

By PETER BLAIS

**I**t could be a tough year for military golfers.

The federal government is scheduled to surrender control of golf courses at Fort Ord in California, Marsh Air Force Base in Louisiana and Fort Benjamin Harrison in Indiana to non-military authorities by year's end. More courses will leave the military fold in the future as the federal government continues to streamline the Defense Department.

While this means better access for the typical public golfer, it could spell the end of preferred tee times and lower green fees at those facilities for active, retired and reserve military personnel. The Military Golf Association (MGA) plans to see those benefits continue.

"Our goal is to preserve golf in the military," said Al Stetz, chairman of the 700-member association formed roughly a year ago. "We became concerned when the government started to close bases and lease or sell the courses. We're trying to grandfather the rights of military personnel to play those facilities."

There are 200 military courses in the United States and another 44 abroad, according to Stetz. Military personnel often built and maintained these facilities.

Even at the affordable fees charged the military, they have generated considerable revenue for the Department of Defense's Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) department. Local MWR divisions have operated the courses and used profits to subsidize non-profit base functions such as day care and arts centers.

MGA supporters contend their long-standing relationship with these courses entitles them to continue receiving the benefits they've enjoyed in the past. For example, while testifying at last summer's U.S. Senate hearings on the fate of San Francisco's Presidio Golf Course — since turned over to the National Park Service and Arnold Palmer Golf Management — Stetz asked that the Senate bill provide for continued access to the Presidio Golf Course and all its facilities by military golfers; continued availability of preferred tee times equivalent to current usage; and green fees at the same rates as other military golf courses in the area, such as Travis Air Force Base or Moffett Field.

The Senate has not passed a final bill, although the Park Service indicated it cannot show favoritism to one group over another, Stetz said. "But the Park Service does extend discounts to senior citizens," he noted.

The government is selling Fort Ord to the local municipality of Seaside, which will hire a management company to operate the widely known Bayonet and Black Horse courses. Similar scenarios are likely at forts Marsh and Benjamin Harrison.

"We're trying to get the new operators to grandfather benefits

## Group backs military cause

Several Defense Department golf courses scheduled to privatize this year

the military has enjoyed at those facilities," Stetz said. "We have to make the new organizations aware it is in their best interest to maintain those benefits because the military still makes up a major portion of their customers."

MGA will prepare an annual position paper addressing issues such as access to military courses, fee structures and tee-time allocations. The paper will make recommendations to MWR

service chiefs and other groups with a military interest.

"We don't want to micro-manage their operations," Stetz said. "At first glance they were skeptical about our association. But we've been getting more cooperation now that they understand what we're after. We sent letters to each of the MWR chiefs, not to gain their support, but primarily to give us a point of contact."

MGA provides other services

in addition to lobbying for continued access and price discounts. MGA has accumulated information on the various military courses — such as locations, yardages and handicap ratings — and makes that available to members traveling throughout the country.

"Despite the cutbacks, some bases are adding courses," Stetz noted. "They added 18 holes at Fort Belvoir near Alexandria, Va.

and are building a new 18 at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington. Pensacola (Fla.) Naval Air Station is adding nine."

One of the association's main efforts is supporting and promoting golf tournaments. MGA hopes to organize a dozen tournaments this year, highlighted by the MGA Open. This year's event will be in San Antonio.

MGA has eight volunteer staff members and hopes to double its membership this year. For more information write Military Golf Association, PO Box 2611, Kensington, MD 20891-2611; telephone 800-958-7MGA.

