

# Vietnam Veterans of America

Chapter 324 - PO Box 18631 - Milwaukee, WI 53218

In Service to America



## Meeting Notice

16 September, 2021

Elks Club

5555 W. Good Hope Rd.

Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.

Chapter Meeting 7 - 8 p.m.

Future Meetings

20 October, 17 November, 15 December

Chapter web page: [www.vietnamvetschapter324.com](http://www.vietnamvetschapter324.com)

National web page: [www.vva.org](http://www.vva.org)

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## Retirees and Disabled Vets Due for Record Raise Next Year

By Jim Absher, 17 Aug 2021, Military.com

Military retirees and disabled veterans could see their monthly checks jump by hundreds of dollars each month in 2022, the largest increase since 1983. The annual inflation-based Cost of Living Adjustment, or COLA, soon will be determined by the government, and all the figures point to an increase of at least 6%, and maybe more, beginning in 2022.

That means that next year, military retirees will see their monthly retirement check increase, with the average monthly check going up by around \$160. Veterans receiving disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs also will see their monthly disability payments increase, with the average monthly amount increasing by nearly \$100.

According to the Defense Department, there are around 1.87 million military retirees, with an annual average retirement payment of \$30,265. The VA says nearly 5.1 million veterans receive disability compensation, with an annual benefit of \$18,549.

The annual COLA increase is based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which is measured by the Department of Labor. That agency measures the

costs of a select group of goods and services and compares those costs to the previous year. If there is an increase, retirees and many others receiving government benefits see an increase in their monthly payments for the upcoming year. If those costs go down, the government payments will remain the same in the upcoming year.

In 2021, costs for most goods and services have gone up much faster than they have in the past. The most recent data from the Department of Labor is showing a 5.4% increase from last year, and there are two more months left in the current fiscal year, which ends on Sept. 30.

So, unless there is a major turnaround of the economy, with prices dropping dramatically in the next month or so, next year's government payments should see a hefty increase.

The CPI also is used to determine federal employee retirement and social security COLA adjustments as well as other federal benefit programs, so the CPI increase will affect over 50 million Americans.

# Third vaccine dose available to vulnerable Vets

By David Walter, Milwaukee VA Medical Center, Friday, August 20, 2021

Additional COVID-19 vaccinations are now being given by the Milwaukee VA Medical Center to immunocompromised Veterans as the virus continues to surge, fueled by the Delta variant. In addition, plans are being made to give booster shots to all Veterans and employees, starting eight months after initial administration of the vaccines.

Any Veterans who are immunocompromised should contact their health-care provider to set up a time to get the third shot, said Dr. Kim Bell, head of pharmacy at the Milwaukee VA Medical Center.

On Aug. 12, the FDA authorized the third dose of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for immunocompromised people, and Bell said Veterans and caregivers have been contacting the hospital, anxious for more information on how to get their shots.

“On Monday, the calls started ramping up,” Bell said. “The clinic has been busy, and that’s a good thing.”

Bell emphasized that walk-ins are not allowed for the third vaccine dose; instead those shots must be scheduled through the Veterans’ health-care providers. However, a Veteran at the hospital for a previously scheduled appointment can get the shot at that time.

So who is considered immunocompromised? Bell said the designation includes those who have had cancer and/or transplants, and those on certain types of medication. “It’s a pretty long and varied list,” she said, noting that Veterans who are unsure should contact their doctor.

The third doses are recommended only for people who received Pfizer or Moderna. Those who received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine should wait for further guidance.

The additional dose is being recommended because data suggest it enhances the antibody response to COVID-19. Studies have shown that immunocompromised people have a reduced antibody response compared to healthy vaccine recipients.

## First shots increase

Meanwhile, those who have not been vaccinated are still encouraged to get their shots. Bell said there has been a slight uptick in first vaccinations in recent weeks as COVID cases have risen.

No scheduling is required for Veterans, caregivers and their family members to get shots at

the Milwaukee VA. They can walk into the Quick Shot clinic, located inside the hospital near the East Entrance, and be served immediately.

Bell said about 64 percent of Veterans served by the Milwaukee VA Medical Center have received at least one dose of the vaccine. “We still have a number of people who have not been vaccinated,” she said. “We still need those people to come in and get their vaccine so we can get to that critical number and help stop the spread.”

## Planning begins for booster shots

On the horizon are booster shots for all others who received the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines. The FDA has yet to approve those shots, though that approval is expected soon. Boosters would begin the week of Sept. 20 at the earliest.

Those seeking booster shots should wait until eight months after they received their second dose, according to the CDC. “We will not start doing that before FDA and CDC authorize it. We’re awaiting further direction from them,” Bell said. “But we’re beginning our planning.”

Bell said people seeking boosters won’t be able to “jump the line;” they’ll need to show their vaccination cards when getting the booster. “We are bound to the exact instructions given in the emergency use authorization,” Bell said. “We have to stick to that.”

“Just like we did in the beginning, we’re asking everyone to be patient. We will get to them. We have enough vaccine. When their turn is due, we will be here and ready for them.”

Until then, Bell said the priority is those who are immunocompromised. “Right now, we’re helping the most vulnerable patients – the people who potentially don’t have as much protection,” she said.

For those who got vaccinated and are not immunocompromised, Bell said they “still have really good protection against severe disease, hospitalization and death, though we are seeing a little bit of an uptick in those people having mild or asymptomatic infections. We will get to those people.”

“We did this once before and got everybody their two doses. We’ll do it again.”

# The Briefing I Should Have Given

LtCol Robert Bushman, USAFR Ret, 5 Jun 2021

Fifty years ago, when I was a green Air Force lieutenant at Phan Rang Air Base in the then Republic of Vietnam, my job was to give “intelligence briefings” to pilots on their missions in the war. Here I describe why my briefings were neither intelligence nor intelligent.

My unit flew the F-100 fighter, a relatively small, fast, single-engine, single-seat aircraft, developed in the early 50s to engage enemy aircraft at supersonic speed ([https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/north-american-f-100d-super-sabre/nasm\\_A19781577000](https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/north-american-f-100d-super-sabre/nasm_A19781577000)). The trouble was, however, that in this war, that aircraft was used instead as a tactical bomber, a role for which it was eminently unsuited. It was very difficult, unusual even, for F-100 pilots to deliver their bombs accurately enough for them to do the intended damage. Pilots joked that they bombed to scare monkeys. Apparently, military planners finally got the picture because all the F-100 units in Vietnam were deactivated and withdrawn four years before the end of the war.

According to the operational procedure evolved by the Air Force in WWII, before leaving on their missions, pilots are to receive an intelligence briefing. This briefing would be about their target—its location, appearance, disposition, defenses, etc., and therefore give the pilots the necessary understanding of their target for them to effectively plan and execute their mission at the least risk to themselves. This procedure made good sense. Except in Vietnam.

In Vietnam, we rarely had any information specific to the targets our pilots were to hit. The targets were almost always unknown in advance of our briefings. Instead, all we could give pilots was the location where they were to rendezvous with a forward air controller (a “FAC”), flying in a small, slow, low-flying observation aircraft, who was in contact with our ground forces, who could at least partially see what was going on below (which was often under jungle canopy), and who could therefore theoretically direct our pilots to an appropriate target. Our pilots, in flights of two aircraft, flying high and fast, could usually not see these targets. The FAC would briefly describe the on-scene situation to our pilots and mark the target by launching a rocket at it that would leave a visible trail of white smoke. This was the only indication of the location of the target that our pilots had. The FAC would usually qualify

his smoke mark with instructions like, “35 yards southwest.” (Imagine yourself, circling fast and high overhead, trying to spot some point like that on the ground, let alone aligning your aircraft appropriately, while spiraling downward, and manually releasing your bombs at the precisely correct instant.) The FAC would pass back to the pilots his assessment of the supposed bomb damage (“BDA”) from the airstrike. My office took those reports from the pilots when they returned. Usually, there was nothing notable.

In that kind of war, this process was operationally logical, but it totally obviated the need for any kind of intelligence briefing beforehand. So, in order to maintain the pretense that we intelligence officers were delivering intel to our pilots, we served up a brief summary of military intel highlights from the previous day in the war, with no relevance to the pilots’ actual mission for the day. The only important item of our briefing, the FAC rendezvous point, was actually not intelligence but just operational information. Furthermore, after takeoff, our pilots were often diverted to some FAC other than the one we had sent them to.

So what of my “intel briefings,” then? In giving these briefings to pilots, I always had the distinct feeling of irrelevance, despite my earnest intent to be relevant. I felt silly, clownish even, which further served to reinforce the justifiable disdain pilots held for my function. I have often reminisced over those briefings, wondering just what I might have delivered that would have been relevant. So here then is what I imagine I could have said, had I the nerve:

“Good morning, gentlemen. The rendezvous point for your mission today is 63 for 84 off 22 [the azimuth and range of the point relative to a ground-based navigation beacon]. Last night in the intel shop, we went through a 6-inch stack of intel reports from all over Vietnam and found nothing relevant to your mission today. Therefore, I will offer some conjecture about your mission today which I do view as relevant.

“You each carry a load of eight, unguided, 500 lb iron bombs, fused to explode on impact after their free-fall. Those bombs that make it through jungle canopy to explode on the ground will each create a crater about three feet deep and ten feet in diameter, with shrapnel effectively spraying about 150 feet around. If a bomb should happen to fall

Continued next page

## Briefing continued

within 15 feet of your intended target, that target can be considered destroyed. If your bomb happens to kill a North Vietnamese soldier, you will never have known anything about him or his motives. Of course, you do understand, it is highly unlikely that any of your bombs will land close enough to your target to do substantial damage. It is just as likely that one of your bombs will destroy a random farmer's hut, killing him, his wife and children, his dog, his chickens, or his buffalo. It is also possible that one of your bombs will fail to explode and just bury itself in the ground. Years later, some Vietnamese children will discover it, and while playing with it will cause it to explode, scattering shreds of their flesh across nearby trees and bushes.

“As for the monetary cost of your flight today, considering the cost of your aircraft, its development and manufacture [each F-100 would cost \$6.8 million today], its fuel, weapons, the specialized maintenance required to keep it flying [60 man-hours of maintenance for every hour of flight], maintenance management, training, and upkeep, and the management, training, and upkeep of the long

list of other support personnel—airfield personnel, weathermen, air traffic controllers, radar techs, munitions techs, fuel specialists, personnel specialists, medical doctors, dentists, lab techs, cooks, auto mechanics, those who maintain the base telephones, power, water, and sewer plus all their equipment and facilities, plus of course, those to staff the gym, library, hobby shop, theater, swimming pool, and the layers of management above it all, as well as all the buildings and the airfield itself with its hangers and exceedingly long concrete runway that we had to build in order to mount this operation halfway around the world], your flight today will cost the American taxpayer a rough average of \$2,750,000 [my estimate]. And that for only one of the 27 flights our unit will make today, which we do every day of the year [360,283 combat sorties were flown by F-100s in the war]. Apart from whatever rationalization for the war you may find, the reality revealed by any cost-benefit analysis, including the opportunity cost of what else that money could have been used for, would no doubt be painfully absurd.

“Have a good flight.”



# The Stryker is a ‘deathtrap’ but you’re paying for it anyway

Mark Perry, Responsible Statecraft, JUNE 30, 2021

Still reeling from the \$3.6 billion in cuts it endured under the recently announced Biden defense budget (two percent off its topline, but it could end up being much more), the U.S. Army is nevertheless forging ahead with its high-profile modernization program.

As it turns out, few senior Pentagon civilians whose job it is to eyeball the Army’s plans are impressed. Designed to reshape the service “into a multi-domain force by 2035,” the Army is coming under mounting criticism for its purchase of weapons systems that reflect what one Pentagon official called “last generation thinking.”

Exhibit A, one of these officials says, is the Army’s decision to award a \$942 million six-year contract to Oshkosh Defense to fit the service’s Stryker infantry carrier vehicle with “a 30mm, unmanned turreted auto-cannon.” Few argue that the “precision lethality capability” upgrade is frivolous, but that’s not the point. The problem with the Stryker is not that it’s not lethal, but that it’s vulnerable. The brainchild of former Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki, the eight-wheeled Stryker was first deployed in Iraq in October of 2003. Designed as an armored troop transport, it initially won high marks for its performance in delivering soldiers to the battlefield. It didn’t take long for that to change.

As it turns out, there were problems with the Stryker from the very beginning: the armor shielding it was fitted with proved largely ineffective and weighty, mud splattered from its rubber wheels into the engine during deployments caused innumerable maintenance problems, computer command displays inside the vehicle didn’t always work, soldiers in battle gear were being killed in rollover incidents because their seatbelts didn’t fit and (crucially), the bottom of the vehicle was thinly armored. The armor problem became obvious during the Battle for Sadr City, in April and May of 2008.

Fought amidst the dark alleys and narrow streets of Baghdad’s most populated and impoverished neighborhood, the fight involved a face-off between the U.S. Army and the Jaish al-Mahdi militia of Muqtada Al-Sadr’s Sadrism Movement. The Stryker did not fare well. Six Strykers were destroyed within six days, and the vehicle could not maneuver in Sadr City’s crowded streets. In several instances, tanks were employed to defend the Strykers which, because of

their width and large turning radius, found themselves under constant attack and unable to move.

More crucially, the destruction of the Strykers was not the result of direct fire from Sadrism gunmen, but from improvised explosive devices planted by them. The flat-bottomed Stryker proved particularly vulnerable to landmines, whose explosive power easily penetrated the vehicle’s road armor — which exploded upwards into the crew and infantry cabin. It was after the fight for Sadr City that the Stryker took on its own distinctive nickname. Soldiers called it “the Kevlar coffin.” The Stryker’s performance in Afghanistan, beginning in the summer of 2009, was even worse — with the combat vehicle diverted from missions its commanders believed it couldn’t handle. The Stryker was not only as vulnerable as it had been in Iraq, it had difficulty traveling off-road, which is all Afghanistan is.

A report in Stars and Stripes at the time noted the vehicle’s vulnerabilities: “In one incident in August [2010], a 1st Squadron flat-bottomed Stryker was struck by a massive bomb hidden in a highway culvert in Kandahar province. The blast peeled away the armor protecting its engine like the skin of an orange, snapped off a wheel at the axle and mangled the metal cage that was designed to protect troops from rocket-propelled grenades.” Soldiers in both Iraq and Afghanistan repeated the same mantra: the Stryker was a very good combat vehicle, so long as it traveled on roads, it wasn’t raining — and didn’t have to fight. Defenders of the vehicle say that the Stryker’s critics have it all wrong: the object of the Stryker isn’t to deliver soldiers to an enemy emplacement, or even to take on enemy armor. Rather, the Stryker is designed to move light infantry forces close to an objective — like a Chevy Suburban.

So why is the U.S. Army doubling down in building an infantry carrier that has proven to be a death trap for American soldiers? The answer is all too obvious: “This is the most egregious example of corporate welfare I’ve seen in a long time,” a senior Pentagon official said. Put another way, while the U.S. Army’s Stryker infantry carrier is still unlikely to protect America’s soldiers, the army’s decision to shovel \$942 million at Oshkosh Defense for unnecessary upgrades will (yet again) pad the pockets of an American defense contractor.



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