



# Your GUARD Retirement

Whether you're a young recruit or a seasoned Vet, you'll find in this guide the compelling reasons to stay in for those 20 years, and how to prepare properly when you're close to finishing. We'll help demystify the retirement system (which can seem confusing at first) and walk you through the process of retiring. Retirement may seem far off, but time flies. And when you're kicking back in your favorite fishing chair, thinking about how you got there, the people you've met and the difference you've made in the world, it'll all seem more than worthwhile.

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## How It Works

Spend 20 years in the Guard (and make sure they're "good" ones—more on that in a second), and you'll start drawing a check when you're 60 (or younger, if you deploy). The size of the check is based on points you earn by serving. It's a simple equation: More service equals more money.

### TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR GUARD RETIREMENT, HERE'S WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO:

**1. Put in at least 20 "good" years of service.** Every year spent on Active Duty counts automatically as a good year. To get a good year in the Guard, you

have to earn 50 retirement points [see "Doing the Math" below for more on earning points], which is usually equivalent to 12 drills and an AT. If you don't get 50 points in a year, you keep the points, but that year doesn't count toward retirement. Your 20 years don't have to be consecutive. And good years spent in the Reserve count.

**2. Get your 20-year letter.** This is the official document you'll receive after you have built up 20 good years.

**3. Not be eligible for Active Duty retirement.** In other words, you're not allowed to retire from both Active Duty Army and the National Guard.

**4. Be at least 60 years old.** You can start drawing checks even earlier if you've deployed after Jan. 28, 2008 (although you'll still have to wait until age 60 for other nonpay benefits). For every 90 days of deployment after that date, you can reduce your eligible age by three months. From the day you get your 20-year letter to the day you become eligible to draw retirement pay, you will be known as a "gray area" retiree. And you can't retire before age 50 no matter how much time you've spent on deployment.

**5. Complete and submit a retirement packet.** It's really not that complicated, and there are NCOs whose sole job is to help you do this right. The most important part is making sure your record is accurate and complete. See "Tips From the Pros" on the next page for more.



## Doing the Math

When you retire, the number of retirement points you've accumulated during your Guard career will determine what percentage of an Active Duty salary you'll receive. Another simple equation: More points equals more pay.

### HERE'S HOW YOU EARN POINTS:

- ▶ **1 point for each day of Active Duty**, including AT
- ▶ **1 point for each Multiple Unit Training Assembly (MUTA) at drill** – Each MUTA is a minimum of four hours. (The exception is funeral honors detail, which requires just two hours.) Only two MUTAs are allowed per day. To get two in one day,

you have to be on duty a minimum of eight hours. There is no maximum number of hours per MUTA.

- ▶ **1 point for every three hours of Army correspondence courses** – The courses you take don't have to be within your career field. Points acquired from courses are automatically reported to the Retirement Points Accounting System, or RPAS.
- ▶ **130 points max per year for non-Active Duty** (AT counts as Active Duty)
- ▶ **15 points automatically each year you're serving**

### HERE'S HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR RETIREMENT PAY IN 4 EASY STEPS:

- ▶ **ADD** up your total number of retirement points
- ▶ **DIVIDE** it by 360
- ▶ **MULTIPLY** that by .025
- ▶ **MULTIPLY** that by your Retired Base Pay\*

\*If you joined the Guard after Sept. 7, 1980, your Retired Base Pay is the average of your highest three months of pay. So even if you've been reduced in rank, your retired pay is still based on the highest rank you held, as long as you held it for at least three months.

#### EXAMPLE

The average Retired Base Pay for an E-8 retiring at the 20-year mark is \$4,878. The Soldier is retiring with 4,000 points.

$$4,000 / 360 = 11.11$$

$$11.11 \times .025 = 2.7775$$

$$2.7775 \times \$4,878 = \$1,355$$



### Tips From the Pros

When you retire, the number of retirement points you've accumulated during your Guard career will determine what percentage of an Active Duty salary you'll receive. Another simple equation: More points equals more pay.

Each state has a Retirement Points Account Management (RPAM) NCO, or retirement NCO, who's assigned to help walk retiring Soldiers through the process. To help shed some light on retiring from the Guard, we talked to two of them—Oregon Sergeant First Class Noah Root and Minnesota Sergeant First Class Susanne Swanson.

**1. Start early.** The retirement process may seem daunting, but it's actually fairly simple. "Qualified individuals should start the retirement planning process within 12 months of their projected retirement date," Swanson says. The packet itself isn't huge, but you'll want to allow yourself time to chase down records in case anything is missing or inaccurate. "[Soldiers] should submit their application for retired pay no earlier than nine months and no later than 90 days prior to the date retired pay is to begin," she says. Root adds, "If all the proper personnel are available, it really shouldn't take more than a couple weeks to get a packet from start to finish. Typically, it's the processing of awards and decorations that takes the most time."

**2. Keep track of your points.** One common problem is incorrect records. "The first step [in the retirement process]," Root says, "is to ensure that your annual points statement is accurate and updated." Since your pay is based almost entirely on the number of points you have, this is crucial. And don't forget you can earn points for more than just drill, Root says. "During my time as the RPAM NCO, the biggest issue I've run into is Soldiers not getting retirement points for completing duty," he says. "You could be authorized a retirement point for going to a training meeting, or for meal prep as a cook prior to drill. NGR 680-2, Appendix C will explain what you can receive a retirement point for, even if you aren't being paid."

**3. Seek out your retirement NCO.** The good news is that almost anything that can go wrong with your records can be fixed if you have the documentation to back yourself up. If you need to correct something, including your number of retirement points, your retirement NCO can tell you what documentation you need. "As long as I have the right documents, I can go back as far as the system allows," Root says. "The furthest I've gone back is the early '60s."

$$\left( \begin{array}{l} 24 \text{ drill days a year} \\ + \\ 14 \text{ AT days a year} \end{array} \right) \times 20 \text{ years}$$

# 760

**MINIMUM NUMBER OF DAYS AT WORK TO RECEIVE A RETIREMENT**



## Fringe Benefits

Retiring from the Guard also affords you a wide range of nonpay benefits. Some can save you money. Others can be a huge convenience. All of them together add quality of life to go along with your retirement check.

### HEALTH INSURANCE

Access to this is one of the biggest nonpay benefits. After age 60, various healthcare plans are available to retirees. Your proximity to an Army post at the time of your retirement determines exactly which plans are available to you. Coverage varies depending on which plan you choose, but no matter the plan, there is a small fee—an annual fee for some, and a monthly premium for others. All plans offer solid coverage for very low cost. TRICARE Prime is the cheapest option, with a current annual enrollment fee of only \$282.60 for an individual.

If you're a gray area retiree (retired, but not yet drawing a monthly check), you and your family members can purchase medical coverage through TRICARE's Retired Reserve program. The current monthly premium is \$388.79 for an individual and \$957.44 for a member plus family. TRICARE Retired Reserve is very competitively priced when compared with similar civilian insurance programs, with low deductibles (currently \$150 per individual and \$300 per family), comprehensive coverage and preventive health checkups included.

### OTHER BENEFITS

#### ▶ Retired ID card

Grants access to military posts (along with their gyms, entertainment options, and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs), gives discounts at a wide range of civilian stores, and proves eligibility for other benefits

#### ▶ Base Exchange/Post Exchange (BXPX) and commissary access

Can save retirees significant amounts of money on military gear, electronics, clothing, home goods and much more, including online shopping

#### ▶ Affordable life insurance

#### ▶ Space-A travel

CONUS-only eligibility for gray area retirees

#### ▶ On-post medical facility usage and legal assistance

For non-gray area retirees only



## Reflections From a Retiree

When he retired in April 2016, Chief Warrant Officer 5 John Vitt was the current longest-serving member of the Arizona Army National Guard. Vitt served 41 years in the military, and 36 with the Arizona Guard. We picked his brain for tips on carving out a successful Guard career, and how to make retirement smooth.

**Did you expect your career in the Guard to last as long as it did?** I did not expect the Guard to be a career when I joined. Initially, I thought I was going to be one and done. When I went over 10 years of service, I thought, *You know what? I might as well hang in there.* There was a light at the end of the tunnel. I never thought I would literally be serving until the day I would collect on it!

**Why did you decide to extend your service after 20 years?** When I got my 20-year letter, I thought, *Let's shoot for 30.* And when I got to 30, I thought, *I'm so close to making it to the end!* Some of it was being in the right place at the right time—in the right unit, with the right command team. And there was always that dangling carrot—this doggone check I could get, starting at age 60 and going for the rest of my life.

**Did choices you made early in your career help set you up for success?** Becoming a warrant officer helped. Granted, I would've been happy leaving service as an E-8. But I look back and think, *Wow. That was a great career move.* And then drill attendance—always making sure that I was earning retirement points whenever I could, just by looking for training opportunities where I could put on the uniform and accrue points.

**Was the retirement process difficult or time-consuming?** I talked to my retirement NCO, and he gave me a checklist. There was some paperwork, but most of it was really easy—a direct deposit form and a few others. Then there was double-checking to make sure my records were accurate—awards and all of that. I think I was done in about an hour. But one of the reasons it went smoothly is because I did regular reviews of iPERMS [the Interactive Personnel Electronic Records Management System] and my NGB Form 22 [the Guard's version of a DD Form 214].

**How do you feel now, reflecting on a career's worth of service?** Looking back, I had an outstanding career. I made some difference in the world. And one of the biggest impacts I made was in the lives of the people around me. I'm going to miss that.

## The Final Countdown

You don't have to wait for your 20-year letter to start the retirement process. Hit these marks to stay on track and reap your benefits ASAP:



**1 YEAR LEFT**

Review your annual points statement for accuracy



**9 MONTHS LEFT**

Contact your retirement NCO



**4 MONTHS LEFT**

Complete your records review



**AT LEAST 90 DAYS LEFT**

Submit your retirement application



**RETIREMENT DAY!**

Brainstorm what to do with that fat check when it comes