



# 2nd Battalion 1st Infantry Chapter,

## Americal Division Veterans Association (ADVA)

WEBSITE: [www.2-1-196th.com](http://www.2-1-196th.com)

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Volume 9

“A Soldier Once And Always”

April 2019

**Commanders Corner:** Fellow Legionnaires of 2-1 Infantry, Welcome to Spring, finally! I don't know about you, but I'm looking forward to Summer and time with the family in the Outer Banks, in Avon, NC to be specific. One of our members, Curtis Dean updated to Lifetime Member. Thank you, Curtis. And Jim Hansen had a change of address to 6917Archer Ct. Inver Grove Heights, MN. In case you missed last month's newsletter, I will still add the two Veterans Reunions coming up this year that 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment veterans attend. As an association, we are a Chapter under the Americal Division Veterans Association (ADVA) who will be having their 2019 Reunion, 2-6 October 2019 at the Crown Plaza Providence/Warwick (Airport) at 801 Greenwich Ave, Warwick, RI 02886. See the ADVA website for additional information: <https://americal.org/cmsaml/index.php/reunions.html>.



The 196<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade Association is having their 2019 Reunion, 22-25 August 2019 in Lombard, IL, at the Westin Hotel (west of Chicago). See: <https://www.196th.org/reunion2001/reunionp.htm>.

I've decided with my wife to attend both, reunions. I will see you in Rhode Island for the ADVA 2019 Reunion in October.

You might know that the American Legion Celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary this month. The Department of Virginia hosted a Centennial Gala and the guest speaker was the Virginia National Guard Adjutant General, MG Tim Williams. He made some interesting comments that should be of concern to all Veterans. His primary concern to fill billets in Army and Air Guard Units in Virginia is the shrinking base of eligible recruits. Most youths no longer meet the physical requirements for service in the Armed Forces; this is depressing and dangerous. What is more striking is that of this smaller pool of eligible young people, only a very small percentage think to serve the Nation. This is where Veterans have a choice; either you sit on your hind end and do nothing or you get involved in promoting serving the Nation as a citizen's obligation, right and duty. We can't afford to do nothing. We need to get out in our high schools and colleges and promote service to the Nation. God bless you and your families, and hope you have a great spring time. Remember our collective extended family, those Americans serving in our Armed Forces all over the world, and especially to the memories of those that gave the ultimate sacrifice. It is time to renew your yearly dues. Send your remittance to Jesse Mendoza.

Got a comment, idea or complaint, contact me at [Commander.2.1.jgw@gmail.com](mailto:Commander.2.1.jgw@gmail.com).

John  
Commander

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

**Forget the Rhetoric, Pay the Nation's Defenders:** When members of the nation's Coast Guard needed help resulting from the government's shutdown, the Veterans of Foreign Wars provided \$100,000 in financial assistance. It enabled members of the Coast Guard and their families to cover rent, put food on the table and pay utility bills. Our government's first responsibility is to secure the nation and protect its citizens. Congress and the White House must remember this going forward. They must push through the rhetoric and take care of those who are on the front lines protecting the nation. What the Coast Guard, DHS and all members of the U.S. military do daily allow the rest of us to sleep easier at night. No one should ever take that for granted.

**North and South Korea Begin Landmine Removal:** Troops from North and South Korea have begun clearing landmines from the two countries demilitarized zone (DMZ). The clearing of those minefields began after the countries signed a military agreement which would the DMZ into a "peace zone." The agreement plan included the removal of around a dozen guard posts, removal of weapons from the Joint Security Area and the excavation of war remains from the area. The first two elements of the agreement that did not require UN approval were successfully implemented without major issues throughout 2018.

**President Trump signs executive order to empower Veterans and end Veterans suicide:** President Donald J. Trump signed an executive order titled "National Initiative to Empower Veterans and End Veterans Suicide," which focuses on improving the quality of life for America's Veterans and ending the tragedy of Veteran suicide. "As the largest integrated health care provider in the nation and a leader in developing innovative mental health and suicide prevention strategies, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is uniquely positioned to co-chair this effort with the White House," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Veterans suicide is a national public health issue that affects communities everywhere, and this executive order is a national call to action." The executive order mandates the establishment of the Veteran Wellness, Empowerment and Suicide Prevention Task Force. The task force will include the Secretaries of Defense, Health and Human Services, Energy, Homeland Security, Labor, Education and Housing and Urban Development, and many other executive departments. "We are committed to saving Veteran lives, but just as there is no single cause of suicide, no single organization can end Veteran suicide alone," Wilkie said. "We must work side by side with our partners at all levels of government — and in the private sector — to provide our Veterans with the mental health and suicide prevention services they need. This executive order advances the public health approach to suicide prevention further by identifying key integrations and connections across the federal government and communities that can be used to save Veterans' lives."

### **The Loss of Good Men is Always Devastating:**

Most of us have been lucky enough to be a 'Nam combat survivor, really brings home how lucky we are to still be able to enjoy good health and have the chance to be around the great guys we were fortunate enough to serve with. One of the greatest, although one of the most unconventional soldiers, we had the pleasure to serve with, was Julius "Juju" Deriscavage. Juju was a piece of work and we always knew what was on his mind; it's as if his brain was directly connected to his mouth. Aside from his gruff exterior, he was one of the most caring and, giving individuals ever to be considered a friend. SGT Chuck Holdaway, past Chapter Commander, was in 1<sup>st</sup> Plt., Bravo 2/1, knew who he was because he and his best friend, Mike Fox, were 2 crazy combat hardened veterans. They became really close when SGT Holdaway temporarily took over 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon. The 3 men got really close, always walking 1-2-3 in some combination on point. Our friendship renewed at the 196<sup>th</sup> LIB reunion in St. Louis in 1989; our first order of business was to take Fox's station wagon to the liquor store and fill it with cases of beer for our buddies who attended. The impromptu "hospitality room" had a bathtub just made for our haul. Throughout the years we got together at 196<sup>th</sup>, ADVA and Kokomo reunions as much as possible. Mike Fox died several years ago and it was pretty hard on us. Mike was a piece of work in himself and it was an empty feeling not having him around. Mike was Juju's best friend from Nam until Mike passed away. Juju was a true warrior, being awarded the Silver Star for his actions at Tam KY in '68 and he could always be counted on when the you-know-what hit the fan. In spite of his surly facade, Juju was one of the most giving, caring person. He was great with his family members and cherished and respected all of his Vietnam buddies. He gave unselfishly to the 2/1 chapter both monetarily and by serving as an elected At-large officer of the chapter. He was always contributing funds to help the chapter and, over the years, gave hundreds to the general chapter fund, Bravo Brick Fund, Flower Fund, and whatever else the chapter needed. He was instrumental in helping to keep the web site up to date and correct; He called himself "The Idea Man". We lost a great guy on March 16<sup>th</sup> this year and the memory of him will continue to bring joy and laughter as we continue on. He would have wanted that! Another loss for his family, friends and our chapter occurred with the passing of Stanley "Stan" Disorda on Friday, March 8th. Stan at his first Americal reunion became attached to Chapter members and contributed to a great time. Stan served as our chapter representative on the ADVA Executive Committee for a short time until his illness forced him to relinquish those duties. Stan was a member of A 2/1, 196<sup>th</sup> L.I.B. and made the trip to Vietnam on board a ship with the first group of the 169<sup>th</sup> to arrive in country. He was a 25 year retired veteran of the U.S. Army serving in Vietnam, Desert Storm, Bosnia and Iraq. After retirement he worked for military



contractors in Iraq and Kuwait from 2003 -2010. He was a member of his local VFW, American Legion, Masonic Lodge and Eagles. He leaves behind a son, daughter, two step-sons and his companion of many years, Betty "Buffie" Buffington. Buffie attended ADVA reunions with Stan and was a joy to be around. He was buried with full military honors by the U.S. Army 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne at Fort Campbell, KY. Rest in Peace Comrade.

**John Malpass, Cdr. of Company B writes:** Yes, we lost a good buddy last Friday. I miss all of my troops, but Ju-Ju Driscavage was special. He got me in trouble for saluting the Battalion Commander while squatting down (next to his Juicy Fruit gum wrappers), but that was Ju-Ju (and due for a haircut). I always said that I was blessed to have a kick-ass company, that I was happy I never had to fight anyone as tough as we were, and Ju-Ju was as tough as they come. God bless him and all my troops from B-2/1.

**A True American Hero:** April marks the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pat Tillman's death in Afghanistan, (April 22, 2004). Tillman and a member of the Afghan National Army were tragically killed by friendly fire during a firefight in Spera, Afghanistan. Two other U.S. soldiers were wounded. Tillman enlisted in the U.S. Army with his brother, Kevin. In doing so, Pat turned down a \$3.6 million NFL, contract with the Arizona Cardinals. Kevin likewise, left behind a professional baseball career with the Cleveland Indians. Both men were part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn., 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regt. Tillman will always be remembered as a man who embodied the ideals of selfless sacrifice. He was an uncommon man whose integrity is an inspiration to others. He is truly an American hero.

**VA to Announce Decision on New Agent Orange Presumptive Conditions:** Three years after a scientific body recommended that the Department of Veterans Affairs consider adding three conditions -- bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson's-like symptoms -- to the list of qualifying diseases tied to Agent Orange, affected veterans may soon find out whether they are eligible for disability compensation and VA health care. During a Senate Veterans Affairs hearing Tuesday on the VA budget, Dr. Richard Stone, the executive in charge of the Veterans Health Administration, said a decision on the three illnesses likely would come in the next 90 days. Responding to a question from Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, Stone said the VA is working "through\_this right now, and it would be my hope" to have a decision within three months. He added that the recommendation will go to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie for final approval.

**75 Years After he was Shot Down, WWII Soldier is Heading Home:** Seventy-five years after enemy forces shot down his glider over Germany during World War II, Pfc. Clifford M. Mills is coming home to Perry County. Mills was 29 on Oct. 18, 1944, when he was reported missing in action near Wyler and Zylflich, Germany. He was serving with the 319th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, 82nd Airborne Division. "They were going to go back later to retrieve him, but when they did he was missing. There was a flood there, and his body was missing. He was an unknown soldier for quite a while," said a niece of Mills, who spoke to some local media members Tuesday and requested that, for now, her name not be used. Mills' remains eventually were recovered and placed in a U.S. military cemetery in Belgium, but he remained unidentified. His name is listed on the Walls of Missing at Margraten American Cemetery in the Netherlands. After a process that involved taking DNA from Mills' brother in Perry County and studying family dental records, Mills' remains finally were identified on Jan. 29.

## 2/1 LOCATOR

\*\* Send your locator notices to **Locator c/o P.O. Box 2639 Key West, FL 33045**, or [jhughesgroupins@aol.com](mailto:jhughesgroupins@aol.com). – email. Okay to include photo, name / nickname, rank, home origin if known, and time of Vietnam service.

### **Purple Heart Recipients Added to VA Priority Claim**

**Process:** VA Secretary Robert Wilkie was six-years old when his father came home after being gravely wounded during the invasion of Cambodia. His father spent years recovering from his combat injuries, and when he finally retired, Robert Wilkie Sr. left service with two bad knees, needing two new hips, and with lead in his body leftover from that conflict in Southeast Asia. His father's experience during those years greatly influence how Secretary Wilkie views VA's role in provided care and benefits to the men and women injured during their military service. To this day, he holds Purple Heart recipients, like his father, in especially high regard. This is why he was so pleased to announce an amendment to the Veterans Benefit Administration's (VBA) priority processing categories "Those who hold the Purple Heart, the recognition of wounds taken in battle, will now receive priority consideration when it comes to claims before the Department of Veterans Affairs," said Wilkie during recent testimony before the House Subcommittee of Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies. With this amendment, Purple Heart recipients who submit initial disability compensation claims on or after April 1, 2019, will be added to nine categories of emergent claims requiring priority processing from VBA. These include claimants who are:

**in the Fully Developed Claim (FDC) Program**  
**homeless or experiencing extreme financial hardship**  
**terminally ill**  
**more than 85 years old, or**  
**survivors of a former Prisoner of War (FPOW).**

### **The last Pearl Harbor Survivor in Kansas City**

**has Died:** The man believed to be the last Kansas City-area resident to survive the attack at Pearl Harbor has died. Local television station reports that 96-year-old Dorwin Lamkin of Overland Park, Kansas, died March 17. A cause of death was not disclosed. Born in Wisconsin, Lamkin joined the Navy in 1940. He was a corpsman on the battleship Nevada when the Japanese attacked at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on Dec. 7, 1941. Lamkin later served at several battles while on the heavy cruiser San Francisco in 1943 and 1944. He was awarded several medals and citations. He was the longtime president of a chapter of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association and helped lead the drive to create the Pearl Harbor Memorial Park in Mission, Kansas.

### **Remains of Ohio Soldier Killed in Korean War**

**Identified:** The remains of an Ohio soldier killed during the Korean War have been identified. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency said in a statement Monday that Army Cpl. Stephen Nemecek, of Cleveland, was accounted for on July 13, 2018. Officials say the 21-year-old soldier was reported killed fighting against the Chinese People's Volunteer Forces at Turtle Head's Bend, near the village of Unsan, North Korea, on Nov. 2, 1950. He was buried at a United Nations cemetery that was soon closed as the situation in North Korea worsened. remains received in an exchange with Chinese and North Koreans after the war were interred at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. A renewed effort to identify unknown remains resulted in Nemecek's identification. Burial arrangements haven't been announced.

At my age, "getting lucky" means walking into a room and actually remembering why I came in there.

### **Military Housing Dollars Unlikely to be Diverted to Border Wall:**

Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan said he had made no decisions on whether the border wall was militarily necessary, a key determination required before military construction funds could be redirected to build it. President Donald Trump announced he would get a border wall built by declaring a national emergency, which allows his administration to access unspent funds in defense accounts. The White House has eyed \$3.6 billion in military construction funds, drawing concern from lawmakers and the services. Shanahan is expected to ultimately support the wall construction, but he is still determining how military spending could support it. "We understand there are some priorities that won't be considered," Shanahan said. "Military housing ... what's been interesting ... I've received a number of letters, I've had lots of feedback. 'Do not jeopardize the projects that are underway,'" Shanahan said. "[Navy] Secretary [Richard] Spencer, so many people, they are very mindful about it, and I appreciate we're trying to work through this very complicated situation. People remind us, these are real, live, very important projects." Section 2808 of Title 10 of U.S. Code allows military construction funds to be reprogrammed to support other activities, such as Trump's national emergency declaration, if there is a determination they are "necessary to support the use of the armed forces," the Pentagon said in a statement. Shanahan said he has made no decisions on that issue.

### **Thousands more Soldiers Will Deploy to Pacific to Increase Army Footprint:**

In a move to bolster U.S. troop presence in the Pacific, the Army has plans to deploy thousands of soldiers to the region for ongoing rotations. The new deployments could include as many as 5,000 to 10,000 troops, the equivalent of a division headquarters and several brigades, Gen. Robert Brown, commander of Army forces in the Pacific, told Stars and Stripes in a media roundtable interview this week. Brown said that existing rotations and forces stationed in the region would remain in their assigned missions and that the new rotations would add to that force strength. Gen. James McConville, vice chief of staff of the Army, said at the interview that the force is part of the Dynamic Force Employment concept unveiled last year as part of the National Defense Strategy. "We're talking about moving troops into a place with certain capabilities based on the partners we're dealing with — move them out and move them back," he told Stripes. "And then have the agility to move around the globe and in this theater the way we need to in response to our partners.

### **Here's How the Army's New Fitness Team did at Their First Competition:**

Members of the Army's new Warrior Fitness Team competed together for the first time in early March and, not to put too fine a point on it, they crushed it. Six of the athletes earned first place in the CrossFit Endeavor event, while Sgt. 1st Class Anthony Fuhrman finished in the top 10 at the Amateur Strongman Classic, part of the Arnold Sports Festival held Feb. 28 through March 3 in Columbus, Ohio. "We were able to overcome a lack of practice, and I think everybody was just so excited to be there," 1st Lt. Chandler Smith told Army Times in a March 15 phone interview. At the time, it had only been two weeks since Army Recruiting Command selected the 15 members of the Warrior Fitness Team, who have not yet all made their way to their Fort Knox, Kentucky, headquarters to begin their full-time gigs as Army athletes.

Worry is a conversation you have with yourself about things you cannot change. Prayer is a conversation with God about things He can change.

**Pentagon agrees to set up McSally's military sexual assault task force:** Sen. Martha McSally (R-Ariz.) on Wednesday said that acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan has agreed to immediately form a Pentagon task force to combat sexual assault. "My goal, and the goal of the Department of Defense, is to eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment in the United States military," Shanahan said in a statement. "DoD leadership is committed to fixing this and I look forward to working with Senator McSally and our taskforce to find solutions that will eliminate this issue from our ranks." In a letter to Shanahan sent Monday, McSally requested that he set up the task force, which would be comprised of herself, "representative experts from all military services, and specialized civilian experts, to take a deep dive into this issue." She asked that the task force "begin meeting immediately with a goal of having recommendations ready" for the markup of the Senate Armed Services Committee's version of the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). McSally also wants the task force to meet with her next week to go over ideas. In a statement accompanying the letter, McSally noted that "within hours of sending the letter," Shanahan responded via phone "and agreed to take steps to form the task force." A former A-10 pilot and squadron commander, McSally earlier this month shocked her Senate colleagues and Air Force leaders when she revealed during a hearing that she was raped by a superior years ago while serving in the military branch. Since then, she has requested an executive summit with top Air Force leaders, including Secretary Heather Wilson and Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein to discuss preventing sexual assault in the military. And last week during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, McSally pressed Shanahan for his commitment on tackling the issue, which he gave. "In 2017, there were 6,769 sexual assaults reported across our entire military, likely thousands of others that were not reported. ... Many steps have been taken by the military over the last years and this body — over 100 legislative actions. But it's not enough," McSally said at the time. "We have weeks now before the NDAA will be marked up before this committee. I am fully locked on like a missile on this target, and I want to be working with you and the military services to take a fresh look at this," she added.

**University Trumpeters Among Volunteers Playing 'Taps' for Veterans' Funerals:** Ten trumpet students at a Louisiana university are offering to play "Taps" at veterans' funerals, rather than leave the haunting farewell bugle call to a mechanical device. "A lot of people get a recording, and play it over a speaker. It means something because it's the song. But when you have an actual person with the horn ... and you hear the horn ring over the fields, it takes the breath out of your chest," Kody Jernigan, a music education major at the University of Louisiana in Monroe, said in a telephone interview. The senior from Longview, Texas, is a member of Talons for Taps, named because the university's mascot is the Warhawk — a nod to the World War II-era Curtiss P-40 Warhawk airplane. All are members of the ULM Trumpet Studio: seven trumpet majors and three other students taught by Assistant Professor Eric Siereveld. Siereveld said "all of them jumped in head-first" when he suggested the volunteer program and explained why he felt it was important. Service members deserve the honor, he said. "They've sacrificed too much for us to not have what in the long run is a relatively small acknowledgement of the sacrifice they've given." The Pentagon has estimated that 10 to 15 percent of military and veterans' families ask for a funeral with military honors: at minimum, a two-person uniformed honor guard, folding and presentation of the U.S. flag, and a rendition of "Taps."

**ADVA 2019 National Reunion:** The 2019 National Reunion dates have been set and Registration forms are available in the latest issue of the Americal Journal and on our WEBSITE. The location is Newport, RI and the dates are October 2-6, 2019. Headquarters hotel is the Crown Plaza Providence/Warwick. Reunion guests can stay at a price of \$109.00 per night plus tax. Reservations can be made by calling 401-732-0261. Remember to tell the reservation clerk that you are attending the 2019 ADVA Reunion. The Reunion code is ADV Tours have been scheduled for Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

**Chuck Holdaway Says:** Past National Commander ADVA Larry Swank, who is in charge of the 2019 ADVA reunion in R. I. Has passed out some information that is pretty useful if we want to be in the host hotel together. He said he stated there are 2 hotels (one overflow) and the host hotel will only accommodate 210 rooms before they go to the overflow. We need to put something in the April newsletter informing our guys of this. Reunion headquarters is the Crowne Plaza Providence/Warwick (airport), located at 801 Greenwich Ave., Warwick, RI 02886. The reservation number is 401-732-6000 and be sure to ask for "in house reservations" otherwise, you may be transferred to another hotel in the chain. Dates are Oct 2-6 (Wednesday – Sunday) and the room rate is \$109 + tax/night. The ADVA committee has only 3 rooms available that could probably be used for hospitality rooms and Larry will get back to Chuck Holdaway as soon as he contacts the hotel. Because of the distance and travel time for Jesse, Chuck will take care of getting things set up and make sure your name is on the room. Chuck will arrive on the 3rd (Thursday) to help set up. Hopefully, we'll get one of the rooms, otherwise, we may have to get a room like we did in OK City which was pretty cramped but, at least by an open area. If you have any questions, let Chuck Holdaway know. Found out "in house reservations" is only open until 4:30 pm EST. Might want to note that; otherwise will be sent to general reservations and may not get set up for reunion discount. Be sure you use the Reunion code **ADV** when making reservations

**VA Recommends Dropping Legal Challenge over 'Blue Water' Navy Veterans Benefits:** Veterans Affairs leaders will not recommend appealing a federal court ruling to award disability benefits to thousands of Vietnam veterans who claim exposure to cancer-causing chemical defoliants during ship deployments off that country's coastline. During an appearance before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said he will not ask the Department of Justice to continue to fight the legal issue. Federal officials have until late April to appeal the decision, issued by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in January. Wilkie emphasized that other federal officials could still offer arguments in favor of filing an appeal. But his recommendation is likely to be an oversized factor in any decision, given the potential impact on his department. Letting the decision stand would give advocates for so-called "blue water" Navy veterans the victory they have been pursuing for more than a decade, arguing that thousands of ailing and aging Vietnam veterans have been unfairly blocked from collecting disability benefits for their on-duty injuries. Under current department rules, the blue water veterans — an estimated 90,000 individuals — can receive medical care for their illnesses through VA. But to receive disability benefits worth up to several thousand dollars a month, they must prove that their ailments are directly connected to toxic exposure while on duty.

Never in my wildest imagination did I think we would have to fight with our own country for the security of our own country.

**Pentagon Notifies Congress \$1 Billion Authorized to begin New Wall Construction:** The Pentagon notified Congress that it has authorized the transfer of \$1 billion to begin new wall construction along the US-Mexico border, drawing immediate objections from Democratic lawmakers. A Pentagon budget reprogramming notification sent to Capitol Hill on Monday and obtained by CNN indicates that up to \$1 billion will go toward building 57 miles of fencing, improving roads and other measures on the southern border. The Department of Defense authorized the Army Corp of Engineers to begin planning and construction for the project Monday night. The department will direct the funds toward 18-foot-high fencing along the Yuma and El Paso sections of the border, according to a letter acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan sent to Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen. In February, President Donald Trump declared a national emergency in order to funnel billions of dollars to wall construction. As part of his announcement, he directed the use of counterdrug monies to partially fund new wall construction. Under the national emergency, other funds can also be dedicated to building the wall and related infrastructure, including military construction funds.

**VA Contracting at 'High Risk' for Wasting Tax Dollars:** The Government Accountability Office on Wednesday declared Department of Veterans Affairs contracting, which topped \$26 billion in 2017, is a "high risk" area of government, susceptible to waste and mismanagement of taxpayer money and in need of more oversight. The GAO, a leading government watchdog agency, presented a biennial report to the House Committee on Oversight and Reform on government programs that are vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse and mismanagement. After a government-wide review, the GAO added two new areas to its latest report, one of them being VA contracting. The VA spent \$26 billion in fiscal 2017 to contract for goods and services – one of the largest procurement budgets across the U.S. government, said Gene Dodaro, who leads the GAO. The watchdog found outdated acquisition policies, little oversight and an unreasonable workload on its contracting officers, among other risks. "They have outdated policies and practices and haven't been able to save a lot of money," he told the oversight committee. "Many purchases are being made under emergency situations." Dodaro specifically brought attention to how the VA purchases medical supplies. Contracting officers rushed orders of a large amount of medical supplies that could've been routinely purchased, he said. Those emergency purchases accounted for 20 percent of the Veterans Health Administration's overall procurements in fiscal 2016, totaling nearly \$2 billion, the GAO report states. Other watchdog groups have recorded problems during the past two years with how the VA buys medical sup-

**Michigan is Helping vets in Prison get their VA Disability Benefits:** It can be difficult for veterans who end up in prison to receive the care and benefits that their counterparts on the outside get. That's less of an issue now for veteran prisoners in Michigan, who can take advantage of the state's Incarcerated Veterans Program to ensure they get the information and benefits they need. "We're just trying to show these men that no matter what they did, their service to their country has been appreciated," said Tom Winn, warden of the Saginaw Correctional Facility in Saginaw County, Mich. Through the Incarcerated Veterans Program, veterans can connect with local VA centers in Ann Arbor and Saginaw to access their medical records, get the exam from a VA medical professional required for disability claims and get help applying for the disability benefits to which they are entitled. That's huge for these veterans, as the only way for them to get their disability benefits is through the VA. The Incarcerated Veterans Program launched in 2014 and is a collaboration between the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, Michigan Department of Corrections, those two VA medical centers and the Veterans Benefits Administration office in Detroit.

**California Prepares to Unleash National Guard to Help with Wildfire Prevention efforts:** California is preparing to mobilize National Guard troops to reduce the threat of wildfires by clearing hazardous dead trees, vegetation and creating fuel breaks, according to Cal Fire. The fire agency has identified nearly three dozen priority projects in more than 200 communities around the state in areas considered high fire-risk zones. It comes as the state is bracing for perhaps another tough wildfire season after devastating 2017 and 2018 blazes that killed more than 120 people. Some of the National Guard troops set to help in the wildfire prevention efforts previously were focused on assisting in the Trump administration's U.S. border request. In February, California Gov. Gavin Newsom rebuked President Donald Trump's "manufactured crisis" at the border by announcing plans to pull more than 250 troops from the southern border. Last April, California's previous governor, Jerry Brown, agreed to send about 400 of the state's troops to the border at the request of Trump, who cited "a crisis" at the border due to a "combination of illegal drugs, dangerous gang activity, and extensive illegal immigration."

**Pres. Trump Presents Medal of Honor to Son of Army Staff Sergeant who Died Protecting His Soldiers:** The family of an Army staff sergeant who used his own body to shield three of his soldiers from the fatal blast of a suicide bomber in Iraq received the Medal of Honor for his actions. Trevor Oliver, 22, son of the late Staff Sgt. Travis Atkins, told a packed room in the White House that while he took great pride in receiving the medal on behalf of his father, it was the words and stories that his fellow soldiers told of his father's service, friendship and leadership that he valued the most in recent days. "Everything that you have said to me over the last few days has meant the world to me," he said. "Dad always had the funniest stories about you guys. I feel so close to you and to him with every story I hear." Atkins joined the Army in 2000 out of the Bozeman, Montana, area. He first deployed with the 101st Airborne Division to Iraq for the 2003 invasion. He left the Army after his first enlistment. So, in 2005, Atkins rejoined the ranks and by mid-2006 he was back in Iraq with the 10th Mountain Division. On June 1, 2007 he was killed saving the lives of three of his squad members.

