



VBA TODAY

V E T E R A N S B E N E F I T S A D M I N I S T R A T I O N

REMEMBRANCE DAY
2010



December 7, 1941, "A date which will live in infamy." The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor resulted in the deaths of more than 2,400 Americans, with an additional 11,000 wounded. The American Navy sustained a crippling blow with seven ships sunk, four of which were battleships. Other naval ships docked in the harbor sustained massive damage, and 159 aircraft were destroyed.

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day, observed each December 7th, honors those who lost their life on that fateful day, as well as those who acted with courage and valor during the attack, and in its aftermath. This December 7th, join with us as we remember and honor the sacrifices our military made at Pearl Harbor, and on every other battlefield on which they've fought.

O V E R S E A S M I L I T A R Y S E R V I C E S
C O O R D I N A T O R P R O G R A M

VA's mission to provide benefits information to active duty Servicemembers takes VA staff to some interesting locations. Places like Germany, Italy, Japan and the UK. Yes, you read that correctly, VA provides benefits briefings to military personnel stationed overseas through the Overseas Military Services Coordinator (OMSC) Program. Currently there are benefits counselors at three locations in Europe (Germany, Italy and the UK) and three in Japan (Okinawa, Iwakuni and Yokosuka). Coordinators travel extensively within their assigned country, and in some cases find themselves country hopping in support of their mission. Tours lasts between two to four months.

The need to provide Servicemembers with information on VA benefits prior to their release from military service was addressed in Public Law 101-510. As a result, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between VA and DoD was created. It granted VA staff access to DoD facilities for the

purpose of conducting Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and Disability Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) briefings. However, the overseas component of the program did not materialize until 1994, when another Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between VA and DoD was signed, addressing the needs of Ser-



vicemembers overseas.

VA employees serving in this position have their work cut out for them. Those who successfully navigate the application and interview process are provided with the dates and location of their overseas assignment when notified of their selection. Then the work begins – preparing for overseas travel is never an easy task, and it can

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be a rather daunting one for those who have never experienced international travel. Numerous details are attended to prior to leaving; obtaining both an official and tourist passport, making travel arrangements, and researching information such as customs, culture and climate. Preparations conclude with a week of training at VA central office. Some of the topics presented are, a refresher course on VA benefits available to active duty Servicemembers, information on navigating overseas military installations,

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OVERSEAS MILITARY SERVICES COORDINATORS PROGRAM

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briefing techniques, and a general information session titled, "Being an OMSC." By the end of the week, each counselor is ready for a career adventure most people only dream of.

Upon arriving at their temporary duty site, the OMSC's first order of business is to familiarize themselves with their office and the schedule left for them by the outgoing OMSC. They, in turn, will prepare the schedule for the OMSC who follows them. The briefing schedule lists the date, time and location of each TAP/DTAP briefing, and will play a large part in shaping the course of their stay. Once they set their regular office hours they are off and running.

Perhaps the most important traits for an OMSC to possess are flexibility and adaptability. They are the keys to surviving any overseas tour, and this is no exception. This is not an 8:00 to 5:00 job, and working weekends is not uncommon. Although each counselor has an office at their home base, travel is frequent. For instance, an assignment in Italy finds a home base in Aviano, but travel to Naples, Sigonella, Vicenza, Portugal and Spain are also in the mix. Likewise, a UK assignment has six bases in country, but also an addi-

tional one in Bahrain. Therefore, while their bags may be unpacked for a while, they never get too comfortable. They are constantly on the go.

The ability to adapt easily to changing



environments is also helpful when navigating military culture and communities. Those who have previously served in the armed forces adapt easily, but someone who has not spent much time interacting with the military may find it more difficult. Before long, though, even the greenest of OMSCs navigates the system with

little difficulty.

Those who have served as OMSCs will tell you the pace is hectic, travel constant and changing plans at a moments notice is par for the course. In spite of all that, most OMSCs would jump at the chance to do it again. When asked why, the resounding answer is, the opportunity to serve Servicemembers and Veterans. Although every employee in VBA serves Veterans and Servicemembers, the majority do so without interacting with Veterans directly. Being able to do so on a daily basis is extremely rewarding, so much so, that some OMSCs have served more than one tour.

The ability to provide active duty Ser-

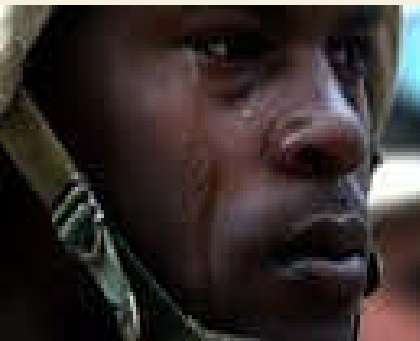
vicemembers the benefits information they need, regardless of their duty station, is a critical piece of VBA's outreach program. Overseas Military Services Coordinators fulfill this vital role with the care and compassion our Servicemembers and Veterans deserve, and with a dedication to duty that is only found in those who truly believe in their mission.



Wishing those who are away from their families, the happiest of holidays and a very safe and prosperous New Year!

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER PTSD

The recent conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan have drawn attention to the prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the need for effective treatment, and a need for increased awareness within both the military community and the public at large. VBA is helping to meet this challenge. The claims process is being streamlined by removing the need to provide corroborating evidence in support of a claim for PTSD under certain conditions. First, the claimed stressor must be consistent with the places, types and circumstances of the Veteran's service. This simplifies the process for those Veterans who did not serve in combat units, but whose support units witnessed actions similar to those of combat units, a common occurrence in today's conflicts. Second, a VA or VA contracted psychiatrist or psychologist confirms the claimed stressor supports a diagnosis of PTSD as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,



fourth edition (DSM IV).

The changes adopted by VBA regarding evidence required in support a PTSD claims should shorten the claims process, providing needed benefits to Veterans more quickly. But, remember, even while a claim is pending, those suffering with PTSD have

other avenues of support available to them.



Local Vet Centers are an invaluable resource for both Veterans and their families. They offer a wide variety of counseling services, as well as a safe, inviting atmosphere where Veterans can connect with each other. Many of the staff working in local Vet Centers are Veterans themselves, over half of which are combat veterans. Veterans who served in combat are eligible for their services; service connection for PTSD is not a requirement. For more information about Vet Centers visit <http://www.vetcenter.va.gov>.

Veterans who served in a combat zone receive five years of free medical care after their release or discharge for any condition related to their combat service. All the Veteran needs to do is enroll in VA's health care system. Visit <http://www.va.gov> for more information.

While it is important that those suffering from PTSD get the help they need from mental health professionals, it's also helpful for their friends and family to learn about the condition as well. John Keeley, a readjustment counselor at the Reno Vet Center, notes that the Yellow Ribbon program has been helping to educate families on what their returning veteran may be experiencing and how they may act in cer-

tain social situations. Raising awareness in this manner is especially helpful during this time of year. The holiday season typically brings with it family gatherings and other social activities, so understanding that your loved one may not want to participate, or feels uncomfortable in social gatherings goes a long way in diffusing a potentially stressful situation.

Effectively treating



PTSD requires help from mental health professionals, but the support and understanding of friends and family is also crucial. Not all wounds are visible, but with proper treatment and support, all wounds can be healed.

RESOURCES

<http://www.PTSD.va.gov>

E-mail ncptsd@va.gov

PTSD Info Line
1-802-296-6300

Combat Call Center
1-877-927-8387 (WAR-VETS)

Suicide Prevention Hotline
1-800-273-8255

Lest We Forget

“Lest We Forget” is a fitting theme for the St. Louis VA Regional Office’s 2010 Veterans Day Ceremony, that was held on Wednesday, November 10th. The stage was set with an ex-

and history with the younger generation.

Several years ago the St. Louis VARO began a partnership with a local elementary

This year the entire 5th grade choir performed a patriotic concert and presented over 300 handmade medals as gifts for our Veteran employees. Assistant Principal Kevin Helton of Oakbrook Elementary School stated, “VA has made studying America history real and alive for our students. Oakbrook students consider visiting the VA as one of the highlights of their 5th grade school year”.



Dave Unterwagner, Director, St. Louis Regional Office, and students from Oakbrook Elementary

This year, David Unterwagner, our Director, reminded St. Louis VARO employees and guests that “Veterans Day is all about remembering and honoring those who defended and those who now defend our democracy, our freedom and our very way of life.” The words of President Calvin Coolidge continue to ring true “The nation which forgets its defenders will itself be forgotten.”

hilarating rendition of our National Anthem, sung by a proud Navy Veteran, who continues to serve as an Education Claims Examiner. Five VARO Veteran employees, representing each branch of the military, shared their personal military experiences and their response to “Why I am Proud to Have Served.” A choir of nearly one hundred 5th grade students performed a patriotic tribute, ending with a song entitled “We’ll Never Forget Our Veterans.”

school and encouraged the students to celebrate American history through the eyes of a Veteran. The first time they participated in our annual Veterans Day celebration only about 20 students along with their teacher came and sang a few patriotic songs.

In keeping with Secretary Shinseki’s request to “celebrate the lives and legacy of America’s 23 million living Veterans”, the St. Louis VARO did indeed take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank our Veterans for their service and share veterans’ stories



VA Employee, Ray Cole, being “pinned” with a homemade medal.

Educational & Vocational Counseling: What We Can Do For You

When you're getting out of the military, you have a lot of things on your mind: job issues, family matters, school issues perhaps, maybe also setting up house in a new place.

In addition to helping you go to school or buy a house, or perhaps paying you disability compensation and treating you for medical problems, there's one other thing we can do for you right now.



We can help with educational and vocational counseling. This is a very thorough service, worth real money if you were charged for it.

You may already be quite certain what you're going to do for the next few years. Even so, it could help to sit down with a professional and map things out. Especially given the present economy and the scary job market. Our staff specializes in understanding careers and career outlooks. They study the labor market.



What We Do.

Here's how we'd proceed:

- ◆ Get you talking about your history and background.
- ◆ Explore your patterns of abilities and skills and interests with the help of aptitude, ability, temperament and interest tests. You'd get a professional interpretation of the results. In other words, we try to learn who you are.
- ◆ Work with you to settle on an educational or vocational goal for yourself.
- ◆ Help you to make realistic plans, to design your own roadmap for education and/or employment, taking into account any special needs you may have.
- ◆ Help you pick an educational or training facility—or plan out a job campaign.

Eligibility. You qualify if you meet any one of the following three criteria:

- ◆ You're a transitioning servicemember: (a) within 6 months of getting separated from active duty, or (b) within one year **following** separation from active duty.
- ◆ You're currently using educational assistance un-

der any one of the GI Bills (dependents using VA education benefits qualify too).
◆ You're currently eligible for educational assistance under one of the GI Bills. (<http://www.gibill.va.gov>.)

Your Discharge.

One more thing. To qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill or the Montgomery GI Bill you need an "Honorable" discharge.

But for the educational and vocational counseling within one year following separation, you can qualify with a discharge "under honorable conditions." You might even qualify with a discharge that reads "other than honorable." (In such cases, we make our own independent decision.)

Remember; however, to receive the counseling through this "transitioning servicemember" path, you have to apply within a year of getting out.

Lots of smart people get ahead of themselves by preparing for careers that aren't in demand, that lead to jobs they don't like, or that can't be pursued in the place they want to live. We offer a chance to avoid those pitfalls. And maybe even learn a thing or two about yourself.



**SAN DIEGO VETERAN'S DAY PARADE
HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED**

VA Regional Office, San Diego participated in the 24th Annual San Diego Veterans Day Parade. The event was a celebration honoring America's Veterans for their patriotism, love of country, and their willingness to serve and sacrifice for the common good.



Director Lily Fetzer and over 70 VA Regional Office employees volunteered and marched in the Veterans Day Parade. The 2010 parade theme was "Cold War Veterans". VA employees handed out flags and candy along the parade route.



Social Media and the VA Unveiling VA's Blog

Engaging – not the first word that comes to mind for most Veterans when thinking about VA. But VA's new blog, VAntage Point, hopes to change that. Launched on November 8, 2010, the blog is VA's newest social media tool.

An excerpt from the blog leaves no doubt about its mission, "For too many Veterans (and families), communicating with VA can be such a hassle that it affects the Department's ability to carry out its mission of providing benefits and services to America's former Servicemembers. If Veterans and VA are talking past each other—or not talking to each other at all, then two things happen: Vets don't know what they're entitled to or how to get it, and VA doesn't know what needs Veterans have." The blog creates a forum in which a dialogue with Veterans and their families can take place.

There's no doubt that VA has important benefits information to convey to the Veteran community, but Veterans also have important information about how those benefits are being received that needs to be shared with VA. Now, thanks to Brandon Friedman, Alex Horton and Lauren Bailey, Veterans have a means for doing so.

The blog is a unique blend of posts from VA insiders, like Brandon, Alex and Lauren, as well as guest blogs from other VA employees and Veterans. Posting guidelines do ex-

ist, however; they are designed to ensure that posts are well thought out, similar to what you would expect from a letter to the editor. Pieces critical of VA are not excluded, and anyone can comment, engaging both VA and other Veterans in an ongoing dialogue.

The Department's social media team has already made great strides in opening a conversation with Veterans through VA's Facebook page, and they are now looking to step up the interaction on VAntage Point.

The blog can be accessed from the main VA

Internet page, or at www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage.

You Can Find Us online at:



[Facebook](#)



[Twitter](#)



[YouTube](#)



[Flickr](#)

OR Connect With Us On:

<http://www.vba.va.gov/VBA/>



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VETERANS
BENEFITS
ADMINISTRATION