



DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

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Service Bulletin

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)

PATRICK DUNN DESIGNATED VA'S ACTING BENEFITS CHIEF

Patrick W. Dunne, a retired Navy rear admiral and a senior official within the VA, was designated by President Bush to serve as the Department's Acting Under Secretary for Benefits. In this capacity, Dunne will be responsible for a \$52 billion budget that provides compensation and pensions to nearly 4 million veterans and survivors, along with administering the successful Montgomery GI Bill educational program, VA's home loan guaranties, one of the nation's largest life insurance programs and other veterans' benefits.

A graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Dunne spent 33 years on active duty. He commanded the attack submarine Baltimore and U.S. naval forces in the Marianas. Since August 2006, he has served as VA's Assistant Secretary for Policy and Planning.

Dunne replaces retired Navy Vice Admiral Daniel L. Cooper, who announced Feb. 28 he would be leaving VA on April 1 after six years managing the Department's benefits programs.

ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE WILL BENEFIT SOME VETERANS

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

Veterans who last year received disability compensation, pensions or survivors' benefits from the VA may be entitled to an economic stimulus payment of at least \$300. To qualify, veterans must file a tax return for 2007, even if they aren't normally required to file. To qualify, taxpayers must have at least \$3,000 in income in 2007. While VA's disability compensation, pensions and survivors benefits are not subject to income tax, the administration's economic stimulus proposal, passed by Congress in February, allows veterans and survivors to count those payments toward the income requirement of \$3,000.

To claim the benefit, veterans -- like other taxpayers -- must file an income tax return. For eligible veterans who do not normally file a tax return, information about claiming the economic stimulus payment is available in "Package 1040A-3," available from IRS offices or on the Internet at <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/k1040a3.pdf>.

VA ANNOUNCES SGLI AND VGLI PREMIUM REDUCTIONS

Veterans and military personnel with life insurance policies managed by the VA will see a reduction in their premiums, thanks to improved investment earnings and a reduction in non-combat claims. The premium cuts affect military personnel covered by Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) and veterans covered by the Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI).

On July 1, 2008, the premiums for basic SGLI will be 6.5 cents per month for \$1,000 of coverage, down from 7 cents per month for \$1,000. This translates into a 7 percent savings. Also, on July 1, 2008, VGLI premium rates will be reduced for veterans aged 30 to 64, who make up 85 percent of those insured under the program. Premium rates for those under age 30 are already competitive. More than 2.4 million people currently participate in the VA-managed SGLI program, with another 433,000 in VGLI.

To obtain more information about the SGLI and VGLI premium reductions or to view a table with the new VGLI rates, visit the VA insurance Web site at www.insurance.va.gov, or call the Office of Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance at 1-800-419-1473.

FAST LETTERS

VA utilizes Fast Letters to send information to all concerned about fast changing issues. These letters are sent via e-mail to all Regional Office Directors' mailboxes and are also available from the C&P Service website, ARMS & WARMS. Fast Letters can announce policy and procedural changes. The following are being disseminated to all National Service Officers (NSOs) in an effort to keep them informed of relevant VA actions. NSOs are encouraged to access the VA's Intranet for the complete document(s) listed below and to periodically review for updated Fast Letters.

FL 08-08 Additional Guidance on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

This letter provides guidance on:

- Development for in-service mental health treatment records
- In-service initial diagnosis of PTSD
- Rating mental disorders that led to release from service
- Corroboration of in-service stressors based on combat
- Corroboration of in-service stressors not based on combat
- Stressor development follow-up
- Formal finding of insufficient stressor information
- Revised initial PTSD VA examination worksheet
- PTSD and individual unemployability (IU)

FL 08-02 TRIP Procedures Update

This letter revises the TRIP procedures enclosed with Fast Letter 07-18. It also introduces the release of the web-based TRIP training. The enclosed document, "TRIP Procedures," provides the current guidance. The outlined instructions for processing requests for web-based TRIP access are effective immediately. A demonstration of the web-based TRIP course was provided to service organizations on November 29, 2007. Twenty-three individuals then participated in a successful validation study that was completed on December 14, 2007. The web-based TRIP course is now available. *Therefore, regional offices are no longer required to conduct training during the first and third quarters of the fiscal year.*

FL 08-01 Joint VA-Department of Defense (DoD) Disability Evaluation System (DES) Pilot Program

On October 16, 2007, the President directed VA and DoD to conduct a pilot program to modernize and improve the way disabilities are evaluated and compensation is awarded to injured service members. The pilot will focus on a single comprehensive medical examination and a single disability evaluation provided by VA. The goals of the pilot program are to simplify the DES process, conduct one examination, make one disability evaluation, and reduce the overall time it takes a service member to progress from referral to Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) to receipt of VA benefits.

The joint VA-DoD DES pilot began on November 26, 2007, in the National Capital Region and involves Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Bethesda National Naval Medical Center, Malcolm Grow Air Force Medical Center, and the VA Medical Center in Washington, D.C. Rating decisions will be completed by the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office. This Fast Letter is provided to promote awareness of the pilot processes and the new application form. If successful, the pilot may expand nationally and involve other offices with military treatment facilities located in their jurisdiction.

For the purposes of this pilot, VA developed and obtained OMB approval of a one-page claim form, VA Form 21-0819. This form will be used in lieu of a VA Form 21-526 for the DES pilot participants. A VA Form 21-526 will not be required if a reopened claim is submitted at a later date.

FEDERAL REGISTER

<http://www1.va.gov/ORPM/>

VA PUBLISHES FINAL RULE REGARDING VETERANS EDUCATION: INCORPORATION OF MISCELLANEOUS STATUTORY PROVISIONS

The VA published a final rule, effective January 15, 2008, to amend its regulations governing various aspects of the education programs administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. These amendments reflect some of the provisions of the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001, the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003, and the Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006.

The changes include: Restoration of certain education benefits for individuals being ordered to active duty; restoration of Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance to certain full-time National Guard members; an opportunity for certain Vietnam-era veterans to qualify for Montgomery GI Bill education benefits; an increase in the maximum amount an individual can receive under the Senior Reserve Officer Training Corps educational assistance program and still qualify for the Montgomery GI Bill—Active Duty program; establishment of an ending date of the eligibility period for spouses under the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance program; expansion of special restorative training benefits to certain disabled spouses or disabled surviving spouses; and providing educational benefits for an independent study course that leads to a certificate reflecting educational attainment offered by an institution of higher learning. The document also amends the education regulations by making changes to reflect current agency organization and on substantive changes for the purpose of readability or clarity.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

DEFENSE FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING SERVICE (DFAS)

<http://www.dfas.mil/>

SOME RECENT MILITARY RETIREES MAY RECEIVE RETROACTIVE PAYMENT

Service members with retirement dates on or after January 1, 2008, may receive a retroactive payment based on the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The annual NDAA contains authorities that impact various aspects of military active and retired pay, including any pay increases. The 2008 NDAA was not enacted before January 1, 2008, preventing DFAS from computing the final active duty pay rates for members retiring in January or February. Members who retired during this period had their new retiree pay accounts computed with a 3 percent pay increase effective January 1, 2008, pending final action on the act. With the enactment of the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act on January 28, 2008, the active duty basic pay rates were authorized a 3.5 percent increase, retroactive to January 1, 2008.

As a result, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service will re-compute the 0.5 percent increase on accounts impacted by this legislation. A Retiree Account Statement detailing the increase will be mailed to the effected retiree's address of record and will also be available for viewing online at www.mypay.gov.

No action is required by the retiree to receive the retroactive payment. Retroactive payments should be received by eligible retirees within 30 days. All payments on or after March 1, 2008 have been updated to reflect the 3.5 percent increase.



EDWARD R. REESE, JR.
National Service Director