THE ADJUTANT

SERVICE / STRATEGY / PURPOSE

Military Wealth & Retirement Readiness

THE FIELD BRIEF + PRACTICAL WORKBOOK

Seven decisions. A clear cash-flow picture.
A practical plan for your next chapter.

01 / Decision checklists

02 / Monthly cash-flow worksheet

03 / Preparation timeline and readiness tracker

04 / Stress test and 30-day action plan

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START WITH THE WHOLE DECISION

Retirement is a system.

A pension is one part of the picture. Your plan must connect income, benefits, healthcare, housing, family commitments, taxes, savings, and purpose.

How to use this workbook
Work through the seven decisions. Record verified figures on page 6, map your preparation on page 7, and mark remaining gaps on page 8. Use page 9 to choose your next actions.

1. Verify
Gather statements and official estimates. Mark projections clearly; do not treat pending benefits as approved income.

2. Map
Convert dependable income and recurring costs to the same monthly basis. Keep taxes and deductions visible.

3. Test
Ask what changes if income arrives late, costs increase, or your household needs change.

4. Act
Give each unresolved decision an owner, a source, and a follow-up date.

Your retirement system matters
Active-duty military retirement, Guard/Reserve retirement, civilian federal retirement, and Social Security have different rules. A person can have more than one system. This workbook organizes preparation; it does not establish eligibility or application deadlines.

Scope
General education only, not individualized legal, tax, investment, financial-planning, medical, or veterans-claims advice. Verify material decisions with the responsible agency and qualified professionals. Do not submit private records through public comments.

DECISIONS 01-02

Define the mission. Secure the floor.

01 Define what retirement must accomplish

Start with the life your plan must support.

- ☐ Describe an ordinary Tuesday: where you live, who you see, and how you spend your time.
- ☐ Identify family, housing, travel, service, and legacy commitments.
- ☐ Separate optional work from work needed to pay essential bills.

02 Build the dependable-income floor

Separate gross estimates from spendable income. Record source, expected start date, and confidence level.

- ☐ Obtain official estimates for each applicable pension.
- ☐ Review survivor elections, taxes, insurance, and other deductions.
- ☐ Compare Social Security start-date options using your own official estimates.
- ☐ Include only established benefits in your confirmed-income baseline.

My retirement must make room for:

DECISIONS 03-04

Assets and earned benefits.

03 Give every investment account a job

Define what each account is for and when you expect to use it.

- ☐ List TSP, IRA, and other accounts, balances, beneficiaries, and purposes.
- ☐ Separate cash needed soon from long-term investments.
- ☐ Review withdrawal rules and tax effects before moving money.
- ☐ Check whether your investment mix fits your ability to tolerate losses.

04 Place veterans benefits inside the plan

Established benefits and projected outcomes belong in different columns.

- ☐ Record approved benefits and the documents confirming them.
- ☐ Verify eligibility for healthcare, education, housing, and state benefits.
- ☐ Ask the responsible agency how benefits interact in your circumstances.
- ☐ Keep official records and points of contact where your household can find them.

Avoid double counting. An account balance is not monthly income. A withdrawal reduces that balance. Benefits paid directly to someone else are not automatically money available for your own spending.

DECISIONS 05-07

Protect the household and next chapter.

05 Plan healthcare before the transition

Map coverage for everyone who depends on the plan.

- ☐ Verify coverage start dates and required enrollment actions.
- ☐ Plan for prescriptions, dental, vision, and uncovered costs.
- ☐ Check coverage rules before relocating or living abroad.

06 Reduce fixed obligations. Preserve margin.

Flexibility is a form of wealth.

- ☐ List debts, housing costs, insurance, and family obligations.
- ☐ Budget for repairs and annual bills as well as monthly spending.
- ☐ Identify a cash reserve and a plan for delayed first payments.

07 Retire toward purpose

A durable plan includes identity, contribution, relationships, and routine.

- ☐ Choose the work, service, learning, or mentorship you want to continue.
- ☐ Plan how you will maintain community, health, and accountability.
- ☐ Name one goal for your first year beyond leaving work.

WORKSHEET / MONTHLY CASH FLOW

What will actually be available?

Planning month: _____ Figures checked on: _____

Income source	Gross / month	Deductions*	Net / month
Military retired pay	$	$	$
Civilian pension, if applicable	$	$	$
Social Security, if applicable	$	$	$
Established VA benefits, if applicable	$	$	$
Other dependable income	$	$	$
A. Total dependable net income			$

*Taxes, insurance, elections, and other amounts already withheld. Do not subtract the same item again below. Use only income available to your household.

Monthly uses of money	Amount
Housing, utilities, insurance, maintenance	$
Food, transport, healthcare, personal spending	$
Debt payments and family obligations	$
Annual / irregular costs divided by 12	$
Savings and reserve contributions	$
B. Total planned uses	$
C. Monthly margin = A minus B	$

If C is negative: identify the specific expense change, work income, or planned investment withdrawal needed. Keep investment withdrawals separate from dependable income; check sustainability and taxes before relying on them.

PLANNING TIMELINE / NOT AGENCY DEADLINES

Prepare in stages. Verify the dates.

These are suggested planning windows, not filing deadlines. Obtain your actual deadlines from your service, employer HR office, SSA, and healthcare administrator.

Planning stage	What to do	Your date
6-12 months before	Identify applicable retirement systems; request estimates; inventory service records and benefit elections.	
3-6 months before	Confirm submission windows with the responsible office; compare healthcare and survivor choices; build a cash reserve plan.	
1-3 months before	Submit applications within verified windows; retain receipts; confirm separation date, benefit effective dates, and expected first payments.	
Final month	Confirm contact and payment details; track outstanding documents; arrange coverage and access to records.	
First 30-90 days after	Reconcile actual deposits and deductions; resolve errors; update the budget, beneficiaries, and household records.	

Keep these dates distinct: last day of employment/service, retirement effective date, benefit entitlement month, and first payment date may differ. Do not assume one date answers all four questions.

READINESS TRACKER

Turn unknowns into next actions.

Mark each item V = verified, R = researching, or N/A. Record the next action and a date. A completed checklist supports preparation; it is not an agency approval.

Item	Status	Evidence / next action / date
Retirement eligibility and service credit		
Pension estimate and deductions		
Social Security estimate and filing window		
Survivor / beneficiary decisions		
Healthcare coverage and enrollment dates		
Debt, housing, family obligations		
Reserve for delays and unexpected costs		
Application receipt and outstanding items		

Document inventory

Locate identification and service records; pension and Social Security estimates; account statements; benefit decisions; insurance records; debt balances; beneficiary information; and applicable family or court documents. Requirements vary: get the exact application checklist from the receiving office.

Storage: Keep sensitive records in secure storage, not in this public guide or a public website form. Tell a trusted person how to locate them when needed.

STRESS TEST / 30-DAY ACTION PLAN

Give the plan some breathing room.

Scenario	What changes?	My response
Expected plan	Use verified income and realistic costs.	
Income starts late	How many months can cash reserves cover?	
Unexpected expense	What repair or healthcare cost could disrupt the plan?	
Market decline	Can planned withdrawals be reduced or deferred?	

NET INCOME - **PLANNED USES** = **MARGIN / GAP**

WEEK 1 Gather records and official estimates.

WEEK 2 Complete the cash-flow worksheet and identify gaps.

WEEK 3 Run the scenarios above and choose your reserve plan.

WEEK 4 Assign your next three decisions an owner and date.

My next three actions

OFFICIAL RESOURCES / CONTINUE THE MISSION

Go to the source.

Use these official starting points to locate the rules for your retirement system. This workbook does not reproduce benefit rates, guarantee eligibility, or replace official application instructions.

Military retired pay | Defense Finance and Accounting Service
https://www.dfas.mil/RetiredMilitary/

Civilian federal retirement | U.S. Office of Personnel Management
https://www.opm.gov/retirement-center/

Social Security | Social Security Administration
https://www.ssa.gov/retirement

TSP accounts and withdrawals | Thrift Savings Plan
https://www.tsp.gov/

Veterans benefits | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
https://www.va.gov/

Military healthcare | TRICARE
https://www.tricare.mil/

Retirement taxes | Internal Revenue Service
https://www.irs.gov/retirement-plans

About Thomas Mengesha
Retired U.S. Army officer, former attorney, and former college professor. More than 26 years of Army service, from E-1 to commissioned officer.

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Website Briefing Room membership and YouTube channel memberships are separate offerings.

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