My Fellow Legionaries

On the 11th of November 2013 I along with the Department Auxiliary President, and the SAL detachment Commander, traveled to Saint Avold France to perform a Wreath Laying Ceremony for Veterans Day, at Lorrain Cemetery. Also there were members from the Tuskegee Airman Group, who also laid a wreath. The SAL Detachment Chaplain (Comrade Rev. Ronald Moore) offered opening and closing Prayers. The Ceremony was conducted in a very dignified and honorable way to honor our fallen HERO’s.

On the 30th of November I attended John Wayne Post GR79’s annual Thanksgiving Celebration, along with Vice Commanders Jerry Aman, Casby Logan, also present were the SAL Detachment Commander and the Auxiliary President. Like always the event was well prepared and executed. There were about a 120 guest all who enjoyed the event and the camaraderie. The food was great and all appeared to have a great time. My cap is off to Commander Brown, and members of John Wayne Post GR79.

The Department Oratorical Final will be held on the 22nd of February 2014 in Stuttgart. Now is the time to start preparing for this event. I would really like to see more contestants at this year’s event, and more support from the posts. If your area does not have a DoD School offer support/help to a post that does, this worked out just fine last year between post GR03 and GR79.

The Department is still in need of a JROTC Chairman. If you are interested in this program, please contact me or the Department Adjutant Comrade Max Rice

**MEMBERSHIP, MEMBERSHIP, MEMBERSHIP.** I cannot stress membership enough. It is the bloodline of our organization. It enables us to perform our missions
to the Veterans and their Families, and supports not only National Programs but ours also. While you are out there recruiting, new members do not forget your current members, get them to renew in a timely manner. If you have any questions on membership do not hesitate to contact the Membership Chairman Comrade Brown, at joedan.pascall@goolemail.com. He can answer your questions and resolve any problems you are having with membership.

I would like to remind all of you this is neither mine nor the Department Newsletter Editor’s Comrade Greaux Newsletter. It is yours. Department Officers, Post Commanders, Adjutants, and members of this department can and should submit articles for this publication. You cannot convince me that your post or a member of your post has done something worth mentioning, and here is the place to do that, let the entire department know, what you are accomplishing. Take credit for what you are doing, to support your post, and its programs.

In closing I wish all of you a Very Merry Christmas and a Very Happy and prosperous New Year. Please keep those in harm’s way and their families, in your thoughts and prayers also.

James M. Settle
Department Commander

Phone: 07138-67359
E-Mail: Please use this E-Mail address temporarily until I can register a new one. americanlegion@hotmail.com

The Department Web Page is: www.AmerLegionDeptFrance.org
The department has a Face Book page at the following www.Facebook.com/ALDeptFrance. Please visit and like this page. Thanks

Lorraine Cemetery St. Avold France. Veterans Day 2013
Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

This is a time of the year when we gather with family and friends to give thanks. Thanks for the loving family and friends we are so lucky to have. Thanks for our health and the well-being of others. Thanks for the freedoms we enjoy in the greatest nation in the world.

I would like to give thanks to each and every one of our dedicated American Legion Family members. The work you do on behalf of veterans, active-duty military members and their families is inspiring to me.

Thank you to the service officers who help our veterans file and receive the claims they earned through their service to country.

Thank you to all of you who support our programs aimed at developing the youth of America — Legion Baseball, the Oratorical Contest, Boys State and Nation, and the list goes on.

Thank you to everyone who contributed donations to our many programs that help others in need such as the National Emergency Fund, Operation Comfort Warriors and Temporary Financial Assistance.

Thank you for working every day on behalf of veterans, servicemen and women, and the communities in which they live.

For God and Country,

Dan Dellinger

National Commander

The American Legion
DEPARTMENT VICE COMMANDER AT LARGE / MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN Joe D. Brown

VCAL Brown while in the Heidelberg Hospital ➔

GR79 Commander Brown conducts General Membership Meeting while in hospital

GR79 Veteran Day 2013 ➔

GR79 Thanksgiving fest ➔

GR30 Thanksgiving fest ➔
MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

REQUIREMENTS TO JOIN THE AMERICAN LEGION

IMPORTANT: EVERYONE MUST SUBMIT A COPY OF DD 214 OR DISCHARGE.

NEW MEMBERSHIP

Eligible veterans applying for first time membership must submit the following information to Post Membership Committee:

1. Complete American Legion Membership application. Applications are available at the Post Home
2. COPY OF DD214 OR DISCHARGE
4. If the information is correct, membership will be approved and then a membership card will be mailed to you.
5. Please see eligibility dates below.

TRANSFERS

Veterans applying for transfers from your current Post to our Post must submit the following:

a. Completed Member Data Form.
b. COPY OF DD214 OR DISCHARGE
c. COPY OF MEMBERSHIP CARD

6. Membership dues payment, if current year dues are not paid. If current dues are paid, please pay dues for next year's membership.

ELIGIBILITY DATES

MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY in the American Legion is based on honorable service with the U.S. Armed Forces between:

(April 6, 1917 -November 11, 1918) World War I
(December 7, 1941 - December 31, 1946) World War II
(June 25, 1950 - January 31, 1955) Korean War
(February 28, 1961 - May 7, 1975) Vietnam War
(August 24, 1982 - July 31,1984) Lebanon/Grenada
(December 20, 1989 - January 31, 1990) Operation Just Cause
(August 2, 1990 - Today)* Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm

Because eligibility dates remain open, all members of the U.S. Armed Forces are eligible to join The American Legion at this time, until the date of the end of hostilities as determined by the government of the United States. Must have served at least one day of active military duty during one of the dates below and honorably discharged or still serving honorably.

For any questions please contact our membership chairman, joedan.pascal1@gmail.com M-0170-1888034
Membership Chairman
Charlie Joe BROWN
Arthur Ballou is a Post Member of Kaiserslautern Post GR01 (Kaiserslautern, Germany). Also, the BOSS representative for Post GR01

VCAL Joe Dan Brown presents the Recruiter Centran Award at the Kaiserslautern Post GR01 (Post Home)

The National Commander and Auxiliary President Visit at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center USO Warriors Center
DEPARTMENT
VICE COMMANDER
Jerry Aman

On 12 November I attended GR 1982’s Executive Council and General Membership meetings. Again it was encouraging to witness the close cooperation that exists between the local military and GR 1982. This was again evident as three community organizations were at the membership meeting to present their programs and request support from the post.

GR 1982 supports two military communities. In Illesheim they recently supported a Kinderfest and the Child Development Center. In Ansbach the post contributed $ 763 to the Junior ROTC which was generated during their recent combined fund raiser. Additionally they assisted in the Veteran’s Day ceremonies.

December will be a busy month for the post what with Christmas parties, hosting German kids from a local Kinderheim with a day on Storch Barracks, Illesheim and other projects. Commander Buchanan is working closely with the community high school in obtaining candidates for the Department’s oratorical contest.

If the post is unable to support all activities requested of them you can count on their individual members to pitch in as demonstrated by 2nd Vice Commander Ken Aungst who will personally bake a ham and his “lip-smacking” baked beans for the “Single Soldiers Home Cooked Meals” program of a local Engineering unit.

GR 1982 reinvests the money they take in during community activities in the youth of the Community and is another fine example of the American Legion’s commitment to community service. These acts should qualify them for consideration for the National Post Excellence Award.

Further information on the post’s activities can be found on their Facebook site: www.facebook.com/AmericanLegionPost1982. You do not need to be a member of Facebook in order to view their site.

On November 13 I attended GR 06’s General Membership meeting on Patch Barracks, Stuttgart. A quorum was present and after the American Legion’s opening ceremony Post Commander Derek Duyne got right down to business.

Commander Duyne reported that the children’s Halloween party was a big success as was the Post’s Veteran’s Day ceremony with over 100 attendees for the wreath laying ceremony. After the event the post received several complimentary comments from the military for their contribution.

The post has now has 217 members (78.6%) and need 61 additional members to attain 100%. SAL and Auxiliary membership is at 100%. A recruitment drive is underway and an “on-post” dining hall has been reserved for Saturday the 21st of December for a member appreciation holiday meal.

As in previous years, GR 06 will be hosting the 2014 oratorial contest which we hope gets more participation from other posts than in previous years. This is a noble program for the youth in our communities and helps them develop their speaking skills and prepares them for college. I recommend that Department Legion members in communities that have high schools go on the American Legion’s web site and click on Programs and then Oratorical Contest to learn more about the program and how to sponsor a candidate. More information will follow.

In keeping with the tradition of our fine organization GR 06 is another example of the American Legion supporting their military communities and the welfare of its soldiers and their families.

On 17 November 2013 on German Volkstrauertag (Memorial Day) ten members of the William D. Nelson Post GR 09, Department of France, participated in a wreath laying ceremony at the Ulm Artillery Monument honoring soldiers who died in combat and persons who have suffered at the hands of oppressors.

The Traditional Ulmer Artillery Association was formed in 1909 and since 2009 GR 09 has participated in this solemn affair. With this friendship the American Legion also disseminates the understanding of the Legion’s principles to our German hosts.
Past Commander Robert Lindsey and 2nd Vice Carlos Fonseca placing a wreath at the monument with Legionnaire Garner displaying the post colors.

FINANCE OFFICER Gary Miller

Images from GR06 Veterans Day Ceremony 2013
DEPARTMENT SERVICE OFFICER George Hall

I am now set up at my home for VA, DAFS, SSA, ACG, CA.
The address is AmKirchwald 3, 69251 Gaiberg

Phone H 06223 5475
Phone M 0176 7227 6350
Email hallgt@yahoo.com

DEPARTMENT ADVOCATE George W. Seeburger

After our Department Finance Officer successfully opened Membership with Pentagon Federal Credit Union, Post GR14 initiated action to do the same. Post GR14 has been accepted, in spite of the German address.

If any other Post is interested, keep in mind, that the major disadvantage is that the Checking Account requires a continuous balance of $500.--. Otherwise there is a monthly service fee of $10.--. I have on hand all 4 of the application forms (PDF Format) prepared for fill-in with Acrobat Reader.

George W. Seeburger
Judge Advocate

DEPARTMENT PRESIDENT
Isolde E. Settle

Fellow Auxiliary Members and Legionnaires,

On the 11th of November, I represented the Department at Lorrain Cemetery; in Saint Avold, France, for Veterans Day memorial and Wreath Laying Ceremony. Also present were the Department Commander, SAL Detachment Commander, SAL Detachment Chaplain, and members of the Tuskegee Airman Group. Though it was a small ceremony, it was full of honor and respect for our fallen heroes.

The 30th of November was a very special day for me it was John Wayne Post's annual Thanksgiving Day event. Once again Commander Brown and Post members provided a GREAT meal. Like always everyone there felt at home, and had an enjoyable time. The food drinks and conversations were endless. GREAT JOB once again John Wayne Post GR79.

I have spoken a few times on our role to assist the post in their events, and the need to communicate with each other better to accomplish this. I believe that we are now doing a much better job at doing this and I am sure we are supporting the Legion with their events and efforts in supporting our past, present and future veterans and their families, more vigorously.

In closing, I wish all of you a Very Merry Christmas, and a Very Happy New Year. Please keep those in harm's way and their families, in your prayers.

Isolde E. Settle
Department President

PHONE: 07138-67359
E-Mail: isoldesettle@outlook.com
My fellow Comrades,

On the 11th of November I along with the Department Commander and Auxiliary President were in Saint Avold, France to participate in the Veterans Day Memorial and Wreath Laying Ceremony. The Ceremony was conducted in the Lorrain Memorial Chapel. The Detachment Chaplain Comrade Rev. Ronald Moore offered both opening and closing prayers for this ceremony. Though the participation was not what was expected, all there paid their respects to our fallen heroes. Once again it was an Honor and Privilege, for me to represent the Detachment in this ceremony.

On the 30th of November I represented the Detachment in Heilbronn, at the annual John Wayne Post GR79’s Thanksgiving Day event. I enjoyed myself, and had many conversations with Legion and SAL Members. Also attending this event, were the Department Commander, Madame President, and Vice Commanders Jerry Aman and Casby Logan, who is also the Detachment 1st Vice Commander. My cap is off to the Commander, Comrade Brown and John Wayne Post Members for a great Thanksgiving Day.

All Squadrons have their 2014 Membership Cards. Membership renewal this year is very slow; we are not doing very well in the membership arena this year. I encourage all squadrons to start their Membership renewals NOW. Remember the Detachment has a Membership fund which will allow Squadrons to do a transmittal now and then reimburse the Detachment once the dues are collected from their members.

I still encourage SAL Members in the Detachment that are Dual Members to carry your SAL Cap to events, this will show SAL support to their Post, Detachment, and the Department.

Those post desiring to start a squadron, please contact me or the detachment Adjutant and we will help you to get started.

In closing I wish all of you, a Very Merry Christmas and a Very Happy New Years. Please keep those in harm’s way and their families in your prayers.

Joshua J. Settle
Detachment Commander
Phone: 07138-67359
E-Mail: josh.sal@hotmail.com
November with Paris Post No. 1... by Commander Carl W. Hale

November was a busy month beginning with honoring military sacrifices in service 99 years after World War One. The Paris Post No. 1 along with the Flanders Field Post BE02 participated in Armistice Day ceremonies in Passendale, Belgium on 10 November and then in Ypres, Belgium on 11 November. The Canadian Legion hosted the Passendale ceremony. The ceremony was held in the evening. Participants were provided torches to light a path and guide all during the march from the memorial to the town center. The march symbolized the length of territory defended by the Canadian military during which over 1,000 men died for such a short stretch of land. The British Legion hosted the Ypres ceremony. The Paris Post No. 1 Honor Guard team carried the National colors and four regimental flags in the Poppy Parade. I laid a wreath on behalf of The American Legion together with World War Two veteran, Comrade Maurice Sperandieu. Comrade Commander Joseph Schram and his Post Chaplain also participated in the Poppy Parade as flag bearers. The Armed Forces Network Benelux camera crew followed our Legion Honor Guard team during the ceremony. AFN Benelux plans to follow the Legion Honor Guard and the Flanders Field Post during 2014 at the many ceremonies planned in honor of the 100 years since World War One.

The weekend after the Veterans Day ceremonies I chaired the Paris Post No. 1 annual meeting. I spent a week on annual leave working on documents to keep the Post up-to-date. At the meeting the Post members agreed on an updated Standard Operating Procedure for our Post Mausoleum. We reviewed an update to the Post Constitution and By-Laws and tabled the final review and agreement for the January 2014 Post meeting. According to the French laws for private organizations we are required to announce to all members when the Post Constitution and By-Laws will be changed and offer all the opportunity to make arrangements to attend the meeting to review and vote. With this article in the Department Newsletter I as the Post Commander am providing all Paris Post No. 1 members official notice that the 18 January 2014 meeting will include a vote on an updated Post Constitution and Post By-Laws. During the November meeting we were honored to have present Comrade Department of Arkansas Vice Commander Jake Greeling of Post 345. Comrade Greeling is the Vice Commander of the Northwest Territory of Arkansas. He and his lovely wife Karen visited Paris for their fortieth wedding anniversary and dedicated the Saturday, 16 November to participate in our annual meeting. Comrade Greeling’s Post 345 won first place in the National Legion Yearbook competition. With this news I challenged the Paris Post No. 1 members to work on a Post History Yearbook for 2014. The annual meeting is also the Post Officers election meeting. The following are the Paris Post No. 1 election results: Commander Carl W. Hale, Vice Commander Clarita Geoghegan, Chaplain Tyrone Peterson, Treasurer Richard Allen, Executive Committeeeman Andre Humbert and Philippe Wizenick, appointed Adjutant Curtis Bartosik.

The weekend after the Post annual meeting I drove to USAG Ansbach to the Boy Scouts of America, Transatlantic Council’s Camp Freedom, to participate as a volunteer for the Order of the Arrow Lodge Leadership Development as a member of the Cooking Team. We arrived from Brussels at 2330 and were given a quick tour of the camp kitchen and received our cooking assignments. We were up at 0500 to begin preparing the breakfast. Immediately after the breakfast we began the Thanksgiving dinner feast. We prepared five turkeys. There were three turkeys to be oven roasted and two turkeys to be deep-fried. We also prepared corn on the cob, mashed potatoes, green bean casserole, candied yams, and several apple and pumpkin pies. We fed over forty participants. The American Legion
supports the Boy Scouts of America. Both organizations require volunteers to provide a strong program in support of our youth.

December 14th is a good day to be in Bastogne, Belgium. The city is hosting the 69th annual NUTS parade, Bastogne Historical Walk and wreath laying ceremonies at the General Patton and General McAuliffe memorials. There will be many World War Two re-enactors along the historical walk trail making the hike interesting for all participants. You are cordially invited to join us in Bastogne. I will be there with our Boy Scout Troop 457. We hope to see you there. Be safe during these winter months. Do not drink alcohol and drive your vehicle during these next few weeks of the holiday season. We wish you the best of health and happiness. All the best Merry Christmas wishes from all the members of the Paris Post 1 to the Department of France. For God and Country.

Commander Carl W. Hale

Comrade Department of Arkansas Vice Commander Jake Greeling presenting a Department of Arkansas coin to Paris Post No. 1 Commander Carl W. Hale

A bouquet of flowers representing The American Legion lays among many wreaths at the Menin Gate of Ypres, Belgium during the Armistice Day / Veterans Day ceremonies.

Paris Post No. 1 Annual Post Meeting / Elections.
Good afternoon COL Benson, COL Torza, and CSM Clowser, Soldiers and Friends of The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. It is an honor to stand before so many Soldiers and Veterans. Today I want to speak to you about some of the concerns and accomplishments of our veterans.

More than one a day. That is how many members of our active-duty military, National Guard and Reserve forces have committed suicide over the last year. Simply put, we are losing more service members by their own hands than we are by the enemy in Afghanistan.

Only those who experienced firsthand the horrors of combat can understand why most of these young men and women feel compelled to take such drastic and permanent measures.

But those of us gathered here to observe Veterans Day know that we love them. We appreciate them. We are grateful for their service.

We are their friends, their family, their co-workers and their neighbors. It is up to us to ensure that every veteran feels that his or her service to this country is appreciated by their fellow Americans. There are many tangible ways that we can acknowledge their sacrifice, but the easiest is to simply say “Thank you for what you have done for our country.”

If he is showing signs of unhappiness or depression, encourage him to seek help through the VA immediately. If she has had difficulty obtaining the benefits that she is entitled to, let her know that The American Legion has thousands of trained service officers nationwide that will help her navigate the VA Office free of charge.

And if that veteran has made the Supreme Sacrifice, remember the price that has been paid for our freedom and offer your support to the loved ones left behind.

Veterans Day is a time to honor not just those who have fought and died for us in battle, but, in fact Veteran’s Day is a day to celebrate the living Veterans, all of the outstanding men and women who served in our nation’s Armed Forces.

Veterans Day is a day to celebrate Soldiers like Command Sergeant Major Clowser, CSM Dunn, CSM Brown and CSM Chang. Collectively they have over 100 years of military experience, and between them, close to 20 years of time served in combat.

Today is for veterans like Ken Aungst. Stand up Ken. Ken has been living in the Illersheim area since 1955. He is a retired 1SG that served for 26 years. He has worked for and retired from both the post office and Aafes. Ken told me the story of his base camp in Kontun, Vietnam being overrun by the North Vietnamese. The sappers breached the wire and entered the bunkers. They destroyed 16 helicopters, 27 vehicles, wounded 22 personnel and killed 6 during this attack. One of the destroyed helicopters was one that Ken had just exited minutes earlier. Ken grabbed a sniper rifle that he received from Special Forces soldiers in a recent barter. Ken climbed onto the roof of a small shack and for a day and a half laid there shooting into his own perimeter bunkers in order to repel the enemy. Ken Aungst earned 4 Air Medals and 2 purple hearts during his 3 tours in Vietnam. Join me in giving Ken a round of applause.

Today we honor the young Sergeants and Staff Sergeants assigned to the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade who have served their entire careers with the United States at war.

In the last two weeks as Ansbach’s Reserve Component Career Counselor, I had the honor to welcome in over 30 new Soldiers holding the rank of privates during their in-processing. These young Soldiers were straight from AIT.
They were children when the horrors of 9-11 happened. They remember that day like you and I and they have now volunteered to serve their country. They know they will deploy to combat and possibly pay the ultimate price; yet they willingly step forward to fight for freedom around the world.

Not all veterans have seen war, but a common bond that veterans share is an oath in which they expressed their willingness to die defending the United States of America. Perhaps most significant in preserving our way of life are the battles that America does not have to fight because those who wish us harm slink away in fear of the Coast Guard cutter, the Navy aircraft carrier, the Air Force fighter squadron or the Army soldier on patrol.

On May 21 of this year, the United States lost one of its bravest veterans; Army Technical Sergeant Vernon McGarity. He was seriously wounded during a German artillery barrage at the Battle of the Bulge. Refusing an offer to be medically evacuated, he tenaciously led a small unit against the enemy’s great Western Front offensive and rescued two of his wounded comrades under heavy fire. He directed devastating fire on a light cannon, which had been brought up by hostile troops to clear resistance from the area. He took it upon himself to destroy a machine gun position by killing or wounding all hostile gunners with his deadly accurate fire. Only when his squad’s last round had been fired, was the enemy able to advance and capture McGarity and his men.

For his actions, McGarity was awarded the Medal of Honor. After the war, McGarity served in the Tennessee National Guard for 28 years, retiring as a lieutenant colonel. He also worked for over three decades for the Veterans Administration in Memphis, helping his fellow veterans secure the well-deserved benefits that they earned.

The valor and dedication that defined warriors from previous generations continues today. April 15, 2013 was a day that changed Boston forever. When two cowardly terrorists detonated bombs at the end of the Boston Marathon, three innocent people were killed and hundreds wounded. At least 15 victims lost limbs.

Enter Marine Captain Cameron West and retired Marine Sergeant Gabriel Martinez. Both were among a group of wounded warriors who visited the Boston Medical Center six days after the attack. The two men, West, who previously lost his right leg during action in Afghanistan, and Martinez, who lost both legs, shared their upbeat attitudes with the Boston victims.

One victim, Celeste Corcoran, was still understandably despondent over the recent loss of her legs. “I can’t do anything right now,” she told the Marines.

“After this, you’ll be more independent than you ever were,” Martinez answered. “This isn’t the end. This is the beginning.”

While we should all be grateful for the remarkable advancements made in military medicine and prosthetics, the fighting spirit and inspirational stories of our veterans are not due to technology.

These traits come from the heart. When then-Governor Ronald Reagan introduced returning POW John McCain at a speaking engagement in 1974, the future president asked, “Where do we find such men?” He was speaking of many veterans, when he answered, “We find them in our streets, in the offices, the shops and the working places of our country and on the farms.”

And many of these veterans are women, such as Army Chief Warrant Officer Lori Hill. While piloting her helicopter over Iraq in 2006, she maneuvered her helicopter to draw enemy gunfire away from another helicopter and she provided suppressive fire for troops on the ground. Despite flying a damaged aircraft and suffering injuries, she landed the helicopter safely, saving her crew. For her actions, she became the first woman to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Women are major contributors to our military presence in Afghanistan and many have given their lives in the War on Terrorism. The American Legion recently issued a report calling upon VA to improve its response to the unique needs of women veterans. The VA and military health systems need to adequately treat breast and cervical cancer as well as trauma that resulted from domestic violence, sexual harassment and assault.

America is home to more than 1.2 million women veterans and they deserve our support.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us always treat our 22 million veterans as the saviors of our country that they are, even when the guns are no longer shooting.

Thank you for being here, God Bless America and God Bless our veterans.

This speech is a modified version of the recommended American Legion Veterans Day Speech.
Post 1982 2VC Ken Aungst and Dan Pulis place the Veterans Day wreath in the 12th CAB Memorial Park on Katterbach Army Airfield.

American Legion Post 1982 members along with Ansbach’s VFW attended the Veterans Day Ceremony.

Ansbach High School JROTC posted and retired the colors for the Veterans Day ceremony.

Soldiers of the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade attended the Veterans Day Ceremony.

SFC Robert Forsythe, Post 1982 member and the Ansbach Garrison Equal Opportunity Advisor narrated the ceremony.
ANSBACH, Germany (Nov. 19, 2013) It was a cold evening Nov. 17. Approximately 200 attendees gathered beside the St. Johannis church in downtown Ansbach, where fiery torches served as the only light. The assembly was there to remember the victims of war, violence, deportation and terrorism of the past and present throughout the world.

On any other given day, pedestrians might walk past without a second glance at the monument along the church wall. However, on Volkstrauertag, literally "People's Mourning Day," delegates of the German Bundeswehr reservists, German veterans' associations, American Legion, Post 1982 and the U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach assembled in front of it to pay their respect to the fallen.

The day is celebrated throughout Germany the second Sunday before Advent Sunday, which is the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day.

Ansbach's Lord Mayor Carda Seidel reminded the audience that "even though peace and freedom have become reality for Germany 68 years after the end of World War II," there are still wars raging in other countries with the civilian population suffering terribly. The ceremony, according to Seidel, is there to serve as a reminder to "champion a world without war, terror or displacement."

"It's important to the American Legion to participate in such community ceremonies, especially because Post 1982's motto is 'Helping Veterans, their Families and the Ansbach community,'" said Master Sgt. Christopher Buchanan, commander of American Legion, Post 1982. "And as veterans and Soldiers serving and living in the Ansbach community, it's also important to the American Legion to bond with the German community and share their customs."

Delegates from USAG Ansbach included Col. Christopher M. Benson, commander of the garrison.

After the remarks and prayers, each delegation placed a decorated wreath in a designated spot while a brass ensemble from Schalkhausen played soft music. The hushed audience listened as a lone trumpeter played "Taps" into the night before the ceremony closed.
After 20 years of dominancy, the Flanders Field Post BE02 in Belgium has been revitalized and is now up to 37 new members. During the last 9 months, we have been actively recruiting new members to the American Legion. We also have over 40 potential new members that have indicated a desire to join our ranks. We hope that they will take the final step to join. During the last 3 months, we have been busy expanding and have now established a chapter of the American Legion Riders and are planning for 2014 to establish a chapter of the American Legion Auxiliary. The President of the Riders, Comrade Paul Dunn, has been extremely influential in establishing the chapter. We look forward to seeing the Riders at the many ceremonies scheduled for the 100 year anniversary of the start of World War I and the 70th year anniversary of the liberation of Belgium.

On 10 & 11 November members of the Flanders Field Post BE02 participated in several ceremonies honoring the veterans of World War I. The American Legion Riders participated in a small ceremony at the Flanders Field American Cemetery honoring the American veterans who fought in Belgium in 1918. Other members of Post BE02 partook in a night’s ceremony on 10 November in the city of Passchendaele and then the next morning in the Poppy Parade and wreath laying ceremony in the city of Ieper. Our World War II veteran, Comrade Maurice Sperandieu, has been influential in representing the American Legion at many of the ceremonies held in Belgium. During the Veteran’s/Armistice Day ceremonies the Flanders Field Post BE02 flag was flown for the first time in 20 years.

We have been fortunate to have a Belgian citizen to head our Graves Registration, Memorial and Ceremony Committee. Frank De Rudder volunteered to coordinate the myriad ceremonies that the Flanders Field Post BE02 and the American Legion Riders will participate in the next year. Another of our standing committees, the Child & Youth committee, will be headed by Comrade Charles Lyons. We are looking forward to the many activities and programs that will be sponsored by the committee.

During the past months The Post’s members have been active in many other activities. On Halloween evening, the American Legion Riders joined other organizations and groups in the ‘trunk or treat’ event on the USAG Brussels compound. For our first big endeavor is, Post BE02 plans to conduct an Oratorical Contest in January 2014 for students from the 4 American High Schools in the BENELUX area. While it is a large undertaking, our Vice Commander, Comrade John DuBose has taken the initiative to head the project. Our Chaplain, Comrade Gavin Wainwright, has volunteered to head our JROTC program. The members of Post BE02 will honor distinguished cadets at the JROTC programs at SHAPE and at AFNORTH.

As we to continue grow in membership, Post BE02 will be able to participate in many more programs to assist the area veterans and service members, their families and the U.S. military community.

Joseph R. Schram
Commander, American Legion “Flanders Field” Post BE02
American Legion Riders, Flanders Field Chapter BE02 with the Boy Scouts of America from Waterloo, Belgium

American Legion Riders at Flanders Field American Cemetery

Ieper Poppy Parade

Comrade Maurice Sperandieu at Borlo, Belgium
# List of US Customs Offices in Europe

Information for retirees who may need to update or apply for a German Tax Card (pink card)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Civilian &amp; DSN Phone Number</th>
<th>Hours of Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ansbach</td>
<td>US FORCES CUSTOMS - EUROPE Barton Barracks Building 5254, Room 316</td>
<td>0981-183-7842 or 7546 DSN: 468-7842 / 7546</td>
<td>Mon-Fri: 0800-1600 Closed on weekends and US holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bamberg</td>
<td>US FORCES CUSTOMS - EUROPE Warner Barracks Building 7011, Room 124,125</td>
<td>0951-300-7460 or 9312 DSN: 469-7460 / 9312</td>
<td>Mon-Fri: 0800-1200 &amp; 1230-1530 Closed on weekends and US and German holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baumholder</td>
<td>US FORCES CUSTOMS - EUROPE Smith Barracks Building 8724, Room 2</td>
<td>06783-6-7442 / 8193 DSN: 485-7442 / 8193</td>
<td>Mon-Fri: 0800-1200 &amp; 1230-1600 Closed on weekends and US and German holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garmisch</td>
<td>MP Station Artillery Kaserne Building 209</td>
<td>08821-750-3648 / 3601 DSN: 440-3601 / 3648</td>
<td>Tue - Fri: 1300 - 1600 Closed on weekends and German holidays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geilenkirchen</td>
<td>470th ABS/LGT Geilenkirchen NATO Air Base Building 94, Rooms 8&amp;9 (TMO-CS)</td>
<td>02451-632227 DSN: 458-6087 / 6031 / 6030</td>
<td>Mon-Thurs.: 0800-1600, Fri: 0800-1400, on first Thursday of the month 0800-1200 due to training Closed on weekends, German and some US holidays</td>
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<td>Hohenfels</td>
<td>US FORCES CUSTOMS - EUROPE Training Area Building 10, Room 118</td>
<td>09472-83-2012 / 2745 DSN: 466-2012 / 2745</td>
<td>Mon-Fri: 0800-1200 &amp; 1300-1530 Closed on weekends, US holidays and 1st Thursday of each month</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ramstein</td>
<td>US FORCES CUSTOMS - EUROPE Ramstein Air Base Building 305, Room 14</td>
<td>06371-47-0100 DSN: 480-0100</td>
<td>Mon-Fri: 0800-1600 Closed on weekends and US holidays</td>
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<td>Schweinfurt</td>
<td>US FORCES CUSTOMS - EUROPE Conn Barracks Building 64</td>
<td>09721-96-8846 / 8847 DSN: 353-8846 / 8847</td>
<td>Mon-Fri: 0800-1200 &amp; 1230-1530 Closed on weekends and US and German holidays</td>
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<td>Spangdahlem</td>
<td>US FORCES CUSTOMS - EUROPE Spangdahlem Air Base Building 139, Room 106</td>
<td>06565-61-4500 DSN: 452-4500</td>
<td>Mon-Fri: 0900-1200 &amp; 1300-1600 Closed on weekends and US holidays</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I NEED PICTURES...I NEED HISTORY

I have a BIG problem; I have run out of pictures to post on The Department of France Website. I know there are Legionnaires in the Department that have pictures that need to be posted on the Website. We NEED to preserve this part of our Department History. If you have pictures for me, send me an e-mail, I will send you a link to a photo sharing program called "DROP BOX", when you get it go to "get started" and it will tell you step by step on how to use it. It is a program that National uses and it works great when you want to send a large amount of pictures. It's easy to use, I have

setup a folder called The Department of France, just create a file drag it into the Department folder; send me an e-mail with a short story plus date, the function, and location. I will pull it out of Drop box and post it on the Website, it's that easy.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at dhaggan@sbcglobal.net

If you have a couple of minutes login into The Department Website and checkout the Photo Gallery.

LET’S PRESERVE OUR DEPARTMENT HISTORY FOR THE FUTURE

Share your post’s legacy

On Centennial Celebration page
In 2018, The American Legion will begin celebrating 100 years of service to veterans, military personnel, families and communities. To honor the Legion’s centennial, many events at the national, department and post levels will occur starting at the 2018 National Convention in Minneapolis and continuing throughout the 2019 convention in Indianapolis. Planning for these celebratory events is currently underway by the Legion’s 100th Anniversary Observance Committee, but help is needed at the post level to tell the larger story of The American Legion’s first century.

All 13,000 Legion posts worldwide, whether chartered in 1919 or 2009, have histories and legacies that have contributed to the overall identity of The American Legion. Each post can convey its legacy by sharing historical photos, videos and print material on the Legion’s new Centennial Celebration web page: www.legion.org/centennial

How to get started

Posts are encouraged to form centennial committees now, made up of members who will collect historical artifacts and data on the post. For example, the centennial committee may identify:

- Who founded the post and when
- Who the post was named after
- Important dates in the history of the post
- Families involved with the post for multiple generations
- Notable members
- Notable alumni from youth programs such as Boys State, the Oratorical Contest or Legion Baseball
- What makes the post special or unique
- Great things the post has done for its community

If this information isn’t accessible from post archives or members, speak with the local library or media outlets (newspapers, radio, TV) that have covered events about your post.

Share your story

Once your post’s centennial committee has collected photos, videos and print material related to its history, share it on the Legion’s new Centennial Celebration web page.

To create a post history page, follow these seven steps:

1. Go to the Centennial Celebration web page, www.legion.org/centennial
2. Register (in the upper-right hand of the page) to be an administrator. The administrator of a post’s page allows him or her to monitor all content submitted to the page before it appears to the general viewing public.
3. Click "Share Your Post History" located under "History" on the left hand navigation column.
4. Enter your department and post number.
5. Click "Yes, create post x."
6. Complete the required fields needed to start; you only need your post number, city and charter date. If you don’t know when your post was chartered, put in an estimated date until you find the answer; you can add/change information as you receive it.
7. Click "Save" when finished.

Once your post page is created, members — and those whose lives have been touched by the post — can add historical photos, timeline events (significant moments that helped build the chronology of your history) and upcoming events celebrating your history and the Legion’s centennial.

And for step-by-step instructions on how to share your post’s legacy and vision, download the Legion’s Centennial Celebration Workbook here.

If your post does not have access to the technical tools or expertise needed to create a Centennial Celebration history page, the workbook features paper forms of timeline events, photo galleries and upcoming events. The forms can be submitted to a third party who is willing to create the web page and act as the post’s administrator.

For more information, please email: ledwards@legion.org
AFN Internet radio service goes global

The American Forces Network plans to launch more than two dozen Internet radio streams Tuesday, greatly expanding the reach of the military network’s radio programming overseas.

Nearly every AFN radio station in Europe and the Pacific will get its own online stream, enabling listeners to hear their local stations through computers and mobile devices.

Another seven streams from the AFN broadcast center in California will carry a variety of options already available through satellite decoders, including talk, country, urban, classic rock, top-40 and adult hits. AFN’s PowerNet service — broadcast on AM in most locales — will also be accessible through the service.

“This is something that makes us relevant again in the arena of radio,” said Keith Fenske, AFN Europe’s chief of Web operations and architect of the online services. The expansion of the network’s online services “gets us out there so that people aren’t limited by their distance from a transmitter” or by technical constraints that prevent some Americans from being able to tune in their local stations.

The services will be accessible through the network’s Europe and Pacific region websites — anfeurope.net and afnpacific.net — and through its mobile applications, available for free through iTunes and the Google Play store.

Listeners in countries where AFN is authorized to broadcast will have access to all streams coming from the network’s broadcast center as well as stations in their region. The system blocks listeners in Europe from streaming broadcasts from the Pacific and vice versa by determining the location of his or her computer or mobile device.

That technology will also allow AFN to include local command information in its streams coming out of California. If a listener is on the road listening to one of AFN’s global services, Fenske said, “it'll determine where you're at, and it should be able to provide you with the command information that’s pertinent to the area that you're physically located.”

AFN launched a pilot streaming service in Europe in June 2012 to test the viability of an online radio service. During the pilot period, “we exceeded over 750,000 hours of total programming streamed,” Fenske said. “That was pretty huge.”

More than half of that came from listeners tuning in from military computer networks, Fenske said, despite limitations imposed by some commands.

The Air Force in particular had mostly blocked its personnel from accessing AFN’s pilot service, Fenske said, “but we're pretty confident that by launch date ... or shortly thereafter” that Air Force and other military networks “will allow this service to be played on it.”
The Department of Veterans Affairs has announced grants totaling nearly $14 million to aid homeless veterans, including providing for their transportation to and from VA medical centers and clinics.

In separate statements on Tuesday, the VA announced it would provide $4.9 million in grants to provide enhanced services for homeless vets in 11 states, and also disburse another $8.8 million in grants to fund 164 housing rehab projects across 37 states and buy vans to facilitate the transportation of homeless veterans.

The multi-million dollar efforts are the latest in the VA's five-year plan -- announced by VA Secretary Eric Shinseki in 2009 -- to eliminate veteran homelessness by 2015.

Shinseki, in a recent roundtable discussion with reporters, suggested the rough economic times of recent years could make the original 2015 end goal difficult to achieve, but the goal will remain the same.

The VA said that on one night in January 2012 -- the last date for which the department has released figures -- there were 62,619 veterans on the streets.

That’s down more than 17 percent since Shinseki pledged an end to vet homelessness.

During the roundtable, he called it “remarkable” that at a time when veteran homelessness typically would go up, it has actually gone down, according to a report in Stars and Stripes.

The $8.8 million grant is set to rehabilitate transitional housing and buy vans in 37 states, as well as Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico.

The $4.9 million grant will fund community agencies providing services to homeless veterans.

These funds follow the VA's July announcement of $300 million in Supportive Services for Veteran Families grants, which enables non-profits and community organizations to assist veterans and their families who are low-income or otherwise at risk of homelessness to stay in their homes.

The VA said it is committing $1 billion through fiscal 2014 toward programs that prevent or turn around homelessness among the country's veterans.

“We want every veteran who faces homelessness to know that VA is here to help,” Shinseki said in a statement.
A physician formerly with the VA hospital in Jackson, Miss. warned lawmakers on Wednesday that a department proposal to permit all nurse practitioners to function independently and without physician supervision is a recipe for disaster.

That practice played a role in poor and at times fatal care given to patients at the G.V. Montgomery VA Medical Center, Dr. Phyllis Hollenbeck said in testimony before a House Veterans Affairs Committee oversight panel.

"In view of what has happened at Jackson, it is a blessing that this hearing comes as proposed changes to the VA Nursing Handbook have come out," she said. The changes would make all NPs throughout the VA healthcare system operate independently, unsupervised, and without regard to state licensure requirements or scope of practice, she said.

According to the VA, its policy on nursing services, including for nurse practitioners, is still being reviewed and vetted for input from internal VA program offices and outside professional groups and agencies.

A 2010 Institute of Medicine report called "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health" recommended removing scope-of-practice barriers for the nurse practitioners so they can practice to the full extent of their education and training, according to the VA. The department contends that the change would increase access to care and ensure continuity of the highest quality of care for our Nation's Veterans.

Now different states have different rules regarding physician supervision of nurse practitioners, with most not requiring it for NPs trained as Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist, VA says. Even under the proposed change, according to VA, this group would continue to practice under the direction of chief of anesthesia or chief of surgery, depending on the administrative structure of the anesthesia program at a VA facility.

Hollenbeck told lawmakers that in her experience it would be a mistake to not require the NPs to operate as part of a team, under the supervision of a physician.

At Jackson, operating independently led to missed diagnoses for heart disease, diabetes, and asthma, among other illnesses, said Hollenbeck. And when diagnoses are made, she said, the diseases are not monitored or treated appropriately, resulting in the patient's condition worsening.

Hollenbeck, who now works for the VA's Compensation and Pension Service, said she also found that NPs will not update current patient conditions, but cut-and-paste an earlier history or physical.

In one instance, she said, a veteran had white blood cell changes indicating the onset of chronic lymphocytic leukemia for 10 years that was finally diagnosed when severe pain led to discovery and subsequent biopsy of a mass in his abdomen.

Hollenbeck was one of five current or former VA employees at Jackson who filed whistleblower complaints that led to a VA investigation of the facility and ultimately a White House Office of Special Counsel review into investigation.

The OSC report, sent to President Obama on Sept. 17, faulted the VA's response to its investigation in some areas, including in its claims to address admitted problems. The report called the VA's response to the complaints, given concerns for patient safety, unreasonable and called for an update on its reforms within 60 days.

Dr. Charles Sherwood, former chief of ophthalmology at the Jackson hospital, was another whistleblower to testify on Wednesday. Sherwood previously filed a complaint after a court case brought by three female radiologists revealed the VA was aware that one of its doctors was not appropriately reading all the x-rays he was given.

Though the VA's Inspector General confirmed some of the complaints brought by Hollenbeck, it also concluded that the chief radiologist's failure to actually read all the x-rays brought to him had any significant impact on patient care.

Rica Lewis-Payton, network director of Veterans Integrated Service Network 16, which includes the Jackson facility, told lawmakers that the VA notified the family in the event they found a patient's care was affected by the radiologist's work.

"We know that a number of issues have been raised about this center, and we take those concerns seriously," Lewis-Payton said. "We work aggressively to identify and correct any errors, and we are adopting a series of significant reforms to improve the center."

She also told lawmakers the VA is holding people accountable for any wrongdoing — ejecting claims by Hollenbeck and Sherwood that the department has covered up for staff and senior managers who have violated VA policy and even federal law.

But because the hearing was public, Lewis-Payton said, "I am not at liberty to provide specifics about what has been done in individual cases."
1. Clock ticking on budget deal again; defense spending still unresolved

The House and Senate are only $90 billion apart on reaching a deal on the $3.5 trillion federal budget for 2014, but closing that gap is proving difficult because nobody is budging.

Delays in getting an agreement are a growing concern for lawmakers, especially members of the House and Senate appropriations committees who are trying to pass 2014 spending bills by Jan. 15 to avoid another shutdown and prevent $109 billion in sequestration cuts that would lop $53 billion from the defense budget.

Differences with defense spending are part of the problem, but only a part. The House version of the 2014 defense funding bill proposes $512.5 billion in the base budget plus $85.8 billion for contingency operations. The Senate bill proposes $516.4 billion in the base budget and $77 billion for contingency operations.

Budget negotiators are expected to resolve differences on defense spending and how much to allocate for contingency operations but details of how money would be spent would be left to the appropriations committees, which need time to make adjustments.

Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., the Senate Appropriations Committee chairwoman, said that if budget negotiations do not wrap up before Dec. 15 — the current deadline — completing detailed budgets would be difficult because Congress is scheduled to work only eight legislative days between Dec. 15 and Jan. 15.

As budget negotiators met Nov. 13 to discuss their differences, Douglas Elmendorf, director of the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, warned there is no miracle cure.

With choices that include cutting discretionary spending such as the defense budget; cutting entitlements such as Social Security and Medicare; and raising taxes, lawmakers need to understand that they have to pick at least one and possibly a combination of more than one, Elmendorf said.

2. US Aircraft Carrier Group Begins Philippines Relief Operations

The U.S. Navy launched a huge relief operation in the typhoon-ravaged central Philippines Thursday, as the devastated Philippine city of Tacloban began the grim task of burying its dead.

The aircraft carrier USS George Washington and a contingent of seven supply ships arrived in the Philippine Sea early Thursday, and began delivering water and emergency rations to the wrecked city. The carrier also has medical facilities and can produce 1.5 million liters of fresh water a day. One of the ships in the carrier group, the USNS Charles Drew, made its first delivery of food and drinking water to the storm ravaged city of Tacloban Thursday.

The giant hospital ship USS Mercy also is making emergency preparations to depart the United States, and is expected to join the emergency flotilla within weeks, along with the British carrier HMS Illustrious.

3. Report: Air Force is Shrinking
The Air Force's acting secretary says the uncertainty around the federal budget makes it extremely hard to make decisions about the service's future shape and size. But even if the budget cuts are undone, the service will need to get smaller, he said.

Eric Fanning, the undersecretary of the Air Force who's currently serving as its acting top civilian, says both he and the service's chief of staff, Gen. Mark Welsh, believe that even if the Air Force were funded up to the level it requested, it would still be spending too much money on people and planes and not enough making sure the force was trained and ready. But sequestration, he says, only adds to that problem.

Assuming the service has to meet the funding caps of the budget control act for the next several years, he says the Air Force would have to reduce in size by 25,000 airmen and 550 aircraft.

"The Air Force is too big for the budget going forward if it stays at the sequestered level," he said. "That means we're going to have to pull things out of it just to right-size it, and then pull even more things out of it to protect what we need for future investments."

Fanning, speaking at a day-long summit organized by the online publication Defense One, said the Air Force is already building politically painful reductions into the two alternative budget plans it's constructing for 2015. The version of the plan that incorporates sequestration into the picture assumes not just that the Air Force will have fewer aircraft and personnel, but that it will be doing fewer things.

John Stovall
Director, National Security Division
202-263-2984

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**TSA program allows faster security screening for military**

By showing their Common Access Card, members of the military won't have to remove their shoes, belts, jackets and hats and will be able to keep laptop computers in their cases in pre-screening lanes at airport security checkpoints under a program expansion announced Wednesday by the TSA and the Department of Defense.

The program is already in use at 10 airports and will begin at 100 airports on Dec. 20 in time for the Christmas holiday travel period.

"TSA joins with the American people in showing its appreciation for the service and sacrifices of our men and women in the Armed Forces," TSA Deputy Administrator John W. Halinski, a Marine Corps veteran, said in a statement. "Providing expedited screening while on travel is the least we can do for these courageous men and women."

The TSA Pre program is available to active-duty members of all branches of the military, reserves, National Guard and the Coast Guard.

With the program, military members can use their Department of Defense identification number when making airline reservations. The identification number will then be used as their Known Traveler Number. At the airport checkpoint, military members will be able to enter the TSA Pre lanes.

The TSA also has a Wounded Warrior Screening program that expedites security screenings for wounded soldiers. To apply for the Wounded Warriors program call the TSA at 1-855-787-227.
**New Budget Cut Options Include Military Pay, Vets**

Military members, retirees and veterans have a few more reasons to be wary of politicians who say their top priority is to cut federal spending.

The Congressional Budget Office on Wednesday released a report of more than 100 options for reducing budget deficits. It's a timely product as House and Senate conferees strive to negotiate by mid-December a new debt-cutting deal to replace automatic budget cuts of sequestration.

More than a few of the CBO options are fresh ideas to roll back compensation for categories of veterans or to raise TRICARE fees for military retirees, on suggestions that the government is being too generous.

To be fair, CBO is not singling out veterans here. There are options in the report to make nervous many segments of society dependent on federal payments, from social security recipients to drug manufacturers.

But for select veterans' programs, CBO makes some hard-edged points that lawmakers bent on cutting spending might find compelling, if not persuasive, to help address the nation's debt crisis.

Here are some of those ideas:

**Cap Military Pay Raises** – From 2000 through 2010, Congress approved basic pay raises that averaged a half percentage point above private sector wage growth. The military could save $25 billion from 2015 to 2023 by reversing course, capping raises yearly at .5 percent below civilian wage growth. CBO predicts only a "minor" effect on force retention.

Evidence in favor of this move are data showing cash compensation for enlisted members now exceeds wages of 90 percent of civilian counterparts, well above the Defense Department's goal of keeping service pay ahead of 70 percent of civilians of similar age and educational background. CBO says officer compensation exceeds 86 percent of private sector peers.

The case against capping raises is that recruiting and retention goals could be compromised, CBO says, and smaller raises also dampen other elements of military compensation including retirement annuities.

**Raise TRICARE Fees** – CBO floats two options to have military retirees pay more for health care. One is to have TRICARE-for-Life users -- retirees, spouses and survivors age 65 and older -- pay the first $550 of costs not covered by Medicare and then 50 percent of the next $4950. CBO says this would slow TRICARE costs by $31 billion from 2015 to 2023 but also save Medicare dollars as older beneficiaries seek fewer health services.

The drawback is some TLF users might not seek needed preventive care or manage their chronic conditions as closely as they do now.

The second option targets "working age" retirees and families enrolled in TRICARE Prime by raising fees, deductibles and co-pays in a complex combination too detailed to describe here. The Prime changes for retirees could save from $2 billion to $11 billion by 2023, depending on final details.

**Concurrent Receipt** – Until 2003, military retirees who drew tax-free compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for service-connected disabilities saw retired pay reduced by an equal amount. Congress phased out this ban on "concurrent receipt" over several years to for retirees with disability ratings of 50 percent or higher. As a result, last
year 420,000 retirees received $7 billion in concurrent receipt payments.

Lifting this ban, CBO suggests, encouraged many more retirees to seek a VA disability rating. In 2005, only 33 percent who served 20 or more years received VA disability pay. By 2012, that proportion of longevity retirees drawing disability pay had climbed to 45 percent.

CBO says $108 billion could be saved from 2015 to 2023 if the ban on concurrent receipt were restored for current and future retirees. They "would still receive higher after-tax payments than would retirees who are not disabled," CBO noted.

The argument against is that retired pay and VA pay compensate for "different characteristics of military service: rewarding longevity in the former case and remunerating for pain and suffering in the latter...Moreover, some retirees would find the loss of income financially difficult."

That CBO floated such an option could dampen hope among military retirees with disabilities rated 40 percent and less that Congress someday will lift the concurrent receipt ban for them too.

**Narrow Eligibility for VA Compensation** – The law requires VA to define "service-connected" ailments broadly so if symptoms occur in service the condition usually is compensable. Last year, CBO says, VA paid 520,000 veterans a total of $2.9 billion "for seven medical conditions that...are generally neither caused nor aggravated by military service."

VA could save $20 billion, from 2015 to 2023, if it stopped compensating veterans for the following: chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; arteriosclerotic heart disease; hemorrhoids; uterine fibroids; multiple sclerosis; Crohn's disease and osteoarthritis.

Indeed, if Congress eliminated "compensation for all disabilities unrelated to military duties," CBO says, the savings would be far greater, though, admittedly, this "would be more difficult to administer."

The argument in support is that VA disability pay should be more comparable to civilian systems, which "do not typically compensate individuals for all medical problems" that develop during employment.

The opposing argument is that military service "imposes extraordinary risks" and hardships, which justify current pays and benefits including compensation for those who become disabled in any way while in service.

**Tighten VA "IU" Benefits** – VA will supplement regular disability compensation for veterans not rated 100-percent disabled if they are deemed "unable to engage in substantial work," CBO explains. The "Individual Unemployability" (IU) benefit is paid today to 300,000 veterans, boosting monthly incomes by an average of $1800 a month.

A third of IU veterans, however, are over 65, the age by which many American workers are retired and drawing full social security benefits. CBO said VA could save $15 billion by 2023 if it stopped IU to older veterans.

These are not recommendations, CBO says, only options intended to inform lawmakers.
Proposal would give DoD a year for plan to clean up POW/MIA agencies

Sen. Claire McCaskill is preparing legislation to give the Defense Department a year to come up with a plan to clean up its besieged POW/MIA accounting operation.

The Missouri democrat plans to introduce an amendment to the annual National Defense Authorization Act when the bill hits the Senate floor this week, McCaskill said in a statement Thursday.

McCaskill’s amendment calls for an analysis of whether parts of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command and the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Person Personnel Office should be combined and a determination on which components should have direct responsibility for accounting and analysis. It would examine how other countries account for their missing to determine best practices.

“It’s obvious to me that our military leadership are going to need a deadline in order to effectively tackle this mess,” McCaskill said. “Our military families deserve honesty from their government, and this plan will also require the Pentagon to give an honest assessment and accounting of our recovery efforts so we have a full understanding of the work before us.”

The amendment would require the Pentagon to provide breakdowns of the numbers of POW/MIA by conflict and how many are thought to be lost at sea or in a geographically inaccessible location, are in custody awaiting identification and have been interred without identification, along with how many cases in which next of kin have refused to provide DNA samples, the statement said.

McCaskill, a senior member of the Armed Services Committee, already has demanded answers from Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel on JPAC’s phony arrival ceremonies, which were billed as the arrival of remains from foreign battlefields but basically were pomp and circumstance using military props and previously repatriated remains.

McCaskill has taken the lead in seeking to root out mismanagement at JPAC and DPMO since the release of two scathing reports over the summer. In July, The Associated Press exposed an internal review that chronicled turf wars and questionable recovery results that the JPAC brass had covered up. A Government Accountability Office report mirrored those findings.

Senate hearings in August looked into the matter. However, families of the missing complained they were not invited to tell their stories of frustration.

Former JPAC employees who have been critical of the agency told Stars and Stripes that the senator’s amendment doesn’t go far enough. Families of the missing also are skeptical.

“The problem is not just the system but the people that are in the high places within the accounting community,” said Mary Ann Reitano, who is leading her family’s efforts to recover her cousin, Cpl. Gregory Harris, a Marine Corps radioman who went missing in Vietnam in 1966.
Secretary of State John Kerry on Thursday announced a new public-private partnership intended to advance career opportunities for veterans interested in foreign affairs.

Kerry offered no real details on how the Veterans Innovation Partnership -- or VIP -- will operate, but identified one university, one technology company, and four federal agencies, including State, that are signed onto the program.

"The bottom line is pretty simple," Kerry said, "I believe that those who have worn the uniform have shown that they know how to serve in one capacity and through that capacity have now developed new capacity to be able to serve yet again at the front [for the United States]."

Kerry was joined at the announcement by Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, D-Ha., who served two combat tours as a member of the Hawaii Army National Guard, USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah, and Department of Veterans Affairs Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs Tommy Sowers.

Through VIP, veterans interested in foreign policy will be assisted in gaining international employment in the public and private sector, he said. In addition to the State Department, the partnership also includes the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and Millennium Challenge Corporation.

Outside government, the University of Massachusetts-Boston and iRobot Corp., a maker of robots for the consumer, security and defense markets, have signed on, Kerry said.

The secretary said the VIP program is particularly important to him, reminding reporters and others at the press conference that he has been involved in veterans issues "literally, since the day I returned from Vietnam."

Kerry was a co-founder of Vietnam Veterans of America. He also was involved in the battle for veterans to be compensated for Agent Orange exposure and for increasing life insurance on servicemembers raised from $12,000 to $500,000.

Kerry said the VIP program "is not just about what the State Department can do for veterans. It’s really based on the notion that veterans can do a lot for the State Department, and we’d be foolish not to try to reach out and harness this talent that exists."

"Being a veteran doesn’t automatically qualify you to be on the right side of any given foreign policy issue. It doesn’t work that way," he said. "But it’s a perspective. The experience of being a veteran does qualify you to speak with a voice that is a little bit different, and also helps you to validate ways in which we can project American voice and values abroad."
Loose change at airports may go to upgrade USO lounges

A quarter here, a penny there and pretty soon all the loose change left in plastic bins at Transportation Security Administration airport checkpoints adds up to real money — about $531,000 in fiscal 2012.

The coins not claimed by passengers are supposed to pay for aviation security, though only about $6,500 has been spent as of March 1, according to a House committee report. Rather than sitting unused, lawmakers say they’d rather it go for high-definition televisions and free snacks for veterans at airport lounges.

"Travelers' lost change is unappropriated dollars that should be put to good use," Florida Republican Jeff Miller said at a House Homeland Security Committee meeting in October.

The TSA would be required to give future unclaimed cash to groups that run airport lounges dedicated to active-duty U.S. military personnel, veterans and their families under Miller’s bill that the House is scheduled to vote on this week.

The USO, by running airport lounges, is the only organization that currently would qualify for the funds set aside in the legislation. The TSA estimates that passengers have left behind $2.2 million in change in the past five years.

Miller, chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, is also co-chairman of the USO Congressional Caucus.

The United Service Organizations is best known for sending celebrities such as comedian Bob Hope and World Wrestling Entertainment Inc. wrestler John Cena to far-flung military bases to entertain U.S. troops. Its main service is supporting and encouraging uniformed troops while aiding military families.

The nonprofit group operates lounges in 45 U.S. airports, the largest at international facilities such as Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson, Dallas/Fort Worth and Baltimore-Washington.

Those USO rooms are similar to the airport lounges operated by airlines including United Continental Holdings’ United Airlines and Delta Air Lines. The USO boasts more camouflage fatigues and fewer three-piece suits.

The military center at Baltimore-Washington International Airport, a frequent stop for service members heading home from Afghanistan, is typical. A 72-inch flat-panel television sits in front of rows of plush blue chairs.

The lounge has a free snack bar with coffee, soda and candy bars and frozen treats. Many items, like ice cream bars from Nestle SA, are donated. Most centers have free Internet service and phones to call home.

There's even a room set up where service members can pick out a children's book, read it aloud while being recorded, and then have the DVD recording sent home to their kids.

For some jet-lagged service-members, BWI Airport in Maryland is the second or third layover from Afghanistan on their way home. The lounge has a sleeping room with chairs that recline flat and a free wake-up call so they don’t miss their connecting flights.

BWI's 5,000-square foot USO lounge, the third-largest in the U.S., costs about $228,000 a year to operate, according to USO officials at the airport. After hosting about 82,000 travelers last year, the BWI center may serve 85,000 this year, said John Falin, who manages the BWI site and four other USO centers in the region.

"What our service members do is so important and we just want to honor them and make them feel important," he said in an interview at the airport.

Air Force Maj. Nathaniel Karrs, his wife, Amanda, and son, Evan, 10, sat in the front row while the large TV showed the CBS game show "The Price is Right."
"It's perfect," Karrs said as his family waited for a flight to Ramstein Air Base in Germany. "One last place to call home."

The TSA collects about $500,000 a year in coins that travelers empty from their pockets into bins and buckets then forget to reclaim after walking through security screening.

The agency "makes every effort to reunite passengers with items left at the checkpoint," TSA spokesman Ross Feinstein said in an e-mail that. 

"However, there are instances where loose change or other items are left behind and unclaimed."

TSA doesn’t comment on pending legislation, Feinstein said. The White House hasn't formally supported or opposed the bill.

"Any pocket change we would get from this would go to helping out troops and their families," USO spokeswoman Gena Fitzgerald said. "If this passes, we’ll be thrilled — not just us, but the troops that we serve will be thrilled."