



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

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

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Volume 8

“A Soldier Once And Always”

May 2018

Commanders Corner: Well, Summer of 2018 is coming up. I hope that some of you will be able to make the Americal Division Veterans Association 2018 Reunion, which the 2-1 Association Chapter attends as well, 26-29 September 2018 in Oklahoma City, OK. I am trying to work out going, but I have two American Legion conferences to go to this year and may not be able to make this one.



I was recently elected as the Commander of American Legion Post 284 in Colonial Heights, VA where we live. I assume office in June 2018 and the term runs till June 2019. We have an active post with nearly 1,100 members, about 600 of whom are Vietnam Era veterans.

This month we were involved with presenting four awards to Army ROTC students at our local college, Virginia State University. All the veterans' organizations were there, Legion, VFW, Purple Heart, AUSA, MOAA and another half dozen to show our appreciation to young men and women who are picking up the gauntlet of service and studying to become Army Officers. If you are retired and have time on your hands, consider looking for a local high school or college with an ROTC program, doesn't matter what branch of service, to support however you can. Our future leaders need the counsel of veterans. Remember our collective extended family, those Americans serving in our Armed Forces all over the world.

Thank you for your monumental efforts supporting National Vietnam War Veterans Day! You inspired a surge of patriotic outreach to Vietnam veterans and their families in each of the 56 U.S. states and possessions, and hosted the largest monthly number of events in VWC history, exceeding the next closest month by 25 percent! More than 2 million Vietnam veterans and their families have now been publicly and individually thanked and honored during 13,034 events. In addition, even your most conservative estimates indicate that 29 million attendees have applauded our Vietnam veterans and their families in person at these events – 12% of our country's adult population!

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

John

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



A DVA 2018 National Reunion: The 2018 National Reunion dates have been set and Registration forms are available in the latest issue of the Americal Journal. The location is Oklahoma City, OK and the dates are September 26-30, 2018. Headquarters hotel is the Oklahoma City Wyndham Gardens Airport Hotel. Reunion guests can stay at a price of \$79.00 per night plus a 14% tax. Reservations can be made by calling 405-685-4000. Remember to tell the reservation clerk that you are attending the 2018 ADVA Reunion. Tours have been scheduled for Thursday and Friday including a visit to Fort Sill, OK where the latest ADVA monument is located, lunch is being provided at a Ft Sill mess hall and a visit to the Artillery Museum. Look for more details in the 1st Quarter ADVA Journal.

A Tribute to Veterans: For more than two centuries, untold numbers of Americans have answered the call to duty. Freedom is our cause, but freedom does not come free, and many paid the ultimate price. They truly deserve to be remembered. The America we know would not be the same were it not for the men and women we honor on Memorial Day. We also pay tribute to the unsung heroes and heroines of our nation's defense—the spouses, children and families of our servicemen and women. You might not have worn our nation's uniform, nor carried a rifle on your shoulder, but you have carried the weight of worry. Through your personal sacrifice in time of war and peace, you, too, have served our nation, and we salute you.

Web Site Information Verification: Guys do me a favor and get on our web site <http://www.2-1-196th.com/> and check out the “2/1 Chapter Members List” and the “2/1 Roster Information By Company” pages in the left hand column. I would like you to verify that I have the correct personal information and the correct company or multiple companies assigned for all of you. I have used a combination of the member page and our membership information to attempt to get it right. If you are okay; no problem but, if I have something incorrect please let me know. Also, if you want a picture added on the roster page, send me a .pdf picture. I would prefer a picture from Nam; most guys you may have served with will more likely recognize you better instead of a current picture. You can notify me of any changes by clicking on the “Contacts” page in the left hand column and send it to the webmaster.

Thanks

Chuck Holdaway

“Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and passed on ... or we will spend our sunset years telling our children's children what it was like in the United States when men were free.”

— Ronald Reagan

Ace of Spades by Bruce Neilson

The original fame of the Ace of Spades came because in games like Poker, where you can assign a value to a suit so that you know which hand beats which if there are duplicates, the Spades were considered the highest suit. The Ace, though originally the lowest card in value, was switched to the highest value in many decks. Some have used the example that the Ace represents God, and thus the high card. Others have claimed that the Ace represents the people, the peasantry, and during the French Revolution it became a popular notion to show the revolt by placing the Ace as the high card over the royalty.

However, the Ace of Spades is also associated with death. This is both in the sense of tarot card reading (since the origin of tarot cards is muddled with the time frame of the adoption of regular playing cards), and in the sense that the Ace represented a mark. This second point is a uniquely American tradition because, during the Vietnam War, American GIs began a tradition of placing the ace on a dead body, or leaving it in a village. Thus ideas like “being aced” were linked to death and dying. GIs would even sometimes wear the Ace of Spades in their helmets as a sign that death was coming with them as a fear tactic.

Ever since Vietnam, the use of the Ace of Spades as a symbol of power and death has been a permanent link in the minds of many Americans. The use of the card in tattoos, and even in music such as Motor Head’s famous “Ace of Spades,” has only made the notorious associations even harder to ignore. However, the card is just one more in the deck... though it still sits pretty in one of the most powerful places in the cards.

The ace of spades, the so-called “death card” is featured in many movies about the Vietnam War. The symbol is also depicted on various unit crests, special operations privately made patches, collar insignia, and on flags and painted vignettes on military aircraft and gun trucks.

The ace of spades was also featured in many movies about the Vietnam War. Who could forget the scene in Apocalypse Now where a young sailor sees soldiers throwing cards on the bodies of dead Viet Cong:



About the “Buddy Poppy” An integral part of the VFW community since 1922, the Buddy Poppy symbolizes the VFW promise: that sacrifices of American troops will never be forgotten. It is the VFW’s official memorial flower, inspired by Canadian Army Col. John McCrae’s famous poem, “In Flanders Field,” which is reproduced on this page. Proceeds from the distribution of Buddy Poppies- on Memorial Day and throughout the year- are used to aid veterans and their families. In fact, our National Home is an important beneficiary of this campaign, which is a why children in residence vie for the honorary role of Buddy Poppy child each year. While the poppies originally distributed were shipped from France, members soon came up with a better idea. Disabled, hospitalized and aging veterans – in VA hospitals and state veterans homes – began making paper flowers and shipping them out to the Posta and Auxiliaries for distribution. The VFW pays veterans for this work, providing additional income for the little luxuries that make hospital life more tolerable. Furthermore, Poppy assembly is often used as a therapy program to provide exercise for fingers and hands crippled by wounds, disease and the effects of old age.

Despite Progress, National Army Museum is Still 2 Years Away from Opening: If you drive on U.S. Route 1 by Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County, Virginia, you can see the National Museum of the United States Army under construction. Although construction started more than a year ago, it will be another two years before the museum opens. The \$200 million project was originally expected to open in 2019, but that has been pushed back to 2020. The 185,000-square-foot-museum space will house more than 1,300 artifacts, documents and images that will be selected from the Army’s total collection of 630,000 items in order to tell the stories of American soldiers. The Army Historical Foundation said that most of the artifacts and art pieces have never been seen by the American public. The foundation is leading the fundraising campaign for the museum and it is overseeing the construction. The museum will house the three main galleries: Soldiers’ Stories; Fighting for the Nation; Army and Society. “I think this is the most important thing I’ve ever been involved in,” said Brig. Gen. Creighton Abrams, the executive director with the Army Historical Foundation. Abrams served in the Army for more than 30 years. He said the building is 59 percent complete and should be finished in another year, at that point the foundation will hand off control of the museum to the Army. A foundation spokesman said the Army is waiting until the construction is further along before giving a firm opening date for the museum. Abrams said the Army is one of the cornerstones of the country. “We created the Army (Continental Army) in 1775 more than a year before we signed the Declaration of Independence,” he said. The purpose of the museum will be to honor every single American soldier whoever served in the U.S. from its inception in 1775 to the present day. When the museum does open sometime in 2020 admission will be free. It is estimated the museum will welcome 500,000 to 700,000 visitors each year.

Will New Retirement System Entice More Service Members to Leave Early? Service personnel chiefs told lawmakers they are watching how the new Blended Retirement System affects retention. “I think it will be a significant indicator on retention in the out years,” Army Lt. Gen. Thomas Seamands, deputy chief of staff, G-1, told the House Armed Services Committee’s military personnel panel. “I think we’re going to have to fundamentally change how we address retaining talent.” In today’s Army, if someone stays for 10 years, there’s a pretty high probability they’ll stay until the 20-year mark, he said. But “that dynamic could potentially change, but we won’t see that probably for the next seven to 10 years. So we need to be prepared. We’re thinking about it now, trying to get our heads around it.” Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., said it’s his hunch that service members will get out at the 17-year mark under the new BRS, which comes with a retirement-fund matching plan and reduced pension, instead of the legacy system’s all-or-nothing retirement approach. Those who are eligible to make a choice have until the end of 2018 to opt into BRS. Eligibility is limited to active-duty service members who have fewer than 12 years of total service as of Dec. 31, 2017; and reserve-component members in a paid status with fewer than 4,320 retirement points as of Dec. 31, 2017; all those entering service as of Jan. 1, 2018, automatically join BRS, and all those who’ve served beyond those benchmarks remain in the legacy system. Under the legacy system, only about 19 percent of active-duty members and 14 percent of reservists stay long enough to earn retirement.

Veterans are people who, at one point in their lives, wrote a blank check payable to the United States Of America, for an amount up to and including their lives. Remember ALL of our Vets..

Faster VA Claims Decisions: If your service-connected condition has gotten worse and you're planning to file an increased disability claim for that condition, there's a better way to file. Get the fastest decision on your claim for an increase by filing it as a Decision Ready Claim (DRC). Filing as a DRC means you can get a decision within 30 days after your claim is submitted. Work with an accredited Veterans Service Organization (VSO) or other accredited representative to determine if the DRC program is right for you and your claim for an increase. Your VSO can then help you gather and submit all relevant and required evidence so your claim is ready for VA to make a decision when you submit it. Don't need to file a claim for an increase? You can also file these other types of compensation claims through the DRC program:

- Direct Service Connection Claims
- Presumptive Service Connection Claims
- Secondary Service Connection Claims
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation for surviving spouses

Learn more about the DRC program, including eligibility requirements, what medical evidence you need to submit, and how to find an accredited VSO at www.benefits.va.gov/drc.

The Global War On Terror Memorial Is Now In This Green Beret Vet's Hands: The Global War on Terror Memorial Foundation has named a former Fort Bragg soldier and Green Beret to serve as its director. Michael “Rod” Rodriguez will guide the nonprofit organization as it seeks to raise money for and organize a new memorial on the National Mall in Washington. “Following Congress’ approval of the Global War on Terrorism War Memorial Act in August, the foundation now faces an exciting new future as we move toward site selection and the 24-step process for establishing a national memorial in the nation’s capital,” said David Burke, president of the foundation’s board of trustees. “Rod has been an active member of our board of trustees for the past 18 months. With his institutional knowledge and extensive background, we are confident that he is ideally positioned to lead the foundation through the vital steps that lie ahead.” Michael Rodriguez served in the U.S. Army 21 years, including 15 in Special Forces. He deployed nine times during his career, including to Somalia in 1993 with the 10th Mountain Division and to Afghanistan with the 7th Special Forces Group. He has served at Fort Drum, New York; Fort Bragg and White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico. In his final assignment, Rodriguez was a sniper instructor with the 1st Special Warfare Training Group, U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg. In addition to his work with the Global War on Terror Memorial Foundation, Rodriguez also serves on the advisory council for President George W. Bush’s Military Service Initiative and is executive ambassador for the Green Beret Foundation. Rodriguez has strong ties to Fort Bragg. His wife recently retired from the Army after 21 years, including service with the 18th Airborne Corps and 44th Medical Brigade. And his son recently returned from Afghanistan with the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division. The Global War on Terror Memorial Foundation said that in the months ahead, Rodriguez will help advocate for land within the National Mall for the memorial.

“The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed. A well-regulated militia, composed of the body of the people, trained to arms, is the best and most natural defense of a free country.”

— James Madison

Ranger instructors come out on top at Best Ranger competition: Two senior NCOs from the Airborne and Ranger Training Brigade took top honors at Fort Benning, Georgia, Sunday in the annual Best Ranger competition. SSgt. 1st Class Joshua Rolfes and Anthony Allen bested 50 other two-man teams who competed over three days and a dozen events to prove themselves the best of the Army’s Ranger-qualified soldiers, according to a Fort Benning release. Rolfes and Allen, one of four ARTB teams, stayed ahead of the pack for most of the competition, never falling below eighth place and going into the final day’s events in first place. They were also repeat competitors, having come in fourth place last year. Capt. Matthew Thwaites and 1st Lt. Kendall Ward of the 75th Ranger Regiment claimed second place, and 1st Lt. Jeremy Dettmer and Cpl. Tyler Taormina, also from the Ranger Regiment, came in third. The competitors spent Saturday night on an orienteering course and then the Darby Queen obstacle course, finishing up the competition with a water survival assessment and a buddy run back to the starting point.



Air Force B-52s Shatter Vietnam-era Records During Two-Year ISIS Deployment: More than four decades ago, the Air Force’s iconic B-52 Stratofortress set records as it pounded North Vietnamese targets during Operation Linebacker II. But during its recently-concluded two-year deployment to the Middle East to fight the Islamic State and Taliban, the BUFF — or “Big Ugly Fat Fellow” — smashed through those milestones. According to an April 12 release from U.S. Air Forces Central Command, the 23rd Bomb Squadron from Minot Air Force Base in North Dakota last June launched its 400th consecutive B-52 mission without a delay due to maintenance problems. This broke a B-52 streak that stood since December 1972, when the Air Force carried out 11 days of massive bombing in North Vietnam. Air Force Global Strike Command said Tuesday that during the first three days of Linebacker II, 312 sorties were launched without a maintenance cancellation. The 69th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron, which arrived in September 2017, then launched 834 straight B-52 missions without any maintenance cancellations. The 69th flew its last Stratofortress mission of that deployment April 7, before the bombers departed April 11 to return to Minot. Two B-1B Lancers arrived March 31 to replace the departing B-52s. B-52s flew more than 1,850 missions from Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar, in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, and dropped nearly 12,000 bombs. Stratofortresses were among the aircraft dropping massive amounts of bombs on Mosul, for example, during the campaign to push ISIS out of the key Iraqi city.

All 4 Service Chiefs on Record: No harm to Units from Transgender Service: Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Goldfein told Congress he was not aware of any negative effects from transgender personnel serving, joining all three other service chiefs in a rare public split with President Donald Trump over the issue. In the last two weeks Gen. [Mark] Milley, Gen. [Robert] Neller, and Adm. [John] Richardson have told the Senate that they have seen zero reports of issues of cohesion, discipline, morale as a result of open transgender service in their respective service branches. Goldfein said among the transgender service members he had talked to, he had found a “commitment to serve.”

Mattis Wanted Congressional Approval Before Striking Syria: Defense Secretary Jim Mattis urged President Trump to get congressional approval before the United States launched airstrikes against Syria, but was overruled because of the desire for a rapid and dramatic response, military and administration officials said. Mr. Trump, the officials said, wanted to be seen as backing up a series of bellicose tweets with action, but was warned that an overly aggressive response risked igniting a wider war with Russia. The recent limited strikes on three targets, which lasted under two minutes, were the compromise. The debate reflects a divide between Mr. Trump and the defense secretary, who, like no other member of the cabinet, has managed to maintain a cordial relationship with the president even while reining him in. Until this month, Mr. Mattis had a buffer at the White House in the former national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, who often deferred to the defense secretary. The arrival of Mr. Trump's new national security adviser, John R. Bolton, means that buffer is gone. Administration and congressional officials said the hawkish Mr. Bolton is not expected to defer to the defense secretary; already, neoconservative members of the Republican foreign policy establishment have started to air concerns that Mr. Mattis is ceding strategic territory to Iran and Russia in Syria. Mr. Mattis is widely viewed by global leaders as the strongest and perhaps most credible voice on foreign policy in an administration that has been rocked by firings and resignations among senior presidential advisers. The recent exits of both General McMaster and Rex W. Tillerson as secretary of state have focused more attention on Mr. Mattis's role in the cabinet.

Medal of Honor Approved for Air Force Combat Controller: Tech. Sgt. John Chapman, the combat controller who was killed during the fierce Battle of Roberts Ridge in Afghanistan in 2002, will be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, according to a report in Task and Purpose. Chapman would be the first airman to receive a Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for valor, for actions since the Vietnam War. Chapman originally received an Air Force Cross, the second-highest valor award an airman can receive, for his heroism during the March 4, 2002, battle against al Qaeda fighters. But newly-enhanced video from a Predator drone showed more evidence that Chapman was not dead, but instead unconscious, when a team of Navy SEALs withdrew from the battle under withering fire. The video analysis suggested Chapman regained consciousness and resumed fighting al Qaeda members approaching on three sides. Chapman is believed to have crawled into a bunker, shot and killed an enemy fighter charging at him, and killed another enemy fighter in hand-to-hand combat. This new evidence prompted former Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James in 2016 to recommend his Air Force Cross be upgraded to the Medal of Honor.

Fallen Vietnam Pilots, Crew Members Honored with Monument at Arlington National Cemetery: More than 40 years after the end of the Vietnam War, the helicopter pilots and crew members killed in action during the conflict were honored at Arlington National Cemetery with their own monument. On Wednesday, the Vietnam Pilot and Crewmember Monument was dedicated near the Tomb of the Unknowns at the Virginia cemetery. The Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association spearheaded the effort to honor the nearly 5,000 pilots and crew members killed during the war. With help from the cemetery and Congress, the monument was approved in 2017, three years after the idea was first proposed. Vietnam veterans, families and friends filled the cemetery's amphitheater before following a wreath procession to the monument in Section 35 on Memorial Drive.

The 101st Airborne Division is Back in Afghanistan: The 101st Airborne Division unfurled its colors at Bagram Airfield, Sunday, marking the start of the unit's fourth Afghanistan deployment in the last decade. During past deployments to the country, the 101st was focused on the eastern provinces. Now, though, the division will oversee NATO's Resolute Support mission to train, advise and assist Afghan government operations across the nation, according to an Army press release. The division's commander, Maj. Gen. Andrew Poppas, and senior enlisted leader, Command Sgt. Maj. Todd Sims, spoke at the ceremony, as they took the reins from their counterparts in the 3rd Infantry Division. During the ceremony, Poppas said it was encouraging to see the change and progress in Afghanistan since the unit was in charge of Regional Command-East in 2008. "Not only are the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces fully responsible for Afghanistan's security nationwide, but routinely conducting independent and combined arms operations," Poppas said. "We have gone from an active combat role or partnered operations to merely training, advising and assisting these capable Afghan combat formations — a monumental and hard-fought achievement."

Majority of Americans Support National Guard on Border: A majority of Americans think President Donald Trump's plan to send National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexico border will be effective in combating illegal immigration in the short term, according to a Reuters poll from April 15-19. Fifty-five percent of U.S. adults think deploying the National Guard to the border will be effective in the short term, but only 49 percent think it will be effective in the long term. About 16 percent of Americans think it will be "very effective" short and long-term. Seventy-seven percent of Republicans think deploying the National Guard will be effective in the short term, compared with just 42 percent of Democrats. 85 percent - of Trump voters are confident in the plan in the short term. But people across both parties tend to be less sure it is a durable strategy, slipping to 73 percent for Republicans and 34 percent for Democrats. The poll shows Democrats are split over whether deploying the National Guard will curb illegal immigration. Forty-eight percent see it as ineffective in the short term, while 42 percent see it as effective - a difference of just 6 percentage points. Trump has also called for more Border Patrol agents as part of his immigration crackdown. Responding to a separate question in the poll, nearly 60 percent of Americans say they support the increase. Trump has also called for more Border Patrol agents as part of his immigration crackdown. Responding to a separate question in the poll, nearly 60 percent of Americans say they support the increase. Trump has also called for more Border Patrol agents as part of his immigration crackdown. Responding to a separate question in the poll, nearly 60 percent of Americans say they support the increase. Trump has also called for more Border Patrol agents as part of his immigration crackdown. Responding to a separate question in the poll, nearly 60 percent of Americans say they support the increase.

VA Launching Text Message Service: The VA Healthcare System will launch VEText, a text message appointment reminder service, for its enrolled Veterans April 18. In addition to appointment reminders, the text message service will allow enrolled Veterans to cancel and confirm future appointments and offer an option to download an appointment reminder to a calendar file. All Veterans enrolled in the VA Healthcare System will be opted-in automatically. Veterans can opt-out any time. Veterans without mobile phones will continue to receive appointment reminders by mail and home phone. For a preview of the messaging system, text 'Demo' to 909-245-9443 from a mobile phone.

Vietnam IG Inspection: Jan. 5 1951 Al Horner and Jim Gales were born and both ended up in Bravo Co. 2/1, 81mm mortar platoon in August 1971. For our 21st birthday we were out on fire base Maude in the mud and getting pot shots from the enemy almost daily. A few weeks later we got sent back to the rear area in DaNang for a five day in-country R&R. We took in a floor show at the EM club and at one time we had 200 drinks on our table. Needless to say we were a little drunk and what was a ten minute walk back to our “hootch”, took about an hour and we had five guys leaning on each other for support and between the five of us we finally located our “hootch”. That should tell you how drunk we were. When we got back we were informed that there was an IG Inspection the next morning and we were expected to have polished boots. I was furious, polished boots in Nam and who had any shoe polish. Someone found one can and I grabbed it and said we will not polish our boots in Nam. We are not in the states and the enemy doesn't care if our boots are polished, they will shoot at us anyway. I said there has to be a better use for the polish and AL and Fran Hagan convinced me to use it as camouflage paint. So I proceeded to put it all over my face, neck and arms until the whole can was gone. I was shook awake by my squad leader, Bob Hemmis, who said I had ten minutes to get the shoe polish removed because of the upcoming IG Inspection. Well soap and water did not help, nor sand mixed in with it. As the inspecting General walked in the front door, Bob shoved me out the rear door and saved my ass. I would have been on every detail there was had they seen me. I didn't get caught and that afternoon we were loaded on deuce and a half trucks and driven up to the ridge line around DaNang. I don't remember how long it took for the sweat, frequent washings of soap, water mixed with sand and dirt before I was shoe polish free. I was the brunt of jokes from my platoon for weeks and got strange looks from everyone I passed. The lesson I learned was that we didn't need polished combat boots, black shoe polish is a real great camo paint and it doesn't not wear off fast even with the amount of sweat generated under field conditions. I vowed not to get drunk until the next R&R. Thanks to Bob, I probably got saved from an article 15 and an ass chewing from the Inspector General and then Captain McBane. Nice platoon mates to take advantage of a soldier a little under the weather. In time I did pay back those involved and now we still laugh about it forty plus years later. I also learned that shoe polish on jungle boots serves no purpose.

— Jim Gales

Pentagon: No Civilians Killed in Syria Attack: No civilians were killed in the U.S. and allied strikes on suspected Syrian chemical weapons facilities recently, Pentagon officials said. The April 14 strikes, led by the U.S. in coordination with France and Britain, “were successful in degrading” Assad's ability to use chemical weapons against his enemies, Dana White, the Pentagon's chief spokesperson, said. They were carried out, she said, “without a single report of a civilian casualty.” But while the 105 weapons deployed in the operation met their targets, the strikes left President Bashar al-Assad with the ability to carry out more attacks, Assad's remaining chemical weapons arsenal was “probably spread throughout the country at a variety of sites,” “[The Syrian regime] will have the ability to conduct limited attacks in the future. I would not rule that out.” “However,” she added, “as they contemplate the dynamics of conducting those attacks, they've got to look over their shoulder and be worried that we're looking at them and we'll have the ability to strike them again should it be necessary.” White dismissed Russian claims that the air defense systems it sold to the Syrians intercepted as many as 71 of the 105 cruise missiles fired at three suspected chemical weapons sites.

US officials say Pompeo has met with North Korea's Kim: CIA Director Mike Pompeo recently traveled to North Korea to meet with leader Kim Jong Un, two officials told The Associated Press recently. The highly unusual, secret visit comes as the enemy nations prepare for a meeting between President Donald Trump and Kim within the next couple of months. The officials spoke about Pompeo's trip on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss it publicly. The Washington Post, which first reported Pompeo's meeting with Kim, said it took place over Easter weekend — just over two weeks ago, shortly after the CIA chief was nominated to become secretary of state. Trump, currently at his Florida resort hosting Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, said Tuesday that the U.S. and North Korea were holding direct talks at “extremely high levels” in preparation for a possible summit with Kim. He said five locations were under consideration for the meeting, which is slated to take place by early June. White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Trump and Kim have not spoken directly. Kim's offer for a summit was initially conveyed to Trump by South Korea last month, and the president shocked many when it was announced that he had accepted. U.S. officials have indicated over the past two weeks that North Korea's government has communicated directly with Washington that it is ready to discuss its nuclear weapons program. It would be the first ever summit between U.S. and North Korea during more than six decades of hostility since the Korean War. North Korea's nukes and capability to deliver them by ballistic missile pose a growing threat to the U.S. mainland. The U.S. and North Korea do not have formal diplomatic relations, complicating the arrangements for contacts between the two governments. It is not unprecedented for U.S. intelligence officials to serve as a conduit for communication with Pyongyang. In 2014, then-Director of National Intelligence James Clapper secretly visited North Korea to bring back two American detainees. At his confirmation hearing last week to become the top U.S. diplomat, Pompeo played down expectations for a breakthrough deal on ending North Korea's nuclear weapons at the planned Trump-Kim summit, but said it could lay the groundwork for a comprehensive agreement on denuclearization. “I'm optimistic that the United States government can set the conditions for that appropriately so that the president and the North Korean leader can have that conversation and will set us down the course of achieving a diplomatic outcome that America and the world so desperately need,” Pompeo told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. After a year of escalating tensions, when North Korea conducted nuclear and long-range missile tests that drew world condemnation, Kim has pivoted to international outreach.

Army Dumped a Bunch of Mandatory Training to Free up Soldiers' Time: The Army's top civilian is unloading a pile of training not required by the Defense Department in favor of allowing commanders to distribute guidance to their troops on their terms, according a series of memos. Army Secretary Mark Esper told Army Times in December, and roll-out began this month. “One of the complaints is we're doing all this mandatory training. And when you look at the numbers, it is astounding how much it has grown over the years,” he said, comparing the experience to his time as a battalion commander with the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Italy. “I felt that I had, again, great freedom to do what I wanted to do. I felt that I was trusted to train my soldiers, and I was accountable for it.” “It is this type of burdensome requirement that unnecessarily weighs down our Army from focusing on its core mission,” Esper said of TriPS, a training soldiers must complete before traveling, whether personal or official.

“A man's rights rest in three boxes: the ballot box, the jury box, and the cartridge box.”

— Frederick Douglass