

Afterburner

NEWS FOR USAF RETIRED PERSONNEL

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July armistice commemoration salutes Korean War veterans

Several events in Washington DC will highlight continuing ceremonies this year honoring the 1.8 million veterans of the Korean War.

It will be 50 years ago July 27 that the United States, along with 21 other United Nations members, signed the armistice to end the Korean War.

During the National Salute to Korean War Veterans July 25-27, there will be a star-studded event at the MCI Center, a ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery and a wreath-laying and memorial ceremony at the Korean War Veterans Memorial on The Mall.

The event at the MCI Center will include musical performances by military and nationally-recognized artists, guest speakers and a parade of unit colors from all five branches of the U.S. military and the 21 other nations that participated under the United Nations Command during the war. This will mark the first time all the colors of the major units from the Korean War have been brought together.

The Department of Defense has been sponsoring events across the country to honor and thank Korean War veterans and family members. Events kicked off with a ceremony at the Korean War Veterans Memorial June 25, 2000, marking the 50th anniversary of the day North Korean military forces crossed the 38th Parallel.

Since then, the committee has sponsored more than 100 commemoration events, and there have been many other localized events throughout the nation.

The DoD 50th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee will host a joint service wreath-laying ceremony in honor of Korean War veterans at the Korean War Veterans Memorial on The Mall in Washington D.C., May 26.

Korean War veterans will be the special guests of the commanding general of the U.S. Army Military District of Washington, Maj. Gen. James T. Jackson, for the Twilight Tattoo June 25 at the Ellipse in Washington D.C. at 7 p.m. A Korean War veteran will be the reviewing official for the parade of the troops during the event.

For more information about the Korean War or any of the upcoming events, call the DoD 50th Anniversary of the Korean War Commemoration Committee toll-free 1-866-KOREA50 or visit the official web site at www.korea50.mil.

Key interest areas

Defense Department works Concurrent Receipt rules

As announced in the January issue of the **Afterburner**, the law eliminating the disability offset to retired pay for a small number of retirees becomes effective June 1.

Public Law 107-314 eliminates the disability offset to retired pay for those retirees with at least 20 years of active duty and:

(a) any disability rating (at least 10 percent) that is associated with a Purple Heart or

(b) a disability rating of 60 percent or higher that is due to a combat-related or operations-related disability.

Eligible retirees will have to apply for this new compensation, but at press time DoD had not released the general guidelines on how to apply, the application forms, or the approval procedures.

Retiree Council to meet

The Air Force Retiree Council will meet May 20-23 at Randolph AFB with a number of new members (all Air Force retirees), including both Co-chairmen, as Lt Gen Peterson and CMSAF Finch take their place at the head of the table for the first time.

They will be joined by members Col John X. Loughran III, Area II (California); CMSgt Charles H. Keeler, Area IV (Colorado, Nevada, Utah and Wyoming); Lt Col Lawrence M. Phillips, Area V (Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin); Col Paul Moore, Area VIII (Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio and West Virginia); and CMSgt Vincent D. Mee, Jr., Pacific Region (including Alaska).

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New Congress brings new bills

When the 107th Congress adjourned Nov. 22, those bills that hadn't been enacted into law expired, along with their cosponsorship lists. Each Congress lasts only two years, so the legislative clock was reset with the start of the 108th Congress in January.

The **Afterburner, News for USAF Retired Personnel**, will work to provide information on bills that affect members of the retiree community when they are introduced and follow them as best we can in succeeding issues.

While we can and do encourage you to make your views known on a particular bill, members of the retiree community should note that the **Afterburner** is an official Air Force product and, as such, can make no attempt to influence members of Congress, whether it's through direct contact or indirect contact. In other words, we can't tell Congress how to vote and we can't tell our readers what to tell members of Congress.

Since the **Afterburner** is limited in both number of pages and number of issues, there are restrictions on the amount of information that can be offered. For this reason, we encourage our readers to join one or more military related organizations of their choice, as those groups have the means to present more information in their publications and to actually lobby Congress on key issues.

Those of you with access to computers and the Internet

Editor's Notebook

By
Bill
Turner



should also consider subscribing to the Air Force Retiree News Service (AFRNS) or visit the retiree web site from time to time. The AFRNS is a means by which we disseminate, via e-mail, individual articles we feel of importance to members of the military retiree community. Although the AFRNS is also prohibited from any grass roots efforts to influence Congress, with it we have the capability of presenting more background information and more timely updates.

Please check out the retiree news site at <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/afretire>. On that page, you will find the procedures to subscribe to the Air Force Retiree News Service, and links to many of the military related organizations you may wish to contact.

Call important? Get a name

Got a pencil? How about a piece of paper?

If you're calling somebody to ask questions, get a phone number or complain, the only thing more essential is the phone itself.

Besides the obvious reason of having these tools immediately available to write down the information you need, it's extremely important to get the name of the person to whom you're speaking.

We get a lot of calls in our office and not all customers have called the right place, and some of them have been wrongly referred to this staff by another agency. The call usually starts off with "I called DFAS (or some other agency) and they said..."

The first question, then, is "Who said?" Without a name, it becomes almost impossible to track down the source of the information, which may not always be the correct information.

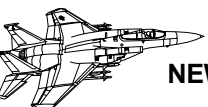
Perhaps a retiree who wants to suspend SBP because of his wife's death – a DFAS action – is unnecessarily and mistakenly referred to the Air Force Personnel Center because we manage the SBP for the Air Force.

Instead the retiree should have been told to send a letter and copy of the death certificate to DFAS-CL, the agency that will actually do the work.

Maybe it's this office who mistakenly refers a customer. Some other agency may need to straighten me out. I always answer the phone with my name, but that may not register at first, so you may need to ask me (or anyone else with whom you deal) to repeat the name.

You should always understand what is being told to you before you hang up, but we all know it doesn't work that way. There's the possibility you need additional information or discover something you thought was clear really wasn't.

A final thought that goes back to the beginning. Have that pencil and paper ready before placing the call.



AFTERBURNER

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*HQ AFPC/DPPTR
550 C Street W Ste 11
Randolph AFB TX 78150-4713*

*E-mail address is [Billy.Turner@randolph.af.mil](mailto:Bill.Turner@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 elsewhere in this issue.*

Design for Air Force memorial unveiled

by Senior Master Sgt. Rick Burnham
Air Force Print News

For the better part of the past century, the men and women of the Air Force and its predecessors have soared high above the clouds in defense of the nation and freedom-loving people everywhere.

Those ideals will soon be reflected in a memorial designed to reach high into the skyline of the nation's capital, honoring those who have slipped the surly bonds to overcome America's enemies, both at home and abroad.

The design for the new Air Force Memorial was unveiled during a ceremony in Arlington, VA in March. Among those in attendance were Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John P. Jumper, along with former chiefs of staff Gen. Michael E. Ryan and Gen. David C. Jones. Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Gerald R. Murray and Ross Perot, Jr., chairman of the Air Force Memorial Foundation Board of Trustees, also attended.

The memorial will provide a fitting tribute to the millions who have served,

are serving today and those who will serve tomorrow, said retired Maj. Gen. Edward F. Grillo, president of the Air Force Memorial Foundation.

"The Air Force does not have a national memorial, so this is certainly long overdue," he said. "We feel this memorial will honor the millions of patriotic men and women who have served in the Air Force and its predecessor organizations — the aviation pioneers of yesterday."

He also said it would serve as a source of pride and tribute to those serving today, and certainly to recognize the nation's military industrial base that has made American airpower the most formidable air force on Earth.

"Most importantly," he said, "it will serve as a tribute to those who have paid the ultimate price."

Construction on the memorial, designed by New York architect James Ingo Freed, will begin in 2004 and be completed in September 2006, coinciding with the 59th anniversary of the Air Force, Grillo said. The design features three "spires" reaching heights



of 270, 230 and slightly above 200 feet. The memorial will be located just southwest of the Pentagon on a "promontory" piece of land, Grillo added.

"The three spires will represent the Air Force in a manner that is projecting itself into the air and space — gracefully yet boldly," he said.

Act reduces retirement home rates, changes names

The 2002 National Defense Authorization Act changed some aspects of the Armed Forces Retirement Home. For military retirees and certain veterans, the most important change was the reduction in residency fees.

The legislation reduced the residency fee to 35 percent of all income to a maximum of \$1,014 a month for independent living.

This is down from 40 percent, and a maximum of \$1,500. Residents at the Gulfport location — formerly known as the U.S. Naval Home and now known as AFRH-Gulfport — will benefit from a temporary reduction in the maximum fee—\$800 per month— until renovated quarters are available or December 2006.

Both locations, AFRH- Gulfport and AFRH-Washington (formerly known as the U.S. Soldiers and Airmen's Home), are considered Continuing

Care Retirement Communities.

"When you consider all the benefits of living at either location, Washington DC or Gulfport, it's a very attractive and affordable option for many people," said Jean Schaefer, public affairs officer for the Armed Forces Retirement Home. "And right now, there are vacancies at both locations."

Residency is open to those veterans from the armed forces whose active-duty service was at least 50 percent enlisted, warrant officer or limited-duty officer who fit at least one of the following categories:

* Retirees with 20 or more years of active duty service who are at least 60 years old;

* Veterans who are unable to earn a livelihood due to a service connected disability;

* Veterans who are unable to earn a livelihood due to a non-service connected disability and who served in a war theater or received hostile fire pay;

* Female veterans who served prior to 1948.

More information is available on the web at www.afrh.com. For the Washington location, call (800) 422-9988, or write: 3700 N. Capitol St NW, Washington DC 20317, or e-mail: publicaffairs@dc.afrh.gov.

The Gulfport location can be reached by phone at 1 (800) 332-3527. Written correspondence should be sent to:

1800 Beach Dr
Gulfport, MS 39507

Publicaffairs@gulfport.afrh.gov is the e-mail address..

Trustees say Social Security not sustainable for the long term

The Social Security Board of Trustees recently declared that the Social Security program is not sustainable over the long term. The 2003 Social Security Trustees Report does extend the projected solvency of the trust funds by one year. In the 2003 Annual Report to Congress, the Trustees announced:

* The projected point at which tax revenues will fall below program costs comes in 2018, one year later than the estimate in last year's report;

* The projected point at which the trust funds will be exhausted comes in 2042, one year later than the estimate in last year's report;

* The projected actuarial deficit of taxable payroll over the 75-year long-range period is 1.92 percent, larger than the 1.87 percent projected in last year's report;

* The Trust Funds would require another \$3.5 trillion in today's dollars, earning interest at Treasury rates, to pay all scheduled benefits over the next 75 years. This obligation grew \$200 billion from last year.

"I want to assure those already receiving Social Security benefits — as well as those who are close to retirement

— that your benefits are secure. But doing nothing will have serious consequences for our children and grandchildren," said Jo Anne Barnhart, Commissioner of Social Security.

"The release of this report is a good time to remind people how the Social Security program works. Social Security taxes pay the benefits of today's retirees.

Money in excess of what is needed to pay today's benefits is invested in special issue, interest-bearing Treasury bonds. This system works well when there is a relatively high ratio of workers to beneficiaries. For instance, in 1965, there were 4 workers for every Social Security recipient.

"But the demographics are changing. People are living longer. The first baby boomers are just five years from retirement and the birth rate is low. Today, there are 3.3 workers paying Social Security payroll taxes for every one person collecting Social Security benefits. That number will drop to 2 to 1 in less than 40 years.



New TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy Program starts

More than 400,000 military pharmacy mail order customers were switched in March to a new TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy program.

According to Army Col. William D. Davies of the TRICARE Management Activity, Falls Church, Va., Express Scripts Inc. will provide services under the new program. The Maryland Heights, Mo., firm won the \$275 million, five-year contract in September to provide mail order pharmacy services for TRICARE beneficiaries.

The director of DoD pharmacy programs, Davies said beneficiaries who had refills remaining on prescriptions on March 1 were transferred to Express Scripts so they can continue ordering medications on time, with a few exceptions. New customers have to register for the program. Information is provided through the TRICARE service centers, military treatment facilities pharmacies, as well as the Express Scripts marketing points of contact.

The usual delivery time for medication is five to seven days. The easiest way for patients to ensure they don't run out of their medication is to have the provider write the prescription for up to a 90-day supply with up to three refills. The beneficiary can request a refill after 75 percent of the medication has been used.

He said all medication is screened for potential drug interactions or therapeutic overlaps that could produce an adverse drug reaction. He said patients' complete beneficiary profiles are entered into the Pharmacy Data Transition Service, which enhances patient safety by keeping their medication records current, on file and readily available.

The new contract saves taxpayers' dollars because it calls for purchasing drug products at federal prices. Best federal prices are at least 24 percent below average commercial wholesale prices Davies estimated.

The TRICARE Management Activity will manage the new contract. Previously the national contract was been managed by the Defense Logistics Agency's Defense Supply Center in Philadelphia.

Patients can fill prescriptions three ways: by direct care at military treatment facilities, or the retail pharmacy network, or the mail order program, Davies noted. The direct care system serves the bulk of the beneficiary population, he said. About 2.5 million beneficiaries use the retail pharmacy network because they don't have access to a military facility.

Most of the beneficiaries who use the mail order program do so for chronic illness medication or maintenance medication needs, Davies said.

Under the TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy system, the co-pay for up to a 90-day supply for most medications is \$9 for brand name products or \$3 for generics. Exceptions include controlled substances, and active duty members have no co-pays.

TRICARE beneficiaries living and working overseas can use the mail order pharmacy if they have an APO, FPO or a U.S. embassy address. However, the prescription must be written by a provider licensed to practice in the United States.

Finance center change creates some confusion, problems

A change in the location to send written correspondence to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) from Cleveland, Ohio to London, Ken., has created some confusion among members of the military retiree community.

The confusion, according to officials, stems from the fact that many retirees and Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuitants think DFAS operations have actually moved from Cleveland to the Kentucky town.

This is not the case, but it has led to problems for both the employees in London, Ken., and in Cleveland. The change created a new way of doing business which hasn't been fully explained. Here's how it works and what customers can do to ease the problems.

Pat Peek, Chief of the Retiree Services Branch at the Air Force Personnel Center, explained that the London, Ken., location is simply a "mail drop" facility where retiree and survivor correspondence to DFAS is handled — opened, sorted and filmed. The Kentucky staff runs documents through a scanning/imaging machine so these important papers can be electronically transmitted to DFAS-Cleveland. Since the documents arriving in London are in all sizes, shapes, and conditions, some are almost impossible to handle.

As a result of this imaging process, it's very important to send documents that have a certain level of consistency to the London, Ken., handlers, said Ms. Peek. Her suggestions are not based on DFAS guide-

lines, but are her recommendations, based on years of experience with the transmittal of documents.

To help you obtain the greatest chance of having the documents you send to the DFAS mail center in Kentucky handled most efficiently:

- * Ensure documents are standard size (8.5 by 11 inches); make enlargements or reductions when necessary before mailing them;

- * Ensure documents are not brittle, fragile, torn or permanently creased because the imaging process uses ungentle, mechanical handling;

- * Ensure any notary or certification seal will be legible after the document completes the scanning/imaging process. If the seal is impressed or embossed, carefully rub a pencil lightly over the raised surfaces. This will slightly darken the impression so that the DFAS technician who processes the electronic copy of document will be able to easily discern it was properly notarized or certified.

- * Be sure to provide a copy of the reverse of documents when data pertinent to the correspondence is on the back of the page;

- * Don't mail and also FAX correspondence to DFAS unless so instructed by DFAS.

- * Place the member's last name and Social Security number in the upper right hand corner on the front of each page mailed.

While following these recommendations may not create an absolute perfect solution, it will go far to make sure the person submitting the document becomes another satisfied DFAS customer, Ms. Peek said.

Government funded study prompts FDA actions on ephedra products

Acting on the release of a government-funded study, the Department of Health and Human Services announced a series of actions designed to protect Americans from potentially serious risks of dietary supplement products containing ephedra.

The results of a Rand Corporation study, commissioned by the National Institutes of Health, provide additional evidence that ephedra may be associated with important health risks, according to a Food and Drug Administration statement.

Air Force Surgeon General officials have repeatedly "strongly advised" people to contact their physicians or health-care providers before taking dietary supplements containing ma huang, ephedra or ephedra alkaloids.

As a result of the study, the FDA proposed warning labels for all ephedra-containing dietary supplements. The proposed label warns about the risks of serious adverse events, including heart attack, seizure, stroke and death; cautions that the risk can increase with the dose, with strenuous exercise and with other stimulants such as caffeine; specifies certain groups (such as women who are pregnant or breast feeding) who

should never use these products; and lists other conditions, such as diseases and the use of certain medications, that rule out the use of ephedrine alkaloids.

Results of the study include:

Weight loss: Short-term use of ephedra or ephedrine is linked with about a 2-pound per month increased weight loss, but the studies lasted only a few months, so there is no evidence of long-term benefit.

Athletic performance: No studies exist on the efficacy of herbal ephedra-containing dietary supplements on athletic performance. The few studies of the active ingredient, the chemical ephedrine, used small samples of mostly fit individuals, finding a modest effect on short-term performance when caffeine is included. Without caffeine, ephedra has little or no effect on athletic performance.

Adverse consequences: Use of ephedra or ephedrine with or without caffeine is associated with two to three times the risk of nausea, vomiting, psychiatric symptoms, autonomic hyperactivity and palpitations.

In one database of 16,000 health complaints by ephedra users, ephedra was linked to two deaths, four heart attacks, nine strokes, one seizure and five psychiatric cases for which other causes were all ruled out.

Itemized billing streamlines TRICARE outpatient payments

The Department of Defense Military Health System converted to "itemized billing" a few months ago to streamline the process for billing uniformed services beneficiaries, third-party payers and persons not eligible for TRICARE for outpatient care received at military treatment facilities.

According to TRICARE officials, the new billing approach does not change access to care for TRICARE beneficiaries. It does, however, change the way those who have other health insurance are billed for outpatient care received at a MTF.

Previously, outpatient bills were calculated using an all-inclusive or "single rate" per visit. The single rate covered not only the provider's fees but also fees for laboratory, radiology and pharmacy services received during an outpatient visit. Under itemized billing, each outpatient service or treatment provided is clearly annotated on the claim form (billing statement for non-DoD patients,) along with all associated charges.

In addition to the itemization of charges for services received during an outpatient visit, MTFs are now also able to bill third party payers for prescriptions filled from orders received from physicians within the MTF.

The move to itemized billing came as a result of the 1996 Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act that required the Military Health System to conform to industry billings standards; the Fiscal Year 2000 National Defense Authorization Act that required DoD apply reasonable charges when billing third-party payers and non-DoD beneficiaries; and from concerns expressed by beneficiaries and third-party payers that the all-inclusive single rate was too ambiguous for use in processing claims.



Overall, the transition to itemized billing is a win-win situation, officials said. Beneficiaries who have other health insurance and receive care at a MTF can now receive an explanation of benefits and bill that clearly identifies the health care services received and their associated cost. DoD benefits from the collections received, which can be put toward resources to support medical services and other patient-related initiatives at MTFs. Third-party payers also receive a benefit.

Claims submitted by DoD are now similar to claims submitted by civilian providers, which creates assurance for payers that third-party payments made to DoD mirror established industry practices. While DoD's initial efforts have focused exclusively on outpatient care, plans are underway to convert billing practices for inpatient care to itemized billing later this year.

Beneficiaries who have questions or concerns about an itemized bill or explanation of benefits should contact their regional managed care support contract claims processor or TRICARE service center representative.

"Forgotten Widows" milestone nears as program approaches 6-year mark

With a major milestone coming up Dec. 1, Air Force officials are increasing efforts to reach surviving spouses who may fall into a category called "forgotten widows."

To date, more than 900 individuals have applied for the Annuity for Certain Military Surviving Spouses (ACMSS) with more than 600 of them being approved, according to Frank Viser of the Retiree Services Branch at the Air Force Personnel Center. They are currently receiving a monthly annuity of \$188.36.

Since there is a six-year statute of limitations on payments, the Dec. 1 date becomes most significant since it's the six year anniversary of the program's effective date.

Currently, if approved, an annuity will be paid retroactive to December 1997 for active duty spouses and as late as October 1999 for some Reserve spouses.

Viser explained that there is no statute on applications, meaning that while no one will be barred from applying in the future, they will be barred from receiving more than six years worth of retroactive payments. Currently, widows who receive an annuity retroactive to Dec. 1, 1997 are receiving in excess of \$11,000 plus the \$188.36 monthly pension.

Eligibility criteria remain the same. For spouses of active duty retirees, the member must have retired before Sept. 21, 1972, and died prior to March 21, 1974. For spouses of Reserve retirees, the member must have retired; been entitled to pay except for not attaining age 60; and died prior to Oct. 1, 1978. In addition, applicants must not have remarried or be receiving any other military survivor annuity.

If you believe you, or someone you know, is eligible, contact Viser at 1 (800) 531-7502 for further information and to obtain an application.

Identity theft gains attention after TriWest computer theft

Identity theft remains a hot topic among DoD officials, Congressional leaders, and the general population.

The Financial Institutions and Consumer Credit and Oversight and Investigations Subcommittees of the House Financial Services Committee recently held a joint hearing on data security issues with regard to the growing problem of identity theft.

TriWest Healthcare Alliance President & CEO David J. McIntyre, Jr., testified about issues related to identity theft, specifically mitigation efforts for companies that are victimized and the need for stronger legislation to thwart identity theft and assist victims.

Although thefts of personal information from corporations via computer hard drives and databases have become increasingly common in the past few years, the subject gained maximum exposure within the military community following the Dec. 14 break-in at a TriWest office in Phoenix. That event resulted in the theft of computer equipment and data files containing personal information about U.S. military service members, their families and retirees.

To date, no criminal or fraudulent uses of the personal information stored on the stolen TriWest files have occurred. Federal law enforcement continues to investigate the crime, assisted by a \$100,000 reward offer from TriWest for the arrest and successful prosecution of those responsible.

“TriWest’s story is exceptional because of the company’s quick response in contacting the 500,000-plus individuals whose confidential personal information was compromised – a burden voluntarily taken on at a great expense to TriWest,” said Arizona Congressman John Shadegg, who serves on the House Financial Services Committee.

Affected areas were Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota,

TRICARE offers no hearing aid coverage, officials explain

TRICARE does not cover hearing aids for retirees or their family members under any of the TRICARE programs, according to TRICARE officials responding to an increasing number of questions by retirees.

Officials point out, however, a retired member may check with the Veterans Administration (VA) to determine if that agency may help.

Additionally, some military facilities support a Retiree At-Cost Hearing Aid Purchase Program (RACHAPP). Check with your nearest military treatment facility to see if it supports this program.

The MTF may be able to purchase the hearing aid, and you reimburse the MTF its costs, probably less than if you purchased it on the open market.

South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, and extreme Western Texas.

For further information, beneficiaries may call toll-free (888) 339-9378 or e-mail questions to computertheft@triwest.com.

The DoD efforts to enhance patient protection include establishing a health information security task force.

Dr. William Winkenwerder, Jr., assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, stated that “Every TRICARE contractor worldwide has been notified of the theft, and directed by DoD to conduct an assessment of information security procedures.

DoD will evaluate each assessment with its contractors and are taking additional steps to heighten information security throughout our health care system.”

3 Europe recreation resorts close earlier than planned

The war in Iraq, increased force protection and a declining dollar value overseas has forced Army officials to close three of its armed forces recreation centers in Europe a year earlier than planned.

The Von Steuben Hotel in Garmisch closed April 15, while the Chiemsee Lake and Park hotels will remain open through Labor Day, Sept. 1, and close permanently the next day. All three hotels were originally scheduled to close in October 2004.

Meanwhile, Garmisch’s Patton Hotel, Alpenblick Golf Course, outdoor recreation equipment checkout center, tour service and the campground will stay open.

“Because of the world situation, we’ve had to adjust our operations,” Pete Isaacs, chief operating officer at the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, said.

“Many of our customers in Europe are deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom and their families are taking care of business at home. Understandably, vacations are on hold. As a result, current and predicted occupancy has fallen dramatically,” he explained.

Isaacs said other factors that hurt AFRC Europe operations were increased security concerns, which he said reduces vacation travel, and the value of the U.S. dollar overseas.

“We’ve had to deal with a 19 percent devaluation of the dollar against the Euro, which is the currency used to pay for 50 percent of our operating expenses,” Isaacs said.

Remaining AFRC Europe facilities in Garmisch will stay open while the new 330-room hotel Sheridan there is under construction. The hotel will open in October 2004, the date the Army had planned to end all operations in Chiemsee and close the hotel in Garmisch.

Shades of Green resort set to reopen in December

Reservations are already being taken for the Dec. 15 reopening of a new, improved Armed Forces Recreation Center Shades of Green hotel on Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando.

Shades of Green has been closed for expansion and complete renovation since early 2002. Meanwhile, guests eligible to stay there have been booked into Disney's Contemporary Resort at Shades of Green's daily rates. The rates are based on rank from a low of \$66 for E-1s through E-5s to \$99 for senior officers. The range starting Dec. 15 will be \$70 to \$116.

When Shades of Green reopens, he said, it will have double the guest space at 586 rooms, a new 500-space parking garage and 7,500 square feet of flexible special-event space for reunions, weddings and other family-oriented social functions. There will be 11 suites, up from just one.

Jim McCrindle, the hotel's general manager since it opened in 1994, said more rooms will conform to the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. "We had handicapped-accessible rooms before, but now we will have bona fide ADA-designed and equipped rooms with the wider bathroom doors and the roll-in showers," he said. Nine of the existing rooms were completely renovated to ADA standards.

The near-two-year project includes complete makeovers of all the existing rooms to the same standards as the new ones — new carpet, paint, curtains, mattresses and bedspreads.

"All the rooms are exactly the same size and everything is brand new," Jim McCrindle said.

All rooms will have standard amenities such as ironing boards and televisions, but there will be some new twists — refrigerators, wireless TV keyboards and 12 hours of Internet access for about \$6. Guests will be able to play TV video games, in-room movies and order attraction tickets online from the hotel's tickets and tours office.

The hotel restaurants are being remodeled. The four include a new Northern Italian-themed trattoria. Shades of Green has its own two heated swimming pools, a kiddie pool, play area and tennis courts. It's situated among three Walt Disney World Resort golf courses: two 18-hole championship courses and a nine-hole executive course with discounted greens fees for military players. Free shuttle bus service transports guests to and from Disney attractions.

For more details or to make reservations visit www.shadesofgreen.org or www.armymwr.com/shades/index.html, or call toll-free 1-888-593-2242.

Travel wisely

By Bill Turner

Editor's note — The following article is intended to assist members of the retiree community in getting the

most for their leisure dollars. Commercial products and services are mentioned for informational purposes only and should not be construed as a military endorsement.

It's true. The best things in life are free.

It's also true that the second best things in life can be inexpensive, especially if you're careful in your travel planning. An example is a recent vacation we arranged by again booking a condo through the Armed Forces Vacation Club as discussed in a previous Travel wisely column. This time it was to Fairfield Bay, north of Little Rock, Ark.

The best part of this vacation was just relaxing and enjoying the scenery and nowhere was it better than Mountain View, Ark, a small town of not many more than 2,000, and each one of them seemed to be musically inclined.

Driving over early on a Saturday morning, we enjoyed a great breakfast at the reasonably priced Bay restaurant, then joined a small gathering listening to a Dulcimer group that had come up from northern Mississippi.

Other groups, composed of musicians playing a variety of instruments came together, played and sang and broke up only to have their members join other groups. A particular group comes to mind because of the diversity of the members, three of them remaining constant while others changed. A couple named Earl and Shirley was there from the start,

him playing a banjo, her a guitar and both singing.

Later they were joined by a large, personable man called John who had a different style of playing a guitar, beating it unmercifully with a gloved hand. He also sang and did a good job of that, too. Musicians came and went, but the talented Shirley, who must have sang professionally, averaged singing a song about every 10 minutes throughout the day.

We checked out other little groups. In one, there was a guitar player whom I saw later playing bass in another group, which had a mandolin player who later joined the Earl, Shirley, John group for one number before he departed to play a fiddle in another group.

There was "The Mitchell Family" that did such a great job on religious songs; a real old timer with a harmonica who was joined by several guitar players and singers, who seemed to enjoy their own company as much as we enjoyed them.

We were there for six-plus hours, enjoying every minute. The only cost other than our breakfast and lunch was the buck we each spent on a large cup of tea and another dollar each for an ice cream cone purchased at the Ice Cream Shack. Incidentally, around this area that same ice cream cone (but probably not as good) would have been at least \$3.

The point of all this is that by planning, you can stretch your vacation dollars with some great, free entertainment. Also, don't forget to check out similar activities in your own residential area. Many folks come to your area to vacation and they discover things you might have overlooked. When's the last time you checked out your own backyard?

Test opens stateside Space-A air travel to military families

A one-year test that started April 1 permits Space-Available air travel within the continental United States by family members who accompany their military sponsors. The test ends March 31, 2004.

Defense transportation officials said dependents of active-duty members and military retirees will be eligible. Their travel priority during the test will be the same as their sponsor's.

Current regulations allow dependents to travel Space-A with sponsors to, from and between overseas points, but prohibit their travel point-to-point within the continental United States. Active duty and retired military members

already have Space-A privileges stateside and overseas.

To register for Space-A travel, retirees may sign up 60 days in advance.

For more information on the Space-A privilege, visit the Air Force Air Mobility Command space-A web site at <http://amcpublic.scott.af.mil/Spacea/spacea.htm>. Phone numbers of passenger service operations are listed below.

Please note that these locations and phone numbers were taken from the AMC web site just before the copy was sent to the publisher in late April. There is no guarantee the numbers are still current. If unable to get through, call the base information number.

Altus AFB, Okla. -- (405) 481-6350
 Andrews AFB, Md. — (301) 981-1854/3604
 (NAS) Atlanta, Ga. — (770) 919-6359
 Barksdale AFB, La. — (318) 456-4978/3226
 (NAS) Brunswick, Maine — (207) 921-2689
 Cannon AFB, N.M. — (505) 784-2801/2802
 Charleston AFB, S.C. — (843) 963-3048
 Columbus AFB, Miss. — (601) 434-2861
 (NAS) Corpus Christi, Texas — (512) 939-3385
 (NAS) Fort Worth, Texas — (817) 782-6288/6289
 Davis Monthan AFB, Ariz. — (520) 228-3641
 Dobbins AFB, Ga. — (770) 919-4903
 Dover AFB, Del. — (302) 677-4088
 Edwards AFB, Calif. — (805) 277-4185/4412
 Eilson AFB, Alaska — (907) 377-1854/1250
 Elmendorf AFB, Alaska — (907) 522-8588/4616
 Fairchild AFB, Wash. — (509) 247-5435
 F. E. Warren AFB, Wyo. — 1-800-832-1959 (Option 7)
 Forbes Field, Kan. — (913) 231-4210
 Grand Forks AFB, N.D. — (701) 747-4118
 Grissom ARB, Ind. — (765) 688-2254/2255
 Hickam AFB, Hawaii — (808) 449-1515/6833/1854
 Hill AFB, Utah — (801) 777-1854/2887
 Holloman AFB, N.M. — (475) 479-5411
 Homestead ARB, Fla. — (305) 224-7505
 (NAS) Jacksonville, Fla. — (904) 542-3956/3825
 Keesler AFB, Miss. — (228) 377-2120/2123
 Kelly AFB, Texas — (210) 925-8714/8715
 (NAS) Key West, Fla. — (305) 293-2769
 Kirtland AFB, N.M. — (505) 846-1652/2075
 Langley AFB, Va., — (757) 764-3531; Recording: (757) 764-5807
 Little Rock AFB, Ark. — (501) 987-3342/3933
 (NAS) Lemoore, Calif. — (209) 998-1680
 Los Alamitos Army Air Field, Calif. — (562) 795-2571
 Los Angeles IAP, Calif. — (310) 363-0714/0715

Luke AFB, Ariz. — (602) 856-7131/7132
 MacDill AFB, Fla. — (813) 828-2440/2485
 Malmstrom AFB, Mont. — (406) 731-4622
 March AFB, Calif. — (909) 655-2913/2914
 Maxwell AFB, Ala. — (334) 953-6454/7372
 McChord AFB, Wash. — (253) 982-7259
 McClellan AFB, Calif. — (916) 643-3944/4105
 McConnell AFB, Kan. — (316) 652-3701/3840
 McGuire AFB, N.J. — (609) 754-5023/2864
 (NAS) Memphis, Tenn. — (901) 872-5331/5332
 Minot AFB, N.D. -- (701) 723-2347/2348
 (NAS) Miramar, Calif. — (858) 577-4285
 Nellis AFB, Nev. — (702) 652-2562/6099
 (NAS) New Orleans, La. — (504) 678-3101
 Norfolk NAS, Va. — (757) 444-4148/4118
 (NAS) North Island, Calif. — (619) 545-9567
 Offutt AFB, Neb. — (402) 232-6235/7111
 Patrick AFB, Fla. — (321) 494-5631
 (NAS) Patuxent River, Md. — (301) 826-3836
 Pease ANGB, N.H. — (603) 430-3323
 (NAS) Pensacola, Fla. — (850) 452-3311
 Peterson AFB, Colo. — (719) 556-4521; Flight recording: (719) 556-4707
 (NAS) Point Mugu, Calif. — (805) 989-7731/7305
 Pope AFB, N.C. — (910) 394-6527/6528
 Randolph AFB, Texas — (210) 652-1854/3725
 Rickenbacker IAP, Ohio — (614) 492-4595
 Robins AFB, Ga. — (912) 926-3166/4915
 Scott AFB, Ill. — (618) 256-2014/4042
 South Weymouth, Mass. — (617) 786-2713/2667
 Stewart ANG, N.Y. -- (845) 563-2226
 Tinker AFB, Okla. — (405) 739-4360/4339
 Travis AFB, Calif. — (707) 424-1854
 Tyndall AFB, Fla. — (850) 283-4244/4245
 Westover AFB, Mass. — (413) 557-2549
 Whidbey Island NAS, Wash. — (360) 257-2604
 (NAS) Willow Grove, Penn. — (215) 443-6216/6217
 Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio — (937) 257-7741/8549; Flight Information: (937) 257-6235

AFTERBURNER

News Briefs

F-15s strike

Centennial Celebration of Aviation Art" for a limited engagement during 2003.

The first exhibit, "A Century of Flight," was unveiled Jan. 16 and features 60 paintings by Keith Ferris. The second exhibit, "Air Power," began April 12 and contains pieces from Wilson Hurley, William Phillips, Roy Grinnell, Dru Blair, Ronald Wong and Craig Kodera.

On June 6, "Aviation Art Worldwide," features works by Robert Taylor, Tiro Vorster, Don Connolly and the French artists "Les Peintres De L'Air." The fourth exhibit, "Those Magnificent Flyers," begins Aug. 26 and is dedicated to the art of James Dietz.

The final exhibit, "Fly Me to the Future," begins Oct. 9, and showcases pieces by John Clark, Robert McCall and Mark Waki.

For more information on "A Centennial Celebration of Aviation Art," call Denise Bollinger at (937) 255-8046, Ext. 492. For more information about the Air Force Museum, visit the web site: <http://www.wpafb.af.mil/museum/>.

2003 Retired Almanac available

Now in its 26th year, the Retired Military Almanac is a 256-page guide designed to keep retirees up to date on many subjects of interest, including detailed information on recently passed legislation.

There are sections on military health care, including TRICARE and TRICARE for Life, as well as information on veterans benefits (including a current list of VA facilities), Space Available lodging and travel, and many other topics.

Order directly from the publisher for \$10.95 (includes postage) by sending a check or money order to Uniformed Services Almanac, Inc., PO Box 4144-AB, Falls Church, VA 22044, or if ordering by credit card, call toll-free (888) 872-9698. You can also order secure online: www.militaryalmanac.com.

Bond holding period increases

Department of Treasury officials have announced that the minimum holding period for Series EE and I bonds increased from six to 12 months beginning Feb. 1, 2003.

This means people who purchase EE or I bonds on or after Feb. 1 must wait one year before they may redeem those bonds.

AF Museum displays aviation art

Shock and awe

Original paintings by aviation artists are being featured at the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio as the museum offers "A

People who purchase bonds will receive a notification of this new policy with their bonds until the current preprinted bond stock reflects the change. More information is available at www.savingsbonds.gov.

DoD to institute short-term enlistments

Retiree family members who have decided against joining the military because of what they considered a too lengthy enlistment term may want to rethink their decision.

A new military short-term enlistment program will begin Oct. 1 aimed at expanding the opportunities for all Americans to serve the country.

The program will work like this: A recruit enlists for the option and incurs a 15-month active duty service obligation following completion of initial-entry training, for a total active duty commitment of about 19 months.

Following successful completion of active duty, service members may reenlist for further active duty or transfer to the selected reserve for a 24-month obligation.

Once this is completed, service members may stay in the selected reserve or transfer to individual ready reserve for the remainder of their eight-year commitments.

There are other provisions of this policy and military recruiting offices have additional details.

Florida law increases property tax exemption for disabled veterans

Various agencies are working with Florida veterans' associations and property tax administrators to make sure veterans with service-connected disabilities are aware of a new Florida law which increases the exemption from property taxes from \$500 to \$5,000.

The increased exemption applies only to homestead property (the Florida home in which the veteran lives). The exemption is available to any veteran who lives in Florida, who owns homestead property, and who has a service-connected disability of from 10 to 90 percent. State law already provides a full homestead property tax exemption to veterans who are 100 percent permanently and totally disabled.

The legislation took effect Jan. 1, 2003. Applications for property tax exemptions are due by March 1 of every year. Disabled Florida veterans may apply for the additional exemption at their county property appraiser's office.

AAFES sets "Still Serving" sale

The annual Army and Air Force Exchange Service "Still Serving" sale to honor members of the retiree community, is set for Sept. 19-21 at most major AAFES facilities.

In the past, the Defense Commissary Agency has scheduled its annual case lot sale in the same time frame. In addition, some Retiree Activities Offices slate annual retiree appreciation day activities around these activities.

VA secretary adds CLL to Vietnam Vet benefits list

Based upon a recently released review of scientific studies, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi has decided to extend benefits to Vietnam veterans with chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL).

"Compelling evidence has emerged within the scientific community that exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange is associated with CLL," Principi said. "I'm exercising my legal authority to ensure the full range of VA benefits is available to Vietnam veterans with CLL."

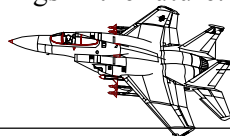
The ruling means that veterans with CLL who served in Vietnam during the Vietnam War don't have to prove that illness is related to their military service to qualify for Department of Veterans Affairs disability compensation. Additionally, for more than 20 years, VA has offered special access to medical care to Vietnam veterans with any health problems that may have resulted from Agent Orange exposure, and this decision will ensure higher-priority access to care in the future.

The decision to provide compensation was based upon a

recent report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) that found among scientific studies "sufficient evidence of an association" between exposure to herbicides during the Vietnam War and CLL.

VA requested the IOM panel of experts to focus on CLL in their report because of veterans' concerns that CLL shares some similarities with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, which the IOM had previously connected to Agent Orange exposure.

In the meantime, veterans with questions about health-care, compensation and survivor benefits may call a toll-free help line at 1-800-749-8387 for information. The VA also encourages Vietnam veterans who have not done so to request a subscription to "Agent Orange Review," VA's free newsletter that will keep them abreast of developments on this issue and other policies and scientific findings in the future.



DoD renews TRICARE Retiree Dental Program contract

The Department of Defense has awarded Delta Dental Plan of California a contract to provide services for the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program (TRDP). This is a five-year renewal contract and is valued at approximately \$987 million.

"The new contract provides a greatly enhanced dental benefit package and improved customer service for our retirees," said Dr. William Winkenwerder, Jr., assistant secretary of defense for health affairs.

The new contract became effective May 1, 2003. With its current enrollment of 650,000, the TRDP is already the nation's largest voluntary, all enrollee-paid dental program.

The TRDP will offer dental coverage throughout the 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Canada. All premiums are paid by those enrolled and vary depending on where they live.

According to Delta officials, the new contract reduces the mandatory enrollment obligation to only 12 months, after which enrollees can remain in the program on a month-to-month basis. Additionally, the waiting period for a full scope of benefits has been reduced to just 12 months, after which 50 percent coverage for crowns, bridges, full/partial dentures and orthodontics goes into effect.

"Since the program was first introduced in 1998, Congress and the Department of Defense have steadily increased the benefits we are allowed to offer," said Lowell Daun, DDS, senior vice president for Delta's Federal Ser-

vices division.

Dr. Daun noted the program continues to carry a \$50 per person, per year deductible, but now also includes a family cap of \$150 and an increased annual maximum amount of \$1,200 against which preventive and diagnostic services are not counted.

Coverage for these services, as well as for basic restorative services, periodontics, endodontics, oral surgery and dental emergencies is available immediately on the effective date of coverage. Crowns, bridges, full and partial dentures and orthodontics are available after 12 months continuous enrollment.

Retirees and their family members can obtain more information about the program at <http://www.tricare.osd.mil> or by visiting the Delta Dental Plan of California web site at <http://www.ddpdelta.org>.

Delta Dental may also be contacted:

By Phone:

Enrollment (new enrollments, changes and related correspondence), 1 (888) 838-8737 Monday - Friday (excluding holidays), 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. pst.; Customer Service (claims, eligibility inquiries & related correspondence), 1 (888) 336-3260, Monday - Friday (excluding holidays), 8:15 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. PST.

By Mail:

Delta Dental Plan of California, Federal Services, P.O. Box 537008, Sacramento, CA 95853-7008.

By E-mail:

Enrollment: ddpenroll@delta.org; Customer service: ddpservice@delta.org.

Key legislation affecting retirees

Two bills affecting the Survivor Benefit Plan have apparently stalled, but all hope is not lost according to some officials.

The bills, S. 451, the Survivor Benefit Plan Benefits Improvement Act of 2003, is a companion bill to H.R. 548, introduced in the House earlier. It would in-

crease the age 62 SBP annuity over a period of five years.

Because of the reported high costs, SBP failed to get the needed support but could gain new life later on the floor.

Other bills to watch:

House — H.R. 303 would eliminate the disability offset to military retired pay for all retirees with 20 or more years of service; H.R. 36 would allow qualifying survivors over age 55 to retain Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) if they remarry after the age of 55. Currently, they must forfeit that compensation if they remarry at any age.

Senate — S. 19 would authorize full concurrent receipt; S. 58 and H.R. 56 would allow military retirees to enroll in the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) as an alternative to TRICARE. Retirees who entered service before June 7, 1956 would be exempt from paying premiums.

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 addresses supplied by the Defense Finance and Accounting Service's Cleveland Center (DFAS-CL).

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, KY address below is a contractor that films the written request as a computer image and transmits it to DFAS.

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/RSFPP but who are receiving DIC in lieu of the SBP/RSFPP, mail 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 Social Security number and that of the sponsor and sign your request.

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), mail 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.

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), mail the new address and include the sponsor's retired grade and SSN to:

HQ AFPC/DPPTTR
550 C Street West Ste 11
Randolph AFB TX 78150-4713

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

HQ AFPC/DPPTTR
550 C STREET WEST STE 11
RANDOLPH AFB TX 78150-
4713

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