

## April Social

No social in March, so our next event will be a dinner social. A separate invite will be sent out soon, but please save the date!

Speaker: Cmdr Stacey Mersel, USCG  
Billet: Deputy Sector Commander,  
Sector Anchorage, USCG  
Date: April 27  
Location: Coast International Inn

Coast Guard Sector Anchorage is the sector with the largest geographical area, exercising authority in a jurisdiction extending through-out Western Alaska, The North Slope, and the Aleutian Islands through Prince William Sound.

Sector Anchorage has several subordinate units, which include Marine Safety Unit Valdez, Several Marine Safety Detachments, Several Cutters and an Aids To Navigation Team. Sector Anchorage's missions include, but are not limited to: Search And Rescue, Pollution Prevention & Response, Waterways Management, Port Security, Vessel Inspections, and Investigations.

In 2014 Sector Anchorage was relocated from Downtown Anchorage to a state-of-the-art facility attached to the Alaska National Guard Armory on Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

In 2015, Commander Stacey Mersel reported aboard and currently serves as the Deputy Sector Commander for Sector Anchorage in Alaska. Her

responsibilities include Alternate Captain of the Port and the execution of Coast Guard missions throughout Western Alaska and the Arctic, the Service's largest and most geographically diverse area of responsibility.

Cmdr Mersel will speak to the Chapter about the wide-ranging and critical operational requirements of the Coast Guard in Alaska and our Arctic environment.

## JROTC Awards

Every spring we provide MOAA medal/ribbon certificate sets to leading JROTC candidates at local high schools and in Fairbanks. Our annual JROTC awards are coming up. Joe Sheehan will be presenting the Awards at the Paul Brodale High School in Fairbanks on April 20 (with our thanks). If you are interested in being a presenter this year in the Anchorage area, please let us know! There will be a Dining-out for April 23rd for 6 Anchorage and the Valley JROTC program (West, South, Eagle River, Colony, Wasilla, & Bartlett). We will also have presentations at an East High School event with date TBD.

Separately, MOAA National has changed the policy of providing ROTC/JROTC medal-certificate sets. Chapters will now purchase the sets at the member store. Because of unit expectations, we have gone ahead and purchased them this year and will discuss with the chapter at our next opportunity to ensure there are no

objections to continuing this tradition when current stocks are exhausted.

## May Social

We are coordinating with MOAA National for the visit from MOAA National on May 25. The President of MOAA, LtGen Dana Atkins, USAF (Ret) will join us. We are also coordinating with JBER and Alaska Command (ALCOM) for a visit with LtGen Kenneth Wilsbach, the Commander, Alaskan Command. More to follow!

## February Social

The chapter attended the ASYMCA "Salute to the Military" on Feb 18.



A great time was had by all, and a sterling group of warriors were honored at this wonderful event!

## MOAA News

*Tom Philpott  
Mar 2, 2017*

**VA Costs Could Balloon With 'Choice' Reform, New 'AO' Ailments:** VA Secretary David J. Shulkin this week announced that his priorities for improving services to veterans include expanding access to private sector



health care in part by asking Congress to remove two irksome cost controls.

Under the often-criticized VA Choice Program, enacted in 2014 in response to a wait-time scandal across the VA health system, veterans can seek private sector care at the VA's expense only if they face wait times longer than 30 days for a VA appointment or they live more than 40 miles from a VA health care facility.

Congress set these restrictions to limit the exodus of patients to private sector care during what was seen as a temporary crisis. Without the restrictions, the Congressional Budget Office predicted, VA Choice Program users would burn through in less than a year the \$10 billion set aside for a three-year emergency program.

The Trump administration now wants Choice extended and expanded, as do key congressional leaders, despite warnings from veteran service organizations that shifting too many patients and too much funding to private sector care could begin a slide toward full privatization of VA health care.

Shulkin told attendees at a conference of the American Legion Tuesday he wants Congress to extend authority for Choice past its Aug. 7 sunset date "because we need those resources to be able to provide the care for veterans that they deserve."

More surprisingly, Shulkin said the VA will seek authority to redesign the VA Choice Program to provide faster access to private sector care, which "means we're going to need to eliminate the 40-mile/30-day rule." President Trump, he added, is committed to such moves to ensure more timely care.

VA policymakers made those early cost projections by congressional auditors look wildly high. They did so by continuing to serve as gatekeepers on access to non-VA care, referring patients whenever possible to approved networks of civilian providers, and leaving veterans frustrated, angry, and complaining to Congress.

By early 2016, the VA had revised the 40-mile rule twice to broaden eligibility, first by replacing "as-the-crow flies" distance with driving distance to the nearest VA hospital or clinic and later mandating a VA facility must have at least one primary care physician to be counted in the 40-mile rule.

Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.), a physician who now chairs the House Veteran's Affairs Committee, noted the VA health budget has climbed from \$97 billion in 2009 to almost \$180 billion this year while the VA hired 100,000 more health care employees, he told Legionnaires. Still, Roe said, he wants to see access to private sector care expanded and veterans put "in charge of health care decisions."

"If you feel like you're not getting the care you need at the VA hospital, then you should have the choice to go where

you want," Roe said. Veterans deserve "the absolute best health care that can be provided by anybody in the world," he added.

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), an architect of the VA Choice Program, also wants it expanded. He said the VA "does the best job of anybody on [post-traumatic stress disorder], traumatic brain injury, prostheses" and other select health services. But veterans shouldn't have to wait to get routine medical care, McCain told the American Legion conferees. They should have the same access to local physicians and hospitals as do Medicare patients.

Shulkin listed nine other priorities, some with significant price tags, including modernizing the VA's electronic medical records. But one pending issue he didn't discuss could increase VA costs by more than many of his other priorities combined. Shulkin is said to be weeks away from deciding whether hundreds of thousands more Vietnam War veterans will be eligible for VA compensation and health care for new illnesses linked to Agent Orange and other herbicides used during the war.

Among ailments under final review is hypertension (high blood pressure) which afflicts two thirds of elderly Americans to include Vietnam War-era veterans. Other conditions that might be added to the list of 17 ailments the VA presumes were caused by wartime herbicide exposure are bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and conditions with Parkinson's disease-like symptoms.



A year ago, the National Academy of Medicine, formerly known as the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, delivered to the VA the last of a series of reviews of scientific studies on ailments possibly linked to chemicals used in Vietnam to defoliate jungles where the enemy could hide. The Academy concluded recent research strengthens the association to herbicide exposure of bladder cancer and hypothyroidism, finding “limited or suggestive” evidence of a link. That was an upgrade from “inadequate or insufficient” evidence found earlier. The report also affirmed limited or suggestive evidence that herbicides could cause hypertension. It also found “no rational basis” not to add conditions that cause Parkinson's-like symptoms from the limited or suggestive evidence category.

Dr. Ralph Loren Erickson, chief consultant of post-deployment health services for the Veterans Health Administration, said the Academy findings were reviewed for months by a VA technical work group that included experts in disability compensation, environmental medicine, public health, toxicology, epidemiology, and legal requirements of relevant statutes. That work then was reviewed by a strategic work group and finally a task force of senior VA leaders. Shulkin received their final packet of recommendations Feb. 17, three days after he was sworn into office.

“It doesn't take much imagination to realize how broad it would be and the costs involved” if Shulkin, backed by

staff work, decides high blood pressure is a service-connected condition for Vietnam veterans, said Rep. Tim Walz (Minn.), ranking Democrat on the House Veteran's Affairs Committee.

“I trust the secretary. I know he'll do what's best for veterans,” said Walz. “But I think we put him in a very difficult position” where a decision to add high blood pressure to the list of presumptive conditions also would force him to ask for billions of dollars more to process claims, award compensation, and provide care for a condition common in any adult population, or else cut back on other VA services.

DoD estimates 3.4 million service members deployed to Southeast Asia from 1964-75. If 75 percent still are alive and, based on age, two thirds have high blood pressure, that's almost 1.7 million more veterans potentially filing new compensation claims.

Asked whether the VA takes cost into account for such decisions, Erickson said no. “I suppose at some later date, someone who is paid to count beans and to cost things out will probably come up with a number,” he said. “But as it relates to the decision for presumption, cost is not a factor. What we are guided by is if the scientific evidence in the peer review literature is sufficient to support presumption.” Erickson said the drafting of new rules following the secretary's decision on possible new presumptions would take several months because other federal

agencies, including the Office of Management and Budget.

## Defense News

**CENTCOM commander supports troop increase in Afghanistan:** The head of U.S. Central Command told lawmakers on Capitol Hill Thursday that he supports increasing the number of U.S. forces in Afghanistan and he also addressed growing concerns about mission creep in Syria and the war against the Islamic State group. (Military Times)

**Pentagon Blocks Littoral Combat Ship Overrun From a GAO Report:** The Pentagon office that reviews information to determine whether it's classified has blocked publication of potentially embarrassing data on cost overruns for the first two vessels bought under the Navy's primary Littoral Combat Ship contracts, according to a new congressional audit. (Bloomberg)



**US general says Russia has deployed banned missile:** The U.S. military for the first time is publicly accusing Russia of deploying a land-based cruise missile in violation of a Cold War-era nuclear arms treaty. (Associated Press)

**U.S. Navy ship changes course after Iran vessels come close:** U.S. official





Multiple fast-attack vessels from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps came close to a U.S. Navy ship in the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, forcing it to change direction, a U.S. official told Reuters on Monday. (Reuters)

**Air Force details multiple 'unsafe and unprofessional' Russian aircraft intercepts:** Russian aircraft conducted several "unsafe and unprofessional" encounters with both U.S. and NATO aircraft on Feb. 10, according to additional information provided by the Air Force. (Defense News)

**This week in Congress Military readiness takes center stage:** Lawmakers will take a close look at military readiness and quality of life issues in a series of hearings this week, and Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin will make his first appearance before Congress in his new Cabinet post. : (Military Times)

### Little Known American Heroes Ira Hayes



Ira Hamilton Hayes, also known as Chief Falling Cloud to his Pima Native American tribe, was part of the small group who raised the American flag at Iwo Jima during WWII. He participated in the invasion of the island as well as

the subsequent battle for it. His image has been immortalized in the now famous war picture.

### Medal of Honor Col Theodore Roosevelt



A century after his July 1, 1898, charge up San Juan Hill in Cuba, the nation awarded the Medal of Honor to U.S. Army Col. Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt.

To some the award seemed overdue. To others, it was unearned. Roosevelt fought in his famous battle during the Spanish-American War, which lasted from 1898 to 1901.



Although he served two terms as president, wrote 40 books, and earned the Nobel Peace Prize, Roosevelt called San Juan Hill his finest moment.

### 2016/17 Calendar of Events

General dates of interest are noted below. Membership meetings are generally on the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month except as noted.

- April 11-14: MOAA Storming the Hill
- Apr 27: Dinner Social
- May 25: Dinner Social
- Jun 14: Army Birthday
- Aug 4: Coast Guard Birthday
- Sep 18: Air Force Birthday
- Sep 21: MOAA First Dinner of Season
- Oct 13: Navy Birthday
- Oct 26: Dinner Social
- Nov 10: Marine Corps Birthday
- Dec 1#: Christmas Social
- Jan 25 (2018): Dinner Social TBD
- Feb 22: ASYMCA Salute to the Military
- Mar 22: Dinner Social

### Contact Information

Please share this newsletter with active duty, Guard, Reservist and retired Officers you know and encourage them to join. Contact information below:

- E-mail: [c2burton@gci.net](mailto:c2burton@gci.net)
- Phone: (907)644-6202
- Address: 1143 M Ct.  
Anchorage, AK 99501
- Annual chapter dues: \$25; on or about January of each year, on-line payment may be made at <https://chapterdues.moaa.org/Membership.aspx> or a check payable to Captain Cook Chapter.
- Chapter site: [www.MOAA-AK.COM](http://www.MOAA-AK.COM)

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