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Warrior News

<http://www.usarc.army.mil/95thdiv/2bde/3-378th/newsletter.html>



3rd/378th

Upcoming Drill Dates

April

- 17 -0700 First Formation
Uniform: PT am / BDU pm
Lunch: Postal Facility
- 18 -Uniform: BDU
Lunch: Golden Corral

May 14-16

June 12

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2ND Brigade, 95TH Division
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Battle Lines Forming Over SBP Reform, TRICARE for Reserves

With open enthusiasm and some private hand-wringing, Congress began debating this month two initiatives that military associations and key lawmakers identified as quality-of-life priorities for the 2005 budget: Survivor Benefit Plan reform and the opening of TRICARE to drilling reservists.

Advocates for widows and reservists gained some traction in early March despite rising worries over budget deficits and fresh warnings from Defense officials that boosting entitlements won't improve readiness. The Senate March 10 amended its 2005 budget resolution to allow room for legislation that would open TRICARE, the military's triple healthcare option, to drilling reservists, National Guard members and families. They would pay a modest premium, perhaps \$500 a year for individual coverage and \$1800 for families, on top of TRICARE usual fees and co-payments. The amendment by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) and Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle (S.D.) directs Senate appropriators to cover the \$5.6 billion cost, over five years, using unspent funds earmarked for reconstruction projects in Iraq. The amendment also supports a 50 percent rise in Montgomery GI Bill education benefits for reservists. On SBP reform, Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) said she expected the Republican-led Senate to reject her amendment, seeking \$498 million over five years to fund her bill, S 1916. It would phase out over 10 years the sharp drop in monthly SBP that occurs when surviving spouses turn 62 and become eligible for Social Security. Payments typically drop

from 55 percent of the covered annuity down to as low as 35 percent. "I don't think it's going to pass but I'm going to offer it anyway," Landrieu said. "Because I would like my colleagues on the other side to be on the record in saying...[w]e can afford \$2.6 trillion in tax cuts but we can't afford \$2 billion (over 10 years) to help out military families." SBP reform and Reserve TRICARE were issues in the House too as the budget committee weighed amendments to its spending ceilings. Rep. Jim Nussle (R-Iowa), committee chairman, promised to impose more fiscal discipline this year. But if the chairman's markup of the budget resolution fails to include SBP reform, Rep. Chet Edwards (D-Texas) promised an amendment to fund HR 3763, a bill identical to Landrieu's but introduced by Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Fla.). With 12 of 21 Republicans on the House Budget Committee having co-sponsored Miller's bill, Edwards hoped to force colleagues to choose between helping military survivors and adhering to the will of Republican leaders. A Democratic staffer said his party learned much in last year's showdown over concurrent receipt, also known as the Veterans Disability Tax. Democrats' threatened then to use a discharge petition to force a vote on legislation that the White House opposed but many Republicans had co-sponsored. That pressure encouraged Republicans into a compromise that boosted the incomes of a few hundred thousand disabled retirees. "We discovered that if there is enough Democrat pressure on these things Republicans will cave," bragged a Democratic aide. "And if they don't cave, then the veterans beat them up." The Miller/Landrieu bills, crafted with help from a service association, has made SBP reform look more

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Reserves Civilian Employment Information Program Announced

Implementation of a mandatory Reserve component Civilian Employer Information database began last week, culminating a yearlong effort to establish a Department of Defense-wide system to capture and understand who employs the 1.2 million members of the seven Reserve components. Army Reserve soldiers will enter their employer data at <https://www.hrc.army.mil>.

Guard and Reserve members are required to register information about their civilian employer and job skills, in order for the department to meet three different requirements defined in law. The Department of Defense is required to: give consideration to civilian employment necessary to maintain national health, safety and interest when considering members for recall; ensure that members with critical civilian skills are not retained in numbers beyond those needed for those skills, and; inform employers of reservists' of their rights and responsibilities under the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act.

The goal is to populate and maintain an employer database with 95 percent accuracy of the Selected Reserve and 75 percent accuracy of the Individual Ready Reserve.

For further information, contact Lt. Col. Bob S. Stone, bob.stone@osd.mil, (703) 693-8617.

Awarding Veterans Easier

Army veterans and their families can have an easier time tracking and receiving medals and decorations thanks to an automated system used by the Clothing and Heraldry Product Support Integration Directorate (PSID). The Web-based system eliminates extensive paperwork, reduces processing time and has capabilities such as allowing each veteran the opportunity to find out the status of his or her request or make

address changes online. These types of inquiries that used to be handled telephonically or by letter can be entered online at <http://veteranmedals.army.mil>. Award criteria and background for the different service medals can also be found on the Website. Requests for medals are initiated through the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis. Eligible veterans or the next-of-kin of a deceased veteran can request medals from NPRC at <http://vetrecs.archives.gov/>.

Birthdays - April

Happy Birthday to the members of the 378th and their families.

- Kenneth Catlett III – April 25
- Abigail Ellis – April 15
- Christopher Cornell – April 16
- SGT Jack Cornell – April 8
- Michael May – April 25
- Taylor Schall – April 1
- Timmy Williams – April 5
- Amber Smith – April 2
- Garret England – April 22

Quotable Quotes

"When people forget themselves, they usually do things others remember."
-- R.W

Battle Lines Forming Over SBP Reform, TRICARE for Reserves

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affordable. It would lower short-term costs by offering enrollment to current retirees who would pay higher premiums. Also it would lengthen to 10 years phase out of the benefit drop at age 62. Last year's bill proposed a five-year phase out.

The House Armed Services Committee got behind 10-year reform plan in late February, asking the budget committee to set aside funds. New estimates from the Congressional Budget Office put the cost at \$498 million over five years, small enough that proponents hope even Nussle might support it, rather than expose committee Republicans to charges of hypocrisy when actually forced to vote on the bill.

Some Republican committee staffers, however, see the Miller bill as a ruse. They view the real cost as \$800 million a year, rising to more than \$1 billion, once the 10-year phase in of higher benefits is complete. That's why some staffers are "wringing their hands," said a Republican colleague. "They're scared the committee is actually going to do something on SBP" even with their chairman, Nussle, under pressure to restrain entitlements.

Some of that pressure comes from senior Defense officials. Dr. David Chu, under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness, told the Senate Armed Services Committee March 2 that opening TRICARE to reservists and their families could cost \$1 billion a year "with little payoff in readiness."

The same would be true, he suggested, with initiatives to enhance SBP, or to lower the age at which reserve retirement benefits begin and or to remove the concurrent receipt ban on all retirees with disabilities. "More long-term entitlements are not the answer to our readiness issues," Chu said.

Steve Strobidge, co-chair of The Military Coalition, an umbrella group of service associations and veteran groups, said entitlement gains are overdue, and that critics like Dr. Chu are losing credibility.

Will advocates for widows and reserve forces win this entitlements debate? Election-year politics, the strain of war and genuine concern among lawmakers over deficits will all be factors. Only the outcome is in doubt.

Featured Website

<http://www.army.mil/tooursoldiers/>
We are providing this service as an opportunity to send a message of support to Soldiers who are serving in the War on Terrorism. It is not designed to be a letter writing service, instant-messaging service, e-mail service, bulletin board or general chat service. These messages are viewed individually and edited or deleted based on content. Profanity and violations of operational security, privacy, and propriety will not be posted. Soldiers around the world appreciate your thoughts and feelings of support.

News From the Front-Lines

Some news from our deployed soldiers and their families.

I apologize about not responding often. Everyone seems to be in high spirits and doing everything we can to keep us busy/entertained. We PMCS our vehicles (mostly 5 tons but I have to PMCS a see truck too). Sometimes we have to set up bunkers and barriers with the equipment operators and sometimes we carry dirt around. PFC Gilles is getting promoted to SPC on Monday (12 APR). I am unsure of when I am getting my SPC but I have been told the paperwork has been started. We get Sundays off and that is normally the time we get to use the computers. The weather is not bad yet, its only mid 90's right now. The new chow hall opened two days ago and is really good. I will try better to keep in touch. What is happening in our unit?

PFC Taylor

I thought you may not have heard that they have arrived safely to their camp at Victory North close to Baghdad Airport. Our son, SPC Dickey (Tom) has been assigned to the heavy rescue platoon. This is a first for an engineering battalion. We have not heard from Tom yet but the family support in Pennsylvania keeps us informed. He said the soldiers morale is extremely high and they are very pleased with the living conditions at Camp Victory. They were attached to the 1st Cavalry Division while in Wisconsin!

Renee Dickey

Korea Vets Recognized with Medal

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas -- A new defense medal will be issued to Servicemembers who served in South Korea, or adjacent waters, after July 28, 1954. This includes those serving there today, and those serving up to a not-yet-determined future date.

The Korea Defense Service Medal will be awarded to those assigned, attached or mobilized to units

operating or serving on all the land area of South Korea, and the continuous waters to 12 nautical miles from shore and all airspace above those areas. Recipients may include active duty, Reserve, Guard, veterans and retirees. This medal is not to be confused with the Republic of Korea War Service Medal.

Individuals will only be awarded one KDSM regardless of amount of time spent in Korea, said Air Force Personnel Center officials here. The medal does not have any associated promotion points under the Weighted Airman Promotion System. It is directly above the Armed Forces Service Medal in precedence.

Procedures for receiving the KDSM varies.

The medal will be issued to Air Force active-duty, Reserve and Guard people by their servicing military personnel flights beginning in the fall. Questions should be addressed to the contact center at DSN 665-5000 or (800) 616-3775.

Veterans, retirees or their next of kin may claim entitlement by writing to: National Personnel Records Center, 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63132-5100. Requests should include documents clearly proving service and dates in Korea such as orders, performance reports, DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, flight records, a decoration citation or other official documents. Veterans and retirees should address questions to the NPRC customer-service center at (314) 801-0800.

Air Force Reserve and Guard veterans, retirees and next of kin may submit their request with supporting documentation to: Headquarters Air Reserve Personnel Center, 6760 Irvington Place 4000, Denver, CO 80280-4000. Reserve and Guard veterans and retirees younger than 60 should address questions to ARPC headquarters at (303) 679-6134.

Reserve and Guard veterans and retirees older than 60 and next-of-kin of deceased Reserve and Guard veterans and retirees must send requests to the NPRC with supporting

documentation. Questions should be addressed to the NPRC customer-service center at (314) 801-0800.

Officials Announce Program for Retiree Employment

WASHINGTON (AFPN) -- Defense Department officials implemented a new policy March 22 allowing defense managers to hire civil-service retirees needed in critical positions without offsetting their retirement pay, which was required under a previous law.

A similar provision was previously implemented for military retirees. Until enactment of this stand-alone provision, authorized by the 2004 National Defense Authorization Act, DOD civil-service retirees had their pay reduced by the amount of their pension. This benefit applies only to people hired on or after Nov. 24.

"This tool will help us address the challenges of a 'retirement-driven talent drain' as our current generation of dedicated civil servants becomes eligible to retire," said David S. Chu, the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

The policy has a number of restrictions and requirements. A retiree can only be hired into hard-to-fill positions where the retiree has unique or specialized skills or qualifications. A retiree cannot be re-employed in his or her previous job position unless someone above the hiring official approves it and certifies the critical conditions.

In addition, a retiree may be hired for up to one year as a mentor to less experienced employees or to provide continuity during critical organizational transitions. Before any retiree can be hired, the position must be offered to qualified defense workers who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own.

For executive-level positions, only the secretaries of the military departments or heads of defense agencies and field activities may appoint annuitants to such positions.

Army To Reduce Reservists Medical Holds

By Lisa Burgess, Stars and Stripes, European Edition
March 12, 2004

ARLINGTON, Va. — Army officials are promising reserve component soldiers found medically unfit to serve that they will not languish waiting for a discharge.

According to a policy issued March 3, Reserve or National Guard soldiers who are being medically discharged or retired will now be released from active duty no more than 30 days after the Army makes its final ruling, instead of a three-month maximum previously in effect.

The Army's official goal is to release such soldiers "within five working days" once the service's Physical Disability Agency issues its final determination that the soldier is "unfit" for service, the policy says.

The 30-day window is a "worst-case" scenario, specified, "only to allow installations flexibility to handle special cases," according to the policy.

The full month might be needed, for example, if a soldier's condition takes a sudden turn for the worse while he or she is waiting for discharge paperwork and must be re-evaluated by the medical board, said Col. Fred Schumacher, executive officer and reserve component advisor on the Army Physical Disability Agency.

The new policy "is a recognition that we need to get [reserve soldiers] back to job and family as fast as we can, after appropriate medical treatment and processing," Schumacher said.

Previously, Army rules allowed officials to take up to 90 days to wrap up out-processing for any soldier found medically unfit for service after he or she went through the Army's physical disability evaluation system.

Active-duty soldiers use the extended out-processing to "essentially begin a career shift," seeking employment

outside the Army, as well as finding new housing for their families, Schumacher said.

The 90-day out-processing maximum remains the standard for active-duty soldiers.

But reserve component soldiers who have been "medically boarded" are in a very different position, because they have civilian lives, Schumacher said.

The medical board process already takes "several months" beyond a soldier's actual medical treatment in Army hospitals.

So once the board has issued its final ruling, "it's pointless to have them just sitting around," Schumacher said. "The soldier needs to get on with his life."

Delays in out-processing can place a special strain on reservists because their jobs and families are often located far from the active-duty mobilization station or an Army medical facility where soldier is required to stay until officially discharged.

But the hardships posed by the 90-day out-processing window didn't reach the attention of Army officials until large numbers of Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers began getting called up for Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

The "medical hold" issue came to a head last spring with news stories about hundreds of reservists stuck for months at Fort Stewart, Ga., waiting for their conditions to be evaluated, treated by service doctors, and assessed by the Army medical board.

Savings Deposit Program Assists Deployed Service Members

ARLINGTON, Va. -- Deployed uniformed service members have the chance to earn a guaranteed 10 percent interest on their savings annually.

Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), in accordance with the Department of Defense, implemented the Savings Deposit Program in August 1990 for members who were serving in the Persian Gulf Conflict. The Act progressively changed to include troops assigned to areas of operation outside the United States on ships or mobile units. This program includes Operation Iraqi Freedom service members assigned to a combat zone or in direct support of a combat zone.

"A service member can contribute up to \$10,000, but interest of 10 percent will not accrue after that amount," said Roger Castillo, program director for the Savings Deposit Program. "A member can participate in the program if the member is serving outside the United States or its possessions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, and has served at least 30 consecutive days in an area that has been designated as a combat zone or in direct support of a combat zone. Also, members serving on permanent duty assignment outside the United States or its possessions in support of contingency operations and serving on active duty in the designated area for more than 30 days."

To make a deposit into the fund, troops are asked to contact their financial office. Withdrawing the money before leaving the combat zone is not authorized, unless there is an emergency. The last day to make a deposit into the fund is the date of departure from the assignment. However, interest will accrue for up to 90 days after return from deployment.

"This is a great opportunity for service members to accrue at a higher interest rate than at an average interest rate of 2 or 3 percent," said Patrick T. Shine, acting director of DFAS. "We are always taking the extra step to assist our troops and their families in any way possible, especially while members are deployed."

DFAS will post the savings deposit balance of active-component members to their Leave and Earnings Statement.

Warrant Officers to Sport Branch Insignia

By Sgt. 1st Class Marcia Triggs

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, April 12, 2004) – Beginning this summer, the warrant officer component is taking another step toward better integrating itself into the Army's officer corps.

As of July 9 all warrant officers will replace the "Eagle Rising" insignia on their left collar with their appropriate branch insignia. The insignia will have to be purchased, it will not be issued.

Regular commissioned officers have always worn their branch insignia on their left collar, and this uniform change is a step toward the full integration into the branch-based systems of the larger officer corps, personnel official said.

"Warrant officers traditionally have not been treated as part of the officer corps. We've kind of been in this strange gray area between the noncommissioned officer and the regularly commissioned branch officer," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Albert Eggerton, the warrant officer personnel policy integrator for the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, G1.

"When Congress and our own leadership look at initiatives for the officer corps, they tend to overlook us because we're so small," said Chief Warrant Officer 5 Andrew Barr, who previously worked in G1 with Eggerton. "We make up less than 2 percent of the Army and less than 14 percent of the officer corps."

As the technical experts, the role of warrant officers will increase dramatically as technology drives the battlefield, said Barr, who is currently at the U.S. Army Signal Center at Fort Gordon, Ga.

Retiring the "Eagle Rising" insignia resulted from the Army Training and Leadership Panel – Warrant Officer Study. The study was the third phase in a four-phase Army-wide self-assessment directed by retired Gen. Eric Shinsek, the former chief of staff.

Forty-five initiatives came out of the study to include changing the chief warrant officer 5 rank to a silver colored bar with a black line in the center of the bar. The rank is currently worn by senior warrant officers in the Navy and Marine Corps, and was first approved in 1973.

The current rank, a silver bar with four open face squares, was always meant to be a transitional rank, Eggerton said.

"In the future we see an increasing role in joint operations, and it would make it easier in the joint world to identify us correctly by wearing the same insignia that our sister services are wearing," Eggerton said.

The change in uniform is not the first step the warrant officer component has taken in its journey to be more recognized in the officer corps, Eggerton said.

A recommendation has been approved for a pay table reform for warrant officers. The proposed pay raise is to counter the targeted raises that NCOs received in 1999-2001, Eggerton said. It is now less attractive for NCOs to become warrant officers because there is a much smaller pay differential, he said.

Currently the monthly base pay for a staff sergeant with eight years in the military is \$2,516. The monthly base pay for a warrant officer 1 with eight years is \$2,928.

Other changes Eggerton said are in the process of being reviewed for approval are combining the warrant officer education system with the officer education system, and getting warrant officers commissioned at warrant officer 1 rank instead of warrant officer 2.

When Congress approves initiatives that will affect lieutenants, warrant officers 1 aren't affected, Eggerton added. With the change, such laws would automatically include warrant officers, he added. However, Eggerton added, the change is tentative on congressional approval and if the Navy or Marine Corps have any objections.

Most of the changes that will be implemented from the ATLDP study will take a lot of time to implement, Eggerton said. The process of change, he said, will be ongoing throughout the next decade.

Officials Extend Stateside Space-A Travel Test

by Tech. Sgt. Mark Diamond
Air Mobility Command Public Affairs

More military members and their families can exclaim "I'm going to Disney World," thanks to the recent expansion of Shades of Green Armed Forces Recreation Center on Walt Disney World Resort. Affordability, a term often lost on visitors to Disney World, is the main attraction to Shades of Green. Room rates are based on rank and range from \$70 to \$225 per night for a standard room and \$82 to \$119 for a poolside room.

The hotel features a 500-seat ballroom, two new restaurants, two heated swimming pools, 586 rooms, two lighted tennis courts, hot tub, children's pool and play area, lounge and sports bar, banquet accommodations, gift shops, video arcade, laundry facilities, fitness center and automated teller machines.

Guests are provided transportation to all Walt Disney World attractions and early entry into select venues inside the Magic Kingdom. Epcot, Disney-MGM Studios and Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park are just minutes away.

Self-supporting and operated with non-appropriated funds, Shades of Green is reserved for active duty and retired members of the uniformed services, Reserves and National Guard, as well as active and retired Department of Defense civilians and their families.

For room reservations at Shades of Green, call 888-593-2242 or fax to 407-824-3665. The hotel's direct number is 407-824-3400 and fax is 407-824-3460. An online reservation system is coming soon.

