

# Bugle Blasts

November 2017

Volume 9 Number 5



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This Newsletter is dedicated to serving and former members of the Armed Forces of the United States and to their families and friends.

Do what's right, no matter what the cost. It always costs. Do what's right anyway.

## Editor/Publisher/s Notes – Mike Berger

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**I send a BB every month. If you or someone you know doesn't get the BB by the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the month email me. I can just about guarantee the problem is on your end not mine. Home email addresses recommended – if you provide a business or government email address it may be the cause for a BB being rejected.**

## Commissaries to start accepting Military Star card this month – source Military Times

Commissary customers soon will be able to use their Military Star credit card to pay for their groceries, as officials roll out acceptance of the card over the next month and a half. The Military Star card is a credit card accepted at all the military exchanges, with 1.5 million cardholders. On Oct. 3, a pilot test starts at the Fort Lee commissary. On Oct. 9, five more commissaries will join the pilot: Hanscom Air Force Base; Carlisle Barracks; Naval Air Station Oceana; Naval Air Station Key West; and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. Twenty more stores, including some overseas, join in Oct. 16.

By Nov. 9, the remaining 212 commissary stores are expected to be on board accepting the Star card, if the pilot test of the software is successful. The fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act required the commissaries to start accepting the card.

Extending this acceptance “offers greater customer convenience while lowering overhead expenses and strengthening commissary, military exchange and quality of life benefits,” said Defense Commissary Agency spokesman Kevin Robinson. “In focus groups conducted by a third party, military shoppers have expressed a desire for a single non-cash tender type that can be used across the installation,” he said.

Current interest rate on the Military Star card is 11.24%. Unlike interest paid to other card companies, money paid by cardholders in interest charges for the Military Star card (incurred when cardholders don't pay off their balance each month) goes back to morale, welfare and recreation programs on military installations.

Robinson had no information about whether part of the profits from interest charges will be shared with the commissary agency. Defense officials have been taking steps to reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars - about \$1.4 billion a year - used to fund commissaries. In addition to debit cards, cash, personal checks, travelers checks, money orders and other types of payments such as government food assistance, commissaries accept other credit cards like American Express, Discover, MasterCard and Visa.

Shoppers who use the Military Star card at the commissary will accumulate rewards point just as they do at exchanges, Robinson said, but they won't be able to redeem Military Star rewards cards at commissaries. As always, consumer advocates advise shopping around for the best interest rate and other terms on any credit card. And just like other cards, if you don't pay these off each month, you'll pay the interest charges.

## Veteran Targeted Scam – Trading Cash for Benefits

An active scam involves scammers attempting to convince veterans to trade their VA benefits for fast cash, often at a fraction of the value of the true VA benefits' value. VA officials have stated in no uncertain terms that such a deal is always bad for the veteran and must be avoided in any form.

Any veteran or military family receiving such an offer should report the offer to Operation Protect Veterans by calling 855-800-9023 to verify legitimacy and help prevent the growth of this scam. The hotline has been set up and managed by AARP.

## Calendar and Upcoming Events

### November 2017

National Model Railroad Month  
3 – Housewife Day  
5 – Gunpowder/Guy Fawkes Day  
10 – US Marine Corps Day  
11 – Veterans Day  
20 – Universal Children's Day  
23 – Thanksgiving Day



### December 2017

5 – Bathtub Party Day  
7 – Pearl Harbor Day  
12 – Chanukah Begins (8 days)  
16 – Chocolate Covered Anything Day  
23 – Festivus (for the rest of us)  
25 – Christmas Day  
27 – National Fruitcake Day

### No Cost Flu Shots for Veterans at Walgreens – source eBenefits Online

Flu Season is here! Veterans protect yourselves and get a **NO COST** flu shot! The cold and flu season is upon us and VA has once again teamed up with Walgreens Pharmacies nationwide to allow all veterans who are currently enrolled in the VA healthcare system to be able walk into any of the over 8000 Walgreens nationally (and the Duane Reade pharmacies in the New York metropolitan area) to receive a vaccination at no cost. Vaccinations will be available through March 31, 2018.

Veterans wishing to receive the no cost vaccination simply need to present a Veterans Identification Card and a photo ID, at any participating Walgreens to receive the vaccination. The Group ID is: VAFLU. In addition, after the Walgreens pharmacist administers the vaccine Walgreens will transmit that information securely to VA where it

becomes part of the patient's electronic medical record. VA is committed to keeping Veteran patients healthy, and during this flu season, vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of flu. No matter where you live, visit your local VA clinic or Walgreens to get a no cost flu shot.

To find your local VA, visit [www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp). To locate a Walgreens store near you, call 800-WALGREENs (800-925-4733), or go to [www.com/findastore](http://www.com/findastore).

To learn more about the partnership visit <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/immunization.asp> or call 1-877-771-8537.

To get more information on flu and flu vaccine, visit [www.publichealth.va.gov/flu](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu) or [www.cdc.gov/flu](http://www.cdc.gov/flu).

### Army vet sentenced to prison for falsely claiming he can't walk – source Army Times

Retired Master Sgt. **Mack Cole Jr.** was sentenced to 27 months in federal prison for health care fraud, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas announced. Cole, 54, told his doctors at VA that he couldn't walk. But he was convicted in June after video recordings showed him mowing his lawn and walking around his driveway without the assistance of a wheelchair, the Justice Department said in a statement.

A federal jury convicted Cole of four counts of health care fraud and two counts of making false statements in a matter involving a health care benefit program, according to the Justice Department. In addition to the prison term, Cole has been ordered by the court to pay more than \$375,000 in

restitution to VBA, as well as almost \$60,000 to VHA. Cole will also be placed on supervised release for three years following his prison sentence.

Cole was deployed with the Kansas Army National Guard to Kosovo in 2004. Prior to his deployment, he injured his back during a training operation, according to the Justice Department. In 2006, he retired from the military and began receiving monthly benefits as a disabled veteran. The jury in the case found that Cole had exaggerated his service-connected injuries to receive higher benefits, the Justice Department said. Special agents from VA conducted the investigation, recorded the video surveillance and brought the evidence to the courts, the Justice Department said.

### VA Fraud – source Suffolk News-Herald

A Suffolk, VA man has pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud the VA GI Bill program. **Kent Chillous**, 55, faces a potential maximum penalty of 20 years in prison when he is sentenced in January. Chillous is a U.S. Navy veteran who attended the Hampton Roads Skills Center using Post-9/11 GI Bill funds. The school purported to be a welding training school offering vocational skills to its students, many of whom were veterans using GI Bill funds. However, the school did not provide regular instruction for any of its course offerings, either in a classroom setting or practical, hands-on setting. "Moreover, the majority of students were not even physically present at HRSC during most of the hours their courses were purportedly held," the press release continued. "Indeed, some students never once entered the HRSC building at any point during their period of enrollment."

According to court documents, Chillous was enrolled as an HRSC student between June 2016 and July 2017, during which time he did not receive welding instruction and was rarely, if ever, physically present at the school. However, on the basis of his enrollment, VA paid him a regular housing stipend and paid HRSC for his tuition. Additionally, a few months after his enrollment at the school, Chillous and the school's owner struck a deal for Chillous to recruit veterans to enroll in HRSC, to boost the GI Bill revenue coming into the school. Chillous was paid a recruitment fee of approximately 8% of the tuition HRSC would receive from the VA on behalf of each veteran he successfully enrolled. Over the next 10 months, Kent successfully recruited approximately 20 Post-9/11 GI Bill-eligible veterans to enroll at HRSC. Chillous pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit wire fraud.

### Ex-head of Tomah VA allowed to resign, given settlement – source Military Times

**Mario DeSanctis**, the former head of the Tomah, Wisconsin VA Medical Center was allowed to resign and given a settlement after allegations that painkillers were being overprescribed to patients. DeSanctis was fired from the hospital in 2015. But a USA Today investigation found he

fought his dismissal and reached a deal in which he was allowed to resign. He and his attorney were paid \$163,000. The Tomah VA hospital was rocked in January 2015 by reports of inappropriate dosages of narcotic painkillers and retaliation against employees who questioned the practice.

### **Vietnam Veterans Memorial Volunteers Sought – source Together We Served**

When the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated in Washington, D.C. in 1982, a promise was made to never forget those who served and sacrificed their lives in the Vietnam War. Etched in its black granite walls are the names of 58,318 service members who were killed or remain missing. The Wall honors their courage, sacrifice, and devotion to duty and country. Since its inception, The Wall has become a sacred place for loved ones and visitors to pay their respects. By separating the war from the warrior, The Wall began a process of national healing.

This year marks the 35th Anniversary of The Wall. In commemoration, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) is honored to host the 2017 Reading of the Names of the service members inscribed on The Wall. The Readings will take place at The Wall for 65 hours over a

four-day period beginning with an opening ceremony on Tuesday, Nov. 7 at 3:00 p.m. Volunteers will read names for approximately eight hours from 4 p.m. on November 7 to 12 a.m. on Nov. 8. Participants will then read the names for 19 hours daily from 5 a.m. until 12 a.m. on November 8, 9, and 10. Volunteer readers can sign up for a specific name on The Wall or for a timeslot in which they are available to read.

VVMF is asking the public to join them as a reader or as a spectator. Registration is open for 2017's reading times at <http://www.vvmf.org/ROTN>. One of the best ways to honor our fallen is to say their names and share their story. Behind every name on The Wall is a person, a life cut short, and a family changed forever. By saying their names, we are saying we will never forget them.

### **Hurricane Scam**

The newest “hot scam” preys on the benevolent nature of veterans, military families and the public by asking them to donate money to the victims of recent hurricanes.

The phony charities designed to take your money are highly sophisticated and the scammers are highly trained to scam you and others out of millions of dollars. Their use of technology is cutting edge. For instance, the scammers are using telephonic screen technology to make it look as if they are actually calling from the phony organization they set up as viewed on the your caller ID.

The scammers are also using similar names of legitimate organizations as to confuse the people being called. Scammers state they are from “UFO” for example, confusing a veteran, for example, into thinking he/she may have heard USO, which most veterans are familiar with. Or, as reported by thousands of complaints, the scammers may use “Red Kross,” tricking veterans into believing they are working with the more familiar Red Cross organization.

Some scammers are using “ghost websites” that look and operate like legitimate websites of familiar organizations.

The bogus websites mimic the characteristics of legitimate organizations, however, one main element that may suggest the site is bogus is the URL ending. Even if the name is familiar (i.e., Veterans of Foreign Wars) check the URL destination where the funds are to be sent. The name may be misappropriated. If the designated name ends in “.com, .net, .ws, .biz” rather than “.org,” you may not want to send funds to the organization. Always check with your local office to verify organization before sending funds.

Everyone should investigate the organization asking for money before donating any cash. To avoid such scams never donate by e-mail, send cash electronically or send funds to an organization name with which you are not familiar. AARP has set up a hotline to help people victimized by these scammers. Any person involved in any kind of suspected scam is invited to report it at 877-908-3360. Before sending funds check with Better Business Bureau <http://www.give.org/charity-reviews/national> or Charity Navigator <https://www.charitynavigator.org> to verify legitimacy of an organization.

### **Veterans ID cards to be available starting in November – source Military Times**

VA officials will start issuing new veterans ID cards this month, giving recipients an easy way to provide their military service for business discounts and other promotions. The cards will be made available for no cost to any honorably discharged veteran who applies through the department's website.

The new cards won't replace VA medical cards or official defense retiree cards, and will not carry any force of law behind them. But supporters have called a national veterans ID card a simple way to honor veterans' service and a way to help them prove their service status for non-federal

activities. They have also argued that many veterans' practice of carrying around copies of their military discharge paperwork or other personal documents to get corporate discounts leaves them open to fraud and identity theft.

Several states - but not all 50 - give veterans the option to identify themselves on drivers licenses. But the national ID card through VA would give a more standard way to verify military service.

VA officials have not yet said how long it will take to issue cards after a veteran has requested them.

### **Did you know?**

On September 27, Russia completed the task of destroying its huge, Cold War-era chemical weapons stockpiles, winning praise from an international chemical weapons watchdog. Russia has spent more than 290 billion rubles (more than \$5 billion) to destroy the 40,000 metric tons of chemical weapons it possessed.

### Many Tricare Users Will Face Higher Out of Pocket Costs in 2018 – source [military.com](http://military.com)

Many current Tricare users will likely see higher out of pocket fees for care starting beginning January 1. Tricare for Life and Tricare Prime users are not impacted by the change.

Currently, both active-duty and retiree Tricare Standard users, as well as Tricare Reserve Select and Tricare Retired Reserve users pay deductibles based on a "percentage of allowable amount" system. The amounts differ widely and are based on several factors, including provider location and type of care. Those fees are paid annually until a user hits his or her "catastrophic cap."

The new system, which also combines the Tricare Standard and Extra plans into program known as "Tricare Select," will instead shift those users to a flat point-of-service fee that will count towards the deductible and annual caps. Those caps are \$1,000 for active-duty and Tricare Reserve Select users and \$3,000 for all others. The new fees will be \$27 for primary care and \$34 for specialty care for Tricare Select and Tricare Reserve Select users, and \$35 and \$45 for both reserve and regular retiree Select users. The annual out-of-pocket caps are \$1,000 for active-duty and Tricare Reserve Select users and \$3,000 for all others.

Additionally, some primary and specialty care will be considered "high value" and carry its own set of lower flat fees. Tricare officials offered no additional information on what that care is or when that fee information will be released. Although some preventative care, such as cancer screenings and vaccines, is currently free to those users, Tricare officials said they'll be adding to the list of free care. No information was readily available on what the newly free care is.

Other services, such as emergency room and urgent care visits will also carry flat fees regardless of location. In-network urgent care visits will be \$27 for Tricare Select and Reserve Select users and \$45 for retiree users, while in-network emergency room fees will be \$87 and \$116, respectively. The fee amounts were chosen based on cost averages from across the Tricare system, officials said. That

means that while some users will likely spend less at some providers, many will likely be spending more.

Troops who enter the service after Jan. 1 will see an entirely different - and in many cases, lower - set of fees based on the same flat-fee concept. Those costs were set by law in 2016. New active-duty Select users will pay \$15 for in-network primary care and \$25 for specialty care, while future retirees who enter the service are currently scheduled to pay \$25 and \$40 respectively for primary and specialty care. The change to a flat fee, Tricare officials said, gives users more clarity on the cost of a visit before it's time to pay the bill. Rather than fluctuating fees based on geography and provider, users will know what to expect before going to the appointment.

"We wanted to go to a fixed cost share," said Navy Adm. Raquel Bono, who heads the Defense Health Agency, which manages Tricare. "We felt that was something more predictable and more patient friendly, and we also felt it was an easier construct."

Military family advocates found the change both surprising and concerning. While other Tricare changes that will hit Jan. 1 had been previously announced or ordered through legislation, this change came as a surprise. They said they are worried that the new flat fees will bring a surprise cost increase for many users. A series of changes made by Congress in 2016 were specifically designed to protect current Tricare users through a "grandfather" clause. The new fees, they said, circumvent that protection.

"By doing this cost share to co-pay conversion for the grandfathered group, they have made it more complicated, and walked away from the idea that your plan will remain same," said Karen Ruedisueli, a deputy director of government relations for the National Military Family Association (NMFA). "The fact is, some people will be paying more, which I think is against the whole concept of grandfatherin."

### Did you know? Law Allows Retirees and Vets to Salute Flag when not in uniform

Traditionally, members of the nation's veterans service organizations have rendered the hand-salute during the national anthem and at events involving the national flag only while wearing their organization's official head-gear. In 2008, the National Defense Authorization Act contained an amendment to allow un-uniformed servicemembers, military retirees, and veterans to render a hand salute during the hoisting, lowering, or passing of the U.S. flag.

A later amendment further authorized hand-salutes during the national anthem by veterans and out-of-uniform military personnel. This was included in the Defense Authorization Act of 2009, signed on Oct. 14, 2008. Here is the text from the law:

SEC. 595. MILITARY SALUTE FOR THE FLAG DURING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM BY MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES NOT IN UNIFORM AND BY VETERANS.

Section 301(b)(1) of title 36, United States Code, is amended by striking subparagraphs (A) through (C) and inserting the following new subparagraphs:

(A) individuals in uniform should give the military salute at the first note of the anthem and maintain that position until the last note;

(B) members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present but not in uniform may render the military salute in the manner provided for individuals in uniform; and

(C) all other persons present should face the flag and stand at attention with their right hand over the heart, and men not in uniform, if applicable, should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart;

Note: Part (C) applies to those not in the military and non-veterans. The phrase "men not in uniform" refers to civil service uniforms like police, fire fighters, and letter carriers - non-veteran civil servants who might normally render a salute while in uniform.

### **Alert - Korea Agent Orange: VA Coverage – source various**

Veterans who served in a unit in or near the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ) anytime between April 1, 1968 and August 31, 1971 and who have a disease VA recognizes as associated with Agent Orange exposure are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides. These Veterans do not have to show they were exposed to Agent Orange to be eligible for disability compensation for these diseases. VA and DOD must determine the Veteran's unit operated in the DMZ area and the Veteran was physically there.

Camp Casey and other Camps on the DMZ are presumptive sites for exposure to Agent Orange. But, you

have to have a disability that is a presumptive to exposure to Agent Orange. Go to the Agent Orange Review and see what disabilities qualify and if you have one of them then file for it. But, also look at the small print some conditions have a caveat to them. Such as peripheral neuropathy must have been diagnosed within one year of last exposure to Agent Orange.

[I was at Casey from 1965-66 so this does not apply to me – if you were there or near the DMZ from 68-71, get on the AO Register at VA.]

### **VA My Health eVet Website: Are You Enrolled? – source Vantage Point**

Hurricane season takes place from June to November. But dangerous storms and other emergencies that might require evacuation can occur at any time. It's important to take care of your health care needs to help ease stress during a potential emergency. My HealtheVet provides Veterans with online access to their medication refills, VA health records, Secure Messaging and other valuable tools even when the brick and mortar buildings are inaccessible. If weather or another emergency forces you to evacuate to another area, your VA medical records travel with you in your My HealtheVet account. Here are a few ways My HealtheVet can help in an emergency:

- Have instant access to your medical records
- Print a list of your current medications, including names and dosage
- Refill VA prescriptions

- Reschedule your VA appointments via Secure Messaging
- Contact your health care team via Secure Messaging

To access the above features, it's important that you upgrade your account to Premium level. You can start the upgrade process at <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/web/myhealthevet/upgrading-your-my-healthevet-account-through-in-person-or-online-authentication>.

A Premium account ensures you have access to your medical information and health care teams. During times of emergency, such as natural disasters, you should stay in a safe location and follow the guidance of local government officials. If your medical needs are urgent, please contact 911 or your VA facility. Your safety is always VA's number one concern.

### **Weird Facts About Your Body – source Odd Stuff Magazine**

The Human Body is a treasure trove of mysteries, one that still confounds doctors and scientists about the details of its working. It's not an overstatement to say that every part of your body is a miracle.

1. It's possible for your body to survive without a surprisingly large portion of its internal organs. Even if you lose your stomach, your spleen, 75% of your liver, 80% of your intestines, one kidney, one lung, and virtually every organ from your pelvic and groin area, you wouldn't be very healthy, but you would live.
2. During your lifetime, you will produce enough saliva to fill two swimming pools. Saliva is more important than you realize. If your saliva cannot dissolve something, you cannot taste it.
3. The largest cell in the human body is the female egg; the smallest is the male sperm. The egg is the only cell in the body that is visible by the naked eye.
4. The strongest muscle in the human body is the tongue; the hardest bone is the jawbone.
5. Feet have 500,000 sweat glands and can produce more than a pint of sweat a day.

6. The acid in your stomach is strong enough to dissolve razor blades. The reason it doesn't eat away at your stomach is that the cells of your stomach wall renew themselves so frequently that you get a new stomach lining every three to four days.

7. The human lungs contain approximately 2,400 kilometers (1,500 mi) of airways and 300 to 500 million hollow cavities, having a total surface area of about 70 square meters, roughly the same area as one side of a tennis court. If all of the capillaries that surround the lung cavities were unwound and laid end to end, they would extend for about 992 kilometers. Also, your left lung is smaller than your right lung to make room for your heart.

8. Sneezes regularly exceed 100 mph; coughs clock in at about 60 mph.

9. Your body gives off enough heat in 30 minutes to bring half a gallon of water to a boil.

10. Your body has enough iron in it to make a nail 3 inches long.



### The new World War I commemorative coin – source Defense News

A new commemorative coin has been unveiled to mark the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I and honor those Americans who served. The silver dollar coin was authorized by Congress in 2014, and features a service member holding a rifle to honor those who fought in the war from 1914 to 1918.

Acting Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley unveiled the design on the first day of the AUSA's annual meeting in Washington, D.C. "It's an opportunity to remember 4.7 million men and women who served 100 years ago," McCarthy said. "Those soldiers performed their difficult mission and left a legacy that touches us all every day." No war should be forgotten, he said, and neither should anyone's military service.

World War I veterans are the only ones who don't have a national memorial in Washington, D.C., said Terry Hamby, a Vietnam veteran and commissioner of the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission. "With this coin, it starts the



process to commemorate their service," Hamby said, adding that the proceeds from the coin will help with the construction of the planned World War I memorial at Pershing Park near the White House. There will be a groundbreaking ceremony on Nov. 9, with plans to eventually add a flagpole and a 65-foot-long commemorative wall.

The coin, titled Soldier's Charge, will be available in January, with proceeds benefiting the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission. The commission focuses on public outreach and education about American involvement in the war. No price has been set yet, but prices for silver dollar commemorative coins were \$51.95, according to the U.S. Mint website.

[Note. The helmet in the image is clearly incorrect. Word is the US Mint did not consult with experts prior to designing the coin, and apparently would not correct the image after the matter was brought to their attention.]

### Lawmakers take first steps toward a BRAC for VA facilities – source Military Times

House lawmakers have taken the first steps toward shutting down hundreds of VA facilities through a process similar to military base closure rounds, saying the move is critical to keep the department from wasting millions of dollars on underused, aging buildings.

But some of the largest veterans groups said they have serious concerns with the proposal, saying it's ripe for abuse and could tempt VA officials to outsource more veterans' medical care to private-sector physicians. Even supporters admitted the plan will be a difficult sell on Capitol Hill.

At issue are the roughly 6,300 facilities owned by VA across the country. Department officials have said more than 57% are more than 50 years old, and hundreds of others provide little value to veterans care or department management. In June, VA Secretary Shulkin announced plans to close at least 430 vacant or mostly vacant buildings over the next year, a move expected to save about \$7 million annually. But he also has pushed for further authorities to close other locations, to better match department resources with future needs.

The VA base-closure-style plan would establish an eleven-member outside panel to recommend facility closings and resource shifts based on facility needs that would involve an in-depth review of real estate and health care strategies,

complete with public hearings. The final commission recommendations would need to be approved by the president. Congress would have 45 days to override the White House decision if they disagree with the planned closings and moves.

But veterans groups said they have serious concerns that an outside panel could focus on savings instead of seeking the best care options for veterans, creating major problems for a system already dealing with wait time and access challenges.

But even without those concerns, any federal facility closing process faces a difficult path in Congress. DoD officials have been petitioning lawmakers for five years to hold another military base closing round, only to have the proposal rebuffed annually.

GAO researchers said the last five BRAC rounds have produced nearly \$12 billion in annual federal savings. But the last round conducted in 2005 still has not recouped its original costs, which has lead many in Congress to question the value of such cutbacks.

As the congressional debate continues, VA officials are reviewing another 784 non-vacant but underused facilities to determine if they can close or restructure them in coming months.

### Hotel Scam – source bestiestuff.com

You arrive at a hotel and check in. You give the desk your credit card, they scan and return the card, and you go to your room. The hotel receives a call and the caller asks for a room, which happens to be yours.

You answer and the caller says, "This is the front desk. We need to verify your charge card (or some other reason), please read me the name on your card, you account number and the 3-digit check-code number on the back of the card." You provide the information thinking its routine. In fact

you've been scammed. You thought you were talking to the front desk. Instead a scammer called and asked for a random room number and got you.

If you ever encounter such a situation tell the caller you will go down to the front desk to clear up any problem. Go to the desk or call and ask if there was a problem. If none, inform the hotel manager that someone tried to scam you acting as a front desk employee. Report the scam to the police. Perhaps the call can be traced via caller ID.

### **Suspect in Army Reserve weapons theft reaches plea deal – source Army Times**

A man charged with stealing 16 guns from an Army Reserve facility in Massachusetts, escaping from a Rhode Island prison and trying to rob two banks has reached a plea deal with prosecutors that could put him behind bars for 15 years.

**James Morales'** deal with federal prosecutors was signed Sept. 15. A change-of-plea hearing is scheduled for Nov. 13. Morales' federal public defender did not immediately respond to a phone call for comment Monday, a holiday.

Morales, a former Army reservist from Cambridge, MA, stole six M-4 carbines and 10 M-11 handguns from the Lincoln W. Stoddard U.S. Army Reserve Center in Worcester in November 2015, prosecutors said. Morales was tied to the theft through DNA evidence and an electronic monitoring bracelet he was wearing because he was out on bail on a child rape charge at the time, authorities have said.

He was captured in New York days later. He escaped from the privately run Wyatt Detention Facility in Central Falls, RI, on Dec. 31, stole a car in nearby Attleboro, MA, and was recaptured five days later after allegedly trying to rob banks in Cambridge and Somerville, MA, prosecutors have said.

According to the plea deal, prosecutors agreed to recommend 14 years in prison for the charges stemming from the gun thefts and bank robbery attempts, and one additional year for the escape. The deal also calls for three years of probation. Morales faced up to 90 years in prison if convicted at trial of all the charges. The judge isn't bound by the prosecution's recommendations.

Two people convicted of helping sell the stolen guns already have been sentenced. **Tyrone James** received nearly five years behind bars, while **Ashley Bigsbee** received a nearly 2-year sentence.

### **Did you know?**

#### **VA owns a ritzy Paris hotel – it's potential sale is opposed by veterans group – source Military Times**

Lawmakers are again working to get VA to sell its multi-million dollar hotel in France to pay for more relevant needs, but the American Legion official is standing in their way. They say the plan is really a get-rich-quick scheme for a foreign developer that could jeopardize World War I artifacts and cheat American taxpayers out of a valuable property. "This is a short-sighted attempt and a quick fix to larger issues within VA," said Lou Celli, director of the Legion's Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Division. "Ultimately, by selling the building, veterans lose."

Pershing Hall, which sits less than a mile from the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, has been managed by VA since 1991 and owned by the federal government since 1935, when Legion officials transferred ownership of the site in hopes of establishing a permanent war memorial and veterans assistance site. That didn't happen. The site still houses numerous works of art and historic artifacts, including items related to Gen. John Pershing.

In the 1990s, after years of neglect, the site was converted into a luxury hotel and spa. Operations are handled by a French firm with VA receiving periodic lease payments. It is also supposed to serve as a meeting place for American veterans groups traveling abroad, although veterans organizations have complained that access is severely limited. That has led to questions about the value of the site, both as a practical asset for VA services and as a potential windfall for the government if it's sold to a private developer. Multiple lawmakers in recent years have advocated selling the site and using the money to pay for more practical projects within the U.S.

Rep. Mike Coffman, R-Colo. - a longtime critic of the site - has again offered legislation to sell the building. "While Pershing Hall is probably a terrific hotel, it makes no sense that the VA keeps a luxury hotel on its books," he said

during a House Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing. "The VA needs to focus its time and resources on its core mission, taking care of our nation's veterans." Coffman's measure would require the preservation of the site's historic artifacts and give proceeds of any sale to the American Battle Monuments Commission. Legion officials would rather see ownership of the historic site transferred to the ABMC.

In the past, the group has been open to the idea of a sale, but is now strongly against the idea. They say a 99-year lease on the property with the current hotel firm makes a sale to a new outside buyer largely impractical. The building has been valued at more than \$82 million, but Legion officials estimate the lease decreases the realistic sale price to less than \$9 million. If the current hotel firm purchases the property - as they have stated they want to do - they can break the lease and sell the land at the higher rate.

"We never expected this building to be used as a hotel," Celli said during testimony before the committee. "We are disheartened that Pershing Hall is not a military memorial or space for veterans ... but even more concerned with the blatant disregard to the second- or third-order effects of selling this building to a private organization." Rather than allowing a private firm to profit, Celli said, federal officials should look for ways to improve the site. He said VA is "not capable of appropriately maintaining the location" but said another federal agency like the ABMC may do a better job.

Coffman said he thinks the government should cut its losses and get whatever money out of the site possible. Despite repeated legislative debate on the site in recent years, Coffman's proposal and other related sale plans have received only partial support from Congress. Committee officials did not say whether they would schedule a full panel vote on the issue in coming weeks.

### Mail Theft – source various

Despite the emergence of cybercrime, mail theft can still be an easy way for thieves to steal your identification. The US Postal Service received over 60,000 complaints of mail theft last year, which resulted in over 2,000 convictions. This is the tip of the iceberg since a larger amount of stolen mail goes unreported, or occurs without the recipient's knowledge. It takes just one piece of intercepted mail for a criminal to begin stealing your identity. That's the bad news. The good news is that there are simple ways to protect yourself from mail thief.

Once mail is stolen there are several ways it may be used to steal your identity or to commit other crimes. Criminals could take account information from credit card bills or other mail from your bank and use it to make new purchases, or to order new credit cards or checks that they can intercept later. They can also use change of address forms included in credit card statements and other bills or report a credit card as lost or stolen and ask that a new card be mailed to a new address.

The simplest thing you can do to avoid having mail stolen is to get a mailbox with a lock. Mail theft isn't a highly planned crime; thieves will go to the next house rather than try to break into a locked mailbox.

You should be careful with outgoing mail as well. If you mail checks or anything else with sensitive personal

information drop it at a post office rather than leave it in your mailbox. Better yet, pay bills online more quickly and securely than by mail.

Be aware of suspicious activity around your neighbor's mailboxes and ask them to look out for you. If you receive mail everyday but suddenly stop receiving it you would be right to suspect someone may have fraudulently requested your mail be forwarded elsewhere.

Get to know your mail carrier, your first line of defense against mail theft. Always request that mail be held when you are going out of town, even if it's just for a day or two. You can do this online at **USPS.gov**.

The USPS is now offering a free service called Informed Delivery where you get digital copies of mail coming to your address. It is currently available only for letter-size mail. You receive a grey scale image of the front of mail scheduled to arrive. If you suspect mail is being taken this may be a way to confirm if something isn't received as expected. Get more information at:

<https://informeddelivery.usps.com/box/pages/intro/start.action>.

If you believe mail has been stolen file a mail theft complaint with the US Postal Inspection Service at <https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov/>, then take steps to monitor your credit for signs of unauthorized activity.

### Michigan military base tests positive for contaminated water – sources AP and Together We Served

A combat center in northern Michigan has become the third military base in the state to test positive for contaminated groundwater. Preliminary results are in for tests conducted at five locations at the Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center earlier this year, said Capt. Brian Blumline, a civil engineer for the base. Blumline said all the sites showed elevated levels of perfluorooctanoic acid and perfluorooctyl sulfonate, which are contaminants from firefighting foam that was used in training at the base many years ago. They were considered safe at the time.

Contaminants seeped into the groundwater when the foam was used, and there's concern a plume could have traveled over time and entered residents' well-water sources. "It's been in our groundwater for a long time and the test numbers came in very high," Blumline said.

The maximum level of such contaminants deemed safe in Michigan is 70 parts per trillion, which Blumline described as one drop of dye in three Olympic-sized swimming pools. State Rep. Sue Allor said the test results at the base were at or about 80,000 parts per trillion. "My feeling right now is there needs to be more action and this isn't moving fast enough," Allor said. "We're talking about people's lives here. I want to make sure the health, safety and welfare of residents, animals and property are the top priority in this."

Blumline said state environmental and health agencies will provide updates to the public on what steps will be taken moving forward. "We're not going to be able to fight this without community support," he said.

Contamination also has been found at Camp Grayling and the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base. The Alpena base is expected to receive more definitive test results in January.

### Netflix Scam: Phony Tech Support – source BBB Scam Alert

Trying to reach Netflix for help with your account? If so, watch out for this crafty con. Scammers provide fake customer support numbers online and fool callers into purchasing unrelated computer software.

**How the Scam Works:** You have trouble with your account and search online for the customer support phone number. You find up what appears to be a legitimate toll-free number (1-888 or 1-844 number). A "representative" answers and says your Netflix account has been hacked. In one version, the scammer claimed a dozen people from across the globe all used a victim's account. Skeptical? The "representative" says they can provide proof that your

account was hacked. But first, they need remote access to your computer.

Granting access can open you up to the risk of identity theft. Scam artists can install malware that records passwords or hunts for personal information, such as bank account numbers. However, this scam appears to be a pretext for selling expensive computer security software. Victims report paying between \$200 and \$900 – it will do nothing to fix your Netflix account, which was never hacked in the first place.

**Protect Yourself:** Don't ever give a stranger remote access, and be careful when searching for support phone numbers.



### VA Benefits Delivery at Discharge Update – source Stars & Stripes

Servicemembers will have less time to claim disability compensation before leaving the military but should get benefits faster under changes made by VA. Troops who want to resolve disability claims before leaving the military must enroll in the “Benefits Delivery at Discharge” program 90 days from separation. Quick Start, a program launched in 2008 that allowed troops with 59 or fewer days left to begin their claims process, has ended.

Late-filed claims mean veterans will be waiting an average of 90 days after separation to get a decision on benefits, he said. Submitting disability claims between 90 and 180 days before separation will ensure claims can be fully developed.

### And Finally . . . .

#### Does the 5-Second Rule Hold Up? – source The Conversation, Washington Post, others (edited for length)

When you drop a piece of food on the floor, is it okay to eat if you pick up within five seconds? This myth contends if food spends just a few seconds on the floor, dirt and germs won’t have much of a chance to contaminate it. Research in my [Paul Dawson] lab focused on how food and food contact surfaces become contaminated, and we’ve done some work on this particular piece of wisdom.

The “five-second rule” might not seem like the most pressing issue for food scientists to get to the bottom of, but it’s worth investigating food myths like this one because they shape our beliefs about when food is safe to eat.

So is five seconds on the floor the critical threshold that separates an edible morsel from a case of food poisoning? It’s a bit more complicated than that. It depends on just how much bacteria can make it from floor to food in a few seconds and just how dirty the floor is.

It’s hard to pin down the origins of the five-second rule, but a 2003 study reported 70% of women and 56% of men were familiar with the rule and that women were more likely than men to eat food dropped on the floor.

So what does science tell us about what a few moments on the floor means for food safety? Earliest research is attributed to Jillian Clarke, a high school student participating in a research apprenticeship at the University of Illinois. She and her colleagues inoculated floor tiles with bacteria then placed food on the tiles for varying times. They found bacteria were transferred from the tile to the foods within five seconds, but didn’t report the specific amount of bacteria that made it from the tile to the food.

In 2007, my lab at Clemson University published a study in a peer-reviewed journal on this topic. We inoculated squares of tile, carpet or wood with *Salmonella*. Five minutes after that, we placed either bologna or bread on the surface for five, 30 or 60 seconds, then measured the amount of bacteria transferred to the food. We repeated this exact protocol after the bacteria had been on the surface for two, four, eight and 24 hours.

We found the amount of bacteria transferred didn’t depend much on how long the food was in contact with the contaminated surface. The overall amount of bacteria on the surface mattered more, and this decreased over time after the initial inoculation. What’s at issue is less how long your

Troops enrolling in the benefits program will need to be at their duty station for 45 days after enrolling to make sure they can attend medical exams.

Those who miss the deadline can still file claims through the VA’s “eBenefits” program after they leave the military, but may have to wait 18 months for a resolution. A smarter option is to file a claim while still in uniform. By filing here and getting their exams done they can ensure they receive their disability claim right after separating. More information on the program can be found at: <http://bit.ly/2w78XAn>.

food is on the floor and much more how infested with bacteria that patch of floor happens to be.

We also found the kind of surface made a difference. Carpets seem to be slightly better places to drop your food than wood or tile. When carpet was inoculated with *Salmonella*, less than 1% of the bacteria were transferred. When the food was in contact with tile or wood, 48%-70% of bacteria transferred.

A study from Aston University in the UK used nearly identical parameters and found similar results testing contact times of three and 30 seconds on similar surfaces. They also reported that 87% of people asked either would eat or have eaten food dropped on the floor.

From a food safety standpoint, if you have millions or more cells on a surface, 0.1% is still enough to make you sick. Certain types of bacteria are extremely virulent; it takes only a small amount to make you sick. For example, 10 cells or less of an especially virulent strain of *E. coli* can cause severe illness and death in people with compromised immune systems. But the chance of these bacteria being on most surfaces is very low.

It’s not just dropping food on the floor that can lead to contamination. Bacteria are carried by various “media,” which can include raw food, moist surfaces where bacteria has been left, our hands or skin and from coughing or sneezing. Hands, foods and utensils can carry individual bacterial cells, colonies of cells or cells living in communities contained within a protective film that provide protection. The microscopic layers of deposits containing bacteria are known as biofilms and are found on most surfaces and objects. Biofilm communities can harbor bacteria longer and are very difficult to clean. They also have an enhanced resistance to sanitizers and antibiotics compared to bacteria living on their own.

So the next time you consider eating dropped food, the odds are in your favor that you can eat that morsel and not get sick. But in the rare chance there is a microorganism that can make you sick on the exact spot where the food dropped, you can be fairly sure the bug is on the food you are about to put in your mouth. Research (and common sense) tell us that the best thing to do is to keep your hands, utensils and other surfaces clean.