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1. Vietnam Green Beret to Receive Medal of Honor: The White House announced Wednesday that President Trump will present the Medal of Honor on Oct. 23 to a retired Army Green Beret, who is credited with saving multiple lives during a covert four-day mission into Laos. Capt. Gary Michael Rose had received the Distinguished Service Cross in 1971, just four months after the Special Forces mission in which he survived bullet and rocket wounds and a helicopter crash to provide life-saving aid to more than 100 comrades. Soldiers who served with him, as well as lawmakers and Pentagon officials, lobbied for several years to upgrade his DSC, which required a special waiver passed by Congress and presidential approval. [Read his story.](#)

2. VA Facility Hurricane Updates: The Department of Veterans Affairs is open and continuing to serve veterans in many hard hit hurricane areas in the Gulf and Mid-Atlantic regions, but only sporadically in sections of South Florida, Puerto Rico and the American Virgin Islands. See updates for [Hurricane Harvey](#) and [Hurricanes Irma and Maria](#).

3. VFW, VVA Host Bad Paper Panel: Last Friday, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and Vietnam Veterans of America hosted a panel discussion on bad paper discharges in the Capitol Visitor Center. The panel, which consisted of subject matter experts from around the country, discussed the topic with colleagues, veterans' service organizations representatives and congressional staff. The focus of the discussion was the long-term impact of bad paper discharges on veterans and their families, as well as identifying possible policy solutions. Many veterans who received bad papers received administrative discharges without due process rights. The number of these

discharges has increased by more than 600 percent since World War II. Until recent years, individuals being administratively separated were not screened or given the opportunity for treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or military sexual trauma.

[Watch the panel discussion.](#)

4. VA Releases New Veteran Suicide Data: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently released a more comprehensive analysis of veteran suicide data. After working with the Department of Defense, as well as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to gather data for the most extensive veteran suicide study ever conducted, VA found last year that an average of 20 veterans die by suicide on a daily basis. Of those 20, only six were actively enrolled in VA — meaning those six had actively used VA or enrolled within the system sometime within a year of their death. Suicide is currently the 10th leading cause of death in the United States and rates of suicide are continuing to increase. The veteran population is currently overrepresented in suicide deaths. While many believe it is younger veterans of the Post-9/11 era who deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan that are dying by suicide at the highest rates within the veteran community, it is actually veterans who did not deploy and are 50 years old or older. This newly released data from VA does an analysis of veteran suicide broken down at the state level. [Read more and view the data reports.](#)

5. FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act: On Monday, the Senate voted 89-8 to overwhelmingly pass their version of the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The Senate version authorizes \$700 billion in total — \$640 billion for the Pentagon’s base budget, and \$60 billion to sustain ongoing operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. Included in the Senate version is a 2.1 percent pay increase for service members; \$8.5 billion to strengthen missile defense; 24 additional F-35 joint strike fighters; 10 additional Boeing F/A-18 Super Hornets; five more Navy ships; and end-strength increases of 6,000 soldiers and 1,000 Marines. In light of this, the Senate version still includes TRICARE fee increases, which the VFW strongly opposes, and is \$83 billion above authorized budget caps for military spending. The House and Senate will meet next week to resolve any differences between their versions of the bill. Stay tuned to the Action Corps Weekly for updates on this important bill.

6. Army VSO/MSO Roundtable: The VFW participated in a veterans and military service organization roundtable on Thursday with the Honorable Ryan McCarthy, acting secretary of the Army, who was joined by Army Chief of Public Affairs Brig. Gen. Omar J. Jones IV; Director of Operations, Readiness, and Mobilization Brig. Gen. D. A. Sims II; and senior officials from the Strategy & Plans Division and Soldier for Life. Discussions focused on Army priorities, current and future operations, budget, national defense strategy and Soldier for Life priorities.

7. Free VA Caregiver Course Available Online: The Department of Veterans Affairs partnered with PsychArmor Institute to provide a free online course to break down VA’s Caregiver Program. The course takes approximately 10 minutes and includes information about how VA is organized, who is eligible for the Caregiver Program, how to enroll in it, what documents are needed and where to apply. The course also offers tips and guidance on what actions to take after enrollment is complete, and what resources are available to help veterans and their caregivers. [Take the online course.](#)

8. Senate Panel Supports Consumer Protection Rules: On Wednesday, the Senate Armed Services Committee Ranking Member and former Army officer Senator Jack Reed held a panel discussion comprised of military service members and representatives from Americans for Financial Reform. The panel discussed the impact of the recent Equifax data breach and Wells Fargo credit card scandal on service members, veterans and their families, and highlighted the need for increased oversight and accountability for companies, specifically as it pertains to a consumer's ability to challenge a company's illegal activity in a court of law. The most discussed tactic, commonly referred to as "forced arbitration," is often times slipped into the fine print of a contract, and waives the consumer's rights to certain legal actions, such as a public court hearing, and in many situations class-action lawsuits. To better protect consumers, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) recently issued a final rule that prohibits banks from using forced arbitration clauses with class-action bans. Because predatory lending disproportionately impacts service members and veterans, this final rule was supported by numerous veterans organizations and consumer protection advocates. Despite this support, the House voted only 15 days later to permanently repeal this protection under the Congressional Review Act. In order for this repeal to become law, Senate Joint Resolution 47 (S.J. Res. 47) needs only a simple majority of 51 votes to pass in the Senate when it comes up for a vote between now and late October. The VFW supports efforts to protect service members and veterans from forced arbitration and calls on the Senate to vote down S.J. Res. 47. [Learn more about how the CFPB protects service members and veterans.](#)

9. Veterans Day 2017 Poster: The Veterans Day National Committee announced its selection for the 2017 National Veterans Day Poster from more than 100 submissions. The winning poster was designed by Air Force veteran Robert Dubois, a retired high school teacher in Oregon. To view or download the poster, go to the VA's [Veterans Day Poster Gallery](#).

10. New Retirement System Education Continues: The Defense Department is continuing to roll out its education programs regarding the new Blended Retirement System (BRS) that takes effect Jan. 1, 2018. All current service members are grandfathered under the legacy retirement system, which for the most part provides roughly 50 percent (or High-3) of basic pay per month for life, once the 20-year minimum requisite is met. Current military can also continue contributing to their Thrift Savings Program (TSP) accounts, which has no government match. From Jan. 1 forward, all new enlistees will be auto-enrolled into BRS which, once the minimum 20-year requisite is met, reduces the vested amount to 40 percent of basic pay, but adds government contributions to TSP accounts of a free 1 percent of pay after the completion of 60 days of service, and a match of up to 4 percent at the beginning of year three of service. BRS also adds Continuation Pay, which is a one-time payment at the completion of 12 years to those who agree to serve an additional four years. Active-duty members would currently receive between 2.5 and 13 times their monthly basic pay, and DOD is developing policy to treat Reserve Component members on active duty similarly. Other Reserve Component members would receive between 0.5 and 6 times their basic pay (as if on active duty, not drill pay). A difficult choice is left for mid-career military — those with less than 12 years of active service, or with less than 4,320 points in the Reserves. They will be given a one-time opportunity to opt-in the entire 2018 calendar year, which is why educating the force is so important. [Learn more about the new Blended Retirement Systems.](#)

11. MIA Update: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency has announced identifications of remains and burial updates of 11 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:

-- **Army Air Forces 1st Lt. Francis J. Pitonyak**, 25, of Detroit, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Sept. 22 in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C. Pitonyak was a member of the 36th Fighter Group, 8th Fighter squadron based at Wards Airdrome near Port Moresby, Territory of Papua. He disappeared while leading a four-ship of single-seat fighter aircraft on an armed patrol mission. Enroute to Nadzab, Territory of Papua, the pilots encountered inclement weather, causing one pilot to return to base, where he reported his fellow pilots, including Pitonyak, missing. After an unsuccessful aerial search the following day, Pitonyak was declared deceased on Oct. 28, 1943. [Read about Pitonyak.](#)

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Ray James**, 21, of Sylvarena, Miss., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Sept. 22, in his hometown. James was assigned to Company F, 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division. James' unit landed on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll on Nov. 20, 1943, against stiff Japanese resistance. James was killed on the first day of the battle. [Read about James.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Thomas M. McGraw**, 26, of Lakewood, Ohio, whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Sept. 22 in Seville, Ohio. McGraw was a member 716th Bomber Squadron, 449th Bombardment Group. On Feb. 28, 1945, McGraw and 10 other B-24J Liberator aircrew took off from Grottaglie Army Air Base, Italy, as part of a mission to target the Isarc-Albes railroad bridge in northern Italy, which was part of Brennan Route, used by Germans to move personnel and equipment into and out of Italy. After the bombing run, the other aircraft moved toward the rally point and witnessed one aircraft skim the mountain tops with at least two damaged engines. The plane was last seen near Lake Wiezen in Austria and no parachutes were reported exiting the aircraft. Based on this information, McGraw was reported missing in action. [Read about McGraw.](#)

-- **Air Force Col. Martin R. Scott**, 34, of Jenks, Okla., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Sept. 22 in Claremore, Okla. Scott was a fighter pilot assigned to the 8th Tactical Fighter Wing. On Mar. 15, 1966, 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. An organized search was not possible due to hostilities in the area and Scott was subsequently declared missing in action. [Read about Scott.](#)

-- **Army Pfc. Gerald F. Wipfli**, 23, of Nekoosa, Wis., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Sept. 23 in his hometown. Wipfli was a member of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry. In early November 1944, his unit engaged with German forces in the town of Schmidt, Germany, within the Hürtgen Forest. After the intense fighting, it took the unit several days to account for its personnel. Wipfli was one of 33 unaccounted-for soldiers and was declared missing in action on Nov. 4, 1944. [Read about Wipfli.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. William R. Sadewasser**, 24, of Wellsville, N.Y., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Sept. 23 in Ulysses, Pa. Sadewasser served with Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division, as part of the 31st Regimental Combat Team deployed east of the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea. The RCT was attacked by an overwhelming number of Chinese forces in late November 1950. Sadewasser was

among the more than 1,000 members of the RCT killed or captured in enemy territory. He was reported missing as of Nov. 28, 1950. [Read about Sadewasser.](#)

-- **Army Cpl. Daniel F. Kelly**, 18, of Pittsburgh, Pa., whose identification was previously announced, will be buried Sept. 27 in Bridgeville, Pa. Kelly was assigned to C Company, 1st Battalion, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. In late November 1950, his unit was ordered to advance as part of an offensive push to drive the North Koreans to the Yalu River, along the border of North Korea and China. They were attacked by Chinese forces and Kelly was declared missing on Nov. 26, 1950. [Read about Kelly.](#)

-- **Army Air Forces Sgt. Charles H. Daman** was a member of the 714th Bombardment Squadron, 448th Bombardment Group, 2nd Bombardment Division. On April 4, 1945, Daman, along with more than 400 other bombers, took off to attack airbases at Parchim, Perleberg and Wesendorf, Germany, as part of an Allied attempt to cripple what was left of the German air force. Daman's aircraft, which held 10 airmen, was attacked by enemy fighter planes in the vicinity of Hamburg. Interment services are pending. [Read about Daman.](#)

-- **Navy Water Tender 2nd Class Porter L. Rich** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Rich was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Rich.](#)

-- **Navy Seaman 2nd Class George J. Wilcox** was assigned to the USS Oklahoma, which was moored off Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when Japanese aircraft attacked his ship on Dec. 7, 1941. Wilcox was one of 429 crewmen killed in the attack. Interment services are pending. [Read about Wilcox.](#)

-- **Army Pvt. Shirley E. Bailey** was a medic with Company G, 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. Bailey provided medical support to his unit as they fought in the Hürtgen Forest of Germany, an area comprised of roughly 50-square miles along the Belgian-German border in late 1944. On Nov. 29, when Bailey's battalion was moving out, a German counterattack struck his company. Bailey rushed forward to aid a wounded man and was himself killed by enemy fire. Interment services are pending. [Read about Bailey.](#)

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.