Weekly Report
National Security Division
Week ending 28 June 2019

National Security Strategy:

1. **Protect the homeland, the American people, and the American way of life**
2. **Promote American prosperity**
3. **Preserve peace through strength**
4. **Advance American influence**

SSG David Bellavia becomes first living Medal of Honor recipient from the Iraq War

In the middle of a pitched battle in Iraq came a call for help: Members of Staff Sgt. David Bellavia's platoon of soldiers were pinned down in a dark house under intense close-range machine-gun fire.

Bellavia stepped into a doorway and squeezed the trigger of his belt-fed M249 squad automatic weapon until it ran dry of ammunition. The Americans, including Bellavia, retreated from the house successfully into the night as insurgents continued to fire on them. But that was just the beginning of Bellavia's valor on Nov. 10, 2004, according to Army accounts of the battle and those of veterans who served with him.

On Tuesday, Bellavia, 43, of Lyndonville, N.Y., became the first living American to receive the Medal of Honor for actions in the nearly nine-year Iraq War. President Trump draped the award around his neck during a White House ceremony as friends and family members as well as 32 people who served with Bellavia in Iraq watched and then cheered.

Bellavia, who left the Army in 2005, is credited with braving enemy fire to free fellow soldiers from the kill zone, and reentering the house in the city of Fallujah to chase down and kill other insurgents, including one in hand-to-hand combat with a knife.
"Alone in the dark, David killed four insurgents and seriously wounded a fifth, saving his soldiers and facing the enemies of civilization," Trump said.

Bellavia, who was previously awarded the Silver Star for his actions that day, is among a group of service members who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan whose awards for valor were upgraded after a review launched by then-Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter in 2016.

Click here to read more.

President signs Blue Water Navy Veterans Act into law

The decades-long fight for Blue Water Navy veterans to receive VA disability benefits for illnesses linked to exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War is over.

On Tuesday, June 25, President Trump signed into law H.R. 299, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019. The American Legion-supported legislation will extend disability benefits covering medical conditions associated with Agent Orange exposure to those who served on ships off the coast of Vietnam, known as "Blue Water" Navy veterans.

Veterans who served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1975 are presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange if diagnosed with a medical condition associated with the herbicide, according to the Agent Orange Act of 1991. Presumptive diseases of exposure to the herbicide include certain cancers, Parkinson's disease and diabetes. However, this act applied only to veterans who served on land and in Vietnam's inland waterways. H.R. 299 extends these benefits to any military personnel who served on any vessel during the Vietnam War that came within 12 nautical miles of the coastlines of Vietnam.

H.R. 299 further expands coverage and includes the provision that every veteran exposed to herbicides like Agent Orange should receive the same presumptive benefits. A provision in H.R. 299 states, "A veteran who, during active military, naval, or air service, served offshore of the Republic of Vietnam during the period beginning on January 9, 1962, and ending on May 7, 1975," will be eligible for disability compensation for presumptive conditions of herbicide exposure. This will allow veterans who fall into that category and whose claims have been denied or held in pending status to gain access to VA medical care for conditions on the presumptive list.

H.R. 299 will afford spouses of certain veterans whose death was caused by a service-connected disability access to pension benefits. The bill also provides the children of veterans of covered service in Thailand who suffer from spina bifida access to health care, vocational training and rehabilitation, and monetary allowance.

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Acting U.S. SecDef Mark Esper lays out priorities in first message to the force

Still officially the Army secretary, Acting Defense Secretary Mark Esper finished out his first day on the job with a memo to the Defense Department on Monday, 24 June 2019.

At the top of his list are lethality, a buzzword carried on from his predecessors, as well as building alliances and improving the department's efficiency, according to the letter.

"Since rejoining the Department nearly two years ago as the Secretary of the Army, my confidence in the incredible skill, professionalism, and commitment of our military and civilian workforce has grown even stronger," Esper wrote.

The retired lieutenant colonel and former Raytheon executive's promotion was announced last week, after Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan withdrew himself from consideration. The confirmed deputy secretary of defense, Shanahan had been filling in since early this year, after Defense Secretary Jim Mattis resigned.

However, in order for Esper to be officially confirmed, he will have to step down from this current role, per the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998. The law requires that someone being nominated for a job not currently be serving in an "acting" role, which would require a new acting SECDEF to take over while Esper awaited confirmation.

"The surest way to deter adversary aggression is to fully prepare for war," Esper wrote in his memo, sticking closely to the National Defense Strategy the department laid out under Mattis' direction in 2018.

- Build a More Lethal Force
- Strengthen Alliances and Attract New Partners
- Reform the Department for Greater Performance and Affordability

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Staff Activities

- This week staff continued to developed briefing and sponsor pages for National Security Commission programs. These sheets will be used by the Marketing Division to seek corporate donors to fund The American Legion's National Security programs that promote community service.
- Monday, Staff (Gold Star Coordinator) participate in an Office Call with The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), with the intent to strengthen relationships. TAPS offers compassionate care to all those grieving the loss of a loved one who died while serving in our Armed Forces or as a result of his or her service.
- Tuesday, Staff accompanied DC ED Lou Celli to a meeting with Taiwan Embassy officials regarding planning for a high level Taiwanese delegation to the Legion National Convention in August.
- Tuesday, Staff visited The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace hosted conversation with Pakistan Ambassador, Asad Majeed Khan to discuss current and future relations between Pakistan and the United States.
- Tuesday, Staff visited The Foundation of for Defense of Democracies hosted a discussion with an assortment of Turkey specialists on June 25, 2019. Topics discussed during the conversation includes the most recent election, the Kurds involvement in the fight for democracy.
- Tuesday, Staff participated in a conference call with President Trump and the Secretary Of Veterans Affairs; The Honorable Robert Wilkie. Receiving an update on The MISSION Act. This act strengthens VA's ability to deliver trusted, easy to access, high quality care at VA facilities, virtually through telehealth, and in your community. The Department Of Defense's office is overseeing the Thirteenth Quadrennial Review of military Compensation (QRMC). Every four years, DoD commissions a complete review of compensation principles and concepts for members of the Armed Forces.

POW/MIA Update

This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency made 6 new announcements. Click on the links to read more:

News Releases

June 26, 2019
USS Oklahoma Marine Accounted For From World War II (Black, W.)

June 24, 2019
Airman Accounted For From World War II (Gotts, H.)

June 21, 2019
Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Butler, B.)

Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Geary, S.)

Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Woods, R.)

June 20, 2019
Airman Accounted For From World War II (Gochnauer, T.)

Soldier Accounted For From World War II (Givens, J.)

Rhonda Powell, Director, National Security Division