

## **1<sup>ST</sup> DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR APRIL 2025**



**By Richard Strehlow      262-641-0977**

### **VA NEWS & INFORMATION:**

Did you know veterans who performed the secret, often dangerous work of testing nuclear weapons deserve new recognition and may now call themselves “Atomic Veterans,” according to the Defense Department? The department announced the Atomic Veterans Commemorative Service Medal to recognize that “the service and sacrifice of the Atomic Veterans directly contributed to our Nation’s continued freedom and prosperity during the period following World War II.” Veterans qualify for the medallion-only award who served between July 1945 and October 1992. The dates coincide with those of nuclear testing in the U.S.

Did you know the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health and Benefits mobile app enables veterans to send secure messages to health care providers, view upcoming appointments, view claims and appeals status, upload documentation, locate VA facilities, download veteran benefits letters to prove veteran status, and more? Veterans can also login using fingerprint or face ID. VA Health and Benefits app is available via the Apple App Store or Google Play Store

Did you know according to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 13% of the homeless population are veterans? Roughly 40,000 veterans are on the streets in America on any given night, which is actually a considerable improvement over the last decade.

A half a century after serving in Vietnam, thousands of veterans have a new reason to believe they may be dying from a silent killer, a time-bomb of a disease that shows no signs of surrender. Latest test results from multiple studies show some veterans may have been infected by a slow-killing parasite while fighting in the jungles of Southeast Asia.

Scarring, though often overlooked, can significantly impact the quality of life for many veterans. It is crucial to recognize that scarring, whether it results from combat injuries, surgeries, or other incidents, can qualify for compensation under the VA’s disability benefits.

For instance, a veteran with a scar from a gunshot wound may be eligible for compensation if the scar is disfiguring or limits mobility. Similarly, scars resulting from burns or shrapnel injuries are also considered compensable, especially if they lead to chronic pain or emotional distress.

The legacy VA appeals process has changed to the decision review process. If you disagree with a VA benefit or claim decision, you can choose from three decision review options (Supplemental Claim, Higher-Level Review, or Board Appeal) to continue your case. If you are not satisfied with the results of the first option you choose, you can try another eligible option. If you disagree with a VA medical decision, you can request a Clinical Appeal.

Massive cuts in the VA workforce will hurt veterans. It does not take a staffing expert to predict that these wholesale and sudden cuts will adversely affect VA services, delay claims, slow down services, and cause many veterans to lose their jobs. This article is part one of a two-part series encouraging veterans to file for VA service-connected disability compensation and their other hard-earned VA benefits and services before this massive VA layoff.

With this dark cloud hanging over the VA, VA employees, veterans, and VA services — veterans with service-connected disabilities caused by or worsened by military service wounds, injuries, illnesses, traumas, and Hazardous Material (HAZMAT) contamination and exposure injuries should move now to file military service-connected disability compensation claims. Veterans should also notify their Congresspeople and state leaders if they disagree with these massive layoffs and see their services being reduced or delayed.

Do your homework. Veterans should use a VA-accredited Veterans Service Officer (VSO) or a VA-accredited Attorney or Claims Agent to help them prepare, submit, and manage their claims

Did you know statistics from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs show that up to 20% of veterans who served in Iraq operations and 15% of those who served in Vietnam have PTSD every year?

Sinusitis, commonly referred to as a sinus infection, is an inflammation or swelling of the tissue lining the sinuses, which can lead to a range of uncomfortable symptoms such as nasal congestion, facial pain or pressure, headache, and a reduced sense of smell. This condition can be caused by various factors including infections, allergies, or environmental irritants, and it is notably prevalent among veterans who may have been exposed to unique environmental conditions during their service, such as dust, smoke, and other pollutants. For veterans, the impact of sinusitis can extend beyond physical discomfort, potentially affecting their quality of life and ability to engage in daily activities. It is essential for veterans experiencing symptoms of sinusitis to seek appropriate medical advice and support, as early intervention can lead to more effective management of the condition.

Did you know veterans who are enrolled in the

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system may be eligible to receive free hearing aids, glasses or contact lenses? These “sensorineural aids” are provided at no charge to veterans who are determined to need the devices, even if the veteran is not “service-connected” for hearing or vision impairment.

Did you know that a rating percentage is considered "protected" once it is in place for 20 years? There would be no danger of a decreased disability rating after the 20 year mark. Veterans whose ratings have been in place for less than 20 years may be..

Military veterans who say they were sickened by lingering amounts of the herbicide Agent Orange aboard repurposed airplanes after the Vietnam War now have some strong scientific support for their claims. A new study has found that veterans who were exposed to aircraft that had previously sprayed Agent Orange over Vietnam during the war may have been exposed to dioxin levels above Department of Defense (DoD) standards for maximum permissible exposure to poisonous chemicals.

Did you know chronic pain can serve as a basis for Total Disability Individual Unemployability (TDIU)? TDIU is a benefit that compensates veterans at the 100% disability rate if they cannot maintain gainful employment due to their conditions. Chronic pain often causes both physical and mental impairments that impact work capabilities.

Did you know that mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestos can take between 20 to 50 years to start showing symptoms?. The long latency period is also the reason why the number of asbestos caused deaths in the U.S. has been increasing in the past decades. Everyone exposed to asbestos fibers is at risk of getting ill. However, veterans are disproportionately affected. This is well illustrated by medical reports, which show that about one-third of mesothelioma patients are veterans. Mesothelioma is a deadly aggressive cancer that is exclusively caused by asbestos exposure.

Measles is a highly contagious viral infection characterized by symptoms such as a high fever, cough, runny nose, and a distinctive red rash that typically appears several days after the initial symptoms. Unfortunately, measles can lead to serious complications, including pneumonia, encephalitis, and even death.

Anemia is a condition characterized by a deficiency of red blood cells or hemoglobin in the blood, which can lead to reduced oxygen transport throughout the body. This is particularly relevant to veterans, who may experience anemia due to various factors such as chronic health conditions, nutritional deficiencies, or the physical and emotional toll of military service. Anemia can significantly impact both the physical and emotional well-being of veterans, leading to symptoms such as fatigue, weakness, and decreased cognitive function, which can hinder their ability to engage in daily activities and enjoy a quality life. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 3.5 million people in the United States are affected by anemia, highlighting the importance of awareness and education in this area.

For veterans, understanding the implications of anemia and its management is crucial to fostering a supportive community and promoting overall health.



**Remember..... That all gave some, but many gave all!**