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U.S. Reviews Disability Retirements

Associated Press

The Defense Department acknowledged variances in military disability retirements yesterday and pledged to tighten up the standards.

An "intensive and critical" review is under way, Lt. Gen. Leo E. Benade, deputy assistant secretary of defense, told a Senate Armed Services subcommittee.

Chairman Harry F. Byrd Jr. (Ind.-Va.) said the subcommittee's call for a status report stemmed in part from the retirement on disability pay last year of Maj. Gen. John D. Lavelle, commander of the 7th ~~th~~ Force, not long after he had passed a flight pay physical examination.

Byrd said that more than half of the Air Force generals retiring in 1971 were given disability pay and that 70 per cent of the disability retirees had qualified within six months earlier for flight pay.

"There appear to be some abuses," Byrd said, reporting that 47.6 per cent of general officers retiring in 1971 were on disability, compared with 11.5 per cent in the rank of lieutenant colonel and 9.2 per cent for sergeants major.

Military retirement total cost is estimated at \$4.7 billion in fiscal 1974, starting next July 1, including \$783 million for disability retirees.

Disability retirees also receive tax advantages costly to the government, Byrd said, estimating that a general retiring after 30 years' service would receive \$27,000 a year retired pay, of which \$18,000 would be nontaxable.

Benade said individuals seeking to remain on duty often minimize health problems "and may be less than frank" with examining physicians, but their concern shifts when facing imminent retirement.