

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.

30 Percent of Veterans Have Had Suicidal Thoughts, New Survey Finds [Richard Sisk, *Military.com*, 2019-10-30]

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- Another new section of the survey dealt “specifically with thoughts of suicide,” Mousseau said, adding that “an alarming number of 33% of our warriors” said they had suicidal thoughts.
- In a follow-up email, she cited two other studies in which more than 30% veterans said they had suicidal thoughts, while a separate study of the general population showed the rate of suicidal thoughts at about 9%.

[30 Percent of Veterans Have Had Suicidal Thoughts, New Survey Finds](#)

Lawmakers have ‘no confidence’ in VA’s whistleblower protection office [Leo Shane III, *Military Times*, 2019-10-30]

- Lawmakers say they have lost confidence in the Veterans Affairs office founded to investigate whistleblower complaints and aren’t inclined to send cases there following a [damning report about its operations](#) by the department’s inspector general last week.
- Members of the [House Veterans’ Affairs Committee](#) criticized the leader of the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection during a Tuesday afternoon hearing, citing multiple failures with the agency’s investigations and limited results from the office’s work over the last two years.
- Among the most problematic findings were a lack of sufficient training for staff, an inconsistent approach to the office’s mission and responsibilities, and a refusal to investigate cases where whistleblowers wanted to remain anonymous.

[Lawmakers have ‘no confidence’ in VA’s whistleblower protection office](#)

Why millennials are skipping church and not going back [Christine Emba, *The Washington Post*, 2019-10-27] [OPINION]

- Here are a few things we’ve learned about millennials this month: We don’t have time to relax or think, but we do like to sleep. We’re less interested in television than our parents. And after destroying [vacations, weddings, car commuting](#), and other traditional activities in a well-publicized rampage, we have turned our attention to the basilicas.
- The data comes from the findings of two surveys released this month. Analyzing 2017 data from the American Time Use Survey, economist Michelle Freeman of the Bureau of Labor Statistics [found](#) that while millennials are more highly educated and spend more time working than their older counterparts, they have stepped back dramatically from religious activities.
- At the [Pew Research Center](#), studies tracking America’s religious landscape found that although religious beliefs and practice have been declining at a rapid pace for people of all ages, the drop-off has been most pronounced among people ages 23 to 38. In 2019, roughly two-thirds attend worship services “a few times a year” or less, and 4 in 10 say they seldom or never go. A decade ago, it was more than half and only 3 in 10, respectively.

[Why millennials are skipping church and not going back](#)

CULTURE

[How Dorie Miller's bravery helped fight bigotry in the Navy](#) [Thomas W. Cutrer and T. Michael Parrish, *Navy Times*, 2019-11-01]

Among the pantheon of America's heroes, none might seem more improbable than the Black son of Texas sharecroppers and grandson of slaves, Doris Miller.

Miller, known to many as "Dorie," was born on October 12, 1919, during the darkest days of the lynching epidemic that blighted the South in the 20th century's first decades. Only three years before Miller was born, his hometown of Waco became the scene of one of the most brutal lynchings on record when 17-year-old Jesse Washington was burned alive on the lawn of the city hall.

Miller was compelled to drop out of high school in order to help support his struggling family — "We were a little hungry in those days," his mother later explained — but when he could not find work, in September 1939, at 19, he joined the U.S. Navy.

[USAFA to Name Airfield After Tuskegee Airmen Commander](#) [Jennifer-Leigh Oprihory, *Air Force Magazine*, 2019-10-31]

The US Air Force Academy in Colorado on Nov. 1 will rename its airfield in honor of the late Gen. Benjamin Davis Jr., the former head of the Tuskegee Airmen and the Air Force's first African-American general.

Renaming the airfield helps honor and memorialize the legacy of the first Black military aviators in the Army Air Corps, according to an Oct. 30 USAFA release.

Davis graduated from the US Military Academy at West Point in New York in 1936, and earned his pilot's wings from the Advanced Flying School at Tuskegee Army Air Field, Ala., in March 1942. He became part of the Army Air Corps two months later, according to his Air Force [biography](#). When Davis initially tried to join the Corps during his time at West Point, he was rejected on the basis of race, USAFA said.

During World War II, Davis [commanded](#) the 99th Pursuit Squadron (later [the 99th Fighter Squadron](#)), the US Army Air Corps' first unit comprised solely of African-American airmen. The squadron deployed to [North Africa and Sicily](#). He was later put in charge of the 332nd Fighter Group (which the 99th FS joined) that took on the German Luftwaffe, USAFA said.

DISCRIMINATION

[Lawmakers have 'no confidence' in VA's whistleblower protection office](#) [Leo Shane III, *Military Times*, 2019-10-30]

Lawmakers say they have lost confidence in the Veterans Affairs office founded to investigate whistleblower complaints and aren't inclined to send cases there following a [damning report about its operations](#) by the department's inspector general last week.

Members of the [House Veterans' Affairs Committee](#) criticized the leader of the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection during a Tuesday afternoon hearing, citing multiple failures with the agency's investigations and limited results from the office's work over the last two years.

Last week, the VA inspector general offered a scathing assessment of the OAWP's work thus far, accusing leadership of creating "an office culture that was sometimes alienating to those it was meant to protect."

Among the most problematic findings were a lack of sufficient training for staff, an inconsistent approach to the office's mission and responsibilities, and a refusal to investigate cases where whistleblowers wanted to remain anonymous.

SEE ALSO:

[Scathing IG Report Details VA's Whistleblower Protection Office Failures](#) [*Military.com*, 2019-10-28]

DIVERSITY

Parris Island Marines to start training with next gender-integrated boot camp class

[Philip Athey, *Marine Corps Times*, 2019-10-30]

A Marine company with South Carolina's 2nd Recruit Training Battalion will soon see male and female recruits training next to each other, the Marine Corps confirmed Wednesday.

This will be the third time a historically all-male Marine Corps recruit company has been partially gender-integrated.

*"[Company H will be integrated](#) when it begins training at the end of this week," Capt. Bryan McDonnell, a spokesman for the Marine Corps recruit depot at Parris Island, South Carolina, told *Marine Corps Times* in an email.*

Like the previous limited gender-integrated Marine companies, Hotel Company will share the same barracks, but each platoon will have its own squad bay for Marines to sleep, shower and do platoon and individual training, McDonnell said.

Wes Studi to make Oscars history for Native American actors [Lindsey Bahr, *The Associated Press*, 2019-10-26]

When Cherokee actor Wes Studi was thinking about moving to Los Angeles to take a shot at being an actor in the 1980s, he asked a friend if it was a good idea. The friend said "why not? There aren't many Native American actors."

Although there was no way he could have known it at the time, the Tulsa, Oklahoma native came at the perfect time too. Hollywood had started to move beyond its deplorable past of casting White actors for indigenous roles and looking for more authenticity in casting. Some of his first films included "Dances With Wolves," "The Last of the Mohicans" and "Geronimo: An American Legend" that would lead to a fruitful 30-year career that's still very active.

This Sunday, Studi will make history as the first ever Native American Oscar recipient at the 11th annual Governors Awards, alongside fellow honorary Oscar honorees David Lynch and Lina Wertmüller. (In 1982, Cree musician Buffy Sainte-Marie, who was born in Canada, became the first indigenous Oscar winner for co-writing the music to best song winner "Up Where We Belong.")

MISCELLANEOUS

Army Medical Center Won't Appeal \$12.3M Verdict for Child Burned During Surgery [Mike Carter, *Military.com*, 2019-10-28]

The Army has withdrawn plans to appeal a \$12.3 million verdict awarded to the family of a child who was seriously burned and disfigured in an operating-room fire at Madigan Army Medical Center in 2015, clearing the way to release money the child needs for additional surgeries and rehabilitation, according to court documents.

The decision came more than two months after the Army, after admitting responsibility for the fire in court documents, announced it would take the verdict to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals for possible review after damages came in nearly four times the amount government attorneys had recommended the child and his parents be paid.

The damages were determined by U.S. District Judge Ronald Leighton in Tacoma following an extensive hearing about the challenges the child must overcome. The child's attorneys argued the delay caused by an appeal would delay additional surgeries and treatments the now 5-year-old boy requires.

The boy, whose father was an active-duty soldier at [Joint Base Lewis-McChord](#), had been admitted to Madigan for a minor surgery in 2015 to remove a benign cyst from his forehead. However, the 13-month-old boy's face was engulfed in a fireball when a surgeon activated an electrocautery device -- a sort of electric scalpel -- while an anesthesiologist administered concentrated oxygen through a face mask.

CNO won't let convicted SEAL retire as chief [Navy Times, 2019-10-29]

The long saga of accused SEAL war criminal Special Warfare Operator Chief Edward "Eddie" Gallagher might've come to an end on Tuesday, with a ruling that will let him retire as a petty officer first class, convicted only of posing for a photo with a dead detainee.

In a prepared statement emailed to Navy Times by his spokesman Cmdr. Nate Christensen, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday retained the spirit of a military jury's recommended sentence, if not the letter of the law.

"After careful consideration as the convening authority, Adm. Gilday decided to uphold the sentence as adjudged by a jury of Gallagher's peers, but disapproved the automatic reduction in rate to E-1," wrote Christensen. "Consequently, Gallagher will remain a First Class Petty Officer (E-6)."

On July 2, a military panel of his peers at Gallagher's San Diego court-martial trial [cleared him](#) on premeditated murder, obstruction of justice and all other major charges tied to a 2017 deployment with Alpha Platoon, SEAL Team 7, to Iraq.

SEE ALSO:

[Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher's family is asking Trump for a presidential pardon](#) [Task & Purpose, 2019-10-31]

[CNO Denies Request to Allow Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher to Retire a Chief Petty Officer](#) [Military.com, 2019-29]

Cockroaches, mold, raw sewage: 8 military families sue privatized housing company [Karen Jowers, Military Times, 2019-10-29]

Citing all-too familiar scenarios ranging from houses overrun by cockroaches to mold-blackened walls, eight military families have filed a lawsuit against a privatized housing company alleging fraud in connection with their homes that were [uninhabitable](#).

The complaint, filed Tuesday in federal court in San Antonio, alleges that Hunt Military Communities failed to properly maintain the houses at Randolph Air Force Base and Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas, "subjecting tenant service members and their families to [atrocious conditions](#), including pervasive mold and other airborne toxins." It alleges the company was aware of the condition of the houses, but misled the families by leasing houses that were uninhabitable and not safe for human occupancy.

The families are from the Army, Air Force and Navy.

Many of the service members and their family members have [fallen ill](#) with a variety of respiratory and other symptoms, have lost nearly all their [personal possessions](#) because of mold contamination, and paid their full base housing for the “woefully substandard” housing, according to the lawsuit.

Does ICE follow its policies when it comes to deporting military veterans? [Piper Katarina Hudspeth Blackburn and Sam Cabral, *Military Times*, 2019-10-30]

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents aren't always following the rules in deporting military veterans who are not citizens and treating them without regard for their service to the country, a deported veteran who has since become a citizen told a House Judiciary subcommittee on Tuesday.

“Under today’s laws, veterans come home to America with an American flag draped around their casket,” said retired Army Specialist (E4) Hector Barajas-Varela. “There is no honor in being deported or (in being) thanked for their service only when they die.”

Approximately 130,000 troops from over 30 countries have been naturalized since 2001. As of 2016, there were about more than half a million foreign-born U.S. military veterans in the country. Noncitizens who serve in the military are able to apply for legal status after about six months and eventually can apply for citizenship.

But Barajas-Varela told the Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship that noncitizen troops often are not educated on their rights.

Noncitizen service members, like other noncitizens, can be deported under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which said [immigrants could be deported](#) for wider variety of crimes, including nonviolent offenses.

For some military families, the discovery of mold is only the beginning of their troubles [Karen Jowers, *Military Times*, 2019-10-31]

As the [problems](#) with mold and other [health](#) and safety issues have come to light in some military privatized housing, officials in the services and in privatized housing companies have vowed publicly to address the problems quickly.

In some cases, that means a family has to leave the home while the company remediates the problem, which might take a week, or even months. At some installations, it also meant fewer homes available for incoming families, causing delays for move-ins and difficulty finding hotel rooms.

No one — least of all the families themselves — wants anyone to stay in a house that isn't safe. But some families have found new levels of frustration in leaving their homes. There's [inconsistency](#) in how the families are treated in this displacement process, from base to base, company to company, and even sometimes on the same installation, according to families and advocates.

There are inconsistencies in how fast companies make decisions about remediation and whether families should leave the houses; what kinds of living expenses are paid, and whether families have to continue to pay rent when they're out of a base house, said Darlena Brown, an Army wife who is founder and president of the Military Housing Advocacy Network. Some families have been displaced for 130 days, she said. Sometimes the only hotels available are off base 30 minutes or more away. And there are inconsistencies in whether families are reimbursed for any of their belongings that are ruined because of mold; how companies determine whether the house is safe for their return; and other issues.

SEE ALSO:

[Eight Military Families in Texas Sue Housing Company over Alleged Water Leaks, Mold and Bugs](#) [*Military.com*, 2019-10-30]

[The Air Force has put this privatized housing landlord on notice](#) [Air Force Times, 2019-10-29]

[Indefinite enlistment takes effect Nov. 18](#) [Stephen Losey, Air Force Times, 2019-10-25]

The Air Force will move to a new system of “[indefinite enlistment](#)” for airmen with at least 12 years of service on Nov. 18, service officials confirmed Friday after a leaked memo appeared online Wednesday evening.

Under the new system, airmen who hit 12 years time-in-service will now [automatically have their enlistments extended](#) to their rank’s high year of tenure mark. They can apply to retire once they become eligible, or separate before becoming retirement-eligible, when they wish, as long as they don’t have an active-duty service commitment.

Airmen who are promoted will have their service extended to their new rank’s high year of tenure. This will eliminate the [need for airmen to re-enlist](#), if they want to remain in uniform.

SEE ALSO:

[Bonuses, service commitments and more: Here’s how the Air Force’s new indefinite enlistment will work](#) [Air Force Times, 2019-10-31]

MISCONDUCT

[Another report of special operators behaving badly, this time in Oki](#) [Courtney Mabeus, Navy Times, 2019-10-29]

Japanese authorities on the island of Okinawa busted four sailors late Sunday for allegedly boozy and boorish behavior, the latest scandal to roil California-based Naval Special Warfare Command.

According to the [Okinawa Times](#) on Tuesday, at least three sailors — one of them shirtless — entered a tavern in the [coastal resort village of Onna](#) around 9 p.m. local time Sunday and demanded info about a “strip bar.”

The service members were “out of control” and threw things around the restaurant before fleeing when they heard a police siren, a 25-year-old manager told the newspaper.

RELIGION

[Why millennials are skipping church and not going back](#) [Christine Emba, The Washington Post, 2019-10-27] [OPINION]

Here are a few things we’ve learned about millennials this month: We don’t have time to relax or think, but we do like to sleep. We’re less interested in television than our parents. And after destroying [vacations](#), [weddings](#), [car commuting](#) and other traditional activities in a well-publicized rampage, we have turned our attention to the basilicas.

Or rather, away from them. Apparently, we’ve stopped going to church.

The data comes from the findings of two surveys released this month. Analyzing 2017 data from the American Time Use Survey, economist Michelle Freeman of the Bureau of Labor Statistics [found](#) that while millennials are more highly educated and spend more time working than their older counterparts, they have stepped back dramatically from religious activities.

At the [Pew Research Center](#), studies tracking America’s religious landscape found that although religious beliefs and practice have been declining at a rapid pace for people of all ages, the drop-off has been most pronounced among people ages 23 to 38. In 2019, roughly two-thirds attend worship services “a few times

a year” or less, and 4 in 10 say they seldom or never go. A decade ago, it was more than half and only 3 in 10, respectively.

SEXUAL ASSAULT/HARASSMENT

[Judge blocks student suspension over note about ‘rapist’](#) [David Sharp, *The Associated Press*, 2019-10-24]

A federal judge on Thursday blocked a three-day suspension imposed on a high school student for posting comments about a “rapist” on a bathroom mirror, saying her comments were constitutionally protected free speech.

Aela Mansmann acknowledged posting the sticky note that proclaimed, “There’s a rapist in our school and you know who it is.”

Her attorneys contended it was a general message aimed at calling attention to the unaddressed problem of sexual assaults, and that punishing her would discourage victims from coming forward.

Cape Elizabeth High School administrators [suspended Mansmann for three days](#) for bullying, saying the note led to an individual staying home from school for eight days out of concerns for his safety. An attorney for the school didn’t return calls or emails seeking comment on Thursday’s court ruling.

SEE ALSO:

[Judge blocks suspension of Maine student over rape awareness note](#) [The Hill, 2019-10-26]

SUICIDE

[30 Percent of Veterans Have Had Suicidal Thoughts, New Survey Finds](#) [Richard Sisk, *Military.com*, 2019-10-30]

The annual survey of veterans by the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) found encouraging signs on home ownership and access to Department of Veterans Affairs care, while pointing up disturbing trends in suicidal thoughts, burn pit exposure and sexual assaults.

For the first time in its 10-year history, the WWP survey included questions about exposure to toxic substances: 70% of respondents said “they were definitely exposed in their time of service” to burn pits and other sources of toxins, said Dr. Melanie Mousseau, WWP’s director of metrics.

Another new section of the survey dealt “specifically with thoughts of suicide,” Mousseau said, adding that “an alarming number of 33% of our warriors” said they had suicidal thoughts.

In a follow-up email, she cited two other studies in which more than 30% veterans said they had suicidal thoughts, while a separate study of the general population showed the rate of suicidal thoughts at about 9%.

SEE ALSO:

[Will VA be ready to process new ‘blue water’ Vietnam veterans benefits next year?](#) [Military Times, 2019-10-30]

[Quality of life is improving for many injured veterans, but health issues are on the rise as they age, survey says](#) [Military Times, 2019-10-29]

[Report finds no definitive reasons for Alaska post suicides](#) [The Associated Press, 2019-10-29]

[Veteran’s suicide at Florida cemetery raises additional concerns over VA outreach, response](#) [Military Times, 2019-10-28]

VETERANS

Veterans looking for answers as new data shows rise in cancers over two decades of war [Tara Copp, Shirsho Dasgupta, and Ben Wieder, *McClatchy Washington Bureau*, 2019-10-30]

Veterans saw a spike in urinary, prostate, liver and blood [cancers](#) during nearly two decades of war, and some military families now question whether their exposure to toxic environments is to blame, according to a McClatchy investigation.

McClatchy found that the rate of cancer treatments for veterans at Department of Veterans Affairs health care centers increased 61 percent for urinary cancers—which include bladder, kidney and ureter cancers—from fiscal year 2000 to 2018.

The rate of blood cancer treatments—lymphoma, myeloma and leukemia—rose 18 percent in the same period. Liver and pancreatic cancer treatment rates increased 96 percent and prostate cancer treatment rates increased 23 percent.

McClatchy analyzed all billing data for veteran visits involving a cancer diagnosis at VA medical facilities from fiscal year 2000 to 2018. The data was obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests. A more in-depth methodology of the review can be found [here](#).