

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.

First all-female spacewalking team makes history [Marcia Dunn, *The Associated Press*, 18 October 2019]

- The world's first all-female spacewalking team made history high above Earth on Friday, replacing a broken part of the International Space Station's power grid.
- As NASA astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir completed the job with wrenches, screwdrivers, and power-grip tools, it marked the first time in a half-century of spacewalking that men weren't part of the action. They insisted they were just doing their job after years of training.
- Meir, a marine biologist making her spacewalking debut, became the 228th person in the world to conduct a spacewalk and the 15th woman. It was the fourth spacewalk for Koch, an electrical engineer who is seven months into an 11-month mission that will be the longest ever by a woman. Both are members of NASA's Astronaut Class of 2013, the only one equally split between women and men.

[First all-female spacewalking team makes history](#)

Share of Americans with no religious affiliation growing [David Crary, *The Associated Press*, 17 October 2019]

- The portion of Americans with no religious affiliation is rising significantly, in tandem with a sharp drop in the percentage that identifies as Christians, according to [new data](#) from the Pew Research Center.
- Based on telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, Pew said Thursday that 65% of American adults now describe themselves as Christian, down from 77% in 2009. Meanwhile, the portion that describes their religious identity as atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular," now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009.
- Pew says all categories of the religiously unaffiliated population—often referred to as the "nones"—grew in magnitude. Self-described atheists now account for 4% of U.S. adults, up from 2% in 2009; agnostics account for 5%, up from 3% a decade ago; and 17% of Americans now describe their religion as "nothing in particular," up from 12% in 2009.

[Share of Americans with no religious affiliation growing](#)

'This is my squad': SMA Grinston talks about his push to build cohesive units [Kyle Rempfer, *Army Times*, 17 October 2019]

- The new sergeant major of the Army, [Michael A. Grinston](#), is looking at ways to strengthen squad-level cohesion among soldiers during his tenure.
- The new SMA wants to find and replicate the model of strong, cohesive units across the Army by focusing on the positive aspects of being a soldier. Doing so will hopefully address ongoing problems, including [sexual harassment](#) and assault, [suicide prevention](#), and domestic issues, while also building on Army readiness priorities like preparing soldiers for the new fitness test.
- Grinston hopes that at least some of those problems can be addressed by instilling a certain mindset into soldiers, and [squad](#) leaders in particular: "This is my squad, and I don't let anything happen to them."

['This is my squad': SMA Grinston talks about his push to build cohesive units](#)

CULTURE

[Statue of first African American fighter pilot unveiled in Georgia](#) [Jeremy Redmon, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 2019-10-09]

[Hillard Pouncy Jr.](#) helped desegregate the U.S. military during World War II as one of the original Tuskegee Airmen, training as a bombardier but never seeing combat.

Now 97 and living in Austell, the retired chemist came here Wednesday to help honor a Black forefather. A bronze statue of Eugene Bullard, a Georgia native who became the world's first African American fighter pilot, was unveiled at this military installation before a large crowd of descendants, U.S. troops, French officials and others. It happened on what would have been Bullard's 125th birthday.

In the early 20th century, [Bullard ran away from his Columbus home after his father was nearly lynched there](#), joining a band of gypsies and then stowing away on a ship for Europe. He fought the Germans for the French Foreign Legion during World War I before joining France's air service. The segregated U.S. military would not accept him as a pilot because he was Black, though Bullard was posthumously commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force in 1994.

DIVERSITY

[First all-female spacewalking team makes history](#) [Marcia Dunn, *The Associated Press*, 2019-10-18]

The world's first all-female spacewalking team made history high above Earth on Friday, replacing a broken part of the International Space Station's power grid.

As NASA astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir completed the job with wrenches, screwdrivers and power-grip tools, it marked the first time in a half-century of spacewalking that men weren't part of the action. They insisted they were just doing their job after years of training.

Meir, a marine biologist making her spacewalking debut, became the 228th person in the world to conduct a spacewalk and the 15th woman. It was the fourth spacewalk for Koch, an electrical engineer who is seven months into an 11-month mission that will be the longest ever by a woman. Both are members of NASA's Astronaut Class of 2013, the only one equally split between women and men.

SEE ALSO:

[Two female astronauts are making history. How to watch NASA's first all-female spacewalk](#) [USA TODAY, 2019-10-18]

[Paving the way: The 6888th all-female, all-Black unit inspires others](#) [Nikki Wentling, *Stars and Stripes*, 2019-10-14]

For over an hour Monday, dozens of female soldiers and veterans at the Association of the United States Army annual meeting in Washington took turns shaking the hand of Indiana Hunt-Martin, a 97-year-old World War II veteran whom many of them credited for "paving the way" for their service.

Hunt-Martin is one of seven living veterans from the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the only all-Black, all-female unit to serve in Europe during the war. Known as the Six Triple Eight, the battalion of 855 women managed a major backlog of mail from Americans to their loved ones overseas.

The women were "unheralded and unnoticed" when they returned home, said Anne Macdonald, a retired brigadier general and president of the Army Women's Foundation.

Recently, the unit has garnered some attention. A monument honoring the battalion was established last year at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., and there's now an effort underway to award the women the Congressional Gold Medal.

MISCELLANEOUS

[Air Force base facing dilemma of aging workforce](#) [The Associated Press, 2019-10-12]

Around half of the 30,000 people who work at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton are nearing the end of their careers, the Dayton Daily News [reported](#).

Air Force Gen. Arnold Bunch Jr., commander of the Air Force Materiel Command, said during a recent forum in Columbus that filling those jobs and taking care of employees is “critical.”

More than a third of employees at the Air Force Research Laboratory are eligible to retire, which could prove a challenge. Nearly 70% of the lab's workforce has at least a master's degree. According to a U.S. Census estimate from 2017, only 10% of Ohioans age 25 and older hold an advanced college degree.

[The Air Force has a new secretary; Barbara Barrett sworn in](#) [Stephen Losey, Air Force Times, 2019-10-18]

Barbara Barrett was sworn in as the [25th secretary of the Air Force](#) on Friday, two days after the Senate voted to confirm her 85-7.

Barrett, the fourth woman to serve as the [Air Force's top civilian leader](#), posted a video of her taking her [oath of office at the Pentagon](#) on her official Twitter account.

Barrett is an instrument-rated pilot who in 2009 trained at the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center in Star City, Russia, and Kazakhstan, and was certified for space travel. She is also the first civilian woman to land in an F/A-18 Hornet on an aircraft carrier.

SEE ALSO:

[Barbara Barrett confirmed as next Air Force secretary](#) [Defense News, 2019-10-16]

[Combat troops at higher risk for opioid, heroin addiction, study says](#) [Patricia Kime, Military Times, 2019-10-14]

Combat exposure puts U.S. troops and veterans at substantial risk for abusing prescription opioids and even heroin—more so than service members who deployed but never saw a firefight, according to a working paper published last month by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

In the study, [entitled “Did the War on Terror Ignite an Opioid Epidemic?”](#) economists with NBER, a non-profit that conducts economic research and disseminates it to policy makers, corporations and academia, determined that opioid abuse among combat-exposed veterans was 7 percentage points higher than among those who deployed but didn't see combat.

While its unknown exactly how many U.S. troops and veterans misuse opioids or use heroin, in 2015, VA officials reported they had seen a 55 percent increase in opioid use disorders among veterans following combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and in fiscal 2016, VA treated roughly 68,000 veterans for opioid addiction.

[Eight-second attention span? The Army of the future needs you.](#) [Todd South, *Army Times*, 2019-10-15]

Army recruiters [are looking to the gaming world](#) and trying to reach the emerging, “Generation Z” population that’s on the heels of millennials as they build a force to fight in 2035.

Maj. Gen. Frank Muth, head of Army Recruiting Command, spoke Monday at the Association of the U.S. Army’s Annual Meeting and Exposition on building the [multi-domain operations](#) leaders [of the future](#).

Muth emphasized that the core leadership traits remain the same but how and what today’s recruits will be doing may look much different.

SEE ALSO:

[Army ROTC must find more officers than it has in years, and here’s how it’s happening](#) [Army Times, 2019-10-16]

[Inside Big Navy’s war on beards](#) [Courtney Mabeus, *Navy Times*, 2019-10-14]

Effective [Oct. 8](#), the Navy scrapped permanent no-shave chits, waivers that allowed some sailors who suffer from [Pseudofolliculitis Barbae](#)—a common condition often called “razor bumps”—to grow out their scruff throughout a career.

Personnel with the permanent no-shave chits have six months to receive a medical reevaluation, which likely will trigger a new treatment regimen, according to the updated [Bureau of Naval Personnel instruction](#) that replaces guidance [released in 2004](#).

The Navy allows some [religious exemptions for beards](#) on a case-by-case basis. But a key factor considered by commanders is whether the scruff will “pose a health or safety hazard” or interfere with the proper wear of respiratory equipment.

[Men and Women Seeing Different Failure Rates on Army’s Gender-Neutral Fitness Test](#) [Kyle Rempfer, *Army Times*, 2019-10-15]

The Army general in charge of the service’s new combat fitness test said he’s confident it will remain gender-neutral, despite reports of female soldiers failing at much higher rates than men.

The popular Facebook page U.S Army W.T.F! Moments recently posted what appeared to be a set of leaked slides showing that about 84% of women failed the Army Combat Fitness Test, compared with 30% of men.

Master Sgt. Shelley Horner, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the ACFT Mobile Training Team, said some of the scores seen during the year-long field test, which wrapped up at the end of September, were the result of soldiers taking the new six-event test for the first time.

SEE ALSO:

[Run times are a key predictor for musculoskeletal injuries, Army researchers say](#) [Army Times, 2019-10-17]

[Here’s how the Army is planning to roll out the ACFT this year](#) [Army Times, 2019-10-16]

[New Army Chief Wants to Let Soldiers Stay Longer at Favorite Duty Stations](#) [Richard Sisk, *Military.com*, 2019-10-17]

Soldiers could get an opportunity to remain longer at duty stations of their choice under a policy pushed by new Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville.

The traditional “industrial-age” system that can require moves every three years is out of place in an information-age Army, McConville said.

“I don’t see why people can’t stay four, five, six, seven, eight, nine years,” McConville said to a packed audience of military families Tuesday at the Association of the U.S. Army’s annual exposition and convention.

[Social Media OpSec Concerns Overstated, Army General Says](#) [Hope Hodge Seck, *Military.com*, 2019-10-16]

A one-star general, an Army lieutenant, a popular cartoonist and the formerly anonymous administrator of a controversial community Facebook page walk onto a stage.

It’s not the setup of an elaborate joke, but the foundation of a deeply nontraditional panel discussion at the [Association of the United States Army’s annual meeting](#) in Washington, D.C. And it came with some very nontraditional advice.

The groundwork was laid for a conversation about the value of social media to military leaders by an essay posted by a four-star general. Army Gen. Robert Abrams, commander of United Nations Command, ROK-US Combined Forces Command, and United States Forces Korea, called on officers and other leaders to “get on the bus” with social media in order to stay part of the conversations taking place in their units.

[‘This is my squad’: SMA Grinston talks about his push to build cohesive units](#) [Kyle Rempfer, *Army Times*, 2019-10-17]

The new sergeant major of the Army, [Michael A. Grinston](#), is looking at ways to strengthen squad-level cohesion among soldiers during his tenure.

The new SMA wants to find and replicate the model of strong, cohesive units across the Army by focusing on the positive aspects of being a soldier. Doing so will hopefully address ongoing problems, including [sexual harassment](#) and assault, [suicide prevention](#) and domestic issues, while also building on Army readiness priorities like preparing soldiers for the new fitness test.

Grinston hopes that at least some of those problems can be addressed by instilling a certain mindset into soldiers, and [squad](#) leaders in particular: “This is my squad, and I don’t let anything happen to them.”

[What the Army is doing to fix housing problems and set up tenant bill of rights](#) [Kyle Rempfer, *Army Times*, 2019-10-17]

Reports [of mold](#), vermin and [lead contamination](#) in family housing units and a limited response to families’ complaints about the problems put the Defense Department’s privatized housing program under congressional scrutiny in recent months.

Two [Army housing](#) surveys conducted this year by an independent third party showed a drop in overall satisfaction rates from 2018.

The service is working to address those issues, according to Army Secretary Ryan D. McCarthy, and evidence of that should start percolating this winter.

SEE ALSO:

[Here are Army leaders’ lessons learned from housing problems](#) [*Military Times*, 2019-10-16]

[More than 250 have enrolled in the Army’s new housing health registry](#) [*Stars & Stripes*, 2019-10-15]

[‘What’s Your Warrior?’ Army launches new ads with less combat focus](#) [Kyle Rempfer, *Army Times*, 2019-10-16]

The Army is preparing to launch an advertising campaign this November called “What’s Your Warrior?” courtesy of the service’s [new Chicago-based marketing team](#).

The campaign differentiates from past efforts in its focus on the Army’s many military occupational specialties that don’t involve direct combat, according to Brig. Gen. Alex Fink, chief of [Army Enterprise Marketing](#).

*While the campaign hasn’t launched yet, Fink gave *Army Times* an early look of one copy of a print ad. It depicts actual U.S. soldiers from five different career paths: a lab tech, a signals troop, an aviator, a cyber operator and a sniper-qualified soldier.*

The soldiers were chosen for the ads because the marketing team wants to expose Generation Z to a variety of options.

MISCONDUCT

[CID investigating whether Army infantry officer called for mass murder and destruction amid racist, anti-government Reddit screeds](#) [Meghann Myers, *Military Times*, 2019-10-11]

*Army investigators have opened an inquiry into a Reserve operations officer in connection with [racist, anti-government screeds](#) calling for extreme violence posted online, an [Army Reserve](#) spokesman confirmed to *Military Times* on Thursday.*

The Army Reserve is investigating Maj. William Jeffrey Poole, 34, in connection with messages posted under the name “Nebor” on the social media site Reddit after a group of [Army subreddit](#) whistleblowers compiled a 75-page dossier on his comments across multiple online platforms.

The military services have been wrestling recently with alarming headlines and investigations into White supremacist and other far-right internet musings by troops.

Last year, the Defense Department reported in a letter to former Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minnesota, that it had received [27 reports](#) of extremist activity in the previous five years, and that 18 of those troops had been disciplined or discharged because of it.

RELIGION

[After deadly shooting, Pittsburgh synagogue plans reopening](#) [Ramesh Santanam, *The Associated Press*, 2019-10-18]

Leaders of the Pittsburgh synagogue where worshippers were fatally shot last year want to rebuild and renovate the building, turning it into what they hope will be a “center for Jewish life in the United States” and a symbol against hatred.

On Friday, they outlined their vision for the Tree of Life building, where three congregations — Tree of Life, Dor Hadash and New Light — had gathered on Oct. 27, 2018. A gunman opened fire, killing 11 people and wounding seven.

The building in the city’s Squirrel Hill neighborhood has not reopened since the shooting, [considered the deadliest attack on Jews](#) in U.S. history. Tree of Life leaders now envision a rebuilt space that includes

places for worship; memorial, education and social events; classrooms and exhibitions. The mission is to fight anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination.

Naval Academy midshipmen seek Satanic Temple space [Geoff Ziezulewicz, *Military Times*, 2019-10-15]

A group of U.S. Naval Academy midshipmen who follow The Satanic Temple religion recently asked for the storied naval institution to accommodate their faith like any other.

But in a nod to internet virality and pushing a message before the boss has signed off, officials in Annapolis have been doing a little clarifying since an Oct. 8 internal email leaked out proclaiming that “Satanic services” would soon be offered on the campus.

Cmdr. Alana Garas, an academy spokeswoman, has been tasked with clarifying.

Those midshipmen who follow The Satanic Temple — an IRS-recognized, tax-exempt religion — were just asking for a “study group space,” not for a sacrifice stage or to burn a pentagram into Ingram Field or to erect a giant horned icon in front of the Zimmerman Bandstand.

SEE ALSO:

No, the US Naval Academy isn't offering 'satanic services' — but not for the reason you think [Task & Purpose, 2019-10-15]

Share of Americans with no religious affiliation growing [David Crary, *The Associated Press*, 2019-10-17]

The portion of Americans with no religious affiliation is rising significantly, in tandem with a sharp drop in the percentage that identifies as Christians, according to new data from the Pew Research Center.

Based on telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, Pew said Thursday that 65% of American adults now describe themselves as Christian, down from 77% in 2009. Meanwhile, the portion that describes their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009.

Both Protestant and Roman Catholic ranks are losing population share, according to Pew. It said 43% of U.S. adults identify as Protestants, down from 51% in 2009, while 20% are Catholic, down from 23% in 2009.

Pew says all categories of the religiously unaffiliated population — often referred to as the “nones” grew in magnitude. Self-described atheists now account for 4% of U.S. adults, up from 2% in 2009; agnostics account for 5%, up from 3% a decade ago; and 17% of Americans now describe their religion as “nothing in particular,” up from 12% in 2009.

SEE ALSO:

Three Decades Ago, America Lost Its Religion. Why? [The Atlantic, 2019-09-26]

SEXUAL ASSAULT/HARASSMENT

1 in 3 American Indian and Alaska Native women will be raped, but survivors rarely find justice on tribal lands [Maren Machles, Carrie Cochran, Angela M. Hill and Suzette Brewer, *USA TODAY*, 2019-10-18]

More than half of American Indian and Alaska Native women will experience sexual violence in their lifetimes, according to the Department of Justice.

National data on sex crimes in tribal communities is scarce, so Newsy spent 18 months focused on two reservations: the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana and the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. After analyzing exclusively obtained documents and conducting dozens of interviews, a stark picture emerged.

Sexual assault investigations can fall through the cracks when tribes and the federal government fail to work together. Even for those few cases that end in a conviction in tribal court, federal law prevents most courts from sentencing perpetrators to more than a year.

SUICIDE

[15 Years After the Iraq War's Deadliest Battle, Marines Fight to Save Their Comrades](#) [Gina Harkins, *Military.com*, 2019-10-13]

They were some of the first [Marines](#) to push into Iraq, and now their unit has lost more members to suicide than it did in the war's most ruthless battle.

Thirty-five members of 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, have died by suicide since 2003. That surpasses the number of Marines the unit lost during the Second Battle of Fallujah, serving as a stark reminder of the wounds still carried by many who fought the war's toughest fights.

Operation Phantom Fury, the second chapter of the fight to retake Fallujah from Iraqi insurgents, will forever be known to Marines. It was the service's bloodiest urban combat since the Vietnam War's Hue City, and incredible examples of combat heroism and famous images of brotherhood emerged from the fight.

[Air Force Top Enlisted Leader: Keep Asking Fellow Airmen How They're Doing](#) [Oriana Pawlyk, *Military.com*, 2019-10-17]

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright just wanted to get airmen talking -- to each other, friends, family -- with the service's one-day pause to break down unresolved feelings they may have buried deep inside.

Wright doesn't expect commanders at each base to draft a plan of what they believe could prevent suicide, which has plagued the service's ranks in recent months, with 78 airmen taking their own lives between Jan. 1 and July 31. But the top enlisted airman hopes the effort might help struggling airmen again feel a sense of purpose when they come into work, even if they carry baggage from their personal lives with them.

The Air Force in August ordered a one-day "tactical pause" that had commanders and airmen address a rise in suicides across the force. As of Aug. 1, the service had exceeded the number of suicides in all of 2018 by nearly 20 people.

Wright said suicide has become the leading cause of death in the Air Force despite airmen serving overseas in combat.

SEE ALSO:

[Chief Wright, Superstar](#) [Air Force Magazine, 2019-10]

[Community partners and support key to veteran suicide prevention](#) [Richard Stone and Barbara Van Dahlen, *Military Times*, 2019-10-18] [OPINION]

As the leaders of the [Veterans Health Administration](#) and the [President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide \(PREVENTS\)](#) Task Force, we fear the oft-repeated, “one suicide is too many” will one day lose its impact.

Suicide is a national problem that disproportionately affects veterans. President Donald Trump authorized the PREVENTS task force to address the Department of Veterans Affairs' top clinical priority, suicide prevention, and to provide a template for the nation to do the same.

Last month, VA released its [2019 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#), which includes data from 2005 through 2017. This report showed that among U.S. adults, the average number of suicides per day rose 43.6 percent, from 86.6 in 2005 to 124.4 in 2017. These numbers included 15.9 veteran suicides per day in 2005 and 16.8 in 2017, an increase of 6.1 percent. After adjusting for population differences in age and sex, the suicide rate for veterans was 1.5 times the rate for non-veteran adults.

While the smaller increase of suicide among the veteran population is reason to believe VA's suicide prevention programs are beginning to have an impact, we must do more. Each life lost to suicide is a failure to support someone in need, and the comparatively higher rate for veterans means we must expand our efforts further.

[Each of us has a role in preventing veteran suicide](#) [Gen. James L. Jones, Ret. and Col. Michael Hudson, Ret., *The Hill*, 2019-10-13] [OPINION]

Each year, more than 6,000 American veterans take their own lives. These include some of the bravest, most dedicated men and women this nation has ever produced. Soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who put their own lives on the line to protect all of ours, find at some point that they cannot go on.

This is a tragedy. And it's one all Americans can and must personally do more to help prevent.

This starts at the individual level, and it starts with paying attention. A person who is struggling emotionally and possibly considering suicide often will show signs of agitation, despondency, or increased use of alcohol or drugs, for example. Mental health experts say these signs may not be obvious or frequent, but when a veteran is a friend, family member or coworker, you may see changes over time that highlight tougher periods in their lives.

If you see these signs, please don't dismiss them. Studies show that not everyone who talks about feeling trapped or hopeless will die by suicide, but most people who die by suicide [do exhibit warning signs](#) — whatever they are experiencing may not be something they're capable of working through on their own. That's why experts tell us that reaching out to ask how someone is doing, finding out more and trying to be there for them is so important.