



SCUTTLEBUTT STACK – 14 DEC 2016

VA HOSPITAL LEFT DECEASED VETERAN IN SHOWER ROOM FOR 9 HOURS, REPORT FINDS

An internal report blames staffers at a Veterans Affairs hospital in Florida for leaving the body of a deceased veteran to decompose in a shower for nine hours and then trying to cover it up.

The 24-page report concluded that hospice staffers at the Bay Pines VA hospital failed to provide appropriate post-mortem care to the veteran's body, Fox 13 Tampa reports.

The report found hospice staff put the veteran's body in a hallway and left it there for an unspecified time, the station reported. Staff then put the veteran's body in the shower room and did not "check on the status of the decedent...for over nine hours."

The report also found that a staff member then "falsely documented" the incident, Fox 13 reported.

The investigative report said that leaving the body unattended for so long increased the chance of decomposition.

"The report details a total failure on the part of the Department of Veterans Affairs and an urgent need for greater accountability," Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Fla., told the station. "Unsurprisingly, not a single VA employee has been fired following this incident, despite a clear lack of concern and respect for the veteran. The men and women who sacrificed on behalf of our nation deserve better."

The unnamed veteran died in February after spending time in hospice care.

The hospital's Administrative Investigation Board ordered retraining for staff.

Hospital spokesman Jason Dangel told the Tampa Bay Times hospital officials view what happened as unacceptable.

Source: FoxNews

A PARDON FOR BOWE BERGDAHL? UNLIKELY, EXPERTS SAY

A presidential pardon to spare ex-Taliban captive Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl from facing a court-martial on charges he deserted and endangered his fellow soldiers appears unlikely in the final weeks of President Barack Obama's tenure, according to experts.

Not only has Obama granted few pardons, the president also has demonstrated no interest in meddling with the military justice system in which Bergdahl has been entangled since his release in May 2014 by insurgents in Afghanistan, several experts on presidential pardons and military law told Stars and Stripes.

Bergdahl, 30, has admitted to Army investigators that he willingly left his post in eastern Afghanistan in June 2009 and was quickly abducted by Taliban fighters. Last year, the Army charged him with "misbehavior before the enemy by endangering the safety of a command, unit or place" and "desertion with intent to shirk important or hazardous duty." The more serious misbehavior charge carries a potential life sentence, if convicted. His trial is scheduled for April.

But because Bergdahl's court-martial will occur during the administration of President-elect Donald Trump, the soldier's attorneys have petitioned the White House for a pardon. Eugene Fidell, Bergdahl's lead lawyer, has said his client cannot receive a fair trial with Trump as commander in chief after the president-elect criticized Bergdahl on several occasions during the campaign. Trump referred to Bergdahl as a "no-good traitor" at nationally televised rallies and opined that he should have been executed.

Fidell said he is preparing, if necessary, to file a motion to dismiss the case on the basis of Trump's comments soon after the Jan. 20 inauguration. Beyond that, Fidell has declined to discuss the pardon request.

Few pardons under Obama

Bergdahl's defense team will probably have to file the motion for a pardon, said P.S. Ruckman Jr., a political scientist and the editor of the Pardon Power blog.

A pre-conviction pardon would be extremely rare, he said. While not unheard of -- President Gerald Ford famously pardoned his predecessor Richard Nixon in 1974 ahead of any conviction related to the Watergate scandal -- pre-trial pardons have typically been reserved for blanket amnesty approvals. For example, President Jimmy Carter granted unconditional pardons on his first day in office in 1977 to draft dodgers during the Vietnam War.

Perhaps more telling, Ruckman said, is Obama's own history with clemency.

While Obama has granted commutations -- a power to reduce convicted offenders' sentences -- at a historic rate, he has shown little interest in granting pardons.

Obama has approved only 70 pardon requests in his eight years in office, the second fewest granted since John Adams, the nation's second president. Obama has denied more than 1,600 pardon requests during his presidency, according to the Justice Department.

"Someone trying to get a pardon from this guy is a long, long shot," Ruckman said. "After eight years, there is zero evidence that Obama is likely to grant a big time, controversial pardon. There is just zero evidence at this point to suggest that he is the kind of person willing to do anything like that."

Even the White House hinted a pardon for Bergdahl -- or any other high-profile clemency-seekers such as Edward Snowden or Army Pvt. Chelsea Manning -- is unlikely to come before Jan. 20.

"The president ... has said previously, he does not expect to essentially ram through any pardons at the last minute," White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest told reporters Dec. 8. "There's an established process and the president believes that's a process that's worth following."

Typically, that process only begins after a five-year post-conviction waiting period, and approval can take several more years once the petition has been submitted, Ruckman said. It involves background investigations and reviews by the deputy attorney general and the White House council.

"It's a multilayered, bureaucratic, slow-moving, plodding kind of thing," Ruckman said. "And, frankly, no sane person would bet on it" with Obama in office.

Other factors

If Obama really wanted to dismiss the charges against Bergdahl, he could have done so at any time, said Eric Carpenter, an assistant law professor at Florida International University and a former Army defense attorney and prosecutor.

"The fact that President Obama has not to this point taken any action to prevent a court-martial -- he could have at any point -- is pretty strong evidence to me that he won't grant a pardon," Carpenter said.

Obama's advisers are certainly aware of the opinions of many people in the military and veterans' communities, who on social media have regularly voiced displeasure with Bergdahl's actions, said Victor Hansen, an associate law professor at the New England School of Law and a former Army lawyer.

"There's no political gain for the president in pardoning Bergdahl," Hansen said. "I would expect his advisers to steer him away from this and tell him: 'Why would you want to get involved in this case that has not even been litigated yet?'"

Source: Stars & Stripes

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NATIONAL GUARD CELEBRATES ITS 380TH BIRTHDAY

The National Guard celebrated its 380th birthday Tuesday with a series of special events across the country and overseas.

The Guard traces its birthday to Dec. 13, 1636, when the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law establishing formal militia companies consisting of all adult males older than 16.

The New York National Guard planned a cake-cutting ceremony. The event Tuesday afternoon at the state Division of Military and Naval Affairs headquarters in Latham was set to include a symbolic re-enlistment ceremony for new members of the New York Army and Air National Guard.

The traditional military cake will be cut by the youngest and oldest National Guard members present -- 17-year-old Private Cameron Thompson and 59-year-old Chief Warrant Officer Robert Wold.

In Germany, service members from U.S. Africa and European Commands celebrated the Coast Guard's birthday at U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart last week.

"On the occasion of the National Guard birthday, it provides an opportunity to recall how it all began because it's such an important part of our history and our culture," AFRICOM Special Assistant to the Commander, Maj. Gen. Worthe Holt, Jr., said at the event. "Here we are 380 years later, still representing people who are employed and work in our communities, but yet are ready to put the tools of their trades behind and step up and

take the fight when it's necessary to defend our country, to respond to natural disasters, to provide humanitarian assistance, and all the various things that characterize the National Guard."

Source: FoxNews

OBAMA: PRESIDENT WITHOUT BRIEFINGS WOULD BE 'FLYING BLIND'

President Barack Obama says any president who shuns daily intelligence briefings would be "flying blind" on national security matters, a stiff push-back against Donald Trump's suggestion that that he doesn't need daily read-ins to fulfill his campaign pledge to "make America safe again."

"I think the president-elect may say one thing and do another once he's here" in the White House," Obama said late Monday on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show."

Intelligence agencies, Obama said, "are not perfect, they would be the first to acknowledge that. If you're not getting their perspective, their detailed perspective, then you are flying blind."

Trump said on "Fox News Sunday" he's not interested in daily intelligence briefings unless developments have changed enough to merit his attention. Trump campaigned heavily on making national security his priority, crafting one widely seen ad around the phrasing that he'll "make America safe again." He wrapped several campaign proposals in the national security theme, including a temporary ban on Muslim immigration and immediate deportation of millions of people in the country illegally.

Asked whether he's rejecting valuable intelligence, Trump was defiant.

"I get it when I need it," he said of the top-secret briefings sessions, generally designed to present facts for the president to make decisions on when something's changed and what, if any, action should be taken.

"I'm, like, a smart person," Trump continued. "I don't have to be told the same thing in the same words every single day for the next eight years."

The remarks sent Trump allies, such as incoming White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus Tuesday, insisting that the president-elect respects intelligence analysts.

In his Monday night appearance, Obama said the U.S. intelligence agencies are stocked with "extraordinary, hard-working and patriotic and knowledgeable experts."

"It doesn't matter how smart you are," Obama said. "You have to make the best information possible to make the best decisions possible."

Obama also commented on the burgeoning controversy surrounding the CIA's conclusion that Russia was engaged in computer hacking aimed at interfering with the U.S. election process and helping Trump in his campaign against Democrat Hillary Clinton. A congressional investigation is in the works, and Obama has ordered a wide-ranging review of the hacking situation.

The aim, Obama told "The Daily Show," was to ensure that "the public and our elected representatives, going forward, can find ways to prevent this kind of interference from having an effect on the elections in the future."

"This was not a secret running up to the election," he added. "The president-elect in some of his political events specifically said to the Russians, hack Hillary's emails so we can finally find out what's going on and confirm our conspiracy theories."

VA DRUG PRICES TO CHANGE FEB. 27

Prescription drugs received through the Department of Veterans Affairs for non-service connected conditions could cost many veterans less under a new rule that kicks in Feb. 27.

Currently, the VA charges veterans who do not qualify for free health care \$8 or \$9 for a 30-day or less drug supply, depending on their category. Those costs were set to increase over time based on a Medical Consumer Price Index calculation.

The new plan, however, will categorize drugs into tiers, similar to how medication is handled by Tricare. Tier 1 medications, described as "preferred generics," will cost \$5 for a 30-day or less supply. Tier 2, or "non-preferred generics," will cost \$8 for a 30-day or less supply. Tier 3, or "brand name," will cost \$11 for a 30-day or less supply.

Officials estimate that most users will see a 10 to 50 percent reduction in the cost of the drugs they receive from the VA, according to the rule proposal posted to the federal register early this year.

"By our estimate, 94 percent of co-payment eligible veterans would experience no cost increase, and 80 percent would realize a savings of between \$1 and \$5 per 30-day equivalent of medications," the proposal states.

A series of seven criteria is used by the VA to determine which generic drugs are on the lower-cost "preferred generics" list, and which drugs are "non-preferred generics" and cost \$3 more per 30-day or less supply, according to the rule proposal.

For example, generic drugs typically used to treat a common "chronic condition," such as hypertension, will be on the list, while topical creams, products used to treat musculoskeletal conditions, antihistamines and steroid-containing generics would not because they are typically used on an "as-needed basis," the document says.

"VA estimates that at least 50 percent of all billable prescriptions would be in Tier 1, with no more than 35 percent in Tier 2, and approximately 15 percent in Tier 3," the rule proposal states.

The annual drug co-payment cap for veterans in priority groups two through seven is \$700.

Veterans who meet certain qualifications, including a disability rating above 50 percent or who qualify as low-income, can receive free health care from the VA and are not subject to the co-pay costs.

Source: military.com

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TRUMP SAYS CANCEL NEW AIR FORCE ONE: COSTS 'OUT OF CONTROL'

Six weeks from taking office, Donald Trump says he wants the government to cut some costs by canceling its order for a new Air Force One, the plane that carries presidents around the globe.

The government has contracted with Boeing to build two or more new planes, which would go into service around 2024. That means Trump wouldn't fly on the new planes unless he pursued and won a second term. But the Air Force has pressed for a faster schedule, saying the current planes are becoming too expensive to repair and keep in good flying shape.

The contract for the planes was to be about \$3 billion, but costs have been reported to be rising. Trump tweeted early Tuesday, "Boeing is building a brand new 747 Air Force One for future presidents, but costs are out of control, more than \$4 billion. Cancel order!"

Asked for comment, Boeing spokesman Todd Blecher said, "We are going to have to get back to you after we figure out what's going on."

Trump now uses his own plane, also a 747, but as president he would travel aboard the Air Force jet, which is equipped with special safety, defensive and communications equipment.

Later Tuesday, Trump is making the second stop of this "thank you" tour in North Carolina, less than a week after his bombastic return to rallies at an Ohio appearance that felt more like a raucous campaign stop than a traditional speech by a president-to-be.

At that Cincinnati stop, Trump disparaged the media as "dishonest," inspired loud "Build the wall" chants, took swipes at fellow Republicans and stunned his own aides with his surprise announcement from the stage that he was appointing retired Gen. James Mattis as secretary of defense.

Mattis' selection was being formally announced Tuesday, and Mattis will appear with Trump at the evening event in Fayetteville, Vice President-elect Mike Pence said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe."

Later this week, there will be rallies in Iowa and Michigan as Trump barnstorms the country to salute his supporters who delivered the victories in the battleground states he needed to capture the White House.

The North Carolina rally comes a day after Trump chose retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson to be secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, raising fresh concerns about the lack of experience some of Trump's Cabinet picks have with agencies they're now being chosen to lead.

Carson, who opposed Trump in the Republican primaries, has no background in government or running a large bureaucracy.

Pence defended Carson's selection, saying he was "absolutely qualified" for the post.

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, Trump's choice to be ambassador to the United Nations, has no foreign policy experience. Steve Mnuchin, a former Goldman Sachs partner and Hollywood executive, is Trump's man to lead the Treasury Department but has never worked in government. And Mattis, a widely praised battlefield commander, spent decades in the Marine Corps but now is tapped to run the nation's largest government agency, the Defense Department, with 740,000 civilian employees in addition to 1.3 million service personnel.

Democrats swiftly criticized Carson's qualifications for his job. House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi called him a "disconcerting and disturbingly unqualified choice." And New York Sen. Charles Schumer said he had "serious concerns about Dr. Carson's lack of expertise and experience in dealing with housing issues. Someone who is as anti-government as him is a strange fit for housing secretary, to say the least."

Carson would oversee a budget of nearly \$50 billion that provides rental assistance for more than 5 million households. Demand for that assistance is high in part because housing costs are rising faster than incomes. HUD also promotes home ownership with the Federal Housing Administration underwriting about 1 in 6 mortgages issued in the U.S. The agency is charged with enforcing federal fair housing laws, too.

In a statement, Trump said he was "thrilled to nominate" Carson, citing his "brilliant mind" and his passion "about strengthening communities and families within those communities."

Carson, who grew up poor, quickly endorsed Trump after ending his own presidential bid despite Trump noting what he called Carson's "pathological temper." Carson has been coy about joining the new administration, saying shortly after Trump's election victory that he wasn't certain he'd fit into a Cabinet-style role in a job like Health and Human Services secretary.

Trump's selections also highlight a frequent divide between the two major political parties in their strategies in filling out a Cabinet: In early 2009, Republicans criticized incoming President Barack Obama for not making enough selections with private-sector experience.

On Monday, Trump received a fresh stream of visitors to the New York skyscraper that bears his name. His most surprising guest was Democratic former Vice President Al Gore. Transition officials said early Monday that Gore would meet with Trump's daughter, Ivanka, about climate change, which is Gore's signature issue.

But Gore said he also met with Trump directly and the two had a "very productive conversation."

"It was a sincere search for areas of common ground," said Gore, who did not detail what the men discussed. The president-elect has called man-made climate change a hoax and has pledged to undo a number of regulations designed to protect the environment.

Source: AP

MARKET ROCKED AFTER TRUMP CRITICIZES F-35 PROGRAM IN TWEET

Donald Trump is bent on reforming government spending, one tweet at a time.

This morning just before 9 a.m., the president-elect lashed out at the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program on Twitter, promising to change the game after he enters office.

"The F-35 program and cost is out of control," he tweeted. "Billions of dollars can and will be saved on military (and other) purchases after January 20th."

Though Trump did not clearly state what he planned to do after he becomes president, the tweet sent ripples across the defense community and had an immediate impact on the stock market value of Lockheed Martin Corp., the manufacturer of the F-35.

Within hours of the tweet, the company's stock had dropped more than 4 percent, multiple outlets reported, for a loss in value of more than \$4 billion so far.

While the F-35 program has long been held up as an example of acquisition malpractice, with years of delays and budget overruns, defense officials and Lockheed executives have struck an optimistic note this year as three U.S. F-35 variants hit final milestones ahead of their first deployments.

Trump's comments come the same day the Israeli government, the first country to sign on to purchase the F-35 through the U.S. foreign military sales process, welcomes the arrival of the its first F-35 "Adir" fighters.

In remarks at a ceremony in Israel to mark the event, Jeff Babione, F-35 program manager for Lockheed Martin, emphasized the company's efforts to reduce aircraft unit costs.

"Since the beginning, we've invested hundreds of millions of dollars to reduce the price of the airplane more than 70 percent. We project the price of the aircraft will be \$85 million in the 2019 -2020 timeframe," he said, according to remarks provided to Military.com. "When we get to that price, the F-35 will be less expensive than

any fourth-generation fighter in the world. And it will be the premiere fifth-generation fighter. That's an incredible value for anyone operating the airplane."

Babione told reporters in March that F-35A unit cost may drop from roughly \$100 million per plane today to \$85 million by 2019, dependent in part on an international block buy that would drive costs down due to economies of scale.

Trump's tweet on the F-35 comes six days after he targeted defense giant Boeing in a tweet about costs for Air Force One, the president's private plane.

"Boeing is building a brand new 747 Air Force One for future presidents, but costs are out of control, more than \$4 billion. Cancel order!" he wrote.

Lockheed Martin officials have said they plan to respond to Trump's tweet about the F-35 later today.

Source: dodbuzz

PENTAGON REPORTEDLY BURIED STUDY EXPOSING \$125 BILLION IN WASTE

Senior defense officials suppressed a study documenting \$125 billion worth of administrative waste at the Pentagon out of fears that Congress would use its findings to cut the defense budget, The Washington Post reported late Monday.

The report, which was issued in January 2015 by the advisory Defense Business Board (DBB), called for a series of reforms that would have saved the department \$125 billion over the next five years.

Among its other findings, the report showed that the Defense Department was paying just over 1 million contractors, civilian employees and uniformed personnel to fill back-office jobs. That number nearly matches the amount of active-duty troops -- 1.3 million, the lowest since 1940.

The Post reported that some Pentagon leaders feared the study's findings would undermine their claims that years of budget sequestration had left the military short of money. In response, they imposed security restrictions on information used in the study and even pulled a summary report from a Pentagon website.

"They're all complaining that they don't have any money," former DBB chairman Robert Stein told the Post. "We proposed a way to save a ton of money."

Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work, who originally ordered the study, told the paper that the plan laid out in the report was "unrealistic."

"There is this meme that we're some bloated, giant organization," Work said. "Although there is a little bit of truth in that ... I think it vastly overstates what's really going on."

Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook echoed Work's claim in a statement to Fox News, which said that the DBB report "had limited value" because it "lacked specific, actionable recommendations appropriate to the department."

Work claimed that some of the report's recommendations were being implemented on a smaller scale and would save an estimated \$30 billion by 2020. However, the Post reported that most of the programs had been long-planned or were unrelated to the Defense Business Board report.

Source: FoxNews

OBAMA DEFENDS RECORD AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

President Barack Obama defended his record as commander-in-chief Tuesday against the pledges of President-elect Donald Trump to reverse much of his national security and counter-terror legacy.

Obama, who came to office in 2009 with expectations of ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, was candid in acknowledging that the goal of a United States at peace would be the task of another administration.

"On Jan. 20, I will become the first president of the United States to serve two full terms during a time of war," Obama told U.S. Special Operations and Central Command troops at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida.

"For eight years that I've been in office, there has not been a day when a terrorist organization or some radicalized individual was not plotting to kill Americans," Obama said.

The president told the troops that the threat has required him to send them "in harm's way" on constant deployments and he warned that "the threat will endure" well beyond his presidency.

For their continued sacrifice, Obama said, "It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve as your commander-in-chief."

In what was billed as his last major address on defense issues, Obama said he wanted to "talk about the foundation that we will leave for the next administration."

If adhered to, the foundation was there to achieve stability in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, while defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and limiting the ability of ISIS and other terror groups to threaten and influence attacks on the homeland, Obama said

Trump's name was never mentioned, but much of the address appeared aimed at the president-elect, who in a speech later in the day formally announced retired Marine Gen. James Mattis as his nominee for secretary of defense.

The rule of law must be preserved in the U.S. way of war, Obama said, as he argued against the re-introduction of "enhanced interrogation techniques" such as waterboarding.

Obama also renewed his calls against "stigmatizing Muslims" and for shuttering the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, saying that U.S. courts and prisons were best equipped to deal with terror suspects.

"Rather than offer false promises that we can eliminate terrorism by dropping more bombs, or deploying more and more troops, or by fencing ourselves off from the rest of the world, we have to take a long view of the terrorist threat," Obama told troops gathered in an airplane hangar. "We have to pursue a smart strategy that can be sustained."

Trump and Mattis have both pilloried Obama's record as commander-in-chief.

Trump has called Obama's national security policies a "disaster," and Mattis, in a speech last spring to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said that Obama was leaving the next president a "mess."

"The bottom line on the American situation is quite clear," Mattis said. "The next president is going to inherit a mess. That's probably the most diplomatic word you can use for it."

Trump made a surprise announcement of the Mattis choice last week.

Throughout his term, Obama has been adamantly opposed on nearly every defense issue by congressional Republicans, and the opposition continued Tuesday after his speech at MacDill.

Sen. John McCain, an Arizona Republican and chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, quickly issued a statement excoriating Obama's record.

"President Obama's speech was nothing more than a feeble attempt to evade the harsh judgment of history," the senator said. Obama will be leaving behind "emboldened enemies" and "dispirited allies," he added. "No rhetorical conceit will alter history's verdict."

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MAN AMONG LAST SURVIVING MARINE RAIDERS FROM WORLD WAR II

When Harold Berg signed up for the Marines in 1942, the war wasn't looking too good for the Allies.

"After Pearl Harbor, just about every boy my age wanted to get into the war," said the 91-year-old Berg recently. "We were angry for the Japanese killing all our sailors, soldiers and Marines.

"It might not be politically correct, but I wanted to fight the Japanese," he said.

Berg, formerly of Normal but who now lives in Peoria, is one of three surviving men who were part of an experiment by the Marines to create elite Raider units that would lay the foundation for special operations in the U.S. military. Though they were in existence for only two years, the Marine Raiders created a lasting legacy that continues today with the recent renaming of the U.S. Marine Corps Special Operations units to Raiders.

Consider this: When the four Raider battalions were folded back into Marine infantry units, the nearly 8,000 men earned seven Medals of Honor, 141 Navy Crosses and 330 Silver Stars. They also earned 2,406 Purple Hearts during their two years.

"Every day I think about it, it's a part of you and it makes you think about what you have done and what you have been," Berg said.

To appreciate how important the Raiders were, one needs to go back to late 1941 and the beginning of 1942. Following the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese rolled from victory to victory. The Battle for Coral Sea, the first one where the two sides didn't see each other except by plane, was a stalemate. The Japanese took Bataan, Wake Island and Guam. After years of being on the sidelines, the United States brought its industrial might and its huge population to bear but it would take time.

Enter the Raiders, a new concept for the United States. It was borrowed, in part, from the British, who had their own commando units and was seen as a way to bring the fight directly to the Japanese and to offset their larger numbers and experience. Berg dropped out of Woodruff High School as a junior and enlisted in the Marines when he was 17.

In a video made for the Marine Corps, he said he joined after some "good looking Marines came to my high school and spoke on stage."

"They told us what we 17-year-olds wanted to hear" about being a Marine," he said a few years ago. "We knew as Marines we would have one job -- to fight.

He volunteered for and was accepted into the 1st Raider Battalion, whose mission was to conduct small unit raids. Essentially, they were to land on Japanese-held islands before the main force of Marines, disrupt the beach defenses and to cause as many casualties and destruction as they could. They were on their own, without much support.

"I was proud to get in the Raiders. We Raiders knew we would be the first in and the last out. I went to New Caledonia and then on to Guadalcanal," he said of his first taste of combat. He walked ashore Guadalcanal in early 1943, well after the main battle was over but while thousands of Japanese were still on the island. He was involved, he said, in the "mopping up" process.

But it was brutal. Casualty rates were 50 percent to 60 percent. Guam, he said, was a particularly fierce fight. He was bayoneted in the leg by a Japanese soldier, earning him his first Purple Heart.

"We were trying to get the lieutenant back to the beach and thought this Japanese soldier was dead. Well, we shot him after that," Berg said.

He was also involved with the battles for Saipan, Bougainville and New Georgia.

The Raiders were a short-lived group. It lasted two years before they were folded into regular Marine infantry units. Berg went on to join the 4th Marines Regiment, where he participated in the battles for Guam and Okinawa. He was wounded twice and received his second Purple Heart for his shoulder, hand, chest and face injuries sustained from an enemy grenade. The combat was no less fierce after he was out of the Raiders.

A squad leader in Okinawa, he had all 12 men either killed or wounded during the battle.

His regiment, the 4th Marines, was chosen to be the Corps' representative at the signing of the peace treaty with Japan that was held on the USS Missouri. So he and about 900 other Marines stood attention at a nearby parade ground with the massive battleship in their view.

And while the Raiders' experiment ended, their legacy didn't. Their work laid the foundation for special operations here in the United States and that can be seen in the recent renaming of the Marines Special Operations Command from MARSOC to the Marine Raiders. Berg was able to go to the ceremony in North Carolina last year where that renaming was done and where the legacy that he and his buddies earned was passed down to the current generation.

"The new Raiders are like we were; they are anxious for action. I was mighty glad to see MARSOC training. The Marine Corps is the best organization to teach you to fight," he said recently.

Bill Eudaly, a spokesman for the United States Raiders Association, said people like Berg are living treasures.

"Faced with an implacable enemy in the Pacific, these men volunteered for an extremely perilous mission and acquitted themselves with courage, character, and fortitude," he said. "As Raiders, they also pioneered a type of warfare that is a model for special forces in all branches of our service today."

And after the war, he did what many veterans did, come back home, go to work, raise a family and melt back into society. He spent 40 years as an insurance adjuster for Country Companies in Normal and returned to Peoria in 2008.

Oh, and that high school diploma, check that off the list. Berg said he received his degree a "year or two ago."

And while he might be lauded as a hero by others, he disowns that statement, saying softly but firmly: "We know where the real heroes are. They are buried in areas all over the Pacific. Those are the real heroes."

