

OUR VETERANS

Veteran's News and Notes

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FRED LANGSTON

VA Contacting Veteran Students

VA representatives are calling GI Bill users across the country to explain their education benefits under the new Post-911 GI Bill and ensure beneficiaries are able to receive payments due them. The calls are scheduled to go to those who have applied for benefits under the new educational assistance program. Those who registered for advanced payments will be called as well, to ensure they received their benefits. To protect the personal identity of veterans, VA representatives (actually JD Power's contractors)

will not ask for any personal information, such as birthdates or Social Security numbers. But, they may ask family members for information to contact veterans who are away at school.

Board of Veterans Appeals Expanded

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki announced the addition of four new Veterans Law Judges to the Board of Veterans' Appeals (BVA), which will enable the board to increase the number of cases being decided. BVA is an appeals body where veterans, their dependents, or their survivors can go when they're not satisfied with decisions about claims for benefits administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The board currently has 60 Veterans Law Judges. VA provides a pamphlet entitled, How Do I Appeal, to anyone who isn't satisfied with the results of a benefits claim that was decided by a VA regional office, medical center or another local VA office. For more information about BVA or to download a copy of the pamphlet,

visit VA's Gateway to VA Appeals webpage at www.va.gov/vbs/bva.

Retirees and Vets Allowed to Salute Flag

Traditionally, members of the nation's veterans service organizations render the hand-salute during the national anthem and at events involving the national flag while wearing their organization's official headgear. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 contained an amendment to allow un-uniformed servicemembers, military retirees, and veterans to render a hand salute during the hoisting, lowering, or passing of the U.S. flag. A later amendment further authorized hand-salutes during the national anthem by veterans and out-of-uniform military personnel. This was included in the Defense Authorization Act of 2009, which Former President Bush signed on Oct. 14, 2008.

SUPPORT S.1939 - The Agent Orange Equity Act of 2009

We encourage everyone to contact California U.S.

Senators Boxer and Feinstein requesting that they co-sponsor S.1939. Deliver the following message to them either by phone, fax, letter or email. Please support Viet Nam Vets who have been deprived and excluded from earned benefits by congressional self serving enactments. Passage of this legislation will rectify this unjust exclusion. Fred Langston

"Dear Senator:

I strongly urge you to co-sponsor and support S 1939, the Agent Orange Equity Act of 2009. This legislation would expand the legal presumption of exposure to Agent Orange for veterans who served in the vicinity of Viet Nam.

Before 2002, it did not matter where a veteran served in the Vietnam War. If disabled due to the exposure to the terrible poisons in the air and waterways, the VA would pay disability compensation. In 2002, Congress decided to 'save our taxpayers money' and ordered the VA to implement a 'foot on the ground' policy. After this policy revision, only members who actually set foot on the ground in Vietnam

could get compensated for medical conditions caused by Agent Orange and other herbicides that were routinely sprayed. Those serving outside of were ineligible for compensation even though they were contaminated by these toxins. The VA follows the mandate of "boots on the ground" which excludes most Navy and Air Force personnel who have Agent Orange related issues but who can not prove "boots on the ground."

S. 1939 would correct this by redefining a Viet Nam veteran as one who during active military service in Vietnam, including the inland waterways, ports, and harbors the waters offshore and the airspace above.

Your name and address"

(Anyone wishing to have this message sent to their Senators on their behalf can contact the undersigned)

Contact Fred Langston at fclangston@yahoo.com, or 619-766-9109, and provide your NINE digit ZIP code for info about your elected officials addresses and phone numbers.

"The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of early wars were treated and appreciated by our nation." -George Washington-

It is the VETERAN, not the preacher, who has given us freedom of religion.

It is the VETERAN, not the reporter, who has given us freedom of the press.

It is the VETERAN, not the poet, who has given us freedom of speech.

It is the VETERAN, not the campus organizer, who has given us freedom to assemble.

It is the VETERAN, not the lawyer, who has given us the right to a fair trial.

It is the VETERAN, not the politician, who has given us the right to vote.

It is the VETERAN, who salutes the Flag, who serves under the Flag, and whose coffin is draped by the Flag.

ETERNAL REST GRANT THEM, O LORD, AND LET PERPETUAL LIGHT SHINE UPON THEM.

Sending gifts to troops overseas? U.S. Postal Service has some tips

Military and U.S. Postal officials have announced this year's deadlines for mailing letters and parcels to military members overseas in order to ensure it gets there by December 25th. Here are the deadlines:

First-Class letters and cards: Dec. 11
Express Mail Military Service: Dec. 19
Priority Mail: Dec. 19
Parcel Post: Nov. 13
Parcel Airlift Mail: Dec. 4
Space Available Mail: Nov. 27

For APO/FPO AE addresses with the ZIP code 093 (Iraq, Afghanistan, and surrounding areas):

First-Class letters and cards: Dec. 4

Priority Mail: Dec. 4
Parcel Post: Nov. 13
Parcel Airlift Mail: Dec. 2

Space Available Mail: Nov. 27

Express Mail Military Service is not available for those areas.

Gifts from friends and loved ones make the holidays brighter for military folks serving far from home. Follow these guidelines so your cards and gift packages reach them safely.

Pack it right. It's important to make sure the gifts are properly cushioned so they won't get jostled around or damaged on their trip.

If you're reusing a box, cover all the old labels and markings with heavy black marker or your labels. Tape it up with clear or brown packaging tape, reinforced packing tape, or paper tape. Avoid things like cord, string, and twine—they get caught in our mail processing equipment. Also, be mindful of sending anything temperature-sensitive (like candy or candles) to hot climates.

Use these addressing tips:

Use the service member's full name.

All mail must be addressed to someone specific; addressing mail to "Any Service Member" is no

longer permitted.

Include the unit and APO/FPO

(Air/Army Post Office™ or Fleet Post Office™) address with the nine-digit ZIP Code® (if one is assigned).

SSGT First & Last Name
Unit 2050 Box 4190
APO AP 96278-2050

SGT First & Last Name
PSC 802 Box 74
APO AE 09499-0074

Seaman First & Last Name
USCGC Hamilton
FPO AP 96667-3931

SGT First & Last Name
CMR 1250

APO AA 09045-1000

Check for foreign restrictions

Before you send a card or gift to one of our troops overseas, make sure you're aware of certain restrictions. Every country has customs regulations regarding incoming mail. Although there are specific restrictions for each five-digit Military Post Office™ ZIP Code™ (APO/FPO), generally, the following are prohibited in the region of Operation Iraqi Freedom:

- Obscene articles (prints, paintings, cards, films, videotapes, etc).
- Any matter depicting

nude or seminude persons, pornographic or sexual items, or non-authorized political materials.

· Bulk quantities of religious materials contrary to the Islamic faith. Items for the personal use of the addressee are permissible.

· Pork or pork by-products.

Mail addressed to military personnel overseas is subject to certain restrictions of mailing regarding content, preparation and handling. See www.usps.com for details.

XEROX IS DOING SOMETHING COOL

If you go to this web site, www.LetsSayThanks.com you can pick out a thank you card and Xerox will print it and it will be sent to a soldier that is currently serving in Iraq. You can't pick out who gets it, but it will go to a member of the armed services.

How AMAZING it would be if we could get everyone we know to send one!!! It is FREE and it only takes a second.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the soldiers received a bunch of these? Whether you are for or against the war, our soldiers over there need to know we are behind them.

This takes just 10 seconds and it's a wonderful way to say thank you. Please take the time. We can never say enough thank you's.

Thanks for taking to time to support our military!

The Back Country Messenger would like to extend our gratitude and thanks to those serving in our military, whether overseas or here at home.

We wish you a happy holiday season and may you be safe as you go about your duties! Your sacrifice is what our freedom is all about. May we never forget.