Listserv #64 Veterans Studies Interest Group
Issue #64 November/December 2023

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 Shortfall in Military Recruiting; The Million Veteran Program Reaches Its Landmark; Pearl Harbor Survivors: Military Building; Remains of Airforce WW II Gunner Identified.

Shortfall in Military Recruiting
In what is quickly becoming a threat to national security, military recruiting for the All-volunteer Force is running into difficulties. In fact, all the usual sources of military recruits, including military family members, are declining. In response to this, former Army Chief of Staff GEN George Casey and I conducted a workshop on what veterans might do to improve this recruiting picture. The main result of this workshop will be a White Paper which is in process. The following is a discussion of the problem as an introduction to this White Paper.

The military recruiting numbers are alarming. In 2022, the shortfall in Army recruiting of enlisted persons was 15,000 individuals or one full division. Navy recruiting was also down while the Marines and Air Force held on.

The possibility that this was just a temporary decline, perhaps an immediate aftermath of the COVID epidemic, was put straight the very next year. The Army wanted to recruit 65,000 active-duty soldiers but was down again by 15,000 and has had to shrink from 485,000 soldiers in 2021 to 452,000. Propensity to serve was now down to 9% among the young, the lowest level since 2007. According to Army Secretary Christine E. Wormuth “This is an existential issue for us”.

The Air Force missed its goals (by 10%) for the first time since 1999. Despite offering cash bonuses, a student loan repayment program, raising the maximum enlistment age from 39 to 41 and accepting individuals who have low scores on military aptitude tests, the Navy fell about 7500 sailors short in 2023. The Air Force was down by 10% of its goal of 26,877 and only the Marines were OK. It seems that this decline in propensity to serve in the military and the shortfalls will be here for a while. At the same time, considerable work is underway to improve this situation. Let’s hope it happens.
The Million Veteran Program Reaches Its Landmark

The Million Veteran Program is a genetic database to which veterans, in their spirit of service, volunteer to provide genetic and clinical information. It is the largest such database in the world and we initiated it in 2011, after several years of planning. Veterans who enroll in this study complete a 30-minute health survey and donate a blood sample for genetic analysis. For privacy, identifiers such as names, Social Security numbers and date of birth are removed, and researchers see these as a code. Participation details on the program are here.

On November 8 at 3:46 PM, the VA reached its landmark of 1 million veterans. Other numbers are also impressive. For example, the database has been responsible for over 350 peer reviewed publications on a host of health conditions including cancer, diabetes, PTSD, suicide prevention, Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, kidney disease and more.

According to VA Secretary Denis McDonough “Thanks to the Veterans who signed up for this program, VA can better understand — and eventually treat — the health conditions that affect Veterans of all eras and backgrounds. This will help us improve health care and ultimately save lives, for Veterans and non-Veterans alike.” VHA Undersecretary Dr. Shereef Elnahal said “Because these Veterans chose to join our mission, VA now has the largest global database of genomic information that is connected to health information — a critical tool that will improve the health of Veterans for generations. It is a gift to the world.”

And here is what Iraq War Veteran Zelpha Anderson said about his involvement with MVP “If there’s a way that whatever I can provide from a health perspective can benefit someone down the line — a future Veteran, or my children, or my children’s children — then I’m happy to be a part of that effort. I hope that [studying] my DNA will lead to more-precise medicine and more-precise care plans for people that are like me. So, as a Latina and a Black American, I think what I can provide to the program may have some benefit to future Veterans of color.”

Besides genetic information, the program also includes information on health, wellness and nutrition all of which will contribute greatly to our knowledge in these areas. For PTSD, a study of over 165,000 veterans identified several genes related to this disease, a most important advance.

A New York Times article marked the occasion. In the Spring there will be a VA celebration of this landmark.

Pearl Harbor Survivors

On December 7th we passed the 82nd anniversary of Pearl Harbor, and the number of its survivors is dwindling. This year, 5 survivors showed up at Pearl for a ceremony while 6 others had been expected but were too frail to come.

There is only one member of the famed US Arizona still living, 102-year-old Lou Conter of California. In previous years the survivors shared their stories with visitors but that is no longer possible. According to David Kioton of the National Park Service “We [Park Rangers] could be the best storytellers in the world, [but] we can’t really hold a candle to
those that lived it sharing their stories firsthand. But now that we are losing that
generation and won’t have them very much longer, the opportunity shifts to reflect even
more so on the sacrifices that were made, the stories that they did share.”

We don’t know exactly how many Pearl Harbor survivors there are but of the 16 million
who served in World War II overall, about 120 thousand were alive in October and
about 131 die each day. According to one rough estimate, there were 87,000 military
personnel on Oahu on December 7th, 1941. As for the US Arizona, more than 1100
sailors and marines were killed with over 900 still buried inside.

At the ceremony this year, Harry Chandler, 102, who as a Navy hospital corpsman 3rd
class raised the US flag on a hill above Pearl Harbor and recounted that the memories of
the USS Arizona blowing up still come back to him today. He saw the planes coming in,
thought they were from the States and then took cover as their bombs were dropping.

Ike Schwab, tuba player in the band, had just taken a morning shower aboard the USS
Dobbin, and he was the only one topside to see the USS Utah capsizing. Now 103, he
was a 21-year-old 140 pounder who managed to lift boxes of ammunition weighing twice
that. He made it through the war unscathed, and still gets together with his bandmates
and made it back to the Pearl Harbor reunion along with caregivers.

There are still some stories left.

**Military Building**

Alarms have been sounded about the state of our military and especially of our Navy.
According to Eric Labs, an analyst for the Congressional Budget Office, “In terms of
industrial competition and shipbuilding, “In the U.S. now, we just don’t have the
industrial capacity to build warships...in large numbers very fast.”

Can we replenish our military fast enough? In part, the problem goes beyond
money. Recently Lockheed Martin promised to double the production of Javelin
anti-tank missiles by 2024 but pushed back to 2026. The US announced the sale
of harpoon anti-ship missiles to Taiwan in 2020 but they might not be delivered
during until 2026.

Recent wars such as in Ukraine have been resource intensive and according to
William LaPlant, the Pentagon’s top acquisition official “We are relearning just
how resource-intensive this type of warfare can be, and how dialing down our
production numbers, and the just-in-time delivery model, doesn’t work in this
kind of conflict.”

Civilian production of such things as semiconductors, autos and airliners has
been problematic. On the average a new lead ship (first in its class) cost 40%
more than the navy’s first estimates and delivery times for submarines have
grown from 6 to 9 years. And, while, for example, China's weapons are typically inferior to the US, they are beginning to catch up.

And back to money - among the ways to address the problem might be to use mass produced substitutes for costly specialized parts, as SpaceX does, using certain kinds of production techniques and as we did in World War II (i.e. outside of Pentagon or NASA requirements). If we want a bigger military, we might have to build it more cheaply.

Remains of Airforce WW II Gunner Identified
Science, of course, makes many things possible including the identification remains of those lost in battle. Staff Sgt. Franklin P. Hall, 21, of Leesburg, Florida, was identified in July by scientists who used anthropological and DNA analysis, according to the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency. Hall was in the 66th Bombardment Squadron, 44th Bombardment Group (Heavy) in the European Theatre in January 1944 when he was attacked by the German Air Force. The Germans found the crash site, recovered 9 sets of remains and buried them in a French cemetery at Poix-de-Picardie.

Staff Sgt Hall from Defense Pow/MIA Accounting Agency

Sgt. Hall was declared “non-recoverable” in 1951. Ongoing research ultimately disinterred the remains in 2018 and identified them. The Sergeant will ultimately be buried in Leesburg FL.

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.”
Stats Section

Trends in U.S. Veteran Demographics

VETERAN POPULATION SIZE
Nationally, the overall number of veterans has been steadily declining.

22,916,819
2007

17,411,251
2019

CHANGING VETERAN DEMOGRAPHICS
The population of post-9/11 veterans is younger, more diverse (in terms of sex and race/ethnicity), and more educated than earlier cohorts of veterans.

Post-9/11
Pre-9/11

<table>
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<th>Average age</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Multiracial/other</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>College degree</th>
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<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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STATE OF RESIDENCE
The largest populations of veterans reside in states with numerous military bases, including Texas, California, and Florida. States with the highest proportions of veterans include Western states and Virginia.

Various trends in US veteran demographics.
From Rand Epstein Family Veterans Policy Research Institute