

**VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS  
DEPT SERVICE OFFICE – NORTH DAKOTA  
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**SERVICE OFFICE REPORT – June 2020**

|  | <u>THIS MONTH</u> | <u>YEAR TO DATE</u> |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|
| CONTACTS:<br>(Phone calls, emails and walk-ins)  | 755               | 12,151              |
| COMPENSATION:<br>(Service-connected disability)  | \$ 1,519,953.00   | \$ 17,877,318.97    |
| PENSION:<br>(NSC Pension, Death, Burial and DIC) | \$ 11,241.44      | \$ 730,496.13       |
| MISC BENEFITS:<br>(Education, Waivers, etc.)     | \$ 11,918.69      | \$ 170,532.63       |
| RETROACTIVE:                                     | \$ 234,347.16     | \$ 2,875,354.17     |
| TOTAL:   | \$ 1,812,460.69   | \$ 22,421,884.66    |

**1. HVAC Conducts Oversight Hearing on VA Telehealth: On Tuesday, members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Technology Modernization and Health Subcommittees, VA, and VSOs discussed the expansion and impact of VA telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Tammy Barlet stated according to data from a COVID-19 survey conducted by the VFW VA converted many routine care appointments to telehealth. "Telehealth overcomes longstanding barriers, allowing veterans to maintain their continuum care with providers they trust" she said. Watch the hearing.**

**2. Complete the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry:** All veterans who served in eligible locations should include their information in the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pits

Registry. Participation in the registry is very important as it will allow VA to track burn pit exposure and draw inferences regarding associated adverse health effects. Exposure to burn pits may be associated with respiratory conditions such as asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD). Recently, VA stated that veterans with underlying respiratory conditions may be at greater risk for developing complications related to COVID-19. Service members and veterans who have already signed up for the registry should make sure that their contact information, phone number, address, and email are up-to-date.

**3. HVAC Women Veterans Task Force Holds Online Forum:** On Tuesday, members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Women Veterans Task Force, VA, women veterans, and VSOs discussed the mental health and wellness of women veterans and the impact of COVID-19. VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Tammy Barlet, a Coast Guard veteran, said department officials are behind in providing data on women's usage, complaint rates at medical facilities, and communication with VSOs. "This is the time to over-communicate, not go radio silent," she said. Telemedicine, women veteran peer specialists, sexual harassment, inconsistent services at different locations, and VA outreach were other critical issues discussed. Watch the forum.

**4. IRS Extends Deadlines for Disaster Situations:** On Tuesday, the IRS announced that victims of the April tornadoes, severe storms, and flooding that took place in parts of Mississippi, Tennessee and South Carolina will have until Oct. 15, 2020, to file individual and business tax returns. The IRS is offering this relief to areas designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as qualifying for individual assistance. Find the current list of eligible localities.

**5. Legislation Introduced to Expand Survivors' Benefits:** On Tuesday, Rep. TJ Cox (D-CA) introduced VFW-supported H.R. 6933, the *Caring for Survivors Act of 2020*. This important legislation would increase Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments to an amount equal to 55 percent of the permanent and total disability monthly compensation rate, and would make survivors eligible for DIC after a veteran has consistently held a permanent and total disability rating for five years. This idea was put forth in the *Independent Budget Report*, co-authored by the VFW, Disabled American Veterans, and Paralyzed Veterans of America. The VFW thanks Rep. Cox and all cosponsors for their efforts to expand survivors' benefits. Learn more.

**6. VFW Participates in SVAC Roundtable on Toxic Exposure:** On Wednesday, VFW National Legislative Service Deputy Director Matthew Doyle participated in a roundtable hosted by the Senate

Veterans' Affairs Committee. The purpose of the roundtable was to discuss a possible legislative solution to address toxic exposure during military service. Doyle stated, "The VFW affirms its support for a permanent framework to grant disability benefits to veterans who have developed health conditions as a result of their exposure... This framework would be evidence-based so that science would drive the granting of benefits, and benefits would not be granted without adequate science." The VFW thanks Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Ranking Member Jon Tester (D-MT) for hosting the roundtable, and for their efforts to expand veterans' disability benefits for toxic exposure.

**7. MIA Update:** The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced five new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

-- **Army Cpl. Billie Joe Hash, 18**, of Corbin, Kentucky, was a member of Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Hash will be buried Aug. 29, 2020, in his hometown. Read about Hash.

-- **Navy Radioman 3rd Class Irvin F. Rice, 22**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Rice. Interment services are pending. Read about Rice.

-- **Navy Seaman 1st Class Wesley E. Graham, 21**, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Graham. Interment services are pending. Read about Graham.

-- **Army Master Sgt. James Hart, Jr., 25**, was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. Read about Hart.

-- **Army 1st Lt. Anthony R. Mazzulla, 26**, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, after a fighting withdrawal near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. Read about Mazzulla.

-- **Army Cpl. Billie Joe Hash, 18**, was a member of Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 6, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. Read about Hash.

-- **Army Pfc. John J. Sitarz, 19**, was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division. His unit was engaged in battle with German forces near Germeter, Germany, in the Hürtgen Forest, when he was declared missing in action on Nov. 2, 1944. Sitarz could not be recovered because of the ongoing fighting, and his status was changed to killed in action on Nov. 3, 1945. Interment services are pending. Read about Sitarz.

-- **Navy Fire Controlman 3rd Class Robert T. Stout**, 21, was assigned to the battleship USS Oklahoma, which was moored at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor, when the ship was attacked by Japanese aircraft on Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Oklahoma sustained multiple torpedo hits, which caused it to quickly capsize. The attack on the ship resulted in the deaths of 429 crewmen, including Stout. Interment services are pending. Read about Stout.

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. John M. Fahy**, 19, was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll of the Gilbert Islands, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting at Tarawa, approximately 1,000 Marines and sailors were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded, while the Japanese were virtually annihilated. Fahy died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. Read about Fahy.

-- **Army Master Sgt. James L. Quong**, 30, was an Army Reserve captain in World War II but gave up his commission to join the Regular Army as a master sergeant in the Korean War, he was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered. Interment services are pending. Read about Quong.

-- **Army Cpl. Francis J. Rochon**, 21, was a member of Company C, 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Sept. 1, 1950, near Changnyeong, South Korea. The Army officially declared Rochon deceased on Dec. 31, 1953, and declared his remains non-recoverable Jan. 16, 1956. Interment services are pending.