



COLUMBIA VOYAGER

<http://www.TriCitiesMOAA.org>

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September 2017

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OPERATION ORCHARD Connecting the dots

Deir ez-Zor is the largest city in eastern Syria and is located 280 miles to the northeast of Damascus on the shores of the Euphrates River. At one time, it was home to a nuclear reactor, part of the Syrian nuclear weapons program. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert decided to adhere to the 1981 Begin Doctrine and unilaterally strike to prevent Syria from developing a nuclear weapons capability, despite serious concerns about Syrian retaliation. Just after midnight on September 6, 2007, an Israeli airstrike destroyed the reactor in Operation Orchard.



Before & after reactor pictures

At the September meeting, our new president, Mark Hanneman, will describe how intelligence connected the dots leading up to Operation Orchard and the destruction of the Syrian nuclear reactor.

We will meet at Clover Island Inn on Tuesday, September 19. Please make reservations with Paul

Seipt by Thursday night, September 14.

HQ MOAA sends . . . COLA

As of July, the cost of living index was 1.5% above the baseline. At this time last year, it was around 0.25%.

Commissary Changes On Course — or Lost?

As MOAA has reported before (“Are Commissaries in Jeopardy?”), many new changes have come to the commissary after last year’s National Defense Authorization Act gave DoD the ability to sell items above or below cost, as well as encouragement to introduce a private label of its own. MOAA recently received an update on some changes, and we’re sharing some details with you.

The Defense Commissary Agency’s (DeCA’s) new private label, Freedom’s Choice, has hit the shelves. You might already have seen Freedom’s Choice bottled water, and all “initial performance indicators are quite good,” according to senior defense officials. DeCA’s long-term goal is to have 3,000-4,000 private-label items on commissary shelves. Commercial grocery markets have seen a growth in private-label sales of 25-35 percent. Private labels take space away from name-brand items, but DeCA says the quality is comparable, and the competition gives patrons better prices.

Only 10 commissaries have been part of DeCA’s variable pricing pilot

program. Economics predicts that when the price of an item is increased, consumers will buy fewer of that item. Variable pricing allows DeCA to do what is necessary to direct sales. To effectively manage variable pricing, DeCA has been working with vendors to get the very best price on items before determining what the shelf price should be. Careful study of pricing and close attention to local market behaviors, which can vary from national norms, will be required to implement this DeCA pilot. Senior defense officials say they have seen less than a 0.02 percent change in sales in commissaries participating in the variable pricing pilot.

Reduced sales are a concern across the defense resale industry, which includes DeCA as well as the service exchanges (AAFES, NEX, MCX, and CGX). Exchanges rely on foot traffic from the commissaries, and as sales continue to drop, profits at the exchanges (which help pay for Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs) are at risk. DeCA is committed to regaining the patronage of customers through various new programs, including the Click2Go program, an online shopping service with curbside pickup, currently at three installations: Fort Lee, Va.; Offutt AFB, Neb.; and Travis AFB, Calif.

What can you do if your commissary seems off the mark in delivering this valued benefit?

Senior defense officials emphasize your concerns are most effectively delivered at the store level. Engaging with your store manager can resolve most issues more efficiently than taking them to DeCA Headquarters or DoD itself. Each store should have posted a picture with the name of the store manager and also have an office where you can submit concerns.

Vets Get the Full Attention of Lawmakers

While it has been difficult to get major legislation through Congress, that hasn't been the case with some important veterans' bills.

In fact, it has been a banner year for veterans as Congress quickly moved legislation through the process in an unusually bipartisan and bicameral way while other important legislation, like the defense bill and other federal measures, stalled.

Here's a brief recap of the year and what's in play today.

- Oct. 1, 2016. The VA starts the fiscal year with its full 2017 budget, including advance appropriations for FY 2018, while other federal agencies were forced to operate under a continuing resolution.

- Jan. through March 2017. Lawmakers hit the ground running

in the new Congress, introducing more than 200 bills to help veterans in the first quarter of the 115th session—a trend that has continued to inch up every year since 2001.

- April. The president extends the Veterans Choice program, commonly known as “Choice,” before it was due to expire in August, giving the VA time to expend remaining funds in the program and develop a better replacement program for veterans receiving care through private providers.

Retiree Health Costs – Last year Congress voted to raise TRICARE co-pays and enrollment fees for retirees, applying them to retirees who joined the military after 2018. The Senate bill would remove that grandfathering protection, hikes in enrollment fees and copayments would apply to new and existing retirees beginning in 2019.

The change would affect 600,000 retiree households enrolled in TRICARE Prime, raising out of pocket cost for individuals from \$530 a year to \$670 and for family coverage from \$1270 to \$1615. For the 450,000 retirees using TRICARE Select plans costs would climb, from an average of \$580 a year for single coverage to \$1105, and from an average of \$1685 for family coverage to \$2655.

**September Meeting
Tuesday, September 19**

Clover Island Inn
Clover Island
Kennewick

Social hour at 6:30
Dinner at 7:00
\$27.50 per person

A reservation made
is a reservation paid.

Reservations by
Thursday, Sept 14 to
Paul Seipt
375-5112
pama227@charter.net

Menu

Hawaiian Island Dinner Buffet
Sweet and Pulled Pork
Teriyaki Pineapple Chicken
Hawaiian Rice
Steamed Vegetable Medley
Fresh Fruit Tray
Tossed Green Salad
Coconut Bread, Pineapple Butter
Pineapple Upside Down Cake
Coffee/Tea.