

VA PROVIDING BETTER CARE FOR THE ELDERLY VETERAN

VA teams provide specialized treatment for Veterans with geriatric needs

As one who wore the uniform of the U.S. Marine Corps for 22 years, serving in World War II and the Korean War, Henry Holley subscribed to the Marines’ Latin motto: Semper Fidelis “always faithful, always loyal.”

Today, Holley is quick to apply that tag to VA. He believes the VA health care system has been incredibly faithful to him in the three years he’s been a patient of the geriatric clinic at the Atlanta VA Medical Center. The 91-year-old Veteran has serious back and knee pain stemming from his military service that hampers his ability to walk.

“I can’t get over how committed and qualified they are.”
“Every need I’ve had, they’re right on the spot helping me,” he says. “I just can’t get over the service and how wonderful and committed and qualified they are. They bend over backward to help me. I’m so grateful.”

Dr. Rina Eisenstein (left) a primary care physician on the GeriPACT team at the Atlanta VA, talks with patient Henry Holley, who served in the Marines. With them is nurse care manager Cathy Woods. (Photo by Joey Rodgers)

Holley is one of some 1,500 patients enrolled in the geriatric clinic at the Atlanta VA, which formed one of the first dedicated geriatric clinics in VA. The clinic, which transitioned in 2011 to the Geriatric Patient Aligned Care Team (GeriPACT) model, serves a patient population with an average age of 86.

The GeriPACT team has provided Holley with support in geriatric primary care, pharmacy, nursing, mental health care, and social work, and it has referred him to other departments for optical and dermatology services. The Atlanta VA has also arranged to get him a walker and a scooter, as well as a chair lift, a physical therapist, and a caregiver for use in his home.

“I even get valet parking at the Atlanta VA,” Holley says. “I try to tip the boys, but they won’t take anything.”

A team of VA researchers recently described the implementation of VA’s GeriPACT model in an article in the Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine.

GeriPACTs are like a one-stop shop. They combine traditional health care services with community-based services, featuring doctors, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, and other specialists. The goal is to streamline the health care experience of Veterans with geriatric needs and expedite their visits to a VA facility, rather than requiring them to set up multiple appointments with providers.

60,000 Veterans – 65 and older – received GeriPACT care in 2015

The researchers write: “GeriPACT is one approach for bringing an interdisciplinary, patient-centered perspective to primary care in a manner that can likely [justify] the higher staffing costs,” with less reliance on placing people in long-term care institutions. “It is a model which can provide training for the next generation of providers and clinicians.”

In 2015, about 60,000 patients received GeriPACT services, out of the 1.5 million Veterans at least 65 years in age who were enrolled in the VA system. The model is currently in place at dozens of VA medical centers, but not all.

Watch this 2015 VHA video for a close-up look at a GeriPACT in action.

In addition to the elderly, GeriPACTs treat younger patients with geriatric-type needs. Dr. Rina Eisenstein, a primary care physician with the Atlanta GeriPACT, says one of her patients is a 59-year-old Veteran with early-onset Alzheimer’s disease. “These types of patients are no way geriatric age, but they are geriatric-appropriate because of their inability to function,” she says.

With the Veteran population not getting any younger, Eisenstein hopes GeriPACTs will eventually be in place at all VA medical centers.

“We have a lot of Vietnam War Veterans who are getting older and had possible exposure to Agent Orange,” Eisenstein says, pointing out that such exposures can lead to numerous medical problems. “Those patients are very difficult to care for, but GeriPACTs are very well-equipped to provide care for them.”
WAVE OF ELDERLY VETERANS CREATES FINANCIAL WORRIES FOR VA’S NURSING HOME SERVICES

By: Leo Shane III

Debra Reeser, an ophthalmology health technician at Mountain Home VA Healthcare System in Tennessee, conducts an eye exam on a veteran in February 2016. Department officials say they expect the number of veterans eligible for VA-backed nursing home care to rise above 1 million in the next five years. (VA photo)

WASHINGTON — More than one million veterans will be eligible for taxpayer-funded nursing home services within the next five years, according to the latest estimates from federal administrators trying to balance the costs of institutional care with alternative options allowing those individuals to stay in their homes.

Already, the annual costs of nursing home care have risen to almost $6 billion, Veterans Affairs officials told lawmakers at a congressional hearing last week. By 2024, that number could top $10 billion, a significant portion of the department’s overall budget.

“As veterans age, approximately 80 percent will develop the need for some long-term services and support,” Dr. Teresa Boyd, assistant deputy undersecretary for health at the Veterans Health Administration, told lawmakers. “The aging of the veteran population has been more rapid and represents a greater proportion of the VA patient population than in other healthcare systems.”

By law, VA officials must provide nursing home care for veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 70 percent or more. The department currently maintains 156 state homes across all 50 states.

But a study by USA Today and the Boston Globe last fall found that about two-thirds of those facilities scored worse than private-sector nursing homes in a series of quality indicators last year.

And VA officials acknowledge that many veterans are seeking options to remain at their own homes or with family caregivers rather than enter the institutions, a shift in cultural preferences in recent years.

“There's an urgent need to accelerate the increase and the availability of the services since most veterans prefer to receive care at home,” Boyd said. “And VA can improve quality at a lower cost.”

Dr. Scotte Hartonft, acting director of VA’s Office of Geriatrics & Extended Care, said programs like adult day care, home-based primary care and tele-health options have been extended significantly in recent years. He called those programs a win for both veterans and the department.

“It provides (veterans a) choice, but it also is much less expensive than nursing home care,” he said.

Two years ago, VA officials launched the Choose Home Initiative to promote and expand more home care initiatives. Hartonft said five VA medical centers are running pilot programs related to that goal, with an eye towards expansion in coming years.
Lawmakers said that work is critical, not only for today’s elderly veterans population but for the long-term issues facing the Iraq and Afghanistan war generation.

“Looking forward to 2035, the veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq will be middle aged, they’ll have health issues much like the Vietnam veterans experience today,” said Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Ga. “They have the co-morbidities of post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, palliative traumas. How is VA going to address this?”

More information on VA long-term and geriatric care is available at the VA web site.
WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert Wilkie released the following statement:

Revolutionizing VA Health Care

By Secretary Robert Wilkie

The past two years have been an exciting time for Veterans and for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Under President Trump’s leadership, VA has enacted more reforms across the organization than at any other time since the 1990s, with key advances in the areas of transparency, accountability and customer service. VA will soon build on this progress by rolling out a plan that will revolutionize VA health care as we know it. This week, as part of VA’s implementation of the MISSION Act, the department will introduce long-awaited access standards on community care and urgent care that will take effect in June and guide when Veterans can seek care to meet their needs – be it with VA or with community providers.

VA’s current patchwork of seven separate community care programs is a bureaucratic maze that’s hard to navigate for Veterans, their families and VA employees. Our new access standards will form the basis of a federal regulation that will consolidate VA’s community care efforts into a single, simple-to-use program that puts Veterans at the center of their VA health care decisions. Strict and confusing qualification criteria like driving distances and proximity to VA facilities that don’t offer needed services will be replaced by eligibility guidelines based on what matters most: the convenience of our Veteran customers.

Although these new standards represent an important win for America’s Veterans, they will not be without controversy. Some will claim falsely and predictably that they represent a first step toward privatizing the department. Here are the facts: under President Trump, VA is giving Veterans the power to choose the care they trust, and more Veterans are choosing VA for their health care than ever before. Since 2014, the number of annual appointments for VA care is up by 3.4 million, with over 58 million appointments in fiscal year 2018. Simply put, more Veterans are choosing to receive their health care at VA. Patients’ trust in VA care has skyrocketed – currently at 87.7 percent – and VA wait times are shorter than those in the private sector in primary care and two of three specialty care areas.

And why should we be surprised?

A 2018 Rand study found that the VA health care system “generally delivers higher-quality care than other health providers.”

A 2018 Dartmouth study found that “Veterans Health Administration hospitals outperform non–Veterans Health Administration hospitals in most health care markets.”

A 2019 study in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) shows that VA wait times are shorter than the private sector in primary care and two of three specialty care areas. These studies provide verification of the fact that VA has made great strides since 2014, and now compares favorably private sector for access and quality of care – and in many cases exceeds it.

And VA employees are noticing improvements as well. VA ranked sixth out of 17 federal government agencies in the Partnership for Public Service’s annual “Best Places to Work” tabulation, up from 17th last year.

We know that to keep the trust of our Veterans we must continue to deliver. Our medical services must meet our
Veterans’ needs and reinforce the trust that forms the basis for every interaction with VA. We will constantly innovate, upgrade, and pursue ways to serve our nation’s heroes as best we can.

Our new access standards are a vital part of this effort.

Most Americans can already choose the health care providers that they trust, and President Trump promised that Veterans would be able to do the same.

With VA’s new access standards, the future of the VA health care system will lie in the hands of Veterans – exactly where it should be.

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**HEALTH INFORMATION**

**RECOMMENDED ADULT IMMUNIZATION SCHEDULE FOR AGES 19 YEARS OR OLDER, UNITED STATES, 2019**

Recommended Adult Immunization Schedule, for ages 19 years or older, United States, 2019

For vaccine recommendations for persons age 0 through 18 years, see the [Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule](#).

**Haemophilus influenzae type b vaccination**

Special situations

- **Anatomical or functional asplenia (including sickle cell disease):** 1 dose Hib if previously did not receive Hib; if elective splenectomy, 1 dose Hib, preferably at least 14 days before splenectomy
- **Hematopoietic stem cell transplant (HSCT):** 3-dose series Hib 4 weeks apart starting 6–12 months after successful transplant, regardless of Hib vaccination history

**Hepatitis A vaccination**

Routine vaccination

- **Not at risk but want protection from hepatitis A** (identification of risk factor not required): 2-dose series HepA (Havrix 6–12 months apart or Vaqta 6–18 months apart [minimum interval: 6 months]) or 3-dose series HepA-HepB (Twinrix at 0, 1, 6 months [minimum intervals: 4 weeks between doses 1 and 2, 5 months between doses 2 and 3])

Special situations

- **At risk for hepatitis A virus infection:** 2-dose series HepA as above
  - Chronic liver disease
  - Clotting factor disorders
  - Men who have sex with men
  - Injection or non-injection drug use
  - Homelessness
- Work with hepatitis A virus in research laboratory or nonhuman primates with hepatitis A virus infection
- Travel in countries with high or intermediate endemic hepatitis A
- Close personal contact with international adoptee (e.g., household, regular babysitting) in first 60 days after arrival from country with high or intermediate endemic hepatitis A (administer dose 1 as soon as adoption is planned, at least 2 weeks before adoptee’s arrival)

**Hepatitis B vaccination**

Routine vaccination

- **Not at risk but want protection from hepatitis B** (identification of risk factor not required): 2- or 3-dose series HepB (2-dose series Heplisav-B at least 4 weeks apart [2-dose series HepB only applies when 2 doses of Heplisav-B are used at least 4 weeks apart] or 3-dose series Engerix-B or Recombivax HB at 0, 1, 6 months [minimum intervals: 4 weeks between doses 1 and 2, 8 weeks between doses 2 and 3, 16 weeks between doses 1 and 3]) or 3-dose series HepA-HepB (Twinrix at 0, 1, 6 months [minimum intervals: 4 weeks between doses 1 and 2, 5 months between doses 2 and 3])

Special situations

- **At risk for hepatitis B virus infection:** 2-dose (Heplisav-B) or 3-dose (Engerix-B, Recombivax HB) series HepB, or 3-dose series HepA-HepB as above
  - **Hepatitis C virus infection**
  - **Chronic liver disease** (e.g., cirrhosis, fatty liver disease, alcoholic liver disease, autoimmune hepatitis, alanine aminotransferase [ALT] or aspartate aminotransferase [AST] level greater than twice upper limit of normal)
  - **HIV infection**
  - **Sexual exposure risk** (e.g., sex partners of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg)-positive persons; sexually active persons not in mutually monogamous relationships, persons seeking evaluation or treatment for a sexually transmitted infection, men who have sex with men)
  - **Current or recent injection drug use**
  - **Percutaneous or mucosal risk for exposure to blood** (e.g., household contacts of HBsAg-positive persons; residents and staff of facilities for developmentally disabled persons; health care and public safety personnel with reasonably anticipated risk for exposure to blood or blood-contaminated body fluids; hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, home dialysis, and predialysis patients; persons with diabetes mellitus age younger than 60 years and, at discretion of treating clinician, those age 60 years or older)
  - **Incarcerated persons**
  - **Travel in countries with high or intermediate endemic hepatitis B**

**Human papillomavirus vaccination**

Routine vaccination

- **Females through age 26 years and males through age 21 years:** 2- or 3-dose series HPV vaccine depending on age at initial vaccination; males age 22 through 26 years may be vaccinated based on individual clinical decision (HPV vaccination routinely recommended at age 11–12 years)
- **Age 15 years or older at initial vaccination:** 3-dose series HPV vaccine at 0, 1–2, 6 months (minimum intervals: 4 weeks between doses 1 and 2, 12 weeks between doses 2 and 3, 5 months between doses 1 and 3; repeat dose if administered too soon)
- **Age 9 through 14 years at initial vaccination and received 1 dose, or 2 doses less than 5 months apart:** 1 dose HPV vaccine
• Age 9 through 14 years at initial vaccination and received 2 doses at least 5 months apart: HPV vaccination complete, no additional dose needed
• If completed valid vaccination series with any HPV vaccine, no additional doses needed

Special situations

• Immunocompromising conditions (including HIV infection) through age 26 years: 3-dose series HPV vaccine at 0, 1–2, 6 months as above
• Men who have sex with men and transgender persons through age 26 years: 2- or 3-dose series HPV vaccine depending on age at initial vaccination as above
• Pregnancy through age 26 years: HPV vaccination not recommended until after pregnancy; no intervention needed if vaccinated while pregnant; pregnancy testing not needed before vaccination

Influenza vaccination

Routine vaccination

• Persons age 6 months or older: 1 dose IIV, RIV, or LAIV appropriate for age and health status annually
• For additional guidance, see www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/index.htm

Special situations

• Egg allergy, hives only: 1 dose IIV, RIV, or LAIV appropriate for age and health status annually
• Egg allergy more severe than hives (e.g., angioedema, respiratory distress): 1 dose IIV, RIV, or LAIV appropriate for age and health status annually in medical setting under supervision of health care provider who can recognize and manage severe allergic conditions
• Immunocompromising conditions (including HIV infection), anatomical or functional asplenia, pregnant women, close contacts and caregivers of severely immunocompromised persons in protected environment, use of influenza antiviral medications in previous 48 hours, with cerebrospinal fluid leak or cochlear implant: 1 dose IIV or RIV annually (LAIV not recommended)
• History of Guillain-Barré syndrome within 6 weeks of previous dose of influenza vaccine: Generally should not be vaccinated

Measles, mumps, and rubella vaccination

Routine vaccination

• No evidence of immunity to measles, mumps, or rubella: 1 dose MMR
  o Evidence of immunity: Born before 1957 (except health care personnel), documentation of receipt of MMR, laboratory evidence of immunity or disease (diagnosis of disease without laboratory confirmation is not evidence of immunity)

Special situations

• Pregnancy with no evidence of immunity to rubella: MMR contraindicated during pregnancy; after pregnancy (before discharge from health care facility), 1 dose MMR
• Non-pregnant women of childbearing age with no evidence of immunity to rubella: 1 dose MMR
• HIV infection with CD4 count ≥200 cells/µL for at least 6 months and no evidence of immunity to measles, mumps, or rubella: 2-dose series MMR at least 4 weeks apart; MMR contraindicated in HIV infection with CD4 count <200 cells/µL
• Severe immunocompromising conditions: MMR contraindicated
• Students in postsecondary educational institutions, international travelers, and household or close personal contacts of immunocompromised persons with no evidence of immunity to measles, mumps, or rubella: 1 dose MMR if previously received 1 dose MMR, or 2-dose series MMR at least 4 weeks apart if previously did not receive any MMR
• Health care personnel born in 1957 or later with no evidence of immunity to measles, mumps, or rubella: 2-dose series MMR at least 4 weeks apart for measles or mumps, or at least 1 dose MMR for rubella; if born before 1957, consider 2-dose series MMR at least 4 weeks apart for measles or mumps, or 1 dose MMR for rubella

**Meningococcal vaccination**

Special situations for MenACWY

• Anatomical or functional asplenia, including sickle cell disease, HIV infection, persistent complement component deficiency, eculizumab use: 2-dose series MenACWY (Menactra, Menveo) at least 8 weeks apart and revaccinate every 5 years if risk remains
• Travel in countries with hyperendemic or epidemic meningococcal disease, microbiologists routinely exposed to *Neisseria meningitidis*: 1 dose MenACWY and revaccinate every 5 years if risk remains
• First-year college students who live in residential housing (if not previously vaccinated at age 16 years or older) and military recruits: 1 dose MenACWY

Special situations for MenB

• Anatomical or functional asplenia, including sickle cell disease, persistent complement component deficiency, eculizumab use, microbiologists routinely exposed to *Neisseria meningitidis*: 2-dose series MenB-4C (Bexsero) at least 1 month apart, or 3-dose series MenB-FHbp (Trumenba) at 0, 1–2, 6 months (if dose 2 was administered at least 6 months after dose 1, dose 3 not needed); MenB-4C and MenB-FHbp are not interchangeable (use same product for all doses in series)
• Pregnancy: Delay MenB until after pregnancy unless at increased risk and vaccination benefit outweighs potential risks
• Healthy adolescents and young adults age 16 through 23 years (age 16 through 18 years preferred) not at increased risk for meningococcal disease: Based on individual clinical decision, may receive 2-dose series MenB-4C at least 1 month apart, or 2-dose series MenB-FHbp at 0, 6 months (if dose 2 was administered less than 6 months after dose 1, administer dose 3 at least 4 months after dose 2); MenB-4C and MenB-FHbp are not interchangeable (use same product for all doses in series)

**Pneumococcal vaccination**

Routine vaccination

• **Age 65 years or older** (immunocompetent): 1 dose PCV13 if previously did not receive PCV13, followed by 1 dose PPSV23 at least 1 year after PCV13 and at least 5 years after last dose PPSV23
  o Previously received PPSV23 but not PCV13 at age 65 years or older: 1 dose PCV13 at least 1 year after PPSV23
  o When both PCV13 and PPSV23 are indicated, administer PCV13 first (PCV13 and PPSV23 should not be administered during same visit)
Special situations

- **Age 19 through 64 years with chronic medical conditions (chronic heart [excluding hypertension], lung, or liver disease; diabetes), alcoholism, or cigarette smoking:** 1 dose PPSV23
- **Age 19 years or older with immunocompromising conditions (congenital or acquired immunodeficiency [including B- and T-lymphocyte deficiency, complement deficiencies, phagocytic disorders, HIV infection], chronic renal failure, nephrotic syndrome, leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin disease, generalized malignancy, iatrogenic immunosuppression [e.g., drug or radiation therapy], solid organ transplant, multiple myeloma) or anatomical or functional asplenia (including sickle cell disease and other hemoglobinopathies):** 1 dose PCV13 followed by 1 dose PPSV23 at least 8 weeks later, then another dose PPSV23 at least 5 years after previous PPSV23; at age 65 years or older, administer 1 dose PPSV23 at least 5 years after most recent PPSV23 (note: only 1 dose PPSV23 recommended at age 65 years or older)
- **Age 19 years or older with cerebrospinal fluid leak or cochlear implant:** 1 dose PCV13 followed by 1 dose PPSV23 at least 8 weeks later; at age 65 years or older, administer another dose PPSV23 at least 5 years after PPSV23 (note: only 1 dose PPSV23

**Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis vaccination**

Routine vaccination

- **Previously did not receive Tdap at or after age 11 years:** 1 dose Tdap, then Td booster every 10 years

Special situations

- **Previously did not receive primary vaccination series for tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis:** 1 dose Tdap followed by 1 dose Td at least 4 weeks after Tdap, and another dose Td 6–12 months after last Td (Tdap can be substituted for any Td dose, but preferred as first dose); Td booster every 10 years thereafter
- **Pregnancy:** 1 dose Tdap during each pregnancy, preferably in early part of gestational weeks 27–36
- For information on use of Tdap or Td as tetanus prophylaxis in wound management, see Prevention of Pertussis, Tetanus, and Diphtheria with Vaccines in the United States: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

**Varicella vaccination**

Routine vaccination

- **No evidence of immunity to varicella:** 2-dose series VAR 4–8 weeks apart if previously did not receive varicella-containing vaccine (VAR or MMRV [measles-mumps-rubella-varicella vaccine] for children); if previously received 1 dose varicella-containing vaccine: 1 dose VAR at least 4 weeks after first dose
  - Evidence of immunity: U.S.-born before 1980 (except for pregnant women and health care personnel [see below]), documentation of 2 doses varicella-containing vaccine at least 4 weeks apart, diagnosis or verification of history of varicella or herpes zoster by a health care provider, laboratory evidence of immunity or disease

Special situations

- **Pregnancy with no evidence of immunity to varicella:** VAR contraindicated during pregnancy; after pregnancy (before discharge from health care facility), 1 dose VAR if previously received 1 dose varicella-containing vaccine, or dose 1 of 2-dose series VAR (dose 2: 4–8 weeks later) if previously did not receive any varicella-containing vaccine, regardless of whether U.S.-born before 1980
- **Health care personnel with no evidence of immunity to varicella**: 1 dose VAR if previously received 1 dose varicella-containing vaccine, or 2-dose series VAR 4–8 weeks apart if previously did not receive any varicella-containing vaccine, regardless of whether U.S.-born before 1980
- **HIV infection with CD4 count ≥200 cells/µL with no evidence of immunity**: Consider 2-dose series VAR 3 months apart based on individual clinical decision; VAR contraindicated in HIV infection with CD4 count <200 cells/µL
- **Severe immunocompromising conditions**: VAR contraindicated

**Zoster vaccination**

Routine vaccination

- **Age 50 years or older**: 2-dose series RZV 2–6 months apart (minimum interval: 4 weeks; repeat dose if administered too soon) regardless of previous herpes zoster or previously received ZVL (administer RZV at least 2 months after ZVL)
- **Age 60 years or older**: 2-dose series RZV 2–6 months apart (minimum interval: 4 weeks; repeat dose if administered too soon) or 1 dose ZVL if not previously vaccinated (if previously received ZVL, administer RZV at least 2 months after ZVL); RZV preferred over ZVL

Special situations

- **Pregnancy**: ZVL contraindicated; consider delaying RZV until after pregnancy if RZV indicated
- **Severe immunocompromising conditions (including HIV infection with CD4 count <200 cells/µL)**: ZVL contraindicated; recommended use of RZV under review

**Adults Age 65 and Older**

Vaccines are especially important for older adults. As you get older, your immune system weakens and it can be more difficult to fight off infections. You’re more likely to get diseases like the flu, pneumonia, and shingles — and to have complications that can lead to long-term illness, hospitalization, and even death.

If you have an ongoing health condition — like diabetes or heart disease — getting vaccinated is especially important. Vaccines can protect you from serious diseases (and related complications) so you can stay healthy as you age.

Getting vaccinated can help keep you, your family, and your community healthy.

On this page, you'll find answers to common questions about vaccines for adults age 65 and older.

**Which vaccines are recommended for adults age 65 and older?**

Check this easy-to-read vaccine schedule (PDF - 138KB) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to find out which vaccines are recommended for adults age 65 and older.
You may also need other vaccines — for example, if you’re planning to travel outside the United States.

**Does Medicare cover vaccines for older adults?**

Medicare Part B covers vaccines that protect against the flu and pneumococcal disease — and the hepatitis B vaccine if you’re at increased risk for hepatitis B. It also covers vaccines that you might need after an injury (like the tetanus vaccine) or coming into contact with a disease (like the rabies vaccine).

Medicare Part D plans generally cover more vaccines than Part B. But depending on your Medicare Part D plan, you may have out-of-pocket costs for these vaccines. Contact Medicare to find out what’s covered.

Did you know? There is a high-dose flu vaccine and an adjuvanted flu vaccine, which includes an adjuvant (substance) that creates a stronger immune response. Both vaccines are designed to be more effective in older adults. **Learn more about flu vaccines for adults age 65 and older.**

**• CONTROL YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE TO REDUCE MEMORY LOSS**

Tight control of your blood pressure won’t necessarily spare you from full-blown dementia, a new trial concludes. But it might lower the risk of slight declines in thinking and memory, a condition known as mild cognitive impairment (MCI), the researchers added.

The clinical trial is the "first study in history to show that any intervention can reduce your risk of developing mild cognitive impairment, an early form of dementia," said lead researcher Dr. Jeff Williamson, professor of gerontology and geriatric medicine at Wake Forest School of Medicine, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.
"What is good for your heart in terms of blood pressure-lowering is also good for your brain," Williamson added, noting the trial ended early, which likely affected the dementia result. "We just didn't have enough dementia cases develop over time" in the group with less-restricted blood pressure, he explained.

High blood pressure affects more than three-fourths of people over the age of 65, and it has been identified as a potential risk factor for MCI and dementia in observational studies, the study authors said in background notes.

The new clinical trial focused on nearly 9,400 people, average age 68, who had been randomly assigned to treatment that would keep their systolic blood pressure at or below a goal of either 120 or 140 mm Hg.

Participants were all at high risk for heart disease, and the clinical trial initially was aimed at seeing whether a more stringent blood pressure goal would save lives.

The planned five-year trial ended early, after a little over three years, because the group kept at 120 systolic blood pressure fared so much better than the other group, the researchers said.

The lower blood pressure goal "prevented death, stroke, heart attack, and heart failure so much more quickly and so much more powerfully," that people in the 140 systolic group were allowed to go on the same therapy as the lower blood pressure group, Williamson said.

But an offshoot of the trial continued to track the participants, to see whether tight blood pressure control had any effect on risk of developing dementia or mild cognitive impairment.

After five years of follow-up, the investigators found that tighter blood pressure control reduced the risk of MCI by 19 percent, and the risk of MCI or probable dementia combined by 15 percent.

The 120 systolic group also had a 17 percent reduced risk of dementia, but that result was not statistically significant, according to the report.

The Alzheimer's Association has agreed to provide funding to keep tracking the patients for another couple of years, Williamson said.

"We feel additional follow-up of this cohort will provide the last piece of the puzzle we need," he said.

There are a couple of ways blood pressure could influence brain health, Williamson suggested. High blood pressure could damage the tiny blood vessels in the brain, harming brain tissue. It also could affect the amount of toxic substances that enter and lodge in the brain.

Dr. Kristine Yaffe is chief of neuropsychiatry and director of the Memory Disorders Clinic at the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center. She said that even though the trial didn't meet its primary endpoint of significantly reducing dementia, it's still "exciting because it reminds us how important cardiovascular disease and vascular health is to the brain and to cognition."

Yaffe, who wrote an editorial accompanying the results, added, "I think you can't throw the baby out with the bathwater. You have to look at the whole picture here. They found an effect on MCI, which is the first time
anybody's shown a way to reduce MCI. Now we need to study this more. I think there's a lot more we can try and understand."

The clinical trial was published online Jan. 28 in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

PREVENTING WINTER INJURIES WITH TRICARE

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says cold weather can cause extra strain on your heart. Outside of heart strain, cold-weather injuries such as hypothermia, frostbite, and falls can occur if you aren’t careful. There are things you can do to help protect your health and safety. Know your TRICARE options for getting care in case an injury occurs. And follow these tips below to prevent, spot, and treat winter injuries.

Heart Strain

Cold weather can affect your heart, especially if you have cardiovascular disease. Simply walking through heavy, wet snow can strain some people’s heart. The best way to avoid heart strain when doing outdoor winter activities, such as shoveling snow, is to work at a slower pace and take pauses. According to the American Heart Association, signs of overexertion and heart strain are:

- Chest pain or discomfort
- Lightheadedness or dizziness
- Cold sweat

Tips to combat heart strain and overexertion in the winter are to:

- Take frequent rest breaks when shoveling snow or performing other hard work in the cold.
- Avoid drinking alcohol before or immediately after shoveling.
- Learn the warning signs of a heart attack and learn how to perform CPR.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when the body’s internal temperature drops due to extremely cold temperatures. The best way to prevent hypothermia is to dress in warm, loose-fitting layers of clothing. Also make sure to wear a water-resistant coat to keep dry. Signs of hypothermia include:

- Intense shivering
- Feeling tired or sleepy
- Feeling disoriented or confused
- Loss of coordination

If you notice any of these warning signs or suspect hypothermia, you want to seek medical attention as soon as possible. If medical care isn’t available, follow these tips to help restore warmth slowly:

- Move into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove wet clothing.
- Warm the center of the body first (chest, neck, head) using an electric blanket, if available. If not, use dry layers of blankets and clothing.
- Drink warm beverages like tea, hot chocolate, or warm water to help raise the body temperature.

Frostbite

Frostbite occurs when a body part freezes, damaging the tissue. Fingers, toes, nose, cheeks, chin, and ears are the areas that are most prone to frostbite. So, it’s important to cover these body parts in warm, dry clothing when going outside in winter. Watch for these signs of frostbite:

- Redness or pain in any skin area
- Numbness
- Tingling or stinging
- Aching
- Bluish or waxy looking skin
Tips to treat frostbite include:

- Seek warm shelter as soon as possible.
- Warm the affected area using body heat.
- Immerse the affected area into warm water.

**Falls**
Walking on ice is dangerous. Many cold-weather injuries result from falls on ice-covered sidewalks, steps, driveways, and porches. To prevent winter falls, make sure you:

- Keep your steps and walkways free of ice by using rock salt or another chemical de-icing compound.
- Watch where you’re walking before you take a step.
- Avoid being in a hurry and take your time during your day-to-day winter travels.

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**DOD AND CIVILIAN DOCTORS, PHARMACIES NOW SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT OPIOID PRESCRIPTIONS, WATCHING FOR ABUSE**

By: *Karen Jowers*

![Image of OxyContin](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*OxyContin, an opioid, is shown at a civilian pharmacy. (Toby Talbot/AP)*

With an eye toward identifying possible opioid and other drug abuse problems in military patients, Defense health officials have launched a program to monitor these prescriptions — by sharing information between the military system and civilian providers and pharmacies.

The Military Health System Prescription Drug Monitoring Program “will allow civilian and military providers to review patient opioid prescription histories to ensure there are no overlapping opioid prescriptions that can worsen an opioid use disorder or cause an overdose,” said Navy Vice Adm. Raquel C. Bono, director of the Defense Health Agency, in an announcement.

Through prescription drug monitoring programs, medical providers and pharmacies can track how many controlled substance prescriptions a patient receives, and the quantity and strength of the medications.

Concerns have been raised about DoD’s inability to provide this data to the states, and to get data from the states, in ongoing efforts to battle the nationwide opioid addiction crisis.

Defense Health Agency officials are negotiating agreements with the states to begin the process for sharing prescription data; nine states and territories have signed. The intent is to have all states connect to the network in the near future, according to an announcement from the Defense Health Agency.

DoD began sharing its controlled substance prescription information through the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy’s Prescription Monitoring Program Interconnect System on Dec. 20. This system allows civilian providers to see information for patients who received their controlled substance medications at a military hospital, clinic or pharmacy.
Lawmakers included a provision in the fiscal 2019 National Defense Authorization Act that required DoD to set up the Military Health System Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, comparable to drug monitoring programs operated by the states. It was a challenge to share the data previously because of operational security, officials said.

In her statement, Bono thanked Congress for giving DoD the tool to help protect its patients from the dangers of opioid disorders.

The monitoring program “will give the Military Health System and civilian sector alike a powerful tool for opioid safety that also meets our unique requirements for operational security,” she said.

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THE LATEST WEAPON AGAINST CANCER BY MOLLY SHEN | KOMO NEWS

SEATTLE--It's the latest advance in the fight against cancer. It's not a new drug, but a new technique that practically puts a patient's tumor in the surgeon's hands before they even walk into the operating room. The medical breakthrough comes off a 3D printer in the Veterans Administration Puget Sound Hospital Innovations Lab after around 36 hours. Initially, it doesn't look like much. But peel back the layers and you'll see a replica of Greg Marshall's kidney. And you'll see his cancer.

"Well yeah, the big C, you know." Marshall said he thought he was suffering from a urinary tract infection. "And that's how they found it," he said. "So right away, ding ding, ding, you know. I'm the type of guy, I really don't show it on the outside, but on the inside I'm eating myself up. Worry and anxiety."

Doctors weren't able to ease his anxiety as they talked him through his disease using images from his scans. "It looks like gobbledy gook to me, because all it does is come up in stages," he said. "You look at it and say, oh really."

It was much easier to understand the complications of his disease and upcoming surgery with a 3D model in hand. Marshall came to see Doctor Michael Porter at the VA. Porter was able to show Marshall exactly where the tumor was located, its size, and discuss how the surgery would proceed.

Porter says this type of patient education is the first area of promise that comes with 3D printing. The second is in surgical planning. The model helps Dr. Porter prepare for what will be a complicated surgery. Before birth, Marshall's two kidneys grew into one single organ.

"He has an extra number of blood vessels," Dr. Porter said of Marshall. "Most people have one artery and one vein that goes off to each kidney. He's got at least two arteries and two veins."

This took 36 hours to make. What is it? A 3D printed version of a Yelm man's kidney. It's so precise, it helps both patient and doctor prepare for surgery to remove a tumor. #KOMONews at 11p
If Porter tries to remove the tumor without controlling those extra blood vessels, his patient could suffer catastrophic blood loss. And he needs to save as much of the single kidney as he can. Before surgery, he analyzed the 3D model, and during surgery, he consulted it again.

"See the artery right there, we're following that, so the vein is actually way north of us," he said to a colleague. This type of planning saves time in the operating room, and that saves money. The VA estimates the OR costs $80 a minute. Using the 3D model to map out the complicated surgery could save two hours of time - or $9,600 - with a model that cost less than $1,000 to produce. It also means less fatigue for the surgeon and less time under anesthesia for the patient.

Porter believes the third advantage of 3D printing is still to come, in the form of rehearsing surgery. As the material used in the printer becomes more "organ like," doctors can practice surgery a day or two ahead of time.

"That is particularly promising in minimally invasive and robotic assisted surgeries," Porter said. "There's less leeway in terms of adjusting during the case. Running through the surgery ahead of time may make planning that much better."

The lab at the VA has now turned out more than 20 3D models for surgical planning. Doctor Beth Ripley is a radiologist overseeing the 3D printing program at the VA Puget Sound. "I always say to the surgeon, tell me what you're worried about," Dr. Ripley said. "What keeps you up at night. These are the things I need to make sure are in the model."

Ripley and Porter both say the VA is a leader in the country for 3D medical printing. "The VA has a strong commitment to research and education in addition to clinical care for veterans. This is an example of how that can advance patient care," Porter said.

Dr. Ripley points to the vastness of the VA, which more than 100 hospitals. "This is the place you're really going to see how 3D printing grows," she said. The VA recently announced a partnership with GE Healthcare to expand the use of 3D printing in hospitals across the country.

As a graphic designer, Greg Marshall is a visual person who appreciates how the VA planned his surgery. As a cancer patient, he appreciates how it ended. "They told me that they got it all and my labs were good. So I'm happy about that," Marshall said.

**NEWS PERTAINING TO THE KOREAN PENINSULAR**

- NORTH KOREA'S KIM SHUFFLES NUCLEAR TALKS TEAM AFTER DEFECTIONS, SPYING ALLEGATIONS

SEoul (Reuters) - Veteran North Korean diplomats are being sidelined from nuclear talks ahead of a second summit with the United States as recent defections and allegations of spying undermine the trust of leader Kim Jong Un, South Korean officials and experts say. Kim has purged and replaced many top diplomats and officials who served his father and grandfather with new, younger advisors as he gears up to meet U.S. President Donald Trump in Vietnam next week.

Among the most significant changes, Kim has appointed little-known Kim Hyok Chol to spearhead working-level talks with U.S. nuclear envoy Stephen Biegun.

A former ambassador to Spain who was expelled in 2017 after North Korean nuclear and missile tests, Kim Hyok Chol has been working at the State Affairs Commission, a top governing body chaired by the young leader, a South Korean official said.
He replaced Vice Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui, who led negotiations in the run up to the first Trump-Kim summit in Singapore in June.

“It’s a big boys’ game and many diplomats are being neglected, as they face fierce inter-agency rivalry and questions about their ideological faithfulness given their experience in richer, capitalist nations,” the South Korean official said, asking to remain anonymous due to the sensitivity of the issue.

“Kim Hyok Chol is a career diplomat too, but he apparently has passed a loyalty test to become the point man in the negotiations.”

Kim Hyok Chol (R), North Korea's interlocutor leading negotiations with the United States, is pictured upon arrival at Beijing's international airport on his way to the Vietnamese capital Hanoi, in Beijing, China in this photo taken by Kyodo February 19, 2019. Kyodo via REUTERS

SPY CHARGES
The promotion of Kim Hyok Chol, believed to be in his late 40s, was partly influenced by the 2016 defection of Thae Yong Ho, a former deputy ambassador to Britain, and the recent disappearance of Jo Song Gil, a senior diplomat in Italy, the official said.

Adding to Kim Jong Un’s mistrust in veteran diplomats, Han Song Ryol, who was vice foreign minister in charge of U.S. relations until early last year, has been purged on charges of spying for the United States, two sources with knowledge of the situation told Reuters.

Han was one of the best known and highly respected North Korean diplomats in the United States, having for years manned the so-called “New York channel,” a key diplomatic conduit between Pyongyang and Washington, before returning home in 2013.

But Han has been out of the public eye for the past year, with state media last mentioning him in February 2018. South Korea’s Unification Ministry removed his name in its annual ‘Who’s Who’ in North Korea directory, released last month.

Kim Hyok Chol, North Korea's interlocutor leading negotiations with the United States, is pictured upon arrival at Beijing's international airport on his way to the Vietnamese capital Hanoi, in Beijing, China in this photo taken by Kyodo February 19, 2019. Kyodo via REUTERS

A diplomatic source in Seoul told Reuters, citing North Korean officials, Han was purged last year after being accused of spying for the United States and pocketing funds.

Michael Madden, a North Korea leadership expert at the Washington-based Stimson Centre who regularly speaks with sources inside the country, said two people told him Han faced “espionage charges” and disappeared last July.

Thae also said Han had been purged, which means he was likely to have been sent to a labor camp for reeducation or possibly executed.

Trump expects to meet Kim Jong Un again after Hanoi

South Korea’s Chosun Ilbo newspaper also reported last month, citing an unnamed source, that Han was sent to a labor camp after making an unspecified proposal on the nuclear talks against the ruling Workers’ Party’s guidelines.

An official at the Unification Ministry said the information on Han could not be confirmed.

“There were financial problems, but the biggest thing was his spy allegation. Several other diplomats, especially those who were close to Han, were investigated,” said the first source, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

DRIVING A WEDGE

In a 2017 report based on interviews with 20 elite defectors, the North Korea Strategy Centre, a defector-run think tank in Seoul, said more than 70 officials have been executed since Kim took power in late 2011.

Thae said at least 10 diplomats were killed under Kim, and replaced by younger aides and loyalists. Many other diplomats and officials have been sidelined.

In a Facebook post last week, Russia’s Embassy in North Korea confirmed Kwon Jong Gun was the new director of the foreign ministry’s North America Department, a post that has been vacant since Choe became a vice foreign minister.

Choe’s boss, Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho, a former nuclear envoy who was widely expected to be U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s counterpart, has never had a chance to show his credentials as Kim continued to rely on Kim Yong Chol, a former spymaster specialized in inter-Korean affairs.
Thae, the former diplomat in London, said the unorthodox new breed of negotiators was aimed at driving a wedge between the free-wheeling Trump and his team of technocrats, who were mostly cautious and skeptical about North Korea’s claims of pursuing denuclearization.

“North Korea’s diplomacy has taken an unprecedented tactical course, which is tailor made for Trump,” Thae told a news conference in Seoul on Tuesday.

“By appointing Kim Hyok Chol, Kim Jong Un was trying to give the impression that there’s no one between them, so that Trump will talk to him and shut his ears to his own staff.”

**KOREAN WAR HERO, GEN. PAIK SUN YEOP LEADS MORE THAN 500 FORMER S.KOREAN GENERALS TO INITIATE THE FUND-RAISING FOR THE USFK DEFENSE COST (SMA)!**

*Kim N.Korea Analyst*

General Paik Sun Yeop is the symbol of ROK-US alliance and Korean War Hero. November 21st, 2018 was Gen. Paik’s 99 years old birthday. There were Harry Harris US Ambassador to Seoul, who is a former US Navy Admiral and the Commander of US Indo-Pacific fleet, and South Korea’s Defense Secretary Jung Kyeong-doo to celebrate Paik’s birthday. Despite the old age, General Paik Sun Yeop goes to the war memorial office every day. His birthday was also held at the war memorial. The 99-year-old veteran went to the seminar room of the war memorial, the peace hall, immediately after his birthday party was over. On the same day, there were many stars of South Korea. About 500 former South Korea’s generals gathered. All of them are gathered because they cannot observe the national crisis anymore. Gen. Paik is the leader of this group.

South Korea faces National Defense Crisis after the Inter-Korea Summit

The national crisis that is currently underway in South Korea’s appeasement policy towards North Korea. These former generals are the experts in the military field, more than anyone, have expressed concern that the contents of the Inter-Korean military agreement reached on September 19, 2018, were wrong.

At that time, the meeting was originally the place where former generals invited active defense officials from the South Korea (Republic of Korea) government. In other words, former generals were trying to inform the active generals about the problems of the current Inter-Korean military agreement. And the former generals were asking the active generals why they approved the Inter-Korean military agreement that is favorable to North Korea. Surprisingly, none of the active Defense officials of the Ministry of National Defense (DoD) came out. Defense Ministry did not even answer the official invitation sent by former generals. Because of this, the debate seminar at the time was originally planned as Q&A sessions between the active and former officers, but it could not proceed properly. Instead, former generals made a public announcement about what was wrong with the Inter-Korean military agreement in detail.

South Korea dismantled ISR and military readiness

One of the main speakers of the event was Shin Won-sik Former Army Lt. Gen., Operation Chief of Joint Chief of Staff pointed out many of problems. One of them is about the new no-fly zone policy under Inter-Korean Military Agreement. Currently, South Korea’s Reconnaissance assets, RC-800, and RC-7 are capable of collect information near MDL (military demarcation line). Its optimum collection range is between 10~20km away from the MDL. However, the new agreement prohibits any air assets’ flight within 10km to 40km of MDL. Therefore, any South Korean Reconnaissance assets cannot foresee and detect North Korea’s military buildup near the border.

There are more problems which Shin pointed out. The newly produced agreement bans the launch of South Korea’s K-9 self-propelled artillery tanks, the main firepower of the South Korean Marine Corps deployed around the border in the west coast. The new agreement required the K-9 to cover its muzzle with white cloth all the time, and the entire K-9 tanks should be covered with tents. If there is an engagement between the two Koreas in case of emergency, the marines will need at least five minutes to uncover the tent and the muzzle.
Not to long ago, in 2010, North Korea carried out a surprise attack on Yeonpyeong Island (YP-do) where marines were deployed. North Korea’s provocation took place shortly after South Korea marines’ K-9 artillery shooting exercise. North Korea was aiming for this specific timing because they believed that most of the shells would have been exhausted by fire training. It shows how much North Korea is capable and cunning in terms of military tactics. At that time, our Marine Corps responded to the provocation of North Korea by launching K-9 self-propelled artillery within three minutes. If the Marine Corps did not respond quickly, South Korea’s damage would have been greater. Despite these unforgettable precedents, this agreement essentially blocked the ways of South Korea’s military response in case of emergency. As a result, the Inter-Korean military agreements have lost Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities of South Korea and have degraded the military preparedness against North Korea.

$54 billion (USD) VS $88 million (USD)

This same group, Former South Korean defense ministers and more than 500 military generals will form a group called the Former Generals’ Protection for Republic of Korea (tentative name) to go on collective action against the current government’s security policy and the delayed payment for the US Forces Korea (USFK).

The group will hold an inauguration ceremony on the 30th of January at the Korea Press Center in Seoul, Korea. A group will again lead by the Korean War Hero, Gen. Paik Sun Yeop. Not only Gen. Paik but also former Secretary of Defense, Kim Tae-young and many other former military high officials will join the event.

A Group raised serious problems with the current Moon Jae-in administration’s delay of payment for the USFK defense budget which officially known as special measures agreement (SMA). In particular, the current Moon’s administration has collected unprecedented taxes from its citizens. Kim Sun-taek, chairman of the South Korea Taxpayers’ Federation in an interview with the ChosunIlbo said that the Korean government has now taxed more than 60 trillion won (KRW) in taxes which is equivalent to about $54 billion USD. Currently, the defense fee that Korea has not paid to the US is known as about 983 billion won (KRW), which is equivalent to about 88 million dollars (USD). This cost is very small compared to the tax that Korea accumulated.

Nonetheless, Moon Jae-in administration is confronting the US government without paying USFK stationary budget. If this situation continues, the USFK will withdraw from the Korean peninsula in the worst case. Such withdrawal is what North Korea wanted for decades, ever since the beginning of North Korea from their first leader, Kim Il-song. Once the USFK withdraws, South Korea’s military readiness cannot defeat nor deter North Korea’s attack. General Shin Won-sik in the Pen N Mike interview said that most of the USFK forces currently in South Korea are not combat troops but administrative troops. The United States has withdrawn its combat troops in Korea over the past several years.

If the withdrawal of such combat forces continues, it could pose a threat to the security of South Korea as well as Northeast Asia. In the midst of this desperation crisis, the former generals of South Korea came off their feet. Since the South Korean government does not pay the defense cost for the USFK, the generals are trying to get ahead of the national defense fund-raising for the USFK. However, the Korean government is now stating that such fundraising is illegal.

Originally, the South Korean government must pay the defense cost directly to the United States but the government is not doing it. If the South Korean government paid the fee, it would not have been necessary for the people to raise voluntary fund. South Korea is continuing to take time as an excuse that Trump will raise the defense fee. This is interpreted only because the current South Korea administration’s pro-North Korean policy is aligned with North Korea’s desired USFK withdrawal policy.

A lesson of Korean IMF recovery through voluntary fund-raising
If the South Korean government does not pay US Forces Korea defense money in the near future, the national fund-raising will begin with former generals. South Korea has already undergone IMF (International Monetary Fund) in the late ’90s. As the bubble of the economy broke, South Korea faced an economic crisis. At the time, economists around the world predicted that Korea would not be able to get out of the IMF in a short period of time. However, the people of South Korea voluntarily raised and donated their gold. As the currency value of South Korea collapsed, the people collected gold which value was relatively high and stable. As a result of this voluntary Gold raising national campaign, South Korea quickly broke the unfortunate predictions of all business people and quickly escaped the IMF.

The people of South Korea who had this precedent were all together and shared the burden in the national crisis. Therefore the national defense fund-raising will also be successfully promoted. This promotion of fund-raising shows how sincerely South Korea treats the United States and how much they want the USFK to continuously reside in the peninsula. Obviously, this voluntary campaign makes the US reconsider any possibility of withdrawing US forces.

### SOUTH KOREA MULLS ENDING NATIONAL CEMETERY BURIALS FOR MILITARY VETERANS TO MAKE ROOM FOR CANDLELIGHT PROTESTERS, CONSIDERS DESIGNATING NORTH KOREAN COMMUNIST KIM WON-BONG “INDEPENDENCE MERITORIOUS PERSON”

A controversy surfaced when the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans pursued an initiative to cancel burial benefits for military veterans with less than 20 years service but more than 10 years service and instead make room for the burial of those who participated in candlelight protests and those designated as “Democracy Movement Meritorious Persons.” This means certain military veterans will no longer be eligible to be buried at the national cemeteries. The Korean War Veterans Association and other veterans groups strongly opposed the move.

**National Cemetery, Republic of Korea**

According to the National Assemblyman Ji Sang-wook (지상욱), Bareun Mirae Party, who received the recommendation of the “People-centered Patriots and Veterans Ministry Innovation Committee” or *Hyeokshinwi* (국민 중심 보훈혁신위원회 or 혁신위 for short), the Committee deemed the national cemetery burial beneficiaries as “too excessive.” The committee also suggested expanding the list of “Democracy Movement Meritorious Persons” to beyond the current 5.18 (Gwangju Uprising in 1980) and 4.19 (student demonstration in 1960) to include people involved in the 6.10 (protests in 1987), recent candlelight demonstrations, and others. This will increase the number of those eligible for National Cemetery burial. The committee recommended that the new groups should also be eligible for the national cemetery burials and other extensive benefits for generations.

The *Hyeokshinwi* is an external entity formed by the Moon administration to reform the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans. It is one of numerous external committees formed and tasked to reform and “eliminate Jeokpae (“deep-rooted evil/accumulated ills”; corruption) in every government ministry and agency. In reality, they act as a
parallel government to support the policies and goals of Moon Jae-in’s Blue House and his Deoburreo Minju Party.

The *Hyeokshinwi* committee is comprised of 13 members, who have similar leanings to Moon and his party—what is referred to as “code” in Korea—ones who share the same way of thinking. (5:16) They include Ji Eun-hee (지은희), CEO of Justice Memory Foundation (*Hyeokshinwi* chair); Kim Yang-rae (김양래), CEO of 5.18 Commemoration Foundation / Solidarity for Gwangju Citizens / Member, Gwangju Human Rights and Peace Foundation; and Seong Joon-il (성준일), *Minbyun* (far left “Lawyers for Democracy”) / standing member of the Patriots and Veterans Review Commission.

Pi Woo-jin, the Minister of Patriots and Veterans said they must achieve “democratization of Patriots and Veterans.” (4:07) It is unclear what the phrase means, but it could mean broadening the scope and number of the “meritorious person” designation. Minister Pi has said “there were 3 million independence movement activists, but we have only 15,000 people conferred with the honor of “meritorious persons,” which I find regrettable. So we the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans are actively looking for Independence Movement Meritorious Persons.” It is unclear where her 3 million figure came from.

**Kim Won-bong as National Independence Meritorious Person?**

Another controversy is Hyeokshinwi’s effort to give “National Independence Meritorious Person” designation to Kim Won-bong (김원봉) and others with communist backgrounds who conducted activities against South Korea. Hyeokshinwi wants to bestow this honor on those people for the upcoming 100th anniversary of the March 1st movement against Japan during the colonial period. Kim Won-bong was originally an anarchist, and formed an organization in 1919, which was involved in stealing, institution destruction, and VIP assassination. He was also part of the provisional government in Shanghai. He joined the Youth League of the communist party in South Korea as the honorary chair. (9:58) In 1948, he went to North Korea and joined the Korea Workers Party and received awards. During the Korean War, he conducted terrorist activities against South Korea. (10:00) He became a member of the Central Committee of the Korea Workers’ Party, and rose to be the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly in North Korea, the same position as Kim Yong-nam, who visited South Korea during the Winter Olympics. (10:10) Kim Won-bong was purged by Kim Il-sung in 1958.

**Benefits for Independence Movement Meritorious Person**

The “meritorious person” designation brings recognition and gratitude to those designated. It also has tangible and generous monetary and other benefits for the designated as well as for the family members, depending on which category a “meritorious person” falls under.

For an “Independence Movement Meritorious Person,” 3 generations receive benefit (i.e., self and spouse, children, and grandchildren). The designated person receives ₩2,707,000-8,039,000 ($2,400-$7,150) per month, the spouse receives ₩721,000-2,531,000 ($640-$2,250) per month plus other benefits from the government, and the children and grandchildren each receive ₩708,000-2,191,000 ($630-$1,950) per month along with other benefits, such as priority and financial support for housing, education, and government jobs. They also receive a monthly adjustment of ₩210,000-320,000 ($187-285), depending on how many children are in the family.

By comparison, the Korean War and Vietnam War Veterans receive 300,000 won ($268) per month, after the age of 65 and their family members do not receive monthly payments or other benefits like the other categories of beneficiaries.
National Assembly Sohn Hye-won (손혜원), who is mired in multiple scandals, also received “independence movement meritorious person” designation for her father Sohn Yong-woo (손용우) in 2018 after six prior rejections. Sohn Yong-woo was rejected for the status six times because of his activities as a member of the Communist Youth League, Seoul branch of the Korea Workers’ Party (Communist Party of Korea), but was accepted in 2018, after Sohn met with Minister Pi Woo-jin. Sohn Young-woo’s organization was a branch of the Korea Workers’ Party (the party of Kim Il-sung), and it worked against South Korea’s establishment as a liberal democracy and market economy through terrorism and other treasonous activities.

Controversy roils over the growing effort by the Moon administration to recognize, honor, and pay those who have fought against the formation of South Korea as a liberal democracy. It is also unclear why the candlelight demonstrators would be eligible for National Cemetery burial as well as financial payments and other benefits. Meanwhile, it appears that those cast aside to make room at the National Cemetery for the new groups are the Republic of Korea military veterans.

• KOREAN RETIRED GENERALs DEFENDING THE NATION STATEMENTS

Retired Generals salute. General PAIK Sun Yup is the 2nd from left. 2019-1-30 by Korean Retired Generals Defending the Nation (2 Statements)

1. Statement to ROK (Republic of Korea) Armed Forces
2. Statement to the People of the Republic of Korea

A Statement to the ROK Armed Forces

Korean Retired Generals Defending the Nation
Seoul, South Korea
January 30, 2019

We at the “Korean Retired Generals Defending the Nation (KRGDN)” can no longer turn a blind eye to the collapsing national security. Therefore, we with all our heart request to our dearly beloved service men and women as follows:
First, all active-duty service men and women in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, you must decide whether you will give up on the people, territory and sovereignty of this nation by being misled by the sugar-coated “fake peace” and “inter-Korean collaboration” rhetoric or safeguard them by performing your sacred military duty specified in Article 5 of the Constitution. You should not join or connive at any anti-national activities that undermine the nation’s security capability fostered by your proud predecessors. Soldiers are not just nine-to-fivers, but the bulwark of the national security ready to dedicate lives to defend the country. You should sternly reject anti-patriotic demand of the politicians attempting to sell out this nation to enemy. Soldiers, do your best to defend the nation and the people you belong to.

Second, the Moon administration signed “the 9·19 Inter-Korean Military Agreement” that unilaterally neutralize ROK’s security capability though Pyongyang has not shown any substantial progress towards denuclearization. The regime in the North is notorious for numerous military provocations including the tragic Korean war in 1950, and it now is recognized by the United Nations as the worst criminal ring against the humanity. Signing such an enemy-benefiting agreement is not only a violation of the Constitutional but a de facto declaration of the national suicide. As a result, countless wartime defense facilities built by blood and sweat for the past 70 years have been destroyed; early-warning capabilities have been blunted; combat units have been rapidly dismantled; anti-communist and counter-espionage intelligence functions have been crippled; military morale has been dampened and discipline is crumbling. Defense Minister, Chiefs of Staff and Marine Corps Commander, do decide by the end of February 2019 to discard the “9·19 Inter-Korean Military Agreement,” order the entire military to follow the decision, and promptly restore the nation’s disrupted security capability! Do not accommodate anti-constitutional instructions hurting the nation’s security.

Third, all service men and women on active duty should not be enticed by the North’s “juche” ideology advocating the three-generation hereditary dictatorship and aiming at communizing the entire Peninsula. If necessary, please look back to the cases of communized countries to predict the fate of the ROK people and military after communization. Keep in mind that the North Korean military is unmistakably your main adversary until we achieve reunification based on the free democracy orders clearly stated in Article 4 of the Constitution.

Fourth, the ROK-U.S. combined defense system, built by insights and wisdom of the alliance guardians of both countries, has proven to be the best system to safeguard this nation. Nevertheless, the Moon administration is disrupting this system by seducing the public with honeyed words like “security sovereignty” and by trying to separate prematurely the wartime operational control (OPCON). Currently, the Moon administration is delaying an early conclusion of the ROK-U.S. defense burden-sharing (SMA) negotiation, thereby ignoring the possibility of USFK withdrawal and further deterioration of the alliance credibility. Soldiers should not forget that liquidation of the alliance and the combined defense system has been the North’s 70-year old desideratum. Soldiers, remember that protecting the combined defense system is the way to protect your nation and your families. Defend it desperately.

Fifth, we will not accept as beloved members of military community those soldiers who sell out military honor to keep their positions. Former Defense Minister Song Young-moo who signed the enemy-benefiting “9·19 Inter-Korean Military Agreement” must publicly apologize if he wants to show even a tinge of remorse for dishonoring his predecessors and colleagues. Defense Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo, who demands faithful implementation the Agreement and presses for preparation for an early OPCON transfer at every military commanders’ meeting to flatter political authority, must immediately resign and apologize to the public and the military community. Lastly, our beloved active-duty brothers and sisters, do not participate any longer in the act of treason and follow only the order given by the Constitution.

Hail, Free ROK! Hail, the ROK People! Hail, the ROK Armed Forces!
A Statement to the People of the Republic of Korea

Korean Retired Generals Defending the Nation
Seoul, South Korea
January 30, 201

We at the “Korean Retired Generals Defending the Nation (KRGDN)” briefed the citizens of this nation on the severity of security situation of the Republic of Korea (ROK) by issuing a statement after hosting the “Grand Forum on the 9·19 Inter-Korean Military Agreement” at the war memorial, Seoul, on November 21, 2018. Also, we sent 20 public questions to the government in the name of “415 retired generals concerned about the national security.” The Moon Jae-in administration, however, has remained silent. We believe the Moon administration have refused to answer our questions because either they have no confidence in convincing the public of the legitimacy of the Agreement or they completely ignore the demand made by the retired generals. We at KRGDN can no longer turn a blind eye to the current gloomy situation that may lead to not only a collapse of security but a demise of the nation. Therefore, we plea for your support as follows:

First, this nation was built and has been developed by desperate dedication of patriotic citizens for the past 70 years. Nonetheless, the Moon administration has been denying the legitimacy of its own nation and bringing down liberal democracy under the cloak of “inter-Korean collaboration” initiated by the unreliable Pyongyang regime. We shall no longer sit idly by so that the Moon administration and Pyongyang can determine the fate of this country. Now is time for the citizens to come together under the flag of “defending free democracy and opposing communism” and to bring the Moon administration’s anti-constitutional activities to a halt. If President Moon and his administration continue to disregard the citizen’s warning, the people of the nation will have to bring them to justice by employing all rights and means laid out in the Constitution.

Second, “the peace on the Korean Peninsula” that the Moon administration and the Kim regime in the North are jointly shouting does not mean genuine peace. Rather, it is “fake peace” designed to communize the whole peninsula. It is nothing more than a deceiving propaganda tactic to disrupt, incapacitate and disable ROK’s security capability, withdraw the U.S. forces in South Korea (USFK) and communize the country. All hardworking ROK citizens including entrepreneurs, merchants, engineers and farmers must recognize dire consequences the entire nation will face after communization. We will lose everything we have, and this land will turn into a killing field. This being the reality, the self-styled ‘right-wing’ opposition parties still going on divisive factional strife even on the brink of the nation’s collapse must decide whether they will voluntarily dissolve or throw away their easy-going behavior and unite in solidarity to put an end to the pro-North Korean leftist government. The ROK people must stand up together and squash the fake peace plot. United we stand, divided we fall.

Third, “the 9·19 Inter-Korean Military Agreement” that unilaterally inflicts harms to ROK’s security readiness and capability while Pyongyang has shown no interest in denuclearization only benefits the enemy. We must abrogate the agreement to protect the country. The ROK people must fight vigorously to scrap the Agreement.

Fourth, the ROK-U.S. alliance has provided this nation with security shield and economic stability, thus ensuring the its survival and prosperity. People’s power must safeguard this alliance, if the government refuses to do so, until the Peninsula is unified on the principles of liberal democracy and permanent peace takes root. Therefore, we should spend money preferentially for the ROK-U.S. alliance rather than for the North Korean regime since our help to the untrustworthy regime can any time boomerang on us as lethal weapons. If the Moon administration refuses necessary defense burden-sharing to support the USFK while profusely spending money for the regime in Pyongyang, the citizens will have to step in and launch a nation-wide fund-raising campaign to support the U.S. soldiers in this land.
Fifth, the Moon administration is suppressing conservative NGOs and civic groups dedicated to defense of ROK and oppressing patriotic conservatives and shaking the press, thus destroying humanity and liberal democracy in this nation. Now all citizens must stand up to the Moon administration’s tyrannical and unfair politics to protect the democracy.

Six, the Moon administration must stop the reverse navigation in its economic policy by discarding the anti-market populist policies. The moon administration, responsible for the current economic unrest, should strive for better quality of life of its own people rather than for the tyrannical regime in Pyongyang. Also, it should not let the Pyongyang regime twist arms of South Korean entrepreneurs to bribe itself. The ROK people will no longer tolerate the flattering diplomacy toward the North.

**NORTH KOREAN LEADER WON’T GIVE UP NUCLEAR WEAPONS, PROMINENT DEFECTOR SAYS**

Thae Yong Ho, a former North Korean diplomat who defected to South Korea, speaks to reporters in Seoul on Tuesday, Feb. 19, 2019.

By KIM GAMEL | STARS AND STRIPESPublished: February 19, 2019

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will never give up nuclear weapons but may agree to reduce production facilities in exchange for sanctions relief during his upcoming summit with President Donald Trump, a prominent defector said Tuesday.

Thae Yong Ho, one of the most senior diplomats to flee the communist state, said Kim’s strategy is to persuade Trump to essentially accept North Korea as a de facto nuclear power.

“If you take out nuclear weapons, what else do they have, nothing,” he said at a news conference in Seoul, adding that the regime sees them as essential to its survival.

“They are trying to tip the extremely uneven scale when it comes to conventional weapons compared with the United States and South Korea,” he added. “No one in the world can persuade North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons.”

He said the bellicose rhetoric in the months before nuclear talks began early last year was part of that effort, but he insisted Pyongyang never intended to go to war.

“That strategy worked,” Thae said. “Unfortunately President Trump fell into this trap.”

North Korea will expect to see a partial easing of international sanctions during the Feb. 27-28 summit in Vietnam, Thae said.
In return, the North may agree to dismantle its Yongbyon nuclear material production facility and to destroy intercontinental ballistic missiles, he said.

The U.S. administration has insisted that it will maintain punishing economic sanctions until the final, fully verified denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is achieved.

But it also is under tremendous pressure to achieve concrete results in Vietnam after widespread criticism that the first U.S.-North Korean summit in Singapore ended with only vague promises.

Thae warned that the second meeting between the two men in less than a year will be a failure if Trump does not persuade Kim to agree to complete denuclearization and return to key treaties that were abandoned when previous talks collapsed more than a decade ago.

“If the U.S. is really trying to achieve the complete denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula then it needs to first require the North Korean leader to get rid of nuclear weapons and to promise to return to the non-proliferation treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency,” Thae said.

He said a promise to dismantle the North’s nuclear material production facility at Yongbyon would be a small prize, comparing it to “lifting sanctions without any concrete measures from North Korea.”

The Soviet-era plant was also at the center of past failed negotiations. Thae said the complex now has more than 390 facilities that would have to be inspected and verified, which means the process would almost certainly not be finished before the end of Trump’s first term.

He also said any pledge to dismantle ICBMs would be limited because the international community doesn’t have a complete tally of the weapons that could target the U.S. mainland.

A series of missile and nuclear tests, including the test-firing of ICBMs toward Japan, in 2017 raised fears that the divided peninsula was on the brink of a nuclear war.

Trump has frequently touted the suspension of those tests as a measure of success since his administration began new talks with the North Koreans last year.

But Thae said the moratorium was possible because the North Koreans already had made strong progress.

He also said that Yongbyon and the main nuclear testing facility at Punggye-ri were on the table because they had already served their purpose.

“They’ve already come very close to their end of life,” he said.

Thae was a senior diplomat at North Korea’s embassy in London when he defected to South Korea in 2016. Since then, he has been very vocal in his criticism of the regime.

But he reversed his call for Jo Song Gil, an old colleague who went missing from North Korea’s embassy in Italy in November, to defect to South Korea.

Thae said Tuesday that he had confirmed via a contact in North Korea that Jo’s daughter had been repatriated and was in the government’s custody.

Italian media have reported that Jo has sought asylum in the United States.
“I was lucky enough to bring all my family out safely to South Korea, but now that I found out for a fact that his daughter is in North Korea, then I cannot demand or plead with Cho to come to South Korea,” he said.

- **BIPARTISAN HOUSE GROUP INTRODUCES BILLS TO STALL SYRIA, SOUTH KOREA TROOP WITHDRAWALS** BY ELLEN MITCHELL - 01/30/19 03:35 PM EST 90

A bipartisan group of eight House lawmakers on Wednesday introduced two bills to make it more difficult for the Trump administration to withdraw troops from Syria and South Korea.

The bills, introduced by freshman Reps. Tom Malinowski (D-N.J.), and Van Taylor (R-Texas), would limit the funds the administration may use to pull troops from the countries.

Democrat Reps. Andy Kim (N.J.), Jimmy Panetta (D-Calif.), and Max Rose (N.Y.), also back the bills, as do Republican Reps. Mike Gallagher (Wis.), Elise Stefanik (N.Y.), and Will Hurd (Texas). Kim, Gallagher and Stefanik all serve on the House Armed Services Committee.

The first bill, titled the “Responsible Withdrawal From Syria Act,” prohibits the use of Pentagon funds to draw down active duty troop presence in Syria below 1,500.

“None of the funds made available to the Department of Defense (DoD) for fiscal year 2019 may be used” on such a withdrawal unless the Defense and State secretaries and the director of National Intelligence submit to Congress a report that addresses several questions, according to the bill.

The list of 15 questions includes queries on the current strength and of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the threat the group continues to pose to the U.S. and its allies, the risks involved with conducting counter-ISIS operations following a withdrawal, and the administration’s military and political strategy for meeting any remaining threat from the group.

The lawmakers also want to know and whether the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) — the group the U.S. has partnered with in fighting ISIS — will remain a viable fighting force in the absence of a U.S. military presence in Syria, the actions the administration plans to take to ensure the safety of Syrian nationals who provided support to the coalition and the commitments, if any, that Turkey has extended with respect to fighting ISIS and refraining from military action against the Kurds.
“While every effort should be made to reach lasting solutions through diplomacy, the reality remains that the United States must stand ready to protect our interests and the security of our allies in the Middle East,” Taylor said in a statement.

“We must also ensure that our actions don’t contribute to a resurgence of terrorism in the region or to the expanded influence of malign foreign actors like Iran or Russia in Syria.”

President Trump raised concerns among lawmakers and the intelligence community late last year when he announced that the U.S. would begin a military withdrawal from Syria after claiming victory over ISIS.

The decision, which led to the resignation of Defense Secretary James Mattis and other officials, was criticized as too hasty, ill thought out and an opportunity for ISIS to regain losses and ramp up the fight against U.S.-allied Kurdish fighters.

Officials, lawmakers and international allies are also are worried that Turkey, who views the SDF as a terrorist organization, will move to retaliate against the group once U.S. forces leave the region.

The second bill, titled the “United States and Republic of Korea Alliance Support Act,” takes a similar route and would also halt the use FY-19 DoD dollars “to reduce the total number of Armed Forces serving on active duty in the Republic of Korea below 22,000,” pending several certifications to Congress.

Trump has signaled in the past that he wants to draw down troops in the Korean Peninsula, complaining that the cost of maintaining a military presence there is too high.

The Defense secretary and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff must “jointly certify to the relevant congressional committees that the Republic of Korea would be fully capable of defending itself and deterring a conflict on the Korean Peninsula that would threaten United States interests following such a reduction,” the bill states.

The Defense secretary must also consult with U.S. allies, including South Korea and Japan, regarding such a reduction, and the secretary and the chairman must jointly certify to Congress that North Korea has “completed verifiable and irreversible nuclear disarmaments.”

The bill’s release comes a day after Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats testified to Congress that the chances of full North Korean denuclearization appear unlikely.

“We currently assess that North Korea will seek to retain its WMD [weapons of mass destruction] capabilities and is unlikely to completely give up its nuclear weapons and production capability because its leaders ultimately view nuclear weapons as critical to regime survival,” Coats said.

The president and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un are expected to meet for a second summit next month to further discuss North Korea’s nuclear program.

- **SOUTH KOREA, US SIGN $920 MILLION DEFENSE COST-SHARING DEAL IN TIME FOR SUMMIT**

The U.S. and South Korea have reached an agreement on cost sharing for U.S. forces, like these of the 25th Infantry Division photographed on March 21, 2015. However,
the agreement is only for one year rather than the usual five years.

By KIM GAMEL | STARS AND STRIPES

SEOUl, South Korea — South Korea agreed to pay $920 million this year in a new defense cost-sharing deal with the United States that was signed Sunday, lifting a strain on the alliance just in time for the next U.S.-North Korean summit.

The United States, meanwhile, reaffirmed the need for a “stable U.S. military deployment” and offered assurances that it has no plans to change the number of forces on the divided peninsula, the Foreign Ministry said in a press release.

The provisional contract, known as the Special Measures Agreement, was inked nearly six weeks after the previous five-year accord expired.

Negotiators held 10 rounds of talks last year but remained deadlocked over President Donald Trump’s demand that the South pay significantly more.

Buying time

The compromise calls for South Korea to pay 1.0389 trillion won, or $920 million, this year to offset the cost of maintaining some 28,500 American troops, officials said. Seoul paid 960 billion won ($830 million) last year.

That’s short of the $1.5 billion per year that Trump reportedly had at one point demanded. But the two sides also agreed to a one-year agreement instead of the usual five-year timeframe, so negotiators will have to return to the table soon.

The deal - which must still be ratified by South Korea’s National Assembly - resolves a dispute between the longtime allies at a crucial time, with a second U.S.-North Korea summit due to take place at the end of the month in Hanoi, Vietnam.

“We have a number of domestic steps that we need to go through,” Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha said as she met with the top U.S. negotiator Timothy Betts.

“I think the response so far has been quite positive. Of course, there are some points of criticism as well,” she added. “We will have to deal with them, but I think at this point we were able to close the gap on the total amount.”

South Korea has hosted American troops since the two countries fought together against the communist-backed North in the 1950-53 Korean War, which ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

President Moon Jae-in also has been credited with playing a mediator role in persuading North Korean leader Kim Jong Un to engage in diplomacy aimed at ridding his country of nuclear weapons.

“The United States government realizes that Korea does a lot for our alliance and for peace and stability in this region,” Betts said. “The SMA is only a small part of that. But it’s an important part and we are pleased that our consultations resulted in an agreement that I think will strengthen transparency and strengthen and deepen our cooperation in the alliance.”

Alliance test
The burden-sharing talks were a test for Trump’s insistence that U.S. allies should pay more for their own defense. He also has insisted that NATO members increase their contributions, and the issue is expected to arise soon in Japan in talks on funding the 50,000 U.S. troops based there.

Trump has complained that maintaining troops in South Korea is too expensive and said in the past that he would like to bring them home. But he insists that troop numbers are not part of the equation in nuclear talks with the North.

When asked about the possibility in an interview with CBS last week, Trump said he has “no plans” to withdraw troops from the peninsula and hasn’t even discussed the issue.

However, he added “maybe someday,” reiterating that he would like to save the money.

Brinkmanship is common in the cost-sharing talks, which have taken place since 1991, but the U.S.-led effort to persuade North Korea to give up its weapons raised the stakes.

Trump surprised Seoul and many of his own aides when he announced after his first summit with North Korea on June 12 that he was suspending joint war games with South Korea, which he called “very expensive” and “provocative.”

Many analysts expressed concern he may make a similar gesture in his upcoming talks with Kim.

The next round of annual joint military exercises, called Key Resolve/Foal Eagle, is due to be held in the spring, although officials have said they won’t announce a date until after the Vietnam summit.

North Korea hates the drills, which it considers a rehearsal for an invasion. The North and its main backer, China, also would like to see the U.S. military presence removed from their doorstep.

**Military costs.** South Korea insists it pays a fair share of the some $2 billion per year needed to keep the troops in the country, with funds mainly used for salaries of nearly 9,000 local employees who provide food and administrative services, and other logistical needs.

U.S. Forces Korea, the main command, said in its Strategic Digest that Seoul paid about 41 percent of the cost.

The South also paid the bulk of the more than $11 billion price tag for expanding the Camp Humphreys Army garrison as part of a long-delayed plan to relocate most Americans south of Seoul.

The U.S. military also enjoys less tangible benefits, including rent-free land for its bases and an exemption that allows government-operated vehicles to use expressways toll-free.

Services had not been interrupted thanks to reserve funds, but USFK had warned the Korean Employees’ Union that it would have to put local staff on unpaid leave beginning in mid-April if a deal wasn’t reached.

The allies also missed the Dec. 31 deadline in 2013, but they managed to reach a deal a few weeks later when South Korea agreed to increase its contribution by 5.8 percent, with a 4-percent cap on the inflation rate.

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**GEN. ABRAMS: NORTH KOREA HAS NOT CHANGED ITS MILITARY POSTURE AS TRUMP-KIM MEETING NEARS**

*Commander of U.S. Forces Korea Gen. Robert Abrams testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Tuesday, Feb. 12, 2019, during a hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington.*
WASHINGTON – The top U.S. military commander in South Korea said Tuesday that North Korea has made few, if any, changes to its military posture and has provided no evidence it intends to end its nuclear program since agreeing to do so in the summer.

Tensions have eased along the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea since the summit in June between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Singapore, Army Gen. Robert Abrams, the chief of U.S. Forces Korea, told the Senate Armed Services Committee. But Kim’s regime has declined to provide proof that they had taken any irreversible steps toward denuclearization and his forces have continued to conduct “full spectrum” training exercises.

“I remain clear-eyed about the fact that despite the reduction in tensions along the [demilitarized zone] … we have observed no significant changes to size, scope, or the timing of their ongoing exercises compared to the same time period over the last four years,” said Abrams, who took command in South Korea about three months ago.

“Further, North Korea’s conventional and asymmetric military capabilities along with their continued development of advanced conventional systems remain unchecked. These capabilities continue to hold the United States, [South Korea] and our regional allies at risk.”

North Korea remains the No. 1 immediate threat to American forces in the Indo-Pacific Command area of operations, said Adm. Philip Davidson, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command chief who testified alongside Abrams on Tuesday.

The observations come just weeks before Trump and Kim are set to meet face-to-face again. That summit is scheduled for Feb. 27 and 28 in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Trump has touted an optimistic view of North Korea – once proclaiming it was no longer a threat – since his first meeting with Kim. He tweeted this week that he looked “forward to seeing Chairman Kim & advancing the cause of peace!”

Abrams, Davidson and several Republican Armed Services Committee members endorsed the president’s second summit, saying they hoped to see the North Koreans commit to dismantling their nuclear programs transparently.

Several Democrat members did not express such optimism. Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said the first meeting led to “a stark and stunning lack of any action [or] progress.” Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., raised concerns that Trump could make a bad trade in the talks, such as removing American troops from South Korea.

“That action would significantly undermine regional security and our ability to fulfill our treaty obligations to South Korea,” said Reed, the top Democrat on the committee.

Following his first meeting with Kim, Trump abruptly announced he would cancel large-scale military training exercises in South Korea. North Korea agreed to return to the United States some 50 boxes of remains believed to contain the bodies of missing American servicemembers from the Korean War.

Abrams downplayed the impact of curbing those high-level exercises on U.S. and South Korean troops’ combat readiness, saying servicemembers have continued to conduct training exercises together on smaller scales. They remain prepared and capable of defending South Korean territory against an invasion from the North, he said.

Abrams also said the last time that North Korea launched a ballistic missile or conducted a nuclear weapons test was before the first Trump-Kim summit.
"Today is day 440 since the last strategic provocation of the [North Koreans] … either a missile flight test or nuclear weapons test," he said. "The reduction in tensions on the peninsula is palpable. Along the DMZ, there has been significant reduction that has enable nation-confidence building measures … decreased the chance of mistakes, miscalculation, and continue to preserve space for the main [diplomatic] effort."

The upcoming second summit, he said, was a “positive sign of continued dialogue.” “It certainly beats the alternative of what we were living with in 2017,” Abrams said.

**DESPITE KIM SUMMITS, NORTH KOREA STILL A THREAT, SAY US COMMANDERS** *By: Joe Gould*

WASHINGTON — U.S.-North Korean diplomatic talks have lessened hostilities between the two countries, but Pyongyang hasn’t shown verifiable denuclearization or change in the capability of its military forces, U.S. military officials in the Pacific said Tuesday on Capitol Hill.

As President Donald Trump plans his second summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for Feb. 27-28 in Vietnam, the administration is facing mounting pressure to produce results from its high-stakes diplomatic efforts. The first summit in Singapore in June generated headlines and optimism, but few developments.

“Despite a reduction in tensions along the [Demilitarized Zone] and a cessation of strategic provocations coupled with public statements of intent to denuclearize, little to no verifiable change has occurred in North Korea’s military capabilities,” U.S. Forces Korea’s commander, Army Gen. Robert Abrams, told the Senate Armed Services Committee.

In an exchange with SASC ranking member Jack Reed, D-R.I., Abrams affirmed the U.S. presence and posture in South Korea is appropriate to deter Pyongyang, and that South Korea and Japan would be concerned without that presence.

Abrams also affirmed to Maine Independent Sen. Angus King that even if the nuclear threat is eliminated, North Korea’s conventional capability, unless it’s reduced, justifies the continued U.S. troop presence on the divided peninsula.

Trump has complained about the cost of maintaining that presence, raising fears he may seek to withdraw the 28,500 troops. He said in an interview last week that he had no plans to do so and that it hadn’t been raised.
Though the president made a calculated diplomatic concession to halt large-scale U.S.-South Korean military exercises, Abrams told lawmakers that North Korea’s winter military training, “including a slate of full-spectrum exercises … is progressing along historic norms.”

Abrams said at his nomination hearing in September that Trump’s decision to last month to cancel military exercises with South Korea had led to a “slight degradation” in American readiness. On Tuesday, he said joint training continues and that the lack of exercises isn’t evident at the battalion level or below.

On Tuesday, Abrams told Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, that Kim has prioritized the development and training of North Korean special operations forces. Several lawmakers pressed Abrams and the commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command’s chief, Adm. Philip Davidson, to describe the impact of the Trump administration’s engagement with North Korea. Both leaders were upbeat.

Abrams said Tuesday marked 440 days since North Korea conducted a nuclear or missile flight test, adding there has been a “palpable” reduction in tension on the Korean Peninsula.

“My personal opinion is the announcement of a second summit between President Trump and the Supreme Leader Kim is a positive sign of continued dialogue,” Abrams said. “It certainly beats the alternative of what we were living with in 2017.”

But lawmakers were skeptical. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said there had been a “stark and stunning lack of action” on denuclearization, while Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., groused that as a member of the Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees, he had yet to receive a briefing about commitments made at the Singapore summit. Neither officer referenced a new Korea Times report that Pyongyang has agreed “in principle” to accept verification by International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors of its denuclearization, in line with repeated demands from the U.S. to take concrete steps toward nuclear disarmament.

Specific dates and places, as well as programs for IAEA visits to North Korea, and other details will be dealt with in follow-up working-level talks, according to an official unnamed by the Korea Times report.

• **PENTAGON SHRINKS KEY US-SOUTH KOREAN MILITARY EXERCISE**  By: Aaron Mehta

In this March 12, 2016, file photo, U.S. Marines, left, and South Korean Marines, wearing blue headbands on their helmets, take positions after landing on the beach during the joint military combined amphibious exercise, called Ssangyong, part of the Key Resolve and Foal Eagle military exercises, in Pohang.
A key military exercise between the U.S. and South Korea will go ahead next year — but in a diminished form, in order to not interfere with ongoing political negotiations with North Korea.

“We are not cancelling exercises,” Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis told reporters at the Pentagon Wednesday. “Foal Eagle is being reorganized a bit to keep it at a level that will not be harmful to diplomacy.”

Mattis later added that the exercises are being “reduced in scope,” but did not give details on actual numbers.

Foal Eagle represents one of the two biggest annual exercises between the U.S. and the ROK, with the 2018 edition involving roughly 11,500 U.S. troops and 290,000 South Korean troops. The exercise covers air, land and naval coordination, making it perhaps the closest representation to what the two nations would be doing if war broke out with North Korea.

The news comes roughly a month after the Pentagon officially suspended another joint exercise known as Vigilant Ace, an annual December air exercise involving more than 12,000 forces.

As part of the Trump administration’s outreach to North Korea, President Donald Trump last June pulled the plug on near-term military exercises between the U.S. and South Korea, deriding them as “war games.” North Korea has long sought the cancellation of such joint exercises, which it views as provocative in the region.

At the time, the pause in the joint training exercise was cast as temporary, something of a carrot-and-stick approach for good behavior from Pyongyang.

But since then, the Pentagon has cancelled or limited further exercises — sometimes with mixed messaging. Such was the case in August, when Mattis told reporters there were “no plans, at this time, to suspend any more exercises” on the Korean Peninsula before Trump took to Twitter and shot down the idea of restarting the exercises.

Speaking on the Hill in August, Army Gen. Robert Abrams, the then-nominee and now head of U.S. Forces Korea, said the pause in exercises has led to a “slight degradation” of readiness, and analysts have raised concerns that cancelling exercises into 2019 would increasingly impact America’s preparedness for conflict in the region.

Mattis, for his part, has previously downplayed the impact on readiness from hitting pause on the exercises, in part because a number of smaller exercises have continued between the U.S. and ROK. If Foal Eagle is “reorganized” in that manner, it could take the form of several lower-level events, perhaps down at the battalion level.
The Devil’s Playground is a timely account of what it is like to serve along perhaps the most dangerous and sensitive strip of land in the world. In recent months two bullet-riddled attempted escapes from North to South brought worldwide headlines. And with Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un exchanging threats, the world hopes for a diplomatic solution, but watches with bated breath.

Author Gary L. Bloomfield, a military journalist in what is called “the demilitarized” zone between North and South Korea in the 1970s, combines his personal experience with interviews and historical insights to present a fresh, up-to-date, account of what it is like to serve on perhaps the most contentious strip of land in the world today.

The Devil’s Playground combines history with current events that today have the rest of the world watching, hoping there is no explosion, which could lead to a nuclear war. While world attention is focused on the Koreas, few people understand what is at stake and what happens there every day. Here is the unfiltered answer.

Formed in 1953 after the Korean War ended in a stalemate, the demilitarized zone is anything but. It is in fact one of the most heavily-armed regions in the world—a powder keg just waiting for someone to light the fuse. There have been more than 40,000 truce violations ranging from minor fisticuffs to brutal killings, from moving heavy artillery into the zone to assassination attempts in downtown Seoul since the Armistice Agreement was signed.

The demilitarized zone is also the focus of an intense propaganda war—with thousands of flyers sent across the border each year from both sides. Few people realize that over the years North Korea has trained 100,000 men for guerrilla warfare across the border, and it is unknown how many have already secreted themselves in South Korea. It is the duty of the American and South Korean soldiers there to stop them.

Gary Bloomfield presents here the first unvarnished accounts of the tension and the impact serving on the line can bring. Just one example: Though firefights are rare, US soldiers often hear North Korean soldiers and their laughter and the taunts, but they rarely see their tormentors.

Life along the demilitarized zone is a war of nerves, a game of cat and mouse, though it’s hard to tell who’s chasing whom. Bloomfield covers it all in unsparing detail and offers fascinating previously little-known details.

Life along the demilitarized zone is a war of nerves, a game of cat and mouse, though it’s hard to tell who’s chasing whom. Bloomfield covers it all in unsparing detail and offers fascinating details. Here is Guardpost Ouellette, which some American soldiers call the edge of the world; or Radar Site #4, overlooking the truce village of PanMunJom to the west, a hilltop where the tension is thick 24 hours a day; deadly minefields and miles of razor-sharp concertina wire and the desperate people who try of pass over them. Here also are the trigger-happy, shoot-to-kill sentries along the border on both sides; concrete bunkers with 24-hour guards armed with machine-guns, and spotlights, trip flares and other sensing devices concealed everywhere add to the heavily-fortified barrier against a North Korean attack. And of course the details of the Tree Incident in 1976, which nearly triggered World War III.

The Devil’s Playground is a living history with the spit of real life and a vivid look at brinksmanship in its most precarious state.
KOREAN WAR VETERANS MEMORIAL WALL OF REMEMBRANCE
Help us commemorate those who served and sacrificed.

To make a contribution, please visit:

WWW.KOREANWARVETSMEMORIAL.ORG

The Korean War Veterans Memorial Foundation, Inc. is a non-profit, tax exempt foundation chartered in the District of Columbia as a 501C3 Foundation. Donations made to the Foundation are justified as a tax deduction by the donor.

• KOREAN WAR VETERANS MEMORIAL WALL OF REMEMBRANCE
Are you aware that the Korean War Veterans Memorial Foundation (a non-profit Foundation chartered in the District of Columbia) is seeking funding to place the names of the 36,574 fallen veterans on a Wall of Remembrance (WOR) to be added to the National Korean War Veterans Memorial in our Nation’s Capital, so as to honor all who gave their all during that War? That Wall of Remembrance will finally give credence to the Memorial’s theme that “Freedom is not Free.” Just as Huntsville honors its veterans from every war, so will the Foundation honor our nation’s veterans fallen in battle during the Korean War.
Someone once said that “our nation owes a debt to its fallen heroes that we can never fully repay, but we can honor their sacrifice” and that the Foundation seeks to do. It was just last December when the Foundation’s efforts to shepherd legislation through numerous Congresses finally succeeded in having the legislation signed into law (Public Law 114-230) to build that Wall - using solely private, tax-deductible, funding. If you are interested in writing another or follow up story on particularly the Korean War Veterans to let your community know of the Foundation’s efforts, please get back in touch with me.
MIA UPDATE: This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced new identifications. Returning home with full military honors are:

**Soldiers Accounted For From Korean War**

By DPAA Public Affairs

[https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1752215/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-ferguson-c/fbclid/IwAR33erLiDcTUickBQ0ruywZ_uchb1COL-OEmdl8-iE1e_cUeff8wzzbJvAFE/](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/Article/1752215/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-ferguson-c/fbclid/IwAR33erLiDcTUickBQ0ruywZ_uchb1COL-OEmdl8-iE1e_cUeff8wzzbJvAFE/)

WASHINGTON—**Army Cpl. Carlos E. Ferguson**, killed during the Korean War, was accounted for on Feb. 4, 2019.

In May 1951, Ferguson was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division, engaged in combat against the North Korean People’s Army and the Chinese People’s Volunteer Forces. The battle, fought near Kangye, South Korea, from May 16-20, was named the “Battle of the Soyang River.” Ferguson was reported missing in action on May 18, 1951.

DPAA is grateful to the Department of Veterans Affairs for their partnership in this mission.

Ferguson’s name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, along with the others who are missing from the Korean War. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

For more information about DPAA, visit www.dpaa.mil, find us on social media at www.facebook.com/dodpaa, or call 703-699-1420/1169.

WASHINGTON—**Army Master Sgt. Charlie J. Mares**, killed during the Korean War, was accounted for on Feb. 4, 2019.

In July 1951, Mares was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, engaged in combat against the Korean People’s Army. Mares was reported missing in action following the battle, fought near Kwonbin-ni, South Korea, on July 31, 1951.

DPAA is grateful to the Department of Veterans Affairs for their partnership in this mission.

Mares’ name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, along with the others who are missing from the Korean War. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

**DPAA Agency Video**

Please click on this link to see a wonderful story of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency

[https://youtu.be/FcSwcb57OGg](https://youtu.be/FcSwcb57OGg)
The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) announced that Army Pvt. Winfred L. Reynolds, 20, of High Point, North Carolina, killed during the Korean War, was accounted for on Jan. 16, 2019.

In April 1951, Reynolds was a member of Medical Company, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, and attached to 2nd Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, near Hwach’on Reservoir, South Korea. He was killed on April 26, 1951, while caring for wounded Soldiers. Because of ongoing fighting in the area, Reynolds’ remains were unable to be recovered.

In 2017, the Ministry of National Defense Agency for Killed in Action Recovery and Identification (MAKRI), a South Korean organization with the same mission as DPAA searched in the vicinity of where Reynolds was killed and recovered possible osseous material. The remains were accessioned into the MAKRI laboratory, where it was determined the remains were likely of European decent. They were subsequently sent to the DPAA laboratory for analysis.

To identify Reynolds’ remains, scientists from DPAA and the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System used mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) analysis, anthropological analysis, as well as circumstantial and material evidence.

DPAA is grateful to the South Korean Government and the Ministry of National Defense Agency for Killed in Action Recovery and Identification for their partnership in this mission.

Today, 7,670 Americans remain unaccounted for from the Korean War. Using modern technology, identifications continue to be made from remains that were previously returned by North Korean officials or recovered from North Korea by American recovery teams. Reynolds’ name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, along with the others who are missing from the Korean War. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

WASHINGTON—Army Sgt. George R. Schipani, killed during the Korean War, was accounted for on Jan. 30, 2019.

In late 1950, Schipani was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division, when his unit took part in the Battle of Unsan, North Korea. Early in the morning of Nov. 2, 1950, Schipani’s battalion was struck by enemy units of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Forces. After several days of intense fighting, survivors escaped to friendly lines. Schipani was reported missing in action as of Nov. 2, 1950.

DPAA is grateful to the Department of Veterans Affairs for their partnership in this mission. Schipani’s name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in
Honolulu, along with the others who are missing from the Korean War. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

WASHINGTON—Army Cpl. James C. Rix, killed during the Korean War, was accounted for on Feb. 8, 2019.

In November 1950, Rix was a member of Company E, 7th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was killed in action on Nov. 30, 1950, during heavy fighting between the Chinese People’s Volunteer Forces (CPVF) and the 7th Cavalry Regiment in the vicinity of South Pyongan Province, North Korea. His remains were processed through a 7th Cavalry Regiment Collection Station on Dec. 1, 1950, and interred at the United Nations Military Cemetery (UNMC) Pyongyang, on Dec. 2, 1950.

DPAA is grateful to the Department of Veterans Affairs for their partnership in this mission. Rix’s name is recorded on the Courts of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, along with the others who are missing from the Korean War. A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

• MORE US REMAINS FROM KOREAN WAR NEARING FINAL ID

A case of remains repatriated from North Korea is carried off a C-17 Globemaster at Osan Air Base, South Korea, Friday, July 27, 2018.

By ROBERT BURNS

WASHINGTON — The remains of more American soldiers killed decades ago in the Korean War are likely to be identified shortly from 55 boxes provided last summer by the North Korean army, the lead scientist working on the identifications said Wednesday.

John Byrd, director of the Defense Department laboratory responsible for the work, said in an Associated Press interview that the additional identifications are probably coming in the next few weeks.

He said there will be at least a couple, with a few more that are not quite as advanced in the process also likely to be positively identified.

"We are finalizing all of the reports and putting them through final quality assurance before we officially make the ID and notify the families," Byrd said.

This progress comes as President Donald Trump prepares for a follow-up summit meeting next week with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on nuclear disarmament. At their first meeting in June, Kim agreed to turn over an unspecified number of U.S. war remains. Trump hailed this as evidence of an improved U.S. relationship with the North.
Byrd's lab thus far has positively identified three U.S. soldiers from the remains in the 55 boxes, including one last month.

Byrd said it was too early to provide a firm estimate of how many individuals are likely to be represented in the remains, but he offered an educated guess — based on his extensive experience and having worked with the remains since last summer — that "it's probably more than 50 and less than 100."

He said early indications are that perhaps 80 percent of the remains are those of Americans. The rest likely are Asians - probably South Koreans who fought alongside Americans.

The North Korean army turned over the 55 boxes on July 27, in line with a joint Trump-Kim statement at the conclusion of their Singapore summit on June 12 that the United States and North Korea "commit to recovering POW/MIA remains, including the immediate repatriation of those already identified." U.S. officials have said the North has suggested in recent years that it holds perhaps 200 sets of American war remains. Thousands more are unrecovered from battlefields and former POW camps.

Although next week's Trump-Kim summit in Hanoi is focused mainly on nuclear weapons issues, and there is no clear sign that it will deal again with Korean War remains, military family groups are holding out hope the talks will give a new boost to what have become stalled efforts by the Pentagon to resume recovery efforts inside North Korea.

"We are pursuing the highest levels of government to be sure it's on the agenda" in Hanoi, said Rick Downes, president of the Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War POW/MIAs. Downes, who was 3 when his father, Air Force Lt. Hal Downes, went missing in action in North Korea in January 1952, was present in Hawaii last summer when an American plane delivered the 55 boxes. He said in an interview Tuesday his group is troubled that the issue seems to have since fallen from the attention of senior U.S. officials.

The North has yet to agree to face-to-face negotiations on terms under which Defense Department recovery personnel would be allowed to travel to known locations of missing U.S. soldiers. The reason for this impasse is unclear, but it has dashed U.S. hopes for beginning recovery operations as early as this spring.

Chuck Prichard, spokesman for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, said Wednesday, "We remain optimistic that joint recovery operations this summer are still possible."

The U.S. undertook 33 joint recovery operations in North Korea between 1996 and 2005, when they were suspended by Washington amid growing U.S. concern about the North's nuclear weapons program. The Pentagon estimates that about 5,300 Americans were lost in North Korea.

Trump occasionally cites his Singapore meeting as evidence of a breakthrough with North Korea on the long-contentious issue of recovering remains from the Korean War, which ended in 1953.

"The remains are coming back," Trump said Tuesday in the Oval Office. He said "certain" ones had been identified, not mentioning that the number is just three. "Their families' members have found out exactly what's going on, and they've had ceremonies that are absolutely beautiful," he added.

He went on to say that during his 2016 campaign he was approached by people who asked, 'Is it possible to get the remains back from North Korea?' So we've done that," although the numbers thus far are relatively small.

The first person identified from the materials in the 55 boxes was Army Master Sgt. Charles H. McDaniel of Butler, Missouri, and Vernon, Indiana. The second was Army Pfc. William H. Jones of Nash County, North Carolina. And the third, announced last month, was Army Sgt. Frank Julius Suliman of Nixon, New Jersey.
Korean War Personnel Accounting main lines of effort:

**Repatriation of U.S. remains recovered by, and under DPRK control** On July 27, 2018, the Korean People’s Army of the DPRK turned over 55 boxes of remains to UN officials in accordance with a commitment for repatriation as agreed upon in a Joint Statement signed by President Trump and Chairman Kim during the June 2018 Singapore Summit. On several occasions in the past, the DPRK officials have indicated they possess as many as 200 sets of remains they had recovered over the years. A definitive number has never been confirmed.

**Identification of remains already recovered and under U.S. control.**
Remains recovered during and/or shortly after the Korean War that could not be identified were buried as unknowns in 866 graves at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (NMCP). There is one set of unknown remains from the Korean War buried at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery to date, 254 unknowns buried in the NMCP have been disinterred by DPAA, or its predecessor organizations; 120 have been identified and others are undergoing analysis at DPAA’s Laboratory in Hawaii using forensicanthropology, odontology, sampling for DNA, and other scientific methods.

**Investigative and remains recovery operations in the ROK and the PRC.**
Approximately 950 personnel are missing in the ROK and fewer than 20 are known to be missing in the PRC. DPAA continues to work with both partner nations on these efforts.

**Joint Field Activities (JFAs) in the DPRK. JFAs consist of investigative and recovery operations**
JFAs consist of investigative and recovery operations. The DoD conducted 33 JFAs in the DPRK from 1996 through 2005. The Secretary of Defense is authorized to reimburse costs associated with efforts to recover remains, but does not pay for remains or information. Also included in the Singapore Joint Statement was the commitment to recover remains. Although yet to be scheduled, if DoD-Korean People’s Army negotiations to consider the resumption of field operations were to be successful, included would be planning and logistical discussions.

**Korean War-era archives**
DoD continues to conduct archival research in the United States, the ROK, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the PRC. DoD has also conducted research in North Korean archives, and currently there is an arrangement with the PRC for the People’s Liberation Army to search its military records for information on U.S. personnel, in particular since Chinese Communist Forces administered and operated the POW camps in North Korea for most of the war.

**Oral history programs in the U.S., ROK, Russia, and the DRC**
DoD periodically interviews Korean War veterans in the United States, the ROK, Russia and the PRC. These efforts are designed to obtain information that will help determine the circumstances of loss for missing servicemen; build DoD’s knowledge base of Korean War loss incidents; and gain eyewitness accounts of prison camp life and prisoner movements.

**Live Prisoner Issue.** Finding live U.S. personnel is a high priority of our accounting effort, when and if information is reported claiming a sighting of a live U.S. person still held from the Korean War. The Department of Defense (DoD), with the full support of the U.S. Intelligence Community, has investigated all credible reports and sightings of alleged U.S. survivors of the Korean War in North Korea. Since 1995, more than 25,000 defectors from the DPRK have been screened for information concerning U.S. personnel possibly in the North. To date, this effort has produced no useful information. Most reports pertain to six known U.S. military defectors. Of the six defectors, five are reported to have died in the North, and one, Sergeant Jenkins, now deceased, was returned to U.S. control in 2004.
This is a working number from the Personnel Missing Korea (PMKOR) list; approximately 5,300 lost in the DPRK.

208 boxes of remains received from DPRK, many of which were commingled; possibly 400 remains in the 208 boxes.

55 boxes of remains received from the DPRK on July 27, 2018, it is likely there may be more than 55 separate individuals represented.

Original estimate of 866 sets of Unknown remains located in NMCP when exhumations began in 1999. The Total displayed represents disinterred caskets to date.

DPAA ANNUAL MEETINGS
The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) conducts periodic updates and annual government briefings for families of American servicemembers who are missing in action (MIA). These events are designed to keep family members informed of the U.S. government’s worldwide mission to account for those still missing and to discuss in detail the latest information available about their specific cases.

At the annual and monthly update meetings, speakers include senior officials, experts, and scientists who work in the wide range of tasks associated with the POW/MIA mission. During the meetings, there are formal presentations, question and answer sessions, and one-one-one discussions between government officials and family members.

DoD has conducted these update programs since 1995, reaching more than 17,000 family members face-to-face.

Family Updates: Up to eight times a year, government officials meet with MIA family members who live within a 350-mile radius of major metropolitan areas across the country. These meetings are designed to address the individual needs of the family members while bringing information to their communities. Government officials
also meet one-on-one with family members to discuss the details of each of their cases. About 150-200 family members and 30 government officials attend each meeting.

Annual Briefings: Two briefings are held annually in the Washington, D.C. area. One is for Vietnam War families and the other is for Korean and Cold War families. The location of these events makes it possible for senior government officials to attend and for families to access Washington-based offices related to POW/MIA matters. At these briefings, family members have the opportunity to meet with numerous civilian and military specialists of the government whose expertise includes: foreign government negotiation, formulation of national policy, remains recovery and identification, DNA science, archival research and intelligence analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2019 Family Update Schedule*</th>
<th>2020 Family Update Schedule*</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 26</td>
<td>Birmingham, AL</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 23</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>San Antonio, TX</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>Salt Lake City, UT</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 18</td>
<td>Omaha, NE</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 19-22</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.**</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 01-02</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.***</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 07</td>
<td>Dayton, OH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 12</td>
<td>Colorado Springs, CO</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Family Member Updates are tentative and subject to change

*** The Korean and Cold War Annual Government Briefings

The Family Updates are tailored to meet the needs of attendees representing losses from all conflicts.

Please register early so that analysts may prepare to discuss your specific cases.

- Hotel Information
- Casualty Office Contacts
- Sample Agenda
# DIRECTORIES

## U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- **VA Regional Office (Benefits)**: 800.827.1000, VA.gov
- **Office of the Secretary**: 202.273.4800, VA.gov
- **Arlington National Cemetery**: 703.607.8585, www.arlingtoncemetery.mil
- **Board of Veterans Appeals**: 202.565.5436, www.bva.va.gov
- **Central Office (Main Switchboard)**: 202.273.5400
- **Funeral Arrangements & Eligibility**: 703.607.8585, www.cem.va.gov
- **Personal Locator**: 202.273.4950

## Other Veteran Government Agencies
- **Department of Defense**: 703.545.6700, https://www.defense.gov
- **Small Business Administration (VA)**: 202.205.6600, https://www.sba.gov

## Congressional Committees
- **Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs**: 202.224.9126, www.veterans.senate.gov
- **House Committee on Veterans Affairs**: 202.225.3527, https://veterans.house.gov
- **Congressional Rural Health Care Coalition**: 202.225.6600, www.ruralhealthinfo.org

## Other Veteran Related Offices and Agencies
- **U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims**: 202.418.3453, uscourts.cavc.gov
- **Questions on specific Cases**: 202.501.5970
- **USO**: 888.484.3876, https://www.uso.org

## POW/MIA
- **Army Worldwide Locator**: 866.771.6357, hqdainet.army.mil/mpsa/per_locator.htm
- **Navy Times Locator Services**: 901.874.3388, https://www.navytimes.com
- **Personnel Locator**: 800.333.4636

## PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)
- **VA PTSD Information**: 802.296.6300, www.ptsd.va.gov
- **VA PTSD Help – In Crisis – Suicide Prevention**: 800.273.8255, www.veteranscrisisline.net
- **National Center for PTSD – Behavioral Science Division**: 857.364.4172, www.ptsd.va.gov/PTSD/about/divisions

## Locator and Reunion Services
- **Army Worldwide Locator**: 866.771.6357, hqdainet.army.mil/mpsa/per_locator.htm
- **Navy Times Locator Services**: 901.874.3388, https://www.navytimes.com
- **Personnel Locator**: 800.333.4636

## Archives
- **Marine Corps Historical Office**: 703.432.4877, guides.grc.usmcu.edu/archives
- **Naval Historical Center (Operations Archives)**: 202.433.3170, www.history.navy.mil
- **United States Army Center of Military History**: 866.272.6272, www.history.army.mil

## Women Veterans
- **Women in Military Service-America Memorial Foundation**: 703.533.1155, www.womensmemorial.org

**U. S. Army Retired Lapel Button and Badge:** Type “Soldier for Life” into the search box at [https://www.shopmyexchange.com](https://www.shopmyexchange.com)

**Veterans Service Records** — Replace DD Form 214, awards:

- Retired 4/1/1996 or later: Visit [http://soldierforlife.army.mil/retirement/](http://soldierforlife.army.mil/retirement/), Click on “Army White Pages” at the bottom, then log in. Next click on “Click Here to Access Your Army Record.”
- Retired 3/31/1996 or earlier: Call Human Resources Command at (888) 276-9472 or visit [http://vetrecs.archives.gov](http://vetrecs.archives.gov) National Personnel Records Center (Military Personnel Records); 1 Archive Drive. St. Louis, MO 63138-1002

**DFAS** (800) 321-1080 (M-F, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST) [http://www.dfas.mil/mysqlPay](http://www.dfas.mil/mysqlPay)

**Retiree/Annuitant web page** [http://www.dfas.mil/retiredilitary.html](http://www.dfas.mil/retiredilitary.html)

**Social Security** (800) 772-1213 [http://www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov); If overseas, contact the American Embassy/consulate, or visit [http://www.socialsecurity.gov/foreign/phones.html](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/foreign/phones.html)

**Medicare** (800) 633-4227 [http://www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

**TRICARE** [http://www.tricare.mil](http://www.tricare.mil)

**Health Beneficiary Counseling Assistance Coordinator:** [http://www.tricare.mil/bcacdcao](http://www.tricare.mil/bcacdcao), or nearest military treatment facility

**TRICARE North**: (877) 874-2273; [http://www.hnfs.com](http://www.hnfs.com); CT, DC, DE, IL, IN, KY, MA, MD, ME, MI, NC, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, RI, VT, VA, WI, WV, some ZIPs in IA, MO, TN

**TRICARE South**: (800) 444-5445; [http://www.humana-military.com](http://www.humana-military.com); AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS, OK, SC, TN (except 35 TN ZIP codes near Ft Campbell), and TX (except the extreme SW El Paso area)

**TRICARE West**: (877) 988-9378; [http://www.uchcmilitarywest.com](http://www.uchcmilitarywest.com); AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, IA (except 82 Iowa ZIP codes near Rock Island, IL) KS, MO (except the St. Louis area), MN, MT, ND, NE, NM, NV, OR, SD, SW TX, UT, WA, WY

**TRICARE Overseas**: (888) 777-8343; [http://www.tricare- overseas.com](http://www.tricare-overseas.com)

**TRICARE for Life**: (866) 773-0404; TDD (866) 773-0405; [http://tricare.mil/Plans/HealthPlans/TFL.aspx](http://tricare.mil/Plans/HealthPlans/TFL.aspx)


**TRICARE Network Pharmacy**: (877) 363-1303; [http://www.expres-scripts.com](http://www.expres-scripts.com)

**TRICARE Retiree Dental Plan**: (888) 838-8737; [http://www.TRDP.org](http://www.TRDP.org)

**US Family Health Plan**: [http://www.usfhp.com](http://www.usfhp.com)

**Armed Forces Recreation Centers** [http://www.armymwr.com](http://www.armymwr.com)

**Hale Koa Hotel, Hawaii**: (800) 367-6027; [http://halekoa.com](http://halekoa.com)


**Shades of Green, Florida**: (888) 593-2242; (407) 824-3665 [http://www.shadesofgreen.org/reservations.htm](http://www.shadesofgreen.org/reservations.htm)

**Dragon Hill, Korea**: 011-822-790-0016 [http://www.dragonhilllodge.com](http://www.dragonhilllodge.com)

**Veterans Affairs (VA) Information** [http://www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

**Burial & Memorial Benefits** [http://www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov) / (877) 907-8199

**Benefits and Services**: (800) 827-1000 (Retired Soldiers overseas should contact the American Embassy/consulate); TDD (800) 829-4833 [http://benefits.va.gov/benefits/](http://benefits.va.gov/benefits/)

**GI Bill**: (888) 442-4551; [http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill)

**Health Care Benefits**: [http://www.va.gov/health](http://www.va.gov/health)

**Insurance**: SGLI/VGLI: (800) 419-1473; All other insurance: (800) 669-8477 [http://www.shadesofgreen.org/reservations.htm](http://www.shadesofgreen.org/reservations.htm)
Respectfully submitted,

James R. Fisher

James R. Fisher
National Executive Director
Korean War Veterans Association, USA

Sister Service Publications for Retired Service Members
Coast Guard Evening Colors: http://www.uscg.mil/ppc/retnews/
Marine Corps Semper Fi: https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/ then click Career/Retired Marines, then Semper Fidelis Newsletter
Navy Shift Colors: http://www.navy.mil/ then click Links/Shift Colors