

### **MILITARY MEDICAL COSTS ARE BECOMING A WORRY**

Military medical costs have doubled in four years. Many say the Pentagon needs to rethink the generous coverage it provides or risk making sacrifices in other areas of the Defense Department budget. The military benefits package, coupled with expanded retiree coverage, has put the Pentagon into the same financial predicament that threatens major companies such as General Motors Corp. The cost of covering 9 million active-duty members, retired personnel, and their families rose from \$18 billion in 2001 to \$36 billion this year, said William Winkenwerder, Jr., Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. By 2010, that figure will likely reach \$50 billion, he said, with 70 percent devoted to retiree coverage. The main culprit is Tricare for Life, the program enacted in 2001 that guarantees comprehensive coverage for retirees. It was created in response to a public outcry from veterans as they moved from military coverage into the less-generous Medicare program at age 65. Over the past decade, military personnel, retirees, and their families have experienced virtually no increase in co-payments, while federal civilian workers have seen out-of-pocket costs increase between 57 percent and 87 percent.

### **NAVY PINS HOPES TO NONTRADITIONAL LITTORAL COMBAT SHIP**

The littoral combat ship is not a traditional surface warship, not built in a major shipyard, and not even a single ship. It's two separate ship designs, one of which will be built in landlocked Wisconsin. It's intended to fight submarines, disarm mines, and hunt terrorists close to shore. And, the littoral combat ship, or LCS, is the centerpiece of the Navy's future surface fleet. "In my mind, LCS brings a whole new way of looking at both capabilities and also acquisition," said VADM Joseph Sestak, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Warfare Requirements. Lockheed Martin Corp. (LMT) and General Dynamics Corp. (GD) each are signed on for the first phase of the program. The Navy's latest plan, released late last month, calls for building between 63 and 82 littoral combat ships, comprising nearly half of the planned fleet's surface combatants. At \$220 million per hull, the relatively small ships could save the Navy from falling below the 260-ship

fleet of its minimum projections.

### **BLIMPS TO PROVIDE EXPANDED COMMUNICATIONS FOR MARINES IN IRAQ**

Marines in Iraq will soon be getting blimps to improve non-line-of-sight communications among ground units and between ground units and aircraft, according to a Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) official. The Marine Airborne Re-Transmission Systems (MARTS) was developed by DARPA to fill a Marine Corps urgent need statement for non-line-of-sight communications. DARPA created a relay capability on the blimp to take the Marines' UHF and VHF radios along with the Single Channel Ground and Airborne Radio System (SINCGARS) and the Enhanced Position Locating and Reporting System (EPLRS) as well as their normal analog radios. The first blimp is being deployed to Iraq; however, its exact location and delivery date are classified. The Marine Corps is procuring a second blimp and trying to get money for four other blimps.

### **FINAL THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN OPEN SEASON**

The final Uniformed TSP Open Season will run from 15 April to 30 June 2005. Details concerning the Uniformed Thrift Savings Plan may be found at <[www.tsp.gov](http://www.tsp.gov)>. Military members are eligible to contribute a maximum of 10 percent from their base pay in 2005. This includes Naval Reservists in a pay status. Military members, who have not previously enrolled in TSP, are eligible to join TSP during this open season. In addition, military members, who currently have a base pay election, can start TSP for any special or incentive pays they are currently receiving or will be eligible to receive in the future. Effective 1 January 2005, all TSP payroll support for Reserve and Guard members for Army, Air Force and Navy is located at the Reserve Center of Excellence DFAS-Cleveland military pay operations. TSP inquiries can be made via telephone at com 216-522-5335.

### **FREDERICK C. BRANCH, 82; FIRST BLACK OFFICER IN U.S. MARINE CORPS**

Frederick C. Branch, the first African American commissioned officer of the U.S. Marine Corps, has died. He was 82. Branch

died in Philadelphia after a short illness. One of 20,000 black Marines to serve in World War II, Branch earned his second lieutenant's bars 10 Nov. 1945. The landmark promotion did not come easily.

"For a person of color to aspire to be an officer in the Marine Corps was a danger," Cornell A. Wilson, Jr., a Marine Corps general, said last year when Branch was honored at the 95th annual convention of the NAACP in Philadelphia. Born 31 May 1922, in Hamlet, NC, the fourth of seven sons of a minister, Branch studied at Johnson C. Smith University and had transferred to Temple University in Philadelphia when he was drafted in May of 1943.

The Marine Corps had barred blacks until President Franklin D. Roosevelt forced the opening of ranks with a 1941 executive order.

### **JUNIOR OFFICER DIES AFTER ACADEMY TEST**

A junior naval officer assigned to the U.S. Naval Academy collapsed and died yesterday after a routine physical fitness test. The cause of death is under investigation. The officer apparently collapsed near one of the academy's athletic fields after completing the 1 1/2-mile-run portion of the test. All Navy personnel are required to take physical readiness tests twice a year, which includes two minutes each of push-ups and sit-ups and either the run or a 500-yard swim.

The officer had completed all three portions of the test and was walking with friends when he collapsed.

### **LOCATING DECEASED'S INSURANCE POLICIES**

Many times survivors are faced with not knowing which insurance company to notify and/or make claim to for benefits they were told by deceased family members they would receive. There is no central repository which identifies all policies in effect. There are some "Internet" companies such as <[www.LostPolicy.com](http://www.LostPolicy.com)> that charge a fee to search for possible policies by sending mass e-mailings to hundreds of the major insurance companies. However, each state has an insurance commission that can be located on the Internet who will generally help survivors locate a company that might still be holding the proceeds from a life insurance policy; but they have to have the name of a company to assist you. ⚡