



THE EMERALD VOICE

FIVE STAR CHAPTER



EMERALD EMPIRE CHAPTER OF THE MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Due to the Lane County COVID-19 risk level rising to the extreme level, the **ROTC RECOGNITION DINNER MEETING** originally scheduled for 12 May has been **cancelled**.



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
Happy Birthday, May 22nd



HOLIDAY FARM FIRE

With the prediction of another busy wildfire season, former chapter member Tommy Albert sent an article on his experience the night of the fire and the recovery process he has gone through. This is valuable information into how you can prepare to make a recovery after a tragic loss. See page 4.

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MAY 2021

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Memorial Day Monday, May 31st

MOAA MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS MANY

2021 CHAPTER OFFICERS

President	Ken Evans	914-6235
1st Vice Pres	Dick Norton	915-5696
2nd Vice Pres	Dick Kimbell	915-0405
Secretary	Jim Koch	719-440-9036
Treasurer	Elaine Callahan	968-1746
Chaplain	Jonathan Landon	946-3888
Membership	Mike Kennedy	463-7951
Newsletter	Pat Harris	942-5274
Webmaster	Ginger Banks	484-3336
Golf Tourney	Floyd Bard	729-7265



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MAY 8th

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES, 28 APRIL 2021

PRESENT: An in-person meeting was held for the first time this year. Officers: President Ken Evans, 1st Vice President Dick Norton, Secretary Jim Koch, Treasurer Elaine Callahan. Board members: Frank Balazs, Eric Watkins, and Mike Kennedy. Committee members: Pat Harris. Activities/Events Committee: Floyd Bard. A quorum was established.

OPENING: President Evans called the meeting to order at 1205 and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Michael Kennedy gave an opening prayer.

MINUTES: Minutes of the 24 Mar 2021 board meeting were reviewed. Motion by Dick Norton and seconded by Ken Evans to accept. Motion approved.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

TREASURER'S REPORT for 24 MARCH – 27 APRIL 2021

UMPQUA ACCOUNT

Club Operations:

Beginning balance as of 24 March 2021	\$ 4579.83
Deposits: to Club Operations (luncheon and donations)	\$ 738.50
Expenses: Include luncheon costs, tax filings, Zoom	\$ -542.99

Club Operations as of 27 April 2021 **\$ 4775.34**

Special Projects Fund: added \$ 0 in donations **\$ 2168.05**

*VAGT added \$2075.00 in donations **\$ 3096.11**

ROTC Scholarship Booster Fund: added \$ 110 in donations **\$ 2680.00**

UMPQUA CHECKING ACCOUNT grand total as of 27 Apr 2021 **\$ 12719.50**

OCCU ROTC SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENT FUND

Balance as of 28 February 2021	\$ 2958.94
Donations	\$ 0.00
Interest	\$ 0.38
OCCU Total Balance as of 31 March 2021	\$ 2959.32

BENTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION (BCF)

EMERALD EMPIRE MOAA SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENT FUND

Previous balance as of 28 February 2021 **\$ 46429.31**

BCF Balance as of 31 March 2021 **\$ not yet available**

NOTES:

The Veterans Appreciation Golf Tournament (VAGT) expenses and donations will be listed as a subgroup under Special Projects Fund.

BCF Balance is not yet published on their website.

Motion to accept by Eric Watkins and seconded by Dick Norton. Motion approved.

"The Emerald Voice"

is published monthly by Emerald Empire Chapter, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA),
PO Box 767, Eugene, Oregon 97440-0767
Email: EmeraldEmpireMOAA@gmail.com

The Emerald Empire Chapter of MOAA is a Eugene-based 501(c)(19) veterans organization that meets regularly at the Veterans' Memorial Building at 1626 Willamette Street. We have 141 regular and associate members made up of active, retired and former members of the nation's seven uniformed services and their surviving spouses. We, and the national organization, are a non-partisan advocate on military personnel matters, especially proposed legislation affecting the career force, the retired community and veterans of the uniformed services. As a local chapter, we focus more on the local military community, e.g., gathering clothing and personal care items for the patients in the VA Hospital in Roseburg. Other areas of emphasis can be found at <http://www.moaa.org/takeaction/>.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES (cont.)

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Veteran's Appreciation Golf Tournament – Floyd Bard brought the board up to date on the current status. For clarification he explained the categories of forms.

Two types for registration - Individual and Team

Three types for Sponsors - Holes, Registration Area, and Donation

He will be gone the entire month of May. June will be a big push month for all activities to include a media blitz. The majority of registrations and sponsorships will come in during the 90-day period before the event. Floyd will provide a written report to be attached to the minutes.

Dick Norton will be sending recognition letters to the sponsors.

2. ROTC Award Dinner - Due to the Governor's designation of Extreme Covid Risk the 12 May 2021 Dinner is canceled. Ken Evans discussed several possibilities to present the awards: incorporate the awards into our June luncheon or a June dinner if the risk category changes. Commissioning is in June and maybe presentations could be made then. Ken will check with Chris Warren about it. In the past some restaurant gift cards were given out. They may be hard to come by this year. Eric Watkins thought we might have some MOAA Medals but has not found them.

Actions: a. Check hazard status in 2 weeks, 12 May, to see what is allowed.

b. Based on 12 May report Board will determine if it is feasible to have a June lunch or dinner meeting for ROTC scholarship awards. Possible time would be June 9th to 16th (note that U of O commencement is 14 June).

c. If hazard level and time frame not sufficient than alternate method to present scholarships to be explored including a brief ceremony at commissioning time (check with Chris Warren on date and time).

d. Ken to get MOAA medal to Frank and Frank will check with Delp's to see if they can be made at a reasonable cost.

e. Eric to check with Burt on flag location and if flags were stolen a second time.

NEW BUSINESS: None at the moment

1st VICE PRESIDENT REPORT: We are surviving. The Veterans' Building is responding to our needs. The next news letter will cover fire loss experiences and what some of our members have had to deal with. There were 80 hits on our new website.

2nd VICE PRESIDENT REPORT: Membership remains the same. Attracting new members remains a little slow. Younger people are not joining many organizations.

COMMENTS FROM THE PRESIDENT: We were happy to meet in-person.

Chapter Luncheon Meeting: To Be Announced

Next Board Meeting: 26 May 2021, method to be announced.

Meeting adjourned 1307 hours.

James Koch, Secretary

Holiday Farm Fire Experience

Former Emerald Empire Chapter member Tommy Albert and his wife Kathy lost their house to the wildfire that swept through the McKenzie River valley last Labor Day weekend. That fire forced almost a dozen of our members to evacuate; two lost their homes and one lost a cabin. Tommy and Kathy decided not to rebuild and have since moved into a new house near Waco, Texas. They drove to Texas in their one remaining vehicle, carrying all their worldly possessions in the back seat, along with their cat. In fact, their loss was so complete that when they sat down to their first meal in the new house, they realized they didn't even have any salt and pepper.

Editor's note: This article was originally written for the National Smokejumpers Association's (NSA) magazine. Yes... our Tommy jumped out of perfectly good aircraft into blazing infernos.

Should You Draw the Short Straw

Submitted by Tommy Albert

We in the NSA have spent varying lengths of time in wildfire, either as active fire fighters or living in the urban interface. All of us have seen the devastating destruction in the aftermath of a wildfire. Having worked in southern California especially, when the Santa Anna winds were blowing, the helplessness of watching house after house ignite and burn to the ground was daunting. We dropped retardant in attempts to save houses even though the effectiveness was marginal at best. To be truthful, drops were made that had no effect on retarding the fire but we made the ineffective drops so the homeowners felt we were "attempting" to save their homes.

Never would I have imagined being on the "other side of the fence." I lived on the beautiful wild and scenic McKenzie River just outside of the Willamette NF for over 20 years. Having observed bottoms of drainages escape destruction when all the surrounding area burned, lead to some apathy on my part even though I know the "perfect storm" was always within the realm of possibilities.

On September 7th it happened, the perfect storm. A typical dry mid to late summer and early fall, high pressure on the east side of the Cascades, low pressure on the coast producing hot, dry easterly winds in excess of forty mph. Power was lost around 8:00 PM when a limb fell on a powerline resulting in small fire. We called the local Fire Marshall at 10:30 PM and were told the fire is 18 miles upriver from our house and fire crews were on the fire. He went on to say that if it became necessary, they would issue a Level 1 evacuation notice, followed by a level 2 before a level 3 would be issued (Level 1: Pre evacuation notice – get ready. Level 2: Be set to evacuate. Level 3: Evacuate within 10 minutes.).

The fire exploded as the winds picked up, and we received a Level 3 evacuation order at 1215 AM emphatically stating, evacuate immediately! There was never a Level 1 or 2 order issued. The fire, named the *Holiday Farm Fire*, traveled over 13 miles in one hour. When all was said and done, the fire consumed approximately 850 structures and miraculously only 1 person died in the fire. There is no telling how many wild animals, pets, and livestock perished.

It was not until 5 days later that we learned our house, sheds, boat, gazebo, and belongings were totally consumed by the fire. We were not able to step foot on the property until almost 3 weeks after the fire. To say it was disheartening is an inexpressible understatement. The fire was so hot it killed 180 foot plus Douglas Fir trees that had been limbed 100 feet up. Nothing but the foundation of the house was recognizable. Just imagine, everything you and your spouse accumulated over a lifetime... gone.

It is worth mentioning that there were structures left standing. Three burned and the fourth left standing. Though in many cases there was no apparent rhyme or reason as to why, on the other hand, those who had defensible space in some but not all areas, survived. Worth taking a look-see around your property. Anything you can do to not join this "club," is well worth it.

Should You Draw the Short Straw (continued)

This leads us to the purpose of this writing, insurance. I personally am very lucky in that I was in the military and qualified for USAA coverage. Just as importantly, I married a lady that monitored and adjusted our coverages annually. Without her diligence we could have, like many did, found ourselves underinsured and out of pocket for thousands of dollars. Everyone who had USAA gave them a Five Star rating. I emphatically agree. I can't attest to peoples' experience with other insurance companies except, those I talked to with Progressive had nothing good to say. I can attest to that as my boat and trailer were insured by them.

The McKenzie River drainage is heavily populated with blue-collar residents living paycheck to paycheck. Many were renting with no renter's insurance. Others who owned homes were either not insured or carried minimal insurance. Life as they knew it has been forever altered. Many are still residing in FEMA provided motel rooms and trailers. Some I am told, are living in tents on their property.

Wildfire events are increasing primarily due to increased development in the urban interface. This along with heavier fuel loading, be it Global Warming or just a cyclable weather pattern, you draw your own conclusions... Bottom line, if you live in the urban interface, you need to take a serious look at your insurance coverage and the vegetation around your home.

The *indented* information below is provided by an insurance agent who is highly experienced in wildfire related claims:



Structure: The home value these days is critical to keep up with for the homeowner as home appreciations are rising rapidly. Many companies will include a cushion of about 20% increased dwelling limit, meaning if you have a home insured for \$500,000 there would be an extra \$100,000 (20%) available if the loss exceeded the stated coverage. You never want to rely on this, but it is good to know it is available. To clarify, many people use that 20% as a basis for coverage so they might only insure the home to \$420,000 knowing there is the 20% available, effectively eliminating the cushion. We recommend reviewing the replacement coverage annually to be sure this is keeping up with your specific area, outside the small index increase each year that is built into the policy. This is the customer responsibility not the insurance agent or carrier to track these values. (Note: Home replacement in most areas now exceeds \$300 a square foot. Cost of lumber and metal is dramatically on the rise and \$400 a square foot is possible.)

Personal Property: Most policies offer replacement cost coverage as their default position in this category. This covers the true value of items that a customer would choose to replace. For example, if you lost a leather couch in a fire that you purchased in 2002, you could go to a local retailer and buy a new leather couch at today's cost and it would be covered under your insurance. If you choose NOT to replace those items you would receive the actual cash value (ACV) of those items, which would be equivalent to the depreciated or "used value". In the couch scenario, what would a 20-year-old couch be worth? This is what you would get in the ACV scenario if that coverage was selected or if the item was not "replaced". I am simplifying this by example. (Note: Know your policy provider requirements on replacing personal property).

Relating to record keeping: Keeping records in the CLOUD or on a thumb drive or hardcopy stored off premises. This is only for the client benefit to easily recall items in the home, shop, garage etc. It can be a challenge to remember every detail. We recommend opening cabinets etc. and documenting items within just to help with recall. Likely the insurance carrier will

Should You Draw the Short Straw (continued)

never ask to see the footage or listings. There are cases where certain unique items would benefit from this documentation (artwork, antique furniture, collectibles).

Also keep in mind there are certain limitations by category, of which many of those have theft limitations with most carriers (guns, jewelry, art), nonetheless, cash, coins, collectibles, often have very modest limits even relating to a fire loss. (Note: Be aware of your providers requirements relating to personal property claims.)

Vehicles: On another note, all vehicles, boats, ATVs, motorcycles, classic cars, snow mobiles etc., must carry their own coverage to be considered for a fire claim. This would be under the comprehensive coverage or physical damage coverage of the specific vehicle policy and would be filed as a separate claim under that policy, subject to the selected deductible. Most home insurance carriers only allow for vehicles that are used for maintaining the property (small yard tractors, mowers, snow blowers and ATVs setup for maintenance), to be included in the homeowner's policy.

Business: Also keep in mind that any business owned items or if someone was running a business out of their home, these items would not be covered as coverage would fall under the business General Liability policy. For business operating in an on premises outbuilding or detached shop, this can be problematic as items in the shop that are business owned or the actual "shop" itself will not be covered with many carriers. The building and its contents would also need to be covered under a business policy, even if it is located on the same premises.

We videotaped our possessions in every room and outbuildings. This is important and will help you with a claim. Our policy stated that we could either itemize our possessions or take 75% of the contents coverage. Unfortunately, I stored the video on a thumb drive in the safe, and yes, it was destroyed along with everything in the safe. Good plan but not executed well. Recommend you store pictures and spreadsheets on the "Cloud." We found out the hard way that even high-end safes with a good thermal rating will not hold up to a sustained house fire resulting from a wildfire.

Review your policy annually. We opted for replacement value on all our coverages. I had a boat insured by USAA's "partner," Progressive as USAA doesn't insure boats and trailers. When we turned in our claim Progressive said that after four years, replacement value ceases and that "our agent should have explained that." No agent did, nor was there any notice, nor reduction in premium. They said we could have renegotiated our contract at that time. That must have been on page 63 in the small print. School of hard knocks, eh...

Consider "Riders" on your high value items. We carried riders on guns, computers/printers, and jewelry. The cost is minimal, and the value of these items is paid separately.

As the house appreciated, we adjusted our insurance coverage accordingly. This eliminates haggling over the value of your home and also increases content coverage. House values today are appreciating at a very fast pace. You can get a new appraisal just for insurance purposes only. This will help you to determine necessary coverages. Our USAA police asked if we wanted coverage of our outbuildings and we selected to have coverage and the cost was minimal.

Bottom line, you can obtain better coverages at surprisingly reasonable rates. Review your policy and check to see the cost of additional coverages (riders, outbuildings, decks). Unbeknown to us, our policy also included trees and shrubbery. We had all these items covered. In our case, it was an extremely wise investment netting us an equitable payout and a financially stable platform for our "new" life.

We had plans to rebuild until several contractors said it will be three years before we could count on getting into the house on the river property and that the cost will be \$300 a square foot. With the price of lumber skyrocketing, \$400 may be a more realistic figure.

Take the time to sit down with your agent and thoroughly review your coverages. Then inquire on costs for additional coverages. This is well worth your time should YOU draw the short straw. You will be happy you spent the time and money to receive the coverages you want. Once the fire starts, it's too late.

Tommy Albert, CJ-64

Visit our website at www.emeraldempiremoaa.org Another great resource for veterans.

NEEDS OF THE CHAPTER FIRST VICE PRESIDENT, by Dick Norton

I seem to be the guy that is continually crying "Want, Want, Want", but we seem to always need someone to assist in some capacity or other. In this case, it is to fill the vacancy created with the moving away Ed and Sue Daly to the great state of Florida. As you know, Ed did a great job in sharing information of the latest political decisions made at both State and Federal levels that has or will affect veterans. Many of us rely on this information from our newsletter to stay informed and up to date. This only requires a quick overview of the monthly MOAA Magazine and a review of the web site for the ODVA and the information is revealed for you. Not difficult, does not take much time but is really needed. If you find it in your daily routine to include these needs for our newsletter, please let me know so I can stop "Wanting".

ROTC Boosters

The Emerald Empire Chapter ROTC Boosters provide the scholarship monies normally awarded at the annual Cadet Dinner planned for the May General Meeting. We are still accepting donations for the 2021 scholarships. The following donations have been received:

Frank Balazs, 1st Lt, USMC, (Fmr)	Richard Kimbell, CDR, USNR (Ret)	Ken Evans, CAPT, USPHS (Ret)
Elaine Callahan, CAPT, USPHS (Ret)	Clayton Robson, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)	Pat Harris, CAPT, USCG (Ret)
Darren McMahon, CPT, USA (Ret)	William Kellogg, Maj, USMC (Ret)	Richard Norton, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)
Scott Sandgathe, CDR, USN (Ret)	Lynnette Campbell, MAJ, USA (Ret)	Charles Cole, CAPT, USN (Ret)
Robert Beck, LTC, USA (Ret)	John Abele, Capt, USMC (Ret)	James Armour, CPT, USA (Ret)
Raymond Byrne, Jr., BG, USA (Ret)	Robert Heaton, Maj, USAF (Ret)	Ronald Sticka, Col, USAF (Ret)
Ronald Lechnyr, LCDR, USPHS (Fmr)	James Paschall, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret)	Darlene Thomasec, LTC, USA (Ret)
Donald Simpson, LTC, USA (Ret) in memory of Mike Reuter, LTC, USA (Ret)	Judy Simpson, Associate	William Gutheim, COL, USA (Ret)
Mike Kennedy, CAPT (CHC), USN (Ret)	Ed Daley, Maj, ANG (Ret)	Thomas Stewart, CDR, USNR (Fmr)
Robert Tully, Jr., LTC, USA (Ret)	James Brann, LTC, ARNG (Ret)	Dale Offet, CPT, USAR (Ret)
Mark Schibler, Lt Col, USAF (Ret)	Mike Lee, COL, USAR (Ret)	James Helbling, LTC, USA (Ret)
John Simmons, CH, Lt Col, USAF, (Ret)	Eric Watkins, LTC, USA (Ret)	James Miller, CPT, USA (Ret)
Donald Simpson, LTC, USA (Ret) in memory of his twin brother, Patrick Simpson, LTC, USA (Ret)	Alan Keaton, MAJ, USA (Ret)	Jon Weck, COL, USA (Ret)
CW2 John Toensing, USA (Fmr)	Earl Hain, LTC, USA (Ret)	Erven Kincaid, LCDR, USN (Ret)
Bert Toepel, COL, USA (Ret)		
Norman Hoffman, BG, USA (Ret)		

Booster contact is John Toensing (541) 345-7535. Checks may be given to the Treasurer at meetings (whenever we have the next one), or mailed to: Emerald Empire Chapter, P.O. Box 767, Eugene, Oregon 97440-0767.

SURVIVING SPOUSE CORNER: Focusing on Finances After Loss

By: Pat Green

The loss of a spouse has quite an impact. At first, you are busy dealing with grief and helping your family recover from the loss. Eventually, though, you must focus your energy on finances. Your goal should be to live comfortably with as little financial stress as possible. Losing a spouse often means a reduction in family income. This requires some changes and hard decisions as you consider:

Where should I live? Many factors are involved in this decision. Work, commute time, children, their friends, activities, and school proximity, health, safety, and other family responsibilities are all important.

What can I afford? This is probably the most important consideration. If you and your spouse were conservative in spending, your living expenses and debt might be manageable. Do a budget analysis based on your current income and spending. Be aware of adjustments. Income might be down, but taxes might be up if your new IRS tax status is “single” (higher rates). Include new insurance costs for yourself to protect any dependents. Don’t forget to add in the expense of services your spouse provided, such as lawn mowing, painting, or handy jobs. Do the calculations. If you can stay put for a while, great!

How can I make changes to my current home? It’s home, and you love it. You can freshen things up with some inexpensive changes like rearranging furniture, adding some fresh paint, buying a new bed or bedspread, and relocating photos and wall art.

What if a change of address is necessary? Downsizing or moving might be the best option for your new financial circumstances or emotional state. Make a pro/con list of emotional factors and expenses. Be thoughtful about real estate commissions, state income tax, moving, and redecorating expenses as well as all those emotional pluses and minuses. Investigate whether spousal disability exemptions and entitlements are available at a new home or new location. Changing states can generate issues. Do your homework. Be diligent!

This is a lot to do and a lot to consider, but help and resources are available. There are excellent calculators and programs online to assist with mortgages, investments, budget analysis, and insurance decisions, including on MOAA.org. Find them at MOAA.org/Finance.



MORE ON THE SURVIVING SPOUSE by Carol Norton

Your last will and testament is a document that designates what happens with your property, guardianship of your children, and names the person (executor) who carries out your wishes after you die. If you don’t own a lot of property, a simple will is likely all you will need.

It’s possible to draft up a simple will on you own, but it comes with its own set of pros and cons. These include problems with outdated information, specific state related tax issues, and how they handle specific trusts. If you need a very basic will, SmartLegalForms, LegalZoom, or RocketLawyer all provide a simple template for doing so for between \$25.00 and \$90.00. These laws and requirements change often, and if you don’t do it right you might unintentionally give someone more power over your estate than you want. Most simple wills have just a few sections where you can say what happens to your assets and designate who gets any property you own.

Continued on page 9, MORE

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

“Effective Friday March 26th, Lane County will move to the Low Risk category for the COVID health risk.” That is how I started last month’s President’s Corner. How quickly the landscape changes in this crazy COVID time. Just when it looked as if we had some form of normalcy the boom gets lowered. I must say that getting together with all of you that were able to attend the April 14th luncheon was very nice and refreshing. It was good to see people in person.

As of April 30th, the Governor has declared that 15 counties will move to the Extreme Hazard category which effectively keeps all activities and gatherings from happening. This makes planning anything in the next two-to-four weeks extremely difficult. As such we will NOT be having the May ROTC awards dinner as we are not allowed to have a gathering of any size. Even if the hazard rating changes in the next one-to-two weeks, we would not have enough time to plan, obtain special door prizes and work with catering. A big disappointment. In two weeks, we will look at the hazard decree and see what may be allowed and if we can arrange a function in June.

In the meantime, let us enjoy the weather, visit those friends and family that we can and make do as well as possible. This issue’s special article on insurance and planning by former members Tommy and Kathy Albert is something to take to heart and, with the thoughts they present, we might productively occupy our time reviewing, cataloging and planning.

I will say again, stay tuned to newsletters and emails as we continue to figure out what we can do and how. I will close by thanking all of you donors as we are insured to be able to make ROTC scholarship awards for 2021 even though we don’t particularly know when and where. Thank you and stay healthy.

Submitted by: Ken Evans, President



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When making the selection of your executor, it is important that he or she fully understand your desires and has a full understanding that the executor’s assignment is to serve your wishes, and not to pick and choose those that he or she feels is more deserving after you are gone.

I use a number of references in selecting the information I am sharing with you and not my personal opinions. These references come from either a MOAA web site or information acquired through Google.

Visit our website at www.emeraldempiremoaa.org

MOAA ARTICLES

Check Out Indeed’s Job Search Guide for Former Servicemembers, by Kevin Lilley

Indeed adds 10 jobs per second to its offerings. MOAA’s Job Board, powered by Indeed listings, had more than 50,000 veteran-hiring positions in the Washington, D.C., area alone in a recent search. But volume isn’t all Indeed offers – transitioning servicemembers and veterans can get advice from Indeed’s experts via their recently published [job search guide](#). Along with advice on preparing applications, interview techniques, and getting started in a new position, the job guide provides links to Indeed-specific resources that can help you succeed in your search. Some examples:

Finding your prospective employer’s [Indeed Company Page](#).

Using Indeed’s [salary comparison tools](#).

[Reaching out to Indeed](#) with questions about listings or other concerns.

Beyond the Listings

MOAA can help with all parts of your job search. Whether you’re searching for your first job out of uniform or looking for an upgrade on your post-service career path, visit MOAA.org/Careers to learn what programs are right for you. You can also follow MOAA for the [latest in transition and career news](#), including changes to your education benefits and regular advice from our team of transition experts. Premium and Life members can access additional resources, including [archived webinars](#), [résumé critiques](#), and [exclusive publications](#).

House Panel Tackles Growing Backlog of VA Compensation and Pension Exams

By: Brenden McMahon

A March 23 House committee hearing addressed a critical VA exam backlog preventing hundreds of thousands of veterans from receiving earned benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost 350,000 veterans are awaiting their compensation and pension (C&P) exams, a figure that’s more than tripled since early 2020. These exams are a critical step in the VA disability claims process, determining a veteran’s eligibility for access to VA health care, disability benefits, and other VA services. The exams were paused VA-wide in April 2020 because of the pandemic and [restarted late the next month](#) at some locations. VA representatives and advocates from veterans service organizations (VSOs) addressed the backlog during the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs (HVAC) Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs hearing, led by Rep. Elaine Luria (D-Va.), the subcommittee’s chair, and its ranking member, Rep. Troy Nehls (R-Texas).

MOAA was heartened to hear the subcommittee’s bipartisan concerns and calls for action to address the backlog and other issues of oversight. Key areas identified by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the VA’s Office of the Inspector General (VA OIG) included:

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) lacks a long-term strategy to eliminate the C&P exam backlog in a timely fashion.

GAO recommendations on the oversight of contracted examiners have yet to be fully implemented by VBA. Concerns remain that data from the oversight process still cannot be fully used to analyze the operations of the program.

OIG and GAO concur that VBA lacks and should develop a detailed, written plan to address the backlog, the quality of contracted examiners, and ensure there is uniform guidance across all levels of VBA and VHA.

ROTC SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Emerald Empire Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America



Though the ROTC Dinner is cancelled, we would still like to recognize the outstanding MSIII achievers and all the graduating MSIV and V.



2021 Emerald Empire Chapter, MOAA

MOAA ROTC Scholarship recipients:

Derek Akey is from Gainesville, Florida, is majoring in Marketing and is a retired discus thrower for the University of Oregon. He has a passion for bow hunting and 3D design that he uses to manufacture his own archery products out of his college apartment. He plans to commission and serve as an active-duty career EOD officer, using his background in athletics to build a cohesive, motivated team wherever the Army takes him.

Alex Andrade is from Gilroy, California. He is a General Social Science major, studying Applied Economics, Business, and Society in the college of Arts and Sciences. He is minoring in Leadership and Administrative Skills in the College of Education. He has participated on both the Ranger Challenge and Color Guard teams, received the prestigious Marauder's Tab and participated in the Bataan Memorial Death March. He hopes to graduate in June of 2022 and commission as a Military Intelligence Officer.

Benton Community Foundation recipient:

Kasey Campbell is from Salem, Oregon. She is majoring in Human Physiology and is studying to become an Athletic Trainer. She is a Young Life leader, part time waitress and an athletic medicine intern. She is working to become a combat arms officer in the Oregon National Guard in the spring of 2022 and hopes to complete 20 years of service through the Guard, assisting, supporting, and strengthening soldiers throughout her time in service.

The following Military Science cadets will be graduating this year

Abel, Andre
Buddie, Augustine
Carrasco, Eric
Dibene, Anikka
Dowden, Hailey
Hanlan, Aylin
Hwang, Eric
Kepa'a, Noa



Lopez-Custodio, Martha
Mendoza-Lopez, Miguel
Pasag, Justin
Roney, Caitlin
Stahlberg, Pierce
Withem-Rardin, Serenity
Zheng, Wenha
Hart, Grace (MSV)

The Path Forward

During a March 25 HVAC hearing, VA Secretary Denis McDonough outlined four guiding principles for his vision of the future of the department. You can learn more about his approach and other plans for the VA [at this link](#). McDonough is committed to improving VA's outreach and engagement with veterans, their caregivers, their families, and survivors. More work is required to address the backlog and the quality of contracted C&P exams, but the secretary has been hard at work, in his first 45 days, to address all areas of veteran health care and benefits.

MOAA will continue to engage with VA, Secretary McDonough, Congress, and our VSO partners to improve the quality of, and timely access to, VA health care and benefits. The growing backlog of C&P exams must be addressed by the VA, the training of VBA-contracted examiners must improve, and GAO and VA OIG recommendations for these areas must be fully implemented.

**MILITARY OFFICERS
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MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

MOAA is the largest veterans' organization for military officers in the United States, with approximately 355,000 members.

The organization represents those on active duty, former officers, members of the National Guard, Reserve, Retirees and their surviving spouses.

Chapter Mission Statement:

The mission of the Emerald Empire Chapter of MOAA is to advocate for our military community and connect it to the nation we serve.



Though **DOD** no longer allows us to display the seals or logos of the various services, we are allowed to say this: "This activity supports the U.S. military and its veterans; however, it is not officially connected to or endorsed by the U.S. Department of Defense or any of its branches." So, imagine if you will, a colorful display of the symbols of the services to which we have devoted more than 2,000 years of duty.

