

2010910 Retiree News

1. **The Promise.** *Retiree News* contains information about benefits, National Guard events, and news about current, former, and retired members. There will be no chain e-mail, cute pictures, or sales pitches. Publication of *Retiree News* is on a random schedule – as topics come up and time permits. If you change your mind about receiving issues of *Retiree News*, send an e-mail to retireenews@hawaiiintel.net and you will be off the *Retiree News* mailing list.

2. **Rules of Engagement (ROE).** Periodically, someone e-mails a request for contact information for another *Retiree News* reader. We forward that e-mail to the reader for their action. This preserves the privacy of the reader and their e-mail address.

3. **Business.**

The following article, "[90,000 'Stop-Loss' Vets Due Money](#)", is the September 9, 2010 column written by Tom Philpott. He is a columnist for the *Military Times* newspapers – *Army Times*, *Air Force Times*, etc.

Military members who were forced to stay on active duty under "stop loss" orders, for days or months beyond projected separation or retirement dates, sometime from Sept. 11, 2001, to Sept. 30, 2009 are due some retroactive compensation of \$500 a month. The deadline for applications – October 21, 2010 – is rapidly approaching.

Before you stop reading and pressing Delete, please take the time to read the article. Chances are you may not be among those who qualified, but you might know someone who does qualify. Please get this information to any military member who you think may qualify.

90,000 "Stop Loss" Vets Due Money

Help Needed to Find 90,000 'Stop-Loss' Vets Due Money

Let's go on a scavenger hunt!

The object is to find one (or more) of 89,836 service members, many of them now veterans, who were forced to stay on active duty under "stop loss" orders, for days or months beyond projected separation or retirement dates, sometime from Sept. 11, 2001, to Sept. 30, 2009.

They might be a family member, a friend, a fellow employee, or your mailman. But if you find one before Oct. 21 the prize will be their gratitude because the government is ready to pay them, on average, \$3500.

The precise payment formula is \$500 for every month or partial month they were kept on active duty involuntarily after 9/11 to ensure force readiness during some difficult times for the nation and their service.

Hint: Only the Army used "stop loss" authority beyond 2003. Indeed, it still uses stop-loss to keep some soldiers beyond their period of obligated service. Current stop-loss pay comes from a different pot, and use of stop-loss even by the Army is set to end by next March.

Congress ordered the Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay program established last fall but it allowed only a one-year window for eligible veterans and service members to claim their payments. With six weeks remaining, 38 percent have done so. That leaves \$320 million on

the table, and the likelihood a lot of it will be returned to the U.S. Treasury or spent on lesser priorities, if deserving veterans aren't told about the cash by Oct. 21.

Lernes "Bear" Hebert, acting director of officer and enlisted personnel management for the Department of Defense, said 55,000 retroactive stop loss claims have been processed to date and \$212 million paid out.

"This payment is for services already rendered. It has no strings attached," said Hebert. Those who believe they might be eligible can get full details and fill out an application online at: www.defense.gov/stoploss.

Completing the application isn't difficult, Hebert said. If an applicant doesn't have all the supporting documents needed to complete the form, he or she should file it anyway by Oct. 21 and allow program staff to help them complete it later.

"A professional counselor with that member's service will contact them and answer any other documentation questions they might have. They can either be contacted by e-mail or by phone, depending on the contact information provided with the application," Hebert explained.

Retroactive stop loss pay might not even be taxable if it was earned while the member was serving in Iraq, Afghanistan or another designated Combat Zone Tax Exclusion area. That would be verified by Defense Finance and Accounting Service, said Hebert.

Some members while in stop loss status changed their minds about leaving and reenlisted. If they did, or were paid bonus money, they will only be eligible for the \$500 for months or partial months of stop loss before electing to reenlist. If not sure money is due, file a claim by the deadline.

All four DoD branches of service used stop-loss orders after 9/11. The Navy used it sparingly, on only 250 sailors. Of those, only 33 have filed claims so far. The Marine Corps' pool of eligible veterans or current service members is 8,892, yet only 3040 have applied for payment. The Air Force has processed 3500 claims out of 16,000 eligible. The Army has processed more than 49,000 claims out of an eligible population of 120,267.

All the services are reaching out to potential claimants, urging them to apply. The Army has conducted several direct mailings to try to reach former and retired soldiers, even chasing down address changes or contacting next of kin, when possible, to ensure the word gets out.

But for all the outreach, including to news outlets nationwide, Hebert said the services clearly haven't been able to reach all eligible veterans.

"There is still a group, we believe, that has not heard about this program," he said. "There is another group that has heard about it but question its legitimacy...If it looks too good to be true, you think twice."

A third group, Hebert said, might have pinned reminders "to the fridge and said 'I still have time.' They are living their busy lives with their families and haven't got around to applying. That's a group we really want to remind strongly that October 21st is not that far away."

Eligible members or vets will be kicking themselves if they wait until Oct. 22 to mail an application or hit "send" on an online application. By law, applications sent past the deadline can't be paid.

The good news is "it really is a very simple process," said Hebert. "It requires minimal investment -- a half hour -- and yields an average pay back of over \$3500. That's a pretty good return."

"Even the palest ink is better than the best memory." - Chinese proverb

From last October on the first to file were service members still on active duty or those who had been kept on active duty for many months. Since then, the average payment has gotten smaller with slower applicants, on average, having served less time in stop loss status.

"We're still trying to get out there to the farms, factories and the schools to get word to those individuals who perhaps have not stayed in contact with the department over the years," Hebert said.

"Many members have family out there who might hear about this or might read your article. We are asking them to tell a friend," said Hebert. "Reach out to those families that they know served between 9/11 and Sept. 30, 2009, and not assume they have heard about this program. Being responsible for getting them no-strings-attached money is being a pretty good friend."

Readers who succeed at this "scavenger hunt" are encouraged to share with us how the good news reached a veteran or how the "found" money will be spent, a belated gift for having served longer than planned.