



December 15, 2017

This is the last issue of the year. The next Action Corps Weekly will be on Jan. 5, 2018.

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1. VFW Meets VA, USMC Leadership: VFW National Commander Keith Harman met with VA Secretary David Shulkin yesterday to discuss the continued implementation and refinement of the Veterans Choice Act, as well as helping veterans to gain easier access to quality care both inside VA and through contract providers. Today he meets Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. Glenn Walters to discuss VFW troop support programs, service officer assistance and budget issues. Tonight he hosts a dinner for dozens of wounded, ill and injured troops recuperating at nearby Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, and their families.

2. VFW Testifies at Hearing on Changes to Pre-Discharge Claims Programs: On Wednesday, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs held a hearing regarding recent changes to pre-discharge claims programs, which enable transitioning service members to file disability compensation claims before they are discharged from military service. VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci was on hand to deliver testimony which focused on the Benefits During Delivery (BDD) and Quick Start claims. Gallucci expressed the VFW's concern that recent changes to the pre-discharge programs seem to indicate VA is attempting to reduce its claims workload by shifting responsibility to veterans service organizations, without adequately addressing unintended consequences. Additionally, Gallucci pointed out that in fiscal year 2017 alone, the VFW represented 500,000 claimants, which yielded more than \$7.6 billion in earned benefits. [View the hearing](#) or [read the testimony](#).

3. VFW Sets the Record Straight on Decision Ready Claims: On Dec. 14, VA sent veterans an email promising they would receive claim decisions in 30 days by working with organizations

like the VFW through the Decision Ready Claims (DRC) process. To set the record straight, VFW National Veterans Service Director Ryan Gallucci put together a video explaining why the 30-day promise is misleading, and what the DRC process really means for veterans seeking to access their earned benefits. Gallucci also joined CBS Radio's Connecting Vets on Friday morning to spread the word on how this program really works and why veterans need to have a candid conversation with their accredited VFW Service Officer about whether or not DRC is right for them. [Watch the video](#) or [listen to Ryan's Connecting Vets interview](#).

4. DHA Executive Council Meeting: On Tuesday, the VFW participated in the quarterly Defense Health Agency (DHA) MSO/VSO Executive Council meeting led by DHA Deputy Director Guy Kiyokawa. He was joined by Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Jon Rychalski, DHA's Acting Deputy Assistant Director for Financial Operations Brig. Gen. James Dienst, Acting Director J-10 TRICARE Health Plan Kenneth Canestrini, Director of Communications for the Military Health System Richard Breen, and senior representatives from the Sesame Street for Military Families program. The meeting included an update on the TRICARE changes set to take effect Jan. 1, possible impacts to health care delivery should a government shutdown occur, and clarification on the joint health care objectives being pursued by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Also discussed were new changes as a result of the FY18 National Defense Authorization Act, such as an increase in pharmacy copays starting Feb. 1, 2018, and authorization of hospice care for individuals under age 21. [Read details on the pharmacy costs](#).

5. GI Bill Implementation Hearing: This week the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity held a hearing on VA's efforts to implement the changes brought about by the Forever GI Bill. VA representatives testified about the IT issues they are currently facing, and the struggle with notification letters to student veterans. One of the issues highlighted by Chairman Jody Arrington (R-TX) was the misleading and contradictory letters being sent to those students whose eligibility has been restored because their school was recently closed. VA's solution to this issue is to fix how they track these students in order to make sure they receive the correct notice in the future, instead of multiple contradictory letters. Another issue raised was the low number of students who have applied to have benefits restored after abrupt school closures in the past few years. Only a few hundred of the nearly 8,000 students who may be eligible have applied for benefit restoration and that number needs to be higher. These students might not know they can apply for this benefit and VA needs to do a better job notifying those who are eligible. If you were impacted by a recent school closure and are facing issues accessing your restored GI Bill benefits, please contact vfwac@vfw.org. [Read the new Forever GI Bill provisions or apply for benefit restoration](#). [Watch the hearing](#).

6. Army Guard Selects New Senior Enlisted: Command Sgt. Maj. John Sampa has been selected to become the new senior enlisted advisor to the Army National Guard. Sampa is an Iraq veteran and member of VFW Post 3903 in Rosenberg, Texas. He is currently the command sergeant major of 14,000 soldiers assigned to the Texas Guard's 36th Infantry Division. He will replace CSM Christopher Kepner, who has held the position since May 2016.

7. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced identification of remains and burial updates of eight American servicemen who had been missing in action from World War II and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Sgt. Kermit J. Lejeune**, 23, of Church Point, La., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Dec. 14 in his hometown. Lejeune was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit engaged with Chinese forces in the vicinity of Unsan County, North Pyongan County, North Korea. Lejeune was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950. Lejeune was later reported to have been captured and died in a North Korean POW camp in early 1951. [Read about Lejeune.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Albert E. Atkins**, 20, of Belvidere, N.J., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Dec. 15 in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. Atkins was a member of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 187th Airborne Regimental Combat Team. His unit attacked enemy forces near Mae-Bong, South Korea, on May 23, 1951, in an attempt to secure Hill 911. As the company prepared to assault the hill, Atkins and two other soldiers from his company were reported missing in action. [Read about Atkins.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class George J. Wilcox, Jr.**, 19, of Byram, Miss., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Dec. 16 in Evansville, Ind. Wilcox was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Wilcox was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. [Read about Wilcox.](#)

-- **Navy Mess Attendant 2nd Class Archie Callahan, Jr.**, was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Callahan was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Callahan.](#)

-- **Navy Storekeeper 1st Class John W. Craig** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Craig was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Craig.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class James C. Solomon** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Solomon was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Solomon.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces 2nd Lt. Robert R. Keown** was a P-38 pilot assigned to the 36th Fighter Squadron, 8th Fighter Group. On April 16, 1944, Keown and three other aircraft escorted a B-25 medium bomber on an aerial search near the mouth of the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea. The fourship encountered heavy overcast conditions after charting their course home. Heavy rain forced them to turn toward the open ocean, where Keown and his wingman became separated from the other aircraft. His last known location was listed as more than a mile north of Yalu Point. None of the four aircraft returned from the mission. Interment services are pending. [Read about Keown.](#)

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Milton M. Beed** was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. The unit was supporting South Korean forces in the village of Hoengsong, an area known as the Central Corridor in South Korea, when Chinese forces launched a massive counter-offensive, driving the support force to withdraw to Wonju.

Beed could not be accounted for and was declared missing in action as of Feb. 12, 1951. Interment services are pending. [Read about Beed.](#)

To sign up new veterans' advocates, click here: <http://capwiz.com/vfw/mlm/signup.htm>.

As always, we want to hear your advocacy stories. To share your stories or photos with us, simply email them directly to yfwac@vfw.org.