

# Did You Know?

**(By: Raymond P. Toczek Legion Service Officer)**

**312-980-4266**

**[Raymond.Toczek@va.gov](mailto:Raymond.Toczek@va.gov)**

That twice a year your Chicago Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation (VA&R) staff attend service officers' school. Just recently our summer meeting of accredited service officers met in Indianapolis, Indiana for three days of intense refresher training as well as updates on the myriad of VA benefit and law changes. Starting at 8:00 in the morning and lasting till 8:30 at night (with breaks for lunch and dinner) our National VA&R people trained us in claims processing, techniques on conducting a personal hearing before the Decision Review Officers and travel judges, how and when to appeal cases and recent court decisions from the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. Legion service officers fly in from all over the United States and we share best practices as well as air our concerns and problems. At the end, a one hundred question certification test is taken and we return to our home states to put what we learned into practical application with the veterans we serve. Each year we also come back with some interesting tidbits. Here are just some examples:

- So far 81,000 vets from OEF, OIF, Operation New Dawn and Desert Shield and Storm have signed up for the Open Burn Pit Registry. If you have not done so go to the following site:  
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/registry.asp>
- The Bd. for Correction of Military Records (BCMR) can now change a name on a DD 214 if the veteran had a sex change.
- With "Don't ask, don't tell, the BCMR can sometimes upgrade a bad discharge if the veteran got out only because of homosexual feelings but no illegal acts.
- The BCMR can change the vet's home of record on enlistment. This is important for those trying to get the Ill. Veterans Grant.
- To help with the appeals backlog the American Legion has a pilot program out of Minnesota. It is showing promise and may be rolled out to other states.
- Over 63,000 veterans are awaiting hearings on their appeals and this number may top 100,000 by the end of the year.
- New recruits are given the option of financial coaching so they won't blow their first paycheck on a new car or stereo equipment.
- Of the 21.8 million veterans in our country 1.6 million are female.
- From the last census a vet's median income is \$35,000, non-vet is \$24,500.

- A new scam are Pension Advance Companies. They give you a quick loan but then take payments out of your pension and charge VERY high interest rates.
- Vets must use a specific form to let the Veterans Administration know then intend to file. They can no longer write a simple letter saying they wish to file for Veterans Administration comp. or pension.
- If you lie to the Veterans Administration and then tell your American Legion Service Officer what you did in most cases we will revoke you as a client.
- Of all the prescriptions written in the world, 75% are for Americans.
- Over 100,000 Americans die each year from multiple drug interactions.
- Any vet with a joint injury e.g. shoulder, elbow, or ankle and who have some pain on movement of that joint should get a minimum rating of 10% for that joint.
- Even if you enter service with a pre-existing medical problem you can sometimes get Veterans Administration compensation if the service made it worse.

These are just a few of the interesting bits of information we gathered from our school. The Department of Illinois can be proud of its service officers. We are motivated, skilled, compassionate and always on a learning curve. If you should ever have a benefit question yourself or are approached by someone from your Post or District with a question don't hesitate to refer them to us. Our contact information is listed above. Remember, there is no stupid question, only a stupid answer!

**\*People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men and women stand ready to do violence on their behalf\***