Vietnam Veterans of America

Chapter 324 - PO Box 18631 - Milwaukee, WI 53218

In Service to America

Meeting Notice

21 September, 2022

5555 W. Good Hope Rd.
Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.
Chapter Meeting 7 - 8 p.m.

21 September

Future Meetings
21 September, 19 October, 16 November, 21 December
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A quick look at the legendary Charles “Chargin” Beckwith

In 1952, the Green Bay Packers drafted “Chargin’ Charlie” Beckwith from the University of Georgia. But seeing as how the Korean War was already in its second year, Chargin’ Charlie declined the offer for a different green uniform.

Commissioned as 2nd Lieutenant, Charles Beckwith served a few years on the Korean Peninsula, in war and later peacetime. It was after Korea that he joined the 82d Airborne, and later, U.S. Army Special Forces.

Beckwith’s first mission was to train the Royal Lao Army in 1960 but his mission to deploy with British SAS to Malaysia as they fought a Communist insurgency is one that forever changed military history.

It was there that Beckwith came down with a mean case of Leptospirosis — a bacterial infection that causes kidney failure and pulmonary hemorrhaging. Doctors did not expect Beckwith to survive.

In fact, they called it one of the three worst cases they’d ever seen. Beckwith was given three weeks to live — and he did.

He survived the infection and his time with the Special Air Service inspired him to develop the American Army’s version of such an elite unit. In 1963, he formed the specialty unit code-name Project Delta, personally selecting the men best suited to conduct long-range recon operations in Vietnam.

But his time in Delta — and on Earth — was nearly cut short in Vietnam in 1966. Beckwith was shot in his abdomen with a .50-caliber round. He was taped up, but essentially left for dead.

But death still didn’t come.

Beckwith not only recovered, he continued with his military career, fighting in a series of battles from the Tet Offensive in 1968 until the end of the war in 1973.

It was in the mid-70s that Beckwith’s elite unit idea finally became a full reality. He was given the authority and formed the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment – Delta in 1977. The new elite unit focused on anti-terror and hostage recovery ops, based on the model of the British SAS.

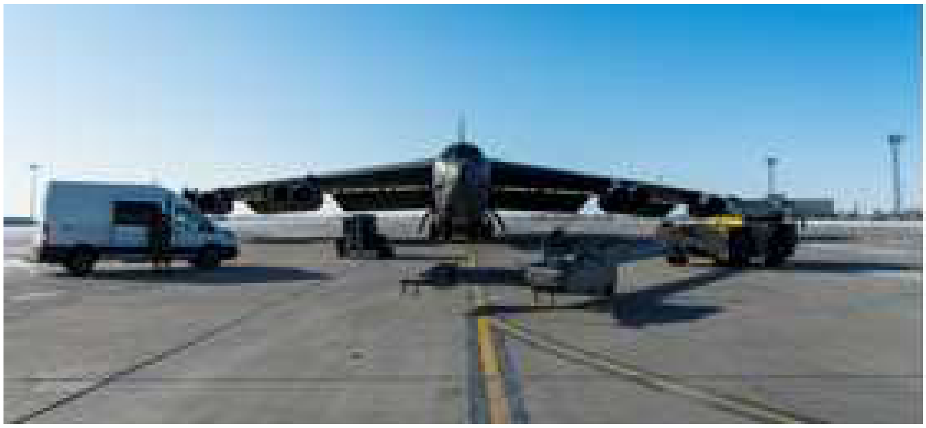
Unfortunately for Beckwith and Delta, their first mission was Operation Eagle Claw, the doomed hostage rescue of Americans held in Iran. After the catastrophic failure of Eagle Claw, Beckwith retired from the Army..

B-52 Stratofortress Bomber

John A. Tirpak, Air Force Magazine, May 19, 2022

Update 07: CERP Costs Jumps by Half in New Estimate of Refit

The cost of the B-52 re-engining program has increased 50 percent because of integration issues, according to revelations in a House Armed Services panel hearing. Air Force acquisition executive Andrew P. Hunter acknowledged the B-52 Commercial Engine Replacement Program (CERP) price hike as voiced in a question from Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA) in testimony on service modernization. “We currently believe there is cost growth from our design work that we did originally through the middle-tier acquisition program to what we anticipate we’ll be looking at [in] Milestone B,” which evaluates readiness for entry into the engineering and manufacturing development phase, Hunter said.



The B-52 CERP has been conducted as a middle-tier acquisition program to get underway rapidly and develop a prototype system but is now moving to a “traditional” program, and the Air Force is firming up the costs it expects to pay, Hunter said. The cost increases have more to do with integrating the engines on the B-52, which is a Boeing effort, and has less to do with the engines themselves, which will be built by Rolls-Royce, he added. “I want to emphasize that a lot of that engineering work is actually inside the airplane, on the support struts, to which the engines attach, versus the engine itself, which is largely a commercial engine that already exists,” Hunter said. The engine needs only “a modest number of modifications,” he said. “So it’s really about re- engineering 1960s aircraft to perform all the way through” to the end of the B-52’s lifetime, now envisioned as circa 2050.

The Air Force told Congress a year ago that the CERP effort had increased in cost by nine percent because of pandemic-related supply issues, to about $11 billion. Hunter did not speculate on a new cost estimate. The end of the risk reduction and prototyping phase is rapidly approaching, Hunter said, and when it’s done, “we’ll have an effective design ... [that will] allow us to go into an acquisition program to allow us to do that re-engining.” At Milestone B, “we will ... have in our hands the real, full cost of what it will take to do it, and we’ll set the original baseline for the full program ... at that point,” Hunter said. The Air Force will “assess” at that milestone whether “it still make sense to move forward with that program,” Hunter said, adding, however, that “we will need a new engine for the B-52 to get it out to its full lifetime.”

In an email response to a query from Air Force magazine, Boeing said the “50 percent differential in the CERP cost comes from an original, 2017 government estimate produced by the Air Force program office, compared to the latest 2022 estimate. The company said it “is our understanding that the government’s estimate has been adjusted over the years from the initial business case analysis, developed at a very early phase of the acquisition, to incorporate additional complexity” as well as “further historical fidelity on similar programs, as well as additional understanding of technical scope and complexity of the design.”

Rolls-Royce North America said through a spokesperson that the company “has been collaborating closely with the Air Force and program integrator Boeing on the CERP program.” There have been “no changes in engine pricing since the contract was awarded.” The Air Force was not able to comment on the B-52 CERP cost increase by press time.

The CERP seeks to integrate eight new Rolls-Royce F130 engines per aircraft to replace the Pratt & Whitney TF33s, which are original equipment on the B-52Hs, built in 1962. The engines will be digitally controlled, requiring new pylons, new twin-engine nacelles, and wiring to connect the powerplants to the B-52 cockpit. The project is part of an overall modernization of the B-52 fleet that includes digital wiring, new communications, and a new radar, among other improvements.

National Defense Service Medal won’t be awarded after December

By Meghann Myers and Davis Winkie, Military Times, Sep 6, 2022

Following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the formal end of combat operations in Iraq, the Defense Department is preparing to truly transition the military out of a wartime posture. Which is to say, the National Defense Service Medal is going back into retirement on Dec. 31.

The award — affectionately known as the “pizza stain,” which all troops serving since 9/11 have been able to pin on their uniforms after initial training — won’t be awarded for the foreseeable future.

“Termination is based on the United States no longer conducting large-scale combat operations in designated geographic locations as a result of the terrorist attacks on the United States that occurred September 11, 2001,” Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin wrote in a memo signed Aug. 30.

This brings to a close the fourth conflict for which troops could earn the National Defense Service Medal. It previously was activated for five years during the first Gulf War, 13 years for Vietnam and four years for the Korean War.

The announcement comes a month after the department scaled back eligibility for the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, which will be limited to deployments to Syria going forward. Similarly, the Inherent Resolve Campaign Medal — awarded for the defeat-ISIS mission — has been restricted to Syria, its airspace and 12 nautical miles out to sea. Troops deploying to Iraq for train-advise-assist missions will instead receive the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal.

It’s not that the U.S. is no longer involved in counterterrorism or any potential combat operations, according to the Pentagon, but that those operations are on such a small scale they don’t rate the medal.

Still, troops continue to deploy throughout the world, including to ostensible war zones.

New VA Employee Survey Reveals Severe Understaffing at VA Facilities

August 29, 2022

AFGE, the largest union representing 283,000 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees, and the Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute (VHPI) are calling on VA leadership and Congress to fully fund staff and expand VA resources after shocking revelations from a new survey of approximately 2,300 VA employees and veterans.

A few examples of the survey results include:

- 60% of survey respondents reported losing key resources needed to serve veterans, especially staff, over the last four years.
- Nearly 90% said their facilities needed more frontline staff.
- 64% said that there are vacant positions for which no recruitment is taking place. A respondent at one facility reported 48 physician vacancies. At another, a staff of 12 full-time outpatient psychiatrists has been whittled down to one.
- 50% reported that beds, units, and programs have been closed due to staffing and budget shortages, even when there is a patient demand for such services.
- More than 20% of respondents who work at the VA say they have partially shifted their work away from direct veteran care towards monitoring and coordinating more expensive private sector care.

"The results of this survey show that the staffing crisis at the VA is hurting our veterans," said AFGE National VA Council President Alma Lee. "For too long, VA workers have been asked to do more with less. VA leadership must continue to work with its union partners to address this staffing crisis and ensure the VA is equipped to provide the critical, direct services our veterans earned and want."

According to the VA's own data, at the end of Q2 there were 64,909 existing vacancies.

"These shocking survey results should be a wake-up call to Washington," said VHPI President Paul Cox, himself a Vietnam veteran. "Rather than outsource care to the costly, less prompt, and unaccountable private sector, lawmakers must fund more VA positions and properly resource facilities. Only then can they honestly claim to support the nine-million veterans who rely on the VA's world-class care."

VA employees are deeply committed to serving veterans. But many were shaken by Secretary McDonough's recent recommendations to close dozens of facilities. Some are reconsidering their careers at the agency, which could worsen understaffing issues at the VA.

Prosthetic Limb Tattoos

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center Policy

From the very cringe to the very meaningful, tattoos have a special place in the military. Now, a policy at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center will help ensure wounded service members don't have to part with the beloved tats they got during their time in uniform. "[O]ur general policy is that if you had a tattoo before you lost your limb and you would like the same tattoo on your prosthetic/artificial limb cover, then we will try to make this happen, depending on available resources," said Dr. Paul Paqsquina, chief of rehabilitation at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. It's unclear how long the program has been available for service members receiving treatment at Walter Reed.

Tattoos and troops are one of the world's more storied love affairs. Celebrated by young soldiers and at times begrudged by senior leaders, service member tattoos can range from absolutely outrageous to sentimental, providing an opportunity to memorialize fallen brothers or sisters. If nothing else, they often represent a memory, person, or place that was important enough that the service member wanted to keep it with them forever. And losing a limb in service to their country shouldn't take that away. More than 1,500 service members lost limbs during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the Department of Defense. And Paqsquina says that of those, a "high percentage" has lost more than one limb. While the first step is saving a service member's life, according to Paqsquina, "the next step is restoring lives, and providing some meaning to those lives."

The program to recreate service members' tattoos is an attempt to "do whatever we can to make our nation's heroes 'whole' after the sacrifices they made," Paqsquina said, adding that its most important benefit is that troops are "proud and happy" to show off their prosthesis to friends and family. "This hopefully helps their self-confidence," he said, "encourages them to avoid isolation, provides an ice-breaker for meaningful conversations with people they meet for the first time, and gives the public a greater sense of the sacrifices made by our service members and the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities across the country and globe."

This World War I battlefield is on fire and exploding 100-year-old ordnance

The war to end all wars isn't done ravaging the continent.

The First World War ended 104 years ago, but thanks to wildfires burning the European continent, echoes of the Great War are being heard. And seen. And nearly killing firefighters because bombs left over from the conflict are blowing up.

A massive wildfire is currently raging in the Kras region in Slovenia's southwest. The fires are having the unexpected effect of setting off multiple unexploded ordnances (or UXOs) left in the ground from World War I. The fire has burned more than eight square miles, and forced at least three villages on or near the Italian-Slovenian border to evacuate, including the border town of Opatje Selo. More than 1,000 firefighters and elements of the Slovenian military have been fighting the blaze.

The fires alone are presenting risks to firefighters, but the risk of sudden, unexpected explosions add another level of danger. Local media reported that one explosion sent shrapnel right by a group of firefighters, but no one was injured in the blast. Slovenia has sent in bomb disposal teams to help clear the space for containing and battling the fires. Slovakia, Austria and Croatia have also dispatched helicopter crews to assist in the efforts.

"The problem is that because of the unexploded ordnance firefighting units cannot penetrate into the fire but can only act on its edges," Slovenian Defense Minister Marjan Šarec told the Slovenian Press Agency.

During World War I, the border fight between Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire saw more than 200,000 people die. Among the campaigns there were 12 battles to capture and advance across the Isonzo River, led on the Italian side by Luigi Cardona, who was infamous for his dedication to throwing troops into enemy fire and incurring heavy losses.

The fires burning across Slovenia are part of a wave of fires in Europe right now, exacerbated by a heat wave that prompted massive evacuations in multiple countries. The same high temperatures melted a Royal Air Force runway in the United Kingdom this week. Fires in Spain have killed at least 500 people, according to the Spanish government.

The ordnances appear to be standard explosives. According to World War I historian Simon Jones, it's highly unlikely the unexploded bombs now going off contain mustard gas or any other chemical weapons. Although Austria-Hungary ordered mustard gas shells to the border front against the Italian armies in 1918, there was no evidence any were fired in the fighting.

Even though wars end, the risks from UXOs continues on for decades to come. The former Yugoslav nations still deal with landmines left over from the wars of the 1990s. And Japan is still recovering and disposing of UXOs from World War II. Experts and people working in ordnance disposal believe it will take several more decades to clear the UXOs left over from World War I.

Native children's remains to be moved from Army cemetery

By Michael Rubinkam, Army Times, Jun 14, 2022

CARLISLE, Pa. — For more than a century they were buried far from home, in a small cemetery on the grounds of the Army War College. Now they're heading home.

The Army began disinterring the remains of eight Native American children who died at a government-run boarding school at the Carlisle Barracks, with the children's closest living relatives poised to take custody. The disinterment process, which began over the weekend, is the fifth at Carlisle since 2017. More than 20 sets of Native remains were transferred to family members in earlier rounds.

The children had lived at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, where thousands of Native children were taken from their families and forced to assimilate to white society as a matter of U.S. policy — their hair cut and their clothing, language and culture stripped. More than 10,000 children from more than 140 tribes passed through the school between 1879 and 1918, including famous Olympian Jim Thorpe.

"If you survived this experience and were able to go back home, you were a stranger. You couldn't even speak the language your parents spoke," said Rae Skenandore, of the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin. She is a relative of Paul Wheelock, one of the children whose remains will be disinterred.

The off-reservation government boarding schools — Carlisle was the first, with 24 more that followed — "ripped apart tribes and communities and families," said Skenandore.

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