



Compensation & Pension Service Bulletin

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Policy (211)

Information on Vietnam Naval Operations

Compensation and Pension (C&P) Service has initiated a program to collect data on Vietnam naval operations for the purpose of providing regional offices with information to assist with development in *Haas* related disability claims based on herbicide exposure from Navy Veterans. To date, we have received verification from various sources showing that a number of offshore "blue water" naval vessels conducted operations on the inland "brown water" rivers and delta areas of Vietnam. We have also identified certain vessel types that operated primarily or exclusively on the inland waterways. The ships and dates of inland waterway service are listed below. If a Veteran's service aboard one of these ships can be confirmed through military records during the time frames specified, then exposure to herbicide agents can be presumed without further development.

All vessels of Inshore Fire Support [IFS] Division 93 during their entire Vietnam tour
USS Carronade (IFS 1)
USS Clarion River (LSMR 409) [Landing Ship,

Medium, Rocket]
USS Francis River (LSMR 525)
USS White River (LSMR 536)

All vessels with the designation LST [Landing Ship, Tank] during their entire tour [WWII ships converted to transport supplies on rivers and serve as barracks for brown water Mobile Riverine Forces]

All vessels with the designation LCVP [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel] during their entire tour

All vessels with the designation PCF [Patrol Craft, Fast] during their entire tour [Also called Swift Boats, operating for enemy interdiction on close coastal waters]

All vessels with the designation PBR [Patrol Boat, River] during their entire tour [Also called River Patrol Boats as part of the Mobile Riverine Forces operating on inland waterways and featured in the Vietnam film "Apocalypse Now"]

USS Ingersoll (DD-652) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, October 24-25, 1965]

USS Mansfield (DD-728) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River August 8-19, 1967 and December 21-24, 1968]

USS Richard E. Kraus (DD-849) [Destroyer] [Operated on coastal inlet north of Da Nang, June 2-5, 1966, protecting Marines holding a bridge]

USS Basilone (DD-824) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, May 24-25, 1966]

USS Hamner (DD-718) [Destroyer] [Operated on Song Lon Tao and Long Song Tao Rivers, August 15-September 1, 1966]

USS Conway (DD-507) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, early August 1966]

USS Fiske (DD-842) [Destroyer] [Operated on Mekong River, June 16-21, 1966]

USS Black (DD-666) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, July 13-19, 1966]

USS Providence (CLG-6) [Cruiser, Light, Guided Missile] [Operated on Saigon River 3 days during January 1964]

USS Mahan (DLG-11) [Guided Missile Frigate] [Operated on Saigon River October 24-28, 1964]

USS Okanogan (APA-220) [Attack Transport] [Operated on Saigon River July 22-23, 29-30, 1968 and August 5-6, 1968]

USS Niagara Falls (AFS-3) [Combat Stores Ship] [Unloaded supplies on Saigon River and Cam Rahn Bay, April 22-25, 1968]

Procedures (212)

BDN Automated CRSC/CRDP Payments Discontinued

A recent review revealed that the automated Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) and Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) payments that were still being made on some BDN cases were resulting in overpayments. Therefore, that process was discontinued. Accordingly, all BDN CRSC/CRDP payments will be made through the Audit Error Worksheet (AEW) process. As with all AEWs, Virtual VA (VVA) and TINQ (Treasure Inquiry) should be checked for prior payments before processing.

Fast Letter 10-03, Chapter 35 Benefits for Dependents of Servicemembers

On January 7, 2010, C&P Service released [Fast Letter 10-03, Chapter 35 Benefits for Dependents of Servicemembers](#). This letter contains guidance for the development and processing of claims for Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA/chapter 35

benefits) under Public Law 109-461. Section 301 of the law allows the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to pay DEA benefits to dependents of severely disabled servicemembers who are pending discharge from the military. Eligible dependents may now receive DEA benefits before servicemembers are discharged.

The new category of eligible persons includes the spouses and children of active duty servicemembers who at the time of VA's decision:

- are hospitalized or receiving outpatient medical care, services, or treatment;
- have a total disability permanent in nature, incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service; and
- are likely to be discharged or released from service for the disability.

Fast Letter 09-52, Verification of Participation in "Special Operations" Incidents

On December 9, 2009 C&P Service released Fast Letter 09-52, *Verification of Participation in "Special Operations" Incidents*. This fast letter provides instructions for verifying a Veteran's involvement in Special Operations Forces classified missions or obtaining related classified documents.

Correcting Erroneous Diagnostic Codes for Undiagnosed Illness

Members of a Gulf War Veterans Information Systems (GWVIS) Work Group have identified many records, potentially involving qualifying chronic disabilities associated with service in Southwest Asia, with erroneous diagnostic codes. These errors can negatively impact the quality of the GWVIS reports which are provided to stakeholders who monitor Gulf War Veterans' use of Compensation and Pension

Benefits.

The most common errors involve misplacement of the diagnostic codes in the 8800 series and/or misuse of the analogous codes XX99. While RBA2000 prevents these errors from occurring in current ratings, the errors still exist in ratings completed prior to RBA2000. RVSRs should be reminded that before signing a new rating decision, they must verify the accuracy of the entire codesheet, including previously entered diagnostic codes (per M21-1MR III.iv.6.D.20).

RVSRs and Authorizers are asked to pay particular attention to previous ratings involving any Undiagnosed Illness or any medically unexplained chronic multisymptom illness, to ensure that all diagnostic codes have been input correctly according to M21-1MR IV.ii.2.D.16.d-g. When errors are identified, action must be taken to correct the hyphenated codes.

Training & Contract Exams (213)

Skill Certification Tests

The next VSR Skills Certification test will be given on February 10, 2010. VSRs who have completed the VSR training curriculum, are meeting the local trainee performance standard, and have one year time in grade as a GS-10 are eligible to take this test.

The next Journey-Level Rating Veteran Service Representative (RVSR) Certification test is scheduled for February 24, 2010. To be eligible to take the test, RVSRs must be at the GS 12 level or above, be meeting the local performance standard, and have been an RVSR for at least 24 months.

Further information regarding these tests will be forthcoming from the Office of Field Operations.

Quality Assurance (214)

Rating Quality Call

The Monthly Rating Quality Call for January is scheduled for January 28, 2010, at 2:00 PM EST. The results from the IRR study will be discussed. Please ensure that, at a minimum, your training coordinators and/or quality reviewers are on the call. The call-in information is posted on the calendar page for January 2010, and can be accessed through the calendar link on the C&P Home Page. Questions may be directed to the 214B mailbox at VAVBAWAS/CO/214B.

M21-4 Update

Chapter 2, Paragraph 2.05 g. "COVERS" of M21-4, *Manpower Control and Utilization in Adjudication*, has been updated requiring regional offices to do a periodic rescan of folders in COVERS every seven days as a minimum. The update is available on the C&P Intranet and through WARMS. Questions should be submitted to the 214A mailbox at VAVBAWAS/CO/214A.

Fiduciary STAR Reviews

Effective with the call up list for January 2010 (work product codes completed in December 2009), the newly assigned Fiduciary STAR staff, located in Nashville, TN, will start conducting national quality reviews for Fiduciary cases. All Principal Guardianship Folders (PGFs) requested for national quality review should be sent to the STAR Nashville office at the following address:

3322 West End Avenue
Suite 730
Nashville, TN 37203

Questions can be directed to the Quality Assurance mailbox, VAVBAWAS/CO/214B or Christi Greenwell at 615-279-8380.

Business Management (215)

VOR Enhancements

Several enhancements were made to VOR last week. This includes a new brokered work detail report which allows stations receiving brokered work to see that work in VOR. The Current Month Operations report has also been corrected to resolve an issue that intermittently showed decreasing numbers of cases processed through various cycles as the month progressed. A revised VOR Desk Reference Guide has been posted to the C&P Website.
<http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/Publicat/Users/docs/VOR.doc>

Veteran Services (216)

VA Form 21-4703, Fiduciary Agreement

VA Form 21-4703, *Fiduciary Agreement*, has been substantially revised. The updated form is dated July 2009 and has just been released. The new form requires prospective fiduciaries to initial all applicable blocks after the Field Examiner thoroughly explains to him or her the responsibilities required of a fiduciary. The updated form also requires the completion of a *Fund Usage Agreement* (Page 3). The signatures of both the Field Examiner and the prospective fiduciary are now required. Effective immediately, all VARO Fiduciary Activities will use VA Form 21-4703 dated July 2009 and dispose of all previous versions of the form. The direct link to the form is http://vaww4.va.gov/vaforms/form_detail.asp?FormNo=21-4703.

[VA Form 21-4718a, Certificate of Balance on Deposit and Authority to Disclose Financial Records](#)

VA Form 21-4718a, *Certificate of Balance on Deposit and Authority to Disclose Financial Records*, has been revised. The updated form is dated February 2009 and has just been released. The verbiage in block 8 has been changed to ensure the protection of the assets of the incompetent Veteran or beneficiary. The direct link to the form is http://vaww4.va.gov/vaforms/form_detail.asp?FormNo=21-4718a.

[Fiduciary Teleconference](#)

As a reminder, the next national fiduciary teleconference is scheduled for **today, January 21, 2010, at 2:00 p.m. EST**. The notice of this teleconference was sent to the mailboxes of the Directors, Veterans Service Center Managers (VSCMs) and the Western Area Fiduciary Hub Manager. Please ensure all fiduciary managers participate in the call. Unfortunately, seventeen VAROs with Fiduciary Activities failed to log into the last call on November 18, 2009. It is imperative that fiduciary managers are aware of the information disseminated and discussed during these calls.

[VA Form 21-7288a, Daily Record of Veterans Assistance Interviews](#)

One of the most common action items cited for Direct Services following site survey visits is related to VA Form 21-7288a, *Daily Record of Veterans Assistance Interviews*. The most common action items cited are for improper use of this form. Use of the incorrect version has resulted in inaccurate timeliness reporting. M21-1MR, Part II.1.2.b mandates that VA Regional Offices maintain a daily record of Veterans assistance interviews. Fast Letter 07-17, *Instructions for Electronic Version of VA*

Form 21-7288a, Daily Record of Veterans Assistance Interviews, dated July 3, 2007, directs all VA Regional Offices to use VA Form 21-7288a dated April 2007. An electronic version of this form is located on the C&P Service Intranet site, National Call Center (NCC) Manager and Public Contact (PCT) Coaches home page under “Personal Interview Activity” (<http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/Direct/Coaches/pia.htm>). The instructions for the proper completion of this form are also found on this site. To ensure accurate timeliness and DOOR reporting, it is imperative that these instructions are followed in entirety and without deviation.

[Congressional Correspondence](#)

Recent site visit survey results have revealed VA Regional Offices are using an incorrect processing time requirement for Congressional correspondence (this includes letters received by mail, facsimile requests, and electronic mail). It is mandatory that Congressional inquiries are acknowledged on a timely basis and the response addresses the concerns of the constituents and our customers. M21-1MR II.5.3.b states special mail (which includes Congressional mail), that cannot be fully answered within **five** workdays after receipt in VA, should be acknowledged within **two** workdays by sending a locally generated letter. The interim response will inform the inquirer that a complete reply will be made as soon as possible. For consistency purposes, Congressional inquiries received by telephone must follow the requirements above.

[Homeless Veterans](#)

In an excerpt from Secretary’s Shinseki’s speech given at the November 2009 Homeless Veteran Summit in Washington, DC, the Secretary stated, “Those who have served this nation as Veterans should never find themselves on the streets, living without care and without hope.” There are 131,000 Veterans estimated to

be homeless on any given night. The Secretary is committed to ending homelessness among Veterans within the next five years. We find ourselves with an enormous challenge, and we must do our part to help reach that goal.

As part of our efforts to end homelessness among Veterans within five years, Regional Offices increased the number of homeless Veterans claims received and processed during the first quarter in FY 2010. The following data shows the number of homeless Veterans claims received and processed in FY 2010 against FY 2009.

Homeless Veteran Claims

	FY 2009 1 st Quarter	FY 2010 1 st Quarter
Received	1,281	2,187
Processed	1,292	1,756

In comparing the data from the first quarter of FY 2010 to the first quarter of FY 2009, there was a 70.7% increase in the number of homeless Veterans claims received and a 26.4% increase in the number of homeless Veterans claims processed.

Although the above numbers show a very positive trend, there is still a great deal of work to be done. The goal to eliminate homelessness among Veterans will only be accomplished through targeted, meaningful outreach, expedited claims processing, and a true commitment by every VA employee.

As a reminder to the regional offices, please ensure that all homeless Veterans claims are marked with the “Homeless Flash” in VETSNET.