



86th Airlift Wing  
Retiree Activities Office  
and KMC Retiree Council  
**Summer 2020  
Newsletter**



**SERVING THE RETIREES IN AND AROUND THE KASERSLAUTERN MILITARY COMMUNITY**



*From the Vice Wing Commander, 86 Airlift Wing, Ramstein AB, Germany*

Dear KMC Retiree Community

Each of you play a critical role in making the Kaiserslautern Military Community the model for US-German partnership. On 1 May Brig Gen Mark August thanked the host nation team for how we've collectively tackled COVID-19. He credits the reduction in cases to restrictions from both our host nation and the DoD. We continue to work with German counterparts to improve quality of life and keep our entire community healthy.

COVID-19 limited our ability to celebrate several memorial events of the spring and summer. While we could not gather for Memorial Day, the 76th Anniversary of D-Day, or July 4th, we remain closely connected to your service and on behalf of a grateful nation, Thank You!

As we work toward reopening services and establishing the next normal, we will leverage technology to help the community stay connected. Team Ramstein is proud to give you our unwavering support. Please stay informed, connected, and engaged as we work to meet the needs of our community during this changing environment.

The Retiree Activities Office remained closed over the last few months, but faithful volunteers continued to work and look for opportunities to provide resources to the retiree community. We are analyzing the best options to reopen the Retiree Activities Office and maintain a protective posture against further spread of COVID-19. More to come in the near future.

On behalf of Brig Gen August and all the Airmen of the World's Best Wing, thank you for your patience and partnership in 2020. Your continued service as community ambassadors makes us humbled to serve with you in the Kaiserslautern Military Community.

*Original Signed*  
COL Matthew S. Husemann  
86 AW Vice-Wing Commander

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### **From Your Recently Assigned Kaiserslautern Retirement Services Officer**

My name is Erik Thomsen and I am the US Army Garrison Rheinland-Pfalz Casualty Assistance Program Manager with additional duty as your Garrison Retirement Services Officer. My first taste of military service was as a member of the US Coast Guard with duty stations in Alaska and California. After leaving the Coast Guard, I went to work for a multi-national company that is the largest owner of mortuaries and cemeteries world-wide. While working for this company, I became a California-licensed funeral director and an apprentice embalmer. I also earned a license as a PreNeed Funeral Counselor, which provided the opportunity to gain experience working with families.

After 12 years working in the private sector, I made the decision to join the Army. During my Army service, I served with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, Kentucky having deployed to Iraq twice for a total of 57 months. My next overseas tour took me to Germany with assignments in Kaiserslautern, Baumholder and Landstuhl. My last assignment, prior to retirement in October 2019 after nearly 23 years of active duty, was as the non-commissioned officer in charge of the US Army Memorial Affairs Activity-Europe.

I started working in my current position in April 2020. I am pleased to be able to work with all Post-retirement families providing them with guidance and information on survivor benefits and entitlements and then, following the death of the retiree, helping survivors fill out the myriad of paperwork to obtain benefits.

I stand ready to inform and assist all Retirees and their spouses on all post retirement matters. My office is located on Kleber Kaserne, Building 3245 (Central Processing Facility Room 217). You do not need an appointment and our office hours are M-F 0800-1600. My 24-hour phone is: 0162 1085 359. Stop by anytime and I look forward to meeting all of you.

(Author: Erik Thomsen)

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## Veterans Compensation:

What is a “Presumptive” Service Connection? VA presumes that specific disabilities diagnosed in certain veterans were caused by their military service. If one of these conditions is diagnosed in a Veteran in one of these groups, VA presumes that the circumstances of his/her service caused the condition, and disability compensation can be awarded. What conditions are “PRESUMED” to be caused by military service?

### Veterans who might fall into one of the groups:

- Former prisoners of war who have a condition that is at least 10 percent disabling
- Vietnam Veterans who were Exposed to Agent Orange who Served in the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975
- Atomic Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation
- Gulf War Veterans who served in the Southwest Asia Theater of Operations who have a condition that is at least 10 percent disabling by Dec. 31, 2021

### Veterans within one year of release

from active duty: Veterans diagnosed with chronic diseases (such as arthritis, diabetes, or hypertension) are encouraged to apply for disability compensation.

## CY 2020 EVENTS

**July-CANX-11** July- Surviving Spouse Workshop

**August ----- Summer break No Meetings**

### **September**

----- 08 September – Retiree Luncheon -Golf Course - Augusta Room -

-----25 September--- Retire in Germany Briefing (RIG), at Hercules Theater Start at 13:00

**October---** -- 17 October— Information Outreach at LRMC DFAC

-----29 October ---- Retiree Appreciation Day (RAD) Hangars (TBD by Committee)

**November –05** November— RAD in Officers Club (TBD by Committee)

-----07 November -- Surviving Spouse Workshop – What a Surviving Spouse (Family Member) Needs to Know, Ramstein AB, Building 306, Conference Center

----17 November -- Retiree Luncheon Golf Course - Augusta Room- 11:00 – 13:00

**December---Holiday Season -- No Meetings**

### **Veterans with continuous service of**

**90 days or more:** Veterans diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)/Lou Gehrig's disease at any time after discharge or release from qualifying active service is sufficient to establish service connection for the disease, if the veteran had active, continuous service of 90 days or more.

### **Get all the details at this link:**

<https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets/serviceconnected/presumption.pdf>

(Author: Jim Barrante)

### **RAO Director Still Needed**

Greetings fellow retirees!

The Wing Commander still needs to appoint a new Director in accordance with AFI 36-3106.

The position has been vacated since September 2019. The previous Acting Director, Jim Barrante, had been filling in but has recently removed himself from the leadership role. If anyone is interested in volunteerism, the opportunity is wide open for you. For starters show up and see if the volunteer position is right for you. The RAO team is in place with experienced reliable volunteers which makes stepping into this position easier. If you are interested, please contact anyone in the RAO.

### **Are you a Procrastinator?**

Considering the Coronavirus, those of you who have been procrastinating about getting their documents in order should reconsider. Do you have a trusted agent? Did you ensue your spouse know where documents are kept? Do you have a will, a health document (medical directive) telling exactly what you want done should you become ill? Does your spouse know about the bank accounts, stocks, bonds? Does your spouse know where your

DD 214 is located? Does your spouse have copies of prior-year tax returns?

Due to fear of the spread of the virus from person to person even funeral rules have changed. Family members may or may not be permitted to attend a funeral or the number of participants can be limited. It is more important than ever for all our retirees to be prepared for the unexpected. As the saying goes, two things are sure in life...death and taxes. Yes, the surviving spouse must file a tax return for the deceased.

In other words, a tax return can be filed as married filing jointly.

We have a rather good Casualty Assistance Checklist which we will be sending in a separate e-mail after dissemination of this Newsletter. It gives you a great starting point. Our next SSW is scheduled for November 2020, you will receive an e-mail as we get closer to the date. Until then continue to practice social distancing, wear a facial covering and above all be safe.

Now that the lockdown is being lifted and businesses reopen, take the time to make an appointment with either the Army or Air Force Legal Offices to have your documents prepared. Do not put off for tomorrow what can be done today. (Author: Denise Schleyer)

### **What does your combined Retiree Activities Office and the Kaiserslautern Military Community (KMC) Retiree Council do for You?**

#### **First of all, who are we?**

The Kaiserslautern Military Community (KMC) has two retiree organizations: one Army and one Air Force that are mandated by regulation/instruction to represent, support, help, and advise retirees.

Due to the nature of our combined community here in Kaiserslautern, the two organizations consisting of an all-volunteer force work together to provide these services.

**The Rheinland-Pfalz Army Garrison has a Retiree Council** appointed by the Garrison Commander that meets regularly and works through the Retiree Services Officer (RSO), a paid position on the Garrison staff.

**The 86th Airlift Wing has a Retiree Activities Office (RAO)** whose Director is a volunteer appointed by the Wing Commander and operates from an appropriated funded office on Ramstein Air Base. It is staffed, totally by volunteers, staying open currently three days a week. Many of these same volunteers are appointed to the KMC Retiree Council thus working with both organizations.

### **Now – what do we do for you?**

- We support the Wing and the Garrison commanders by being the focal point for issues that affect retirees from all service branches and their surviving spouses. We also assist retired Department of Defense civilians and veterans no matter where they reside. If you bring us a concern, we will try to resolve it locally providing appropriate response and /or if necessary, pass it up the Chain of Command for resolution.

- We collect and promptly disseminate, via email from the 86AW /RAO, all the information touching on retiree issues that comes from the Defense Financial Accounting System (DFAS), Social Security Administration, TRICARE, Mortuary Affairs, Casualty Assistance, Veterans Affairs, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center and any of our service agencies.

- We meet regularly with the Commander of LRMC.

- We provide a “Surviving Spouse Workshop” designed to educate retiree spouses of the benefits due them because of the member’s service. And we include information on what the retiree might have to do if the spouse dies first or vice versa.

- We provide a quarterly “Retiring in Germany” brief for people near retirement to let them know what it means to be a permanent resident here. This is an extra add-on to the Transition Assistance Program.

-Occasionally, we sit down and do one-on-one versions of one of our presentations if needed.

-We help with the annual Retiree Appreciation Day (RAD) by advising the project committee of desired activities.

- The RAO stays open three days a week to answer questions and respond to e-mails. We receive phone calls, e-mails, and walk-ins at the rate of about 80 a week. They maintain information, as current as we can get, on subjects ranging from transferring your car, obtaining an EU driver’s license, shopping assistance program, installation access and how to submit claims to the Foreign Medical Program.

Our members are retirees from all the military services and include spouses, widows, and Department of Defense retirees. If you would like to help, we would be delighted to have you join us. You can contact us by email, phone or stop by the RAO or talk to one of the KMC Council members listed below.

Or you can visit us on our Facebook page **Ramstein RAO** at:  
<https://www.facebook.com/RamsteinRAO/>

E-mail RAO – [86aw.rao@us.af.mil](mailto:86aw.rao@us.af.mil)  
DSN 480-5486, civ 06371-47-5486, Bldg. 2120  
Room 124, Ramstein Air Base.  
TUES-WEDS-THURS 1000-1200 and 1300-1500

**Members are as follows:**

**RAO Staff**

- Jim Barrante, AF CMSgt (R)
- Robert Cooper, AF Major (R)
- Lara Kalin-Cristofori, AF Major (R)
- Denise Schleyer, DoD Civilian (R)
- Zabrina Tipton, Spouse Active Duty
- Tammy Thompson, AF SMSgt (R)
- Mike Goff, AF SMSgt (R)
- Anthony Giammetta, Army Capt (R)

**KMC RETIREE COUNCIL**

- Benny Strange, Army, Lt Col (R), President
- Jhames Illanez, AF Major, (R)
- Barbara Nelson, DoD Civ (R),
- Christa Purdy, Widow Representative (Lt Col Army deceased)
- Michael Richter, Army, SGM (R)—also KMC Rep USAREUR Council
- Debbie Shelton, Navy, Lt Cdr, (R)
- Michael Paine, DoD Civilian, (R)
- Denise Schleyer, DoD Civilian, (R)
- Robert Cooper, AF Major (R)
- Steven Swiger , Army Sgt (R)

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(Author: LtCol Benny Strange, Retired, KMC Council President)

**VOLUNTEERISM**

**The Retiree Activities Office (RAO)**

established and located in Building 2120, Room 124, at Ramstein Air Base exists to support, unite, and enhance the military retired, active duty and DoD civilian retiree communities through **positive volunteerism**. All military retirees, regardless of service affiliation, DoD civilians, surviving spouses of retired and active duty personnel and all service members preparing to retire can ask and will receive assistance and guidance from the RAO.

Staff members are appointed by the Director and perform administrative duties in the RAO now open on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Currently the staff consist of 5- experienced and 2- recently assigned volunteers. The RAO is waiting for someone to step up and take over as the new Director.

We need VOLS to fulfill and accomplish a myriad of duties as described above to serve others residing in the KMC footprint. Do you want to volunteer? Send an e-mail to: [86aw.rao@us.af.mil](mailto:86aw.rao@us.af.mil) (Author: Jim Barrante)

**RAO FACEBOOK PAGE**

The RAO Facebook page consists of current and upcoming KMC Retiree events and announcements and the latest news of LRMC services to our retiree community here in the KMC. We would like to invite you, our local FB retirees, to our ***'Ramstein RAO' page*** and join us as we reach out to our KMC retiree community of over 3,500 retirees.

The FACEBOOK can be viewed around the globe. "Like" us at <https://www.facebook.com/RamsteinRAO> and help us spread the word that we are here for our KMC retiree community. (Author and Maintainer: Robert Belt, US Army SSgt (R))

## **ACCESS TO RETIREE PUBLICATIONS OF EACH SERVICE:**

### **Army Echoes:**

<https://www.armyg1.army.mil/rso-migrated/echoes.asp>

### **Navy Shift Colors:**

<https://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/reference/publications/shiftcolors/Pages/default.aspx>

### **Air Force Afterburner:**

<https://www.retirees.af.mil/library/afterburner/>

### **Marine Corps Semper Fidelis:**

<https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/webcenter/portal/MRAHome>

### **Coast Guard Evening Colors:**

<https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/>

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## **Reminder to Cast Your Ballot**

Registering to Vote and submitting a ballot **is fast, easy, and** can be done from anywhere in the world! You start by confirming your voter registration with your state. Some states require absentee voters to register annually so you may need to re-register.

Go to [FVAP.gov](https://www.fvap.gov) to connect to your state's voter portal to register to vote, request a ballot, and more. Once you confirm your registration, follow a few simple steps to vote in the 2020 U.S. general election on Tuesday 3 November. You can also choose to complete a [Federal Post Card Application \(FPCA\)](#). The completion of the FPCA allows you to request absentee ballots for all **elections for federal offices (President, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House of Representatives)** including primaries and special elections during the calendar year in which it is submitted.

**DO NOT put it off**---Voting for your candidate is important! And everyone's VOTE counts!  
(Author: Denise Schleyer)

## **Are you Eligible to use VA's "Foreign Medical Program (FMP)?"**

Any US Veteran who is rated by the Department of Veterans Affairs as having a service-connected disability and who resides overseas is eligible. You do not have to be a retiree. Did you know if you have a hearing disability (service connected, even if incurred with a 0% rating) that you could still use the FMP to obtain those expensive hearing aids. You must submit a certificate of medical necessity (diagnosis, examination results, audiology testing), type of device needed, and the cost estimate for the device. Additionally, the FMP may authorize services for service-connected Veterans to order hearing aid batteries, accessories and repairs. If you have a service-connected hearing impairment, you may obtain replacement batteries through the VA at no cost from the VA Denver Acquisition & Logistics Center as long as you have an overseas address. Veterans must register with the FMP office first. The registration by the FMP of your hearing aid(s) in the VA Denver Acquisition & Logistics Center database establishes authorization for the VA Denver Acquisition & Logistics Center to provide the batteries and repair(s) directly to you. Hearing aid repairs will be completed for Veterans living overseas as long as the hearing aids are authorized and have been registered with the VA Denver Acquisition & Logistics Center.

Find out more about the Foreign Medical Program at:

<https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/fmp/index.asp>

(Author: Jim Barrante)

## [Any Veteran with a service-connected disability can shop at the Exchange and DECA\)](#)

Effective 1 January 2020, the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 came into effect allowing Veterans with a service-connected disability, Purple Heart recipients, former POW and primary veteran caregivers to shop at the commissaries, military exchanges and utilize certain Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs.

Any Veteran who falls into the above mentioned categories will need the following: a Veterans Health Identification Card (VHIC) and a German Resident Permit to take advantage of this new program.

In order to obtain a VHIC, a member needs to enroll in the VA healthcare system by either calling 1-877-222-VETS (Mon – Fri 0800 – 2000 Eastern Standard Time), going on-line to [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll) or a VA medical facility in the CONUS.

Please do not confuse the VHIC with the Veterans ID Card. A Veteran ID card will not substitute for the VHIC.

Once enrollment is verified, the Veteran needs to go to a VA medical facility with a valid passport to have their picture taken for their VHIC. Please be aware that there are no VA medical facilities in Europe, so you will need to go back to CONUS to get your picture taken. When you enroll it is recommended that you put an address of a close relative, friend or acquaintance as your US address and your German address as your mailing address. The VHIC card will be mailed to your German address that you provided when enrolling in the VA health system.

Once you receive your VHIC in the mail, you will need to go to Pulaski Barracks to start the process to obtain an Installation Access Control System installation pass to get access to the base. After you receive your Installation Access Card, you will need to go to US Customs office and obtain an AE Form 550-175K to get the Pink-Card. You will need to bring your passport, German residence permit and VHIC to both the US and German Custom Office. Please be aware if you do not reside in Germany you will not be able to shop on base due to host nation agreements and laws. Once US Customs issues the AE Form 550-175K you take the form to your local German Custom Office to receive your Pink-Card. The Pink Card is used to account for purchased items to access German taxes and import fees. Your local German Custom Office will tell you how often you must bring in the Pink Card to pay your German taxes and import fees on your purchased items.

(Author: Lara Kalin-Cristofori)

## [Do I Need A VISA?](#)

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All Americans living in Germany who are in possession of an “Aufenthaltstitel” (residency permit) will not need a Visa to travel within the European Union (EU). Soldiers and GS will be covered under the SOFA Agreement.

If you have family and friends visiting from the USA, they will need an EU VISA. The requirements will be the same as online registration that is currently required by EU members traveling to the United States of America. Again this will not be implemented until 2021 however if you require additional information please go to

<https://www.etiasvisa.com/etias-requirements/americans>

(Author: Robert Cooper)

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## German Tax Laws

The two areas of the tax law that require your attention are **income tax and inheritance**.

U.S. citizens who receive the Social Security (SS) benefit are required to report this income on the German Steuererklärung (income tax form). One is also required to report their world-wide income. This includes retired pay and, for those who worked as a civil servant, it would be the civil service pension paid by the Office of Personnel Management. The annuity from SS is directly taxed by Germany.

The world-wide income is used in the Progressionsvorbehalt to determine the tax rate to be applied to all income that is directly taxed. Germany also taxes ones survivors' inheritance.

All inheritance has a tax-free portion. For example, the surviving spouse has a 500,000 Euro tax-free portion. In the case of surviving children, each heir enjoys a 400,000 Euro tax-free portion.

When the last will and testament is submitted to the German probate court (Nachlassgericht), the survivors must report the value of the assets of the estate. If ones principal residence is Germany, one cannot avoid paying taxes on the amount of money above the tax-free portion. Furthermore, when reporting the value of the assets of the estate, assets outside of Germany, for example in a U.S. bank, must be reported as a part of the estate. There are actions that can be taken while the Retiree is still alive to reduce the tax burden. For example, real estate and tangible high value items or money can be given to descendants prior to the Retiree's death. Therefore, if the value of the total estate is significant and the heirs will be facing a high tax bill, it is worth the expense to seek the advice of a German tax advisor (Steuerberater).

(Author: permission for reprint from Darmstadt July Newsletter)

## Upon Completion of Government Service in Germany—what is my Status?

Upon completion of a tour of duty (long term stay) either on active duty and/or as a civilian federal employee, once your Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) status ends and you remain in country **—you are here illegally unless you obtain the proper documents through the Foreign Registration Office.**

Many of us old timers thought that once you transition from government service without a US-forces job that provides one with logistical support you would be considered a tourist and could thus still seek logistics-supported employment within 90 days. If you could not then obtain a job, then you would have to apply for residency. **That is not the case.**

An exception to these rules is if the American taking a European out and/or resigning /retiring from a federal paid position wants to stay in Germany and has a German/ European spouse, he or she can legally remain in Germany but must also register with the Foreign Registration Office.

## **Here are the rules:**

If you are already in Germany covered by SOFA status and you retire/separate or resign from a civilian/contractor job (with logistical support), you must depart the Schengen area on your last duty day and can officially return to start the 90 days under the visa waiver. No fee in this case. Same applies as above.

The other option is that you stay in Germany but apply for the tourist visa (Fiktionsbescheinigung) at your local Foreign Registration Office before you retire/separate or resign. A fee must be paid. Then you can officially stay for 90 days.

It is best for retirees who desire to stay in country after retirement to obtain a tourist visa for **90 days prior to their retirement date.**

This information was provided and validated from several sources provided to the author.  
(Author: Jim Barrante)

Reminder: The RAO is in Building 2120, Room 124. Our business hours are Tuesday – Thursday from 1000 – 1500 hours. Our Phone Number is 06371-47-5486, DSN 480-5486. E-Mail Address is: [86AWRAO@us.af.mil](mailto:86AWRAO@us.af.mil), we are also on Facebook at [Ramstein RAO](#).

The Facebook effort was created and still maintained by passive RAO/Council Volunteer, retired Army SSG Bob Belt. Thank you, BOB! Thumbs UP

## **[RAO/KMC COUNCIL EVENTS REMAINDER OF 2020](#)**

**August ----- Summer break No Meetings**

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