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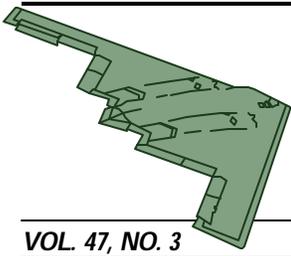
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Afterburner

NEWS FOR USAF RETIRED PERSONNEL

VOL. 47, NO. 3

AFRP 36-1

WINTER 2005

Tricare officials urge educated decisions on Medicare Part D

Most Tricare beneficiaries don't need drug coverage

The window for enrolling in Medicare's new prescription drug plan opened Nov. 15 and extends through May 15, but Tricare Management Activity officials encourage eligible beneficiaries to weigh the facts before deciding whether to enroll.

Coverage under the new prescription drug plan, called Medicare Part D, begins Jan. 1 and is open to anyone already enrolled in Medicare. The plan represents the first time Medicare has offered prescription drug coverage for its estimated 42 million beneficiaries. Tricare officials estimate that about 1.7 million of the 9.2 million Tricare beneficiaries are eligible to enroll in the new plan, but emphasize that it's not the most prudent choice for everyone.

In most cases, there is no added value for Tricare beneficiaries to buy the new Medicare prescription drug coverage, officials said. Tricare generally pays as much or more than a standard Medicare prescription plan, they said. Unlike many non-DoD Medicare beneficiaries, those under Tricare already have what officials call a "robust" pharmacy benefit.

It charges no monthly premiums and requires minimal co-payments for drugs received through the Tricare Mail Order Pharmacy and retail pharmacies network. In addition, there's no cost for prescription drugs received at military treatment facilities, officials noted.

The one group of eligible Tricare beneficiaries who may benefit from the new Medicare Plan D would be those with limited incomes and assets, officials said. This

(See Prescription Drug Plan on page 4)

Military retirees to get 4.1 percent pay increase

A 4.1 percent pay increase is in store for most military retirees, as well as those individuals receiving Social Security, Survivor Benefit Plan annuities and veterans' disability compensation. The Cost of Living Adjustment is the largest since the 5.4 percent increase in 1991.

The increases will first appear in January 2006 paychecks. Newly retiring members will receive a somewhat smaller, partial COLA for the year of their retirement because they already received a January military pay raise (which also raised their retired pay) during their retirement year. Members retiring in 2005 will receive one of the corresponding COLAs below based on their year of entrance and date of retirement:

Members who entered service before Sept. 8, 1980, and who retired on or after Jan. 1, 2005, will receive a 3.4 percent COLA. Those entering the service on or after Sept. 8, 1980 (whose retired pay is calculated on their highest 36 months' basic pay rather than final basic pay), and retired between Jan. 1, 2005, and Sept. 30, 2005, will receive a partial COLA based

on the calendar quarter in which they retired. Those who retired in the first quarter of calendar year 2005 will receive 3.4 percent; in the second quarter, 2.8 percent; and in the third quarter, 1.4 percent. Those who retire after Oct. 1, 2005 will see no COLA this year.

Social Security

Monthly Social Security and Supplemental Security Income benefits for more than 52 million Americans will also increase 4.1 percent in 2006. The 4.1 percent COLA will begin with benefits that more than 48 million Social Security beneficiaries receive in January 2006. Increased payments to 7 million Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries will begin on Dec.30.

Some other changes that take effect in January of each year are based on the increase in average wages.

Based on that increase, the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax (taxable maximum) will increase to \$94,200 from \$90,000. Of the estimated 161 million workers who will pay Social Security taxes in 2006, about 11.3 million will pay more taxes as a result of the increase in the taxable maximum in 2006.

Editor's notebook

by Bill Turner

Some final thoughts about computers.

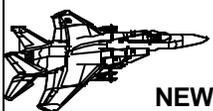
The nicest thing about being editor of the **Afterburner** is that it gives me a forum to discuss subjects of my choosing and to put forth a personal opinion from time to time. As some of you may remember, several times this column has been used to encourage readers to obtain information from sources other than the **Afterburner**.

Quite a few people have expressed their views, some even indicating that I may have a personal agenda to eliminate the **Afterburner**. Not true. I definitely understand the need for it. My agenda is simply to let folks know that if and when it goes away, there are other ways to stay informed, including the online **Afterburner**.

Back to my my final thoughts about computers; based on those comments mentioned earlier, I have seen the light and wish to say I will mention computers in this column no more...after this time.

Most letters have been similar to a short note I received responding to my most recent column. Titled "**Afterburner** safe for two more years," I said funding, shaky for a long time, had been assured for two years with the Air Force Directorate of Personnel picking up the printing tab.

That latest note, referring to the two years, exclaimed:



AFTERBURNER NEWS FOR USAF RETIRED PERSONNEL

*The **Afterburner** is authorized by Air Force Instruction 36-3106. It is published in February, June and November by the Retiree Services Branch. Distribution: individuals entitled to Air Force retired pay; unremarried surviving spouses of retirees (automatically if they are receiving an annuity under Survivor Benefit Plan and/or the Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan, or the Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan); unremarried nonannuitant surviving spouses of deceased Air Force members who were entitled to receive retired pay, may receive the **Afterburner** by requesting it from the address below. The **Afterburner** is not sent to former spouses nor to retirees of other services. Additional copies are not available. The **Afterburner** address:*

HQ AFPC/DPPRT
550 C Street W Ste 3
Randolph AFB TX 78150-4713

*E-mail address is afpc.retiree@randolph.af.mil and the phone number is (210) 565-2126. The **Afterburner** is available on the Internet at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/afretire/>. 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. To change your address to receive the **Afterburner** and other official correspondence, see the procedures on page 12 of this issue.*

"Then what do we do. I am 75 years old and have no need for a computer." Whether there is a need for a computer is an individual determination. What bothers me is the number of people who included age as a determining factor. The fact is that age has nothing to do with it. At any age, there is still the need to stay informed. Thus, my interpretation is that "at my age I no longer want to put forth the effort to learn something new." What was the magic age? It ranged from 70 on up.

On the other hand, looking at retired members who do have computers, I've also received nearly 11,000 responses from individuals agreeing to give up their printed copy and read the **Afterburner** online to save money. When I enter a computer file to add the proper code, the age and name pop up on the first page. The oldest individual I noticed was 96, but there were many in their 70s and 80s and yes, in their 90s.

For those of you who don't want computers, that's okay. There are reasons. Perhaps you have a debilitating physical or mental problem that accompanied the aging process. Maybe you can't afford it.

But if it's apprehension of taking on a new technology, you may be leaving yourself short in the learning process. With a computer and Internet access, you can find more information in 30 minutes on the Internet than you can in three issues of the **Afterburner**.

Even better, by subscribing to various free news services, you don't even have to surf the web. You can have the information sent to you via electronic mail. If you're not one of the more than 52,000 already subscribed to the Air Force Retiree News Service (AFRNS), we'll start by letting you know how you can obtain that service. Later, using that medium, we'll tell you how to get other information via e-mail.

Go online to <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/afretire> and click on Retiree News and then on How to Subscribe. This service is used to send out individual articles of importance to retired members and also let them know when the **Afterburner** has been posted on the Internet.

After subscribing to the AFRNS, send an e-mail message to Billy.Turner@randolph.af.mil with "Cancel **Afterburner**" in the subject line to stop the printed version. Since it's impossible to identify a person simply by an e-mail address, and there are always multiple people with the same name, please furnish your full name, address and last four digits of your Social Security number so we can find you in the computer file.

I will continue from time to time to run a little note explaining how to subscribe to AFRNS and cancel the printed **Afterburner**, but remember what I said about not using this column anymore to push computers? Enough said, and no letters please.

Customers keep "SBP Open Enrollment" phones ringing

As expected, the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) staff has been busy with calls regarding the special open enrollment period that started Oct. 1. Most days there is still a constant ringing of the toll free line which will handle as many as eight calls at a time, two more than the number of qualified people on hand to answer the questions.

Pat Peek, Retiree Services Branch chief, advises members interested in a buy-in cost estimate, or who need more information, not to give up as the number of callers is expected to decrease as the open season winds down to the Sept. 30, 2006 close. The SBP Task Force toll-free number is 1 (800) 531-7502 and operates between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Central Time, Monday through Friday except holidays.

We recognize those residing outside the CONUS may need to obtain an AT&T direct access number to call the SBP toll-free number.

If someone other than the retired member calls for information, that person should have the retiree's most recent retiree pay statement available. Privacy Act restrictions do not permit SBP counselors to access the retiree's account for a second party.

Noting that many callers have been shocked by the high buy-in cost, Ms. Peek pointed to the fact that only by including interest and penalties with the normal monthly premiums back to the time a member first became eligible to elect SBP can the integrity of the fund be maintained. This was one of the provisions of the law that authorized opening the SBP to late enrollment.

Members, who enrolled in SBP upon retiring, pay into the fund for many years before an SBP annuity is ever paid and some annuities may not

be paid because the spouse dies first and the retiree does not remarry. Those coming into the program many years after retirement have less time to pay premiums, and because many are older and perhaps in poor health, life expectancy is shorter.

When faced with the large buy-in, Ms. Peek said the retired member should look at two new provisions that make SBP much more attractive.

One is the elimination of the Social Security offset which previously meant the annuity payment dropped from 55 percent of the retired pay to 35 percent when the surviving spouse reached the age of 62. That increased to 40 percent on Oct. 1 and will rise to 45 percent April 1, 2006; 50 percent on April 1, 2007; and 55 percent on April 1, 2008.

The other recent change is the paid up provision which means that beginning Oct. 1, 2008, retired members who are age 70 and older and who have paid into the program for 30 years will no longer have to pay premiums.

Retired members, who buy-in during the current SBP enrollment period, gain credit back to the time they first became eligible to elect SBP coverage, meaning that some will pay monthly premiums for only three more years.

The government subsidy to SBP was projected to be 40 percent; however, these changes are pushing the subsidy to as much as 65 percent.

Retired members interested in enrolling should read their last issue of the **Afterburner, News for USAF Retired Personnel**, which was distributed in October. It is also available on the Internet at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/afretire> and click on Afterburner.

The issue includes the required forms and presents the information needed to determine the buy-in cost. Individuals, whose "year since event" is six months or more, must use the **next higher** year to determine the buy-in factor to use.

For example, if a member was married at retirement (June 1, 1997) and declined SBP spouse coverage, he would use the 9-year factor (136) since he's been retired 8 years and 6 months.

Spouse and Spouse/Child

Completed years since "Event"	Lump sum factor per \$1 of monthly premium
0	38
1	48
2	57
3	67
4	74
5	83
6	93
7	103
8	119
9	136
10	153
11	171
12	189
13	209
14	228
15	248
16	269
17	289
18	311
19	332
20	355
21	379
22	404
23	430
24	456
25	482
26	506
27	529
28	552
29	574
30	597
31	618
32	639
33	658

DFAS officials see myPay getting even better

While planners and programmers are working on future myPay enhancements, Defense Finance and Accounting Service officials are making an all-out effort to inform retired members and annuitants of the program's current benefits.

myPay is an automated system that puts the pay recipient in control of processing certain discretionary pay data items without using paper forms. They can also get pay statements, tax forms and information.

myPay users, according to DFAS officials, have discovered the ease and convenience of monitoring their pay accounts online, as well as changing tax withholding information, starting or stopping allotments and updating bank information for direct deposit of their monthly pay.

Users of myPay can also access their IRS 1099-R forms online weeks before receiving them in the mail, giving them a jump on completing their IRS tax forms (and getting their refunds quickly).

A number of improvements are being worked, with the finishing touches being put on a feature that will permit

retirees and annuitants to receive e-mail confirmation of the changes they make to their pay account when using myPay. This feature will be launched next year.

Officials emphasize that DFAS is committed to providing access to information and management using the latest in online security. "myPay has always met or exceeded industry-standard security measures to protect users' privacy and, in fact, identity theft protection is greater for myPay users than for those who rely on "snail mail" to transact their financial business," officials said. "That's why 3,422,536 DFAS customers, from active duty military to National Guard, retirees and annuitants, are current myPay users."

The latest security enhancement available to myPay users is the ability to change their login identification (ID) along with their personal identification number (PIN). This allows users accessing the system to use their own unique (and easily remembered) login information without relying on their Social Security number to enter myPay.

Users can make these changes by logging into myPay at <https://mypay.dfas.mil/mypay.aspx>.

Prescription Drug Plan

(Continued from page 1)

includes beneficiaries who qualify for Medicaid.

The new Medicare Part D drug plan options will vary by location, officials said, and beneficiaries living overseas aren't eligible.

The best way for Tricare-Medicare beneficiaries to determine if the new plan is best for them is to evaluate a variety of factors. These include monthly premiums, deductibles, co-payments and drug coverage of several prescription drug plans, including the Tricare pharmacy program.

Since some members of the retiree community have expressed concern that there are penalties for certain seniors who do not sign up for Part D when offered, Tricare officials emphasized the following:

"Tricare pharmacy coverage is considered creditable coverage since it pays, on average, at least as good as or better than Medicare prescription drug coverage. Therefore, the late enrollment fee will not apply if you, as a Tricare-eligible beneficiary, decide to buy Medicare prescription drug coverage after the open enrollment period.

"If Tricare eligibility is lost (for example, due to divorce, remarriage, etc.), you have up to 62 days to purchase Medicare prescription drug coverage without paying the

premium penalty. Credible coverage is lost on Day 63. In addition, you may have to wait until the following November to enroll."

Tricare pharmacy information

For more information on TRRx, beneficiaries may call 1-866-DOD-TRRX (1-866-363-8779) within the continental United States and 1-866-ASK-4-PEC (1-866-275-4732) outside the continental United States.

The Tricare Mail Order Pharmacy (TMOP) program, administered by Express Scripts Inc. (ESI), is available for prescriptions that beneficiaries take regularly. It is the most convenient and cost-effective way for beneficiaries to get prescriptions. They may receive up to a 90-day supply for most medications. Prescription refills may be requested by mail, phone or online.

For more information about how to use TMOP, beneficiaries may visit www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE or contact TMOP member services at 1-866-DOD-TMOP (1-866-363-8667) within the continental United States or 1-866-ASK-4PEC (1-866-275-4732) outside the continental United States.

BRAC deadline expires; DoD to begin closures, realignments

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission's (BRAC) recommendations for reshaping the Defense Department's infrastructure and force structure officially took effect at 12:01 a. m. Nov. 9 after Congress allowed them to pass into law at the mandated Nov. 8 deadline.

By statute, the Defense Department now has until Sept. 15, 2007 — two years from the date President Bush sent Congress the BRAC commission's final report — to begin closing and realigning the installations as called for in the report. The process must be completed by Sept. 15, 2011, DoD officials explained.

The 2005 BRAC recommendations represent the most aggressive BRAC ever proposed, affecting more than 800 installations, officials said.

The four previous BRAC rounds — in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 - resulted in 97 major closures, 55 major realignments and 235 minor actions, according to DoD figures. Overall, closing and realigning these installations saved taxpayers around \$18 billion through fiscal 2001 and a further \$7 billion per year since, officials said.

BRAC 2005 is being called an important milestone in changing DoD's domestic bases to improve efficiency and operational capabilities. It also supports plans to move thousands of U. S. forces currently serving overseas to within the United States as part of DoD's new global positioning strategy, officials said.

After months of study, installation visits and public hearings around the country, the nine-member BRAC panel approved 86 percent of DoD's original BRAC recommendations — 119 with no change and another 45 with some amendments. The panel also rejected 13 recom-

mendations, significantly modified another 13, and made five additional closure or realignment recommendations on its own initiative.

Of DoD's 33 major closure recommendations, the panel approved 21, recommended seven bases be realigned rather than closed, and rejected five recommendations outright. In addition, the commission recommended closing rather than realigning another installation, for a total of 22 major closures.

Many of the transformational recommendations in the report, particularly those to establish joint operations, will present significant challenges as they are implemented, officials acknowledged.

Meanwhile, DoD is poised to begin working with civilian employees and communities affected by the BRAC decisions. DoD has a long and successful history of helping its civilian workers impacted by base closings, officials noted. This includes programs that promote placement, training, retraining and transition to new positions.

Since 1989, DoD has reduced its civilian work force by 428,400 people, with less than 10 percent of those reductions through involuntary separations, officials said. DoD's Priority Placement Program, which officials call the centerpiece of DoD's Civilian Assistance and Re-employment programs, gives defense employees placement priority at other DoD facilities.

DoD's Office of Economic Adjustment will take the lead for the federal government in helping communities affected by base closures and realignments, working cooperatively with the President's Economic Adjustment Committee, officials said.

Services complete indefinite ID card software upgrades

A software upgrade has been completed at military identification card issuing facilities, allowing eligible family members and surviving spouses to receive indefinite ID cards at age 75 upon expiration of current IDs.

Card issuing facilities are authorized to issue the new ID card within 90 days of expiration as there will be no mass issuance, according to ID card management officials. Eligibility rules for ID cards have not changed.

Tricare officials point out that the Military Health System requires all eligible beneficiaries to have a current ID card in order to receive health care. Also, beneficiaries are reminded that their personal information must be current in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

Changes to sponsor's status, home address and family

There is no plan to mass issue new ID cards, but new cards may be issued within 90 days of expiration.

status (marriage, divorce, birth and adoption) are examples of information that need to be properly reported to and maintained in DEERS.

Questions concerning eligibility may be directed to the DEERS Support Office, at 1 (800) 538-9552, or information can be found online at www.tricare.osd.mil/DEERS.

Beneficiaries can also find the nearest ID card issuing facility at www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl/owa/home.

Pay statements and tax forms slated for December distribution

Retired and annuitant account statements and 1099-R tax statements will be mailed throughout the latter half of December.

Hoping to eliminate problems encountered last year, DFAS officials remind pay recipients that the account statement and tax form will be mailed in the same envelope. Last year, many individuals failed to notice and then complained to DFAS that they had not gotten the 1099 when the problem was one of misplacement.

While the exact mailing schedule is unknown, DFAS was scheduled to provide completed statements and forms to the printing and mailing contractor by Dec. 14, 2005, for incremental mailings.

For retirees, the Retired Account Statement will reflect changes due to the cost-of-living increase, the Veterans Administration (VA) Legislative increase and changes to the Federal Income Tax Withholding rates.

Due to the VA legislative increase, recipients of Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) will also receive an increase to their CRSC amount. This amount will affect the December 2005 entitlement scheduled for the payment on Jan. 3, 2006 and will be reflected on the

CRSC pay statement available to retirees on *myPay*. Retirees who do not have a *myPay* account will not receive a CRSC pay statement.

Also, during December, retired members entitled to receive either CRSC or Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) will be provided with an election form as part of the annual open season. During the open season, affected retirees will have the opportunity to elect to receive either CRDP or CRSC for the next year. In order for the entitlement to change, the form must be received and processed by Jan. 31, 2006. Based on the election, the change will take effect on the payment dated Feb. 1, 2006.

In addition, as a result of the phased-in CRDP, the amount retirees will receive for CRDP will increase effective January 2006 and will be reflected in the payment dated Feb. 1, 2006.

The Annuitant Account Statement will reflect changes due to the cost-of-living increase, changes to the VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) amounts and changes to Federal Income Tax Withholding rates.

Agencies announce 2006 scholarship program openings

Two agencies that support scholarship programs benefiting the children of military retired members — the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) and the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) have announced the openings of their 2006 programs.

DeCA begins its sixth year of rewarding academic excellence and the 2006 scholarship program will remain open until Feb. 22, 2006.

Applications and complete details are available at any commissary worldwide, online at the Military Scholar Web site or through a link at <http://www.commissaries.com>.

Applications, which must include an essay on why the applicant admires a great military leader (past or present), have to be turned in at a commissary by Feb. 22, 2006. At least one \$1,500 scholarship will be awarded at every commissary location with qualified applicants.

The program is open to unmarried children under the age of 21 (23 if enrolled in school) of active duty personnel, Reserve, Guard and retired military. Eligibility is determined using the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) database. Applicants should ensure that they, as well as their sponsor, are currently enrolled in the DEERS database and have a current ID card.

Under the MOAA program, nearly 1,300 students will

receive up to \$4,000 each in interest-free loans for the school year. More than 500 of them will be first-time recipients.

For MOAA Scholarship Fund applications and for complete details of the program including scholastic criteria, visit MOAA's web site at www.MOAA.org/education or email edassist@MOAA.org. Students may apply online. The application deadline is 12 p.m. EST, March 1, 2006.

Applicants for the loans, which are awarded annually for up to five years of undergraduate study, must be children of MOAA members or of enlisted service members and be under the age of 24.

Applicants may be graduating high school seniors or full-time college students working toward their first baccalaureate degree.

In addition to the interest free-free loans, MOAA will award 28 grants to college seniors who are current loan recipients in the program, 7 grants to children of deceased retired officers, and 20 grants to children whose military parent died in active service. Five of the 28 senior grants will be for \$5,000 and the others will be \$4,000 each.

Also, 590 of those receiving the interest-free loan are Designated Scholars who receive a \$3,500 interest-free loan and a \$500 grant.

Combat Related Special Compensation rate hits 68 percent

It's not a sure thing, but an approval rating of 68 percent should make it worth the short time it takes to apply for tax-free Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC).

The 68 percent rate is derived by the CRSC staff at the Air Force Personnel Center, basing it on the approximately 21,000 applications submitted since June of 2003.

Those who have been approved for 10 percent or more are or will be reaping the benefits of additional tax-free compensation ranging from \$108 to \$2,249 per month for 100 percent combat-related disabilities, according to Kathy Garfield, CRSC Processing chief.

The basic qualifications, Ms. Garfield explained, are:

Be retired with 20 (or more) years of active duty or retired at age 60 from the Guard or Reserve;

Be receiving military retired pay;

Have a compensable VA disability of 10 percent or higher and military retired pay is being offset to receive the VA disability compensation (VA Waiver).

"Disabilities from injuries or illnesses incurred during armed conflict, due to exposure to Agent Orange, combat training, aircrew duties, simulated war exercises, parachuting, munitions demolition, instrumentalities of war, etc., **potentially** qualify for compensation," said Ms. Garfield.

She emphasized the word potentially since not all injuries and illnesses will qualify, although they may have the ring of combat-relatedness to them. "In case of a retiree's uncertainty, submit a claim," Ms. Garfield said. "Let the CRSC staff make the determination."

Retired members thinking they meet the criteria should complete an application, make copies of required documents and mail the package to HQ AFPC/DPPDC (CRSC), 550 C Street West, Suite 6, Randolph AFB, TX 78150-4708.

The CRSC team needs copies of the DD 214 or retirement order as well as VA rating decisions addressing the disabilities claimed and any other available documentation. Retired members who do not have their rating decision letters should make that known when submitting the application. The CRSC staff will work with the VA to obtain rating decisions.

For more information and an application, call the CRSC staff at (210) 565-1600 or the AFPC Contact Center at (800) 616-3775. Questions and a request for an application may also be sent by e-mail to AFPC.DPPDC.AFCRSC@randolph.af.mil. Also, information and applications are available online at <http://www.dod.mil/prhome/mppcrsc.html>.

DoD demonstrates global electronic medical records system

The U.S. military demonstrated its new Internet-based electronic medical records system to reporters at a recent rollout in Bethesda, Md.

"This is not just an electronic health record that's built around one hospital, or even a local community of hospitals. It moves information globally," said Dr. William Winkenwerder, Jr., Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, who attended the event held at the National Naval Medical Center here.

The system is called AHLTA, and it operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Winkenwerder said, noting all medical data is secured and accessed only by authorized personnel. AHLTA - not an acronym, he said - is the system's name.

The \$1.2 billion system uses off-the-shelf technology and began phase-in across the force in January 2004, officials said. Today, it's been deployed to about 60 percent of the military; full fielding is estimated to occur around January 2007, officials said.

The system will potentially serve more than 9 million U.S. service members, retirees and their families across the globe, Winkenwerder said. Future plans include shar-

"All medical data is secured and accessed only by authorized personnel" -- Dr. Winkenwerder

ing military medical information contained on AHLTA with the Veterans Affairs Department, Winkenwerder said.

Widespread use of interactive electronic medical records systems like AHLTA will ultimately produce lower costs, fewer medical mistakes and better care, said U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Michael O. Leavitt, who attended the event with Winkenwerder.

Medical researchers can use data gathered by AHLTA and similar systems to head off outbreaks of disease, said Navy Vice Adm. Donald C. Arthur, Surgeon General of the Navy, also at the ceremony.

"We're talking about the ability to aggregate those records, to put them together so that we can locate disease patterns," Arthur said.

Wynne sworn in as 21st AF secretary

In front of 4,200 U.S. Air Force Academy cadets, Michael W. Wynne was sworn in recently as the 21st secretary of the Air Force.

In this role, he is responsible for the affairs of the Department of the Air Force, including organizing, training, equipping and providing for the welfare of its nearly 370,000 men and women on active duty, 180,000 members of the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve, 160,000 civilians and their families, as well as about 760,000 members of the retiree community.

Mr. Wynne replaced Pete Geren, who had served as the acting secretary of the Air Force since July 29.

Prior to appointment, Secretary Wynne served in the Department of Defense as the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics.

Mr. Wynne served in the Air Force for seven years, ending his service as a captain and assistant professor of astronautics at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

He graduated from the United States Military Academy and also holds a masters' in electrical engineering from the Air Force Institute of Technology and a masters' in business from the University of Colorado.



Retiree golf classic begins late May

The 23rd annual national retired military golf classic will be held in Myrtle Beach, SC from May 30 through June 3, 2006. It will be played on five different golf courses at the Myrtle Beach National and Wildwing Plantation Golf Clubs.

Only 872 men and 132 women will be accepted for this event, described as the largest retired military golf event in the world. More than \$150,000 in cash and prizes will be awarded.

Applications will be mailed in early December to those on the mailing list. Applications will also be available at most military golf courses in the United States. Priority will be given to those who have played in previous classics.

After Feb. 1, 2006, acceptance will be on a first-come, first-served basis. A waiting list will be established once the classic is full. For applications call 1 (800) 255-4763

or 1 (866) 469-7853 or write to National Retired Military Golf Classic, PO Box 3608, Myrtle Beach, SC 29578.

VA activates surviving spouse web site

The Department of Veterans Affairs recently activated a new web site aimed directly at surviving spouses of military members who died on active duty and surviving spouses of veterans who died after serving their country.

The site, at <http://www.vba.va.gov/survivors>, not only has links to the VA pages describing survivor benefits but also to other government sites that may offer valuable information and assistance.

There is also a link to Frequently Asked Questions that answers many questions. For more specific questions, the site tells how to contact the VA directly.

The main VA web site is at <http://www.va.gov/>.

Memphis Belle at Air Force museum

The "Memphis Belle," the Eighth Air Force's first B-17F heavy bomber to complete 25 successful bombing missions over Europe during World War II, is now at the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

The move came as the result of an agreement between the Air Force and the Memphis Belle Memorial Association.

The aircraft, which is currently in the museum's restoration hangar in Area B, is being prepared to undergo several years of restoration work.

Once restoration on the aircraft begins, the public can view it as part of the museum's "Behind the Scenes" tours. For future announcements and tour updates, check the museum's Web site: <http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum>.

'Gateway to Europe' ends legacy

Although 60 years of airlift legacy came to a close at Rhein-Main Air Base, Germany, the "spirit" of this base will endure.

The long-time airlift hub, the "Gateway to Europe," closed during an October ceremony attended by more than 800 service members, veterans, civilian employees, American and German dignitaries and well wishers.

A C-17 Globemaster III bearing the name "Spirit of Rhein-Main" was unveiled by Lt. Gen. Christopher Kelly, Air Mobility Command vice commander; Col. Brad Denison, 469th Air Base Group commander; and retired Col. Gail Halvorsen, the famed Berlin Airlift "Candy Bomber."

A C-17 with the moniker, "Spirit of Berlin," made the symbolic last flight. The base's vital airlift support mission transitioned to Ramstein and Spangdahlem air bases Oct. 1.

VA news notes

VA prescription co-pays set to increase Jan. 1

Co-payments for outpatient medicines prescribed through Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities will increase by \$1 for a 30-day supply of prescription drugs. The increase to \$8 from \$7 for a 30-day supply of prescription drugs takes place on Jan. 1, 2006.

The increase is required by federal law, which bases VA's co-payments for outpatient prescriptions on increases in the Medical Consumer Price Index.

The \$1 increase will not affect veterans who have an injury or illness connected with their military service resulting in a 50 percent or greater disability.

Other veterans with less-pronounced service-connected ailments – those classified as Priority Groups 2 through 6 – will see their prescription drug co-pays rise by \$1. These groups' annual out-of-pocket expenses for VA medicine will remain capped but at a higher level. The new cap will rise to \$960 per year, up \$120 from the previous level. Veterans who have no injury or illness related in any way to their prior military service – referred to as Priority Groups 7 and 8 – will also see their co-payments increase, but there is no cap on annual payments for outpatient medicine.

Not all prescription drugs will be subject to the \$1 increase. Outpatient medications not subject to co-payments include:

- Medication for treatment of a service-connected disability;
- Medication for a veteran who has a service-connected disability of 50 percent or more;
- Medication for a veteran disabled by 50 percent or more for unemployability;
- Medication for a veteran whose annual income does not exceed the amount of VA pensions;
- Medications for health problems that may be linked to Agent Orange for Vietnam veterans, to radiation exposure, to undiagnosed illnesses of Persian Gulf War veterans, or for new veterans within two years of discharge after serving in a combat theater.

VA sees no across-the-board review of PTSD cases

The VA will not review the files of 72,000 veterans currently receiving disability compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to VA Secretary R. James Nicholson

On May 19, 2005, VA's Inspector General reported on

an examination of the files of a sample of 2,100 randomly selected veterans with disability ratings for PTSD. The IG cited insufficient documentation in the files and a dramatic increase in veterans filing for disability compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder since 1999.

"The problems with these files appear to be administrative in nature, such as missing documents, and not fraud," Nicholson said. "In the absence of evidence of fraud, we're not going to put our veterans through the anxiety of a widespread review of their disability claims. Instead, we're going to improve our training for VA personnel who handle disability claims and toughen administrative oversight."

"Not all combat wounds are caused by bullets and shrapnel," Nicholson added. "We have a commitment to ensure veterans with PTSD receive compassionate, world-class health care and appropriate disability compensation determinations."

VA offers online prescription refills

Thousands of veterans are now receiving their prescription drug refills from the VA with greater convenience, speed and security.

More than 70,000 prescriptions have been refilled using the latest service added to VA's "MyHealtheVet," the personal online health record system designed for veterans in the VA health care system. The prescription refill service began Aug. 31.

The secure online prescription refill service has quickly emerged as one of the more popular features in the MyHealtheVet system, which connects with VA's electronic records system. When a veteran orders a prescription refill, the request is routed to VA's computer system to be filled by one of the department's outpatient mail pharmacies. The refill is then sent directly to the veteran, eliminating the need for a trip to the pharmacy and a wait in line.

By last month, more than 100,000 veterans had signed up to use MyHealtheVet, which is located on VA's Web site at www.myhealth.va.gov.

On the same subject, the VA has warned veterans not to give credit card numbers over the phone to callers claiming to update VA prescription information.

"Some unscrupulous scammers have targeted America's veterans, especially our older veterans," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "VA does not call veterans and ask them to disclose personal financial information over the phone."

Veterans with questions should contact the nearest VA medical center or call, toll-free, 1 (877) 222-8387.

Who to contact

Address Change -- See page 12.

Air Force Retiree Services Branch – HQ AFPC/DPPRT, 550 C Street West Ste 3, Randolph AFB TX 78150-4713; (210) 565-4663. Manages the retiree activities program and supports the Air Force Retiree Council; advises the Air Force retirement community.

* **Air Force Aid Society** - Contact the AF Aid Society through the Family Support Center on any Air Force base or go to the Society's web site at www.afas.org. Phone: 1 (800) 769-8951.

* **Air Force Enlisted Foundation, Inc.**, 92 Sunset Lane, Shalimar FL 32579, or call (850) 651-9858 or 651-3766, or toll free (800) 258-1413; the web address is <http://www.afenlistedwidows.org> and the e-mail address is afef@afenlistedfoundation.org.

* **Air Force Village Foundation** - A retirement community for retired and honorably separated officers and their spouses, widow(er)s and elderly family members. Also provides assistance to widow(er)s of Air Force officers. Write to AFVF: 5100 John D. Ryan Blvd., San Antonio TX 78245-3502, <http://www.airforcevillages.com>; call (210) 677-8989 or the toll free number: (800)762-1122.

* **The General and Mrs. Curtis E. LeMay Foundation**, 17050 Arnold Dr., Riverside CA 92508, helps indigent widows of Air Force members. Phone (909) 697-2099/2000; or toll free 1 (800) 554-5510; <http://www.lemayfoundation.org>.

Arlington National Cemetery – (703) 607-8585, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org>.

Armed Forces Recreation Centers:

Dragon Hill, Korea–011-822-790-0016, FAX 011-822-792- 0036; <http://www.dragonhillodge.com>.

New Sanno Hotel (Tokyo)– <http://www.thenewsanno.com>.

Hale Koa Hotel, Hawaii – 1(800) 367-6027; fax is (800) HALE FAX; write Armed Forces Recreation Center, 2055 Kalia Road, Honolulu, Hawaii 96815-1998.

Shades of Green Resort in Orlando, Fla – (407) 824-3600; fax (407) 824-3665. Toll-free reservations number is 1 (888) 593-2242.

Europe – AFR Resorts in Europe; Vacation Planning Center; Unit 24501; APO AE 09053; 011-49-8821-72981; FAX 011-49-8821-3942. E-Mail vacation@afrc.garmisch.army.mil; or write Vacation Planning Center, AFRC Europe, Unit 24501, APO 09053; <http://www.armymwr.com>.

Armed Forces Retirement Home - Washington – Contact USSAH Admissions Dept., Washington, D.C. 20317-0001; (800) 422-9988 or (202) 730-3337.

Armed Forces Retirement Home - Gulfport -- Closed because of Hurricane Katrina; <http://www.afrh.com>.

DEERS Telephone Center – (800) 334-4162 (Calif.); (800) 527-5602 (Alaska and Hawaii); (800) 538-9552 (all other states).

ID cards – Call (800) 616-3775 for location of the nearest issuing facility.

Locating Air Force retirees or active duty members – Write a letter to the person you're trying to locate, seal it in a stamped envelope, enter your return address (including retired grade) and send letter and addressee's name, grade and SSN or service number in another envelope to HQ AFPC/DPDXIDL, 550 C Street West Ste 50, Randolph AFB TX 78150-4752; www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/IM/AFLocator&FOIA/afwwloc.htm or call (210) 565-2660.

Lodging Reservations – Air Force, (888) 235-6343 (AF-LODGE), after prompt, dial first three digits of base name; Army, (800) 462-7691 (GO-ARMY-1); Navy, (800) 628-9466 (NAVY INN).

Lost Records --Retired members should use Standard Form 180 to request a copy of lost documents including the DD Form 214. The Form is available from the a VA office or the nearest military personnel unit. Also, may be downloaded from <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/standard-form-180.html>. Members retiring on or before 30 Sep 2004 should send the form to NPRC/NCPMF-C, 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63132-5000. Check the Web site at: <http://vetrecs.archives.gov>. Dependents' medical records are forwarded to an NPRC depository at 111 Winnebago St., St. Louis, MO 63118-4126 two years after the sponsor retires. Those who retired on or after Oct 1, 2004 can request copies by sending the SF 180 to AFPC/DPFFCAMP, 550 C St. West, Suite 19, Randolph AFB, TX 78150; Fax: Commercial (210)565-4021, DSN: 665-4021. More records information is available at <http://vetrecs.archives.gov>.

Medicare: 1 (800) 633-4227; <http://www.medicare.gov>.

Pay – Defense Finance and Accounting Service-Cleveland Center; toll-free (800) 321-1080; commercial (216) 522-5534. Fax (800) 469-6559. SBP annuitants may use the same voice toll-free number but the fax is (800) 982-8459.

Report a Retiree's Death - Call toll-free, 1 (877) 353-6807. Overseas, call the US Embassy.

Survivor Benefit Plan – Call or visit the military personnel flight at the nearest Air Force installation.

Tricare – General telephone menu: (303) 676-3400. The Web site is <http://www.tricare.osd.mil>. **Tricare Senior Pharmacy** – (877) 363-6337. **Tricare Retiree Delta Dental Plan** - 1 (888) 838-8737, <http://www.DDPdelta.org>. **Tricare for Life** - 1 (866) 773-0405.

VA matters – Regional Offices, 1 (800) 827-1000. Retirees overseas should contact the US Embassy. **Insurance:** VA Regional Office and Insurance Center, PO Box 7208 (claims inquiries); PO Box 7327 (loans); PO Box 7787 (payments); Philadelphia, PA 19101; 1 (800) 669-8477. **Grave Information**, 1 (800) 697-69470; **Gulf War Vets**, 1 (800) 749-8387; **GI Bill:** 1 (888) 442-4551. Web site: www.va.gov

Social Security – (800) 772-1213 or (410) 965- 8019 or write to: Social Security Administration, Attn: Office of International Operations, 6401 Security Blvd, Baltimore Md 21235. Web site: <http://www.ssa.gov>.

Arlington National Cemetery gains 70 acres for expansion

After years of searching for more space for Arlington National Cemetery, Defense Department officials have garnered more than 70 acres of land to expand the sprawling 600-plus-acre hillside on the west bank of the Potomac River overlooking the nation's capital.

The fiscal 2000 National Defense Authorization Act contained a provision expanding the cemetery.

In 1998, officials estimated they would run out of grave space between the year 2025 and 2030, according to cemetery superintendent John Metzler, Jr. "So one of the things we were directed to do was to develop a new master plan and to look at not only what we needed to do internally to maintain the cemetery, but also how we could look at expanding the cemetery beyond the year of 2025."

Officials searched around the cemetery in all directions to see who owned the land, what it was currently being used for, and the likelihood of being able to acquire the land.

As a result, they were able to acquire three parcels of land so far, including the 44-acre Navy Annex that lies to the south. "We also acquired a piece of property inside the cemetery that had belonged to the National Park Service, which was being used as a buffer zone between the Arlington House and the cemetery," Metzler said. "There was a 24-acre tract, and we were able to acquire half of that."

More information on the Arlington National Cemetery, including eligibility criteria, is available by calling commercial, (703) 607-8585, or going to <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org>

The Arlington House is the mansion where Gen. Robert E. Lee lived before the Civil War. After he joined the Confederacy, the plantation was confiscated at the outbreak of the Civil War and the mansion converted to headquarters for the Union's Army of the Potomac. The grounds were used as a burial site for families that were too poor to claim their deceased loved ones from the battlefield.

Today, the mansion is restored as a museum, and the grounds are considered a sacred shrine.

The cemetery also will use a 17-acre tract of land that's now a picnic area at adjacent Fort Myer, Metzler noted. "We're also looking at relocating our utilities inside the cemetery from underneath the grass-tufted area and placing them underneath our roads," he said.

With these initiatives in place, Metzler said, Arlington would be able to continue operations until at least 2060, and that would include development for both ground and columbarium burials.

Long Term Care Insurance not for everybody: Is it for you?

Active duty Airmen, some Reservists, appropriated-fund civilian employees, retirees and qualified family members can still apply for the Federal Long-Term Care Insurance Program (FLTCIP).

The program can help federal employees defray the costs of in-home care, nursing-home care, or assisted-living facilities for people no longer able to perform normal daily activities because of chronic-health conditions.

"Long term care insurance isn't just for old age - nearly 40 percent of people needing long term care are under age 65," said Ms. Janet Thomas, human resources specialist at the Air Force Personnel Center. "Health insurance will cover hospitalization and medical care, but not necessarily long term care. The Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program provides protection from the potentially high cost of long term care."

The FLTCIP, the largest program in the nation, is sponsored by the Office of Personnel Management and pro-

vides affordable group premiums and comprehensive benefits.

Two types of plans are available:

Facilities-Only Plan: This covers all levels of nursing home, assisted-living facility and inpatient hospice care.

Comprehensive Plan: This covers everything the Facilities-Only Plan covers, plus care provided at home by a nurse, home health aide, therapist, informal caregiver or other authorized provider. Costs of adult day care centers and home hospices are covered as well.

Premiums are based on applicant's age, so the sooner people apply, the smaller premium they will pay, according to Ms. Thomas. Once enrolled, coverage will not be canceled as long as premiums are paid on time and coverage can't be canceled due to age or a change in health.

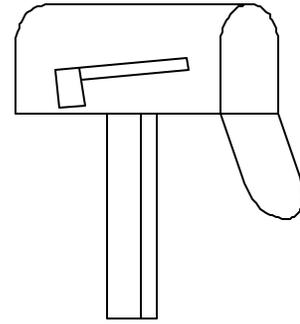
For more information, call 1-800-582-3337, TTY 1-800-843-3557, or visit online at www.LTCFEDS.com. Representatives are available weekdays 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern Time.

How to change your correspondence address

The **Afterburner, News for USAF Retired Personnel**, is mailed to Air Force retirees and Survivor Benefit Plan annuitants using correspondence addresses supplied by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service's Cleveland Center.

Addresses of non-annuitant surviving spouses of Air Force retirees are maintained in a separate data base explained below.

It's important to send the change of address to the correct location to ensure the change is made in a timely manner. Please note that the London, Ken., address below is a contractor that films a written request as a computer image and transmits it to the Cleveland pay center.



Retirees – Those members in receipt of or entitled to retired pay, including retirees whose pay (part or all), comes from the VA or from Civil Service (because of combined federal service), should send their change of address to:

DFAS
U. S. Military Retirement Pay
P.O. Box 7130
London, KY 40742-7130
Phone: 1 (800)321-1080 or
FAX: 1(800)469-6559

Include your Social Security number and sign your request when mailing or FAXing.

SBP/RSFPP annuitants – Those surviving spouses who are in receipt of or entitled to a Survivor Benefit Plan/Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan annuity (this includes surviving spouses of retirees who were enrolled in SBP but who are receiving DIC in lieu of the SBP) must send a change of address to:

DFAS
U.S. Military Annuitant Pay
P.O. Box 7131
London, KY 40742-7131
Phone: 1(800)321-1080 or
FAX: 1(800)982-8459

If mailing or FAXing, include your and the deceased sponsor's Social Security numbers and sign the request.

Non-SBP/RSFPP annuitants --

Surviving spouses of retirees who were not enrolled in either the Survivor Benefit Plan/Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan (but who may or may not be receiving a DIC pension from the VA), and who are currently receiving the **Afterburner** in their own name, should mail the new address and include the sponsor's retired grade and SSN to:

HQ AFPC/DPPRT
550 C Street West Ste 3
Randolph AFB TX 78150-4713

Surviving spouses in this category who are not receiving the **Afterburner** in their own name may request to be placed on the list by sending a letter of request to the same address.

DO NOT use this portion as a Change of Address form. See information in the appropriate block above for the correct change of address procedures. Anything else will only delay matters.

HQ AFPC/DPPRT
550 C STREET WEST STE 3
RANDOLPH AFB TX 78150-4713

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