

Did You Know?

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That one of the most frustrating things we run across at the Department Veteran's Affairs and Rehabilitation office in Chicago are rumors. We can never pin down the sources but many simply come from word of mouth. A veteran overhears something while in a VA clinic, comrades talk at the Post bar before a meeting, or someone thinks they are a "know it all" and gives out false advice. Some of the rumors are harmless but others, if believed, can cause veterans to loose out on valuable benefits they are entitled to and which they earned while in the service. Here are some of the more common rumors we encounter and the real truth.

1. A veteran with a bad discharge can not receive VA benefits. Although most veterans benefits are contingent on having a good discharge there are many exceptions to the rule. For instance a veteran serves during the end of World War II and gets out with an honorable discharge. The Korean Conflict comes along and they are recalled and that period of service ends with a dishonorable discharge. The veteran is still fully eligible based on his World War II service. Or a veteran is drafted during the Vietnam War and during his two years he thinks the Army is a good career move so he re-ups for four more years. Everything is going fine until the tail end of his next four years and he gets out on an "Other than Honorable" discharge. He is still eligible based on completing his initial two years of service. So if you know of someone with bad paper you might want them to contact us for advice.

2. Only veterans who have service-connected disabilities can use the VA hospitals. Wrong again. Over sixty percent of veterans getting treatment and/or their medications from the VA have no service-connected problems. Myself included. I was drafted and served two years in West Berlin and never got a scratch. But my income is low enough to put me within the means test and qualify me for care.

3. It's been over a year since I was released from active duty, I can't file a claim for VA compensation benefits, I blew the time limit. Again wrong. Although you must file within one year of discharge to receive benefits retroactive to the date you were released other than that there is no time limit for filing. If granted, you will receive benefits only back to the date of your filing. We have many Vietnam era veterans filing for the first time and they are getting benefits. They simply won't get paid back to the date they got out.

4. And finally, don't worry honey when I die the VA will take care of my burial. False. Although there are some VA burial benefits available like a government headstone, free plot in a National Cemetery, burial flag, honor guard and a small stipend for burial expenses the bulk of the funeral expenses like the casket, embalming, wake, hearse, etc. must be born by the family.

These are just some examples. I will continue to look out for more from the "Rumor Mills" and report back to you in a later newsletter. In the meantime, as always, your VA&R staff is ready to assist you. Just contact me at the above telephone number or e-mail address.