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CSAF sends letter of retiree support to wing commanders

The following is a memorandum from Gen. Norton A Schwartz, Air Force chief of staff, sent to all wing commanders in April:

With nearly 690,000 retired Airmen in our Air Force Family, it is an honor to see many of them "still serving" at our bases worldwide. They volunteer hundreds of thousands of hours annually supporting our active-duty forces, fellow retirees and surviving family members. These Airmen are the epitome of the Air Force core value, "Service Before Self," and they set the standard for the President's call to Americans for a new spirit of service to our Nation.

I ask for your support in assisting these retired Airmen and the programs they operate out of your base's Retiree Activities Office, or RAO. One way to help is supporting their operations at the local level, including annual Retiree Appreciation Day events and periodic retiree newsletters. I understand the tough fiscal realities we face, but the return on this investment is priceless and allows us to thank our retirees for their service -- then and now.

Please support your local RAO and its programs, events and services. Get personally involved and encourage today's Airmen to join you. Our retired volunteers are a select group of Wingmen. They have gone before us, embodying our core values of Integrity, Service and Excellence. Their diverse backgrounds and experience add strength to today's force, and they truly reflect the retiree motto of "Still Serving."

Service still seeking special compensation claimants

RANDOLPH AFB, Texas (AFRNS) -- The approval rate of claims for Combat-Related Special Compensation, or CRSC, is currently running 66 percent, but the program is still not attracting a third of the number of people thought to be eligible.

The increase in claims for the CRSC pay that officials expected has just not happened. Air Force Personnel Center officials expected an increase in claims would occur when the benefit was expanded to include all combat or combat-related disabilities rated as service-connected by the Department of Veterans Affairs at 10 percent or higher.

The CRSC staff at AFPC believes the lack of participation may be because many retired Airmen have still not heard about the program, or perhaps people are confusing the CRSC criteria with that of Concurrent Retirement Disability Payments.

“When in doubt – apply,” said Rick Castro, CRSC program manager for the Air Force. “It may very well be the key to receiving additional tax-free money. I encourage all who meet the basic eligibility criteria to apply and let the experienced staff make the decision.”

In determining eligibility, retired military members should answer the following questions:

- Am I receiving retired military pay?
- Do I have a compensable VA disability of 10 percent or higher?
- Is my retired military pay offset by VA disability payments (VA waiver)?

“If you answered ‘yes’ to those questions and have not submitted your CRSC claim, you must not need the money,” said Mr. Castro. “Having more money than you had yesterday is not a bad thing. It’s tax-free and could go a long way in funding the education of children, grandchildren, or any number of quality-of-life improvements.”

The CRSC staff has already processed over 37,000 Air Force claims since the program’s inception in 2003; however, this is just a drop in the bucket compared to the number of retirees still possibly eligible, said Mr. Castro. Data shows there are more than 200,000 members receiving Air Force retired pay who also receive 10 percent or greater VA disability compensation today. Even subtracting the 50,000 already under Concurrent Retirement Disability Pay, there are still 120,000 retirees who have not applied for CRSC.

Although CRSC specifically addresses “combat-related” disabilities incurred from armed conflict, retirees who developed disabilities from other than combat may also be eligible. Disabilities caused by exposure to Agent Orange, combat training, aircrew duties,

simulated war exercises, parachuting and munitions demolition potentially qualify for compensation under this program.

Slipping and falling in an exercise or even during combat -- if not caused by something related to combat, combat training, or an instrumentality of war -- normally do not qualify for CRSC.

“That said, let our experts make the call,” Mr. Castro explained. “That way if you do not qualify and something in the law or Department of Defense CRSC policy changes in the future that could affect the prior decision, we will already have a claim and documentation, and can reassess a claim based on the new eligibility factors.”

The CRSC team needs a copy of any and all copies of a retiree’s Department of Defense Forms 214 and retirement order. They also need copies of any VA rating decisions addressing the disabilities being claimed, and any other available documentation.

Eligible retirees may also receive “Individual Unemployability” payments and increased CRSC adjusted for dependents.

For more information and a claim form, write to HQ AFPC/DPSDC (CRSC), 550 C Street West, Suite 6, Randolph AFB, TX 78150-4708; call the CRSC Branch at (210) 565-1600; or toll free to the Total Force Service Center, then select 5, then 1, and then 4. Information and claim forms are also available online at the Air Force CRSC Web site at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/library/combat.asp>.

Tax credit began April 1

Public Law 111-05, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, was signed into law by President Obama on Feb. 17. This act authorizes a tax credit for most workers including recipients of retired and annuity pay.

This tax credit takes the form of a reduction in federal withholding tax rates. These new federal tax rates began April 1 for retired and annuity payments pay due May 1. The new tables can be found on the Internal Revenue Service’s Web site at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/n1036.pdf>.

People wishing to adjust their federal tax withholding after this tax credit takes effect must submit a new W-4 and mail it to:

U. S. Military Retired Pay
P.O. Box 7130
London, KY 40742-7130
Or fax it to (800) 469-6559.

At press time, there is no indication annual tax liabilities will be reduced.

Retiree ID cards really do not expire

Some military retirees and others, including those who work in various offices on military installations, believe that the "EXP DATE" on the back of a retiree identification card means the card is no good after that date. That is not the case.

What that date reflects is when that individual is eligible for Medicare, and therefore eligible for Tricare For Life medical coverage if enrolled in Medicare Parts A and B. It has nothing to do with the "EXPIRATION DATE" on the front of the ID card.

The "EXPIRATION DATE" on the front of the card determines when a person needs a new card. A significant change is a person's physical appearance, or a damaged ID card, also means a new card may be necessary.

For the location of the nearest ID card issuing facility, visit <http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsi/owa/home>. Officials suggest contacting the facility in advance to ensure hours of operation and determine all the required documents needed for renewal.

Government-furnished headstones, markers, medallions

Several options are available to the survivors of eligible retirees for obtaining government-furnished headstones, markers, medallions.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will furnish upon request, at no charge, a government headstone or marker for the grave of any eligible deceased veteran in any cemetery around the world. Headstones and markers are furnished to eligible spouses and family members of veterans who are interred in a national, military post/base, or state veterans cemetery. For veterans who have chosen columbaria inurnment, niche markers are also available.

A new public law affects already-marked graves. Public Law 110-157, signed Dec. 26, 2007, allows the VA to furnish a government headstone or marker for the graves of eligible veterans who died on or after Nov. 1, 1990, regardless of whether the grave is already marked with a privately purchased headstone or marker. Under the previous law, when the grave was already marked, only veterans who died on or after Sept. 11, 2001, were eligible.

This public law also gives VA authority to "furnish, upon request, a medallion or other device of a design determined by the Secretary to signify the deceased's status as a veteran, to be attached to a headstone or marker furnished at private expense." This benefit will be available in lieu of a government-furnished headstone or marker, for veterans in privately marked graves who died on or after Nov. 1, 1990.

VA officials currently estimate the medallion will be available in summer 2009. People interested in the new medallion can visit the "New Headstone Device" Web page at <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmtype.asp> for updated information regarding this new benefit.

Eligible veterans are entitled to either a government-furnished headstone or marker, or the new device, but not both. People interested in submitting a claim for the new medallion can submit a claim once a contract has been awarded for manufacturing the new product. Claim instructions will be posted on the headstone device Web site. If, after seeing the final new medallion design, people change their mind, they will still have the option to apply for a traditional government-furnished headstone or marker.

There is no charge for the headstone or marker itself; however, arrangements for placing it in a private cemetery are the applicant's responsibility and all setting fees are at private expense, according to VA officials.

There is no change in eligibility for veterans in unmarked graves. Regardless of the date of death, VA will furnish, at no charge to the applicant, a government headstone or marker for the unmarked grave of any eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world.

More information on government-furnished headstones and markers can be found on the <http://www.cem.va.gov/>

Retired general joining Air Force's retiree council

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AFRNS) -- A new face will share the head of the Air Force Retiree Council table at its annual meeting May 5 to 8. Retired Lt. Gen. Steven R. Polk, who left active duty in February 2006, succeeds retired Lt. Gen. Donald L. Peterson as council co-chair with retired Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Gerald R. Murray.

The co-chairs serve as personal advisers to the chief of staff and the secretary of the Air Force on all issues regarding retirees and their families. General Polk's appointment was announced by Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton A. Schwartz.

Meeting at the Air Force Personnel Center here, the council receives briefings on today's Air Force structure from senior members of the Air Staff and other Air Force elements. This information helps the 20-member panel address issues submitted from 107 base retiree activities offices worldwide. Subjects range from proposed increases in Tricare fees to publication of the *Afterburner* to various benefit and entitlement enhancements. Recommendations on key issues are forwarded to the Air Force chief of staff and subject matter experts.

A native of Bay City, Texas, General Polk graduated and was commissioned from the U.S. Air Force Academy, and completed 38 years on active duty. His assignments

included worldwide flying duty, and a tour as an instructor and assistant professor of engineering mechanics at the academy. He currently lives in San Antonio.

Retirees can write to General Polk or Chief Murray at: HQ AFPC/CCU, 550 C STREET WEST STE 8, RANDOLPH AFB TX 78150-4713.

Editor's note

Each year at this time, Air Force Retiree Services is inundated with calls from people who did not receive their 1099R necessary to file their federal income tax returns. Unfortunately, there isn't anything we can do other than refer callers/e-mailers to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

Much like the traditional December holidays, the mailing of your 1099R and annual Retiree Account Statement – in the same envelope -- happens at the same time each year – about mid-December.

Those of you with an active myPay online account are very fortunate. Your 1099R and RAS is posted online earlier in December, and you will not receive these documents by mail.

Those of you without an active myPay account are not so fortunate. For you, it's more of a challenge. All you can do is hope that your address on record with DFAS is current and correct, and pray that the envelope doesn't get lost in the mail.

If you have computer access, it's imperative you establish an online myPay account by visiting <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx>. Request a Personal Identification Number, or PIN, and use the online account regularly – every few months -- so it doesn't become dormant.

If you do not have computer access, it's critical you establish a myPay phone account. Call toll free (877) 363-3677 to request a PIN for a phone account. It takes about two weeks for the PIN to be mailed.

We understand your urgency getting your 1099R, but we don't have them nor do we have access to them. We also understand your frustration in trying to get through to DFAS via telephone. If the option menu doesn't rattle your rivets, the wait on hold just might. Take a deep breath. Be patient. Remember to breathe. This too will pass.

Don't wait to set up an account. Do it now. Avoid the rush. You'll be glad you did next December.

Enjoy the latest *e-Afterburner!*

Tammy Cournoyer
Retiree Services Section

What's going on in your Air Force

In order to keep you better informed about your Air Force, the e-Afterburner will regularly highlight current events affecting all Airmen.

Tankers top shopping list, transportation commander says

by Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – Acquiring a new fleet of Air Force tankers, known as KC-X until an airframe is chosen, is imperative, the commander of U.S. Transportation Command told the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 17.

“My top priority remains the recapitalization of our aging tanker fleet,” Air Force Gen. Duncan J. McNabb told the senators. “The KC-X will be a game-changer.”

The aircraft, designed to be a refueler with cargo-carrying capability, will revolutionize the mobility world the same way the C-17 did for in-theater and strategic airlift, the general said.

“It will be the ultimate mobility force multiplier,” he said.

The Air Force selected Northrop Grumman/EADS for the tanker project last year, but rival bidder Boeing protested the decision. Bidding was reopened after a Government Accountability Office found flaws with the process.

General McNabb praised the performance of the C-130J and C-17 airlifters. The airframes “have come of age since 9/11 and have allowed us to change how we support the combatant commanders by air,” he said. “The current C-5, C-130 and KC-10 modernization programs will make an enormous difference in our capability and reliability.”

Guard essential at home and abroad, says chief

by Army Staff Sgt. Jim Greenhill
National Guard Bureau Public Affairs

BALTIMORE -- The National Guard is playing an essential role domestically and overseas, Gen. Craig McKinley said here recently, challenging leaders to do more with the same amount of money.

The chief of the National Guard Bureau spoke to about 700 leaders attending the National Guard's 2009 Domestic Operations Workshop after he returned from visiting National Guard troops in Southwest Asia.

"The thanks and the kudos from the senior leadership, both Army and Air, for the services of the National Guard was most humbling," he said. "How appreciative the senior military leadership is overseas for the contributions of the National Guard.

"This mission would not be done nearly as capably or as professionally or as ably or as timely without (our) Soldiers and Airmen."

General McKinley said the Guard is making vital domestic contributions and making sure it's prepared for a smorgasbord of potential challenges ranging from a significant attack on the homeland to problems on the nation's Southwest border.

During national economic challenges, the National Guard needs to be particularly fiscally prudent, General McKinley said.

"The Department of Defense certainly will be asked to pay its fair share to help in the domestic financial crisis," he said. "We are not immune from doing things more efficiently, more effectively, and (the secretary of defense) has said that, for now, people are off the table. They are the most, our most highly prized asset, our most critical resource, but that we're going to have to look everywhere for efficiencies, everywhere to cut costs ... and make sure that we don't sacrifice our readiness. We will do our part."

The National Guard has a reputation for squeezing every drop out of defense dollars, General McKinley said.

The way to find money to improve programs the National Guard wants to grow is to use existing resources more efficiently, he said.

Reflecting on his recent trip, General McKinley talked about the successes he saw in Iraq.

"My sense was a great deal of progress is being made in Iraq," he said. "We've made great strides. I know each day we hear about incidents, but those incidents have gone down dramatically, and it's really because of the tactics, techniques and procedures that our services are using in Iraq to root out the insurgency and to actually not only take territory but to hold territory and then to give it off to the Iraqis so that they can govern themselves."

General McKinley said he saw many challenges in Afghanistan.

"(It) is going to be a very difficult engagement," he said. "It will test all of us. The nature of the war in Afghanistan is going to be far different from the war ... in Iraq."

General McKinley also said he was struck by the National Guard's contribution to the seamless, integrated, joint nature of overseas operations.

"Somewhere over the Atlantic Ocean as they're headed eastbound, our Soldiers and our Airmen understand what they're getting into," he said. "They understand what set of orders they're on. They understand the command and control relationships that they're going to fall in on as soon as they get on the ground, and they get it, and there's no doubt in anybody's mind that that professional force that you live and work with at home is that same dedicated workforce overseas."

The National Guard is a team.

"I emphasize the word 'team,' " McKinley said. "There is no room in the organization for a non-team atmosphere."

The National Guard also is a member of a joint team that includes U.S. Northern Command and numerous other local, state and federal agencies.

"In the event of a natural disaster, an American citizen doesn't really care what servicemember comes to his or her door," McKinley said. "They just expect us to be trained properly, they expect us to be competent, they expect us to be able to solve their problems and restore security and stability."

Death of a spouse affects Survivor Benefit Plan coverage

Remember your retirement party 25 years ago? Do you remember out-processing? Do you remember the Survivor Benefit Plan briefing you received?

If a retiree can answer "yes" to at least one of the questions, it is most likely the question about the party.

Many retirees do not remember specifics about SBP coverage. Unfortunately, the Air Force Retiree Services office receives calls almost daily from retired Airmen whose spouse has just passed away, and the SBP coverage needs to be suspended.

Air Force SBP counselors advise retirees to send a certified copy of their spouse's death certificate, along with a brief letter or completed DD Form 2656-6 (SBP Election Change Certificate), to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in Cleveland. The mailing address is: DFAS, U.S. Military Retirement Pay, PO Box 7130 London, KY 40742-7130; or via fax to (800) 469-6559.

Premiums are suspended effective the first day of the month following the month the spouse dies. SBP spouse coverage is not terminated when a spouse dies. Coverage is placed in a suspended status pending a possible future marriage.

For retirees who later remarry, there are several options available. For more information, please click here, or visit the SBP portion of the Air Force Retiree Web site at www.retirees.af.mil.

Reader suggests using quotable quotes

Tech. Sgt Ronald L. Stum Jr., an Air Force retiree, wrote that he really enjoys the information in the Afterburner, but one of the things he would like to see is quotes placed throughout each online edition. In these turbulent times, some words of wisdom, humor or just plain common sense may be just what everyone needs. Armed with Robert Byrne's "The 2,548 Best Things Anybody Ever Said," here goes:

"Nothing is impossible for the man who doesn't have to do it himself."

A.H. Weiler

Look for more quotes throughout this issue.

RAO Spotlight

Retired Master Sgt. C. Vance Shannon wishes to recognize retired Tech. Sgt. Elbert L. Moore, the Retiree Activities Office director at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev.

Sergeant Shannon believes Sergeant Moore is someone who serves the Nellis military retiree community with distinction. He provides excellent day-to-day service in the Nellis RAO, his RAO newsletters are informative and humorous, and he holds annual retiree appreciation events for military retirees and their families. These events are appreciated by the Nellis retiree community. They offer an opportunity to meet representatives from base agencies, VA and Tricare representatives, and fellow retirees.

Sergeant Shannon feels there are other military installations that provide good RAO service, but none that he has encountered provide the quality of service that Sergeant Moore and his staff offer.

Retirees can give to Air Force Assistance Fund

By retired Chief Master Sgt. William D'Avanzo
Air Force Personnel Center

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas (AFRNS) – Even if retired, you can still give to the Air Force Assistance Fund. This year's annual campaign -- the 36th -- began Feb. 9 and runs through May 1; however, installation commanders will decide on a specific six-week period for their base's campaign.

Retirees can contribute through a one-time gift of cash or check, or by payroll deduction from their retired pay. This year, Airmen will likely need us more than ever before.

A report from The Center on Philanthropy shows that in the past 40 years' four longest recessions, individual giving declined an average of 3.9 percent per year. Many civilian

charities will be hit hard, resulting in fewer dollars for helping individuals in need, and giving our Airmen fewer options to reach out to for assistance.

If you haven't given to the AFAF since retiring, now's your chance to once again help the four charities: the Air Force Village Foundation, Inc.; the Air Force Aid Society, Inc.; the General and Mrs. Curtis E. LeMay Foundation; and the Air Force Enlisted Village, Inc. These organizations help with emergency aid, educational needs, or help secure a retirement home for widows or widowers of Airmen in need of financial assistance.

There are four ways to give:

-- Completing an AF Form 2561 available at www.afassistancefund.org, and donating by cash, check or payroll deduction from your Air Force retired pay (please print and physically sign);

-- Mail contributions (cash/check/money order) and contributors' forms to Air Force Assistance Fund, HQ AFPC/DPSIMF, 550 C Street West Ste 37, Randolph AFB TX 78150-4739. Note that contributions mailed to AFPC will not be counted toward any particular installation's goals or totals;

-- Mail contributions directly to the affiliate(s) of your choice at the addresses in the campaign brochures, also found on the AFAF Web site. Note that contributions mailed directly to affiliates cannot be counted toward any installation or Air Force goals or totals; or

-- Mail completed Payroll Deduction Plan form directly to DFAS, Cleveland Center, ATTN: Code FR, P.O. Box 99191, Cleveland OH 44199-1126.

Thank you for your consideration of giving toward the Air Force Assistance Fund.

"A lot of people like snow. I find it to be an unnecessary freezing of water."

Carl Reiner

Thunderbirds release 2009 air show schedule

NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE, Nev. -- The U.S. Air Force Air Demonstration Squadron 2009 air show season is well under way.

In their 56th season, the Thunderbird team consists of 12 officers and more than 120 enlisted Airmen.

The remaining 2009 schedule is as follows:

May

2-3 Robins AFB, Ga.
9-10 Branson, Mo.
15-17 Andrews AFB, Md.
23-24 Wantagh, N.Y. (Jones Beach)
27 USAF Academy, Colo.
30-31 Ellsworth AFB, S.D.

June

6-7 Hill AFB, Utah
13-14 Ocean City, Md.
20-21 Dover AFB, Dela.
27-28 Helena, Mont.

July

4-5 Battle Creek, Mich.
11-12 Peoria, Ill.
18-19 Dayton, Ohio
22 Cheyenne, Wyo.
25-26 Milwaukee, Wisc.

August

8-9 Vienna, Ohio (Youngstown Air Reserve Base)
15-16 Chicago, Ill.
19 Atlantic City, N.J.
22-23 Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Mich.
29-30 Hillsboro, Ore.

September

5-7 Cleveland, Ohio
12-13 Sacramento, Calif.
19-20 Hickam AFB, Hawaii

Sept. 22- Oct. 26
Far East locations

November

7-8 Homestead ARB, Fla.
14-15 Nellis AFB, Nev.

(Courtesy of Air Force News Service)

If you need to contact the e-Afterburner...

The *e-Afterburner* address:

HQ AFPC/DPSIAR
550 C Street W Ste 8
Randolph AFB TX 78150-4713

E-mail address is afpc.retiree@randolph.af.mil and the phone number is (210) 565-2126. Retirees may write to the co-chairmen of the Air Force Retiree Council by using the office symbol, HQ AFPC/CCU, at the address above.

“Just because your voice reaches halfway around the world doesn’t mean you are wiser than when it reached only to the end of the bar.”

Edward R. Murrow