



Wounded Warrior Voice

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WHAT'S NEW: AW2 Symposium

By COL Jim Rice, AW2 Director

Now is your chance to tell the Army what you really think by submitting an issue for this year's AW2 Symposium. This is your opportunity to influence and change policies related to warrior care and transition for wounded, injured, and ill Soldiers, Veterans, and their Families. Issues selected and prioritized by delegates at previous symposiums have been brought to the attention of the Army resulting in positive changes. For example, one of the issues created and submitted at the Symposium was funding service dogs for wounded warriors. This issue was raised at the Army Family Action Plan Conference in 2010 and was voted in the top five issues. The Warrior Transition Command (WTC) has the lead in resolving this issue. The 6th AW2 Symposium will be held in San Antonio, TX, June 18-25. AW2 conducts symposiums to identify and develop recommendations to resolve issues and change policies that impact wounded Soldiers, Veterans, and their Families. Approximately 250 Soldiers, Veterans, and Family members have attended AW2 Symposiums since their inception in June 2006, and 65 issues have been prioritized and worked by the Army and Veterans Affairs. We are also asking AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, and Family members to apply to become delegates at this year's Symposium. AW2 will select 65 delegates to represent the AW2 population at the Symposium. To apply to become a delegate or submit an issue, please contact your AW2 Advocate.

WHAT'S NEW: Warrior Games

By Lee McMahon, WTC Stratcom

Wounded servicemembers will compete in the inaugural Warrior Games May 10-14, 2010, through a joint effort between the U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Olympic Committee. These inaugural games are part of an effort to inspire recovery, capitalize on physical fitness, and promote new opportunities for growth and achievement.

Eligibility will include wounded, ill, and injured servicemembers from differing categories including: upper and lower body injuries, spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, and post-traumatic stress. The events will be shooting, swimming, archery, sitting volleyball, cycling, track, wheelchair basketball, discus, and shot put. An estimated 200 athletes will be drawn proportionally from each service.

[AW2 Soldiers Stories](#)

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For more information, please visit the WTC Web site at <http://wtc.armylive.dodlive.mil/warriorgames/>.

WHAT'S NEW: AW2's New Sergeant Major

By Ryan Alexander, WTC Stratcom

SGM Robert Gallagher recently joined AW2 as the new Sergeant Major. Gallagher is a highly decorated Soldier who has spent more than 28 years serving our country in operations all over the world. As a Soldier who has suffered from combat wounds, including traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and hearing loss, Gallagher has firsthand experience with the challenges facing AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, and their Families.

To read the interview with SGM Gallagher, please visit the AW2 Blog at: <http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/01/06/an-interview-with-aw2s-new-sergeant-major-csm-robert-gallagher/>.

MONEY MATTERS: Military OneSource Offers Free Tax Filing

Military Families may take advantage of the free electronic tax filing services offered through Military OneSource. People can access the H&R Block at Home program by going to Military OneSource at <http://www.militaryonesource.com/> and clicking on "Tax Filing Services." The program is open to active duty, Guard, and Reserve servicemembers, regardless of activation status, as well as spouses, dependent children, and Family members standing in for a deployed servicemember.

Please ensure tax filing is through Military OneSource, because those who file through H&R Block directly may be charged for services. The program is set up for basic returns. People who wish to upgrade to the premium program also may incur charges. For tax assistance, filers can call a Military OneSource tax consultant from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. EST, seven-days-a-week, at (800) 730-3802. (SOURCE: American Forces Press Service)

MONEY MATTERS: Housing Assistance Program for Wounded, Ill, and Injured Soldiers

The Homeowners Assistance Program, often referred to as HAP, is authorized in Section 1013 of the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966, as amended. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and Department of Defense (DOD) implementing guidance expanded the Homeowners Assistance Program (HAP) to provide benefits to wounded, ill, or injured servicemembers. This law provides some monetary relief for eligible personnel faced with losses on the sale of their primary residence when there is no present market for the sale of such property upon reasonable terms and conditions. DOD designated the U.S. Army as executive agent for the HAP. Working with installation commanders and housing officials, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers district realty specialists will offer all possible assistance in determining and disbursing HAP benefits to eligible homeowners. HAP information at the HAP Web site at <http://hap.usace.army.mil>.

MONEY MATTERS: Pay—What Happens When a Retiree Dies

It is extremely important that the surviving spouse or annuitant contact DFAS immediately to notify them of the retiree's death.

Retired pay and entitlement to allotments end with the death of the retiree. No further allotment payments may be made after receipt of notice of the allotter's death. Therefore, if payment of premiums for insurance or other important bills are being paid out of the retiree's pay account, arrangements need to be made (as a backup plan) for those payments to be made from another account. This will ensure accounts (especially if medical insurance payments are being made) remain current and the surviving spouse or Family member(s) are still covered without a lapse in coverage.

Deductions made from the retiree's pay, but not paid to the allottee, become part of the arrears (retired pay for days retiree lived in month of death) of retired pay. Any check or bond issued and mailed to a recipient for which entitlement does not exist must be recovered immediately by the issuing office.

It is important to note that the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity does not automatically start after the death of a retiree, as this is a separate entitlement, and DFAS must have an application in order to establish it. (Note: Survivors of retirees do not receive SBP unless the retiree has elected SBP and paid for coverage, usually through deductions from retired pay.) DFAS will provide the retiree's survivors the SBP annuity and arrears of pay paperwork. The deceased retiree's survivors can also contact their Retirement Services Officer (RSO) for assistance. The RSO contact information is published in each issue of Army Echoes (pg. 13) and is also available on the Army RSO's homepage at www.armyg1.army.mil/retire. (SOURCE: ECHOES, Jan-April 2010, http://www.armyg1.army.mil/RSO/docs/echoes/10_Jan.pdf)

MONEY MATTERS: Military Housing Allowance Rates Set for 2010

Military members will see an average raise of 2.5 percent in housing allowance rates in 2010. The increase comes to average of around \$37 per month for the more than 900,000 servicemembers expected to draw the basic allowance for housing in 2010. Some areas will see a higher increase, while others will see less.

The 2010 raise is down from 2009's 6.5 percent average, and is the smallest percentage increase since the inception of the BAH program in 2000. This is due to the past year's recession and declining housing market. For more information, visit <http://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/perdiem/bah.html>. (SOURCE: American Forces Press Service)

BENEFITS: VA to Provide Payments to Eligible Surviving Spouses

The VA announced immediate actions to quickly identify and pay surviving spouses who are eligible to receive the deceased Veteran's VA compensation or pension benefit for the month of the Veteran's death. This benefit is only payable to surviving spouses of Veterans who were receiving VA compensation or pension benefits at the time of their death. Because VA does not always know if a Veteran

is survived by a spouse, some surviving spouses have not received the month-of-death benefit to which they are entitled.

A surviving spouse of a Veteran, who was receiving VA benefits at the time of death and believes he/she may be eligible for the month-of-death benefit, should go to <http://www.va.gov> and provide the information requested. VA will determine eligibility. VA has also established a special Survivors' Call Center for spouses who believe they may be entitled to this retroactive month-of death benefit.

Surviving spouses are encouraged to contact the Survivors' Call Center at the toll-free telephone number, (800) 749-8387. The Call Center is open Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Central Standard Time. (SOURCE: ECHOES, Jan-April 2010, http://www.armyg1.army.mil/RSO/docs/echoes/10_Jan.pdf)

BENEFITS: Military Service and Social Security

By Venus Carpenter, AW2 HR Specialist

Military service can be credited to the record of a Soldier or Veteran for Social Security purposes for Soldiers/Veterans who were on active duty (including active duty for training*) from 1957 through 2001. These extra earnings credits may help the Soldier/Veteran qualify for Social Security or may increase the amount of the Social Security benefit up to a maximum of \$1,200 a year. Special provisions apply and each case is different so check with the Social Security Office for details. Soldiers/Veterans need to ensure they have their DD Form 214 and any other related documents. *Special extra earnings credits are not granted for inactive duty training.

If the active military service occurred:

- After 2001, there are no special extra earnings credits for military service (Public Law 107-117, The Defense Appropriations Act, stopped the special extra earnings credit)
- From 1968 through 2001, Soldiers/Veterans do not need to do anything to receive these extra credits—the credits were automatically added to the record
- From 1957 through 1967, Social Security will add the extra credits to the record when Soldier/Veteran applies for Social Security benefits

For more information, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/military.htm>.

CAREER & EDUCATION: AW2 Veterans and Federal Employment (Part I)

By Scott Cox, AW2 Career Specialist

Trying to get a federal job can be like climbing a Tibetan mountain top or, at best, become a confusing and frustrating task. Many Veterans do not know there are advantages related to military service of which they can leverage—simply because they are Veterans. Veterans who receive a disability rating from Veterans Affairs (VA) have additional advantages, and in some cases, can move to the head of the applicant pool if they are qualified for a position to which they applied.

A Veteran needs to understand what it means to be “qualified.” The Veteran’s federalized resume, with details of all duties and all jobs held, is very important to being considered qualified for a federal position. The more information in the resume relevant to the position for which they are applying, the better the chances of getting that position. Two helpful resources for resume building are at <http://jobsearch.usajobs.gov/?WT.svl=navsearch> or <http://acpol.army.mil/employment/>.

Veterans should maintain realistic expectations. A combat award or a Purple Heart does not guarantee a federal job. However, federal law does exist to allow Veterans to leverage their service and disabilities and receive preference in hiring. Also, the Veteran may not qualify for a federal position at the same level of pay he or she had in the service. There are exceptions, of course, but if a Veteran does not have a college degree and only four to five years in the service, he or she might want to consider looking at GS-7 level or other lower entry level positions in order to get their foot in the door and then advance from within.

There are a couple of Web references that might help:

- There is a good general overview of Veteran employment topics at: <http://www.usajobs.gov/veteranscenter/>
- Detailed discussion on the subject of Veterans preference at: <http://www.opm.gov/veterans/html/vetguide.asp>

Veterans need to know they have these advantages and how to take action in order to leverage these advantages.

CAREER AND EDUCATION: Veterans Employment Coordination Service

By Jane Dulin, AW2 VA Liaison

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is committed to increasing the number of Veterans working in VA facilities and established the Veterans Employment Coordination Service (VECS) to support that commitment. VECS was established to improve efforts to attract, recruit, and hire Veterans into the VA, particularly severely injured Veterans returning from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

VECS' Regional Veterans Employment Coordinators (VEC) are available throughout the country to provide personal assistance to Veterans interested in applying for VA positions. VECS seeks to ensure that Veterans not only have the tools for success, but access to the resources and networks necessary for their transition to the VA workforce.

More information about the program can be found online at <http://www4.va.gov/VECS/> or contact your AW2 Advocate.

CAREER AND EDUCATION: Post-9/11 GI Bill Advance Payments

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is beginning the process of recovering advance payments made available during the fall 2009 semester to Veterans and servicemembers who applied for education benefits. The advance payments helped thousands of student Veterans during the first days of the Post-9/11 GI Bill focus on studies and not their finances. VA is closing the books on advance payments and focusing on supporting Veterans for the spring semester. VA sent out notification letters explaining the repayment process.

In October, VA instituted an advanced payment process for all eligible students who were currently enrolled in an institution of higher learning for the fall 2009 term. As part of that process, a Web portal and VA offices made advance payments. At that time student Veterans were told that advance payments would be deducted from future benefit payments. In collaboration with the Department of Defense, VA will also notify active duty servicemembers who may have mistakenly applied for the advance payment of their options for returning un-cashed checks or reimbursing deposited funds. VA discontinued advance payments via the Web site portal following the conclusion of the fall 2009 semester. (SOURCE: VA Press Release, January 23, <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1845>)

FAMILY: Grants Available from 'Our Military Kids'

For some military children, the stress and anxiety caused by a parent's deployment do not end once their father or mother has returned home. Children of injured servicemembers face new challenges that come with learning to adapt to physical, mental, and emotional changes in a loved one. Our Military Kids, a nonprofit based in Washington, DC, is a member of the AW2 Community Support Network and provides grants to children of injured servicemembers for extracurricular activities. The grants help these children cope with the strain of having a parent recovering from physical and/or mental wounds by getting them involved in a sports, fine arts, or academic tutoring program.

Children of severely injured servicemembers are eligible for a grant covering up to \$500 of an activity. To apply, Families may visit <http://www.ourmilitarykids.org/> for more information. (SOURCE: Mary Carolyn Voght, Our Military Kids)

AW2 SOLDIER STORIES

To find out what has been in the news about AW2 Soldiers, Veterans, Families, and staff, visit the AW2 Blog on Mondays for the weekly digest of those stories at <http://AW2.armylive.dodlive.mil>.

THE BLOG UPDATE: February

Soldier Graduates from Maneuver Captain's Career Course

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/26/soldier-graduates-from-maneuver-captains-career-course/>

Give an Hour Provides Free Counseling

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/25/give-an-hour-provides-free-counseling/>

Check Out Army Social Media

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/24/check-out-army-social-media/>

AW2 Weekly Digest February 15-19

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/23/aw2-weekly-digest-february-15-19/>

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: What May Help You

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/19/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-what-may-help-you/>

AW2 Weekly Digest February 1-5

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/17/aw2-weekly-digest-february-1-5/>

Grants Available from Our Military Kids

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/16/grants-available-from-our-military-kids/>

Job Opportunities for California Veterans

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/12/job-opportunities-for-california-veterans/>

Comprehensive Soldier Fitness: New Tool for Soldiers, Families, and Army Civilians

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/04/comprehensive-soldier-fitness-new-tool-for-soldiers-families-and-army-civilians/>

AW2 Community Support Network Update

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/02/aw2-community-support-network-update-3/>

AW2 Weekly Digest January 18-29

<http://aw2.armylive.dodlive.mil/index.php/2010/02/01/aw2-weekly-digest-january-18-29/>

AW2 ADVOCATES IN THE FIELD: Sergio Cuevas

Sergio Cuevas was recently hired as an AW2 Advocate for Fort Bliss, TX and just completed AW2 Orientation Training in Alexandria, VA. Before joining AW2, he supported the Texas Workforce Commission for a year and a half helping Soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan get their benefits and transition into the civilian community—making sure they didn't fall through the cracks. As an AW2 Advocate, Cuevas would like to better educate commanders about behavioral health issues of Soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder. He would like to ensure Soldiers get the care that they need before leaving the Army and possibly losing their benefits. "I want to make sure I have all the facts in and help all I can to advocate for Soldiers and Veterans," he said. Cuevas is also an AW2 Veteran.

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