



Heart of Texas Chapter (TX-07)
Military Officer Association of America
P.O. Box 23964 Waco, TX 76702-3964

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Chapter Web Site: hotmoaa.org

President's Column
Greetings,

Acoustic technical problems have continued to hinder communications at the dinner meetings, as was the case at our latest meeting on March 18. I apologize to all who had difficulty hearing my words as well as any of the others' presentations. We are working with RCC to improve the communications system in the ballroom; ideas have included additional speakers at the back of the room, more portable microphone such as a lapel mic for whoever is speaking; any ideas that any member has will be welcome.

Harold and RoseMary Rafuse gave a great presentation (for those who heard it well!) on fundraising. Harold mentioned that for sponsorship of the annual golf tournament, our biggest fundraiser by far, we need to start early recruiting sponsors. The Board has discussed the issue and concluded that this year we will not be able to hold a golf tournament, for several reasons including restrictions on use of the Cottonwood Golf Course and unavailability of private clubs right now, so we will start early working on the 2022 tournament.

Immediate Past President Gary Urban gave a brief presentation on Remembrance of Viet Nam; several members remember it quite well!

Dr. Bill Ferguson who volunteers with the McLennan County Health Department for administering COVID-19 immunizations gave a brief update on progress toward immunizing area residents. And progress is being made with vaccines becoming more readily available; there were no members who wanted the vaccine and have not either gotten it or gotten an appointment for vaccination. It was also pointed out that as of March 29, any person 16 years of age and older is eligible for an appointment to get vaccinated – that should help!

Jim Milam, Membership Committee Chairman mentioned that we have 79 active members now; there is room for more active members as well as approximately 20 more associates (spouses who are not veterans) and 2 "honorary members"; a Board motion passed to invite Congressman Pete Sessions to fill an honorary post. Finally, there are still a few who have not caught up with dues payment of only \$25.

Harold Rafuse has composed information about HOT Chapter MOAA educational scholarships that are given preferentially to military-oriented individuals living in the area; details will be found on our Chapter website at hotmoaa.org. This information covers our 2021 educational scholarship program, which includes the 2021 announcement of the educational scholarship program, 2021 scholarship program procedures and the 2021 scholarship application form. This information will be forwarded to high schools and colleges in Central Texas.

Respectfully,
Bill Milnor

APRIL SPECIAL DAY RECOGNITION

- **Birthdays:** Charles Adamo, Judy Bauer, Gaye Baugh, Mort Bowman, Lori Brubaker, Voncyle Burns, Kathy Endres, Patsy Norman Farr, Jimmie Hanes, Gay Mays, Susan Perdue, Lyn Powers, and Dee Rogers.
- **Anniversaries:** Ted and Lyn Lawson, Gene and Sheila Lednicki, Bill and Susan Perdue, and Don and Ann Speed.

CONGRATUATIONS TO ALL

HOT CHAPTER BOARD MEETING

The next Board meeting will be on Tuesday, April 27, 5 p.m., at Uncle Dan's BBQ, 1001 Lake Air Drive, which is located near the intersection with Valley Mills Drive and Lake Air Drive.

Upcoming Events and Information Items

APRIL 15, THURSDAY DINNER MEETING AT RIDGEWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

BANQUET ROOM

GUEST SPEAKERS ON TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY CORPS OF CADETS AND THE

CALVARY **SOCIAL HOUR: 6:00 P.M. **,
**CALL TO TABLES 6:35 P.M. *, *INTRO &
ANNOUNCEMENTS 6:40 P.M. **, **DINNER
6:55P.M.**. **DRAWING & PRESENTATION

7:50 P.M.

MENU: Berry salad, Chicken Madera, Salmon with lemon caper sauce, Rice pilaf, Spring medley vegetables, Pecan pie, Chocolate pie, Fresh Rolls and Butter, Fresh Brewed Iced Tea or Hot Tea and Coffee. Please note dinner charge is \$33 per person, payable at registration table, cash or check made to HOT Chapter MOAA. Please call

**Vince Tobola, 254-709-5795 or e-mail
vtobola@aol.com, NLT Tuesday, 13 April, Noon
for sign-ups.**

Early RSVP's are welcome and appreciated.

After this time, please contact Vince Tobola as soon as possible if plans change on attending and we will work to accommodate you at the dinner meeting. NOTE: Summer dress code will be in effect, gentlemen, collared shirts and slacks, optional for coat and/or tie and ladies attire as desired.

DINNER MEETING HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

- **Masks are now optional at Ridgewood Country Club**
- **Please be aware of your personal conditions since fever is one of most likely symptoms of coronavirus and we all need to take proper care to protect others.**

MEETING SCHEDULE FOR 2021

Ridgewood Country Club (RCC) is at 7301 Fish Pond Road. Meetings are normally third Thursday.

- **20 May 2021**, Dinner meeting with guest speaker, Bill Easley, Israel Trip presentation.
- **4 June 2021**, Chapter fun golf event, Friday afternoon at Cottonwood Creek Golf Course, Waco.
- **15 July 2021**, Dinner meeting with entertainment by Ken Ratajczak, performing music by John Denver and friends.

NEW LAW SIGNED FOR INCREASED VACCINATIONS ALL VETERANS AND SPOUSES

President Joe Biden on March 24 signed into law a sweeping new measure that supercharges the Department of Veterans Affairs' ability to vaccinate millions of Americans.

The Save Lives Act will allow the VA to vaccinate all veterans, veteran spouses, caregivers and Civilian Health and Medical Program recipients, regardless of their VA eligibility. However, patients enrolled in VA care will get priority. About half of all 18 million living U.S. veterans are enrolled in VA care, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"This new law expands options for where veterans and their families can receive the COVID-19 vaccine, ensuring that every veteran, spouse, and caregiver will have access to the protection they need from VA," Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., the chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee said in a statement. "This bipartisan bill follows through on our shared goal of getting more shots into the arms of as many veterans as possible."

The bill's signing comes during a massive concerted effort from the Biden administration to give vaccine access to as many Americans as possible, with the goal of the country starting to return to relative normalcy by Independence Day.

ANNOUNCEMENT ON COMPREHENSIVE TOXIC EXPOSURE BILL

On March 23, there was a press conference held by Sens. Thom Tillis (R-NC) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) to introduce S. 927, the Toxic Exposure in the American Military (TEAM) Act. This legislation aligns directly with a priority to establish a permanent framework to address past, present, and future toxic exposures in the military at locations both domestic and abroad. Unlike other bills which address toxic exposures in a piecemeal fashion, the TEAM Act will not only take care of a significant number of veterans but would provide VA the guidance necessary to address all toxic exposures in the military. There is also a companion bill, H.R. 2127, introduced by House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Ranking Member Mike Bost (R-IL). The hope is this comprehensive legislation will provide America's veterans with the care and benefits they need.

PENTAGON EXPECTS ALL TROOPS TO HAVE ACCESS BY MAY 1

The Pentagon expects the broad military population to have access to the COVID-19 vaccine by May 1, with the entire Defense Department vaccinated by July. Defense Health Agency Director Lt. Gen. Ronald J. Place, in a March 26 briefing at the Pentagon, said the DOD has vaccines underway at 343 sites, in addition to the 3,000 military personnel working at Federal Emergency Management Agency mass vaccination sites as part of the country-wide push to ramp up COVID-19 vaccinations.

So far, the DOD has administered 1.8 million doses of the shots to 1.1 million military members, families, civilians, contractors, and retirees. Of that total, about 600,000 service members have received a shot—about 30 percent of the force, Place said.

The Defense Department, like the rest of the nation, has prioritized the populations who received the vaccines first. The initial focus was on “lowering operational risk and those most vulnerable.” About 60 percent of service members are in the “final tier” or general population that will be last to be open to receive the vaccine.

Place said the broad supply chain has been “working well, with shipments arriving on time.” The Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which unlike the Moderna and Pfizer versions does not require extreme cold storage, has been especially helpful for the military to inoculate service members deployed in remote environments.

As more service members receive the vaccine, the Defense Department has noticed a higher take rate among those troops who declined to receive it when they were first offered. Some troops have been offered the vaccine three or four times, and eventually decided to receive it, Place said. Senior military leaders have been encouraging service members to receive the vaccine as soon as possible. For example, Acting Air Force Secretary John P. Roth visited multiple Air Force bases recently, and encouraged Airmen and Guardians to get the shot when it is available to them.

COLA WATCH

The January 2021 Consumer Price Index is 255.296, 0.7% above the FY 2021 Cost Of Living Allowance baseline. For updates, see moaa.org/colawatch.

Membership Corner

The membership of the Chapter has increased by ten over the last month, with eight Regular members (seven having paid their 2021 dues and one new member), and **two new Associate members (Karen Augeri and Rose Mary Rafuse)**. We still have seven who were Regular members last year that have not paid their dues this year. Based on our current number of Regular members we can accept ten more spouses of Regular members to apply for an Associate membership. Your Board of Directors agreed, when they met in March, to offer Congressman Pete Sessions (TX-17) one of our two Honorary membership positions. The offer has been extended through his Waco office. Acceptance is anticipated.

Our newest Regular member is Michael “Mike” Stain, who joined the Army in 1966 and serve on Activity Duty thru '69 and then six years in the Reserves. Mike and family are moving from the Houston area to Waco this month and plans to join us for our April dinner/meeting. Come and welcome Mike as our newest member.

Did you know that **National MOAA has three levels of membership?** **BASIC** (which is **FREE**), **PREMIUM** (with a yearly or multiple year payment at a reduced amount) and **LIFE** (onetime payment based on age). Of our (HOT MOAA) five categories of membership: only our **Regular** members are required to hold and maintain National MOAA membership at least at the **BASIC** level; **Surviving Spouses** and **Associate** members are encouraged, but not required; and **Future Officers** and **Honorary** member are not required to hold and maintain National MOAA membership. For those who need or wish to become National MOAA members, an application form can be found at hotmoaa.org. For those applying for **BASIC** membership, you must include an email address and mail your application to MOAA, 201 N. Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314-9975 Download and mail a **BASIC**. For those applying for **PREMIUM** or **LIFE** membership, mail your application to MOAA, P.O. Box 1488. Merrifield, VA 22116-9820 – along with your check payable to MOAA.

Remember: ***Every member of HOT Chapter of MOAA is a recruiter!*** Help us grow the Chapter. Send the contact information on a potential new member to Jim Milam at: jimmilam@aol.com or 9021 Ledge Stone Dr., McGregor, TX 76657. Thanks.

SENATE INTRODUCES BILL TO EXTEND AND IMPROVE CARE AND BENEFITS FOR GULF WAR ILLNESS

On March 25, Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ) introduced a bill that addresses concerns surrounding care and benefits for Persian Gulf War veterans outlined in the Independent Budget. Although U.S. military operations in the Persian Gulf are currently ongoing, the authorization to provide benefits will expire on December 31, 2021. The *Improving Benefits for Gulf War Veterans Act* would permanently extend VA's authority to grant benefits for Gulf War Illness and would broaden the definition of Persian Gulf veteran to include those who served in Afghanistan, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, and Jordan. Additionally, since Gulf War Illness is difficult to identify, the bill would create a single Gulf War Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) for the associated symptoms and would provide training to VA medical examiners for Gulf War disability claims.

LOCAL EVENTS

- April 9-10, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., MidTex Farm, Ranch and Garden Show at the new Base facility at the Extraco Events Center, 4601 Bosque Blvd. The free event allows the public as well as farmers, ranchers and gardeners to view exhibits of the latest farm and ranch equipment, seed, chemicals and agriculture-related services and technologies. More info online at waco-chamber.com.
- April 24, Cameron Park Zoo will hold an Earth Day-themed Party for the Planet, which will feature animal enrichment activities and presentations. These activities are included in the cost of admission. More information at www.cameronparkzoo.com.
- May 1, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m., KidZoobilee in person at Cameron Park Zoo. KidZoobilee costs \$20 per person age 2 and up. Kids will enjoy a number of attractions, including zip lining, rock climbing, mechanical bull riding, visiting with characters and more. Food trucks will have snacks and drinks for purchase and visitors can wander the zoo to look at animals, including Zeke, the baby giraffe. More info available at www.cameronparkzoo.com.

ASSISTANCE TO VA FOR FILLING MEDICAL STAFF VACANCIES

On March 24, U.S. Senators Mike Braun (R-IN) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH) introduced bipartisan legislation that helps the Department of Veterans Affairs actively recruit and hire separating Department of Defense medical department personnel to help fill its more than 45,000 open positions.

The Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021 directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a program that will help actively recruit medical personnel, who are within one year of completing their military service, to remain in federal health care in departments like Veterans Affairs. Representatives Robert E. Latta (OH-05) and Kathleen M. Rice (NY-04) introduced companion legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives.

In 2019, the VA Inspector General stated that staff shortages are a root cause of many of the problems in Veterans' care. The Department of Defense has robust medical departments in the Army, Navy, and Air Force totaling 111,462 Active Duty and 67,951 Reserve personnel in 2020. All or part of the medical education and training has been paid for by the Federal government. Their Military Occupation Specialties (MOSs) span the full spectrum of the medical professions from primary care physicians, to neurosurgeons, nurse practitioners, health care administrators, physical therapists, pharmacists, health care administrators, physical therapists, pharmacists, radiology technicians, medical logistician, biomedical maintenance, etc. All of these medical specialties can be utilized in the VHA, and their knowledge of the new electronic health record will also be invaluable. Currently, an average of 13,000 active duty medical departments members separate from the military each year at the end of enlistments/contracts or through retirement. There is no formal program in place to actively recruit them to remain in federal health care in departments like Veterans Affairs (VA).

WEBSITES FOR LOCAL ATTRACTIONS

1. The Texas Ranger Museum and Hall of Fame at www.texasranger.org.
2. The Dr. Pepper Museum at drpeppermuseum.com.
3. Waco Mammoth National Monument at www.nps.gov/waco.
4. The Mayborn Museum at www.baylor.edu/mayborn/.

APRIL MOAA MAGAZINE ADVOCACY LETTERS

The April MOAA magazine issue contains tear-out letters for your use consideration. These are intended to raise awareness on toxic exposure for our currently serving service members, TRICARE coverage for adult children on par with commercial plans, and our focus on the Basic Needs Allowance for those most junior and vulnerable service members with families.

Please consider signing, sealing, stamping, and mailing these letters to the four leaders in Congress who have influence over the committees and throughout the legislative process.

The important letters included in this issue to be sent to the four leaders of the House and Senate are intended to help create the “surround sound” needed on the Hill to ensure support for those who control the rhythm of Congress and the conference committee, where all the differences between the House and Senate must be resolved before they can present the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to the president.

BLUE ANGELS UPDATE AIRCRAFT

The Blue Angels flew performed their first show in March 1946, flying Grumman F6F-5 Hellcat fighters at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida. The name “Blue Angels” was first officially used in July 1946. In August, they switched to the higher-powered Grumman F8f-1 Bearcat. In the late summer of 1949, the team traded in their Bearcats for their jet, the Grumman F9F-2 Panther.

To mark the transition from legacy Hornets (F/A-18C0 to the Super Hornet (F/A -18E), the Blues flew a combined final flight with both types of aircraft on November 4, 2020. For more on the team, go to blueangels.navy.mil.

MOAA VACATIONS

As a member of MOAA, you can use MOAA VACATIONS to assist with planning travel trips. You can find this on the MOAA web site. Their official travel agency has the mission to provide the very best vacation experience for every member. In addition to the opportunity to enjoy the camaraderie of traveling with your fellow MOAA members from across the country we have also negotiated special value-added offers to enhance your next vacation.

HOW THE VA PLANS TO SPEND THE \$17 BILLION IN NEW COVID RELIEF MONEY

The Department of Veterans Affairs just received over \$17 billion as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. How will they spend that money?

Of the \$17 billion-plus in emergency funding that will add to the department’s \$243 billion fiscal 2021 budget, which runs through Sept. 30, \$10 billion is earmarked directly for health-care and homeless programs. Another \$4 billion is allocated to the Community Care or MISSION program that provides medical care from civilian providers in certain cases.

That means that the majority of the emergency funding will go right back to caring for veterans. While no special or individual programs have been announced by the VA, the fact that the funding is earmarked to provide services directly to veterans is not a bad thing.

Another \$1 billion of the emergency funding goes to cover the medical bills of veterans.

According to the law, that money is earmarked to write off veterans copayments for medical care provided by the VA from April 2020 through September 2021.

There will be still more money is going to help veterans who were affected economically by the COVID-19 crisis. A total of \$386 million is designated for the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program, which offers up to 12 months of cash payments to eligible veterans who enroll in job training programs for high-demand jobs.

The remaining money is divided between several programs, including:

- \$100 million to modernize VA’s health-care supply chain
- \$750 million in grants to state veterans homes and nursing homes
- \$272 million to speed up compensation claims processing and appeals
- \$80 million to pay for special medical leave for VA employees affected by COVID-19
- \$10 million to the VA’s Inspector General program to keep tabs on all that money.

This \$17 billion is in addition to \$19.5 billion in emergency funding provided to the VA as part of the 2020 Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act).



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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

DINNER MEETING THURSDAY, APRIL 15
GUEST SPEAKERS FROM TEXAS A&M
UNIVERSITY ON CORPS OF CADETS AND THE
CALVARY

MEMBERSHIP CORNER

LEGISLATIVE AND VA BILL UPDATES
VACCINATIONS AT DOD AND VA