

## Service Bulletin

February 2010

### **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**

<http://www.va.gov>

#### **VA Begins Recovering Post-9/11 GI Bill Advance Education Payments**

[www.gibill.va.gov/advpayrecovery.htm](http://www.gibill.va.gov/advpayrecovery.htm)

VA has begun the process of recovering advance payments made available during the fall 2009 semester to veterans and servicemembers who applied for education benefits. In October VA instituted an advanced payment process for all eligible students who were currently enrolled in an institution of higher learning for the fall 2009 term. As part of that process, a web portal was established to allow electronic submission for advance payment. Advance payments were also made on-site at VA offices around the country. At that time student Veterans were told that advance payments would be deducted from future benefit payments.

In collaboration with the Department of Defense, VA will also notify active duty service members who may have mistakenly applied for the advance payment of their options for returning un-cashed checks or reimbursing deposited funds. VA discontinued advance payments via the website portal following the conclusion of the fall 2009 semester.

#### **VA Freezes Increase in Prescription Copayments**

VA has announced that any increase in veterans' out-of-pocket payments for pharmaceuticals will be delayed until June 30, 2010. This means the department will delay a scheduled \$1 increase – to \$9 – in the copayments facing veterans for each 30-day supply of medicine for the treatment of conditions not related to military service.

During this period, VA will also keep \$960 as the maximum, annual out-of-pocket payments for pharmaceuticals for non-service-related conditions. The \$960 cap will not apply to veterans in priority groups seven and eight. The yearly maximum out-of-pocket

payment was scheduled to increase to \$1,080 on January 1, 2010. There are no copayments associated with the treatment of conditions related to military service.

### **VA Announces Insurance Dividend Distributions for 2010**

Approximately 900,000 veterans are projected to share \$286.4 million in annual insurance dividends this year. These payments will be made to insurance policy holders on the anniversary date of their policies. Payments will be sent automatically through different payment plans and the amounts will vary based on the age of the veteran, the type of insurance, and the length of time the policy has been in place. Consistent with private mutual insurance company practice, the VA is returning a portion of premium payments back to policyholders because the agency had strong financial results.

VA operates one of the nation's largest life insurance programs, providing more than \$1 Trillion in coverage to seven million servicemembers, veterans, and family members. Veterans who have questions about their policies may contact the VA insurance toll-free number at 1-800-669-8477, send an email to [VAinsurance@va.gov](mailto:VAinsurance@va.gov), or visit the Internet at [www.insurance.va.gov](http://www.insurance.va.gov).

### **VA Data on "Brown Water" Vietnam Naval Operations**

VA Compensation and Pension (C&P) Service has initiated a program (VSCM Bulletin 01/21/2010 *Information on Vietnam Naval Operation*) to collect data on Vietnam naval operations. This program has identified naval vessels which conducted operations on the inland "brown water" rivers and delta areas of Vietnam.

If a veteran's service aboard one of these ships can be confirmed through military records during the time frames specified, then exposure to herbicide agents can be conceded for claims for service connection of disability based upon the presumption of such exposure. Please read carefully as some types of ships qualify for RVN service while other ships require verification of specific dates aboard ship.

The ships and dates of inland waterway service are listed below:

All vessels of Inshore Fire Support [IFS] Division 93 during their entire Vietnam tour.

USS Carronade (IFS 1)

USS Clarion River (LSMR 409) [Landing Ship, Medium, Rocket]

USS Francis River (LSMR 525)

USS White River (LSMR 536)

All vessels with the designation LST [Landing Ship, Tank] during their entire tour. [WWII ships converted to transport supplies on rivers and serve as barracks for brown water Mobile Riverine Forces]

All vessels with the designation LCVP [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel] during their entire tour.

All vessels with the designation PCF [Patrol Craft, Fast] during their entire tour.  
[Also called Swift Boats, operating for enemy interdiction on close coastal waters]

All vessels with the designation PBR [Patrol Boat, River] during their entire tour.  
[Also called River Patrol Boats as part of the Mobile Riverine Forces operating on inland waterways and featured in the Vietnam film “Apocalypse Now”]

USS Ingersoll (DD-652) [Destroyer]  
[Operated on Saigon River, October 24-25, 1965]

USS Mansfield (DD-728) [Destroyer]  
[Operated on Saigon River August 8-19, 1967 and December 21-24, 1968]

USS Richard E. Kraus (DD-849) [Destroyer]  
[Operated on coastal inlet north of Da Nang, June 2-5, 1966, protecting Marines holding a bridge]

USS Basilone (DD-824) [Destroyer]  
[Operated on Saigon River, May 24-25, 1966]

USS Hamner (DD-718) [Destroyer]  
[Operated on Song Lon Tao and Long Song Tao Rivers, August 15-September 1, 1966]

USS Conway (DD-507) [Destroyer]  
[Operated on Saigon River, early August 1966]

USS Fiske (DD-842) [Destroyer]  
[Operated on Mekong River, June 16-21, 1966]

USS Black (DD-666) [Destroyer]  
[Operated on Saigon River, July 13-19, 1966]

USS Providence (CLG-6) [Cruiser, Light, Guided Missile]  
[Operated on Saigon River 3 days during January 1964]

USS Mahan (DLG-11) [Guided Missile Frigate]  
[Operated on Saigon River October 24-28, 1964]

USS Okanogan (APA-220) [Attack Transport]  
[Operated on Saigon River July 22-23, 29-30, 1968 and August 5-6, 1968]

USS Niagara Falls (AFS-3) [Combat Stores Ship]  
[Unloaded supplies on Saigon River and Cam Rahn Bay, April 22-25, 1968]

## **DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DoD)**

<http://www.defense.gov/>

### **Military Families Get Free Access to Caregiver Network**

<http://www.sittercity.com/dod>

Military families now have free access to an online network of quality caregivers who can assist with everything from babysitting to dog walking. Sittercity is the nation's largest online source for local babysitters, nannies, elder care providers, dog walkers, housekeepers and tutors, and contains more than a million caregiver profiles.

The Sittercity Corporate Program, funded by DoD, offers military families -- including active duty, Guard and Reserve -- with a paid membership to the site. While the membership is free, servicemembers will be responsible for the hiring and payment of caregivers. Military members and their families can activate their membership at <http://www.sittercity.com/dod>.

The paid membership enables military families entry to a DoD Web site portal where they can match up caregivers to their situation; gain instant access to caregiver profiles that include background checks, references and reviews; and find military-certified care providers as well as caregivers who are military-subsidized and authorized access to a military installation.

## **U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA)**

[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)

### **Social Security Disability Benefits for Wounded Warriors**

<http://www.ssa.gov/woundedwarriors/>

Military service members can receive expedited processing of disability claims from Social Security. Benefits available through Social Security are different than those from the Department of Veterans Affairs and require a separate application. The expedited process is used for military service members who become disabled while on active military service on or after October 1, 2001, regardless of where the disability occurs.

In order to receive SSA disability benefits, a claimant cannot engage in substantial work activity for pay or profit, also known as substantial gainful activity. Active duty status and receipt of military pay does not, in itself, necessarily prevent payment of disability benefits. Receipt of military payments should not stop military personnel from applying for disability benefits from Social Security. If a service member is receiving treatment at a military medical facility and working in a designated therapy program or on limited duty, SSA will evaluate the work activity to determine eligibility for benefits. The actual

work activity is the controlling factor and not the amount of pay received or the person's military duty status.

For additional information see the publication *Disability Benefits for Wounded Warriors* available at the SSA Wounded Warriors Web site: <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10030.pdf>

**Social Security Adds 38 New Compassionate Allowance Conditions**  
[www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances)

SSA announced in January that the agency is adding 38 more conditions to its list of Compassionate Allowances. This is the first expansion since the original list of 50 conditions - 25 rare diseases and 25 cancers - was announced in October 2008. The new conditions range from adult brain disorders to rare diseases that primarily affect children.

Compassionate Allowances are a way of quickly identifying diseases and other medical conditions that clearly qualify for Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability benefits. It allows the agency to electronically target and make speedy decisions for the most obviously disabled individuals. In developing the expanded list of conditions, Social Security held public hearings and worked closely with the National Institutes of Health, the Alzheimer's Association, the National Organization for Rare Disorders, and other groups.

Social Security will begin electronically identifying these 38 new conditions March 1. For more information about the agency's Compassionate Allowances initiative, visit:



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