

Another Salute to Our Veterans

By

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When service members take the oath to serve our country they are signing to give their lives to the military and follow the direction of the political leadership without question. Since Operation Desert Storm much attention has been given to the federal administration established in 1930 to assist and care for our veterans and now known as the [U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#) or more simply put the VA. The recent publicity on long wait lines and veterans literally dying while waiting for care has brought to the forefront the need of improvements in the massive system. The first step should be the contacting of those many veterans who don't know they have benefits or have given up trying to navigate the requirement process for what should have been a simple request for assistance.

The VA has three administrative departments, the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA), the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA). When veterans look for health care or want to file for a disability they need to understand that within the VHA alone there are three different departments which encompass [compensation](#), [health care](#) and [pensions](#). These departments do not communicate unless the veteran supplies the permissions with the proper forms. Most veterans or care givers don't realize these departments are separate and this leads to much confusion in the filing process.

The term veteran applies to all who have served in the military and earned the care and support of the administration, though the provided care is not equal. The levels of care have eight categories depending on when, where the vet served, and the sickness or injuries received. These benefits are the promise of service whether in the combat theater or serving during the combat era.

After 40 years of Army aviation service and not wanting to take off the uniform, being asked to lend assistance to our local veteran organizations became a 'continuation of service' for this proud veteran. When asked to write an article describing my efforts to assist our local area veterans, my first thought was, "An article—I could write a book on the subject after just two years." Becoming a Veteran Service Officer accredited by the Department of Veterans Affairs has become a challenge much greater than flying helicopters in combat. Getting shot at and returning fire was an easy task. Diving into a "pool of political quick sand" has become a more daunting task. The more I have learned the more I realize I don't know. Just take a look at the U. S. Code, [Title 38](#) and you will see what must be digested and acted upon by the veterans advocate for the needy veteran and family.

When called and traveling to the homes of these veterans and finding the families caring for their veteran fathers not knowing of the benefits available such as [Aid and Attendance](#) (A & A) was a shocking experience. A & A is financial assistance provided for hiring trained health care personnel for those families whose veteran falls into a qualifying category as mentioned above.

Several times I was called to assist a family having difficulty dealing with the VHA or not knowing of available benefits and then having the veteran die before a claim is submitted or returned after filing—extremely disheartening. I have found that many older veterans are not

internet connected or too proud to file for health benefits and the family suffers the financial burden of the needed veteran's care.

Then there are the veteran's I have found being treated at VHA facilities suffering from service connected injuries or illnesses and never advised to file a claim for their disabilities. When a veteran dies from a service connected disability the spouse may be eligible for [Dependency and Indemnity Compensation](#) (DIC) if a claim has been first filed for that veteran's disability. The death certificate must relate that the cause of death was the same as the service connected disability of the veteran.

I also have found veterans living alone with only SSI as income and not aware of the financial assistance available from the VHA called a [Pension](#). Last year the Veterans Administration notified the Social Security Administration (SSA) that 22,000 veterans across the country, who were receiving SSI, might be eligible for a pension. The SSA sent threatening letters to the veterans advising them to file with the VA or lose their SSI. My rhetorical question is why did the VHA not notify the veteran and lend assistance to these disabled vets? I was able to assist three of these veterans in our area and appalled at the content of the SSA letters.

The reward for me is seeing the amazement and hardy thanks from the old veteran who didn't know of his eligibility for health care and getting a free 200 mile round trip ride to receive testing and obtaining hearing aids along with his new VHA annual physical. I tell them to not thank me but 'Thank the Lord' for keeping me alive through my combat service tours.

It is the opinion of this writer that there should be no discrimination for the care given any veteran or combat era veteran. For every man or woman in combat there are at least ten supporting personnel making up a team to meet the combat or support mission whether land, sea, or air. It is the team that wins in combat and not just a few heroes that we see get the recognition. The cost of war and contingencies must be realized and added to the defense budget and not to an organization to do DNA research and train medical personnel for other private facilities; or, Congress must pass [HR 3122](#) "The Veterans Administration Legislative and Objective Review Act of 2015."

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