

Veterans Studies Interest Group Listserv

Issue #40 March 2020

The Veteran's Creed

1. *I am an American Veteran*
2. *I proudly served my country*
3. *I live the values I learned in the military*
4. *I continue to serve my community, my country and my fellow veterans*
5. *I maintain my physical and mental discipline*
6. *I continue to lead and improve*
7. *I make a difference*
8. *I honor and remember my fallen comrades*

This month's Listserv includes VA and the Coronavirus; Seventy-Five Years Since Iwo Jima; The Netherlands Honors Black Soldiers; Vets in State Legislatures; Veterans Unemployment; and, Veterans Are Not Working at Jobs Matching Their Skills

VA and the Coronavirus

As of 2 days ago, the VA reported 5 cases of COVID-19 which were in their hospitals in Palo Alto, North Las Vegas and New Orleans. None have died. VA hospitals are instituting various restrictions and screening procedures which are more severe in areas where case numbers are higher such as in California and Washington state. The agency has at least 2,000 virus tests and is also sending patients to local health departments. VA also cancelled one of its major events, the annual sports clinic for disabled veterans in [Colorado](#).

Seventy-Five Years Since Iwo Jima

Seventy-five years ago, for 36 days from February 19 to March 26, 1945, U.S. Marines took on the Japanese in the battle of Iwo [Jima](#). The battle was responsible for the most U.S Medal of Honors awarded in World War II (one quarter of them) and resulted in history's most iconic war photograph. The main purpose of the U.S. attack was to gain a toehold in the perimeter of the main Japanese islands for an upcoming invasion. The battle itself was fierce. Japanese forces under Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi had developed a defensive strategy that took advantage of the island's mountainous landscape and jungles to set up camouflaged artillery positions to survive both pre-invasion bombing and [invasion](#). Over the next few days 70,000 US Marines landed, outnumbering the Japanese 3:1. Four days into the fighting, the Marines captured Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima's south side where the famous flag was raised and photographed by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal. The fighting, however, raged on for four weeks. Japanese Gen. Kuribayashi set up a garrison in the mountains and on March 23 300 of his men mounted the final banzai attack. The attack was unsuccessful, marking the end of the official battle, but Americans continued to capture Japanese holdouts who refused to surrender. Dozens of them were killed during this final stage. U.S. Marines sustained 25,000 casualties and nearly 7,000 deaths while only 200 of the initial 21,000 Japanese on the island survived. This included 2 soldiers who continued to hide in the mountains, finally surrendering 4 years after the end of the war

in 1949. Although the American military rebuilt the airfield, they never used it to stage an attack on Japan proper, unnecessary in any [event](#).

The famous photograph is the basis of the Marine Corps War Memorial of six Marines raising the flag. Sculpted by Felix de Weldon, it is adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery. We now see the second photograph taken with a larger flag. Three of the six Marines, Sgt Michael Strank, Cpl Harlon Block and PFC Franklin Sousley were killed soon after the flag raising. The other three, PFCs Rene Gagnon and Ira Hayes and Navy corpsman John Bradley became celebrities, participating in war bond rallies. But then the mistakes. In 1947, it came out that PFC Henry Hansen was incorrectly identified as Harlon [Block](#) (both were killed in action). In 2016, PFC Harold Schultz and not John [Bradley](#) was identified in the photograph and in 2019, PFC Harold Keller and not Rene [Gagnon](#). Nevertheless, the photo remains embedded in public consciousness, a lasting symbol of camaraderie and valor.

The battle of Iwo Jima forms the basis of various movies including two by Clint Eastwood "Flags of our fathers" and "Letters from Iwo Jima" depicting the battle from the American and Japanese sides respectively. There are a number of reunions and celebrations related to the Battle, including one scheduled for March 28 on the [island](#) and one at Camp [Pendleton](#) held on Feb 15. Two New Jersey veterans of Iwo Jima, 99-year-old John Welsh of Gloucester Township and 97-year-old Francis "Frank" or "Elmer" Beach of Oaklyn, both of whom had seen the flag raising, met, shook hands and exchanged war stories at the Battleship New Jersey museum. The Iwo Jima Association maintains a Web site [here](#) and the National Marine Museum [here](#).



Postage stamp of the Iwo Jima flag raising issued in 1945. On the day of issue there were long lines to buy it and over 137 million were ultimately [sold](#). Many thought that this photo lifted the spirits of the country and helped continue the war

The Netherlands honors black soldiers

Among the heroic soldiers who fought in Northern Europe following D-Day was the 784th Tank Battalion, a segregated African American [force](#). Their first duty was in the Netherlands. After the D-Day landing, the Allies had moved into the Netherlands in September 1944. On Christmas Day 1944, the 784th Tank Battalion arrived at Soissons, France from which they were directed to the 35th infantry (Wagonwheel) Division. At

that time, African Americans generally performed supportive rather than direct combat duty. Their first job was to bring nearly 20,000 soldiers who died on the march to Germany to burial. They ferried the corpses from makeshift cemeteries and conducted makeshift services to give the deaths dignity. Ultimately the burial grounds became the Netherlands American Cemetery at Margraten.

But the service of the 784th did not stop there and, because of manpower needs, they wound up fighting in the Allied campaign. Many of the soldiers who died in the Netherlands, some 8,291 of them, are buried at Margraten Cemetery, which is akin to Arlington National Cemetery in the U.S. Every year there are wreath laying ceremonies. Among the graves are those of 172 African American soldiers who fought in segregated units and have been largely overlooked by history. About 10 years ago, Dutch and American historians began to work on the contributions of these black liberators, trying to find descendants and relatives of the soldiers in these units. Researchers have made extensive efforts to find their families through the American Genealogical Society and other approaches as part of a Black Liberators [Project](#).

Cpl. Jefferson Wiggins, a sharecropper's son who escaped Jim Crow to join the segregated Army was in the 784th. Wiggins later received a battlefield commission from Gen. Patton and went on to write books about his service in the segregated military and gave a graduation keynote address at West [Point](#). He died in 2013. Cpl. James Baldwin was part of the same force and recently received recognition from the Dutch Embassy in Washington. Now 95, he plans to visit Margraten one last time on his hundredth [birthday](#).

Vets in State Legislatures

According to a study by Rebecca [Burgess](#), veterans accounted for 12% of state legislators in 2018, down from 14% [in 2016](#). (Veterans make up about 7% of the adult population). North Dakota, at 20% has the highest percentage and there were increases in those years and CA, IL, MN, NJ, NY and OH while ID, MA, MI, ND and RI saw declines. The Army, which is the service with the highest number of individuals, also provides the highest number of legislators. The total is nearly 1000 veterans serving in state legislators, including 29% post 9/11 veterans. The numbers of veterans in the U.S. Congress also dipped a bit in 2018 as outlined in the December 2018 [Listserv](#).

Veterans Unemployment

In figures released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on March 6, there has been a slight uptick in veterans' unemployment to [3.6%](#). While this number is far below the 7-10% observed in the mid-2010's, it is the highest level in a year and for the first time since [2016](#), higher than the national unemployment average of 3.5%. The number of unemployed of veterans specifically from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars also saw an increase to 4.5% from below 2% this time last year (though a smaller database makes this number less [reliable](#)) . About 8.9 million veterans are currently in the [workforce](#) with about 330,000 veterans nationwide looking for work last month. Over the years, veterans' earnings have been higher than their [counterparts](#).

Veterans Are Not Working at Jobs Matching Their Skills

The modern-day military is a center for highly advanced technology. Other countries have yielded substantial technological returns on their training of the military. Israel,

for example, has made itself an international technological powerhouse in part on this basis.

We need to catch up. A recent New York Times [article](#) discusses a LinkedIn [study](#) of veterans and nonveterans with bachelors degrees, on the issue. In general, veterans' employment has been excellent with lower unemployment than civilian counterparts in the past few years (until a slight change this month— see above). However, it has been estimated that 33% of veterans are underemployed, 15.6% more than [nonveterans](#). (Underemployment is defined as a deficiency in paid work or work not using person's [skills](#).)

About 55% of veterans in transition do something totally different than they did in the military according to the LinkedIn study. Veterans without college degrees may be "pushed toward low skill jobs even though their training and the culture of the military might well translate into other types of [positions](#)." Many jobs require licenses and training for skills that veterans learned, particularly in healthcare. For example, veterans with knowledge in emergency responses may have no immediate access to credentialing processes to become physician's assistants (though in fact physician assistant programs initially borrowed much from the duties of military corpsman). There needs to be reform in occupational licensing laws. For example, the recent DoD budget bill has a provision to conduct a pilot program for collaboration with colleges and healthcare systems to grant credit toward Physician Assistant studies for previous military work. At Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte NC, there is a program to teach veterans to translate military medical training to civilian hospitals. One startup, Parsable, aims to shift industrial workers from paper to technology and has a goal to hire 10% of its staff from the veteran pool (they now have about 6%).

Appeals to hire veterans tend to be based on patriotism and help for damaged veterans. However, we also need to orient our thinking to the skills that these veterans have. In addition, there has to be more work to get them the training they need via the G.I. Bill which provides many useful approaches to leap ahead of their nonveteran counterparts but may be ill-used.

The Listserv is available as an archive on the Georgetown University Library website under the title "Veterans Interest [Newsletters](#)".

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Stats Section

Casualties in the Mexican Civil and Spanish-American Wars

War or Conflict	Branch of Service	Number Serving	Casualties			
			Total Deaths	Battle Deaths	Other Deaths	Wounds Not Mortal ^a
Mexican War^c 1846-1848	Total	78,718	13,283	1,733	11,550	4,152
	Army	—	13,271	1,721	11,550	4,102
	Navy	—	1	1	—	3
	Marines	—	11	11	—	47
Civil War^{cd} (Union Forces Only) ^e 1861-1865	Total	2,213,363	364,511	140,414	224,097	281,881
	Army	2,128,948	359,528	138,154	221,374	280,040
	Navy	84,415	4,523	2,112	2,411	1,710
	Marines	^f	460	148	312	131
Spanish-American War 1898-1901	Total	306,760	2,446	385	2,061	1,662
	Army ^g	280,564	2,430	369	2,061	1,594
	Navy	22,875	10	10	—	47
	Marines	3,321	6	6	—	21

From Congressional Research [Service](#)