



THE IRONMAN—A DOUBLE ENDER’S NEWSLETTER

Membership Scorebox

Current	26
Lifetime	3
Past Due	154
Snail Mail Ad- dresses Only	266
Email Address	473
Total Shipmates	3.617

Antecedents & Descendents

A recent photo on the CG-24 Facebook page of the Qingdao (1986) port visit group pier side gives an excellent side-by-side look at the Leahy Class cruiser and a Spruance Class destroyer. It isn't often that you can catch the two ship classes like this. It was quite revealing.



Shown are the USS REEVES (CG-24) pier side, and the USS OLDENDORF (DD-972) outboard of the REEVES. If you were a Chinese Naval official, you might figure that the OLDENDORF was the superior warship. But you would have been big-time wrong. Yes, OLDENDORF was commissioned in 1978 as one of the first flights of Spruances built from plans that originated in the late 60s. And, she was full of holes—literally—large empty spaces with really high overheads that still needed purpose.

at the ship lines for the DL class, they seem to be a stretched version of the SHERMAN class, the first new ship design since WWII.

The KING (DLG-8) class of destroyers followed directly from the DLs. The biggest difference at this point was the addition of a missile battery aft.

Then came the LEAHY class in 1961. In many ways, the basic ship design remained the same. The biggest difference was the inclusion of two missile batteries, one each fore and aft. And, any major gun battery was removed. All ships in the various classes were driven by 1200 psi steam plants.

REEVES was commissioned in 1964 from plans that evolved from the first Leahy-class frigate for which a hull was laid in 1959, and plans for which probably predated to 1949. REEVES was actually an evolutionary progression from the SHERMAN (DD-931) with a 1200 psi main steam plant.

The new DL class, include NORFOLK (DL-1), MITSCHER (DL-2), and JOHN S. MCCAIN (DL-3) also incorporated the new 1200 psi plan. The WILLIS A LEE (DL-4) and WILKINSON (DL-5) were part of that draft. However, looking

Back in the day, ships were designed for three primary warfare areas—surface warfare (SUW), anti-submarine warfare (ASW), and anti-air warfare (AAW). Up to this point, most ship's had some capability in all three of these areas—except the Leahy-class. They could shoot mis-

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Dues Notice!

Please be sure to check your mailing label or email notation.

If it doesn't say Current above your name at the top of the label, you should renew your annual dues. To reach the greatest number of shipmates, we will publish the complete Association newsletter to any valid email or snail mail address. Your dues payments make this possible.

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The President's Page



Greetings to the Reeves Association Family

Here we are... starting at the last few weeks of winter 2015, and I'm positive that most of us are hoping that

springtime got the memo to arrive on time. This has been a truly impressive winter for most of the country, and a particularly brutal year to winter-over in New England. The news footage of storm after storm clobbering Boston made us thankful that we picked this year to relocate from the East Coast to Colorado. We were particularly pleased by the weather in our new neighborhood (Pueblo), as it turned out to be a very mild winter. Who would ever have thought a move to Colorado would equate to milder winter weather. Of course we keep hearing "all bets are off for spring time in Colorado". I guess we'll see.

Leading off with a weather story generally means that this is a slow time of the year for exciting Reeves news topics to populate my column. It really has not been all that long ago that we were together in Portland, and it's not yet time to start talking about our next reunion in San Antonio. That makes for a slow news date, any way you look at it. So I started thinking about all the things in my world that maintain my association with the Reeves Family when we're not in the midst of planning for, or recovering from, a reunion.

I was surprised at the number of ways that serve to keep me in continuous touch with my shipmates. You all seem to pop-up on my radar more than I had figured, and I started to think

about all those influences. I started with the obvious stuff, like Mike Robertson reminding me that I was once again holding up the latest newsletter by not having my article ready. I'm working on it.... Other sources seem to show up through various means, like e-mails and the occasional Facebook posts concerning the status of my friends and shipmates. The e-mails, for the most part, are usually jokes and interesting articles sent from shipmates to keep my inbox full. While it doesn't seem like much, the fact is that someone has taken the time to think of you and share something with you. The joke messages are normally "forwards" from other friends, and cover the range from silly to serious.... While some push the limits of R-rated. The interesting articles that get forwarded cover the realm from neat pictures, tech stuff, cool videos, stupid stunts, and historical military stories. They somehow also manage to keep me in the loop on the latest in political commentary. The best part is that you get to choose what you care to read; delete what you don't like, and forward the better stuff to the next circle of friends.

Facebook is another way to keep in touch with shipmates. My day is somehow not complete unless I also get to track the antics of Stu as he pursues his Iron-Butt riding missions, or gets to visit with a bunch of reputable BTs from the Dubuque. I also recently got to see pictures of Rick Gilbert's brand new first grandchild. Rick was a Reeves BT when I was onboard, and is still serving on active duty. We hope to get him involved with us at some point, but for now he looks busy. While these few examples seem trivial, they are a constant reminder of the connection we all share with each other as Reeves

shipmates and how we manage to keep in touch.

The best reminder of that connection to surface lately was an e-mail letter that Mike Robertson and I recently received from Shipmate Jeff Wofford. Jeff was writing to touch base and update us on how things were going after the loss of his Father. For those that aren't aware, Jeff was notified of his Father's passing while we were all together at our last reunion in Portland. We, as brothers and shipmates, were there for Jeff at a very important time. Jeff's letter provided some status on how things are doing as he and his family recovers from their loss, and to remind us of the importance of his association with us as friends and shipmates during a time of need. He also relayed how other FTs he worked with on the Reeves have since stepped up to help. Now that's what shipmates do..... Thanks Jeff, for touching base.

I guess the point of this is that we as one-time, and mostly at different times, shipmates have become more of a family over the last few years. While it's easy to think that the Reeves Association is just a group of guys to catch up with every few years at a reunion, the fact is that we are all linked together on a more regular basis than we think. Try to take a look around you and you'll see what I mean. We're all in this together, even if the most visible link may be nothing more than a silly e-mail, bawdy jokes, interesting articles, and the occasional post on Facebook. Every one of them helps to keep the connection alive until we meet again in San Antonio.

Here's wishing you "Fair Winds and Following Seas"

//tom

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All comments, suggestions, submissions and criticism are welcome. My email is always open...

Life Memberships

At the 2014 reunion in Portland, shipmates voted for a Life Membership. After researching various Associations, it was decided that the US Navy Cruiser Sailor Association's plan was best for the USS Reeves Association. Monies for life membership are placed in an interest-bearing account and not mixed with operating funds. The schedule is simple:

Age	Amount
< 50	\$500
<60	\$400
<70	\$300
<80	\$200
=>80	\$100

We already have three life members.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial

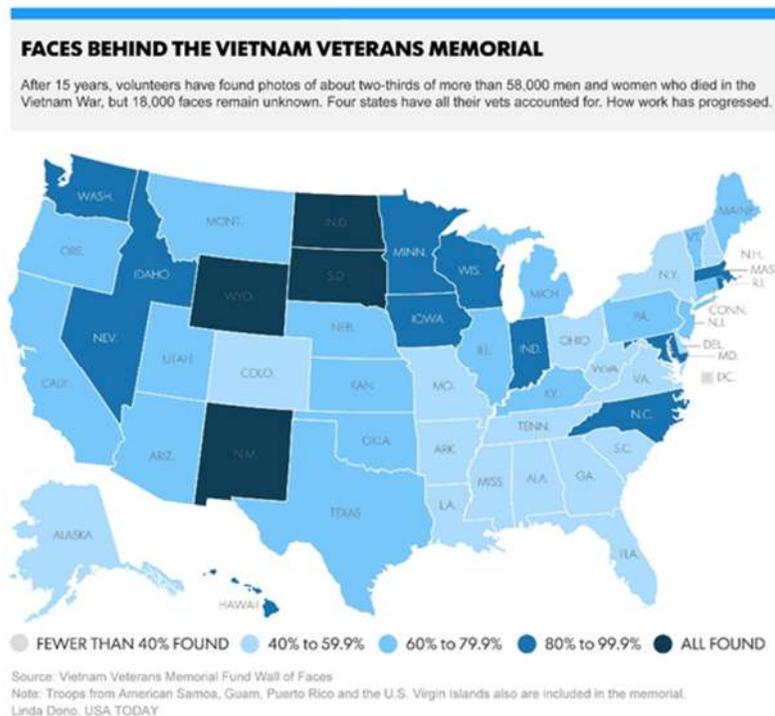
For almost 15 years, volunteers have been collecting photographs of the more than 58,000 names engraved on the polished black panels of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. Now they have a few more than 18,000 pictures to go, and Marcy Ellis of Keizer, Ore., has helped make the Wall of Faces a little more complete. Her brother, Army Pfc. Melvin Chloupek, was awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart after he died Feb. 28, 1968, trying to help a fellow soldier. A shadow box with all his medals hangs on the wall in her Keizer home. So does a framed flag, the one that was draped over his coffin. She has his official Army photo, too, in a frame in her living room. Now a copy is with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. "He was very kindhearted, very sensitive. Our personalities were quite a bit alike," said Ellis, who was born seven years after Chloupek. Her older brother died three days before her 13th birthday.

Janna Hoehn, a florist from Maui, Hawaii, is one of the volunteers of the Faces Never Forgotten project who is collecting photos. She got involved in part to help make up for how Vietnam veterans were treated when they re-

turned, and is focusing on California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington. "Until this gets out in newspapers, it surprises me how many people have really not heard about this," said Hoehn, who has been at it for three years. "It's a very hard

Center at the Vietnam Memorial on the National Mall. A prominent feature will be larger-than-life pictures of those whose names are on the wall. The center also will feature displays of the more than 400,000 personal articles, letters and gifts that have been left at the foot of the memorial since its dedication in 1982. "The photos are out there," said Executive Director Barry Smith of the Nevada Press Association, which put out an alert to its members last year. "We just need to make people realize this project is going on." Before Memorial Day, 34 Nevadans were without photos. By Wednesday, that number was down to 24. The photos do not have to be of the service

member in uniform. Many are high school yearbook photos or family snapshots. Though volunteers are looking for high-resolution copies of original images, even a low-quality photo will suffice until a better one can be found. "It is the very least we can do to show our honor and love for these American (service members)," said Andrew Johnson, a newspaperman from Mayville, Wis., whose son was killed while serving in Afghanistan in 2012. [Source: Statesman Journal (Salem, OR) | Capi Lynn | Feb. 11, 2015 ++]



project and a very emotional project, but the rewards are priceless." She started out needing 323 photos for Oregon, has tracked down 128 so far and has been promised about 40 more. You can search for your loved one or veterans who have died in your area at the Wall of Faces website <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>. You can submit a photo electronically on the individual page that pops up.

Organizers are raising money for what will eventually become a two-story, underground Education

DECA Budget Cuts—Commissary Subsidy Reduced \$300 Million

Defense officials want to reduce operating days and hours of most commissaries, as part of an effort to sharply reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars going to support the stores. Supporting documents for DoD's fiscal 2016 budget request, released 2 FEB, indicate defense officials want to reduce the commissary subsidy by about \$300 million, to about \$1.15 billion. Most commissaries would remain open at least five days a week, according to the budget documents. But similar to a proposal floated last year, DoD has bigger plans for reducing the commissary budget, and for raising prices, starting in fiscal 2017.

Officials are asking for legislative changes that would allow them to expand the types of items commissaries sell, and to allow "variable pricing" — i.e., price markups. The surcharge money is used to build, repair, maintain and modernize commissaries, and to pay for store equipment. Taxpayer dollars are used

to cover the costs of overhead and employee wages and benefits. "This will allow goods to be priced above cost to increase revenues on certain items, while providing more savings to a market basket of goods that affect junior members with families the most," according to the budget documents. Currently, all items in commissaries are sold at cost plus a 5 percent surcharge added at the register. With the help of those additional proposed cuts starting in fiscal 2017, DoD would save a cumulative \$4.4 billion from fiscal years 2016 to 2020, according to the budget documents. In their budget request last year, DoD officials proposed cutting \$200 million in Defense Commissary Agency funding, the first phase of a proposed three-year plan to slash the DeCA budget by \$1 billion. In the end, lawmakers restored that \$200 million to the budget.

It remains to be seen whether lawmakers will be receptive to the latest proposed cuts.

Recommendations released by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission on 29 JAN proposed more modest cuts in the subsidy, and also suggested consolidating the commissary and exchange systems into one retail agency. Defense officials said the commission's report has not been taken into account in deliberations specifically on the 2016 budget request. The proposals have raised alarms in some quarters. "If you cut hours, cut days and cut savings, the benefit is no longer a benefit," said Joyce Razer, executive director of the National Military Family Association. Draft documents obtained by Military Times note that proposed reductions in operating hours would save more than \$29 million in fiscal 2016, and cuts in days of operation would save \$58 million. DeCA operates 241 stores around the world, including 178 domestic locations. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | Feb. 02, 2015 ++]

VA Prescription Tracker—24/7 Online Access

Veterans can now track the status of most of their prescriptions online, thanks to an innovative idea by a Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) employee. The new 24/7 service allows online tracking for most prescriptions mailed from the VA Mail Order Pharmacy (<https://www.myhealth.va.gov/index.html>). The Prescription Tracker was recommended by VA employee Kenneth Siehr, a winner

of the President's 2013 Securing Americans Value and Efficiency (SAVE) Award. Siehr's idea focused on the use of technology as a way to save money and improve the services VA provides to its patients. "Our nation's Veterans deserve a first-class pharmacy and quality customer service as a part of the exceptional health care available from VA," said Siehr, the National Director for Consolidated

Mail Outpatient Pharmacies. "It is an honor to be part of serving Veterans and to have been recognized for an idea that enhances our services to them."

More than 57,000 Veterans are currently using the service through My HealthVet, an online feature that allows Veterans to partner with their health care team. The

(Continued on page 10)

Our Next Reunion: San Antonio, Texas

Our shipmates selected San Antonio as our 2016 reunion site. The CVB has been contacted and the internet explored. Here's an article about San Antonio that says a lot:

Top 5 Things to Do in San Antonio, Texas by Colleen Lanin, The Travel Mama

Here are five San Antonio experiences not to be missed, no matter how long your stay!

1) Explore River Walk

When I asked what we had to see in San Antonio, everyone but everyone suggested [River Walk](#). After wandering along the picturesque paths lined with shops and restaurants aplenty, it's easy to see why this is such a popular choice. Be forewarned that River Walk is not especially stroller or wheelchair accessible. (This meant a lot of stroller lugging for the hubs!)

A Travel Mama from Houston suggested we take a river taxi through the [River Walk Extension](#) to float through raising and lowering locks à la the Panama Canal. Alas, we did not have time to venture to the extension. We did, however, take a [Rio San Antonio Cruise](#) through the main waters of River Walk. The boat tour was a fun little adventure for the kids, while the entertaining commentary about San Antonio by the boat's captain was educational for the adults. I was impressed by how San Antonio has taken such strides to preserve its history and culture over the years, rather than bulldozing over its past like so many other American cities.



2) Try a Paleta Bar

While exploring River Walk, we

asked a couple munching on popsicle-like goodies for directions. This incited my daughter to beg for ice cream. They explained the frozen treats were not ice cream but [Paleta Bars](#), a Mexican frozen fruit dessert on a stick. The duo pointed us up the hill to Bolivar Cafe in La Villita where we could purchase some bars of our own. When locals tell me I need to taste something, I listen! These yummy all-fruit treats (in flavors like coconut, lime, strawberry, or mango) were worth the climb.

After your snack, mosey through [La Villita](#), San Antonio's old town, which is now a charming cluster of galleries and shops.



3) Visit the Alamo

You can't leave San Antonio without a visit to [The Alamo](#), right? While it may not be as graceful as the Eiffel Tower or as awe-inspiring as the Egyptian Pyramids, there is something about visiting a place you've heard of your whole life. I got that sense of, "So *this* is the Alamo!" The Alamo was built originally as a mission and was fortified and used for military purposes over the years. I was surprised to find it smack-dab in the middle of downtown (just a couple of blocks from River Walk). I had pictured it as a lone building in the middle of the desert somewhere.

Walk the Alamo's lovely grounds, toss pennies for luck into a fountain, wander through the compound's three buildings, and read about why we should "Remember the Alamo," all for free!



4) Get Tex-Mex

Every other restaurant in San Antonio seemed to specialize in Mexican cuisine. There were numerous selections along the River Walk to choose from. A famed location that we stumbled upon along the freeway after our evening flight arrival was [The Alamo Café](#). This place was big on atmosphere, with mini rivers running throughout its interior and giant American and Texas flags draped across one wall. The highlight for my five-year-old daughter was watching the ladies in traditional Mexican garb rolling out handmade flour tortillas. They even tossed her some dough to play with!

5) Eat a Big Ol' Steak

I don't eat much red meat but I figured, when in Texas, I should eat like a Texan! I ordered a porterhouse at the upscale, yet rustic [18 Oaks](#) at the brand-spankin' new [JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa](#). The restaurant overlooks the resort's gorgeous golf course and smells of wood burning in the hearth. They serve all local, organic grass and oat-fed beef. They may have converted me to a meat-eater. I keep daydreaming about that dang steak.

If you're looking to splurge on a delicious steak dinner slathered in parsley garlic butter, head here! You can choose from six sauces; I sampled the blue cheese and the peppercorn. They were both so heavenly, I can't decide which was better!

Financials

FY 2015 Operating

Income

Dues	\$1120
Donations	\$20
Reunions	\$0
Ship’s Store	-\$5
Cost of Goods	\$8
Total Income	\$1128

Expense

Advertising	\$27
Newsletters	\$83
Postage/Delivery	\$150
Reunion Expenses	\$0
Total Expense	\$260
Net Income	\$869

FY 2015 Assets

Total Assets	\$7041
Liabilities	\$0
Net Equity	\$7041

Charitable/Educational Objectives

The USS Reeves Association is an educational, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization registered with the Internal Revenue Service, FEIN 86-1163983. For that purpose at the 2010 business meeting, it was recommended that future excess funds be used for donations and scholarships as determined at business meetings starting in 2012.

Shift Colors

To receive the Navy’s Shift Colors newsletter via email send the following information to Mill_ShiftColors@navy.mil -- First name; Last name; E-mail address; Title (Mr., Mrs., rank, etc.); and Military affiliation (retiree, surviving spouse, veteran, other). There is no longer any funding for hard copies to be printed and mailed. To receive Shift Colors it does not matter whether or not you’re retired, active duty, a veteran, a surviving spouse, or just someone who’s interested in receiving the newsletter.

Antecedents & Descendents (continued)

siles mostly. If they used their WWII vintage 3” 50 Cal guns, forget using missiles. The guns were adjacent to the aft fire control turrets. The two didn’t mix. And, the Leahy’s were equipped with the steel domed SQS-23 sonar that had a lot of trouble detecting nuclear powered submarines, especially the Hotel, Echo and November class Soviet subs. So basically the Leahy’s became pretty limited to AAW.

In follow-on upgrades, the Leahys were upgraded with Naval Tactical Data Systems which added a newer warfare area—Command, Control and Communications (CCC). At this point, the Leahys became an essential part of the evolving 1980s Battle Group structure in their original AAW Picket role with a whole lot more bang for the buck.

With the Spruance-class (1975), the Navy did a massive restart. In NTDS parlance, they did a jump-shift with their trackball.

The 1200 psi plant was abandoned in favor of the twin LM-2500 gas turbine engines (which brought with them the variable-pitch prop). The 1975 model of the Spruance was a suped up stern-drive speed boat with a couple of weapons systems, good communications, maneuverability and a lot of room for new stuff later on.

Over time, in it’s 20 year life span, evolving systems and sensors were added to the Spruance class. This included surface to surface Harpoon missiles, long range Tomahawk, and close-in weapons systems. 5” 54 Mk48 guns were supplemented with 50 Cal guns. Some ships received very specialized ASW sensors. All ships were super quiet with the Prairie Masker system to decouple ship noises

from the sea. Through all of this, the Spruances remained an ASW, SUW and CCC capable ship.

Meantime, the Arleigh Burke (DLG-51) class of destroyers were in development. These ships included all of the advancements, developments and lessons learned from all of the preceding ship classes.

So, when you look at a Leahy alongside a Spruance (and you can’t anymore because they’re all gone), two different ships with two different capabilities and two different primary missions.

And, just remember, bigger isn’t always better.

Some stats:

	<u>Reeves</u>	<u>Oldendorf</u>
Displ	8200 LT	8040 LT
Propulsion	1200 psi	4 Gas Turb
Range	8,000 @ 20kt	6,000 @ 20kt
Length	533 ft	563 ft
Beam	55 ft	55 ft
Draft	26 ft	29 ft
Speed	32 kt	32.5 kt
Officers	37	19
Enlisted	408	315

The final armament mixes for both classes were impressive and is too lengthy to compare here.

The biggest difference was that the Leahys were primarily Anti Air Warfare platforms while Spruances were primarily Anti Submarine and Surface Warfare platforms. Both shared the Command, Control, Communicate, and Electronic Warfare missions.

1960's (\$10) + s/h



1968—Entering Sydney Harbor

1990's (\$10) + s/h



1992—Seattle Sea Fair Festival

Mousepads (\$10) + s/h



Ship's Store

1970's (\$10) + s/h



1975—Departing Pearl Harbor

Challenge Coins (\$14) + s/h



Golf Shirts (\$20) + s/h (2XL/3XL-add \$2)



1980's (\$10) + s/h



1985—Enroute Yokosuka from Australia

Reunion ball caps (\$10 each) + s/h

2009—San Diego

2010—Chicago

2012—Charleston

2014—Portland



T-Shirts (\$15) + s/h (2XL/3XL-add \$2)



USS Reeves Association – Ship's Store Order Form

Price	S/H	Total	Description
		Total	

Shipping and handling:

Shipping is via USPS Priority or Fedex. Please add the following for each item to cover the Association's packaging and postage costs:

Photos: \$2 per photo

Ball caps: \$3 each

Mousepads: \$3 each

Challenge Coins: \$2 for 1, \$.50 for each additional coin

Shirts: \$3 per shirt

Shipping Label

To:

Address:

City, State, ZIP:

Phone:

Email:

Send order to: USS Reeves Association
c/o Michael Robertson
15709 N Sycamore St
Mead, WA 99021

Refinancing Your Home—Read This First

A federal regulator has taken action against NewDay Financial, a nonbank mortgage lender specializing in VA loans, alleging that the company engaged in deceptive advertising and paid kickbacks to an unnamed veterans organization for customer referrals. NewDay, headquartered in Fulton, Maryland, will pay a \$2 million penalty, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which said NewDay had revenues of more than \$100 million in 2013. "NewDay profited from the trust that veterans place in their veteran service organization," said CFPB Director Richard Cordray, in announcing the action. "Veterans, and any consumers getting a mortgage, deserve honest information about lender endorsements." The CFPB declined to identify the veterans' organization involved. "As a general matter, the CFPB does not name third parties who have not been the subject of enforcement action," said bureau spokesman Sam Gilford.

NewDay officials also declined to name the veterans' organization. In a statement, company officials said they are pleased to resolve "these technical legal issues" with the CFPB. "There has never been



any allegation or suggestion that the company's actions ever directly harmed our borrowers. We will continue our tireless efforts to serve veterans in the dignified manner they deserve," the statement said. According to the CFPB consent order, beginning in 2010, an arrangement was made between NewDay and the unnamed veterans' organization through a broker company. The broker company contracted directly with NewDay and paid the veterans' organization a portion of the fees it received from NewDay. Based on agreements among the three entities, NewDay was designated as the exclusive lender of the veterans' organization, and NewDay sent advertising communications to that group's members by the Postal Service and e-mail, with the veterans' organization's approval.

For example, one emailed advertisement read: "NewDay USA is [veterans organization's] exclusive provider of home loan programs based on their high standards for service and the excellent value of their programs," according to CFPB. Such advertising communications "promoted the relationship" between NewDay and the veterans' organization, and encouraged and recommended the use of NewDay's mortgage products to the group's members," the CFPB stated. NewDay representatives made similar statements to the members during phone conversations. NewDay paid the broker company a monthly "licensing fee" of \$15,000. For each referred member who contacted NewDay about a 100-percent loan-to-value mortgage refinancing and had his or her credit report pulled, NewDay paid the organization a \$15 "lead generation fee," and paid the company a \$20 "lead generation fee." For each referred member who contacted NewDay about a reverse mortgage and completed mandatory counseling, NewDay paid the veterans' organization a \$75 "lead generation fee" and the broker company a \$100 fee. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Karen Jowers | Feb. 10, 2015 ++]



VA Budget 2016—Proposal & Concerns

The Veterans Affairs Department would see almost an 8 percent jump in discretionary spending and a \$9 billion overall increase in its budget under plans outlined by the White House on 2 FEB. If adopted by Congress, the budget plan would continue the steady rise in VA program spending since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2004, the total VA budget was just under \$64 billion, more than \$100 billion less than the fiscal 2016 request. The budget plan includes money to continue the Veterans Choice Card program approved by Congress last summer, in response to the patient-wait-times scandal that forced the resignation of several top department officials. VA officials have about \$15 billion in funding through 2017 for those private care visits and physician hiring. But administration budget planners warned that "more resources in certain areas will be required to ensure that the VA system can provide timely, high-quality health care into the future."

The White House promised to offer new, long-term budget legislation for VA programs in coming months, to allow "essential investments in VA system priorities in a fiscally responsible, budget-neutral manner." The budget plan calls for \$7.5 billion in mental health spending, \$7.5 billion in long-term care programs and \$2.8 billion in prosthetics research and development. VA officials would spend \$431 million more under the plan in an effort to end the department's claims backlog, including continued development of digital processing systems and conversion of paper records to electronic files. And the department wants to spend \$1.4 billion in fiscal 2016 for programs to prevent and reduce homelessness among veterans. The department has a stated public goal of ending that problem nationwide

before next January, just three months into the new fiscal year. The budget request calls for an 8.3 percent increase in health care services specifically for women (\$446 million total), an area where both VA officials and outside groups have said the department needs to adapt to a changing veterans population. And the measure includes a separate \$66.6 billion request for advance medical care appropriations for fiscal 2017, designed to prevent political fiscal fights from disrupting veterans health care services.

In a statement, VA Secretary Bob McDonald called the budget plan "one of the greatest opportunities in [department] history" for helping veterans. "We are listening to what veterans, Congress, employees, veterans service organizations and other stakeholders are telling us," he said. "We aspire to make VA a model agency that is held up as an example for other government agencies to follow with respect to customer experience, efficient and effective operations, and taxpayer stewardship." Lawmakers will spend the next several months debating the request and grilling officials over the growing department budget.

However,

The Veterans Affairs Department budget keeps going up, but it's still not enough, outside advocates say. A coalition of veterans groups praised President Obama's fiscal 2016 budget request for VA programs after it was released Monday, but said the plan still falls more than \$1 billion short of what the department truly needs to keep up with the demands on the system. "They're going in the right direction, but there are still a lot of things that need to be fixed," said Joe Violante, national legislative direc-

tor for Disabled American Veterans and one of the authors of this year's veterans "independent budget." "This administration has tried to give VA the resources it needs. But I don't know if they're always on the mark," he said.

The independent budget calls for \$74.5 billion in discretionary VA spending for fiscal 2016, which would be more than a 9 percent jump from last year in nonmandatory department spending. VA has proposed slightly less than an 8 percent increase in that funding. The groups behind the independent budget — DAV, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America and AMVETS — see shortfalls in health care spending, staffing for benefits processing and major construction efforts. Last month, they highlighted all three of those areas as major legislative issues facing VA, noting that the shortfall in major construction alone could reach tens of billions of dollars within a decade if funding isn't made available now.

Violante noted the sharp increase in VA funding over the last decade — the department's total budget has risen by almost \$100 billion since 2004 — and praised Obama for steady increases in each of his years in the White House. But he also said coalition members will push lawmakers to go even further, especially in light of VA deficiencies exposed during last year's patient wait times scandal. Lawmakers last summer provided about \$17 billion in emergency funding to VA officials to hire new physicians and expand private care options. But they also promised closer oversight of VA's budget request this year, to ensure that the new money wasn't simply plugging holes caused by waste and inefficiencies. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane | Feb. 02, 2015 ++]

Railgun Update

The U.S. Navy is tapping the power of the Force to wage war. Its latest weapon is an electromagnetic railgun launcher. It uses a form of electromagnetic energy known as the Lorentz force to hurl a 23-pound projectile at speeds exceeding Mach 7. Engineers already have tested this futuristic weapon on land, and the Navy plans to begin sea trials aboard a Joint High Speed Vessel Millinocket in 2016. “The electromagnetic railgun represents an incredible new offensive capability for the U.S. Navy,” Rear Adm. Bryant Fuller, the Navy’s chief engineer, said in a statement. “This capability will allow us to effectively counter a wide range of threats at a relatively low cost, while keeping our ships and sailors safer by removing the need to carry as many high-explosive weapons.”

The massive railgun that needs just one sailor to operate it relies on the electromagnetic energy of the Lorentz force—the combination of electric and magnetic forces on a point

charge—for power. The Navy likes the weapon for several reasons, not the least of which it has a range of 100 miles and doesn’t require explosive warheads. That makes it far safer for sailors, and cheaper for taxpayers. According to the Navy, each 18-inch projectile costs about \$25,000, compared to \$500,000 to \$1.5 million for conventional missiles. “[It] will give our adversaries a huge moment of pause to go: ‘Do I even want to go engage a naval ship?’” Rear Admiral Matt Klunder told reporters. “Because you are going to lose. You could throw anything at us, frankly, and the fact that we now can shoot a number of these rounds at a very affordable cost, it’s my opinion that they don’t win.”

The Navy’s been talking about using railguns for the past ten years. The Office of Naval Research launched a prototype program in 2005, with an initial investment of \$250 million committed through 2011. The Navy anticipates spending

about that much more by 2017. Of course the Army is interested in having one too, and the Pentagon is in general interested in many aspects of the technology. In July, the Navy will display the electromagnetic railgun prototype at San Diego Naval Base. “Frankly, we think it might be the right time for them to know what we’ve been doing behind closed doors in a Star Wars fashion,” said Klunder. “It’s now reality. It’s not science fiction. It’s real and you can look at it.”

[Source: Wired Magazine | Allen McDuffee | Apr 9, 2014 ++]

VA Prescription Tracker (continued)

(Continued from page 4)

number is expected to grow as VA starts to educate Veterans about the new feature. Later this month, the tracking feature will include images of the medication that dispensed. Over the next year, a secure messaging alert will be added so that Veterans know when a medication was placed in the mail. “VA prescription refill online is an excellent example of how one employee looked at the process of VA prescription tracking through the eyes of our Veterans and came up with an idea that better serves Veterans,” said Interim Under Secretary for Health, Carolyn M. Clancy. “This idea is both innovative and transformative, and it is certainly one, when put into action, improves customer service for America’s Veterans.” [Source: VA News Release | Feb. 04, 2015 ++]



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Valuable News Sources

As I have said before, the semi-monthly RAO Bulletin is an invaluable source of USN/DOD news for this newsletter. I strongly recommend every Veteran subscribe to this informative and timely source:

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Wounded Warrior Project Lawsuit

A national veterans nonprofit group is suing a Gig Harbor veteran in federal court, alleging that the former airman has defamed the organization in articles he posted to several websites. The Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) is seeking unspecified financial damages from Vietnam veteran Gordon “Alex” Graham in a lawsuit the nonprofit filed in federal court in Tacoma in early FEB. Based in Florida, the Wounded Warrior Project raised \$225 million in 2013. It collects funds through a one-time and monthly giving program that has drawn celebrity endorsements, including a recent commercial featuring actor Mark Wahlberg. The nonprofit alleges that Graham’s postings to websites such as Veterans Today and Graham’s blog have hindered its fundraising by creating an aura of suspicion around its work. Graham has called the Wounded Warrior Project a “scam” in articles that criticize its spending on fundraising, advertising and salaries.

In court documents, the Wounded Warrior Project’s lawyers point to dozens of statements from social media websites in which people linked to Graham’s stories, criticized the nonprofit and said they would not donate to it again. “WWP has and will continue to suffer irreparable harm as a result of Graham’s defamatory

statements regarding WWP,” the lawyers wrote in their complaint. One posting they cited reads “I’m greatly concerned about all of the rumors and articles circulating that’s suggesting [WWP] is a scam . . . I hate to say it, but I want to cancel my membership.” Reached by phone 9 FEB, Graham, 63, said he had not yet been served with the lawsuit. He said he had been anticipating that the Wounded Warrior Project would file suit against him because it pursued legal action against another critic last year in Indiana. Wounded Warrior Project won that case against Dean Graham, who is not related to Alex Graham of Gig Harbor. Dean Graham retracted the allegations he leveled against Wounded Warrior Project in a May court filing. Alex Graham removed his articles from the Veterans Today site Monday after a reporter informed him of the lawsuit.



Alex Graham takes issues with salaries paid to Wounded Warrior Project executives. The group paid a total of \$2.2 million to 11 executives in 2013, according to tax forms the Wounded Warrior Projects posts to its website. “They’re spending so much money on fundraising that there’s nothing left for the veterans,” Graham told The News Tribune. Wounded Warrior Project contends that it spends 80 percent of its revenue on its own programs for wounded veterans and grants to other organizations. It gave a small grant to Tacoma’s Goodwill in 2013, for example. The group, founded in 2003, wrote in court filings that it provided support to almost 58,000 wounded veterans or military family members in 2014. Alex Graham’s campaign gained so much attention that the nonprofit database Guidestar in 2014 issued a statement distancing itself from Graham’s characterizations of financial records he obtained from its website. Several national news organizations also have produced segments challenging Graham’s depiction of the organization. For info on WWP refer to <http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org>. [Source: The News Tribune (Tacoma, WA) | Adam Ashton | Feb 10, 2015 ++]



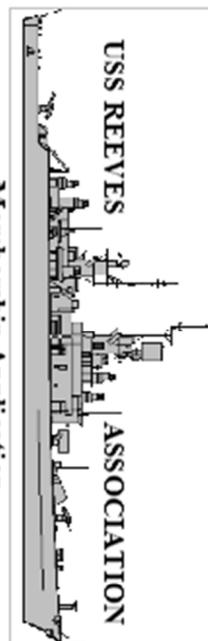
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