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 issue of the listserv includes Army War College Event; RAND Study on Extremism in Veterans; Veterans and Homelessness; VA COVID Wrap-Up; PACT Act Claims; Veterans Fallen in Ukraine; 101-Year-Old D-Day Veteran

Army War College Event
On May 5-6 the Army War College held a conference entitled Military and Society: The All-Volunteer Force Turns 50. As part of this conference, I made a presentation based on a book that I and former Army COS George Casey wrote entitled Supporting Veterans After 50 Years of the All-Volunteer Force and 20 Years of War: Ideas Moving Forward. The presentation specifically focused on the public perception of veterans and how these perceptions affect veterans’ lives. The Broken Veteran Narrative, which emphasizes veterans’ challenges with little note of their assets, is an important component of how veterans’ perceptions are presented to and perceived by the public. The presentation can be found here

RAND Study on Extremism in Veterans
The subject of extremism in veterans is a both sensitive and prickly topic. Among the details in the public eye are the fact that nearly 1/5 of those facing federal or DC charges in the January 6, 2021 incursion on the US Capitol were veterans (who comprise 1/16 of the US population) and the widely publicized DoD extremism “stand down” for all military branches in Spring, 2022.

Now comes an important survey by the RAND think tank on extremism (released in May) which refutes the idea that extremism is more common among veterans. RAND surveyed nearly 1000 veterans and found no evidence that they had more extreme beliefs than the rest of the American population.

Here are some of the findings:
- Support for extremist groups—white supremacism, (0.7/7%) (veterans/previous surveys of general population), membership in Proud Boys (4.22/9%), membership in Antifa (5.5/10%), black nationalism (5%).
While support for QAnon (13.5 percent) appeared relatively low compared with general surveys, support for political violence (17.7/19%) and the racist Great Replacement theory (28.8/34%) appeared similar to that of the general population.

A majority of veterans who expressed support for extremist groups did not endorse political violence. However, a full 18% of the sample may also be vulnerable to recruitment for new or emerging extremist groups and this is disquieting.

Veterans of the Marine Corps expressed the highest support for extremist groups and beliefs on both sides of the political spectrum among the different branches of service.

Among the criticisms of the report are the fact that respondents self-reported and may or may not have been honest about their views on extremism. Also, veterans can bring military skills to extremist groups even with the modest numbers favoring violence. They also bring legitimacy. On the other hand, others welcomed the report as a refutation of the notion that extremism is more common among both the military and veterans.

**Veterans and Homelessness**
Contradicting one of the most widely held beliefs about veterans, their rate of homelessness is not much different from the general population. Such numbers are in part due to a VA-HUD initiative of the last 11 years that has cut the rate of veteran homelessness by about 55%.

According to an HUD report, as of December 2022, the rate of homelessness among veterans was 20/10,000 and in the general population 18/10,000, a difference which needs to be corrected but not nearly the difference supposed by the public. (see also Listserv #45)

Below is a graph showing the decline in homelessness in both sheltered and unsheltered veterans 2009-2022. Men constituted 89% (29,392) of homeless veterans and 3% of homeless veterans were in family households.

From HUD.
VA COVID Wrap-Up
With President Biden’s declaration of the official end of the COVID Public Health Emergency, the VA ended its COVID emergency program. Here are the final numbers posted on May 11.

VA:
- Cared for >750,000 veterans with COVID
- Vaccinated >4.5 million veterans, 340,000 employees, 130,000 veteran caregivers, family members and dependents and 61 thousand others
- Provided >1 million pieces of PPE including gowns, gloves, masks, other equipment including ventilators, test kits and negative air machines
- Supported 50 States and all territories as well as a number of Native American tribes
- Conducted >900 research projects over 80 medical centers
- Completed >1.7 million claims, lowering the backlog by >100,000 claims
- Helped >200,000 veteran families experiencing financial difficulties
- Implemented COVID relief and provided housing and educational payments to millions of veterans and family members
- Implemented a new VA life insurance program, VALIFE
- Conducted >450,000 internments
- Expanded the Veterans Legacy Memorial with creation of 4.5 million pages
- Opened 7 new national cemeteries serving >500,000 veterans

PACT Act Claims
At an April symposium at the University of Chicago, VA secretary Denid McDonough discussed the relatively modest number of claims related to the PACT Act signed into law on August 10, 2022. Up to that point, only about 10% of individuals potentially eligible under this legislation had filed for claims. He hoped to see the number increasing.

The PACT Act provides for presumptive benefits related to burn pit exposure in the Gulf War and Arab and Afghanistan wars, hypertension and monoclonal gammopathy of uncertain significance for Vietnam Veterans and radiation related illnesses for veterans who served at several locations in the 1960s and early 1970s. It is estimated that 6.2 million veterans are eligible for these benefits. As of May 12th the VA had decided 252,000 of the 546,000 PACT Act claims filed by veterans with nearly 80% of decisions resulting in approval. The VA has also performed about 2.2 million toxic exposure screenings since the PACT Act was signed into law.

Secretary McDonough acknowledged that the VA has considerable work to do to communicate this new opportunity to veterans and “rebuilding trust in the department.” The Department has also taken a number of steps to reduce its claims backlog.

Veterans Fallen in Ukraine
It is not known how many Americans have taken up arms in the war. In the Ukraine. The estimates are in the thousands. These individuals were inspired by the same motivations that led our citizens to join the military after 9/11 and throughout American
history - love of liberty, disdain for tyranny and personal reasons. They also did so after warnings from the US government of the dangers of anyone who steps out on the battlefield. At least 16 Ukraine volunteers have died. Here are some of their stories as compiled by the Washington Post on Memorial Day.

Army veteran Andrew Peters, age 28 of Marshfield WI, was moved by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's appeal to military veterans worldwide to join the Ukrainian Foreign Legion and repel the Russians. He decided to sign up and his father, a Gulf War Army veteran considered the same but ultimately decided against it - he thought his son was probably relieved that his father would not “embarrass him.” In April, Ukrainian military officers brought Andrew’s ashes to his parents’ home. The father turned down an offer for his son to be added to a local memorial that recognizes U.S. troops killed in combat fearing a reaction. He did fly both American and Ukrainian flags outside the family home.

Nick Maimer, 45 of Boise, Idaho, had served in the Army as a Green Beret for 2 decades and his moral compass, he had said, guided him to the Ukraine. Nick was a quiet and contemplative person who focused on helping others. He died in a building collapse near the city of Bakhmut. His death was disclosed in a video showing the now famous leader of the Wagner mercenary group Yevgeniy Prigozhin who stood near the lifeless body with Maimer’s driver's license and Veterans Affairs card. Ukrainian forces subsequently received the remains from the Wagner group, and they are to be returned to the family. The father, Paul Maimer, said “It’s amazing concerning the circumstances there can be some closure. At this point it is all we can ask for.”

Cooper Andrews, 26, a retired Marine Corps Sergeant from Ohio was killed around Bakhmut and his mother is fighting to have his remains returned. The son had gravitated toward the opportunity to fight fascism, “If I don't do it, who is going to do it?” Andrews was passionate about social justice stimulated by the killing of 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland OH by police. He had been an Eagle Scout and liked the structure of the Marine Corps though disturbed by racism he encountered in its ranks. His experience with the Ukrainian unit was generally good on that score. When attempting to have his body returned and buried with his father, the family found it difficult to communicate with the US government (as seen below a common experience) and sought help from the local Ukrainian community.

Grady Kurpasi, 58, was born in South Korea, adopted by an American family, and subsequently signed up for the marines after 9/11. He had volunteered to serve in the Ukraine and, as his friend said, every US veteran killed in the Ukraine “absolutely, 100% sacrificed for what we believe in, which is our freedom and democracy... there is no distinction from [fighting for the US].” Kurpasi had signed up shortly after he retired from 20 years in the Marine Corps. He joined a group of international fighters near Kyiv in a group called “Team Raven” who were tasked with holding an observation post when Kurpasi was last seen alive. To determine his fate, his family pressed the Biden administration to get involved but according to a friend, the State Department was “absolutely awful.” The friend turned to outside groups like the T. Weatherman Foundation to coordinate efforts with the Ukrainian government. Finally, the remains
were found in a collection of trees near Oleksandrivka west of Kherson, along with his gear, some of which will be in an exhibit in a Ukrainian museum honoring foreign fighters. The State Department claimed to have worked closely with the Ukrainian authorities in this effort. Kurpasi signed his Emails “What shores know not our blood.” which his friend Heath plans to have tattooed on his arm alongside the names of marines killed in Afghanistan.

Pete Reed, 33, was a Marine Corps veteran, was in Iraq in 2016 doing humanitarian work during which time he met his future wife, journalist Alex Potter. Before going to the Ukraine, he had been deployed to Afghanistan twice as an infantryman. He then undertook humanitarian work in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Poland with Global Outreach Doctors, a nonprofit that sends medical personnel in areas of conflict and famine. His wife described him as always willing to help everyone and anyone and his core values were compassion and kindness. Reed also had been particularly affected by the death of a friend Andrew Carpenter who was shot on patrol in Afghanistan. He had “a bucket list” of things to accomplish before dying, one of which was to make a name for himself. Since he died there have been more than a dozen memorial services in his honor, events which would have taken him aback. For his wife, the hardest moments are shortly after friends visit, leaving her alone in an empty house. She and his family will spread his ashes in rural Beckett MA where he found meaning at a day camp he attended as a child. His wife said, “We're just going to gather some friends and family and toss Pete to the wind.”

While these men fought under a different flag and no matter what one thinks of the war, there is much to make Americans proud.

101-Year-Old D-Day Veteran
World War II veteran Peter Orlando, now 101, had a front row seat for D-Day, June 6, 1944, and the battle of Omaha beach. One of the very few veterans of that battle still surviving, Orlando served on the USS ATR-2, an ocean-going 168X33 foot rescue tug whose mission was to tow damaged and struck landing craft away from the battle-scarred shore. The then 22-year-old was a stone’s throw from Omaha beach and well within reach of enemy fire. “Too dumb to be scared” he was standing on the bow of the tug when an officer hollered “Orlando, get the f---in here!”

Orlando’s father had served in the US Navy in World War I and his grandfather in the Italian Navy. He had grown up on the beach in South Boston and there was nothing else for him to do in World War II except join the Navy. He was ultimately assigned to the “Dungaree Navy” a name given to smaller ships working in coastal waters. Since there was no official uniform, the men wore standard issue bell bottom jeans which started out blue but soon turned black from the oil and grease of the engine rooms.

Orlando had trained as a radio operator but his job on D-Day was crucial - salvaging damaged landing craft and other vessels quickly so other men could come on to the beach. It was work that had never been done before. Orlando departed Weymouth England the night before D-Day on one of 5,000 ships headed for France. He had a front row seat to the 2,400 casualties of that day in a boat amidst drowned soldiers. The crew
started to pull these soldiers onto the ship but were ordered to stop because there was no more room. “I’ll always carry in my mind all of the GI’s who drowned.”

Orlando participated in Operation Mulberry, a top-secret plan to assemble floating concrete harbors off Normandy for vehicles to unload supplies and soldiers. He also continued to work along the coast diffusing explosives, removing wreckage, and helping to repair artificial harbors damaged by the storms. Another job for the tow was “to blow up ships that were stuck in the way.” A major fear was hitting German mines, but it never happened.

After the war, Orlando learned photography on the GI bill and raised the family in Concord MA where he now resides in an assisted facility. He is very proud of his service. “Just had my physical” the 101-year-old said last month and “The doctor said he’ll see me next year.”

Joel Kupersmith, M.D.
Professor of Medicine

The Listserv is available as an archive on the Georgetown University Library website under the title “Veterans Interest Newsletters.

The Listserv will not be distributed over the summer but will resume in September.

Stats Section

Military Losses in American Wars

Until the Vietnam War, Civil War casualties were more than the sum of casualties in all other American wars. More details on deaths, the wounded and living in America’s wars are here.