



Veterans News And Views

New Agent Orange Presumptives !



After a long wait, the “final rules” have been issued by VA Central Office regarding 3 new diseases that are now recognized as being a result of service “In-country” in Vietnam. They are: Ischemic Heart Disease, Parkinson’s, and a form of Leukemia called hairy “B” cell.

This means that if you have been diagnosed with any of these, AND you meet the “in-country” service requirement, the VA will consider the condition(s) to be service connected. This will afford you the opportunity to receive treatment for your service connected conditions from the VA at no cost. Depending on the severity of the condition, you may also be entitled to a monthly compensation check from the VA.

As always, the devil is in the details, so please call me for the specifics of your case.

STARS AND STRIPES HONOR FLIGHT



There is a “rumor” going around that we will start flying Korean War vets next, at this point it is ONLY a rumor. The Board of Directors has not made any decisions regarding the long term future of the program.

They will however, accept the application of, and schedule a flight for a terminally ill veteran of any war period.

The Board of Directors is planning a meeting in early January to start planning the flights for 2011. There are a number of issues that need to be addressed, size of the plane, how many “stops” in D.C., as well as our wait list, which has swollen, once again over 600 veterans.

I will keep everyone posted as we work through the details.

The Stars and Stripes Honor Flight is proud to say, that by the end of this year, they will have flown more than 1000 area veterans to see their WWII Memorial in Washington, D.C.

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Iraq and Afghanistan



Iraq may be “winding down” but Afghanistan is heating up, as it witnessed by the continuing casualties suffered by our troops there.

Some have tried to compare the current conflicts to our past wars, whether it be Vietnam or WWII. Neither comparison seems either appropriate, nor

honest.

The current War Against Terrorism and Iraqi Freedom, are unique unto themselves.

There is no draft, so everyone fighting there is a volunteer.

Technology is different, the enemy uses some very unconventional means for inflicting harm, aimed as much

at the psyche of the local population as well as our coalition troops.

While war is never a popular issue, at least this go-round, our troops have the support of the majority of Americans, unlike what occurred to our troops who served in Vietnam.

We, as fellow veterans, need to insure that our friends and neighbors appreciate the sacrifices our military personnel, and their families, make every day.



Vet Centers (It takes the courage of a warrior to ask for help.)

The Vet Center “system” was established in the late ‘70s to assist primarily Vietnam Veterans in dealing with PTSD and “readjustment” issues.

Their role remains one of counseling, and assisting veterans in readjustment.

They are staffed primarily with combat veterans, who have “been-there-done-that”.

They offer services to the veteran and his family in working through the myriad of issues that can confront a family, when a veteran returns from the battle-front. While their paycheck may come from the VA, I often tell

people, that they are on a “different planet” than the traditional VA System.

These men and women REALLY DO CARE! That is not to say that the rest of the VA system doesn’t, but the Vet Center staff have a unique perspective that many others within the VA do not.

I often refer people to the Vet Center, not only for their counseling expertise, but also to assist the vet and my self in developing the medical diagnosis we need to proceed with a claim.

See the attached brochure for more info.

VA MEDICAL SYSTEM NEWS

The VA Medical System remains open to many veterans. That’s the “good” news.

We here in Wisconsin are fairing better than a number of other areas in the country.

As of this writing, there is only about a 3-5 month waiting list at the VAMC Milwaukee, and a longer wait for its branch clinic in Cleveland, WI.

Please remember, that if you do not have a service-connected disability, then you must either meet the “Means Test” requirements, or have served “in-country” in Viet-

nam to get enrolled in the system. Current Means Test levels for a resident of Ozaukee County are:

Single Veteran about \$41,000

Married Veteran (no Children) \$48,000

The “cap” increases by about \$5,000 for each dependent child.

There is a “rumor” that there will be some additional monies in the system for next year, and that these “caps” may increase some. I will keep my eyes and ears open, and keep you informed.

What Services VA Healthcare System Will Not Provide

Trust Fund Still in Trouble

For at least the last three biennium budget cycles, the Veterans Service Organizations, have been trying to get the State Legislature to wake up to the fact that the Veterans Trust Fund is going broke.

The Legislature, for whatever reason, has chosen to “kick the can down the road” and ignore the warnings.

We have now reached a “crisis stage”. If the Legislature fails to take action during this next budget cycle, then they will be locking the doors at the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs.

While I do not foresee them actually reaching the stage of “locking the doors”, I have a great deal of concern over what will remain of State Veterans Benefits.

We already have a significant projected budget deficit going forward in to the next biennium, and most Legislators, and the new administration, are more keen on cutting programs, rather than expanding them.

We will ALL need to keep a close eye on what goes on in Madison, as we enter the upcoming Legislative session.



While most veterans agree that the VA Healthcare System is a very good benefit, I occasionally hear from some veterans about what they will not do.

Hearing Aids, Dental work and eyeglasses.

The VA simply does not have the capacity to deal with these issues for all veterans.

The VA offers these service ONLY for those veterans who have related service-connected disabilities, or former POWs or those vets receiving 100% compensation for other service-connected disabilities.

There are some rare exceptions made for those, when their VA primary care physicians feel these services are a medical necessity.

Veterans with a 10% disability for anything, can get some help with hearing aids.

While the system is not perfect, they do the best they can with the resources they are provided.



PENSION WITH AID AND ATTENDANCE

This topic has become a “hot-button” issue of late, so let me try to clear up some questions and dispel some rumors.

First of All VA Pension is an INCOME based benefit for WARTIME veterans or their surviving spouses. This does not mean you have to have served “in-theater”, just that you served during a designated war period. The income levels required to qualify are quite frankly disgustingly low. You must also have liquid assets generally below \$80K in order to qualify.

The Aid and Attendance “add-on” is based on the receipt of “assistance with the needs of daily living”. A rather broad category, but one that generally entails receiving help with medication maintenance, help with daily hygiene or other similar assistance.

I generally see the requests come from individuals who are in, or about to enter, Assisted Living or Nursing Home settings. Though, I have assisted with a few for “in-home” care. If you, or someone you know falls within this criteria, we can generally “eliminate” their income from the equation, as the cost of these services usually far exceeds their income.

The VA’s own web site says that this program is not designed to be an “asset preservation” program, which is one reason why they pay at the rates that they do. I usually tell people that this pension will not stop the bleed of their assets, but it will slow it down.

Every case has to be dealt with individually, so these “qualifiers” listed above are just general guidelines.

As always, call me with your individual cases, so we can discuss specifics.



County Veterans Service Office

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Serving Those Who Served America

Farewell to a Colleague and a Comrade

Thomas Burkhalter, Col, USA, Ret. Passed away on December 23, 2010.

Tom served as the Ozaukee County Veterans Service Officer from 1990 to 1997. He was the Richland County CVSO before coming to Ozaukee County.

Col. Burkhalter's organizational affiliations include the American Legion Van Ells-Schanen Post 82, Post 5373 Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, Korean War Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America, Military Order of the Purple Heart, the 40 et 8, 5th RCT Association, Outpost "Harry" Survivors Association, County Veterans Service Officers Association of Wisconsin, the Manitowoc Kiwanis Club, the American Psychological Society, the Masons, and The Scottish Rite.



Tom continued to work on behalf of veterans after leaving the CVSO position here in Ozaukee County.

He worked diligently on behalf of the homeless and incarcerated veterans until his untimely passing.

Tom will be sorely missed by all.

A Parting Thought

Even before the recent announcement that the VA was adding three new diseases to the "presumptive list" for exposure to Agent Orange, the nay-Sayers were starting up their questioning in Washington. Some of the negative talk was originating from some very unexpected places, such as some on the Veterans Affairs Committee.

There is now an on-going debate in Washington and elsewhere, as to whether the VA should be adding diseases to the list, and more importantly, to some, the cost of these add-ons. The National Institutes for Health has conducted extensive studies on the latest 3, as well as a number of others that were already on the books. If there was not "statistical" evidence that Vietnam veterans were developing these diseases at a higher rate than the general population, they would never have recommended to the VA Secretary to even consider adding anything to "the list".

It always seems strange to me, that as we wind down a war (at least Iraq for now) everyone in D.C. suddenly becomes budget conscious, especially when we are talking about veterans benefits.

What surprises me, is that some of those most often

quoted for questioning these add-ons are veterans themselves.

I have always firmly believed, that if Congress wants to send our young people into harms way, they need to not only fully fund their combat related needs, but be prepared to assist these very same men and women with their readjustment into "normal society", and just as important, is that Congress be prepared to deal with the physical and emotional trauma their decisions have left on our newly minted veterans.

The war ain't over, just because the troops come home. As we have seen from our past engagements, the "wounds of war" can continue to afflict our troops for many years afterward.

It is incumbent on us, the veterans of past conflicts, to insure that tomorrow's veterans receive the assistance they need to reintegrate themselves into society.

See you around the county.

Ken