DEOMI News Highlights

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Army welcomes first Islamic division-level chaplain [Christopher Diamond, Army Times, 27 May 2017]
- The 7th Infantry Division this week welcomed Lt. Col. Khalid Shabazz as its new chaplain during a change of stole ceremony, making Shabazz the Army’s first Islamic chaplain to serve at the division level.
- Shabazz, the former I Corps deputy chaplain, became the division’s chaplain during the ceremony Tuesday at the Lewis Main Chapel on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, according to the Army. Maj. Gen. Thomas James, the 7th Infantry Division commander, officiated the ceremony.
- In addition to a doctorate degree and four master’s degrees, Shabazz has a long history of working with soldiers of all faiths. He was raised a Lutheran in Louisiana and converted to Islam as a soldier.

Bill to Protect Whistleblowers Who Refuse to Break Rules Goes to President [Charles S. Clark, Government Executive, 31 May 2017]
- President Trump will soon decide whether to sign a bipartisan bill just passed by Congress that would clarify that whistleblower protection laws shield federal employees who disobey a superior’s directive if it is illegal or violates regulations.
- The Follow the Rules Act (H.R. 657)—introduced by Reps. Sean Duffy, R-Wis., and Gerry Connolly, D-Va.—corrects what sponsors saw as a misinterpretation by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in the case of Rainey v. MSPB.
- That case involved State Department African Affairs program director Timothy Rainey, who received negative performance reviews and was removed from duty after he refused to force a contractor to re-engage a subcontractor who had previously been discharged. Duffy introduced first an amendment and later a bill in 2016 to clarify the situation.

The military is building a case to block transgender applicants—at least for now [Andrew deGrandpre and David Larter, Military Times, 1 June 2017]
- A controversial Pentagon directive that would allow transgender men and women to join the military beginning this summer now faces indefinite delay as senior leaders within each of the services voice lingering concerns about the Obama-era policy intended to end discrimination but dismissed by critics as social experimentation.
- This development, confirmed to Military Times by multiple sources with knowledge of these internal discussions, comes as the Defense Department faces a July 1 deadline to fully implement a policy that one year ago lifted the ban on transgender personnel already in uniform, and established the conditions and timeline by which new applicants could join either through enlistment or as officer candidates.
- A Pentagon spokesman, Army Lt. Col. Myles Caggins, would not address the prospect for delaying transgender accessions, saying only that there’s been no change to existing military policy allowing transgender troops already serving to do so openly.

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Culture
Black Music Matters: Why We Celebrate African-American Music Appreciation Month

By Janice Williams
Newsweek, June 1, 2017

Long before Paul Whiteman, a bandleader, orchestral director, violinist and composer dubbed himself “The King of Jazz” back in the 1920s, Joseph Oliver, aka King Oliver, was pioneering the sound of jazz and Dixieland down in Louisiana with the syrupy sound of his cornet. In fact, it was King Oliver’s melodic compositions back in the early 1900s that influenced the iconic and brassy sound of Louis Armstrong, who is considered one of the greatest trumpet players of all time.

Even Elvis Presley, who has long been revered as the King of Rock ‘n’ Roll, was heavily influenced by the sound and swagger of Chuck Berry, a guitarist, singer and songwriter who forged a style of rhythm and blues back in the 1950s that ultimately led to the creation of rock music. Elvis’ own discography features a few songs originally composed and performed by Berry, including classics like “Maybellene” and “Memphis, Tennessee.”

Just about every genre of music has, in some way, been touched and influenced by African-Americans. That’s why in 1979, President Jimmy Carter proclaimed the month of June as Black Music Month.

The month-long observance, which was first inducted on June 7, 1979, was created to recognize and celebrate the historical influence African-Americans have had on the music industry and is intended to pay homage to the many artists, writers, songs and albums that have shaped American pop culture and the inspiring musical moments that have brought citizens—white, black and every other skin color—together.

The idea was initially sparked following President Richard Nixon’s declaration of October as Country Music Month back in 1972. Although Black Music Month was effective in driving sales of music created by African-Americans—the month-long celebration was first launched with the slogan, "Black Music is Green"—the charge of artists (including Berry) and music mavens that petitioned Carter to proclaim the holiday celebrating black music brought forth an uplifting and unifying moment for people from all backgrounds.

Despite Carter’s proclamation, an official presidential order announcing Black Music Month during the month of June wasn’t signed off on until 2000 when the House of Representatives approved House Resolution 509, a decree that officially recognized the importance, study and celebration of African-American music.

Over the years, American presidents have continued the tradition of honoring Black Music Month, including Barack Obama, who officially changed the month-long holiday’s name to African-American Music Appreciation Month in 2009.

Recently, President Donald Trump proclaimed the first African-American Music Appreciation Month of his tenure, honing in on the accomplishments and impact of artists like Berry, Dizzy Gillespie and Ella Fitzgerald.

“During June, we pay tribute to the contributions African Americans have made and continue to make to American music. The indelible legacy of these musicians who have witnessed our Nation's greatest achievements, as well as its greatest injustices give all Americans a richer, deeper understanding of American culture. Their creativity has shaped every genre of music, including rock and roll, rhythm and blues, jazz, gospel, hip-hop, and rap,” the president said in a statement, released Wednesday.
The debate over Confederate monuments shows how far the U.S. has to go [OPINION]

By Ishaan Tharoor

More than a century and a half after the end of the Civil War, Americans find themselves divided over its legacy. This month, the city of New Orleans completed the process of removing four Confederate monuments—a memorial and three statues that glorified white supremacists and the leaders of a failed rebellion. It wasn't an easy feat, according to the city's mayor, Mitch Landrieu, who said that the original contractor hired to remove the statues backed out after receiving death threats and seeing his car set ablaze. The decision passed only after a two-year review process, a vote of the city council and multiple legal challenges.

Still, many in the South remain unhappy with what they perceive as the desecration of their history. Watching the disappearance of a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, a politician from neighboring Mississippi declared that anyone pushing for these removals ought to be “lynched” — a hideous choice of words given the history of the term in his state.

Landrieu suggested that such rhetoric further justified his city's actions. “These statues are not just stone and metal. They are not just innocent remembrances of a benign history,” he said in a powerful speech May 19. “These monuments celebrate a fictional, sanitized Confederacy; ignoring the death, ignoring the enslavement, ignoring the terror that it actually stood for.”

Now the mayor of Baltimore, which has its own statues of Confederate leaders, hopes to follow Landrieu's lead.

All countries struggle with the wounds and sins of their past. In Spain, lawmakers recently passed a symbolic resolution calling for the exhumation of the remains of Francisco Franco, the dictator whose tomb sits at a vast tourist site honoring those slain in the country's hideous civil war. In Germany and France, far-right politicians rage against having to shoulder the guilt of the Holocaust more than half a century after the end of World War II.

In the United States, though, the endurance of Confederate monuments is a visceral reminder of a project that lasted long after the Confederacy was defeated. And it's a startling sign of how divided Americans remain over the history that shapes their nation. Americans, including President Trump, marked Memorial Day on Monday. The holiday, which pays homage to fallen service members, began in the wake of the Civil War, when the relatives and friends of soldiers on both sides decorated the graves of the dead. It would become a platform for Southern politicians to rehabilitate the image of their rebellion. In his remarks, Landrieu lamented this “cult of the Lost Cause” — a bid to give the rebellion a mythic nobility and “hide the truth, which is that the Confederacy was on the wrong side of humanity.”
Soon the memorials no longer took place in cemeteries, but in public squares and city plazas. The Lee monument in New Orleans was unveiled Feb. 22, 1884 — exactly 152 years after the birth of George Washington. It was a deliberate attempt to link the Confederate general to the American Founding Father.

“They were the father and the son-like defender of American 'liberties' in this odd version of history, each achieving a godlike character in their own time,” wrote David Blight, a professor of history at Yale University.

“Many of the statues that cause conflict today weren’t built in the years following the Civil War but in the decades following it, and not by widows or daughters of Confederate veterans, but by defiant descendants,” my colleague Monica Hesse wrote.

Blight argues that this mythologizing created the “foundation on which Southerners built the Jim Crow system” and institutionalized racism for decades to come. He notes that, after Trump’s pandering to the racial grievances of white voters on the campaign trail, the “Neo-Confederates ... have a fledgling, unsteady, ahistorical victory narrative to follow now in the presidency and the White House.”

On Monday, Trump laid a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery and extolled the sacrifices of American servicemen and women who died in combat. “Their stories are now woven into the soul of our nation, into the stars and stripes on our flag, and into the beating hearts of our great, great people,” Trump said.

But consider another speech delivered in the same cemetery on Memorial Day — in 1871. The oration by Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist about whom Trump seemed clueless this year, did not applaud the “manly courage” of all Americans killed in the war but the “noble cause” for which some, but not all, perished.

“We must never forget that victory to the rebellion meant death to the republic,” Douglass said, speaking of the Confederacy and the zeal of its leaders to preserve the institution of slavery. “We must never forget that the loyal soldiers who rest beneath this sod flung themselves between the nation and the nation’s destroyers.”

More than a century later, Landrieu seems to be making the same point. “The Confederacy was on the wrong side of history and humanity,” he said. “It sought to tear apart our nation and subjugate our fellow Americans to slavery. This is the history we should never forget and one that we should never again put on a pedestal to be revered.”

Landrieu also chose to quote the late South African anti-apartheid leader Nelson Mandela, a man now universally admired but once imprisoned, vilified as a terrorist and scorned by leaders in the West. Mandela was speaking in 1998 about his country’s tortured and traumatic search for truth and reconciliation.

“If the pain has often been unbearable and the revelations shocking to all of us,” he said, “it is because they indeed bring us the beginnings of a common understanding of what happened and a steady restoration of the nation’s humanity.”

In 2017, it seems that the United States is struggling to find its own “common understanding of what happened,” and its own reckoning with a racial history built on the dehumanization and exploitation of others.

Ishaan Tharoor writes about foreign affairs for The Washington Post. He previously was a senior editor at TIME, based first in Hong Kong and later in New York. Follow @ishaantharoor
Few in St. Louis Knew Confederate Memorial Existed. Now, Many Want It Gone.

By Julie Bosman
The New York Times, May 26, 2017

Workers from the St. Louis Department of Parks, Recreation and Forestry cleaning paint off a Confederate Civil War monument on Wednesday in Forest Park. (Credit: David Carson/St. Louis Post-Dispatch)

ST. LOUIS — The angry, divisive fight over public symbols of the Confederacy has swept through Columbia, S.C., Birmingham, Ala., and New Orleans. This week, the debate made its way some 600 miles north, up the Mississippi River, to St. Louis, the home of a Confederate memorial many residents did not know was in their midst.

Here in a graceful public park stands this city’s own grand monument to the Confederacy, a 32-foot-tall granite column adorned with an angel and bronze sculpture of a stoic group of figures. It rises in a thicket of trees, next to a trail teeming with runners, bicyclists and wanderers.

Many residents said that until very recently, they had no idea that the 103-year-old memorial honored Confederate soldiers.

“Not till they started making all that hoopla over it,” said Larry Randall, 54, who was setting off on a bike ride one afternoon this week in front of the memorial. “I’ve been coming out here for years. I never paid it no mind.”

Mr. Randall, who is African-American, said he understood why some people are now calling for it to be removed. “If it’s causing problems, then they should get rid of it. Or maybe just polish the words off,” he said. “I could give a hoot.”

This monument has emerged from obscurity in the last few weeks, as four prominent memorials to the Confederacy and its aftermath in New Orleans were pulled down amid protests. The debate has rippled across the South. On Wednesday, Gov. Kay Ivey of Alabama signed a measure that blocked the “relocation, removal, alteration, renaming or other disturbance” of “architecturally significant” monuments that have been on public property for at least 40 years. In Hampton, Ga., a museum said on its Facebook page that it would close next week after a county official asked that it remove all Confederate flags from its building.

Here, a vocal group of activists has turned its attention to this city’s Confederate Memorial, arguing that it, too, should be carted away, out of its prominent place in Forest Park, one of the most beloved public spaces in St. Louis.

The antimonument activists have a powerful lineup of city officials on their side, including Lyda Krewson, the newly elected mayor of St. Louis, who said that she favored removing the Confederate Memorial from the park permanently.

“My own opinion is that it is hurtful,” Ms. Krewson, who is white, said in an interview on Thursday. “It reveres something that, you know, we’re not proud of.”

Tishaura O. Jones, the city treasurer, started a GoFundMe page to raise money for the monument’s removal. In about a week, she has gathered more than $11,000.
She passes the memorial during her weekly drive to the grocery store, usually with her 9-year-old son in tow. “What I’m trying to do is set the record straight,” she said. “The Confederates, in my opinion, were traitors. And in this country, we honor patriots.”

Other St. Louisans are resisting the move, arguing that removing it would be tantamount to blotting out the history of the Civil War. Some have said that the enormous monument is too heavy and expensive to move, particularly when it doesn’t have an obvious new home. Still others say that the monument has rarely attracted attention for more than a century — why should St. Louis be caught up in a debate that, in their view, belongs to the Deep South?

“My first choice would be that everyone forget it was there, like before,” said George Stair, 77, who paused at the monument on an evening walk with his wife, Jane Yu, who agreed that it should stay.

Mr. Stair gazed at the sculpture. “I feel like it’s O.K. to honor ordinary soldiers,” he said. “People went to Vietnam even though they didn’t agree with it.”

Missouri, once a slave state, was torn between North and South during the Civil War, a border state where families and neighbors sympathized with warring sides and were often pitted against one another.

“It was a divided state, which explains why we have so many of these problems here today,” said Mark L. Trout, the executive director of the Missouri Civil War Museum outside St. Louis. (Mr. Trout said his museum would be happy to accept the memorial as a gift, though he did not have a place for it to be displayed at the moment.)

Divisions over the Confederate Memorial turned especially sharp this week, when demonstrators calling for its removal gathered in the park on Tuesday evening. They were joined by a handful of counter-protesters, men who told reporters that they were from outside St. Louis and who carried a Confederate flag.

One opponent of the statue, Amy Maxwell, said that people from both groups were carrying handguns, and at one point someone snatched the Confederate flag and ran off, instigating a chase from the pro-monument group.

Sometime during the night, the monument was spray-painted in blue with the phrases “This is treason” and “Black lives matter.” Workers were seen on Wednesday morning removing the words.

Out for a run on Wednesday, Ms. Maxwell, a 22-year-old student at Saint Louis University, paused in front of the memorial, stepped around the metal barriers and spat on it.

Ms. Maxwell, who is white, said she planned to demonstrate every week until it is removed. “It would be nice to have some black abolitionists memorialized in this city.”

Dorothy Bohnenkamp, 51, a psychotherapist who was born and raised in St. Louis, was taking her usual run in the park on Wednesday, directly past the memorial.

She said she had rarely given the monument a thought until recently, when it appeared in the news, and was not cheering for its removal.

“Personally, I don’t see where it represents anything specifically related to racism,” Ms. Bohnenkamp, who is black, said. “So they take it down. What does that represent? It’s still the same history.”

Ms. Krewson, the mayor, said she would like to act quickly, drawing up a plan for removal within the next three weeks. She has seen cost estimates of close to $130,000, and envisions using a mix of public and private money for the project.
For now, the memorial has become an object of curiosity in the park. Passers-by stopped to inspect the monument, snapped cellphone pictures and traced their fingers over the worn and stained surface.

Ayana Parker, 12, was exercising with her mother, Shalonda Bolden, in the park when they paused to read the lettering on the memorial.

“It’s nice that it’s honoring soldiers,” Ayana said. Her mother gently explained that the memorial was honoring Confederate soldiers in particular.

“It’s for the people who wanted to keep slavery?” Ayana said, her eyes returning to the monument. She grew quiet. “Oh.”

Ms. Bolden said she didn’t believe the memorial should be destroyed. “They should put it in a museum so people can get an explanation of what it is,” she said. “It just shouldn’t be here.”

*Alan Blinder contributed reporting from Atlanta.*
Montford Point Marines Receive Honors in Illinois Town

By Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Bryan Peterson, 9th Marine Corps District
Defense.gov, May 30, 2017

Marine Corps Sgt. Mike Stachowski greets Marine Corps veteran Archibald Mosley at the Colp Area Veterans Celebration, Dedication and Remembrance ceremony in Colp, Ill., May 27, 2017. The ceremony honored fallen service members, Mosley and three other African-American Marine veterans from Colp, who were among the first African-Americans to join the Marine Corps during World War II. They became known as the Montford Point Marines. (Marine Corps photo)

COLP, Ill. — This village in southern Illinois with a population of 250 is often referred to as a “small town with a rich history.”

The history referenced in the motto of Colp, Illinois, comes from the town’s more than 400 men and women who have served in the military, and in some cases, made the ultimate sacrifice during times of war.

The small community briefly saw its population increase about 50 percent on May 27, when people from the neighboring towns came to honor fallen service members during the Colp Area Veterans Celebration, Dedication and Remembrance ceremony.

Celebrating World War II-Era Marines

Two Marines with the 9th Marine Corps District stationed at Naval Station Great Lakes, Illinois, were on hand, where they honored four local Montford Point Marines -- who were among the first African-Americans to serve in the Marine Corps during World War II.

Nearly 20,000 African-Americans joined the Marine Corps in 1942, after President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a presidential directive giving African-Americans an opportunity to be recruited in the Marine Corps, according to the Montford Point Marines Association website.

They didn’t receive Marine Corps recruit training at San Diego or Parris Island, however, but at Camp Montford Point, North Carolina, a segregated training site for African-American Marine recruits. The camp was desegregated in 1949.

Congressional Gold Medal Recipients

The four Marines are Sol Griffin, Jr.; James L. Kirby, Earl Taylor, Jr. and Archibald Mosley. These Marines, among many other Montford Point Marines across the country, were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award that can be given to a civilian by Congress, in 2012.

Congress unanimously voted to recognize the Marines with the medal on Nov. 11, 2011, to recognize their contributions to the Marine Corps during the racial, tense times. Then-President Barack Obama signed the legislation into law, 12 days later.

Mosley, who served in the Marine Corps from 1942-1946, is one Colp’s two living Montford Point Marines. Taylor is the other and he lives in Detroit. He was in attendance to accept the Congressional Gold Medal plaque, created by local townspeople.
Despite what Mosley described as a “physical sacrifice,” to get into a vehicle due to his ailing legs, the 93 year old, who lives in Nashville, Tennessee, at an assisted living facility, made the three-hour trip with one of his daughters so he could tell the story of the Montford Point Marines.

He also said he was told Marines would be there and “would not miss it for the world.”

“I wasn’t disappointed,” the grinning Marine said. “As soon as I got in my wheelchair, the first people I saw were two Marines in dress blues. They reminded me of myself back then -- skinny and lean. But, I can’t wear it anymore. Which is why it’s great those Marines still can, to keep the Corps looking good!”

Honoring Fallen Service Members

During the ceremony, multiple speakers, many of whom were veterans, spoke about the importance of remembering the sacrifices of the fallen. One such person is Jim Gentile, a local man from a nearby town who always wanted to give back to the military. He spearheaded the event that took place next to the town’s post office.

“I couldn’t join the armed services; they wouldn’t let me in during Vietnam,” Gentile said. “But, I always respected the military and what they were willing to leave behind for my freedom. In 2012, I found out about Mosley and three other Colp residents who received the Congressional Gold Medal. Lots of people, including myself, didn’t know about these guys and their contributions. So, I wanted to make it known.”

While going through their initial training, Mosley and other black Marines endured more hardships recruits would normally be used to, such as not getting hot showers and living in cardboard shacks.

Despite the racial treatment they received, it made Mosley and many more driven to get through the training and overseas to the fight.

‘Racism Was Never Present in Battle’

“Those were some bad, horrible times: things I would never wish on my worst enemy,” Mosley said. “But, one place racism never was present was in battle.”

Mosley, along with more than 10,000 other Montford Point Marines, went on to serve in battles like Iwo Jima and Okinawa, performing admirably and enabling them to serve in follow-on conflicts such as in Korea and Vietnam.

“Marine Corps Sgt. Mike Stachowski greets Marine Corps veteran Archibald Mosley at the Colp Area Veterans Celebration, Dedication and Remembrance ceremony in Colp, Ill., May 27, 2017. The ceremony honored fallen service members, Mosley and three other African-American Marine veterans from Colp, who were among the first African-Americans to join the Marine Corps during World War II. They became known as the Montford Point Marines. (Marine Corps photo)

“It’s been said before, but bullets don’t have names, races or religions written on them,” said the former corporal. “It has one objective and that is to kill whoever is not on their side. We fought together against a common enemy.”

Marine Corps Sgt. Mike Stachowski and Marine Corps Lance Corporal Jake Lamb were able to hand-deliver the Congressional Gold Medal mementos to Mosley and to the families of the other recipients.
In addition to hand delivering the mementos, the Marines placed a wreath in front of a sign with the town’s more than 400 service members’ names on it.

Stachowski said he and Lamb were honored to be part of an event that “gives the Montford Point Marines the recognition they deserve.”

“We Remember Those Who Came Before Us’

“One of the things about the Marine Corps that keep me going is how we remember those who came before us,” he said. “Marines like Mosley and the other Montford Point Marines we are honoring today, are the reason why the Corps is and always will be strong.”

“I was very happy to be a part of this,” Lamb said. “I have only been in the Marine Corps just short of two years and this is something I’ll remember having been a part of.”

Mosley said his presence at the ceremony was not about him, but about all people who have passed away fighting for the nation, and for those who the country “didn’t value equally at the time.”

“I am in no way regretful for my time, sacrifice and service to the Marine Corps -- I am very proud for what I did,” he said. “But, I am a preacher and I always preach that we don’t hold grudges, that there should be no malice in our hearts for others. I am just grateful, even though it took a long time, for the people in Washington, D.C., to finally recognize our efforts for our country. I am just glad more people know about us and am very proud to represent all Montford Point Marines.”
Poll: Americans respect all military branches, but Air Force takes the lead

By Ashley Bunch
Military Times, May 30, 2017

The military remains broadly popular with the American public, a recent Gallup poll found, and the Air Force is viewed most highly of all branches. Gallup conducted a telephone poll April 24 through May 2 on American's attitudes about the military and found people had similar levels of confidence in each service.

Overall, Americans like all five branches of the military. However, the Air Force is the most important branch among 27 percent of Americans, while 21 percent say the Army is most important, according to the Gallup poll. The Air Force was also found to be the most important in both 2001 and 2002, four months before 9/11 and shortly after the war in Afghanistan began.

In recent years, the Air Force has been at the forefront of the fight against the Islamic State, leading an air campaign that includes airstrikes, reconnaissance flights, resupply missions and electronic jamming operations.

Confidence however, in each branch is separated by only a few points; 59 percent of Americans selected “very favorable” on the poll for Marines, while Air Force fell closely behind at 57 percent.

Despite the number of Americans serving in the military and the number of supporters for the war in Afghanistan shrinking, the confidence Americans have in the military have not been swayed.

Gallup said out of everyone polled who knew something about each of the branches, three out of four had overall favorable views and more than half had a strong favorable opinion on each branch — Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and the Coast Guard.
Sweetwater WASPs abuzz over return of Hangar No. 1
By Ronald W Erdrich
Abilene (Texas) Reporter-News, May 28, 2017

Jessie Lou McReynolds reacts as Sweetwater Mayor Jim McKenzie presents her with a stainless steel wrench Thursday May 25, 2017 during the dedication of Hangar No. 1 at Avenger Field. The building is a replica of the original hangar which trained the Women Airforce Service Pilots during World War II and is part of the National WASP World War II Museum. McReynolds, 95, was a mechanic at the school. (Photo: Ronald W. Erdrich/Reporter-News)

SWEETWATER – The “gigglin’ little redhead” was all smiles. As the guest of honor, Jessie Lou McReynolds deserved more than just the key to the city. In its place, Mayor Jim McKenzie handed the former airplane mechanic a glittering, stainless-steel wrench.

At 95 years-old, McReynolds’ red locks have long since changed to silver. But that hair and a bubbly disposition earned her an affectionate nickname during the two years she spent fixing airplanes for the Women Airforce Service Pilots.

On Thursday, the National WASP World War II Museum reached a milestone with their dedication of the recreated Hangar No. 1 at Avenger Field. It completes Phase I for the campus.

Ann Hobing, the museum’s executive director, said recreating Hangar No. 1 had been a conversation ever since the museum opened in 2005. The original hangar burned in the 1950s.

“Today we have what we are calling ‘A Dream Realized,’” Hobing said. “We have had board members and donors and volunteers over the course of years planning and designing and fundraising, to get this to happen.”

David Zobrist is the architect for the new building. It sits on the east side of the old municipal hangar that’s been used as the museum up to this time.

“We matched the proportions of this building to that one,” Zobrist said. A small plaza separates the two, both for aesthetic reasons and in adherence to fire codes.

“The old building will become strictly an airplane museum,” he said. “Airplanes that fly will be stored in there. That's why the buildings are pulled apart.”

The plaza features an homage to the base’s original gate. Beneath and slightly behind the elevated sign are three steel cutouts of women. The figures are based on a historical photograph.

“The old building will become strictly an airplane museum,” he said. “Airplanes that fly will be stored in there. That's why the buildings are pulled apart.”

The plaza features an homage to the base’s original gate. Beneath and slightly behind the elevated sign are three steel cutouts of women. The figures are based on a historical photograph.

Zobrist said of the silhouettes. “We recreated that as our gateway entry to the museum.”
The new building, while resembling a hangar from the outside, will be more of a traditional museum and event center within. Standing exhibits in the older building will be moved in here, and new exhibits will be created for the space as well.

The gift shop, administrative offices, and archive room will also be in this new building.

“The beauty of having this space and having it air-conditioned is it keeps our archives within reach and more accessible,” Hobing said. “Like most museums, most of the collections and artifacts are in storage, so having this space we will allow us to refresh exhibits overtime.”

She added that some of the older exhibits will be getting a facelift in the new space and that they hope to incorporate more hi-tech displays which highlight the role of science and engineering in aviation.

“Of course the heritage here at Avenger Field and West Texas and the history of the WASP program, is really core to our mission,” she said.

The WASPs held their annual homecoming this weekend, inviting former members, their families and others to celebrate their legacy. With that event complete, the museum will embark upon Phase II of their plan, to realize all the uses for their new building.

“A lot of what we've done here is restraint; it's to not over-build before we know what to really build,” said Gerald Driemeier, the museum’s creative director. “We are going to spend some time thinking about how the interior will fit out.”

For a museum honoring aviation, it’s fair to say some parts of its completion are still up in the air. No one can put an exact time down for when the entire thing will be done.

Part of the new space will feature a Donor Wall and Zobrist explained why.

“(It’s) an opportunity for people to see that they do make a difference and that they are recognized,” he said. “So from homecoming on forward, we will be doing a fundraising campaign.”

He called this a special project for him.

“Out of all the projects that I've done, and I've been in this business for 30-plus years, this is one of the coolest for what it means,” he said. “My mother-in-law was a WASP, so it’s personal to me and her ashes are out here.”

Betty Jo (Streff) Reed died in 2013 at 90. A typical WASP, Zobrist said she moved herself from Phoenix to Sweetwater when she was 75.

“I met her in El Paso to drive her the rest of the way,” he recalled. “We talked 12 hours about the WASPs, and that's how I got hooked.”

During the war, the WASPs were used to doing it their way and they made sure everyone who worked with them was just as serious about it.

“I really felt honored that they asked a little farm girl to take over and do an important job like that,” McReynolds said.
She'd grown up on a farm as a self-described tomboy. Just like the pilots, with all the men off to war it made sense to find women who knew their way around an engine and how to fix one. McReynolds fit that bill.

“They had us fly, to make us realize the importance of our work,” she continued. “I did it several times; one time they flew us all around, over the city and did flips and what have you.

“I just loved it. I wasn't scared at all.”

Did she laugh the whole time?

“Probably. Because I was known as the ‘giggling little redhead,’” she said, chuckling. “I was ready to go again!”

*Jessie Lou McReynolds is hugged by Jeanne Brewer after the dedication and ribbon-cutting of the new Hangar No. 1 at Sweetwater's Avenger Field Thursday May 25, 2017. The building is a replica of the original hangar which trained the Womens Airforce Service Pilots during World War II and is part of the National WASP World War II Museum. McReynolds, 95, was a mechanic at the school. (Photo: Ronald W. Erdrich/Reporter-News)*
Discrimination
Bill to Protect Whistleblowers Who Refuse to Break Rules Goes to President

By Charles S. Clark
Government Executive, May 31, 2017

Rep. Sean Duffy, R-Wis., is a sponsor of the bill. (Susan Walsh/AP)

President Trump will soon decide whether to sign a bipartisan bill just passed by Congress that would clarify that whistleblower protection laws shield federal employees who disobey a superior’s directive if it is illegal or violates regulations.

The Follow the Rules Act (H.R. 657)—introduced by Reps. Sean Duffy, R-Wis., and Gerry Connolly, D-Va.—corrects what sponsors saw as a misinterpretation by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit in the case of Rainey v. MSPB. That case involved State Department African Affairs program director Timothy Rainey, who received negative performance reviews and was removed from duty after he refused to force a contractor to re-engage a subcontractor who had previously been discharged.

He took his case to the Office of Special Counsel, claiming that the Federal Acquisition Regulation prevented him from following his boss’ order. Getting no satisfaction, he took his case to the Merit Systems Protection Board citing the 1989 Whistleblower Protection Act’s “right to disobey.”

But the MSPB and the appeals court ruling narrowed his rights, citing the fact that the FAR is a regulation and not a law.

Duffy introduced first an amendment and later a bill in 2016 to clarify the situation by extending “the prohibition against a person taking, failing to take, or threatening to take or fail to take a personnel action against any employee or applicant for employment for refusing to obey an order that would require the individual to violate a law to personnel actions against such an individual for refusing to obey an order that would violate a rule or regulation.”

His new version in the 115th Congress passed the House on May 1 and the Senate on May 25.

“The court ruling will take away whistleblowers’ protections when they stand up to bad actors in the federal workforce,” Duffy said. “In effect, this ruling will give permission to supervisors in positions of authority to force federal workers to violate the rules and regulations that Congress, through law, directs the agencies to implement.”

Connolly added in a statement, “As a member of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, I rely on whistleblowers to help us with our oversight and reform work. Without them, rooting out mismanagement, abuse and corruption would be very difficult.”

The nonprofit Project on Government Oversight welcomed the bill as plugging a gap. “While there are more improvements necessary to strengthen whistleblower protections in this Congress,” wrote POGO policy counsel Liz Hempowicz, “the passage of this bill closes a dangerous loophole, and we applaud Representative Duffy for spearheading this effort.”
Transgender Bathroom Debate: Court Backs Wisconsin Teen's Claims of Discrimination at School

By Julia Glum

Wisconsin teen Ash Whitaker notched a victory for transgender students Tuesday when the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a previous ruling that his school should let him use the boys' bathrooms on campus.

In a decision released just before the last day of school, the court affirmed a preliminary injunction from September that allowed Ash, a 17-year-old boy assigned female at birth, to access boys' facilities at Tremper High School in Kenosha, Wisconsin. He'd sued in July after administrators repeatedly limited him to only girls' and gender-neutral restrooms, citing privacy concerns, according to The Washington Post.

The appeals court found Tuesday that the school district was likely violating Ash's rights as guaranteed in Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, as well as the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause.

"I am thrilled that the Seventh Circuit recognized my right to be treated as the boy that I am at school," Ash said in a news release from the Transgender Law Center, which represented him. "After facing daily humiliation at school last year from being threatened with discipline and being constantly monitored by school staff just to use the bathroom, the district court’s injunction in September allowed me to be a typical senior in high school and to focus on my classes, after-school activities, applying to college and building lasting friendships."

Perhaps most notably, Tuesday's ruling sidestepped an ongoing debate over President Donald Trump's February decision to withdraw guidance from his predecessor. In 2016, the Obama White House issued a "Dear Colleague" letter to schools expanding the interpretation of Title IX and recommending that transgender students be able to use whichever facilities correspond with their gender identities.

The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear a previous case—that of Virginia teen Gavin Grimm—earlier this year after Trump revoked the guidance on which Gavin's appeal was built, BuzzFeed reported.

On Tuesday, Judge Ann Claire Williams wrote that she took issue with the Wisconsin administrators' arguments that they didn't didn't violate the Equal Protection Clause.

"The School District treats transgender students like Ash, who fail to conform to the sex-based stereotypes associated with their assigned sex at birth, differently," she said in the opinion. "This places the burden on the School District to demonstrate that its justification for its bathroom policy is not only genuine but also 'exceedingly persuasive'...this burden has not been met here."

The school district's counsel, Ronald S. Stadler of Mallery and Zimmerman, S.C., said in a statement Wednesday that the administrators were disappointed with Tuesday's ruling. Stadler hit out at the court for acknowledging the debate over whether transgender students are protected by Title IX but not falling in line itself.

"The court expanded the 'sex-stereotyping' theory from a recognition that one cannot be discriminated against because of gender non-conformity, such as not wearing clothing typically associated with the individual's sex, and instead created a new right extending discrimination because of sex to now include the status of being transgender," he wrote. "The court also rejected the district's position that there is a rational
basis for requiring men to use men's rooms and women to use women's rooms. Instead, the court believes there is no harm in allowing men and women to use the same restroom."

Stadler said the school district was analyzing whether to ask for a full review of the case, appeal to the Supreme Court or defend it in trial.

*This story has been updated to include a response from the Kenosha Unified School District's legal team.*

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**SEE ALSO:**

[Transgender Teen Wins Landmark Ruling Over Right To Use Boys Bathroom](http://www.newsweek.com/ash-whitaker-transgender-bathroom-trump-617801) [Huffington Post, 2017-05-30]
Diversity
For Army Infantry’s 1st Women, Heavy Packs and the Weight of History

By Dave Philipps

The New York Times, May 26, 2017

The Army has sought to play down the significance of the mixed-gender milestone. But female grunts see it as monumental and revolutionary.

FORT BENNING, Ga.—The first group of women graduated from United States Army infantry training last week, but with soldiers obscured by body armor, camouflage face paint and smoke grenades, it was almost impossible to distinguish the mixed-gender squads in the steamy woods from those of earlier generations. That’s just how the Army wants it.

After the Obama administration ordered the military in 2013 to open all combat positions to women, the Army developed gender-neutral performance standards to ensure that recruits entering the infantry were all treated the same. Still smarting over accusations that it had lowered standards to help the first women graduate from its elite Ranger School in 2015, the Army has taken pains to avoid making any exceptions for infantry boot camp. To the pound, men and women lug the same rucksacks, throw the same grenades and shoulder the same machine guns.

The Army has also sought to play down the significance of the new female infantrymen — as they are still known — not mentioning, when families gathered last week for their graduation, that the 18 women who made it through would be the first in more than two centuries for the American infantry.

“It’s business as usual,” the battalion commander overseeing the first class, Lt. Col. Sam Edwards, said as he watched a squad of soldiers run past — including one with French braids and a grenade launcher. “I’ve tried to not change a thing.”

Female grunts in the battalion see things differently. In interviews during a series of visits to observe training, many said the fact that they could finally pursue a combat career, and have it treated as no big deal, was for them revolutionary. Now many who dreamed of going into the infantry are no longer barred from the core combat positions that are the clearest career routes to senior leadership.

Just before graduation, one female drill sergeant pulled aside a group of female privates, who ranged from high school athletes to a single mother with a culinary degree, and gave them her unofficial assessment out of officers’ earshot.

“This is a big deal,” she said as she looked into one recruit’s eyes. She said they were making history.

‘Misery is a great equalizer’

Rain pounded the roughly 150 troops of Alpha Company, who ranged in age from 17 to 34, as they stood in formation during a tornado warning, waiting to hear if it was too stormy to train.

If the downpour let up, they would practice rushing out of armored vehicles. If not, they would tramp back to the foxholes where they had slept the night before and bail out the standing brown water with canteen cups.
Either way, by day’s end they would be wet, tired, hungry and cold: the four pillars of misery the Army has long relied on to help whip recruits into cohesive fighting teams.

“Misery is a great equalizer,” one male recruit said with a resigned grin.

The rain eventually let up and the sergeants ran the platoons through repeated ambush drills. By the end, while some of the troops had buzz cuts and some had their hair in buns, they all shared the drooping weariness that grunts have worn for as long as there’s been an infantry.

‘She’s a hoss’

In the woods, after hours of mock raids, Pvt. Kayla Padgett rested her rifle against her rucksack and turned to her platoon, assembling them in three neat rows.

It was 90 degrees. A tick crawled along the back of her shirt. The night before, the platoon had slept in the dirt. Everyone was dog tired. Many were covered in ant bites. But as platoon guide, it was her job to make them ready.

“All right, hustle it up, let’s count off,” she said.

One by one the platoon of mostly men each shouted until all were accounted for.

“O.K., good,” Private Padgett said, scanning the group with her blue eyes. “If you haven’t done so, keep loading up ammo, all your magazines.”

Over the years, countless voices have warned that women could never handle the demands of the infantry, and would destroy its all-male esprit de corps. None of the recruits or drill sergeants interviewed at Fort Benning shared that fear. They all pointed to women like Private Padgett.

Private Padgett, right.

The 23-year-old track champion from North Carolina could throw a 20-pound hammer more than 60 meters while on the team at East Carolina University, and showed up at basic training in better shape than many of the men. She is now on her way to Airborne School, and wants to eventually become a Ranger.

“She’s a hoss,” her drill sergeant, Joseph Sapp, said as he watched her. After a tour in Iraq and four in Afghanistan, he has served with his share of soldiers. “Forget male-female; she’s one of the best in the company. She’s one you’re happy to have.”

Not ‘treated special’

In the new integrated infantry companies, women and men train together in mixed-gender squads from before dawn until after dusk: practicing the same raids, kicking in the same doors, doing the same push-ups when their squad messes up. No one gets out of a rotation serving chow.

At night, they sleep in rooms separated by gender, in identical metal bunks with identically scratchy green blankets. To graduate, all must pass tests of the same infantry skills, including hurling a grenade 35 meters,
dragging a 268-pound dummy 15 meters, running five miles in less than 45 minutes and completing a 12-mile march carrying 68 pounds.

Hair is one of the few places where standards still diverge. All men get their heads shaved on arrival. Women don’t. Not wanting to be held to a different standard, though, many of the women decided a few weeks into training to shave in solidarity. They would earn back their hair, just like the men.

“I loved my hair, but didn’t want anyone to look at me and think I was being treated special,” said Pvt. Irelynn Donovan.

‘I wanted to make history’

Private Donovan, 20, grew up outside Philadelphia with five older brothers. She was the only girl on her junior high football team. When assigned to write an essay about an adult she admired, she chose her grandfather, who had served two tours in Vietnam.

“She’s just always been a badass,” said her mother, Cristine Zalewski.

She always wanted to join the infantry, despite a ban on women. On her forearm is a tattoo of flowers wrapped around a saying uttered by her single mother, who sometimes had to scrounge for change in the house to pay bills: “We’ll find a way”

As soon as the ban was lifted in 2016, Irelynn Donovan went to a local recruiter.

“I wanted to make history,” she said. “Pave the way, if not for me, then for others.”

During training, she wrote home complaining that she was exhausted and tired of being yelled at. “Everything is chafing,” she wrote. But she became a standout, nailing the physical tests for both men and women when she did 79 push-ups in two minutes.

‘Hey, the infantry’s tough, man’

Pvt. Chonell Morgan, center.

Afghanistan and Iraq were turning points for the Army’s thinking on women in combat. The wars forced thousands of women who were not technically combat troops into fire fights. Nearly 14,000 women were awarded the Combat Action Badge for engaging with the enemy. Today most of the men leading the Army have served with women in combat for years.

“We saw it can work,” said Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Snow, who heads Army Recruiting Command at Fort Knox, Ky. “And now we have a generation that just wants to accomplish the mission and have the most talented people to do it.”

The Army is determined not to sacrifice performance for the sake of inclusion, and many women have not been able to meet the standard. Of the 32 who showed up at infantry boot camp in February, 44 percent dropped out. For the 148 men in the company, the dropout rate was just 20 percent.

Commanders say the higher dropout rate among females is in line with other demanding boot camps for military police and combat engineers, which have been open to women for years. In part, they say, it is a
consequence of size. A 5-foot-2 woman has to carry the same weight and perform the same tasks as a man who stands a foot taller, and is more likely to be injured.

Why did so many more women fail? One female recruit summed it up by saying simply, “Hey, the infantry’s tough, man.”

“Is it fair?” said the brigade commander overseeing gender-integrated infantry training at Fort Benning, Col. Kelly Kendrick. “I don’t care about fair. I care if you can meet the standard.”

Male soldiers acknowledged in interviews that the women who remain, like Chonell Morgan, 18, are some of the toughest soldiers in the company. During a punishment run the platoons were ordered to undertake on a hot afternoon, Private Morgan, who is from Apple Valley, Calif., was near the front of the pack.

The daughter of a NASA engineer, she postponed plans for college when she heard the infantry was opening to women. Her mother is still upset about the decision, but her father, Lorenzo Morgan, who served in the Army in the 1980s, said, “You have to let your children be who they want to be.”

An unspoken accomplishment

This month, after 14 weeks of running and crawling in the dirt, Alpha Company marched onto the parade grounds in crisp dress uniforms and carefully creased berets.

The company commander’s voice booming over loudspeakers welcomed them to the infantry, but he gave no nod to the women now joining the ranks.

The women appeared to take it in stride. Private Donovan, who had won the award for the highest female fitness score in the company, finishing just behind the top man, pushed through the crowd toward her family, then shrank in embarrassment when her mother greeted her with a bouquet of flowers.

“Mom,” she muttered, looking to see if anyone noticed, “you don’t bring flowers to infantry graduation.”

A version of this article appears in print on May 27, 2017, on Page A12 of the New York edition with the headline: Infantry’s First Women Shoulder Heavy Gear And Weight of History.
The military is building a case to block transgender applicants — at least for now

By: Andrew deGrandpre and David Larter

Military Times, June 1, 2017

WASHINGTON — A controversial Pentagon directive that would allow transgender men and women to join the military beginning this summer now faces indefinite delay as senior leaders within each of the services voice lingering concerns about the Obama-era policy intended to end discrimination but dismissed by critics as social experimentation.

This development, confirmed to Military Times by multiple sources with knowledge of these internal discussions, comes as the Defense Department faces a July 1 deadline to fully implement a policy that one year ago lifted the ban on transgender personnel already in uniform, and established the conditions and timeline by which new applicants could join either through enlistment or as officer candidates.

President Donald Trump does not share his predecessor's view on transgender rights, while plenty in the ranks and inside the Pentagon have questioned the practicality of expending such effort to accommodate a comparatively small demographic. Those advocating for inclusiveness have suspected for many months that the administration could bring about the initiative's demise simply by declining to act upon it.

It's unclear how Defense Secretary Jim Mattis eventually will rule on the matter, though in the past he has cast doubt on whether such moves ultimately advance the military's principal national security objectives. In early May, his deputy distributed a memo to the services' top leaders affording them an opportunity to raise concerns about the policy's implementation. As first reported by USA Today, the memo was carefully crafted to explain that plans would proceed "unless they cause readiness problems that could lessen our ability to fight, survive and win on the battlefield."

A Pentagon spokesman, Army Lt. Col. Myles Caggins, would not address the prospect for delaying transgender accessions, saying only that there's been no change to existing military policy allowing transgender troops already serving to do so openly. "And," he added, "just like their fellow service members, [they may] receive all medically necessary care."

Spokespersons for each of the services referred questions to Caggins.

Jim Mattis faces a difficult decision on the military's transgender policy

The Army and the Marine Corps have been most vocal in advocating for a delay, according to one military official who, like others, spoke with Military Times on the condition of anonymity because the matter remains predecisional and extremely sensitive. No firm decisions have been reached, the official added, and senior leaders will continue to discuss the matter with Mattis's office as the deadline draws near.

Another defense official indicated that a host of practical matters, not institutional opposition, are fueling calls for a delay. "We had several questions for OSD seeking clarification on aspects of the policy that have not been addressed yet," said this official, referring to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. "It's not that we're unsupportive or unwilling to implement it; just that there were administrative matters to be addressed."

Funding also is a concern, this official said. The services had sought an undisclosed sum for related facilities upgrades, including, it appears, to retrofit group showers and make other unspecified accommodations within communal living spaces. "That funding," the official said, "did not come through."

The Defense Department estimates as many as 7,000 transgender troops serve in the active-duty force of 1.3 million. As Mattis's predecessor, Ash Carter, sought to define accommodations for them, he encountered significant internal resistance among longtime civilian staff who believed the military's uniformed leadership did not support the change, a former Pentagon official told Military Times recently.
At its most extreme, this individual said, there were calls to require transgender troops to wear bathing suits while using communal showers.

President Donald Trump speaks with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis after a Memorial Day ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery on May 29, 2017. Photo Credit: Tech. Sgt. Brigitte N. Brantley/Air Force

Beyond those considerations, military officials are apprehensive about whether some transgender recruits or officer candidates could experience psychological side effects associated with their gender dysphoria. Last June, Carter indicated the accession policy would require individuals to have completed any necessary medical treatment and to have been "stable in their identified gender for 18 months, as certified by their doctor, before they can enter the military."

As the Pentagon has debated the issue, officials have examined how other government agencies initiated such change. The Federal Aviation Administration, for instance, requires transgender men and women seeking a commercial pilot's license to be transitioned and stable for at least five years. Otherwise, they can face closer scrutiny and more-intrusive medical screenings, according to the FAA’s website.

At military schools, transgender bathroom decisions will be made case by case

A leading LGBT advocacy group called any delay "unacceptable." In a statement, Ashley Broadway-Mack, president of the American Military Partner Association, said it would send a "deeply alarming signal" from the Trump administration.

"Thousands of transgender service members are openly and proudly serving our nation today," the statement reads, "and there is no reason not to move forward with the timeline as planned now for nearly a year. Any applicant, regardless of gender identity, who is qualified and willing to serve should be allowed to do so."

It's the latest in a series of related developments since Mattis took over at the Pentagon in January. Most recently, officials informed two transgender cadets set to graduate from the Army and Air Force military academies that they would not receive commissions and be allowed to serve on active duty.

Over the winter, the Pentagon quietly rolled backed protections concerning bathroom and locker room access for transgender students attending Defense Department schools. A directive issued last year after an incident in Germany, granted full access to transgender students’ preferred facilities with no questions asked. Now school principals — in consultation with students, their parents and teachers — address such matters case by case, as they had done previously.

Andrew deGrandpre is Military Times' senior editor and Pentagon bureau chief. On Twitter: @adegrandpre. David Larter is a staff writer for Navy Times. On Twitter: @DavidLarter.
Human Relations
Memorial Day sandwich board at Kansas restaurant goes viral

By Bryan Horwath
The Wichita (Kan.) Eagle, May 28, 2017

Kelly Ray is manager and chef at Mayberry’s in Washington, Kan. (Kelly Ray Courtesy photo)

New Kansas resident Kelly Ray wanted to share his message of respect for America’s fallen servicemen and women this Memorial Day weekend.

What happened next was more than he could have imagined.

After moving recently from Missouri to work at Mayberry’s in the northern Kansas town of Washington, Ray brought with him a sandwich board that he made while working at a previous restaurant.

The sign reads “We have 619,300 reasons to be closed on Monday,” referring to U.S. service members lost while fighting in World War I, World War II and the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Mayberry’s, a bar and grill in the town of about 1,100 people, was closed Sunday and Monday.

“I just love the message,” Ray said while driving to Iowa on Sunday. “You don’t have to like our president or like some of the things our government is doing, but you sure better respect those who have laid down their lives for us to be able to live here.”

Brandon Lee of Clay Center, a Mayberry’s patron, posted a picture of the sign on his Facebook page on Thursday. As of early Sunday afternoon, Lee’s post had been shared nearly 64,000 times on the social network.

“To see that it’s over 60,000 shares, that’s amazing,” said Ray, who is the restaurant’s manager and chef. “If it helps get that message out there and maybe brings some people to Mayberry’s, that’s great.”

Ray said the sign came about while he was working for a previous restaurant in Missouri.

“I mentioned to the owner that we should be closed for Memorial Day, and he said, ‘I can’t think of one good reason why we would do that, because people are going to be out and they’ll want to eat,’ ” Ray said. “I saw a post on Facebook with the number of people who have died in our wars, so I basically just put that on a sign and showed it to him.”
The sign must have worked, because ownership decided to close the Missouri establishment for the Memorial Day holiday. When he moved to Kansas earlier this year, Ray said, he brought the sign with him, and his new employer loved it.

According to official U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs numbers and depending on how the deaths are calculated, the sign is a little off on some totals, but the message is clear: Hundreds of thousands of service members died in the wars listed on Ray’s sign.

His hope is that people take some time to think about them during the holiday weekend.

“People talk about Memorial Day being the start of summer and that sort of thing,” Ray said. “But what it’s really about is those people who died. I hope people think about them.”

Mayberry’s will be open from 8 a.m. until 9 p.m. on Tuesday.

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SEE ALSO:
Sandwich board honoring Memorial Day goes viral [Military Times, 2017-05-31]
For civilians, Memorial Day has become the gateway to summer, a cookout holiday. But in the military world, it remains a deeply observed day of remembrance for those who died fighting our country’s battles.

This year, as the holiday approached, I sought out veterans to write a one-sentence tribute in honor of a friend killed in combat. I made the request through contacts at military bases where I’d served as a civilian counselor, through veterans at a local writing group I was co-facilitating, and at book readings.

Word spread. Most of the contributions came from veterans I didn’t know personally. Sentences full of eloquent heartbreak poured into my inbox.

“Vern and Ken, you had a tough night up north and did not come back; you were with us then and you are with us now.”

The wars referenced by the tributes hold a daunting tally of loss, whether it be the more than 6,800 Americans who died at Iwo Jima, the more than 58,000 who died in Vietnam, or the nearly 7,000 who have died in the Iraq and Afghanistan operations. The tributes remind us that for each one who died, there’s a battle buddy, a platoon, a company, a battalion who remembers them and misses them.

“Donny, there is an emptiness never to be filled when I think of your son who you never met — now as old as your father was back then.”

When I worked as a civilian counselor on military bases, conversations with men and women returning from combat often slid toward memories of the friend who didn’t make it home. There were no hardened warriors in those conversations — faces dropped with sorrow and voices became hushed with sadness.

One sergeant’s voice shook with tethered grief as he recalled his 19-year-old buddy: “He went out on patrol one day, and never came back. Something in me went dead. I could never make sense of anything after that.”

“Still thinking about that last phone call, Brian. Still trying to make good on my promise, eight years later.”

At a different base, I watched a broad-shouldered staff sergeant measuring and re-measuring the placement of each shiny medal on the chest of a dress blue uniform; he was preparing to escort his friend’s body back home.

As his white-gloved hands moved across that dark blue field, he said, “I trained him, ma’am. He was my soldier.” When I turned to leave, I almost missed his whispered last remark.

“He was a fine soldier, ma’am.”

“Carrol, fifty years since you were killed in that place half a world away; I am old and you are forever young.”

For combat veterans, memories stretch across landscapes and plow through time, seeping into layers of the present with painful loss. The years matter not to grief. Iwo Jima was more than 75 years ago, Vietnam 50 years gone, and the anguish of recent wars already begins to dim. Yet the tributes offer a clear sense that ever-fresh mourning still pulses in the hearts of our veterans.

“Wimpy, loved by all who knew him, killed on the second day of the invasion of Iwo Jima.”
Grave markers and memorial services honor the dead. Those who return from war carry less visible markers of grief — wounds that are unseen, but tender and lasting. Memorial Day holds a particularly complex poignancy for warriors remembering combat brothers and sisters who never came home.

For them, the holiday isn’t about parades or picnics, it’s about the quiet recall of a friend’s honor, courage and absence.

“Rick, I still miss you, brother, and I continue to strive to leave the world better than how I found it — the example you set for us all.”

Civilians aren’t privy to the bonds forged in the heat of battle. They can’t truly grasp the vulnerability of putting one’s life in someone else’s hands. They’ve never felt the eternal link shaped by staring down terror, then pulling each other into the blaze of bravery required on the battlefield.

The combination of that lack of knowledge, our culture’s reticence to talk about death and complicated feelings about our country’s wars creates a wide gap between civilians and those tasked with carrying the memories of buddies who fought next to them.

That gap can be closed.

“I cannot memorialize one. Thirty-seven were lost when that helicopter went down, five I knew personally.”

This Memorial Day, amidst summer’s happy start, we honor those who gave their lives in service. We honor, too, those who came home, branded with the memories of a friend’s last moments.

There’s a beautiful question that ought to be asked much more frequently on Memorial Day: “Who are you remembering today?”

“I couldn’t remember his name for years and years, the one who asked to switch missions with me. His name was Chuck. I found his name on The Wall and with tears running down my face, I reminded a ghost who I was and where we had met.”

Elizabeth Heaney is a licensed professional counselor who works with combat veterans. Her book, “The Honor Was Mine: A Look Inside the Struggles of Military Veterans,” is available at Amazon.com. She’s online at ElizabethHeaney.com.
To many Americans, Memorial Day has lost its meaning

By Michael Rubinkam
The Associated Press, May 28, 2017

ANNVILLE, Pa. (AP) — Allison Jaslow heard it more than once as the long holiday weekend approached — a cheerful “Happy Memorial Day!” from oblivious well-wishers.

The former Army captain and Iraq War veteran had a ready reply, telling them, matter-of-factly, that she considered it a work weekend. Jaslow will be at Arlington National Cemetery on Monday to take part in the annual wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. She’ll then visit Section 60, the final resting place of many service members who died in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“You can see it in people’s faces that they’re a little horrified that they forget this is what the day’s about,” said Jaslow, 34, who wears a bracelet bearing the name of a fallen comrade. “Culturally, we’ve kind of lost sight of what the day’s supposed to mean.”

While millions of Americans celebrate the long Memorial Day weekend as the unofficial start of summer — think beaches and backyard barbecues, mattress sales and sporting events — some veterans and loved ones of fallen military members wish the holiday that honors more than 1 million people who died serving their country would command more respect.

Or at least awareness.

“It’s a fun holiday for people: ‘Let’s party.’ It’s an extra day off from work,” said Carol Resh, 61, whose son, Army Capt. Mark Resh, was killed in Iraq a decade ago. “It’s not that they’re doing it out of malice. It just hasn’t affected them.”

Veterans groups say a growing military-civilian disconnect contributes to a feeling that Memorial Day has been overshadowed. More than 12 percent of the U.S. population served in the armed forces during World War II. That’s down to less than one-half of a percent today, guaranteeing more Americans aren’t personally acquainted with a soldier, sailor, airman or Marine.

With an all-voluntary military, shared sacrifice is largely a thing of the past — even as U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan and Iraq nearly 16 years after 9/11.

“There are a lot of things working against this particular holiday,” said Brian Duffy, commander in chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

“It hurts,” Duffy said. For combat veterans and Gold Star families especially, “it hurts that, as a society, we don’t truly understand and appreciate what the true meaning of Memorial Day is.”

Jaslow’s group, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, is trying to raise awareness with its #GoSilent campaign, which encourages Americans to pause for a moment of silence at 3 p.m. Monday to remember the nation’s war dead.

Of course, plenty of Americans already observe the holiday. At Indiantown Gap National Cemetery in Annville, about 100 miles northwest of Philadelphia, fresh flowers mark hundreds of graves, and fields of newly erected American flags flap in the breeze. Hundreds of motorcyclists thundered in for a Saturday service. By the end of the weekend, thousands of people will have come to the cemetery to pay their respects.

“This is our Super Bowl,” said Randy Plummer, the cemetery’s administrative officer.

Jim Segletes, 65, a Vietnam-era Marine visiting the grave of his father-in-law, a World War II veteran who died in 2000, said he thinks Americans became more patriotic and aware of military sacrifice after 9/11.
“Everyone is more in tune with veterans, more so than when I was in the service,” he said.

Douglas and Rene Kicklighter, Iraq veterans at the cemetery with their 10- and 12-year-old sons, said they believe most people understand what the holiday’s about. But they, too, cringe when they hear: “Happy Memorial Day.”

“It’s not happy,” said Rene Kicklighter, 37, who retired from the Army National Guard. “It’s somber. I try to flip the lens on the conversation a bit and gently remind them what it’s really about.”

Memorial Day, originally known as Decoration Day, was conceived after the Civil War as a way to honor the Union’s war dead, with Southern states setting aside separate days to honor fallen Confederate soldiers. By the early 20th century, the holiday had evolved to honor all military members who died in service.

Some veterans say Memorial Day began to be watered down more than four decades ago when Congress changed the date from its traditional May 30 to the last Monday in May to give people a three-day weekend. Arguing that transformed a solemn day of remembrance into one associated with leisure and recreation, veterans groups have long advocated a return to May 30. For years, the late Hawaii Sen. Daniel Inouye, a World War II veteran and Medal of Honor recipient, asked Congress to change it back, to no avail.

That leaves it to people like Resh, the Gold Star mother, to spread the message.

Invited to speak to high school students in Allentown, Pennsylvania, she said she told them, “What is the true meaning of Memorial Day? Ask any Gold Star family and they’ll tell you what it means. It’s not about the picnics. It’s about the men and women who have given their lives for this country.

“Every day is Memorial Day for us.”
Trump pays somber tribute to fallen troops on Memorial Day

By Darlene Superville
The Associated Press, May 30, 2017

ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — President Donald Trump expressed the nation’s “boundless” gratitude for the ultimate sacrifice paid by Americans defending the United States, dedicating his first Memorial Day address as commander in chief to a top Cabinet secretary and two other families who lost loved ones.

Participating in the somber, annual observance Monday at Arlington National Cemetery, Trump recounted the stories of Green Beret Capt. Andrew D. Byers of Colorado Springs and Christopher D. Horton of the Oklahoma National Guard as Byers’ tearful parents and Horton’s emotional widow looked on.

In Memorial Day remarks [see the transcript] at Arlington National Cemetery, President Donald Trump urged the audience that stories of incredible military bravery must be told for 1,000 years. (May 29)

Trump also singled out for special mention Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly, a retired Marine four-star general whose son, Marine 2nd Lt. Robert M. Kelly, was killed in November 2010 after he stepped on a land mine while on patrol in southern Afghanistan.

To all Gold Star families, Trump said of their lost service members:

“They each had their own names, their own stories, their own beautiful dreams. But they were all angels sent to us by God and they all share one title in common and that is the title of hero, real heroes.”

“Though they were here only a brief time before God called them home, their legacy will endure forever,” Trump said.

Horton, a sniper sent to Afghanistan in 2011, died in a gun battle with the Taliban near the Pakistan border three months into his deployment. Byers was on his third combat tour and, Trump said, ran through smoke and a hail of bullets to rescue an Afghan soldier when he was killed last November.

Secretary Kelly’s other son, Johnny, is getting ready for his fifth military deployment. A son-in-law, Jake, is a wounded warrior.

Trump also recognized former U.S. senator and GOP presidential nominee Bob Dole, 93, who suffered lifelong injuries during World War II. He attended the ceremony along with his wife, Elizabeth Dole, also a former U.S. senator.

“As we honor the brave warriors who gave their lives for ours, spending their last moments on this Earth in defense of this country and of its people, words cannot measure the depth of their devotion, the purity of their love or the totality of their courage,” Trump said.

“We only hope that every day we can prove worthy not only of their sacrifice and service, but of the sacrifice made by the families and loved ones they left behind. Special, special people,” he said.

Before the remarks, Trump laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, touching it for a long moment before stepping away. He then rested his hand on his heart as a bugler played taps.

Stepping to the microphone to deliver the address, Trump seemed to relish the warm welcome from the audience gathered in the sun-splashed amphitheater. Trump has been feeling particularly aggrieved in recent weeks by federal and congressional investigations into contacts between his associates and Russian
government officials, including news reports that Jared Kushner, his son-in-law and top White House adviser, proposed establishing secret back-channel communications with Russia during the presidential transition.

The president was accompanied to Arlington cemetery by Vice President Mike Pence, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as a slew of advisers and Cabinet members, including Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin and Housing Secretary Ben Carson.

After the address, Trump visited a section of the cemetery for U.S. service members killed in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The White House said Trump visited the gravesite of Robert Kelly, who was laid to rest in Section 60.

Asked what meaning Memorial Day held for him, Secretary Kelly said: “Sad.”

Accompanied by Pence, Trump walked briefly among the white marble headstones and greeted families, including Brittany Jacobs and her 6-year-old son, Christian, who was dressed like a Marine. Jacobs’ father, Marine Sgt. Christopher Jacobs, died during a training accident in California in 2011.

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Miscellaneous
'Initiation' is back: MCPON ends officialdom's 14-year ban on using the term for chiefs' training

By Mark D. Faram
Navy Times, May 30, 2017

(Navy chief selects can once again be "initiated" into the mess.)

The Navy’s top enlisted sailor has made it OK to refer to the process of making new chief petty officers as an "initiation," ending 14 years of official taboo for the term once closely associated with hazing and sophomoric pranks.

There's no official name change — administratively, the six-week training program will continue to be referred to as CPO-365 Phase II — but in releasing his 2018 guidance, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (SG/IW) Steven Giordano made it clear with his words that use of the word “initiation” is back.

“We are initiating new chief petty officers, and providing a roadmap for people to be successful in life — whatever the course,” Giordano wrote in his letter accompanying the official guidance that was made public Tuesday.

In a move that is likely to be popular with the deckplates, Giordano said it’s time for the word "initiation" to be associated with today's tough, professional training and not the hazing practices of years past.

In reality, he’s just acknowledging what everyone wearing anchors already knows — the word initiation has remained in everyday use among sailors despite official efforts to get rid of it.

Giordano says he has no problem with the word because those in the mess have earned its return with their actions.

“Historically, when you said the word initiation or initiating, you were defining that word by actions that were not in keeping with our core values,” Giordano said Tuesday in an interview with Navy Times.

“We needed to change our actions and that is exactly what has transpired over a number of years now where we now have a program that is focused on developing leaders, where we are focused on treating each other with dignity and respect.”

Giordano said bringing back the word is the result of a “rudder correction” applied by past MCPONs Rick West and Mike Stevens that were embraced by all chief petty officers and has resulted in the CPO-365 process that they started becoming a tough and challenging period for preparing to joining the mess — which was the purpose of initiation in the first place.

“I couldn’t be more pleased with where we are today with our actions in CPO-365 in developing our future leaders,” Giordano said in the interview. "And if we get that part right, when you say that you are an initiated chief petty officer, you are going to understand that those actions are what defines that term and not the other way around when we had this negative connotation that represents bad actions.”

In his letter, he also made it clear that he wants the training to be tough because it has to be. Still, he made it clear that shenanigans won’t be tolerated.

“Respect the dignity and welfare of all participants while pushing one another to new limits; we deserve, and should expect, nothing less,” Giordano wrote. “Done correctly, this process will never come close to anything that can be construed as hazing.”
Giordano has his history correct. The term was taken out of mainstream use first by MCPON (SS/AW) Terry Scott in August of 2004 for just the reason’s Giordano mentioned — it had come to evoke hazing and unprofessional conduct.

"I prefer calling it a transition or training," Scott told Navy Times in an August, 2004 interview. "Initiation, regretfully, has negative connotations and it should never be so."

And even his successor, MCPON (SW/FMF) Joe Campa wrestled with the term, too, and attempted to find a compromise.

"Transition' is passive -- and I don't think there is anything passive about being a chief petty officer," Campa told Navy Times in a July 2007 interview. ""Transition' doesn't lay out any expectations, so I never liked that term."

Yet the term "initiation" also was not one that Campa liked, saying it meant, "Something is being done to somebody. That if you withstand it, you're in -- it creates no expectation on the part of the selectee."

Campa settled on a new term for the process.

“Induction' means that standards have to be met, requirements have to be met on the part of the selectee and that, when you do get pinned, there is a feeling of acceptance, of belonging," Campa said at the time.

Officially, induction lasted six years until the MCPON (AW/NAC) Mike Stevens ended the naming carousel and officially “sundowned” the phrase induction, opting to simply call the final six week process of making new chiefs simply CPO 365 Phase II.

And that’s where it stands today — it’s still just Phase II — but Giordano’s use of the term acknowledges the reality on the deckplates that it’s ok to openly be proud of being initiated into the mess.
WASHINGTON — Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin outlined an ambitious reform of nearly every aspect of his often-criticized department during a “State of the VA” address at the White House on Wednesday, calling it a sign of the president’s commitment to helping veterans.

“Many of these challenges have been decades in building and they’ve spanned multiple administrations,” Shulkin told reporters at the event. “This is the time for us to really address these chronic problems that in many ways have harmed veterans and their families.”

The plan includes promises to speed medical care access to all veterans, reduce disability claims backlogs, expand community care options for patients, reduce VA’s footprint nationwide, improve the department's information technology systems and reduce both the number of bureaucrats in VA’s headquarters and “burdensome regulations” within the department.

Nearly all of the ideas have already been started by VA and touted by agency leaders in the last few months.

But together, the plan represents the most sweeping reform goals for the department since President Barack Obama in 2009 announced plans to end veterans homelessness, eliminate the claims backlog and modernize VA’s files.

Shulkin said most of his 12-point reform plan won’t require additional funding from Congress, but many parts will require new legislation authorizing significant changes in rules and authorities.

Some of those are already underway. The Senate is scheduled to vote in June on new accountability legislation that would make it easier to fire misbehaving VA employees. The House earlier this month approved new legislation to simplify the disability claims appeals process.

Others include getting lawmakers to consolidate existing outside care funding streams into a single new program and to authorize VA to shutter or sell off unused department facilities, things that VA leaders have been requesting for several years.

“The president, the vice president, Congress, veteran service organizations all share the goal to help modernize VA,” Shulkin said. “That's why I'm confident that we can turn VA into the type of organization that veterans and families deserve and all of us want to see.”

Other plans include a 10 percent cut in VA central office staff and a new waste, fraud and abuse advisory committee to be stood up in June.

A new program to compare VA hospitals to community care options has already identified 14 medical centers below acceptable care standards, prompting new oversight and performance fixes for those facilities.
Most of the reforms don’t include a timeline, but Shulkin promised regular progress and updates on each topic. He said plans to reform VA’s information technology will require new funding to complete, and he will present that plan to Congress later this summer.

Among the more controversial steps is an expansion of outside care options for veterans, a move critics have decried as “privatization” of the department.

Shulkin pushed back on that, saying he is not advocating for the slow dismantling of his department.

“This is not a privatization of VA. This is not diluting the impact of VA,” he said. “Every day I'm in this job, I am more and more convinced that veterans and America need a strong VA. It's essential for national security, it's essential to honor our commitment.

“I will not allow our policies to weaken the VA. Our policies will strengthen the VA, but working with the private sector is the way to do that.”

The roll-out of the reform plan was the latest in a series of high-profile events for VA in Shulkin’s few months in office.

He has already spoken with reporters from the White House briefing room twice, something his last two predecessors never did. Last month, to mark his first 100 days in office, President Donald Trump signed an extension of Obama-era health care programs in a crowded ceremony at VA, touting his commitment to fixing the department. Administration officials have repeatedly listed their top two priorities as rebuilding the military and taking care of veterans.

But veterans groups reacted with dismay earlier this month when Trump’s first budget proposal included plans to trim some benefits payouts to help curb growing department costs.

Shulkin defended that budget plan — and his pledge not to ask for more money for most of the reforms — as a difficult balance between serving veterans and being responsible with taxpayer funds.

“So we are going back and looking at programs and saying could those resources be reallocated in different ways, not to withdraw total dollars from veterans, but could they be revised and reallocated to work better for veterans?” he said.

“I understand that there is a lot of passion on this, and we will have plenty of time to work with Congress and with our veteran service organizations to make sure that we're getting this right.”

Leo Shane III covers Congress, Veterans Affairs and the White House for Military Times. He can be reached at lshane@militarytimes.com.
The White House's promised veterans complaint line goes live today

By Leo Shane III

Military Times, June 1, 2017

WASHINGTON — President Trump’s long-promised hotline for veteran complaints officially launches on Thursday, but questions remain about the long-term plans for the new resource.

The phone line — live now at 855-948-2311 — is designed to “collect, process and respond to the complaints of individual veterans in a responsive, timely and accountable manner,” according to Department of Veterans Affairs officials.

VA Secretary David Shulkin on Wednesday described the initial rollout of the line as a soft launch, with “live-answer agents” receiving and processing some of the calls. He promised that by Aug. 15, the hotline will have continuous coverage from a live operator 24 hours a day, every day of the week.

“This is something the president had talked about,” he told reporters. “We're going to be testing that system starting tomorrow and fine-tuning it over the next several months.”

During the presidential campaign last year, Trump touted the hotline as a way for veterans to have a direct line to the commander in chief, and even suggested that he would answer it himself if the opportunity arose.

“This could keep me very busy at night, folks,” he told a crowd of supporters during a July 26 rally last summer. “This will take the place of Twitter.”

Calls to the line will be kept confidential, but information will be shared with VA officials, and in some cases veterans will be asked to give personal information for responses to specific problems.

Exactly which officials will respond to the problems and how they’ll be processed remain unclear. The call center is being billed as “the White House/VA Veterans’ Complaint Hotline,” but during the presidential campaign Trump suggested the idea as a way to directly report issues to the Oval Office without interference from VA leaders.

Department officials said they will use information from the hotline to “improve the delivery of care and benefit services to all veterans, including their families, caregivers and survivors,” but offered no further specifics. White House officials have deferred questions about the effort to the VA.

The cost of the hotline also remains unclear. VA officials said the soft launch will total $190,000, which includes one-time computer and phone setup expenses.

In later phases, the recurring cost for the telephone line and maintenance alone is estimated to be $5,700 per month. Money needed to pay salaries for around-the-clock operators has not yet been calculated.

Democrats on Capitol Hill have been skeptical about the effectiveness and cost of the hotline idea. Last month, in a hearing on the fiscal 2018 budget, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee ranking member Rep. Tim Walz, D-Minn., called it “a drain on (the VA’s) IT budget.”

Leo Shane III covers Congress, Veterans Affairs and the White House for Military Times. He can be reached at lshane@militarytimes.com.
Misconduct
Air Force vet convicted of terrorism gets 35 years in prison

By Larry Neumeister
The Associated Press, June 1, 2017

NEW YORK (AP) — A U.S. Air Force veteran convicted of terrorism charges for trying to join the Islamic State group and die a martyr was sentenced Wednesday to 35 years in prison by a judge who called it a “very sad thing” a onetime airman would want to join a group seeking to destroy America.

Last year’s conviction of Tairod Pugh, of Neptune, New Jersey, was the first verdict from more than 70 cases the government brought against Americans accused of trying to support the militant group.

“This isn’t about whether you’re a Muslim or a Christian or Jewish,” U.S. District Judge Nicholas G. Garaufis told Pugh, who’s 49. “This is about whether you’re going to stand up for your country.”

The Brooklyn judge called Pugh’s military service “a long time ago” commendable but said the defendant squandered his training as an airplane mechanic and all the good things the United States did for him with a decision to betray his country.

“The work of the Islamic State is to destroy our way of life,” the judge said.

He added that he can’t imagine a U.S. military veteran trying to join such a group.

“It’s a very sad thing,” he said.

Prosecutors said Pugh was stopped at a Turkish airport in 2015 carrying a laptop with information on Turkey-Syria border crossing points, 180 jihadist propaganda videos, including footage of an Islamic State prisoner beheading, and a letter declaring: “I will use the talents and skills given to me by Allah to establish and defend the Islamic States.”

At trial, prosecutors showed jurors materials found on Pugh’s computer and cited a letter Pugh wrote to his wife saying, in part, “There is only two possible outcomes for me: Victory or martyr.”

Prosecutors said he sought a route into Syria to join the Islamic State group. Authorities forced him to turn back. He was arrested soon after his return to New York.

Pugh was in the Air Force from 1986 to 1990, when he was trained to install and maintain aircraft engines and navigation and weapons systems.

Pugh gave a rambling statement Wednesday, interrupted when he started to cry and when the judge cut him off, saying, “I can’t listen to this whole thing. I just can’t. ... I’m not the psychiatrist. I’m the judge, and I’m limited in what I can do.”

Before Pugh was interrupted, he was defiant.

“I am innocent,” he said.

During closing arguments, defense attorney Eric Creizman said Pugh had no ill intent in Turkey a month after losing his job as an aviation mechanic and telling his supervisor to stop “talking to me like I’m an idiot.” He said Pugh had hoped to move to the Middle East with his wife.

He said his client was feeling small and inconsequential when he started researching the rise of the Islamic State group in the summer of 2014, impressed that Muslims somewhere were trying to establish a country and wouldn’t “back down from anything.”
A Marine colonel and two majors could face career-ending disciplinary or administrative action after two of them were reportedly drugged and robbed of sensitive equipment by local women they had picked up in Colombia.

A military investigation into the February incident found that the three officers went to an off-limits neighborhood of Bogota and later returned to their hotel rooms with four local women, the Miami Herald first reported on Friday.

At the end of the night, two of the officers — Col. Roger McDuffie and Maj. Andrew Mueller, according to the newspaper's report — were drugged and passed out in their rooms. Several of their belongings were stolen, including a work laptop, other government-issued equipment and personal cell phones, the report said.

A third officer, Maj. Mauricio Saenz, was not drugged, but like the other two officers he drank and cavorted with the women, according to the Miami Herald. All three men are married.

McDuffie, Mueller and Saenz declined to comment on Tuesday, said Gunnery Sgt. Zachary Dyer, a spokesman for U.S. Marine Corps Forces South. The three officers are performing administrative duties while cases are pending.

“U.S. Marine Corps Forces, South takes all allegations of misconduct seriously, and has thoroughly investigated this incident,” Dyer said in an email. “The command investigation has been completed and we are going through the process of adjudicating the incident. Marines are expected to uphold high standards of personal conduct and this command will appropriately address substantiated allegations of misconduct.”

Dyer declined to provide Marine Corps Times with the investigation cited by the Miami Herald.

Based on the Miami Herald’s story, a military law expert said he believes the three officers could face a variety of administrative or disciplinary actions, including court-martial.

“If they were court-martialed, they could be sentenced to a dismissal, which is equivalent to a dishonorable discharge,” said retired Marine Lt. Col. Guy Womack, a military defense attorney in Houston.

However, the officers could also face non-judicial punishment, be administratively separated or “be given a stern talking to and sent home,” said Womack, who is not involved with the case.

If court-martialed, the three officers could face charges such as conduct unbecoming an officer, failure to obey a general order, loss of military property, drunkenness and pandering, Womack told Marine Corps Times in an interview Tuesday.

The Miami Herald reported that the three men and their female companions walked past other Marines who were waiting to go to the airport, and that means they could be charged with conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline and bringing discredit to the service, Womack said.

Although losing government property worth more than $500 is punishable up to a year in prison, Womack said it is unlikely that any of the officers will face jail time.

“I think a panel of military members, which would also be officers senior to these officers — if they thought a dismissal was appropriate, I think they would consider that to be enough,” he said.
Suspected drug thefts persist at VA centers

By Hope Yen
The Associated Press, May 29, 2017
WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal authorities are investigating dozens of new cases of possible opioid and other drug theft by employees at Veterans Affairs hospitals, a sign the problem isn’t going away as more prescriptions disappear.

Data obtained by The Associated Press show 36 criminal investigations opened by the VA inspector general’s office from Oct. 1 through May 19. It brings the total number of open criminal cases to 108 involving theft or unauthorized drug use. Most of those probes typically lead to criminal charges.

The numbers are an increase from a similar period in the previous year. The VA has pledged “zero tolerance” in drug thefts following an AP story in February about a sharp rise in reported cases of stolen or missing drugs at the VA since 2009. Doctors, nurses or pharmacy staff in the VA’s network of more than 160 medical centers and 1,000 clinics are suspected of siphoning away controlled substances for their own use or street sale — sometimes to the harm of patients — or drugs simply vanished without explanation.

Drug thefts are a growing problem at private hospitals as well as the government-run VA as the illegal use of opioids has increased in the United States. But separate data from the Drug Enforcement Administration obtained by the AP under the Freedom of Information Act show the rate of reported missing drugs at VA health facilities was more than double that of the private sector. DEA investigators cited in part a larger quantity of drugs kept in stock at the bigger VA medical centers to treat a higher volume of patients, both outpatient and inpatient, and for distribution of prescriptions by mail.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., said AP’s findings were “troubling.” He urged Congress to pass bipartisan accountability legislation he was co-sponsoring that would give the agency “the tools needed to dismiss employees engaged in misconduct.” The Senate is set to vote on the bill June 6.

“The theft and misuse of prescription drugs, including opioids, by some VA employees is a good example of why we need greater accountability at the VA,” Rubio said.

In February, the VA announced efforts to combat drug thefts, including employee drug tests and added inspections. Top VA officials in Washington led by VA Secretary David Shulkin pledged to be more active, holding conference calls with health facilities to develop plans and reviewing data to flag problems. The department said it would consider more internal audits.

Criminal investigators said it was hard to say whether new safeguards are helping.

“Prescription drug diversion is a multifaceted, egregious health care issue,” said Jeffrey Hughes, the acting VA assistant inspector general for investigations. “Veterans may be denied necessary medications or their proper dosage and medical records may contain false information to hide the diversion, further putting veterans’ health at risk.”

Responding, the VA said it was working to develop additional policies “to improve drug safety and reduce drug theft and diversion across the entire health care system.”

“We have security protocols in place and will continue to work hard to improve it,” Poonam Alaigh, VA’s acting undersecretary for health, told the AP.

In one case, a registered nurse in the Spinal Cord Injury Ward at the VA medical center in Richmond, Virginia, was recently sentenced after admitting to stealing oxycodone tablets and fentanyl patches from
VA medication dispensers. The nurse said she would sometimes shortchange the amount of pain medication prescribed to patients, taking the remainder to satisfy her addiction.

Hughes cited in particular the risk of patient harm. “Health care providers who divert for personal use may be providing care while under the influence of narcotics,” he said.

AP’s story in February had figures documenting the sharp rise in drug thefts at federal hospitals, most of them VA facilities. Subsequently released DEA data provide more specific details of the problem at the VA. Drug losses or theft increased from 237 in 2009 to 2,844 in 2015, before dipping to 2,397 last year. In only about 3 percent of those cases have doctors, nurses or pharmacy employees been disciplined, according to VA data.

At private hospitals, reported drug losses or theft also rose — from 2,023 in 2009 to 3,185 in 2015, before falling slightly to 3,154 last year. There is a bigger pool of private U.S. hospitals, at least 4,369, according to the American Hospital Association. That means the rate of drug loss or theft is lower than VA’s.

The VA inspector general’s office said it had opened 25 cases in the first half of the budget year that began Oct. 1. That is up from 21 in the same period in 2016.

The IG’s office said the number of newly opened criminal probes had previously been declining since 2014.

Michael Glavin, an IT specialist at the VA, says he’s heard numerous employee complaints of faulty VA technical systems that track drug inventories, leading to errors and months of delays in identifying when drugs go missing. Prescription drug shipments aren’t always fully inventoried when they arrive at a VA facility, he said, making it difficult to determine if a drug was missing upon arrival or stolen later.

“It’s still the same process,” said Glavin, who heads the local union at the VA medical center in Columbia, Missouri. The union’s attorney, Natalie Khawam, says whistleblowers at other VA hospitals have made similar complaints.

Criminal investigators stressed the need for a continuing drug prevention effort. The VA points to inventory checks every 72 hours and “double lock and key access” to drugs. It attributes many drug loss cases to reasons other than employee theft, such as drugs lost in transit. But the DEA says some of those cases may be wrongly classified.

“Inventories are always an issue as to who’s watching or checking it,” said Tom Prevoznik, a DEA deputy chief of pharmaceutical investigations. “What are the employees doing, and who’s watching them?”

Follow Hope Yen on Twitter at https://twitter.com/hopeyen1
Tairod Nathan Webster Pugh, one of the first U.S. defendants to face trial for supporting the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) is shown in this government exhibit image provided by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York, March 8, 2016. Pugh was sentenced to 35 years in prison by the Brooklyn federal court, May 31, 2017. (U.S. Attorney's Office/Reuters)

An Air Force veteran found guilty of trying to join the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) has been sentenced to 35 years in prison. He maintained his innocence in a courtroom speech.

Tairod Pugh, a 59-year-old former Air Force mechanic originally from New Jersey, was first detained at an airport in Turkey in 2015 after buying a one-way plane ticket to that nation from Egypt, where he was living at the time. Turkish authorities reportedly discovered maps of ISIS territory and crossings along the porous Turkey-Syria border, as well as a trove of jihadist propaganda videos, according to prosecutors. Pugh was arrested by U.S. authorities upon his return to New York and was later found guilty of attempting to provide material support to a group designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S., and of obstructing justice after Pugh tried to destroy the hard drives containing the incriminating evidence of his intentions. Pugh, however, denied the charges and said he was the victim of discrimination.

"I am a black man. I am a military man. I am a Muslim man," Pugh said at his sentencing hearing in Brooklyn federal court on Wednesday, Reuters reported. "I protected this country and the Constitution. And my service was repaid by dishonoring my name."

"My only regret is that it's taken me so long to recognize how frightened and racist my country has become," he added.

U.S. District Judge Nicholas Garaufis interrupted Pugh's half-hour speech, rejecting the convict's account and calling it "a sad thing" that a veteran would back a group that opposes U.S. ideals with violence. Garaufis said prosecutors had successfully demonstrated to a jury during a week-long trial in March 2016 that authorities pursued Pugh because he was discovered with suspicious maps, 180 jihadist propaganda videos and a letter declaring: "I will use the talents and skills given to me by Allah to establish and defend the Islamic State," Garaufis told Pugh that basing his argument on racism and Islamophobia was invalid.

"This isn't about whether you're a Muslim or a Christian or Jewish," Garaufis said, according to the Associated Press. "This is about whether you're going to stand up for your country."

Pugh's case was the first of about 70 cases involving U.S. citizens allegedly supporting ISIS to reach a verdict. The militant group rose out of a merger between Al-Qaeda in Iraq and other jihadist organizations in 2006, and later expanded operations into Syria after war broke out between the government and other insurgent groups. At its height in 2014, ISIS claimed as many as five to six million people in territories in Iraq and Syria under its control and 200,000 active militants, according to Foreign Affairs Review. Last year, a New York-based security analysis firm, the Soufan Group, estimated that between 27,000 and
31,000 foreigners had left their homes to fight for ISIS since 2011. This figure included about 250 U.S. citizens according to a 2015 congressional report cited by NPR.

ISIS's territory has since been diminished to a fraction of its former size, as the jihadists have faced various adversarial forces in both Syria and Iraq in recent years. ISIS's defeat in the Middle East has raised concerns worldwide about the prospect of jihadist fighters returning home to commit attacks against civilians.

SEE ALSO:
Air Force vet convicted of terrorism gets 35 years in prison [The Associated Press, 2017-06-01]
U.S. Air Force veteran gets 35 years for trying to join Islamic State [Reuters, 2017-05-31]
Guillaume Cuvelier on patrol on the southern front lines of Kirkuk, Iraq. (Rick Findler)

A well-known militant who fought with Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine and participated in far-right European politics before joining the U.S. Army has been discharged from the military, a spokeswoman for the Army said.

Earlier this month The Washington Post reported that Pfc. Guillaume Cuvelier, 29, had spent time with French ultranationalist groups before helping create an anti-Western militant group in eastern Ukraine in 2014. After leaving Ukraine in 2015 and fighting alongside Kurdish peshmerga in Iraq, Cuvelier shipped to U.S. Army basic training in January.

Before his discharge last week, Cuvelier — a dual French and U.S. citizen — was serving as a newly minted infantryman in a Hawaii-based unit, according to records provided by the Army.

In a short exchange in April, Cuvelier confirmed his service in the Army and his time in Ukraine.

Lt. Col. Jennifer Johnson, an Army spokeswoman, would not give the reason Cuvelier was discharged, saying that it was protected under the Privacy Act.

Cuvelier’s discharge was neither honorable nor dishonorable, Johnson said in an email. “Soldiers who are in an entry-level status because they have served less than 180 days of continuous active duty are normally discharged with an uncharacterized description of service,” she said.

Cuvelier’s past of espousing extreme right-wing views and his role in an armed group backed by a U.S. adversary was recorded on websites, social media groups and in an online documentary. With Cuvelier’s easily searchable history, his enlistment raises questions about the Army’s recruitment process and whether applicants are thoroughly vetted.

Kelli Bland, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Army Recruiting Command, did not respond to a request for comment, nor did Cuvelier.

When it was first reported that Cuvelier was serving in the Army, Bland said that the military had “begun an inquiry to ensure the process used to enlist this individual followed all of the required standards and procedures.”

The Army often forbids those who display “extremist views or actions” from entry, Lt. Col. Randy Taylor, a spokesman for the Army’s Department of Manpower and Reserve Affairs, said in an email in April. Taylor added that “if an Army official determines an applicant has the potential for meeting Army standards, the official may in exceptional cases allow those who have overcome mistakes and past conduct, made earlier in their lives, to serve their country. However, in many cases a history of gang or extremist activity is disqualifying.”
In Cuvelier’s case, it appears his past was either overlooked by a recruiter or he was not forthcoming about it, a move that might have opened him up to fraudulent enlistment charges under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Cuvelier, when first confronted about his potentially problematic history in April, said that he had changed.

“The Army is my only chance of moving on and cutting with my past,” Cuvelier said in a text message. “I realized I like this country, its way of life and its Constitution enough to defend it.”

“By publishing a story on me, you are jeopardizing my career and rendering a great service to anyone trying to embarrass the Army. My former Russian comrades would love it. … so, I please ask you to reconsider using my name and/or photo.”

As a U.S. citizen, Cuvelier’s time fighting in Ukraine for the Donestk People’s Republic could open him up to federal prosecution as the breakaway state is subject to U.S. government sanctions.

A March 2014 executive order that was applied to the republic that June says that U.S. citizens are prohibited from assisting any of the sanctioned entities with “funds, goods or services.”
Racism
Marines arrested at pro-Confederate rally with white nationalist regalia

By Jeff Schogol
Marine Corps Times, May 30, 2017

Two active-duty Marines stationed in North Carolina are back at their duty stations after being reportedly being arrested for trespassing at a pro-Confederate rally and allegedly unfurling a banner with a slogan used by white nationalists, Corps officials said.

Sgt. Michael Chesny is an explosive ordnance disposal technician based at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point and Staff Sgt. Joseph Manning is stationed at the Marine Corps Engineer School at Camp Lejeune, according to officials.

The Times-News first reported on Saturday that the two Marines were arrested on May 20 after allegedly climbing a building and unfurling a banner with a quote from George Orwell’s novel “1984” and the letters “YWNRU,” which reportedly stand for “You will not replace us,” a slogan associated with the white nationalist group Identity Evropa. The two Marines were released later that day on $1,500 bond.

The incident occurred in Graham, North Carolina, about 175 miles inland from Jacksonville and Camp Lejeune. The two Marine NCOs allegedly hung the banner on a building on the town's main street before a local "Confederate Memorial Day rally," the newspaper reported.

Chesny’s command is looking into the matter to determine whether any action is warranted, said Mike Barton, a spokesman for Cherry Point.

“Once the investigation is complete, the commanding officer's action can range from taking no action and letting the civilian authorities prosecute the case, to administrative actions such as formal admonishment, non-judicial punishment or administrative separation from the service,” Barton said. “The commanding officer may refer the case to a court martial if the investigation determines the misconduct was serious enough to warrant a prosecution of crimes not already handled through the Alamance County criminal court.”

Manning’s command is working with civil authorities on the matter and has not decided whether to take any disciplinary action against him, said Capt. Joshua Pena, a spokesman for Training and Education Command.

A combat veteran, Manning joined the Marine Corps in June 2002, Pena said. His military awards include the Purple Heart, Combat Action Ribbon, Iraq Campaign Medal and Afghanistan Campaign Medal. Information about Chesny’s awards was not immediately available on Tuesday.

Since joining the Marine Corps in 2007, Chesny has deployed to Afghanistan once and made two other deployments with Marine expeditionary units, Barton said. His military decorations include the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, NATO Medal-ISAF Afghanistan and three Marine Corps Good Conduct Medals.
Muslims thankful for support after rant, deadly attack

By Gillian Flaccus
The Associated Press, May 29, 2017

A heart-shaped wreath covered with positive messages hangs on a traffic light pole at a memorial for two bystanders who were stabbed to death Friday, while trying to stop a man who was yelling anti-Muslim slurs and acting aggressively toward two young women, including one wearing a Muslim head covering, on a light-trail train in Portland, Ore, Saturday, May 27, 2017. A memorial grew all day Saturday outside the transit center in Portland, as people stopped with flowers, candles, signs and painted rocks. Jeremy Joseph Christian, 35, was booked on suspicion of murder and attempted murder in the attack. (AP Photo/Gillian Flaccus)

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Muslims in Portland, Oregon, thanked the community for its support and said they were raising money for the families of two men who were killed when they came to the defense of two young women — one wearing a hijab — who were targeted by an anti-Muslim rant.

“I am very thankful as a Muslim, I am very thankful as a Portlander ... that we stand together here as one,” Muhammad A. Najieb, an imam at the Muslim Community Center, said Saturday.

The two young women “could have been the victims, but three heroes jumped in and supported them,” he said.

A fundraising page launched by his group for the families of the dead men, a surviving victim and the two young women had raised more than $300,000 by Sunday evening.

Police said they’ll examine what appears to be the extremist ideology of suspect Jeremy Joseph Christian, 35, who is accused of killing the two men Friday. Christian’s social media postings indicate an affinity for Nazis and political violence.

Messages left at the home of Christian’s mother were not immediately returned.

The attack occurred on a light-rail train on the first day of Ramadan, the holiest time of the year for Muslims.

Christian was being held on suspicion of aggravated murder, attempted murder, intimidation and being a felon in possession of a weapon. He was arrested a short time after the attack when he was confronted by other men.

One of the victims of the hate speech is sending her thanks to those who came to her defense, according to KPTV (http://bit.ly/2qq2QEy).

Destinee Mangum, 16, told the station on Saturday that she and her 17-year-old friend were riding the train when Jeremy Christian approached them yelling what is described as hate speech. She said her friend is Muslim, but she’s not.

“He told us to go back to Saudi Arabia, and he told us we shouldn’t be here, to get out of his country,” Mangum said. “He was just telling us that we basically weren’t anything and that we should kill ourselves.”

The girls were scared and moved to the back of the train while a stranger jumped in to help.

“Me and my friend were going to get off the MAX and then we turned around while they were fighting and he just started stabbing people and it was just blood everywhere and we just started running for our lives,” Mangum said.

Alvin Hall said had just stepped off the train on Friday when he saw a man bleeding from the neck, KATU-TV (http://bit.ly/2rcpdwm ) reported. Hall said his instincts kicked in and he went after the suspect.
“My first process was, ‘What can I do? Where did he go?’ and someone said, ‘He ran over to the bridge,’ ” Hall said. “So I just took up running from the bridge up the stairs.”

He said he met Chase Robinson and Larry Blackwell, and the three men confronted the suspect, who turned on them with a knife.

“The minute he saw me he started coming after me. He’s like, ‘You want some of me, you’re a snitch, come on after me, you want some of this?’ and started chasing me,” Hall said.

Soon, police arrived and took the suspect into custody.

Christian will make his first court appearance in the case Tuesday, and it wasn’t clear if he had an attorney. No one answered the phone at his Portland home.

Police identified the men killed as Ricky John Best, 53, of Happy Valley, Oregon, and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai Meche, 23, of Portland. Mayor Ted Wheeler said Best was an Army veteran and a city employee. Meche earned a bachelor’s degree in economics in 2016 from Reed College in Portland and landed a job with the Cadmus Group, a consulting firm in the area.

Police say Micah David-Cole Fletcher, 21, of Portland was also stabbed and is in serious condition at a Portland hospital. Police say his injuries are not believed to be life-threatening.

Fletcher is a student at Portland State University and was taking the train from classes to his job at a pizza shop when the attack occurred. In 2013, Fletcher won a 2013 poetry competition, the Verselandia poetry slam, with a poem condemning prejudices faced by Muslims, according to The Oregonian/OregonLive (http://bit.ly/2s2qPXH).

Police said one of the two young women on the train was wearing a hijab. The assailant was ranting on many topics, using “hate speech or biased language,” police Sgt. Pete Simpson said.

The FBI said it’s too early to say whether the slayings qualify as a federal hate crime. However, Christian faces intimidation charges, the state equivalent of a hate crime.

The Portland Mercury, one of the city’s alternative weeklies, posted an article on its website saying Christian showed up at a free speech march in late April with a baseball bat to confront protesters and the bat was confiscated by police.

The article included video clips of a man wearing a metal chain around his neck and draped in an American flag shouting “I’m a nihilist! This is my safe place!” as protesters crowd around him. The Oregonian/OregonLive also had video from the April 29 march showing Christian.

Simpson confirmed the man in the videos was Christian.

On what appears to be Christian’s Facebook page, he showed sympathy for Nazis and Timothy McVeigh, who bombed a federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995.

SEE ALSO:
Trump condemns deadly Portland knife attacks, says 'victims were standing up to hate and intolerance' [2017-05-29]
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Portland train stabbing victim: 'I'm just trying to heal and recover' [2017-05-31]
Portland stabbing survivor: 'You've got to put your life on the line sometimes' [2017-05-31]
Noose found at African American history museum in D.C.

By Jon Herskovitz and Dan Whitcomb

Reuters, May 31, 2017

The Washington Monument rises behind the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington, DC, U.S. on September 14, 2016. (REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque/File Photo)

A noose, a symbol of racial lynching, was found on Wednesday on the floor of an exhibit about segregation at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution officials said.

A gallery at the museum on the National Mall was partially closed for about three hours, and U.S. Park Police were called in to investigate what was described by the museum's director as a "horrible act."

"The noose has long represented a deplorable act of cowardice and depravity — a symbol of extreme violence for African Americans," Director Lonnie Bunch said in an email to museum staff sent to Reuters by a museum spokeswoman.

Bunch said museum officials do not know who was responsible and told staff the incident "is a stark reminder why the work you do is so important."

A U.S. Park Police spokeswoman confirmed the agency was investigating but declined to provide any further details.

The incident comes less than a week after a noose was found hanging from a tree outside the nearby Hirshhorn Museum, Smithsonian.com, an affiliated news organization, said.

Speaking at a dedication ceremony in September 2016 for the $540 million African American museum, then-President Barack Obama said the facility tells the story of black America, and "helps to tell a richer and fuller story of who we are."

The museum contains about 36,000 items that trace the journey of African Americans from slavery in the 1800s to the fight for civil rights in the 20th century and beyond.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture is part of the Smithsonian, which includes 19 museums, including the Hirshhorn and galleries and the National Zoological Park.

It had 30.2 million visits last year, according to its website.

"The Smithsonian family stands together in condemning this act of hatred and intolerance, especially repugnant in a museum that affirms and celebrates the American values of inclusion and diversity," the institution's secretary, David Skorton, told the staff in an internal email. "We will not be intimidated."

(Editor by Cynthia Osterman)

SEE ALSO:

Our ugly racism’s newest artifact: The noose left at the African American Museum [The Washington Post, 2017-06-01] [OPINION]

Noose found at exhibit in African American Smithsonian museum [The Washington Post, 2017-06-01]

Portland train stabbing victim: 'I'm just trying to heal and recover'

By KGW-TV (Portland, Ore.)
USA TODAY, May 31, 2017

Micah Fletcher, 21, was stabbed during the attack on the Portland, Ore., light-rail train Friday, May 26, 2017. Fletcher spoke with KGW-TV on Tuesday, May 30, 2017, a day after his release from the hospital. (Photo: Devon Haskins, KGW-TV, Portland, Ore.)

PORTLAND, Ore. — During an emotional interview Tuesday, one of three men stabbed during last week's attack on a Portland, Ore., light-rail train, said he's having a hard time processing what happened to him.

Micah Fletcher said he's unsure how to move on after the attack, so he's focusing on trying to get better.

"I got stabbed in the neck on my way to work, randomly, by a stranger I don't know, for trying to just be a nice person," said the 21-year-old Portland State University student. "Like, I don't know what to do after that, you know.

"I'm healing. That's what I'm doing. As much as I can, in whatever way I can," he said.

Fletcher, who won a citywide poetry slam in high school for a poem that spoke out against prejudice faced by Muslims, said Portland can only heal from this tragedy if its citizens come together to assure that the city is a place where people can feel safe again.

"We're about to go through a very hard time. Things are happening, the world is changing," he said. "We need to remember that this is supposed to be a city where people can be safe, where children can play, where laughter can grow and where love can take roots in the soil.

"It's going to take us standing together as a community if you want that to be the Portland we live in," he said.

On Friday, Jeremy Christian, 35, allegedly stabbed three men who were trying to protect a Muslim woman and a black woman, after Christian shouted racial and anti-Muslim slurs at them.

Rick John Best, 53, of Happy Valley, Ore., Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, 23, of Portland, were fatally stabbed.

"Two very good people lost their lives that day," Fletcher said Tuesday. "I'm very injured, both physically and mentally. I do not feel well. And I mourn the loss of those two very brave individuals who put their lives on the line like that. I wish their families as much healing as they can in these times of immense trials and tribulations."

Fletcher said two people came to his aid after he was stabbed Friday. He said he owes those people his life and also thanked officers, paramedics and doctors who helped him.

Community support has been helpful as well, Fletcher said. He noted that he has felt the expressions of love, support and admiration. He also said funds raised to help him and his family are appreciated.

Fletcher said once his medical and recovery bills are covered, he will donate the rest of the money raised on his behalf to the families of Best and Namkai-Meche.
"I don't want to profit off of this," he said. "I want any money, once the medical bills are paid off, I want the money to go to the families of the people that lost their lives that day."

Injury missed being fatal by millimeters

An affidavit of probable cause released Tuesday revealed more details about Friday’s incident.

After Christian got on the train and started shouting at two teenage girls and making threatening comments about "decapitating heads," several men stepped in to diffuse the situation. A man identified as Mr. Forde in the court document first tried to stop Christian but was unsuccessful.

According to video from TriMet, the city’s transit agency, and cellphone video from passengers, Christian charged at Namkai-Miche first. Fletcher stood up next to Namkai-Miche and was shoved by Christian. Fletcher shoved him back and yelled at him to get off the train. Christian, who had retrieved a 3 ¾-inch folding knife from his pocket, opened it and swung, stabbing Fletcher in the neck. Fletcher grabbed his neck to stop the bleeding and got off the train, where he received assistance from passengers on the platform until police and other first responders arrived.

On the train, Christian proceeded to stab Namkai-Miche and Best, who had moved in to help, multiple times. Christian then left the train and was apprehended shortly after by police.

Christian, who made his initial court appearance Tuesday, is charged with two counts of aggravated murder, one count of attempted aggravated murder, one count of first-degree assault, two counts of intimidation in the second degree and three counts of unlawful use of a weapon stemming from the Friday attack.

Fletcher told Ryan Lufkin, Multnomah County deputy district attorney, that doctors told him his injury missed being fatal by millimeters.

Fletcher was released from the hospital Monday night, Julie Reed, a hospital spokeswoman confirmed Tuesday.

In a statement to Portland State University students, President Wim Wiewel said, "Micah's family and friends report that he is getting better every day, and he was able to give a thumbs up from the hospital over the weekend in a photo the family shared with the media."

Contributing: The Associated Press. Follow KGW-TV on Twitter: @KGWNews

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Portland stabbing survivor: 'You've got to put your life on the line sometimes' [2017-05-31]
Threat shuts down college embroiled in racial dispute

By Susan Svrluga and Joe Heim

The Washington Post, June 1, 2017

Evergreen State College. (Shauna Bittle)

Evergreen State College, which has been in the national spotlight after protests over race boiled over last week, closed Thursday after receiving a direct threat.

The school of about 4,500 students in Washington state posted this warning: “College closing immediately. In response to a direct threat to campus safety, the college is closing immediately for the day. All are asked to leave campus or return to residence halls for instructions.”

A spokeswoman for the school wrote in a text message Thursday afternoon that a threat had been called in to local law enforcement and that the president decided to close the school temporarily out of an abundance of caution.

Bret Weinstein, a professor at Evergreen State University, had returned to work Thursday, a week after he was confronted by an angry group of students who converged on his classroom calling him a racist and demanding his resignation. That incident and a protest the next day — in which students surged to the president’s office at the small liberal arts college in Olympia — were captured on video and shared widely on social media, touching off the latest conflagration in on-campus culture wars.

In March, Weinstein, who is white, wrote that he disagreed with an administrator’s suggestion that white people might consider avoiding campus one day during a “day of absence” protest. The “day of absence” has been a tradition on campus since the 1970s, a symbolic demonstration designed to raise awareness about the contributions of people of color and an opportunity for them to gather and discuss racial issues.

This year, the school suggested that white students and faculty stay away from campus that day. Weinstein, a biology professor, wrote a letter to organizers saying that he would not stay away from campus, noting, “On a college campus, one’s right to speak — or to be — must never be based on skin color.”

Some of those who protested Weinstein last week saw the response to their demonstration as evidence of overaggressive policing and society’s inability to understand the way people of color are treated. Others, however, saw a place where white people were singled out and opponents could effectively cut any debate short by labeling other points of view as racist.

Racial tensions have been simmering at the school all year. The academic year began with protests over race, with students interrupting convocation in September. In January, according to the student newspaper the Cooper Point Journal, some students grabbed a microphone from an administrator during a ceremony welcoming the new police chief and chanted “F— cops!”

Student protest leaders did not immediately return messages seeking comment Thursday.

Weinstein had raised objections by email in November to an “equity action plan,” saying he did not think it would benefit students of color, sparking an extended debate.

The school is 75 percent white, a school spokeswoman said. But the enrollment is diverse in many ways, including students from many races, a large percentage who identify as LGBTQ, and a number of military veterans, the school’s president, George Bridges, said Thursday, leading him to seek ways to unify and support students.

In an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal Wednesday, Weinstein explained his objection to the equity action plan:
The plan and the way it is being forced on the college are both deeply authoritarian, and the attempt to mandate equality of outcome is unwise in the extreme. Equality of outcome is a discredited concept, failing on both logical and historical grounds, as anyone knows who has studied the misery of the 20th century. It wouldn’t have withstood 20 minutes of reasoned discussion.

This presented traditional independent academic minds with a choice: Accept the plan and let the intellectual descendants of Critical Race Theory dictate the bounds of permissible thought to the sciences and the rest of the college, or insist on discussing the plan’s shortcomings and be branded as racists. Most of my colleagues chose the former, and the protesters are in the process of articulating the terms. I dissented and ended up teaching in the park.

As tensions continued to mount this spring, protesters confronted Weinstein and college leaders more directly, yelling at the professor and calling him racist, while angrily presenting demands to George Bridges, the president, the following day that included firing several people. At one point, as Bridges gestured while making a point to the crowd, shouts can be heard on video ordering him to keep his hands down at his sides.

On social media, some complained that student protesters had been shoved against a wall by overly aggressive police.  

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But to many watching the videos of the protests, or following coverage on sites including Fox News, the campus looked out of control and irrational, with students yelling and not listening to responses.

On social media, many people reacted with outrage, calling the protesters racist for asking white people to avoid campus, accusing the school administration of pandering to extreme demands, and ridiculing what they saw as liberalism run amok.  

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“Virulent anti-White racism on full display at Evergreen State College,” another person wrote.
The story resonated well beyond the Evergreen campus, Weinstein said in an interview, because readers and viewers believed that free speech was being shut down.

“It turns out that one thing that does seem to unite people is the sense that there is something abhorrent about shouting people down,” he said. “Especially on a college campus, where one should be able to listen to opposing viewpoints.”

Last week, Bridges, the school’s president, rejected demands that the staff members be fired. But he agreed to many of the students’ concerns and announced that the school would begin mandatory cultural competency training for all faculty and staff. On Thursday, he noted it will be expensive to do that, since the school has about a thousand employees, but that the college is committed to making it happen.

He said there would be additional training for police, emphasizing deescalation techniques and working with different populations, and additional support for students who are minorities.

On Tuesday, Bridges issued a public statement asking everyone to recommit to empathy, dignity and respect. It read, in part:

> On college campuses across the U.S. and here at home, conversations about equity and free speech will continue. These are incredibly complex and sometimes emotional issues to navigate. We at Evergreen have the courage to try. With tolerance and respect, my belief is that we can succeed, and continue to learn from each other.

On Thursday, Bridges said, “The activism and disruption we’ve witnessed … really, I believe, is symptomatic of much of the intense disruption and disaffection we’re seeing across the country, not just on college campuses, but across the country.”

He said he thinks that’s driven by increasing economic and racial inequality in the wider society, dissatisfaction with institutions including the government, and concern about the future of the country. He said if people can “listen to understand,” it will help them come together as a community.

“Evergreen has always been proud to engage in difficult social issues on our campus. That is something we do well, and we’ve done well since the 1970s.”

Susan Svrluga is a reporter for the Washington Post, covering higher education for the Grade Point blog.

Joe Heim joined The Post in 1999. He is currently a staff writer for the Metro section. He also writes Just Asking, a weekly Q&A column in the Sunday magazine.

SEE ALSO:
Threat closes Washington college after protests over race [AP, 2017-06-02]
The Latest: Evergreen college to remain closed Friday [AP, 2017-06-02]
Religion
Army welcomes first Islamic division-level chaplain

By Christopher Diamond
Army Times, May 27, 2017

The 7th Infantry Division this week welcomed Lt. Col. Khallid Shabazz as its new chaplain during a change of stole ceremony, making Shabazz the Army's first Islamic chaplain to serve at the division level.

Shabazz, the former I Corps deputy chaplain, became the division’s chaplain during the ceremony Tuesday at the Lewis Main Chapel on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, according to the Army. Maj. Gen. Thomas James, the 7th Infantry Division commander, officiated the ceremony.


Shabazz was selected earlier this year by the Army chief of chaplains and is replacing Lt. Col. Jimmy Nichols, who is headed to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to serve as the installation chaplain.

"As simple as it sounds, I want to give people a sense of purpose," Shabazz said. "My job is to help them be stronger on the other side of the door than when they came in."

Army makes military history with first Muslim division-level chaplain

In addition to a doctorate degree and four master’s degrees, Shabazz has a long history of working with soldiers of all faiths. He was raised a Lutheran in Louisiana and converted to Islam as a soldier.

"What has served me well is I was Christian for 28 years," Shabazz said. "I know both sides. I want to meet people where they are. ... My job is not to convert anybody or impose my religion on anybody. My job is to ensure that those people are strong and resilient."

As no religion is endorsed by the Army, the Army Chaplain Corps upholds the concept of pluralism, requiring chaplains to support all faiths.

Throughout Shabazz’s service to the Army, he has traveled the world as a professional military religious adviser, leader and ethics instructor.

While Shabazz does expect some hesitancy from soldiers when they see the crescent moon on his uniform, he is prepared to respectfully deal with resistance by openly working with all faiths.

"The transformative power of loving people, to me, it crosses all so-called faith issues," Shabazz said. "That's what's most important to me. I approach every situation with that attitude and with that respect."
Chaplain offered solace at Pentagon on 9/11

By Marian Rizzo
Ocala (Fla.) Star-Banner, May 21, 2017

Retired U.S. Army Col. Janet Horton displayed a mix of emotions as she sat at her dining room table and reflected on her 28 years in the military. Horton frowned over the multiple rejections she faced after being commissioned to the chaplaincy. She smiled at the way God worked good out of all the negativity. And she wiped away tears as she talked about the events of Sept. 11, 2001, when hijackers plowed American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon, killing 125 of her co-workers.

“You go back and to a degree you relive it all,” she said. “It was amazing to me to see God’s presence and love healing everything. Time after time, you see love in the face of hate.”

On the table before her lay a spread of graphic photos showing the aftermath of the attack. Horton paused now and then to regain her composure while pointing out places of significance — the site of the impact, the section of the building blocked by fire and debris, the center courtyard where the injured were laid out, the location of Horton’s office on the south side of the building, dangerously close to where the plane went in, and the dental office in the back where Horton had been called away for X-rays.

“They called me in that morning,” she said. “In order to be deployable, you had to have panoramic X-rays. They were supposed to be taken on my birthday, Aug. 11, but someone misplaced my file. I was waiting for them to release me when the first plane went into the towers. At 9:15, we were in front of the monitor watching the second plane hit. About 20 minutes later, somebody came running in and said we had to evacuate the building.”

Horton believes she would have been killed or seriously injured had she been sitting at her desk.

“When I got in my office the next day, big chunks of the ceiling were down on my desk and debris was everywhere,” she said. “My desk was a little way in, but my secretary’s desk was at the door. She felt the impact and saw the fireball coming toward her. She was able to run down the corridor ahead of the dust and debris. When the plane hit, there was so much fuel and it was burning so hot, the rescue workers had to go in from the back side and pull out people who were still alive.”

Within seconds after the attack, numerous acts of heroism began to unfold.

“What people did to save someone else was the most inspiring thing I ever saw,” Horton said. “One of the women was on fire. Three or four people saw her and took off their jackets and put them on her to smother it. You weren’t thinking about yourself at all. The thought was, what can I do to help the firemen or the next casualty? By late afternoon, the firemen had been working for hours and were hot and tired. Three of us broke into a concession stand. A two-star general got down on his knees and scraped up ice for them.”

The injured were moved to the courtyard first, then were transferred to ambulances outside the complex. Horton convinced the guards to let her and two other chaplains through the barricade to minister to the injured.

“We just knelt beside them,” she said. “Every one of them would cry immediately when we started to pray. More than anything, you’re making sure they know that God is with them and to have that sense of peace that they’re not alone.”

That same female chaplain who knelt and prayed with burned and battered victims at the Pentagon had endured harsh rejection during her first five years in the military. Trained for the chaplaincy at the Christian Science headquarters in Boston, Horton had earned a Master of Divinity degree and was commissioned by the Army as its third female chaplain in 1976.
“Multiple people told me I shouldn’t be there,” Horton said. “It was such an emotional issue at that time. Women were just being integrated in the military in the 1970s. Before that, women could be in the women’s auxiliary office as clerks and other support specialties, or they could join the nurses corps. When all the occupational positions were opened to them, this whole idea of women being officers — and then add in a chaplain — this was the birth of a new idea and some people had labor pains with it.”

Horton received death threats, nasty phone calls and was run off the road. When she was awarded two high-ranking awards, a male chaplain spit at her and told her she didn’t deserve them.

“My human reaction was a lot like a gas grill lighting up,” she said. “There are not too many things a person can do to you that are worse than spitting in your face. I instantly had to turn to God, and it was like a voice spoke to me, ‘The soldiers spit on Jesus.’ It just quenched the fire and I was no longer angry. I reached out and hugged him.”

Now 65, Horton is married to retired Lt. Col. Jeff Harvey. She has written a memoir, “Cracking the Camouflage Ceiling,” which was released in April and is available on www.hawthornepub.com.

“I’m not sure even the women today are accepted, there are so few of them,” she said. “Part of the reason I wrote that book was to help them too.”
Settlements With New Jersey Suburb Clear Way for Proposed Mosque

By Rick Rojas

Mohammad Ali Chaudry, president of the Islamic Society of Basking Ridge, in December. “We look forward to welcoming people of all faiths and backgrounds to our mosque,” he said. (Credit: Karsten Moran for The New York Times)

A proposed mosque that had been blocked by officials in a New Jersey suburb will now be allowed to move forward after settlements were reached on Tuesday in lawsuits that accused the township of discriminating against Muslims.

Officials in the suburb, Bernards Township in Somerset County, voted last week to agree to the settlements, which will require the township to pay a little more than $3 million.

The township will also have to back down on some of its previous requirements — including a request for more than twice the number of parking spaces originally planned — which were cited in the lawsuits as complications created to stymie the mosque’s construction. In addition, township officials will have to participate in diversity and inclusion training.

The Islamic Society of Basking Ridge, a Muslim organization in an unincorporated neighborhood in the township, bought a four-acre plot in 2011 in an area where zoning permitted houses of worship. It developed plans to build a mosque of more than 4,000 square feet, with a prayer room large enough for 150 people. The group said it tailored its plans so that the mosque would blend into the neighborhood, forgoing a dome and designing its minarets to look like chimneys and be shorter than the steeples of churches in town.

But after four years, and dozens of public meetings, the township’s planning board denied the application, citing reasons such as storm water management and potential disruption to neighbors.

Last year, the Islamic Society, a 70-member group led by a former township mayor, filed a suit in Federal District Court accusing the township of turning “what should have been a simple board approval” into a “Kafkaesque process.”

Soon after, the United States Justice Department filed its own suit, claiming that the township had discriminated against the group because of its members’ faith. It accused the township of violating a federal law, the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, by making the organization abide by standards and procedures that the township had not applied to other groups.

The settlements follow a ruling from a federal judge in December that found that the township and its officials had violated the group’s rights.

“Bernards Township made decisions that treated the Islamic Society of Basking Ridge differently than other houses of worship,” William E. Fitzpatrick, the acting United States attorney for New Jersey, said in a statement. “The settlement announced today corrects those decisions and ensures that members of this religious community have the same ability to practice their faith as all other religions.”
The township will also have to cooperate with the Islamic Society as it applies for the necessary approvals to start construction.

“We look forward to welcoming people of all faiths and backgrounds to our mosque,” Mohammad Ali Chaudry, the president of the Islamic Society, said in a statement. “Our doors will be open to anyone interested in building bridges to promote harmony in the community and peace in the world.”

The mosque proposal set off an uproar in the community, with public meetings crowded with angry residents. Anti-Muslim sentiments circulated on fliers and in social media posts. The Islamic Society’s mailbox was smashed, and a vandal later covered the society’s initials on the mailbox, I.S.B.R., with “ISIS.”

Some critics of the proposal argued that their opposition did not stem from antipathy toward Muslim people but was rooted instead in more practical concerns. In a statement on Tuesday, the township argued that it had a responsibility to ensure that development projects like the mosque “do not unduly impact others’ ability to peacefully and quietly enjoy their own property.”

Legal experts and civil rights groups said it had become increasingly common in recent years for local governments across the country to use zoning laws to try to prevent mosques and Islamic schools from being built. Bridgewater Township, also in Somerset County, agreed in 2014 to pay nearly $8 million to settle a similar case.

A Muslim group filed suit against Bayonne, N.J., last week after a zoning board denied its plans to convert a warehouse into a mosque and community center amid protests like those in Bernards Township. Officials at the United States attorney’s office for New Jersey said Tuesday that the Justice Department was investigating the allegations of discrimination.

In Bernards Township, officials maintained that their actions were not discriminatory and said the decision to settle was made to end a yearslong ordeal and reduce the financial risk posed by continuing litigation.

“Bernards Township is a diverse and inclusive community, where for years the I.S.B.R. congregation have practiced their religion along with their neighbors unimpeded,” Michael P. Turner, a township spokesman, said in a statement.

He noted that the society had assembled in a public community center and park and that Bernards Township had elected Mr. Chaudry, a Pakistani American who has lived there for more than 40 years, as mayor not long after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

“We remain a united township,” Mr. Turner said, “where all are welcome.”

SEE ALSO:
New Jersey Town To Pay Millions After Denying Mosque Permit [Huffington Post, 2017-05-30]
Justice Department probing N.J. town over mosque denial as another town settles [Reuters, 2017-05-30]
New Jersey town to pay $3.25 million in lawsuit over mosque [CNN, 2017-05-30]
Sexual Assault /
Harassment
French Open takes player’s credential for harassing reporter

By Samuel Petrequin
The Associated Press, May 30, 2017

PARIS (AP) — A French tennis player’s French Open credential was revoked because he grabbed a reporter and kissed her on the neck during a live TV interview at the tournament.

The French Tennis Federation announced Tuesday it was punishing 21-year-old qualifier Maxime Hamou “following his inappropriate behaviour towards a female journalist” a day earlier, when he lost in the first round at Roland Garros.

The FFT said it would investigate the matter further.

Hamou’s behavior also caught the attention of French politicians.

On Twitter, Sports Minister Laura Flessel called what Hamou did to Eurosport TV’s Maly Thomas an “assault.” Cecile Duflot, a member of parliament, tweeted: “He kisses her by force, she tries to get away, he holds her by the neck and everyone... laughs #tired.”

Flessel and Duflot also criticized 1988 French Open runner-up Henri Leconte and other in-studio guests who laughed at and applauded Hamou’s on-air actions.

“A live assault is not funny,” Flessel wrote. “We should never let this happen, and never trivialize such acts.”

Hamou, who is ranked 287th, posted a statement on Instagram on Tuesday in which he apologized to Thomas “if she feels hurt or shocked by my attitude during her interview.”

He wrote, in French, that he let his “excess of enthusiasm express itself awkwardly toward Maly, who I know and sincerely respect.”

Hamou added that he would offer an apology in-person if Thomas wants one.

Eurosport said in a statement that it regretted what had happened.

More AP tennis coverage: https://apnews.com/tag/apf-Tennis

SEE ALSO:
Tennis Player Banned From French Open After Forcibly Kissing Reporter On Live TV [Huffington Post, 2017-05-30]
Forest Service women: We faced assault, mistreatment, retaliation if we complained

By Michael Doyle
McClatchy Washington Bureau, May 30, 2017

WASHINGTON—Female Forest Service workers in California reported enduring sexual misconduct, harassment and a fear of retaliation if they complained, according to a previously unreleased study obtained by McClatchy under the Freedom of Information Act.

While many Forest Service employees voiced general satisfaction with their workplaces, women were much more likely than men to identify serious problems in the 2015 survey.

Their grievances spanned a wide range, from misdeeds to mismanagement, and they echoed complaints lodged by women in the military and other federal agencies.

“Concerns included inappropriate supervisor behaviors, derogatory or patronizing attitudes towards females, a lack of accountability when issues arise and a lack of respect toward subordinates,” the 56-page study noted.

“The fact remains that a male-dominated workforce can lead to a variety of negative consequences for women,” it added.

The report, called a “workplace environment assessment” of the Pacific Southwest Region, was commissioned by the Forest Service and prepared by a consulting firm called ICF International. It was provided to McClatchy on May 18, in response to a Dec. 1 FOIA request.

The report mirrors investigations by a congressional committee and the Interior Department’s Office of Inspector General that have identified similar management missteps and alleged mistreatment of women in the National Park Service. The inquiries have exposed what some fear is a systemic problem in the government’s public lands agencies.

“I think that in any setting where you are in remote areas, where there is a separate code of conduct that is used to provide discipline, that oftentimes you have pretty egregious behavior,” Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., said in an interview.

Speier said members of the Congressional Caucus on Women’s Issues hoped to hold a hearing later this year, possibly at Grand Canyon National Park, on the National Park Service and Forest Service workforce controversies. She has previously authored legislation addressing military sexual assault and harassment, which surveys have suggested is prevalent.

Citing the study on its workers in California, the Forest Service said in a statement Friday that it “takes seriously the findings in the assessment.”

It added, “The region’s goals in undertaking the assessment were to gain a better understanding of the current environment and to identify things that are working well, but also to identify areas for improvement.”

The Forest Service said it had undertaken a number of steps, including additional training, close cooperation with civil rights staff and engaging with a professional consultant to “help us recognize and take steps to manage gender-related and other unconscious bias that may exist.”
Among female Forest Service workers in the agency’s California-based Pacific Southwest Region, 20 percent indicated that they had witnessed insulting or disrespectful remarks or behaviors regarding an employee’s gender in the prior three years.

Thirty-one percent said they felt excluded from decision-making or group action.

Four percent of the women said they had experienced sexual harassment or misconduct.

“Women provided consistently less favorable responses than men across all aspects of the workplace environment,” the study reported.

It said “perceptions regarding a lack of accountability emerged as one of the most common problems” and that “fear of retaliation is a concern for a substantial percentage of employees in the Region.”

Previous hearings before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee have also put a spotlight on related issues within the Forest Service.

“I really love my job, but I have witnessed females being overlooked, not taken seriously, passed over and not given equal opportunities. This has also happened to me,” Denice Rice, a fire prevention technician on California’s Eldorado National Forest, told the House committee last year.

The Forest Service’s Pacific Southwest Region manages 20 million acres in California. Its workforce consists of approximately 5,000 full-time employees, 70 percent of whom are men. Seasonal employees bring the workforce to about 7,500, with a big majority in the male-dominated firefighting field.

All told, 1,084 employees responded to the workplace survey. Consultants also interviewed 90 workers, including seven from the Stanislaus, four from the Eldorado and six from the Sequoia national forests.

The good news for the Forest Service is that the majority of survey participants and interview subjects were relatively satisfied with their workplace environment.

“By far, the most common theme expressed by female participants about their co-workers regarding women in the workplace was that their co-workers are great and/or they had no issues with their co-workers related to gender discrimination,” the report noted.

For instance, 68 percent of women said they agreed or strongly agreed that their workplace “embodied a safe, respectful work environment” for females.

Among men, though, 87 percent answered the same, reflecting a significantly different perspective across genders that Forest Service officials have been trying to equalize.

In a similar vein, 55 percent of women said the Forest Service had taken “effective steps” to rectify sexual harassment or misconduct, compared with 72 percent of men.

Twenty-one percent of the women disagreed or strongly disagreed with the notion that employees were treated fairly regardless of gender.

While the majority of those surveyed reported having “positive experiences” with their supervisors and local leadership, the report cautioned that “a notable percentage of participants held negative perceptions, and complaints related to supervisors and local leadership were among the most commonly reported concerns across the assessment.”

With more concerted workforce training, and a younger generation of supervisors coming up, researchers suggest problems may start to diminish.

“There was a trend of improvement across the region,” the report said.
Report finds sloppy handling of sexual misconduct cases in Justice Department

By Joe Davidson
The Washington Post, June 2, 2017

Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz testifies on Capitol Hill in September 2012. (J. Scott Applewhite/AP)

Everything wasn’t civil within the Civil Division of the Justice Department.

For an agency filled with lawyers familiar with handling evidence and detailing investigations, the agency’s management of sexual harassment and misconduct cases was surprisingly sloppy, according to the department’s Office of Inspector General (OIG).

While the number of documented harassment cases is not great, “we identified significant weaknesses in the Civil Division’s tracking, reporting, and investigating of the 11 sexual harassment and misconduct allegations that we reviewed” during fiscal 2011-2016, the report said, “as well as inconsistencies among penalties imposed for substantiated allegations.”

In one case, a male attorney allegedly spied on two female lawyers while they pumped breast milk. “The investigation into the allegation consisted of the male attorney’s supervisor speaking with him,” according to the report. “Thereafter, his supervisor accepted the male attorney’s explanation of the incident as an honest mistake and imposed on him an informal disciplinary action of oral counseling.”

There are examples of lower-level workers being punished more harshly than upper-level officials for similar offenses. In some situations, the offenders were “flushed” to other offices, like a pedophile priest assigned to a new parish — a practice known as “pass the trash.”

Three cases from the report illustrate the problems.

- A senior supervisory lawyer groped the breasts and rears of two female attorneys at an office happy hour. The same lawyer, who also made unwelcome sexual and offensive comments, previously was reprimanded in writing and punished with a lesser title for sending sexual emails to co-workers.

The senior attorney moved to another office within the department, but his new supervisors were not told of his conduct. “He received no suspension or loss in pay or grade, despite the prior misconduct and the seriousness of the second incident, with the deciding official commenting that a suspension ‘would unnecessarily deprive the government of [the senior official’s] litigating services.’ ”

This case involved potential criminal assault charges, but it was not referred to outside law enforcement authorities. OIG said the case demonstrates poor decision-making and “an inadequate appreciation” of the department’s zero-tolerance policy.

- A senior attorney admitted stalking another lawyer and hacking into her personal email. The senior official did a “catfishing” operation, meaning he used a fake online persona in an attempt to lure the victim into a relationship. Again, no suspension or loss in pay or grade, but he did get a written reprimand, a lesser title and was restricted for one year from the facility where his victim worked. Though there were potential criminal implications, referral was not made for possible prosecution.

- A mid-level staffer, grade GS-9, received a letter of admonishment after making inappropriate comments about a female colleague’s body. The letter did not constitute formal discipline and did not go into his file.

Yet, while the actions of the GS-9 “was significantly less flagrant than the misconduct” of the lawyers, both GS-15s, “the disciplinary response in this case was only slightly less severe than the penalties imposed in
those cases,” the report said. This raises the risk that “the Civil Division may impose less severe penalties for substantiated cases of sexual harassment and misconduct for high-performing employees.”

Not only that, the harassers in cases A and B subsequently received performance awards. This sent a message — sexual misconduct will be lightly punished and some of the guilty will be rewarded.

“What is alarming about the Civil Division and what rings true for the entire labor force is the lack of accountability for individuals committing acts of sexual misconduct due to the absence of punitive procedures,” said Wanda Killingsworth, president of Federally Employed Women. “Without any internal system to protect employees from sexual harassment the fight to effectively combat workplace sexual harassment is directly inhibited and the current report on the Department of Justice just proves that lack of awareness is a breeding ground for abuse.” The division’s cases, she added, “are not unique to any single agency, but nonetheless present in many sectors of the workforce.”

Another consequence is that sexual misconduct can negatively affect far more than the targeted victim by creating “a hostile work environment, lower productivity and morale, and diminish an agency’s reputation and credibility,” Deputy Inspector General Rob Storch said in a podcast.

A central finding, he added, “was that the Civil Division does not consistently or effectively track, record, or maintain adequate information on allegations of sexual harassment and misconduct. For example, case files were maintained only in hard copy, the content of those files was inconsistent, and the Civil Division relied on the memory of one human resources officer to track all allegations of misconduct.”

While the report focused on one division, a memo from Inspector General Michael Horowitz to Deputy Attorney General Rod J. Rosenstein said the findings indicate the department should “assess the handling of sexual harassment and misconduct allegations across all components.”

In response to the report, Rosenstein said “it is fortunate that there are relatively few substantiated incidents of sexual harassment, but even one incident is too many. We will review the Inspector General’s recommendations and consider whether additional guidance is required to ensure that all misconduct allegations are handled appropriately, in support of our goal of a workplace in which everyone is treated fairly.”

The department agreed with the OIG’s recommendations to track sexual misconduct allegations, report allegations to the appropriate offices, develop consistent penalty guidelines and consider guidance on performance awards to those under investigation or recently disciplined for misconduct.

Previously, the report concluded, the division did not respond to sexual harassment and misconduct allegations “in a manner that would successfully eliminate such misconduct from the workplace.”

Columnist Joe Davidson covers the federal government in the Federal Insider. It replaced the Federal Diary, which focused on federal employees. Davidson previously was an assistant city editor at The Washington Post and a Washington and foreign correspondent with The Wall Street Journal, where he covered federal agencies and political campaigns. Follow @JoeDavidsonWP
A senior Interior official retires after investigators find he sexually harassed multiple women

By Lisa Rein
The Washington Post, May 31, 2017

A senior law enforcement official at the Interior Department who investigators documented had sexually harassed six women who worked for him or with him has retired, rather than face discipline, according to agency officials familiar with the terms of his departure.

Tim K. Lynn, a senior executive in charge of Interior’s Office of Law Enforcement and Security, left the government in April and planned to return to his home state of Oklahoma, those two officials say. They asked for anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the retirement.

Lynn’s departure came a little more than a month after Deputy Inspector General Mary Kendall’s office disclosed what it said was a long pattern of inappropriate behavior he showed toward female employees.

Lynn, 52, a former law enforcement officer with the U.S. Forest Service and Secret Service, had led a department that acts as a liaison to Interior’s other enforcement agencies. Investigators said in a detailed report in February that he acted inappropriately toward six women, touching, hugging, text-messaging and flirting with them at the office and discussing “inappropriate” subjects.

Investigators provided graphic detail about one of the women, a direct report who told a high-level supervisor that Lynn made lewd overtures and unwanted advances to her in the office.

The case was the first test of a zero-tolerance policy for sexual misconduct that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke set for his 70,000 employees on his first day in office in March. The agency has been dogged for years by widespread allegations of inappropriate behavior, particularly at the National Park Service, where rangers and other employees work in remote locations where misconduct evaded scrutiny.

Sexual harassment cases at Yosemite National Park, Canaveral National Seashore and more recently, Yellowstone National Park have prompted angry congressional hearings and an ongoing, agencywide survey of Interior employees to gauge the scope of the problem. Lawmakers in both parties criticized the Obama administration for doing little to punish sexual predators.

Zinke told employees in an email on his first day that he would take swift action against any employee found to be engaging in sexual misconduct.

Heather Swift, an agency spokeswoman, confirmed that the Office of Law Enforcement is now being led by an acting director, Darren Cruzan. She declined to confirm Lynn’s departure, citing restrictions on disclosure of employee personnel information. Lynn did not return a phone message left with his ex-wife.

At an internal meeting in April, employees in the law enforcement division were told by Harry Humbert, a deputy assistant secretary, that Lynn was retiring, according to the two agency employees with knowledge of the meeting. Humbert told the staff that Lynn’s case was not to be discussed in the office, these employees said.
In the report, investigators gave an account of Lynn from one of the women as a “touchy-feely type guy” who would brush against her arm, squeeze her shoulders, administer “reflex checks” to her knees and occasionally wink at her during meetings. At first she did not tell anyone about these actions since she was new in the office “and wanted to see if they were just part of Lynn’s personality or something more,” the report said.

According to the report, the woman started to document the encounters last summer because they made her more uncomfortable. Lynn came into her office once when she was alone, put his head on her shoulder and rubbed her hair, she said. Then he joked that she was “looking at porn.” She said she was not.

Another time, the woman said Lynn told her, “I’m going to tell you something very, very private,” then showed her a Facebook photograph of a woman he said was his dental hygienist and told her that his hygienist wanted him to be her “sugar daddy.”

She told investigators Lynn asked her if she had ever dated anyone she worked with. He once saw her in the office icing her leg after a bike ride, asked her if she was hurt, and then said: “Do you want me to be like your daddy and kiss your boo-boos all better for you?” When she declined, he continued, investigators said. “What’s the matter? Did your daddy never kiss your boo-boos for you?” he said. When she told him his comments were “weird and uncomfortable,” he replied: “I’m so sad that your daddy never kissed your boo-boos for you.”

The employee survey of sexual harassment is expected to be released this summer.