



# IA Family Connection

MARCH 2008

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## Military Spouse Career Advancement Initiative

The Military Spouse Career Advancement Initiative is a pilot program offered by the Departments of Defense and Labor to help military spouses develop portable careers. The program provides Career Advancement Accounts to pay for expenses directly related to post-secondary education and training, including tuition, fees, books, equipment, and credentialing and licensing fees. Accounts may be up to \$3,000 for one year, and may be renewed for one additional year.

Demonstration states and installations are:

- California (San Diego Metro and Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base)
- Colorado (Fort Carson Army Installation and Peterson Air Force Base)
- Florida (Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Eglin Air Force Base, and Hurlburt Field)
- Georgia (Fort Benning Army Installation)
- Hawaii (Hickam Air Force Base, Naval Station Pearl Harbor, Kaneohe Bay Marine Corps Base, and Schofield Barracks Army Installation)
- Maine (Naval Air Station Brunswick)
- North Carolina (Fort Bragg Army Installation and Pope Air Force Base)
- Washington (Fort Lewis Army Installation, McChord Air Force Base, and Naval Station Kitsap)

Military spouses of active-duty service members in the grades of E1-E5 and O1-O3 are eligible. Spouses in need of renewing credentials (for example, nursing and teaching certificates) upon relocating are also eligible. Go to [www.militaryspouse.org](http://www.militaryspouse.org) for more information.

## Postal Service Announces Military Discount

The U.S. Postal Service is rolling out a new, larger flat-rate box that will feature - for the first time in Postal Service history—a military discount for those mailing to APO and FPO addresses.

Regardless of how much they weigh, the boxes will cost \$12.95 to mail for the general public, and \$10.95 if mailed to an APO or FPO address, postal officials said. The boxes themselves are free.

Customers can begin using the new flat-rate box at the new mailing rates March 3. The boxes will be available online by February 20. For more information visit <http://www.usps.com>.



## Free Space “A” Flights for Families of Deployed



Military families of deployed personnel may be able to save some travel money thanks to a new Space “A” policy for families. As of December 6, 2007, spouses and children of personnel deployed 120 days or longer now can use military transport in CONUS, to/from CONUS, and within/between theater, provided they have a verification letter from the military member’s commander.

In the past, only overseas-based dependents could travel to the States or within theater on one round trip. The new policy allows family members, regardless of where they are based, to travel unaccompanied for unlimited times during the deployment when seats are available. Children under the age of 18 still need an eligible parent or legal guardian to travel with them.

“This policy is intended to provide better support for the military families during a deployment period,” says Lt. Col. Michael Holmes, of the Office of the Assistant Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Transportation Policy. The travel option is also available to Guard and Reserve families, as well as Navy families whose military sponsor is assigned to a deployed ship with PCS orders.

While many may use the privilege to visit parents and grandparents, the guidelines do not restrict travel to home of record or family-based visits. That makes the policy more equitable and useful, since many people’s extended families may not live in their home of record. In addition, some families may find help and encouragement in a visit to friends at a previous base, or through a low-cost vacation getaway.

Space A, which is based on availability, often involves waiting to gain space on a flight (and the government won’t cover meals, lodging or other costs associated with that). Even so, families—especially those with children—could find this to be a real boost to their travel budget. A family of four based on the West Coast who wants to travel to the East Coast to stay with grandparents for a few weeks could potentially save up to a few thousand dollars in airline tickets. Of course, there’s no guarantee with Space “A” flights, but for those who can take the time, the opportunity for free flights can be not only a morale-booster, but also a money-saver.

## What’s Helpful/What’s Not!

In a recent virtual IA Family Discussion we talked about some of the inconsiderate things people do and say about the ongoing war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Everyone agreed that the most considerate comment people can make to an IA Sailor or their family is “Thank you for your service to our country.”

What are some ways people are supporting you? Do you have a reserved parking space at the commissary as do the IA family members at NAS Patuxent River? Has a community group or your church provided support in a creative way that you especially appreciated? Has your command or Fleet and Family Support Center been especially helpful?

If you’re not getting the support you need, tell us what would be helpful to you while your Sailor is deployed. Send your ideas and we’ll include in upcoming newsletters to ensure all IA family members get the support and attention they deserve. Send your comments and name to [Handbooks.Feedback@navy.mil](mailto:Handbooks.Feedback@navy.mil). We’ll publish some of the best ideas in hopes they’ll catch on in other areas.



Sign spotted at the commissary at NAS Patuxent River.

## Tax Time



Make tax time simple with these tips:

- Visit the IRS Website at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov). Download helpful publications like *Pub 3, Armed Forces Tax Guide*, and *Pub 17, Your Federal Income Taxes*. Everything you need to know about taxes and more is included in these two publications.
- Don't pay for tax help if you don't need to! Almost every military installation has trained volunteers to assist you. Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) locations can be found on [www.vita-volunteer.org](http://www.vita-volunteer.org). Military OneSource offers free online filing through H&R Block, tax advice and many free informational publications. Go to [www.militaryonesource.org](http://www.militaryonesource.org) or phone 1-800-730-3802 for additional information. Also while you are online with the IRS, check to see if you qualify for the IRS FREE FILE service.
- Since your spouse is deployed automatic 180-day extensions are available to anyone serving in a combat zone. Check out combat zone locations in *Pub 3*, and take advantage of the extension if you need to. No penalties or interest apply if the extension is due to service in a combat zone.
- Wondering how your spouse will sign his or her return? If serving in a combat zone, you can sign for your spouse with one of three things: a Special Tax Power of Attorney, a *Form 2848 Tax Power of Attorney* from the IRS or simply a written explanation that the member is deployed to a combat zone attached to the return.
- While working on taxes for 2007, plan for 2008. If you are near a military installation, call the local family center to see if Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) is offered on base. You can also contact Military OneSource to speak with a tax professional. What might you need to be concerned about? If you received a big refund, that means you gave an interest-free loan to Uncle Sam, and you are over-withholding on a monthly basis. It may be time to adjust your withholding via the *IRS Form W-4* (they also have an easy-to-use calculator online to help adjust your withholding.) Don't pay any more taxes than you have to—it is your hard-earned money, you should get as much as allowed in your regular pay. If you ended up paying at tax time, you may need to increase your withholding, because no one likes to write a check to the government at tax time! Maybe you qualify for some credits you don't know about... whatever the issues, taking time to do some tax planning now could put more money in your pocket next month!



**ECRC IA HELPDESK**  
[ecrc.hq.fct@navy.mil](mailto:ecrc.hq.fct@navy.mil)

**ECRC IA FAMILY  
 HELPDESK**  
[ecrc.fs.fct@navy.mil](mailto:ecrc.fs.fct@navy.mil)

**ECRC IA WEBSITE**  
[www.ecrc.navy.mil](http://www.ecrc.navy.mil)

The constant current source for IA information.

For **EMERGENCIES**  
 Staff Duty Officer  
 (757) 763-8640

24 HR Toll Free Family  
 Hotline  
 1-877-364-4302

## Do You Know?

If you are a Navy family and live near an Air Force, Army or Marine Corps base, you may use their services. Every service branch has a Fleet and Family Support Center. They are just called different names—Airmen and Family Readiness Centers, Marine and Family Services Centers, and Army Community Service Centers.”

You can also use your Navy Fleet and Family Support Center by phone or email: Go to [www.ffsp.navy.mil](http://www.ffsp.navy.mil) to locate an FFSC near you.



## March

### IA Family Connection

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Join us for an opportunity to virtually meet other IA family members to share information, ask questions, and provide tips and resources.

**Thursday, March 13, 2008 8:00–9:30 PM EDT**  
<https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/300060438>

### My Sailor's Coming Home!

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Homecoming – there's nothing more exciting! Are you ready? During this 60 minute discussion we'll talk about changes, expectations, and helping your Sailor readjust to family and friends after being deployed. We'll also touch on what to do if you are concerned your loved one may have experienced too much stress due to serving in a combat zone with options for help, if needed.

**Tuesday, March 18, 2008 1:00–2:30 PM EDT**  
<https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/676933423>

### Children and Deployment

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There's no doubt about it, deployments can be tough for kids to understand. Toddlers are confused, school-aged children may worry and teens may withdraw. Join other parents in a discussion about supporting children during deployment.

**Tuesday, March 25, 2008 10:00–11:30 AM EDT**  
<https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/403093574>

### Are You Ready for Deployment?

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IA/GSA deployments are a bit different than a typical deployment that you may or may not have experienced. Join us in this 60 minute discussion to:

- Learn what you need to do to get ready for deployment.
- Get updates about organizations that can help if you need it.
- Gather tips to help make this a smooth deployment.
- “Meet” other family members whose Sailors have recently deployed.

**Thursday, March 27, 2008 7:00–8:30 PM EDT**  
<https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/575149019>

## Meet with other IA family members from around the world in the comfort of your own home!

To participate in the IA Family Connection:

### You will need:

1. A computer with broadband Internet access.
2. A telephone.

### To join:

1. Go to the browser address listed next to the date you want to attend. It will take you to a registration website where you'll be asked for a few pieces of information.
2. You will receive a confirmation email from WEBINAR providing the Internet browser address for the session as well as the telephone number to dial.

### To attend session:

1. Insert the website address for the session into your browser window. It will scroll and a box will come up on your screen.
2. Click “Download GoToMeeting”. To download GoToMeeting.
3. Click “run”.
4. A bar will appear in the middle of the page as it downloads.
5. If you arrive before the facilitator, a window will let you know. Do not exit the window. Just wait for the meeting to start.
6. Once completed, the computer will ask you to enter: Name & email address.
7. “Waiting to View Screen” will appear. You are connected.
8. Dial in on your phone by calling:  
**1-800-791-2345 Code: 40560**

These virtual IA family member discussion groups are hosted by Commander Navy Installations Command and Fleet and Family Support Centers worldwide.