



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

VETERANS DAY 2010



Armistice Day

November 11, 1919, was first proclaimed by President Woodrow Wilson. In his proclamation he said, "To us in America, the reflections of Armistice Day will be filled with solemn pride in the heroism of those who died in the country's service and with gratitude for the victory, both because of the thing from which it has freed us and because of the opportunity it has given America to show her sympathy with peace and justice in the councils of the nations."

On May 13, 1938 Congress passed an Act that made November 11 of each year a legal holiday, to be known as "Armistice Day." Later, on June 1, 1954 Congress amended the Act, changing "Armistice" with "Veterans."

HONORING NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS

Each November during American Indian and Alaskan Native Heritage Month we recognize and celebrate the contributions of native cultures. American Indians played a critical role in the development of our country, and have served in the U.S. Military for over 200 years. In fact, American Indians have the highest rate of service per capita of any group.

Their service in the U.S. Military began with the Revolutionary War, and American Indians and Alaskan Natives have served in every armed conflict since then. However, it has only been recently that the public has become aware of the contributions American Indians and Alaskan Natives have made in service to their country, and the public's knowledge is still very limited at best.

The Navajo Code Talkers of WWII are probably the most well known group of American Indians to have served in the military. Their contribution to the war effort was invaluable. By providing American forces with a code the enemy could not break, they saved both American lives

and critical operations in the Pacific theater. However, this was not the first time an American Indian language was used as code. During WWI, and again in Europe during WWII, Choctaw code talkers assisted in securing military operations. During WWI, in addition to relaying critical information over field telephones in Choctaw, the written language was used to send encoded field orders. During WWII Choctaw code talkers were used



as radio operators.

A less well-known military unit that played a critical role in our nation's defense is the Alaska Territorial Guard (ATG). Established in 1942, and sometimes referred to as Eskimo Scouts, the ATG was our first line of defense for the Alaskan coastline. A voluntary unit, the 6,368 members served without pay, it was later disbanded in 1947. In rural

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Agent Orange Update	2
Fully Developed Claims	3
A Veteran's Journey Through Breast Cancer	4
National Guard Transition Assistance	5
Gulf War & Afghanistan Presumptive Illnesses	6

areas members ranged in age from as young as 12 to as old as 80 years of age; the unit also included at least 27 women volunteers. Their missions included securing the terrain around the Lend-Lease air route between the U.S. and Russia, safeguarding the only source of strategic platinum in the Western Hemisphere, and placing and maintaining survival caches along transportation corridors. Members of the ATG were finally recognized for their service to the nation in 2000, when a law was passed granting them US Veteran status.

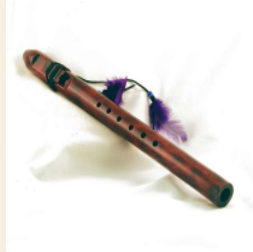
(Continued on page 2)

NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS

(Continued from page 1)

American Indians and Alaskan Natives have made vital contributions in defense of our country. They count among their ranks 17 Medal of Honor recipients. They have contributed not only their individual service, but also their languages, culture and customs to securing our nation's freedom. It is with a deep debt of gratitude that we acknowledge their ser-

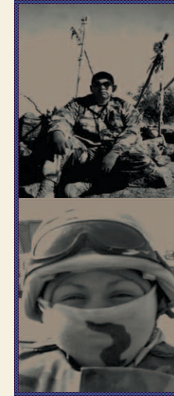
vice to country and the importance of their cultural heritage.



Albuquerque, New Mexico will be hosting the

67th annual National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) this November. NCAI is the leading organization for securing and protecting the rights of American Indians, Alaskan Natives and their descendents. Staff from both the Albuquerque Regional Office (RO) and the New Mexico VA Health System will be at the conference providing information on VA benefits

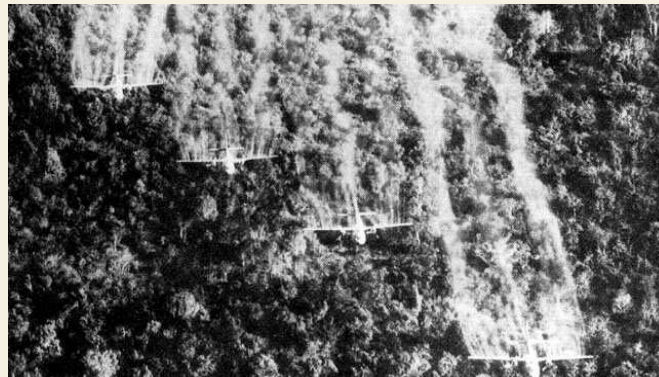
and programs to conference attendees.



"To care for him who has borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan..."

Abraham Lincoln
March 4, 1865

AGENT ORANGE UPDATE



claim for any of the above conditions, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) has already identified claims requiring re-adjudication and reprocessing is underway. Veterans who served in RVN, have been diagnosed with IHD, PD or HCL, and have not previously submitted a claim for their condition, should submit an original claim for service connection to their local VA Regional Office. For further information regarding the new rule, visit <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/>

Agent Orange Help Line

1-800-749-8387

GW/AOHelpline@VBA.VA.gov

The wait is over. The final rule adding presumptive service connection for ischemic heart disease (IHD), Parkinson's Disease (PD) and B Cell Leukemias, such as hair cell leukemia (HCL), took effect on October 30, 2010. This new rule affects Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) anytime during the period beginning January 9, 1962 through May 7, 1975, as well as veterans who served in specific military

units stationed at or near the Korean DMZ during the timeframe of April 1968 through July 1969.

Previously denied claims for any of the above conditions filed by *Nehmer v Department of Veteran Affairs (Nehmer)* class members must be reprocessed by VA as required by court order, and retroactive benefits provided to affected Veterans and their survivors. More important, claimants covered by *Nehmer* need not submit a new



FULLY DEVELOPED CLAIMS

Processing benefits claims faster and more efficiently is VBA's goal. A number of programs have been tested in the field in an effort to ascertain the most efficient means of processing claims. One of the more promising pilots was the Fully Developed Claim (FDC) pilot, and it has since been adopted at each of the 57 regional offices across the country.

The Fully Developed Claims pilot was established in December 2008 in response to the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008, although its roots go back to the Veterans' Claims Adjudication Commission (VCAC) of 1996. The purpose of the recent pilot was to determine if claims needing only a VA exam (VAE), or additional federal records as evidence could be moved through the claims process more quickly. Ten regional offices (RO) were chosen to participate in the FDC pilot, with a target of 90-days for completion of each claim. Claims eligible for inclusion in this program are rating-related claims for live compensation. The pilot concluded in December 2009, and the results of the pilot led to the expansion of the program to all ROs.

Both Veteran Service Officers (VSO) and Veteran Services Representatives (VSR) received training during the initial phase of the pilot. The training was designed to not only explain the requirements of the program and ensure the proper certification for each claim was received, but also as a means of advertising the availability of the program and the potential reward of a quicker deci-

sion. In order to get a true picture of processing times, expedited processing for VAEs or federal records searches was not requested.

The results of the study showed that while processing time was reduced by 64 days for claims in the FDC pilot, those claims only represented 1.1 percent of the claims inventory. Because of the small percentage of claims involved in the study, the results cannot be applied to the entire claims inventory. The study also concluded that the pilot stations that worked closely with their VSO, promoting the program and the benefits to both the Veteran and the VSO, showed the most improvement in timeliness for FDC claims. Encouraged by the results VBA chose to expand the program to all ROs, and in June 2010, the FDC program was rolled out to all regional offices, with a few minor changes.

The most apparent change in the FDC process is documentation. The 21-526EZ for disability and the 21-527EZ for pension were created to assist veterans in completing their claim. The new forms are noticeably shorter and include the certification statement required for inclusion in the FDC program. The certification states that the Veteran has no other evidence to submit in support of his or her claim. In the event additional evidence is submitted, the claim is removed from the pilot and is processed as a "regular" claim.

The more significant change to the program is the addition of allowing informal claims to be established, while the Veteran gathers the evidence needed to

submit a fully developed claim. The advantage to the Veteran is it allows time to gather the necessary documentation for the claim and preserves the effective date. The Veteran has one year from the date of the informal claim to submit his or her claim with the required evidence to qualify for the FDC program. The advantage to VBA is twofold. First, and most obvious, it does not count toward timeliness until the formal claim is submitted. Second, it eliminates some of the congestion in processing areas, allowing claims processors to focus on those claims that require additional assistance from VA in developing the claim.

Although it's still too early to predict the impact the Fully Developed Claims program will have on the claims inventory, it has shown some promising results. Equally important to processing claims more quickly is including the Veteran in the claims process. Making the claims process inclusive will more likely generate a positive experience, ultimately resulting in a partnership between VBA and the Veterans we serve.



A Veteran's Journey Through Breast Cancer



Fredda Bryan retired from the Navy in 2010, but you won't find her at home, and you won't find her taking it easy on a long relaxing, and well-deserved vacation. She's much too busy to for that. Having survived breast cancer twice, Fredda Bryan is a woman with a mission, and enough vitality and energy to put the Energizer bunny to shame.

Ms Bryan is a veteran of the Navy, retiring after 22 years of active duty as an air traffic controller. She is proud of the fact that she is the first Black woman to reach the rank of Senior Chief Petty Officer as a naval air traffic controller. And, although Fredda would have preferred to remain in the Navy and continue her career, she is too focused on her current mission of raising awareness about cancer in general, and breast cancer specifically, to waste time thinking about what could have been. Her current mission grew out

of her own experience as a breast cancer survivor.

Fredda's first diagnosis of breast cancer came in 2002, after returning from a six-month deployment. She found a lump in her breast while doing a self-breast exam, something she learned as a part of her naval training. "The training I received in the Navy saved my life," she said, "before joining the Navy I didn't know about self-exams."

"I'm not a breast cancer survivor, I'm a breast cancer thriver."

Following her diagnosis Fredda was not only concerned about her health, she had never known anyone who had survived cancer; she was also worried about her career. She was relieved to discover that she could remain on active duty during her treatment.

While receiving treatment at Naval Medical Center Portsmouth in 2002, she became involved in helping spread the word about breast

cancer awareness by attending medical fairs as a volunteer. "At first I wore my uniform, because I wanted women to know they could remain on active duty while receiving treatment for breast cancer, but the younger enlisted women wouldn't approach me, they were probably intimidated by my being a senior enlisted person." So, Fredda began wearing the more approachable jeans and pink tee shirt to the events. The change in wardrobe worked, and Fredda was able to share her story with other women in the military, but most important, she was there to support them. Fredda explained, "I really enjoy helping military women in their journey through breast cancer," noting the whole purpose of living is to positively affect the life of every person you come in contact with.

Fredda's second diagnosis ultimately led to her retirement from the Navy, but her retirement has led her down a new path. "I'm not a breast cancer survivor, but a breast cancer thriver," she says. Her volunteer work resulted in obtaining the position as the African American Men's Health Initiative Coordinator with the American Cancer Society, South Atlantic Division.

She is active in the National Association of Black Military Women, conducts peer reviews on Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs (CDMRP), and still volunteers to raise awareness about breast cancer. She especially enjoys interacting with women veterans, as well as women still on active duty. She recently spoke at the Hampton VA Medical Center for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Fredda Bryan is an inspiration to us all. In addition to surviving breast cancer twice, she has had a successful career in the military, has embarked on a second career helping cancer patients and survivors alike, and doing it all with grace and spirit.



NATIONAL GUARD TRANSITION ASSISTANCE ADVISORS: KEY TO A HAPPY HOMECOMING

Returning from deployment is typically a time for celebration, for returning to "normal," for getting on with your life. However, coming home brings stress with it as well. The support provided by the close-knit community National Guardsmen come to rely on during deployment disbands when each member of the unit returns to civilian life. Having a new support system in place is critical to successfully transitioning back into the larger community, and Transition Assistance Advisors (TAA) are there to fill that gap.

Each state and US Territory have a Transition Assistance Advisor to help transitioning Guard members with obtaining the services they may need, as well as the benefits they are entitled to through the VA, Military Health system, and state and local agencies. TAAs receive annual training on VA health care services and benefits from the Department of Veteran Affairs health care and benefits experts. Many of the TAAs are retired senior leaders in the Guard. Their training and experience, combined with the comprehensive network of state and local agencies that the TAAs have developed, place them in the unique position of understanding the needs of returning Guardsmen and their families, providing strategies to effectively access agencies to help meet those homecoming needs.

But, it hasn't always been this way. The need for augmenting services provided to National Guard members returning from deployment was first identified in 2004 as the number of Guard and

Reserve units returning from multiple deployments increased. National Guard leadership suggested having a VA employee assigned to the Adjutant General's office in each of the 50 states, as well as each U.S. Territory. Although VA agreed the need existed, the agency could not support the initiative without additional resources.

Talks continued to find a viable solution for this pressing problem and in 2005 a deal was struck. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the National Guard, Veterans Hospital Administration (VHA) and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), pledging to support the

t r a n - s i - t i o n
[t r a n - z i s h - u h n]
m o v e m e n t ,
p a s s a g e , o r
c h a n g e f r o m
o n e p o s i -
t i o n , s t a t e ,
s t a g e , s u b -
j e c t , c o n -
c e p t , e t c . ,
t o a n o t h e r ;
c h a n g e

State Benefits Advisors (SBA) hired by the National Guard to provide transition assistance to Guard members and link with VA for collaborative efforts and develop state coalitions. Their mission was threefold. First, assist individuals returning from deployment with their transition back into the civilian community by educating them on the benefits available to them from the VA, DoD and

state and local agencies. They also assist with troubleshooting problems an individual might have in navigating each system. Second, develop state coalitions to bring the leadership together in a powerful force under the Governor to address homecoming needs and community services. Third, to serve as an advisor to National Guard leadership, identifying systemic problems with the demobilization process, and assisting in addressing those issues.

State Benefits Advisors eventually adopted the title of Transition Assistance Advisor, as that title more appropriately defined their role. TAAs work closely with staff from VBA, VHA and the State Director of Veteran Affairs. Their knowledge of the agencies, and the professional relationships they have cultivated, enable them to provide personal linkages to Points of Contact at federal and state agencies and resolve individual issues successfully in a reasonable timeframe. TAAs are the key to the National Guard's transition program and an invaluable resource in small communities. They play a vital role in assisting Guardsmen as well as other Reservists and families in successfully returning to civilian life. For more information on the TAA program, or to contact the TAA in your state, visit <http://www.taapmo.com/>.



Presumptive Illnesses for Veterans Who Served in Southwest Asia and Afghanistan

The final regulation that added nine infectious diseases to the list of presumptions for service connection associated with service in Southwest Asia and Afghanistan was published in the *Federal Register* on September 28, 2010. The list of illnesses includes Brucellosis, Campylobacter jejuni, Coxiella Burnetii (Q fever), Malaria, Mycobacterium tuberculosis, Nontyphoid Salmonella, Shigella, Visceral leishmaniasis and West Nile virus.



Veterans who served in Southwest Asia or Afghanistan and previously submitted claims for any of the illnesses now covered by the new rule, and was denied service connection, should resubmit their claim. VA began processing claims under the new rule on September 29, 2010.

You Can Find Us online at:

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

OR Connect With Us On:



[Facebook](#)



[Twitter](#)



[YouTube](#)



[Flickr](#)

The Marine Corps celebrates its 235th Birthday this November 10th. Happy Birthday USMC!



Important Toll Free Numbers:

VA Benefits 1-800-827-1000

Education 1-888-442-4551

Health Care 1-877-222-8387

Insurance 1-800-669-8477

Insurance (SGLI/VGLI only)

1-800-419-1473

VA Pension 1-877-294-6380

VBA Today is an official publication of the Veterans Benefits Administration. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent that of the Veterans Benefits Administration

810 Vermont Ave, N.W.
Washington, DC 20420

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