



The Veterans Digest

October 2004

False Rumor Regarding Destruction of Military Personnel Records at National Personnel Records Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

There is a false rumor circulating on the Internet, in e-mails, and among veteran service organizations that Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs) at the National Personnel Records Center, operated by the National Archives and Records Administration, will be digitized and then destroyed. **This rumor is NOT TRUE.**

Neither the Department of Defense (DoD) nor the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) intend to destroy any OMPFs stored at the Center. The purpose of any electronic scanning would be to help preserve the originals and increase efficiency in handling reference requests.

The National Archives and Records Administration preserves and protects OMPFs that were transferred from the military service departments because they are permanently valuable records that document the essential evidence of military service for the veterans of our nation. NPRC generally stores and services OMPFs for retired, discharged, or deceased military personnel.

The National Personnel Records Center responds to approximately 4,000 requests pertaining to military records each day, totaling more than one million requests each year. Many of those requests are for Separation Documents (usually DD Form 214) and the Center answers the majority of those inquiries in ten days or less.

Requests resulting from this rumor will have a

negative impact on NPRC's ability to respond to requests from veterans with real immediate needs, such as medical treatment, employment, retirement, etc.

Please pass this information on to those members of your organization that interface with veterans. Your assistance with this information will allow us, and you, to better serve the needs of our veterans.

Source: E-mail received from NPRC on Sep. 28, 2004.

Disabled Guardsmen/ Reservists Should Choose *Not to Receive VA* Compensation Payments For Weekend Drills

Disabled Guardsmen and Reservists returning from active duty deployments must make the decision whether to forfeit their Guard/Reserve weekend pay or their VA compensation for that weekend. In almost every case the reservists should choose to forfeit the VA compensation.

Reason No.1: The important thing to remember in these cases is that the Guardsman/Reservist is not forfeiting all of their drill pay or all of their VA benefit. Most Guardsmen/Reservists are civilians for 28 days out of every month, and will be compensated by VA at the normal rate for those 28 days. The only compensation VA will recoup will be a small portion of the pay the Guardsman/Reservist received for those two days a month they drilled. For a person who is rated 10% service-connected disabled, that amounts to \$3.53 per day. So, for a drill weekend, VA will only be recouping \$7.06. The Guardsman/Reservist does not forfeit their

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Guard/Reserve (continued from page 1)

entire VA benefit.

Explanation: Guardsmen and Reservists are paid according to the number of Unit Training Assemblies (UTAs) they attend in a year, as well as the number of annual training (AT) days they attend in the year. A Unit Training Assembly, or UTA, is a four-hour block of training. The Guardsman/Reservist receives one day of pay for each UTA he or she attends during the training year.

Most drills are made up of multiple UTAs, or MUTAs, and consist of either two or four UTAs, normally called a MUTA-2 or a MUTA-4. Therefore, if a Guardsman/Reservist drills just on Saturday or just on Sunday, they are paid for a MUTA-2. If they drill on both Saturday and Sunday they are paid for a MUTA-4.

On an annual basis the normal reservist accumulates attendance at 48 UTAs and 15 days of annual training, a total of 63 training days during the year.

VA only counts the number of physical days drilled, not UTAs attended: 24 drill days and 15 days of annual training amounts to 39 days. At the rate of \$3.53 per day the reservists would owe VA \$137.67 at the end of the training year. That is the amount VA would withhold from their VA benefits until it is recouped.

On the other hand, if the Guardsman/Reservist chooses to forfeit their drill pay, they would have to reimburse the Guard/Reserve the \$3.53 for each UTA they attended while receiving VA benefits and each annual training day they attended during the year. They would have to reimburse the Guard/Reserve \$222.39. That's \$84.72 more than they would have paid had they chosen to forfeit the VA benefit.

To determine the amount to be recouped for persons rated more than 10%, divide the amount of the monthly VA compensation by the number of days in the month, or use an average of 30. The following is a quick reference for those rated higher than 10% disabled. Rates are for 2004.

Rating Amount VA would recoup per training day

20%	\$6.83
30%	\$10.53
40%	\$15.13
50%	\$21.53

Note: *Guardsmen/Reservists who are rated any higher probably would not be able to continue to drill.*

Reason Number 2: The reservist chooses after the fact whether they wish to forfeit the Guard/Reserve pay or the VA pay. He or she will receive their drill pay and

their VA pay for the entire training year, which runs from October 1st to September 30th. At the end of the training year the reservist chooses which pay to forfeit (reimburse). If he or she chooses to forfeit the Guard/Reserve pay he/she will have to reimburse the state an amount equivalent to the daily rate shown above for each of the UTAs they were paid for while receiving VA benefits, *not the number of physical days*. Although they drill for only 2 days, Saturday and Sunday, they are paid for 4 days. If they forfeit their drill pay for those two days they drilled (4 UTAs) they will be forfeiting almost double the money they would forfeit if they chose to forfeit the VA pay.

Reason No. 3: If VA benefits are waived to receive training pay, at the end of the training year, after the reservist reports on VA Form 21-8951 the number of UTAs and annual training days he or she attended during the training year, VA will simply adjust the VA award to withhold future benefits until an amount equal to the amount owed is withheld. No overpayment will be created in the VA account and the normal VA rate will be restored when the reported number of days benefits has been withheld.

I strongly encourage County Service Officers and others who work with returning Guardsmen and Reservists to recommend they forfeit this small amount of VA compensation rather than their drill pay.

Source: Tom Applegate, Huntington County Veterans' Service Officer

Montgomery GI Bill Update

Montgomery GI Bill benefits have increased. Starting 1 October 2004, full-time students with GI Bill benefits can receive \$1004 per month to cover the cost of their education. This increase could allow for as much as \$36,000 in educational costs.

The GI Bill provides up to 36 months of education benefits for college, business, technical or vocational courses; distance learning including correspondence courses; certification tests; apprenticeship/job training; and flight training.

Increased benefits for Reservists also commence 1 October 2004.

Montgomery GI Bill (Chapter 30) rates are as follows:

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Montgomery GI Bill (continued from page 2)

Full time is \$1004 per month.

3/4 time is \$743.00

1/2 time is \$502.00

Less than 1/2 time but more than 1/4 time is \$502.00**

1/4 time or less is \$251.00**

** Tuition and Fees ONLY. Payment cannot exceed the listed amount.

Apprenticeship and On-The-Job Training

First six months of training: \$753.00

Second six months of training: \$552.20

Remaining pursuit of training: \$351.40

Correspondence and Flight

Entitlement charged at the rate of one month for each \$1004.00 paid.

Selected Reserves - Chapter 1606

INSTITUTIONAL

Full time: \$288.00

3/4 time: \$216.00

1/2 time: \$143.00

Less than 1/2 time: \$71.75

COOPERATIVE

\$288.00 (Full Time Only)

CORRESPONDENCE

Paid at 55% of the approved charges for the course. Entitlement charged at the rate of one month for each \$288.00 paid.

APPRENTICESHIP/ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

First 6 Months: \$216.00

Second 6 Months: \$158.40

Remainder of Program: \$100.80

Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance Program (Chapter 35)

INSTITUTIONAL

Full time: \$803

3/4 time: \$603

1/2 time: \$401

Less than 1/4 time: Tuition cost. Not to exceed the rate of \$401 for less than half time but more than 1/4 time and \$200.75 for 1/4 time.

FARM COOPERATIVE

Full time: \$648

3/4 time: \$486

1/2 time: \$325

CORRESPONDENCE

Entitlement charged at rate of one month for each \$803 paid.

APPRENTICESHIP/ON-THE JOB TRAINING

First 6 months: \$585

Second 6 months: \$438

Third 6 months: \$291

Remainder of Program: \$147

There are a number of bills before Congress addressing Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) enhancements. Further information is available at <http://www.gibill.va.gov>

[Source: FRA News-Bytes 24 SEP 04]

VA Announces Policy on Laser Eye Surgery

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a new policy providing a single, uniform standard of care throughout the Department for performing laser eye surgery procedures. The policy is intended to provide an additional level of safety for patients who seek eye care from the VA. It requires that all therapeutic laser eye surgeries at VA facilities will be performed under the supervision of an ophthalmologist in a manner consistent with Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO) standards.

Only optometrists who are fully trained and appropriately licensed will be granted clinical privileges by the department to perform therapeutic laser eye surgery under the supervision of an ophthalmologist. Presently, Oklahoma is the only state that licenses optometrists to perform laser surgery.

VA will continue to evaluate and consider state and national standards of practice as it sets its own standard of care. VA currently operates 158 hospitals, 132 nursing homes, 42 residential rehabilitation treatment programs, and 854 outpatient clinics. The new policy will take effect immediately at all facilities with the

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VA Laser Eye Surgery (continued from page 3)

capability to perform laser eye surgeries.

[Source: VA News Release 2 AUG 04]

Update of National Guard and Reserves Units Mobilized - 117 Units are from Indiana

Nearly 415,000 Guard and Reservists have been activated since 9/11. Figures are released weekly by DoD of the total number of the National Guard and Reserve forces mobilized.

As of 22 September 2004 the total number currently on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 140,174; Naval Reserve, 3,962; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, 11,130; Marine Corps Reserve, 11,559; and the Coast Guard Reserve, 1,515.

This brings the total National Guard and Reserve personnel who have been mobilized to 168,340 including both units and individual augmentees.

We checked on 29 September 2004 and found that the Army Guard and Reserves currently have 102 units from Indiana mobilized, for a total of 4,311 personnel. That list consists of 65 Army National Guard units and 37 Army Reserve units. The Air Force has 2 National Guard units mobilized and 1 Air Force Reserve unit for a total of 382 personnel. The Marine Corps Reserves has 5 units mobilized; 3 from Indianapolis, 1 from Terre Haute and 1 from South Bend. The number of reserve Marines deployed is not listed. The Navy has 7 Naval Reserve units mobilized for a total of 63 personnel.

Anyone interested in knowing which units are mobilized can access the web site at www.defenselink.mil/news for the latest list, or contact Tom Applegate at (260) 358-4863 or e-mail tom.applegate@huntington.in.us.

To obtain DoD news releases or to be added to their e-mailing list, go to www.defenselink.mil/news/dodnews.html#e-mail

[Source: DoD News SEP 04]

DFAS myPay System Change

The Defense Finance and Accounting Service has informed retired military users of the myPay system that if they want to receive printed paper documents in the future, they will have to notify DFAS.

Retired members can either call the customer contact center at (800) 321-1080 between 0900 & 1930 EST anytime during the year or log on to myPay by 31 Oct 04 at <https://mypay.dfas.mil> to select the hardcopy option associated with each document they prefer to have mailed.

According to DFAS, the myPay service provides convenience, privacy, security, and the capability to view and print individual personal retirement account information 24 hours a day. In addition, myPay provides on-line availability of Tax Form 1099R and the annual retiree account statement. In the future DFAS will not print and mail these documents routinely.

[Source: Armed Forces News 24 SEP 04]

Indiana Military/Veterans Retiree Day

This year's Indiana Military/Veterans Retirement Day events will take place on Saturday, November 13th at the World War Memorial, 431 North Meridian, Indianapolis, Indiana.

All Military retirees are invited, with a special invitation to widows and dependents of deployed Guard and Reserve forces. Briefings and seminars will last from 9:00 AM until 3:30 PM.

[Source: American Legion Service and Legislative Update, September 30, 2004]



Air Force Pharmacy Update

Citing rising costs and tight budgets, the Air Force is pulling some popular costly drugs from their 74 pharmacies. This move will impact on patients and other services' pharmacies as retirees and dependents shift to alternate sources to obtain what they need. There are approximately 150 high-use medications on the DoD/VA contract list. Some of the initial changes in available medications from the list are:

- The allergy medicine Allergera will be replaced by the generic form of Claritan.
- Zyrtec cannot be added to a pharmacy's routine stock unless it already exists in their routine inventory.
- Vioxx and Mobic will replace the anti-inflammatory drugs Celebrex and Bextra.
- Diabetics will be switched from the insulin Humalog to Novolog as long as it can be done safely.

Army and Navy pharmacies carry the same drugs the Air Force is replacing and for the moment have not indicated any plans to change.

The Military Coalition made of about 30 military and veteran advocacy groups oppose the change in Air Force policy. It shifts the costs to DoD's other services with pharmacies near Air Force bases or to patients who must buy the drugs locally or through cost share programs if they do not want to change their medications. Also, the Air Force policy change inappropriately makes budget considerations instead of patient care the primary driver of formulary limits.

Rising cost has been a concern for military officials in recent years, and throughout the entire health-care industry. Last fiscal year the Pentagon spent \$3.8 Billion on its pharmacy benefit. This fiscal year costs are projected to be \$4.8 billion.

[Source: Navy Times Deborah Funk article 16 AUG 04]



VA Diabetes Mellitus Care

Diabetic patients treated by the Department of Veterans Affairs received better care than diabetics under managed health care plans, according to a study published 17 August 04 by Annals of Internal Medicine.

Researchers found that diabetics treated by the VA had gained better control over their cholesterol and gotten more frequent blood tests and eye and foot exams than diabetics treated by the managed care groups. The study compared 6,900 diabetics in eight managed care health plans with some 1,300 diabetics in five VA medical centers in California, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Conclusions published by AIM: "Diabetes processes of care and two of three intermediate outcomes were better for patients in the VA system than for patients in commercial managed care. However, both VA and commercial managed care had room for improvement, especially for blood pressure control."

[Source: Armed Forces News Issue 20 AUG 04]

U.S. Coast Guard WWII Veterans Outreach Campaign

The U.S. Coast Guard announced an initiative to identify and collect the oral histories of its World War II veterans.

Coast Guard World War II veterans--including SPARs and Merchant Marine--are encouraged to record their histories online with the Library of Congress Veterans History Project at www.loc.gov/folklife/vets.

Those veterans needing assistance in recording their stories can receive help from their local Coast Guard Auxiliary public affairs contact.

More information on the Coast Guard's role in World War II can be found at the Coast Guard Historian's website www.uscg.mil/hq/g-cp/history/collect.html

To find the latest news and special features concerning the Coast Guard, visit the Coast Guard Commu-

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USCG Veterans Outreach Campaign

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nity Center website www.military.com/Community/Home/1,14700,COASTG,00.html.

[Source: *Military Report 3 AUG 04*]

Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) For Dependents of Reservists

Reservists with 20 years of satisfactory service are eligible for retired pay at age 60. If they die before turning age 60 that entitlement to retired pay ends. If this happens there is a way for designated persons to receive a portion of the veterans retirement pay in the form of a monthly annuity through the Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan (RCSBP).

When reservists receive their 20-year letter they have available to them three options:

1. No election until age 60 with spousal consent: Service members can decline coverage until they reach age 60, but they will not have coverage between retirement eligibility and age 60. Coverage after age 60 will remain subject to the retiree's election upon reaching that age.

2. Deferred annuity with spousal consent: If the member dies before reaching age 60, the survivor annuity will begin when a service member would have turned 60. If the member lives to age 60, the annuity starts the day after his or her death.

3. Immediate annuity: The survivor annuity begins the day after the service members death, regardless of his or her age.

The annuity is 55% of the base pay amount before the annuitant's age 62 and might be reduced to as low as 35% after that age if the annuitant is eligible for social security payments on the member's account. The maximum base amount is the service member's gross monthly retired pay, but it could be less. The service member can select the base amount, as long as she or he receives at least \$300 a month in retired pay. Retirees can voluntarily discontinue the RCSBP during a one year period beginning on the second anniversary of the date they became eligible to receive retired pay. A

recall to active duty following retirement does not change this date.

Once participation is discontinued there will be no refund of premiums, no benefits will be paid in conjunction with previous participation, and a member may not resume participation for any beneficiary.

Members can elect beneficiaries as follows:

- **SPOUSE:** An annuity is paid to the eligible spouse for life, unless the spouse remarries before his or her age 55.

- **SPOUSE & CHILDREN:** The spouse is the primary beneficiary, and the children are contingent beneficiaries.

- **CHILDREN ONLY:** Children receive an annuity until age 18, or 22 if they are enrolled in school full time.

- **INCAPACITATED CHILDREN:** Receive an annuity as long as they remain unmarried and disabled.

- **FORMER SPOUSE:** Annuity is paid to the elected former spouse.

- **FORMER SPOUSE & CHILDREN :** The former spouse is primary beneficiary and the children are contingent beneficiaries.

- **INSURABLE INTEREST PERSON:** Annuity is paid for life of the beneficiary. This can only be a person who depends on your income for support such as a parent, dependent or non-dependent child, relative, or associate.

[Source: *TROA Magazine AUG 04*]

VA Survivors Benefits Available

The VA has a variety of programs to assist the survivors of military personnel who die on active duty. Regardless of whether the in-service death is due to combat, accident or disease, the following eligibility criteria, services, and benefits apply:

- **Reservists and National Guard:** When a member of the Reserves or National Guard dies while federally activated or on inactive duty for training, the death is considered service-connected for VA death benefits.

Activation of a National Guard unit by a governor alone in support of current security operations does not qualify unit members for these VA benefits, except life insurance.

- **Casualty Assistance Program:** This VA pro

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VA Survivor Benefits (continued from page 6)

gram gives personal attention to surviving family members after in-service deaths, and to help them with benefit information and applications. A casualty assistance officer is designated at each of VA's 57 regional offices. These VA officers work closely with military casualty officers to ensure timely assistance is available to beneficiaries.

- **Monthly Payments for Spouse & Children:**

When a service member dies while on active duty, the death is considered service-connected unless it was due to willful misconduct. VA pays at least \$967 a month in Dependency and Indemnity Compensation to surviving spouses. In most cases, survivors' claims are processed within 48 hours. In some cases VA can pay more than \$967 a month, such as a \$241 benefit for each dependent child who is unmarried and under age 18 or up to age 23 if studying at a VA-approved school. Payments are increased if the surviving spouse is housebound or needs a home aide. The basic rate for survivors is adjusted annually and payments continue generally until the death or remarriage of the spouse before age 57. Remarriage after age 57 does not affect benefits. Additional information about benefits for family members, to include low-income parents of the veteran, is available at www.vba.va.gov/bln/dependents.

- **Life Insurance:** Most service members and reservists take VA's life insurance coverage, Service members' Group Life Insurance, though a few decline coverage. Most choose coverage at the highest levels and their designated beneficiary receives a payment of \$250,000. VA has paid every claim related to Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom within 48 hours of receiving the necessary paperwork. VA also offers beneficiaries free, personalized financial planning through a financial services company.

More information is available at www.insurance.va.gov.

- **Educational Assistance:** When an active-duty service member dies, VA's Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program generally provides up to 45 months of education benefits to the un-remarried surviving spouse for 10 years, or for children aged 18 to 26. Currently the rate is \$803 a month for full-time attendance, with lesser amounts for part-time education. This benefit may be used to pursue secondary school programs; associate, bachelor or graduate de-

grees; technical or vocational training; apprenticeships; and other types of training, including work-study programs. More information is available at www.gibill.va.gov/education/C35pam.htm.

- **Refund of Service Member's Unused GI Bill Contribution:** If the deceased service member had contributed to the Montgomery GI Bill education program, the designated life insurance beneficiary or surviving spouse is entitled to a refund of the money that was collected through payroll deduction but was not awarded in education benefits during the service member's lifetime. Most active-duty military members participate in this educational benefit program, which deducts \$1,200 from their pay at \$100 monthly during their first year of service.

- **Home Loans:** Surviving spouses of military members may be eligible for a VA-guaranteed home loan from a private lender. The loan may be used to purchase, construct or improve a home, to refinance an existing mortgage or for certain other purposes. As with the program for veterans, VA guarantees part of the total loan, permitting the purchaser to obtain a mortgage with a competitive interest rate. Except for manufactured homes and other select cases, the surviving spouse may obtain a no-down payment loan if the lender agrees.

- Refer to DoD's Tricare program for survivor's health benefits at www.tricare.osd.mil.

More information about how VA services apply in individual cases is available from veterans services representatives at (800) 827-1000. People wishing to receive e-mail from VA with the latest news releases and updated fact sheets can subscribe on the internet at: www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/opalist_listserv.cfm

[Source: VANEWS-L 17 Aug 04]



Administration Expands Benefits for Ex-POWs



VA Secretary
Anthony Principi

WASHINGTON (Oct. 2, 2004) - Continuing its commitment to former prisoners of war, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi today announced that the Bush Administration will expand benefits to all former POWs with strokes and common heart diseases.

"This is an issue that has been studied and debated too long," Principi said. "We have scientific studies supporting the association of these illnesses to the military service of our former POWs."

The secretary, who oversees the operations of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), announced the new benefits in a speech tonight at a national convention of the American Ex-Prisoners of War.

The Administration's decision benefits former POWs with strokes and most heart diseases. Those veterans will be automatically eligible for disability compensation for those common ailments, and their spouses and dependents will be eligible for service-connected survivors' benefits if these diseases contribute to the death of a former POW.

In September 2003, Principi launched a nationwide outreach effort to identify and provide benefits to the estimated 11,000 former POWs who were not receiving VA disability compensation or other services. There are about 35,000 living ex-POWs.

The secretary also has urged Congress to change federal law that required that former POWs must be detained for at least 30 days to qualify for the full range of POW benefits.

The Administration's new decision will add to the list of 16 medical problems that VA presumes to be linked to the military service of former POWs. The new rules are likely to take effect on October 7, 2004.

[Source: Butch Miller, Veterans Liaison Office, VA News Release, Oct. 4, 2004]



New Web Site Offers Extensive Information on Terrorist Incidents, Groups

By John Valceanu
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 22, 2004 -- A nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing terrorism on U.S. soil has launched a Web site that provides extensive information on global terrorist incidents and organizations.

The National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism, known as MIPT, is funded by the Department of Homeland Security. The institute created the Terrorism Knowledge Base over the past four years. It was made available to the world in early September, said James Ellis III, MIPT research and program coordinator.

The Terrorism Knowledge Base provides a variety of terrorism-related resources, including original data gathered over a 35-year period, encompassing information on more than 18,000 separate terrorist incidents. In addition to searchable data, such as fact sheets on terrorist organizations and court records of terrorism trials, the site also offers interactive analytical tools capable of developing individualized reports and analyses on various aspects of terrorism.

Because the site provides not only a very broad overview of terrorism but also considerable depth on specific subjects, it is useful to a wide variety of users. These may range from researchers and policymakers to emergency responders or simply interested members of the general public. Defense Department personnel are an important segment of the audience.

"This is a global system, capable of global reach, and for that reason it should be useful to military people or defense officials," said Ellis. "The defense community can certainly be considered a core audience."

Since information available on the site is not classified and freely available to the public, it has been useful to some military and other government personnel operating in overseas locations without access to secure networks.

Visit the site at: <http://www.tkb.org/Home.jsp>