

## **Weekly Report**

**National Security Division**

Week ending January 11, 2019

### *Items of Interest*

#### **Commander concludes tour of Indo-Pacific Theater**



National Commander Brett Reistad meets with Japan Vice Minister of Defense Takako Suzuki.

#### **'Bitterest of Enemies, Now Strongest of Friends': Reistad Visits Japan**

(Legion.org) It's only fitting that after American Legion National Commander Brett Reistad left the continental United States on Dec. 1 for a tour of Pearl Harbor that he conclude his Far East visit three weeks later in Japan.

"The visits were really perfect bookends to a productive and fact-finding series of meetings with diplomats and military leaders which will enable The American Legion to become better advocates not just for our troops who are charged with fighting wars, but for our policymakers who are charged with preventing them," Reistad said. "Pearl Harbor is a permanent reminder that our country must never again take peace for granted and be caught off guard. Later during my visits, I was told repeatedly that our alliance with Japan could not be stronger. The United States and Japan have really gone from being the bitterest of enemies to the strongest of friends."

One relationship which is considerably more complicated and alarming is that of North Korea and the rest of the international community. "The president's patience is not limitless," Joseph Young, the deputy chief of mission in Japan told Reistad during the Legion delegation's visit to the U.S. embassy in Tokyo. "If we don't see some concrete actions by North Korea, we may have to re-evaluate our position (on denuclearization efforts there)."

In addition to concerns about North Korea, Young pointed out that Japan and Russia have never signed a peace treaty to end World War II hostilities with each other due to some disputed islands. Combined with aggressive behavior by China, the need for a strong U.S.-Japan alliance is not only understandable, but a strategic responsibility.

"The cornerstone of Japanese national security is the Japan-U.S. alliance, and going forward, I believe that it is very important and crucial to build a relationship with The American Legion to contribute to the stability of Japan and the world," Japan's Vice Minister of Defense Takako Suzuki said. Suzuki, who is also a member of Japan's House of Representatives, is skeptical of North Korea's willingness to end its provocations. "Even though there are more developmental moves between North Korea and the Republic of Korea, I believe that the threat has not changed even though there is some dialogue," she said. "Therefore in order to address those security issues, we have to consider the condition unchanged and pay special attention to that."

Reistad also met with two other members of Japan's Diet, including Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Kiyoto Tsuji.

"I can't thank you enough for the military service that you have provided us for over half a century. There is so much going on in the Far East and our security environment," Tsuji said. "The tension has been building in the past decade and we need your help. We need this alliance more than ever not just to protect our two countries but the whole Indo-Pacific region."

Tsuji also thanked the United States for coming to his country's aid during "3/11," the day a 2011 earthquake and tsunami devastated the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear facility.

"Some people on our side criticize the Japan-U.S. military alliance and say it's never been tested. But it has," Tsuji said. "3/11 is one big example. That is how our relationship has been nurtured in the past."

Quality of life issues for U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan were also on Reistad's mind as he met with a group of sailors aboard the USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), an aircraft carrier homeported at Yokosuka Naval Base. During the meeting, a senior chief with 22 years in the service said that he earned less than he did six years ago when he was stationed in the United States due to Japan's expensive economy and what many believe is an insufficient Cost of Living Allowance. Another sailor said that her deployment made it impossible to complete a course and was causing problems with her GI Bill benefits.

"These are issues that The American Legion can and will bring back to Congress," Reistad promised.

Reistad also met with the aircraft carrier's commanding officer, Capt. Pat Hannifin. Hannifin was very straight forward about the Reagan's ability to be an instrument of peace or a weapon of war. "At sea, the focus of effort is ensuring that the Reagan is as lethal as possible," he said. "We can be your best friend or worst enemy. You pick it."

## *Status of withdrawal from Syria*



U.S. Marines fire a 120mm mortar round during a registration mission in an undisclosed location of southwest Asia, on Dec. 20, 2018, while supporting Operation Inherent Resolve — the defeat-ISIS coalition.

(Courtesy of Military Times) The U.S. military's three-year mission in Syria shows no signs of ending or significantly changing anytime soon, U.S. officials now say, despite President Donald Trump's announcement in December that the Islamic State was defeated and all troops would be withdrawn immediately.

U.S. airstrikes in Syria have not slowed down based on strike reports released by the American-led coalition, showing that there are plenty of ISIS targets left in the area.

And as of Tuesday, U.S.-backed Syrian fighters were still posting pictures and video of them training with coalition forces at the controversial base of al-Tanf near the Iraq-Syria border, contrary to rumors that the base will soon close.

Additionally, military officials with U.S. Central Command say they are still fighting ISIS militants in the Middle Euphrates River Valley.

The strike report for the second half of December showed 469 air and artillery strikes were conducted in Syria against ISIS tactical units, fighting positions, heavy weapons systems, improvised explosive device facilities, armored vehicles, an unmanned aircraft system and even a barge and a boat.

Regional experts largely agree that ISIS still has the ability to reemerge as a threat, though there is disagreement as to the role the U.S. should play in combating the group.

The lack of a clear message from the White House has left the estimated 2,000 U.S. troops dotting Syria's northeast and southeast in strategic limbo, and could threaten the U.S. military's ability to continue marshaling its Syrian allies in their final campaign against ISIS' remnants.

Not long after Bolton's comments, Trump tweeted Monday morning: "No different from my original statements, we will be leaving at a proper pace while at the same time continuing to fight ISIS and doing all else that is prudent and necessary."

Bolton told reporters that a U.S. pullout would first require assurances that Turkey would not harm the Kurdish allies American troops have been working with across eastern Syria to defeat ISIS.

The uncertainty may reflect disagreement inside the Trump administration. "There is a real confusion in Washington over what the policy should be — with a real rift between the president and his national security advisers," said Joost Hiltermann, the Middle East and North Africa Program Director for the International Crisis Group. "So you get this seesaw approach, where Trump says all troops need to be withdrawn and then [Secretary of State] Mike Pompeo and John Bolton say 'no, no, no.'"

Bolton traveled to Turkey early this week to discuss the conditions of a U.S. departure from northern Syria with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. However, Erdogan reportedly refused to meet with Bolton on Tuesday and published a New York Times op-ed calling the U.S.-backed Kurdish Peoples Protection Units, or YPG, a terror group.

Read the full article [here](#).

### **DoD has its top-line budget figure**



*Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick Shanahan.*

(Courtesy of Defense News) The Pentagon has officially received its top-line budget figure for fiscal 2020, according to acting Deputy Secretary of Defense David Norquist. Asked if the department had finally received its figure, Norquist confirmed it has, but declined to go into details on what the dollar figure would be.

As of mid-December, before the sudden resignation of Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and his subsequent departure at the end of the year, the Pentagon said it had yet to receive a final budget figure, leading to questions about whether the budget may be delayed in its rollout.

The Pentagon's budget figure has seesawed dramatically over the last three months. The department had been planning for most of the year to a \$733 billion defense top-line figure, until the moment at an October Cabinet meeting when President Donald Trump announced the figure would be \$700 billion.

That number, delivered close to the planned budget finalization date of Dec. 1, sent planners into a frenzy as they attempted to develop a pair of budget offerings matched to both levels. The situation changed again when, following a meeting with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and congressional defense leaders, Trump reportedly boosted the budget to \$750 billion.

In his comments, Norquist indicated that the budget rollout will still happen come February, although what impact the ongoing government shutdown may have on that plan is unknown.

### **DoD Quarterly Suicide Report**

This week, the Department of Defense released its Quarterly Suicide Report (QSR) for the third quarter of Calendar Year 2018. The report will be available online at:

<http://www.dspo.mil/Prevention/Data-Surveillance/Quarterly-Reports/>

The QSRs do not contain the deep demographic analysis that is provided in the annual DoD Suicide Event Reports. Rather, the QSR is intended to provide timely and accurate suicide data reporting to allow leaders at all levels to have near concurrent information that facilitates decision-making related to suicide prevention. One of the principal goals of this QSR is to improve the relevance and availability of data to bolster suicide prevention efforts.

For the third quarter of 2018, the military services reported the following:

- 74 suicide deaths in the Active Component
- 18 suicide deaths in the Reserves
- 34 suicide deaths in the National Guard

Comparisons of suicide counts between Q3 CY 2017 and Q3 CY 2018 are provided below.

- For Q3 CY 2018, the number of Active Component suicide deaths is greater by 3 than Q3 CY 2017 (74 versus 71 suicide deaths)
  - o Air Force is down 2
  - o Army is up 9
  - o Marine Corps is unchanged
  - o Navy is down 4
- For Q3 CY 2018, the number of Reserve suicide deaths is lower by 9 than Q3 CY 2017 (18 versus 27 suicide deaths)
  - o Air Force Reserve is down 5
  - o Army Reserve is down 5
  - o Marine Corps Reserve is up 2
  - o Navy Reserve is down 1

- For Q3 CY 2018, the number of National Guard suicide deaths is lower by 7 than Q3 CY2017 (34 versus 41 suicide deaths)
  - o Air National Guard is up 1
  - o Army National Guard is down 8

Members and their families who need support can reach out to Military OneSource, which offers free and confidential support 24/7 for those in crisis. The number is 1-800-340-9647 or go to <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/>.

The Department of Defense has also partnered with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to promote a confidential crisis line staffed by caring, qualified responders, many of who have served in uniform. The number is 1-800-273-8255, press 1 for anyone facing a crisis.

The DoD "Be There" program offers confidential peer coaching to Active Duty Service members, including National Guard and Reserve members and their families, through 24/7 chat, phone, and text. The DoD "BeThere" Peer Support Call and Outreach Center is staffed by peer coaches, who are Veteran Service members and family members of Veterans, and aims to provide support for everyday problem solving, such as career and general life challenges.

Service members' families who would like to learn more about the "BeThere" Call and Outreach Center or connection with a peer may visit [www.betherepeersupport.org](http://www.betherepeersupport.org), call 844-357-PEER (7337), or text 480-360-6188.

## *Quality of Life*

### **TRICARE Update**

## **TRICARE Open Season**

### **Did You Miss the 2018 TRICARE Open Season?**

If you missed TRICARE Open Season, you still have time to act.

- For this year only, you have until Dec. 31, 2018 to enroll in a new plan or make changes to your enrollment (e.g., switch from individual to family enrollment).
- Beginning Jan. 1, 2019, you can only enroll or make changes during Open Season or after a Qualifying Life Event (QLE), as outlined below.  
Did you intend to enroll in a FEDVIP dental or vision plan, but missed the Federal Benefits Open Season for reasons beyond your control? Visit [www.benefeds.com](http://www.benefeds.com) to see what options are available to you.

### **Making Enrollment Changes Outside of Open Season**

- Outside of TRICARE Open Season, you can enroll in or change enrollment to TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select following a Qualifying Life Event (QLE).
- A QLE is a certain change in your life, such as marriage, birth of a child, or retirement from active duty, which may mean different TRICARE options are available to you. A TRICARE QLE opens a 90-day period for you to make eligible enrollment changes. A QLE for one family member means all family members may make enrollment changes. To learn more, visit [www.tricare.mil/lifeevents](http://www.tricare.mil/lifeevents).

- Outside of the Federal Benefits Open Season, you may only make changes to your existing FEDVIP plan if you experience a FEDVIP QLE. Remember, FEDVIP QLEs may be different from the TRICARE QLEs.

### ***Staff Activities***

- This week, staff continue planning for the upcoming Washington Conference that will be taking place February 25 – 28.
- Wednesday, staff from the National Security Division and the Indianapolis Media Division met with the Sergeant Major of the Army to discuss our support for the Army Service Uniform ‘Pink and Greens’ and the new Credentialing Assistant Program and recruitment initiatives.
- Thursday, staff met with officials from the Embassy of Japan to continue coordinating a dual branded Congressional reception to solidify details for the event through First Degree.
- Thursday, staff participated in a conference call with senior officials from the Department of Defense to discuss the new changes to the UCMJ, the Army's Talent Management Task Force, Upcoming Army Family Initiatives, and updates on any pending congressional legislation that may affect the Army and Soldiers.
- Friday, staff met with leadership from the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition to continue to develop the American Legion’s affiliation.
- Friday, staff volunteered to collect trash at the National Mall. The partial government shutdown has furloughed trash collection services at national parks.

### ***POW/MIA Update***

#### ***Personnel Recovered***

DPAA released the following year end review: In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) accounted for 203 missing persons from past conflicts.

Broken down by conflict, 10 were accounted for from the Vietnam War, 37 from the Korean War, and 156 were from World War II.

The DPAA FY2018 in Review is a chronological pictorial depiction of DPAA's global mission of providing the fullest possible accounting of our missing personnel to their families and the nation. It is a snapshot of the ongoing work by our service members and civilian professionals, the countries in which they operated, and the partners without whom we would not have been successful: the combatant commands, military Service Casualty Offices, the Armed Forces Medical Examiner System-Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory, the Defense Intelligence Agency-Stony Beach, the teams from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the American Battle Monuments Commission cemeteries, and the non-governmental organizations that conduct missions on DPAA’s behalf.

DPAA is focused on the research, investigation, recovery and identification for approximately 34,000 (out of ~83,000) missing Americans they believe are possibly recoverable from World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Iraq, and other designated past conflicts.

Link to FY2018 Year in Review:

<http://www.dpaa.mil/Portals/85/Documents/Newsletters/YiR%20FINAL.pdf>

This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency made 3 new funeral announcements. Click on the links to read more:

[01/09/19: USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II \(Cheshire, J.\)WASHINGTON](#)

[01/08/19: USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II \(Austin, J.\)WASHINGTON](#)

[01/08/19: USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II \(Lescault, L.\)WASHINGTON](#)

Rhonda Powell, Director, National Security Division