



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

WEBSITE: www.b-2-1-196lib.com



Volume 7

"A Soldier Once And Always"

August 2017

Commanders Corner: The 196th LIB had their biannual reunion in Louisville, KY the last weekend in July and I received permission from their President Dave Eichorn, their president, to bring some applications to recruit new members to our chapter. Rich, decided to go to the reunion and gave a recruiting pitch to the 2/1 guys at the reunion. Applications were distributed to all. It seems like one of the hang ups about joining stemmed from the idea our members had to belong to the Americal Division Veterans Association or have served with the division. A lot of these guys are what they refer to themselves as, "Originals". Guys that trained together and traveled to Vietnam on the boats but left before the 196th became part of the Americal Division. I think Rich got all that straightened out. We have been in contact with the Americal and verified our original chapter by-laws confirmed that our members do not have to be affiliated with or belong to the ADVA. Eligibility for our Chapter is open to all who served in the 2nd Bn., 1st Infantry Regiment no matter when or where. This was initiated by a veteran inquiring if he was eligible for membership even though he was not of the Vietnam/Americal era. I have sent him the results of our research. Hopefully, he will become a member. I have updated our web site with our 2nd quarter financials. We are still in good shape. I want to thank all of you who consistently pay your dues or have become life members. I especially want to thank those who have gone beyond by donating extra money to the chapter. There is a C 2/1 reunion in Cleveland in September; I and Rich will be able to attend it to help with our recruiting. We have confirmed a hospitality suite for the Americal reunion, so get there if you can. We did a rough estimate on how many may attend. Membership response to our request for a possible head count "sucked". I have received feedback from some of the members that they are not getting our newsletter regularly and we are working to correct that. The newsletter is always published on the web site within a few days after publication; so you can always check it out there. Also, you may want to go into the web site roster page and verify your email address to be sure we have it correct. Contact Rich to ensure he has your correct email address at: rheroux1@nc.rr.com. Don't forget our elections at the annual chapter meeting; we need as many members there as possible.

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

Chuck



When my grandson Billy and I entered our vacation cabin, we kept the lights off until we were inside to keep from attracting pesky insects. Still, a few fireflies followed us in. Noticing them before I did, Billy whispered, "It's no use Grandpa. Now the mosquitoes are coming after us with flashlights."



2017 ADVA National Reunion Bloomington, MN -- August 23-27

Attendees will stay at the Hilton Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport Mall of America hotel at 3800 American Blvd E, Bloomington, Minnesota 55425. Hotel reservations can be made by calling the Hilton at 952-854-2100 or on the web at <http://group.hilton.com/americaldivisionveteransassociation>. Use the reunion Group Code: ADVA. The reunion room rate is \$114 per day plus 15.25% tax. The group rate will be offered three days before and three days after reunion dates. Call in your room reservation if you plan to use the extended dates or have any problems with the Hilton web site. There is free Hilton shuttle service from the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) to the nearby reunion hotel. We have teamed up again with Armed Forces Reunions, Inc. (AFR). AFR will provide web based reunion registration, pre-selected banquet seating with your friends, and on-site reunion support. You may register for the reunion, tours, and banquet by completing the online form and pay by credit card at afr-reg.com/americal2017. For more details visit the Americal Division Website; Americal.org/reunion, or 2/1 Inf Chapter website; b-2-1-196lib.com/reunion events.

Soldier Gives His Medal of Honor to the Brigade He Says Earned It: The Medal of Honor has always hung heavily around Staff Sgt. Salvatore Giunta's neck. He finally got to take it off. In a ceremony marking the 173rd Airborne Brigade's new memorial to all the brigade's soldiers who earned the military's highest award, by unfastening the medal's blue ribbon from his neck and handing it over to the brigade commander. "It can't be with me because it's ours," said Giunta. In 2010, for his heroic actions during an ambush in Afghanistan, becoming the first living man to earn the medal since the Vietnam War. "I want this to stay in Vicenza, Italy, with the 173rd, with the men and women who earn this every single day through their selflessness and sacrifice," he said. Giunta's gift to the brigade came near the beginning of a casual, 45-minute event on a balmy Italian evening. The walkway, stretching from the brigade headquarters to the gym, is lined with 18 memorials to men who, on what was frequently the worst and final day of their lives, displayed conspicuous gallantry and uncommon valor. Two fought in World War II, 13 fought in Vietnam and three fought in Afghanistan, including Giunta, Sgt. Kyle White and Staff Sgt. Ryan Pitts.

Congress Delays Proposal to Have Women Register For Draft: The controversial proposal to have women register for Selective Service has gone nowhere in Congress and now has been referred to a commission for more study. A message went with the commission's charter to step back and assess whether the Selective Service system was needed in the era of the all-volunteer force before deciding whether to have women register. The draft ended on Jan. 27, 1973, as the Vietnam war was winding down but the Selective Service System remained in place. Currently, women do not have to register for the draft but requires men sign up between the ages of 18-26. In the past, opponents of having women register have pointed to a 1981 Supreme Court decision ruling that women were exempt from the draft since they did not serve on the front lines. The issue came into play again when former Defense Secretary Ashton Carter in late 2015 directed that all combat positions in the military be opened to women. The Senate voted 85-13 to include a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act to lift the draft exemption for women, but the provision was removed in the House. At the time, the Senate Armed Services Committee said that Carter's lifting of the combat exclusionary rule for women had removed any justification for limiting draft registration to men.

Pentagon Seeks Tricare Fee Increases for Military Retirees: Current retirees and all troops who later enter the military retirement system would face higher Tricare fees under the Pentagon's new budget proposal. The plan, released Tuesday, would usher those already in the Tricare system into the fee structure passed by Congress last year by removing a "grandfathering" clause included in the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). That law currently only impacts those who enter the force after January 2018. The proposed Tricare changes do not impact elderly Tricare for Life users. All of the proposed changes must first be approved by Congress before they become law -- a process that could take months or longer -- and some lawmakers have already described the president's budget request as "dead on arrival" on Capitol Hill. Currently, retiree families must pay an annual Tricare Standard enrollment of \$150 for individual and \$300 for families or \$282.60 for individuals and \$565.20 for Tricare Prime. Fees under the 2017 NDAA are \$450 for individuals and \$900 for families on Tricare Select and \$350 for individuals and \$700 for families under Tricare Prime. The 2017 NDAA, signed into law in December, focused for current troops and retirees primarily on program title changes from "Tricare Standard" and "Tricare Extra" to "Tricare Select," back end management and limited expansions for current retirees and troops.

Veterans Groups Urge House to Reject VA Budget Plan: Eight major veterans' organizations urged Congress to provide emergency money to the Department of Veterans Affairs -- without cutting other VA programs -- as the House moved quickly to address a budget shortfall that threatened medical care for thousands of patients. Their joint statement was issued after the House Veterans Affairs Committee unveiled a plan Friday that would shift \$2 billion from other VA programs to continue funding the department's Choice program. Put in place after a 2014 wait-time scandal at the Phoenix VA hospital, Choice provides veterans with federally paid medical care outside the VA. The veterans' groups criticized the plan as unacceptable privatization. They urged the House to embrace a bill that "ensures veterans' health care is not interrupted in the short term, nor threatened in the long term."

Army to Hold Steady on Force Size, Prioritize Missile Defense: The service has requested a total budget for the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 of \$166 billion, an increase of about \$15 billion, or 10 percent, from the recently enacted fiscal 2017 spending plan, according to a budget overview released by the Pentagon. That top line figures includes a base budget of \$137 billion and a war budget of \$29 billion for overseas contingency operations, or OCO. Excluding revolving funds, the budget line with the biggest percentage increase year-over-year was military construction, at 44 percent; followed by research and development, 25 percent; operation and maintenance, 13 percent; family housing, 10 percent; procurement, 7 percent; and personnel, 4 percent. The spending plan "takes important steps to improve readiness and close some vulnerability gaps while supporting the groundwork for a future force ready to face the changing threats of tomorrow," said Maj. Gen. Thomas Horlander, director of Army budget. "The recently enacted fiscal 2017 budget and this fiscal 2018 request are consistent with this administration's goals for the U.S. Army to rebuild readiness, reverse end-strength reduction and prepare for future challenges," he added. The budget continues to support the increased end-strength of all components mandated in the fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, including the move to increase the active force from a previous target of 450,000 to 476,000 in fiscal 2017.

Deputy Director Named for POW/MIA Agency: The Pentagon has tapped Navy Rear Adm. Jon C. Kreitz to be the next deputy director for operations of the agency that searches for, recovers and identifies missing American war dead from around the world. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, with a budget of \$112 million, has the bulk of its operations based out of Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, with about 400 personnel in Hawaii. Army Brig. Gen. Mark Spindler has been the accounting agency's deputy director at Hickam since September 2015. Fern Sumpter Winbush is the interim agency director out of Washington, D.C. Congress mandated in 2009 that the Pentagon have the capacity to identify up to 200 MIAs a year by fiscal 2015 -- a goal the agency has struggled with since then and after going through a Pentagon-mandated reorganization in recent years, aimed at improving efficiency. According to the accounting agency, 110 identifications had been made this fiscal year.

Upcoming Tricare Change Could Hurt Families: A short sentence buried in a series of major Tricare reforms passed by Congress in 2016, set to roll out late this year, is causing alarm among military family advocates. They worry that the measure will block Tricare beneficiaries from accessing the healthcare they need. Currently, military families can at any time switch members of their household from Tricare Prime (the system's clinician-based plan) to the plan currently known as Tricare Standard. That plan allows civilian-based care and self-referrals. Once users make the swap, they often are locked into the new plan for a year. But new rules passed by Congress in 2016 include a requirement that families who want to use Tricare Standard, soon to be known as Tricare Select, go through an "open enrollment" period each year or automatically move into Tricare Prime. Missing the open enrollment period will lock users into the Prime plan unless they experience a "qualifying life event" (QLE) that allows them to move, according to the legislation.



You cannot legislate the poor into prosperity, by legislating the wealthy out of prosperity.

Navy is Issuing Every F/A-18 Pilot A Garmin Watch: The newest weapon in the Navy's fight to prevent physical episodes that endanger fighter pilots in the cockpit is an off-the-shelf Garmin Fenix 3 watch. A sleek wrist-wearable device that retails for around \$450. Navy Air Forces Commander Vice Adm. Mike Shoemaker released a message in January announcing he had authorized the devices for deploying strike fighter squadrons 34 and 37, which both fly the older F/A-18C Hornet, rather than the E/F Super Hornet. "We aim to have 100 percent of our fleet squadrons equipped with the watches. The revelation comes the same day the Navy released a report about physiological episodes that have affected the crews of Hornets, Growlers, and T-45 Goshawk trainers. Commissioned after the Navy ordered a pause in T-45 training flights due to a spike in cockpit episodes. The watches were purchased for all F/A-18 crew based in Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia, because the cabin altimeter gauge of their aircraft was difficult to read due to its size and location, and "its audible warnings are ineffective through the flight envelope." The watches, once issued to pilots, will alert them when cabin altitude reaches a preset threshold. Essentially, the devices could provide pilots with an additional early warning to prevent cabin pressure problems from reaching a crisis point.

He Started as a Cook at Robins Air Force Base, And Now Commands a Wing: A man who once worked as a cook at Robins Air Force Base on Monday took over one of its most important jobs. Col. Tom Grabowski assumed command of the 116th Air Control Wing, a Georgia Air National Guard unit that jointly operates the Joint Surveillance Target Attack Radar System with the 461st Air Control Wing. He is replacing Col. Mark Weber, who has led the wing for the past two years. Grabowski joined the Georgia Air National Guard in 1985 as an enlisted communications officer. In 1986 he worked as a cook in the non-commissioned officers club on base. He is now the commander of 1,143 airmen. "It's a real Cinderella story for me to be starting today, now as wing commander," he said in an interview prior to the ceremony in the Century of Flight Hangar at the Museum of Aviation. After the change of command, Grabowski spoke for a few minutes before stepping away from the podium and giving an order that was a change in protocol. In the center of the hundreds of seated community members, 60 116th airmen stood at attention. Grabowski told the leader of the group to put them at ease. He said he had stood in the same formation for many change of command ceremonies, and he well knew that after standing at attention for that long, no one wanted to listen to the new commander. "So shake it off, get the blood flowing, and listen to what I have to say," he said. "What I absolutely need you to be focused on is being ready, ready for the fight tonight. There is no other Joint STARS on planet Earth for the combatant commanders to get their Joint STARS fix, except right here at Robins Air Force Base."

From Mechanic to Adjutant General: Brig. Gen. Kenneth Nava, a Santa Fe, N.M., native whose Army career began in 1988 as a mechanic with 7th Battalion, 200th Air Defense Artillery Regiment, has had steadily increasing responsibilities since he graduated from Officer Candidate School in 1992 and was commissioned. New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez announced July 14 that Nava is her choice to become Adjutant General of the New Mexico National Guard.

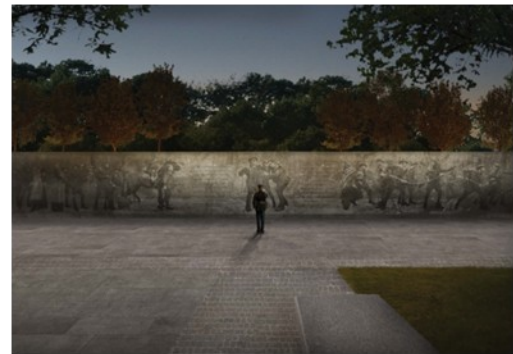
When half of the people get the idea that they do not have to work, because the other half is going to take care of them, and when the other half gets the idea that it does no good to work, because somebody else is going to get what they work for, that is the beginning of the end of any nation!

WWII Veteran's Remains Return Home after Missing 74 Years: More than 70 years ago, a U.S. Army plane dubbed "Hot as Hell" was headed for India on a supply mission. It never arrived, and no one went looking for the doomed aircraft or the eight men because military officials had no way of knowing its whereabouts. All signs of the mission were lost until 2006, when a hiker in northeast India spotted a wing and panel sign inscribed with the bomber's name. In 2015 that the U.S. Defense Department investigated the crash site and found the remains of 1st Lt. Robert Eugene Oxford. Oxford will finally be returned home and then laid to rest with full military honors in his tiny hometown of Concord, Georgia. "We were ecstatic that Eugene was found, but we feel guilty there are seven other men on that mountain top," said Merrill Roan, the wife of Oxford's nephew. Oxford's plane departed Kuming, China, on Jan. 25, 1944, said Staff Sgt. Kristen Duus at the Defense Prisoners of War/Missing in Action Agency. Oxford was declared dead two years later. Oxford's family didn't know the wreckage had been found until 2007 when Merrill Roan saw a message from a relative of another service member on the aircraft. That relative wanted help persuading military officials to investigate the crash site. Officials say a DNA analysis of Oxford's remains matched his niece and nephew. Duus said Oxford is one of 74 veterans who have been identified so far this year. She said all service members are identified before the family is notified and the service member is provided a funeral with honors.

Army New GI Bill Would Make College Education a Lifetime Benefit: A bipartisan bill was introduced in the House of Representatives on Thursday to make the GI Bill for post 9/11 veterans a lifetime education benefit for new recruits who go on to serve three years of active duty. Current post 9/11 veterans who qualify for the GI Bill would still be subject to the use-it-or-lose-it time limit of 15 years for the education benefit under the proposed "Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017," named for the late American Legion national commander who wrote the original GI Bill in 1944. The proposed bill also included reforms and changes to the qualifications for the GI Bill for Purple Heart recipients, National Guard and reservists, the dependents of veterans, and victims of for-profit school closures. At a news conference, Rep. Phil Roe, R-Tenn., chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said he expected to hold a hearing Monday on the GI Bill proposal ahead of quick passage by the full Committee. House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., told the Associated Press that he also expected quick passage by the full House. "We'll move it out this month," he said. On the Senate side, Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Georgia, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said he was preparing to introduce a companion bill to the House version. Rep. Tim Walz, D-Minn., the ranking member on HVAC, said the bill would "enhance one of the best programs ever to come out of Congress," a reference to the original GI Bill that gave a college education to many returning World War II vets. Proponents of the bill stressed the "forever" provision that would allow new recruits to use the GI Bill whenever they choose and not be bound by the 15-year limit. "This takes off that 15-year window," said Rep. Jack Bergman, R-Mich., a member of HVAC and a retired Marine lieutenant general. If passed by Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump, the new bill would take effect recruits who enlist after Jan. 1, 2018. Veterans service organizations enthusiastically backed the bill. "This bill, as currently written, would launch a new era for all who have honorably served in uniform, and for the nation as a whole," said Charles Schmidt, national commander of the American Legion. The new bill would address what were seen as shortcomings in the GI Bill of 2008 which guaranteed full-ride payment to any in-state public university -- or the cash amount for private college students similar to the value of a scholarship at a state college.

Michigan Vietnam Vet Is Trump's 1st Medal of Honor Recipient: Members of Army medic James McCloughan's unit in Vietnam called him "Doc." Now, those soldiers, several of whom McCloughan saved during the ferocious, daylong Battle of Nui Yon Hill in 1969, will have a new name for him: Medal of Honor recipient. Army spokeswoman Valerie L. Mongello said the 71-year-old from South Haven, Michigan, will become the first person to be awarded the nation's highest military honor by President Donald Trump. "I feel honored to be able to accept this for the 89 men that fought that battle," McCloughan said, referencing the number of American combatants, dozens of whom were killed, wounded or went missing during the 48 hours of fighting against hundreds of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. Then a 23-year-old private first class repeatedly entered the "kill zone" to rescue wounded comrades, despite being pelted with shrapnel from a rocket propelled grenade. McCloughan "voluntarily risked his life on nine separate occasions to rescue wounded and disoriented comrades," the White House said in an emailed statement. "He suffered wounds from shrapnel and small arms fire on three separate occasions, but refused medical evacuation to stay with his unit, and continued to brave enemy fire to rescue, treat, and defend wounded Americans." McCloughan described the shrapnel as "a real bad sting." "But at that particular time, I was tending to two guys and dragging them at the same time into a trench line. "I looked down, and I was covered with blood," McCloughan said of the wound that prompted a captain to suggest he leave the battlefield to receive aid. McCloughan had different ideas. "He knew me enough to know that I wasn't going, and he better listen to me." He did. McCloughan stuck around until the battle's conclusion, coming to the aid of his men and fighting the enemy, at one point knocking out an enemy RPG position with a grenade. In all, the Pentagon credits McCloughan with saving the lives of 10 members of his company. McCloughan called the battle "the worst two days of my life." The Medal of Honor is awarded to members of the Armed Forces who distinguish themselves conspicuously by gallantry above and beyond the call of duty while: engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States; engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party. McCloughan has already earned a slew of other awards, including the Combat Medical Badge, two Bronze Stars, the U. S. Army Valorous Unit Citation and the National Defense Medal. He also earned two Purple Hearts, having been shot in the arm in addition to taking the RPG shrapnel. McCloughan left the Army in 1970. Then-Secretary of Defense Ash Carter recommended McCloughan for the Medal of Honor last year. There was a problem, however: The medal needs to be awarded within five years of the recipient's heroic actions. But Congress can waive the time limit, which is what happened in McCloughan's case. U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow reached McCloughan on his cell phone to deliver the news while he and his wife, Cherie, were eating at an IHOP in Colorado. The McCloughans burst into tears at the conclusion of the call. James McCloughan said he told their server what was going on, because "I didn't want her to think we were fighting or something." President Barack Obama signed legislation in late 2016 paving the way for him to receive the medal. But it didn't happen before Obama left office in January, meaning it now falls to Trump to do the honors. "President Donald Trump will be putting that on me for the first time in my experience of doing such a thing," McCloughan said. "That's pretty special."

World War I Memorial Project: The Weight of Sacrifice; As the sun settles on a soldier's etched features, enough to alight the small girl patting his horse. Above him 28 trees rise up from the earth, flamed out in brazen red to mark the end of the Great War. He stands on the precipice of the battlefield, surveying the rising tide which has come to call his brothers from their havens of innocence. The figures before him emerge slowly, at first in low relief, and then pull further out of the morass as they cross the center of the wall. They all trudge onward, occasionally looking back at the life that was until they sink back in and down into the trenches. This is a moment frozen in time, captured in the darkened bronze form which has emerged from the soil to serve as a reminder of the actions. Along the North and South faces we see the emblazoned words of a generation gone by. 137 feet long, these walls gradually slip into the earth drawing their wisdom with them. Around the sculpted faces of the monument the remembrance unfolds. Each cubic foot of the memorial represents an American soldier lost in the war; 116,516 in all. This is a space for freedom built upon the great weight of sacrifice. A memorial and a park built to represent this truth should pay homage to the loss incurred in securing these freedoms. The raised figurative walls visually express a narrative of the sacrificial cost of war, while also supporting a literal manifestation of freedoms enjoyed in this country: the open park space above. The urban design intent is to create a new formal link along Pennsylvania Avenue which ties together the memorial to Tecumseh Sherman on the West and Freedom Plaza on the East. This is achieved by lowering the visual barriers surrounding the existing Pershing Park and reinforcing dominant axes that come from the adjacent context. The central piece, "Brothers-in-Arms," is the focus of the wall, representing the redemption that comes from war: the close and healing ties soldiers form as they face the horrors of battle together. The wounded soldier is lifted by his brother soldiers toward the future and the promise of healing.



War on Terror National Memorial: The process of planning and fundraising for a National Memorial to the War on Terrorism. Hoping to ensure that the first generation of warriors who fought the war will be able to appreciate the memorial, supporters want lawmakers and veterans advocates to accelerate the building process. "A 40 year servicemembers who seized the first airfield in Kandahar in 2001 is now 56," said the executive director of the Global War on Terror Memorial Foundation and a veteran of the Afghanistan War. Military Times reports that no site or design has been selected yet, because under federal law the project technically can't go ahead until 10 years after the conflict ends." Given that the war on terrorism is an ongoing conflict, "supporters are looking for a weaver to the 10 year rule so they can start working now to honor the nearly 7,000 U.S. troops killed" on the many fronts of the war that began September 11, 2001.

U.S. Army to Deploy 2,100 Soldiers to Iraq this Fall: The U.S. Army announced Thursday that 2,100 soldiers from the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) will deploy to Iraq this fall. The soldiers from 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, based in at Fort Polk Louisiana will replace the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, in a regular rotation of forces in support of Operation Inherent Resolve, according to an Army press release. "During the last several months, the Patriots have worked hard and completed multiple training events to include a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation in preparation for this important mission," said Maj. Gen. Walter E. Piatt, commander of the 10th Mountain Division. "I am extremely confident and proud of the entire 3rd Brigade Team." Third Brigade will be the first brigade-sized unit to deploy under the Associated Units Pilot Program. As part of the Army Total Force, 3rd Brigade has served with the 36th Infantry Division, Texas Army National Guard since March 2016, according to the release. "With the enhanced integration of active/reserve components, we're building a better and stronger team that will enable us to fight our nation's wars," said Maj. Gen. S. Lee Henry, commanding general of the 36th Infantry Division, Texas Army National Guard. "We wish the 3rd Brigade well and a safe return to their families." The Army announced the launch of new pilot program in March 2016. The pilot is designed to team up certain active, National Guard and Reserve units so they can train together before they deploy. Currently, the U.S. has about 500 troops, mostly Special Forces, in Syria and more than 5,000 in Iraq in train, assist and advisory roles as part of the military operation against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS. President Donald Trump went to the Pentagon Thursday for briefings on ISIS and Afghanistan. Army Gen. John Nicholson, commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and the NATO Resolute Support mission, has a long-standing request to deploy 3,000-5,000 more American service members to Afghanistan, in addition to the roughly 8,400 currently in country.

VA Has Fired 500 Employees Since Trump Took Office: The Department of Veterans Affairs has fired more than 500 employees since Jan. 20, when President Trump took office, according to a list of job categories of employees recently disciplined or fired. The list, released by the VA on July 3 and updated weekly, has been a way for the embattled agency to be more accountable and transparent about its employee disciplinary process, said VA Secretary David J. Shulkin. The VA is the first federal agency to make this data on employee status public. "Veterans and taxpayers have a right to know what we're doing to hold our employees accountable and make our personnel actions transparent," Shulkin said. The VA has been under fire for shuffling controversial and problematic employees and managers instead of firing them, even after the widely publicized VA "wait list" scandal that rocked the agency. So the number of recent firings is surprising to many VA reform advocates. "In the past, the VA was not straightforward on who they were disciplining and who they let retire," said Dan Caldwell, director of policy for the Concerned Veterans for America, a grassroots veterans' advocacy organization. "Often, the VA would say someone was fired, and we'd find out later that employee was not fired, they were actually just suspended, demoted or had been allowed to retire before they could be fired." "Very few employees were terminated for the 'wait list' scandal -- less than a dozen that we know of -- even though hundreds or even thousands of people were involved," Caldwell said.

The reason the American Army does so well in wartime, is that war is chaos, and the American Army practices it on a daily basis.

New Commander Is Highest-Ranking Woman Officer in Afghanistan: Army Maj. Gen. Robin Fontes on Saturday assumed the highest position of any female service member in Afghanistan since the war began, taking over command of Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan. I promise to give you my full support, my best effort, my respect and my loyalty every day," Fontes told a crowd at a change-of-command ceremony. Fontes took over from outgoing Commander Army Maj. Gen. Richard Kaiser. Fontes, a U.S. Military Academy graduate, has spent 12 years in the region, serving in Afghanistan multiple times, as well as in India, Pakistan and Tajikistan. She speaks three regional languages.



Army Gen. John Nicholson, commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, described Fontes as "the most proficient and competent officer" in the field of security assistance within the military. He said he had to fight to get her the position because she was heavily sought after in Washington. "There is no officer of any service in the United States military that has more experience in this region than Maj. Gen. Robin Fontes," Nicholson said. "She is the best possible commander for this command. She will take this command to the next level." In addition to taking control of CSTC-A, Fontes will assume the role of deputy chief of staff, security assistance for Resolute Support headquarters. CSTC-A is part of NATO's Resolute Support mission aimed at developing Afghan security forces. It provides resources and training in areas such as management and sustainability.

First Woman Takes Command of Special Forces Group Battalion: Lt. Col. Megan A. Brogden was handed a flag today that was full of symbolism. It marked her new position as a battalion commander and all the responsibilities associated with that job. It marked the pinnacle of her U.S. Army career so far. Brogden, who assumed command of the Group Support Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group, is the first woman to assume command of a battalion within any of the Army's seven Special Forces groups. "It was a very humbling moment," she said after the ceremony on Fort Bragg's Meadows Field. "It's such a great organization." But while happy to take on the challenges and proud of her accomplishments, Brogden is hesitant to mark herself as breaking new ground or smashing through any so-called glass ceilings. "I don't necessarily see it as much of a milestone," she said. "I didn't go to Ranger school or selection. It's a lot about timing." Officials have called Brogden's assuming command a historic moment for 3rd Group and the rest of the Special Forces Regiment. But during the change of command, leaders made clear that she was chosen for her expertise and leadership, not because she is a woman. "She is without a doubt the right choice to assume command of this great unit at this time," said Col. Bradley D. Moses, the 3rd Special Forces Group commander who passed the battalion colors to Brogden, symbolically starting her time in command. Moses said Brogden has an unwavering dedication to soldiers, and a long history of supporting and leading special operations soldiers and maintaining the force. "You're a great officer, Megan. Smart, humble and full of energy. It's an honor to serve with you again," he said. "Lead from the front. Focus on the mission and take care of your soldiers and their families. I look forward to working with you in the days ahead."

C-130 Pilot's Description of Approach into Baghdad.

This is a funny story particularly if you like mixed metaphors!!

There I was at six thousand feet over central Iraq , two hundred eighty knots and we're dropping faster than Paris Hilton's panties. It's a typical September evening in the Persian Gulf; hotter than a rectal thermometer and I'm sweating like a priest at a Cub Scout meeting. But that's neither here nor there. The night is moonless over Baghdad tonight, and blacker than a Steven King novel. But it's 2006, folks, and I'm sporting the latest in night-combat technology - namely, hand-me-down night vision goggles (NVGs) thrown out by the fighter boys.

Additionally, my 1962 Lockheed C-130E Hercules is equipped with an obsolete, yet, semi-effective missile warning system (MWS). The MWS conveniently makes a nice soothing tone in your headset just before the missile explodes into your airplane. Who says you can't polish a turd? At any rate, the NVGs are illuminating Baghdad International Airport like the Las Vegas Strip during a Mike Tyson fight. These NVGs are the cat's ass. But I've digressed.

The preferred method of approach tonight is the random shallow. This tactical maneuver allows the pilot to ingress the landing zone in an unpredictable manner, thus exploiting the supposedly secured perimeter of the airfield in an attempt to avoid enemy surface-to-air-missiles and small arms fire. Personally, I wouldn't bet my pink ass on that theory but the approach is fun as hell and that's the real reason we fly it. We get a visual on the runway at three miles out, drop down to one thousand feet above the ground, still maintaining two hundred eighty knots. Now the fun starts. It's pilot appreciation time as I descend the mighty Herc to six hundred feet and smoothly, yet very deliberately, yank into a sixty degree left bank, turning the aircraft ninety degrees offset from runway heading. As soon as we roll out of the turn, I reverse turn to the right a full two hundred seventy degrees in order to roll out aligned with the runway.

Some aeronautical genius coined this maneuver the "Ninety/Two-Seventy." Chopping the power during the turn, I pull back on the yoke just to the point my nether regions start to sag, bleeding off energy in order to configure the pig for landing. "Flaps Fifty!, Landing Gear Down!, Before Landing Checklist!" I look over at the copilot and he's shaking like a cat shitting on a sheet of ice. Now it's all aim-point and airspeed. Aviation 101, with the exception there are no lights, I'm on NVGs, it's Baghdad , and now tracers are starting to crisscross the black sky. Naturally, and not at all surprisingly, I grease the Goodyear's on brick-one of runway 33 left, bring the throttles to ground idle and then force the props to full reverse pitch. Tonight, the sound of freedom is my four Hamilton Standard propellers chewing through the thick, putrid, Baghdad air The huge, one hundred thirty-thousand pound, lumbering whisper pig comes to a lurching stop in less than two thousand feet. Let's see a Viper do that!

We exit the runway to a welcoming committee of government issued Army grunts. It's time to download their beans and bullets and letters from their sweethearts, look for war booty, and of course, urinate on Saddam's home. Walking down the crew entry steps with my lowest-bidder, Beretta 92F, 9 millimeter strapped smartly to my side, look around and thank God, not Allah, I'm an American and I'm on the winning team. Then I thank God I'm not in the Army.

It is however, time to get out of this hole. Hey copilot how's 'bout the 'Before Starting Engines Checklist." God, I love this job!!!!