

DEOMI News Highlights

DEOMI News Highlights is a weekly compilation of published items and commentary with a focus on equal opportunity, equal employment opportunity, diversity, culture, and human relations issues. DEOMI News Highlights is also a management tool intended to serve the informational needs of equity professionals and senior DOD officials in the continuing assessment of defense policies, programs, and actions. Further reproduction or redistribution for private use or gain is subject to original copyright restrictions.

DODIG: Not All USAFA Sexual Assault Cases Were Reported to Congress [Jennifer-Leigh Oprihory, *Air Force Magazine*, 4 October 2019]

- A Defense Department Inspector General investigation [published Oct. 2](#) found that the Pentagon failed to tell Congress about 11 sexual assault reports that US Air Force Academy cadets lodged with the school's Family Advocacy Program, despite a legal requirement to do so.
- The DODIG's deep-dive further determined that the Academy's sexual assault response coordinator lacked a process for documenting interactions with cadets who chose not to file official incident reports. Neither did USAFA systematically track its referrals to victim support services for those who didn't file reports, the IG said.
- Still, DODIG found that the Academy didn't kick out cadets for reporting assaults, and that Air Force Office of Special Investigations agents generally followed Pentagon and service policies when responding to and investigating those claims. The report added that Academy staff properly provided sexual assault prevention and response services to students and made further support services available.

[DODIG: Not All USAFA Sexual Assault Cases Were Reported to Congress](#)

Marines disciplined at San Diego boot camp for abuse and racism targeting recruits, documents show [Dan Lamothe, *The Washington Post*, 5 October 2019]

- More than 20 Marines have been disciplined for misconduct at the service's recruit training center in San Diego since 2017, incidents that included some physical attacks and racist and homophobic slurs, according to Marine Corps officials and documents obtained by The Washington Post.
- The disclosure follows promises by senior Marine Corps leaders to combat aggressive recruit training practices that fall outside service guidelines in the wake of a scandal in which a 20-year-old [Muslim](#) man died after enduring physical and verbal abuse at the Marine Corps' recruit training center on Parris Island, S.C.
- Since that incident, which resulted in a [10-year prison sentence for one Marine](#) and a variety of disciplinary action for others, the Marine Corps has attempted to reset recruit training by placing more emphasis on training for drill instructors on acting professionally and preventing hazing and abuse.

[Marines disciplined at San Diego boot camp for abuse and racism targeting recruits, documents show](#)

New veteran suicide numbers raise concerns among experts hoping for positive news [Leo Shane III, *Military Times*, 9 October 2019]

- Researchers this year changed a key metric in [how they track veterans suicides](#) in an effort to better explain the scope of the problem, but mental health advocates say it still doesn't tell the full story.
- In the last four years, the official government estimate on the number of veterans who die by suicide has gone from [22 a day](#) to 17 a day in the latest Veterans Affairs report. But the rate of suicides among veterans didn't decrease over that span. Instead, the way the figures are sorted and presented did.
- Instead, outside experts note that by many markers the problem [has grown even worse](#). The total number of suicides among veterans has increased four of the last five years on record. From 2007 to 2017, the rate of suicide among veterans jumped almost 50 percent.

[New veteran suicide numbers raise concerns among experts hoping for positive news](#)

CULTURE

[New Navy Chief Learning Officer Wants to Develop a Thinking Force](#) [Megan Eckstein and Ben Werner, *USNI News*, 2019-10-07]

The Department of the Navy's new chief learning officer sees creating a thinking force, able to quickly apply classroom concepts to live situations, as the new training focus for all sailors and Marines.

A week on the job, the Navy's new Chief Learning Officer John Kroger is spending much of his time meeting with the Navy's educational leaders to understand better how the many pieces of the department's education system fit together. There is a department-wide embrace of the idea that career-long intellectual development is critical to national security, he told USNI News.

Kroger's role as CLO is to align the department's academic institutions, which include the United States Naval Academy, the Naval War College, Naval Postgraduate School, Marine Corps University and the soon-to-be established Naval Community College.

DISCRIMINATION

[More concerns over whistleblower protections at VA](#) [Leo Shane III, *Military Times*, 2019-10-04]

Several months after [emotional testimony from whistleblowers](#) who say they still face retribution and harassment at work, key congressional leaders said this week they worry not enough has changed at the Veterans Affairs office charged with protecting those individuals.

But VA officials are dismissing those concerns as off-base, saying they response they have received from most of the veterans community thus far has been positive and the office's work still progressing on schedule.

During testimony before the committee this summer, Under Assistant Secretary Tammy Bonzanto (who oversees the whistleblower office) said staff are still developing a host of data analysis tools to better track complaints and supervisor responses, in an effort to prevent retaliation from occurring.

[Supreme Court takes up cases about LGBT people's rights](#) [Mark Sherman and Matthew Barakat, *The Associated Press*, 2019-10-08]

A seemingly divided Supreme Court struggled Tuesday over whether a landmark civil rights law protects LGBT people from discrimination in employment, with one conservative justice wondering if the court should take heed of "massive social upheaval" that could follow a ruling in their favor.

With the court's four liberal justices likely to side with workers who were fired because of their sexual orientation or transgender status, the question in two [highly anticipated cases](#) that filled the courtroom was whether one of the court's conservatives might join them.

A key provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 known as Title 7 bars job discrimination because of sex, among other reasons. In recent years, some courts have read that language to include discrimination against LGBT people as a subset of sex discrimination.

SEE ALSO:

[Why the Supreme Court case on LGBT worker protections will be pivotal](#) [*The Washington Post*, 2019-10-08]

[For LGBT people outside U.S. Supreme Court, cases have a familiar ring](#) [*Reuters*, 2019-10-08]

[Central figures in Supreme Court LGBTQ discrimination cases speak out](#) [*NBC News*, 2019-10-08]

DIVERSITY

Adjustable tabs, new nursing shirt: Marine Corps considering these changes to maternity uniforms [Philip Athey, *Marine Corps Times*, 2019-10-09]

The Marine Corps is looking at changes to its maternity uniforms including adding adjustable tabs for the maternity shirt and tunic as well as a commercial nursing shirt for the utility uniform.

These possible changes are still in the research and development phase, according information from the quarterly briefing from the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service in September, and come from feedback when the Corps was pursuing [a new dress blue coat for female Marines](#).

The tabs would allow pregnant Marines to adjust the uniform's size during the different stages of pregnancy. The blouse for the Marine utility uniform currently has the adjustable tabs.

'For pride and for country.' Hispanic airmen share their stories at Robins Air Force Base [Becky Purser, *The Telegraph (Macon, Ga.)*, 2019-09-26]

Air Force Lt. Col. Daniel Moreno's grandfather, who was from Mexico, gained his U.S. citizenship by serving in World War II.

Moreno was among three panelists who shared their backstories Tuesday at the Heritage Club on Robins Air Force Base as part of this year's Robins Hispanic Heritage Observance.

About 18.1% of the U.S. population today or about 58 million people are Hispanic, Moreno noted.

In the Armed Forces, overall, 17.8% of the estimated 2.2 million personnel are Hispanic.

In the Air Force, including active guard and guard reserve, 14% of enlisted personnel are Hispanic, compared to 6% of officers, he said.

On the Way for Female Airmen: Better-Fitting Dress Blues [Oriana Pawlyk, *Military.com*, 2019-10-10]

In line with a months-long effort to redesign gear, flight suits and other [ill-fitting equipment worn by female airmen](#), the U.S. [Air Force](#) is now working on a solution to make better [dress blue shirts and pants](#) for daily wear, according to the service's top enlisted airman.

*"Our priority right now is female [uniforms](#)," Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright told *Military.com* Wednesday. *Military.com* accompanied Wright and Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein on a trip to [Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst](#), New Jersey.*

The goal is to get a more practical shirt/pants combination that doesn't bunch, pinch or need as much tailoring. Wright said he hopes the teams have a solution "soon, and then we can start implementing some of the changes that will be more comfortable or functional for females."

MISCELLANEOUS

Air Force breaks recruiting record—again [Stephen Losey, *Air Force Times*, 2019-10-09]

In all, the active-duty [Air Force recruited](#) 34,660 airmen in 2019. That's about 1,000 more than the 33,645 new airmen it recruited in fiscal 2016, which at the time was the most since the Vietnam War era.

The bulk of the newly accessed airmen were enlisted, which accounted for 32,421 new recruits — nearly 9 percent more enlisted recruits [than in fiscal 2018](#). And of those enlisted recruits, 250 previously served in the military.

The Air Force also brought on 1,442 line officers, 763 health professionals, and 34 chaplains in 2019.

The total 2019 active-duty results surpassed, by more than 500, the Air Force's [goal](#) of bringing on 34,149 new active-duty airmen. AFRS said the active-duty goals were to access 32,050 enlisted, 1,230 line officers, 836 health professionals, and 33 chaplains. The only active-duty category that fell short was health professionals.

SEE ALSO:

[USAF Hits 2019 Personnel Goals, Facing Retention Ripple Effects](#) [Air Force Magazine, 2019-10-04]

[Tech company expands role in recruiting for Air Force and Marine Corps](#) [Military Times, 2019-10-04]

[Army veteran deported after drug conviction now a US citizen](#) [The Associated Press, 2019-10-04]

An Army veteran deported to Mexico after serving time in prison for a drug conviction became a U.S. citizen on Friday.

Miguel Perez Jr. held up his citizenship certificate for the cameras after being sworn in, saying, "Here it is."

Perez, who was raised in Chicago, had a green card. But after serving 7½ years for a 2008 nonviolent drug conviction, he [was deported last year](#). He was granted permission last month by immigration officials to re-enter the country for another chance to become a U.S. citizen. Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker [pardoned him](#) in August.

[Feds call for family leave guarantee in 2020 budget](#) [Jessie Bur, Federal Times, 2019-10-10]

Federal employee groups are calling on Congress to include provisions in the final National Defense Authorization Act for 2020 that would guarantee civil servants 12 weeks of paid leave in the event of the birth or adoption of a child or a family member falling critically ill.

The federal government has struggled in recent years to both attract and retain new employees, especially in the younger generations, to replace the large number of employees that are set to retire in coming years.

Both the House and the Senate have had individual bills introduced that would put in place a paid family leave policy, and the House moved to [add it to their version of the NDAA](#) in July, in order to increase the bill's chances of passage.

[More than half of Army spouses in survey say they are stressed, overwhelmed and tired, report shows](#) [Diana Stancy Correll, Army Times, 2019-10-07]

A majority of Army [spouses](#) reported feeling stressed, overwhelmed or tired in the past year.

Such were the results of a new [Rand Corp. study](#) evaluating challenges Army spouses encounter, attitudes they have toward the Army and how spouses use resources available to them.

“When asked to indicate the issues they faced in the past year, Army [spouses](#)’ most frequently chosen issues were their own feelings of being stressed, overwhelmed, or tired, followed by their soldier’s feelings of being stressed, overwhelmed, or tired,” the report said.

The report was based on a survey completed by more than 8,500 Army spouses.

SEE ALSO:

[Military spouses: Check out these hundreds of thousands of temporary job opportunities nationwide](#)
[*Military Times*, 2019-10-08]

[Navy goes mobile-first, offering more incentives to attract and keep sailors](#) [Scott Wyland, *Stars and Stripes*, 2019-10-10]

The Navy is going more digital and making it easier for sailors to access information on their phones as it seeks to attract new recruits and retain sailors, the service’s top human resources officer said Thursday.

The changes are part of the “Sailor 2025” program, which is trumpeted as changing how the Navy recruits, promotes and delivers information to sailors.

Another policy, enacted last year, lets sailors’ spouses move earlier or stay behind for up to six months to allow their children to complete the school year, wrap up a job or care for a chronically ill family member.

MISCONDUCT

**[Court Withdraws Opinion Saying Military Retirees Shouldn’t Be Court-Martialed](#)
[Gina Harkins, *Military.com*, 2019-10-08]**

A controversial legal opinion that determined court-martialing military retirees was unconstitutional has been withdrawn.

The Navy-Marine Corps Court of Criminal Appeals will reconsider the case of Stephen Begani, a retired Navy chief petty officer who faced a court-martial after leaving the military. The court also withdrew its July 31 opinion on court-martialing retirees, according to an Oct. 1 order.

Earlier this year, the [U.S. Supreme Court upheld](#) the Defense Department’s authority to prosecute military retirees for crimes they commit.

**[Hackers target job-hunting service members, veterans with sham employment website](#)
Diana Stancy Correll, *Military Times*, 2019-10-10]**

Veterans hunting for jobs may have thought “Hire Military Heroes” was just another jobs website that would help them find employment.

But in reality, the site prompted users to download an app containing malicious malware that would allow the attacker to access a plethora of information, according to cybersecurity researchers at Cisco Talos.

The phony site shared a similar URL to the site “Hiring Our Heroes,” an employment site the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation launched.

According to the security intelligence and research group, [an actor called Tortoiseshell](#) was responsible for the attack—the same actor [Symantec identified](#) being behind attempts targeting Saudi Arabian IT providers.

Marines disciplined at San Diego boot camp for abuse and racism targeting recruits, documents show [Dan Lamothe, *The Washington Post*, 2019-10-05]

More than 20 Marines have been disciplined for misconduct at the service's recruit training center in San Diego since 2017, incidents that included some physical attacks and racist and homophobic slurs, according to Marine Corps officials and documents obtained by The Washington Post.

The disclosure follows promises by senior Marine Corps leaders to combat aggressive recruit training practices that fall outside service guidelines in the wake of a scandal in which a 20-year-old Muslim man died after enduring physical and verbal abuse at the Marine Corps' recruit training center on Parris Island, S.C.

The March 2016 death of Pvt. Raheel Siddiqui, who fell 40 feet to his death while running away from a drill instructor who had targeted him and other [Muslim recruits](#), brought a public reckoning for the Marine Corps, which perhaps more than any other military service has celebrated the intimidating boot camp curriculum it imposes upon prospective Marines.

Since that incident, which resulted in a [10-year prison sentence for one Marine](#) and a variety of disciplinary action for others, the Marine Corps has attempted to reset recruit training by placing more emphasis on training for drill instructors on acting professionally and preventing hazing and abuse.

Report: CO forced minions to write his FITREP, gave secretary 'panic attack' [Geoff Ziezulewicz, *Navy Times*, 2019-10-05]

Navy [Cmdr. Jesus "Manny" Cordero-Vila](#) was at the helm of [Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station Sicily](#) for only about nine months.

But in that time, the CO allegedly forced his subordinates to write his fitness reports, outlawed the mention of his predecessor's name, provoked a panic attack in his secretary, tried to "voluntell" sailors into community service projects and seemed to harbor little knowledge about the basics of his command's cyber mission, according to an internal investigation obtained by Navy Times.

Cordero took command of the Italy-based unit in January 2018 and was relieved in September of that year. A complaint to the Inspector General sparked a probe, which revealed that shortly after he arrived in Italy his leadership style began to bother multiple members of the command, which provides communications for personnel in Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

SEXUAL ASSAULT/HARASSMENT

Child sexual abuse charge was dropped for this Marine colonel. Now the alleged victim's family is calling to remove appeals process [Philip Athey, *Marine Corps Times*, 2019-10-07]

When [a Marine colonel was sentenced to 66 months of confinement](#) in 2017 after a court-martial into [sexual abuse allegations](#) of their 6-year-old daughter, the Perry family said they thought justice was served.

In addition to his prison sentence, the conviction meant Col. Daniel Wilson would [lose his military retirement benefits and have to register as a sex offender](#) upon his release.

In July, though, Wilson's [sexual abuse charge was tossed](#) by a military appeals court using Uniformed Code of Military Justice Article 66(c), or factual sufficiency powers. Factual sufficiency allows an

appellate court to review the trial record and act and as a final juror on the case, overturning the conviction if it says guilt was not proved beyond a reasonable doubt.

But the Perry family is now calling on Congress to remove from the UCMJ the power, which does not exist in most U.S. civilian courts, so that, as they say, future victims can be protected.

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A Defense Department Inspector General investigation [published Oct. 2](#) found that the Pentagon failed to tell Congress about 11 sexual assault reports that US Air Force Academy cadets lodged with the school's Family Advocacy Program, despite a legal requirement to do so.

DOD also did not inform lawmakers of 24 archived cases reported from 2015 to 2017, the IG found, though the watchdog could not prove whether the Air Force had to submit those reports.

The DODIG's deep-dive further determined that the Academy's sexual assault response coordinator lacked a process for documenting interactions with cadets who chose not to file official incident reports. Neither did USAFA systematically track its referrals to victim support services for those who didn't file reports, the IG said.

Still, DODIG found that the Academy didn't kick out cadets for reporting assaults, and that Air Force Office of Special Investigations agents generally followed Pentagon and service policies when responding to and investigating those claims. The report added that Academy staff properly provided sexual assault prevention and response services to students and made further support services available.

SUICIDE

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Instead, outside experts note that by many markers the problem [has grown even worse](#). The total number of suicides among veterans has increased four of the last five years on record. From 2007 to 2017, the rate of suicide among veterans jumped almost 50 percent.

Veterans are 1.5 times more likely to die by suicide than Americans who never served in the military. For female veterans, the risk factor is 2.2 times more likely.

VETERANS

2 Isleta Pueblo members receive lost Vietnam War medals [Russell Contreras, *The Associated Press*, 2019-10-04]

Two Isleta Pueblo members who served in the U.S. military during the Vietnam War were presented Friday with military medals they earned but never received.

During a special ceremony at Isleta Pueblo, U.S. Sen. Tom Udall pinned the replacement medals to All Pueblo Council of Governors Chairman E. Paul Torres and former Isleta Tribal councilman Diego Lujan.

Udall, a Democrat from New Mexico, said he sought the replacements for the two veterans after he learned Torres did not have his discharge papers or his medals. Udall also found out Lujan never received five of his medals.

Udall had made the discovery after his office conducted interviews as part of the Veterans History Project in conjunction with the Library of Congress.

VA is millions over budget, years behind on cemetery projects [Nikki Wentling, Stars and Stripes, 2019-10-04]

The Department of Veterans Affairs is at least \$17 million over budget and years behind schedule on multiple projects to build new veterans cemeteries, a federal watchdog reported this week.

The National Cemetery Administration, part of the VA, plans to create new cemeteries across the country in order to provide veterans with “reasonable access” for burial—meaning that state or national cemeteries are within 75 miles of veterans’ homes.

About 8% of the country’s veterans don’t have reasonable access, especially in rural areas, the VA said. The agency missed its goal of reducing that to 4% by the end of 2017, the Government Accountability Office said in a report released Tuesday.

The GAO found the VA “has made limited progress in implementing its plan to create burial access and is years behind its original schedule for opening new cemeteries.”

VA refunds \$400 million in mistaken home loan fees [Leo Shane III, Military Times, 2019-10-08]

Veterans Affairs officials have paid out more than \$400 million in refunds of [home loan funding fees](#) in the wake of [an inspector general’s report](#) that tens of thousands of veterans were improperly tagged with extra costs when applying for the loans.

Department officials said they reviewed 130,000 cases over the summer to look for errors, which mostly involved simple clerical mistakes or disability ratings changes after veterans settled on their loans.

Under existing rules, veterans and service members must pay a VA funding fee when they apply for a VA home loan, with costs between 0.5 percent and 3.3 percent of total money lent. The money is designed to defray some administration costs for the department, but disabled veterans are exempt from the fee.

However, an inspector general report released earlier this year found that at least 53,000 disabled veterans had been charged the fees in recent years. VA officials announced in May they would review current and past loans, and contact veterans eligible for refunds.

Young vets unemployment up again in September [Leo Shane III, Military Times, 2019-10-04]

The unemployment rate for younger veterans [rose again last month](#) even as the national jobless rate dipped to its lowest level in 50 years.

Officials from the Bureau of Labor Statistics said number of post-9/11 era veterans filing for unemployment benefits rose in September, pushing the rate to 4.5 percent. It’s the highest that figure has been since early

2018, and the fifth time in the last six months that figure has increased since the young veteran unemployment rate hit a [historic low of 1.7 percent in April](#).

The figure translates into about 157,000 younger veterans looking for work. The overall veterans unemployment rate dropped from 3.5 percent in August to 3.1 percent in September.