

## USPHS & NOAA Veteran Recognition

This month, Senator Lesil McGuire introduced SB 184, a bill to recognize the US Public Health Service and NOAA Commissioned Officers as veterans in the state of Alaska.

Through this bill, Senator McGuire recognizes her father's previous service with the USPHS along with the many officers serving the medical and sanitation needs throughout Alaska. At the same time NOAA servicemember, including our member and legislative liaison Captain Bob Pawlowski, will see their service in the charting and mapping of Alaska properly recognized at last.

Currently, veterans are only those who served in the armed forces. This bill would change many statutes to reflect those that served in the uniformed services and bring the state's definition in line with the federal definition and Title 38 – Veterans Benefits. This bill also supports the mission of serving the seven uniformed services. Bob will keep the chapter apprised of the bill's progress.

## February Event

This month, we supported the ASYMCA Salute to the Military on February 20, where 12 outstanding junior enlisted military members were honored for their service. General Philip Breedlove, Commander of the U.S. European Command. As always, it is heart-warming to see the level of support that

Anchorage has for our military, and it gives all of us a chance to say "Thank you".



## March Dinner Social

Our next dinner social will be as noted below.

- Date: March 24, 2016
- Speaker: Mr. John Parrott, Manager, Ted Stevens International Airport, State of Alaska Department of Transportation
- Time: 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm.
- Location: Coast International Inn
- Address: 3450 Aviation Ave, Anchorage, AK 99502, USA
- Phone: 907-243-2233

Please join us for what we're sure will be an informative and entertaining evening!

## Future Events

On April 28, our tentative speaker will be Mr. Steve Ribuffo, the Director of the port of Anchorage.

## 2016 Captain Cook Chapter Dues

We normally tuck our annual reminder about dues at the end of the newsletter. However, this year, our intrepid

Secretary, Edie Grunwold, is dragging our collective self into the brave new world. We now have on-line dues paying, thanks to her research and coordination with MOAA National. When you have a moment, enjoy the new experience at the below web-link:

<https://chapterdues.moaa.org/Membership.aspx>

As always, thank you for being a part of our chapter and your support to MOAA! Edie, thanks from all of us for the legwork involved in working this out!

## Current MOAA National Issues *Military Health System*

*February 26, 2016*

This has been a busy week for the Military Health System (MHS) on Capitol Hill. It isn't a secret Congress is intently focused on reforming the MHS, including the TRICARE program, and held several hearings this week on that topic.

MOAA and The Military Coalition submitted written testimony for these hearings, stressing the need for system improvements, and not just fee increases for beneficiaries. Particular areas of concern include:

- Unresponsive TRICARE Prime appointment and referral systems
- Lower patient loads of military vs. civilian providers
- Outdated payment systems for pediatric care

- Wellness and case management program shortfalls
- Inconsistent/inadequate coverage for Reserve Component beneficiaries

At a Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee hearing Tuesday, Chairman Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said, "...we need to learn how we can redesign an outdated 20th Century health care system that's become unsustainable and does not work as well as it should for service men and women and their families."

Just how outdated is the system? That was addressed by a panel of witnesses from the civilian health care industry, and was followed by a panel of MHS leadership, including the service Surgeons General.

The first panel focused on positive trends within civilian health care, which the witnesses said is becoming much more consumer-driven.

Provider performance has become more transparent to a more discerning consumer, with access becoming a key measure of system performance. Access to care was highlighted as what sets a first-class system apart from the rest.

Civilian health care industry leaders also discussed how payments to providers are changing - rapidly. More civilian health organizations are basing their payments to doctors, hospitals, and other providers on value and quality outcomes, rather than simply paying a

set fee for each patient visit. In other words, civilian payment systems are focused more and more on rewarding superior system performance and penalizing underperforming providers - doctors whose patients don't recover as well, or hospitals with higher-than-normal readmission or infection rates, for example.

The second panel of defense and service medical leaders discussed the current state of the MHS. While described as providing excellent operational and superior survival rates for battlefield injuries, the MHS struggles with providing consistent peacetime beneficiary care.

They acknowledged their own internal surveys show the MHS is fragmented, administratively cumbersome, and plagued by difficulties in accessing care. From access to military hospitals to the design of the TRICARE network contracts, the system has not kept up with modern practices. The surgeons general acknowledged these issues and vowed to make changes. Success depends on improving access to care, as well as better aligning the readiness mission with beneficiary care. "I think TRICARE as its design is really antiquated. I wouldn't give it a B," said Sen. Graham. "...we're going to look at TRICARE and turn it upside down and make it more transparent and make it more accountable..."



*Tripler Army Medical Center*

MOAA will work with Congress in the coming months in our ongoing efforts to improve access and other problem areas while doing our best to protect against imposing disproportionate fee increases.

"We're pleased Congress seems serious about improving care delivery and healthy outcomes for military beneficiaries, and is digging deeper than just fee hikes," said MOAA Deputy Director of Government Relations, Capt. Kathy Beasley, USN (Ret).

### **Current MOAA National Issues FY17 Budget and Cost-shifting**

*February 12, 2016*

On Feb. 9, the administration unveiled its proposed FY17 budget. The request is strikingly similar to the administration's budget proposal last year and once again calls for a military pay raise cap, commissary funding cuts, and higher TRICARE fees.

### **Military Pay and Retirement**

Under the Pentagon budget proposal, service-members would receive a capped pay raise for the fourth year in a row. The proposed 1.6 percent pay raise is another .5 percent below the average American's 2.1 percent raise, as measured by the Employment Cost Index (ECI). The

proposed cap further expands the pay gap between the military and the private sector to 3.1 percent. The budget touts this as "the largest raise in four years;" but each of the last seven military raises have been lower than any raise during the previous 48 years.

The budget proposal also proposes adjustments to the new, blended retirement system that will take effect for new service entrants in 2018. The new system will cut military retired pay for this group by 20 percent, in order to provide up to a five percent government match to federal Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) accounts held by military members.

Under current law, government matching begins when a service-member reaches three years of service. DoD proposes delaying government matching until the fifth year of service. The budget also proposes extending the government match - which stops at 26 years - until retirement, and increasing the government matching potential to 6 percent. The Pentagon is also pushing for greater flexibility on the continuation pay portion of the new system that comes at the 12 year mark.

MOAA supports improving the match and extending it for the full career, as other 401(k)-like programs do. But we're not in favor of delaying the match until the fifth year of service for junior troops.

### Commissary

One surprising proposal was a \$221 million cut to commissary funding.

"That's perplexing," said MOAA President Lt. Gen. Dana Atkins, USAF (Ret). "Last

year, the administration proposed cutting \$300 million as the first step toward privatizing commissaries. After Congress restored the funding, administration officials agreed the benefit needs to be preserved, and they'd accept whatever level of savings might be realized by business efficiencies without reducing the benefit. To us, that's inconsistent with proposing a \$221 million cut. Without context, that seems considerably more than any efficiencies could be expected to generate in one year."

MOAA will push to restore commissary funding to a level consistent with reasonable expectations of system efficiency improvements that won't affect the value of the benefit.

### Other Recent National Military News

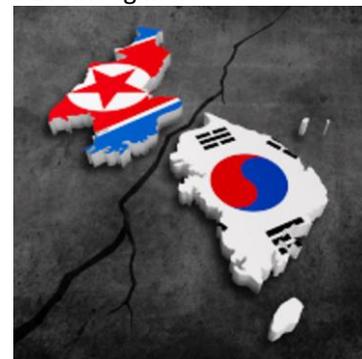
**Should Islamic State's actions be labeled "genocide"?** Whether actions taken by the Islamic State constitute genocide has become a topic of heated debate on Capitol Hill, and Secretary of State John Kerry is tasked with answering that question by March 17 under a measure passed by Congress last year. "We want it so that when we use the label it does set triggers. This is an opportunity for the Obama administration to set that precedent. This is a very consequential debate," said Cameron Hudson of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. *The Washington Post (tiered subscription model) (2/24)*

**US may send military advisers to aid Nigeria in fighting Boko Haram.** US Special Operations advisers may be heading to Nigeria soon to help local troops fight Boko Haram, military officials

say. Brig. Gen. Donald Bolduc, the top US special-ops commander for Africa, recommended the deployment of noncombat advisers. New Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari has promised a vigorous military campaign against the militant terrorist group that has ravaged Nigeria and neighboring countries.

*The New York Times (2/25)*

**UN is finalizing tighter sanctions on N. Korea:** The UN Security Council is putting the finishing touches on a new slate of sanctions against North Korea, called the toughest in two decades. "These sanctions, if adopted, would send an unambiguous and unyielding message to the DPRK regime.



The world will not accept your proliferation. There will be consequences for your actions," said Samantha Power, the US ambassador to the UN. Sanctions include blocking aviation and rocket fuel imports along with mineral resource exports, and mandatory inspections of North Korean cargo coming into or going out of a country.

*Stars and Stripes (2/26)*

**McCain: Senate Armed Services Committee to review combatant commands:** The Senate Armed Services Committee is considering reshaping, and

perhaps even eliminating, combatant commands that the Defense Department has set up around the world. "We need to figure out whether we need the ones that we have," said committee Chairman Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who added that the panel will examine the commands this year. McCain has questioned why Africa Command is headquartered in Germany and the necessity of having both a Northern Command and a Southern Command.

*Defense One (2/25)*

**Budget cuts forcing Army to focus only on current readiness, leaders say:** Army leaders told lawmakers that budget cuts are forcing the military branch to focus on current readiness while putting future readiness at risk. "We're mortgaging our future readiness because we have to ensure success in today's battles," Patrick Murphy, the acting Army secretary, told the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense.

*Army Times (2/24)*

**General: Iraq's battle for Mosul may require US help:** Iraq might use as many as 12 brigades to retake the city of Mosul from the Islamic State, and the US is ready to provide support, according to Army Maj. Gen. Richard Clarke, US land forces commander in Iraq. Iraqi officials, along with US advisers, are weighing how best to mount the attack. Any role the US plays will be with the Iraqi government's approval, Clarke said, adding that it "still remains to be seen, what exact capabilities will be needed. It really goes to what the Iraqis need and when."

*Military Times (2/23)*

**Power restored in Afghan city after US hits Taliban with airstrikes:** Power has

been restored to Kabul, Afghanistan, after US airstrikes hit Taliban positions, driving the insurgents away and breaking an impasse between the militants and Afghan forces. The airstrikes allowed repair crews to reach power lines that had been down since late January.

*The New York Times (2/23)*

**US, China near pact on sanctions against N. Korea:** The US and China are close to reaching an agreement on UN sanctions against North Korea for its recent rocket launch and nuclear testing, but tensions remain high over disputed areas of the South China Sea, officials say. US Secretary of State John Kerry and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met in Washington this week.

*The Associated Press (2/23)*

**Key Democrat says he'd consider defense budget increase:** Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., the top Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, says he's amenable to a defense budget increase proposed by Republicans. "I think \$609 billion in the president's budget is a pretty solid starting point, and I'm open to the idea that maybe we need a little more," he said. House Republicans are calling for a hike of up to \$23 billion.

*Defense News (2/22)*

**Obama seeks to close Gitmo, bring detainees onto US soil:** President Barack Obama has sent Congress a plan that could lead to the closure of the Guantanamo Bay prison, and the transfer of as many as 60 detainees to US detention facilities. The move would cost \$475 million, but would save the country \$85 million a year in reduced operating costs.

*Bloomberg (2/23), The New York Times (2/23)*

**Officials: Islamic State hurting from US airstrikes, falling oil prices:** US airstrikes and the drop in oil prices are taking a financial toll on the Islamic State, US officials say. The militant group is cutting its fighters' salaries and reducing weapons spending as the US hits sites where it keeps its cash and produces oil, the officials say. "The bank vaults aren't being replenished. It is a fairly closed economy. And you can only tax and extort people so many times," said former Treasury Department official Matthew Levitt. *Los Angeles Times (2/21)*

**Military projects face visibility threat from advanced tech:** Advances in technology are making once-covert operations around the world visible to anyone with an Internet connection, so US Special Operations Command must use caution, write Harry Oppenheimer and Aaron Picozzi from the Council on Foreign Relations. For example, commercial satellite imagery allowed IHS Jane's to pick up on the expansion of an airstrip in Syria. "While it's nothing new that a Russian military intelligence unit could complete a comprehensive study of a Syrian airstrip, it is novel that a supporter of the self-declared Islamic State could use open-source information to perform this type of analysis full time," they write. *Defense One (2/19)*

**Bill would tie veterans' cost-of-living hike to Social Security increase:** Lawmakers want to make sure that veterans' cost-of-living increases occur automatically and are permanently linked to Social Security COLA increases.

The Social Security increases are automatic under current law, but increases for veterans have to be approved each year. "The current process leaves veterans and their families, who depend on these benefits to make ends meet, in limbo until Washington actually passes legislation," said Rep. Ralph Abraham, R-La., who sponsored the bill. [\*Military Times\* \(2/20\)](#)

**Air Force looks beyond stealth to laser weapons, "intelligent" autonomous aircraft:** With other nations catching up to US advances in stealth aircraft and precision weapons, the Air Force is requesting \$2.5 billion for research focusing on new areas such as laser weapons and autonomous flight.



The goals include systems that enable aircraft to defend themselves with weapons that fire at the speed of light and drones that can navigate on their own, taking into account multiple factors. [\*Defense News\* \(2/20\)](#)

**US Navy commander: Situation in South China Sea isn't US-China fight:** Vice Adm. Joseph Aucoin, commander of the Navy's 7th Fleet, says the situation in the South China Sea shouldn't be viewed as a fight between the US and China. "This shouldn't seem provocative. What we're trying to ensure is that all countries, no matter size or strength, can pursue their

interests based on the law of the sea," he said. He added that China's addition of a missile system on one of the disputed islands in the region wouldn't deter the US from flying military planes over the area.

[\*Yahoo/The Associated Press\* \(2/21\)](#)

**Islamic State bombs Syrian cities as Kerry announces possible cease-fire:**

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for bombs that killed almost 130 people in two Syrian cities Sunday. The bombings occurred the same day US Secretary of State John Kerry announced a provisional agreement on a cease-fire that could begin in just a few days. He noted that some parties might not comply.

[\*The Associated Press\* \(2/21\)](#)

**Pentagon seeks further changes in retirement program:**

The Defense Department's budget request for 2017 would make further adjustments to the military retirement system. "This is for ... senior enlisted and senior officers, and we think these are changes we've proposed before that would help us manage the force better," said Mike McCord, the Pentagon's comptroller. Changes include a delay of matching contributions for junior troops and an expansion of those contributions for senior service members.

[\*Military Times\* \(2/21\)](#)

**US shares info with Russia on Special Forces movements:**

Russia is receiving information from the US on the movements of American Special Forces in Syria. The information exchanges are aimed at preventing US casualties in Russian airstrikes. "We provided a geographical area that we asked them to

stay out of because of the risk to US forces," said Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook.

[\*Military Times\* \(2/18\)](#)

**GAO: MDA is falling short on mission to protect US homeland:**

A new Government Accountability Office report says the Missile Defense Agency is making risky purchases as it tries to improve US domestic missile defense. MDA's efforts "to prove it can defend the US homeland against the current ballistic missile threat have not been demonstrated."

[\*Defense News\* \(2/18\)](#)

**Air Force prepares for the future:**

The Air Force is closing in on its vision for the country's future air power that will lay the groundwork for acquisitions. "It won't be just one airframe that comes out of it. It'll be a family of systems that helps us make sure we can guarantee the air superiority that the joint force depends on," said Lt. Gen. Mike Holmes.

[\*Reuters\* \(2/18\)](#)

**Navy pursues plan to modify Tomahawks for anti-ship warfare:**

Within 10 years, Navy ships that now can fire Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles could use anti-ship missiles with a range of 1,000 nautical miles. The Navy's 2017 budget request includes \$434 million for Raytheon Tomahawk modification.

[\*USNI News\* \(2/19\)](#)

**US flyover in S. Korea seen as show of force:**

US F-22 fighter jets flew from a base in Japan to a base near Seoul, South Korea, today in a show of force intended to send a message to North Korea.



The flyover resembled previous instances in which the US has deployed warplanes in response to acts of aggression from the North.

[Military Times/The Associated Press \(2/17\)](#)

**House approves VA disability exams by local doctors:** Veterans would be allowed to use local doctors for disability examinations instead of having to travel to Department of Veterans Affairs facilities under a bill passed by the House last week. The bill would require the VA to compile information from local doctors and gauge progress on the bill's implementation.

### Early Medals of Honor

The Medal of Honor is awarded to those who serve and act far above and beyond the call of duty. This month, we look at those who helped establish the award, the senior honor a grateful nation can bestow upon earned gallantry

- The first Medals of Honor (Army) were awarded by and presented to six "Andrews Raiders" on March 25, 1863, by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, in his office in the War Department. Private Jacob Parrott, a Union Army volunteer from Ohio, became the first recipient of the medal, awarded for his volunteering for and participation in a raid on a

Confederate train in Big Shanty, Georgia on April 12, 1862 during the American Civil War. The six decorated raiders met privately afterward with President Lincoln in his office, in the White House.<sup>[24][133]</sup>

- The first Medal of Honor (Navy) was awarded by Secretary of War Stanton to St. Phillip on April 24, 1862 during the American Civil War and to 41 sailors on April 4, 1863 (17 for action during the Battle of Fort Jackson).
- The first Marine awarded the Medal of Honor (Navy) was John F. Mackie on July 10, 1863, for his rifle action aboard the USS *Galena* on May 15, 1862.

### Little Known American Heroes

#### Sgt. Reckless

This war hero isn't exactly human although she helped a great deal during the Korean War. Sergeant Reckless was a Mongolian mare who was beloved by the Marines for her incredible display of heroism and courage. It was not uncommon for this mare to travel through highly active battle fields in order to bring ammunition and other supplies to the soldiers.



In one momentous day, Reckless made 51 trips from the Ammunition Supply Point to the firing sites, 95% of the time by herself. She was able to move 386 rounds of ammunition (which is over

9,000 pounds!) over 35 miles of open rice paddies and up steep mountains.

### 2016 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.

- Jan 21: Dinner Social (Verdie Bowen, State of Alaska Veterans Affairs)
- Feb 20: ASYMCA Salute to the Military
- Mar 24: Dinner Social (John Parrott, Mgr, T. Stevens Intl Airport)
- April 11-14: MOAA Storming the Hill
- Apr 28: Dinner Social (Steve Ribuffo, Dir, Port of Anchorage)
- May 26: Dinner Social (Speaker TBD)
- Jun 14: Army Birthday
- Aug 4: Coast Guard Birthday
- Sep 18: Air Force Birthday
- Sep 22: MOAA First Dinner of Season
- Oct 13: Navy Birthday
- Oct 27: Dinner Social (Speaker TBD)
- Nov 10: Marine Corps Birthday
- Nov 24: Dinner Social (Speaker TBD)

### 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  
(payable to Capt. Cook Chapter)

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