



August 25, 2017

**In This Issue:**

- 1. VA Appeals Reform Becomes Law**
- 2. President Approves GWOT Memorial**
- 3. Europe Fact-Finding Trip**
- 4. VA Hosts Online Discussion for Benefits**
- 5. V-J Day Commemoration**
- 6. MIA Update**

**1. VA Appeals Reform Becomes Law:** On Wednesday, the president signed into law the VFW-supported *Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017*, which now provides three options for veterans to appeal disability rating decisions made by the Veterans Benefits Administration, as well as allows some veterans already in the appeals process to opt into the new system. The three options available to veterans dissatisfied with their initial claims rating decisions are to seek a higher-level review by a regional office on the same evidence presented to the original claims processors; to file a supplemental claim with a regional office that would include the opportunity to submit additional evidence; or to opt for an expedited consideration of their appeal directly to the Board of Veterans' Appeals. The entire intent of the new law is to speed the appeals process, which VFW National Commander Keith Harman wholeheartedly supports. "As a former veterans' service officer myself, I know first-hand that many of the veterans the VFW helps every day to access their earned benefits will be better served under this new framework," [he said](#). "The VFW looks forward to working with the VA to make sure this new framework results in timely, understandable and accurate benefits decisions for veterans." Read the [Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017](#).

**2. President Approves GWOT Memorial:** The president signed the VFW-supported *Global War on Terrorism Memorial Act* into law late last week, which now clears the way for the GWOT Memorial Foundation to secure federal approval for acreage on the National Mall, and coordinate a national design competition. It also exempts the memorial from a 1986 law that requires Congress to wait 10 years after the official end of a military conflict before considering a war memorial in the nation's capital. VFW National Commander Keith Harman [praised the VFW members](#) who are the driving force behind the new memorial: GWOT Memorial Foundation founder and executive director, Andrew Brennan, is a life member of VFW Post 3945 in Pittsburgh; Rep. Mike Gallagher, a life member of VFW Post 2037, Green Bay, Wis.; Rep. Seth Moulton, a member of VFW Post 2005, Marblehead, Mass.; Sen. Joni Ernst, a life

member of VFW Post 2265, Red Oak, Iowa; as well as recognized veterans advocate Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia. Follow the memorial's progress on the [GWOT Memorial Foundation website](#).

**3. Europe Fact-Finding Trip:** VFW Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief William "Doc" Schmitz conducted his initial fact-finding trip to Europe Aug. 1-11. The itinerary included meetings with U.S. military and diplomats assigned to NATO headquarters, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), 7th Army Training Command, U.S. Africa Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Air Forces Europe/Africa, and U.S. Army Europe. The first-hand look at the situation in Europe provides invaluable insight into the challenges our service members, retirees, and their families are facing there and helps VFW shape its advocacy efforts. [Learn more from his after action report](#).

**4. VA Hosts Online Discussion for Benefits:** The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hosted a Facebook Live, ExploreVA event, Aug. 22, to allow individuals the opportunity to ask questions. During the event, more than 400 comments were responded to by a team of VA employees focusing on general VA information and benefit resources. ExploreVA is an easily accessible portion of the VA website that hosts occasional Facebook Live streams which allow for interaction between VA, veterans, family members and caregivers who want to learn more about VA benefits and services. [Visit ExploreVA](#).

**5. V-J Day Commemoration:** Visitors to Washington, D.C., are invited to commemorate the 72nd anniversary of Victory over Japan Day at the National World War II Memorial at 11 a.m., Sept. 2. The WWII Memorial has very few disability parking spaces, and street parking could be limited since it's the tourist season. Taxis are plentiful and recommended. The two closest Metro stations, Federal Triangle and Smithsonian, are both about a half-mile away. [Learn about this and other events](#).

**6. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced burial updates and identifications of remains of five American servicemen who had been missing in action from World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Cpl. Henry Andregg, Jr.**, 22, of Whitwell, Tenn., whose identification was previously announced, is being buried today in Chattanooga. In November 1943, Andregg was assigned to Company C, 2nd Amphibious Tractor Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on Tarawa. Over several days of intense fighting, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, but the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Andregg died sometime on the first day of battle, Nov. 20, 1943. [Read about Andregg](#).

-- **Army Sgt. 1st Class Max E. Harris**, 21, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Aug. 27 in his hometown of Monticello, Ind. In late November 1950, Harris was a member of Company L, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division, when it was attacked by overwhelming numbers of Chinese forces east of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. It would be later learned that Harris had been captured, but died while en route to a POW camp. [Read about Harris](#).

-- **Army Pfc. Felipe A. Champion**, 20, of Cameron County, Texas. On Feb. 12, 1951, Champion was a member of Company K, 3rd Battalion, 38th Infantry Regiment, when he was reported missing in action following a battle with Chinese forces in an area known as the Central Corridor, South Korea. Interment services are pending. [Read about Champion.](#)

-- **Air Force Col. Martin R. Scott**, 34, of Tulsa, Okla., a fighter pilot assigned to the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing. On March 15, 1966, then-Captain Scott was piloting an F-4C Phantom II on an armed reconnaissance mission over North Vietnam. His aircraft was shot down while on a strafing run, and no parachutes or emergency signals were seen. Interment services are pending. [Read about Scott.](#)

-- **Air Force Reserve 1st Lt. David T. Dinan, III**, 25, of Nutley, N.J. On March 19, 1969, Dinan, a member of the 34th Tactical Fighter Squadron, 288th Tactical Fighter Wing, was piloting an F-105 Thunderchief on a strike mission over northern Laos. During the second strafing pass, Dinan transmitted a distress message before the aircraft crashed. A Forward Air Controller did observe Dinan's parachute enter the jungle. Search and rescue aircraft conducted an aerial search and located a parachute and confirmed the death of the pilot; however, they were unable to recover the body due to enemy fire. Interment services are pending. [Read about Dinan.](#)

**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](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).**