



May 27, 2016

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1. Memorial Day 2016: National Commander John Biedrzycki will be representing the VFW at the White House Monday morning, as well as participating in Memorial Day ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Locally, many of our 6,600 VFW Posts will be hosting similar ceremonies to honor our fallen. As we gather to remember the more than one million Americans who died in our nation's conflicts going back to the Revolutionary War, please remember to keep our 83,000 missing and unaccounted for servicemen — and their families — in your thoughts. Memorial Day weekend activities in Washington include:

- **National Memorial Day Concert**, Sunday, May 29, from 8-9:30 p.m. on the west lawn of the U.S. Capitol, and aired live on PBS stations nationwide.
- **National World War II Memorial Observance**, Monday, May 30, at 9 a.m.
- **Arlington National Cemetery Memorial Day Observance**, from 11 a.m. to noon, Monday, inside the Memorial Amphitheater next to the Tomb of the Unknowns.
- **Vietnam War Memorial Observance**, from 1-2 p.m., Monday.
- **National Memorial Day Parade**, start time 2 p.m., Monday, from the National Archives building down Constitution Avenue past the White House.
- **Korean War Veterans Memorial Observance**, at 5 p.m., Monday.

2. Senate Hearing on Pending Health Care Bills: On Tuesday, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing to discuss several bills on veterans health care and benefits, including legislation to expand the Veterans Choice Program, expedite the disability compensation appeals process, and improve mental health care programs for women veterans. VFW Senior Legislative Associate Carlos Fuentes offered the VFW's support for many of the bills being considered and offered recommendations to improve others. Fuentes urged VA to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce the more than 450,000 appeals backlog before reforming the process for future appeals. VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson and members of the committee also discussed Secretary McDonald's recent comments on how VA measures wait times. To read the testimony or view the webcast, visit: <http://www.veterans.senate.gov/hearings/pending-legislation-052416>.

3. House Advances Veterans Legislation: On Monday, the House of Representatives advanced several veterans bills. These include the *VA Health Center Management Stability and Improvement Act*, which would require VA to develop and carry out a plan to hire permanent directors at each VA medical center; bills to rename VA outpatient clinics and U.S. post offices after heroic veterans; and a bill to grant veterans the opportunity to appeal Caregivers Program eligibility determinations to an independent contractor. The House has passed several veterans bills in the past couple of months, and awaits Senate action on a large veterans health care and benefits bill before negotiation on a final veterans bill that would be considered by Congress and sent to the president. However, the House has failed to pass legislation to expand the Caregivers Program to pre-9/11 veterans who suffer from injuries and illnesses which limit their ability to live independently. The VFW urges its members and supporters to call on the Senate to pass the *Veterans First Act*, which includes language to expand the Caregivers Program, and tell the House to act on legislation to expand the Caregivers Program to veterans of all eras. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates.

4. Democratic Leadership Roundtable: Four times a year the House Democratic leadership hosts a veterans service organization (VSO) roundtable in an effort to stay connected with the issues that most concern the veterans community. The most recent roundtable took place on Wednesday, May 25. Topics the VFW discussed were the legislative action Congress must take to continue to improve veterans' access to care. This includes making it easier for VA to hire more physicians, allowing VA outpatient clinics to have extended hours and weekend appointment options, simplify the contract process so private community doctors can more easily see veterans, and consolidate and streamline the non-VA care payment system so veterans aren't charged for care in the community that VA should pay for. We also discussed the need for increased resources to pay for expansion of caregiver benefits, Blue Water Navy, and other benefits and services veterans and their families' need. Leaders from the Appropriations Committee committed to working more closely with VSOs so they can better understand these needs and work to find ways to fund them.

5. VA Proposes APRN Full Practice Authority: The Department of Veterans Affairs is proposing a policy to allow full practice authority to Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN) within VA. By doing this, APRNs will be able to assess, diagnose, interpret diagnostic tests and prescribe medications for patients. Permitting full practice to APRNs is being proposed as a means of increasing access to care for veterans. APRNs are clinicians with advanced degrees and training to provide primary, acute and specialty health care services. Depending on their specialization, they are certified as nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified registered nurse anesthetists and certified nurse midwives. All VA APRNs are required to obtain and maintain current national certification. For more information on the APRN proposal, visit: <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=2791>.

6. Brain Health Summit Focuses on TBI/PTSD: On Tuesday and Wednesday of this week, One Mind — an organization led by retired Gen. Peter Chiarelli that is dedicated to promoting and supporting brain health — held a summit in Arlington, Va. Among those in attendance were employees of The Department of Veterans Affairs, National Institute of Mental Health, and The Food and Drug Administration. Panel discussions were hosted by world renowned Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) researchers, clinicians and policy analysts. The key sessions focused on the translation of science into clinical practices,

standardized screening for TBI, the diagnosis of PTSD, and progress toward better diagnostic and prognostic assessments for TBI and co-morbid conditions. The conference wrapped up with talks centered on recommendations for advancing TBI/PTSD treatment and policy implementation in the future of medicine. For more information on One Mind, visit their website at: <http://onemind.org/>.

7. VFW Hosts U.S.-Russia Joint Commission: On Tuesday, VFW National Commander John Biedrzycki hosted a reception for the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs at the VFW Washington Office. The commission was formed in 1992 by then Presidents George H.W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin to help thaw superpower relations around a humanitarian issue. Their meeting in Washington this week was their first in 11 years and 20th overall. The commission's purpose is to help break down bureaucratic barriers in order to help determine the fates of American and Russian MIAs from World War II through the end of the Cold War.

8. MIA and Burial Updates: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced burial updates and new identifications of remains of 13 missing and unaccounted for servicemen from World War II, Korea and Vietnam. Being returned for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class Challis R. James**, of Portsmouth, Ohio, **Fireman 1st Class Frank E. Nicoles**, 25, of Eau Claire, Wis., **Warrant Officer Daryl H. Goggin**, 34, of Eugene, Ore., and **Chaplain (Lt. j.g.) Aloysius H. Schmitt**, 32, of St. Lucas, Iowa, had been missing since Dec. 7, 1941, when the battleship USS Oklahoma they were aboard suffered multiple torpedo hits and capsized as it was moored off Ford Island in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Richard Davis**, of Indiana County, Pa., who was lost fighting in North Korea on Nov. 2, 1950. It would be later learned he was captured but died in captivity. He was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division.

-- **Navy Lt. Cmdr. Frederick P. Crosby**, 31, of Orlando, Fla., was piloting an RF-8A Photo Crusader on a combat mission in North Vietnam when his aircraft was hit by enemy fire and crashed in Thanh Hoa Province on June 1, 1965. He was assigned to Light Photograph Squadron 63.

-- **Army Pvt. Earl J. Keating, 28**, will be buried May 28 in his hometown of New Orleans. Group remains representing Keating and **Pvt. John H. Klopp**, 25, also of New Orleans, were buried in Arlington National Cemetery on March 23. On Dec. 5, 1942, Keating and Klopp died repulsing a Japanese attack in present-day Papua New Guinea. Both were subsequently buried, but their graves couldn't be located after the war. Both were assigned to Anti-Tank Company, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd Infantry Division. Read more at:

<http://www.dpaa.mil/NewsStories/NewsReleases/tabid/10159/Article/777845/soldiers-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-keating.aspx>.

-- **Marine Pfc. Elmer L. Mathies Jr.**, 21, will be buried May 28 in his hometown of Hereford, Texas. Mathies died Nov. 20, 1943, while fighting the Japanese on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. He was assigned to Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. Read more at:

<http://www.dpaa.mil/NewsStories/NewsReleases/tabid/10159/Article/777823/marine-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-mathies.aspx>.

-- **Navy Motor Machinist's Mate 1st Class John E. Anderson**, 24, will be buried May 28 in his hometown of Willmar, Minn. On June 6, 1944, Anderson was stationed aboard a Landing Craft Tank that after offloading its men and equipment during the D-Day invasion on Omaha Beach was destroyed by enemy fire. Read more at:

<http://www.dpaa.mil/NewsStories/NewsReleases/tabid/10159/Article/777787/sailor-missing-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-anderson.aspx>.

-- **Army Pvt. John P. Sersha**, 20, of Leoneth, Minn., will be buried May 28 in Eveleth, Minn. On Sept. 27, 1944, during Operation Market Garden, Sersha was one of three “Bazooka Men” sent out with a platoon to assault German positions near Groesbeek, Netherlands. None of the three men returned. Sersha was assigned to Company F, 325th Glider Infantry Regiment. Read more at: <http://www.dpaa.mil/NewsStories/NewsReleases/tabid/10159/Article/777857/soldier-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-sersha.aspx>.

-- **Air Force 1st Lt. Donald W. Bruch Jr.**, 24, of Montclair, N.J., will be buried May 29 in East Petersburg, Pa. On April 29, 1966, Bruch was piloting an F-105D Thunderchief toward a target in North Vietnam when his aircraft was struck by enemy anti-aircraft artillery. He was assigned to the 333rd Tactical Fighter Squadron, 355th Tactical Fighter Wing. Read more at:

<http://www.dpaa.mil/NewsStories/NewsReleases/tabid/10159/Article/778981/airman-missing-from-vietnam-war-accounted-for-bruch.aspx>.

-- **Marine Pfc. James B. Johnson**, 19, of Poughkeepsie, N.Y., will be buried May 31 in Arlington National Cemetery. Johnson died Nov. 20, 1943, while fighting the Japanese on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands. He was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division. Read more at:

<http://www.dpaa.mil/NewsStories/NewsReleases/tabid/10159/Article/779753/marine-from-world-war-ii-accounted-for-johnson.aspx>.

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

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