

**December 2013**

# **Moving Forward**

Your primary source of information on transition from the military

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As the new Retirement/Transition Services Officer for the Benelux region I would like to say it is truly a privilege and an honor to be on board to provide the support you and your Family so richly deserve.

First and foremost, thank you for your service to the Nation. I pledge to honor your service by ensuring you are armed with the knowledge of all the tools and resources available to prepare to be competitive and successful in the global workforce.

It is an exciting time for us as we roll out new initiatives in partnership with the Department of Labor,

Veteran's Affairs, and other agencies within our organization to realize the goal of transition preparedness.

This newsletter is one of our initiatives and will be published on a quarterly basis.

Our goal is to give you valuable information and insight to make your transition from the military smooth, effortless, and free from the stressors that naturally accompany a life transition such as this.

I look forward to working with you and offering whatever assistance you need; again, thanks for your dedication and devotion to duty.

## Army Career & Alumni Program Initiatives/Requirements:

By law, at 12 months all retiring/separating Soldiers must start the ACAP process by completing the pre-separation counseling checklist.

This checklist is a roadmap for the transition assistance process and leads service members to the resources available in preparation of their transition. Recently, the Department of Defense redesigned the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for all service members transitioning from the military.

The enhanced Transition GPS course can be attended in person or accessed through the ACAP or Joint Knowledge Online (JKO) website.

The redesigned TAP makes a concerted effort to ensure our service members will be "career ready" and well postured to meet personal goals for civilian life.

DOD's long-term aim for this new transition service delivery model is to embed the preparation for separation into civilian life throughout the

Military Life Cycle (MLC). No later than the end of 2014, all service members will be required to incorporate civilian career development throughout the span of their military careers ensuring that they are "career ready."

All Soldiers retiring/separating within 12 months must contact the Retirement/Transition Services Office, Bldg. 253 on SHAPE at 366-6293 to set up an appointment to complete the pre-separation counseling checklist with the Retirement/Transition Services Officer. At this appointment, the pre-separation counseling checklist is completed, the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) is initiated, and the Soldier will be registered to attend upcoming TAP and VA workshops.

Active duty military serving in the other branches of service may also contact the Retirement/Transition Services Officer if they wish to be scheduled to attend TAP and VA workshops.

### ***Moving Forward***

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Moving Forward is a quarterly product of the USAG Benelux Retirement and Transition Services Office. To contact the *Retirement/Transition Services Officer* call *For more information or to enroll in these workshops, please contact the Transition Services Officer at DSN: 314-366-6293, civilian +32065326293.*

# ACAP Goals

The Army's ACAP goals are targeted on its human resource needs and are worthy of every leader's support. First, as an employer, the Army spends more than \$500 Million dollars a year on Unemployment Compensation payments made to recently separated Soldiers.

Each Soldier who meets the eligibility criteria is entitled by law to up to 26 weeks of unemployment compensation, and the Army must pay for it. While we are required to inform transitioning Soldiers of their eligibility for unemployment compensation, ACAP helps transitioners to understand the negative impact of unemployment on the attainment of their career goals. ACAP also provides transitioners the detailed job assistance training, counseling and resources they need to quickly find a job – often before they leave active duty. An Army Research Institute (ARI) study demonstrated that the full use of all ACAP services reduces the time it takes for a transitioner to find a job and increases the amount of money they earn.

As important as saving money is, the Army's

ACAP goals also include support to the manning of the total Army. ACAP supports the Army's Active Component recruiting effort by producing successful alumni. The decision to enlist in the military and, more specifically, the Army is often influenced by friends and relatives. When alumni are successful they serve as powerful examples of what Army service can do for a young man or woman's future. Those who are capable of translating Army skills, training, and experience into rewarding careers are living billboards promoting the Army as a great place to start. ACAP also supports Active Component retention by helping Soldiers to intelligently compare their Army earnings, benefits and potential for growth with what they can reasonably expect to achieve in the private sector. Many ACAP clients realize that they need to stay on active duty in order to gain new skills, education, training and experience. In FY 2010, more than 11,000 ACAP clients reenlisted - that's the equivalent of almost 23 battalions.

The ACAP website is <https://www.acap.army.mil>

## Soldier For Life (SFL) Initiative

Soldier for Life helps Soldiers achieve the right mindset, obtain the necessary training and qualifications, and make the necessary connections to be successful in their effort to reintegrate into civilian life.

### ONCE A SOLDIER, ALWAYS A SOLDIER

The SFL initiative highlights the Soldier "lifecycle" with four points: "start strong, serve strong, reintegrate strong, and remain strong. It collaborates with a number of entities, including states, cities, universities, non-profits, local veterans groups and businesses.

The program provides links where veterans can turn for information on benefits, education and career opportunities, fitness and health, family services, mental health services, suicide prevention, post-traumatic stress disorder, and traumatic brain injury.

### REMAIN STRONG

A successful reintegration is extremely important as veterans who have meaningful work and a purpose are less likely to have, but not exempt

from, some of the serious issues facing the nation's veterans. Reducing unemployment, eliminating suicide, and reducing homelessness are major goals of successful reintegration. Soldier for Life seeks to build strong relationships between the military and the community, keep that trust and continue to grow those ties. The Army wants veterans to be successful members of their communities who "Remain Strong" using the resources and training from the Army, while readily having access to the wide network of civilian entities that support them.

Soldier for Life is one of many programs that are part of the Army's Ready and Resilient Campaign. R2C aims to support and strengthen the mental and physical readiness of Soldiers and includes a wide range of programs meant to ensure the right conditions exist for Soldiers to be ready to do their job, or even to transition to the civilian workforce.

The SFL website is full of valuable resources and links through all four stages of a Soldier's "lifecycle". <http://www.army.mil/soldierforlife> SFL is also on twitter @csaSoldier4Life

# VA Grants Up to One Year of Retroactive Benefits

WASHINGTON - The Department of Veterans Affairs announced that veterans filing an original Fully Developed Claim (FDC) for service-connected disability compensation may be entitled to up to one-year of retroactive disability benefits.

The retroactive benefits are in effect Aug. 6, 2013 through Aug. 5, 2015.

Filing an FDC is typically the fastest way for veterans to receive a decision on their claims because fully developed claims require veterans to provide all supporting evidence in their possession when they submit their claims. Often, this is evidence that VA legally must attempt to collect on the veteran's behalf, which is already in the veteran's possession, or is evidence the veteran could easily obtain, like private treatment records. When veterans submit such evidence with their claims, it significantly reduces the amount of time VA spends gathering evidence from them or other sources -- often the longest part of the claims process. While VA will still make efforts to obtain federal records on the veterans' behalf, the submittal of non-federal records [and any federal records the veteran may have] with the claim allows VA to issue a decision to the veteran more quickly. Typically, VA processes FDCs in half the time it takes for a traditionally filed claim.

FDCs can be filed digitally through the joint, DOD-VA online portal, eBenefits. VA encourages veterans who cannot file online to work with an accredited veterans service organization that can file claims digitally on veterans' behalf. While submitting an FDC provides a faster decision for any compensation or pension claim, only veterans who are submitting their very first compensation claim as an

FDC are potentially eligible for up to one year

of retroactive disability benefits under the newly implemented law.

FDCs help eliminate VA's claims backlog because they increase production of claims decisions and decrease waiting times. Also, VA assigns FDCs a higher priority than other claims which means veterans receive decisions to their claim faster than traditional claims.

VA continues to prioritize other specific categories of claims, including those of seriously wounded, terminally ill, Medal of Honor recipients, former prisoners of war, the homeless and those experiencing extreme financial hardship. As part of its drive to eliminate the claims backlog in 2015, VA also gives a priority to claims more than a year old.

As of November 16th, 2013, the VA had 697,389 disability compensation claims. More than 393,000 of those claims are part of the backlog, which means they have been pending more than 125 days.

VA is continuing to implement several initiatives to meet the Department's goal to eliminate the claims backlog by 2015. The agency has completed 1 million claims a year over the past three fiscal years. The VA announced that it was mandating overtime for claims processors in its 56 regional benefits offices to increase production of compensation claims decisions and launched an initiative to expedite disability compensation claims decisions for veterans who have a waited a year or longer. As a result of these initiatives, VA's total claims inventory remains at lower levels not seen since August 2011. The number of claims in the VA backlog -- claims pending over 125 days -- has been reduced by 17 percent compared to the highest point in March 2013.

**Helpful Hint: USAG Benelux has a page dedicated to employment opportunities  
[www.usagbenelux.eur.army.mil/employmentreadiness/employmentX.html](http://www.usagbenelux.eur.army.mil/employmentreadiness/employmentX.html)**

## Program help homeless veterans

WASHINGTON—The Department of Veterans Affairs has approved \$8.8 million in grants to fund 164 projects in 37 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico to rehabilitate currently operational transitional housing projects and acquire vans to facilitate the transportation needs of homeless Veterans.

The Grant and Per Diem Program helps close gaps in available housing for the nation's most vulnerable homeless Veterans, including men and women with children, Indian tribal populations, and Veterans with substance use and mental health issues.

Since 2009, homelessness among Veterans has

decreased more than 17 percent. The VA has committed over \$1 billion in fiscal year 2014 to strengthen programs that prevent and treat the many issues that can lead to Veteran homelessness.

Details about the GPD Program are online at [www.va.gov/homeless/GPD.asp](http://www.va.gov/homeless/GPD.asp)

To help a homeless Veteran or Veteran at risk of homelessness, refer them to the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans, 1-877-4AID-VET, or direct them to [www.va.gov/homeless](http://www.va.gov/homeless). The hotline connects homeless Veterans, Veterans at risk of becoming homeless and their families with the VA services and benefits they have earned.

### Workshops and Briefings

#### TAP Workshops

USAG Benelux – Feb. 25-27, May 28-30 , Aug. 26-28

USAG Benelux-Brussels – Jan. 28-30, April 8-10, July 15-17

USAG Benelux-Schinnen - March 25-27, June 24-26, Sept. 23-25

#### VA Benefits Briefings

USAG Benelux-Schinnen – Jan. 15

USAG Benelux-Brussels – Feb. 12

USAG Benelux – March 12

In addition to the group briefing, the VA counselor may be available to conduct 1-on-1 sessions the day prior with interested participants. For more information or to enroll in these workshops, please contact the Transition Services Officer at DSN For more information or to enroll in these workshops, please contact the Transition Services Officer at DSN: 314-366-6293, civilian +32065326293.

### State Veteran's Benefits

Many states offer veterans benefits.

These benefits may include educational grants and scholarships, special exemptions or discounts on fees and taxes, home loans, veteran's homes, free hunting and fishing privileges, and more.

Each state manages its own benefit programs.

The Military.com website has a list of links to the websites for each of the individual states that offer veterans benefits.

The links are available at <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-state-benefits/state-veterans-benefits-directory.html?ESRC=mrvr.nl>



# Retreat for military and veteran wellness

The Boulder Crest Retreat for military and veteran wellness is the first country retreat established to provide free respite, activities and programs for our nation's seriously wounded warriors and their families to reconnect and recover during their recovery and rehabilitation.

Boulder Crest Retreat is a rural sanctuary for wounded military warriors and their families to enjoy non-clinical, recreational therapeutic activities aimed at assisting with their physical, mental, financial and spiritual recovery. Boulder Crest Retreat recognizes both visible and invisible injuries, such as PTS and TBI. They serve wounded military personnel, their caretakers and family, as well as gold star family members. There are no costs associated with the stay at Boulder Crest Retreat. However, participation in any off-site recreational activities may be subject to regular fees through those providers.

The 37 acre retreat, which opened in September 2013, is located in Bluemont, Virginia and provides

private accommodations, recreational and healing activities, and resources to 250-500 families each year.

Boulder Crest Retreat offers the following ADA-accessible amenities and services:

- Four cabins that can accommodate up to six people and are available for 2 to 14 day stays.
- A lodge where guests can gather to connect with other families and participate in programs.
- Extensive outdoor amenities that include an archery range, nature trails, playground, organic garden, bird sanctuary and fishing pond.
- Recreational activities and programs include nature walks, fishing, archery, gardening, swimming and kayaking in the Shenandoah River, hiking the Appalachian Trail, golf, tennis and tours.
- Healing activities: yoga, meditation, massage therapy, journaling, art and music therapy, canine and equine assistance therapy.

Visit the Boulder Crest Retreat Website at <http://bouldercrestretreat.org>

## Did you know?

Computers in the Digital Training Facility (DTF) classrooms located on Chievres Air Base are set up and available for Soldier's use to access and complete virtual transition assistance workshops? If you know a Soldier transitioning who does not have computer access and requires a dedicated location to complete this training, please have them contact the DTF manager at DSN: 361-6155 or civilian: 068-27-6155.

If you are thinking about using your GI Bill and going back to school, consider these industries.

The Top 10 Most in Demand Jobs for 2013/2014 are:

1. Software Developers (applications and systems software)
2. Accountants and Auditors
3. Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists
4. Computer Systems Analysts
5. Human Resources, Training and Labor Relations Specialists
6. Network and Computer Systems administrators
7. Sales Reps (wholesale and manufacturing, technical and scientific)
8. Information security analysts (web developers, computer network architects)
9. Mechanical engineers
10. Industrial engineers