

Good morning, Legionnaires and veterans advocates, and welcome to 2020! Today is Thursday, January 2, 2020, which is 55 MPH Speed Limit Day, National Buffet Day, National Run It Up The Flagpole and See If Anybody Salutes It Day, and World Introvert Day.

Today in History:

- On January 2, 1980, in a strong reaction to the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, President Jimmy Carter asks the Senate to postpone action on the SALT II nuclear weapons treaty and recalls the U.S. ambassador to Moscow. These actions sent a message that the age of detente and the friendlier diplomatic and economic relations that were established between the United States and Soviet Union during President Richard Nixon's administration (1969-74) had ended.
- 1788: Georgia votes to ratify the U.S. Constitution, becoming the fourth state in the modern United States.
- On January 2, 1974, President Richard M. Nixon signs the Emergency Highway Energy Conservation Act, setting a new national maximum speed limit at 55 mph. The act was intended to force Americans to drive at speeds deemed more fuel-efficient, thereby curbing the U.S. appetite for foreign oil. With it, Nixon ushered in a policy of fuel conservation and rationing not seen since World War II.
- An explosion rocks the Sago Mine in Sago, West Virginia on January 2, 2006. 13 coal miners were trapped, and all but one eventually died. The tragedy, exacerbated by false reports that 12 of the miners had been rescued, brought scrutiny upon the media, the company that owned the mine and the administration of then-president George W. Bush.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

- **Associated Press:** [Militiamen withdraw from US Embassy but Iraq tensions linger](#)
- **Military Times:** [Is adopting a service dog right for you? What veterans diagnosed with PTSD need to know](#)
- **Omaha World-Herald:** ['Insanity'? Offutt chief stands by policy of no guns in cars](#)
- **Stars & Stripes:** [Afghanistan: Remembering the fallen of 2019](#)

If you wish to be removed from this email list, kindly email mseavey@legion.org with "Remove" in the subject line. If you have received this from someone who forwarded it and would like to be added, email mseavey@legion.org.

Associated Press: [Militiamen withdraw from US Embassy but Iraq tensions linger](#)

By: Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Joseph Krauss, The Associated Press | 17 hours ago

BAGHDAD — Iran-backed militiamen withdrew from the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad on Wednesday after two days of clashes with American security forces, but U.S.-Iran tensions remain high and could spill over into further violence.

The withdrawal followed calls from the government and senior militia leaders. It ended a two-day crisis marked by the breach of the largest and one of the most heavily fortified U.S. diplomatic missions in the world.

The attack prompted the Pentagon to send hundreds of additional troops to the Middle East. In an orchestrated assault, hundreds of militiamen and their supporters broke into the embassy compound, destroying a reception area, smashing windows and spraying graffiti on walls to protest U.S. airstrikes against an Iran-backed militia over the weekend that killed 25 fighters. The U.S. blamed the militia for a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base in the northern city of Kirkuk last week that killed a U.S. contractor.

The protesters set up a tent camp overnight and on Wednesday set fire to the reception area and hurled stones at U.S. Marines guarding the compound, who responded with tear gas.

There were no injuries on either side and no American staff were evacuated from the compound. The Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella group of state-allied militias — many backed by Iran — called on its supporters to withdraw in response to an appeal by the Iraqi government, saying "your message has been received."

By late afternoon the tents had been taken down and the protesters relocated to the opposite side of the Tigris River, outside the so-called Green Zone housing government offices and foreign embassies. U.S. Apache helicopters circled overhead.

"After achieving the intended aim, we pulled out from this place triumphantly," said Fadhil al-Gezzi, a militia supporter. "We rubbed America's nose in the dirt."

Kataeb Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militia targeted by the U.S. airstrikes, initially refused to leave but later bowed to demands to disperse. The militia is separate from the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, though both are backed by Iran.

"We don't care about these planes that are flying over the heads of the picketers. Neither do we care about the news that America will bring Marines," said Mohammed Mohy, a spokesman for Kataeb Hezbollah.

"On the contrary, this shows a psychological defeat and a big mental breakdown that the American administration is suffering from," he said, before withdrawing from the area.

The violence came as Iran and its allies across the region have faced unprecedented mass protests in recent months and heavy U.S. sanctions have cratered Iran's economy.

Iraq has been gripped by anti-government protests since October fueled by anger at widespread corruption and economic mismanagement, as well as Iran's heavy influence over the country's affairs. Those protesters were not involved in the embassy attack.

President Donald Trump blamed Iran for the attack on the embassy and the Pentagon dispatched an infantry battalion of about 750 soldiers to the Middle East. A U.S. official familiar with the decision said they would go to Kuwait.

Iran denied involvement in the attack on the embassy. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was quoted by media as saying that "if the Islamic Republic makes a decision to confront any country, it will do it directly."

Iran later summoned the Swiss charge d'affaires, who represents American interests in Tehran, to protest what it said was war-mongering by U.S. officials.

Public consular operations at the embassy were suspended and future appointments cancelled, it said in a statement.

Tensions have steadily risen since Trump withdrew the U.S. from Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers and embarked on a campaign of maximum pressure through economic sanctions. Iran has responded by abandoning some of its commitments under the deal.

U.S. officials have blamed Iran for the sabotage of oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and a drone attack on Saudi oil facilities in September that caused a spike in world oil prices. But the Trump administration has not responded with direct military action, apparently fearing a wider conflict. The U.S. has sent more than 14,000 additional troops to the Gulf region since May in response to concerns about Iranian aggression. At the time of the attack, the U.S. had about 5,200 troops in Iraq, mainly to train Iraqi forces and help them combat Islamic State extremists.

The U.S. and Iran have vied for influence over Iraq since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

Iran has close ties to Iraq's Shiite majority and major political factions, and its influence has steadily grown since then.

Iran helped to mobilize tens of thousands of mostly Shiite militiamen to battle the Islamic State group when it stormed across northern and western Iraq in 2014 as the armed forces collapsed. The U.S. and Iran both provided vital aid to Iraqi forces, who eventually declared victory over the extremists in December 2017.

The political influence of the Popular Mobilization Forces has risen in recent years, and their allies dominate the parliament and the government. That has made them the target of the anti-government protesters, who have attacked Iranian diplomatic missions and the local headquarters of parties affiliated with the militias across southern Iraq.

They have also set up a sprawling protest camp in central Baghdad, and for weeks have been trying to enter the Green Zone. Iraqi security forces have beaten them back with tear gas and live ammunition, killing hundreds.

The militiamen and their supporters, however, were able to quickly enter the Green Zone and mass in front of the embassy, with little if any resistance from authorities.

Iraq's government vehemently condemned the airstrikes on the militia, saying it violated national sovereignty. But Iran and its allies might have also seen the attack as a way of diverting attention from the anti-government protests.

"Iran has been trying to provoke the U.S. into helping it solve its Iraq problem," said the Crisis Group, an international think tank. "The Trump administration, by responding to the attacks in Kirkuk and elsewhere with airstrikes, has obliged."

Military Times: Is adopting a service dog right for you? What veterans diagnosed with PTSD need to know

By: Diana Stancy Correll | 3 hours ago

As many as 20 percent of veterans who served in operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom are affected by post-traumatic stress disorder, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

While there are multiple options one could choose for treatment, nonprofit organizations like K9s for Warriors and Southeastern Guide Dogs have championed a treatment method that veterans can't receive directly from the VA: service dogs.

These trained animals can perform a range of tasks such as providing tactile stimulation to help the veteran cope with anxiety or panic attacks, or standing directly in front of their handler in a crowd to give the veteran space from other people. The goal is to empower veterans who are living with PTSD.

"The dogs are never going to be a cure for it, they're simply going to be a tool to help them in their recovery with it," Suzy Wilburn, director of admissions and alumni support at Southeastern Guide Dogs, told Military Times.

The VA is currently evaluating whether service dogs can benefit veterans diagnosed with PTSD. Although Congress first mandated a study on the topic in 2010, it has been put on the back burner twice.

Most recently, it was launched again in 2015 and is still being conducted. According to the New York Times, the VA said in May it will unveil the study's results in 2020.

But K9s for Warriors, which matches post-9/11 veterans with service dogs, has pointed to research Purdue University released in 2018 that found veterans with service dogs experienced lower overall symptoms of PTSD, lower levels of depression and a greater ability to engage in social activities.

Purdue partnered with K9s for Warriors for the study and examined 141 veterans with PTSD: 75 who had graduated from K9s for Warriors program, and 66 who were on the waitlist.

Under current policy, veterans cannot be matched with a service dog through the VA. But the agency can recommend veterans work with nonprofits that are members of Assistance Dogs International or the International Guide Dog Federation, coalitions that provide accreditation to organizations who train and place service dogs, to start the process of adopting a service dog. Military Times spoke with experts at K9s for Warriors and Southeastern Guide Dogs, accredited organizations with the agencies above, and here's what you need to know.

What's the process like?

In order to apply for a service dog, veterans typically must submit documentation that they have been diagnosed with PTSD from their military service, conduct a series of interviews over the phone and/or at home with the service dog providers, undergo criminal background checks, and participate in a training course.

Information, including the contact information of the veteran's current mental health provider, primary care physician, and references, are also commonly requested.

"Here at Southeastern Guide Dogs we have a pretty extensive application process that they go through," Wilburn said.

“What we want to find out is if they’re appropriate to have a dog,” Wilburn added.

This is to ensure that Southeastern Guide Dogs knows important information about the applicant up front to prevent wasting a veteran’s time, and the organization’s time if it’s not a right match. Approximately 50 percent of the applications Southeastern Guide Dogs receives are rejected due to various reasons, including a criminal background or if the veteran is not also receiving treatment from a mental health professional, Wilburn said.

“We tend not to place our dogs if there’s a tendency toward any kind of violence,” Wilburn said. The organization also conducts an at-home interview to guarantee that the veteran lives in an environment safe for a dog.

During those checks, Wilburn said they figure out what a veteran is looking for in a service dog. That is, do they want a dog that will help them leave the house for the grocery store during the middle of the day, or one that will help them cope with flashbacks or nightmares.

At that point, Southeastern Guide Dogs determines which dog they’ve been training is best suited for the veteran, and then they work with that animal for 12 weeks to customize commands tailored to that specific veteran.

Lastly, veterans are brought to Southeastern Guide Dogs campus in Palmetto, Fla., for an 11-day training course to instruct them on how to work with their service dog.

Altogether, it can take up to two years for Southeastern Guide Dogs to train the service dogs the organization breeds, Wilburn said. Matching a veteran with a dog through Southeastern Guide Dogs takes between six months to a year.

K9s for Warriors also has a thorough application process, and asks for a variety of information in its 37-page application to service veterans diagnosed with PTSD, a traumatic brain injury, and/or military sexual trauma.

“We look at your mobility, we look at your activity level, we look at your home life, we look at the animals that you have in your home, we look at the goals that you have within three to five years,” Mike Drafts, Warrior Relations Manager at K9s for Warriors and a Marine Corps veteran, told Military Times.

Similar to Southeastern Guide Dogs’ application process, veterans must submit documentation from a physician confirming they have service-connected PTSD. K9s for Warriors also conducts criminal background checks and contacts references.

Likewise, veterans also must submit confirmation that they are physically and mentally able to participate in a 21-day training program where they will go out in public with a service dog.

According to Drafts, 85 percent of the dogs K9s for Warriors trains are rescue dogs. The organization has a dedicated procurement team that evaluates dogs in shelters to determine if the dogs have an aptitude and are medically cleared to work as a service animal.

In the event a dog cannot pass K9s for Warriors training program, they are then adopted through the organization to prevent them from ending up in a kill animal shelter.

According to Drafts, K9s for Warriors has accepted approximately 360 applications in 2019.

Drafts said a “good percentage” of applicants are accepted, however noted that failing to meet requirements disqualifies some candidates.

Those who are approved won’t receive a dog immediately though. Even after being accepted into the K9s for Warriors program, veterans must be patient because the organization’s wait list is between 12 to 18 months.

The final portion of the matching process requires the veterans to undergo 120 hours of training on site at its headquarters in Ponte Vedra, Fla., where the veteran is matched up with a fully

trained service dog. The training is designed to show the veterans how they can instruct the service dog and work together as a team.

Once veterans graduate from programs like Southeastern Guide Dogs and K9s for Warriors, they must cover costs associated with having a service animal.

However, veterans who have substantial mobility limitations stemming from a mental health disorder can qualify to receive veterinary benefits for their service dogs, provided the dogs were adopted through an organization Assistance Dogs International or International Guide Dog Federation has accredited.

Drafts said approximately 38 graduates from the K9s for Warriors program have received approvals for this benefit this year.

Service dog vs. emotional support animal

Service dogs and emotional support animals are not the same, and do not perform the same functions. Although emotional support animals have attracted media attention in recent years, experts note there are several major distinctions between the two.

“The big difference between a service dog and an emotional support animal is actually not the dog itself, but the handler,” Rory Diamond, K9s for Warriors CEO, told Military Times. “For a service dog, the handler has a disability and that dog is trained to help with that disability.” That differs from an emotional support animal that could help anyone “feel better,” regardless of whether the handler has a disability or not, Diamond said.

Wilson expressed similar sentiments when asked about emotional support animals.

“Although it does the emotional part of it, it’s not trained in any specific tasks to do that,”

Wilson said. “It’s going to sit on your lap and let you pet it and love it, and you’re going to feel better about yourself...but it’s not going to help you mitigate anything disability-wise.”

Wilburn also pointed out service dogs have public access rights covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act, which only recognizes dogs and miniature horses as animals specifically trained to perform tasks for those with disabilities.

In contrast, emotional support animals do not have public access rights at all.

The PAWS Act

Groups like K9s for Warriors do not charge veterans going through their program to train and place a service dog. But both chambers of Congress have introduced legislation that would provide veterans a voucher to use to receive a service dog, known as the Puppies Assisting Wounded Service Members Act, or PAWS Act.

“The PAWS Act would change VA policy completely,” Diamond said, adding this could allow groups to match more veterans with service dogs.

The legislation would instruct the VA to establish a grant program to give veterans with PTSD \$25,000 vouchers they can use to adopt a service dog, if that organization belongs to the Association of Service Dog Providers for Military Veterans. K9s for Warriors estimates it costs \$27,000 to train and place each dog.

Rep. John Rutherford, R-Fla., introduced the measure in the House in June, and Sen. Debbie Fischer, R-Neb., reintroduced it in the upper chamber in November.

Previous efforts to pass the legislation have been unsuccessful. For example, it was first introduced in 2016 but was never brought to a vote.

Diamond said that K9s for Warriors will continue working to advance the legislation, and will instead invest more energy into the Senate in 2020 so the legislation advances this time.

“What you’ll see is a big push in the Senate in January...we’re going to put all of our efforts into the Senate side, since the House seems to want to kill it every year,” Diamond said.

Advice for veterans?

For veterans starting the process of adopting a service dog, Wilburn and Diamond advised veterans to do their research ahead of time.

In particular, Wilburn warned that illegitimate organizations could attempt to target veterans because they may be in a “vulnerable” state.

“Although they may not feel that way, there are organizations and scammers out there that know that they’re vulnerable and will take advantage of that,” Wilburn said.

To safeguard against this, Wilburn said that veterans should head to Assistance Dogs International, which establishes standards of training to ensure the dogs “meet the highest standards in the industry,” according to the organization’s website.

“That’s the best place for a service member to start, is to look at these accredited organizations around the country,” Wilburn said.

Diamond also recommended that veterans visit the Association of Service Dog Providers for Military Veterans’ website to familiarize themselves with various providers that connect veterans with service dogs, what the standards are, and what’s expected during the process.

Similarly, he recommended that veterans avoid working with organizations that require veterans to pay for the service dogs.

“There are lots of groups that are working for free,” Diamond said.

For Drafts, he recommended that veterans have ample support from their family to adopt a service dog because it can significantly alter the dynamic between a veteran and his or her family.

“What I mean by support is that this is a lifestyle change like no other, meaning that it is a service dog and it’s almost like you’re adding a third person to a relationship,” Drafts said.

Drafts pointed out that the service dog is very different from a family pet, and said the animal is designed to develop a bond with one person: the veteran.

But no matter what, Drafts said K9s for Warriors wants to be a resource for veterans — even if their organization can’t directly assist them. If you need help, let someone know, Drafts said.

“It’s not just that we’re providing service dogs for veterans,” Drafts said. “We’re here to help any and every veteran.”

According to the VA, veteran suicides increased in 2017, averaging approximately 17 per day. Reducing that number is K9s for Warriors’ ultimate mission, and Drafts said that’s why they want to help all veterans — period.

“We’re just here to change lives,” Drafts said. “And that’s what we’re trying to do.”

Omaha World-Herald: ['Insanity'? Offutt chief stands by policy of no guns in cars](#)

By Steve Liewer / World-Herald staff writer | Dec 31, 2019

A new policy barring military and civilian personnel at Offutt Air Force Base from transporting privately owned firearms onto base beginning Jan. 2 has drawn a fierce backlash on social media, with one Facebook poster calling it “insanity” and another calling it “craziness.”

Col. Gavin Marks published the order Monday on his Facebook page, though Offutt personnel were notified of the change Dec. 9 by email, said Ryan Hansen, a 55th Wing spokesman. It followed a mandatory review of Offutt’s Integrated Defense and Anti-terrorism Plan, which was required to be completed within 120 days after he assumed command of the 55th Wing last June.

“He spoke with security forces, OSI, many, many base agencies,” Hansen said. “He amended the policy because he felt it would be in the best interests of safety and security for everyone at Team Offutt.”

The decision follows two highly publicized Offutt-related gun incidents last year. In the first, Marine Pfc. Ali Al-Kazahg, 22, of Milford was arrested May 31 at Offutt’s StratCom gate while carrying two semi-automatic rifles, a pistol, a silencer, a bump stock, a vest with body armor and a case of ammunition.

In the second, an Offutt airman shot and killed his wife and then himself Sept. 28 in their home in the Rising View military housing area.

Two other shootings at Navy bases in December — one at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, Hawaii, and the other at Naval Air Station Pensacola — left six dead and eight wounded.

Those latest shootings prompted new calls to allow more service members to carry weapons on base.

Marks’ order overturned a previous policy that allowed Department of Defense ID card holders with a concealed-carry license from Nebraska or reciprocating states to transport personal firearms onto base, provided they are inside their vehicles, unloaded and inside a locked container. That policy had been in place since September 2018, Hansen said.

Concealed carry of weapons outside of vehicles aren’t allowed at Offutt, or at other military bases.

The new restriction doesn’t apply to current and former military law enforcement personnel who have been granted permits under the Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act, which allowed qualifying military police to carry concealed weapons. Offutt began granting those permits two years ago and was among the first bases to do so.

“The commander’s intent for this change is that firearms will be effectively controlled and safely handled on Offutt AFB,” Marks said in the order, adding that it “is reflective of the full confidence in the 55th Security Forces Squadron’s ability to defend the installation and its personnel.”

Hansen said people who live in homes inside Offutt’s gates will still be able to carry unloaded firearms to and from their residences in locked containers as long as they tell the gate guard they have a registered weapon and are transporting it to their home.

By noon Tuesday, Marks’ Facebook post had drawn nearly 600 comments, almost all opposed to the change. Many of the posters’ profiles indicated that they were from out of state, though some did say they were personally affected by the change.

“This decision puts Offutt personnel in harm’s way and illustrates that the leadership does not trust their people,” wrote Tim Donahoo, whose LinkedIn profile said he is a navigator instructor on E-4B Nightwatch aircraft based at Offutt. “I’m not surprised but very disappointed with the decision to disarm service members and make them defenseless.”

Donahoo and others said the policy effectively prevents them from protecting themselves while traveling to and from Offutt.

Tara R. Simmons said in her Facebook post that she is married to a service member and would no longer want to attend on-base events with him because of the rule.

“We live a good twenty minutes from the base,” she wrote. “I cannot believe I have to leave my firearm at home. I am unprotected from the time I travel to and from the base. The idea of it makes me feel exposed.”

Hansen said Marks appreciates the response but is sticking with his decision.

“(He) understood from the beginning this change could be viewed negatively and may inconvenience some,” Hansen said in a statement. “However, he strongly believes in the policy change and feels it is in the best interest of Offutt Air Force Base.”

Stars & Stripes: [Afghanistan: Remembering the fallen of 2019](#)

By STARS AND STRIPES | Published: January 1, 2020

Twenty-two American service members were killed in Afghanistan in 2019, the highest number since NATO combat operations in the country ended at the end of 2014.

Since then, the United States has continued a separate counterterrorism mission.

All but four of the military fatalities in Afghanistan in 2019 were combat-related.

The deaths came as Washington held direct peace talks with the Taliban aimed at the ending the war, the U.S.’s longest, throughout most of the year. The talks are ongoing.

Roughly 13,000 American troops were deployed to Afghanistan at the start of 2020.

Since the war began in 2001, some 2,400 U.S. servicemembers have been killed in the country, while more than 20,000 have been wounded.

- Army Sgt. Cameron A. Meddock, 26, died Jan. 17 at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany from small-arms fire wounds he received in Badghis province in northwest Afghanistan.
The Texas native was assigned to Company A of 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, and served as a fire team leader.
Meddock is survived by his wife, Stevie, who was pregnant with their first child at the time of his death.
His awards and decorations include the Purple Heart, Joint Service Commendation for Combat and Army Achievement Medal with two oak leaf clusters.
“Sgt. Cameron Meddock is one of America’s most precious sons,” said Col. Brandon Tegtmeier, commander of the 75th Ranger Regiment. “The entire nation should strive to emulate the warrior, patriot and husband that Cameron was.”
- Army Sgt. 1st Class Joshua “Zach” Beale, 32, was killed by small-arms fire in southern Uruzgan province on Jan. 22.
Beale, from Carrollton, Va., was assigned to 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group, at Fort Bragg, N.C.
He enlisted in the Army in 2011, after graduating from Old Dominion University in 2008 with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice.
He is survived by his wife, Lindsey Christine Beale, and two daughters, Leah and Grace.
Beale was posthumously promoted to sergeant first class and posthumously awarded the Bronze Star — his third — as well as the Purple Heart and a Meritorious Service Medal.
“Joshua was a smart, talented and dedicated member of 3rd [Special Forces Group] and the special operations community,” Col. Nathan Prussian, commander of 3rd SFG. “He will be greatly missed by everyone who had the fortunate opportunity to know him.”
- Army Sgt. 1st Class Will D. Lindsay, 33, of Cortez, Colo., died March 22 after being wounded during combat in northern Kunduz province.
He was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Carson, Colo., and

died alongside Spc. Joseph P. Collette.

Lindsay is survived by his wife, Susan Unger Lindsay, and four daughters.

His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star with four oak leaf clusters, the Purple Heart and the Meritorious Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster.

“Will was one of the best in our formation, with more than a decade of service in the Regiment at all levels of noncommissioned officer leadership,” Col. Lawrence Ferguson, the 10th SFG (A) commander, said in a statement.

- Army Sgt. Joseph P. Collette, 29, of Lancaster, Ohio, died March 22 of wounds sustained in combat operations in northern Kunduz province.
He was assigned to the 242nd Ordnance Battalion, 71st Explosive Ordnance Disposal Group, out of Fort Carson, Colo., and posthumously promoted to sergeant.
Collette had married his wife, Caela Marie Collette, in December 2018 before his first overseas deployment to Afghanistan.
He was “the most genuine person you’ll ever meet,” she said.
Joseph Collette’s awards and decorations include the Purple Heart, the Combat Action Badge and the Senior Explosive Ordnance Disposal Badge.
- Marine Sgt. Robert A. Hendriks, 25, was one of three Marines killed April 8 by a car bomb outside Bagram Airfield.
Originally from Locust Valley, N.Y., Hendriks was assigned to the 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, and served as an infantry machine gunner.
Hendriks joined the Marines in October 2012. His awards include the Selected Marine Corps Reserve Medal and the National Defense Service Medal.
Hendriks was promoted posthumously to sergeant.
He was “the perfect son,” Erik Hendriks, his father, told the New York Post. “I am the proudest dad on Earth.”
- Marine Staff Sgt. Benjamin S. Hines, 31, of York, Pa., died April 8 in a car bomb explosion outside Bagram Airfield.
He was assigned to the 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division and was on his second overseas deployment.
He was one of three Marines killed by the blast just days before they were to return to the United States.
Hines’ awards and decorations include a Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, two Iraq Campaign Medals and a Meritorious Mast.
Hines was promoted posthumously to staff sergeant.
Hines’ sister, Meghan, told the York Daily Record that her brother was “always the first person to step up when he knew something was wrong,” and that he was her hero, regardless of whether he wore a uniform.
- Marine Staff Sgt. Christopher K.A. Slutman, 43, was killed April 8 by a car bomb outside Bagram Airfield.
The infantry rifleman was assigned to the 25th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division, and was a fireman in his civilian career.
He is survived by his wife, Shannon Metcalf Slutman, and three daughters.
Slutman’s awards and decorations include two Iraq Campaign Medals, a Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal and four certificates of commendation.
Slutman was “truly one of New York City’s bravest” and was decorated for bravery in 2014 after

rescuing an unconscious woman from a burning building in the South Bronx, Mayor Bill de Blasio said in a statement.

- Army Spc. Miguel L. Holmes, 22, died in eastern Nangarhar province from wounds sustained in a noncombat incident May 6.
Holmes, from Hinesville, Ga., was assigned to 1st Battalion, 118th Field Artillery Regiment, 48th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, Savannah, Ga.
The 118th is a unit of the Georgia Army National Guard.
Holmes is survived by three sisters, two brothers, two grandparents and a large extended family.
- Army Sgt. James G. Johnston, 24, was killed June 25 by small-arms fire in southern Uruzgan province.
From Trumansburg, N.Y., Johnston was assigned to the 79th Ordnance Battalion, 71st Ordnance Group, at Fort Hood, Texas. He entered active-duty military service in July 2013 as an explosive ordnance disposal specialist.
His awards and decorations include a Bronze Star, a Purple Heart, an Army Commendation Medal and the Combat Action Badge.
Johnston and his wife, Krista Johnston, were expecting a baby girl at the time of his death. “I love you husband, forever and always; you better watch over me and our baby girl,” his wife wrote on Facebook.
- Army Master Sgt. Micheal B. Riley, 32, was killed by small-arms fire in southern Uruzgan province on June 25.
Riley, born in Heilbronn, Germany, while his father served there, was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group, at Fort Carson, Colo.
He was on his sixth overseas deployment and died alongside Sgt. James Johnston.
His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star, five Army Commendation Medals, the Special Forces tab, the Ranger tab and the Combat Infantryman Badge.
“He was doing what he loved to do. He died for our country,” Riley’s cousin, Janeal Murchison, told Fox 2 St. Louis.
- Army Sgt. 1st Class Elliott J. Robbins, 31, a Green Beret medical sergeant from Utah, died June 30 from noncombat injuries in southern Helmand province.
Robbins was born in San Diego and enlisted as an infantryman out of high school. He was assigned to the 10th Special Forces Group, Fort Carson, Colo.
Robbins is survived by his wife, Vickie, and son, Elliott.
His awards and decorations include the Army Commendation Medal with combat device and one oak leaf cluster.
“A skilled soldier with three combat deployments, Robbins will always be remembered,” said Col. Lawrence G. Ferguson, 10th Group commander at the time.
- Army Sgt. Maj. James “Ryan” Sartor, 40, died July 13 from injuries sustained by enemy fire in northern Faryab province.
The Texas native was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), out of Fort Carson, Colo.
Sartor’s awards and decorations include the Bronze Star with three oak leaf clusters, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal and the Joint Service Commendation Medal.
“Ryan was a beloved warrior who epitomized the quiet professional,” said Col. Brian R. Rauen, 10th Group commander. “He led his soldiers from the front and his presence will be terribly missed.”

- Army Spc. Michael Isaiah Nance, 24, of Chicago, died July 29 after being shot by an Afghan soldier at a military camp in southern Uruzgan province.
He was assigned to the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, at Fort Bragg, N.C. Nance was killed alongside Pfc. Brandon Jay Kreischer. Nance had only been in Afghanistan two weeks before he died.
“He died protecting our freedoms. He died a hero,” Nance’s cousin Trevor Harris said at his funeral.
- Army Pfc. Brandon Jay Kreischer, 20, died July 29 after an Afghan soldier opened fire at a base in southern Uruzgan province.
The Ohio native was assigned to the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, at Fort Bragg, N.C.
Kreischer is survived by his wife, Grace, whom he married in January 2019, and was pregnant with his son.
“If I die in the combat zone for America, I do not call it a tragedy, I call it glory,” Kreischer wrote two years before his death.
- Army Master Sgt. Luis F. DeLeon-Figueroa, 31, was one of two Green Berets killed Aug. 21 in northern Faryab province by small-arms fire.
DeLeon-Figueroa was assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group and posthumously promoted to master sergeant.
His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star, Army Commendation Medal with “V” device for valor and Army Commendation Medal with two oak leaf clusters. He was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.
Luis is survived by three daughters, according to a GoFundMe page set up after his death.
“Luis was a father, son, grandson, brother and best friend to many,” the page said.
- Army Master Sgt. Jose J. Gonzalez, 35, of La Puente, Calif., was killed during a raid alongside Afghan special forces in southern Faryab province on Aug. 21.
He was assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., and died with fellow Green Beret Master Sgt. Luis F. DeLeon-Figueroa.
Gonzalez spent 17 years in the U.S. military. He was a Marine before joining the Army and eventually serving as a Special Forces engineer.
He had been previously wounded in combat.
Gonzalez was posthumously promoted to master sergeant and awarded a Bronze Star and Purple Heart. His other awards include two Bronze Stars with “V” device for valor and three Army Commendation Medals.
He is survived by his wife, Brenda, and two children.
- Army Sgt. 1st Class Dustin Ard, 31, died of wounds received in combat in southern Zabul province on Aug. 29.
The Idaho native was assigned to 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces (Airborne), at Washington’s Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and was a communications sergeant.
Ard left behind a pregnant wife, Mary, and a 3-year-old daughter, Reagan.
“My heart has a hole so big, I can hardly stand it,” Bruce Ard, Dustin’s father, said. “He was the finest young man I have ever known. Not because he was my son, but because of the person he is.”
- Army Sgt. 1st Class Elis A. Barreto Ortiz, 34, from Morovis, Puerto Rico, died in a Sept. 5 suicide blast in Kabul.

He was assigned to the 82nd Brigade Support Battalion, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, out of Fort Bragg, N.C.

President Donald Trump cited Ortiz's death when he halted peace negotiations with the Taliban that had spanned much of 2019.

Ortiz is survived by his wife, Legana Aponte, two sons and a daughter.

"He was always happy, a tremendous friend; he never said no," said Miguel Otero, who had been friends with Ortiz for over 30 years.

- Army Sgt. 1st Class Jeremy W. Griffin, 40, was killed Sept. 16 by small-arms fire in central Wardak province.
The Special Forces communications sergeant was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne), at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., and was on his fourth combat deployment.
Griffin was born in Panama and enlisted in the Army in 2004, when he was 25.
He was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart, adding to a previous Bronze Star and Army Commendation Medal.
"He was a father, he was a husband, he was a son, he was a Green Beret and he was an American hero," Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said of Griffin.
- Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kirk Fuchigami Jr., 25, was killed in a helicopter crash Nov. 20. The incident happened in eastern Logar province.
Fuchigami was assigned to 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade at Fort Hood, Texas. He was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star.
He and Chief Warrant Officer 2 David C. Knadle were providing security to ground troops when the incident occurred. Knadle also died.
Fuchigami, who was born in Hawaii, is survived by his wife, McKenzie Norman, who he married shortly before his deployment.
- Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 David C. Knadle, 33, was killed in a helicopter crash Nov. 20, while providing security to ground troops in eastern Logar province.
The Texas native was assigned to 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade at Fort Hood, Texas, and was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star.
Knadle is survived by his wife Silkey Knadle, his five-year-old daughter Starling and his 15-year-old stepson Eason Bertone.
- Sgt. 1st Class Michael J. Goble, 33, was killed in a roadside bombing in northern Kunduz province on Dec. 23.
The New Jersey native was assigned to 1st Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) at Eglin Air Force. Fla.
Goble is survived by his daughter, Zoey, and partner, Jennifer Albuquerque.
His awards and decorations include the Bronze Star.
"Sgt. 1st Class Michael Goble represented the best values of our Armed Forces and of New Jersey — dedication, fearlessness and excellence," New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy and Lt. Gov. Sheila Oliver said in a joint statement.

THE AMERICAN LEGION 100th ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE COINS



Join us in celebrating a century of service.
Click [HERE](#) to order your coins today!



THE AMERICAN LEGION

VETERANS • DEFENSE • AMERICANISM • YOUTH

