



2nd Battalion 1st Infantry Chapter,

Americal Division Veterans Association (ADVA)

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

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Volume 12

“A Soldier Once And Always”

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Commanders Corner: Greetings to all my 2/1 infantry brothers families and friends and fellow brothers from our sister units. I hope this finds everyone healthy happy and a year wiser. 2020 was a challenging year for everyone and it looks like we will still face similar challenges in 2021 in addition to new ones but we are probably best equipped to face these challenges then many others.



I hope that many of you have been able to obtain the COVID vaccine and if you have not I encourage you to reach out to you servicing VA facility or local government agencies to enquire about receiving it. I have contacted my VA facility and they are still awaiting the vaccine and the local government is still working on health-care workers and next school teachers so it still unclear when a vaccine can be obtained. My home state of West Virginia is leading the country in getting people vaccinated and my brother who is blind in resides in A VA facility has received both his shots which I am very thankful for.

As many of you have probably followed our nation's capital is being guarded by up to 25,000 National Guard and I understand that as many as 15,000 could be kept there until mid-march. I don't remember that being the case when the Viet Nam protest were going on but as usual these situations always become political which is unfortunate for our country. The latest flare up is that the guardsmen were sent to underground garages and were having to sleep the cold floors. As we all know comfort is not always a choice when serving on active duty. I am sure they will be able to withstand the hardships. My biggest complaint is that it does show a huge disrespect of our soldiers which brings back memories of the disrespect we received when asked to serve our country. I guess times have not changed that much when it comes to our military and politicians.

I am still hoping that we will be able to assemble in Indianapolis this year although there seem to be many questions on how the future will play out. In the meantime don't hesitate to make your plans to participate.

Finally The VA has announced that any co-pays you might owe from 2020 and moving into 2021 will be on extended hold instead of being billed in January.

Again I hope everyone is being active and as much as possible being able to stay in touch with your families and friends. Isolation is not a good thing.

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

Dwight Sybolt
Commander



From H Duckworth O'Brien's "A Grunt's Life": :
Hygiene: A grunt in the bush had to make do with what was at hand. You didn't get a lot of clean fatigues sent to you and there weren't local hotels to bath in either. If you found a stream, you jumped in clothes and boots still on. Taking your G.I. soap, you wash your fatigues best you can then yourself. It doesn't take long for things to dry after you put them back on. You're used to being wet.

Thank you note from Chuck Holdaway: Chapter members, I want to thank all of you who attended the annual ADVA reunion in Indianapolis last year. It was almost 2 years in the planning and re-planning due to all the COVID problems both real and manufactured., it was an arduous task getting everything in place but, considering the circumstances, it turned out better than we could foresee. My most disappointing part of the reunion was the cancellation of almost 200 room reservations the last 2 weeks before the reunion date. We took a really large hit on our reunion income on that. I want to especially thank my wife, Sam, Juliana "Mrs. Foxhole" Abney, Jesse and Eileen Mendoza and Jack Head (11th LIB) for all their assistance before, during and after the reunion. It is almost time for the biennial Americal Division Veterans Association to be held this spring and we have 2 members running for the ADVA Executive Committee; myself and Jerry Hughes. I have been on the council for 2 years and would like to serve again (you are only allowed to serve 4 consecutive years). I would also like to get some new blood on the council and strongly urge you to send in your ballot helping to elect Jerry to the committee. Also, Jack Head will make an excellent Junior Vice Commander. Last but not least, I would like to see more of our members get involved in the ADVA by running for the Executive Committee in the future elections. We can become a strong voice in the future direction of the ADVA if we want to be. Thanks again. By the way, the chapter web site has been updated with the latest newsletter and the company rosters brought up to date with our new members.

Chuck Holdaway
Chapter At-large officer

VA Benefits for Presumptive Exposure: If you are a Veteran or survivor who may be eligible for the newly established military exposure presumptive conditions, VA encourages you to apply for benefits. Even if the illness or injury is not a presumptive, we still want every Veteran to file a claim for benefits they've earned and deserve.

I could end the deficit in 5 minutes. You just pass a law that says; Any time there is a deficit of 3 % of the GDP, all sitting members of Congress are ineligible for reelection.
Warren Buffett

From Rich Rinaldo: PFC Stanley C. Goff, Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) recipient, while a member of Company B, 2nd/1st INF then under command of John Malpass about a year before I was assigned to the battalion.

As background, my wife Pat and I were privileged to attend a reception at the newly-opened National Museum of the US Army at Fort Belvoir, Virginia last November. (A must visit for all) There was some time to roam the exhibit halls and, naturally, I drifted toward the Vietnam section. There I was delighted to see a picture of this young Black soldier receiving the award from General Abrams. I also saw that he wrote a book, *BROTHERS: Black Soldiers in Nam, with his buddy Robert Sanders*.

I immediately ordered a copy of this book, which contains oral stories of and reflections about their experience in Vietnam. I highly recommend the book, as it is a memoir long overdue for wider publication.

There was also discussion by Goff about race, which was very moving and should be a source of pride and meaning for anyone who served in combat in Vietnam as an infantryman. Here are some excerpts:

...Some of the guys are dead and gone. I loved them all. [The Captain] tried to instill in us that there wasn't no black or white in Nam. You forgot about that s***. I felt that way.... I felt closer to everybody in that unit at that time than I do my own blood sisters and brothers. Because it was us. We'd seen hard times. We'd seen fear. It was THE FAMILY. I mean, it was us man....

We were so close it was unreal. That was the first time in my life I saw that type of unity and total harmony. It was really great man. It was beautiful. That was the only thing in Vietnam that had any meaning.

John Malpass, wrote this explanation surrounding the actions of Stanley Goff's action. Stanley Goff was a machine gunner and brand new to B/2/1. We were OPCON to the 1/1 Cav at Tam Ky (in I Corps) in August of 1968. We received fire from an NVA Heavy Weapons Company as we were attempting to cross a huge open area, at least 100 meters across (a large rice paddy). The company was pinned down by the heavy fire. Goff stood up with the machine gun and charged the enemy, killing several. His fire allowed the rest of the company to cross the area without any casualties. How Goff was not hit was a miracle. The NVA even fired a recoilless rifle at him! Back at the firebase, I transferred him to the 196th HQ, where he became their bugler. I transferred him because he had no fear, and I was concerned he would get killed. Creighton Abrams awarded him the DSC at LZ Baldy. (I put him in for the MOH, but it was downgraded to a DSC).

Editor's Note: If anyone knows the whereabouts of this soldier, please let me know.

103 Marines Already Separated for Refusing COVID-19 Vaccine: A total of 103 Marines have been separated from the Corps for refusing to get vaccinated against COVID-19, the Marine Corps confirmed. The Marine force had until Nov. 28 to be vaccinated or apply for an exemption. All who failed to meet that timeline will be administratively separated from the Marine Corps, according to a previously published administrative message.

Currently 95% of the active duty Marine Corps is partially or fully vaccinated. The Corps has approved 1,007 exemptions to the vaccine, Maj. Jim Stenger, a Marine Corps spokesman, told Marine Corps Times in an email. Marines discharged solely for refusing the vaccine will receive either an honorable or general discharge, according to provisions in the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act.

Member's Departure: Robert Blair Stonerook, age 72 of Hopewell, passed away on December 15, 2021. Robert was born on May 24, 1949, to the late Park H. Stonerook and Bonita E. Mauger in Sandusky. Bob proudly served in the US Army. While a member of Co. B 2nd Bn. 1st Inf Regt, 196th Light Infantry brigade; he received a National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with 2 Bronze Stars, Vietnam Campaign Medal with 1960 Device, Combat Infantryman Badge, Good Conduct Medal, 2 Overseas Bars, Sharpshooter and Marksman Medal. He was a member of the Baltimore VFW Post #3761. Known to his friends and family as Bob, he was passionate of the outdoors, and wildlife and the lord's living wonders. Bob is survived by his wife Mona and 2 sons, Kyle and Scott. Kyle writes “Hey gentlemen....glad your here. Thank God you

were helped loved the camp playing he loved, and talk-good ole everyday son, sharmment with and the and man a known in (Stoney)



there for dad and him through. He sitting around fire at home and all the old tunes sharing stories ing about the days. Grateful to have been his ing every mommy best friend greatest patriot boy could have life.” Robert Stonebrook was

a member of 3rd squad, First Platoon Company B. He was an outstanding and very brave soldier and will be greatly remembered and missed. He was a true Grunt and proud of our Vietnam service. I spoke with him in the last 30 days and he sounded great...and was happy with his life. It's as tough loosing our brothers, our men today, as it was back in the Nam. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his wife Mona and the entire Stonebrook family. A red, white and blue wreath was sent to his funeral from all of his Bravo brothers in his memory

US Army vax Deadline: Discharges Begin January, 98% comply: The Army's deadline for active duty troops to be vaccinated against COVID-19 passed Dec 22, 2021, and Army officials offered a snapshot of the service's data . The vast majority of the Army's approximately 485,900 active duty soldiers have complied with the Pentagon's vaccine requirement, the release said — 96% of troops are fully vaccinated, and an additional 2% have received at least one dose. Only 3,864 soldiers have “refused the vaccination order without a pending or approved exemption,” the release said. That includes two battalion commanders and an additional four “leaders” who have been relieved, but the release didn't specify the rank or echelon of the latter four. In January, commanders will begin involuntarily discharging soldiers who have refused the shot. Most of them — 2,767 — have already received a general officer memorandum of reprimand, an adverse administrative action that could end their careers even if they now opt to get the shot.

Army Pauses Enforcement of Vaccine Mandate for Civilian Workers: Top Army leaders are directing service officials to pause enforcement of President Joe Biden's corona virus vaccination mandate for civilian workers after a federal judge recently ordered the U.S. government to temporarily halt the policy. The Army issued preliminary guidance this week to commanders, managers and supervisors across the service “to pause ongoing formal or informal disciplinary or enforcement actions against civilian employees” who remain unvaccinated, Lt. Col. Terry Kelley, a spokesman, said.

POW/MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced three burial updates and two new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from World War II and Korea. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Air Forces Capt. Nando A. Cavalieri, 24**, of Eveleth, Minnesota, was assigned to 324th Bombardment Squadron, 91st Bombardment Group, 8th Air Force. On Feb. 3, 1945, the B-17G Flying Fortress bomber on which Cavalieri was serving as a bombardier crashed as a result of enemy anti-aircraft fire. Following the war, his remains could not be identified. He will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia. The date has yet to be determined.

-- **Army Pfc. Don D. Dowler, Jr., 18**, of Clarinda, Iowa, was assigned to Company D, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Dowler will be buried in Santa Maria, California. The date has yet to be determined.

- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Billy Turner, 20**, of Ardmore, Oklahoma, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Turner. He will be buried in his hometown. The date has yet to be determined.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class John R. Melton, 23**, was assigned to the battleship USS West Virginia, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS West Virginia sustained multiple torpedo hits, resulting in the deaths of 106 crewmen, including Melton. Interment services are pending.

Army Announces 3 unit Rotations to Mideast, Europe and Korea: The Army has announced three brigade combat team deployments in the coming months as part of a regular rotation of forces around the globe. The 1st Infantry BCT, 10th Mountain Division, from Fort Drum, New York, will deploy to U.S. Central Command this winter to support the U.S. commitment to Operation Inherent Resolve, the named mission to defeat the Islamic State group in Iraq and Syria. Major combat operations ended when ISIS lost its territorial caliphate in 2019, but the group remains active as an insurgency. Tensions between the U.S. and Iran-backed militias in the region also continue to garner headlines. The 1st Armored BCT, 1st Armored Division, stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas, will deploy this spring to support the U.S. commitment to South Korea. Army units regularly rotate to the Korean peninsula, though there are also about 28,500 U.S. troops permanently assigned there. Many of the U.S. forces in the country are located 40 miles south of Seoul at Camp Humphreys. The 3rd Armored BCT, 4th Infantry Division, stationed at Fort Carson, Colorado, will deploy to Europe this spring to support “the U.S. commitment to NATO allies and partners. Russia recently amassed 120,000 troops along its border with Ukraine, sparking concerns over a possible war in Eastern Europe. There have been long simmering tensions in the region following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and amid the ongoing War in Donbas. While Ukraine is not a NATO member, the U.S. has strongly warned Russia against taking military action there. In recent years, NATO has also helped supply Ukrainian forces with better weaponry, including anti-tank missiles and some drone technology.

Be the reason someone feels loved and believes in the goodness of people.

Last Surviving ‘Band Of Brothers’ Officer – Dies at 99: Retired Army Col. Edward Shames — the last surviving officer of Easy Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division — passed away December 2, 2021, at the age of 99. Shames and his brothers-in-arms were immortalized in HBO’s miniseries “Band of Brothers,” which documented Easy Company’s movements from training and parachuting into Normandy on D-Day as part of Operation Overlord to the disastrous Operation Market Garden, and the turning point at Bastogne’s Battle of the Bulge. Ed was born in Norfolk, Virginia on June 13, 1922, to the late David and Sadie Shames. In August, 1942, Ed was called to duty in World War II. During the war, he was a member of the renowned Easy Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division now known globally as the “Band of Brothers.” Ed was involved in some of the most important battles of the war. He made his first combat jump into Normandy on D-Day as part of Operation Overlord. He volunteered for Operation Pegasus and then fought with Easy Company in Operation Market Garden and the Battle of the Bulge in Bastogne. Ed gained a reputation as a stubborn and very outspoken soldier who demanded the highest of standards from himself and his fellow soldiers. He not only earned the respect of his men, but was recognized by command for outstanding leadership and on June 13, 1944, he received a battlefield commission to Second Lieutenant. This made him the first non-commissioned officer in the Third Battalion to receive a commission in Normandy.



Military Recruits Required to Sign Statement Acknowledging COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate Before Training: Before heading to recruit training, new military enlistees will first have to sign a statement saying they understand they will need to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Recruits are required to get the vaccine, regardless of the branch, in accordance with the guidance that mandate vaccines for service members. Recruits who enlist with the Marines who are not vaccinated will have to sign a statement of understanding at the Military Enlistment Processing Station that says they will be vaccinated, James Edwards, deputy director of communication strategy and operations for the Marine Corps Recruiting Command, told USNI News. Once they arrive at their recruit training, they will be vaccinated as part of their medical processing, Edwards said. This is likely a similar process for the other branches, Edwards said. Those who are already vaccinated prior to joining the military do not get vaccinated again.

Air Force discharges 27 for refusal to get COVID vaccine: The Air Force has discharged 27 people for refusing to get the COVID-19 vaccine, making them what officials believe are the first service members to be removed for disobeying the mandate to get the shots. The Air Force gave its forces until Nov. 2 to get the vaccine, and thousands have either refused or sought an exemption. Air Force spokeswoman Ann Stefanek said Monday that these are the first airmen to be administratively discharged for reasons involving the vaccine. She said all of them were in their first term of enlistment, so they were younger, lower-ranking personnel. And while the Air Force does not disclose what type of discharge a service member gets, legislation working its way through Congress limits the military to giving troops in vaccine refusal cases an honorable discharge or general discharge under honorable conditions.

A Veteran-Owned Business Brings New Life into the Original Coney Island Hot Dog:

New York's Coney Island is so culturally linked with hot dogs that the word "Coney" is synonymous with the food in many parts of the country. This is because the hot dog as we know it was invented on the beach at Coney Island. We may not remember the name of the man who invented them or his original hot dog brand, but two [Army](#) veterans and brothers, Joe and Michael Quinn, are out to change that. The Quinn brothers were inspired by their grandfather's stories about Coney Island, even though it had become a bit run-down by the time they grew up in the area. Their lifelong dream was to reopen Feltman's Hot Dogs and revive the brand. They had a plan in place. Oldest brother Michael went into the food industry, while Joe (the youngest) went off to West Point for a career in the Army. Middle brother Jimmy went to work in finance at Cantor Fitzgerald, with the idea of making some money and starting up a business. "That was Jimmy's goal," Quinn says. "To go to Wall Street, make a whole bunch of money and then use that money to fund the business. My brothers were just infatuated with the story of Feltman's." The Quinn brothers were inspired by their grandfather's stories about Coney Island, even though it had become a bit run-down by the time they grew up in the area. Their lifelong dream was to reopen Feltman's Hot Dogs and revive the brand. They had a plan in place. Oldest brother Michael went into the food industry, while Joe (the youngest) went off to West Point for a career in the Army. Middle brother Jimmy went to work in finance at Cantor Fitzgerald, with the idea of making some money and starting up a business. "That was Jimmy's goal," Quinn says. "To go to Wall Street, make a whole bunch of money and then use that money to fund the business. My brothers were just infatuated with the story of Feltman's."



Three Human Smuggling Attempts, 100 People Detained off Florida's Coast:

The U.S. Coast Guard and federal immigration agencies stopped three human smuggling attempts and detained 100 people off Florida's coast from Sunday to Tuesday, the military branch said in a news release sent on Wednesday. Along with U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations officers, Coast Guard members detained 43 people on Sunday off Jupiter's coast and one suspected smuggler was transferred to Homeland Security Investigation officers for further investigation, according to the Coast Guard. Another 26 people were apprehended on Sunday by Border Patrol officers after a "maritime smuggling event" landed in the vicinity of Ocean Boulevard, the Coast Guard added.

Organization Hopes to Pay Mortgage of Fallen SEAL Team 8 Commander:

The Tunnel to Towers Foundation announced plans to raise enough funds by Christmas to pay off the mortgage of the recently fallen SEAL Team 8 commander's home. Cmdr. Brian Bourgeois, 43, died Dec. 7, 2021 after sustaining critical injuries during a fast-rope training exercise in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He leaves behind a wife and five children, all of whom were with him when he passed. "The loss of a husband and father is heartbreaking at any time, but even more so at Christmas," Tunnel to Towers Foundation Chairman and CEO Frank Siller said "I am calling on all Americans to help us lift the burden of a mortgage off this family as quickly as possible, so they know they can stay in their home they shared with Brian this Christmas and every Christmas going forward," Siller added. Bourgeois was a Naval Academy football player and 2001 graduate. He served in the special warfare community for more than two decades.

The Provolone and Salami Luncheon:

A combat story: The time period was late April 1969, shortly after the re-establishment of the Kam Duc Special Forces Camp southwest of Da Nang, Republic of Vietnam. The battle for the Landing Strip lasted approximately 2 weeks. The 2d Battalion 1st Infantry became heavily involved in eliminating enemy forces of the 2nd North Vietnamese Division that wanted to deny use of the air strip that provided much needed supplies to units of the Americal Division's 196th Light Infantry Brigade and Special Forces units working in that area. After the engagement was over and the enemy was disbursed, each company received new missions. Two Rifle Companies (A & B) that assisted in the elimination of the enemy forces left the area to take up the fight in Que Son Valley; an area not far from Kam Duc. I commanded Co. B and my very good friend Rich Rinaldo was in charge of Co. A. As we got closer to where the units were to pass through each other, I remembered Rich Rinaldo boasting of receiving a care package from his family living in New York City's Little Italy. He often bragged about how the family sent him packages of Italian cold cuts and flavored Provolone cheese. It was almost noon when we met up with each other. Rich invited me to have lunch with him. In spite of my devotion to "C" rations, I accepted the invitation. After securing the area surrounding the parameter of his company, I met up with Rich. He had just opened his care package and we had the most wonderful lunch together while serving in Vietnam. He had Genoa salami, provolone cheese, peppers soaked in olive oil, other Italian cold cuts, nuts, figs and a whole lot more delicacies from the Italian side of New York. I am here to tell you, that this small unexpected luncheon on the side of a slanting hill far enough away from the riggers of combat is the most pleasant memories of our association in the U.S. Army. After serving over 20 years, Rich and I are still very good friends and often expounding of our taking the opportunity to share a most delightfully pleasant Italian lunch in the middle of a very dangerous area of South Vietnam. Thanks Rich, for the memories.

17,000 Pounds of Cocaine, Marijuana Offloaded by Coast Guard in Port Everglades:

Crewmembers of the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Vigilant offloaded illegal narcotics worth an estimated \$236 million on Wednesday in Port Everglades in Fort Lauderdale. The crew offloaded more than 12,000 pounds of cocaine and more than 5,000 pounds of marijuana following a 45-day patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean. An embarked U.S. Coast Guard law enforcement detachment followed the ship's crew, allowing authorities to perform law enforcement operations in international waters. The drugs were seized by crews of the Vigilant, USCGC Tampa, and the Royal Canadian Navy in international waters off the coasts of Mexico, Central and South America. 17 suspected drug traffickers were arrested. Numerous U.S. and partner nation agencies work together to combat transnational organized crime. "The successful interdiction of over 17,000 pounds of illegal narcotics and the apprehension of 17 suspected traffickers are the result of tremendous teamwork," said Commander Jay Guyer, commanding officer of the Vigilant. "We are thankful for coordinated efforts across the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of Defense, Customs and Border Protection, as well as our international partners from Canada and throughout Central and South America."

Train for a Career in Tech: Are you seeking a career in the tech industry? VA's Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) program can help you reach your goal. VET TEC not only pays tuition and fees, it also offers a housing allowance to use while you earn your certification. Learn more about the VET TEC program.

Battlefield Nurse Founded American Red Cross: December 25th marked the 200 anniversary of the birth of Clarissa "Clara" Barton. Among her numerous accomplishments, Barton inspired and assisted in organizing what was to become the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, contributed important precedents to the Army Mortuary Affairs, and was instrumental in founding the American Red Cross. In an era when women had little access to formal power, Barton acquired an influence that achieved great things. Clara Barton along with other women gathered food, clothing, blankets, medicine and other supplies for the soldiers stricken in one of the first battles of the Civil War in support of the 6th Massachusetts Militia as they moved to reinforce Washington. One thing led to another, and Barton found herself providing similar services on battlefields including Cedar Mountain, Bull Run and Fredericksburg, Virginia and Antietam, Maryland. Inspired by Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War, the women assisted the sick and wounded while also endeavoring to provide clean water and accommodations, healthy food and fresh air. After the war Barton established an Office of Missing Soldiers to help find or identify soldiers missing or buried in unmarked graves. Her agency helped find and properly bury over 13,000 troops who had died at Andersonville Prison Camp in Georgia. Barton traveled to Europe following the Civil War where she met Dr. Louis Appa, founding member of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, Switzerland. Inspired by his notion of volunteerism on a neutral basis protected under the auspices of the Geneva Convention in 1864 appealed to her. In the Franco-Prussian 1870-1871, Barton assisted in establishing field hospitals and coordinated relief to citizens of Strasbourg, France and Paris where she received the Prussian Cross. After returning to the United States, in 1873 she began lobbying for an American Red Cross. Barton's commitment to unmilitary calamities proved prescient. Red Cross deployments included assistance to the Ohio River Valley floods in 1884, famine in Texas in 1887, tornadoes in Illinois in 1888, yellow fever in Florida in 1888 and Johnstown Pennsylvania, flood survivors in 1889. Barton continued as president of the American Red Cross until 1904, when she was 83. The Red Cross was hard at work mobilizing the humanitarian instincts of Americans into the service of worthy causes. Barton died of pneumonia on April 12, 1912. By that time the American Red Cross was increasingly visible worldwide as a champion of humanitarian relief there could not be a greater legacy.

Navy' Coast Amphibious Fleet completes move: The Navy has completed the shift of its East Coast amphibious fleet to Hampton Roads with the arrival of the USS Iwo Jima from Mayport, Florida. A year of preparations and planning went into moving the ship's 1,150 sailors and their families from Florida, Capt. Judd Krier said. "It's a huge job," he said. Most of the families are already here, and are settling in with the help of Fleet and Family Services, the housing office and the connections many crew members had forged from earlier stints in Hampton Roads, he said. "It feels good to be back," Krier said, noting that the Iwo Jima's home port had been Norfolk until 2014. The Iwo Jima's move means Norfolk is home to four amphibious assault ships.

VA Tests New Automated System that Could Speed Up Claims Decisions: Department of Veterans Affairs officials are hoping a new automated system that helps render decisions on disability claims will accelerate the process and decrease the backlog of claims applications. The automated system being considered by the VA has proven to shorten the disability claims review process from 100 days to two under certain circumstances and conditions, according to the agency. A pilot run of the VA Automated Benefits Delivery System, launched in December, looked at claims filed by veterans seeking upgrades to their disability ratings for hypertension and cut 98 days from the process for those with complete files. "We saw an opportunity to look at our traditional disability claims process and see how we can better leverage the data we have ... to introduce business-process automation," explained Rob Reynolds, acting deputy undersecretary for the VA's Office of Automated Benefit Delivery, during a press conference with reporters recently. The system takes electronic or paper claims and uses algorithms to determine whether the file contains enough data and information to render a decision. It then weighs the information against the rules that govern disability claims and makes a recommendation whether to approve or disapprove the claim. The system's recommendation is reviewed and validated by a rating veterans service representative. If at any time the system decides that more information is needed -- the veteran needs a comprehensive medical exam or more data is required to render a decision -- the claim is sent to a claims reviewer for traditional processing, Reynolds said. "The algorithm is pulling the necessary data we need. The rater is the final decision maker," he said. After the pandemic began, the number of backlogged claims rose from 70,000 to 211,000. While the VA reduced that to roughly 180,000 by mid-2021, the number grew again as veterans applied for benefits under an expansion of covered conditions, including illnesses related to Agent Orange and airborne pollutants.

Veterans Can Now Use the Home Depot Military Discount: All U.S. veterans, active-duty service members and their spouses now qualify for Home Depot's everyday military discount thanks to an expansion announced by the home improvement retailer. In the past, only active-duty troops, military retirees and their dependents could use the discount. Veterans were permitted

Army Ahead of Schedule on Email Transition, IT Leaders say: The Army's migration from the Department of Defense's custom email system to a Microsoft Office 365 platform is ahead of schedule, with more than 50% of the service's accounts transferred so far, top IT officials said. "Over 50% of our Army has transitioned from legacy and into the Army 365 environment," Lt. Gen. John Morrison, the deputy chief of staff and Army G-6, said during a media roundtable recently. "We expect by end of this calendar year we will be approaching 60% and maybe even over that." The new Army 365 (A365) system is a part of a broad shift to give soldiers, civilians and contractors cloud-native tools that can be accessed anywhere, along with storage and collaboration tech. The shift falls under the larger adoption of cloud back-office tools through the DOD's Defense Enterprise Office Solutions (DEOS) contract. The Army's system, however, has enhanced security measures on top of the normal commercial system. While the Army is currently "ahead of schedule," Morrison said that the March deadline to get everyone a new email account and off of the legacy Defense Enterprise Email system (DEE) may get pushed back. Morrison said he spoke with the director of DISA to ensure that everyone who needs access to email will continue to get it. The Army purchased roughly 200,000 fewer licenses for the Microsoft-based platform than there are members of the service as a cost-saving measure.

38 Maine National Guard members to be deployed to 10 hospitals starting this week: Gov. Janet Mills announced details on the deployment of Maine National Guard members to help hospitals deal with the latest surge in COVID-19 cases. The administration said 15 Guard members will be sent this week to the Saint Joseph's Manor nursing home and rehabilitation center in Portland and 12 members will be assigned to Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston. Those deployments will open more than 40 additional beds for patients discharged from hospitals, which are seeing record numbers of severely ill COVID-19 patients. Mills said last week that she would activate up to 75 National Guard members to help with non-clinical roles in hospitals and nursing homes.

Decades After Being Killed in Combat, a Soldier is Getting a Proper Burial at Punchbowl: In June, 1944, U.S. Marines and Army troops landed on Saipan under heavy enemy fire and engaged Japanese forces in one of the bloodiest battles of the War in the Pacific. Thirteen days into the fighting, Waipahu-born soldier Anthony Mendonca was killed in action. He was 28 years old. "I think he's a hero, in my mind," Wilma Boudreau said. Boudreau is Mendonca's cousin. She sat in her Kailua home, turning the pages in a booklet from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Agency. The information and photographs describe the DPAA's effort to recover and identify Mendonca's skeletal remains. After the battle in Saipan, the Army notified Mendonca's family that his body was not recovered. It turned out his remains were in a grave in Manila and labeled as Unknown X-10. For decades, Mendonca's sister Violet pressed the Army to find and identify her brother. "She tried every which way to get those bones found. And they finally did. But then they took so long to get the DNA done because you have to search for relatives to submit the DNA," Boudreau said. In April, 2020, researchers used dental records and DNA samples to make the match. They notified Mendonca's relatives. "We are very very grateful to the Army for finding those bones" Boudreau said. Mendonca was the youngest of twelve children. Before the war he worked as a welder for the Inter-Island Steam Navigation Company. Boudreau said her family kept his memory alive. "Because he was missing, the love just grew because you don't have a closure. That I think was always in their hearts. Where is Anthony? Where is Tony? They called him Tony," she said. Mendonca's remains will be buried with full military honors Thursday at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl.

NATO Military Recruits Required to Sign Statement Acknowledging COVID-19 Vaccine Mandate Before Training: Before heading to recruit training, new military enlistees will first have to sign a statement saying they understand they will need to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Recruits are required to get the vaccine, regardless of the branch, in accordance with the guidance that mandate vaccines for service members. Recruits who enlist with the Marines who are not vaccinated will have to sign a statement of understanding at the Military Enlistment Processing Station that says they will be vaccinated, James Edwards, deputy director of communication strategy and operations for the Marine Corps Recruiting Command, told USNI News. Once they arrive at their recruit training, they will be vaccinated as part of their medical processing, Edwards said. This is likely a similar process for the other branches, Edwards said. Those who are already vaccinated prior to joining the military do not get vaccinated again.

COVID-19 Booster is Critical: As we approach the third year of the COVID-19 pandemic and with rapidly increasing cases of the Omicron variant, CDC vaccine guidelines include receiving a vaccine booster. Data has shown those who are fully vaccinated and have received a booster shot are less likely to be contagious and require hospitalization. Veterans, caregivers, and spouses may receive the COVID-19 vaccine and vaccine booster by checking with their local VA facility for vaccine clinic times.

No VA Workers Have Been Fired over Vaccine Mandate, with Less Than 1% Failing to Meet Deadline: About 3,000 of the Department of Veterans Affairs' 380,000 employees have failed to report their vaccine status, as the VA requires, and face disciplinary action, which could include being fired. To date, however, no one has faced termination, VA Secretary Denis McDonough said this week. Roughly 90% of the VA's workforce has complied with the department's vaccine mandate, which set an Oct. 8 deadline for health care workers and those who interact with veterans. The deadline was Nov. 22 for all other employees. Read Next: Inside the Oath Keepers' Plan for an Armed Takeover of the US Capitol Of the remaining 10%, nearly all have applied for a medical waiver or religious exemption. But roughly 3,000 employees, or less than 1% of the workforce, have not complied with a requirement to report their vaccination status.

American Legion Pancake Breakfast: The monthly American Legion Post 187 famous Pancake Breakfast will be served on Sunday, February 13, 2022 from 8-12 a.m. The breakfast is presented every second Sunday of every month at the American Legion Hall, 225 East Holding Avenue, Wake Forest, NC., (Across the street from the Wake Forest Post Office). The breakfast offers a menu of pancakes, several types of sausage (mild and spicy), coffee, tea, hot chocolate, and orange juice. The aspect that has made the offering unique is that customers can eat as much as they care to for one low price. Adults eat for \$6.00 per person – Children under 12 for \$1.00 and children under 7 eat free. The proceeds from the breakfast is used to assist rehabilitating veterans.

An Airborne S.O.S. An Airbus 380 is on its way across the Atlantic. It flies consistently at 800 km/h at 30,000 feet, when suddenly a Eurofighter with Tempo Mach 2 appears. The pilot of the fighter jet slows down, flies alongside the Airbus and greets the pilot of the passenger plane by radio: "Airbus, boring flight isn't it? Now have a look here!" He rolls his jet on its back, accelerates, breaks through the sound barrier, rises rapidly to a dizzying height, and then swoops down almost to sea level in a breathtaking dive. He loops back next to the Airbus and asks, "Well, how was that?"

The Airbus pilot answers: "Very impressive, but now you look!" The jet pilot watches the Airbus, but nothing happens. It continues to fly stubbornly straight, with the same speed. After 15 minutes, the Airbus pilot radios, "Well, how was that?"

Confused, the jet pilot asks, "What did you do?" The Airbus pilot laughs and says, "I got up, stretched my legs, walked to the back of the aircraft to use the washroom, then got a cup of coffee and a chocolate fudge pastry."

The moral of the story is: When you are young, speed and adrenaline seems to be great. But as you get older and wiser, you learn that comfort and peace are more important.

This is called S.O.S.: Slower, Older, but Smarter.

Dedicated to all my friends who are like me, now realizing that it is time to slow down and enjoy the rest of the trip.