

THE "ANCHOR"

A Newsletter of FRA Branch, Auxiliary Unit 261 and Club 261 of Kings County

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Volume 2015- 1

January – March 2015

Branch/Unit/Club 261 News & Events

REOCCURING EVENTS

CLUB BOG MEETINGS	Held the 2 nd Wednesday of each month beginning at 5:00 PM
GENERAL ASSEMBLY BRANCH & UNIT MEETINGS	Held on the 2 nd Friday of each month, unless otherwise noted – Assembly Meeting at 5:30 PM. Come on out and support you Branch and Unit.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JANUARY

Note: All times listed are Pacific Time (PT)

Thursday, 1st	MEMBER's POT LUCK – 12:30 - Close NFL Ticket – Wild Card Playoffs
Saturday, 3rd	Arizona at Carolina – 1:20 pm – BofA Stadium - ESPN Baltimore at Pittsburgh – 5:15 pm – Heinz Field - NBC NFL TICKET – Wild Card Playoffs - Club Opens at 10:00 am
Sunday, 4th	Cincinnati at Indianapolis – 10:05 am – Lucas Oil Stadium - CBS Detroit at Dallas – 1:40 pm – AT&T Stadium - FOX

Wednesday, 7th	BOG Meeting – 5:00 pm – Club Lounge
Friday, 9 th	SPAGHETTI FEED – 5:00 – 8:00 pm / \$8.00 per person BRANCH/UNIT General Assembly Meeting – 5:30 pm
Saturday, 10th	NFL Ticket – Divisional Playoffs TBD at New England – 1:35 pm – Gillette Stadium - NBC TBD at Seattle – 5:15 pm – Century Link Field - FOX
Sunday, 11th	NFL Ticket – Divisional Playoffs - Club Opens at 10:00 am TBD at Green Bay – 10:05 am – Lambeau Field - FOX TBD at Denver – 1:40 pm – Sports Authority Field at Mile High – CBS
Sunday, 18th	STEW COOK-OFF – Noon – 2:00 pm / \$5.00 per person NFL Ticket – Conference Playoffs - Club Opens at 10:00 am TBD at TBD – Noon – FOX TBD at TBD – 3:30 pm – CBS
Monday, 19th	MARTIN LUTHER KING Holiday MEMBER'S POT LUCK – Noon – 2:30 pm / for those wishing to participate
Sunday, 25th	QUARTERLY BREAKFAST – 8:00 – 11:00 am / \$8.00 per person NFL Pro Bowl – Club Opens at 8:00 am TBD at TBD – 5:00 pm – U of Phoenix Stadium - ESPN

FEBRUARY

Note: All times listed are Pacific Time (PT)

Sunday, 1st	NFL Ticket - Super Bowl TBD at TBD – 6:30 PM – U of Phoenix Stadium - NBC
Monday, 2nd	GROUNDHOG DAY
Wednesday, 11th	BOG Meeting – 5:00 pm – Club Lounge
Thursday, 12th	LINCOLN's BIRTHDAY
Friday, 13th	BRANCH/UNIT General Assembly Meeting – 5:30 pm
Saturday, 14th	VALENTINE's DAY BURN YOUR OWN STEAK - ???? - ???? / \$???.?? per person PRESIDENT's DAY Holiday
Monday, 16th	WASHINGTON's BIRTHDAY MEMBER's POT LUCK – Noon – 2:30 pm / for those wishing to participate.

MARCH

Note: All times listed are Pacific Time (PT)

Sunday, 8th	DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME BEGINS – Turn clocks ahead 1 hour
Wednesday, 11th	BOG Meeting – 5:00 pm – Club Lounge
Friday, 13th	BRANCH/UNIT General Assembly Meeting – 5:30 pm
Tuesday, 17th	ST PATRICK's DAY



Good Food!
Good Friends!
Good Fun!

Buon Cibo!
Buoni Amici!
Buon Divertimento!

Spaghetti Dinner!

Branch & Unit Members
and Guests
Come Join us for a
Little Taste of Italy!
(American Style)

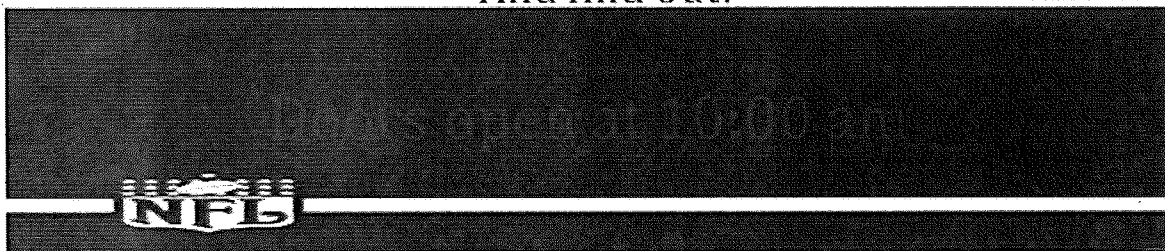
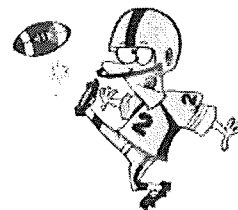
Tickets will be available for
purchase at the bar.



Portions of the food shown are for illustrative purposes only and are not
representative of the actual food for sale.



NFL Ticket
6 Flat screen TVs
Munchies and Food
Cold Beer Specials
The Play Offs are just around the corner!
Is Your Team gonna be a Contender?
Come watch them on
Sundays at Club 261
And find out!



ANNOUNCEMENTS, NEWS and VIEWS

SICK CALL: Our thoughts and prayers go out to our sick and home bound. We pray you all will get well soon, so you can attend the Branch and Unit meetings, be out and about having fun and do the things you like doing.

BRANCH/UNIT GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETINGS – The Branch and Unit General Assembly meetings are held on the 2nd Friday of each month beginning at 1730.

CLUB 261 BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETINGS – The Club Board of Governors' (BOG) meetings are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month beginning at 1700.

FRA Newsbytes

FRA is the oldest and largest association representing the interests of current and former Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard personnel. If you are not a member and are eligible, please join FRA at www.fra.org/join. The larger the membership base, the louder your voice is heard on Capitol Hill!

The "ANCHOR"

Shipmates, trying to get our publication going again (at least quarterly). If you have any suggestions, articles you'd like to see published, please send ideas, etc. to me @ arthur.archer@sbcglobal.net. Any grammatical or spelling errors found in this publication have been included deliberately, to see if the publication is actually being read.

Senate to Consider NDAA and Floor Amendments

The Senate version National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA-S. 2410) has been approved by committee and is awaiting action on the Senate floor. The Senate may start work on the bill next week, when they return from their recess. Hundreds of Senate floor amendments have been filed, but only a few impact pay and benefits. The House has already passed its version of the bill. Once the Senate approves its version, a conference committee will be appointed to resolve the differences between the House bill (H.R. 4435) and the Senate bill (S. 2410). The conference committee report will be voted on by both chambers. If approved by the House and the Senate it will then be sent to the president to be signed into law or to be vetoed. Members are urged use the FRA Action Center (action.fra.org/action-center) to urge their support for key Senate amendments that include:

Eliminating the TRICARE pharmacy co-pay increase; Restoring the active duty/reserve pay increase from 1% to 1.8%; Expanding concurrent receipt for disabled service members; Eliminating the BAH cut for active duty; and Improving VA claims processing.

These amendments may not be approved without your support.

VA Advanced Funding

Both the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees have approved the "Putting Veterans Funding First Act" (H.R. 813/S. 932 respectively). These bills are now on the floor in their chambers of origin. One or both of them may be voted on in the upcoming (lame duck) session. America's veterans should not be held responsible for Washington's inability to reach an agreement on how to cut spending. Our

veterans were there for us when we needed them the most, and the "Putting Veterans Funding First Act" will ensure they have our support during their time of need.

Currently, Congress provides advanced funding for the VA's health care programs as a result of FRA supported legislation enacted in 2009 (P. L. 81-111). Providing the remainder of the discretionary budget—roughly \$8 billion—up front would make it easier for the VA to plan for key investments in information technology, claims processing and construction projects.

Members are urged to use the Action Center (action.fra.org/action-center) to ask their legislators to support this important legislation.

Senate Majority Shift

The Republicans gained majority control of the U.S. Senate this week, and increased their majority in the House. Both the House and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairmen (Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon (Calif.) and Sen. Carl Levin (Mich.) respectively) are retiring and are expected to be replaced Senator John McCain (Ariz.) in the Senate and Mac Thornberry (Tex.) in the House.

The current (113th) Congress will be back in session next week with a full agenda of important issues to be addressed before the end of the year, including the FY2015 National Defense Authorization and the FY 2015 budget.

VA Implements Choice Program

FRA will closely monitor the implementation of the FRA-supported "Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act" (VACAA) that was recently passed by Congress and signed into law by the President (P.L. 113-146). Among other provisions, the new law establishes the "Choice Program" to improve accessibility to Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) health care by allowing eligible veterans to use qualified health care providers outside of the VA system.

The VACAA includes a \$10 billion fund to pay for non-VA care for veterans who live 40 or more miles from a VA facility or have been experiencing wait times for care of more than 30 days. VA will soon begin mailing "Choice Cards" to veterans who were enrolled in VA health care as of August 1, 2014, and to recently discharged combat veterans who enroll within the five-year window of eligibility.

Not all veterans who receive a card will be able to participate in the Choice Program. They must meet the criteria established under the new law. VA will be implementing the law in stages. The Choice Card will be issued in three phases. The first group of Choice Cards will be mailed to veterans who live more than 40 miles from a VA facility. The next group of Choice cards will be mailed to veterans waiting for an appointment longer than 30 days. The final mailing of Choice Cards will be sent between December or January to the remainder of all veterans enrolled in VA health care who may be eligible for the Choice Program in the future.

This program was highlighted in Tom Philpott's syndicated "Military Update" column (11-6-14) and is available at www.fra.org. For additional information on this program call 1-866-606-8198 or visit www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.

Lame Ducks Work on NDAA

Although voters selected a new Congress, the current (Lame Duck) Congress still holds office until January 2015. The current Senate is considering derailing floor amendments and a final vote on the Senate National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA-S. 2410) and will go with a separate

Defense Authorization bill that has been worked on behind closed doors with staff and select members of House and Senate Armed Services Committees. This still unnumbered bill will be delayed until December and will have to be put on the fast-track without any committee or subcommittee hearings. This mystery bill will only have time to get an up or down vote in the House and Senate without any opportunity for amendments.

The final bill reduces BAH, provides for a smaller pay raise (one percent) and increases pharmacy co-pays for TRICARE Standard and Prime. Members are urged to use the FRA Action Center (action.fra.org/action-center) to urge their Senators to bring the Senate NDAA bill (S. 2410) to the floor for consideration of key amendments and a final vote.

Members of Congress with Military Experience

The number of Representatives with military experience in the upcoming 114th Congress, which starts in January 2015, will decline from 84 to 81. The number of Senators with military experience will actually increase from 19 to 20. This will be the first Congress in a very long time that does not have any World War II veterans.

Defense Authorization Update

Hill staff has indicated that negotiations over the final version of the FY 2015 Defense Authorization bill have stalled over a provision in the Senate version of the bill (S. 2410) that would increase pharmacy co-pays for military retirees under age 65. The House bill (H.R. 4435) does not increase pharmacy co-pays.

Shipmates are strongly urged to use the FRA Action Center (action.fra.org/action-center) to ask their senators to support amendments that would eliminate the pharmacy co-pay increase from the measure.

HVAC has Oversight Hearing on Veteran's Choice Card

The House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a hearing to evaluate the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) implementation of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act (VACAA) that was recently signed into law (P.L. 113-146). The new law provides a \$10 billion fund to pay for non-VA care for veterans who live 40 or more miles from a VA facility or have had to wait more than 30 days to receive care. VA began mailing "Choice Cards" in August to veterans who were enrolled in the VA health care system and recently discharged combat veterans who enroll within the five-year window of eligibility.

VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson told committee members that Choice cards have been distributed to all "40 milers" and those waiting 30 days or more are scheduled to receive theirs by the first week of December. All other enrollees will receive Choice cards by the end of January. FRA supported the VACAA and is monitoring implementation of the Choice Card. To learn more about the Choice Program, click here: <http://www.va.gov/opa/choiceact>.

The new law also makes it easier to terminate VA employees for inferior performance on the job. During the hearing, Gibson answered questions regarding the 1,000 VA employees, including 42 senior executives, who are currently pending termination for poor job performance. Several committee members, including Chairman Jeff Miller (Fla.) and Ranking Member Michael Michaud (Maine), expressed frustration with the slow speed with which VA is acting to complete those removals.