



The E-9ers

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**Army
Navy
Air Force
Marine Corps
Coast Guard**

March 2012

Volume 15 Number 3

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Fellow E-9ers:

I hope that you were all safe during the last snowfall. A friend of mine had a bad fall in the last snow, and he is still in an assisted-care home. He is progressing nicely, and hopes are high that he will be returning home soon. So please be careful.

We all have grand kids, and the following article caught my eye. I don't know who wrote it, but we can all gain from these written words. "Little Eyes Upon You" — "There's a wide eyed little child who believes you're always right. And their eyes are always open while watching day and night. You are setting an example every day, in all you do. For this little person is waiting to grow up and be just like you."

No tears now; hope you all have a good month, and hope to see you at the next meeting.

Your Prez,
Bill

FREE TAX RETURN PREPARATION

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, a partnership between the Internal Revenue Service and the military, provides at military bases across the country free, individual income tax preparation for all military personnel and dependents eligible for legal assistance. The program's services are offered to active duty, reservists, retirees, and their dependents for both federal and state income taxes. Servicemembers filing taxes through VITA should bring their tax information, social security cards, photo identification, W-2 wage and tax statements, bank account with routing numbers, power of attorney forms, and all other income information. For more information, visit the IRS website at <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=107626,00.html> or contact your base VITA office.

Military.com Article, Dated January 23, 2012

TRICARE HOME DELIVERY PHARMACY

The Tricare pharmacy home delivery program already fills over 1 million prescriptions a month, and a recent reduction on co-pays for generic prescriptions gives many beneficiaries an even greater incentive to receive their regular medications by mail. Tricare beneficiaries can now get generic prescriptions without a co-pay. Ideal candidates for the pharmacy home delivery program include those with several regular maintenance medications for conditions such as hypertension and diabetes who already fill their 90-day generic prescriptions at a local pharmacy. For more information, visit the Tricare website at <http://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE/>.

Military.com Article, Dated January 2, 2011

The E-9ers OFFICERS

The following officers of the E-9ers Association are interested in hearing from you and what suggestions that you may have to improve our group. If you have any thoughts that you would like to share, please give one or more of them a call. They would love to hear from you.

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The E-9ers Association Next Monthly Meeting

March 28, 2012

11:00 a.m.

at

Mr. Panda Restaurant
2852 S. Havana Street
Aurora, CO

DOD MULLS TRICARE CHANGES FOR FUTURE RETIREES

The Pentagon could require future working-age retirees to take employer-provided health care as a way to tackle the Defense Department's cost growth, one top official said January 30. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy said DOD won't try to change the system for current retirees or serving troops, but she said re-casting the benefits for future generations of retirees must be on the table if the department is to get control of its spending.

"No one is going to change the contract" of anyone currently serving or who served, Flournoy said, "but we've asked Congress for authority for a commission to look at this holistically to ask the question if we can have a better system." Flournoy told members of the Reserve Officers Association (ROA) in Washington that military compensation costs have far outstripped increases in personnel in recent years. DOD figures indicate the costs of military healthcare, which includes retirees, have exploded from about \$19 billion in 2001 to more than \$50 billion last year.

Many retirees or reservists in the civilian workforce who can get employer health care prefer to stay on Tricare, said Flournoy. They are entitled to it, she said, "but that means DOD is carrying a lot of the health care cost that would otherwise be borne by private-sector employers." "In principle you can make an argument for that, but the truth is, in reality, what happens is that's money that's not being spent on capabilities, on equipment, on training, on readiness, on those kinds of programs for our personnel," Flournoy said. "So we really have to look at this in a holistic way."

Flournoy also said DOD has to look at the compensation it gives to those servicemembers who do not serve until retirement. "The majority of the military don't stay on for 20 years," she said. "They stay for many, many years and walk away with nothing."

Michael O'Hanlon, a national security and defense policy specialist at the Brookings Institution, also told the ROA audience that the Pentagon has to take a new look at what it promises to its younger troops. There are ways to save money and also do better by these younger troops, he said, but called for doing it gradually so that it doesn't have a negative impact by cutting across the board or hurting those who have been counting on the benefits they've been working toward.

But O'Hanlon said he wondered about the priorities in Washington when the Pentagon and Congress were talking about scaling back benefits for future servicemembers and not getting control of costs for mandatory social welfare programs. "Though I'm in favor of re-thinking military pension, military health care, Tricare for Life, et cetera," he said. "I find it a little troubling ... that we're getting this whole locomotive of changing retirement benefits going full steam while we haven't yet found a way to talk about the broader Social Security reform, Medicare, and Medicaid reform for the nation at large."

Everyone needs to sacrifice, he said. "And it doesn't make sense to focus on those who have served when it's politically untouchable to focus on the other 90 percent who have not served," he said.

Military.com Article, Dated January 30, 2012

NEW DATA LEAK – VA RELEASES INFO ON 2,200 VETS

The Department of Veterans Affairs says personal information for more than 2,200 veterans, including Social Security numbers, was posted on Ancestry.com after it mistakenly released the data through the Freedom of Information Act.

The department said January 20 there is no indication the information was misused, but it is still notifying all potentially affected veterans and is offering free credit monitoring. The department also said that Ancestry.com removed the information as soon as the VA alerted it to the department's mistake.

While the VA was required to release the requested records under the Freedom of Information Act, somehow, information about living veterans was released as part of a database about deceased veterans. The department said it is investigating how the mistake happened.

Military Times Article, Dated January 20, 2012

TRICARE PHARMACY MERGER WORRIES LAWMAKERS

Seven lawmakers have written to the Pentagon expressing concern over a proposed merger between the company that manages Tricare's pharmacy benefit and another corporate pharmaceutical giant. The bipartisan group, led by Reps. Walter Jones, R-NC, and Joe Courtney, D-CO, said the transaction could lead to higher drug prices as well as a decline in benefits.

The lawmakers also have written to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) about the merger between Tricare's pharmacy benefit manager Express Scripts of St. Louis, MO, and Medco of Franklin Lakes, NJ. The FTC is investigating the deal because it would create a company with control of about 30 percent of all U.S. prescriptions — for about 135 million people — and 60 percent of the mail-order drug market. The two companies began talks last July.

"On its face, increased concentration suggests greater opportunity to leverage economies of scale and realize cost savings," the lawmakers wrote. "However, there is little evidence that increased pharmacy benefit management market concentration will significantly lower costs for consumers or the American taxpayer."

The merger is opposed by the National Community Pharmacists Association, which represents chain retail pharmacies and independent pharmacists, and Preserve Community Pharmacy Access NOW!, a coalition of 60 organizations and groups that believe the merger will hurt overall health care. "This merger would further reduce competition in the already concentrated pharmacy benefit management market and could lead to higher prescription drug costs, limited patient choice, and inferior service," NCPA Chief Executive Officer B. Douglas Hoey said.

An Express Scripts spokesman said he could not comment on details of the proposed merger or the FTC investigation, but he said it would not be in the company's interest to raise prices or let service slip. "Our mission is to make health care affordable. Everyone is well aware of the budget challenges, but we have a mission to be good stewards of the taxpayer dollar," Express Scripts spokesman Thom Gross said. Public Health Service Rear Adm. Thomas McGinnis, chief of Tricare's pharmaceutical operations director, said the contract process will help keep cost increases in check.

Express Scripts won the Tricare contract in 2008 and is in its third exercised option year of five. According to McGinnis, other companies are vying for Tricare's business, worth \$6.1 billion in fiscal 2009. "The only thing we worry about is adequate competition. I can count five big players out there right now that are probably going to bid on the contract we have put on the streets. I don't know how many will bid, but there are some big players even without the merger issue," McGinnis said.

Military Times Article, Dated February 9, 2012

AID AND ATTENDANCE RATE INCREASE

The United States Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs approved a rate increase in the Veterans Administration's (VA) Aid and Attendance Pension rate. The VA Aid and Attendance Pension provides benefits for veterans and surviving spouses who require the regular attendance of another person to assist in eating, bathing, dressing and undressing, or taking care of the needs of nature. It also encompasses individuals who are blind or in a nursing home due to mental or physical incapacity and offers eligibility for assisted care in an assisting living facility. For more information, visit VA's Veterans Pension Program webpage at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/pension/>.

Military.com Article, Dated February 6, 2012

VA CHANGES EMERGENCY CARE POLICY

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a change in regulations regarding payments for emergency care provided to eligible veterans in non-VA facilities. The new regulation extends VA's authority to pay for emergency care provided to eligible veterans at non-VA facilities until the veterans can be safely transferred to a VA medical facility. More than 100,000 veterans are estimated to be affected by the new rules. For more information about emergency care in non-VA facilities, visit the VA website at <http://www.nonvacare.gov/>.

Military.com Article, Dated January 23, 2012

AUDIT FINDS ISSUES AT VA CEMETERIES ACROSS THE US

The Veterans Affairs Department found burial problems at military cemeteries across the United States, the department's National Cemetery Administration said. The report said the departmental unit found numerous instances of misplaced headstones and at least eight cases of people buried in the wrong spots, the Washington Post reported January 23.

The review came after revelations of widespread burial problems at Arlington National Cemetery that led to congressional inquiries and a criminal investigation. While many of the problems found at Arlington were traced to an outdated paper record system, VA officials said problems at several of its cemeteries largely resulted from carelessness during renovations, such as headstones and markers temporarily removed then reset improperly.

In an interview with the Post, National Cemetery Administration Deputy Undersecretary for Field Operations Glenn Powers said the department is working to return all headstones to their proper places and trying locate affected families to offer apologies and explanations. Powers said problems were discovered at national cemeteries in Ohio, Maryland, New Jersey, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, and Texas and he is waiting for reports from two San Francisco-area cemeteries.

"We strive to operate the best cemetery system in the world, and if something like this happens, there is no excuse," Powers said. "The amount of times this happens is rare. But there is no margin of error; there shouldn't be any kind of error. We need to learn and make sure it doesn't happen again."

The audit, ordered in October, included only sections of cemeteries renovated during the past 10 years, the Post said. The VA checked 1.3 million grave sites in 85 of its 131 cemeteries, including Confederate sites. Once the initial survey is done, Powers said a more comprehensive review will be conducted.

Military.com Article, Dated January 24, 2012

LAWMAKERS WARY OF RETIREMENT COMMISSION PLAN

Lawmakers generally seem to agree that standing up an independent commission to study possible reforms to the military retirement system is a good idea, but they are less supportive of the fast-track approval process that the Defense Department (DOD) is seeking to try to force Congress to adopt the commission's recommendations. The DOD proposal calls for authority similar to what has been provided to past base closure and realignment commissions, so that Congress could only give an up-or-down vote on the commission's final recommendations, with no ability to make any changes.

Sen. Carl Levin, D-MI, the Senate Armed Services Committee chairman, supports the idea as long as the authority of the commission would be limited to retired pay, and not expanded to include any other parts of the military pay and benefits package. Levin and Sen. Jim Webb, D-VA, chairman of the armed services committee's personnel panel, co-sponsored an amendment last year to the 2012 defense budget that would have created such a commission, but the amendment was never taken up for consideration. "This is something we need to look at, and it would be good to get outside advice, but we have to be really careful about how much power we provide to a retirement reform commission," Levin said.

Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, ranking Republican on the personnel panel, said he also approved of having a commission study retired pay. "With the budget pressures we face, we have to look at everything," he said. "But we have to look at it very carefully." Levin and Graham said one unbending condition for congressional approval of a commission would be a guarantee that all current retirees and current service members be exempt from any retired pay reductions. Additionally, Graham said he would not support any plan that hurts recruiting.

On the House Armed Services Committee, aides said lawmakers are reluctant to approve the up-or-down voting process that could limit influence over the final plan. "Having a committee of smart people look at military retired pay and come up with ideas for improving it is fine, but the BRAC-like process is not fine," said an aide, who asked not to be identified.

Military Times Article, Dated January 26, 2012

WILL NAVY SKIP AIR FORCE FOOTBALL RIVALRY?

Winning the Big East Championship means more to Navy football coach Ken Niumatalolo than capturing the Commander-in-Chief's trophy the three service academy football teams battle for each year. Niumatalolo went on to say he'd rather play Notre Dame every year than the Air Force Academy if scheduling conflicts caused by the Big East forced the Naval Academy to choose.

Since Navy's football team accepted the Big East's invitation to join the conference starting in 2015, these are the choices the Naval Academy athletic director might face. "If it gets to the point because of scheduling conflicts that we can't play everybody and the schedule is going to become an issue, the Army game will never go anyplace. I'd rather keep Army and Notre Dame and not worry about the Commander-In-Chief's trophy. We're in a conference now. So we need to try to win a conference championship," Niumatalolo told ESPN.com.

Navy's coach knows he might be alone in this opinion. He expects a backlash from alumni who value the rivalry with the Air Force Academy. Niumatalolo argued the Academy's rivalry with Notre Dame is vital to the health of its football program, more so than the Air Force Academy. His coaching staff can recruit high school players on the promise they will play national powerhouse Notre Dame every year.

"Notre Dame is a big part of keeping our program vital. It allows us to recruit people that otherwise might not look at us. They're a powerful institution. For our program, now that we're in the league, in my mind that becomes our No. 1 goal," Niumatalolo told ESPN.com. Beating Army remains Navy's top priority, no matter what conference the Naval Academy joins, Niumatalolo said. He knows not to mess with that level of tradition.

Army and Navy's football teams have played 112 times with the first game played in 1890. They've played every year since 1930. Navy has won the last ten meetings, a point of pride for current Midshipmen and alumni. The three service academies have competed for the Commander-in-Chief's trophy since 1972 awarded to the winning team by the president at the White House. Navy has won seven of the last nine CIC trophies, however, Air Force has won the last two.

Navy and Notre Dame have played every year since 1927. Next year, the two will play in Dublin, Ireland in a national televised game. It's still unclear whether the Naval Academy will have to choose who it keeps on their schedule. Navy had been an independent before accepting the Big East's invitation this winter. Big East officials have not decided if its teams will play eight or nine conference games each season.

College football teams typically play 11 or 12 games. Navy is scheduled to play 12 next year. Even if the Big East played a nine-game slate, the Naval Academy could still schedule Army, Notre Dame, and Air Force.

Military.com Article, Dated February 2, 2012

VA EXPANDS LIST OF SHIPS WITH AGENT ORANGE RISK

The Veterans Affairs Department has added 47 vessels to its list of Navy and Coast Guard ships whose crews may have been exposed to the defoliant Agent Orange. Former service members who served aboard these "blue water" ships as well as the more than 200 others listed in VA's database from 1962 to 1975 may be eligible for disability compensation.

Vessels recently added to the roster include the hospital ship *Repose*, which operated in close coastal waters from 1966 to 1970, and the transport ship *General R.M. Blatchford*, which landed elements of the 1st Infantry Division at Vung Tau in October, 1965.

The online inventory at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/shiplist/index.asp> is not fixed; it is updated periodically as veterans or VA staff provide or find evidence that a ship moored, operated close to shore, or traversed an inland waterway where its crew risked exposure to the toxic herbicide.

VA pays disability compensation to qualifying veterans or their survivors for 14 medical conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange.

Military Times Article, Dated January 20, 2012

VETERANS GROUPS PUSH BACK AGAINST NEW HEALTH CARE FEES

Of the \$259 billion in savings the Pentagon is carving out of the next five defense budgets, just over 10 percent will come from future military pay and retiree health care, a top military leader said. The \$29 million in hoped-for savings from personnel spending accounts for one-ninth of total proposed spending cuts over the next five years, though personnel expenses are about one-third of the Defense Department budget, Adm. James Winnefeld, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said in an interview with Stars and Stripes on January 27.

Still, veterans groups argue that DOD is looking for savings in the wrong places. "Increasing retiree enrollment fees and co-payments while reducing services is a breach of faith with all military retirees," said Joe Davis, public affairs director for Veterans of Foreign Wars' Washington office.

Military retirees would start paying more for Tricare fees and co-pays at the doctor's office, as well as higher drug co-pays. Health care for active-duty troops wouldn't be touched, but pay increases would be curtailed starting in 2015, officials announced. Additionally, Congress would study changes to the military retirement system, although Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta emphasized current servicemembers are exempt from any future changes.

Defense Department leaders summarized the budget request that President Barack Obama will submit to Congress, but didn't release line-by-line details. Though the personnel cuts were disproportionately small, planning for them was disproportionately difficult, Winnefeld said. "These were the toughest decisions that we had to make as we went through this process," Winnefeld said. "Because it's about people who are fighting a war, it's about families whose soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines are overseas."

But finding that money was crucial to meet the requirements of the national defense strategy — one designed to cope with nearly \$500 billion in budget cuts over a decade — introduced by Obama at the Pentagon in January, Winnefeld said. "We're hopeful that veteran's groups understand what we're trying to accomplish here, and that in terms of the defense budget itself, it's big money that if we weren't able to find would cause us to take real capability out that is necessary, we believe, to defend this nation," he said.

But a veterans' group official said that rather than putting the cost burden on military retirees, the DOD should first look to improve financial management and cut waste. "Our charge, and our pushback to that proposal is that we're asking Congress and asking DOD to look for other efficiencies, and other ways to save that money," said Tim Tetz, American Legion legislative director. "There's no reason to believe they can't come up with a lot of savings within the Tricare program itself before asking retirees to pay more."

NVOA News Article, Dated January 28, 2012

UVC AWARDS BANQUET

The 40th annual United Veterans Committee of Colorado Awards Banquet is fast approaching. This year's banquet will be on Sunday, April 29th, and will be at the Renaissance Denver Hotel at 3801 Quebec Street in Denver. The banquet honors veterans, legislators, other individuals, and organizations for outstanding activities and accomplishments on behalf of the Colorado Veterans Community. This year's guest speaker is Medal of Honor recipient, Sal Giunta.

The meal choices include salmon, beef, and chicken. The cost is \$50 per person and payment must be received by April 22nd. Dress is black tie optional, military dress, service uniform, or business attire. Reception and cash bar begins at 3:30 PM and the banquet will start at 5:00 PM. The E-9ers Association is always well represented at this banquet and will have tables at the banquet. For more information, please call (303) 341-9170.

PHOTOGRAPHS SOUGHT FOR VIETNAM MEMORIAL

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund is collecting photographs of the more than 58,000 American servicemembers whose names are inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. The photos will become part of The Education Center at The Wall, a multi-million dollar visitor's center slated to open in November. For more information or to submit a photograph, visit The Education Center at the Wall website at <http://buildthecenter.org/join-the-campaign/pafwan/submit-a-photo.html> or call 202-393-0090.

Military.com Article, Dated January 30, 2012

VA STRUGGLING WITH DISABILITY BACKLOG

The Department of Veterans Affairs is facing a growing backlog of disability claims, fueled by veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and a policy change making it easier for Vietnam veterans to file Agent Orange-related claims.

The number of pending claims before the VA stood at 853,831 on January 27, an increase of nearly 100,000 from last year and nearly 500,000 from three years ago. "Nearly 1 million veterans today are stuck in the backlog and more than half wait at least half a year to find out if their claim has been processed," said Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Although the VA has processed nearly a million claims over the past year, another 1.3 million new claims were filed during the same period. Of the approximately 2.2 million veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, 624,000 have filed disability claims and many more are expected. In addition, more than 200,000 Vietnam War veterans have filed claims based on new regulations adopted in 2010 making it easier to get compensation for health problems caused by exposure to defoliants such as Agent Orange.

VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki launched a department-wide effort to break the backlog, according to agency officials. The budget for the Veterans Benefits Administration reached \$2 billion in 2012, a 20 percent increase over the previous year, which the VA says will accelerate services for veterans. But some members of congressional oversight committees question whether there is much to show for the additional money. The VA is preparing a new paperless claim processing system that officials say will help the department reduce the backlog by taking months out of the process.

"The only way we're going to be able to do that is . . . to get out of the paper world and into the digital world," Thomas J. Murphy, director of compensation service for the Veterans Benefits Administration, said at a hearing January 24 before the House Veterans' subcommittee on disability assistance and memorial affairs. The system, which the VA says uses cutting-edge information technology, has been tested in Rhode Island and Utah, and will be rolled out nationwide beginning this summer and continuing through 2013.

The VA also renewed its efforts to reform the complex disability rating system, which has not been comprehensively revised since it was created at the end of World War II. "No one has managed to find a viable solution . . . since its introduction more than half a century ago," Miller said. Members of the subcommittee urged the Defense Department and the VA to standardize their disability rating systems and eliminate confusion between the two. "The fact of the matter is veterans still don't have a seamless transition," said Rep. Jon Runyan, (R-NJ), chairman of the subcommittee. "Veterans are getting stuck in the system between the bureaucracy of DOD and VA."

The revision — which began in 2009 and involves a systematic and comprehensive review of current medical information with panels of experts in 15 areas of health, including mental disorders, infectious diseases, and the respiratory system — is not expected to be completed until 2016. "This is a process that needs to be done right," Murphy told the subcommittee. But veterans service organizations are urging quicker action. "Vets are dying while waiting for the VA to do this job," Theodore Jarvi, past president of the National Organization of Veterans' Advocates, told the subcommittee.

Stars & Stripes Article, Dated January 29, 2012

HOUSE BILLS PROMOTE RELIGION AT WAR MEMORIALS

The House has passed a bill confirming the use of religious symbols at military memorials. It was also voting on legislation to order that a prayer issued by Franklin Roosevelt on D-Day be installed at the World War II memorial in Washington.

The first bill would write into law existing practice of allowing display of religious symbols at military memorials and cemeteries. It was introduced by Rep. Duncan Hunter, a San Diego Republican, in response to a federal court decision a year ago that a 43-foot cross at St. Soledad Veterans Memorial in La Jolla, CA was unconstitutional.

The other bill, expected to pass later the same day, would direct the Interior Secretary to install a plaque of inscription with the FDR prayer to the nation on June 6, 1944.

Military Times Article, Dated January 24, 2012

**2012
CALENDAR**



MARCH

- 1 Asiatic Fleet Memorial Day
- 11 Daylight Saving Time Begins
- 13 UVC Meeting
- 17 St. Patrick's Day
- 20 First Day of Spring
- 28 Membership Meeting

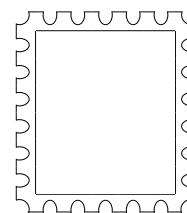
HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

- Mar 1, 1974 (38th) James & Mary Boyle
- Mar 3, 1956 (56th) Thaddeus & Cathy Gembczynski
- Mar 8, 1968 (43rd) David & Lynne Wagner
- Mar 9, 1973, (39th) Bennie & Ann Ellington
- Mar 13, 2003 (9th) Gene & Cathy Tomczak
- Mar 14, 1970 (42nd) Tom & Sandra Keller
- Mar 15, 1952 (60th) Wally & Delores Reid
- Mar 21, 1979 (33rd) Stanley & Christine Galloway
- Mar 24, 2001 (11th) John & Ruth Spaar
- Mar 27, 1967 (45th) Bill & Sue Wells
- Mar 28, 1954 (58th) Donald & Arvilla Cole

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

- 1 Kenneth Giese
- 1 Lewis Winningham
- 4 Robert Abshire
- 5 Larry Mitchell
- 7 Earl Moses
- 13 Wayne Ortiz
- 19 Cheryl Lutz
- 19 Rubylee York
- 21 Carla Gerle
- 23 Suzanne Hegwood
- 24 Wally Moll
- 25 Genaro Salazar
- 26 Walter Dick
- 28 Toshi Sherburne
- 28 Joseph Sykora
- 30 Max McIlrath

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

