

VETERANS JOURNAL



PUBLISHED BY
FRANKLIN COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE COMMISSION
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Fall 2005 Issue

Douglas E. Lay, Director
Anna M. Henry, Administrative Assistant

The information in this journal is being provided to make the veteran community aware of some current events, activities and veterans issues that are of mutual concern. From time to time, we will include some relevant information important enough to be repeated to insure that veterans and their families are aware of the full range of benefits and entitlements available to them.

New Faces at the Veterans Service Commission

Douglas E. Lay became the new Director of the Franklin County Veterans Service Commission on June 13, 2005. David M. Bradley retired after 16 years of service as first a commissioner and then as the Director of the Veterans Service Commission.

We also have two new commissioners on board, Carl Swisher and Gary Pfaff, representing the American Legion and VFW respectfully. Roy Morello and Stephen Commodore decided to retire after many years of service on the board of the Franklin County Veterans Service Commission.



The occupation of a soldier has meaning beyond comprehension
The job that they do without contention
The lives of our soldiers' is a lifelong test
And the lives of their families' one would never guess
To protestors, think of them as you stand in the streets and jeer
Think about who and what has given you freedom to be here
It is our soldiers who stand and fight
The heroes that gave you the voice to say "it's wrong" or "it's right"
Through deployments and war our soldiers go
Into situations that we will never really see or know
The military family sits in fear and they wait
Waiting to hear of their hero's fate
Why do we send our soldiers to strange lands to fight?

So, we, as Americans can speak freely by day and sleep safely at night
But they do it for the good of their country and people everywhere
As you stand in the streets holding you signs
Think of those soldiers approaching enemy lines think of the dedication that keeps you free
So that even you will never be subjected to what he can now see
He is ensuring your freedom and your right
To a voice and a sky that is not lit up at night
I think we should take time to give thanks everyday
To the men and the women who have given us the freedom to live our own way
I choose to support our soldiers who endanger their lives to fight
And to protestors, it was soldiers who gave you the right!

By A M Smith

Now Available!

If you are interested in receiving the Journal by email, please contact Franklin County Veterans Service Commission by calling Anna Henry at (614) 462-2500.





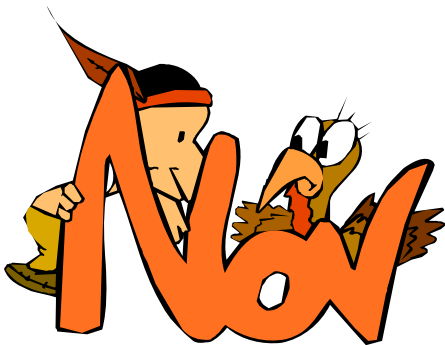
22nd Fall Begins



10th Columbus Day

30th Daylight Savings Time Ends

31st Halloween



8th Election Day

11th Veterans Day

24th Thanksgiving

COMBAT VETERAN FACT SHEET

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides cost-free health care services and nursing home care for conditions possibly related to military service to veterans with combat service after November 11, 1998 for a period of 2 years beginning on the date of their separation from active military service.

Who's Eligible?

Veterans, including activated Reservists and National Guard members, are eligible if they served on active duty in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Gulf War or in combat against a hostile force during a period of "hostilities" after November 11, 1998 and have been discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.

Public Law 105-368 <Title 28 USC 1710 (d)(D)> authorizes VA to provide combat veterans cost-free care for conditions potentially related to their combat service for up to two years following their discharge or release from active duty. These veterans will be enrolled into Enrollment Priority Group 6 if not otherwise qualified for a higher enrollment priority group assignment. VA provides full access to the Medical Benefits Package by virtue of this enrollment status. Also, veterans who enroll with VA under this authority will retain enrollment eligibility even after their two-year post discharge period ends under current enrollment policies.

For those veterans who do not enroll with VA during this post two-year discharge period, eligibility for enrollment and subsequent care is based on other factors such as a compensable service connection rating, VA pension status, catastrophic disability determination or the veteran's financial circumstances.

What's meant by "hostilities"

"Hostilities" is defined as conflict in which Armed Forces members are subjected to the danger comparable to that faced in a period of war. For purposes of establishing this special

eligibility VA accepts service documentation that reflects service in a combat theater, receipt of combat service medals and/or receipt of imminent danger or hostile fire pay or tax benefits.

Copays

Veterans who qualify under the special eligibility are not subject to copay requirements for conditions potentially related to their combat service. Unless otherwise exempted these veterans must either disclose their prior year household income or decline to provide their financial information and agree to make applicable copayments for care or services VA determines are clearly unrelated to their military service. This disclosure may provide additional benefits such as eligibility for travel reimbursement, cost-free medication and/or medical care for services unrelated to duty in the theater of combat operations.

The VA health care provider is responsible for determining if treatment is possibly related to the combat veteran's military service. In making this determination, the health care provider must consider that the following types of conditions are not ordinarily considered to be due to military service: (1) Congenital or developmental conditions, for example, scoliosis, (2) Conditions which are known to have existed before military service, and (3) Conditions have a specific and well-established cause and that began after military combat service.



Dental Care

Eligibility for VA dental benefits is based on very specific guidelines and differs significantly from eligibility requirements for medical care. Combat veterans may be authorized dental treatment as reasonably necessary for

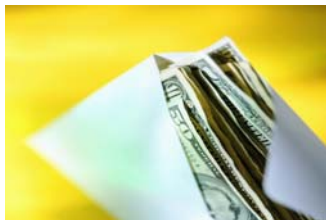
the one-time correction of dental conditions if:

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- They served on active duty and were discharged or released from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable from a period of service not less than 90 days and
- The certificated of discharge or release does not bear a certification that the veteran was provided, within 90-day period immediately before the date of such discharge or release, a complete dental examination (including dental X-rays) and all appropriate dental service and treatment indicated by the examination to be needed and
- Application for VA dental treatment is made with 90 days of discharge or release

To get additional information

Additional information is available at the nearest VA medical facility. The telephone number can be found in the local telephone directory under the "U.S. Government" listings. Veterans can also call toll-free: 1-800-827-1000 or the Health Benefit Service Center at 1-877-222-8387. Veterans may also visit the VA health benefits website: [Health Eligibility Center](#)



**COMBAT-RELATED
SPECIAL
COMPENSATION
(CRSC)**

Information proved by:
HQ AFPC/DPPDC
550 C STREET WEST, SUITE 6
RANDOLPH AFB TX 78150-4708
OFFICE: 210-565-1600

TOLL-FREE: 800-616-3775

FAX: 210-565-1101

PURPOSE & ORIGIN

- To restore some or all of the retirement pay offset by Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability compensation
- Established by the 2003 & 2004 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and mandated by Public Law 107-314
- Effective 1 June 2003 and later expanded 1 January 2004
- Compensation is tax-free

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

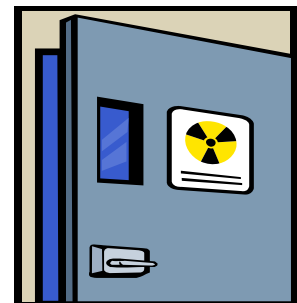
- Retired veterans with minimum of 20 years active duty, or retirement at age 60 for reservists and Air National Guard
- Retired pay offset by VA compensation for combined disabilities rated at 10 percent or more.
- Disabilities must be attributed to armed conflict, hazardous service, simulating war, instrumentalities of war, or conditions considered presumptive to exposure to Agent Orange, internment as a Prisoner-of-War (POW), and so forth

DEFINITION OF COMBAT-RELATED DISABILITIES

- **Armed Conflict (AC)** – a war, expedition, occupation of an area or territory, battle skirmish, raid, invasion, rebellion, insurrection, guerrilla action, riot, or any other action in which service members are engaged with a hostile or belligerent nation, faction, force, or terrorist
- **Hazardous Service (HS)** – includes, but is not limited to aerial flight duty, parachute duty, demolition duty,

experimental stress duty, and diving duty.

- **Simulating War (SW)** – results from military training, such as war games, practice alerts, tactical exercises, airborne operations, grenade and live-fire weapons practice, leadership reaction course, weapons practice, bayonet training, hand-to-hand combat confidence and obstacle courses. Does NOT include physical training activities such as calisthenics, jogging, formation running, and supervised sports.
- **Instrumentalities of War (IN)** – which do not have to be incurred during a period of war, include wounds caused by a military weapon, accidents involving a combat vehicle, injury or sickness caused by fumes, gases or explosions or military ordnance, vehicles, or material
- **Agent Orange (AO)** – incurred as a result of exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam or Korea. Must be granted as presumptive by the VA or if diagnosed prior to retirement, evidence must be provided to confirm in-country Vietnam or Korea service during the period Agent Orange was in use



Radiation Exposure (RE) – includes documented on-site

- participation in a test involving the atmospheric detonation of a nuclear device; occupation of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, Japan by US forces from 6 Aug 45 through 1 Jul

46; interment as a POW in Japan during World War II; or service in Paducah,

Kentucky, Portsmouth, Ohio, or the area identified as K25 Oak Ridge, Tennessee for at least 250 days before 1 Feb 92

- **Gulf War (GW) Mustard Gas or Lewisite (MG)** – incurred as a result of service in the Persian Gulf War or exposure to Mustard Gas or Lewisite even though there is a direct connection and the disability did not occur immediately. Must be granted as presumptive by the VA

CRSC vs. CRDP

- Concurrent Retirement Disability Payments (CRDP), also known as Concurrent Receipt, is separated and distinct from CRSC
- Defense Finance and Accounting Service – Cleveland (DFAS_CL) manages CRDP
- Veterans may receive compensation from CRDP or CRSC, but not both
- To receive CRDP, veterans must have a combined VA rating of 50 percent or more
- CRDP is taxable; CRSC is tax-free
- CRDP is an automatic payment. To receive CRSC, veterans must apply
- Retirees eligible for both programs elect which one to receive through DFAS-CL

- For information on CRDP, contact DFAS-CL at 1-800-321-1080

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

- Review program guidance and requirements at Department of Defense or Service website
- Gather supporting evidence from personal records on the disabilities that may be combat related
- Complete DD Form 2860, *Application for Combat-Related Special Compensation* (CRSC)
- Include DD Form 214, *Certificate of Release or Discharge From Active Duty*, and applicable VA Rating Decisions with application
- Forward to appropriate Service office of primary responsibility for determination of eligibility
- If approved, payments will be made by Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) – Cleveland Center (DFAS-CL)

APPLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE AT SERVICE WEBSITES:

Department of Defense
www.defenselink.mil/prhome/mppcrsc.html

US Army Human Resources Command
USA Physical Disability Agency (CRSC)
200 Stovall Street
Alexandria VA 22332
1-866-281-3254
www.crsc.army.mil

Secretary of the Navy Council of Review Boards
Attn: Combat-Related Special Compensation Branch
720 Kennon Street SE, Suite 309
Washington



ATTITUDE

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what others think or say or do. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a company...a church...a home. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice everyday regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past...we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude! I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.

Author Unknown



Old Soldiers' associations in Ohio now fight time

By: Jeb Phillips
The Columbus Dispatch
Monday, July, 25, 2005

All the old Ohio soldiers are dead. So Jackie Starr thought it was time to let the office die, too.

She closed it in April. All that's left now are three empty garbage cans, a clean cubicle and the sign outside the door: Veterans of World War I. Someone has taped a piece of paper below the sign that reads, "Gone from this Earth But Never from Our Hearts."

Starr, 75, began working for the Ohio chapter of the veterans organization in 1968, when there were 10,000 state members. Her father had been one. And those members were stubborn, she said. They wanted only other Great War veterans to join. It was what veterans call a "last man" organization. It would stand only as long as the war's last man did.

The veterans office was on the fourth floor at 34 E. Chestnut St. Some other groups with offices on that floor of the Downtown state building will live as long as the U.S. fights wars: the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Catholic War Veterans, and the Military Order of the Purple Heart. But others will die unless they somehow find new members.

The Army National Guard's 37th "Buckeye" Division, for example, ceased to exist in 1968. Its youngest veterans are about 55 years old.

"The crunch is on us right now. Unless something happens, we'll be gone," said Cyril Sedlacko, 81, secretary/treasurer of the division's veterans association.

The World War I vets were willing to fade away. The 37th's vets have decided they'll fight. The Korean War Veterans Association made sure a long time ago that it would go on. The Vietnam Veterans of America are debating the issue.

The groups that want to survive say it's for future veterans who will need help getting the government benefits they deserve. Some people, though, admit that all this is just the natural human desire to keep living.

"It borders on ego," said Joe Jennings 59, executive director of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Buckeye State Council. "You can't keep John Wayne alive forever."

Jennings and other delegates will vote next month at the national convention on the Vietnam organization's life. The bylaws have "nailed the death nail," he said, by limiting membership to people who served from 1964 and 1975.

A proposed change would allow veterans of more-recent conflicts, including those in Iraq and Afghanistan, to join. Those veterans don't have their own organization. Instead of creating one, they could join one already helping veterans.

If that's the true rationale for opening membership, Jennings said, he will vote for it. But if the debate next month is about prolonging the organization's life, he'll vote no.

"We can go out in a blaze of glory."

The Korean veterans' bylaws opened that group up from the beginning. According to the veterans, the Korean War has never actually ended: the parties never signed a peace treaty. So anyone who has served in Korea since 1950 can join, said Michael Mahoney, 74, president of the Ohio Department of the Korean War Veterans Association.

Except very few new people are joining. Maybe they think the war just went from 1950 to 1953.

"I figure that by 2010, there will be very few of us left," Mahoney said.

He's practical about it: "The ultimate goal in life is to drop dead," Mahoney said.

Sedlacko and other 37th Division Association officials aren't as accepting. They changed their bylaws two years ago. The 37th was the only unit of the Ohio Army National Guard until 1968, when it was deactivated. Almost all Ohio Army National Guard units that now exist came from that unit. They're called "heritage" units, and the 37th has extended membership to them.

But not many new people are joining that group either. Sedlacko blames the budget. The state allows the 37th Association about \$6,000 a year. That's not a whole lot to spend on recruiting, Sedlacko said. He has asked the General Assembly for more. Until he gets it, he thinks the organization will keep slipping away.

He has made at least one move that will keep the 37th around, he said. One of his daughters is now executive secretary. She's 34. Jackie Starr was 38 when she started working for the World War I veterans.

And as it turns out, Starr hasn't quite been able to let go of her organization. She's the "acting quartermaster," according to the Governor's Office of Veterans Affairs. She still puts out a newsletter, which goes to 150 members of the ladies' auxiliary, mostly daughters of veterans. She couldn't quiet let the office die either. "I didn't want it to be gone," she said. "So I moved it here." "Here" is a storage room in the basement of her West Side home. Her nameplate is on a file cabinet, and the chapter charter hangs on one wall. Her father's picture taken in 1918 hangs on another. She's still doing all of this, in par, to remember her father and those like him. Which is what those other organizations want, too. "People need

to realize that these men and women made sacrifices," Starr said.

WOMEN VETERANS



HOUSE PASSES PERMANENT GI BILL INCREASE

NAUS
July 29, 2005

This week the full House unanimously passed HR 3200 which is a permanent increase to the amounts of Serviceman's Group Life Insurance (SGLI) and Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI).

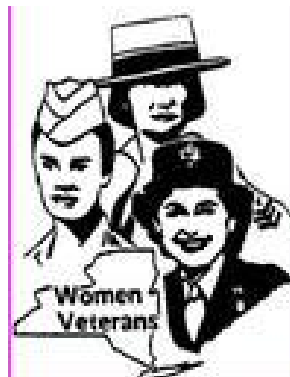
Earlier this year Congress approved an increase in SGLI and VGLI coverage to a maximum of \$400,000. This measure was included in the Supplemental Defense Appropriations Act and expires on September 30, 2005. This bill, when agreed to by the Senate will make the increase permanent.

NAUS NOTE: We applaud the efforts of Congress to improve the insurance coverage for our troops. We now would like to see the amount of the so-called "Death Gratuity" increased from \$12,000 to \$100,000 for ALL members of the military and not solely those deployed in support of combat operations. There should be no "classifications" or increments placed on a service members death. They should all be equal!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What services are available to women veterans?

A full continuum of comprehensive medical services including health promotion and disease prevention, primary care, women's gender-specific health care' e.g., hormone replacement therapy, breast and gynecological care, maternity and limited infertility (excluding in-vitro fertilization), acute medical/surgical, telephone triage, emergency and substance abuse treatment, mental health, domiciliary, rehabilitation and long term care. VA researchers at many VA facilities also conduct medical research on women's health.



How do I access the system for health and benefits services?

Veterans can apply for VA health care enrollment by completing VA Form 10-10EZ, "Applications for Health Benefits." The 10-10EZ may be obtained by visiting, or writing any VA health care facility or veteran's benefits office.

You can also call the VA Health Benefits Call Center toll-free at 1-877-222-VETS to determine your eligibility or access the form from the Health Administration Eligibility Reform website:
www.va.gov/elig.



OHIO TROOPS TO TEACHERS

What is Troops to Teachers (TTT)?

The Troops to Teachers program is designed to assist separating or retiring military personnel in pursuing a rewarding second career in public education (elementary, secondary or vocational) while also facilitating employment in public schools. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education and administered by the U.S. Department of Defense through the Defense Activity for Non-traditional Education Support (DANTES), the goal of the program is to help improve American education by providing mature, self-disciplined and dedicated personnel for our nation's classrooms. The program serves as a link between interested military personnel and education related agencies such as: traditional and alternative teacher certification programs, school districts and teacher recruitment centers.

Who may register?

The general categories of eligibility are military personnel and veterans who:

- Possess or are eligible for an honorable discharge' and
- Separated from active duty with six or more years of service; or
- Currently serving in the Guard or Reserve with ten

or more years of total service.

Education Requirements:

- Must have a baccalaureate or advanced degree from an accredited institution; or
- A minimum of one year of college, with six years of work experience in a technical field for vocational school teacher.

What can Troops to Teachers do for me?

- Provide certification advisement and counseling;
- Assist with job referral and placement assistance;
- Provide financial assistance to eligible individuals.

Certification Advisement

- Information is available in the following areas:
- Requirements for certification to teach in Ohio's public schools (TTT participants must hold an appropriate Ohio teaching credential);
- Information on teacher shortage areas and the advantages of teaching in these areas (eligibility for financial assistance and increased job opportunities);
- Resource information on teacher preparation certification programs throughout Ohio.

Job Referral and Placement Services

- View job vacancies posted on the Ohio Department of Education website;
- Post your resume on the TTT internet referral website and Ohio's web-based recruitment system

for school administrators to view;

- Ask TTT participants who are currently working as teachers, basic questions about becoming a teacher.

Financial Assistance

The following financial assistance may be available to eligible individuals:

- Stipends of up to \$5,000 to reimburse costs associated with becoming certified to teach. Recipients of these stipends must agree to teach for three years in a school located in a "high need" district;
- Bonuses of \$10,000 to those who agree to teach for three years in a school that serves a high percentage of students from low-income families.

Active Duty individuals in the following categories may apply:

- Retired from active duty;
- Active duty member with approved date of retirement and has one year or less remaining before retirement; or
- Separated on or after 8 Jan 2002 for physical disability.

Reserve and Guard members in the following categories may apply:

- Retired from the Selected Reserve;
- Currently serving in the drilling reserves with ten or more years of creditable service towards retirement and commit to serving an additional three years or until eligible for retirement;
- Drilling reservists separated due to a physical disability on or after 8 Jan 2002. Must apply within four years after separation; or
- Transitioning from active duty on or after 8 Jan 2002, and have served six years on active duty immediately before separation, and

commit to three years with a drilling reserve unit.



Routes to Ohio Teacher Certification

Traditional Pathway to Teaching

The vast majority of teachers in Ohio enter the profession after completing a prescribed course of study in teacher education from a college or university approved to recommend individuals for licensure in Ohio.

Conditional Teaching Permit

The Conditional Teaching Permit is a one-year nonrenewable license to teach in grades seven through 12. The following requirements are needed before entering the classroom:

- Hold a bachelor's degree;
- Complete 15 semester hours of coursework in the subject area to be taught;
- Pass a test of basic skills (Praxis I); and
- Complete within the past five years, six semester hours to be taught or professional education.

Alternative Educator License

The Alternative Educator License is a two-year nonrenewable license for individuals wishing to teach in grades seven through 12. Eligible individuals may enter teaching directly through this license, or progress from the Conditional Teaching Permit to this license. The following requirements are needed before entering the classroom:

- Hold a bachelor's degree;
- Complete 30 semester hours of coursework in the subject area to be taught;
- Passes the required Praxis II tests in content area; and

- Complete six semester hour of professional educational coursework.

Financial Assistance for Future Ohio Teachers

A federal grant awarded to Ohio, entitled "Expanding the Pool of Qualified Teachers" (EPQT), provides funding to military personnel who are interested in teaching in Ohio through the state's alternative licensure route. The EPQT grant can cover \$4,800 in tuition expenses for the required teacher education coursework, \$13,000 for special education content courses, and \$500 for Praxis examination fees.

For more information contact:

Veronica Whetsell
 Ohio Troops to Teachers
 Coordinator
 Ohio Department of Education
 25 South Front Street, Mail Stop
 505
 Columbus, Ohio 43215-4183
 Toll Free (800) 852-6064
 (614) 466-5734
 (614) 728-3058 fax
veronica.whetsell@ode.state.oh.us



**"FAMILIES FIRST"
 MOVING PROGMAN
 DELAYED**

NAUS
 July 29, 2005

The Families First program that was scheduled to kickoff Oct. 1 has been delayed until Feb. 1, 2006, due to technical difficulty in meeting computer security requirements of the Defense Information Systems Agency.

Customer service surveys, on moving satisfaction and problems already have begun and will be incorporated in the program, said officials. Features slated to begin

Feb. 1: Web-based claim filing directly with the carrier: full replacement value for lost or damaged items; direct communication between service members and their carrier to arrange delivery of household goods; and choice of carrier based on performance rather than the lowest bid.

The program will be operated by the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, which handles military moves for all services.

**TROOPS COMING
 HOME WILL BRING
 WAR WITH THEM,
 COUNSELORS TOLD**

By Jeb Phillips
 THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

It was hard at first to understand what was going on, which was part of the point.

The video clip opened with a shaky view of the sky and a building and the sound of popcorn popping. Then screams of pain. Then the camera panned to American soldiers kneeling with guns and you understood: This was Iraq, this was a firefight, and the popcorn sound was gunfire.

Then, near the end of the clip, there were more screams. This time from the Americans and they sounded triumphant.

The Ohio mental-health workers in the conference room needed to see those images, said Army Reserve Col. Terry Washam. They'll be helping returning troops deal with those moments – the uncertainty, the pain, the adrenaline of battle – for years.

"It's surreal," said Washam, mental-health-care line manager for the Louis Stokes Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Cleveland. "The emotion just keeps ramping up in that scene."

In a first-of-its-kind conference for the state, military mental-health experts spent a day last week in a Polaris conference room teaching 180 civilian health workers what to expect from the troops returning from Iraq and

Afghanistan. About 7,000 members of the Ohio National Guard have already come home.

Early national statistics showed that major depression, generalized anxiety and/or post-traumatic stress disorder were diagnosed in 17 percent of returning troops. Studies of Vietnam War vets show that half of those with post-traumatic stress disorder will abuse alcohol.

The goal of the conference is to help lower those numbers, said Dr. Edgardo Padin-Rivera, manager of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Program at the Cleveland VA center, although it's not exactly clear how to do that.

"We yet have no idea who is going to get (stress disorder) and who is not," he said. But people who do develop it seem to for a clear reason – they've had to change themselves to prepare for war, and now they're having to change back.

"It's a lot of risk, a lot of fear, but its power," Padin-Rivera said. "Using that power feels good. When you come back here, you can't use that anymore."

David Roby, and outreach worker for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, said that some war duties require soldiers to become emotionally numb. Roby spent 18 months as an Army Reserve military-police officer in Iraq, escorting convoys all over the country. He said it's difficult to make the transition back to normal life.

Part of the key to a successful transition is counseling, talking things out. The military can help some, the experts said. But the reserve troops have to come back home. That puts a heavy burden on civilian counselors.

Luann Ross, a Netcare triage worker, said she has taken a lot of calls from veterans' families, hoping someone could talk to their loved ones. Ross said the conference had given her some hope that local and national resources could help those people.

"It's encouraging," she said.

Diane Justus, a chemical-dependency counselor in Ashtabula, said knowing that substance dependency is often associated with stress helped her.

"We have some returning soldiers up in Ashtabula County," she said. "Of course, everyone has returning soldiers."

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VA Rechecking Post-Traumatic Stress Claims

Fox News Channel
Friday, August 12, 2005
Associated Press

GLENVILLE, N.Y.- The government is going to take a new look at the claims of about a third of the military veterans who now get disability payments for post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Veterans Affairs Department will begin a year long review next month of 72, 000 cases after an internal study found inconsistencies in the way the claims were decided, including many cases approved though they lacked required medical evidence.

Millions of dollars a year could be involved.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, a mental illness characterized by subjective symptoms like flashbacks and nightmares, can be difficult to diagnose and quantify.

The review will cover veterans whose claims were approved between 1999 and 2004 and who received full disability benefits -- \$2,299 a month -- for PTSD alone or in combination with other conditions, said VA spokesman Phil Budahn.

The review won't consider the other side of the question, whether some veterans were

wrongly denied benefits, and that has some critics upset.

"We need to pay as much attention to improper denials as we do to improper grants," said Illinois Rep. Lane Evans, ranking Democrat on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Budahn said the VA could look at that later, "but first we're just going to keep our focus on the problem that's been identified."

Randy Reese, national service director for Disabled American Veterans, complained that the review would divert resources from the VA's backlog of several hundred thousand disability claims yet to be processed.

Last year, the VA spent \$4.3 billion on PTSD disability payments, not including medical care.

The number of vets receiving compensation benefits for the illness rose nearly 80 percent between 1990 and 2004 -- from 120,265 to 215,871. During the same period, benefits for all types of disabilities grew by just 12 percent to about 2.5 million.

So far, about 10 percent of the stress syndrome increase comes from veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Budahn said.

Some experts say PTSD is diagnosed to readily. "PTSD went from being problematic to being accepted as a condition, to being almost too easily accepted," said Wilbur Scott, a University of Oklahoma sociologist who has written about the disorder.

Budahn attributed the increase mostly to rising awareness of the illness, thanks to education efforts by the VA, veterans' organizations and health care workers.

If the current review finds a veteran's claim does not include adequate proof of a "stressor" -- the specific event or events that trigger the mental illness -- the veteran will be asked to provide more information and could ultimately lose benefits.

Proof of a service-related triggering event is one of the VA's few hard and fast requirements for PTSD disability benefits. The inspector general's report last May found that more than 25 percent of

the PTSD cases reviewed lacked adequate proof of a service-related stressor.

"Some disabilities are inherently prone to subjective rating decisions, especially conditions such as PTSD where much of the information needed to make a rating decision is not physically apparent," VA inspector general Richard Griffin said. "This subjectivity leads to inconsistency."

Valid stressors can be difficult to prove.

"Sometimes it's a bureaucratic nightmare to get the evidence. People in wartime aren't sitting there with a steno pad keeping good records," said Mary Ellen McCarthy, Democratic staff director for the House Veterans subcommittee on disability assistance.

The VA said it would work with vets to help them prove their cases. It will also be on guard for possible fraud -- one vet in the sample review last spring submitted as evidence a personal account written by someone else and published on the Internet.

Some Iraq war vets with PTSD say identifying a single, specific stressor can be arbitrary.

"I think the whole year over there (in Iraq) was my stressor, but they actually wanted a specific incident," said Jesus Bocanegra, 23, of McAllen, Texas. His disability status won't be part of the review because it was approved this year. "I just gave them two."

Col. Charles Hoge, chief of psychiatry and behavior services at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, said that while most service members with PTSD can identify incidents that affected them deeply -- for instance, their worst firefight, losing a buddy or seeing injured children -- "the reality is that there are also stressors that are ongoing."

Hoge has found evidence of PTSD symptoms in about 15 percent to 17 percent of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"For most people who go into a war environment, it will affect them in some way," Hoge said. "An important minority of people are

going to be affected to the degree
that they need treatment.'



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