



The E-9ers

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

November 2009

Volume 12 Number 11

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Fellow E9er's:

I guess we can say that we're in the fall season, seeing we got snow this week. It has been a good summer for our family, and I hope yours also.

We have lost some of our members, but have gained some too. Hope the group who went to the balloon fiesta had a good time, despite the wind.

It is that time of the year again — election of officers. I have asked Mike Phelps, Bob Lee, and Mardy Flor to come up with a list of candidates for next year. Please consider running for a position.

Your Prez,
Bill

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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TRICARE INPATIENT COSTS INCREASE SLIGHTLY FOR FISCAL YEAR 2010

Every year the costs for Tricare-covered inpatient services are reviewed and are subject to change. For the coming fiscal year 2010, which runs from October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2010, the increase for some out-of-pocket costs paid by Tricare Standard beneficiaries at civilian hospitals for inpatient care and inpatient behavioral health services is small.

For active duty family members using Tricare Standard and Tricare Extra, the daily cost share for inpatient admissions at civilian hospitals has increased from \$15.65 to \$16.30 per day or \$25 per admission, whichever is greater. There is no charge for separately billed professional services.

The daily cost share for retirees, their families, and other eligible beneficiaries using Tricare Standard for inpatient admissions at civilian hospitals has increased from \$535 to \$645 per day or 25 percent of the total charge, whichever is less. Additionally, these beneficiaries pay 25 percent of the Tricare - allowable charge for separately billed professional services. The out-of-pocket costs for retirees, their families, and other eligible beneficiaries for inpatient behavioral health services at low-volume civilian hospitals has increased from \$193 to \$197 per day or 25 percent of the billed charge, whichever is less.

For additional information about copayments and cost-shares for Tricare - covered services, visit the Tricare Web site at <http://www.tricare.mil/costs>.

Tricare Press Room Release, Dated September 30, 2009

The E-9ers Association Next Monthly Meeting

November 18, 2009

11:00 a.m.

at

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

FLAG BURNER PILLORIED BY VETERANS

Valley Falls, NY is a red, white, and blue village that is still seeing red after a flag that flew over Iraq was burned by a 21-year-old. The payback? He was publicly humiliated September 20 by being duct-taped to the flagpole that Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1938 said he desecrated September 18.

Nick Normile, post commander and Vietnam War veteran, said he's been flooded with calls from media outlets since the events of that week received attention from local TV stations and newspapers. He's been asked to go live on a veterans radio show program from Tennessee, another radio show from Chicago, and even received a call from NBC studios in New York City. But Normile said he's not planning to let the story get any more attention and has declined appearances. "I'm not trying to be some martyr or hero," Normile said. "I just did what I thought was right."

The 21-year-old appeared intoxicated when he entered the VFW post on the day of the alleged act, Normile said. When the man was refused service for not having a proper ID, he ran out in a fit of anger. He cut the rope of the flag, which had once flown over troops in Iraq, and ignited it with a cigarette lighter. Two days later, Normile said the man was forced to sit in the sun pilloried for six hours as townspeople gathered across the street for a youth soccer picnic. A sign was hung around his neck detailing what he had done. It recalled the Middle Ages punishment, subjecting him to public humiliation and scorn.

"He'll never disrespect the flag again, I can tell you that," Normile said on September 25. A week later villagers were hush-hush about the event, but patrons of the post bar gave a nod of agreement to the punishment, pointing proudly to a newspaper clipping of the event on a bulletin board.

Patriotism is on open display in this village of about 500 -- the walls of a defunct railroad bridge near its entrance now brightly colored red, white, and blue. Most of the historical homes have American flags of their own hanging from porches, some also adorned with the Don't Tread on Me flag, popular with Tea Party activists.

Normile said once he found out what the man had done, he knew he had to be taught a lesson. Normile said he went out hunting for him, but when he couldn't find him at his apartment, he sought the help of the man's uncle to bring him out. "He manned up, he knew he had punishment coming," said Normile, who described the young man he refused to identify as guilty and ashamed. "I told him to think about those kids in the foxhole, and how they had no one to set them free," Normile said. "It got to him, so I was satisfied. He showed a lot of remorse, no attitude."

Normile said the flag, whose pieces will be retired in a formal ceremony, had significant meaning. The village's auxiliary had been sending toiletries and other goods to Soldiers in Iraq, who then sent back the flag that had flown over their bunker. It was received with great attention and a ceremony. State troopers and Rensselaer County sheriffs deputies said no charges had been filed by either the VFW post or the man.

Military.com News Article, Dated September 28, 2009

VA IG SAYS TOO MANY VETERANS WAITING FOR CLAIMS

Too many veterans' disability claims take more than a year to process, the Veterans Affairs Department's inspector general said September 23. An audit released by the VA showed that a year ago, 11,000 veterans had claims pending more than a year. It says the agency awarded retroactive payments totaling about \$43 million for about a third of them. Of that total, it says about \$14 million were unnecessarily delayed because of deficient claims processing.

Among the worst cases, one veteran was owed nearly \$65,000 for a delayed claim, and another veteran waited more than two years for payment, the IG said. "These delayed benefit payments have the potential to adversely affect the economic status and quality of life for veterans who are eligible for benefits," the IG said.

The report said the VA has made progress in reducing lingering claims, but it's still creating too much of a financial burden for veterans. The VA has hired more claims processors but is struggling with a growing number of claims approaching one million as more veterans who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars file claims. It recommended changes such as improving its workload management. The VA agreed with most of the IG findings and recommendations, the IG said.

Military.com News Article, Dated September 24, 2009

MILITARY RECRUITING HITS HISTORIC HIGHS

The Pentagon's personnel chief said October 13 the military has completed its best recruiting year since 1973, meeting all its goals and bringing in a better educated group of young people. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps met goals for active duty and reserve recruiting during the budget year that ended September 30 - the first time that has happened since the all-volunteer force was established, said Defense Department head of personnel Bill Carr.

He told a Pentagon press conference that it's partly because of department spending on finding recruits, even as fewer civilian jobs were available due to the nation's economic problems. He also cited increases in military pay.

For the active-duty force overall, Carr said 96 percent of recruits had a high school diploma, the best showing since 1996. For the Army, it was about 95 percent, up 11 percentage points from the previous year. And 73 percent of Pentagon recruits scored above average on the military's math and verbal aptitude testing, the best showing since 2004, Carr said. The military spends about \$10,000 per recruit, taking into account advertising, recruiter time, and office leases for recruiting stations, he said. Recruits are in the 90th percentile of earners for their education and time in the workplace, Carr said.

He said studies show that those born between 1978 and 1996 "are more inclined toward service to society. That's a good thing, because that means we start off stronger with a given group of young people." There also are factors that limit the pool from which the military must draw roughly 300,000 recruits each year. Some 70 percent of American high school students go on to college now, compared with only half in the 1980s. And one in four in the prime recruiting age of 17 to 24 are obese, raising fitness questions, compared with one in 20 in the 1980s, Carr said.

Military.com News Article, Dated October 14, 2009

VA ADVANCE FUNDING BILL CLEARS CONGRESS

Historic legislation aimed at preventing Congress' inability to get its work done on time from hurting veterans' medical care is on its way to the White House for President Barack Obama's expected signature after clearing Congress on October 13.

Passage of the bill by the Senate came on the 13th day of the new fiscal year, in which lawmakers have made a case for financial safeguards by passing only one of the 13 separate appropriations measures needed to keep the federal government running. The only appropriations bill approved so far is the one that provides funding for Congress itself.

Delays in passing the Veterans Affairs Department budget are nothing new; this is the 20th time in the last 23 years that the VA budget has not been approved by the start of the fiscal year. Failure to act on time, which can be disruptive to medical budgets, led every major veterans organization to make the advance funding bill their top legislative priority for the year.

The bill, HR 1016, passed the Senate by voice vote and with no debate. The House of Representatives gave final approval to the bill October 8 with a 409-1 vote.

President Barack Obama endorsed the idea of advanced VA appropriations in April, and is expected to sign the bill.

The Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009 provides funding one year in advance for veterans medical programs so there will be no lapse if Congress fails to approve the traditional budget by the start of the fiscal year. Advance funding for medical services, facilities, and research programs takes effect with the fiscal 2011 budget, assuming Congress provides promised money in the 2010 budget that also covers those programs for 2011.

To ensure enough money is provided in advance, Congress approved a mechanism for the advance budget requiring VA to provide an estimate that is reviewed for accuracy by the Government Accountability Office, a nonpartisan arm of Congress. A copy of the review will be made available to the public, which is why the word "transparency" is included in the bill's name.

Military Times News Article, Dated October 15, 2009

SENATE QUESTIONS VALUE OF CONTRACTED VA CARE

A Senate committee reviewing the increased use of contracted health care for veterans disability exams and treatment is growing increasingly skeptical that this is a cheaper or higher-quality alternative to using Veterans Affairs Department health care workers. About one-quarter of the medical exams required for compensation and pension claims are handled by contract doctors as part of an effort launched in 1996 to address delays in getting appointments.

VA also has turned to contractors under a pilot project to provide specialty care not available — or not available without a long wait — at veterans hospitals and clinics, and general and specialty care in rural areas or other locations far from VA facilities. But the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, which endorses the idea of reducing appointment wait times, is not sure the increased reliance on contract health care is a good thing.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-MT, said he doubts that an exam to determine a veteran's disability rating could be done as accurately by a contract doctor as by a VA physician with years of experience. Sen. Richard Burr, R-NC, said he has heard from a North Carolina urologist who has decided to stop providing contract care to veterans because VA does not provide enough information about a veteran's medical condition in advance of an appointment, and does not do a good enough job monitoring patients who had a one-time visit with a contract specialist. And, Sen. Roland Burris, D-IL, pressed VA officials — without getting a direct answer — about why the department does not try to hire more doctors in places like the Washington, DC area, rather than rely on a contractor to provide disability exams.

A psychiatric clinical nurse testifying before the committee on behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, an employee union, called contract care "over-utilized and under-scrutinized by many VA facilities in both rural and urban areas" and questioned whether reliance on contracts as a short-term fix for staff shortages and long patient waiting lists was in the best interests of veterans. "Contract care requires that VA give up a certain degree of control to a for-profit outside entity," said Mary Curtis, a nurse and clinical care coordinator at the VA medical center in Boise, ID.

"In the short term, the effect is that VA may be less able to control costs, quality of care, provider qualifications, and medical privacy or ensure that care is delivered timely and is geographically accessible," Curtis said. "In the long term, excessive use of contract care may deplete the VA health care system of the staff, equipment, and other resources it needs to continue to provide veterans with a full range of services. The diversion of large numbers of veterans to contract providers may also weaken VA's research capacity and academic affiliations."

VA officials and representatives of the major health care contractors defended the quality and cost of care. Tim McClain, president and chief executive officer of Humana Veterans Health Services, which provides specialty care, said his company does not undermine VA. He called his company's work an "effective backstop." VA officials said they are restructuring their contract oversight from local authority to more centralized control so they can better monitor services and costs.

Military Times News Article, Dated September 30, 2009

ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON MERGER TO BEGIN NEXT YEAR

The process of combining Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson into one joint operation will begin early next year, Army officials said October 13. The joint installation in Anchorage will be the result of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure process. Across the country, 26 facilities are being combined into 12 bases. The Anchorage transition to one base will begin January 31 and is slated for completion by October 2010.

A commander for the joint facility has not yet been named. Col. Timothy Prior, the commander at Fort Richardson, will be the deputy commander of the joint base. Air Force Col. Jeffery Vinger is the provisional joint base commander.

The plan has been in the works for four years, and vice chiefs of the Air Force and Army signed off on the plan Friday. "This union formalizes an already close working relationship the Air Force and Army have shared for years," Prior said in a prepared statement.

Vinger said the military was focused on maintaining services for soldiers, airman, their families, and the combined civilian work force. "Efficiencies won't translate to job cuts; that's not the goal of this initiative. We're looking for best practices from both services," he said.

Military Times News Article, Dated October 13, 2009

VETERANS MAY GET ANOTHER STIMULUS CHECK

Millions of veterans could get another \$250 stimulus check next year if President Barack Obama can convince lawmakers that the move is needed to help the economy. The plan would follow the economic recovery checks sent out this spring to senior citizens, disabled workers, and some veterans as part of the broader stimulus package.

Veterans and their survivors who are currently receiving disability compensation, dependency and indemnity compensation, or pension payouts would qualify. Any veteran receiving Social Security benefits would also be eligible for the \$250 check. The plan would apply only to citizens living in the United States, Puerto Rico, or Guam.

In a statement October 14, Obama said the checks are designed to help "those hardest hit by the recession." An estimated 2 million veterans would be eligible for the payments, not including those among the 49 million Social Security beneficiaries who could receive checks.

Senior administration officials would not commit to when veterans will see the checks, noting that Congress still must draft and adopt legislation to authorize the payments. But they believe lawmakers will be open to the idea, with one official noting that "the most important thing we can do to strengthen this economy is provide additional relief to those hardest hit." Both House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said they will work with Obama on the proposal, with Pelosi saying in a statement that "providing another economic recovery payment is the right thing to do."

The announcement came just hours before the Social Security Administration announced it will not have a cost-of-living adjustment for Social Security recipients in 2010, the first time in 35 years without an increase. White House officials said the drop in inflation rates negated the need for a Social Security COLA increase. Another round of \$250 checks would cost about \$13 billion; Obama pledged that the money will not hurt Social Security, but offered no specifics on where the funding would come from.

Military.com News Article, Dated October 16, 2009

SOME TRICARE PREVENTIVE SERVICES ARE NOW FREE

As of September 1, certain Tricare beneficiaries no longer have to pay out of pocket for immunizations, mammograms, and some other preventive services. However, the benefit does not apply to all preventive services or to Medicare-eligible beneficiaries. Also effective the same date, beneficiaries can request reimbursement for any of these covered preventive services that they have paid for since October 14, 2008. The benefit is retroactive to that date, when it was signed into law.

Covered preventive services include screenings for colorectal cancer, breast cancer, cervical cancer and prostate cancer; immunizations; and certain physical exams, including well-child visits for children younger than 6. This means the patient has no co-payments or cost shares, even if his or her annual Tricare deductible has not been met. Here's how to get reimbursed, according to Tricare officials:

- No claim form is required. Beneficiaries should contact the Tricare contractor that processed their claim and request a reimbursement. Beneficiaries may call or write; written requests should include the sponsor's Social Security number, full names and dates of birth of all dependents, and a current mailing address.
- Beneficiaries will be reimbursed directly by the contractor.

Military Times News Article, Dated September 2, 2009

VA RESTARTS VIETNAM VETERANS STUDY

House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) commended Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) Secretary Shinseki for agreeing to restart the National Vietnam Veterans Longitudinal Study. VA initiated the study in 1984 as a result of a Congressional mandate. In 2000, Congress again directed VA to reassess this generation of veterans in a follow-up study and provide a report by October 2004. However, this directive hasn't been carried out by the VA until now.

Military.com News Article, Dated September 28, 2009

VA TO SHORT-CUT SOME AGENT ORANGE RULINGS

A new Department of Veterans Affairs ruling will soon relieve Vietnam veterans suffering from three specific illnesses from the burden of proving their ailments are linked to Agent Orange exposure to receive VA health care and disability payments. Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric K. Shinseki's decision, announced October 13, establishes a service connection for Vietnam veterans stricken with hairy-cell leukemia and other B-cell leukemias, Parkinson's disease, and ischemic heart disease, VA chief of staff John Gingrich told American Forces Press Service.

Shinseki made the decision based on a recent report by the National Academy of Science's Institute of Medicine. The report cited new scientific studies pointing to a strong connection between the illnesses and Agent Orange exposure. Shinseki determined that evidence was compelling enough to establish a presumption that affected veterans' illnesses are service-related, Gingrich said. This determination will short-cut the process for them to receive services through what Shinseki called "a world-class health care system," as well as monthly disability payments.

But before the ruling takes effect, it must be published in the Federal Register and opened for final comment, Gingrich explained. He predicted that the process would be completed early next year. It's unclear exactly how many of the 2.1 million Vietnam veterans the ruling will affect, Gingrich said. If 10 percent have the presumed illnesses, that could result in some 200,000 new VA claims.

Agent Orange, named for the orange-colored barrels in which it was stored, was sprayed widely during the Vietnam War to defoliate trees and remove concealment for the enemy. Veterans have long blamed the herbicide for causing a variety of illnesses, but until now, there's been no official recognition of a link. That put the burden on veterans to prove an association - a process Shinseki conceded too often has created an adversarial relationship between the VA and veterans.

Shinseki, a retired Army general and a Vietnam veteran himself, lamented this situation this summer at a medical symposium in San Antonio. "I have asked why, 40 years after Agent Orange was last used in Vietnam, this secretary is still adjudicating claims for presumption of service-connected disabilities tied to its toxic effects," he told attendees at the Association of the U.S. Army's Institute of Land Warfare Army Medical Symposium.

Shinseki also questioned why the debilitating effects of Gulf War illnesses still are being debated 20 years after Operation Desert Storm. "Why weren't conclusive studies conducted by the DOD and VA to render presumption of service-connected disability resulting from exposure to toxic environments associated with these operations?" Shinseki asked. "Such findings would have facilitated VA's settling of service-connected disability claims in far less time. The scientific method, and the failure to advocate for the veteran, got in the way of our processes." Veterans deserve better, he said.

"We must do better reviews of illnesses that may be connected to service, and we will," he said. "Veterans who endure health problems deserve timely decisions based on solid evidence." Shinseki's decision brings to 15 the number of presumed illnesses VA recognizes. Others are:

- Acute and subacute transient peripheral neuropathy;
- AL amyloidosis;
- Chloracne;
- Chronic lymphocytic leukemia;
- Diabetes Mellitus (Type 2);
- Hodgkin's disease;
- Multiple myeloma;
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma;
- Porphyria cutanea tarda;
- Prostate cancer;
- Respiratory cancers; and
- Soft-tissue sarcoma other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma or mesothelioma.

SOCIAL EVENTS

DECEMBER: E-9erS Christmas Party

DATE: Sunday, December 13, 2009

TIME: 11:30 AM

PLACE: Marie Callendar's Restaurant; 51 West Dry Creek Court, Littleton, CO.

COST: \$19.69 for Sunday Brunch. Tax and tip included. Reservations & Money to Mardy by the November E-9 meeting.

A note to the E-9ers from Mardy: "I will not be doing the Socials for E-9ers after 2009. I would like for you all to know I have thoroughly enjoyed doing the Socials. The E-9ers Organization is the best in the whole wide world. Not the USA, but the Whole Wide World. I know when it is time, hopefully, for someone else to take over, and this is the time. I wish to thank all E-9 members for positive comments, assistance with socials, and attending members. Just Me Mardy"

CALL FOR VETERANS' PHOTOGRAPHS

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and FedEx Office recently hosted the launch of The National Call for Photos campaign. This campaign will gather images of the more than 58,000 men and women whose names are on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The FedEx Office will use its locations across the country to help in gathering photos. The fund's latest initiative is The Education Center at The Wall whose exhibits will display photographs of people whose names are on The Wall, a selection of the more than 100,000 items that have been left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, a timeline of key military events of the Vietnam War, and a history of the memorial. For more information, visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund website at <http://www.vvmf.org/> or telephone 1-866-990-WALL (9255).

Military.com News Article, Dated September 28, 2009

WELCOME ABOARD!

The following new members have recently joined our association. Please welcome them into our elite group of E-9ers and spouses:

Thomas G. Rochford, CMSgt, USAF (RET)
Charles J. Ferg, SGM, USMC (RET)

Cynthia L. Rochford
Wanda A. Ferg

MILITARY SERVICE AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Earnings for active duty military service or active duty training have been covered under Social Security since 1957. Social Security has covered inactive duty service in the armed forces reserves (such as weekend drills) since 1988. If you served in the military before 1957, you did not pay Social Security taxes, but you were given special credit for some of your service.

You can get both Social Security benefits and military retirement. Generally, there is no reduction of Social Security benefits because of your military retirement benefits. You'll get your full Social Security benefit based on your earnings. For more information, go to following website: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10017.html>.

IN MEMORIAM

Bettie Jean Blair passed away on September 23, 2009. Bettie was an enlisted member of the Women's Army Corps and a Korean War veteran. She was a charter member of the E-9ers Association and proudly participated in numerous veterans organizations. Bettie will be missed by all those who loved and knew her over the years. Please remember her in your prayers. In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting that donations be made to the: Women in Military Service Memorial Fund; Web site: womensmemorial.org/.

2009 CALENDAR



NOVEMBER

- 1 Daylight Savings Time Ends
- 3 Election Day
- 10 U.S. Marine Corps
Established (1775)
- 10 UVC Meeting
- 11 Veterans Day
- 18 Membership Meeting
- 26 Thanksgiving Day

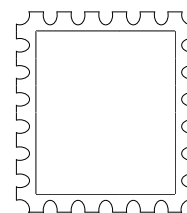
HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

- Nov. 1, 1976 (323rd) Don &
Lolita Young
- Nov. 13, 1955 (54th) Julian &
Betty Dracon
- Nov. 30, 1974 (35th) Larry &
Joy Lowe

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

- 2 Barbara Dick
- 3 Lois Van Sciver
- 4 Wally Reid
- 8 Rosalyn Mitchell
- 11 Paul Lietz
- 12 Jeffrey Study
- 13 Ann Ellington
- 15 Jerry Gamache
- 16 Ethel Darden
- 17 Cheryl Six
- 18 William Allan
- 18 Jo Sube
- 18 Debbie Gamache
- 21 Vincent Patton
- 24 Theda Victor
- 28 Karen Schwanke

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

