

Did You Know?

(By: Raymond P. Toczek Legion Service Officer)

312-980-4266

Raymond.Toczek@va.gov

That our annual state convention is now over and it was a great time to meet our comrades from all over Illinois. As service officers for the Department it was also a good time for Wayne Macejak, Bill Slider, Carolina Contreras and myself to converse with other post service officers. These are your four Department service officers in the Chicago VA&R office. We had a table in the display area during the convention and we had lots of foot traffic. There were many interesting questions, rumors and concerns. Some of these rumors and questions have been covered in my previous articles but we came back from Springfield with some brand new ones or updates on old ones. Here they are:

1. I receive VA non-service connected pension. I turned 66 and started drawing my Social Security. I don't have to tell the VA since they are the government and will find out. TRUE BUT. Yes they will be notified by Social Security but this only happens once a year. In the meantime you are being overpaid and will be asked for the money back. Under the pension program changes in income must be reported immediately.
2. I just went through a messy divorce. I had my lawyer change my will and I took him off my VA life insurance. That's good, right? NO. Changes to government life insurance must be made in writing to the Veterans Administration. Wills are not binding for changes.
3. I received a Purple Heart in Vietnam for grazing shrapnel wound. It was minor and the scar is hard to even see. The Veterans Health Administration hospital told me I couldn't use them because I wasn't service-connected disabled and my income was too high. FALSE. Any veteran who received a Purple Heart for any kind of injury, big or small is eligible and should be placed in Category 3.

4. My first husband died back in the 60's and he is buried in a National Cemetery. I have remarried and we are making our burial arrangements. Can my current spouse also be buried in the same cemetery? YES. There is no limit to the number of deceased spouses being buried. As far as we know the record for an Illinois veteran is five!
5. I have heard that servicemen and women who served at Camp Lejeune for over 29 days between 1/1/53 and 12/31/87 days are now eligible for some benefits, is that true? YES. These veterans can now be placed in category 6 at the hospital. Also, there are pending regulations to grant some service-connected compensation for certain cancers and other diseases as a result of the drinking water. This is a work in progress so veterans are advised to continue reading their monthly American Legion magazine for important changes.
6. I applied for a hearing loss but was granted only 0%. Guess I can't get hearing aids. FALSE. A zero percent rating for a hearing loss makes you eligible for the aids.
7. You guys in Chicago did your best for my claim but it was denied. Can I get a lawyer to help with an appeal? YES. Although our office would be happy to help you in the appeal stage we understand some veterans prefer to hire a lawyer. Some of the larger firms have medical doctors on staff that can give expert opinions on claims. They can also sometimes track down an old military buddy for affidavits. We do our best with the resources we have in the Chicago office but we never feel bad if you go this route, especially if in the long run you are granted the benefit.

I could go on and on but have to stop now. Our staff was happy to have met so many of our comrades at the convention and thanks for stopping at our table. See you next year. And since we were so close to the Lincoln museum I'll close with a quote from our sixteenth president.

IN THE END IT'S NOT THE YEARS IN YOUR LIFE THAT COUNT BUT THE LIFE IN YOUR YEARS

ABRAHAM LINCOLN