As your Lowcountry Chapter President, I can report that the Council of Chapters trip to Washington DC to meet our SC Congressional Delegation at the MOAA Storm the Hill Day, 5 April 2017 was successful. Information on the legislative issues of the day were discussed with the members or senior staff that will lead to change and protection of the values and need for predictable funding for our military, both active and reserve forces, and protection of retired programs. Key areas of engagement included:

Eliminate the "Widows Tax" (SBP-DIC Offset) protecting Survivor Benefit Plan-Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (SBP-DIC) benefits for military widows and widowers from the military “widow’s tax”. Current law requires surviving spouses of active duty or retired members who died of a service-connected cause to forfeit $1 of their military SBP annuity for each $1 received in DIC. For FY 2017, DIC is $1,258 a month ($15,095 a year), paid only to survivors of veterans whose death is determined to have been caused by service. This offset wipes out most or all of the SBP check for a majority of survivors, including those whose service members purchased the plan through deductions from their retired pay. At a minimum and absent full repeal of the SBP-DIC offset this year, SSIA should be extended 10 years, with incremental increases to the monthly amount to assist affected survivors.

Eliminate Harmful Sequestration Cuts. The Budget Control Act of 2011 established automatic budget cuts known as sequestration and put America's national defense capabilities at great risk. During the 2011 debt negotiations, the administration agreed to reduce the DoD budget by $487 billion over a 10-year period; however, with the enactment of sequestration, additional reductions to the defense budget of $500 billion were added. Although debt reduction is a national priority, a disproportional share of this burden must not be passed on to service members and military family members, who already have served and sacrificed more than other segments of our society. Congress needs to end the harmful effects of sequestration by supporting a bipartisan debt-reduction package that avoids disproportional penalties on the Department of Defense affecting service members and military retirees and their families.

Prevent Disproportional TRICARE Fee Hikes (PDF) The military health care benefit is a commitment our grateful nation makes to service members, their families, military retirees, and survivors for their extraordinary service and sacrifice. MOAA thanks congressional members for their efforts in last year's NOAA to reform the Military Health System. These reforms recognized that decades of arduous service and sacrifice in uniform constitute a very large, pre-paid, in-kind premium that warrants a top-tier health benefit-commensurately better in cost and value than any civilian health plan. MOAA believes the current fee structure to be a fair value in terms of the proportion of costs borne by the beneficiaries and the cost absorbed by the government, considering the extended service and sacrifice of the currently serving and career force and their families. A central tenet of this philosophy is beneficiaries' fees should not rise faster than does their compensation. In other words, the annual percentage fee increase should not exceed the annual retired pay COLA percentage.

As you have heard many times, the chapter members are the ones that influence (President's Message: continued at bottom of page 4)
The Word

Guest Chaplain’s Message

CAPT Kerry B. Magee USNR-RET
Chaplain/Past President TX MOAA Houston Chapter

"LET FREEDOM RING!"

"Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim Liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants." (LEV 25:10)
These words were written circa 1446 B.C. and are inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia by our Founding Fathers. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." These words are from the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776. "We, the People, of the United States, in order to form a more Perfect Union, establish Justice, ensure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common Defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessing of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." These words comprise the Preamble of the Constitution of the United States, finalized on September 17, 1787, and ratified by the States on June 21, 1788. Words, words, words! Too many, you may say. Lady Wisdom says to study, learn, and practice these words. Words are what we live by. They are a Bond from one generation to another, especially in Religion. Almighty God gave us His Words in the Holy Bible, which contains both the Old and the New Testaments. In Freemasonry, we call this Sacred Book the Volume of Sacred Law, The Great Light of Masonry. It is the Rule and Guide of our faith. Many of this Nation’s Patriots also stated good words to live by:

**Benjamin Franklin:** “Only a virtuous People are capable of Freedom.”
**John Adams:** “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.”
**George Washington:** “Of all dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable Supports.”
**Thomas Jefferson:** “We, in America, do not have government by the Majority; we have government by the Majority who participates. . . . . Tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of conscience to remain silent.”
**James Madison:** “A well instructed people alone can be permanently a free people.”
**Thomas Jefferson:** “The God who gave us life gave us Liberty at the same time.”
**Ronald Reagan:** “Freedom is one of the deepest and noblest aspirations of the human spirit.”
**Daniel Webster:** “God grants Liberty only to those who love it and are always ready to guard and defend it.”
**John Quincy Adams:** “Posterity: You will never know how much it has cost my generation to preserve your freedom. I hope you will make good use of it.”
**George Washington:** “It is impossible rightly to govern the world without God and the Bible.”

During the Fourth of July Holiday weekend, I sincerely pray that you will all ponder and contemplate those powerful and magnificent words.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU!
DEJA VOUS ALL OVER AGAIN

Bob Freeman,  
Legislative Liaison

It’s the run-up to fall budget-time. On Capitol Hill, there’s the reprise of military spending issues past and tired, long-discredited myths about military personnel/health care costs “eating DoD alive.” Not true, but with a new administration committed to a strong military, the budget debate WILL be eating-up Congress.

Against a backdrop of U.S. armed forces that have been overused, misused and ultimately abused for over two decades(!), President Trump proposed a budget that “…rebuilds the military, eliminates the defense sequester, and calls for one of the largest increases in national defense spending in American history.” But it’s tough getting “Ground truth” about the FY 2018 defense budget. In fact, Congress finally resolved FY 2017 funding for DoD only in May, with a 120-day continuing resolution (CR). With 30 CRs in nine of the past 10 years, Congress seems incapable of passing a budget! Years of inconsistent, unreliable funding have played havoc with our already-overextended armed forces and families.

The increase for FY ‘18 is penciled-in at some $50 billion, cut from domestic programs; the biggest hit for non-military spending in three decades.

Some Congressional leaders say DoD needs twice the President’s proposed increase to fix military deficiencies and meet threats in an ever-more dangerous world. But if the Budget Control Act of 2011 isn’t repealed, the only doubling for DoD will be billions in indiscriminate budget cuts.

Congress is daunted by the prospect of spending real money on a military too long forced to “do more with less,” while treated as a Petri Dish for social justice experimentation. Defense competes with chiseled-in-stone government social programs enacted/expanded for political patronage. They dominate the budget, are structurally inefficient if not outright corrupt, have a “yuge” constituency and burgeoned under previous administrations.

There’s little DoD can do about “built-in,” non-military mandatory budget expenditures or the 70 percent of American youth unfit to serve, but persistent leadership oversight and accountability failures must be fixed. 16 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, Libyan and Syrian campaigns, personnel drawdowns, pay caps, steep federal budget cuts and a one-third decline in modernization funds since 2011 notwithstanding, units headed for combat must be manned and equipped for mission success, so resource priority goes to them. Consequently, non-deploying units are NOT ready to answer some likely national contingencies. Worse, chronically shorting RDT&E compromises the technological edge we need to prevail in multi-domain battles through the next decade.

Topping this, decades of heavy reliance on contractors for training and support (including combat support) has left leadership and technical skill “gaps.”

The military needs to get back to “growing” experienced, confident sergeant, lieutenant and captain leaders, technical specialists and subject matter experts.

Citing a few of the shortcomings keeping our military from the top of its game, the Army is critically short in 50 military operational specialties; the Air Force is down to 1,500 pilots, while too many airframes are older than their crews; the Navy struggles with elusive F/A-18 flaws and modernization of Naval and Marine aviation with F-35s is glacial. (But we’re doing our part, “training the trainers” at

(Deja Vous; continued on page 4)
MCAS Beaufort.) Other noteworthy “fails” are retirement and healthcare. In an inexplicable attempt to “civilianize” the military and make it more like the business it is not, DoD will change retirement in 2018, automatically enrolling recruits in a 401(k)-style retirement plan, the “blended retirement system (BRS).” (Despite a senior DoD personnel official testifying to the House Armed Services Committee in 2011, “Military retirement costs are neither unaffordable nor spiraling out of control.”) Soon, it won’t be enough for servicemembers to hone tactical proficiency to prevail in stress-filled missions with 24/7 life-or-death decisions. “E-Nothings” through flag rank WILL BE financially proficient! Financial literacy efforts have flopped in the private sector, but we’ll do more with less!

DoD healthcare is fragmented into redundant, counterproductive components operating out of old, underutilized facilities—and all competing for budget-share! Naval Hospital Beaufort (NHB) is a poster child for old and underutilized. 19 (ignored) U.S. Government studies over the past 70 years, show consolidating military medicine would save billions. I’m hoping that VA Secretary David Schulkin’s plans for cooperation with DoD, including IT commonalities, will mean shared resources, reduced expenses and maybe the two departments will even speak to each other! That isn’t happening now at NHB; despite being in the same building, DoD clinics there cannot, or will not, communicate with the VA Clinic on the 4th deck; it takes an act of God to transfer an x-ray to the Ralph H. Johnson VA Hospital in Charleston! A check of NHB shows military medicine’s resources and energies have been diverted, diluted and squandered by administrations obsessed with social justice—the hospital’s main corridor has 100 dispensers filled with 1,000 unread pamphlets from feckless social “anti-” causes.

Shortcomings notwithstanding, our beleaguered force and families have saluted and soldiered-on, despite their burden of sustained high-tempo global combat. SecDef. Mattis, shocked at the lack of readiness to fight, recently told Congress, “Our troops’ stoic commitment cannot reduce the growing risk.” He was clear that chronic stopgap funding and inconsistent budgets would yield the kind of “hollow force” that hobbled us in the inter-World War period and at the outset of the Korean War). Our elected officials are working on the defense bill NOW. Use the link below to send a message to them: Rebuilding must begin with repealing sequestration: http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/alert/?alertid=74607626

(President’s Message; continued from page 1)

legislation with direct contacts with our Congressional Delegation. So, keeping our membership numbers high is KEY to having a strong influence in Washington DC. Go to: www.lcmoaa.org and print out a membership flier for a friend or drop me an email and I’ll send you one. If you need some help in articulating why belong to MOAA watch and then pass along the link http://www.moaa.org/WhyMOAA/ This 3 minute video lays it out why you should belong to MOAA and the benefits of belonging to the organization. We have an excellent “WORD” newsletter for you this month. THANKS BERNIE and our regular contributors. If you have a military adventure story to tell, please add to the history of the Chapter by being published on these pages. Sending a photo is also a GREAT idea. If you have any ideas for the chapter or questions, just call me: 1-413-345-1524. My email is mdakey@yahoo.com. Enjoy the rest of the summer!

Mike
FAMILIES FIRST

Have you ever heard the old adage, “Family is the best medicine?” Well, there seems to be truth to that statement. It has been proven that having family nearby greatly benefits patients battling illness or injury. Did you know that not only is there a direct correlation between the family proximity and the length of time a patient spends in the hospital but the frequency of readmission also decreases when family members closely participate in the recovery process. Imagine how shorter stays in the hospital and less frequent re-admissions benefit not only the individual patient but also how it allows more veterans to be treated annually.

“IT HAS BEEN PROVEN THAT HAVING FAMILY NEARBY GREATLY BENEFITS PATIENTS BATTLING ILLNESS OR INJURY.”

TO PROVIDE A COMFORTING, HOMELIKE ENVIRONMENT WHERE FAMILY MEMBERS CAN STAY, FREE OF CHARGE AND ADDED STRESS, WHILE THEIR VETERAN IS UNDERGOING TREATMENT.

The Fisher House Charleston project will provide a comfortable refuge for families of patients at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. One of the most highly rated VA hospitals in the country, Ralph H. Johnson serves veterans in 22 coastal counties from Myrtle Beach, SC to Savannah, GA.

Fisher House Charleston is a collaboration between Harbour House, Inc., a 501(c)(3) charity, and the Fisher House Foundation. Our purpose is to purchase approved property and help raise funds for the construction of the Ralph H Johnson VA Fisher House. Fisher House Charleston, LLC has purchased 150 Wentworth St., in Charleston, SC. Soon we hope to donate this property to the Veterans Administration. Once gifted, the construction will begin. We need your help to complete and support this "Comfort Home" for the families of veterans being treated at the Ralph H. Johnson Memorial VA Medical Center here in Charleston, SC.

DONATE

Your generosity is greatly appreciated

Checks payable to Fisher House Charleston.
PO Box 1678
Charleston, SC 29402-1678

501(c)3 : EIN: 46-2521401
This Vietnam veteran lived life without family. He wasn’t alone at his Beaufort funeral.

By Stephen Fastenau
sfastenau@beaufortgazette.com

Raymond Thompson was buried Thursday in Beaufort National Cemetery.

His remains came from Charleston. He served as a U.S. Navy seaman during the Vietnam War. There were no friends and family to represent him at his funeral.

That is all that is known about the man described as an indigent veteran.

But that was enough for more than 150 people to attend a ceremony at the cemetery honoring Thompson for his service after word spread this week.

“We are his family,” cemetery representative Louis Brown said as he spoke to the crowd in front of Thompson’s flag-draped casket. “And it’s evident by everyone here today.”

Cemetery director Sonny Peppers learned Tuesday that Thompson would be buried behind the gates on Boundary Street and had no one to represent him. He reached out to the local chapter of Disabled American Veterans.

An email was circulated, and chapter treasurer Ron Voegeli put out a call on Facebook for the community to turn out.

The message spread quickly. The crowd was the largest Voegeli said he had seen for a Beaufort National Cemetery ceremony, and the veterans organization has supported similar ceremonies for three decades.

A bugler blew “Taps” at the shelter in the rear of the cemetery grounds. A U.S. Navy ceremonial guard from Naval Hospital Beaufort folded the flag and presented it to Disabled American veterans officer James Johnston. The flag will be returned to the cemetery and used in future events, Johnston said.

John Williams, a retired Marine, delivered the commitment. He prayed that whatever discomfort Thompson experienced at the end of his life had been replaced with happiness and led the crowd in reciting Psalm 23. “May God bless Mr. Raymond Thompson,” Williams said.

Vietnam veteran Paul Fisher walked through the cemetery before the ceremony, following the procession. The Ohio native had gone through boot camp at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island during the 1960s and swore he would never return to the land of bugs and sand. But he came back three years ago, and attended the ceremony Thursday after receiving an email.

“It’s one of those things,” he said. “Everybody should be recognized.”
Commissaries at Risk???

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) released an overdue report required as part of commissary reform measures included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016. GAO briefed the Armed Services committees more than a year ago on their preliminary observations, but just released the report on its analysis and review of certain aspects of commissary operations. In the meantime, the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) has been moving full steam ahead on pilot programs in variable pricing and private-label products, directly impacting the experience of commissary patrons.

The GAO report concludes that certain DeCA business processes “are not consistent with those generally employed by commercial grocery stores.” This isn’t surprising, as DeCA is constrained by law regarding how much they can charge, to whom they can sell, where they can operate, etcetera. But the report identifies certain areas where the standards used by DeCA are inefficient. This leaves MOAA concerned, because during GAO’s evaluation of the processes, DeCA already was implementing new ways of doing business. Achieving data fidelity is difficult when the evaluation instrument is out of touch and out of sync with the subject. The GAO concludes that:

DeCA’s methodology for calculating the patron savings rate has limitations and “DeCA lacks reasonable assurance that it is maintaining its desired savings rate for patrons.” Not included in this report are DeCA’s recent changes to its savings calculation. The report goes on to say, “at the time of this review, DeCA officials could not provide evidence to support how the revised savings methodology would address all the limitations we identified, including those related to seasonal bias, sampling methodology for overseas commissaries and geographic differentiation.” Additionally, DeCA’s new calculation compares the prices of private-label items to commissary private-label items, which are not yet available at commissaries. Such a comparison is highly speculative in an area where GAO already is questioning DeCA’s methodologies.

The way DeCA manages products sold at commissaries limits its ability to operate efficiently. GAO recommends DeCA find efficiencies based on store sales or customer demand. While DeCA has seen decreasing sales numbers since 2012, it is in the process of rolling out its own private label. To make room for private-label stock, commissaries will have to remove some items. Will those items be ones patrons feel strongly about losing? The report says, “DeCA has not focused on improving the management of products based on consumer demand and consequently may be missing potential opportunities to improve sales, leverage efficiencies, and achieve savings in commissary operations.” Introducing the private label as a cost-savings maneuver seems risky when other efficiencies may not have been thoroughly explored.

(Commissary; continued on page 8)
DeCA has not conducted a cost-benefit analysis for its service contracts for stocking and custodial services and for distributing products to commissaries. More than 70 percent of the appropriations dollars (the subsidy) go to labor costs, which include staff pay and benefits, shelf stocking, transportation of goods, janitorial contracts and purchased services. There is an argument to be made that DeCA should have explored some savings opportunities from the largest part of the government’s subsidy prior to introducing variable pricing, a private label, and changing the way patrons shop.

MOAA’s main concern is that GAO’s report indicates there are many more avenues of savings that have not yet been explored. If sales are decreasing, and DeCA loses additional patrons based on its new reforms, what does that mean for foot traffic at the exchanges — and the resulting dividends to local Morale, Welfare and Recreation funds?

Commissary reform laws allow DeCA to become a non-appropriated fund (NAF) entity if existing pilots for variable pricing and private label are successful. DoD is required to brief the Armed Services committees before those extra steps can be taken. Some questions remain:

- Will those briefings be made public?
- How have the three requirements of patron savings, satisfaction, and product quality been maintained?
- Has the change in savings benchmark calculations lowered the bar for savings if it doesn’t include exact comparisons?
- What items will patrons see go away to make room for private label, and what assurance is there patrons will not be less satisfied as a result?

The Armed Services committees have reserved oversight authority over all of these reforms. They need to hear from you – and many MOAA members have sent messages asking their legislators to ensure their oversight includes assessment of these gaps noted by the GAO.
John Findeis is presented Civilian of the Year award by the Savannah Military Affairs council. 3rd ID CG Maj. Gen. Leopoldo Quintas was the guest speaker and presented the award.

Mike Akey presents the 2017 MOAA Young American Award to George Ulmer of Beaufort Middle School. See award letter on page 10 of this issue.

MAY LUNCHEON
Lowcountry MOAA president Mike Akey and guest speaker, Russell Baxley, Beaufort Memorial Hospital president and CEO.

Mustering for Beaufort's Memorial Day Parade

Potpourri; continued on page 10
May 18, 2017

Mr. George Corbitt Ulmer
Salem Drive West
Beaufort SC 29902

Subject: 2017 MOAA Young American Award

Dear Mr. Ulmer:

The Low Country Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is delighted that the faculty of Beaufort Middle School has chosen you to receive our Young American Award for 2017. We established this program in 1988 to recognize truly outstanding seventh-grade students attending Beaufort area schools.

Your school selected you for your consistent academic standing and your personal accomplishments in music as well as your exemplary loyalty and citizenship. Faculty members have particularly noted your extraordinary spirit of leadership in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes Club. Your volunteerism and community service, marking you as a community leader and model for other youth. Your confident, deliberate, determined focus on your life’s goals, your respect for others and desire to improve the lives of all with whom you come in contact, are no less than amazing for one so young. You are among the very best of your school, community and country. We wish you great success.

Speaking for our entire Low Country Chapter membership, I am pleased to present this award to such a deserving student.

Sincerely,

Michael D. Akey
Michael D. Akey, Maj Gen, USAF (Ret.)
President, MOAA of the Low Country
LCMOAA and friends,

Col. Marvin J. Harris Communications Award Contest winners announced

MOAA councils and chapters competed in the 2016 Col. Marvin J. Harris Communications Award Contest in two categories of competition: print and e-newsletters and websites. We are pleased to recognize 56 councils and chapters that received five-star awards for their exemplary communication efforts and 51 councils and chapters that received four-star awards for their outstanding efforts.

We are pleased to announce that your Lowcountry Chapter was awarded the 5 star award for print newsletter "THE WORD" and a 4 star award for the LCMOAA Website. Our sincere thanks to Bernie Eveler and Bob Easter for managing, tweaking, composing and putting expertise into these quality products. Our goal is to keep you informed about what your chapter is doing and to solicit volunteerism for the programs we support.

LOWCOUNTRY CHAPTER MOAA MISSION:

The purpose of the Low Country Chapter is to promote the purposes and objectives of the Military Officers Association of America; foster fraternal relations among retired, active, and former officers of the uniformed services and their National Guard or Reserve components; protect the rights and interests of active duty, retired, Reserve, and National Guard personnel of the uniformed services and their dependents and survivors; provide useful services for members and their dependents and survivors; and serve the community and the nation. MOAA is the nation's largest and most influential association of military officers. It is an independent, nonprofit, politically nonpartisan organization.

RECEIVE MOAA LATEST NEWS TODAY. GO TO:
http://capwiz.com/moaa/issues/bills/
and/or
http://www.moaa.org/takeaction/
MEMBERSHIP ELIGIBILITY

Active, Retired, Reserve, and Former Officers and surviving Spouses

SOUND OFF????

Have something you want to get off your chest, or that you want the rest of the chapter to know?

If so, send to lcmoaa@gmail.com to get your words in the next edition of The Word.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

SOUND OFF????

Have something you want to get off your chest, or that you want the rest of the chapter to know?

If so, send to lcmoaa@gmail.com to get your words in the next edition of The Word.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

ALERT

Our chapter has a Facebook page. You can get to it thru a link on our Website at www.lcmoaa.com. "Like Us" to get news and info pushed to you as soon as it becomes available.

Chapter Bulletin Board

Editor, Bernie Eveler, retired Lieutenant of Marines, email…adjutant1154@gmail.com

Low Country Chapter

P.O. Box 1433

Beaufort, SC 29901