

**VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE  
OF LEXINGTON COUNTY**



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# VET NEWS

DECEMBER 2005

## RETIRED PAY COLA INCREASES

Each year, military retirement pay is adjusted to meet the increased cost of living. This Cost of Living Adjustment varies from year to year based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The COLA for 2006 will be 4.1 percent for retired pay, SBP annuities, Social Security, and veterans disability compensation effective December 1, 2005 and will be seen in the January 15, 2006 paycheck. Retirees who first became a member of a Uniformed Service before September 8, 1980 and retired after January 1, 2005 will receive a 3.4 percent COLA increase. For more information, visit [2006 Retirement COLA](#).

## VETS STILL FACE LONG DELAYS FROM VA

Months after the Department of Veteran Affairs told Congress it expected its processing time for veterans' disability claims to drop, agency internal reports show little or no progress. Records show that the department is struggling in its attempt to reduce veterans' waiting time, in part because VA employee productivity nationwide is only three-quarters of what is expected. In some regional offices, it is far lower. The delays mean tens of thousands of veterans who were injured serving the country are waiting far longer to have their cases decided than lawmakers—or even the VA—would like. The waiting-time measure is one of the agency's key goals to show how well it is serving veterans.

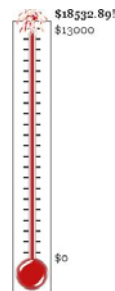
The expected processing time was predicted to drop to 145 days for 2005. For the first 11 months of the 2005 fiscal year, which ended September 30, the department's average time to process disability claims was 167 days, one day slower than last year. The average for August claims was 169 days.

Many claims for disability compensation, which pays veterans for injuries sustained while serving in the military, take far longer than the average. The September 22 report said 4,300 cases from August had taken longer than a year to decide.

## VETERANS' VAN

Donations to the Veterans' Van Fund have reached \$18,532.89. The van will be purchased through a program of the DAV at approximately \$13,000. The vans are titled to the VA Medical Center which then accepts responsibility for maintenance, fuel, and insurance. Volunteer drivers will be needed soon (see related article.). Call Gary Baker at 785-8401.

The extra donation dollars will be used toward financing another van in a more remote area of the county. Why not remember your loved one or honor our veterans with a donation to the Lexington County Veterans Van Fund, 605 West Main Street, Lexington, SC 29072.



**The thermometer graph shows the current status of funds collected, \$18,532.89**

**If your address or Post Commander has changed, please notify us.**

**DRIVERS NEEDED FOR  
LEXINGTON COUNTY  
VETERANS' VAN**

A volunteer driver or volunteer drivers is/are needed for the Lexington County Veterans' Van. The van will be parked at the Lexington County Auxiliary Building at 605 West Main Street, Lexington, SC. The van will be titled to the VA Medical Center which has the responsibility for maintenance, fuel, and insurance.

The designated driver(s) will be required to take a physical examination at the Dorn VA hospital and have a current driver's license. For more information call Gary Baker at 803-785-8401.

**REQUIREMENTS FOR VAN/POV DRIVERS**

**Need copy of current DRIVER'S LICENSE**

**Need copy of current AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE**

**Must view DRIVER SAFETY VIDEO  
If you are a DAV Van and/or POV Driver**

**Must sign SC Dept. of Public Safety Request  
for Drivers Information—Form MV-20**

**Must have a VAN DRIVER'S PHYSICAL EXAM**

**Must complete Van Drivers' Questionnaire  
VA Form May 1991-10-0043A**

**Must complete a DAV VAVS Form 20**

**VIETNAM VETERAN LICENSE PLATES**

Special license plates honoring South Carolina's Vietnam veterans who served on active duty in Vietnam from Feb. 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975 went on sale November 28, after a four-year battle by a former Marine Corps gunner from Gaffney.

Besides an application, an owner must present a DD-214 or documentation that he was awarded the Vietnam Service Medal or that he served on active duty in Vietnam. The tag must be renewed every two years and costs \$20 in addition to the regular fee.

**HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

Home for the Holidays is a service allowing servicemembers serving overseas to register their families for gifts. Servicemembers can register their families via the Operation Hope Website, and their children's names will then be put on a giving tree under a partnership with Toys R' Us and Amazon.com. The gifts will be purchased and donated by other people, and Operation Hope will ship them to the families as a gift from the servicemember. A special gift basket will be shipped to the spouse along with the presents. Operation Hope provides many other services to military members and their families. For more information, visit the [Operation Hope website](#).



**YOUR NEW VET ID CARD**

After you have your picture taken for the new card at the VA medical facility, the card will be mailed to you at the address you have provided within 5 to 7 days. Please verify that VA has your correct address on file. If the U.S. Postal Service cannot deliver the card to you, it will be returned.

After you receive your new card, please remember to take it to your next appointment at the VA medical facility to facilitate your check-in process. This card is only for the purpose of identification and check-in for your VA appointment. It cannot be used as a credit card on an insurance card, and it does not authorize or pay for care at non-VA facilities.

You may contact your local VA medical facility to request a new card if your card is lost or stolen. You will be asked for identifying information such as your name and other information before the card is re-issued to you. After you receive your new VIC card, you can dispose of your old VIC.

Barbara O'Connor has been promoted to Assistant Service Officer to replace Jean Frick who recently retired on disability. Barbara has been with the VA Office for 4 ½ years.

Jennifer Hendrix will be joining the VA Office on December 12 as Veterans Affairs Specialist. She formerly worked in Voter Registration.

## **OVERSEAS HOLIDAY MAIL DEADLINES**

To ensure delivery of holiday cards and packages by 25 December 2005 to military APO/FPO addresses overseas, the US Postal Service recommends mailing parcels by these dates:

Express Mail Military Service, December 19  
First-Class Mail Letters/Cards, December 10  
Priority Mail, December 10  
Parcel Airlift Mail, December 3  
Space Available Mail, November 26  
Parcel Post, November 12

## **POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER UPDATE**

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will not review the files of 72,000 veterans currently receiving disability compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder, the Department's secretary announced.

On May 19, 2005, VA's Inspector General reported on an examination of the files of a sample of 2,100 randomly selected veterans with disability ratings for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The IG cited insufficient documentation in the files and a dramatic increase in veterans filing for disability compensation for post-traumatic stress disorder since 1999.

"We have now just completed our own careful review of those 2,100 files cited in the IG's report," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "The problems with these files appear to be administrative in nature, such as missing documents, and not fraud."

"In the absence of evidence of fraud, we're not going to put our veterans through the anxiety of a widespread review of their disability claims," Nicholson said. "Instead, we're going to improve our training for VA personnel who handle disability claims and toughen administrative oversight."

"Not all combat wounds are caused by bullets and shrapnel," Nicholson added. "We have a commitment to ensure veterans with PTSD receive compassionate, world-class health care and appropriate disability compensation determinations."

## **DFAS myPAY**

This is a Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) automated system that helps active and retired servicemembers, DoD employees, and surviving spouses manage their accounts online. Users can access their

leave and earnings or retirement account statement (RAS) as well as download tax statements (W-2, 1099-R, or 1942S) and forms. MyPay also allows users to easily update bank account and personal contact information online. The site to do this is:

<http://myPay.dfas.mil>

You can also access it through the DFAS home page [www.dod.mil/dfas/](http://www.dod.mil/dfas/). To use MyPay you will need to provide your SSN and a PIN that is initially issued by DFAS. If you have not been issued one, just enter your SSN and click the "new pin" button on the left side of the screen. DFAS will mail a pin to your address on record which should arrive within 7 to 10 days. You can change your personal pin at any time. You also can access your myPay account using a touch-tone telephone at 1-877-363-3677 or 1-478-757-3119. For more information or help, call DFAS customer support at 1-800-390-2348 or 1-216-522-5122 M-F 7-9:30 EST.

All retirees who use myPay automatically consent to receive only an electronic 1099-R and RAS (i.e., must download from the website). Retirees can, however, use the website anytime during the year to choose to receive a hard copy of these forms except between 1 November and 31 December. During the no change period 1 November through 31 December a request for forms to be mailed must be made by phone through the Retired and Annuity Pay contact Call Center at: 1-800-321-1080.

The automatic consent to receive an electronic 1099-R and/or RAS will remain in effect each year unless the user elects a hard copy. Retirees may electronically opt out of this election through the myPay website or by submitting a written request to DFAS at: DFAS, U.S. Military Retirement Pay, PO Box 730, London, KY 40742-7130.

## **THE FREEDOM TEAM SALUTE PROGRAM**

The Freedom Team Salute Program is a new Army initiative that allows soldiers to recognize the contributions of spouses, parents and employers for their ongoing support. Soldiers can go to the [Team Freedom Salute](#) website to send an Army lapel pin, an Army decal, a certificate and "Thank You" letter signed by the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army to those who support them in their service.

**HELP FOR SEVERELY INJURED VETS**

The Department of Defense has opened the Military Severely Injured Joint Support Operations (MSIJSO) Center, a 24/7 service to help severely injured servicemembers find jobs and answer questions they and their families might have. The MSIJSO Center offers help through a 24/7 toll-free number, 1-888-774-1361. In addition the DoD has partnered with Military.com to provide an online Career Center designed to connect severely injured servicemembers with benefits, resources, and employment opportunities to help ease their transition. The Career Center can be found at:

[www.military.com/support](http://www.military.com/support)

**LEXINGTON COUNTY  
VETERANS' DAY PARADE  
NOVEMBER 6, 2005**



**Fort Jackson Band**



**LEXINGTON COUNTY**

**SALUTE TO VETERANS  
OF WWII & VIETNAM WAR  
November 13th  
WKHS**



**Gary R. Baker, Veterans Affairs Officer, reads  
the Lexington County Council Resolution in  
honor of those  
who have served our country**



**T. Moffatt Burriss relates some of his  
war experiences**



**Col. Angelo Perri addresses the veterans  
and their families**

**THANK YOU!**

## Hallowed Grounds

Dedicated to the men and women who are presently fighting for our country's freedom, to those who have died defending our cause and those who have bravely fought for American freedom and are missing in action; and to my Dad, who taught me up to appreciate my country and honor those who have fought so bravely to defend her. I love you, Dad!

This song was written as a reflection after visiting  
Arlington National Cemetery

By: Lisha Lander Hylton

While I walk down the green, sloping hills  
of Virginia,  
On the hallowed grounds,  
of our heroes from war;  
In the fields that were home,  
to an old southern general;  
Rest American soldiers, in the peace  
they died for.

### **CHORUS:**

**They gave their lives for our freedom, in America's name.  
Our heroes are gone, but their memories remain.  
God has called them to His kingdom, now they rest in  
Honored glory;  
From these hallowed grounds -we remember...  
their story.**

As the wind softly blows through the trees  
on the hillside,  
Like a voice from the past, they  
whisper to me.  
"As He died to make men holy, and give  
us salvation,  
Let us live and let us die,  
to set Americans free."

Tell me, how many wars will it take  
till we learn,  
The treasures of freedom, the final  
"Amen"?  
Blowing in the breeze, is the answer,  
to peace.  
Among the graves of these proud countrymen.  
As the sad, mourning cry of a  
whippoorwill fades,  
I see in the distance, a tomb  
and a guard.  
"Here rests in honored glory,  
an American soldier;  
One who is known but to God."

Entombed in the crypts and so often  
forgotten,  
On eagle's bold wings, their souls  
will endure.

In war after war, their bodies  
lay shattered,  
Resting now in The Tomb of the  
Unknown Soldier.

In your own native land, lies your dust  
in the soil.  
It's fitting for your  
worthy grave,  
The earth claims from wars, her most  
sacred souls,  
The ashes of our courage and  
our brave.

Now live, eternal, you saints of  
our wars.  
Dear as the blood that you  
willingly gave.  
No footstep shall tread, on this  
reverent sod.  
The heritage of our soldiers'  
holy grave.

And to those who are lost, and whose lives  
are uncertain,  
In one final prayer, we  
silently make.  
That their valor and virtue, for our country  
at war,  
Be our hope for their glorious fate.

To those living today, giving lives  
for our freedom,  
As they fight for The Land  
of the Free;  
We will pray to our Lord, our Savior  
and Father,  
"May God shed His loving  
upon Thee".

As I gaze toward the sunset, as twilight  
creeps in,  
Over thousands of graves, in the moon's  
early  
, the heart  
of my soul,  
I feel their voices whisper  
softly in the night.

Pleading, "Let there be peace, on earth,  
for mankind.  
God, give us strength, give our  
world unity;  
Let the bells toll for freedom, let the stars and stripes  
fly...  
In the land of the brave and the home of  
the free!"

**MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ONE AND ALL!**

**From**

*The Lexington County*



*Veterans Affairs Office*

*605 West Main Street*

*Suite 101*

*785-8400*

*Gary R. Baker*

*Barbara O'Connor*

*Jennifer Hendrix*

## VIETNAM WAR FACTS:

*Betty J. Carson*

### WOMEN SERVICEMEMBERS SOUGHT FOR REGISTRY

The Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, Inc. needs you! The Memorial, at the Ceremonial Gateway to Arlington National Cemetery, is the nation's only major national memorial honoring all women who have defended America from the Revolutionary War to the present. The Memorial's computerized Register guarantees each registered woman's individual story a permanent place in America's history—and every servicewoman's story is important.

The Foundation is seeking names, addresses, photos and memorable experiences of women who have served to be included in the Memorial's Register. Family members, friends and organizations can register deceased servicewomen from any era or those civilian women who served with other civilian organizations. To register or for more information, please visit the Memorial's Website or call 703-533-1155 or 1-800-222-2294.

9,087,000 military personnel served on active duty during the official Vietnam era from August 5, 1964 to May 7, 1975.

2,709,918 Americans served in uniform in Vietnam

58,148 were killed in Vietnam.

Of those killed, 61% were younger than 21.

11,465 of those killed were younger than 20 years old.

As of January 15, 2004, there were 1, 859 Americans still unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

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OF LEXINGTON COUNTY  
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Lexington, SC 29072  
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**The Veterans Affairs Office will be closed  
December 26 & 27  
for Christmas**

### DECEMBER OUTREACH PROGRAM

December 6st	8-12	Batesburg-Leesville
December 13th	9-12	Chapin
December 20th	8-12	Swansea

### NEW OFFICE TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Lexington Main Office:	785-8400
From Batesburg-Leesville:	332-8400
From Chapin:	941-0231

**These are toll-free calls**

