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## Does It Take An Act of Congress . . . ?

rights, privileges, and benefits of Naval Reservists, both active and retired. I don't recall reading about this new commissary policy in my local newspaper. My elected representatives didn't tout this accomplishment in their last mailing. It would be nice if there were one place I could turn to find out about all these little changes that affect my life. Turns out that there is. It's this little magazine that you're reading. And, if you are computer literate, membership in this fine organization comes complete with access to the Web page that elaborates on these changes.

Faithful readers of this column are aware of the numerous changes that have taken place over recent years from unlimited commissary privileges to Space "A" travel to gray-area retirees, from enhanced TRICARE to Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program eligibility. Far too frequently, however, I meet a Reservist or retiree who complains about the inequity of some existing "policy." The passion of their complaint dies somewhat when I explain that the policy or law in question had been done away with years ago. Lesson learned: Become a member. Stay a member. Be informed.

Second. Sometimes even the most incremental changes do require an act of Congress. Flashing back to 1995, it was pointless to address my concerns to the heavens. I have learned since that it's better to direct your complaints to one capable of effecting change.

A good starting place is the Naval Reserve Policy Board. Title 10, United States Code, established the National Naval Reserve Policy Board (NNRPB) to "consider, recommend, and report to the Secretary of the Navy on Reserve policy matters." Naval personnel are encouraged to become part of this process by looking at our Naval Reserve and the organizations it supports to find ways to improve our programs and become more effective and efficient.

For those who have submitted issues to the policy board in the past or who may have sat on a local or regional policy board, please be advised that this is not your father's Oldsmobile. Policy board submissions no longer need to go through a multi-stage process for consideration. While the policy board urges you to use your chain of command, any Reservist can submit an item for policy board submission at <http://www.hq.navy.mil/nnrpb/suggestion.html>.

Often, the areas where change is sought are outside the purview of the Naval Reserve Policy Board or require Congressional action (such as commissary privileges, access to Space "A" travel, or participation in TRICARE). Although our elected officials are the ones who can provide the solution, they are often unaware that a problem exists. ("You mean to tell me that military Reservists can't use military commissaries?!?") Lucky for us, we have a member of our National Headquarters Staff, Ike Puzon, who, as his full-time job, educates members of Congress on issues facing Naval Reservists. However, unless Ike is apprised that a problem exists, it is virtually impossible to educate members of Congress.

How can you help? Glad you asked. Ike and the rest of the National Headquarters staff take their cues from the membership of the organization. Members are encouraged to submit suggestions for legislative action to the Headquarters staff. They can also submit suggestions to me or to the National Resolutions Chairman, LCDR Andy Scheerer, for discussion at the National Conferences. Once the Resolutions Committee adopts a resolution advocating a legislative course of action, the resolution becomes the Headquarters Staff's marching orders.

We look forward to hearing your suggestions.

**NOTE:** *Recently, GAO released the TACAIR integration study that was mandated by Congress. This report deserves your attention: "Force Structure: Department of the Navy's Tactical Aviation Integration Plan," <<http://www.gao.gov/gi-bin/getrpt?>> GAO-04-900: "In December 2003, the Navy decided to decommission one of three Navy Reserve tactical aviation squadrons, VFA-203, located in Atlanta. The Chief of the Naval Reserve stated that the Navy used a variety of criteria in deciding which unit to decommission. Navy officials, however, could not provide documentation of the criteria or the analysis used to support its decision. Furthermore, we (GAO) could not assess whether the Navy had systematically evaluated and compared other factors such as operational, personnel, and financial impacts for all Navy Reserve squadrons.*

*"The Navy's approach lacked clarity and supporting documentation about how different options were evaluated." Further, "The Navy selected the Reserve squadron to decommission without clear criteria."*

I rarely use the commissary. I live in Buffalo, NY, and tend to find myself within reasonable commuting distance of a commissary only when I am performing Annual Training. Nevertheless, there I was, back in 1995, on day two of my AT at the entrance to the commissary intending to go in and purchase several bags of salted snack foods, some carbonated beverages, and assorted other foods that would offend the command fitness coordinator. The sentinel guarding the entrance asked to see my identification card, which I dutifully presented. He then asked me if I had a commissary card. Never having heard of a commissary card, I asked him what he was talking about. He shrugged off my inquiry and asked to see a copy of my orders. He then explained that Reservists were not allowed to use the commissary unless they were on active duty, but that we could use the commissary 12 times per year if we had a commissary card. I let off a small amount of steam at this poor, beleaguered soul before giving up and deciding that it was easier to purchase snack foods at the 7-11 store outside the main gate. I looked up at the heavens and exclaimed, "Is there any reason we have to do business this way?"

Nine years later, it turned out that the answer is "NO." Thanks to the efforts of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Fiscal Year 2004 National Defense Authorization Act contains a provision allowing unlimited commissary access for National Guard and Reserve service members. No more commissary cards. No more having to show a copy of your orders. This revolution came about in no short measure due to the efforts of the Naval Reserve Association and other organizations to educate members of Congress about this particular issue.

Two lessons to be learned here: The first. Although this is the legislative article, I'll include a free advertisement for membership. There are literally dozens of changes – some subtle, some not so subtle – that affect the