



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

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Volume 8

“A Soldier Once And Always”

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Commanders Corner: By the time you receive this Newsletter, The Americal Division Veterans Association reunion will be ongoing. See the article in the next column. 3 to 4 hundred people are expected to be at the reunion. The reunion hotel is full, members will have to reside at an alternative location; it pays to register early. Something to remember in the future. I anticipate a rousing debate at the annual meeting as the members will express their views on directions the Chapter should be taking. I am looking forward to meeting all who are there and getting familiar with the Chapter's administration and how the organization functions. We will have to nominate the 2 At Large Officers for a tour of 2 years each. If you have anyone who you think will do a good job, let me or Rich know before the Annual Meeting. For members of Bravo company, we will be voting on who will take position of the “Bravo Knife”. Please have your nomination for that as well. Our accomplishments are to be admired. Our power comes with the strength of our members. On this subject; I want to encourage all to attempt to increase our membership. We should all be proud of the unit we served so gallantly and we should want more of our fellow soldiers to be counted in our organization where they will share in the knowledge that we are after all looking for ways to help cope with the many predicament that life produce. There is much assistance available. It is up to you to ask. Write me and let us together employ our collective resource to assist in whatever is bothering you. You might be surprised with the outcome. Let's all do our very best to render assistance wherever possible. I always hope to meet some 2-1 Infantry soldiers at every veterans' gatherings, and I do as well this time. God bless you and your families during the rest of this summer season and for any preparation you are involved in as grandchildren head off to school for the 2018-2019 year. For those who have grandchildren attending higher education facilities, there are many opportunities for help in acquiring funds to defray the cost. The ADVA grants over \$40,000 to students that apply every year. If you are not helping your family take advantage of this funding recourse you are missing a great opportunity. The children will be grateful for your contribution to their education. 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.



A DVA 2018 National Reunion: The 2018 National Reunion will be held September 26-30, 2018 in Oklahoma City, OK. Headquarters hotel is the Oklahoma City Wyndham Gardens Airport Hotel. By the time you get this Newsletter we will be either at the reunion or on our way home. We anticipate the members attending this reunion will be up considerably because it will involve the dedication of the Americal Artillery Monument on the grounds of Fort Sill, OK. “Home of the US Army Artillery”. We will have much to write about concerning this reunion, however, you will have to wait until the next Newsletter to read about what transpires. If you have not secured your reservations it might be too late. dates

The VA Benefits Backlog is Higher Than Officials Say: The benefits backlog at Veterans Affairs is worse than leaders there have acknowledged, according to a new investigation from the department's top watchdog. In a report recently released, the VA inspector general found tens of thousands of benefits cases omitted or ignored by department officials that “significantly understated the number of claims awaiting decisions for over 125 days.” Investigators estimated that the reported backlog only covers about 79 percent of relevant cases, with a host of others misclassified, mistakenly excluded and, in some cases, only acknowledged as overdue after the files had finally been processed. In response, VA officials said they are “reviewing how best to supplement or adjust reporting on the rating-related backlog.” New training and standards are expected to be put in place by the end of this year. The VA claims backlog was a major scandal during President Barack Obama's administration, as frustrations grew over the slow pace of VA's ability to handle an ever-growing number of disability claims. The backlog — the number of ratings cases that took more than 125 days to complete — swelled to more than 611,000 in March 2013 before being drawn down to about 70,000 in September 2015. Officials at the time credited a combination of more staff hires, new processing systems and new electronic medical records for the drop. Some claims take longer than four months due to complexity or updated paperwork. The backlog has hovered between 70,000 and 100,000 cases each week for most of the last three years, even as the total number of claims applications have continued to rise. Last week, the backlog was 86,001 cases, according to VA records. But the inspector general, citing a review of cases from the first six months of 2016, said about 63,600 overdue cases that required ratings decisions were left out of those records for unclear reasons, and nearly 10,000 more were incorrectly recorded by staff.

John
Commander

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



“As for gun control advocates, I have no hope whatever that any facts whatever will make the slightest dent in their thinking — or lack of thinking.”

— Thomas Sowell

In Reversal, DoD Will Let Wounded Warriors Transfer GI Bill Benefits: Purple Heart recipients on active duty will soon be exempt from a new policy barring troops from transferring their post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits to their dependents if they cannot commit to an additional four years of service. The policy announced in July, immediately excluded those who could not extend their service by four years, including wounded troops in the medical retirement process, from the ability to transfer. A change that takes effect in July 2019 will also block those with 16 years of service from making the switch. Prior to the policy change, troops who served a minimum of six years and committed to serving an additional four years were eligible to transfer the education benefit to their dependents. Those who could not commit to additional service because their circumstances prevented them from doing so were allowed to make the transfer anyway. The Defense Department changed gears, announcing the strict no-extension, no-transfer policy will not apply to currently serving Purple Heart recipients. "The Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, signed a policy that allows wounded warriors who have received a Purple Heart to transfer unused Post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits to their dependents, regardless of the number of years they have served," the announcement says. "Effective August 31, Wounded Warrior Purple Heart recipients are eligible to transfer those benefits regardless of their years of total service or ability to complete an additional period of obligated service."

Former NATO Leaders Call for New Headquarters to be Named After Sen. John McCain: Three former NATO secretaries general have called for the alliance's new \$1.4 billion Brussels-based headquarters to be named after the late U.S. Sen. John McCain, who died Aug. 25 after battling brain cancer. In a letter, Anders Fogh Rasmussen (who served in the top post from 2009-2014), George Robertson (1999-2003) and Javier Solana (1995-1999) have supported the tribute to the Arizona Republican's work in "promoting transatlantic unity." The letter, published Thursday, reads: "As three former secretary-generals of NATO, we believe that the transatlantic alliance is the cornerstone of a stable, peaceful and free world. Few things symbolise this alliance, and the enduring benefits of American global leadership, more vividly than the life and work of John McCain. "Despite his being a US Senator, across Europe we all felt that John McCain III was one of our own. Whether advancing the cause of freedom across the former Soviet states of eastern Europe or defending the multilateral international order at a time of skepticism, his work was a beacon for all of us who believe that transatlantic unity is the only means of ensuring peace. "We urge NATO to repay this lifetime of service to its mission by naming its new Brussels headquarters after Senator McCain." McCain, a two-time U.S. presidential candidate and Vietnam veteran, died at the age of 81. He was a regular visitor to NATO in Brussels and a vocal advocate for the alliance throughout his career."

Remains of Missing Soldier From Korean War Identified: U.S. military officials say the remains of a missing soldier who died during the Korean War more than 60 years ago have been identified. The Pentagon's Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced that 1st Lt. Herman L. Falk's remains were identified using DNA analysis, dental records and material evidence. DPAA says the 22-year-old from Manhattan was serving in the Army's 2nd Infantry Division when he and his platoon were reported missing during fighting in South Korea in 1951. Officials say after the war returning American POWs reported Falk had died that spring at a POW camp in North Korea. Falk's remains among those of at least 400 U.S. servicemen handed over by the North.

Marine Killed in WWII Battle in the Pacific Identified: The Defense Department says the remains of a U.S. Marine killed in a World War II battle in the Pacific have been identified as an Arkansas man. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced Tuesday that Marine Corps Sgt. Millard Odom from Batesville, Arkansas, was officially identified Aug. 20 through DNA, dental and anthropological analysis, and "circumstantial and material evidence." Odom was 26 when he was killed in battle on a small island in Betio and was buried there with approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors. The Defense Department said after the war the remains were recovered and unidentified bodies were interred in Honolulu. Odom's remains were sent in 2017 to a laboratory for identification. Officials estimate more than 72,000 U.S. service members who fought during World War II are unaccounted.

Trump Intends to Freeze Federal Pay for 2019: President Donald Trump intends to freeze federal pay in 2019 in order to keep government spending more sustainable, according to a letter Trump sent to the House speaker and Senate president Aug. 30. "I have determined that for 2019, both across the board pay increases and locality pay increases will be set at zero. These alternative pay plan decisions will not materially affect our ability to attract and retain a well qualified federal workforce," Trump wrote. Trump initially called for a federal pay freeze in his FY19 budget proposal, which also included changes and reductions to employee health and retirement programs. The president has the authority to set federal pay from year to year, unless Congress specifically outlines its intent for federal pay increases in government appropriations. Currently, the Senate-passed version of a general government appropriations bill calls for a 1.9 percent federal pay increase, which includes changes to both base and locality pay and matches the pay increase feds received in 2018. The House-passed version of the same legislation makes no mention of federal employee pay, meaning that Trump's intent for a pay freeze will rely on which version of the bill makes it through Congress.

What Happens Now that Veterans Can File Class-Action Suits Against VA? A recent federal court ruling allowing class-action suits against the Department of Veterans Affairs could lead to a host of new legal options for veterans who share similar illnesses, service records or bureaucratic headaches. "It is a watershed moment," said Greg Rinckey, a founding partner of the law firm Tully Rinckey PLLC, which specializes in military law. "For veterans dealing with Gulf War illness or Agent Orange claims ... this makes it easier for them to fight against big government." An eight judge panel on the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals ruled that in "appropriate cases," class-action lawsuits against VA will be allowed. Previous court rulings had questioned long-standing precedent prohibiting such group lawsuits, even as other class-action filings have been brought against other federal entities. The move makes it possible for a group of veterans with similar grievances to use their numbers to put pressure on VA, and win legal relief. The ruling opens a whole new type of cases that can be brought against VA, and how those veterans complaints can be answered. The irony of the appeals court ruling is that the case which allowed class-action lawsuits to move forward — *Monk v. Wilkie* — denied the plaintiff's claim that his case should proceed as one. The panel ruled his desire to group together all veterans facing a wait of more than a year for appeals claims did not meet previously established standards for forming a class. Catherine McCarthy, a student at the Veterans Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School who handled the Monk lawsuit, said officials there are still considering whether to refile the case with new parameters. She said the ruling provides a roadmap for a host of other legal complaints. Plaintiffs have already eyed class-action suits for veterans who were exposed to toxic chemicals.

Mattis Thinks Commanders Have Gone Soft on Misconduct: The number of courts-martial and other severe punishments meted out to misbehaving troops across the military has steadily declined in recent years, raising concerns at the Pentagon's highest levels that some commanders have gone soft on traditional military discipline. The total of general, special and summary court-martial cases handled by the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines has plummeted by nearly 70 percent during the past decade. Military Times found that less severe non-judicial punishment cases also tumbled — down nearly 40 percent over the same period. The dive in Uniform Code of Military Justice enforcement far outpaced the drawdown in overall active-duty troops. Combined end strength of the four services dropped by 14 percent since 2007 to roughly 1.3 million in 2017. Many military experts believe a primary cause for the falling UCMJ numbers stems from commanders' decisions to opt against courts-martial proceedings and instead lean on administrative discipline, which often results in the accused service member getting kicked out of the military. Administrative discipline tends to be bureaucratically easier and less time-consuming than traditional UCMJ measures to punish misconduct. That may explain the highly unusual Aug. 13 memo that Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis fired off, when he voiced concerns that today's military commanders may be jeopardizing the force's long-term good order and discipline. “Leaders must be willing to choose the harder right over the easier wrong,” Mattis wrote in the memo. “Administrative actions should not be the default method to address illicit conduct simply because it is less burdensome than the military justice system.”

VA Establishes New Research Center Focused on Caregivers: Veterans Affairs officials are launching a new center of excellence focused on caregivers, a move that advocates say could significantly boost research and support for families caring for ailing veterans. “We know how important caregivers are to the veteran community now, and we know they're going to be even more important 10 and 20 years out,” said Steve Schwab, executive director of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. “This center is going to own the research in this area and a lot of areas that are still undiscovered.” The center consists of teams of researchers spread across four VA sites in Texas, Florida, Utah and California. Together, the staffers will collect data on caregiver challenges, support service availability and a host of other topics with an eye towards future policy changes designed to improve veteran health care. Earlier studies by the RAND Corporation have identified more than 5.5 million veteran caregivers across the United States, providing medical and emotional support that would total nearly \$14 billion annually. VA officials do grant monthly stipends and training services to some of those family members, but advocates have said those benefits are greatly overshadowed by the value the caregivers provide. Schwab said even though groups like his have helped provide significant research on the topic, having federal backing — and focus — on the topic provides more opportunities. “For example, when we worked with RAND, we identified 10 areas that need further investigation to understand what the community needs,” he said. “Right now, there's no evidence-based research on the effects of caregiving on children. Many of these kids end up working as secondary caregivers. What does that mean for them and for the family? That's the kind of study we need to see get done now.”

“That rifle on the wall of the labourer's cottage or working class flat is the symbol of democracy. It is our job to see that it stays there.”
— George Orwell

Remains of World War II Sailor Identified: The U.S. Department of Defense says the remains of a Wisconsin serviceman killed during World War II have been identified. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency exhumed the remains of Navy Seaman 1st Class George Naegle, of La Crosse, from the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. He was among the unidentified military personnel buried in 46 plots in the cemetery, known as the Punchbowl. Naegle's battleship, the USS Oklahoma, was attacked by Japanese aircraft while it was moored at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. The attack killed 429 crewmen, including Naegle. Of the 16 million Americans who served in World War II, more than 400,000 died during the war.

Remains of Lost Pearl Harbor Sailor Identified as Virginia Man: The remains of a U.S. serviceman killed during the attack on Pearl Harbor have been identified as those of a Virginia man. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency identified the sailor in a news release Tuesday as 23-year-old Navy Seaman 1st Class James W. Holzhauer. No hometown was listed. The agency says Holzhauer was assigned to the battleship Oklahoma when it was attacked by Japanese aircraft and capsized, killing 429 crewmen. In September 1947, after 35 disinterred remains were identified, the unidentified remains were buried and eventually classified as non-recoverable, including Holzhauer. In April 2015, the Deputy Secretary of Defense issued a call for disinterment of unknowns from the Oklahoma. A combination of DNA analysis, anthropological analysis and circumstantial evidence identified the remains as those of Holzhauer.

Wounded Soldier and His Injured Military Dog are Together Again, Recovering in Texas: Six weeks ago, Army Spc. Alec Alcoser and his working dog, Alex, turned the corner of a narrow street outside Bagram Airfield just after dawn. Two two Afghan and three Czech soldiers moved between Alcoser and the civilian to conduct a search while he called the dog back and bent down to get a cigarette. Suddenly, they were enveloped by a bright flash. Alex yelped. Alcoser went down. The dusty, smoky air turned yellow and orange and a firefight broke out. The dog stayed at his side. “I would yell at him and his ears would twitch, but he wouldn't look at me,” said Alcoser, 22, of San Antonio. “He didn't growl, he didn't bark, he didn't cry. He stayed right there.” They were together once more recently, this time at the South Texas Veterans Health Care System's Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center. It was an emotional reunion, with the Harlandale High School graduate wiping tears from his eyes at one point and Alex licking his face. It was the first time they had seen each other since both were in Washington, D.C., where each received the Purple Heart. And if all goes well in rehab over the next few months, they'll be together for good, buddies until the end.



I changed my car horn to gunshot sounds. People get out of the way much faster now.

No Shutdown at VA: Congress Passes Department's Budget On-time: House lawmakers finalized the fiscal 2019 Veterans Affairs and military construction budgets on Thursday, sending the full-year spending plan to the president ahead of the new fiscal year deadline for only the second time in nine years. The plan contains a funding boost of more than 6 percent for VA next year, pushing the department's total budget over \$200 billion for the first time. At \$209 billion in total spending, the department's budget has nearly quadrupled over the last 17 years. The House vote — 377 to 20 — came a day after Senate lawmakers offered similar overwhelming support for the measure, and just a few hours after congressional leaders announced a plan to finalize the fiscal 2019 budgets for the Defense Department and several other non-military agencies by the end of this month, avoiding a government shutdown. White House officials a day earlier praised Congress for their progress in completing the appropriations bills before the end of the fiscal year — Sept. 30 — a feat that has become a rarity in recent years. Since the start of fiscal 2011, only one department has seen its full-year budget finalized by that deadline (VA, for fiscal 2017). It has been 22 years since Congress managed to pass all of its appropriations work on time.

Drug-Running, Lax Opioid Testing Found in VA's Residential Treatment Programs: Poor oversight and failures in testing procedures led to two non-fatal fentanyl overdoses last year at a VA residential treatment program in upstate New York in which patients acquired the potent synthetic drug from another veteran at the facility, the VA's Office of Inspector General reported recently. In a similar report in July, the IG found that lax oversight and poor communication among staff were factors in the overdose death of a patient at another unidentified VA residential drug treatment program in 2015. That patient was found dead in a locked bathroom. An autopsy attributed the cause of death to a heroin overdose. In the case at the Bath, N.Y., VA Medical Center's treatment program, Matthew Helmer, 34, of Hyde Park, N.Y., a resident in drug treatment, was charged in October 2017 with felony counts of drug possession by federal prosecutors, who alleged that he was a "runner" for other veterans in the program, the local Star-Gazette newspaper reported. In court documents, a VA investigator said Helmer told him that "he knew that [patients] overdosed and were currently in the hospital," but was unaware of how they acquired the synthetic opioid fentanyl, the newspaper reported. Drug paraphernalia was found in Helmer's room and he acknowledged that heroin was his own drug of choice, the newspaper said. The IG's report focused on the 170-bed Domiciliary Residential Rehabilitation Treatment Program (DR RTP) in Bath, a town in New York's "southern tier" near the Pennsylvania border.

Arlington Opens New Section with Civil War Burials: Arlington National Cemetery returned to its roots as a resting place for the Civil War dead with a burial of two unknown Union soldiers. The burials marked the dedication of an \$87 million expansion of the cemetery that officials hope will extend the cemetery's life by up to 10 years. The so-called Millennium expansion adds 27 acres and more than 27,000 spaces for burials and cremated remains to a cemetery where more than 400,000 are already interred. The expansion should extend the cemetery's lifespan into the early 2040s, said David Fedroff, deputy chief of engineering at Arlington. Another expansion in planning stages is hoped to extend the cemetery's life beyond 2050. In addition, the Army, which runs the cemetery, has conducted surveys to determine whether the public is willing to support tighter restrictions on eligibility for burial at Arlington that could extend the lifespan even further. The two Union soldiers buried with full military honors were recently discovered at Manassas National Battlefield.

Vets Walk Across US to Draw Attention to Mental Health Fight: Six American and British veterans who walked across the U.S. to raise awareness about mental health problems related to combat service finished their trip in New York City. The group visited the national Sept. 11 memorial at the World Trade Center and then finished their trip a few blocks away, at a garden that memorializes British victims of the 2001 terror attacks. Walking 1,000 miles (1,609 kilometers) from Los Angeles to New York City was easy, members of the group said, compared to the struggle of living with mental wounds related to military service. One of the marchers once attempted suicide. Another struggled with painkillers and alcohol after operations for combat wounds. Several said they are living with post-traumatic stress disorder and the guilt of survival after seeing comrades die in combat. Three of the veterans came from the U.K. to join the Americans on the tour, which raised money for support groups and encouraged veterans to speak up about psychological challenges and get help, rather than suffer alone.

One of the Last WWII soldiers to Make Four Combat Jumps into Europe has Died: Staff Sgt. Russell Brown, one of the legendary paratroopers who made every combat jump during World War II, forever cementing his place in the history of the 82nd Airborne Division. Brown passed away Aug. 31 at the age of 96 in Georgetown, Kentucky, according to an obituary. A spokesman for the 82nd Airborne confirmed the Purple Heart recipient had been one of the lauded soldiers who parachuted into Salerno and Sicily, Italy, as well as Normandy, France, and Nijmegen, Holland. His story was featured in "Four Stars of Valor: The Combat History of the 505th Parachute Infantry" and "All American, All the Way. After leaving the Army, Brown went to work as an explosives technician. He is survived by two daughters, 10 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren, according to his obituary. Brown was one of about a dozen soldiers still alive who had made all four jumps. Retired 1st. Sgt. Harold Eatman died in July at the age of 102.

VA Officials Say One in 10 Department Jobs is Unfilled: More than one in 10 Veterans Affairs jobs is currently unfilled, a vacancy rate being downplayed by department officials but likely to raise serious worries among lawmakers who have already voiced concerns about a lack of medical professionals for veterans programs. More than 45,000 department posts are currently unfilled, with about 40,000 in the Veterans Health Administration alone, according to new data released by the department. The rate was even higher among VA staff offices, with more than 2,500 vacancies, nearly 17 percent of the budgeted management posts. The figures were touted as another step toward transparency in federal government by VA officials, but were mandated to be made public by Congress in the recently passed VA Mission Act. The data was released just before the extended Labor Day holiday weekend. VA officials also called the information release positive news for their department, since it shows their employee turnover rates "compare favorably with other large cabinet-level agencies." But the number of vacancies — roughly 11 percent of the department's workforce — is almost 10,000 higher than total open positions reported by VA officials. They have also pressed Republican colleagues to require VA fill many of those open positions before expanding care options outside the VA system.

"A doctor tells a woman she can no longer touch anything alcoholic. So she got a divorce."

More Artillery, Air Defense: US Army Beefs up its Footprint in Germany: The U.S. Army is expanding its presence in Germany by adding 1,500 forces to be permanently stationed in the country. The additional troops are a “display of our continued commitment to NATO and our collective resolve to support European security,” according to a statement issued by U.S. Army Europe, based in Wiesbaden. The new forces will be on top of the roughly 33,000 American forces already stationed in Germany. Officials chose to activate new units in Germany, rather than relocating existing ones across the Atlantic, to create the envisioned boost in combat power, according to the command. The new units include a field artillery brigade headquarters, two multiple-launch rocket system battalions, and a short-range air defense battalion. Completion of the plus-up is expected by September 2020. The moves reflect a plan by the Army to “reconstitute the equivalent of division-level combat power,” said Col. Terry Anderson, who was the U.S. defense attache in Berlin. The artillery and air defense forces would round out such a force package in conjunction with units already stationed in the country, he added. The new troop commitment comes only months after the Trump administration was said to consider a reassessment of the U.S. footprint in Germany, as reported by The Washington Post. Officials in Berlin seemed unfazed by the report at the time, privately saying that plans were already underway with the Pentagon toward an actual increase in troop numbers. Richard Grenell, the U.S. ambassador to Germany, issued a statement recently thanking “the people of Germany for the incredible spirit and partnership in welcoming all the American men and women lucky enough” to be stationed in Germany. “Americans are committed to strengthening the transatlantic alliance and President [Donald] Trump’s promise to increase U.S. defense capabilities means the alliance is stronger today,” Grenell wrote.

VA John Chapman Died Trying to Rescue a Navy SEAL. Now He’ll Receive the Medal of Honor:

Moments after Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Neil C. Roberts fell from a battle-damaged helicopter onto a snowy mountain in Afghanistan, Air Force Tech. Sgt. John A. Chapman and his Navy SEAL teammates made a fateful decision: They would scramble back to Roberts on another aircraft, knowing that al-Qaeda fighters were closing in. The ensuing battle at Takur Ghar was one of the ugliest near the outset of the Afghanistan war, and it was examined at length by the U.S. military after the deaths of Roberts, Chapman and five other elite U.S. service members. But the Pentagon now says that for years, official accounts did not recognize Chapman’s final moments and how he sacrificed his life in an attempt to save fellow U.S. troops on an incoming helicopter that was about to be ambushed by al-Qaeda fighters. Chapman will become the first member of the Air Force to be recognized with the Medal of Honor — the nation’s highest award for valor in combat — since the Vietnam War. Navy SEALs fighting alongside Chapman thought he was dead when they were forced down the mountain under a hail of enemy fire, but he was unconscious and awoke to fight militants alone for another hour before he was killed March 4, 2002.

“It is usually futile to try to talk facts and analysis to people who are enjoying a sense of moral superiority in their ignorance.”

Thomas Sowell, Social Theorist

Army is Looking for a New All-around Vehicle that Can Swim, Climb and Charge Through Snow: After more than 40 years of service, the robust little all-terrain vehicle that can climb mountains, ford rivers and churn through snow needs replacing. And the Army, Marines and National Guard are asking industry to give them a new ride. Back in June, Army Contracting Command officials put out a Request for Information for industry to share what they think can replace the Small Unit Support Vehicle, a tracked vehicle that’s been in service since the mid-1970s. At one point, there were 1,100 of them in the U.S. military inventory. Now, only a few dozen remain, mostly in service in cold weather areas such as U.S. Army Alaska. The new program to replace the SUSV has been dubbed the “Joint All Weather All Terrain Support Vehicle,” or JAASV. So far, Army officials have only asked for information, but they are expected to issue a proposal with more detailed requests for requirements and timelines from industry in the coming weeks or months. The upgrade and replacement are important for a variety of reasons, some of which are near-term, such as National Guard disaster response to blizzards, floods and fires, which can’t be navigated easily by the current Humvee fleet. Others are for mobility in the Arctic. Leaders are shifting training and resources back to the Arctic as Russia has beefed up its capabilities and manpower in the region in recent years, from new units and commands to upgraded equipment and weaponry.

Lawmakers Ask VA Secretary to Research Marijuana as an Alternative to Opioids: A bipartisan group of lawmakers are urging the new Department of Veterans Affairs secretary to research marijuana as a treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic pain. In a letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie, the lawmakers asked him to initiate a “rigorous clinical trial” of the drug. In recent years, more veterans have come out in support of marijuana as a potential alternative to addictive opioids. “We believe VA has the authority, ability and capacity to carry out such a study,” they wrote. “Many of our nation’s veterans already use medicinal cannabis, and they deserve to have full knowledge of the potential benefits and side effects of this alternative therapy.” Their appeal follows months of seeking help on the issue from former VA Secretary David Shulkin. Wilkie, who was sworn in as VA secretary in July, hasn’t spoken publicly about medical marijuana as a potential treatment for veterans.

Innovation Through Agility: In the 1940s, the Army realized that while effective in the past, mounted cavalry -- like the Blackhorse Regiment -- were no longer adequate to fight in modern conflicts. So too are the fragmented personnel and pay systems that serve our Army today. Modernization is imperative, and the IPPS-A program remains committed to delivering a single, integrated personnel and pay system to all components. IPPS-A looks forward to solve the Army’s more-nuanced problems of personnel and pay. “It is essential that the technical competencies of the Army, its battle labs, and laboratory and development systems be focused in two ways,” said Dr. Bruce D. Jette, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology during a House Armed Services Committee hearing. “First, to know what is being developed commercially which may benefit the Army and, second, what must be developed by the Army because of its unique military value.” must be developed. Moving forward, the program will continue leveraging agile teams to innovate and formulate solutions to the challenges of building an integrated personnel and pay system. The IPPS program is currently on track to roll-out initial capabilities to the National Guard in 2018/19 and achieve full operating capability for the entire Army by fiscal year 2020. We remain committed to developing a system that embodies the mantra of “One Soldier, One Record, One Army” and we are going to get this done for the Total Force.