

Veterans Corner
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By: Robert G. Mitchell

All-volunteer Force is 35 years old

Last month the nation marked 35 years of a military made up exclusively of volunteers. Until July 1973, the military operated under an involuntary draft policy to provide manpower to fight the country's wars. Draftees served during both world wars, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Opposition to the war in Vietnam brought extreme scrutiny of the draft, and Congress eventually approved the establishment of the all-volunteer force.

For the past 35 years, volunteers manned 100 percent of the armed forces during the nation's times of need, including the Cold War as well as conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo. They filled the ranks and fought in the Persian Gulf, Panama and Grenada. Retention flourishes among the services – in both the active duty and Reserve Component – as they continue to operate in Iraq and Afghanistan and conduct humanitarian missions at home and throughout the world.

Experience is evident in today's armed forces' retention statistics. Today nearly one out of every two service members re-enlists. During the draft, only one-eighth of the force chose to "re_up", creating a military where less than 20 percent of the force had more than a few years of service. This is even more impressive considering that today's all-volunteer military has been fighting a two-front War on terror with protracted operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Saratoga County Rural Preservation Co.

Saratoga County Rural Preservation Company (RPC) is transitional housing for homeless veterans in Ballston Spa. The Vet house is supported by grants and contributions. The vets at the house need a few things like beds, curtains, rugs, bedding and computers. If anyone would like to make a donation to the house please contact Budd Mazurek, executive director at 518-885-0091.

CRSC Improvements Implemented

The FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDSS) included an FRE-supported provision expanding Combat-related Special Compensation (CRSC) for Chapter 61 retirees with less than 20 years of service. A Chapter 61 retiree is anyone who has been separated from military service for medical reasons. To receive this benefit, beneficiaries must apply to the military department from which they were separated. The service branches have begun to implement the benefit and are accepting applications for Chapter 61 CRSC. The benefit will be paid retroactively January 1, 2008.

All military retirees who are eligible to receive CRSC must apply to their own branch of service using DD Form 2860, Claim for Combat Related Special Compensation. The form is available at www.dric.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/efoms/dd2860.pdf.

Blind Annuity

This program was established by Chapter 244 of New York State Military Law in 1923. This program benefits are for legally blind New York State War time veterans or their surviving un-remarried spouses. The annuity payment is currently \$1,128.72 annually and dispersed in installments of \$94.06 per month. For eligibility details call Ellen Smith at 486-3602.

Gold Star Parent Annuity

New York State Gold Star Parent Annuity is to honor the person for his/her supreme sacrifice as a symbol of devotion and pride of the family. The Gold Star Lapel Button is given to the widow, parents and next of kin of all members of the armed forces who lost their lives while engaged in hostile action. The annuity payment is \$500 per gold star parent (max) or \$1,000 annually. Payments are dispersed twice a year in March and September. Eligibility must be re-certified annually. For more information and an application contact Ellen Smith at the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs at 846-3602.

New York State Burial Allowance

The supplemental burial allowance provides aid to families of military personnel who were killed in combat or on duty subject to hostile fire or imminent danger on or after September 29, 2003. The benefit provides a maximum \$6,000 payment to defray funeral and burial expenses. This is an unused benefit. For more information please contact the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs at 474-6784.

Major League Baseball Vets

Major League Baseball launched an initiative in July to raise \$100 million to provide free psychological counseling via private practitioners and job assistance for Afghanistan and Iraq War veterans. The efforts are designed to supplement existing government programs and plug gaps, especially where the private sector can play an instrumental role. It is the brainchild of Fred Wilpon, owner of the New York Mets. He told *Time* "It struck me how removed most Americans are from the troops. Most people don't think much about the war. I wanted to reconnect the public with the military." This is at least partly because, as the *Time* writer pointed out, the Administration has never urged citizens to make any sacrifices on behalf of the wars. The program, called Welcome Back Veterans, is being administered by the Chicago-based McCormick Foundation, which is presided over by retired Army general David Grange. For more information, visit welcomebackveterans.org.

Coming Event

The Saratoga County Board of Supervisors is sponsoring the United States Army Field Band and Soldiers chorus concert at the Saratoga Performing Arts center in Saratoga Springs on September 20, 2008 at 6pm. This event is free and open to the general public.