

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 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 2018 I want to highlight some of the more interesting and successful claims or situations we handled.

1. A veteran wanted to file a claim for bladder cancer due to Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam. He did two tours there while in the Army and was sure it was linked to that chemical. But the current Veterans Administration laws don't list that type of cancer so the claim would be denied. Luckily I talked with him further and discovered he was TDY to Camp Lejeune for a sixty day class on a new grenade launcher. Bladder cancer is on the list of conditions there due to the bad drinking water. We got him benefits.
2. A vet had a bad case of PTSD and felt that his sleep apnea was either caused by that or made worse. The VA doctor said "no way" and so we appealed it. It was on appeal for over six years and during that time the vet got several private doctors to opine that the PTSD did aggravate his apnea. He finally won at the Board of Veterans Appeals and is awaiting a nice retro check.
3. A 94 year old WWII veteran was rated 90% but couldn't get needed dental care at the VA. Vets have to be either 100% service-connected disabled or getting paid the 100% rate due to Individual Unemployability. He hadn't worked in 30 years and we were able to prove he still couldn't due to his service-connected disabilities. We got him 100% and he got his teeth fixed.
4. A veteran was rated 100% Permanent and Total. Her spouse had some really large bills for his medications. They were not aware of the CHAMPVA program "meds by mail" and now he is getting his meds "free!"
5. A nursing home contacted us. They had three elderly veterans without any relatives or children. On Medicaid they were only allowed \$30 spending money at the home. We applied for Non-Service Connected pension and we tripled their spending money to \$90 a month.
6. A Navy vet was trying to prove her PTSD was from witnessing a fire on board her ship. Three sailors were seriously burnt during that incident. The VA tried to verify that fire and asked the Navy to search the ship's records for August 1981. That drew a blank. We then noticed that the veteran's penmanship wasn't the best and when she wrote on her statement 1987 it looked like 1981. We asked the VA to try again with the correct date. That did it and she got her benefits.
7. And finally, a soldier was playing foosball in the day room in Germany, smashed his finger, it got infected and they had to cut it off. He didn't realize that even though he was on his own time that injury could be considered service-connected. A soldier is on duty 24/7. We got him benefits!

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 have just returned from D.C. where they had their semi-annual Service Officer Training School. Will be talking to them and hope to learn some new things to pass on to you all. And with a New Year in full swing we all are getting a little older so just remember

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