

# December 26, 2013

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7. **VA chips away at veterans' benefits backlog.**
8. **Smart spending change will help VA patients, taxpayers.**
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1. [Photo gallery: A Christmas feast for US personnel in Bahrain.](#) U.S. personnel stationed in Bahrain were joined for a special meal this Christmas by sailors and Marines from the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman.
2. [Women pilots of WWII will get grand recognition in Rose Parade.](#) In the midst of World War II, with legions of male pilots overseas, the 1,102 young women comprising the Women Airforce Service Pilots flew more than 60 million miles domestically, test-flew repaired military aircraft and ferried non-flying male military officers around the country.
3. [Congress is skeptical of new Pentagon spy agency.](#) Congress is giving only halfhearted support to a Pentagon effort to broaden military espionage operations beyond war zones.
4. [South Sudan crisis lands Marine crisis response unit its largest mission.](#) A new unit of rapid reaction Marines has mobilized to Africa in response to a crisis, marking a muscular milestone for U.S. Africa Command as it contends with a crisis in South Sudan.
5. [Air Force releases early retirement guidance.](#) Some Air Force staff sergeants, captains and higher ranks will be eligible for early retirement under guidelines released by the Air Force Personnel Center.
6. [Dustup over military appeals judge is delaying cases.](#) Dozens of military criminal cases have been thrown into limbo because of a legal challenge over whether Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel improperly appointed a judge to the Air Force's highest court, with attorneys raising questions about the judge's independence amid increasing pressure over the military's handling of sexual assault cases.
7. [VA chips away at veterans' benefits backlog.](#) [Hyperlink to Article](#) **St. Paul Pioneer Press:** Far fewer veterans face long waits for disability compensation after the Department of Veterans Affairs spent six months focusing on the backlog, including mandating case worker overtime and rolling out a new computer system.

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8. [Smart spending change will help VA patients, taxpayers.](#) [Hyperlink to Article Tampa Tribune](#): The James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital's main wing — or bed tower — was built in 1971 and is hopelessly antiquated. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, it is the second worst in the nation in terms of facility deficiencies. So it is encouraging to see Congress find an economical way to fund a replacement.
  
9. [VA joins open data revolution with new website.](#) [Hyperlink to Article Federal News Radio \(Audio\)](#): A new era in open data is arriving at the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA is unrolling a brand new, open data website to give people an inside look at the agency.
  
10. [Veteran Support Line Offers Confidential Help.](#) [Hyperlink to Article WBFF-TV](#): The US Department of Veterans Affairs is reminding veterans that those needing support can use the Dept. of Veterans Affairs crisis line.
  
11. [Could Pot Help Veterans With PTSD? Brain Scientists Say Maybe.](#) [Hyperlink to Article NPR \(Audio\)](#): Veterans who smoke marijuana to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder may be onto something. There's growing evidence that pot can affect brain circuits involved in PTSD.
  
12. [Mass. Veterans look to treatment court for help.](#) [Hyperlink to Article The Boston Globe](#): Ed Cowen is a big, tough-looking ex-Marine — 6-foot-4, 295 pounds, with tattoos covering his arms and piercings in his ears, lip and cheek. So when he approaches a judge in court, the last thing you'd expect him to do is recite a poem he wrote himself.
  
13. [Post-traumatic stress disorder clinic for veterans to open in Middletown.](#) [Hyperlink to Article Times Herald-Record](#): A clinic to treat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder will open in January in Middletown. The Road Back Trauma Center, located in a former medical office building on Ridge Street in the shadow of the old Horton Hospital, will treat clients with an experimental technique espoused by Frank Bourke, the psychologist who will run the center.

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14. [Calm, cool and furry: Therapy dogs help ease nerves in veterans court.](#) A trained service dog, Athena seeks affection from all who will give and provides a calming influence inside and outside the Veterans Treatment Court in return.
  
15. [South Carolina cafe is combination eatery-museum-veterans hangout.](#) The walls and ceiling of the Veteran's Cafe and Grille are crowded with hundreds of items from photos and uniforms to military patches and flags. And, if a veteran can't afford a meal, well, they eat for free.
  
16. [In Boston, VA enlists help of former homeless veterans to help others still struggling.](#) [Hyperlink to Article](#) **The Washington Post (AP):** Not far from where the Boston Massacre helped sow the seeds for the Revolutionary War, David Dyer points toward the underpass where he'd score crack cocaine by day and the train depot where he'd sleep some nights.
  
17. [VA, HUD offering veterans housing help.](#) [Hyperlink to Article](#) **San Francisco Chronicle (AP):** Veterans seeking help with housing after being discharged from the military may be able to turn to a new program through the Department of Housing and Urban Development and Department of Veterans Affairs.
  
18. **VA / VSO-MSO Hearings as December 26, 2013:**
  - **February 25, 2013.** House Veterans' Affairs Committee (Chairman Miller, R-Fla.) will hold a hearing to receive a legislative presentation of the Disabled American Veterans.
  
  - **March 5, 2013.** House Veterans' Affairs Committee (Chairman Miller, R-Fla.) and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (Chairman Sanders, I-Vt.) will hold a joint hearing to receive the legislative presentation of Veterans of Foreign Wars.
  
19. **Today in History:**
  - [1776](#) – [American Revolutionary War](#): In the [Battle of Trenton](#), the [Continental Army](#) attacks and successfully defeats a garrison of [Hessian mercenaries](#).
  - [1790](#) – [Louis XVI of France](#) gives his public assent to [Civil Constitution of the Clergy](#) during the [French Revolution](#).
  - [1793](#) – [Second Battle of Wissembourg](#): [France](#) defeat [Austria](#).
  - [1799](#) – Four thousand people attend [George Washington's](#) funeral where [Henry Lee III](#) declares him as "first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

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- [1805](#) – Austria and France sign the [Treaty of Pressburg](#).
- [1806](#) – Battles of [Pultusk](#) and [Golymin](#): [Russian](#) forces hold [French](#) forces under [Napoleon](#).
- [1811](#) – A [theater fire](#) in [Richmond, Virginia](#) kills the [Governor of Virginia George William Smith](#) and the president of the First National Bank of Virginia [Abraham B. Venable](#).
- [1825](#) – Advocates of [liberalism](#) in [Russia](#) rise up against [Czar Nicholas I](#) and are put down in the [Decembrist revolt](#) in [Saint Petersburg](#).
- [1846](#) – Trapped in snow in the [Sierra Nevadas](#) and without food, members of the [Donner Party](#) resort to [cannibalism](#).
- [1861](#) – [American Civil War](#): The [Trent Affair](#): [Confederate](#) diplomatic envoys [James M. Mason](#) and [John Slidell](#) are freed by the [United States](#) government, thus heading off a possible war between the United States and United Kingdom.
- [1862](#) – American Civil War: The [Battle of Chickasaw Bayou](#) begins.
- 1862 – Four nuns serving as volunteer [nurses](#) on board [USS Red Rover](#) are the first female nurses on a [U.S. Navy hospital ship](#).
- 1862 – The [largest mass-hanging in U.S. history](#) took place in [Mankato, Minnesota](#), 38 Native Americans die.
- [1870](#) – The 12.8-km long [Fréjus Rail Tunnel](#) through the Alps is completed.
- [1871](#) – [Gilbert and Sullivan](#) collaborate for the first time, on their lost opera, [Thespis](#). It does modestly well, but the two would not collaborate again for four years.
- [1883](#) – The [Harbour Grace](#) Affray between Irish Catholics and Protestant [Orangemen](#) causes five deaths in [Newfoundland](#).
- [1900](#) – A relief crew arrives at the [lighthouse](#) on the [Flannan Isles](#) of [Scotland](#), UK, only to find the previous crew has disappeared without a trace.
- [1919](#) – [Babe Ruth](#) of the [Boston Red Sox](#) is sold to the [New York Yankees](#) by owner [Harry Frazee](#).
- [1941](#) – [U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) signs a bill establishing the fourth Thursday in November as [Thanksgiving Day](#) in the United States.
- [1943](#) – [World War II](#): German warship [Scharnhorst](#) is sunk off of [Norway's North Cape](#) after a [battle against major Royal Navy forces](#).
- [1944](#) – World War II: [George S. Patton's Third Army](#) [breaks the encirclement](#) of surrounded U.S. forces at [Bastogne, Belgium](#).
- [1948](#) – Cardinal [József Mindszenty](#) is arrested in [Hungary](#) and accused of [treason](#) and conspiracy.
- [1963](#) – [The Beatles' "I Want to Hold Your Hand"](#) and "[I Saw Her Standing There](#)" are released in the United States, marking the beginning of Beatle-mania on an international level.
- [1966](#) – The first [Kwanzaa](#) is celebrated by [Maulana Karenga](#), the chair of [Black Studies](#) at [California State University, Long Beach](#).
- [1972](#) – [Vietnam War](#): As part of [Operation Linebacker II](#), 120 American [B-52 Stratofortress](#) bombers attacked [Hanoi](#), including 78 launched from [Andersen Air Force Base](#) in [Guam](#), the largest single combat launch in [Strategic Air Command](#) history.
- [1976](#) – The [Communist Party of Nepal \(Marxist–Leninist\)](#) is founded.
- [1982](#) – [Time's Man of the Year](#) is for the first time a non-human, the [personal computer](#).

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- [1991](#) – The [Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union](#) meets and formally dissolves the [Soviet Union](#).
- [1994](#) – Four [Armed Islamic Group hijackers](#) seize control of [Air France Flight 8969](#). When the plane lands at [Marseille](#), a [French Gendarmerie](#) assault team boards the aircraft and kills the hijackers.
- [1996](#) – Six-year-old beauty queen [JonBenét Ramsey](#) is found beaten and strangled in the basement of her family's home in [Boulder, Colorado](#).
- 1996 – Start of the [largest strike](#) in [South Korean](#) history.
- [1997](#) – The [Soufrière Hills](#) volcano on the island of [Montserrat](#) explodes, creating a small [tsunami](#) offshore.
- [1998](#) – [Iraq](#) announces its intention to fire upon U.S. and British warplanes that patrol the northern and southern [no-fly zones](#).
- [1999](#) – The storm [Lothar](#) sweeps across Central Europe, killing 137 and causing US\$1.3 billion in damage.
- [2003](#) – A [magnitude 6.6 earthquake](#) devastates southeast [Iranian](#) city of [Bam](#), killing tens of thousands and destroying the citadel of [Arg-é Bam](#).
- [2004](#) – A [9.3 magnitude earthquake](#) creates a [tsunami](#) causing devastation in [Sri Lanka](#), [India](#), [Indonesia](#), [Thailand](#), [Malaysia](#), the [Maldives](#) and many other areas around the rim of the [Indian Ocean](#), killing over 230,000.
- 2004 – [Orange Revolution](#): The final [run-off election](#) in Ukraine is held under heavy international scrutiny.
- [2006](#) – An [oil pipeline](#) in [Lagos](#), [Nigeria](#) [explodes](#), killing at least 260.