



2nd Battalion 1st Infantry Chapter, Americal Division Veterans Association (ADVA)



WEBSITE: www.2-1-196th.com

Volume 5

"A Soldier Once... And Always"

October 2015

Commanders Corner: As usual, the annual Kokomo Veterans Reunion was excellent. It gave me a chance to see some of my buddies even though I was only able to go up for a day and a half due to the lingering effects of a cold my lovely wife, Sam, decided to share with me. She's so thoughtful that way. Anyway, it was the 33rd annual event and, if you ever get the chance, you should give it a try. Information is available on the Howard County Vietnam Veterans Organization website <http://www.hcvvo.org>. As I mentioned last month, my annual pig roast will be on the weekend of October 10th and the all you 2/1 members are invited to attend. Information is located on my website (map included); <http://www.chuckholdaway.com>. Now, my usual reminder, the Americal Division Veterans Association annual reunion will be held from October 29th through November 1st in Norfolk, VA. Information is available on the Americal website <http://www.americal.org> and on our 2/1 chapter website. For those of you that have never attended; it's truly a good time and is extremely well run. Our chapter will have a hospitality room and provide food and drinks. Remember, we have officer elections this year at the annual meeting in Norfolk; so get your nominations ready. Our chapter meeting will be held approximately half hour after the general Americal meeting. Up for election this year are the offices of Commander, Vice-Commander, and Secretary/Treasurer. Congratulations to Doug Greenlaw on your selection as Commander. See below. We will have the new chapter challenge coins available at the reunion or, they can be ordered through email or snail mail through me. Cost is \$10/coin if mailed but, only an amazing \$7.50 if picked up in person. All proceeds from the coins will be put in the chapter coffers.



Chuck

Keep safe and may the bond of battle never be broken!



Chapter Member Elected Purple Heart Commander: Douglas Greenlaw, former 1st Lt. and CO of Delta Company, 2/1 Infantry, 196th LIB, Handle Delta 6, Vietnam 1967-1968, Greenville, SC, was elected at the recent State Convention to the position of Commander, The Military Order of the Purple Heart for the State of South Carolina.

The founding fathers all agreed there are two classes of people that should not be allowed in government; Witches and barristers.

Six MIAs Recovered: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of five service members missing from World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Recovered are:

- Marine Corps Pfc. James P. Reilly and Cpl. James D. Otto, who were both killed in action on Nov. 20, 1943, while fighting on the Pacific island of Tarawa. They were assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division.
- Army Cpl. Robert E. Meyers, of Franklin County, Pa., was assigned to Company A, 2nd Engineer Combat Battalion, 2nd Infantry Division, when he died fighting in North Korea on Dec. 1, 1950.
- Army Cpl. George H. Mason, who was assigned to the 2nd Reconnaissance Company, 2nd Infantry Division, died while fighting in North Korea on Feb. 14, 1951.
- Navy Lt. j.g. Neil B. Taylor, 26, of Rangeley, Maine, who will be buried in his hometown with full military honors on Sept. 14, exactly 50 years after the A-4C Skyhawk he was piloting crashed while on a bombing mission over Bac Lieu Province, Vietnam, on Sept. 14, 1965.

Pentagon Enlisting Outsiders to Help Search for US WWII MIAs: Justin Taylan has been to the remote Pacific island nations dozens of times over the past two decades, spending countless hours slogging through swamps in his quest to document as many World War II airplane wreck sites as possible. Since 2013, he has conducted those missions for the newly reorganized Pentagon agency whose predecessor he and others had criticized for years for failing to recover and identify more remains of U.S. service members. Taylan's hiring is part of the military's plans to reach out to private groups and others to help with the search for thousands of American war remains scattered from Pacific jungles to the European countryside. Though he said he cannot comment on the details of the cases he's worked on under his contract, Taylan said he has documented more than 80 wreck and war-related sites, including eight aircraft crashes associated with American MIA cases. "So many organizations have something to give and share," Taylan, 37, told The Associated Press recently in between trips to Papua New Guinea. "It's an incredible turn of events to support the mission and get more MIA cases resolved." The Pentagon lists 83,000 MIAs as unaccounted-for from WWII and the Korean and Vietnam wars. More than 73,000 are from WWII, with many of those deemed not recoverable because they were lost at sea. In 2009, Congress set a requirement that the Pentagon identify at least 200 sets of remains a year by 2015. But less than half that number has been identified over each of the past two years. Earlier this year, the Department of Defense unveiled its revamped Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, a move that came a year and a half after the AP obtained an internal Pentagon study that criticized previous efforts as being in danger of spiraling from "dysfunction to total failure." In a shift many critics say is long overdue, the new agency is working with nonprofit organizations such as Taylan's Pacific Wrecks, Inc. and private firms to help with research and actual searches.

Missing Medal of Honor Recipient Identified: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced the identification of remains belonging to Marine Corps 1st Lt. Alexander "Sandy" Bonnyman, 33, of Knoxville, Tenn., who would be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions fighting on the Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands, Nov. 11, 1943 while assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 18th Marines Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. His remains, and that of possibly three dozen other Americans, were recovered by History Flight, a Florida-based nonprofit organization that is assisting U.S. government MIA search and recovery efforts through an expanded public-private partnership opportunity.

The Affordable Act and Your Income Tax: Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), all Americans including all military members (active duty, retired, Selected Reserve, or Retired Reserve) and their eligible family members must have health care coverage that meets a minimum standard called minimum essential coverage or pay a fee. Your TRICARE coverage meets the minimum essential coverage requirement under the ACA. "The term "active duty" means full-time duty in the active service of a uniformed service for more than 30 consecutive days". Beginning in January 2016, DFAS will be providing IRS Form 1095-C to all U.S. military members, and IRS Form 1095-B to all Retirees, Annuitants, former spouses and all other individuals having TRICARE coverage during all or any portion of tax year 2015. An IRS Form 1095 documents you (and your family members, if applicable) have the minimum essential coverage. More information will be forthcoming about the delivery method of these forms. These forms will document the information that DFAS will provide to the IRS on yourself and your authorized family members. DFAS will provide you with IRS Form 1095 series forms no later than Jan. 31, 2016.

Service Connected Veterans Bill would allow access to Commissary and Exchanges: On March 4, 2015, Representative Jeff Fortenberry (NE) introduced H.R. 1292, a bill that would authorize compensable disabled service-connected veterans and their dependents access to Department of Defense exchange and commissary facilities. Their access to these facilities would be on the same basis as if they were members or dependents of the armed forces entitled to retired or retainer pay. This bill is in alignment with longstanding DAV Resolution 095, which calls for legislation to extend commissary and exchange privileges to service-connected disabled veterans and their dependents. Please write your Representative to urge support and passage of this important legislation, a longstanding priority of DAV for its members and disabled veterans everywhere.

China Gives Solid Gold Medals to 5 Surviving Flying Tigers: China has given solid gold medals to five surviving members of the Flying Tigers, a volunteer fighter group formed in China before the United States entered World War II. "The Flying Tigers is the trailblazer of China-U.S. cooperation," Li Qiangmin, consul general of the People's Republic of China. "With the blood we shed together, we achieved the victory against Japan and built the new world order which aimed to bring peace and prosperity to all mankind." Richard Sherman, Frank Burnside and J.V. Vineyard were able to attend the ceremony, Charles Baisden's son, Daniel Baisden, and Carl Kice Brown's daughter, Becky Brown-Hogan, accepted medals for their fathers. The ceremony also opened "Way of a Fighter," an exhibit based on the 1949 memoir by Gen. Claire Lee Chennault, who created the group while a civilian adviser to the nationalist Chinese government.

Will a Smaller Army Mean More Deployments for Reserve and Guard?: Part-time soldiers in the Army Reserve and National Guard may see more frequent deployments a decade from now as the Army tries to maintain a global reach after its post-Iraq War downsizing. That's one of the scenarios under consideration by a commission formed to make peace between the active-duty Army and its Reserve branches in a time of tightening budgets. It's looking at ways to blend the forces, and it's visiting Tacoma this week to gather opinions about what the Army should look like after its steep drawdown. "After 12 years of war, we need to ask the Army, 'what capabilities don't you have now, and what capabilities perhaps do you wish you did?' " said Thomas Lamont, a former assistant secretary of the Army for manpower and Reserve affairs. He's one of three members of the National Commission on the Future of the Army who will be in the South Sound for three days interviewing military leaders, observing training and participating in an open forum to hear from veterans.

Frustrated Allen Stepping Down as ISIS Czar Over Lack of Resources: The commander of the United States' war on Daesh terrorists in Iraq and Syria is stepping down, officials say. Retired Marine Gen. John R. Allen, the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, will leave his position in early November, four U.S. State Department officials told Bloomberg on condition of anonymity. According to the officials, who were not prepared to publicly announce Allen's departure, he has already let his superiors know he will step down. Allen's chief of staff, Karin von Hippel, will also quit to join a British think tank. "U.S. officials familiar with Allen's decision say he has been frustrated with White House micromanagement of the war and its failure to provide adequate resources to the fight. He unsuccessfully tried to convince the administration to allow U.S. tactical air control teams to deploy on the ground to help pick targets for air strikes in Iraq," said the Tuesday report. Apart from support for the militants, the U.S. military has also been leading a coalition to conduct airstrikes allegedly aimed at Daesh militants in Syria as well as Iraq since last year, despite which the Takfiris have gained ground in some of the regions. Last month, the incoming Marine Corps commandant, Lt. Gen. Robert Neller, testified that the situation of the U.S. fight was at a "stalemate" and the program to train militants there had yielded not more than four or five fighters. "John Allen has put his heart and soul into trying to make the president's strategy work," said Derek Harvey, a former senior military intelligence official who worked with Allen at U.S. Central Command. "I have sympathy for the hard task he was given because I do not believe the president's team was fully on board and he was never empowered to bring the leadership necessary to achieve the mission."

Cost of Living Bill Introduced: On June 3, 2015, Sen. Johnny Isakson, with numerous cosponsors, introduced S. 1493, a bill that would authorize cost-of-living adjustments to the rates of compensation for veterans and survivors. The bill was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs for further consideration. As in recent years, this bill does not contain any round-down provision. Please write your Senators today to urge them to cosponsor this measure and work for its enactment prior to the end of first session of the 114th Congress. Link to the address below to send your message: <https://www.votervoices.net/BroadcastLinks/zGLKNcUwAWLQaALm-Ydww>

No man is a leader until his appointment is ratified in the hearts and minds of his men. "The Infantry Journal"

Senators Blast Commander's Claims of Progress Against ISIS: The \$500 million effort begun last December to train and equip Syrian rebels in the campaign against ISIS has produced thus far only four or possibly five fighters actually on the ground in Syria, the head of U.S. Central Command said. "We're talking four or five," Army Gen. Lloyd Austin told senators on Wednesday. He acknowledged that Pentagon and the Obama administration had planned to have at least 3,000 Syrian rebels on the ground by the end of this year, building to an eventual force of about 5,400. "It is taking a bit longer to get things done," the general said. "This is to be expected in the early stages of the fight." Austin also promised the senators that he would protect whistleblowers in his command, essentially confirming that the Defense Department's Inspector General is investigating claims from some on Austin's vast intelligence staff that their reports on ISIS were being doctored to cover up setbacks. The general said he has about 1,200 analysts and other personnel working for him on intelligence. If the IG's report turns up wrongdoing, "Be assured I will take appropriate action," he said. But possibly the worst moments for Austin in a testy and defensive appearance in front of the Senate Armed Services Committee came when he repeatedly tried to maintain the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, was making progress. Senators from both sides of the aisle told him that the campaign against the extremist group was either a "failure," a "total failure," or an "abject failure." Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Virginia, said that the campaign wasn't even legal in his opinion. He told Austin that campaign in Iraq and Syria wasn't covered under the Authorization for the Use of Military Force adopted by Congress after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks. Christine Wormuth, the Pentagon's undersecretary for policy, joined Austin to testify before the committee, but they first had to undergo a withering opening statement from the panel's chairman, Sen. John McCain, R-Arizona.

Vietnam Wall "In Memory" Program: More than 58,000 names meet the Defense Department's criteria to be etched into the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, but those who survived the war — and who later died as a result of their service — are not. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund acknowledges their service and sacrifice through an online "In Memory" Honor Roll. Causes of death that fit the criteria for inclusion in the program include exposure to Agent Orange, PTSD-related illnesses/events, cancer, diabetes, heart attacks, etc. The program is free and the application process is simple. To honor a loved one, you only need to submit the veteran's DD214 to show their proof of service in the Vietnam War, a copy of their death certificate, and a photograph. The application deadline for inclusion in the 2016 ceremony is in March. For information or to submit applications, : <http://www.vvmf.org/InMemoryProgram>.

Lawmaker Seeks Proof Women 'Deserved to Pass' Ranger School: A congressman and combat veteran has demanded that the Secretary of the Army produce paperwork documenting the performance of the women who recently graduated Ranger School. Rep. Steve Russell, R-Okla., a retired Army lieutenant colonel with deep roots to the infantry and combat tours to Iraq and Afghanistan, sent a letter to Secretary of the Army John McHugh on Sept. 15, 2015. Among the documents he requested were patrol grade sheets, spot reports, phase evaluation reports and sick call reports, all "with Ranger Instructors' comments for each and every phase to include every recycled phase and class." Russell also requested peer evaluations and "a complete breakdown of each female candidate's recycle history and dates for each phase." The request from Russell comes nearly four weeks after the first women graduated from the Army's most demanding combat training school.

Guardsman Laid to Rest at Arlington After Dispute With Army: Staff Sgt. Thomas Florich, a Louisiana National Guardsman killed when his Black Hawk helicopter crashed in a training accident, was laid to rest with full honors at Arlington National Cemetery after the Army reversed its initial decision to deny his family's burial request. Florich's family fought with the Army for months to allow their son to be buried with the Marines whom he was serving alongside when their UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter crashed in the Gulf of Mexico during a dangerous training mission in inclement weather. The accident occurred on March 10, 50 miles east of Pensacola, Fla. All 11 servicemembers on board were killed. The seven Marines killed alongside Florich were granted the option of being buried at Arlington. But at first, the Army said Florich, who served as the flight mechanic onboard, wasn't eligible because he and the other Guardsmen were not technically on active duty at the time of the accident. Florich was 26 years old when he was killed. Stephen Florich told "Fox and Friends" in May that his son was in uniform and "serving in the capacity as a crew chief and a door gunner" at the time. "And in adverse weather conditions, he accepted a mission to train people for combat in the future. And in that, he gave all and lost his life," he said. Outgoing Army Secretary John McHugh eventually reversed the decision, granting permission for Florich to be buried after Arlington National Cemetery denied their requests. He also ordered a review of Arlington's burial criteria. "After reviewing the Florich family's request, McHugh agreed that there was a 'compelling justification for granting this request for an exception to ANC's interment eligibility criteria'," the Army said in a statement on June 12, 2015.

Paul Royle, who fled Nazi "Great Escape" dies at 101: Paul Royle. Whose escape from a Nazi Prisoner of War camp in 1944 along with 75 other allied soldiers inspired the famous 1963 Steve McQueen movie "The Great Escape," died on August 23, 2015 at the age of 101, Mr. Royle, a Royal Air Force flight lieutenant, was one of 200 prisoners, who dug several tunnels using improvised tools at Stalag Luft III camp in Sagan, then a part of Germany now Poland. His job was to dispose of the evacuated dirt. He was one of 76 prisoners who made it through a tunnel on a freezing night in March. He and a comrade wandered through the German countryside for about a day before they were recaptured. Only three escapees reached freedom — 50 were executed, including the man that was with Royle. Before the war, Royle studied a trade that would prove useful during his imprisonment — mine surveying. He returned to mining after he was liberated and continued working in it until he switched to engineering in the mid 50's.

President Sets Troop Pay Raise at 1.3 Percent in 2016: President Obama announced a 1.3 percent pay raise for military members next year, a level that's less than what's specified under the law. The change to monthly basic pay will take effect Jan. 1. "This decision is consistent with the fiscal year 2016 Budget and it will not materially affect the Federal Government's ability to attract and retain well-qualified members for the uniformed services," Obama wrote in an Aug. 28 letter. The presidential order is consistent with the Pentagon's proposed budget for fiscal 2016, which begins Oct. 1. The spending plan called for a pay raise of 1.3 percent rather than the 2.3 percent estimated increase in private sector-wage growth, which military pay is supposed to track by law. The 1.3 percent figure is slightly higher than the 1 percent pay increase that service members have received the past two years. While Senators on a key defense panel agreed with the administration's military pay proposal, Republicans on the counterpart panel in the House of Representatives supported a higher cost of living adjustment for military members. However, they didn't specify a figure in their draft version of the legislation and effectively left the decision up to the President..

North Korea Warns it Has Restarted All Nuclear Bomb Fuel Plants: A day after threatening long-range rocket launches, North Korea declared Tuesday that it has upgraded and restarted all of its atomic fuel plants so it can produce more — and more sophisticated — nuclear weapons. Neither announcement was entirely unexpected, and outside analysts see the back-to-back warnings as part of a general North Korean playbook of using claimed improvements in its nuclear and missile programs to push for talks with the United States that could eventually provide the impoverished country with concessions and eased sanctions. But the threats could deepen a standoff between North Korea and the U.S. and its allies because they strike at Washington's fear that each North Korean rocket and nuclear test puts it another big step closer to its stated goal of an arsenal of nuclear-tipped long-range missiles that can hit the U.S. mainland. North Korea has spent decades trying to develop just such a weapon, and while it is thought to have a small arsenal of atomic bombs and an impressive array of short- and medium-range missiles, it has yet to demonstrate that it can produce nuclear bombs small enough to place on a missile or can make reliable long-range missiles. Still, it has conducted three past nuclear tests and a series of steadily improving long-range rocket launches, and some analysts see Tuesday's announcement as foreshadowing an upcoming fourth nuclear test, which would push North Korea further along in its nuclear aims. North Korea said Tuesday in its state media that, as it pledged to do in 2013, the plutonium and highly enriched uranium facilities at its main Nyongbyon nuclear complex have finally been "rearranged, changed or readjusted and they started normal operation." It said its scientists had improved "the levels of nuclear weapons with various missions in quality and quantity." North Korea, an autocracy run by the same family since 1948, closely controls information about its nuclear program, which it describes as a sovereign right meant to combat U.S. military hostility. As a result, just what is happening at Nyongbyon is unclear. North Korea booted out international inspectors in 2009, and independent assessments by outside experts since then have been spotty.

Train Attack Heroes Receive Medals: Secretary of Defense Ash Carter and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Paul Selva presented medals to the three Americans who stopped a radical terrorist on a Paris-bound train last month. At the Thursday ceremony, Airman 1st Class Spencer Stone received the Airman's Medal and Purple Heart Medal, Army National Guard Specialist Alek Skarlatos received the Soldier's Medal, and civilian Anthony Sadler received the Department of Defense Medal for Valor. The Airman's and Soldier's Medals rank ninth in the order of precedence, immediately above the Bronze Star. The Defense Medal for Valor was created soon after 9/11 to recognize government employees and private citizens who perform acts of heroism or sacrifice. The three childhood friends were on vacation Aug. 21 when they subdued, disarmed and hogtied a heavily armed gunman on a train heading from Amsterdam to Paris. France awarded all three Americans the Legion of Merit within days of the attack. After the Pentagon presentation, the three young men met with President Obama in the Oval Office.

Carson shut him down with one brilliant line!

When an atheist called him a "moron" for believing in God, Dr. Ben Carson responded with one brilliant line that put the atheist in his place. *"I believe I came from God, and you believe you came from a monkey," he told the individual, "and you've convinced me you're right."*

Here are interesting fact about World War II: During the 3½ years of World War 2 that started with the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and ended with the Surrender of Germany and Japan in 1945, "The People of the U.S.A." produced the following:

22 aircraft carriers,
8 battleships,
48 cruisers,
349 destroyers,
420 destroyer escorts,
203 submarines,
34 million tons of merchant ships,
100,000 fighter aircraft,
98,000 bombers,
24,000 transport aircraft,
58,000 training aircraft,
93,000 tanks,
257,000 artillery pieces,
105,000 mortars,
3,000,000 machine guns, and
2,500,000 military trucks.

We put 16.1 million men in uniform in the various armed services, invaded Africa, invaded Sicily and Italy, won the battle for the Atlantic, planned and executed D-Day, marched across the Pacific and Europe, developed the atomic bomb, and ultimately conquered Japan and Germany.

2015 ADVA NATIONAL REUNION

Norfolk Virginia

October 28 thru November 1 2015

The Norfolk Waterside Marriott, 235 East Main Street, Norfolk, VA 23510 will be the main hotel for the reunion.



The hotel is noted as the best place to stay. It has just recently been remodeled. The ADVA attendees are offered 3 days before and after the reunion dates based on availability. The reunion guest room rate is \$109 = tax (currently 14 % + \$2 occupancy fee) World War II members will their individual room rate reduced to no-charge when they check-in. There is also a special rate of \$129 + tax for a Concierge Level room. The cutoff date to make reservations is September 25, 2015. Book early to ensure lodging at the reunion hotel. The hotel is offering complimentary overnight parking. There is no parking for RVs in the main street garage or city streets. The hotel is offering free self-overnight parking.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29 - 9:00am - 5:00pm Tour Ft Eustis and Williamsburg
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 30 - 11:30am - 2:00pm Spirit of Norfolk Lunch Cruise
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 31—9:00am - 12:00 Norfolk Botanical Garden Tour

6:00pm - 10:00pm BANQUET DINNER.

As requested by ADVA membership, members and guests can select seating assignments with friends/family before the banquet.

A US Marine enters the Catholic Church confessional booth in Jacksonville, FL. He tells the priest, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. Last night, I beat the sh** out of a flag burner."

The priest says, "My son, I am here to forgive your sins, not to discuss your community service."

A US Marine enters the Catholic Church confessional booth in Jacksonville, FL. He tells the priest, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. Last night, I beat the sh** out of a flag burner."

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National Medal of Honor Museum: The National Medal of Honor Museum Foundation has unveiled architectural designs for the planned \$ 98 million tribute to recipients of the military's highest valor award. The foundation has accelerated efforts to finance the 107,000 square foot museum it intends to build on the eastern shore of Charleston Harbor in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. The museum represents a core part of a legacy eyed by the Congressional Medal of Honor Society, which consists exclusively of the 79 living recipients of the medal. The intended message the Society wants to convey is that ordinary people can do extraordinary things when they put service above self. "It's about the legacy of the medals and the ideals behind it," said foundation and CEO Robert Wilburn, who served as an intelligence officer for the Air Force at the Pentagon during the Vietnam War. "The recipients don't want this to be a monument to themselves but an educational opportunity."

Support House of Representatives Bill HR 313: Representative Stephen Lynch (MA) introduced H.R. 313, a bill that would protect service-disabled veterans employed by the federal government from discrimination when they are absent from work due to their disabilities and the need for health care. Wounded, injured, and ill veterans are significant consumers of health care, often due to their military service. Many veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are subjected to reductions in pay and other penalties due to unexcused absences from work while they seek health care to address their service-connected conditions. This bill would prohibit federal departments and agencies from taking any adverse action against veterans who need to be away from work to address their health care challenges consequent to military service. This bill was approved by the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs at a recent business meeting; however, it has not been scheduled for floor debate. Please write your Representative to urge support and approval of this bill by the House of Representatives.

McCain Bill Would Let All Veterans Seek Care Outside VA: Just before Congress left town Sen. John McCain introduced a bill that could increase the controversy over how to fix the Department of Veterans Affairs, proposing that all veterans be eligible to have private care paid for by their VA insurance. Currently, veterans who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility and those who face long wait times can apply to seek medical care in the private sector on their VA insurance. That was part of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014, a three-year pilot program that McCain, R-Ariz., championed as a way to give veterans more convenient access to health care and to make it easier to fire senior VA officials. McCain's latest bill would make the choice card pilot program permanent and erase the qualifications in the 2014 law, opening the option to every VA eligible veteran. The proposed legislation would remove uncertainty from within the VA, among providers, and especially among our veterans, while sending a strong signal to all Americans that this program is here to stay," McCain said in a released statement. "More than a year after the VA scandal first came to light and a year since VA reform legislation was signed into law, wait times are still too long and veterans are still not getting the care they have earned and deserve." Veterans groups seemed caught off guard by the bill Thursday, and many contacted by Stripes said they had not yet taken a position on the proposed legislation. In the past, most veterans advocates have come out strongly against privatizing VA health care, and this bill appears to put much more emphasis on paying for private health care for veterans. There was some early pushback on McCain's new bill, including from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, who said existing legislation has achieved the goal of simplifying veterans' choice in their health care.

IG Report: 300,000 Veterans Died While Waiting for Health Care at VA: More than 300,000 American military veterans likely died while waiting for health care -- and nearly twice as many are still waiting -- according to a new Department of Veterans Affairs inspector general report. The IG report says "serious" problems with enrollment data are making it impossible to determine exactly how many veterans are actively seeking health care from the VA, and how many were. For example, "data limitations" prevent investigators from determining how many now-deceased veterans applied for health care benefits or when. But the findings would appear to confirm reports that first surfaced last year that many veterans died while awaiting care, as their applications got stuck in a system that the VA has struggled to overhaul. Some applications, the IG report says, go back nearly two decades. The report addresses serious issues with the record-keeping itself. More than half the applications listed as pending as of last year do not have application dates, and investigators "could not reliably determine how many records were associated with actual applications for enrollment" in VA health care, the report said. The report also says VA workers incorrectly marked thousands of unprocessed health-care applications as completed and may have deleted 10,000 or more electronic "transactions" over the past five years. Linda Halliday, the VA's acting inspector general, said the agency's Health Eligibility Center "has not effectively managed its business processes to ensure the consistent creation and maintenance of essential data" and recommended a multi-year plan to improve accuracy and usefulness of agency records. Halliday's report came in response to a whistleblower who said more than 200,000 veterans with pending applications for VA health care were likely deceased. The inspector general's report substantiated that claim and others, but said there was no way to tell for sure when or why the person died. The VA has said it has no way to purge the list of dead applicants, and said many of those listed in the report are likely to have used another type of insurance before they died. VA spokeswoman Walinda West said the agency has publicly acknowledged that its enrollment process is confusing and that the enrollment system, data integrity and quality "are in need of significant improvement." Sens. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., chairman and senior Democrat of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, said in a joint statement that the inspector general's report pointed to "both a significant failure" by leaders at the Health Eligibility Center and "deficient oversight by the VA central office" in Washington. The lawmakers urged VA to implement the report's recommendations quickly to improve record keeping at the VA and "ensure that this level of blatant mismanagement does not happen again." VA has contacted 302,045 veterans by mail, asking them to submit required documents to establish eligibility, West said. To date, the VA has received 36,749 responses and enrolled 34,517 veterans, she said. "As we continue our work to contact veterans, our focus remains on improving the enrollment system to better serve veterans," West said. The Health Eligibility Center has removed a "purge-and-delete functionality" from a computer system used to track agency workloads, West said. VA will provide six months of data to demonstrate that any changed or deleted data on VA workloads has undergone appropriate management review, with approvals and audit trails visible, she said.

["The economy is so bad that: I received a pre-declined credit card in the mail. CEOs are now playing miniature golf. Exxon-Mobile laid off 25 Congressmen. Angelina Jolie adopted a child from America. Motel 6 will no longer leave the light on anymore. A picture is only worth 200 words. They renamed Wall Street "Wal-Mart Street". Finally, I called the Suicide Hot-Line. I got a call center in Pakistan and when I told them I was suicidal, they got excited and asked if I could drive a truck."](#)

Navy Gunner's Mate and Yankee Catcher for All Seasons Yogi Berra Dies.

Navy Gunner's Mate Lawrence Peter "Yogi" Berra dodged bullets and shore battery fire at D-Day well before he began his Hall of Fame career with the New York Yankees. Berra was grazed on the shoulder by fire off the coast of France on what he called a "rocketboat," but he declined a Purple Heart. He thought his mother back in St. Louis might get upset if she found out. President Obama noted Berra's military service in mourning the passing of the iconic catcher for all seasons who died Tuesday September 22, 2015 in New Jersey at age 90. "Yogi Berra was an American original -- a Hall of Famer and humble veteran; prolific jokester and jovial prophet," he said. "He epitomized what it meant to be a sportsman and a citizen, with a big heart, competitive spirit, and a selfless desire to open baseball to everyone, no matter their background." Berra never had a ship named after him for his Navy service but he was honored in July with all the other 63 Hall of Famers who served during wars since the Civil War. At Cooperstown, New York, home of the Hall of Fame, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus announced that the next littoral combat ship would be named the "Cooperstown." Among the Hall of Famers who served in World War II were Ted Williams, Joe DiMaggio, Hank Greenberg and Warren Spahn, in addition to Berra. At an American Veterans Center conference in Washington in 2010, Berra recalled the big mistake his ship made as the invasion boats gathered on



D-Day. Berra said there were six enlisted sailors including himself and an officer aboard with the mission of launching rockets before the troops reached the beach. "We had orders to shoot at anything that came below the clouds," he said. They fired and downed the first plane they saw, which turned out to be an American plane, but they rescued the pilot. "I never heard a man cuss so much," Berra said. "We got him out of the plane but boy, was he mad." Berra said, "It was like the 4th of July to see all them planes and ships out there. I stood up there on the deck of our boat" to watch, he said. The officer told him to get down "before you get your head blown off." Then he grew emotional. "We picked up some of the people who got drowned," he said. He stopped speaking and paused to gather himself but brightened up as he spoke of his later service during the war. While stationed in Naples, Italy, Berra said he finagled a trip to Rome where he was able to find his Italian relatives. He also said he managed to see Pope Pius XII while he was in Rome. What did he say? "'Hiya Pope,' I said." Berra said he joined the Navy at age 18. "If you have to go, you have to go, that's it," he said. "I didn't mind," and besides, sometimes "we got to eat with the WAVES (women sailors). That was good, we got good food." When Berra was asked about the race issue at the American Veterans Center, he seemed puzzled by the question. Everybody ought to be able to play, everybody ought to be able to get along, he said. Berra said he came up to the Yankees in 1946 when Jackie Robinson broke the "color line" with the Brooklyn Dodgers. "Jackie was a great man, Jackie was my friend," Berra said, but Robinson was flat-out wrong about the steal of home in the 1953 World Series. "The only thing I could say about Jackie is he was out at home plate when I tagged him." The umpire said otherwise. Berra teared up again and his voice cracked in speaking about another ballplayer who was probably his best friend, Larry Doby, another Navy veteran of World War II, a Hall of Famer with the Cleveland Indians, and the first African-American to play in the American League. Doby was Berra's neighbor in Montclair, New Jersey, after they retired. Doby would come over to Berra's house and they would reminisce until Berra's wife, Carmen, started finding things for him to do. They'd escape over to Doby's house, until Doby's wife got fed up with them. They'd end up, as always, at the American Legion Hall, just talking baseball. Much has been made of Berra's malapropisms -- "when you get to the fork in the road, take it" -- but those who were at his news conference after DiMaggio, the "Yankee Clipper," died were left speechless by the eloquence and simple sincerity of his final tribute to his friend and teammate. Somebody asked if Berra would now be throwing out the first ball at the next Yankee old-timers' game, an honor that always went to DiMaggio but would now likely be Berra's as the most senior Yankee.