

VETERANS BENEFITS COSTLY

Military retirees and their families are absorbing billions of dollars that military leaders would rather use to help troops fighting today. Congress, pressured by veterans groups, has in recent years boosted military pensions, health insurance, and benefits for widows of retirees. Internal Pentagon documents forecast that the lawmakers' generosity since 1999 will force the federal government to find about \$100 billion over the next six years to cover the new benefits. "The amounts have gotten to the point where they are hurtful. They are taking away from the nation's ability to defend itself," says Dr. David Chu, the Pentagon's Undersecretary for Personnel and Readiness.

ABORTED BURIAL AT ARLINGTON

(Taken from the account of a friend and retired Naval Reserve captain.)

On 22 December 2004, I witnessed first hand the callousness of our military bureaucracy. A burial for our Navy Reserve brother, LCDR John ("Jack") Meyer, had been scheduled at Arlington National Cemetery when, less than three hours before the ceremony, Jack's widow was informed that he could not be buried because he hadn't reached the magic age of 60 and drawn his first retirement check. He had been on the burial list for more than two months, and his friends and family frequently checked with Arlington on the burial arrangements. Everything was a "go" until the day of the ceremony when Arlington cold-heartedly refused to bury Jack. Despite our pleas, a request for waiver was denied. We feel this is an injustice that must be corrected and ask for whatever assistance the NRA can offer – whether it is something immediate or a change in the antiquated rules through legislative initiative.

CONGRESS MULLS RAISING MILITARY DEATH BENEFITS

Private donations are providing cash strapped military families with thousands of dollars as Congress considers raising the service-death gratuity from \$12,000 to \$100,000. Of the almost 1,100 U.S. troops who died during combat in Afghanistan and Iraq, some 210 were based at Camp Pendleton or Miramar Marine Corps Air Station, according to Defense Department and Marine Corps figures. The federal government's \$12,000 death benefit and the associated pay that military families now receive are not enough to help them start a new life – one usually without the primary breadwinner. "The families need the money

more than most people realize," White said. "I think it is our duty to help these families that we owe so much to. It's not about whether you are for the war or against it, or from a red state or a blue state."

PENTAGON EYES GROWTH IN HAWAII

"Hawaii plays an important role," said Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith on a stopover. "It's strategically located. We have important facilities here, and it's a secure location. The idea that we can have an important piece of American territory deep into the Asia Pacific region is something that figures in our thinking, of course." Hawaii may be considered for more troops in the far-reaching realignment expected to take place over the next decade.

PAY LEVEL SHOULD BE TIED TO PERFORMANCE, CNO SAYS

The Navy's representative on the Joint Chiefs of Staff says it's time to scrap one-size-fits-all pay tables and seek ways to tie military salaries to duty-performance – and some of his other ideas about compensation also are grabbing attention in military leadership circles. ADM Vern Clark, Chief of Naval Operations, is careful to say that any overhaul of military compensation would require close cooperation with the other services "because the Navy can't have its own compensation system."

UNDERWAY ON NUCLEAR POWER

In submarine circles, it is probably the most famous message in the world. A half-century ago Monday morning, 17 Jan. 1955, *USS NAUTILUS* backed away from its pier at Electric Boat and sent four words to its support ship by blinking light signals: "Underway on nuclear power," and naval warfare changed forever.

LAWMAKER WANTS CAMERA CREWS BARRED FROM COMBAT THEATER

Rep. Walter Jones, R-NC, said in a 29 Nov. letter to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that he worries the presence of camera crews could end up jeopardizing lives. "There must be a balance between the need for media coverage and the difficult and complex missions being carried out by our brave troops," Jones wrote. "I pray that a Marine or soldier in the future will not lose their life because they hesitated due to concerns that their action would be recorded by the media, reported out of context, and scrutinized by public opinion before all of the facts are presented."

BATH IRON WORKS TO BUILD LAST ARLEIGH BURKE DESTROYER

General Dynamics Bath Iron Works on 21 January was given a \$562.1 million contract modification for the 62nd and last *Arleigh Burke* DDG 51-class destroyer. The as-yet unnamed ship, designated DDG 112, will mark the end of construction of the U.S. Navy's largest class of destroyers since World War II. Bath's Maine shipyard, which builds the destroyers along with Northrop Grumman Ship Systems, Pascagoula, MS, delivered the *USS ARLEIGH BURKE* in 1991. DDG 112, the 34th ship of the class to be built at Bath, is scheduled to be delivered to the Navy in December 2010.

JAMES GARNER, BUZZ ALDRIN TEAM UP TO SUPPORT KOREAN WAR MUSEUM

Actor James Garner has joined Astronaut Buzz Aldrin, PhD, in a drive to build the Korean War Veterans National Museum & Library (KWVNM&L), which will honor the more than 500,000 troops they served with in America's "Forgotten War."

"What people may not know is that before I became an astronaut, I was a combat pilot who flew 66 missions in Korea; and before James Garner redefined the private eye on television, he earned two Purple Hearts in Korea," Dr. Aldrin said. "Unfortunately, a lot of Americans do not know about the contributions and sacrifices soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines made fighting aggression in Korea."

To address this oversight, Dr. Aldrin and Mr. Garner are lending their support to build a state-of-the-art Korean War museum at the former Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul, IL, Bill O'Brien, the KWVNM&L President said.

The museum will be the main national repository housing Korean War artifacts, including books, manuscripts, maps, photographs and other documents associated with the war in which more than 36,000 Americans were killed from 1950-1953. The museum, which is the only facility of its kind devoted to a particular war, will also record and preserve the personal stories of veterans in their own words.

The KWVNM&L is located at:

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