

THE CENTURION

DELAWARE COMMISSION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Robbins Bldg – 802 Silver Lake Blvd, Suite 100, Dover, Delaware 19904

(302) 739-2792 or (800) 344-9900 (in State)

Internet Website: <http://www.state.de.us/sos/vet.htm>

Fax (302) 739-2794

Ruth Ann Minner, Governor
Dr. Harriet Smith Windsor, Secretary of State

Robert D. Marcinkowski, Chairman
Antonio Davila, Executive Director

Volume 10, Number 3

Jul-Sep 2003

CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The continued involvement of our Armed Forces in stabilizing conditions in Iraq needs our collective support. I am proud of the way our veterans' organizations supported and continue to support the active duty members and their families. Our first thoughts should go to the families of those who have lost their lives, for they are suffering the most. Keep them in your prayers. The recent Memorial Day and Flag Day ceremonies continue to be well-attended events. The Commission extends their appreciation to all those who arranged and participated in those events, with special thanks to the Korean War Veterans marking the 50th anniversary of that war. They can take pride in their role to show the world that we stood and fought communism to make the world better, stronger and safer. Our Veterans Home continues to receive active financial support. As of this writing, more than \$38,000 has been donated through the generous contributions of our veterans, their organizations and individuals who have provided a check off donation via their tax returns. Our thanks go out to them. In addition, during the most recent state Bond Bill budget hearings, a line item of \$500,000 was added to the Bill, specifically for the Veterans Home. We have a great start. Let's continue to keep the ball rolling until we have sufficient dedicated funds to meet the VA's matching construction fund requirement. Keep this in mind every time you have the opportunity to speak with, write to, or e-mail our elected representatives.

Sincerely,
Robert D. Marcinkowski, Chairman

THOUGHT FOR THE QUARTER
“If you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything.”

DELAWARE VETERANS HOME

Veterans Home contributions can be made with a check payable to: Delaware Veterans Home Fund, and sent to the Department of State, 4001 Federal Street, Suite 3, Dover, DE 19901. Your donation is tax deductible.

**VA TO FILL PRESCRIPTONS BY
NON-VA PHYSICIANS**

Some veterans waiting to see Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) physicians for the first time may be eligible to receive medications from VA mail out pharmacies that were prescribed by private doctors, under a new policy announced. “This policy should ease the minds of veterans with pharmaceutical needs who have been waiting too long for their first appointment,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. “This decision will help these veterans while preserving our ability to serve others.”

To be eligible for the new benefit, veterans must meet all of the following conditions:

- Have enrolled in VA health care by July 25, 2003, and
- Requested their first primary care appointment with VA by July 25, 2003, and
- Must be waiting more than 30 days for their first appointment with a primary care physician on September 22, 2003.

The first prescriptions will be filled under the new program on September 22. Eligible veterans will be unable to get prescriptions filled before that date. The period between announcement of the program (July 25, 2003) and filling the first prescriptions (September 22, 2003) is necessary to allow VA to identify and contact eligible veterans and to put new systems and procedures in place to deliver this benefit. Principi stressed the policy is a short-term measure to assist veterans who were enrolled and waiting for the appointment by July 25, 2003, when details about the new benefit were published in the *Federal Register*. It will not apply to veterans who

are put on the waiting list after July 25, 2003. VA estimates that 200,000 veterans will be eligible for the benefit. “Traditionally, an examination and a prescription – both by a VA physician—have been required before VA would provide pharmacy benefits to veterans,” Principi said. “By improving the process of giving veterans the medication they’re seeking, we can enhance their health care treatment and reduce the waiting list for everyone”. Veterans covered by the new rule will receive information by mail from their nearest VA medical facility about filing prescriptions by mail from non-VA doctors, including information for the doctors themselves. “Representatives John Mica and Rob Simmons played an important role in launching this new benefit due to their keen interest in improving prescription coverage for veterans,” Principi said. Mica is a Republican from Florida and Simmons is a Republican from Connecticut. (*Department of Veterans Affairs, July 24, 2003*)

**HOUSE BACKS NEW LEGISLATION TO
HELP RETURNING SERVICEMEMBERS
AND VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES**

Renzi Bill Would Provide Disabled Veterans With Assistance in Starting and Growing Small Business Enterprises. The House of Representatives has voted for legislation (H.R.1460) to provide federal support for disabled veterans to create, manage, and grow their own small businesses. Sponsored by Congressman Rick Renzi (AZ), a member of the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Benefits Improvement Act would allow the use of “sole-source” contracting authority and establish a contracting priority for disabled veteran-owned businesses. “The Veterans Entrepreneurship and Benefits Improvement Act is a justified benefit for those individuals who have been wounded or injured in defending our freedoms,” said Congressman Renzi. “This bill will help make entrepreneurship a more integral part of rehabilitation for disabled veterans and bolster the

opportunity for disabled veterans to foster home-based businesses. I am grateful for the opportunity to have introduced and passed this important piece of legislation,” he said. Committee Chairman Chris Smith (NJ) said, “the Renzi bill will significantly empower disabled veterans who run or want to run their own businesses. House approval of this landmark legislation to aid disabled veteran-owned enterprises is a direct result of passionate advocacy by Rep. Renzi and others on behalf of veterans, particularly those disabled by their service,” Smith said.

Specifically, H.R. 1460 would:

- Authorize the use of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits to pay for non-degree, non-credit entrepreneurship courses for eligible veterans at approved institutions.
- Provide federal agencies discretionary authority to create “sole-source” contracts for disabled veteran-owned and controlled small businesses – up to \$5 million for manufacturing contract awards and up to \$3 million for non-manufacturing contract awards.
- Provide federal agencies discretionary authority to restrict certain contracts to disabled veteran-owned and controlled small businesses if at least two such concerns are qualified to bid on the contract.
- Require the Administrator of the Small Business Administration, in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to complete a survey of service-disabled veterans receiving compensation under title 38, United States Code, to determine the number, identity, and primary industry classification of small business concerns owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans; and report same to Congress. The survey would be conducted within two years of enactment and every three years thereafter.
- Establish a contracting priority that places restricted and “sole source” contracts for disabled veteran-owned and controlled small businesses immediately below the priority for socially and disadvantaged firms (known as “(a)” program contracts) for all federal departments and agencies except VA. Such priorities for disabled veteran-owned and controlled small businesses would rank above priorities for HUBZone and women-owned businesses.

- Establish a four-year pilot program in the Department of Veterans Affairs in which service-disabled veteran owned and controlled small businesses would have the same contracting priority as the 8(a) program.

- Extend VA’s specially adapted housing grant to severely disabled service members prior to separation from active duty service.

- Reinstate the Department of Veterans Affairs’ vendee loan program.

- Repeal current law restricting a surviving spouse or dependent children to receiving no more than two years of accrued benefits if the veteran dies while a claim for VA periodic monetary benefits is being processed.

Having passed the House unanimously, H.R. 1460 now moves to the Senate for their consideration and approval. (www.veterans.house.gov/news/108, June 24, 2003)

MILITARY BENEFIT PROPOSALS QUESTIONED

The White House Bush budget office does not appreciate the generosity Congress is trying to show service members. In separate policy statements on pending legislation dated May 20 & 22, 2003 the Office of Management and Budget said Congress was undermining the services and needlessly spending money by proposing increases in death-gratuity payments, expanding commissary shopping privileges for reservists and creating a new incentive pay for troops in South Korea. Efforts by Congress to extend past September 30, 2003 increases in imminent-danger pay and family-separation allowance recently signed into law by President Bush also draw concern from budget officials. In its May 22, 2003 policy statement about H.R. 1588, the House version of the 2004 defense authorization bill, budget officials said the administration is concerned that a number of unsought special pay and benefits authorities divert resources unnecessarily. These mandatory authorities would undermine each military department’s determination of whether such additional benefits are warranted and appropriate. The May 20, 2003 policy statement about S 1050,

the Senate version of the bill, contains similar language. The statements list specific provisions of the bills that are causing concerns. These include:

- a proposal to expand hazardous-duty incentive pay for reservists deployed overseas for their two weeks of annual training,
- a new \$5-a-day incentive pay for troops who set foot in the Arctic or Antarctic and
- a new monthly special pay for National Guard weapons of mass destruction civil-support teams.

In the Senate bill, the administration complains about:

- providing responsibility pay to reserve officers,
- a provision to double the death gratuity to \$12,000 that would be retroactive to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and
- the \$100 monthly incentive pay for South Korea that lawmakers point out was suggested by U.S. military officials in that country.

The statements do not mention differences between Congress and the Bush administration over a much bigger issue: the 2004 military pay raise. The Senate bill rejects an administration plan to cap pay for E-1s, E-2s and O-1's. Instead of approving the administration's plan for military raises ranging from 2 percent to 6.25 percent, the Senate bill sets the minimum raise for all ranks at 3.7 percent while still allowing for larger raises for midgrade and senior enlisted members. The Senate bill also disagrees with the administration by extending the raises to the Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Public Health Service. The administration proposed the same 2 percent pay hike for those three uniformed services that it wants to give federal workers. Congressional aides said objections by White House budget officials to new and expanded pay or benefits are not unusual. The pentagon often has difficulty convincing the budget office to include such upgrades in the administration's spending request. What is surprising is that the administration would oppose bipartisan proposals such as unlimited commissary shopping privileges for reservists and higher benefits for families of people who die on active duty. They are surprised budget officials would oppose making permanent the boosts in danger pay and family-separation allowance

approved by Congress in the wartime supplemental appropriations bill, which Bush signed into law in April. If Congress does not act, those two payments will be cut back to their previous levels October 1, 2003. Danger pay would drop from the current \$225 a month to the old rate of \$150. Family-separation allowance would drop from the current \$250 a month to the old rate of \$100. Aides acknowledge that the two special-pay increases were not factored into the Bush administration's 2004 defense budget because Congress boosted the rates long after that budget plan was submitted to Congress. But aides said they cannot believe the Bush administration wants the rates to decrease on October 1, 2003, because the cut in pay would be significant for troops deployed in dangerous areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan. (*ROS Fort Douglas UT, January 8, 2003*)

GRAHAM BILL TO INCLUDE CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT AS PART OF VA RESTRUCTURING PLAN

Senator Bob Graham, ranking member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, introduced legislation that gives Congress an oversight role over the VA's Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) planning initiative, a process that will shift resources in the VA system, potentially eliminating beds and closing facilities. "In light of recent events, Congress must be involved in the process of determining the future of the VA health care system, especially if facilities are on the chopping block," said Graham, D-Florida. "The CARES process is supposed to make sure that veterans have access to the health care they deserve and that is exactly what Congress can ensure comes out of this process." The bill filed would allow Congress 60 days to review any actions proposed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs under the CARES process. The legislation comes after the VA instructed network directors to re-evaluate plans that were already submitted to the Under Secretary for Health, with directions to convert existing major health care facilities to clinics. This move came after the networks spent nine months seeking input from stakeholders and conducting

analysis of future regional needs. The CARES initiative, created by the VA Secretary in October 2000, is a nine-step process to plan for the future of veterans health care. The multi-year process aims to modernize the VA health care system. (Jill.Greenberg@Graham.senate.gov, June 18, 2003)

APPLICATION PROCESS FOR VET'S CONCURRENT RECEIPT

Congressman Jeff Miller (R-FL-01) reported that the Department of Defense's Director of Military Compensation has outlined the application process for combat-related special compensation, commonly referred to as "concurrent receipt." "A provision included in the 2003 National Defense Authorization Act will compensate an estimated 35,000 retired veterans for disabilities resulting from combat injuries, wounds and diseases," said Congressman Miller. "The payments are tax-free and could range from \$105 up to \$2,100 or more each month. The new provision also covers veterans whose disabilities resulted from actions such as live-fire training exercises, tactical exercises and airborne operations," he added. "Combat related" includes if they were training for combat, if the disability was a result from an instrumentality of war, or a result of hazardous duty they were performing," Miller explained. "However, this does not only apply to injuries, but also to disease." The Defense Department, which is solely responsible for determining eligibility for compensation, expects the application form to be available by the end of May on the Defense Manpower Data Center Web site at <https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/crsc/>. DOD expects to begin receiving applications from eligible veterans as early as June. Veterans eligible for the special compensation must have completed at least 20 years of service and have a qualifying combat-related disability as determined by their military department. They must also be currently receiving 60 percent or higher disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs, he pointed out. Veterans determined to be ineligible will have an appeal process through the Secretary of Defense.

"Although not every disabled veteran will be eligible for this special compensation, the measure is a relief for those who can qualify and who have had their retirement incomes reduced because of disability pay," Miller said. Current law prohibits payment of both disability and retired pay, often referred to as concurrent receipt. Each of the military services will have designated offices and personnel to help veterans through the application process and to help them review eligibility requirements and choose which compensation program is most beneficial.

GUARD/RESERVE-BENEFITS

The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) is responsible for providing the commissary benefit, and is making this information available as a service to our patrons. Only the U.S. Congress and Department of Defense have the authority to determine the rules and regulations that govern the commissary benefit, and to determine who is entitled to commissary privileges. Furthermore, DeCA has no responsibility whatsoever for printing, requisitioning, preparing or issuing Commissary Privilege Cards (CPC).

Who is eligible?

- Current Guard/Reserve
- Guard/Reserve retirees
- Immediate family members

How often can I shop the commissary and what documentation do I need to exercise my commissary privilege?

- Non-active duty Guard/Reserve members are authorized 24 commissary-shopping days per calendar year.
- To shop the commissary, authorized Guard/Reserve members must present:
 - Valid DoD Guard/Reserve ID card
 - Current Year Commissary Privilege Card (CPC)
- Authorized family members must show:
 - Valid DoD Reserve/Family Member ID card
 - Sponsor's Current Year CPC

NOTE: CPCs are issued one per sponsor, not one per each member of a family. Multiple visits to the

same commissary on the same day, or to different commissaries on the same day count as only one of the 24 commissary shopping days.

Guard/Reserve ordered to short term (less than 30 days) active duty (AD), active duty for training (ADT), or annual training (AT) is authorized unlimited privileges during the inclusive dates of such duty. Guard/Reserve and their authorized dependents must show a valid ID and copy of the Active Duty orders. The CPC need not be presented or stamped when the appropriate orders are shown. Guard/Reserve ordered to long-term (more than 30 days) Active Duty are issued Active Duty ID cards. These personnel and family members have unlimited commissary privileges during the period of Active Duty, documented only by valid ID-no orders or CPC required.

When do CPCs expire?

- The CPC expires on 31 December of the year of issue. Unused visits do not carry over to the next year.

How do I get my Commissary Privilege Card?

- CPCs are mailed to Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) and Individual Mobilization Augmentee (IMA), and retired Guard/Reserve in December for use during the next calendar year. CPCs for Troop Program Unit (TPU) are mailed to the Regional Support Commands for distribution through units. Check with your unit administrator, regional support team or use one of the phone numbers or Web addresses listed below:

Reserve 1-800-318-5298 (ask for CPC information)

www.2xcitizen.usar.army.mil/soldierservices/pay/commcards.asp

Air Force Reserve 1-800-525-0102 (ext. 71228)

<http://arpc.afrc.af.mil/dpsse/cpc.htm>

Navy Reserve 1-800-535-2699 (press 1)

www.nrpcweb.nola.navy.mil/commissary.htm

Marine Corps Reserve 1-800-255-5082

Marine Corps Reserve - Retirees (703) 784-9306

Coast Guard Reserve 1-800-772- 8724

www.commissaries.com/guard_reserve.htm, July 2003)

VA SEEKS EXPANSION OF BENEFITS FOR FORMER POWS

Responding to the needs of service members who were prisoners of war during Operation Iraqi Freedom, President Bush has proposed legislation to Congress that would improve benefits for former POWs. “What we’re proposing is to eliminate the current requirement in federal law that a former POW must be detained for at least 30 days in order to qualify for full POW benefits,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. For its disability compensation program, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) currently presumes that certain medical conditions in former POWs who were held at least 30 days are related to their captivity. Using this presumption, a veteran may obtain financial benefits without providing evidence directly linking a medical problem to captivity. “That may have made sense years ago for some conditions linked to nutritional deficiencies, but even a few days enduring terror at the hands of enemy captors may lead to other conditions,” Principi said. The VA proposal also would improve dental care eligibility and exempt former POWs from current co-payments for medications for non-service connected conditions. Currently, some ex-POWs may be charged \$7 for drugs that treat conditions unrelated to their service. The current presumptions in law recognize that military medical records do not cover periods of captivity, which make it difficult for a veteran to provide evidence of the conditions endured. VA pays tax-free disability compensation ranging from \$104 to \$2,193 monthly, depending on the degree of disability, with additional sums for dependents. In transmitting the draft bill to the speaker of the House and the president of the Senate, Principi said, “Studies have shown that the physical hardships and psychological stress endured by POWs have life-long effects on health and on social and vocational adjustment.” Because benefits have changed over the years, VA took steps earlier this year to ensure that all former POWs are aware of benefits to which they are entitled. VA’s outreach included mailing benefits information to more than 10,000 former POWs currently receiving compensation, as well as

another 4,700 known ex-POWs not on its rolls. Although results are now being collected to measure the effect of the outreach campaign, early indications are that VA is receiving hundreds of claims from POWs for new benefits or for higher disability ratings. Because 93 percent of U.S. former POWs served in World War II, a group with an average age of 82, that overall number of surviving ex-POWs fell by nearly 2,800 last year. VA is taking special efforts to process the claims of older veterans quickly. In addition, VA maintains a Web site with detailed information on its benefits for former prisoners of war at <http://www.vba.vagov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/>. (Department of Veterans Affairs, July 15, 2003)

BENEFITS FOR RETIREE DENTAL PLAN

TRICARE has awarded Delta Dental Plan of California a new contract to provide services for the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program (TRDP). The contract covers a five-year period and is valued at about \$987 million. The new dental contract began May 1, 2003, and continues to provide a voluntary enrollee-funded dental plan to retirees and their family members, certain surviving members of deceased active duty sponsors, and to Medal of Honor recipients and their immediate family members and survivors. The TRDP continues as a combined fee-for-service/preferred provider program. While enrollees may seek care from any licensed dentist in the service area, optimal benefits will be available to those enrollees who choose a participating dentist. The new contract includes the following improvements for the enhanced option (note: basic coverage is available only to those who enrolled before September 1, 2000) – the annual maximum benefit has been raised from \$1,000 to \$1,200; the \$50 annual deductible remains the same but there's a limit of \$150 deductible for the entire family; the lifetime orthodontic maximum has been raised from \$1,000 to \$1,200; the enrollment commitment has been reduced from 24 months to 12 months; the benefits have been changed from 30 percent to 50 percent of the allowable amount for crowns, bridges and prosthodontic coverage (available after a 12-month waiting period); new

retirees now have 120 days after retirement to enroll instead of 90, in order to skip the 12-month waiting period. The TRDP offers dental coverage throughout the U.S., Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Canada. All premiums are paid by the enrollee (the plan is not subsidized by the government) and vary depending on where the enrollee lives. Monthly rates range from \$25 to \$36 for singles, from \$49 to \$71 for two persons and from \$82 to \$120 for family for the enhanced coverage. For more information about the TRDP, got the TRICARE Website <http://www.tricare.osd.mil>; Delta's Website <http://www.ddpdelta.org>; call 1-888-838-8737; or write to Delta Dental Plan of California; Federal Services; P.O. Box 537008; Sacramento, CA 95853-7008. (Army Echoes Issue 1, May 2003)

NEW CHAMPVA POLICY BENEFITS SURVIVING SPOUSES

A new law will reinstate health care benefits for *some* surviving spouses covered by the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA) *if they apply by February 4, 2004*. Surviving spouses who lost access to CHAMPVA benefits by remarrying before February 4, 2003, can be reinstated into the program if they remarried after becoming age 55 and if they apply for reinstatement by February 4, 2004. Similarly, surviving spouses who remarried after becoming age 55 and lost access to TRICARE benefits may now be eligible for CHAMPVA coverage *if they meet eligibility criteria*. To be eligible for CHAMPVA, people must be family members of veterans who have a permanent and total service-connected disability, who died of a service-connected condition or who were totally disabled from a service-connected condition at the time of death. Those who want an application for this benefit or more information can contact VA's Health Administration Center at 800-733-8387. Surviving spouses who remarry at a younger age and lose their CHAMPVA benefits can have these benefits restored if their later marriage is annulled

or ends due to death or divorce. Also, widows or widowers of any age who lost benefits under VA's Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) program due to remarriage are eligible for reinstatement of monthly DIC payments if their subsequent marriage ends. (*Army Echoes Issue 1, May 2003*)

GOVERNMENT GRAVE MARKER REQUESTS MADE EASIER

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has revised its application form to make requesting a VA grave marker easier. The new form, Application For Standard Government Headstone or Marker (VA Form 40-1330), includes updated information about changes that expand eligibility for a government marker. The new form and instruction sheets also permit better communication between VA and veterans' families. For deaths on or after September 11, 2001, Public Laws 107-330 made government markers available for use on veterans' graves that were already marked with privately furnished headstones or markers. Previous law prevented VA from furnishing markers when a grave was already marked. The laws require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to report to Congress by February 1, 2006, on the effectiveness of this benefit and to recommend whether it should continue. One of the changes made to the application form will allow VA to report on this new benefit by tracking its use. In January 2002, VA introduced a toll-free fax service for submitting applications. This service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as an alternative to regular mail. Instructions, as well as the fax number, 1-800-455-7143, are on the VA website at www.cem.va.gov/. The application form on the website can be filled in and printed for submitting by mail or fax. Questions about a headstone or marker application can be directed to VA's Memorial Programs Service applicant assistance unit at 1-800-697-6947. "We have received many compliments about the free fax submission line," said David Schettler, director of VA's Memorial Programs Service. "Funeral homes and veterans service officers are finding they can reduce the time

to process a request by up to seven days and avoid postage costs." VA handles more than 1,000 requests daily for veterans' markers. Last year, more than 348,000 headstones and markers were furnished for veterans' graves worldwide, generally within 60 days of VA receiving the application. (<http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/PressArtInternet.cfm?id=621> June 6, 2003)

AGENT ORANGE LAWSUITS UPDATE

In 1984, U.S. District Court Judge Jack B. Weinstein of the Eastern District of New York approved a global class action settlement of all present and future Agent Orange victims' claims. The settlement provided nominal recoveries regardless of causation for all exposed veterans before the age of 60. But it cut off all compensation for class members after 1994. Stephenson, a Vietnam vet, contracted Agent-Orange-related illnesses in the late 1990s. Long after the Agent Orange settlement fund had run dry. He filed a lawsuit against the chemical manufacturers seeking recovery for his injuries, but Judge Weinstein ruled that he was bound by the 1984 settlement. In a unanimous decision, the Second Circuit reversed. The court held that the settlement's failure to provide any recovery for class members whose injuries occurred after 1994 revealed a fatal conflict between victims like Stephenson and the class representatives. In light of this conflict, the court concluded that Stephenson and victims like him had not received adequate representation in the class action and could not be bound by the settlement. Dow chemical appealed this decision to a higher court. In a landmark victory for Vietnam veterans' injured by exposure to Agent Orange, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed June 9, 2003 in favor of Stephenson. They concluded that the 1984 class action settlement of Vietnam veterans' claims against the manufacturers of the toxic defoliant Agent Orange does not bar a suit by veterans who would not obtain any relief under the settlement. Trial Lawyers for Public Justice [TLPJ] had filed an amicus brief successfully urging the Supreme Court to affirm the decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals

for the Second Circuit, which recognized the veterans' right to sue for their injuries. An equally divided Supreme Court affirmed the lower court's ruling in a per curiam opinion by a vote of 4-4. Justice John Paul Stevens recused himself from considering and deciding the case. The Supreme Court's Stephenson decision preserves an important victory in the fight against abusive class action settlement. Because of it manufacturers simply cannot use class actions to block 'future' personal injury victims from obtaining access to justice. The Supreme Court's opinion in Stephenson is the latest chapter in the saga of victims' attempts to obtain recovery for injuries associated with exposure to Agent Orange. (http://www.tlpj.org/pressreleases/stephenson_dow June 9,2003)

ARMY TO AWARD PROMOTION POINTS FOR CIVILIAN CERTIFICATIONS

When Tank Commanders pull their M1A-2 Abrams Tank into the Baghdad maintenance shop for a turbine engine tune-up, they may not see the familiar ASE blue shield sign hanging in the front, but the Army mechanic that performs the work may be ASE certified. For years, Army mechanics have individually earned ASE certifications as a method of self-improvement and professional development. Their only award for this achievement has been self-satisfaction. That's now changing. Starting in October, the Army will begin awarding promotion points to their automotive mechanics and electronics repairmen who earn civilian technical certifications directly related to their trade. Each Army mechanic can earn 10 points for each certification up to a maximum of 50 points. The Army currently promotes their soldiers to junior grade noncommissioned officers using a scoring system that allows them to earn and compile points for such areas as education, awards, special achievements, and performance. Currently, the Army's promotion system does not really look at how proficient a skilled technician is in their job, but now, one branch in the Army is taking their technical expertise very seriously. The Army's Chief Enlisted Career Manager for its automotive mechanics and mechanical maintenance

technicians, Sergeant Major James Herrell explains: "You know, we have some pretty exciting stuff we work on in the Army, but as a general rule, we do the same jobs civilians do. Yes, the Abrams Tank may have a turbine engine, and yes, the armament system on a Bradley Fighting Vehicle includes thermal imagers, but if I recall, turbine engines are becoming quite popular in the power generation community, and I think I remember seeing a TV commercial of a Cadillac with a thermal imaging device on a heads-up display. Heck, every time I turn around I'm seeing a civilian version HUMMER drive by. So our position is the gap between high-tech military technology and civilian equipment is not as wide as one thinks." Most of the technical fields affected by this new policy belong to the Army's Ordnance Corps, one of the Army's largest branches with nearly 118,000 total Army soldiers. "We consider ourselves the Army's Tradesmen with 45 technical related jobs including electronics technicians, automotive mechanics, explosives and munitions specialists, and allied trades such as welders, machinists, and HVAC repair specialists", explained Herrell. We've been working on this policy for quite some time now, and we were recently successful in convincing the Department of the Army that we should use the same measures of technical competency as our civilian counterparts and reward our soldiers who earn them. National skill standards are an important component of quality management and customer satisfaction, and the US Army has fully embraced these practices by adopting nationally recognized industry standards as a part of their personnel professional development models. An example of the Army's commitment to professional credentialing is the Ordnance Corps' recent accreditation of their welding course by the American Welding Society, the machinist course by the National Institute for Metalworking Skills, and all the electronics training by the Electronics Technician Association. Still in the works is the accreditation of all automotive training under ASE's CASE program and the HVAC training under the Partnership For Air Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration Accreditation. "Professional credentialing of our soldiers is a win-

win for everyone”, Herrell explained. Young people considering the Army as a good place to learn a new technical skill can now attend nationally accredited training, earn professional certifications free of charge (the Army pays for certifications up to \$2,000 per certification), and receive more rapid promotions because of it. The Army wins by getting more proficient technicians, and civilian industry wins by getting a more qualified technician when the soldier returns to civilian life. “Consider that the next time you think about your Army. You can no longer think about us as an Army that only prosecutes war and destroys the enemy. You have to look upon your young soldiers not only as warriors, but also as true professionals in their trade that have attained the same level of technical expertise and competency as the civilian workforce. Awarding promotion points for civilian credentials is one of many things the Army is doing to ensure your Army remains the most professional organization in world history, and the Ordnance Corps is leading the way in the regard”, beamed Herrell. (*U.S. Army Ordnance Center and Schools News Release, June 4, 2003*)

THE COMMISSARY SURCHARGE

Shoppers at military commissaries save an average of more than 30 percent of what they would spend at civilian grocery stores. Commissary shoppers know that a 5 percent surcharge is added at checkout to their grocery bill (the surcharge is calculated on the total before coupons are deducted). Not all shoppers know where that money goes. It goes right back into the stores, paying for new construction, renovations and repairs, equipment, and store-level information technology systems such as the checkouts. This provides modern facilities for our service members at a reduced cost to taxpayers.

Surcharge Reduces Appropriated Funding. Surcharge funds are used for building new stores and modifying existing ones. Commissary customer’s surcharge dollars have paid for these projects since 1974. Overall, the surcharge is used to make shopping quick, convenient and pleasant, measures that encourage customers to continue

using their commissary privilege – which, in turn, helps to generate more surcharge funds! Although experimental surcharges had appeared as early as 1879, the first permanent modern surcharge was established in 1952, when Congress decided that commissaries should become more self-sustaining. The services were directed to have their commissaries add a 2 percent surcharge to the price of goods to cover costs of purchasing and maintaining equipment and supplies.

Surcharge increases. From the start, the services followed different courses in fulfilling the law. The Army and Air Force chose to use a straight surcharge, added to the total bill at checkout. The Navy and Marines Corps used a variable surcharge that was more on some items, less on others, but still averaged the prescribed 2 percent. In 1974, to provide funds for construction and improvements of store facilities, Congress set the surcharge at Army and Air Force stores in the United States at 3 percent (European stores were one-half percent more). This was increased to 4 percent in 1976 and 5 percent in April 1983. The surcharge remains at 5 percent at all DeCA stores, stateside and overseas.

Surcharge maintains compensation. The positive effect of the surcharge can best be expressed in simple terms. While it provides funds to build and maintain modern commissaries, it simultaneously enables this construction to be carried out at a minimized cost in tax dollars. From the customer’s viewpoint, the surcharge provides an important, tangible benefit – yet is applied at the same rate (5 percent) as it was nearly 20 years ago. (http://www.commissaries.com/documents/fact_sheets/surcharge02.pdf, March 2002)

FTC OFFERS IDENTITY THEFT INFO

A Federal Trade Commission booklet offers guidance for people who’ve fallen victim to a fast-growing crime: identity theft. “ID Theft: When Bad Things Happen to Your Good Name” warns consumers that identity thieves use low- and high-tech methods to gain access to personal data like Social Security numbers and credit account information. Identity thieves use this information to open up credit accounts, running up thousands of

dollars of illicit bills and bank loans, which are charged to the victim. The publication is available at <http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft> or by calling 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357) or writing to: Consumer Response Center; Federal Trade Commission; 600 Pennsylvania, NW, TM H-130; Washington, DC 20580-0001. (*Army Echoes Issue 1, May 2003*)

100 COMPANIES JOIN VETERANS FRANCHISE PROGRAM

Exxon Mobil recently became the 100th company to join the Veterans Transition Franchise Initiative, commonly known as “VetFran,” which makes obtaining a franchise more affordable for veterans. “Through their service, American’s veterans have earned the gratitude of the entire nation,” said Dr. Leo S. Mackay Jr., Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “I am encouraged that so many corporations have chosen to thank veterans by helping place the dream of business ownership within their reach.” The International Franchise Association (IFA) first introduced VetFran in the early 1990s as a way for franchisers to express gratitude to military members or their service during the first Gulf War. The program was re-introduced last September. The 100 companies offering VetFran discounts to veterans represent a broad range of small-business ownership opportunities, including restaurant, retail, service and technology franchises. More than a dozen veterans have acquired franchises through the VetFran program during the past year, and applications are now being considered from about two dozen other veterans. Many VetFran franchisers allow veterans to acquire a franchise with a down payment of 10 percent or less of the initial franchise cost, which generally ranges from \$45,000 to \$150,000 for a small business. Beginning July 1, Exxon Mobil will provide a one-time waiver of up to \$5,000 for certain training fees to any qualified honorably discharged veteran who has been identified for training to operate a specific Exxon or Mobil franchise dealer site.” Today’s young men and women who are in the cockpits of our frontline fighters on the decks of our fighting

ships and in the turrets of our main battle tanks will be the veterans of tomorrow,” said Mackay. “VetFran offers the means by which many of them can create a meaningful civilian career when they put aside their uniforms.” Additional information for veterans and companies interested in participating in the VetFran program can be found at <http://www.franchise.org> on the Internet. For information about other business opportunities and programs for veterans, visit VA’s Center for Veterans Enterprise Web page at <http://www.vetbiz.gov>. (*Department of Veterans Affairs, July 18, 2003*)

NEWARK ARMED FORCES PARADE AND MEMORIAL CEREMONIES

Sunday, May 18 marked the 68th annual Armed Forces Parade in Newark. The day was gray and rain threatened. It could have been a long-ago day in France, Germany, Korea, or Vietnam. It could have been a hill, a foxhole, or a ship at sea. We are so fortunate in Delaware to have the heritage and the remembrances of the veterans who did return and did provide the freedom we enjoy today. We thank the veterans who turned out in record numbers to participate in the memorial ceremony and parade. There were approximately 2000 citizens present who clapped, cheered, and otherwise showed their appreciation for your defense of our country. We hope you enjoyed the day. May 16, 2004 will mark the 69th ceremonies.

VA FORMS WEBSITE- ONE STOP SHOP FOR VETERANS

Veterans can now find and print electronic copies of VA, VBA, VHA and NCA forms through a VA website www.va.gov/vaforms/. Veterans and VA customers may apply for benefits and services and transact business with VA. The sites can be searched using the form number, keywords or title. Links to other useful forms websites are also provided. VA has invested in technology which will allow forms to be filled and printed and eventually be electronically transmitted. Forms will be added to the site as they are redesigned with this

capability. VA forms managers from VBA, VHA, and OA&MM maintain the site and you may refer questions to them online or by calling Ms. Mary Stout at (202) 273-8664. (*Department of Veterans Affairs, March 25, 2003*)

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION TO DELAWARE VETERANS

In January 1946, Walter W. Bacon, then elected Governor, authorized a state award to those who served in World War II. To honor this commitment to Delaware Veterans, Governor Ruth Ann Minner has announced that the State of Delaware will provide a "Certificate of Appreciation" to all Delaware residents who shall have served honorably in the Armed Forces of the United States during time of peace, conflict or war. To request a "Certificate of Appreciation" the veteran/spouse or next of kin must submit the enclosed application (see page 21) along with a copy of a Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, (DD Form 214). DO NOT SEND ORIGINAL.

WWII VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

In support of Lt. Governor John C. Carney, Jr.'s and Secretary of State Harriet Smith Windsor's WWII Veterans History Project, we are soliciting your participation and support in creating and preserving a permanent record of your personal wartime experiences for future generations of Delawareans and other Americans to share and consult. The effort also will be used in support of the National Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress. Some questionnaires will be selected for a videotaped oral history, while all will be used to create a volume of written histories of WWII veterans from Delaware. Those selected for the videotaped portion of the project will be chosen based on the uniqueness of their questionnaire and the narrative they provide. If you are selected for the videotaped portion of this project, a Veterans History Project staff member will contact you to arrange for a personal interview. To participate in this preservation effort, please complete the attached questionnaire on pages 17/18 and return it

to the Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs, 802 Silver Lake Blvd, Suite 100, Dover, DE 19904. If you need assistance or further clarification on completing the questionnaire, please call 1-800-344-9900 or (302) 739-2792.

HUNTING, TRAPPING AND FISHING LICENSES

The Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs (DCVA) in cooperation with the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), Division of Fish & Wildlife is now issuing Hunting, Trapping and Fishing ID cards for those Delaware veterans and members of the Armed Forces who meet the exceptions to requirements for licensing under Title 7, Chapter 5, Section 502 of the Delaware Code.

- Any veteran having at least a 60% service-connected disability (certified by the Veterans Administration);
- Or 65 years or older;
- Or blind

For more information, please call (302) 739-2792 or (800) 344-9900.

COMMISSION MEETINGS

The Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs meets the fourth Tuesday of each month, 11:00 AM, 802 Silver Lake Blvd, Suite 100, Dover, DE. The meeting schedule varies for June and December of each year. These meetings are open to the public. Any individual requiring special accommodations, shall contact this office one week prior to the meeting date. If you would like to attend, please call 1-800-344-9900 (in State) or (302) 739-2792.

MOBILE VETERANS SERVICE CENTER

Ms. White will be providing services for veterans from the mobile office at the following locations:

AUG 12	Laurel Town Hall
AUG 19	Bridgeville Town Hall
AUG 20	Fenwick Town Hall
AUG 27	Ocean View Town Hall

SEP 02 Seaford Service Center
 SEP 03 Bethany Beach Town Hall
 SEP 09 Laurel Town Hall
 SEP 10 Georgetown Service Center
 SEP 16 Bridgeville Town Hall
 SEP 17 Fenwick Town Hall
 SEP 23 Seaford Service Center
 SEP 24 Ocean View Town Hall

For more information, contact Ms. White at the Pyle State Service Center, (302) 732-9560.

VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS

Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs

(Kent County) – Ms. Melanie E. Bronov - Dover office - may be reached Monday –Friday, 9:00 AM - 4:30 PM, (302) 739-2792 or (800) 344-9900 (in State). Please call for an appointment.

(Sussex County) - Ms. Laurie A. White - Pyle State Service Center located in Roxanna, DE, may be reached Monday-Friday, 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM, (302) 732-9560. Please call for an appointment.

American Legion

Robert McBride, Dept. Service Officer, (302) 633-5323, will visit the following posts between 9:00 AM and 1:00 PM on the following dates:

AUG 15	Laurel, Post 19	875-9948
AUG 22	David Harrison, Post 14	653-1711
AUG 29	Nanticoke, Post 6	629-9915
SEP 05	Oak Orchard/Riverdale, Post 28 (8:00-12:00)	945-1673
SEP 12	Walter L Fox, Post 2	674-3922
SEP 19	Laurel, Post 19	875-9948
SEP 26	David Harrison, Post 14	653-1711
OCT 03	Oak Orchard/Riverdale, Post 28 (8:00-12:00)	945-1673
OCT 10	Walter L Fox, Post 2	674-3922
OCT 17	Laurel, Post 19	875-9948
OCT 24	David Harrison, Post 14	653-1711
OCT 31	Nanticoke, Post 6	629-9915

DE/MD Paralyzed Veterans of America (DE/MD PVA)

Darrell Johnson, Sr., National Service Officer, VA Regional Office, 1601 Kirkwood Hwy, Room 26, Wilmington, DE 19805, (302) 633-5325 or (302) 633-5392. Mr. Johnson will make home visits upon request for vets who do not have transportation to the VA. He will be in the Oak Orchard area the 1st Monday, Dover the 2nd Monday, Frederica the 3rd Monday and at the Home of the Brave on the 4th Monday of each month. In addition to our service officer at the Wilmington VA Regional Office, we also have representatives David Timberman and Mike Wynetar, National Liaison Service Officers, at the Home of the Brave on Tuesday from 10:00 AM until 2:00 PM. The Home of the Brave is located at 6632 Sharps Rd, Milford, DE (302) 424-1681 or 1682.

Disabled American Veterans (DAV)

Paul Lardizzone, Dept. Service Officer (DAV).
 Every Tuesday: DAV Headquarters Building
 & Wednesday 183 South Street
 (Kent) 8:00-12:00 Camden, DE 19934
 (302) 697-9061
 Every Thursday: Department of Labor
 (Sussex) 8:00-12:00 Div. of Emp & Trng
 (302) 856-5230 600 N. DuPont Hwy.
 Georgetown, DE 19947

Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)

Richard Magner, National Service Officer, VA Regional Office, 1601 Kirkwood Hwy, Wilmington, DE 19805, (302) 633-5508.

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)

Terry Baker, National Service Officer, VA Regional Office, 1601 Kirkwood Hwy, Wilmington, DE 19805, (302) 633-5357

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

James Withrow, Dept. Service Officer, VA Regional Office, 1601 Kirkwood Hwy, Room 21, Wilmington, DE 19805, (800) 461-8262 ext. 5326 or (302) 633-5326.

1ST Thursday

Dover Armory (741-7516) 8:00-11:00 AM
Milford VFW (422-4412) 1:30-4:00 PM

2ND Thursday

Dover Armory (741-7516) 8:00-11:00 AM
Milton VFW (684-4975) 1:30-4:00 PM

3RD Thursday

Dover Armory (741-7516) 8:00-11:00 AM
Rehoboth VFW (227-3469) 1:30-4:00 PM

4TH Thursday

Dover Armory (741-7516) 8:00-11:00 AM
Seaford VFW (629-3092) 1:30-4:00 PM

5TH Thursday

Dover Armory (741-7516) 8:00-11:00 AM

NOTE: All persons interested in Outreach Services should first call our office so that some advance information may be obtained to accelerate the application process. Kent & Sussex County residents may call 1-800-461-8262 ext 5326. New Castle County residents may call 633-5326.

NOTE: persons desiring assistance at the Thursday-downstate locations should be at the Dover Armory not later than 9:00 AM or at the afternoon locations by 2:00 PM. The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) provides services to veterans and their dependents without respect to veteran service organization affiliation; membership in the VFW is NOT required for service.

VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS POC

Military Order of the World Wars

LTC (Ret) Michael C Wilgen.....(302) 292-1964

E-Mail mwilgen@udel.edu

American Legion

Ed Phillips Jr.....(302) 628-5221

AMVETS

John Navitsky.....(302) 994-5657

DE/MD Paralyzed Veterans of America

Wayne Carter.....(302) 368-4898

Jewish War Veterans

Barry Newstadt.....(302) 475-2820

Korean War Veterans Association

Dave Gillan.....(302) 737-2242

Military Order Of The Purple Heart

Bill Carroll.....(302) 655-3820

American Ex-Prisoners Of War

Howard Melson.....(302) 539-1808

WAVES Int'l

Ruth Harden.....(302) 998-1373

Vietnam Veterans of America

Robert Corsa.....(302) 933-0119

Veterans of Foreign Wars

Paul Phillips Jr.....(302) 656-5022

The Reserve Officers Association

CWO John V. Hawkins, Sr. (Ret)...(302) 328-8115

**DELAWARE VETERANS
MEMORIAL CEMETERY**

New Castle Co. Section (Bear, DE).....834-8046

Sussex Co. Section (Georgetown, DE).....934-5653

VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

Claims, Benefits, Veterans Services

(Regional Office).....1-800-827-1000

VA Hospital Scheduling.....1-800-461-8262

.....302-994-2511

Veterans Outreach Center

(New Castle County).....302-633-5360

(Kent and Sussex Counties).....302-422-8011

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Al Barclift (Wilmington).....302-761-8093

Michael Companion (Wilmington).....302-761-8096

Desiree Young (Newark).....302-453-4350 ext. 218

Mike Wolanski (VA Regional Ofc).302-633-5492

Steve Flaherty (Dover).....302-739-5473

Charley Roberson (Dover AFB).....302-677-6942

Ron Bythwood (Dover).....302-739-5473

Norris Townsend (Georgetown).....302-856-5230

RETIREE ACTIVITIES

Retired Activities Office

Lt. Col Ken Smith, (USAF RET), Bldg 520, Room 105, Dover AFB, DE 19902, (302) 677-4612.

Retired Navy Activities Affairs Office
 Leon Stajkowski, Naval & Marine Corps Reserve
 Center, 3920 Kirkwood Hwy, Wilmington, DE
 19808, (302) 998-5194.

COMMISSION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Commissioners may be reached by calling (800)
 344-9900.

Bob Marcinkowski (Chairman) MOAA
 Jim Thompson (Vice Chair).....MCL
 Cornelius "Bill" Carroll.....MOPH

Richard Ennis.....KWVA
 Ruth B. Harden..... WAVES NAT'L
 George K. Hastings.....MOWW
 Jesse Kitson.....VFW
 Paul Lardizzone.....DAV
 Richard M. Magner.....AMVETS
 Gary "Mo" Morris.....AMERICAN LEGION
 Barry Newstadt.....JWV
 Reese Phillips.....40&8
 David W. Timberman.....DE/MD PVA
 Robert E. Wasson.....DELVETS
 George Webb.....VVA

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Paid for with State Funds

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NAME/ORGANIZATION _____
STREET _____
CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____ - _____

**MAIL TO: DELAWARE COMMISSION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
 ROBBINS BUILDING
 802 SILVER LAKE BLVD, SUITE 100
 DOVER, DE 19904**

STATE OF DELAWARE

"Serving Delaware's Veterans"

**Delaware Commission of Veterans Affairs
Robbins Building
802 Silver Lake Blvd, Suite 100
Dover, Delaware 19904**

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