

Did You Know?

(By: Raymond P. Toczek Legion Service Officer)
312-980-4266 or raymond.toczek@va.gov

That the American Legion VA&R Chicago office helps veterans and their dependents through many different means. We offer face-to-face interviews by appointment, receive daily e-mails, telephone calls and regular mail. Some of our contacts are routine e.g. follow up on claims, submitting new evidence or updating addresses or banking information. Other contacts involve much more and often times end up with our office filing a new or reopened claim. While we try our best to help all we serve we realize that we can't assist everyone. In those cases at least we will steer them in the right direction. Looking back at 2016 I want to highlight some of the more interesting and successful claims or situations we handled.

1. A veteran asked us to help him with a claim that he had been fighting for ten years. He was medically discharged for a certain condition but the Veterans Administration wasn't paying him any service-connected compensation. We reviewed his records and determined that all the VA needed was proof that he currently still had the condition and was being treated for it. We got him enrolled in the Veterans Health Administration system, he started treatment and we got him a 20% rating. We then reviewed his claim in more detail back to his Military Medical Board and found out that they had overlooked some evidence (temporary misplaced Service Treatment Records). We were able to get him 5 years of back payments.
2. An e-mail from a brother of a veteran asked for help in getting the veteran into a State Nursing Home. We hooked him up with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs who oversee the 4 State homes and he was placed on the waiting list. After several months a spot opened up and he was admitted. However during this time we learned that he was suffering from ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) and had never filed a claim. Any veteran who served at anytime and anywhere for more than 90 days and later is diagnosed with that disease can receive compensation. We filed and he was granted 100%. He now gets over \$3,000 a month from the VA.
3. A female veteran left us a voicemail message and we called her back. While in the Navy she was sexually assaulted by an officer. She was an enlisted person and that officer warned her never to report it otherwise she would never be promoted again. She didn't! Now suffering from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) she was having problems with her claim. We were able to find in her Military Personnel Records some performance evaluations from the time of the rape

- showing a dramatic drop in her job performance. That and a few other bits of evidence and she was granted her benefits.
4. A daughter wrote our office. She very much wanted to join the American Legion auxiliary but was unable to locate her deceased father's DD 214. Her mother had passed away in a house fire along with all the valuable papers. She did have her dad's full name and date of death. We used the online VA National Cemetery Gravesite Locator and found where he was buried. From there the cemetery office had for some reason kept a copy of his DD 214. The daughter is now a member of our Auxiliary.
 5. Finally a veteran had his case on appeal for over three years. He was being denied Agent Orange compensation benefits because he couldn't prove he actually set foot in Vietnam. He was sent there TDY from Guam to repair some aircraft but his TDY orders were missing. Turns out while there he wrote home several times and his mom had kept the letters which clearly showed an APO address from Vietnam. He won his appeal.

People are always asking me why I am still working part-time as an American Legion Service Officer. Didn't I have enough of the job with 33 years at the Veterans Administration? I simple reply that as long as I can continue to help my fellow veterans and have successful outcomes like the ones above I will continue to work and long as I can.

Our Service Officers will be heading off to D.C. soon for our semi-annual Service Officer Training School. Hope to learn some new things to pass on to you all. And with a New Year starting we all are getting a little older so just remember

Old age is not so bad when you consider the alternatives.