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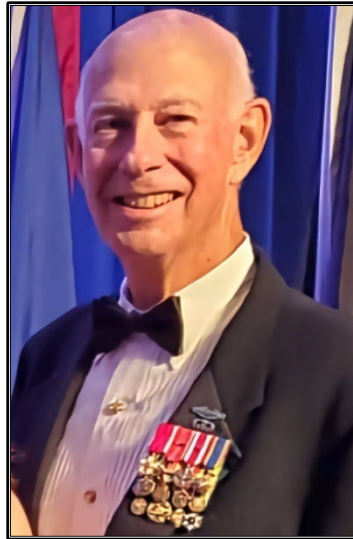
~ Five Star ★★★★★ Chapter ~

## President's Message...

May 2024 Issue

Greetings Colleagues,

Great news! Your chapter has once again been awarded MOAA's Five Star level of Excellence designation. This award makes five years in a row. Kudos to everyone. Additionally, we also have received the Five Star Harris Communication award for our newsletter. This is the first time we have reached the Five Star pinnacle. A special and heartfelt thanks to our publisher Kathy Frank. Thank you Kathy.



May 27<sup>th</sup> marks Memorial Day for our Nation's fallen heroes. Dan Gutierrez has a "Let's not forget" article in this month's newsletter describing his day in May. Mine was May 21. My rifle company B/161 along with A/161 and other units were patrolling the western foot hills of the DMZ operating out of fire bases C2 and A4 (Conthien). Rocket attacks by the NVA from inside North Vietnam were pretty standard evening fare for both fire bases with little or no damage. May 21 was different. My company was at A4. At 5:44 pm a rocket with a time delay fuse struck a large bunker at C2 collapsing it, killing 30 men and wounding another 33 mostly from A/161 and an engineer unit. It was the largest loss of life in a single day in three years and the largest loss of life from a single round during the entire war. It was a daunting recovery operation.

Two months later the Battalion and Brigade stood down.

All gave some! Some gave all!

Rob  
Robin P. Ritchie, COL, USA (RET)  
President



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### May 2024...Chapter Events:

#### No MOAA HA CHAPTER MEETING

**Tuesday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024 @ Noon**  
**MOAA HA BOD Meeting**

Rudi Lechner's German Restaurant  
2503 S Gessner Rd  
Houston, TX 77063



## LET'S NOT FORGET!

*By: Dan Gutierrez  
May, 2024*

In my column of May 2023, I reminded us of the major world shaping events occurring this month. I highlighted such events as the Battle of the Coral Sea in 1942, the German surrender of all its forces to **General of the Army Dwight Eisenhower** in 1945, and the sinking of the British liner HMS Lusitania in 1917. Also, I think it is right that we remember our annual obligation of commemorating the nation's honored dead on Memorial Day and paying tribute to our uniformed services on Armed Forces Day.

On a more personal basis, all of us have memories of our time in service. I have one that happened to have occurred in May, 1968 in Vietnam. My unit was an air defense battalion consisting of M42 "Dusters," truck mounted Quad 50's, and jeep mounted searchlights. As a young staff sergeant E-6, I was made chief of a section of two M42 "Dusters, one truck mounted quad (4 each) 50 caliber machine guns and one searchlight team. I lost the Quad and searchlight teams early in 1967. The Quad was destroyed by a remotely operated explosive and the searchlight was shot out during a nighttime perimeter attack. Neither was ever replaced.

In April of 1968, my battery (Battery A, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 60<sup>th</sup> AD Artillery (Automatic Weapons) was transferred from the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division to the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade. During and after "Tet," we conducted search and destroy operations with various segments of the 173<sup>rd</sup>. On May 11, 1968, I was ordered to join up with Company A, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 50<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry, 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne (yes, the 173<sup>rd</sup> even had a mechanized infantry battalion at that time; that was Vietnam). In the course of this operation we stumbled upon the HQ elements of the 22<sup>nd</sup> NVA Regiment. Soon, we found ourselves surrounded by most of the entire enemy regiment and in the midst of an intense firefight. My section of two "Dusters" laid down a heavy base of fire which helped the infantry regroup and call in supporting fires from both our firebases and close - in air support. One Medic APC, one flame thrower APC and my two "Dusters" brought up the rear as we blasted our way out. At the end of the day, my section of 11 men had 1 KIA and 5 wounded. Yes friends, I remember May 11, 1968.

With my little story, I hope to encourage all of you to come forward with stories of your own. I know it is difficult. I kept mine locked away for years. But we mustn't let the memories die. Let us do honor and show reverence to those who served and sacrificed by keeping their stories a part of our heritage.

On Memorial Day, you will find me at the Houston National Cemetery and as Taps is played I will offer my little tribute to my brothers-in-arms who lay amongst us in honored glory.

LET'S NOT FORGET!



# What an Early Indicator Says About the 2026 Military Pay Raise

By: Kevin Lilley  
MAY 8, 2024

While the final figure won't be known for a few months, recent employment data points to a 2026 pay increase for uniformed servicemembers slightly below what they'll get in 2025.

For nearly a decade, the increase has matched the third quarter Employment Cost Index (ECI) increase for private industry wages and salaries, following federal statute. First-quarter ECI figures, released last month, stood at 4.3%. That's lower than the 4.5% ECI that resulted in the [planned 2025 pay increase](#), and also down nearly a percentage point from the first-quarter figure last year (5.1%).



## **[MORE FINANCIAL UPDATES: [MOAA's COLA Watch](#)]**

MOAA tracks the ECI as part of its work to ensure servicemembers receive the compensation they deserve. A fair pay increase linked to this metric has been in place since the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), but for three years before that, the increase lagged the ECI by as much as a percentage point per year.

## **Overall Quality of Life**

While competitive pay remains critical to the health of the all-volunteer force, it's far from the only tool available to lawmakers as they look to improve the lives of those who serve and their families. [The recent report](#) from the House Armed Services Committee's Quality of Life Panel recommends several changes that could boost servicemembers' finances, to include:

- A 15% basic pay increase for junior enlisted members (E-1 to E-4).
- A restoration of the Basic Allowance for Housing to cover 100% of housing and rental costs, up from 95%. MOAA has championed this change in recent years as part of our annual Advocacy in Action event, and in our discussions with (and [testimony in front of](#)) Quality of Life Panel members.

## **[RELATED: [Ask Your Lawmakers to Restore the Basic Allowance for Housing](#)]**

- An expansion of Basic Needs Allowance eligibility to cover servicemembers with a gross household income at or below 200% of federal poverty guidelines, up from 150%.
- Better calculation methods for the Basic Allowance for Subsistence (to include location and number of dependents) and for cost-of-living allowances (to factor in costs like tolls and food prices that may vary by location).

MOAA has supported this bipartisan panel's work since before its inception and was grateful to see much of the report [reflected in the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement Act](#), which will serve as the base legislation for the upcoming NDAA. Focusing on the needs of those in uniform at the onset of this legislative process sets a benchmark lawmakers must see through to the end – one that gives these issues the national security priority they deserve.

Keep up with future pay updates and the NDAA process by visiting [MOAA's Advocacy News page](#). And register for our [Legislative Action Center](#), which will allow you to easily send customizable messages to your lawmakers in support of our [legislative priorities](#).★



# What a Key Congressional Report Could Mean for TRICARE, Military Health Care Access

By: Karen Ruedisueli  
APRIL 30, 2024



Three of six recommendations from a House Armed Services Committee (HASC) panel that are designed to help tackle the “long-standing problem” of “timely access to quality care” will be part of the base text of the House version of the FY 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The report, released April 11 by the committee’s Quality of Life Panel, looks at widespread quality of life issues faced by servicemembers and their families. MOAA has been an active supporter and resource for the panel since its creation; panel leaders Reps. Don Bacon (R-Neb.) and Chrissy Houlahan (D-Pa.) have spoken at MOAA’s 2023 and 2024 Advocacy in

Action events, respectively, and MOAA President and CEO Brian T. Kelly, USAF (Ret) has testified before the panel and was among those credited with supporting the panel’s work on its report.

## [RELATED: [MOAA President Outlines Key Priorities for New House Quality of Life Panel](#)]

The report’s findings were used to draft the [Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement Act](#), legislation that will serve as the base for the HASC chairman’s mark of the FY 2025 NDAA. The three health care recommendations in the bill would:

- Direct DoD to waive the TRICARE Prime referral requirement for active duty servicemembers to access nutritional, audiological, optometric, or podiatric care in a military treatment facility (MTF), or to access MTF primary and preventive health care services for women.
- Create an urgent mental health care access standard – if urgent mental health care services cannot be provided within three days, the beneficiary must be referred to the TRICARE network for care.
- Direct the services to conduct an annual survey of medical providers to find out why they remain in, or separate from, active service. The report must include retention efforts from the services.

## [RELATED: [MOAA's TRICARE Guide](#)]

The panel also recommends a full Defense Health Agency (DHA) evaluation of access-to-care standards; a DHA report providing access-to-care data from each inpatient MTF; and a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report on how addressing MTF staff shortages could improve provider productivity. These recommendations were not part of the new legislation.

MOAA appreciates the QoL panel’s work to highlight access-to-care issues within the military health system. The referral waiver will allow servicemembers to more quickly and easily access specialty care related to well-being and readiness, while the proposed access standard will ensure beneficiaries in need of urgent mental health care are not retained in an MTF system that lacks capacity for urgent appointments.

## Provider Problems

The report notes medical provider shortages are largely to blame for access-to-care problems; it cites June 2023 GAO data indicating 2,107 MTF behavioral health contractor positions are unfilled.

Other factors contributing to access delays, according to the report, include the lack of standardization for MTF patient-to-provider ratios and the effects of collateral duties on MTF provider capacity.

MOAA’s [concerns about provider shortages](#), magnified by post-COVID health care system capacity constraints, led us to prioritize efforts to halt proposed medical billet cuts. We achieved three consecutive one-year delays with the FY 2020-2022 defense authorization bills. The FY 2023 bill included a [five-year halt](#) to medical billet cuts and requires extensive analysis and mitigation planning before DoD can proceed with medical billet reductions.

*Continued on the following page...*

## What a Key Congressional Report Could Mean for TRICARE, Military Health Care Access

*Continued on the previous page...*

### [RELATED: [TRICARE For Life Under Threat: How MOAA Works to Protect Your Benefit](#)]

The QoL report also notes, "...because the Department currently evaluates access to care data aggregately and not by location or specialty, it could fail to identify problems within a specific network or detect shifting health care landscapes in a particular region, thereby exacerbating problems by not directing resources where they are needed."

It cites numerous findings related to access-to-care problems, including:

- A 2018 [report](#) by the DoD Inspector General (DOD IG) which found DoD did not consistently meet access to care standards for urgent and routine appointments at select MTFs.
- A 2020 DOD IG report which found a lack of access was more acute as it related to [mental health care](#).
- A recently published GAO [report](#) which indicated DHA has not established access standards for urgent behavioral health referrals. Wait times for urgent appointments ranged from more than two weeks to more than three weeks, depending on region.
- A November 2023 DOD IG [Management Advisory](#) which found access to care and wait time challenges are not limited to behavioral health, nor to locations outside the continental U.S.

### MOAA, the NDAA, and Your Health Care

MOAA's FY 2025 NDAA health care priorities have also focused on addressing access issues. Recognizing capacity constraints in both MTFs and the TRICARE network, MOAA has advocated for TRICARE plan flexibility to allow beneficiaries to access care where it is available – either in the MTF or TRICARE network – through more expansive [TRICARE Qualifying Life Events](#) (QLEs), including a QLE for pregnancy.

We have also advocated for greater oversight of TRICARE networks, including a GAO evaluation of network adequacy requirements in the next-generation TRICARE contracts (T-5) to address reports of network erosion in certain geographic areas.

Please watch for opportunities to support FY 2025 NDAA provisions to improve access to care for TRICARE beneficiaries as the bill moves forward. You can find the latest on the NDAA and other MOAA legislative priorities at [MOAA's Advocacy News page](#), and the latest on how you can support those priorities at [MOAA's Legislative Action Center](#). ★



# The First Battlefield Bag Lunch

By: Lt. Col. Patrick J. Chaisson, USA (Ret)

American astronauts orbiting the moon in 1968 may have enjoyed modern freeze-dried meals, but back on Earth, then-Capt. Rick Butterfield and his fellow soldiers stationed in South Vietnam were stuck eating heavy canned rations introduced during World War II.

Butterfield, who retired as a colonel after 33 years of service, recalled how troops often went without rather than carry these bulky provisions on jungle reconnaissance missions. "Given a choice between ammo and food, we starved," he told Military Officer before he passed away in 2022.



*An officer stops to eat C-ration food on a search and destroy operation south of Bien Hoa Air Base, Vietnam, 7th August 1965.*

Fortunately, the U.S. military developed a lightweight, dehydrated field ration for its forces fighting in Southeast Asia. Officially named Food Packet, Long Range Patrol, it became known as the LRP (pronounced "lurp"). LRP, which first appeared in 1967, was meant for use by such elite units as the Navy's SEAL teams and Army Special Forces.

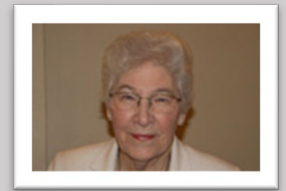
More portable than the canned Meal, Combat, Individual ("C-rat"), this new field ration became an instant hit. "I loved LRPs," said Bob Ochsner, a Special Forces lieutenant who served in South Vietnam's Mekong Delta region. "The beef tasted like beef, and the chicken like chicken."

*"Given a choice between ammo and food, we starved."*

Each meal weighed 11 ounces and came in a waterproof canvas envelope. Menu items included chili con carne, chicken stew, spaghetti, and beef hash. An accessory package contained toilet paper, coffee, creamer, and cardboard matches as well as fruit, chocolate, or an oatmeal bar.

One dehydrated LRP required a pint and a half of water to reconstitute. This presented a challenge, Ochsner said, in places like South Vietnam where "pure water was at a premium." He and his troops always took several extra canteens and purification tablets with them whenever they went on patrol. There was also a Vietnamese LRP, according to Master Sgt. John Conley, USA (Ret), who served with the 407th Radio Research Detachment from 1970-71. This "Packet Indigenous Ration" (PIR), he said, included "shrimp and fish with a supplemental bag of freeze-dried rice." Conley said he preferred the PIR, as it tasted better and had more calories than the American version.

During the Vietnam War era, each meal contained four cigarettes. This was discontinued in 1975, which is also when the outer packaging changed from canvas to thick brown plastic. The last LRPs were manufactured in 1981. As the first dehydrated field ration issued to American troops, LRP is a direct ancestor of today's Meal, Ready-to-Eat: "Warfighter approved" (as stated on the label) for 40 years. ★



## ***Surviving Spouse Corner: Are Your Personal Documents Ready for an Emergency?***

**By: Renée Brunelle Matthews**

Emergencies can strike unexpectedly, leaving individuals and families grappling with chaos and uncertainty. Whether it's a natural disaster like a hurricane or earthquake, a house fire, or a medical crisis, being prepared can make all the difference in navigating through the turmoil. One often-overlooked aspect of preparedness is having essential documents readily accessible for yourself or a trusted person.

It might sound simple, but having your important documents organized and easily accessible can significantly expedite critical decision-making during emergencies. Imagine being evacuated from your home due to an impending hurricane (yes, that has happened to me), and in the rush to leave, you forget to grab essential documents like identification, insurance policies, or medical records. Having these documents readily available in a designated "important documents kit" ensures you have the necessary information on hand to prove your identity, access medical care, or file insurance claims promptly.

Also, having your documents prepared in advance can alleviate stress and anxiety during already tense situations. Emergencies are inherently chaotic, and the last thing you want to worry about is rummaging through drawers or files, searching for vital paperwork. By proactively organizing your documents and keeping them in a secure location, you can focus on prioritizing safety and addressing immediate needs rather than scrambling to gather paperwork under duress.

Another compelling reason to have your important documents ready for an emergency is to safeguard against loss or damage. Disasters such as floods, fires, or earthquakes can destroy physical documents stored in homes or offices. While some documents can be replaced, others, like birth certificates, passports, or irreplaceable family heirlooms, might be lost forever.

Digitally storing copies of essential documents in secure cloud storage like [Everplans](#) or on encrypted USB drives provides an extra layer of protection against physical damage or loss, ensuring critical information remains accessible even if the originals are destroyed.

Furthermore, having your important documents organized facilitates seamless communication and coordination with emergency responders and relief agencies. Whether you're seeking medical assistance, applying for government aid, or navigating insurance claims, having all necessary documentation readily available expedites the process and ensures you receive the support and resources you need in a timely manner.

What documents should you include in your important documents kit? While the specific documents might vary depending on individual circumstances, some essential items to consider include:

- Personal identification (driver's license, passport, Social Security card)
- Medical records (health insurance cards, medication lists, immunization records)
- Financial documents (bank account information, insurance policies, wills, deeds)
- Emergency contacts (family members, doctors, insurance agents)
- Important legal documents (DD Form 214, birth certificates, marriage certificates, power of attorney)
- Property records (homeowner's insurance, mortgage documents, property deeds)
- Copies of valuable photos or sentimental items

Every day you see stories about natural disasters, car accidents, medical emergencies, and unforeseen events that change someone's life forever. The peace of mind that comes from knowing you're well-prepared is invaluable. Take the time today to gather your important documents and create an important document kit — it could make all the difference tomorrow. ★



## Chaplain's Corner...

### PSALM 91 THE WARRIOR'S PSALM



He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
Will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.  
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress.  
My God, in whom I trust."  
Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare  
And from deadly pestilence.  
He will cover you with his feathers  
And under his wings you will find refuge;  
His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

I call Psalm 91 "The Warrior's Psalm" since it was written by King David of Israel as one of the 150 poems in this phenomenal book of Poetry. The King was the promised second King of Israel following King Saul. Both Kings were chosen by God and anointed by the prophet Samuel. David is one of about eight authors in Psalms and the poems were compiled around the Tenth Century BC.

I invite you to read the rest of the Psalm in order to get a better picture as to why it is The Warrior's Psalm.

As a chaplain I often used portions of this Psalm in my chapel services or the Deployment Ceremonies for our soldiers as they prepared to board their aircraft for their Combat Deployment.

I only served two combat tours during the Vietnam War but that was half a lifetime ago. The lessons we all learned during our military service were frequently complex. Our training was always excellent and frequently exhausting. It often prepared us for the idea that we knew what were facing and we had an idea of how to complete our mission but we were also expected to use our training, information, resources and judgment to fill in the details.

Psalm 91 gives us an idea of who God is, what we will face and how, with His help, we will accomplish the seemingly impossible. The four verses above give you an idea of what will follow...The metaphor of battle and the language of the rest of the Psalm helps to fill in the details of what we will face. Anyone who has faced going into battle begins to understand the fear of the unknown. The dangers to be faced, the energy that will be spent and some of the lives that will be lost amplify that fear. Some of these verses seem to be oversimplified exaggeration but that is part of the metaphor. Holy Scriptures are designed both to elicit questions and give answers. Is battle any different?

Fortunately, we don't have to prepare ourselves for deployment or battle...unless life is part of that battle. Life has its own challenges and battles. Health, family problems and challenges, communication difficulties, finances and other relationships, politics, religion and stubbornness all inflict their own wounds and fears. How we face those challenges and react or respond to them will determine both our attitude and the outcome of the problem. This Psalm tells us that God will keep his promises to his people. If we go back to the first verse it tells us that if we dwell in the shelter of the Most High we will rest in His shadow...If we trust in the Almighty He will answer us. Our faith is not a metaphor. If it is a reality, God will provide the resources strength and promises to sustain us whatever the battle. These are not only good words, but a way to live.

~ *David Essells, USAR, MAJ, RET*



# MOAA – HA Chapter Meeting Saturday, April 27, 2024



**Rob Ritchie and  
Kathy Frank**



**Dan Gutierrez**



**Andy Parsons**



**J.C. Nicholson**



**Ivan Santiago**



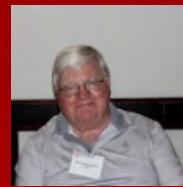
**Harry Stephenson**



**Mike Martin**



**Bob Poland**



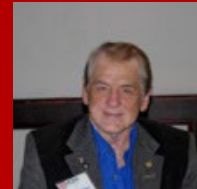
**Denis Blindauer**



**Gene Tulich**



**Ken and Peggy Jayne**



**John Martinec**



**Rollins and Pat Collins**



**Tucker and Belinda  
Coughlin**

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*We need YOU...  
to remain a  
MOAA HA Member!*



*Debating whether to renew your chapter membership?*

*Talking to a potential new member?*

Benefits to belonging to a chapter:

- Camaraderie and Connections: when you attend chapter functions, actively serve on a committee, or take a prominent leadership role, you forge lasting ties with other MOAA members.
- Community Involvement: Membership provide opportunities to contribute to your community in a variety of ways, from providing scholarships to local students, to supporting causes that support wounded warriors and their families.
- Legislative Advocacy: We advocate for the entire military community-all ranks. Members play a critical role in advancing legislation in both Austin and Washington, D.C. This grassroots advocacy is key to MOAA achieving its legislative goals.

Chapter dues reminders will be emailed/sent out in December to those members needing renewal. We are on a calendar year for our chapter dues.

Annual renewal is \$30 for one year, \$20 for each additional year paid with renewal. Surviving Spouse \$15 initial membership; \$10 annual renewal.

Membership Application on the last page!

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL FORM

### MOAA's Core Mission

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is the country's leading organization protecting the rights of uniformed servicemembers and their families. MOAA's constituents proudly hail from every branch of the uniformed services. To them, we have made the same promise that they have made to their country: Never Stop Serving.

MOAA's greatest mission is to improve the lives of those who serve and their families, which is achieved largely through the tireless advocacy efforts taking place in our nation's capital. For more than 90 years, MOAA has supported legislation that benefits the uniformed services community and has remained equally vigilant when fighting to stop legislation that threatens our livelihood. The larger our numbers, the greater our voice. For more detailed legislative actions see [MOAA | Take Action Center \(quorum.us\)](http://MOAA | Take Action Center (quorum.us))

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print)                      Last                                      First                                      Initial                                      Rank

Branch \_\_\_\_\_ Status \_\_\_\_\_ MOAA Nat'l ID \_\_\_\_\_ \*

Spouse's First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. for Directory \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dues:** Regular Membership – \$30 first year; annual renewal \$30 (Discount for multiple years if paid with renewal: \$20 for each add'l. year **paid with renewal**)  
Surviving Spouse – \$15 first year; annual renewal \$10 (same discount for multiple years)

#### Chapter Assistance Fund

\$100.00     \$50.00     \$25.00     Other \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to MOAA-HA and mail to:

MOAA-HA  
PO Box 18372  
Sugar Land, TX 77496



For more information, call COL Robin Ritchie, 713-818-0408

*\*If not a MOAA national member, another benefit of chapter membership is the opportunity to become a national MOAA member at the BASIC LEVEL for free! If you would like to do so, please indicate here:*

YES     NO

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_