

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

NO ONE DOES MORE **FOR VETERANS.**

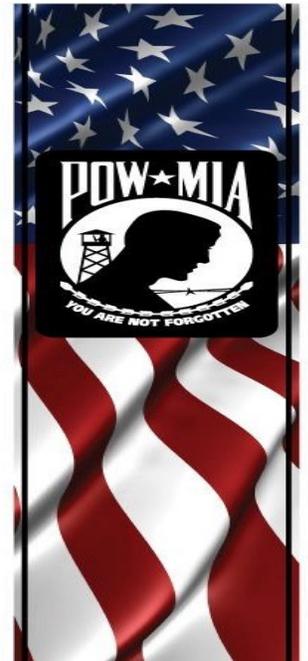
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VFW Post 8555
Newsletter/Calendar

USS MAINE -
SPANISH AMERICAN
WAR



OPERATION -
DESERT STORM
Battles That Shaped Us.



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The Sinking of the USS Maine: A Tragedy That Echoed Across a Nation

On the quiet evening of **February 15, 1898**, in the harbor of Havana, Cuba, a tremendous explosion tore through the United States battleship **USS Maine**, claiming the lives of **260** American sailors and officers—more than two-thirds of her crew. The sudden, catastrophic loss of this proud vessel sent shockwaves through the United States, igniting public outrage, fueling patriotic fervor, and setting the stage for the brief but decisive **Spanish-American War**. For generations of American veterans, the story of the Maine stands as a solemn reminder of sacrifice, the high cost of duty, and the enduring resolve of our nation to stand for freedom and justice.

The USS Maine, a second-class battleship commissioned in 1895, had been dispatched to Havana in late January 1898 to protect American lives and interests amid Cuba's ongoing struggle for independence from Spanish colonial rule. Tensions between the United States and Spain had been rising for years, with widespread American sympathy for the Cuban revolutionaries. The Maine's presence was intended as a show of strength and reassurance, not provocation.



At approximately 9:40 p.m., while peacefully at anchor, a massive internal explosion ripped through the forward section of the ship, detonating her magazines and sinking her rapidly. The blast was heard across Havana, and the night sky lit up with the fury of destruction.

These historic images capture the devastating moment and its aftermath—the explosion that shook the world and the twisted wreckage that remained in Havana Harbor:

The cause of the explosion has never been definitively proven. Initial U.S. Navy investigations in 1898 concluded it was likely an external mine, though Spanish inquiries pointed to an internal accident. Later reviews—including a 1911 inquiry, a 1976 study commissioned by Admiral Hyman G. Rickover, and a 1998 National Geographic analysis—have leaned toward an internal cause, possibly a spontaneous fire in a coal bunker igniting the forward magazines. Despite the uncertainty, the immediate American response was clear: many believed Spain bore responsibility.

Yellow journalism in newspapers amplified the tragedy, with headlines and illustrations fueling the rallying cry "**Remember the Maine! To hell with Spain!**" This powerful propaganda helped unite the nation in support of intervention.



This iconic poster from the era captured the public's outrage and patriotic call to action, blending remembrance of the fallen with solidarity for the suffering Cuban people:

The sinking of the Maine accelerated the path to war. On April 21, 1898, the United States declared war on Spain. In the swift conflict that followed, American forces achieved decisive victories, liberating Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines from Spanish control. The war marked America's emergence as a global power and advanced the ideals of liberty and self-determination.

In the years that followed, the nation honored the Maine's fallen heroes with lasting tributes. Many of the recovered remains were laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, where the ship's main mast stands as a poignant memorial. Others rest in Key West, Florida, under a statue of a sailor holding an oar—symbols of eternal vigilance and sacrifice.

To the veterans of VFW Post 8555 and all who have worn the uniform: the story of the USS Maine is part of our shared legacy. It reflects the American ideals of courage in the face of uncertainty, unwavering commitment to protecting freedom, and the sacred duty to remember those who gave their last full measure. Though the exact cause remains a mystery of history, the valor and sacrifice of those 260 brave sailors endure as an inspiration to every generation.

We remember the Maine. We honor their service. And we carry forward the patriotic spirit that defines our great nation. Thank you, comrades, for keeping their memory alive.

Operation Desert Storm: A Decisive Victory for Freedom and Coalition Resolve

This January marks the **35th anniversary** of **Operation Desert Storm**, the combat phase of the Persian Gulf War that began on **January 17, 1991**. Launched exactly 35 years ago today, this swift and overwhelming campaign demonstrated American leadership, military excellence, and the power of international unity in defending sovereignty and upholding the rule of law. For the veterans who served in the sands of the Middle East, Desert Storm remains a proud chapter of service, sacrifice, and success in protecting freedom against aggression.

The conflict began when Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein invaded and annexed neighboring Kuwait on **August 2, 1990**, seizing control of vast oil reserves and threatening regional stability. In response, the United States—under President George H.W. Bush—built a broad international coalition of **39 nations**, including key Arab allies like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria, as well as NATO partners and former Cold War adversaries. This unprecedented alliance reflected the post-Cold War hope for a "new world order" where aggression would not go unchallenged.

The operation unfolded in two phases: **Operation Desert Shield** (August 1990–January 1991), the defensive buildup to protect Saudi Arabia, and **Operation Desert Storm**, the offensive to liberate Kuwait. On the night of January 16–17, 1991, coalition air forces launched a massive, precision-guided bombing campaign that crippled Iraqi command, air defenses, communications, and supply lines.

These historic images capture the opening salvos of the air campaign—F-15 Eagles and other advanced aircraft soaring into action, embodying technological superiority and unyielding determination:



Over five weeks, coalition aircraft flew more than **100,000 sorties**, dropping **88,500 tons** of bombs and achieving total air supremacy. Iraqi forces, once feared as the fourth-largest army in the world, were devastated before the ground war even began.

On **February 24, 1991**, the 100-hour ground offensive—**Operation Desert Sabre**—unleashed a lightning-fast armored thrust. Coalition forces, led by U.S. armored divisions and Marines, executed a brilliant "left hook" maneuver through the desert, outflanking and overwhelming Iraqi positions. Kuwait was liberated in days, with coalition troops advancing into southern Iraq before a cease-fire took effect on **February 28**.

The ground campaign produced iconic scenes of decisive victory: destroyed Iraqi tanks littering the desert and coalition armor advancing relentlessly.

The human cost was tragically high for Iraq, with tens of thousands of casualties, while coalition losses were remarkably low: the U.S. suffered **147 battle deaths** and **145 non-battle deaths**. This disparity underscored the effectiveness of superior planning, training, and technology.

The retreating Iraqi army set fire to hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells, creating an environmental catastrophe and stark symbols of destruction.

Desert Storm showcased American ideals at their finest: resolute defense of allies, commitment to international law, rapid and decisive action to restore justice, and care to minimize unnecessary suffering. It proved that when free nations stand together, tyranny can be confronted and defeated efficiently.

These powerful tributes honor the Gulf War veterans who returned home to welcoming parades and a grateful nation, as well as those who continue to serve as reminders of sacrifice.

To the Desert Storm veterans of VFW Post 8555 and across our great nation: your swift victory liberated a sovereign country, restored hope in a volatile region, and reaffirmed America's role as a beacon of freedom. Thirty-five years later, your service inspires us to remain vigilant, united, and proud. We remember your valor, honor your sacrifices, and thank you for defending the principles that make our country strong.

2026 Tax Updates: Honoring Texas Veterans with Fairness, Support, and American Resolve

Federal Tax Changes: Strengthening Support for Those Who Stood Guard

The federal landscape for 2026 brings several adjustments designed to ease the tax burden while preserving the tax-free status of key veteran benefits. These measures reflect the nation's patriotic dedication to ensuring that veterans—our guardians of liberty—receive the respect and resources they deserve.

- **VA Disability Compensation and COLA Increase:** Effective December 1, 2025 (with payments reflected in 2026), the Department of Veterans Affairs has implemented a 2.8% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for disability compensation. This tax-free boost helps offset rising costs, with monthly rates starting at \$180.42 for a 10% disability rating and reaching up to \$4,671.47 for 100% disabled veterans with a spouse, child, and dependent parents. Special Monthly Compensation for severe service-connected losses ranges from \$4,584.77 to \$11,843.74.
- **Permanent Tax Brackets and Increased Standard Deductions:** Under the One, Big, Beautiful Bill Act, signed into law on July 4, 2025, the 2018 tax brackets have been made permanent, maintaining progressive rates that promote fairness. For tax year 2026, the top marginal rate of 37% applies to incomes over \$640,600 for singles or \$768,700 for married filing jointly. Standard deductions have risen significantly: \$32,200 for married couples filing jointly, \$16,100 for singles, and \$24,150 for heads of household. These changes can reduce taxable income for veteran households, allowing more resources for family and community contributions.
- **Enhanced Child Tax Credit:** The credit increases from \$2,000 to \$2,200 per child, offering additional relief for veteran families raising the next generation of patriots.
- **Limits on Benefit Apportionment:** Starting February 9, 2026, the VA will restrict need-based apportionments of compensation, pension, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits in most cases. This change streamlines processes while protecting core benefits, ensuring that veterans retain greater control over their hard-earned support.

Texas-Specific Impacts: Building on a Foundation of No State Income Tax

Texas, true to its independent spirit and deep respect for military service, continues to lead in veteran support. With no state income tax—a boon that aligns with American ideals of limited government and personal freedom—federal changes take center stage. However, recent voter-approved constitutional amendments enhance property tax relief, directly benefiting disabled veterans and their families.

- **Existing Property Tax Exemptions for Disabled Veterans:** Texas offers graduated exemptions based on VA disability ratings, reducing the assessed value of a veteran's primary residence: \$5,000 for 10-29%, \$7,500 for 30-49%, \$10,000 for 50-69%, \$12,000 for 70-99%, and full exemption for 100% disabled veterans. Surviving spouses and minor children may inherit these benefits, preserving family stability.
- **New Enhancements from Proposition 11:** Approved by voters in November 2025, this amendment increases the general homestead exemption for disabled individuals (including veterans) from \$10,000 to \$60,000 of market value. This stacks with veteran-specific exemptions, potentially saving thousands annually on school district taxes and easing the financial load for those who bore the physical costs of service.
- **Proposition 7: Relief for Surviving Spouses:** Also passed overwhelmingly, this provides a full or partial exemption on the market value of the homestead for surviving spouses of veterans who died from service-connected conditions. It's a respectful tribute, ensuring that the families of our fallen heroes are not forgotten in their time of need.

These state provisions, combined with federal benefits, exemplify Texas' patriotic commitment to veterans, fostering communities where service is met with gratitude and opportunity.

Practical Advice for VFW Members: Making the Most of These Changes

To fully leverage these updates, Texas veterans should:

1. Review VA benefit statements for the COLA adjustment.
2. Consult a tax professional or use IRS resources to apply increased deductions and credits.
3. Apply for property tax exemptions through your local appraisal district, providing VA documentation.
4. Stay informed via the Texas Veterans Commission or VFW resources for any further developments.

In the spirit of American resilience, these 2026 tax changes reinforce our nation's promise to support those who protected our freedoms. To the veterans of VFW Post 8555: Your service inspires us, and these policies are a small measure of our eternal thanks. Together, we uphold the ideals of liberty, equality, and honor that define our great country. For more details or assistance, reach out to your local Post or VA representative—standing united, as always.

The Blue Ghost's Valor: USS Lexington's Pivotal February 1945 Role in Iwo Jima and the Spirit of American Patriotism

USS LEXINGTON Museum On The Bay



In the annals of American military history, few ships embody the unyielding patriotism, valor, and service of our nation's finest as does the USS Lexington, CV-16—the Blue Ghost. This Essex-class aircraft carrier, commissioned on February seventeenth, nineteen forty-three, earned its haunting nickname from Japanese propaganda that repeatedly claimed her sunk, only for her to rise again, painted in blue-gray camouflage, to strike fear into the enemy. As we at VFW Post 8555 in Poth, Texas, honor the sacrifices of our veterans, let's reflect on the Lexington's extraordinary actions in February 1945 — a month of relentless combat that exemplified the courage and dedication that define military service.



The stage was set after intense strikes in the South China Sea. Leaving those waters on January twentieth, the Lexington, flagship of Task Group fifty-eight point two under Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher, hammered Formosa on the twenty-first and Okinawa again on the twenty-second. Replenished at Ulithi by February tenth, she surged forward with her task force toward the Japanese home islands. On February sixteenth and seventeenth, her aircraft roared off the deck to pulverize airfields near Tokyo, crippling enemy defenses and paving the way for one of World War Two's bloodiest battles: the invasion of Iwo Jima.

February nineteenth marked D-Day for Iwo Jima. The Lexington's planes provided critical close air support from the nineteenth through the twenty-second, shielding Marines as they stormed the black volcanic sands against fortified Japanese positions. These sorties—strafing bunkers, silencing artillery, and protecting ground troops—were vital to securing the island's airfields, which became launchpads for P-fifty-one Mustangs escorting B-twenty-nines to bomb Japan. Amid kamikaze threats and fierce anti-aircraft fire, the Lexington's crew and aviators displayed unparalleled valor, downing attackers and maintaining flight operations under grueling conditions. Her efforts contributed to the capture of Iwo Jima by March, saving countless lives and hastening victory in the Pacific.

This February fury wasn't isolated; it capped a year of the Blue Ghost's legendary service—from the Marianas Turkey Shoot in June nineteen forty-four to Leyte Gulf in October, where her planes helped sink the superbattleship Musashi. Earning the Presidential Unit Citation and eleven battle stars, the Lexington symbolized American resolve. Today, moored as a museum in Corpus Christi, Texas—just a drive from Poth—she hosts ceremonies tying into VPR dates like February fifteenth, commemorating the USS Maine's sinking in eighteen ninety-eight, igniting the Spanish-American War. VFW Posts like ours can draw inspiration, organizing visits or events to honor that legacy.



The USS Lexington reminds us of the patriotism that binds veterans: selfless service, brotherhood, and triumph over adversity. At VFW Post 8555, we salute her crew and all who served. Let's keep their valor alive—attend our next meeting, support our events, and visit the Blue Ghost. Freedom isn't free; it's defended by heroes like those aboard the Lexington.

Contact us at vfwpost8555.com for more on local veteran tributes.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4 08:00 - 10:00 Food Distribution	5	6	7
8 District 20 Bowling Fundraiser	9 19:00 - 21:00 Monthly Post Meeting	10	11	12	13	14
15 U.S.S. Maine Sinking	16 Washington's Birthday	17	18	19	20	21
22 13:00 - 15:00 Post 8555 Auxiliary - Lotteria	23	24	25	26	27	28 Operation Desert Storm

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1	2	3	4 08:00 - 10:00 Food Distribution	5	6	7
8	9 19:00 - 21:00 Monthly Post Meeting	10	11	12	13	14 09:00 - 10:00 District 20 Meeting
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 Kosovo Campaign	25	26	27	28
29	30	31 Somalia	1 08:00 - 10:00 Food Distribution	2	3	4 10:00 - 11:00 District 20 Family Appreciation Picnic