



**VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE
OF LEXINGTON COUNTY**

GARY R. BAKER
DIRECTOR
JEAN FRICK
ASST. CSO

TELEPHONE: (803) 359-8400
FAX: (803) 808-2105

VET NEWS

605 WEST MAIN STREET
SUITE 101
LEXINGTON, S.C.29072

December 2003

OFFICE CLOSING

Please note that the Veterans Affairs Office will be closed on the following dates:

- November 27 and 28, 2003
- December 24, 25, and 26, 2003
- January 1, 2004

VETERANS DAY PARADE

On Sunday, November 9th, downtown Lexington was the scene of the first of what is expected to be an annual parade. Some 35 units from throughout the county marched or rode down Highway 6 from Azalea Drive to the Veterans Monument.

The parade kicked off with a flyover by 3 T-6 trainers lead by Jim Tobul. The Lexington Air Force Junior ROTC provided the color guard with flags from each of the service branches. ROTC units from Pelion High School, Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School, and White Knoll High School marched with music provided by the band from White Knoll High School. Floats, period vehicles, and politicians rounded out the parade lineup.



The color guard of the Lexington High School Air Force Junior ROTC leads the parade down South Lake Drive.

Since 2003 is the 50th anniversary of the end of the fighting in Korea, veterans of the Korean War were the Grand Marshalls of the parade, riding on two floats, one car, and a trolley. Young Korean-American children rode on the two floats with the veterans.



The Korean War veterans (Grand Marshalls) with Korean-American children in native dress.

Sharon Willis, Chair of the Lexington County Employees Committee, chaired the parade committee composed of the Town of Lexington, Lexington Womans Club, American Legion Post 7, and the Lexington County Veterans Affairs Office.

After the parade, a ceremony was conducted in Virginia Hylton Park. Congressman Joe Wilson, Senator Jake Knotts, Clerk of Court Tom Comerford, and County Veterans Affairs Officer Gary Baker were guest speakers as were Smokey Davis, Lexington County Council Chairman, and Dan Breazeale, Mayor of Lexington. Patriotic music was provided by Constance Flemming, Devon Shelton, and Jeff Flanders.

Ann Ricard of the Lexington County Blue Star Mothers, lead the assembled guests in the Pledge of Allegiance. The Gilbert High School Chorus sang a medley of patriotic songs. The Pelion High School Band performed a patriotic musical routine.

Tom Comerford presented plaques to the oldest female and male veterans present. Recognized were Mary L. Resch, Vietnam veteran, and William O. Kaminer, World War II veteran.



Presentation of service flags by Lexington High School Air Force Junior ROTC.

The Lexington Monument Committee held a flag dedication ceremony at the Monument. The flags which had been flying since Veterans Day 2002 were replaced and presented to the individuals or families who sponsored them.

BROOKLAND-CAYCE MONUMENT DEDICATED

Alumni of Brookland-Cayce High School who served in World War II were recognized at a monument dedication on Veterans Day.

A bronze sculpture will be placed on top of a pillar amid 27 name plaques of those who died during World War II.

Over eight hundred bricks were installed recognizing those of the Brookland-Cayce community who served in the war effort.

OUTREACH PROGRAM

The Lexington County Veterans Affairs Office will conduct its outreach program during December on the following dates:

December 2- Batesburg-Leesville Police Department Courtroom

December 9- Chapin Town Hall Council Chambers/Courtroom

December 16- Swansea Town Hall Council Chambers/Courtroom

Sessions for each program will run from 8 am to 12 noon.

The outreach program gives former and present members of the United States Armed Forces and their families the opportunity to apply for benefits. Office staff assist veterans with service-connected and non-service-connected claims, educational benefits, home

loans, and burial benefits. The office certifies and records DD-214s and assists with correcting military records.

Attendees should contact the Veterans Affairs Office at (803) 359-8400 to arrange an appointment and discuss what documentation to bring to the meeting.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 30- Dec 3 American Legion Auxiliary Christmas Gift Shop- Dorn VAMC

Dec. 3, 5:30 pm- Homeless Fundraiser, American Legion Post 6

Dec 5, 1:30-4:30 pm- Christmas Drop-In, American Legion Headquarters

Dec 14- Carolina Honda Christmas Veteran Patient Gift Giving Ride

Dec 18, 8:00 am- Christmas Volunteer Breakfast Drop-In and Patient Bag Packing- Dorn VAMC

Dec 25- Christmas Day

Jan 1- New Years Day

WORLD WAR II MONUMENT DEDICATION

The Monument to World War II veterans will be dedicated on Saturday, May 29, 2004 at the Mall in Washington, DC. Extensive plans are underway for a large ceremony in Washington. A number of local groups are working on taking buses to the ceremony. Contact the VA Office if you have an interest in going. Reservations need to be made soon as the event is expected to bring veterans from across the country.

Veterans organizations are also being encouraged to conduct local programs to encompass World War II veterans who are unable to attend the Washington ceremony.



Gary Baker, Lexington County Veterans Affairs Officer chauffeured by Kelly & Terry Burnett

DECEMBER DATES TO REMEMBER

Dec. 7 Pearl Harbor
Dec 16 Battle of the Bulge begins

NEWSLETTER MAILING LIST

Copies of the newsletter are being mailed monthly to commanders of veterans organizations throughout Lexington County. If someone needs to be added to the mailing list, please notify the VA office. Keep in mind that the VA office has a limited budget so mass mailings are not possible.

HEALTH ENROLLMENT

Effective January 17, 2003, enrollment in the VA health care system has been reduced for veterans who do not have service connected disabilities. Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi ordered that new enrollments which are not based on a service-connected disability must meet a local means test (income threshold). That index for the Columbia area is approximately \$30,000 per year. Veterans whose income exceeds that threshold will not be allowed to enroll in the VA health system.

This enrollment limitation has been imposed due to budgetary limitations on the VA health care system.

MEANS TEST

Veterans enrolled in the VA health care system must annually provide financial information (a means test) to the VA medical center where they are enrolled. The means test information is provided by updating a VA Form 10-10EZ. Copies are available from the VA medical center or from this office.

KEEP US INFORMED

This newsletter is produced to keep Lexington County veterans informed on issues of interest. Notify the VA office if there are any programs, events, or meetings planned by your organization or if there are issues that need to be addressed.

BENEFIT UPGRADES

The House and Senate conferees forged a final agreement on their National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2004 (H.R.1588) unresolved differences on 6 NOV. Both the house and Senate have voted approval and the bill has been sent to the president for signature.

Major personnel items of interest to service members include:

1.) **Concurrent Receipt of Retired Pay and VA Disability Compensation.** On 1JAN 04, all military retirees with at least 20 years of service and VA disability ratings of 50% or higher will see their military retired pay offsets phased out over a ten-year period. Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) will be expanded to include all combat- or operations-related disabilities-from 10% to 100% ratings, also effective 1 JAN 04. Currently, only those with qualifying disabilities rated 60% or higher or who have a disability associated with a Purple Heart are eligible. In both cases, Guard and Reserve retirees with 20 qualifying years of service (including those with less than 7,200 retirement points) will be eligible.

2.) **Military Pay and Allowances.** An average pay raise of 4.15%.

3.) **Enhanced TRICARE Coverage for the National Guard and Reserve.** Cost-share access to TRICARE for non-mobilized, uninsured / unemployed members of the Guard and Reserve and expanded TRICARE coverage prior to and following a mobilization. Also, immediate dental and medical screening for Selected Reservists (primarily, drilling members of the Guard and Reserve) alerted for activation.

4.) **TRICARE Standard Information Outreach.** DoD is directed to develop and implement a plan for information outreach to assist beneficiaries in obtaining access to TRICARE services.

5.) **Imminent Danger Pay (IDP) and Family Separation Allowance (FSA).** Beginning 1 OCT 03 for 15 months an increase in the worldwide use of IDP from \$150 to \$225 per month and FSA from \$100 to 250.

6.) **Military Manpower.** An increase of 2400 in active Army end strength and an increase of 1,779 full-time active duty National Guard or Reserve personnel.

7.) **Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Program.** Equitable SBP coverage for survivors of active duty deaths regardless of the circumstances of the death. SBP annuities for survivors of reservists who die in the line-of-duty while performing inactive duty.

8.) **Health Protection and Surveillance.** The Secretary of Defense must establish a quality control program to ensure compliance with pre- and post- deployment medical evaluations for servicemembers.

9.) **Commissaries.** Unlimited commissary access for National Guard and Reserve servicemembers.

10.) **Military Pay Raise Comparability Process.** A permanent law change tying future military pay raises directly to private sector pay growth, as measured by the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Cost Index (ECI). Current law specifies that raises for active duty,

Guard and Reserve members after 2006 would otherwise be capped one-half percentage point below the average American's pay raise every year.

11.) **Additional SBP Changes.** Survivors of servicemembers killed on active duty will have the option to elect "child only" Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) coverage. This will help many surviving spouses who now see their SBP coverage reduced by the amount of any VA survivor benefit. In addition, the new law tasks DoD and the GAO to conduct a study of military death benefits to include a comparison with private sector death benefits.

12.) **Housing Allowance.** Servicemembers will see an average housing allowance increase of about 6.5% in January. That will reduce median out-of-pocket housing expenses for each grade to 3.5% of housing costs in 2004, with a target of further reducing average out of pocket expenses to zero in 2005.

13.) **Reimbursement for Household Goods.** A new provision authorizes the Pentagon to enter contracts with moving companies that require the companies to reimburse military families the full cost of replacing any items lost or damaged during the move.



White Knoll High School Navy Junior ROTC color guard and detachment

VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE

The Veterans Affairs Office acquired some prints, certificates and memorabilia including a US flag that flew in a F-16 over Iraq in March 2003. The office also receives the Fort Jackson Leader, APG News from Aberdeen Proving Grounds, and has available current and back issues of magazines from the American Legion, VFW, VVA, and Military. The office also receives a variety of materials on veterans issues.

The office will gladly receive any veteran or military magazines, books, memorabilia, videos, photos, etc. from individuals or organizations. Veterans are invited to drop by the VA office.

GREETINGS FROM IRAQ

This letter was recently received by a Blue Star Mother who has been active in sending comfort items to our troops in Iraqi Freedom:

Just wanted to send you this souvenir as a token of my appreciation. It's Iraqi money. They call it Dinars; its worth is less than 1 US dollar. They are doing away with this kind of money as of 15 Jan 04. The new money is out already, but do not have Saddam's face on it like this does. All part of a new government. I just thought it would be neat to have a part of the old Iraqi government.



As for the Soldiers and I, we are doing fine. We have been here (Iraq) since April of 03 and will be here until April 04. We live in one of Saddam's old palace buildings. Most of it is bombed out from the war. We have done a lot of fixing up for the soldiers to stay in...

The Iraqi people that we have met for the most part are real grateful for us being here. Some of them speak English; we have to translate to the others what we are saying. They get paid just for doing this. About \$70 a week; it may not seem like much to us Americans, but to them it's a lot. Compared to what Saddam jobs were paying them (\$45.00 a month). They were being paid in Dinars, but it equals about \$45.00 a month.

Again I just want to say thanks from the guys and myself here. We really appreciate what you are doing in your support.

SFC Brown

The troops still need comfort items, books, CDs, videos, etc. Please drop any items by the VA office as the Blue Star Mothers pick them up and pay for the shipping overseas.



Parade units marching down South Lake Drive- November 9th



Scenes from Iraq

