



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



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

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Volume 9

“A Soldier Once And Always”

October 2019

Commanders Corner: Fellow Legionnaires of 2-1 Infantry, September is here and summer is about to come to an end, and we all hope that you and your families are having a great time. Lari and I had a great time while spending two weeks at a beach house in Avon, NC with our sons, their wives, kids and a Great GMAW and Great Aunt as well.

Congratulations to our new Life Members (LM):

1. Richard Kobut, Hanover Park, IL, 2/1 Delta & Bravo, 66-67
2. Gerald (Jerry) Skeel, Clio, Mi. 2/1 Alpha, 70-71
3. Larry Ricci, Lynwood, IL. 2/1 E Co., 69 - 70
4. Bryant Charles Peterson Lake Elmo, Mn. 2/1 C & A 67-69

Congratulations to new Paid yearly members:

1. Ronald Dougard, Brick Twp., NJ, 2/1 D Co. 65- 66
2. Tom Ellis, Columbus, OH. 2/1 B Co. 69-70
3. Robert Graves Elmhurst, IL. , 2/1 C Co. 70-71
4. Art Heggen, Wynantskill, NY, 2/1 B Co. 65-67
5. Michael A. Hodge,. Galt, Ca., 2/1 A Co. 67-68
6. Michael Lee, Lancaster, Ca., 2/1 D. Co. 65-67
7. John E. Maloney, Willowbrook, IL, 2/1 D Co. 65-67
8. Antonio W. Ramirez, Baldwin, 2/1 HHC CO. 67-69
9. Daniel Sexton, New Richmond, OH., 2/1 D Co. 65-67
10. Terry Toll, Racine, WI., 2/1 A Co. 1967-1968
11. George Wiseman, Mt. Prospect, IL, 2/1 D Co. 65-67
12. David Welle, Milford, IA, 2/1 B Co. 66-67

We're winding down the time to our “Veterans’ Reunions” this year, and hope to see you at least one of them, that 2nd Battalion 1st Infantry Regiment veterans attend:

Our Annual Chapter Meeting and Election of Officers (Commander, vice Commander and Secretary/Treasurer) will be at the Americal Division Veterans Association (ADVA) 2019 Reunion, 2-6 October 2019 at the Crown Plaza Providence/Warwick (Airport) at 801 Greenwich Ave, Warwick, RI 02886. Our Annual Meeting and Election should be sometime on Saturday, 5 OCT. See the ADVA website for additional information: <https://americal.org/cmsaml/index.php/reunions.html>.

Again, I look forward to meeting some more Alpha 2-1INF vets at either of the reunions. I will be bringing my A/2-1INF guidon flag to both. See you there! God bless you and your families, and hope you have a great summer, and start of another school year for the grandchildren. 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.

Got a comment, idea or complaint, contact me at Commander.2.1.jgw@gmail.com.

John Woyansky,
Commander



Julius “Juju” Deriscavage Arlington National Cemetery Funeral:
Julius “Juju” Deriscavage Arlington National Cemetery Funeral: Our dearly beloved comrade Sergeant Julius Driscavage was laid to rest early Monday morning September 16, 2019 in a plot in section 56 of Arlington National Cemetery. His family and friends were present as well as members of his Army family. An honorable military funeral service, along with a formal firing squad and bugler to playing TAPS, was conducted by the U.S. Army’s Third Infantry Regiment; in the finest traditions of this great organization. The Army Chaplain offered prayers on our behalf for the peaceful repose of our fallen service member. The climate was gorgeous without a cloud in the sky. All in attendance were grateful for the military service that Juju had wished upon his passing. On Sunday afternoon Juju’s family conducted an informal gathering to pay tribute to him for the many qualities he has brought to their lives. Everyone was asked to inform all in attendance of their recollections of loved one; and the members of Company B were eager to impart lively true-lived stories for the occasion. All were attentively interested to the stories especially about Juju’s exploits at the various opportunities presented over the years we all knew him. The family was genuinely thankful for all of the tales expressed that evening bringing much joyfulness during a circumstance of sadness.



Julius "Ju-Ju" Deriscavage
February 28, 1948 - March 26, 2019

Web Site Update: In the July issue I alluded to a new link on our web site but, didn’t really do a very good job of explaining it and how to find it. The link is entitled “Forgotten Battles of the Vietnam War” and is on page 2 of the “Related Links” section in the left hand column of our web site. The URL is http://www.2-1-196th.com/httpdocs/Htms_Nam/Links2.htm and the link is in the left hand column under “General Sites”. If you have and problems; just drop me an email and I’ll get you headed in the right direction. Thanks, Chuck Holdaway

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: www.2-1-196th.com 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. Be sure to make your arrangements early because there are just so many rooms reserved for this occasion. Remember what has happened during prior reunions when the rooms ran out and some of us had to stay at an alternative location. Act now!

Army Activates New Units in Europe to Support Poland: The Army Reserve activated seven new units including a regional support group capable of supporting thousands of soldiers such as those in Poland, where troops are deployed to deter Russian activities. Col. Scott K. Thomson, deputy commander of the 7th Mission Support Command, presided over the activation ceremony for the 510th Regional Support Group and six subordinate units at U.S. Army Garrison Rheinland-Pfalz, Sembach Kaserne. “It’s becoming increasingly clear that our Army Reserve units and Soldiers in Europe are indispensable to the security posture to European Command, NATO and United States Army Europe,” Thomson was quoted as saying in an Army statement. The 510th is the only forward-stationed regional support group “organic to” USAEUR, the Army said. It has been staffing up in preparation for activation since late 2017 and is expected to oversee nearly a dozen units. The brigade-level command and headquarters can support base camp operations for 6,000 or more soldiers in-theater, such as the more than 4,500 troops deployed on a rotational basis at about half a dozen bases in Poland, the Army said. Other units activated were the 83rd Sustainment Support Battalion and its headquarters company out of Kaiserslautern, the Wiesbaden-based 319th Military History Detachment, Grafenwoehr’s 530th Movement Control Team and the 603rd Movement Control Team based in Vicenza, Italy, under the 446th Movement Control Battalion

Billions Spent on U.S. Weapons didn’t Protect Saudi Arabia’s most critical oil sites from a Crippling Attack: For years, Saudi Arabia has been a major buyer of U.S.-made weapons. That relationship intensified after President Trump took office, with the American leader pushing oil-rich Riyadh to buy more weapons and Saudi Arabia pledging a purchase of \$110 billion in U.S. arms just months after his inauguration. After this weekend, when a devastating attack on Saudi oil facilities blindsided the kingdom, some observers were left wondering what protection Riyadh’s outreach to the United States has bought it. Notwithstanding the expensive military hardware purchased by Saudi Arabia, experts say, the Saturday attack represented an unusually well-planned operation that would have been difficult for even the most well-equipped and experienced countries to detect and neutralize. “This was a really flawless attack,” said Michael Knights, a scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy who has followed Saudi air defense for decades, adding that evidence suggests that only one of 20 missiles may have missed its target. “That’s astounding.” The operation appeared to circumvent the defenses of Saudi Arabia’s military, including the six battalions of Patriot missile defense systems produced by U.S. defense contractor Raytheon — each of which can cost in the region of \$1 billion. Russian President Vladimir Putin responded to Saturday’s attack with mockery. At an event in Turkey Putin suggested that Saudi Arabia buy the Russian-made S-300 or S-400 missile defense system, as Iran and Turkey had done. “They will reliably protect all infrastructure objects of Saudi Arabia,” Putin said. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, also in attendance at the event, was seen grinning at the remarks. The S-400 system is untested in real-life situations, but it costs less than the Patriot system and has technical features that are, on paper at least, an improvement on the U.S. system, including a longer range and the ability to operate in any direction.

The U.S. Army Museum opening June 2020: June 2020 is the period established by the Committee responsible for the construction of the Army Museum. To see the progress being made by the construction crews please enter the information <https://youtu.be/2twaz4bd5Vk> into your computer.

Esper Warns of Eroding Air Superiority Advantage: Defense Secretary Mark Esper, not even two months into the job as the leader of the Pentagon, made his first major appearance before airmen on Sept. 18 and reminded them the domination the service has enjoyed in the skies is coming to an end. “Our military’s become very proficient at low-intensity conflict. For decades now the Air Force has dominated the skies. Air superiority has been relatively uncontested. Persistent ISR has become the norm. And precision airstrikes are now the weapons of choice,” Esper said during a keynote address at AFA’s Air, Space, & Cyber Conference. “But the conveniences of today’s battlefield will not be the realities of the future.” The Defense Department, in its National Defense Strategy released in early 2018 under his predecessor, former defense secretary Jim Mattis, states that the resurgent power of China and Russia will threaten the US in all domains, especially air, space, and cyber. Under that strategy, Esper said he is leading two major reviews: one on the entire department’s budget, and another on the military’s force posture and major operational plans. “Put simply, some of our long-held advantages have started to diminish. Great power competition has once again returned to the global stage,” Esper said. “If we are to remain the world’s pre-eminent military power, then we must change course away from the past and face the challenges of the future head on.” The first review is taking a “microscope” to the Pentagon’s entire budget, first focusing on the department’s “fourth estate,” or administrative agencies. The review will then move on to the rest of the Pentagon, aimed at not just saving money but also to “give warfighters more of what we need to deter adversaries and, if necessary, fight and win,” he said. The second review is focusing on the Pentagon’s force structure and operational plans, looking to ensure the department is not just doing things right, but is “doing the right things,” he said. Esper, in response to a question from an information operations officer about how the military is structured for global threats from across a spectrum of operations, said “I don’t think we’re optimized from a force location perspective, [it’s] one of the things we’re looking at as we’ve begun this NDS review process. We need to think about how we position ourselves around the globe.” For the Air Force specifically, Esper said the service needs to focus on how it can organize, train, and equip airmen to be prepared for a “full spectrum” of threats, both kinetic and non-kinetic, and in realms such as space and cyber. These two steps to implement the strategy will help “better understand and balance the needs of today with the requirements of tomorrow” and address the “tradeoff of building readiness with consuming readiness,” Esper said.

Saudis Couldn’t stop Attack on Oil Facilities, even with top US Defenses: Saudi Arabia spent billions to protect a kingdom built on oil but could not stop the suspected Iranian drone and missile attack, exposing gaps that even America’s most advanced weaponry failed to fill. In addition to deciding whether that firepower should be turned on Iran in retaliation, the Saudis and their American allies must now figure out how to prevent a repeat of last weekend’s attack — or worse, such as an assault on the Saudis’ export facilities in the Persian Gulf or any of the desalination plants that supply drinking water. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was asked Wednesday on his way to Saudi Arabia how it was possible that the kingdom could have dropped its guard, failing to stop any of the low-flying cruise missiles or armed drones that struck the Abqaiq oil processing center — the largest of its kind in the world — and the Khurais oil field. Even the best air defenses sometimes fail, he replied. “We want to make sure that infrastructure and resources are put in place such that attacks like this would be less successful than this one appears to have been.” Esper said than done. “This is an attack of a scale we’ve just not seen before,” Pompeo said. He called the strike “an act of war” but not say what military response might follow.

Long Missing WWII Soldier to be Buried in Missouri: A World War II soldier who went missing almost 75 years ago during fighting in Germany will be buried with full military honors in his home state of Missouri. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reports that services are planned for Monday at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis County for Pfc. Dewey Wilbur Harris of Cherryville, Missouri. The area where he fell in November 1944 during the Battle of Hürtgen Forest was laced with mines, making the recovery of bodies treacherous. It wasn't until 1946, a year after the war ended, that American forces could retrieve their dead. For many years, Harris' remains were designated as Unknown X-2702. Harris' niece, Mary Stromberg, of Chesterfield, said she cried when she heard the news that he had been identified, saying "I knew Dewey would come home sometime."

Progress on Recovering Missing Troops, but still a Daunting task ahead: Navy Capt. James Bauder's burial at Arlington Cemetery on Thursday marked the completion of 53 years of work to bring the pilot back to American soil after his death in North Vietnam. Leaders at the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency said the ceremony serves as a reminder to the public of the ongoing work to bring every missing service member home, and a reminder to the agency of the work still to be done. "There are more than 81,000 still missing ... I don't think (most Americans) know about that," said Kelly McKeague, director of DPAA. "But for many Americans, when they hear about the nation's commitment to our MIA's and their families, I think they're struck by the noble nature of it." DPAA has made 204 new identifications of fallen troops' remains so far this fiscal year, up slightly from fiscal 2018 totals and more than double from the totals four years ago.

Remains of Korean War POW arrive in Ohio for Burial: The remains of an Ohio soldier who died while a prisoner of war during the Korean War have arrived home for burial. U.S. Army Sgt. Vernon R. Judd's remains were flown Sunday from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency laboratory in Hawaii to Cleveland. North Korea turned over remains including those of the 22-year-old member of Company D, 89th Medium Tank Battalion 25th Infantry Division, to the U.S. in 2018. DNA tests confirmed his identity. Judd, of Stark County's Navarre, was declared missing Nov. 28, 1950. A returned American POW reported Judd died at Hofong Prisoner of War camp, also known as Pukchin-Tarigol, on Feb. 14, 1951. Judd's funeral will be Tuesday at Spidell Funeral Home in Stark County's Brewster, with burial at Ohio Western Reserve National Cemetery in Medina County.

With Death of 98-year-old Muleskinner, only nine Merrill's Marauders remain: At age 98 and living his last days in a hospice facility in northern Michigan, Henry C. Smith wanted to set the Army's record straight on what happened 75 years ago in the jungles of Burma. Sgt. Smith — a member of the famed Merrill's Marauders that waged guerilla warfare on the occupying Japanese — was leading an intelligence and reconnaissance patrol of roughly a dozen men in April 1944. They chanced upon an enemy patrol perhaps 20 times their size, and the Marauders fought it out for several days before running out of ammunition. The five surviving Marauders were captured and "subjected to beatings, humiliation and starvation," according to the citation accompanying the Silver Star that Smith was awarded by the unit's namesake, Brig. Gen. Frank Merrill. Smith, however, tricked one of his captors into untying the ropes binding him, and the 21-year-old soldier overpowered and killed him. He then single-handedly killed eight other guards before releasing the other U.S. prisoners and escaping into the jungle, the Silver Star citation states.

Army's Medical School is a 'Center of Excellence': The Army has a new name for the training center that is the starting point for all soldiers going into Army medicine. The Army's Medical Department Center and School is now called the U.S. Army Medical Center of Excellence. The medical training and education center at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston in Texas was officially renamed, the Army announced. The new name reflects a reorganization that is shifting the center to align with Army Training and Doctrine Command. What will be immediately obvious to soldiers is a lighter-weight acronym: "AMEDDC&S HRCOE" is now reduced to "MEDCoE." That bulkier acronym stood for Army Medical Department Center and School, Health Readiness Center of Excellence, which had been in use since 2015. One year ago, the center began transitioning from Army Medical Command to TRADOC. That change is expected to be complete by Oct. 2. The new, shorter acronym reflects a massive mission, said the two-star commander who has served in MEDCOM at least five times during his 34-year Army career, according to the Army's release.

Alarming VA Report Totals Decade of Veteran Suicides: The Department of Veterans Affairs released an alarming report showing that at least 60,000 veterans died by suicide between 2008 and 2017, with little sign that the crisis is abating despite suicide prevention being the VA's top priority. Although the total population of veterans declined by 18% during that span of years, more than 6,000 veterans died by suicide annually, according to the VA's 2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report. Of particular concern was the suicide rate among former National Guard and Reserve members who were never federally activated and therefore, did not receive VA services. Within that population, there were 919 suicides in 2017, an average of 2.5 per day, the report said. Some 12.4% of all military suicides in 2017 were among this population, the report found. VA is working to prevent suicide among all veterans, whether they are enrolled in VA health care or not," Wilkie said. "That's why the department has adopted a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention, using bundled strategies that cut across various sectors -- faith communities, employers, schools and health care organizations, for example -- to reach veterans where they live and thrive." The new approach was meant "to reach all veterans, even those who do not and may never come to us for care," Wilkie said.

75th anniversary of daring WWII Allied operation marked in the Netherlands: Parachutes glowing gold and white against clear blue skies, hundreds of paratroopers floated to the ground in the eastern Netherlands on Saturday to mark the 75th anniversary of a daring but ultimately unsuccessful mission that Allied commanders hoped would bring a swift end to World War II. Operation Market Garden dropped nearly 35,000 paratroopers deep behind enemy lines in the Nazi-occupied Netherlands. After landing, the troops were to capture and secure key roads and bridges so Allied forces massed in Belgium could pour into Germany's industrial heartland. Recreating the mass drops of September 1944, military aircraft flew low over Ginkel Heath on Saturday and current military parachutists leaped out. Thousands of spectators watched and applauded the soldiers once they were on the ground. One veteran of the original landing, Sandy Cortmann, jumped again while strapped to a British paratrooper. After their landing, a wheelchair took Cortmann to a tent to watch the anniversary ceremony. The British 1st Airborne Division led the huge airborne assault 75 years ago that was part of British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery ill-fated plan for Operation Market Garden. Paratroopers from the U.S. Army's 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions and Poland's 1st Independent Parachute Brigade also were dropped into the Netherlands.

Millions More Vets and Caregivers Are About to Get Commissary, Exchange Access: The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs are gearing up for what will be the largest expansion of patrons to the military commissary system and exchanges in 65 years, making sure that shoppers will be able to get on base and find the shelves fully stocked. Starting Jan. 1, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war and all service-connected disabled veterans, regardless of rating, as well as caregivers enrolled in the VA's Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers program, will be able to shop at Defense Commissary Agency stores and military exchanges. They also will have access to revenue-generating Morale, Recreation and Welfare amenities, such as golf courses, recreation areas, theaters, bowling alleys, campgrounds and lodging facilities that are operated by MWR. Facilities such as fitness centers that receive funding from the Defense Department budget are not included. At commissaries, however, there will be an added cost for new patrons who use a credit or debit card to pay for their groceries, in addition to the 5% surcharge commissary patrons already pay. In addition to ironing out the supply chain concerns, Pentagon officials also have been working to guarantee that the new patrons can get to the stores, which often are located on secure military installations, and will be able to make purchases. The details have required a joint effort for much of the past year between the DoD and the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security and Treasury. Homeland Security is involved because Coast Guard Exchanges are part of the deal, and Treasury plays a role, because it is responsible for ensuring that new patrons pay a fee for credit and debit card purchases at the commissaries. Since most new patrons lack the credentials needed to get on military bases, installations will accept the Veteran Health Identification card, or VHID, from disabled and other eligible veterans. For caregivers, the VA plans to issue a memo to eligible shoppers in the coming months, which will be used in conjunction with any picture identification that meets REAL ID Act security requirements, such as a compliant state driver's license or passport.

Pressured to speed returns, the US military says South Korea can have 15 bases now: The U.S. military wants to set the record straight as it faces South Korean pressure to expedite the handover of bases as part of a drawn-out relocation plan. U.S. Forces Korea is ready to turn over more than half of the bases now, including parts of Yongsan Garrison in Seoul, the command said in a rare public display of frustration. South Korea "recently announced that it desired to expedite the return process of 26 U.S. military installations," USFK said. "Fifteen of the 26 U.S. military installations, including four sites specifically requested for transfer at the earliest possible date ... have been vacated, closed and available for transfer to the (South Korean) government." "Two parcels of Yongsan Garrison have been vacated, closed and available for transfer since 2014 with another three parcels since summer 2019 for a total of five parcels available now," it added. The statement came amid concerns of a widening rift in the long-standing U.S.-South Korean alliance after Seoul ended a U.S.-based military intelligence sharing pact with Japan. The allies also are gearing up for defense cost-sharing negotiations that are likely to be contentious since President Donald Trump has demanded that the South sharply increase its contribution. Both sides have insisted they remain committed to the alliance following the 1950-53 Korean War. "As a testament to our U.S.-(South Korean) alliance, USFK remains committed to returning installations as expeditiously as possible to (South Korean) government control," in accordance with relevant agreements, the USFK press release said. When asked about the statement, a South Korean military official said the 15 bases are still the subject of negotiations.

Veterans Benefits will see a Cost-of-Living bump this year, but how much? Veterans will see a cost-of-living increase in their benefits payouts later this year, but it likely won't be as big as the last one they received. Last week, President Donald Trump signed into law the annual Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act, which guarantees that a host of veterans benefits will see the same annual boost as Social Security recipients. Veterans benefits covered include disability compensation, compensation for dependents, clothing allowances, and dependency and indemnity compensation checks. The measure is typically just a formality — it passed Congress again this year with no opposition — but is required annual work for lawmakers because federal statute does not link annual COLA increases for the two separate payouts. Legislative efforts in recent years to make the increases automatic for veterans have proven unsuccessful.

It Was the Biggest Scam in Tricare's History. Now Troops May Be Going to Jail: In 2013, a handful of pharmacy companies that make compounded medications -- personalized dosages or formulas normally crafted for patients who can't tolerate certain ingredients -- discovered they could make treatments such as pain and scar creams, wound ointments and erectile dysfunction drugs, and market them to patients enrolled in Tricare. Then, they could bill the government a hefty sum, between \$400 and \$10,000 per prescription, making enough to cover the cost of beneficiaries' co-payments, provide kickbacks to participating physicians and middlemen, and generously pad their own pockets. When the Defense Health Agency's losses caused by these specious prescriptions topped nearly \$1.5 billion in the first half of 2015, the Pentagon moved to restrict its coverage of all compounded medications. And the Justice Department began pursuing the unscrupulous pharmacists, doctors, marketers and salesmen involved, including military troops who saw the largest case of medical fraud in the Pentagon's history as a chance to make cash on the side. As of May 2019, the Justice Department has indicted and sentenced 74 people, with 50 more convicted and awaiting sentencing in the nationwide scheme perpetrated by at least 100 pharmacies. The criminals include at least five veterans, with more arrests of former service members possibly to come. The most recent veteran to be convicted is former Marine Bradley White of Oakley, California, who pleaded guilty in July to conspiracy to commit health care fraud. White worked with a team to recruit and pay Marines and dependents to accept medications compounded by the Cleveland, Tennessee, company Choice MD. Choice MD bilked Tricare out of \$65 million; White was responsible for patients who billed Tricare more than \$7.6 million, according to prosecutors. For his work, he received nearly \$200,000 in kickbacks.

Good Riddance, Blueberries! Navy bids Farewell to its worst Uniform ever: Starting Oct. 1, sailors who are currently being forged by the sea will at long last no longer blend in with it. After 11 perilous years of parading around looking like victims of an airplane toilet explosion, the Navy finally is saying sayonara to the Type I Navy Working Uniform, a heinous half-nylon boondoggle that not only wasted hundreds of millions of dollars but endangered the lives of everyone who donned the accursed "blueberry." That's because until 2012, sailors didn't realize that a mere spark could turn them into blueberry flambé. Or — as the Navy Clothing and Textile Research Facility eloquently put it after testing a uniform that doubled as "a thermoplastic fiber" Yankee candle that "melts and drips" when lit — it "will burn robustly until completely consumed." Surveys suggest most sailors, if given the opportunity, will robustly choose to avoid welding clothing to their skin.

Millions of Veterans Have Looked Into Private Care Since Mission Act Rollout: More than a million veterans have consulted with the Department of Veterans Affairs about going to a private doctor since the Mission Act rolled out three months ago, but there has been no immediate rush away from the VA health care system, officials said. "The bottom line is that the Mission Act is a success," said Dr. Richard Stone, head of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). He added that the number of veterans enrolling in VA health care, or choosing to stay in the system, has actually increased since the Mission Act went into effect June 6. The new enrollments include veterans over the age of 65, when they become eligible for Medicare, he said at a hearing of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health. Stone said the fears of several veterans service organizations and congressional Democrats that the Mission Act would lead to the "privatization" of health care at the VA have not been realized. Rep. Julia Brownley, D-California, the subcommittee chairwoman, appeared to agree, saying she is "impressed" with the Mission Act's implementation thus far. But she added that she is "alarmed" by the VA's continuing challenge to enroll female veterans for "high-risk maternity care and fertility treatments." In his testimony, Stone said there had been more than one million "consults" with veterans on whether they would be eligible for, or their interests would be best served by, a community care provider in the private sector. He said that the "best medical interest was a factor considered" in 538,000 of those consultations. Under the Mission Act, the VA maintains control over whether to authorize payment for private care in consultation with the veteran, Stone said. He said the VA currently lacks data on how many of the consults were authorized for private care, adding that it likely will not be available for another three or four months. The community care providers "have to refer back" to the VA on whether the private care is authorized, and the department "can pull that care back" into the VA health care system. "The VA will maintain oversight" of community care authorizations, and will remain the "integrator" of care coordination, Matthews said. In his testimony, Stone said early data "shows that veterans are using the Veterans Community Care Program under the Mission Act only slightly more than they were using community care before the June 6 launch." The initial projections for the Mission Act were that the number of veterans currently receiving VA health care who could become eligible for community care would increase from 8% to 40%. More than nine million vets receive care from the VA. The Mission Act, which stands for Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks Act, was signed into law in 2018 and went into effect June 6 to replace the troubled, inefficient and underfunded VA Choice program. Under Choice, veterans were considered eligible for private care if they have a 30 minute wait or are required to travel more than 30 miles to a VA facility.

Military Times launches job board for veterans: The Military Times has unveiled a new job board that aims to connect veterans with thousands of job opportunities with employers seeking to hire people with military experience. The new online job board offers employers from around the country an opportunity to target veterans and service members who are planning to return to the civilian job market. Service members can create profiles, target a job search to specific locations and set up job alerts for new postings. Veterans employment rates have remained strong in recent years. The job board is the latest addition to the Military Times' expanding support for veterans, which includes the Military Times Veterans Transition Survival Guide, annual 'Best for Vets' rankings for employers, and a news section that provides up-to-date information about education and transition issues.

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Afghanistan and Iraq veterans were the 'ground zero' of the opioid crisis: Study: Veterans who were stationed in Afghan and Iraqi war zones after the 9/11 terror attacks have been hit hardest by the opioid crisis, according to new research. Veterans of the global war on terrorism are experiencing an opioid epidemic nearly twice as severe as the one plaguing civilians, according to a new study distributed by the National Bureau of Economic Research. Researchers affiliated with the University of Connecticut, University of Georgia, and San Diego State University concluded that combat veterans who were deployed after the 9/11 attacks have an opioid abuse rate about seven times higher than civilians who have never served in a combat zone. "While grim national statistics about the 'worst drug overdose epidemic in history' are increasingly well known to the American public, far less well known is that combat veterans constitute a population at ground zero of this crisis," the authors concluded. They found that veterans not only deal with chronic pain that has to be treated when they return from war zones, but also post-traumatic stress that sometimes leads to drug use as a coping mechanism.

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OUR MINUET WITH DEATH

War is the province of death. Herein lies the paradox. War forces patriots for a time to be more intensely alive than they ever were, or ever will be again. What a soaring elation to eventually be enveloped in the quicksand of daily existence.

Nobody comes back from war the same person and it never ends for those who fight it. War is a specter which follows them to the grave. No matter what they do afterwards, the apparition lingers and says, "There is nothing compared to me." And this haunting presence is correct. Intense emotional attachments flower and over time, most fade and grow old ... mere wisps remind us of bygone days. Yet, in the winter of our lives, our grisly companion boldly steps forward into our misty reveries and brings forth with vividness our youthful minuet with death.

When you meet a veteran who has experienced war, you should remember that no matter how ordinary he looks and sounds, combat Veterans are different from you. They know things that you do not know because your life does not teach the things they had to learn. You were never asked to kill your fellow man ... or to die. You have never emerged a hair's breath from death and experienced the elation of just being alive. Nor have you had to endure the presence of death stalking you day...after day...after day ... and for some, even when the danger has long passed.

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