

Did You Know?

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That the American Legion VA&R Chicago office helps veterans and their dependents through many different means. We have walk-in hours, interviews by appointment; receive daily e-mails, telephone calls and regular mail. We also attend outreach events. 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 2017 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 had filed for PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) but when the Veterans Administration ordered an exam he was in jail and couldn't make it. That claim was denied for failure to report for the exam. Being recently released from jail he was homeless and no permanent address. He got him registered in the Veterans Health Administration system and he started treatment for his mental health condition. We also located a relative who agreed to accept his mail and alert him when any VA letters arrived. We had the exam for the claim reschedule, he reported and now is receiving 70% service-connected disabled compensation. We also got him over one year of retroactive payments. He is no longer homeless and has returned to school under the Vocational Rehabilitation program for disabled vets.
2. We were asked to participate in an open house for veterans sponsored by a local hospital. We were one group of about twenty that were there and we manned a table with American Legion pamphlets. We also had one of our Service Officers present to answer questions and possibly take claims. A widow who worked at that hospital was just passing and saw our table. A brief conversation occurred and it turns out her husband served in Viet Nam, was exposed to Agent Orange and died eleven months ago from lung cancer. We immediately started a claim for Survivors benefits and she was later granted over \$1,200 a month. She is now also eligible for VA sponsored health care under CHAMPVA. And since the claim was filed within one year of his death she received a nice retroactive check.
3. A female veteran had multiple service-connected disabled conditions but when the VA added them up using their combined rating table she ended up at 64% disabled. Rounded down to 60% she got that level of pay. We went through her file and noticed that she had extensive surgery which left several scars. Asked if these were tender or icky to the touch she said "oh yeah". If my kids accidentally touch one of them she feels pain. We put in for a tender scar, she got 10% for that and again using the VA's combined rating table she now added up to 66% and

- that was rounded up to the 70% pay level. Not only does she get more money but now her property taxes in Illinois will be waived entirely.
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. She was borne out of wedlock during the Korean War and didn't even know who her natural father was until her mother died and she was going through some family papers. All she had was a name, no date of birth or date of death. Luckily it was an unusual last name. We located four vets with that name but only one of those served during the Korean War. We located his records in a National Archives, had them transferred to Chicago and got the necessary discharge paper. The daughter is now a member of our Auxiliary. She was also very happy to learn that her father received a Bronze Star and Purple Heart awards for his service.
 5. Finally a veteran had his case on appeal for over three years. He was being denied benefits for a back injury which occurred while in the Michigan National Guard during summer camp. Although his leg injury happened during that time and he was granted benefits for the leg, he couldn't locate proof of the back injury. We guided him to local papers in the area of his old National Guard unit. He ran several classified ads seeking any veteran who was in his unit during that summer camp. Several responded who remembered both him and his complaints of his back pain. Affidavits were obtained, submitted to the Board of Veterans Appeals and he won!

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.