VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

DEPT SERVICE OFFICE – NORTH DAKOTA

VA REGIONAL OFFICE BLDG, SUITE 205

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# SERVICE OFFICE REPORT – May 2020

THIS MONTH YEAR TO DATE

CONTACTS: 446 11,705 (Phone calls, emails and walk-ins)

## COMPENSATION: $ 1,326,600.61 $ 16,550,718.36

(Service-connected disability)

PENSION: $ 26,561.68 $ 703,934.45

(NSC Pension, Death, Burial and DIC)

## MISC BENEFITS: $ 1,385.35 $ 169,147.28

(Education, Waivers, etc.)

## RETROACTIVE: $ 282,616.53 $ 2,592,737.64

TOTAL: $ 2,183,164.17 $ 20,238,717.49

**1. VFW Pays Its Respects to the Fallen During Memorial Day:** In recognition of Memorial Day, the VFW honors the legacy of the men and women who served in our nation’s military and made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of freedom. While many Americans signal Memorial Day as the start of the summer, the less than one percent who have donned the uniform, and military families worldwide, understand the true meaning and significance of this sacred day. “Comrades, many of you have walked the hallowed grounds of our national veterans’ cemeteries solemnly laying eyes on the headstones of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen who honorably served and placed the freedom of their nation before their very own safety,” said VFW National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz. “We have lost hundreds of thousands of men and women since the founding of our nation in 1775, and unfortunately, as the global fight on terror continues today, we will lose more protectors of freedom.” This Memorial Day will be different considering the physical distancing and stay-at-home orders issued across the nation because of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. While many Americans will be unable to physically visit loved ones or traditionally gather to memorialize their sacrifice, the VFW encourages the nation to make this Memorial Day as significant as any other in our nation’s history. “On this Memorial Day, like all others before, I’m asking all Americans to spend this day solely on reflecting and remembering the service men and women we have lost over the course of history,” said Schmitz. “Today, and every day, we honor and salute every man and woman -- and the remarkable families of these heroes -- who gave their lives for our nation. Hence, Memorial Day will forever be a day that means everything to the VFW because our warriors decided we meant everything to them.”

**2. VA Begins to Reopen Selected Medical Centers:** This week, VA reopened 20 medical centers as part of a three-phase timeline. The speed of the phases will depend upon the VA medical center’s ability to minimize and control exposure to COVID-19. Even though these VA medical centers are not fully open, certain non-emergency in-person appointments and some elective procedures may be permitted. Physical distancing, mandatory face masks, screening processes, and other rigorous safety measures remain in place for now. Telework, telemedicine, phone consults, and wellness checks will continue whenever possible. VA continues to strongly suggest that a veteran contact their local VA medical center before arriving at a facility. The initial sites will indicate how other VA medical centers reopen in the coming weeks and months. Read more.

**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. 6. Legislation Introduced to Preserve 48-Hour Claims Review:** On Tuesday, Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT) introduced VFW-supported S. 3761, the *Veterans Claim Transparency Act*. This important legislation would reinstate VA’s former policy of permitting VSOs to review claims decisions within the 48-hours preceding promulgation to ensure all claims were properly

evaluated and are error-free prior to a veteran receiving notification of a ratings decision. “The 48-hour review period is an essential feature of the VA claims process,” said VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Matthew Doyle. “It functions as an independent quality review check on claims decisions before final ratings are sent to veterans.” The VFW thanks Senator Tester and all cosponsors for introducing this important legislation. Read more.

**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 Testifies at DAMA Subcommittee Virtual Forum:** On Wednesday, VFW National Legislative Service Associate Director Matthew Doyle testified at a virtual forum hosted by the House Veterans’ Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs. The purpose of the forum was to discuss compensation and pension examinations and other issues facing veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the forum, Doyle stated, "Numerous veterans have lost access to employer-sponsored health care during the crisis due to layoffs. Veteran unemployment is currently near 12 percent and rising. For this reason, the VFW recommends that VA temporarily expedite or ‘flash’ the adjudication of disability claims for veterans who are not yet eligible for VA health care and who have lost access to their private health care during the crisis.” The VFW thanks Chairwoman Elaine Luria (D-VA) and Ranking Member Mike Bost (R-IL) for hosting the virtual forum, and for their efforts to protect veterans’ disability benefits. Watch the virtual forum.

**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:

**-- Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Charles D. Miller,** 19, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, 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. Miller died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. Read about Miller.

**-- Army Sgt. Jesse D. Hill,** 20, 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 Hill.

-- **U.S. Navy Metalsmith 1st Class Leonard F. Smith,** 29, 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 Smith. Interment services are pending. Read about Smith.

**-- Army Cpl. R.B. Cherry,** 19, was a member of Company G, 2nd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 27, 1950, near Anju, North Korea. Using information provided by returned POWs after the war, it was determined that Cherry had been a POW in Camp 5 and died of pneumonia sometime in the winter of 1950. His remains were reportedly buried in a cemetery near the camp and were not recovered. Interment services are pending. Read about Cherry.

**-- Army Sgt. William E. Cavender,** 20, was a member of Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 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 Cavender.

-- **Marine Corps Pfc. Mervin D. Galland,** 24, was a member of Company B, 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. Galland died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. He was reported to have been buried in Row D of the East Division Cemetery, later renamed Cemetery 33. Interment services are pending. Read about Galland.

-- **Navy Fireman 1st Class Louis J. Tushla,** 25, 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 Tushla. Interment services are pending. Read about Tushla.

**-- Marine Corps Reserve Pfc. Thomas F. Johnson,** 18, was a member of Company B, 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. Johnson died on the fourth day of battle, Nov. 23, 1943. Interment services are pending. Read about Johnson.

**-- Army Pvt. Charles Andrews,** 25, was assigned to Company K, 3rd Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division. His unit was engaged in battle with German forces near Brandenburg, Germany, in the Hürtgen Forest, when he was declared missing in action on Dec. 4, 1944. Andrews could not be recovered because of the on-going fighting, and his status was changed to killed in action on Jan. 29, 1945. Interment services are pending. Read about Andrews.

-- **Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. Howard E. Miller,** 22, was a member of Company A, 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. Miller died on the third day of battle, Nov. 22, 1943. Interment services are pending. Read about Miller.

Brian Deckert

Department Service Officer