

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH MAJOR ROY WHITLEY, PROGRAM
MANAGER, RETROACTIVE STOP-LOSS SPECIAL PAY PROGRAM TIME: 2:00 P.M. EST
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ASHLEY MCCALL: Today is the follow-up roundtable from the
previous one, again with Major Roy Whitley, program manager of the Army
retroactive stop-loss special pay program. Today he's going to offer any
answers to any questions you may have and some updated information and
details about the progress of the program.

Major Whitley, any opening remarks?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah. Good morning, folks, and thanks for having
me for our second session. I'm going to do exactly what Ashley said:
I'll give you some updates and I'll answer all the questions I can. I
know there are a lot of them. (Chuckles.) I see them all the time.

So I'll start with, I guess, the chief of staff of the Army had
a little interview with -- I believe it was you, right, Jeff?

Q Yes, that's correct. MAJ. WHITLEY: And --

Q But it's the Army secretary. I'm sorry.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Right, the SECARMY. And he gave you some
numbers, and those were correct. That 10,541 is the number of claims
we're looking at. And we're starting to plow through the e-mails. We've
got a schema for the hard copy versus e-files, and those things can be
talked in more detail when you want to.

And we've got a plan in place for growing the office, which I
talked to the G-1 folks about two-and-a-half, three weeks ago, when we
saw the volumes coming in and we knew we had to make some changes going
forward, both on software and personnel. And since we had picked a site
that could, you know, accommodate about 30 folks, we're -- you know, we
moved beyond 15 and we're, you know, approaching 20.

So we're building it out; we're improving software. The reason
you see some of the delay with handling of the e-files in the early cases

is that we lost time improving the claims end early on, because of stuff from the field, and they'd wanted certain things done. So we -- for every day we spent working claims, we knew we were losing a day on development on the case management. So we're paying that price right now. But all that should be resolved, and we should be caught up with case-management software tonight, probably, but certainly by Monday. And we've got a workflow plan in place for that.

So I guess I'll open it up for questions. That's my first few minutes. And enjoy.

MS. MCCALL: Okay. Jeff and Mike, because it's just the two of you, really, you all can go back and forth with your questions.

Q Okay. The -- you said the number of staff approving -- or looking at applications has gone up from 15 to 20?

MAJ. WHITLEY: We're moving to 20, yes.

Q I'm sorry, you cut out there at the beginning.

MAJ. WHITLEY: We're moving towards 20.

Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: We're just over 15. It's a matter of finding the funding, identifying the people. Right now we're just over 15, and we're moving up, you know, to -- we're looking at 20, and the space will accommodate 30.

Q Okay. And McHugh said that the -- it's -- they need to smooth out the process, make it more understandable to the claimants.

What specific actions are you taking to smooth out the process and make it more understandable to the those applying?

MAJ. WHITLEY: What we're doing is, we're trying to figure out how to write our responses better quite frankly. We have more automatic responses. So when we touch someone's case, every time we open it or look at it, we're trying to come up with, what will be of use for them to -- at least get them not into an e-mail-do loop with us.

So when we for example review the dates that they're claiming, and we've already looked at some of the records in IPERMS, we're going to include text in the remarks section, kind of a chat session sort of thing, and then flag the case manager's window that someone responded, and they'll see the period that we're looking at.

So we want to identify the fact that we have your ETS data and we have your refrag date. So they know exactly what, you know, the measure is, because we're finding out from the thousand cases we've touched so far that about 60 percent agree with a manual review.

And that's kind of a new number, but we didn't have that data before when we last spoke. So we've manually touched about 1,000 cases. And we know that 60 percent of what we touch agrees with what the soldier submitted, which is good.

The bad part about that is that 40 percent do not. And the do-not part is the adjustment up or down. And we're trying to figure out, how do we explain to the folks that are not going to get exactly what they asked for? They're the kind of things we're trying to improve and improve understanding.

And so we're growing the space or growing the people in the space. We're improving the software, so it's more hopefully timely responses. And that will be the case with the new rev of the software. And they should see more of what we're doing with their claim.

Q Mike if you wanted to ask one, go ahead.

Q Yeah.

You know, I think the only question that I have, Major, is when they get the e-mail that says, you know, there's a discrepancy working through their file, what do -- have we been able to nail down a time frame for the claim manager, to get back in touch with the claimant?

Is there a standardized process for that yet? Or is it just as soon as possible?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah. There is not. And the reason there is not is, you know, if you do the math, if you can imagine, 20,000 case numbers are out there, all the advancements.

Q Yeah.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Some people, you know, have seven-eight-nine cases in, in various shapes and sizes.

And we don't -- and I just told you the numbers of folks in the PMO shop.

Q Yeah.

MAJ. WHITLEY: So we're not organized -- you know, this person for that case manager. So when we sent that out, we were hoping just to let them know, "Yeah, we've got your claim." And unfortunately we weren't clever enough to give them worthwhile information, so it led them to think it was being disputed. In reality, that 60 percent means most of the information we're actually getting from their claims -- it's just we have to eyeball it, instead of doing it with automation.

And we're still working that front-end piece, but we're not relying on that as much. It's still (a screen?). It still gives us the ones that are in agreement. So I really can't, you know, come up with a number yet until we work out some of the backlog.

For example, the e-mail -- there's 5,000 e-mails. Only 500 of those e-mail -- so -- from -- so 10 percent of those e-mails actually have attachments not related to an existing case. So 90 percent of all the e-mails are, you know, "Tell me more, tell me more." And you know, for every minute we spend on one of those, we're -- it's minutes we're not spending on closing a case.

So unfortunately we're trying to -- trying to figure out a mechanism. And I think it's going to be case manager side. We created the revisit password for the folks out there, so they come back, look at their claims. They'll see the notes we leave; we'll see the notes they leave.

And we're hoping it will really knock down the anxiety caused by our backlog in e-mails, which is caused by a backlog in the case clearing, which is caused by another backlog. So we're really working through those and trying to focus exclusively on claims clearing.

Q Got it. Okay. Good.

Q Okay. And can you tell us how many of the applications have been forwarded to DFAS for payment? And --

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah, I can do that. Sometime today, tomorrow, sometime by the end of this week there will be right around a thousand claims -- (inaudible) -- been provided to DFAS to -- because we've got it, we've touched it and we know -- we're ready to close them, and it's just a matter of funneling them up and putting them in the right format and sending the rest out.

Q Okay. If you've received 10,000, why haven't the rest been sent to DFAS?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Oh, because, as I said earlier, the claim software was delayed -- not delayed -- but we improved the claim software; and now the case manager software, which is the only thing that's going to help us clear cases faster, was just not able to close cases. We just could not sit there and look at screens and close cases. We were using it for the calculations and looking at IPERMS, but we were just not able to open a case and close a case at one sitting, if you will.

So we incurred a huge -- (word inaudible) -- on the claims that were rolling in.

Q I don't understand. You weren't able to close cases with the software you had?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Correct. There was a claims in. There's three pieces of the software. We went over that before. There's the claims end. So that's the out-facing claims software that the claimants use on the Web page. The back -- the next part of that is the case manager

software, and that has to be able to work into the claims side and then generate the DFAS reports.

So we knew that when we had a start date of 21 October, we were going to spend more time on the claims/customer side and that was going to incur a backlog, which we all are seeing. And now in the last couple weeks, we've been spending a lot of time on the case management. We could use parts of it, but it wasn't fully functional; you know, where we could actually hit a button, close a case, move that and into a DFAS report and so on. So we were still doing a lot of stubby pencil on the back end of it.

Q And why wasn't it ready by October 21st?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Why was it not ready? Well, because it's a lot to do in 120 days; you know, from June till October 21.

Q Yes, but the Air Force was able to pay claims before December 16th.

MAJ. WHITLEY: So do you think there's a comparison between the two services or how they did it?

Q Well, the question I keep getting is, why is it the Air Force, which does have 39,000 people eligible, was able to pay claims or get the claims ready to pay before the Army?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Well, if you, or the person who's asking the questions, were close to it, the Air Force is not -- their stop loss is not scattered over eight years, and the Army's is scattered over eight years. So we have a lot more people in and out. So it's a much larger population, for sure. You know, the 120 -- if you saw Senator Lautenberg's letter, he thinks it's up to 170(,000) or (179,000/169,000 ?). So the Army opted to go with the Web-based interactive version. I think we're the only service doing that. And again, you incur some costs.

I will tell you, there was no one sitting around in the Army staff with a large enough organization to do a GI Bill-like rollout, just put 60, 70, 80 people in a room and wait for 1 October to happen and then start collecting files on 120 and above folks. So they opted -- the Army opted for a Web-based version where we would have the claims jobs of rounding up documents, building a file and sending them in, and then we have case managers working on the case management side.

So what I've been telling the folks in our PMO shop is that there's a lot more road in front of us than behind us. And it was a -- it's been a tough five weeks -- now we're into six weeks -- but everyone knew it was coming on the Army side. We just knew there was going to be a backlog. I don't think we expected it as big as it is. We expected, probably, maybe three-quarters of that, but we were still going to have one. And we knew we were going to be living with some backlog throughout the period; it's just a matter of how much backlog and how long to pay. And that's the two numbers we're working on.

Q Well, now that you have the case manager software system, how long is it going to take to get the other 9,000 claims to DFAS?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Well, there's two things happening. One is, we're still working on refining the front-end screening -- the infamous "known list." There's -- now that we've seen the claims, know what the claims look like, we are going to be in a better position to improve that part. So we are hoping to get better screening on the front end that replicates that, you know, agreement percentage we are getting with the manual process.

On the other side, we're looking at, you know, what could be possibly a thousand a week coming out, going to DFAS. And the claims tend -- the claims coming in have declined. So there was a surge the first couple of weeks, and we're down lower -- you know, about half of what they were originally. We'll be biting into the backlog pretty quickly.

Q Mm-hmm. But if you are able to send a thousand a week, that still takes --

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah, it's --

Q -- about two years, compared -- and the -- and the application cutoff date is next year.

MAJ. WHITLEY: The application cutoff date is next year. Well, the application date is, but to enroll is -- if the application has been submitted, you can --

Q Right, but --

MAJ. WHITLEY: -- (off mike) -- in the following year. Q But are you take -- but are you saying it could take up to 120 weeks, which is two years, to process, to get to pay out all the claims?

MAJ. WHITLEY: No. That would assume that the first guy in was the last guy out. So, no, I'm not saying that at all. What I'm saying is that we're going to eat into the backlog that we have, and there's going to be time at our end and there's going to be time at DFAS's end. So we'll be plowing through the backlog as quickly as we can. And we are building up the office, it appears to me, based on the instructions I've been given.

So it may go well over a thousand, but we'll be biting into the backlog, and then we're going to run it out. And in fact, during a meeting earlier in the week, question was, will there be backlog at the end of the year? And I said that, the way it looks, probably, but we always expected there -- us to be living with some kind of backlog. It's just a question of how big it will be.

Q Mm-hmm.

MAJ. WHITLEY: We don't expect it to grow.

Q Mm-hmm.

Q So at this point, though, you're -- we're only really looking at, from the point of submitting a claim to the point of payment, if I understand this correctly, up to six weeks before somebody receives their payment.

Because those -- the thousand that have been at DFAS, as I understand it, they've asked for 20 working days, or roughly 30 days, to get payments issued. So you're looking at the six weeks plus another 30. Is my math right on that, about seven weeks, you know, from the point of getting a claim in, approved, processed, over to DFAS, and then issue payment?

MAJ. WHITLEY: It could, but that's a bit early. I mean, it's a bit early to make those long-term decisions. We'd like to see it a lot less.

Q Yeah. Well, that's better than --

MAJ. WHITLEY: But certainly not two years for some claimant.

Q Right. (Laughs.) Right. Okay. Yeah, good.

Q And sorry, when did you say the case-manager software was finalized?

MAJ. WHITLEY: We're going to see -- well, it's a matter of being finalized; we've been working it steadily and refining it. But we're going to have the ability, which is the critical ability, to actually close the cases and create the DFAS files probably the end of this week. We're going to be testing it in house on Monday, and we're having training on Monday afternoon.

Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: So we've been looking at it all along. It's not like we haven't seen this stuff before. We've been using it all along. But we could only use parts of it. So when a person has the case number -- which is, you know, the RSL and a bunch of years and a number, we actually look at those, so we get to see the claims. It's just that we had a hard time because we couldn't just hit a button, close it and send an automatic e-mail back with what was happening to the claim. So --

Q And --

MAJ. WHITLEY: -- that level of detail is what we're looking at in the next, you know, day or two. Q And so how have you been doing it? You've been printing out copies and doing it -- I mean, how have you been getting it to DFAS without using the software?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah, well, what you asked me earlier is -- one of you guys -- somebody's asked me is, how did you handle the paper copies, and sequencing numbers? That's why we're dealing with some of the paper copies now, because that's what we had in our hands. And that is not to be confused with anything like we WANT paper copies.

Every paper copy probably takes at least eight times longer, because they're not in any standard format. But we've been using paper copies and turning them into electrons, and then we have to turn them into an e-file. Because at the end of the day everybody has to be in a database in California for future review and audits and anything else. So we've been doing a lot of paper copies.

And a lot of the ones -- all the folks that came in where the Army said it looked like 10 months and the claimant said 10 months, they're getting paid. So it's kind of been a mixed bag.

Q So you've only been able to process paper claims so far?

MAJ. WHITLEY: No, paper claims and the -- and the ones where the months equal -- where the Army said it was 10 and the soldier said it was 10. You know, something like that -- where the months equal, we didn't -- we're not looking at those any further.

Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: We're only looking at the ones that we think may need confirmation, where we compare the soldier's submission to their database.

Q But you said the software -- for those where the months were equal, how did you get those to DFAS?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Oh. What we do is we have a format, the Excel spreadsheet, because DFAS requires a certain format. And we populate some of the columns and they populate some. So of course we keep track by Social Security number, name and so on, and DFAS keeps other fields. So it's really an encrypted Excel spreadsheet going back and forth.

Q Mm-hmm.

MAJ. WHITLEY: I think I answered the question, but --

Q Well, I'm just a little confused. I mean, you haven't had the software to close these cases, but you have been able to send some cases over to --

MAJ. WHITLEY: Right.

Q What does it mean to close a case? What is it the software will allow you to do that you haven't been able to do so far?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Okay. Well, the software has allowed us to look at the claims. That's what it's been allowing us to do. The soldier

submits his forms, so we have all this information -- address, phone number, bank routing (split ?) -- all the information you would need. And that actually gets thrown against that 40-some-million list of folks, were you in the Army. That's the first thing the software is doing, is allowing a person to do that. That's the claim side, and there are some other parts of it.

On the case manager side, we get to see the extract of that and we start looking at the period. So we can see the period that they're claiming, and we're checking against IPERMS, which is a database that has all their extensions and all their 214s and that sort of thing. And then what we've had to do at that point was then take a stubby pencil, take it offline and then create Excel spreadsheets. The software would allow us to look at all the data, move documents in, sends automatic e-mail to the claimant, and then creates a DFAS spreadsheet. And we want it to send it back to California. Q In other words, the pace has been slowed because you haven't had it, but you've still been able to do it.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Oh, absolutely.

Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Much slower. That's why -- you know, we're shooting for well over a thousand a week, but we won't know till we actually start cranking these out.

Q Got it. So that's been the main reason why --

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah.

Q About 1,000, because that software -- what is the name of the software, by the way?

MAJ. WHITLEY: It doesn't have a name. It's not on the shelf. It's custom-designed at the data center.

Q Okay. All right.

MAJ. WHITLEY: But that's really been the primary reason, is that -- and we've talked -- you know, I've talked to other folks about it to, that we focused on the claim side because that was the first level of anxiety. If you remember the early days, we had the browser issue, we had a backspace issue. Just last night I had an issue with international banks.

Q Oh, yeah, that guy from Egypt?

MAJ. WHITLEY: This guy -- well, it could have been Egypt. I think this guy was Germany, but I'm not sure. Anyway, so we had to expand the country code. You know, we can't use (swift ?) accounts. We had to confirm with DFAS that never -- they never send money to a foreign bank, it's always a check. I mean, those are the kinds of things we're learning. I mean, maybe everybody thinks we should know those automatically, but, you know, when we learn them, we say, okay, we've got

to make an adjustment. And that's exactly what we've been doing, those kinds of tweaks and fine tuning.

Q Right. And from the comments we've gotten, it sounds like one thing people would appreciate is some kind of customer call center where you can call in and say, "This is my Social Security number; what's with this claim? What happens next? Can you walk me through the process?" Is the Army thinking about setting anything like that up?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Actually, we have space where we actually set aside an area for a call center, and we just got the 800 number, 877 number, running, about two weeks ago, I think. We finally got that going. And we're answering the phones. I know there's been concerns about the phone being full.

Q Mm-hmm.

MAJ. WHITLEY: And every time we hear that, we're trying to figure out a way of how do we -- we're on the phones all day so -- it seems like when we talk to folks, by and large -- and truly, it's got to be well over 90 percent, 99 percent of you -- that they're very pleasant when we get them.

What happens is, the call has a rollover priority, and when all the case managers are on a call -- and we're trying not to have them on calls; we're trying to have them clearing cases -- (chuckles) -- I guess it goes to a voice-mail, and in the morning, we pick them up. So we're doing the best we can with that.

We actually had discussed that, but we're sitting here looking at: do we want to spend time on call-center folks, or do we want to buy people, you know, bodies, essentially, to clear cases? And it really will only matter to everybody when they get paid.

Q Right. And how --

MAJ. WHITLEY: So we're really kind of weighing, you know, how much of one thing do we need versus the other, because it's always a "pay me now or pay me later."

Q Right. And how many case managers do you have on your staff right now?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Right now -- let's see, there's 16 folks. Everybody -- virtually everybody works cases except for me -- I'm not working, but I'm not a full-time guy on that, obviously -- and the operations guy. So, you know, 14, I guess.

Q Okay. So you say -- so because I think someone --

MAJ. WHITLEY: There are 16 -- I think there are, like, 16 people there, and 14 are probably touching cases on a regular basis.

Q And are you thinking about increasing that number?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Oh, yeah. Yeah. And that's -- it's probably going to go up -- you know, if we go up to 20 it -- because it depends on the amount of funding, the ceiling cap. I don't think the ceiling on the contract is going to be a problem at all. But we're looking at, you know, adding, you know, six more folks, and that gets us, you know, over that 20 mark. And we got space to go to 30 if we have to do anything special. So we're -- they're all case managers, I mean, when we hire folks.

Q Right.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Even persons who are not exclusively case management, that's what they're doing right now.

Q Okay. And when you say looking at adding six more spaces, when do you think that might happen by?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Well, we're -- well, I don't -- I can't tell you when they're going to be sitting in a chair, because there's a few things that have to happen. But we already have the folks looking for the funding, because you need that to put on the contract. We know the contracts manager has already spoken to the contracting officer. And we know that the vendor is already speaking to head-hunters. And we've already spoken about other options with, you know, maybe getting somebody -- you know, folks from in the service or some of the service programs.

So we're pretty far along with pulling the trigger. But it will still take several weeks, from the time we get them till they get, you know, CAC, card access, and AKO accounts.

(Similar delay ?) we had at this end, when we started up -- when we started up, we had to go through the same growing pains early on. So as that backlog was building, what was going on was the office was also being built out.

Q Right.

MAJ. WHITLEY: So we know that's coming. But now we have a lot of trained folks; we have, you know, a (sociometric ?) expert working with us. We have some more green suiters coming in.

Q Right. And when you say you have to get funding, do you mean funding from the Army?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Well, it's just -- it's not really get funding; it's identification of available funds, what's the source of funding going to be.

Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah. So it's not -- I don't think anybody's going to be stingy or anything, just a matter of they have to identify -- deposits going to come out of.

Q Okay. And is this big Army that has to identify it, or you?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yes. It's big Army.

Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Listen, you know, you're talking to Headquarters DA. I'm one stone's throw from the G-1, so right behind me is big Army.

Q Right. Right. Okay. All right. What --

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah, but I don't think that -- that is not -- no one has ever said, "Do it on the cheap or do it badly or anything." They just -- you know, "What are your requirements?" A lot of what I spend my time doing is briefing the backlog, the expected -- you know, (where out ?) of the backlog; what's at claims generation; what are you seeing in the claims. I mean, really, the same questions you ask me -- exactly the same questions I get asked by everybody else. Q Mike, did you have one?

Q Yeah. You know, I just want to jump in and just say, Major, what can we do to help you? Because these have been great questions. And I got to tell you that these have been my primary questions as well, so the answers have been super. Thank you for clarifying. But what -- if there's anything we can do to kind of help ease or clarify, what -- what's the one message that we can help get out?

MAJ. WHITLEY: The -- I think the one thing -- and I talked to Veterans' Services -- (word inaudible) -- the other day about this. I know and I tell my folks every time we speak -- you know, about every third morning we do a little, you know, chat -- I say this is probably the most emotional thing they could be doing here. We're touching their pocketbooks. It could be life-changing. It's the worst time of the year to roll something like this out, right before Christmas. It hits all the buttons for being hard to deal with. And a lot of folks aren't going to receive what they think. And that's going to be our next level.

So what I would ask, you know, for those that are talking to folks out there, is that they be patient. And I know that's a lot to ask, because they believe it's owed them. And it is.

But when folks send -- we have a lot of this -- 88 e-mails, it hurts. It really slows us down. When we have -- and I understand why they do it, and I know it's not personal. No one's taking it personally. And when we have 90 percent of the other e-mails are other than this is a new case, we have go digging, truly, through all those to get to the guy and gal that we need to start a new case for. And we spend a lot of time doing that.

So a lot of folks out there say things to us. When we talk to them on the phone, I can tell it's not malicious. Because I talk to the guys, and they say, I've e-filed; here's my claim. I'm faxing you

tonight; I will be mailing my claim two days later. How can I be sure that you got it?

That makes it real hard for us to bundle it up four weeks later. So I'd just ask them to be patient. One submission electronically will help everybody, to include themselves.

Really that's the reason the Army -- you know, we're taking heat now because of the Web page. But it's going to serve us long better down the road. And really and Jeff noted this, there are congressionals, you know, I've been dealing with. You know, and they're legitimate congressionals. And we're answering them accordingly I think.

We're trying to avoid that kind of stuff, because those -- the folks looking for their payment do not need to be in the starting congressional business or trying to track down Major Whitley business. The need to be in the, my pay is coming, kind of understanding. It's just longer than everyone would like, to include us.

Q By the way, just so you know, I just got an e-mail from a gentleman who had called, he said, retro stop-loss people asking about how families of people -- of soldiers killed in action, who were stop-lossed, would be compensated.

He said, I spoke to a guy named Curtis. And he didn't know anything about stop-loss. And I had to ask him why he called me back, if he didn't have any information about claims like mine or information of how families of soldiers, okay, would get their stop-loss money.

Is this an issue you're having to deal with, people calling in and saying, you know, my father, my husband was killed in action while stop-lossed?

MAJ. WHITLEY: No. That's -- I know -- well, I know exactly who Curtis is, so they got the right office. I can't explain that answer, because he should know better. He has talking points right in front of him. And he recently left the Marine Corps probably two months ago. So he should be very familiar. I believe what he was telling you, although very badly, was he is probably not right in on -- nor are the others on the deceased, how they're being handled. Because they're being -- the deceased, killed in action especially, have already been notified by HRC Command and the Casualty Management Office, by letter signed by a general officer.

And the reason that was done that way -- I don't even have visibility with those guys, until the payments are made, just so we can add them to the total. So I believe part of it is innocent, in that he really doesn't know.

I know that he knows where he works, so I don't believe he's never heard of retro stop-loss, because --

Q No. He knows where he works. It's just, this is what -- I'm just reading this, you know, the e-mail I just got from --

MAJ. WHITLEY: I believe that he -- we tell these guys to be careful, when they're getting into conversations about something that they do not know about.

This is something that he would not know about, because it is being managed by, you know, essentially the, you know, adjutant general of the Army.

And we have several incapacitated claims that have come in, and -- as well as deceased after leaving service, drownings and so on that we're taking care of. We take care of those immediately. They're our priority. And we can only tell that when they go in the e-file and say, this is, you know, an incapacitated soldier or a wounded, ill or injured. And we don't know the situation or conditions of death or circumstances. We just take him offline and we take care of the claim for them.

So I think Curtis is just confused, because he probably hasn't heard that question, and the -- and the system's set up that way. But I'll talk to him when I get back.

Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Because it -- if it was done that way, it was very innocent.

Q Okay. No, no, I'm not -- and I'm not pointing the finger. I just -- literally, it popped up in my mailbox, and I figured you're the right person to talk to.

MAJ. WHITLEY: (Off mike) -- guy. I'm the guy, and Curtis is the other guy. But he's the guy answering the phones. When that phone's ringing, he's the first voice, and then it rolls over. That's why he knows -- and they truly have little talking points. Because frankly, we tell them that once in a while you guys may be calling in, and if I'm not there, they're going to -- you guys will ask them hard questions. And most -- you know, he won't be able to answer.

Q Uh-huh.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah, and, you know, again, he's a -- he's a young ex-Marine that we brought on staff, and, you know, he's doing case closings too -- (chuckles) -- when the phones aren't ringing. So I got it. I'll take it back with me.

Q Okay.

Q Yeah, that's wonderful. Gentlemen, I got to go. Thank you, Major. I appreciate your time. MAJ. WHITLEY: Okay. Glad to be here.

Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Who's left? Jeff?

Q Yeah, it's just me.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Okay, buddy, let's go.

Q I've -- so the way I understand it is, one -- the primary reason why there's been kind of a backlog in these cases is that the software wasn't ready to take claims and then send them over to DFAS electronically; that this had to be done manually, and that takes longer. And now that that software is going to be tested, hopefully on Monday, that should speed up the claims process considerably, and you're looking at sending about a thousand claims to DFAS a week.

Hello?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah, I'm still here.

Q Okay. Does anything of what I just said sound wrong?

MAJ. WHITLEY: It's not as accurate as it needs to be.

Q Okay. Go ahead.

MAJ. WHITLEY: Yeah, the claims software, that software that was developed on the front end, has been up and running fine --

Q Right.

MAJ. WHITLEY: -- since probably week two or three. And a lot of people we talk to fully admit that they were shocked at the improvement from the first few days to week two and three. So that's been up and running. That's why so many people have been able to file claims and sit there and send e-mails and all that.

What that left me with, and the team with and the developers with, was the dilemma of, how do we field the management software so we can now capture --

Q Oh, case -- right. Okay, so it's case-management software that I should be talking about.

MAJ. WHITLEY: And that was running in parts and pieces, as we're, you know, (polishing ?) it, but the latest enhancement was the ability to close the cases and have a remarks -- and there's a lot of claims where we're seeing this -- remarks going from the case manager to the claimant saying, "We need your pay -- your (Dash-4 ?)." That was really hard to do before. Now we'll be able to do that. And once we see the documents and confirm the iPERMs, we'll be able to hit a button and generate the DFAS file. That will eliminate five or six steps, so, yes. And I would expect us to be pushing a thousand claims a week, you know, any time now.

Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: We just -- we will --

Q So it allows the manager to ask the claimant directly for more documents, if needed?

MAJ. WHITLEY: No. There's a remarks section where it's -- it's kind of like a chat, but it's not real-time chat. But as soon as the claims manager sees something, they can respond or ask or tell the claimant exactly what the situation is with their claim.

Generally, we are not asking for any more information, because we're checking iPERMs, which is the official database. So we can look at whatever is missing -- the extension, or something like that. All the -- what I think you need to kind of hone in on is that the ability to close the cases electronically is a huge step forward for us.

Q And by "close case," you mean generate a file for DFAS?

MAJ. WHITLEY: Close -- yes, correct, confirm the data we're looking at; you know, log in the dates from the ETS to the REFRAD, release from active duty; and then, automatically move those data elements into the DFAS file. So as we compile those over the week, I'll be able to send them right to DFAS, and then another claim -- another record copy, if you will, to the data center. Q Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: That's the design approach right now that we have. But we've been working around it, because we cannot physically use the software, close cases up, until this (rev ?).

Q Okay. Okay.

MAJ. WHITLEY: All right?

Q All right. I think that's all I had.

MAJ. WHITLEY: All right.

Q Is there anything else? Okay.

MS. MCCALL: We're almost at the end of our time, sir. Do you have -- Major Whitley, do you have any closing remarks to Jeff (sp) or any of the listeners here?

MAJ. WHITLEY: No, I -- I would just say that the guys and gals that are working in the office do not take it personally. We're all working hard at it. You guys are doing the right things, by getting the word out there. And you know, as the months go by, it'll be less and less contentious, people will be getting paid and it'll be good for all of us. Thanks.

Q Thank you.

MS. MCCALL: Thank you, Jeff and Mike and all of our listeners. And thank you, Major Whitley. And this ends our roundtable.

END.