

**Volume 15, Issue 3**

**September 2011**

## **GI Bill Payment Rates Set to Increase**

Each year the Dept. Of Veterans Affairs adjusts the monthly payment rate for the Montgomery GI Bill. The VA announced that the maximum monthly payment rate for fulltime students will be increased about 3 percent — from of \$1426 to \$1473 — on Oct. 1, 2011. This payment rate automatically adjusts for inflation on the first of October each year. You get current payment rate no matter when you became eligible or begin using it.

## **The Prez Sez**

*The President's Column*

**COL John L. Ruppel, Jr. (Ret.)**

Major General David Baldwin announced the appointment of Colonel Amos Bagdasarian as Special Assistant to the Adjutant General for California ANG for Strategic Initiatives. Colonel Steven Butow was appointed 129<sup>TH</sup> Wing Commander and Lt Colonel Jeffrey Magram was appointed 129<sup>th</sup> Vice Wing Commander. The appointments were effective 8 July. A Change of Command ceremony will be conducted September 10, 2011.

Marguerite Delucchi, the wife of SMSgt Don Delucchi (an original Association Board member), passed away June 22, 2011. An Association Scholarship bearing SMSgt Delucchi's name is awarded annually. The Newsletter contains a piece on Marg.

The Association was recently informed of the passing of Brigadier General Walter Leonardo, a former member of the 129<sup>TH</sup> RQW, on March 1, 2011.

The Association was recently informed of the passing of Capt Steve Church, a former member of the 129<sup>TH</sup> RQW, on August 13, 2011.

If your Newsletter contains a dues notice, the Association has not received a 2011 dues payment. If you do not wish to continue as an Association member, we would appreciate a note to discontinue the membership so valuable financial resources and time aren't wasted.

The San Francisco 49ers are sponsoring a Military Appreciation Game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on October 6. The Newsletter contains information on obtaining tickets

School is back in session, please watch for students — both young and old — around the schools and parks!

Cheers!

*John*

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# Marg Delucchi

30 December 1929 – 22 June 2011

*By Col Bill Ignatow*

Over the years, like many of you I'm sure, I have read the names of colleagues in the Final Flyby and have reminisced about the times we had together. But when I got word that a dear friend had passed the other day, I began thinking about those whose names won't appear in that column, but still made a significant contribution to the success and rich history of the 129th. We must never overlook those spouses and significant others that stood shoulder to shoulder with our members over the years being a silent background force.

Marguerite Delucchi, wife of SMSgt Don Delucchi, left us to be with Don in late June. Marg, as we all knew her, was an amazing woman, wonderful wife, mother and friend. Her support to Don over the years significantly enhanced his contributions to the 129th.

I first met Marg in the early 1970s at various 129th functions. Don and I were hunting and fishing buddies, so we did many things together, but our wives never seemed to be included in those endeavors. Then, Don and I were fishing one day, when out of the blue, he asked if Nancy and I would like to come to his home for a Margarita Party around the pool. Wow, after all these years, an invite to the Delucchi compound. The other guests that night were CMSgt Al and Eulene Obermiller. Needless to say, it was a wonderful evening, Marg had amazing appetizers, the ladies were visiting, and I was as nervous as you could get. When you, at least me, go to an event with a little apprehension about how to act, and the liquor is free and flowing, well, it was easy to get pretty far down into that Margarita Pitcher. I don't remember the end of the evening, but I do remember the ride back to Sacramento from Concord. Nancy had to drive and wouldn't stop anywhere along the way for me to bring back up a few of those margaritas. It took me two days to get the streaks off the side of the car. A few weeks later, we were all at a 129th function when we ran into Don and Marg. While I wanted our little margarita event to be behind us, my wife had to replay to Marg our entire ride home, sparing no detail, and embarrassing me to death. Then Marg, as only she could do, looked right at me and said, "Oh, you too. Eulene had to drive Al home to Fremont because he was also sick. I thought you guys could drink better than that". That was Marg.

One of Marg's amazing talents was cooking. It was all Italian and all good. Each year Don and I would go dove hunting. At the end of the hunt, we would clean the doves and I would always let Don take them all because he said he and Marg loved doves. Now, if you haven't seen a cleaned and plucked dove, it's about the size of a golf ball, with wings. What you would do with something like that was, at the time, beyond me, but Marg had the answer. We were invited to Don and Marg's for a dove feed. The way Don described it was Polenta with Dove Gravy. I couldn't picture this, but it sounded interesting. What it turned out to be was a thick base of polenta (Steamed Italian Cornmeal), spread over an entire dinner plate, with a slice of jack cheese, about a half an inch thick and also the size of the plate, covered with a homemade tomato pasta sauce with ground up dove breast, rather than hamburger. The plate of food weighed two pounds and was the best Italian meal I had ever eaten. In fact, much to the surprise of my wife, I had to have another plate. You have to understand when you went to the Delucchi's for dinner, if they were expecting 6 people, Marg had food for 12. Near the end of the evening, Marg looked over at me and said, "You know Bill, sometimes with that much cheese, your normal morning functions might be disrupted for a day or so". A day? How about a week!! But I'd do it all over again for that meal. Marg could cook.

Nancy and I have been building a home in the Colorado Rockies for the last 20 years. We would do projects as we could afford them. One of the last things we did on the home was the carpeting. We were very proud of this final accomplishment. When the carpeting was being installed, Don and Marg came for a visit. I'll never forget Marg walking in, through the kitchen and sitting down next to me on a stair looking at the work being done. I should mention here that the home is at 9300 feet and we have dogs. Nancy and I like to think we are pretty practical, so when we picked the carpet, we picked a color and style that could be described as light, mud brown commercial. So Marg sat there for a few minutes, watching the progress, not saying anything, when all of a sudden she says, "So Bill, tell me, what color carpet are you going to put on this pad?" The silence that followed was deafening. That was Marg.

As I finish this, I'm sitting on that very step, remembering a great friend who was a wonderful wife to Don, a fabulous mother to Dona and Larry, and a woman who lived life to the fullest. While she may never get a wing dip or a final fly-by, she, like many others, was an important thread in the fabric that holds the 129th together today. Let's never forget those that stand next to those who serve. And Marg, just between you and me, I'm still not sure what color carpet I'm gonna put on this pad.

# *Capt Stephen Hartley Church*

*21 April 1944 – 13 August 2011*



Stephen Hartley Church, known as "Stevie" to his family and many friends, passed away at home on August 13, 2011, with his beloved wife, Connie, and his twin brother and sister-in-law, Larry and Michelle Church, by his side.

Stevie was well known for his quick wit, his contagious laugh and joyous outlook on life. He was born on April 21, 1944, in San Mateo, California and grew up in southern California and Spokane, WA. He graduated from San Jose State University and then served in the Air National Guard and US Air Force before becoming a pilot for United Airlines. After completing a 34-year career with United, he moved to Hayden Lake in 2001 to spend his summertime retirement close to Larry and Michelle. Soon after arriving in Hayden Lake, he met and married Connie. They have spent their winters in Tucson, AZ for several years.

His parents, Hartley and Dorothy Church, preceded Steve in death. In addition to his wife, twin brother and sister-in-law, his sister, Twonnette "Toni" Mackey, his nieces, Kristi Kelley and Kelly Flores, his nephews, Robert and Jeff Church and their spouses as well as numerous grandnieces and grandnephews, survive him; as do Connie's father and step-mother, Ron and Rose Chaney of Sandpoint, whom he affectionately called "Our Folks", and, of course, the puppers, Piglet and Gypsy Rose.

A Celebration of Stevie's life was held at the Hayden Lake Country Club on Friday, September 9th. Another Celebration will be held in Tucson later this fall.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in Steve's name to Kootenai Humane Society (PO Box 1005, Hayden, ID 83835), Humane Society of Southern Arizona (3450 N. Kelvin Blvd, Tucson, AZ 85716) or the charity of your choice.

## *BG Walter C. Leonardo*

On 1 March 2011, Brigadier General (Ret.) Walter C. Leonardo, passed away at age 91 in Winchester, Oregon, where he and his wife had moved to be near their daughter. Brig Gen Leonardo was, at one time, the Commander of the California Air National Guard.

### 49ers vs Tampa Military Appreciation Game in Support of Fleet Week

What a great way to support our troops. You can attend the San Francisco 49ers vs. Tampa Bay Buccaneers game on October 9<sup>th</sup>, buy purchasing steeply discounted tickets at the link below, and a significant amount of the ticket price will go directly toward Fleet Week, which occurs Oct 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, in which we have an entire Carrier Battle Group coming into the bay, with more than 7,000 Sailors and Marines in attendance.

How can you beat this deal? (1) See a 49ers game at a fantastic price of \$45.00 (2) Know that about \$16 dollars per ticket is going to support Fleet Week (3) The October 9<sup>th</sup> Game has a military appreciation theme with a show you won't want to miss. Let's just say with that many troops coming into town, it's going to be a great opportunity to see them at the game and thank them for their service, and you get to see what kind of ½ time show and pre-game activities that only Fleet Week can deliver.

Here is the logon for getting the discounted tickets. Make sure when you select your seating you use the drop down to change from "best available" to "fundraiser". That'll get you the great price. There is a 20 ticket limit per individual at this price.

[www.49ers.com/fleetweek](http://www.49ers.com/fleetweek)

password: fleetweek

## Remarriage Has Impact on SBP Coverage

A retiree who is providing Survivor Benefit Plan coverage for a spouse or a spouse and child will have the monthly coverage cost suspended if those beneficiaries become ineligible for coverage. A spouse loses eligibility on the date of divorce, or death. Children are eligible until age 18, or 22 if a full-time student. Marriage or military service at any age terminates a child's eligibility.

Retirees who remarry and have suspended their spouse-only or spouse and child coverage have the following options:

1. Spouse coverage can resume as before. By law, the new spouse will automatically become the eligible beneficiary at the same level in effect for the previous spouse, adjusted by cost-of-living increases, on the first anniversary date of remarriage, or when a child is born as legal issue of the marriage; however, it is the member's responsibility to notify the Defense Finance and Accounting Service of the new marriage to prevent loss of options or premium debt accrual.

Here are the other SBP options after a post-retirement remarriage:

2. Increase coverage (base amount) up to and including full retired pay. If a retiree selects this option, he or she must pay the difference between the SBP costs previously paid and the costs which would have been incurred if the new level of participation had been originally elected, plus interest. Any increase in premiums, with interest, must be paid before the first anniversary of the marriage. Payment of these premiums and interest must be completed before the spouse qualifies as an eligible beneficiary or the election increasing the coverage will be null and void.

3. Elect not to resume the spouse portion of coverage before the date the spouse becomes an eligible beneficiary. Elections under this option are effective upon receipt; however, notification must be received before the date that the spouse becomes an eligible beneficiary or the spouse coverage will automatically be resumed at the level of coverage for the previous spouse plus any cost-of-living increases.

Election of either Option 2 or 3 above must be done before the first anniversary of the remarriage.

If a retiree has divorced and remarries the same spouse for which he or she had previously provided SBP coverage, the coverage and premium deductions become immediately effective, at the same level as the original election.

Notification of intent to select one of the above options must be accomplished by completing a DD Form 2656-6, Survivor Benefit Plan Election Change Certificate. This certificate, along with a copy of the marriage certificate, should be mailed or faxed (one or the other method, not both) to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service as soon as possible after remarriage. The mailing address is provided in the instructions on the DD Form 2656-6 and the fax number is 800-469-6559.

Failure to notify DFAS well before the first anniversary will restrict a retiree's options and may result in a debt for SBP premiums to begin accumulating.

For more details, call DFAS at 800-321-1080.

## VA Officials Processing New Agent Orange Claims

WASHINGTON -- Department of Veterans Affairs processors have decided more than 28,000 claims in the first six weeks of processing disability compensation applications from Vietnam veterans with diseases related to exposure to the herbicide Agent Orange.

"With new technology and ongoing improvements, we are quickly removing roadblocks to processing benefits," Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said. "We are also conducting significant outreach to Vietnam veterans to encourage them to submit their completed application for this long-awaited benefit."

VA officials published a final regulation Aug. 31 that makes veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam and who have been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, ischemic heart disease or a B-cell, also known as hairy-cell, leukemia eligible for health care and disability compensation benefits. With the expiration Oct. 30 of the required 60-day congressional review, VA representatives now are able to process these claims.

Vietnam veterans covered under the new policy are encouraged to file their claims through a new VA Web portal at [www.fasttrack.va.gov](http://www.fasttrack.va.gov). Vietnam veterans are the first users of this convenient automated claims processing system.

If treated for these diseases outside of VA's health system, it is important for veterans to gather medical evidence from their non-VA physicians. VA officials have made it easy for physicians to supply the clinical findings needed to approve the claim through the new Web portal. These medical forms are also available at [www.vba.va.gov/disabilityexams](http://www.vba.va.gov/disabilityexams).

The portal guides veterans through Web-based menus to capture information and medical evidence required for faster claims decisions. While the new system currently is limited to these three disabilities, usage will expand soon to include claims for other conditions.

VA statisticians have begun collecting data that recaps the progress in processing claims for new Agent Orange benefits at [www.vba.va.gov/VBA/agentorange/reportcard/index.html](http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/agentorange/reportcard/index.html). (Courtesy of VA)

## Many Retirees, Their Families Don't Understand VA Burial Benefits

Retirees may qualify for burial benefits through Veterans Affairs, but it is important to understand what those benefits are and how to request them.

Many retirees and their families do not know all the facts. For example, a survey by Lindberg Research in 2008 shows that 60 percent of veterans mistakenly believe the VA pays funeral, cremation and cemetery expenses for all veterans. In truth, reimbursement of funeral or cremation expenses is limited, and certain restrictions apply.

Six out of 10 veterans also believe caskets are provided free of charge to all veterans. Actually, neither VA nor the various services provide a free casket for a deceased veteran unless death occurs while on active duty.

For a free copy of "10 Important Facts About Your VA Burial Benefits," call the Veterans of Foreign Wars member services at 800-821-2606, select Option 1, then Option 3.

# Gates Proposes Premium Increase for Retiree Health Care

by Donna Miles

*American Forces Press Service*

WASHINGTON (AFRNS) -- Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates is seeking modest premium increases for working-age military retirees who use the TRICARE Prime health plan.

Secretary Gates unveiled sweeping cost-cutting initiatives Jan. 6, including a recommendation to increase TRICARE Prime premiums for working-age retirees in fiscal 2012, the first increase in the plan's 15-year history.

"For some time, I've spoken about the department's unaffordable health costs, and in particular the benefits provided to working-age retirees under the TRICARE program," the secretary told reporters.

"Many of these beneficiaries are employed full-time while receiving their full pensions, and often forego their employers' health plan to remain with TRICARE," he said. "This should not come as a surprise, given that the current TRICARE enrollment fee was set in 1995 at \$460 a year for the basic family plan, and has not been raised since."

Secretary Gates noted the dramatic increase in insurance premiums during that period for private-sector and other government employees. Federal workers pay roughly \$5,000 a year for a comparable health insurance program, he said.

"Accordingly, with the fiscal year 2012 budget, we will propose reforms in the area of military health care to better manage medical cost growth and better align the department with the rest of the country," Secretary Gates said. "These will include initiatives to become more efficient, as well as modest increases to TRICARE fees for ... working-age retirees, with fees indexed to adjust for medical inflation."

These initiatives could save the department as much as \$7 billion over the next five years, he said.

Military retirees automatically are enrolled in one of two TRICARE plans, program spokesman Austin Camacho explained. Retirees who join TRICARE Prime, the system's managed-care option that covers active-duty members, pay an annual enrollment fee of \$230 per year for an individual or \$460 for a family. Those in TRICARE Standard, a fee-for-service plan, pay no enrollment fee or premium. Instead, they pay a yearly deductible of \$150 per person or \$300 per family, as well as co-payments or cost shares for inpatient and outpatient care and medications, up to a \$3,000 annual cap on out-of-pocket expenses.

TRICARE Prime, the managed-care option that covers all active-duty members and many retirees, costs the government \$4,202 per beneficiary per year, said Mr. Camacho. TRICARE Standard, the program's fee-for-service plan, costs \$3,584 per beneficiary per year. TRICARE for Life, for beneficiaries age 65 and older, costs the government \$3,874 per patient per year.

Military retirees are not required to report whether they have jobs that offer insurance plans, Mr. Camacho said, noting that having other insurance does not take them off the TRICARE rolls. Rather, he explained, TRICARE becomes the "second payer" for health care, picking up co-payments and deductibles from the primary insurance plan.

Navy Rear Adm. (Dr.) Christine S. Hunter, a TRICARE official, cited one initiative already saving money. More beneficiaries are using the lower-cost mail-order pharmacy option to fill prescriptions.

# Dondi's Mercantile Store

129<sup>th</sup> AHA Merchandise & Apparel

If you would like to order a 129<sup>th</sup> AHA jacket, we again have jackets in stock. Please contact Liliana Ramos for ordering information.

Want to own a really unique & distinctive shirt or cap to show your affiliation with the 129<sup>th</sup> AHA? Dondi's Mercantile Store has a healthy stock of 129<sup>th</sup> AHA related items. Jackets and vests are customized with your name and rank.

All merchandise can be ordered by phone or on-line. Items and prices are shown at right. Shipping and handling are EXTRA.

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(408) 263-5352

[LilRamos@pacbell.net](mailto:LilRamos@pacbell.net)

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<http://www.129aha.org>

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>COST</u>	<u>SIZES</u>
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All items can be shipped. Shipping and handling are EXTRA. All items are sent via U.S. Mail.

**All profits are used for 129 AHA benefit projects.**

Have you moved? Know a former member of the 129<sup>th</sup> who isn't a member yet?

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / CHANGE OF INFORMATION FORM 2011 Dues \$15.00

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ SPOUSE: \_\_\_\_\_

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TELEPHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

RANK: \_\_\_\_\_ 129<sup>TH</sup> SERVICE DATES FROM: \_\_\_\_\_ TO \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete the above information and mail to:  
129<sup>th</sup> Alumni & Heritage Association  
c/o Col John L. Ruppel, Jr. (ret)  
6718 Zerillo Dr.  
Riverbank, CA 95367-2122

**If your personal information has changed,  
PLEASE USE THIS FORM AND NOTIFY US IMMEDIATELY!!**

Form is available at [www.129aha.org](http://www.129aha.org)



## Final Fly-By In Memoriam

Capt Steve Church  
Mrs. Marg Delucchi  
BG Walter C. Leonardo



## New to the Gang

*Our Newest Members*

LtCol Jay Brookman

## Welcome!

Do you know someone who has been affiliated with the 129<sup>th</sup> RQW or its predecessor organizations - and is not a member of the Association? Let's get them signed up!

Application form is available at

[www.129aha.org](http://www.129aha.org)

## GI Bill Apprenticeship and OJT

If you are a veteran or currently in the guard or reserve, the On-The-Job Training (OJT) Program offers you an alternative way to use your VA (GI Bill) education and training benefits. The following is a summary of these GI Bill alternatives.

When you are trained for a new job, you can receive monthly training benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in addition to your regular salary. This means that you can receive up to \$1104.75 a month (\$258.75 for Reserve/Guard) tax-free, on top of your regular salary! That's over \$12,000 in cash benefits over two years, for training in an OJT or apprenticeship training program.

VA pays OJT benefits on a scale depending on the amount of time the participant is enrolled in OJT. For example the program currently pays \$1104.75 a month for the first six months of training, \$810.15 for the second six months of training and \$515.55 for remaining training.

VA pays GI Bill Selected Reserve participants on a similar scale but at the following reduced rates; \$258.75 a month for the first six months of training, \$189.75 for the second six months of training and \$120.75 for remaining training. Selected Reserve participants.

To qualify, your job must meet the following criteria:

- You must be supervised at least 50 percent of the time.
- Job training must lead to an entry-level position. (Management training programs do not qualify.)
- You must be a full-time paid employee - not on commission.
- Your training must be documented and reported.
- You cannot have previous experience job experience in that field.
- You must be recently hired (within one to two years).
- The job must require at least six months training to become fully trained.
- The employer may be private, local or state government.

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AND  
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**Are You Missing in Action?**

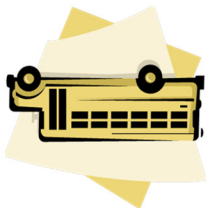
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Have you moved recently - or not so recently? Do we have your correct mail and e-mail addresses & phone number? Please let us know when you move.

The newsletter is mailed out with a request for address correction. The post office does not forward the newsletter to you – nor do they return it to us. They charge us 75¢ for providing your forwarding address. Then we update your file, but you do not get a newsletter until next edition unless you request an electronic copy. Total additional cost to the association is nearly \$1.00 per returned newsletter.

Please take a moment to remember the 129<sup>th</sup> AHA when you notify your correspondents of your new address. A member information form is included in every issue.

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