

Some Survivors of Veterans Face Deadline for Restored Benefit

VA Regional Office
New Orleans, LA.
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The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) wants to ensure that surviving spouses of deceased veterans are aware of an approaching deadline that may affect entitlement to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits.

Last year, President Bush signed Public Law 108-183, the "Veterans Benefits Act of 2003," which restores entitlement to DIC and related home loan and education benefits for surviving spouses who remarry on or after their 57th birthdays. VA officials are concerned that surviving spouses may not be aware of this change in law or may overlook this benefit if their subsequent marriages have not ended.

Generally, VA pays DIC to the surviving spouses of military servicemembers who die while on active duty and to surviving spouses of veterans whose death resulted from service-related causes. The basic monthly rate is \$967 and is increased if the surviving spouse has dependents, is housebound, or meets criteria common to those who need a home aide. There are additional payments for dependent children. Parents who were dependent upon the servicemember's income also may qualify for DIC.

Under previous law, surviving spouses who remarried were not eligible for DIC unless their marriages ended. At that time they could apply for reinstatement of benefits.

Under the new law, surviving spouses who remarried after age 57 and before December 16, 2003, have a limited time to apply for restoration of DIC.

They have one year from the date the new law was enacted, which was December 16, 2003, to apply for restoration of benefits. If VA receives the application later than December 15, 2004, restoration of DIC must be denied.

The one-year application period does not apply to other surviving spouses whose remarriage on or after attaining age 57 followed enactment of the law.

For more information on restoration of DIC, call VA's toll free number at 1-800-827-1000 or visit the nearest VA regional office. Office locations can be found in the blue pages of local telephone directories. People who are hearing impaired should call VA at 1-800-829-4833 by use of a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD).

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LA VA News

VA Broadens Benefits for Partial Loss of Breast

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is broadening its coverage of special monthly compensation for women who suffer loss of breast tissue related to their military service.

The new regulation replaces a policy that limited the special compensation to women veterans losing one or both breasts. The new rule liberalizes the benefit to cover those losing 25 percent or more tissue from a single breast or from both breasts in combination. It includes loss by mastectomy or partial mastectomy, or following radiation treatment. Payments retroactive to January 1, 2003, may be made to eligible women.

Women veterans with service-connected breast tissue loss who are not receiving the special monthly compensation may contact VA to find out if they are eligible under the new provisions. The current special compensation rate of \$82 monthly for breast loss is in addition to the underlying disability compensation for a condition arising or worsening while in the military.

In addition to breast tissue loss, special monthly compensation rates also apply when a veteran loses one or more of the senses of sight, hearing, and speech; experiences loss of a reproductive organ or its use, or suffers severe injuries such as loss of limbs.

Base rates of disability payments before special monthly compensation generally range from \$106 to \$2,239 per month for a single veteran depending on the degree of disability.

The breast benefit provision was included in the Veterans Benefits Act of 2002. In enacting the provisions, President Bush and Congress recognized the physical, emotional, and financial challenges women face as they return to health and acknowledged their need for increased medical attention.

The rule is the latest in a series of changes that have improved VA's services to women veterans, including changes to make it easier for women to establish service-connection for gynecological and breast disorders and to provide more consistent evaluations.

VGLI, Anywhere, Anytime...

Veterans will now be able to access their Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VGLI) accounts at any time of the day or night from any computer or telephone.

Today's veterans are technologically savvy, and VA's Life Insurance program is constantly looking for better ways to meet their needs. New features will be added to both our online account and interactive voice response systems on a continuing basis so veterans can manage their policies from anywhere, at any time.

Using a secure Web site, the VGLI Online Account Access system allows veterans to obtain basic information on their account through the insurance Web site at www.insurance.va.gov. Veterans will be able to view their current amount of coverage, premium rate, and billing method, as well as

change their billing address. In the future, veterans will have access to additional online tools allowing them to change their method and frequency of payment.

Also available on VA's insurance Web site is a new life insurance calculator that allows veterans to calculate a recommended amount of life insurance based on their financial information. The veteran enters financial information directly into the Web site including financial obligations, net additional income needed by survivors, and current assets. By subtracting total assets from total financial obligations and net income needed, the calculator arrives at the amount of life insurance recommended. Users' privacy will be protected by the latest cybersecurity measures.

Veterans can also access their account information through a new VGLI interactive voice response system that allows veterans to obtain account information through the telephone.

Veterans can call VA at 1-800-419-1473 any time, day or night, by using their telephone keypad and can hear recorded information on their accounts. They can also request certain changes to their VGLI accounts, such as billing frequency and payment method, as well as order certain forms via mail or fax.

The latest issue of the "Vet Center Voice," the employee publication for VA's 206 Vet Centers administered by the Readjustment Counseling Service (Vol. 25, No. 2), features articles about U.S. military operations in southwest Asia by two VA employees who completed tours of duty there as Army Reservists.



Have You Heard?

Captain Hugh Reusser, recently returned from duty in Iraq with the 113th Medical Company. He is the Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program Coordinator at the Fort Wayne, Indiana, VAMC. In "Tips From an In-country Soldier," he offers veteran counselors advice on treating Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans when they return home. Vista, California, Vet Center counselor Joe Costello is a staff sergeant in the 301st Psychological Operations Company (Airborne). In his article, "Afghanistan Veteran Returns," he recounts his nine-month tour in Afghanistan seeking out Taliban rebels and working to befriend and support Afghan villagers.

Both articles offer insight into the experiences of Operation Iraqi and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans. Both articles address the issues they are dealing with even after they return home. See Vet Center Voice on the Web at <http://voice.i29.net>.

The Story of a British GI War Bride

By Molly Bounds
widow of
Sergeant Guy Bounds, Army



Spotlight

The first time I ever saw him he was leaning against a wall.
He was tall and tanned; blue eyed, fair hair, in fact he had it all.
He did not even know that I was watching him.
A GI soldier, far from home, so handsome, tall and trim.

As I looked out that window and watched him from above,
I did not know he would become the man that I would love.
Later on that evening I saw him once again,
I was getting out my bicycle to ride off down the lane.
He was standing and talking there with Lord Sherbornes
old chauffeur. He saw me and laughing said, "Is she your
mechanic Sir?"

The next day was Monday and as I went home from school,
I heard a soft voice calling "Hey there little girl, do you
like candy?", then he said "They give us some each week,
I always give my candy away as I don't care for sweets".
I thanked him very much and then went on my way
My pockets full of chocolate bars, it was my lucky day.

Tuesday riding my bike from school as fast as I could go,
I took a short cut through a passage where I should have gone slow.
All at once there he was coming through that hall,
I tried to swerve to miss him and almost hit the wall.
I told him I was sorry as he helped me off the floor,
He laughed and said, "You should toot your horn before riding
through that door."

He had his mess kit in his hand, to supper he was bound
Before I ran in to him and nearly knocked him down.
We stood there and talked a while, the evening soon was gone,
the sky got dark, the moon came up, but we talked on and on.

After that each night we met so glad to see each other.
The war dragged on unnoticed as we had one another.
He told me that he loved me and asked me to be his wife,
To go with him to America and live there all my life.

My eighteenth birthday soon arrived, then he gave me two rings,
one with diamonds, one a plain gold band and promised many
things. That he would care for me forever, never would he leave
my side. (He kept his promise, was always there up until the day
he died.)

Our happiness did not last long, he had to go away,
To fight on a beach in Normandy in the battle called D- Day.
The war went on and on and on, the battles fought were fierce.
He was in Belgium deep in snow the day that I gave birth to our
baby girl so very small I thought she might not survive, but two
weeks later I brought her home very much alive.

The war in Europe was won at last then he came back once more,
with a happy heart and open arms, I met him at the door. A few
weeks leave then off again, this time to the
U. S. A., to his job in the Texas oil fields so very far away. A
few months later we followed him, I could not wait to see my
dearest love, my ex-GI, who meant the world to me.

We had a happy little home, sure sometimes there were tears, but I
wish that I could live again all those happy years. Two more
babies came along to make our lives complete. Everyday I loved
him more life for us was sweet.

Then God took him away from me many years ago,
I thought that I would die as well because I loved him so.
Now more than sixty years have gone since that day he caught
my eye. And I am still in love with him

My American GI.

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

VA Regional Office, New Orleans
701 Loyola Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70113
1-800-827-1000
Interview Lobby Hours of Operation
7:30 am to 4:30 pm

Readjustment Counseling Services
(Vet Center)
2200 Veterans Boulevard, Suite 114
Kenner, LA 70065
(504) 464-4743

Regional Processing Office
(Education Claims)
PO Box 8888
Muskogee, OK 74402-8888
1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30
self-verification **1-877-823-2378**

Veterans Health Administration
Toll-Free Hotline *(Medical Care)*
1-877-222-8387

VA EFT Information Hotline
(Electronic Funds Transfer - direct deposit)
1-877-838-2778

Gulf War / Agent Orange Helpline
1-800-749-8387

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia
(VA Insurance)
PO Box 42954
Philadelphia, PA 19101
1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center
(CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care)
1-800-733-8387

CHAMPVA Inquiries:
PO Box 65023
Denver, CO 80206-5023

CHAMPVA Claims:
PO Box 65024
Denver, CO 80206-5024

Spina Bifida Inquiries and Claims:
PO Box 65025
Denver, CO 80206-5025

Foreign Medical Program Office
(Medical Treatment Abroad)
PO Box 65021
Denver, Co 80206-5021
(303) 331-7590

National Cemetery Administration
Office of Memorial Programs
(Headstones and Markers)
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420
1-800-697-6947

National Cemeteries

Baton Rouge
220 N. 19th Street
Baton Rouge, LA 70806
(225) 654-3767

Alexandria
209 E. Shamrock Street
Alexandria, LA 71360
(601) 445-4981

Port Hudson
20978 Port Hickey Road
Zachary, LA 70791
(225) 654-3767

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center
(Certificates of Eligibility)
PO Box 240097
Los Angeles, CA 90024
1-888-487-1970

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit
Chicago VA Regional Office
1-800-829-4833

Internet Sites of Interest

- > VA Web Site: <http://www.va.gov>
- > Loan Guaranty Property Management: <http://mirage.towerauction.net>
- > Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center: <http://www.vahomes.org/la/home.htm>
- > VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS):
<http://www.vba-arms.intecwash.navy.mil>
- > Gold Star Mothers of America: <http://www.goldstarmoms.com>
- > Sons & Daughters In Touch (Memorial): <http://www.sdit.org>
- > Vietnam Veterans Memorial: <http://www.nps.gov/vive>
- > The Moving Wall (Memorial): <http://www.virtualwall.org>

