

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
AFGHANISTAN ENGINEER DISTRICT**

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EXPLAIN RELOCATION INCENTIVES AND R&R POLICY

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**Afghanistan Engineer District House Meeting  
Kabul, Afghanistan**

**KRIS MULLINS:** As you know, back in May there was a wonderful email from LTG Van Antwerp that stated if you would sign up to come to AED or GRD for one year you would receive a 25% relocation incentive, and if you agreed to come for six months, you would receive a 15% relocation incentive. Under this new memo, the change was that if you came over in a TCS status the incentive rose from ten percent to 15%, and the new incentive now allowed for the bonus to be paid to those who came over in a TDY status.

I am speaking to the Dept. of Army employees only; those who are reimbursable, wear the military uniform, or are schedule "A" employees, I am very sorry, but none of this applies to you. You can all see me about that later. (chuckle) So this memo came out in the middle of May, and was retroactive to the first of May, and they started paying the relocation incentives, almost immediately. In fact, I came over at the end of June, and about three weeks after I got here, I received a large sum in my check for my relocation incentive. Then about a month later, some people came to me saying that they had not received their relocation incentive yet. So after some checking, I learned that Headquarters U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had put a hold on all relocation incentives as of 20 July, stating that there were some problems with the process. A legal finding regarding the law passed in 2005 giving the federal government the authority to pay relocation incentives up to 25% for a one year commitment, stipulated that you could only earn up to 12.5% relocation incentive for a six month tour. So some of us who were paid 15% relocation incentive for a six month tour under the new memo were over-paid, and some were not even paid at all.

Over the past three weeks there has been a flurry of emails, policy letters and memos for you to read and sign regarding this. The gist of it is; those who signed up for a year and were promised the relocation incentive in writing, will receive it in the next few weeks, and if you don't see it in your check, please come see me. Also, for those of you who signed up for 15% for a six month tour and have this in writing, will have their bonuses reduced to 12.5%. We are working out the details on ways that we can still honor the 15% commitment, but we have not received clearance to do so. But, we are working it, and we will continue to work it, because it's a very high priority for the Colonel and me. LTG Van Antwerp has gone to the Office of the Secretary of Defense and asked for a blanket waiver for those that have been over paid, so they will not have to pay it back, but it has not been approved

yet, and there is no guarantee that it will. I recommend that you get with Ms. Karen Williams in S-1 and find out what your options are. If you were promised 15%, I suggest you go ahead and sign the 12.5% letter so we can get you paid on your next pay check. If you have issues, concerns, or complaints, please feel free to come see me. Are there any questions?

**COL O'DONOVAN:** You're very familiar that the law that authorizes three R&R's for a one year tour is expiring at the end of this fiscal year. We found out about three weeks ago, and we've been in an eye-poking, ear-biting, hair-pulling battle ever since, trying to convince people that this is an important issue that needs to be resolved. Now let me explain a little background to you. Within the Army that we serve in, there's a concept called Commander's Intent. It is a doctrinal term that says that only a commander of an organization has intent; everyone else has concepts, ideas that support, but only the commander has intent. But the only person who has intent is the commander, and intent is described as purpose, method and end-state. (what it is you want to achieve, how you want to achieve it, and what it's supposed to look like when you achieve it.) Intent has a place in our formal written documents in our operations orders. My intent is to honor the three R&R's for our one year service people, and the one R&R for our six month service people exactly the way it is laid out in LTG Van Antwerp's letter. That is my intent.

Now there are Armies of bureaucrats between me and my objective, but we are making progress. The very first plan we rolled out was: If you are the commander, and this is your intent, then you can just sign the paper and pay for that R&R, and then go to jail. Mrs. O'Donovan was not too happy with that plan. (chuckle) We did have some discussions about it, but it's not a viable plan. So then we talked about all sorts of variations, and we've looked at a lot of them. One was: You buy your own tickets, and then make a claim against the government, who would either pay or not pay depending on how we work things out. But there's a certain risk involved there, and I don't like that plan, because it doesn't meet my intent. In the second plan, the Deputy Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness has signed a letter and sent it to the Deputy Secretary of Defense asking that our authority be extended. We'll see how that plays out.

We've also asked that the Continuing Resolution Authority language that comes out at the end of the year and allows us to keep doing business have included in it language that will allow us to keep paying for R&R's. We've been told that this will not work, but it's still a little unclear to me why it won't, so I'm still digging into that one. We also have another plan that was cooked up by AED counsel which provides a work-around for the old law which authorizes one R&R for a six month tour. So if people take one R&R half way on their six month tour, then go home at the end, only to return a few weeks later then repeat the process, they can essentially get three R&R's. Only two lawyers could think of a plan like that! (chuckle) We are thinking about renaming the annex after Al and Dale, our District Counsel, for thinking of this. This is a possible option that is being reviewed by higher headquarters.

The bottom line is, you are going to have to trust the chain of command and our support back in the states to work through this, because I am convinced that we will, and that we are going to get back to what we are supposed to be. I know we will in the long term, because there is language in the National Defense Authorization Act which is currently in the House that says to restore this policy. There is now reason to believe that it won't be passed as it works its way through our legislative process.

I believe that in the long term we are going to get this fixed, but I'm just looking for a plan for right now to get us from here to there, so that no one suffers from this.

Now let's talk about how this has affected folks. When this first happened, there were a lot of people who were pretty upset, and I understand that. (The Army gives, and the Army takes away, and the taking away part is pretty rough sometimes.) Some people blew off some smoke and threatened to leave, and that's okay, because blowing off smoke is an age-old Army tradition.

Then most people after thinking about it realized that they didn't come to Afghanistan for the R&R's anyway (it's important, because it's one way we take care of our families), but it's not the predominant reason most people came to Afghanistan. Secondly, I think most people believe that we are going to get this thing worked out, so a lot of people have calmed down. I've received some hate mail from the field, and tried several times to explain to no avail, so perhaps this person just needed to go. I would really hate to see anyone go home without fully understanding the entire circumstances, and what we are trying to do here. I appreciate everyone's patience as we work our way through this, and I'm asking you to trust us.