



## Federal Update for December 8 - 12, 2014



### ***Vet Service Dogs Update ► VA Moving to Alter Access Policy***

Two years after Congress ordered the Veterans Affairs Department to increase access for service dogs to its facilities, the department is moving to alter its policies. In a proposed change to regulations, VA plans to let service dogs into its facilities and medical centers as long as they are under the control of their handlers and the animal is trained to perform a task for a person with a disability, including physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disabilities.

Current policy holds that VA facilities are required to let in only Seeing Eye dogs; facilities managers have discretion to open their buildings to other dogs. The proposed change is more liberal than a law passed in 2012, which required VA to let in Seeing Eye dogs, mobility dogs and other guide dogs that have been trained and accredited by an organization that evaluates guide dogs and service dogs. If implemented, the new policy, published in the 21 NOV Federal Register, would expand access for all types of service dogs, similar to the access provisions spelled out in the Americans with Disabilities Act for private businesses. Under that law, businesses, state and local governments, non-profits and other entities that serve the public must grant access to all service dogs. Establishments are not allowed to ask for any documentation that the animal is a service dog; they can only ask if the animal is needed for a disability and what task the animal has been trained to perform.

VA is soliciting comment on the proposed regulations until Jan. 20 on the Federal Register website. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Nov. 21, 2014 ++]

### ***No Man Left Behind ► Sculpture Unveiled At Camp Pendleton***

In November 2004, embedded photographer Lucian Read captured one of the most memorable battlefield images of the U.S. war in Iraq. Marine 1st-Sgt. Brad Kasal, bloodied but unbowed, was being helped from house-to-house fighting in Fallouja by lance corporals Chris Marquez and Dane Shaffer. In one hand, Kasal gripped his 9-millimeter Beretta, in the other, his K-bar knife. Now the image has been turned into a bronze sculpture by Wyoming artist John Phelps. Titled "No Man Left Behind," the sculpture was unveiled last week outside the Wounded Warrior West site at Camp Pendleton.

To the Marines, Read's picture and Phelps' artwork are a testament to the indomitable fighting spirit of the Marine Corps. A similar sculpture by Phelps is now at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. Phelps' son, Marine Pvt. Chance Phelps, was killed in combat in April 2004 in Ramadi, Iraq. An HBO movie in 2009, "Taking Chance," starring Kevin Bacon, told the story of the return of Chance Phelps' body to his hometown for burial. At a brief but emotional unveiling ceremony last week, John Phelps, 65, who served in Vietnam as a Marine, said he was drawn to the Read picture by the fact that Kasal, although wounded and bleeding, was still holding a pistol and a knife, ready to continue the fight. "That's a powerful statement," Phelps said. "That's a Marine." Kasal received the Navy Cross for bravery in the close-in fighting at what has been dubbed Hell House. He is now a sergeant-major.

The sculpture project was supported by Hope for the Warriors, a nationwide nonprofit that assists Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families. Coming to Camp Pendleton made him think of his son, Phelps said. When asked what his son would think of the sculpture, Phelps, his robust voice suddenly quiet, said, "I know he'd be proud." [Source: Los Angeles Times | Tony Perry | Nov. 15, 2014 ++]

## ***Ebola Military Tax Exclusion ► 21-Day Quarantined Soldiers***

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) wants tax breaks for U.S. troops fighting the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Cruz introduces S.2965, the Operation United Assistance Tax Exclusion Act, which would extend an existing tax break for soldiers in combat zones to those who undergo a 21-day quarantine. "Once our armed forces are placed in harm's way, Congress, and the Commander-in-Chief have a

responsibility to support them and to provide security for the families who remain behind while they face danger,” Cruz said. “The morbidity rate of Ebola poses a substantial danger to those who have been sent to combat it and, for the first time, this risk extends beyond the battlefield and directly threatens the safety of their families.” Cruz said that performing in the hazardous mission is the same as being deployed to a combat zone.

“Congress should give these service members the appropriate recognition and respect for their service in times of grave danger,” Cruz said. “The risks posed to our Armed Forces conducting their assigned mission in Africa warrants this consideration.” [Source: The Hill | Ramsey Cox | Nov. 24, 2014 ++]

## ***Combat Vet Enhanced Benefits Update ► Sen. Walsh Wants 5-yr Extension***

In one of his final acts as a U.S. senator, Iraq War veteran and Montana Democrat John Walsh implored the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee to double the period of automatic medical benefits for post-9/11 combat veterans. Speaking before the committee 20 NOV, Walsh asked members to increase the automatic eligibility for veterans to get medical care at Veterans Affairs facilities to a full decade from the current five years. The provision had been included in a massive VA reform bill considered by Congress earlier this year, but that legislation failed to pass the Senate in February. Walsh then introduced separate legislation, the Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, in March to expand eligibility to 15 years. "Extending the combat eligibility for prioritized care at the VA is an immediate and affordable option that we should pass this Congress," Walsh told committee members. "We shouldn't wait another day."

Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans automatically receive up to five years of health care at VA from date of separation, regardless of whether they have service-connected illnesses or injuries. Walsh told committee members that the time frame should be extended to 10 years because some conditions — including mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder — don't develop immediately after combat exposure. "As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq wind down, many American families are welcoming back sons, daughters, husbands and wives who are changed people. ... We owe them the opportunity to heal,

whether their wounds are seen or unseen," Walsh said. A national study on mental health conditions in the U.S., the National Comorbidity Survey, found that roughly 7 percent of people with PTSD seek treatment within a year of a traumatizing event and the average time patients seek treatment is more than five years.

Walsh pressed the Senate to include his proposal in any year-end legislation. Congress returns to Washington on 1 DEC and could debate several defense and veterans-related bills, including the fiscal 2015 defense authorization and appropriations bills. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, said 24 NOV he hopes to pass legislation by the end of the year that would improve the VA and Defense Department suicide prevention programs. Sanders said he hopes Congress will include Walsh's provision in any veterans legislation passed by 31 DEC. "Overall, I believe that the VA is doing a good job in providing mental health services for veterans, but we have to do better," Sanders said in statement. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Nov. 24, 2014 ++]

## **VA Medical Marijuana Policy Update ► H.R.5762**

Reps. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) introduced legislation (H.R.5762) to allow Department of Veterans Affairs doctors to make recommendations on patients' use of medical marijuana. The VA currently prevents its doctors from giving patients consultations about medical marijuana use. Blumenauer thinks that veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder could benefit from using medical marijuana. Moreover, the Oregon Democrat argued that allowing veterans to obtain medical marijuana in the open would prevent them from buying the drug illegally. "We should be allowing these wounded warriors access to the medicine that will help them survive and thrive, including medical marijuana, not treating them like criminals and forcing them into the shadows. It's shameful," Blumenauer said. Rohrabacher said the current policy is "antiquated" and prevents veterans from having access to a wide range of treatments for their psychological issues. "Conscience dictates that we not coldly ignore these desperate men and women, and that we remove government from its paternalistic stance between patient and doctor," Rohrabacher said. Earlier this year, the House adopted an amendment sponsored by Rohrabacher that would prevent the Justice Department from interfering with states'

implementation of their own medical marijuana laws. [Source: The Hill | Cristina Marcos | Nov. 21, 2014 ++]

## ***Vet Toxic Exposure Legislation Update ► H.R.5484 Hearing 19 NOV***

Representatives Dan Benishek (R-MI) and Mike Honda (D-CA) have introduced the Toxic Exposure Research Act (H.R. 5484) that will, when enacted into law, establish a national center at a VA medical facility for research on the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions of descendants of veterans exposed to toxic substances during their service in the U.S. Armed Forces. On November 19, at 2:00 p.m., in testimony before the Subcommittee on Health of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, VVA National President John Rowan expressed VVA's strong support for this legislation. "This bipartisan legislation is multigenerational in scope and will provide a process for evaluating exposures that may result in toxic wounds to veterans and their offspring," said Rowan. "The invisible wounds of war may not manifest for decades. Most tragically, these wounds may be passed on to subsequent generations, and our children and grandchildren should not have such burdens visited upon them."

Toxins, such as Agent Orange, are suspected of being responsible for birth defects, cancers, developmental disabilities, and other adverse health conditions in the children and grandchildren of veterans at a rate disproportionate to the general population. Veterans were exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides used during the Vietnam War.

During the Persian Gulf War, more than 100,000 troops were exposed to plumes of toxins after U.S. forces blew up the Iraqi ammo dumps containing chemical and biological weapons. These veterans and the next generation deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq were exposed to oil fires, as well as the toxic smog from burn pits in which chemicals, ordnance, and even body parts were incinerated.

"H.R. 5484 is a simple and straightforward proposal that will begin the needed research in the search for answers for the children, grandchildren, and in some cases, great-grandchildren who are manifesting a range of health issues suspected to be a result of a parent's exposure to toxins while serving in the armed forces. We applaud Congressmen Benishek and Honda for introducing this bill that

addresses the conditions that are so heart-breaking to so many families,” Rowan said. Vietnam Veterans of America ([www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org)) is the nation’s only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated to the needs of Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA’s founding principle is “Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another.” [Source: VVA Web Weekly Nov 20, 2014 ++]

## ***VFW Federal Charter ► H.R.5441 & S.2782 Would Include Women***

Identical bills making their way through both chambers of Congress will amend the federal charter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to include women. While thousands of women currently meet the eligibility requirement for joining the organization, the federal charter has never been updated to reflect their service in the military. The VFW is "currently an association of men who, as soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen, served the nation in wars and conflicts on foreign soil or in hostile waters," according to a summary provided by the Congressional Research Service, a division of the Library of Congress. An amendment, sponsored by Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL) replaces gender specific language with neutral terms by striking "men" from the charter and inserting "veterans." It also expands the association's purpose of assisting "widows" to "surviving spouses," the library said in its assessment. On 17 NOV, H.R.5441 passed the House by voice vote after 45 minutes of debate, according to the library's legislation tracking website. An identical bill, S.2782 has made its way the Senate. The bill now heads to the President for his signature.

The Congressional Budget Office said the changes would not require any increase to federal benefits or coffers. [Source: Daily Press | Ali Rockett | Nov. 19, 2014 ++]

## ***DoD Suicide Policy Update ► Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention S.2930***

A bipartisan group of senators introduced legislation (S.2930) 17 NOV designed to improve access to mental health services for troops and veterans and strengthen the Defense and Veterans Affairs departments' suicide prevention efforts. The Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention bill would require the Pentagon and VA to submit to

an independent review of their suicide prevention programs. It also would establish a website to provide consolidated information on mental health services available to veterans and seeks to improve VA's recruitment efforts for quality psychiatrists by establishing a student loan reimbursement program for doctors who sign on to work for VA for a number of years.

Clay Hunt was a former Marine who died in 2011 by suicide after having actively sought treatment for combat-related depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Before his death, Hunt performed humanitarian work in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake and was a key member of a group of former military personnel who formed the disaster relief organization Team Rubicon.

Sens. John McCain (R-AZ), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Richard Burr (R-NC), Roy Blunt (R-MO), Lisa Murkowski (R-AR) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) co-sponsored the bill to provide "additional resources for veterans who suffer from mental health disorders that place them on higher risk of suicide," according to a release "Our nation has a long way to go to decrease the rate of suicide among our veterans and we must do much better in fulfilling our responsibilities to care for those who have risked everything on behalf of their fellow Americans," the senators wrote. House lawmakers in July introduced their own Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans bill — legislation that would require VA to submit to yearly evaluations of its suicide and mental health programs, team with the National Guard to improve care for members and establish a peer support outreach program for veterans. The bill, sponsored by Reps. Jeff Miller (R-FL), Tim Walz (D-MN) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) also would require the Defense Department to establish a review process for troops who received unfavorable discharges possibly because of behavioral problems related to traumatic brain injury or PTSD. In July testimony before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Hunt's mother, Susan Selke, said the legislation would have helped her son and she urged its passage to save other veterans from suffering. "Clay's story details the urgency needed in addressing this issue," she said. "Despite his proactive and open approach to seeking care to address his injuries, the VA system did not adequately address his needs."

Selke, other family members and veterans advocates are scheduled to testify 19 NOV before the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee on military and veterans suicides. Joining them will be Dr. Harold Kudler, chief consultant for mental health

services for the Veterans Health Administration. "An estimated 22 veterans commit suicide every day, a shocking and unacceptable reality," wrote the sponsors of the Senate Clay Hunt suicide prevention bill. "This bipartisan legislation [would] improve and modernize the suicide prevention programs and resources available to our fighting men and women." [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Nov 18, 2014 ++]

## ***Following is a Summary of Veteran Related Legislation Introduced in the House and Senate SINCE the Last Bulletin was Published***

- H.R.5708: Veterans Care Financial Protection Act of 2014. A bill to protect individuals who are eligible for increased pension under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on the basis of need of regular aid and attendance from dishonest, predatory, or otherwise unlawful practices, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Cartwright, Matt [PA-17] (introduced 11/14/2014) Related Bills: H.R.5046, S.1993
- H.R.5731: Servicemembers Foreclosure Protection Act of 2014. A bill to extend foreclosure and eviction protections for servicemembers, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Grayson, Alan [FL-9] (introduced 11/18/2014)
- H.R.5740: Veterans Dependents' Parity Act. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to increase the maximum age for children eligible for medical care under the CHAMPVA program. Sponsor: Rep Fortenberry, Jeff [NE-1] (introduced 11/19/2014)
- H.R.5745: Recognizing Officers and Enlisted Men of the Korean Constabulary Act of 2014. A bill to direct certain actions of the United States Government with respect to recognizing the service and sacrifice of veterans of the Korean Constabulary, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep Terry, Lee [NE-2] (introduced 11/19/2014)
- H.R.5760: Funeral Honors for World War II Veterans Act. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Defense to provide seven person firing parties in the funeral honors details for World War II veterans. Sponsor: Rep Barber, Ron [AZ-2] (introduced 11/20/2014)
- H.R.5762: Veterans Equal Access Act of 2014. A bill to authorize Department of Veterans Affairs health care providers to provide recommendations and opinions to veterans regarding participation in State

marijuana programs. Sponsor: Rep Blumenauer, Earl [OR-3] (introduced 11/20/2014)

- S.2930: Clay Hunt SAV Act. A bill to direct the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide for the conduct of an evaluation of mental health care and suicide prevention programs of the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, to require a pilot program on loan repayment for psychiatrists who agree to serve in the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen McCain, John [AZ] (introduced 11/17/2014)
- S.2950: Physician Ambassadors Helping Veterans Act. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the Physician Ambassadors Helping Veterans program to seek to employ physicians at the Department of Veterans Affairs on a without compensation basis in practice areas and specialties with staffing shortages and long appointment waiting times. Sponsor: Sen Moran, Jerry [KS] (introduced 11/20/2014) Related Bills: H.R.5686
- S.2951: Veterans Dignified Burial Act. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to ensure that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs is informed of the interment of deceased veterans, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Sen Heller, Dean [NV] (introduced 11/20/2014) Related Bills: H.R.5369
- S.2965: Tax Benefits for Military Performing Ebola Humanitarian Services. A bill to provide that members of the Armed Forces performing hazardous humanitarian services in West Africa to combat the spread of the 2014 Ebola virus outbreak shall be entitled to tax benefits in the same manner as if such services were performed in a combat zone. Sponsor: Sen Cruz, Ted [TX] (introduced 11/20/2014) [Source: <https://beta.congress.gov> & <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills> Nov 28, 2014 ++]

## ***USAF Religious Expression Policy ► Revision Approved***

The Air Force's revised regulations governing religious expression contain a new clause guaranteeing airmen "the right to individual expressions of sincerely held beliefs." The revision to Air Force Instruction 1-1 was approved 7 NOV, and the Air Force said the revisions will "clarify guidance for how commanders should handle religious accommodation requests or when airmen's rights to free exercise are

questioned." Mike Berry, senior counsel and director of military affairs for the Liberty Institute, a nonprofit organization that supports religious freedom, said in a 13 NOV interview that the change brings the Air Force in line with Defense Department instruction 1300.17. Under the new rule, Berry said, the Air Force will only be able to deny an airmen the right to exercise his beliefs if there is a compelling government interest.

"The key is setting [free expression] as the default," Berry said. "In the previous version, the way that people interpreted it was overly cautious, or restrictive. What this does is reverse the playing field. It might be subtle, but it's a very important decision." In a 10 NOV release from the Liberty Institute, Berry called the revision "an important step in the right direction for people of faith serving in the Air Force." "Before these changes, the Air Force had the most problematic policy regarding religious accommodation for its members," Berry said. "Now they have a policy that, in writing, protects religious freedom to a greater degree than previously. But only time will tell if this written policy is put into practice." The new clause reads, in full, *"Every airman also has the right to individual expressions of sincerely held beliefs, to include conscience, moral principles or religious beliefs, unless those expressions would have an adverse impact on military readiness, unit cohesion, good order, discipline, health and safety, or mission accomplishment."* That sentence differs from a draft version of the rule in a key way. The draft — circulated earlier this year by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit organization that advocates for separation of church and state in the military — would have only prohibited those expressions if they "would have a real, not hypothetical, adverse impact." In a 6 JUN letter to Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh, MRFF President Mikey Weinstein said that the "real, not hypothetical" language would open the door to discrimination and unwanted proselytization in the Air Force. Weinstein feared that, under the proposed rule, an airman would have been allowed to express disdain or disgust for a fellow airman who is gay, lesbian or bisexual, as long as those opinions stem from "sincerely held" religious beliefs. Because those expressions would have only been prohibited if they had a "real, not hypothetical adverse impact," Weinstein said the draft rule would have set an impossibly high bar for airmen who wish to complain about such statements. Berry said removing the "real, not hypothetical" language potentially weakens the revised regulation, and the Liberty Institute would have preferred it remain. But Berry said his group is still happy with the changes. "It certainly doesn't destroy the underlying principle that religious

freedom will be protected in the military, but it's unfortunate that language was removed, because that would have been even stronger than the current language," Berry said. [Source: AirForceTimes | Stephen Losey | Nov. 17, 2014 ++]

## ***Military History ► Pearl Harbor | Will Lehner***

Will Lehner entered the Naval Reserves at age 17 in 1938. He was called to active service in 1940 and put on a World War I destroyer, the USS Ward. The ship "had been in mothballs" for years, Lehner said, so the crew worked to put it back in commission. Afterward, Lehner served in the boiler room and then as a third-class cook. The Ward set sail for Pearl Harbor, where it patrolled the entrance. There were four "WWI-old" destroyers that would alternate weeks of service. Saturday, Dec. 6, the Ward went out on patrol. Skipper W.W. Outerbridge had taken command just the day before. "He was just a young lieutenant and never had command before," Lehner said. At 3:30 a.m. on Dec. 7, the crew was woken up and ordered to battle stations. "At first we all thought that this was the new skipper. He's just checking us out to see how we work," Lehner said. After an hour and a half, they went back to bed. But at 6 a.m. they were sent back to general quarters. Lehner's station was aft-ammunition handler. But it was again uneventful – until just after 6:30 a.m. "The lookout spotted a submarine on the surface, going toward the entrance," Lehner said. "The skipper says our job is to stop anything that's trying to get in the harbor." At about 6:45 a.m., the Ward fired on that submarine. The first shot, from the No. 1 gun, missed. The No. 3 gun's shot hit the sub between the conning tower and the hull, Lehner said. He saw it roll over and go down. The Commanding Officer of the Ward on 13 DEC 1941 sent the following Action Report on the event:

From: Commanding Officer.

To: The Commandant, Fourteenth Naval District.

(1) Commander Destroyer Division EIGHTY.

(2) Commander Inshore Patrol.

Subject: Sinking of a Japanese Submarine by U.S.S. Ward.

1. While patrolling Pearl Harbor Entrance on Sunday, December 7, 1941, the U.S.S. Ward attacked an unidentified submarine in the Restricted Area off the Harbor. The facts are as follows:

1. At 0637 the Officer-of-the-Deck said, "Captain came on the bridge". A conning tower with periscope of submarine was visible. She was apparently headed for Pearl Harbor trailing the U.S.S. Antares. The Antares was standing toward the channel entrance towing a lighter.
2. At 0640 the attack was started. The Ward bore down on the submarine while accelerating from 5 to 25 knots.
3. At 0645 the Ward opened fire with No. 1 and 3 guns and began dropping depth charges. One shot was fired from each gun. The shot from No. 1 gun missed, passing directly over the conning tower. The shot from No. 3 gun fired at a range of 560 yards or less struck the submarine at the waterline which was the junction of the hull and coning tower. Damage was seen by several members of the crew. This was a square positive hit. There was no evidence of ricochet. The submarine was seen to heel over to starboard. The projectile was not seen to explode outside the hull of the submarine. There was no splash of any size that might result from an explosion or ricochet.
4. Immediately after being hit the submarine appeared to slow and sink. She ran into our depth charge barrage and appeared to be directly over an exploding charge. The depth charges were set for 100 feet.
5. The submarine sank in 1200 feet of water and could not be located with supersonic detector. There was a large amount of oil on the surface where the depth charges exploded.
6. The attack was made at 0645 which was before Pearl Harbor was bombed by Japanese planes.
7. A dispatch by voice transmission was sent to Commandant, Fourteenth Naval District at 0645 which stated:  
"We have attacked, fired upon, and dropped depth charges on a submarine operating in defensive sea areas."
8. The performance of duty by the officers and men during this attack was in accordance with the traditions of this service.

### **Pertinent Information**

- Appearance of submarine: Cylindrical tube about 80 feet long with small oval shaped conning tower. It had no deck. It was painted dark green and was covered with moss indicating that it had been at sea for a considerable period.

- Behavior during attack: In spite of the five minute run from the time of sighting and time of attack, the submarine apparently did not see or detect the Ward. It was making from 8 to 10 knots and was apparently bent on following the Antares into port. Exact distances are not known but at the time of the first shot the range was not more than 100 yards and for the second shot the range was 50 yards or less. The submarine passed very close to our stern.

Lehner said about a half hour after the sub went down they saw a small boat in restricted waters. The Ward approached and called the Coast Guard, which met the boat to escort it away. From over a mile out, Lehner said they saw planes diving down and a lot of smoke over Pearl. They figured it was either ongoing construction or Air Force exercises. "But about that time, two planes and bombers came over towards us, one on each side of the ship, and they dropped bombs on it," Lehner said. "You could see the pilots in them, and we saw the red balls on the plane so we knew. They were Japanese planes, and we said, we're under attack by the Japanese." The bombs missed the Ward, which kept dropping depth charges until the early afternoon, Lehner said.

When they ran out of ammunition, the Ward returned to Pearl to resupply. "That's when we saw all the damage," Lehner said. "There was oil on the water that was burning. There were bodies on the water. The Oklahoma was overturned, bottom-side-up, West Virginia was down and the Arizona was destroyed. That was burning... . It was a terrible mess and of course we didn't stay long, we got our ammunition going and got right back out. ... I hope I never see anything like that again." After the attack, the fear remained. Lehner said they were sure the Japanese "would come in that night and land troops and take over the island." Fortunately, they didn't.

Soon after, the Ward was converted into a fast-transport. Anti-aircraft guns replaced older models, and Higgins boats were added. The Ward joined the war efforts throughout the Pacific, picking up and landing troops. Landing forces on Ormoc Bay, Leyte in the Philippines, would be the Ward's final mission. It was Dec. 7, 1944, exactly three years since the Pearl Harbor attack. Kamikazes dove toward the Ward, Lehner said. "The third one got through, slammed into us and started a fire," he said. "The ammunition started to explode ... We were dead in the water."

The admiral gave orders to abandon ship. "But there were about five or six of us that were still aboard ship, trying to save our ship because this had been our home for over three years. ... We didn't want to leave it," Lehner said. The leadership insisted. If the men didn't leave the Ward, they'd go down with it. Lehner was picked up by a boat near the stern of the Ward. "I just walked to the back and stepped on the guardrail and got in the boat — didn't even get my feet wet," he said. From there, he was taken to a minesweeper and back to Leyte. "It so happened that the skipper of that ship that fired the first shot [Dec. 7, 1941] was the skipper that had to fire the shot to sink the Ward, W.W. Outerbridge," Lehner said. The Ward crew gathered and was shipped back state-side. Lehner spent months in an Oakland hospital recovering from battle fatigue. He received a medical discharge in 1945, ending his plan to make a career of the Navy.

He returned to St. Paul, Minn., and enrolled in school. But none of his classmates believed the Ward had sunk a sub at Pearl Harbor just before the attack. There was no record of that. Decades flew by. Lehner got married, raised a family, moved to Wisconsin and eventually retired. Then in 2000, National Geographic and Bob Ballard, the man who found the Titanic, launched a quest to find the sub. Lehner was invited to go along. He spent 14 days with the crew searching for it. Also aboard: Kichiji Dewa, a Japanese WWII veteran, who served on a mother-sub "that brought the mini-subs over to Hawaii piggy-back," Lehner said. Lehner baked him a cake for his birthday on the ship. "We're friends, we can be friends now. We both had a job to do. He joined the Navy when he was young. I joined the Navy when I was young, and we did our job, what we had to do," Lehner said. However, Lehner said Ballard's team was searching too far out. The funding was cut before the sub was found.

In 2002, the University of Hawaii and Terry Kerby decided to take two submersible submarines down 1200 feet, certain he'd found the sub. Lehner joined. They located the submarine the Ward sunk more than 60 years earlier. "It was such a relief," Lehner said. The Ward's No. 3 gun is on display outside the Veterans Service Building in St. Paul. [Source: American Legion: Legiontown | October 13, 2014 ++]

## ***VA's Top Doctor Named among Top 20 Most Influential People in Healthcare***

*Modern Healthcare Magazine* recently ranked Dr. Carolyn M. Clancy, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Interim Under Secretary for Health, as number 19 in its annual "100 Most Influential People in Healthcare" poll. Dr. Clancy has appeared on the publication's notable list for 11 straight years. "This is a well-deserved recognition of Dr. Clancy's expertise, knowledge, judgment and informed approach to developing and implementing new initiatives here at VA," said VA Secretary Robert McDonald. "As anyone who knows and works with Dr. Clancy can attest, she is a person of enormous integrity, tireless work ethic and a deep love and respect for Veterans. As VA undergoes a transformation focused on delivering the best outcomes for patients, Dr. Clancy brings a dedication to quality and safety that is exemplary."

As Interim Under Secretary for Health at VA, Dr. Clancy oversees the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), the Nation's largest integrated healthcare system. VHA provides care for millions of Veterans at 1,700 hospitals, clinics, long-term care facilities and Readjustment Counseling Centers.

Dr. Clancy most recently joined VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald in launching VA's [Blueprint for Excellence](#). The Blueprint outlines the steps VA will be taking to improve performance, promote a positive culture of service, advance healthcare innovation for Veterans and the country and increase access to care and accountability.

Prior to assuming the duties of the Interim Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Clancy joined VA in August of 2013 as Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health, for Quality, Safety and Value, where she served as the Chief Quality Management Officer for VHA. A general internist and health services researcher, Dr. Clancy is a graduate of Boston College and the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Dr. Clancy holds an academic appointment at George Washington University School of Medicine (Clinical Associate Professor, Department of Medicine) and serves as Senior Associate Editor, Health Services Research and is a member of numerous health-related editorial boards.

## ***Bipartisan Veterans Suicide Prevention Act Passes House***

Washington, DC [12/9/14] – Today, the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (Clay Hunt SAV) Act passed in the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill was introduced in July by Representatives Tim Walz (D-MN), House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Chairman Jeff Miller (R-FL), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and named in honor of the late Iraq and Afghanistan War Veteran and suicide prevention advocate Clay Hunt. The bill now moves to the Senate for consideration.

“The Clay Hunt SAV Act represents a major step forward in the fight to end veteran suicide. I’m pleased the House took action and moved it forward today. I urge my colleagues in the Senate to do the same without delay. Let’s work together to send this bipartisan bill to the President for his signature,” Rep. Walz, the highest ranking enlisted soldier to ever serve in Congress, said. “The fight, however, does not end after this bill becomes law. There is still more that must be done to improve mental health care for our veterans. I will continue working with my colleagues in Congress, veterans, and veterans’ advocates to ensure that improving care for our warriors remains a top priority.”

“Despite record mental health staffing and budget levels at the Department of Veterans Affairs, today’s veterans are falling victim to the invisible wounds of war all too often. An average of 18 to 22 veterans take their own lives each day - a heartbreaking statistic that has remained unchanged for more than a decade. In passing the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, the House took an important step toward putting an end to this grim status quo,” Rep. Jeff Miller, Chairman, House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, said. “The Clay Hunt SAV Act will ensure VA’s mental health and suicide prevention efforts receive crucial independent, third party oversight while creating a greater accounting of available services and fostering an enhanced community approach to delivering veterans suicide prevention and mental health care treatment, which is why I urge my colleagues in the Senate to join me in supporting it.”

“Currently, there are over 2 million Post 9/11 Veterans across the country, and this number will only increase as our military force structure continues to draw

down. As the nature of war changes, the injuries our warriors sustain also change. Increasingly, theirs are invisible wounds, which do not have simple treatment and do not always manifest immediately,” Representative Duckworth said. “Just as these Veterans remained faithful to our country on the battlefield, it is our turn as their Representatives to remain faithful to them and it is our responsibility as a nation to, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, ‘care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.’ This responsibility includes ensuring that when our service men and women make the brave decision to seek help, they get the quality assistance and treatment they deserve in a timely manner. I am proud that this bipartisan legislation takes a crucial step in reducing Veteran suicide.”

“IAVA welcomes this tremendous next step in getting the Clay Hunt SAV Act to the President’s desk and especially applauds Chairman Miller, and Reps. Walz and Duckworth for their leadership in combating veteran suicide,” said IAVA CEO and Founder Paul Rieckhoff. “Today’s vote is the result of a year of IAVA-driven action that brought the epidemic of veteran suicide out of the shadows and into the public spotlight. But now we need the Senate to step up and follow the House’s lead. Twenty two veterans continue to die by suicide each day. Our veterans deserve the 21st century care we promised them when they put on the uniform.”

Clay Hunt epitomized what it meant to live a life of service, both in and out of uniform. Hunt, who helped countless veterans overcome their demons, tragically took his own life in March of 2011. The legacy he left behind, however, will live on for generations to come.

A 2012 study from the Department of Veterans Affairs estimated that 22 veterans are lost each day to suicide. That’s over 150 veteran suicides per week, over 600 per month, and over 8,000 per year. To put these staggering numbers in perspective, it is estimated that more veterans take their own lives each year than have been Killed in Action since 9/11.

The Clay Hunt SAV Act seeks to quell this growing epidemic by:

**Increasing Access to Mental Health Care and Capacity at VA to Meet Demand**

Requires the VA to create a one-stop, interactive website to serve as a centralized source of information regarding all VA mental health services for veterans.

Addresses the shortage of mental health care professionals by authorizing the VA to conduct a student loan repayment pilot program aimed at recruiting and retaining psychiatrists.

### **Improving the Quality of Care and Boosting Accountability at VA**

Requires a yearly evaluation of all mental health care and suicide prevention practices and programs at the VA to find out what's working and what's not working and make recommendations to improve care.

### **Developing a Community Support System for Veterans**

Establishes a peer support and community outreach pilot program to assist transitioning Servicemembers with accessing VA mental health care services.

Representative Tim Walz (D-MN), spent 24 years in the Army National Guard and is the highest ranking enlisted soldier to ever serve in Congress. Representative Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) served in the U.S. Army for 23 years and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Illinois Army National Guard.

## ***VA Implements National Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative***

As part of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) ongoing effort to improve Veterans' access to healthcare, VA is announcing the launch of a national Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative (HSI) to encourage diabetic Veterans receiving VA care to seek support to lower the risk of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar). The new initiative will enable Veterans living with diabetes to work more closely with their VA clinicians to personalize health care goals and improve self-management of the disease.

"The Hypoglycemic Safety Initiative is designed to enable Veterans and their families, partners and caregivers to create a personal plan for blood sugar management based upon the Veteran's unique health goals," said Dr. Carolyn Clancy, Interim Under Secretary for Health. "Our objective is to change how diabetes is managed in VA and the United States, and to help patients improve their personal well-being, not just manage their numbers."

Diabetes is one of the most prevalent diseases among older Americans, with one in four Veterans suffering from the disease. Recent clinical studies indicate that when diet, exercise and stress reduction are not successful, the benefits of achieving intensive blood sugar control with medication are less effective. This is especially true for hypoglycemic agents (pills or insulin) used for those patients who have had diabetes for many years and those who have additional serious health conditions.

HSI's key elements emphasize shared decision-making and universal health literacy to ensure Veterans understand the health information provided by their VA health care team. This includes the "teach back method" where Veterans and their caregivers are asked questions to be certain they understand and can act on key elements of self-management, including diet, exercise, glucose monitoring, managing medications, and insulin injections. The focus of the HSI is to help raise awareness among patients who may be at risk.

"Hypoglycemia has only recently been prioritized as a national public health issue, but Federal agencies are taking a leadership role in addressing the problem. We are proud to note the collaboration of VA with Department of Health and Human Services in aggressively addressing this problem," Dr. Clancy added.