



July 2004

The Veterans Digest

Phone Solicitation from "American Veterans"

There is a group, "American Veterans," that is claiming to help homeless veterans. They are calling homes and requesting credit card donations.

The president of the group is apparently Robert Friend, Jr. If persons check their caller ID, it may read "Safety Programs - 717-234-2635." This is a non-working number.

Robert Friend is the president of American Veterans Coalition based in Gig Harbor, Wa. The Web site with his information is <http://www.american-veterans.org/OnlineRequestAssistance.html> Another report on this group, which has several aliases, may be found at <http://www.give.org/reports/nondissql.asp?798>.

This is not an official VA-recognized veterans service organization. Recommend you alert your staff, veterans and others who inquire about this group.

Note: This release came from Butch Miller, Veterans Liaison Office, and is apparently not AMVETS, even though they now publish a magazine called "American Veterans" and that is the long version of their name. Ed.

Should Reserve Soldier Claimants Waive VA Compensation?

The Defense Manpower Data Center and Department of Veterans Affairs utilizing Social Security Numbers are in the process of identifying Reservists and Guardsman who are reported as receiving concurrent payments of military pay and veteran benefits.

Reserve and Guard Members are reminded that by

provision of law they cannot legally be paid concurrently with VA disability compensation or pension benefits (10 U.S.C 12316 and 38 U.S.C. 5304(c)).

Individuals may elect to keep the training pay received from the military service department. However, to be legally entitled to keep training pay, they must waive VA benefits for a number of days equal to the number of days for which they received training pay.

In most instances, it will be to their advantage to waive VA benefits and keep their training pay. Reserve components report the number of days during the fiscal year for which a reservist/guardsman received training pay as one full day's duty for each 4-hour training assembly attended. Therefore, individuals are credited with four days training pay on a normal drill weekend. On a fiscal year basis, most members are paid for approximately 63 training days representing 48 training sessions and 15 days active training.

If VA benefits are waived to receive training pay, VA will adjust the VA award to withhold future benefits for the same number of days waived and at the monthly rate in effect for the fiscal year in which a member received training pay. No overpayment will be created in the VA account and the normal VA rate will be restored when the reported number of days' benefits has been withheld. [Source: NCOA News Update 4 APR 04]

Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI) Online

Using a secure Web site, the Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI) Online Account Access system allows veterans to obtain basic information on their account through the insurance Web site at www.insurance.va.gov.

Veterans can view their current amount of cover-
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VGLI Online (continued from page 1)

age, premium rate, and billing method, as well as change their billing address.

In the future, veterans will have access to additional online tools allowing them to change their method and frequency of payment.

Veterans can also access their account information through a new VGLI interactive voice response system that allows veterans to obtain account information through the telephone.

Veterans can call VA at 1-800-419-1473 any time, day or night, by using their telephone keypad and can hear recorded information on their accounts. They can also request certain changes to their VGLI accounts, such as billing frequency and payment method, as well as order certain forms via mail or fax.

American Legion Offers Service Officer Training on Disk

The Department Service Office has placed its Field Service Officers Training Manual and Test on 3 1/2 floppy discs.

Included with that information are web site links to the various VA forms and the National Organization's Post Service Officers Guide. All this information can be downloaded and copied.

Post Service Officers may obtain a disc by contacting the Department Service Office.

Service Officers desiring a Certificate of Completion signed by the Department Commander should study all the information, download and copy the test, and then send their completed and signed test to the Department Service Office.

VA Programs for Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an ailment resulting from exposure to extreme stress

involving direct or indirect threat of death, serious injury or a physical threat. The trauma may be experienced alone, as in rape or assault, or in the company of others, as in military combat.

The events that can cause PTSD are called "stressors." They include natural disasters (floods, earthquakes), accidents (car accidents, airplane crashes, large fires) or deliberate man-made disasters (bombing, torture, death camps).

Symptoms include recurrent thoughts of a traumatic event, reduced involvement in work or outside interests, hyper alertness, anxiety and irritability. The disorder apparently is more severe and longer lasting when the stress is of human design.

More than 185,000 veterans were listed by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in 2003 as having PTSD as a service-connected disability.

Vet Centers

VA readjustment counseling is provided through 206 community-based Vet Centers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam. Vet Centers are located outside of medical facilities, often in shopping malls and other community settings.

The Vet Center mission features a mix of direct counseling and help accessing other programs, such as psychological counseling for veterans exposed to war trauma or who were sexually assaulted during military service, family counseling, community outreach and education, and extensive social services and referral activities to help veterans improve their social and economic prospects after the military.

Vet Centers are staffed by interdisciplinary teams that include psychologists, nurses and social workers. Vet Center teams reflect ethnic and gender diversity and include many veterans, most having served in a combat theater of operations.

Eligibility for Vet Center services includes all Vietnam theater veterans, other Vietnam era veterans who accessed Vet Center care prior to January 1, 2004, and any other veteran who served in any war, armed conflict or peace keeping mission. Eligibility for sexual trauma counseling at Vet Centers is open to any veteran regardless of period of service.

In 2003, Vet Centers saw approximately 130,000 veterans and provided over 990,000 visits to veterans (*continued on next page*)

PTSD Programs (continued from page 2)

and family members. For many veterans who would not otherwise receive VA assistance, the Vet Centers make more than 100,000 referrals a year to VA medical facilities and another 120,000 referrals annually to VA regional offices for disability compensation, pensions or other benefits. For the third consecutive year, 99 percent of veterans using Vet Centers reported being satisfied with services received.

VA Medical Center Programs

VA operates an internationally recognized network of more than 140 specialized programs for the treatment of PTSD through its medical centers and clinics. One notable program consists of PTSD clinical teams that provide outpatient treatment, working closely with other VA treatment programs, including Vet Centers and the community. In 2003, more than 77,800 veterans were treated for PTSD by VA specialists.

In addition to 97 PTSD clinical teams, VA operates five specialized inpatient units around the country, plus three brief-treatment units, 14 residential rehabilitation programs, and seven PTSD day hospitals. There also are five outpatient Women's Stress Disorder and Treatment Teams. A special focus in the program has included underserved and minority populations, such as African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans. A specialized PTSD inpatient treatment unit serves women veterans at the Palo Alto, Calif., VA Medical Center's Menlo Park Division.

The Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act (Public Law 106-117) re-established the Under Secretary of Health's Special Committee on PTSD. The committee will assess VA's capacity to diagnose and treat PTSD and provide guidance on VA's education, research and benefits activities with regard to PTSD.

National PTSD Center

VA established the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in 1989, with a mandate to promote research into the causes and diagnosis of the disorder, to train health care and related personnel in diagnosis and treatment, and to serve as an information resource for professionals across the United States and, eventually, around the world. The center consists of seven divisions with distinct, but complementary re-

sponsibilities: behavioral science, women's health sciences, clinical neurosciences, education, evaluation, pacific islands ethnocultural, and executive and resource center divisions.

The center is committed to approaching PTSD through a focus on research, education and consultation. These three threads weave the Center's work together in a way that brings science into practice and ensures that clinical concerns guide scientific priorities.

The National Center has come to be viewed as a world leader in PTSD research. Current research at the center includes large-scale clinical trials, as well as studies on the epidemiology, diagnosis, psychobiology and treatment of PTSD. Among its many educational programs, the center provides regular satellite broadcasts and publishes two newsletters, which highlight the latest developments in research and clinical practices for PTSD.

The National Center also offers a monthly 5-day clinical training program free of charge to VA staff, and maintains a nationally recognized Web site (<http://www.ncptsd.org>) with information about trauma and PTSD. The Web site includes documents such as the Iraq War Clinician Guide to help clinicians diagnose and treat veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom, and a bibliographic database of more than 21,000 articles.

The National Center also provides consultation to clinicians, scientists and policy makers concerning treatment, research and education regarding PTSD.

Veterans Being Compensated for PTSD

Period	Feb. 04	Sept. 99
Pre-WWII	2	1
WWII	24,030	15,879
Korea	9,258	5,412
Vietnam	147,739	90,695
Gulf War	11,533	5,592
Peacetime	7,584	4,491
Total	200,146	122,070

VA Fact Sheet, Jul 2004



Home Loan Boost Gets On Fast Track

The House has passed a bill that would increase the maximum loan available under the Home Loan Guarantee program by 39 percent, to a new level of \$333,700.

HR 4345, approved June 23, also provides for annual increases in the loan guarantee to keep pace with changes in the loan limit of the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

The increase is needed, sponsors said, because median housing prices in many areas are higher than the current \$240,000 mortgage limit.

The bill now goes to the Senate, where there is bipartisan support for the increase. Approval by Congress was made easier when the Congressional Budget Office determined that increasing the mortgage cap would raise government revenue in the additional fees generated from higher loans.

The only remaining hurdle: The Senate hasn't decided whether to pass a separate veterans' housing bill or to include the increase as part of a larger benefits measure.

From Army Times FastTrack, July 12, 2004

House Approves Fiscal Year 2005 National Defense Authorization Act

Washington, D.C. - May 20, 2004 - Today, the U.S. House of Representatives approved H.R. 4200, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005, on a bipartisan 391 to 34 vote. The legislation authorizes \$422 billion for the Department of Defense and the national security programs of the Department of Energy. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter gave the following statement on the House floor:

"Almost three years ago, after the terrorist attacks against our country, we initiated one of the most difficult and complex military campaigns ever undertaken by a nation.

"We aggressively pursued an elusive enemy and, in that pursuit, faced many challenges. Reluctant allies,

intimidated in some cases, and complex intelligence problems combined with tactical difficulties to make the going rough. But through it all, we were carried forward by our greatest asset: our troops.

"They killed the enemy at close range in the 10,000-foot mountains of Afghanistan and during fierce fire fights in the choke points of Iraq. They showed courage every bit as pure and honorable as the men who took Normandy and Iwo Jima and Okinawa and Pork Chop Hill and Hue City.

"As we stand here, some are attempting to besmirch the reputation of these fighting forces pointing to the actions of a handful of rear area soldiers. That attempt to cloud a record of honor is only possible if we allow it to happen. Over a third of a million Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines have served honorably in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 46,000 Bronze Star Medals have been earned by these Americans, whose names will never grace the front pages of our newspapers or lead the TV news coverage.

"When Master Sergeant Bill Pryor charged an enemy position by himself in the mountains of Afghanistan, killing four terrorists, the last in hand-to-hand combat, he did so without publicity, save the thanks of his platoon members. When Gunnery Sergeant Jeff Bohr gave his life to save his wounded Marines, the media barely noticed. It is our job to support these Americans. We can do this by giving them the tools to get the job done.

"This bill does that. With armor, ammunition and technology, with pay increases and combat compensation, health care for guard and reservists, better housing for military families, and much more. In approving this bill, we give in some small measure our thanks, which will never be adequate to those who protect us. This is a defense bill for the troops."

Provisions in the the legislation include:

FORCE PROTECTION: More than \$2 billion in equipment to protect our troops; \$100 million to initiate a new rapid procurement initiative that would help respond to urgent requests for combat equipment by commanders in the battlefield; \$829.6 million for production of Up-Armor Humvees, to provide protection for soldiers from anti-personnel, armor-piercing munitions and improvised explosive devices (IEDs); \$358.2 million for Vehicle Add-On Armor Kits to the Army's truck fleet; \$191.8 million for the Bradley Fighting

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2005 Defense Authorization Act

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Vehicle, which transports troops to the battlefield, provides fire cover to dismounted troops, and suppresses enemy tanks and vehicles; \$275 million for Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to provide increased surveillance capability, particularly for countering the IED threat; \$292.2 million for upgrades to M1A2 Abrams tanks - its capabilities and heavy armor are imperative to force protection; and over \$400 million for new body armor including add-on covering for the shoulder and side body areas.

PERSONNEL BENEFITS: A 3.5 percent across-the-board pay raise for members of the armed forces; increasing the maximum amount of hardship duty pay from \$300 to \$750 per month; making permanent the increased rates for imminent danger pay, from \$150 per month to \$225 per month, and family separation allowance, from \$100 per month to \$250 per month: extending through December 31, 2005 several special pays and bonuses for active duty members and reservists: elimination of out-of-pocket housing expenses; enlistment, reenlistment, and retention bonus equity for deployed reservists to ensure that they are paid using the same authority used to pay active duty members: up to \$3,000 per month in income replacement payments for reservists who experience a reduction in their income while away from their civilian jobs; and \$9.9 billion for military construction and housing.

OTHER: Elimination of the Social Security offset under the Survivor Benefit Plan by increasing the annuities paid to survivors of military retirees who are 62 or older. Elimination of the statutory ceiling on the military housing privatization initiative which allows the Department of Defense to leverage private sector investments and business interests to build and revitalize family housing at domestic military bases.

From the AMRA News, Summer 2004, which quotes the following sources: U. S. House of Representatives Press Release. Contact: Harold Stavenas (202) 228-2539.



VA Expands Operations on Army Posts

WASHINGTON The Department of Veterans Affairs has expanded its Liaison offices to now support 136 military installations to assist with soldier transition from active duty and it is working to make it easier for disabled soldiers to get the help they need, according to the VA's top official, Anthony Principi.

Part of the expanded VA service on military installations is ensuring a VA counselor talks to wounded veterans in military hospitals before those veterans are discharged from the military service. Those hospitals include Walter Reed Medical Center, Washington, D. C.; Eisenhower Army Medical Center, Fort Gordon, Georgia; Brooke Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas; and Madigar Army Medical Center at Western Regional Medical Command, Tacoma, Washington.

The VA is also making a dedicated effort to reach out to the latest generation of combat veterans. Principi is sending out a personal letter to more than 150,000 veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. That letter thanks the veterans for their service and reminds them of VA benefits they may be entitled to.

The letter explaining benefits is in addition to the VA briefings given to approximately 200,000 service members annually as those individuals out process from military service.

"VA has learned many lessons since the Gulf War in 1991 and other conflicts, which will ensure this newest generation of war veterans receives the health-care and assistance they deserve when they return to civilian life," Principi said.

In Operation Iraqi Freedom 4,579 soldiers have been wounded in combat and another 10,387 suffered other injuries or illness through May 7. In Operation Enduring Freedom 210 soldiers have been wounded in combat and 2,105 suffered other injuries or illness through the same period.

There are currently about 26 million U. S. veterans alive today.

From the American Military Retirees Association (AMRA) News, Summer 2004

VA Begins Chiropractic Care

WASHINGTON (June 25, 2004) - Veterans can receive chiropractic care at 26 selected Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities beginning this fall, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi announced today.

VA will hire or contract with doctors of chiropractic to provide the care. In consultation with VA primary care providers, doctors of chiropractic will offer patient evaluations and chiropractic care for neuromusculoskeletal conditions.

“Today, VA makes another significant improvement to the world-class health care we provide for eligible veterans,” said Principi. “Veterans who will benefit from chiropractic services will now have the opportunity to receive chiropractic care to restore them to good health.”

Locations where chiropractic care will be provided include Togus, Maine; West Haven and Newington, Conn.; Buffalo and the Bronx, N.Y.; Butler, Pa.; Martinsburg, W.Va.; Columbia, S.C.; Augusta, Ga.; Tampa and Miami, Fla.; Mountain Home, Tenn.; Columbus, Ohio; **Danville, Ill.**; Iron Mountain, Mich.; Kansas City, Kan.; Jackson, Miss.; San Antonio, Temple, and Dallas, Texas; Albuquerque, N.M.; Fort Harrison, Mont.; Seattle, Wash.; Sacramento and Los Angeles, Calif.; and Sioux Falls, S.D.

Eligible veterans in areas distant from these locations will also be able to receive chiropractic care through VA's outpatient fee-basis program after a referral by their primary care provider, and prior authorization by the department.

VA was authorized to offer chiropractic care and services under the provisions of section 204 of Public Law 107-135, the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001.

Chiropractors seeking employment or to provide contract services to veterans should call the Human Resources office of any of the above facilities. Some VA positions may be advertised at <http://www.vacareers.com>.

From Butch Miller, Veterans Liaison Office
Office - (317) 554-0000 Ext. 4077
Fax - (317) 554-0594
Cell - (317) 319-6972



JUST FOR US

By
Richard “Pappy”
Harshman
Randolph
County, Indiana
Veterans’
Service Officer

Today I was at Arlington
Standing on hallowed ground.
The feeling was so awesome
I couldn’t utter a sound.

I stood at the grave of J.F.K.
And saw the eternal flame.
I saw the grave of R.F.K.
Two brothers of national fame.

I saw so many monuments.
Row, upon row, upon row.
Each was alive once upon a time
Fighting against the foe.

Now here they lie in honor.
For our freedom they have won.
We can’t forget the price they paid
As we face each mornings sun.

They stand as tho at attention
And will through eternity.
I’M glad I am an American
I’M as proud as proud can be.

God gave us this land,
Two hundred years ago.
It’s up to us to keep it
The way He would have it to go.

If it be His will for us,
To keep this country free,
Give thanks to all who sacrificed
Just for you and me.

July 1, 2004

Medals

AFGHANISTAN & IRAQ MEDALS: The Senate voted 98-0 for a bill H.R. 3104 that the House passed on 30 March (423-0) to authorize separate medals for participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The President signed it into Public Law 108-234 on 28 May 2004 even though his Administration was on record as advocating a single medal for service in the "Global War on Terrorism." Members of the armed forces who participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom are now eligible to receive these medals. [Source: NAUS Update 21 May & 4 June 04]

AIR FORCE NEW UNIT MEDALS: The Air Force is designing new medals to recognize units for outstanding heroism in combat and for achievement or service in direct support of combat operations. The Gallant Unit Citation and the Meritorious Unit Award can be awarded to Air Force active-duty, Reserve and Guard units for actions or service while directly supporting combat operations. The Gallant Unit Citation will be awarded to units for extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy of the United States. The action must be while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force on or after Sept. 11, 2001. The Meritorious Unit Award will be awarded to units for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding achievement service directly supporting combat operations for at least 90 continuous days. The military operations must be against an armed enemy of the United States on or after Sept. 11, 2001. [Source: Armed Forces News 15 APR 04]

KOREAN DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL: Personnel seeking verification of their eligibility from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) to receive the Korean Defense Service Medal (KDSM) could be in for long delays and possibly disappointment taking into consideration the following:

- Generally the tour of duty in Korea was for one year and the bulk of the personnel were Army. Considering 40,000 soldiers stationed there each year for 50 years means about 2 million are eligible for this medal. A typical request rate would be between 10 and 30 % of those eligible, so 200,000 to 600,000 requests are projected.
- Many of these people are no longer serving on active duty so the National Personnel Records Center will be the agency that must verify eligibility for this medal.
- The implementing instructions do not list specific source documents to verify eligibility thus records must be screened for evidence to meet eligibility requirements. While records may contain assignment orders many of these orders do not specify Korea. Instead they list something like, APO SF CAL 96012 or FPO 92109. Both would indicate an assignment in the Pacific area but a list of APO/FPO zip code locations inclusive of which years they applied would be required to establish in country assignment. NPRC does not have this list.
- A personnel record does not contain documentation of participation as a regularly assigned air crewmember flying sorties into, out of, within, or over the area of eligibility in support of military operations. Each day that one or more sorties are flown counts as one day toward the 30 or 60-day requirement; so verification of this requirement will be very difficult, if not impossible.
- NPRC does not have a listing of ships that were within 12 miles of Korea and the dates, so verification for Navy personnel based on the personnel records will be difficult. Generally, the Navy Liaison office in St. Louis will process requests for awards from former U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps., and U.S. Coast Guard personnel. That office may have ship location information.
- Being on TDY in Korea may not meet the award criteria. TDY does not generally mean assigned, attached, or mobilized to a unit. Even if TDY is accepted as the basis for this award it will be almost impossible to verify from the personnel records because TDY orders are generally not permanent personnel documents.
- Although verification of assignment may be possible through screening of finance records, these are not available at NPRC.

In view of the above it is suggested that if the veteran or retiree has any supporting documentation of their time in Korea, that it be included with the request. Only one or two documents would be sufficient. Submitting more is redundant and discouraged. [Source: NPRC E-mail 07 Jun 2004]

The Tomb of the Unknowns

The Third Infantry Regiment at Fort Myer has the responsibility for providing ceremonial units and honor guards for state occasions, White House social functions, public celebrations and interments at Arlington National Cemetery and standing a very formal sentry watch at the Tomb of the Unknowns. The tomb has been patrolled continuously, 24/7, since 1930.

The public is familiar with the precision of what is called "walking post" at the Tomb. There are roped off galleries where visitors can form to observe the troopers and their measured step and almost mechanically, silent rifle shoulder changes. They are relieved every hour in a very formal drill that has to be seen to be believed.

They must commit 2 years of life to guard the tomb, live in a barracks under the tomb, and cannot drink any alcohol on or off duty **FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES**. They cannot swear in public **FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES** and cannot disgrace the uniform {fighting} or the tomb in any way.

After **TWO YEARS**, the guard is given a wreath pin that is worn on their lapel signifying they served as guard of the tomb. There are only 400 presently worn. The guard must obey these rules for the rest of their lives or give up the wreath pin.

The shoes are specially made with very thick soles to keep the heat and cold from their feet. There are metal heel plates that extend to the top of the shoe in order to make the loud click as they come to a halt. There are no wrinkles, folds or lint on the uniform. Guards dress for duty in front of a full-length mirror.

The first **SIX MONTHS** of duty a guard cannot talk to anyone, nor watch TV. All off duty time is spent studying the 175 notable people laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. A guard must memorize who they are and where they are interred. Among the notables are: President Taft, Joe E. Lewis {the boxer} and Medal of Honor winner Audie Murphy, {the most decorated soldier of W.W.II} of Hollywood fame. Every guard spends **FIVE HOURS A DAY** getting his uniforms ready for guard duty.

Recently, while we were sleeping, the teeth of hurricane Isabel came through this area and tore the hell out of everything. We had thousands of trees down, power outages, traffic signals out, roads filled with downed limbs and "gear adrift" debris. We had flooding

and the place looked like it had been the impact area of an offshore bombardment.

The Regimental Commander of the US Third Infantry sent word to the nighttime Sentry Detail to secure the post and seek shelter from the high winds, to ensure their personal safety.

THEY DISOBEYED THE ORDER!

During winds that turned over vehicles and turned debris into projectiles, the measured step continued. One fellow said "I've got buddies getting shot at in Iraq who would kick my butt if word got to them that we let them down. I sure as hell have no intention of spending my Army career being known as the damned idiot who couldn't stand a little light breeze and shirked his duty." Then he said something in response to a female reporter's question regarding silly purposeless personal risk.

He said, "I wouldn't expect you to understand. It's an enlisted man's thing."

Soaked to the skin, marching in the pelting rain of a tropical storm, they said that guarding the Tomb was not just an assignment; it was the highest honor that can be afforded to a service person.

In a time in our nation's history when spin and total B.S. seem to have become the accepted coin-of-the-realm, there beat hearts -- the enlisted hearts we all knew and were so damn proud to be a part of -- that fully understand that devotion to duty is not a part-time occupation. While we slept, we were represented by some damn fine men who fully understood their post orders and proudly went about their assigned responsibilities unseen, unrecognized and in the finest tradition of the American Enlisted Man. Folks, there's hope. The spirit that George S. Patton, Arliegh Burke and Jimmy Doolittle left us ... survives.

