



The ALLIANCE



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Military Sharply Warns Congress Against Punting on Spending

The Navy will cancel ship deployments and shut down carrier air wings. The Air Force will ground all non-deploying squadrons in the US. Blue Angel shows will be scrapped, and Fleet Weeks cut. Thousands of bonuses for troops will go unpaid.

Those are just some consequences the military services are warning Congress about if the Congress doesn't pass a comprehensive spending plan for the rest of this year. The warnings underscore major concerns that Congress may punt on the politically dicey budget process by simply approving a full-year continuing resolution (CR) keeping the budget at its current levels instead.

The Pentagon has long warned that military readiness has been cut to the bone by years of constrained budgets, and the latest predictions spell out a stark loss of capabilities. But the looming showdown on Capitol Hill over spending between Democrats, Republicans and the Trump administration may be too politically fraught to stave off the damage that the military warns is coming.

The services hope their point is blunt enough to get Congress to listen. Congressional advocates for higher defense spending plan to point to the lengthy list of potential canceled trainings, maintenance and deployments to pres-

sure lawmakers to cut a deal on spending before the April 28 deadline, after which the government would shut down for lack of approved spending.

Striking a comprehensive budget deal that can secure enough votes in both the House and Senate will be a difficult political task, however.

House and Senate appropriations leaders working on an agreement must navigate the tricky politics of everything from Planned Parenthood funding to the border wall, and there's not much time, with less than a month before the funding deadline and a two-week congressional recess on the horizon.

The politically easier continuing resolution, however, would result in less spending than the military has requested in its budget, as well as include restrictions on starting new programs under the rules of the CR.

But the military and its allies are determined to keep that from happening. Republican Sen. John McCain of Arizona threatened that he would vote to shut down the government before he would vote for a continuing resolution.

"If that's the only option, I will not vote for a CR no
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REPORT from the HILL

It is hard to believe that while we are fighting the longest war in American history -- 14 years and counting in Afghanistan, and increasing numbers of troops being sent back to Iraq -- there are still those in Washington who think military personnel are being paid too much and their compensation and other benefits need

to be cut back. The *From the President* column in this issue tells you about two of them.

Also, still in the target of lawmakers and so-called "think tanks" are military health care and things like Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH). Of course, last year Congress, while giving a retirement benefit to those who serve less than 20 years, at the same time decided to reduce the retirement benefit of under-age 65 retirees in order to pay for that new benefit.

But those "think tanks" still

complain about the high costs of military health care and think military personnel need to shoulder more of the burden, with some wanting those who are over age-65 to also pay more.

Now, a conservative "think tank," called *The Heritage Foundation*, says too many troops now view BAH as an entitlement, and therefore it should be reduced. Heritage wants Congress to put an end to dual-military couples who live together collecting two housing allowances. It also would mean servicemembers who find housing that

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Bernd Dela Cruz

Did you know that if a servicemember dies of a service-connected disability, the survivor is no longer entitled to the full portion of the inherited pension plan? It is true, and an egregiously wrong law.

After the loss of a spouse that died of service-connected causes, surviving spouses are shocked to learn their Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) annuity from the VA is deducted from the military Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) coverage her spouse had purchased.

SBP is the military's Survivor Benefit Plan. It is automatic for Active Duty Deaths with less than 20 years' service since 2001, and a premium based benefit for military retirees established by Congress in 1972. It is automatic unless a retiree AND his or her spouse decline it or opt to purchase a reduced amount. The SBP is reduced dollar for dollar by the VA's payment of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC).

The Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) was established by Congress in 2008 and is increased to \$310 at this time in order to "save" money for funding the elimination of the SBP/DIC offset.

Eligible survivors should receive both SBP and DIC with no offset. SBP is an annuity earned by years of service and/or paid for as income protection for surviving family members. It is not standard practice for insurance programs to deny an insurance payment simply because a beneficiary receives income from another source.

AFTEA has been asking Congress to fix this one for a long time. We know it is expensive, but it is the right thing to do.

Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) has introduced HR 846, and Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) has introduced S. 339, to end this offset for military surviving spouses.

We urge all active duty servicemembers and retirees to make phone calls, send emails and visit their members of Congress, to ask for their co-sponsorship and vote to pass the SBP/DIC offset elimination legislation. We must speak for the fallen military men and women in arms, and do what we can for their surviving spouses and families. This is what we do in the military family . . . no fallen is ever left behind.

Consider joining *Facebook*, and ask to join the "**SBP-DIC Offset 2017 Facebook group.**" It's a "closed group" so you must be approved by the moderator.

I also want to take this opportunity to ask for your help to stop the return of indiscriminate across-the-board spending cuts known as "sequestration" -- which threatens ALL military personnel compensation, health care, pension and disability, and survivor benefits.

The legislation that saved DoD from making devastating cuts to personnel benefits expired on March 16, 2017. Without new legislation very soon, across-the-board spending cuts could return, leaving servicemembers, retirees, veterans and survivors facing significant TRICARE fee hikes and resulting in cuts to the military benefits you and your family depend on.

Congress can no longer evade responsibility for the steep and reckless spending cuts scheduled to decimate the national defense budget. Instead of letting this crude mechanism substitute for Congress as a governing institution, lawmakers should do what they should have done months ago and replace these mindless across-the-board cuts with more reasonable deficit-reducing options.

The harmful effects of sequestration on our military men and women in uniform, retirees, veterans, and survivors are unacceptable.

For generations, the men and women of our military have stood between the American people and the dangers of the world.

It is the responsibility of Congress to keep the commitment that our nation made to those who spent a career in service to our country and ensure that military men and women, retirees, and veterans are compensated for their service and their sacrifices.

Navy Chiefs in the Joint Realm: The Evolution of Deckplate Leadership

By Chief Petty Officer Holly Gray

CAMP H.M. SMITH, Hawaii - Navy Chiefs worldwide celebrated the 124th birthday of the Chief Petty Officer on April 1st, with a theme that represents them so well: Tradition, Heritage, and Pride. Terms like "Ask the Chief", deckplate leadership, and history were shared, along with lots of excellent cake. But why does the Navy make such a distinction over their senior enlisted ranks, which receive the same pay as every other Services' E-7, E-8, and E-9?

This is a question many ask, particularly when serving with joint Services. It can be harder to explain than you would think, since even the Chiefs own creed states "your

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Report from the Hill

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costs less than their BAH rates would no longer be able to pocket the difference.

“Congress should force married military couples to share a single BAH, and all service members to document their housing expenditures in order to receive BAH,” according to a Heritage report.

DoD needs more troops and updated equipment to deal with ongoing global threats, the authors argue. That requires more money, so curbing BAH costs and making changes to other programs like health care and commissary subsidies will be necessary to help the military rebuild after years of budget cuts, they wrote.

Since The Heritage Foundation has a great deal of clout on Capitol Hill, AFTEA will be watching this very closely and if legislation is introduced to support this idea, we will alert you and we will fight it with all of our resources.

Another issue that we are watching closely is the possibility of another health care bill to repeal and replace Obamacare. The last bill that failed to pass the House of Representatives at the end of March contained a provision that would have hurt the poorest of veterans by taking away their subsidy for health care insurance, whether or not they used the VA for their health care. We will closely monitor any new health care legislation and fight to make sure that no veteran or military retiree will lose any of their current health care benefits.

VA Health Care

Shortly after being sworn into office, the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs, David Shulkin, announced a ten-point plan to improve VA health care. The list includes the following:

New accountability legislation. “When people lose their values, and deviate from the ethics and values we hold dearly, they no longer have the right to work in VA,” Shulkin said.

“We’re going to make sure they don’t work in the VA.”

Extend the Choice deadline past August. The controversial VA Choice Card program put in place in the wake of the 2014 wait times scandal is set to expire later this year. “We need to see that legislation extended beyond August, because we need those resources to provide care for veterans that they deserve,” he said.

Choice 2.0 Legislation. Shulkin is also promising that if he gets more money for the Choice Card program, he won’t be simply dumping the funding into a broken system. He has already promised to eliminate program rules that limit outside care options to veterans who live at least 40 miles away from a VA facility or face a VA clinic wait time of more than 30 days. But those changes will also require congressional cooperation.

Infrastructure improvements and consolidations. “We’re going to be looking towards investments, but we’re also going to have to make some choices,” he said. “There are some parts of the country where facilities are sitting empty, and there is no sense in keeping them empty.”

Enhance foundational services in VA. While Shulkin is open to shifting more routine medical care out of the VA system, he is pledging not to have that move pull away funds from department specialties like prosthetics work, post-traumatic stress disorder care, and other veteran-related research.

VA/DOD federal coordination. “The Department of Defense needs us, and we need the DoD,” he said. “We’re going to be working closely to make sure we maximize our ability to work together.”

Electronic medical record modernization. Lawmakers have been frustrated in recent years with the slow pace of modernization efforts for veterans’ electronic medical records. “These systems desperately need modernization,” Shulkin said. “We have to take

those steps this year.”

Breakthrough in suicide prevention. Shulkin called suicide prevention “our top clinical priority right now” and said he is hopeful for major improvements in treatment in coming years. The issue is part of a broader push to get more mental health research and experts into the Veterans Affairs system, something that Trump promised on the campaign trail.

Appeals modernization. Shulkin calls it an urgent improvement which would save time and stress for thousands of veterans and their families. “We need to get that system fixed,” he said. “Veterans should not be waiting anywhere near the amount of time they are to get their appeals heard and decisions made. But until we get a legislative fix, we’re not going to see any progress made.”

Accelerating performance on benefits claims. VA officials brought down the veterans benefits claims backlog by more than 500,000 cases in recent years, but a substantial number of filings still take more than four months to fully process. The backlog numbers have seen an increase in recent months, raising questions of whether improvements made in the past were temporary fixes instead of systemic changes.

This is an issue AFTEA is also watching very closely. While we support making sure all veterans get the health care they have earned, even if they don’t live near a VA facility and must go to a civilian doctor, we will fight to make sure that VA health care is not privatized as some are advocating.

Arlington National Cemetery

Another issue that is of interest to many military retirees is the opportunity for burial in Arlington National Cemetery. The fact is that unless the qualifications for burial are changed, Arlington could be full by just 23 years from now, or very soon thereafter.

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Military Sharply Warns Congress Against Punting on Spending

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matter what the consequences, because passing a CR destroys the ability of the military to defend this nation, and it puts the lives of the men and women in the military at risk," McCain said. "I can't do that to them."

Democrats on the defense committees also agree the military should not be stuck with a continuing resolution.

But the military's warnings about readiness could get overshadowed by larger fights over issues like abortion, as well as the deep cuts to domestic programs the Trump administration has proposed to pay for higher defense spending in next year's budget and a \$30 billion supplemental spending boost requested earlier this month.

"There is a sense of urgency over the question of readiness, and we want to help them," Illinois Democrat Sen. Dick Durbin said of the preparedness of the military. "Unfortunately, the President's approach to helping them is to cut medical research to pay for it. That's very short-sighted."

The House Armed Services Committee has scheduled a high-profile hearing with the full slate of military service chiefs to explain to the

public and other lawmakers what the impact would be if Congress passes a full-year continuing resolution. "They need to know what the consequences are," House Armed Services Chairman Texas Rep. Mac Thornberry said.

The memos, first reported by Congressional Quarterly, highlight the problems the military brass will detail, with stark warnings that a continuing resolution would exacerbate the military's readiness problems. Among the impacts:

- The Army states in its memo sent to Capitol Hill that most units in Army Forces Command would stop training in July, which means brigade combat teams, a grouping of about 3,500 soldiers, deploying to Korea and Europe would cease training while in the US.
- The Navy warns that it would cancel three warship deployments, creating gaps in Europe and the Middle East, and it would shut down four of the nine groups of aircraft on Navy carriers that aren't deployed.
- The Marine Corps said that North American flight operations

would be stopped for 24 squadrons, which would "significantly worsen" Marine aviation readiness, and precision and training ammunition would be reduced.

- And the Air Force said it would ground all non-deploying squadrons starting in May, as well as reduce flying hours that would lead to "a drastic reduction in readiness capabilities to continue operations through the end of fiscal year."

But if recent history is any guide, the military's detailed memos may not be able to sway Congress.

Military leaders issued similar doomsday warnings about sequestration that failed to stop the across-the-board cuts in 2013, with the military stuck in the middle of a larger fight on taxes and entitlements. The budget caps from sequestration are still on the books.

The readiness challenges are a less potent argument than they have been in the past, and the politics of budgets are poisonous all around. So, if there's ever was going to be a year-long CR for defense in recent memory, this would be the year. ✨

Report from the Hill

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With 27 to 30 funeral services a day, five days a week, the cemetery is adding about 7,000 new burials a year.

Between 1967 and 1980, burial at Arlington was limited to those killed in action (KIA), career retired, and Medal of Honor recipients. If policy is changed to limit the cemetery to KIAs only, the cemetery will have enough space for hundreds of years. But doing so would disenfranchise Vietnam veterans, the youngest of whom will be octogenarians around 2040.

Recently the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery (ACANC) produced its final report, including options available to extend the life of the cemetery "well into the future." The report marks the completion of the committee's analysis of the capacity situation, and sets the stage for policymakers to act.

The report includes analysis of the impact of almost 20 variations of land expansions, eligibility changes, burial procedures and more.

The options include, but are not limited to:

- adopting the VA requirement for 24 month active duty service minimum;
- restricting eligibility to retirement from the armed services at certain lengths of service;
- changing eligibility only to those killed in action, active duty deaths, and recipients of qualifying awards;
- expanding the grounds beyond current physical boundaries; and
- establishing a new DoD national cemetery.

The reality is that Arlington will run out of room sometime in the future. The only question is, how long in the future will that be?

AFTEA believes that Veterans who may be eligible for burial at Arlington should have a voice in the process, and Congress has indicated a strong desire to prioritize their inputs. We urge you to contact both of your Senators and your Representative and let them know what you think should be done about Arlington National Cemetery. ✨



Celebrating 50 years of the CMSAF

In April 1967, Chief Master Sergeant Paul W. Airey set on a path untraveled by any other Airman in the U.S. Air Force, and became the first chief master sergeant of the Air Force. Since then, only 17 other men have followed in Airey's esteemed path, yet the impact of these Airmen continuously ricocheted across the force.

"It was 50 years ago that [Airey] became the first Airman bestowed the honor of being called chief master sergeant of the Air Force," said Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein during the CMSAF transition ceremony Feb. 17, 2017. "This position would shape how the Air Force grew as the newest service."

In the early 1960s, Congressman Mendel Rivers issued a bill that mandated the appointment of senior enlisted advisers for all services. Though the bill wasn't passed, Air Force senior leaders decided to create the CMSAF position.

Then CSAF Gen. John P. McConnell announced the position in 1967 and explained its criteria and duties, "The man selected to fill this job will be used as a representative of the Airman force when and where this is appropriate, and will serve as a sounding board for ideas and proposals

affecting Airman matters."

According to the Airmen Memorial Museum, Airey knew the position was not to be taken lightly.

"I ran into a lot of people who said it was going to be a phony position -- there were people who thought that," Airey said. "There were people who said it was something to placate the enlisted force. There were people who said they wouldn't have it because it wasn't going to do what they advertised it as. I couldn't believe this. I had enough faith in the system ... it was going to be set up in all good faith to do something for the enlisted force, to make it an avenue of communication, to try and make it a better Air Force, which I, to this day, believe the job has accomplished."

Over the last five decades, CMSAFs have tackled low retention rates, enhanced professional military education, improved the enlisted promotion system, advocated quality of life initiatives, reinforced the importance of higher education, fought for budget increases and supported joint and coalition operations.

Those improvements may not have been made without Airey taking that first step 50 years ago.

"He was absolutely the right choice to become our first chief master sergeant of the Air Force," Goldfein said. "He fought for a standardized promotion system and laid the foundation for what would become the professional military education that we know today ... creating American Airmen -- our most powerful weapon." ❁

Managing Your Retirement Pay: Educate Your Beneficiaries

Sometimes the most difficult conversations to have are the most important, like helping your loved ones be prepared for when you die. Talking to your family about this topic beforehand is a way to show that you care, and it will help to ease the financial burdens they may face.

Military retirees can have beneficiaries for their arrears of pay (AOP), and if they have elected coverage under the Survivor Benefit Plan, they will have an SBP beneficiary as well. This article is intended to help you prepare your AOP beneficiary to file a claim when the time comes.

First, make sure you understand what an Arrears of Pay beneficiary is and the nature of the benefit to which they are entitled. Find more information on this benefit at: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/provide/aop.html>

Second, tell your beneficiaries who they are. Hopefully, you've designated your beneficiaries for any arrears of pay that may be due. When no beneficiary

is named, the payment is made to the highest person in what is known as the "Order of Precedence."

Third, let your beneficiary know that sometimes money that has already been deposited into your checking account needs to be returned to the government. Military retired pay is only payable for as long as the military member is alive. Entitlement to your military retirement ends when you die. Most banks will automatically deduct any overpaid funds without warning, which can be troublesome, especially if you share a joint account.

Fourth, tell your beneficiaries what documents they will need to send in to make their claim. One copy of the death certificate that includes the manner of death needs to be sent to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS). Also, each beneficiary should complete a Claim for Unpaid Compensation (SF 1174). It's a great idea to go over this claim form with them to make sure they will have all the

information they need to fill it out.

Fifth, let your beneficiaries know that sometimes there is no money due. Each situation is different. It just depends how up to date the account was kept. You can make sure your account is in good standing by performing a yearly audit.

Sixth, when an arrears payment is made, there is a statement on the check that reads, "Retired Pay Payable only during life of Payee." Please do not let this statement alarm your beneficiaries. As long as the beneficiary's name is accurate on the check, the check can be cashed.

You want to have the best care taken of your loved ones when you die. You can help by having a conversation with them to prepare them so they can know what to expect. We know talking about it might be difficult, but hopefully this checklist gives you an idea of the things to say. Don't put it off. Have a conversation about it with your loved ones today. ❁

Navy Chiefs in the Joint Realm: The Evolution of Deckplate Leadership

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new responsibilities and privileges do not appear in print. They have no official standing; they cannot be referred to by name, number, nor file. They have existed for over 100 years, Chiefs before you have freely accepted responsibility beyond the call of printed assignment.”

To help answer this question, U.S. Pacific Commander Adm. Harry Harris accepted my interview request to talk Chiefs and joint leadership -- but not before taking the time to loan me a book from his personal collection. The book, “Ask the Chief” by J.F. Leahy, is indeed a good read, but the fact that the leader of the largest combatant command in the world took the time to loan me his own copy is an example of his passion and respect for his craft, the Navy, and the Chiefs. It also told me he understood plenty about deckplate leadership and the impact such a gesture could have.

Harris could probably attribute this understanding of leadership to the education he received throughout his life and long career. As the joint forces commander in the Indo-Asia-Pacific, Harris is careful to praise and support all Services, but admits a certain bias to Navy Chiefs. After all, he’s the son of one.

Harris was raised on his father’s memories and experiences during World War II, particularly about his time onboard USS Lexington, one of the carriers stationed at Pearl Harbor that only escaped the Japanese attack on December 7th by putting to sea a few days prior. Harry Harris Sr. also shared stories with his son about the fate of Lexington, a controlled sinking during the Battle of Coral Sea. Based on his father’s experiences, Harris said he always knew he would serve in the Navy. He also said he was raised to believe “a Chief Petty Officer can do anything.”

Once commissioned and serving in the Navy, Harris continued to see the truth of his father’s teachings. Recalling one of his early commands at a squadron in Jacksonville, “everything rides on the Chiefs Mess. A Command Master Chief, if he or she is a good one, can make or break the squadron.”

These enlisted leaders have consistently been cited for their direct impact with both junior Sailors and the officers in the wardroom. Their experience, technical expertise, and shared leadership knowledge sets the tone in the workspace, division, department, and command.

Evolution

Just as this year’s birthday theme suggests, Chiefs serve as the stewards of the Navy’s tradition, heritage, and pride. However, another cornerstone of leadership is the ability to change, adapt, innovate, and evolve along with the society the all-volunteer services draw their members from.

“The leadership techniques that my dad learned when he

was a Chief Petty Officer in World War II probably wouldn’t go over too well today in 2017. And the views of most of the officers in WWII would not work today. We evolve over time as we’ve integrated over time. There have been a couple stark markers that force change, such as desegregation of the services and integration of our ships, but we’ve evolved our leadership all along,” Harris pointed out.

Joint Training

Sgt. Maj. Anthony Spadaro, the PACOM Senior Enlisted Leader, was also feeling reminiscent as he quietly celebrated his 32nd year of service in the Marine Corps. He, too, was able to quickly and definitively name a Navy Chief that impacted his career. “Master Chief Nelson, the Command Master Chief on USS Germantown! His leadership is what made me enamored with the Chiefs Mess and how Chiefs lead.”

Army Master Sergeant Mary Ferguson has been a fan of the Navy senior enlisted leadership model since her early days serving with a Chief. She was able to personally experience the training in 2012 when she was approved to complete the Navy process.

Ferguson had already promoted to Sergeant First Class at the time, but sought out this additional training as an opportunity to represent her fellow Army senior enlisted leaders. “I wanted to set the example and show the mess what it meant to be an Army Senior NCO just as much as I wanted to learn what it meant to be a Chief.”

Now serving in South Korea, Ferguson pays her Army and Navy leadership lessons forward. “One of the greatest complements I ever get from Army Sergeant Majors, senior leaders and the Soldiers I lead every day, is that they can’t place it, but I’m different. Damn right, I am. I’m a CHIEF!”

Ferguson’s experience is not unprecedented, as other services’ senior enlisted have completed what is now the Navy’s CPO 365 program, though it is still not commonplace, due perhaps in part to the prerequisites which take most Navy personnel the full 365 days to complete. Other formalized senior enlisted leadership schools are frequently attended by other services. However, the Navy’s training for their new Chiefs offers something that can’t, and isn’t taught in the classroom. Air Force Tech Sgt. Jennifer Connelly, who hopes to join the local program, defines that ‘something’ Chiefs have in one word.

“Camaraderie. That’s why I want to do the Navy’s training. The Air Force has NCO training, but it’s more school and classroom-based, writing papers, and tests,” said Connelly. “I’ve seen how Chiefs share their different traditions and are grooming other Chiefs into being leaders. After attending the Chiefs pinning ceremony last year and seeing their camaraderie, it was very motivating to me.”

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Call to Action

The networking skills taught to all Chiefs, along with deckplate leadership, and their stewardship of tradition and history, are just some of the things Harris has charged his Chiefs with paying forward.

"We need our Chiefs to be for the Joint force what they are already are for our Navy," Harris said during remarks at the Chief birthday celebration. "My call to action for all Chiefs is to take on the challenge to lead all of our Joint forces and help synergize our operations across all the Services. Helping our Services train how we need to fight in the 21st century -- jointly. Mentoring the future Joint leaders that will be ready to fight tonight and win."

However, other services are filling this critical mid-level management role based on their own service-specific experience, training, and guidance. Every service has a version of the Chief. For the Marines, they look to their Staff Sergeants, E-6, to begin this transition to higher responsibility in personnel management. For the Army and Air Force, this transition occurs at the E-8 non-commissioned officer (NCO) level.

"In joint forces, the role of the E-7 is

different. How the leadership in the Navy is different than other services is how they view their senior NCOs. Navy makes it a sharp distinction and stark difference," noted Harris. He also acknowledged a broader acceptance of the role of the Chief will take time. Scenarios are already playing out in joint operations where Chiefs are managing joint troops under a non-Navy chain of command. Harris recommends Chiefs do what they've always done: train those joint Service junior officers.

Impact

The impact Chiefs, and really all military senior enlisted leaders, have on a career and an individual can be staggering. Sure, maybe not every Soldier a Chief helps will be a Master Sgt. Ferguson. True, most Marines won't become a Sgt. Maj. Spadaro. Certainly, many Sailors won't become an Adm. Harris. However, treating every leadership moment as an opportunity to be their Chief, and all that implies, is priceless. After all, sometimes, as Harris points out, "that Ensign may one day be an Admiral." ✿

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