



STILL SERVING

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CHIEF RECOGNIZES RETIREE COUNCIL'S ROLE

Despite fiscal challenges, the Air Force Retiree Council manages to do the best it can with what it doesn't have -- mainly money to travel. The council is the link between members of the Air Force retiree community -- retirees, family members and surviving spouses living throughout the world -- and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh. Current co-chairs retired Lt. Gen. Steven R. Polk and CMSAF Rodney J. McKinley work directly with General



Gen. Welsh

Welsh. There are 16 other council members representing retirees by U. S. geographical areas and overseas. Andrews, Bolling and Dover bases are represented on the council by CMSgt. Chuck Lucas, Springfield, Va., a volunteer in the Retiree Activities Office (RAO) at joint Base Anacostia-Bolling. The council is scheduled to meet May 5-9 at the Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, Tex. The co-chairmen report the council's findings to the chief of staff. Unable to meet last year because of budget constraints, a "virtual" council meeting prepared the co-chairs for their first meeting with General Welsh. "Technology can't replace the face-to-face dynamic that occurs when we gather as a council, but in these tough times, we made it work" said General Polk, a former Air

Force IG. In their meeting with General Welsh, the co-chairs discussed council history, its purpose and current issues. These included concern about rising Tricare costs and reduced Medicare/Tricare For Life reimbursement; support for legislative issues, specifically eliminating offset between the Survivor Benefit Plan and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation; paid-up SBP premiums for retirees at age 67 versus 70; full pay for the month that a retiree dies; and continued support for mailing the Afterburner. "General Welsh expressed his gratitude for the tireless efforts of our Air Force retiree community," Polk said. "He acknowledged and boasted about the countless hours retirees volunteer each year in support of our bases." Installation support provided to RAOs is included on the Air Force Inspector General's inspection checklist.

LOOK FOR YOUR GI INSURANCE DIVIDENDS

Approximately 575,000 veterans holding certain government life insurance policies and who served before 1956 will share \$132.9 million in annual insurance dividends this year. No application is necessary. Payments -- which started in January -- are mailed on policy anniversary dates. Eligible veterans have had Veterans Affairs life insurance policies in effect since they left the military and receive annual VA notifications about the policies. Affected are United States Government Life Insurance (USGLI), National Service Life Insurance (NSLI), Veterans' Special Life Insurance (VSLI) and Veterans' Reopened Insurance (VRI). Dividend amounts are based on age of the veteran, type of insurance and length of time the policy has been in force. Dividends come from the earnings of trust funds into which veterans have paid insurance premiums and are linked to returns on investments in U.S. government securities.

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World War II veterans holding NSLI policies comprise the largest group receiving payments, totaling \$86 million (average \$199). Total dividends of \$2.8 million go to those with VRI policies (\$161). Korean War era veterans who have maintained VSLI policies will receive dividends totaling \$44 million (\$349). Those who served after World War I will share in USGLI dividends totaling \$140,000 (\$101). Veterans with insurance questions should call 1 800 669-8477 or e-mail vainsurance@va.gov.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Col. John Moser, Director, Retiree Activities Office



Colonel Moser

As one grows older, reflection on events assume an ever increasing significance in memory and for planning. Retiree Appreciation Day 2013 was such an event. It provided me with the realities that face our Air Force today as well as for the overall impact on us as retirees. Budget cuts and budget planning are a source of concern, not only on pensions, the future of Tricare, as well as the concept of the “Air Force Family.” As expressed by retired Col. Mike Hayden (MOAA), the attitude on The Hill is for all to “share the pain” -- and this presages the strong probability/possibility of “belt-tightening” for all of us. After his presentation I said, “an outstanding presentation for the most dismal message I have ever heard.” We’ll just have to wait and see as we stumble toward the future.

Attendance was in excess of 300 people. The Health Fair was well organized and staffed by the 579th Medical Group. Our presenters were knowledgeable and informative and door prizes were generously supplied by the Commissary, the Exchange, the Club, the Washington Officers’ Wives Club and the Blinded American Veterans Foundation. Also, my thanks go to our volunteers for “working the hall” and especially the Johns Hopkins Family Health Plan for underwriting the Continental Breakfast.

I’m still concerned about the decrease in calls and visits to the Retiree Activities Office at Joint Base Andrews (JBA). I believe this can be attributed to the “hard to find” location at 1604 California Avenue. Call ahead (301 981-2726) and we’ll light a candle for you. I’ll be talking with the Active Force to see if something can be done about a more propitious central location. But, as mentioned earlier, it will probably be determined by the availability of funds.

Volunteers remain a sparse commodity, especially at Joint Base Anacostia Bolling (JBAB). We have had some turnover of staff and, to use an apt analogy, “we are running as fast as we can to stay in place.” Answering an earlier plea, Col. Roy Block, Springfield, Va., joined the JBAB staff. It is not a demanding job, but the information you provide to your fellow retirees is invaluable. WE NEED YOUR HELP! At JBAB, call me or Chief Lucas at 202 767-5244; at JBA call me or SMSgt Teufel at 301 981-2726.

CORE MISSIONS

By Gen. Mark A. Welsh, Air Force Chief of Staff

Since the Air Force was born in 1947, the core missions of the United States Air Force haven’t fundamentally changed:

1947	Today
Air Superiority	Air and Space Superiority
Air Reconnaissance	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
Airlift Strategic	Rapid Global Mobility
Air Force	Global Strike
Coordination of Air Defense	Command and Control

What has radically changed is how the Air Force performs these missions. Due to technological advances, we now fly faster, farther, and higher than ever before using aircraft and spacecraft that no one could have imagined at the time of our Service’s creation. For example, instead of snapping black and white photos of enemy troop positions, Airmen now control remotely piloted aircraft that capture thousands of hours of full motion video every day. We have also expanded where we operate. In 1947, we primarily operated in the air. Today, we carry out all our core missions through air, space and cyberspace. The result — Global Vigilance, Global Reach, and Global Power for America. To our retiree community: I hope this helps you understand how today’s fantastic airmen contribute to the joint team and to our nation. I encourage you to get to know these outstanding men and women personally and help us tell the Air Force story. Thank you for all that you do to support our airmen and our Air Force.

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ANDREWS MAY 'OPEN HOUSE' CANCELED

The Joint Service Open House at Joint Base Andrews, normally held annually in mid-May, has been canceled. "We will miss the interaction that event allowed us to have with our friends in the community, but this decision will save more than \$2 million in tax dollars," said Col. Bill Knight, 11th Wing commander. "We are in the process of adjusting our strategies to ensure a robust outreach program within our local community," he added. Nearly 1 million people would visit the base over a weekend to see various air show activities and static displays. The cancellation was prompted by a Department of Defense decision to initiate a 45 percent reduction in outreach activities. Its goal is to save an estimated \$1 billion dollars over the next 10 years. The Andrews Open House in 2012 cost approximately \$2.1 million.

NEW SECRETARY ON BOARD - Deborah Lee James is the new Air Force secretary. "I want to welcome Secretary



Sec James

James to our Air Force family," Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh said. "I'm confident that she'll lead us with the same vision and passion she's shown throughout her public service and private sector leadership, building on the extraordinary accomplishments of our Acting Secretary Eric Fanning, who magnificently led our Air Force these last few months." James is the second female Air Force secretary in the service's history, replacing Michael Donley, who retired in June. Shelia E. Widnall served as secretary from 1993-97. Secretary James spent a decade working for the House Armed Services Committee before serving as the assistant defense secretary for Reserve Affairs from 1993-98.

OLD WALTER REED PROPERTY - Plans have been announced by the D.C. government to transform the former Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Northwest Washington into a 3 million-square-foot town center project. The former hospital was merged in 2011 with the Bethesda Naval Medical Center to form the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda. General Services Administration awaits the Army releasing control of the D.C. property. The State Department has also expressed interest in using a portion of the grounds. The D.C. proposal includes a hotel and conference facility along with 318 residential units and a 73-unit senior living complex.

NEW DELTA CONTRACT - Delta Dental of California continues administering the Tricare Retiree Dental Program (TRDP) under a new five-year contract, through December 31, 2018. Some new provisions of the Enhanced program include an increase to \$1,300 in the annual maximum amount for covered services for each person; an increase to \$1,200 in the annual maximum amount for dental accident coverage for each person; an increase to \$1,750 in the lifetime orthodontic maximum amount for each person; and a third cleaning covered for children and adults with diagnosed type 1 or type 2 diabetes. There are no changes in the Basic program. Enrollees are urged to keep information for each family member up to date in DEERS to avoid claims processing delays.

DOUBLE LOSS AT ANDREWS RAO - The Retiree Activities Office at Joint Base Andrews has lost its two most senior volunteers. Retired Lt. Col. Ron Noyes, Bowie, Md., died Nov. 9 and MSgt. Don Banks, Riverdale, Md., "retired" in December. The pair staffed the RAO on Thursdays since 1993. Colonel Noyes established a "retiree" link from the base website that attracted worldwide attention from the military retiree community. Sergeant Banks was cited by Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Larry Spencer at last year's Retiree Appreciation Day.

RAO Photo by Bill Durham

Retired MSgt. Don Banks and wife, Anna, share spotlight with General Spencer at Retiree Day program. (See Page 12).



DEFENSE HEALTH AGENCY ESTABLISHED

The Defense Health Agency, a major streamlining effort of military medicine, opened in October headed by Air Force Lt. Gen. Douglas Robb. It oversees health care among the Army, Navy and Air Force medical departments from



Lt Gen. Robb

Falls Church, Va. The military health system provides medical care on the battlefield as well as to service members, their families and military retirees at home. It is one of the largest health care systems in the world with 56 hospitals, hundreds of clinics and 160,000 employees. Some 2,500 babies are born each week into the system, which has an annual budget exceeding \$50 billion. Like in the civilian sector, military health care costs have increased faster than inflation. Military health costs have more than doubled in the past decade, increasing from \$19 billion in fiscal 2001 to \$51 billion in fiscal 2013. The category accounts for more than 10 percent of the department's budget. That figure is expected to grow, with the cost reaching \$77 billion by 2022. The agency is establishing a shared services model for managing and overseeing the operational work for health information technology, medical logistics, pharmacy operations and facilities planning for the services. In addition, it will manage the Tricare health plan for

the military's 9.6 million beneficiaries. Defense health officials estimate the savings from these shared services will total at least \$3.4 billion in the agency's first five years. By Oct. 1, 2015, the agency is to be fully operational. Each service will maintain its unique mission requirements.

CIVILIAN HEALTH CARE - The Affordable Care Act requires individuals to maintain minimum health care coverage for themselves and dependents claimed on their federal tax return. Those who do not obtain insurance will be charged a penalty beginning with their 2014 federal tax return. Airmen covered under the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (including temporary continuation of coverage), Medicare, Tricare and Children's Health Insurance Program meet the federal requirement. Some civilian employees may not be covered because when they were hired, they had the option to not select a health benefits plan. Many of those employees met the Affordable Care Act requirements by selecting health insurance plans during the annual open season. For more information about the Affordable Care Act, go to www.myPers.af.mil.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE POLICY - Airmen who live in a state that does not legally recognize same-sex marriage are eligible for an administrative absence as long as they are based more than 100 miles from a state, District of Columbia, or other jurisdiction in which they can legally marry. Airmen can receive up to 7 days administrative absence if stationed in the continental United States and up to 10 days if stationed overseas. Also, they may receive 2 travel days if located in the continental United States and up to 5 travel days if overseas.

NEW SBP ELIGIBILITY - Survivor Benefit Plan program enrollment is available for eligible retirees in same-sex marriages. The program provides a monthly income to survivors of retired airmen upon the retiree's death when retired pay stops. Survivors of airmen recalled to active duty from retirement who die while on active duty, may also be protected by the SBP. Enrollment eligibility began June 26, 2013, for same-sex couples who were legally married on or after that date. No SBP premiums for coverage will be charged, nor will any annuity payments be paid for deaths before that date. Retirees married to a same sex partner on or before June 26, 2013, must apply for SBP coverage by June 25. If a retiree elected child coverage at the time of retirement, a same sex spouse may be added at the same level of coverage. If a retiree elected SBP coverage for an insurable interest person at time of retirement, he or she may terminate this coverage and elect spouse coverage. Retirees should seek the assistance of a SBP counselor when making an election. For more information, call 877 353-6807 or a base casualty assistance representative.

BENEFITS WEBSITE - Air Force retirees interested in accessing benefits web pages should establish a Department of Defense self-service log-on identification account. The common logon, developed by DoD and Veterans Affairs, allows beneficiaries to access various benefit websites with a username and password. You are able to access personal information, health care eligibility and personnel records and can review Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance elections or convert SGLI to Veterans' Group Life Insurance, all from one logon account. Retirees and family members are able to access information 24/7. Go to www.myaccess.dmdc.osd.mil/dsaccess.

VARIED PHARMACY OPTIONS AVAILABLE

Tricare beneficiaries have many pharmacy options, including military pharmacies, home delivery and 56,000 network pharmacies. Military treatment facility (MTF) pharmacies fill prescriptions free of charge, up to a 90-day supply for most medications. Not all medications are available at MTF pharmacies. Registered users may also request refills at www.tricareonline.com. Home delivery can be used when traveling on a temporary assignment or moving to another Tricare region. Prescriptions are mailed in the United States and its territories. Beneficiaries can get up to a 90-day supply for most medications with minimal out-of-pocket costs. Beneficiaries can sign up for automatic refills or request them by mail, phone or online. The home delivery option is recommended for prescriptions needed on a regular basis. Beneficiaries using a retail network pharmacy can get up to a 30-day supply. Certain vaccines are covered for zero copayment at participating network pharmacies. Tricare provides a world-class pharmacy benefit to eligible uniformed service members, retirees and family members, including beneficiaries age 65 and older. For more information, visit www.tricare.mil/pharmacy or contact Express Scripts customer service at 1 877 363-1303.



SPECIAL TREATMENT CENTERS - More than 2.5 million U.S. troops have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and 260,000 service members have been diagnosed with the invisible wounds of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress as a result of combat-related injuries and accidents. To treat and care for those suffering from the most severe forms of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress, the first of nine Intrepid Spirit Centers planned nationwide is located at Fort Belvoir, Va. Another is open at Camp Lejeune, N.C., and a third at Fort Campbell, Ky., will open this summer. Other centers are planned for Fort Bragg, N.C.; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Carson, Colo.; Fort Bliss, Tex.; Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. The design and mission of the satellite centers is based on the original National Intrepid Center of Excellence at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. There are still 50,000-plus military members in Afghanistan, and many can be expected to receive treatment at the Intrepid Spirit Centers.

TRICARE GOES MOBILE - Tricare has moved to help beneficiaries access their benefits on their mobile devices through a variety of mobile applications and mobile-optimized sites. The mobile version of [Tricare.mil](http://www.tricare.mil), accessible on mobile devices including tablets and smartphones, is at www.tricare.mil for benefit and contact information. Each of the Tricare regional contractors also has a mobile site or app. Health Net, the North Region contractor, operates www.hnfs.com/go/mobile, which allows beneficiaries to locate Tricare providers and access resources including contact information and information about benefits, claims and eligibility. The pharmacy contractor Express Scripts, Inc. offers a mobile site, www.express-scripts.com/mobile and an app called Express Rx. These allow beneficiaries to get benefit information, start home delivery of their prescriptions, check order status, order prescription refills and find a nearby network pharmacy. Beneficiaries must register with ESI before using the mobile site by going to www.express-scripts.com/activate. The Defense Manpower Data Center also offers a mobile app (for Android phones) called milConnect Mobile. The app allows beneficiaries to locate identification card-issuing facilities, find contact information for Tricare regional contractors and review frequently asked questions. Beneficiaries can download milConnect Mobile from the Google Play store.

IT'S YOUR HEALTH CARE - Many perceive doctors as having the final word when it comes to managing patient care. Each individual is ultimately responsible for getting the care they need. Patients should have a copy of their health history including prior hospitalizations and current and past medical problems. This is especially important if several doctors are being seen. While many medical offices have file sharing or electronic file transfers, patients may have to make copies of their records. Be sure to list all current medications. Make a list of the top 3-5 issues to be discussed with the doctor. Having a list helps patients stay on track during appointments and address the most pressing concerns. Many patients don't speak up because they don't want to question the doctor's instructions. Remember, it's your health care. Be direct, honest and as specific as possible when recounting symptoms or expressing concerns. You might want to bring along a family member or friend to the appointment so they can help ask questions and listen to the doctor's instructions. It is important for patients to know and understand their Tricare benefit; especially what it does and does not cover. They should know about their co-pays, cost-shares and deductibles. For more information, visit www.tricare.mil/plans.

SHORT SERVINGS

Questions Answered - The Total Force Service Center at the Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, Tex., provides 24/7 customer support to the active duty, Air National Guard, Reserve, civilian and retiree populations. It provides customers with seamless access to personnel information services. The toll-free telephone number is 1 800 525-0102

Record Civilian Service - Dorothy Rowe retired at Luke AFB, Ariz., after 70 years' service -- the longest tenure of any civilian in the Air Force. Rowe, 88, started working for the government in 1943 as a clerk typist at the Columbus Army Depot in Ohio. She transferred to Luke in 1953, retiring as the financial analysis chief at Luke.

COLA Set - The 2014 cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for military retired pay, SBP annuities, Social Security checks, and VA disability and survivor benefits is 1.5 percent. It appeared in the January checks. It is the fourth-lowest COLA since 2000, trailing the zero-COLA years of 2009-10 and the 1.4 percent in 2002. Last year, it was 1.7 percent.

Risner Dies - Retired Brig. Gen. Robinson "Robbie" Risner, a celebrated Korean War jet fighter ace and Vietnam prisoner of war, died Oct. 22 at Bridgewater, Va. He was 88. he flew 108 combat missions in Korea and was credited with destroying 8 MiG-15s. In 1965, his aircraft was hit and he ejected over the Tonkin Gulf. He was held at the "Hanoi Hilton" for 7 1/2 years.



Gen. Risner

Band Scores Again - Starting with a cellist in the National Air and Space Museum gallery and swelling to 120 musicians, the Air Force Band registered the first "flash mob" produced by a military band. The 6-minute performance was led by band commander Col. Larry H. Lang. Unsuspecting museum visitors were astonished as instrumentalists joined in from behind airplanes and space capsules and vocalists appeared on a museum balcony.

Medal Shifted - The Defense Department has moved the Kosovo Campaign Medal to the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, effective Jan. 1, 2014. The KCM recognizes contributions of U.S. military personnel in support of Operation Joint Guardian since 1999 as part of the NATO-led Kosovo Force in the Balkans.

Retired Air Force One at Castle - The Castle Air Museum in Atwater, Calif., welcomed a retired Air Force One airplane that flew Presidents Reagan and Clinton and other dignitaries over decades of service. With the Douglas VC-9 in hand, the museum hopes to raise \$10 million for construction of the Presidential Pavilion, a 100,000-square-foot building to house 24 of the museum's vintage military aircraft.



Change In CAP NCOs - The Civil Air Patrol has restructured its noncommissioned officer corps to align with the Air Force. The CAP uses a chevron system similar to the Air Force, but includes CAP on the chevrons with a propeller in place of the star. For 72 years, CAP volunteer forces have completed emergency services, aerospace education and cadet programs, with the guidance and expertise of their NCO corps.

Dover Welcomes C-5 - The Air Mobility Command Museum at Dover AFB, Del., has added an historic C-5 Galaxy to its inventory. It is the only plane to successfully launch an intercontinental ballistic missile in flight. The successful test over the flight test over the Pacific Ocean was not pursued. It is only C-5 accessible to the public.

SBP Change - Most Survivor Benefit Plan annuitants over the age of 55 are no longer required to submit an annual Certificate of Eligibility to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service. Annuitants should no longer expect to receive the annual COE once they reach age 55.

Medicare Fraud Calls - Fraudulent telephone calls involving Medicare cards seek verification of personal information to receive new Medicare cards. Medicare does not call beneficiaries for such information. If you are aware of such calls, notify the Medicare Fraud line at 1 800 633-4227.

DFAS Phone Help - The Defense Finance and Accounting Service in Cleveland has altered its telephone menu options. If you need help with your military retired or annuity pay, choose option 1 after dialing either 1 800 321-1080 or 1 888 332-7411. If inquiring about myPay, choose option 5.

POST-9/11 GI BILL REGISTERS MILESTONE

More than 1 million veterans, service men and family members have benefited from the Post-9/11 GI Bill since the program's inception in 2009. Some \$30 billion has been distributed in the form of tuition and other education-related payments. The program is a comprehensive education benefit created by Congress in 2008. In general, veterans and service members who have served on active duty for 90 or more days since Sept. 10, 2001 are eligible. On average, VA processes initial claims for the educational benefits in 23 days. There is an opportunity to transfer the benefit to immediate family members. Benefits are tiered based on the number of days served on active duty, giving activated National Guard and Reserve members the same benefits as all other active duty members. There also are work-study programs, tutorial assistance and license and certification test reimbursement. Enacted in 1944, the "GI Bill of Rights;" recognized that military service was an inherently selfless act which deserved a certain amount of compensation. Nearly half of the 16 million veterans of World War II went to school – helping to rejuvenate the post-war economy. The Post-9/11 GI Bill builds on the same legacy, giving Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families a chance to improve their lives through higher education. For more information, go to www.gibill.va.gov or call 1 800 827-1000.



CHAMPVA DENTAL - Delta Dental and MetLife allow eligible veterans, plus family members receiving care under the Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA), to purchase affordable dental insurance. More than 8 million veterans who are enrolled in VA health care can choose to purchase one of the offered dental plans. This 3-year pilot has been designed for veterans with no dental coverage, or those eligible for VA dental care who would like to purchase additional coverage. Participation will not affect entitlement to VA dental services and treatment. There are no eligibility limitations based on service-connected disability rating or enrollment priority assignment. People interested in participating may complete an application online through either Delta Dental, www.deltadentalvadip.org, or MetLife, www.metlife.com/vadip. Also eligible are nearly 400,000 spouses and dependent children who are reimbursed for most medical expenses under CHAMPVA. Dental vary by plan and include diagnostic, preventive, surgical, emergency and endodontic/restorative treatment. Participants are responsible for all premiums, which range from \$8.65 to \$52.90 per month for individual plans. Copayments and other charges may apply. Free treatment continues for veterans with service-connected dental conditions. For more information, go to www.va.gov/healthbenefits/vadip or contact Delta Dental at 1 855 370-3303 or MetLife at 1 888 310-1681.

TRANSPORTATION HELP - VA is accepting applications for grants to help state Veterans Service Agencies and Veterans Service Organizations operate or contract for transportation services to transport veterans living in rural areas to VA medical facilities. Transportation is provided at no cost to veterans. A rural area is defined as a county or counties with a population of fewer than seven persons per square mile. Many such areas are found in the western and southwestern United States but at least half of the states have at least one highly rural area.

MORE CAMPUS ASSISTANCE - The Department of Veterans Affairs has added 62 new locations offering the VetSuccess on Campus (VSOC) program, bringing the number of VSOC schools to 94. Locally, the program is now available at George Washington University, George Mason University and Northern Virginia Community College campuses in Alexandria and Annandale. Placing experienced VA counselors on campuses strengthens VA's partnership with colleges and creates opportunities to help veterans. Counselors maintain close relationships with local Vet Centers and VA medical facilities, referring veterans as needed for counseling or medical services. Partner schools provide on-campus office space. Since the inception of the Post-9/11 GI Bill four years ago, VA has issued about \$30 billion in payments to help nearly 1 million service members, veterans and family members pursue their education.

CLAIMS PROGRESS - Significant progress has been made in reducing VA's backlog of disability compensation claims – from 611,000 to 400,835 or 34 percent -- since peaking last spring. Priority is given to claims that have been waiting longer than one year. Efforts continue to further reduce the backlog. Special attention is given to disability claims for homeless veterans, those experiencing extreme financial hardship, the terminally ill, former Prisoners of War, Medal of Honor recipients, and those filing Fully Developed Claims. Regardless of the status of compensation claims, veterans who served in combat since Nov. 11, 1998, are eligible for five years of free medical care from VA for most conditions.

BASE LIBRARIES LIKE ‘HIDDEN GEMS’

During World War I, troops found they wanted more than just the beans and bullets. The American Library Association delivered books and magazines paid for through the war bond program to entertain and give them a slice of home. The association raised \$5 million, distributing more than 7 million books and magazines, erecting 36 camp libraries and providing library collections to over 500 sites, including military hospitals. It laid the foundation for the Defense Department’s first and longest-running morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) program. The Navy established the first military library program in 1919. The Army followed in 1920 and the Air Force opened its library program when it was established as a separate service in 1947. MWR takes pains to provide library services in Afghanistan, even at the most remote forward operating bases. Air Force maintains seven learning resource centers across the U.S. Central Command. Libraries have stayed current with evolving technology. They offer cassette tapes, phonograph records, compact disks and DVDs. Audio books were introduced in 2005 and e-books in 2007. Last year the services spent \$12 million for digital library materials. Military members and their families tap libraries for transitional assistance, bone up on details about spouse employment and tuition assistance and prepare for standardized tests. Online test preparation services are among the most popular offerings. Some patrons use programs to increase their vocational aptitude scores so they can change career fields. Air Force Col. Thomas Joyce, Services director at the Air Force Personnel Center, said “Libraries are like hidden gems that don’t get talked about much, but that are a huge contributor to life-long learning and overall resilience.”



ACCOUNT STATEMENTS - Your Retiree Account Statement (RAS) is a two-page document issued by the Defense Accounting and Finance Service (DFAS) that summarizes your pay, benefits and deductions. It is a description of what you can expect on the next pay date. A monthly electronic account statement (eRAS) is available to those receiving retirement payments. The eRAS is only available on myPay, the online account management system for military members and DoD employees. Statements are available each month and you can access up to 12 statements. In addition to the eRAS, retirees receive a RAS whenever there is a change to their account and each December. If you cannot access myPay or you need a RAS that is no longer in your myPay account, send a detailed written request to: DFAS Retired Pay, P.O. Box 7130, London, KY 40742-7130 .

DIVORCE ENTITLEMENTS - Certain former spouses of current or retired service members are eligible for continued health care benefits and other military installation privileges after a divorce through continued enrollment in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). Other benefits of DEERS enrollment include commissary and exchange privileges and legal assistance benefits. Spouses qualify for continued post-divorce DEERS enrollment if they are unremarried, were married to a service member for at least 20 years, the service member spouse has at least 20 years of military service credited to retirement and there are at least 20 years of overlap between the marriage and the credited military service (“20/20/20” rule). Spouses with at least 15 years of overlap between their marriage and the service member’s creditable years of service are eligible for one year of DEERS coverage from the date the marriage ended. If the service member has a mix of reserve and active duty time, all Reserve years in which 50 points were earned count as creditable years for retirement, along with all active duty years. To apply for continuous enrollment in DEERS, former spouses must provide a marriage certificate, divorce decree and a statement of service or DD Form 214. For more information, visit a base ID card issuing office or legal assistance office.

NEW IDS FOR CIVILIANS - An Air Force civilian identification card that was used by some to access Air Force installations to use Morale, Welfare, and Recreation facilities has been rescinded. Security will confiscate AF Form 354 cards presented for base access. Recognition is limited to holders of a Department of Defense Civilian Retiree ID Cards or other access credentials. Retired civilians can get a DoD identification card, but there is no equivalent for civilian dependents. Some bases use Defense Biometric Identification System cards for installation access. With a commander approval letter from the force support squadron and a DBIDS card, retired Air Force civilian employees and their dependents will be recognized only for that base.

SPACE-A TRAVEL CHALLENGE FOR SOME

Military or-contracted aircraft daily fly to worldwide locations. When mission-related passengers and cargo are accommodated, empty seats are offered to eligible passengers on a space-available basis. Last year, almost 215,000 service members, military family members and retirees took advantage of these flights. In general, active-duty members and retirees and their families can fly Space-A from Air Force bases and many Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard stations. Contract flights leave from Baltimore-Washington and Seattle-Tacoma international airports. Passengers willing to try Space-A travel can sign up at terminals in person, online or by e-mail or phone and remain eligible for up to 60 days. It's possible to sign up for more than one destination and at more than one terminal to improve chances of getting a seat. Seats are offered on a first-come, first-served basis, depending on a Space-A passenger's travel category and date and time they registered. First priority goes to active-duty service members and their accompanying family members on unfunded emergency leave. Military retirees complete the priority list. Air Mobility Command spells out details of Space-A travel on its website. The passenger terminal at Joint Base Andrews is no longer open 24 hours a day. New hours are 4 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. The terminal also opens 3 hours prior to departures and 30 minutes prior to arrivals for missions scheduled between the hours of 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. For more information, call the flight recorder at 301 981-3527/5851. Space-A travel can be a gamble. An often heard adage is "If you have time to spare, go by military air." Passengers should be prepared to buy a return flight on a commercial aircraft, as well as meals and lodging, if they find themselves unable to secure a Space-A flight home. There is no cost on military planes other than for optional meals. On commercially chartered international flights, there is a \$3.90 seat charge and \$17.20 or less for head taxes and federal inspection fees.

THUNDERBIRDS, BANDS BACK - The Air Force is resuming public outreach and community engagements at a reduced capacity. Two popular, high-visibility programs, the Thunderbirds and Wings of Blue aerial demonstration teams, are back. However, the Air Force will not resume a public flyover program across the country, nor will there be Air Force static display aircraft at civilian air shows. Funeral flyovers are not affected by this plan and will continue to be coordinated through normal procedures. The Thunderbirds will work 34 shows divided between civilian and military events, while the Wings of Blue Jump Team has 33 shows scheduled, including Air Force Academy football games. The T-Birds only area appearance will be at Ocean City, Md., June 14-15. Other Air Force assets expected to continue limited activity include Air Force bands. Regional bands will resume public performances and The Air Force Band, based at Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, has resumed tours.



'CANDY BOMBER' REMEMBERED - More than 160 children and service members gathered in Hondo, Tex., to see retired Col. Gail Halvorsen -- the "Candy Bomber" -- take to the skies once again in a vintage C-47 Skytrain. Colonel Halvorsen was a C-47 pilot in support of the 1948-49 Berlin Airlift when he fastened candy rations to tiny parachutes for local children. He would wiggle his wings -- earning him the nickname "Uncle Wiggly Wings." Heike Jackson was 6-years-old. "He was our savior," she said. "We had nothing to eat." Now in her 70s, Jackson attended the reenactment. "To see that wonderful man alive is amazing. ... It's a full circle somehow," said Jackson, who brought candy to the event. Colonel Halvorsen, 93, said, "I did it for the children, to see the smiles on their faces."

OLDEST P-40 - The world's oldest Curtis P-40B Warhawk fighter, which survived the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, has been added to the Collings Foundation, in Stow, Mass. A "very generous sponsor" made possible the foundation's acquisition of the now-disassembled airplane from the Fighter Collection in Duxford, England, which obtained the plane in 2003. The Army Air Corps aircraft escaped destruction during the attack in a maintenance hangar at Wheeler Field, Hawaii. Six weeks later, the aircraft crashed into a Hawaiian mountainside, killing its pilot. Recovery of the aircraft began in 1985; restoration started four years later in Torrance, Calif.

ANOTHER JOINT BASE - Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick has changed the name of the Massachusetts Military Reservation to Joint Base Cape Cod. It is the largest of the state's six military installations in geographical size. Covering approximately 22,000 acres on upper Cape Cod, the area encompasses Otis ANG Base; the 6th Space Warning Squadron at Cape Cod AFS; Army National Guard's Camp Edwards training area; and Coast Guard Air Station Cape Cod.

BUDGET CUTS CURTAIL COMMISSARIES

A glimpse at what commissary and military exchange services could become in light of smaller and unpredictable budgets was described to Congress by Joseph H. JEU, Defense Commissary Agency director. During the first day of the government shutdown in October shoppers racked up twice the typical day's sales, at \$30.5 million, JEU said. "That was



our highest sale day ever." But as the furlough dragged on, its effects increasingly became evident. The hiring freeze had already put a dent in customer service. Two-thirds of all commissaries fell below manning levels required to run the stores effectively, JEU said. "Commissaries experienced a sales loss totally over \$99 million driven by sequestration closures in fiscal year 2013 and government closures in FY2014." All this followed "an impressive year" in fiscal 2012, before sequestration. "Sales were up, topping the \$6 billion level for the first time since 1992," JEU reported. "The commissary continues to be one of the most valued non-pay compensation benefits our military

members, past and present, and their families enjoy." Calling the commissary benefit an "integral element of the total compensation package," JEU said it saves patrons about 30 percent compared to commercial supermarkets. This quality-of-life enhancement comes at a rate of \$2 in patron savings for every taxpayer dollar invested, he reported. Even with commissaries to receive full funding in the proposed fiscal 2014 budget, JEU warned that the impact of sequestration "is likely to be considerable" as the department establishes priorities and balances resources.

SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE - Applications for the Scholarships for Military Children Program must be turned in at a commissary by Feb. 28. Awards are for \$2,000 with at least one scholarship at each commissary with qualified applicants. An applicant must be a dependent, unmarried child, younger than 21, (or 23 if enrolled as a full-time student at a college or university) of a service member, Reserve or Guard member, retiree or survivor of a military member who died while on active duty, or survivor of a retiree. The applicant must attend or plan to attend an accredited college or university, full time, in the fall of 2014 or be enrolled in studies designed to transfer to a four-year program. Fisher House Foundation, a nonprofit organization that helps service members and their families, administers the program. Since 2001 more than \$11.3 million in scholarships have been awarded to 7,412 military dependents from more than 71,000 applicants. For more information, call Scholarship Managers at 856 616-9311 or email militaryscholar@scholarshipmanagers.com.

NEIGHBORLY HELP - Commissary customers and employees donated nearly 740,000 pounds of needed items to local food banks and other charitable organizations during the 2013 Feds Feed Families campaign. Included prepared donation packages, allowing customers to purchase the package and drop it in donation bins in the stores. At many installations commissary industry partners donated manpower and transportation to deliver the donated items to local food banks. The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families. Patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones.

REWARDS CARD - The Defense Commissary Agency's Commissary Rewards Card is available at all commissaries. Complete registration on the DeCA website and load digital coupons to your account. When the card is scanned at the register, coupons are matched to their purchases and automatically deducted from the balance owed. Customers may print a list of coupons. New offers are posted online every 2-3 weeks. Digital coupons, like their paper counterparts, have expiration dates and other terms and conditions that must be followed for redemption. DeCA coupon policy limits one per purchase. For more information, call the customer service hotline at 855 829-6219.

DIVIDENDS ANNOUNCED - The Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) Exchange paid a dividend of \$224 million in FY2012. These funds are critical to Army, Air Force, National Guard, Marine Corps and Navy morale, welfare and recreation efforts. Two-thirds of exchange earnings are paid to the services' morale, welfare and recreation programs with the other third used to build new stores or renovate existing facilities. Customers who shop in exchange stores or online help make the military community a better place to live and work. Purchases made in the past 10 years have provided more than \$2.4 billion to military programs such as youth services, gyms and aquatic centers. The exchange also operates at Marine and Navy locations. Distribution of dividends: Army, \$127.8M; Air Force, \$74.7M; Marines, \$18.8M; and Navy, \$2.7M. AAFES is a joint non-appropriated fund instrumentality of the Department of Defense. It is directed by a board of directors, responsible to Secretaries of the Army and the Air Force through the Service Chiefs of Staff.

BASE LODGING OFTEN OVERLOOKED

Military members, retirees and Defense Department civilians are eligible to book lodging at hundreds of military-owned accommodations all over the world. Facilities range from standard hotel rooms on military installations to campgrounds and recreational vehicle parks to armed forces recreation centers in Garmisch, Germany; Honolulu; Seoul, South Korea; and Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla. Each service, including the Coast Guard, runs its own lodging program for official travelers and offers empty rooms on a space-available basis to leisure travelers from every branch. For those willing to do a little homework, military lodging can open doors to affordable year-round getaways. Those looking for “big city” vacations can check into Navy Lodges in Seattle and San Francisco, as well as San Diego and New York. For a beach getaway, there are Navy Lodges in Gulfport, Miss., or Pensacola, Fla. In addition to the Hale Koa Hotel in Honolulu, the Army operates the Pihilaau Army Recreation Center on Oahu’s Leeward Coast and the Kilauea Military Camp mountain resort on Hawaii’s Big Island. Marines Corps facilities include villas, cabanas and cottages at Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, and the Del Mar Beach Resort, near Camp Pendleton, Calif. Ramstein AB Inn, Germany, is across the street from the passenger terminal, a gateway to many of Europe’s most popular destinations. The Nellis AFB Inn is convenient to the Las Vegas attractions. Peterson AFB Inn provides access to Colorado Springs, Colo., and the Rocky Mountains. Coast Guard facilities include the Petaluma Lake RV Park, in California’s Sonoma County and four cottages in the Florida Keys at Marathon.



SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED - Two daughters and a son of retired enlisted airmen were among 25 persons selected to receive \$1,000 scholarships through the Air Force Club Membership Scholarship Program. There were no recipients in the National Capital Area. Each of the winners also received a laptop computer and portable printer. A total of 156 entries were submitted. Each included a 500-word essay about what inspired them to be successful. For more information about the Air Force Clubs programs, how to apply for this scholarship and view winning essays, visit www.afclubs.net and click on the Club Scholarship logo.

CODE TALKERS HISTORY - Known as Code Talkers, Native Americans learned early on the advantages of their tribal tongues, using indecipherable messages to confuse the enemy. The code talker mission remained classified for decades after World War II. “Navajo Code Talkers created a code that was within the Navajo language. Even another Navajo speaker would not be able to understand it. Others tribes also coded their languages. The United States did not consider American Indians citizens until 1924. The military first enlisted American Indians to relay messages in their native languages during World War I. The program was expanded during World War II. Soldiers from the Comanche, Meskwaki, Sioux, Crow, Hopi and Cree nations took part in the effort. Out of more than 500 tribes, each with distinct languages, about 200 to 250 dialects remain in use today. The National Museum of the American Indian is one of 18 museums within the Smithsonian Institution. It has affiliate locations at the Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Md., the National Museum on the Mall in Washington and in New York City.

PORTRAIT DISPLAY - The Air Force is highlighting 33 veterans for “service and heroism at war” in the fourth volume of Veterans in Blue. The portrait-based display hangs in the halls of the Pentagon. It honors veterans who have helped shaped the Air Force, including former A1C Herb Trimpe who enlisted in 1962 as a weather observer to retired Lt. Gen. Paul Carlton who helped develop a new method for caring for the wounded as chief of surgery at Wiesbaden, Germany, in 1983. Carlton would later become the 17th Surgeon General of the Air Force. After separation, Trimpe was an illustrator for Marvel Comics, where he drew such comics as the Hulk, Wolverine, and G.I. Joe.

‘EARLY BIRD’ GONE - The “Early Bird” is no more. The Defense Department’s daily compilation of published defense-related news and commentary is history. For nearly 50 years, the Early Bird and a cup of coffee marked the start to the Pentagon’s workday. The Early Bird was intended to deliver defense and defense-related news to the Defense Department, but circulation soon ballooned to include White House and National Security Council officials, members of Congress and other federal agencies. By 1980, 6,500 copies of the Early Bird were printed, on average, every weekday in an onsite print plant.

RETIREE DAY ATTENDEES PROVIDED UPDATES



RAO Photo by Bill Durham
Retiree Day attendees take time out for lunch.

More than 300 military retirees and family members attended Retiree Appreciation Day at the Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling Club in October. The annual program alternates with Joint Base Andrews, scheduled to host this year's event in the fall. Air Force Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Larry Spencer highlighted the ballroom gathering with a candid assessment of the fiscal challenges facing today's military structure. He also addressed the sexual assault issue and the emphasis being placed in resolving it. Still, mission requirements are being met, he said, and the "character, commitment and dedication remain high, including those Still Serving." Prior to the ballroom presentations, a Health Fair covered a multitude of Tricare services, including available of the annual flu shots. A Tricare representative assured attendees that "All Tricare plans qualify under the Affordable Care Act." Dozens

of door prizes were distributed amid reports on legislation, legal service and casualty assistance. Maj. Gen Sharon Dunbar, Air Force District of Washington commander, noted progress on construction of a medical clinic and surgery center at Andrews, scheduled for completion in FY2017. Col. John Moser, Retiree Activities Office director, cited Johns Hopkins Family Health Plan, for providing continental breakfast. Special sales were offered at the Base Exchange and Commissary, both of which also contributed door prizes. ID card renewals also were available.