

VETERANS JOURNAL



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FRANKLIN COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE COMMISSION
250 West Broad Street, Columbus Ohio 43215
(614) 462-2500 FAX (614) 462-2505
E-mail: veteransservice@franklincountyohio.gov
Website: www.franklincountyohio.gov/vets



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Summer 2008 Issue

Doug Lay, Director
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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.

AGENT ORANGE LAWSUITS UPDATE

On 8 MAY the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit unfortunately reversed the decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims in Haas v. Peake. The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims had previously found that Vietnam War blue water veterans who had served on ships off the coast of Vietnam but had never set foot within the land borders of Vietnam were entitled to a presumption of service connection disability if they suffer from one of the listed diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure. Also, they had ruled that the VA's regulatory interpretation that the veteran needed to have "set foot within the land borders of Vietnam" was unduly restrictive. The higher Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit reversed and ruled: "We hold that the agency's requirement that a claimant have been present within the land borders of Vietnam at some point in the course of his duty constitutes a permissible interpretation of the statute and its implementing regulation, and we therefore reverse the judgment of

the Veterans Court." This was a 2-1 decision with a thoughtful dissent by Judge Fogel so the Claimant may attempt to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court which Commandeer Haas has said he will do. You can find the full 57 page decision in the list of decisions at <http://www.ca9c.uscourts.gov/dailylog.html>

Most likely VA will now move quickly to resolve (decide) claims that have been placed on hold awaiting this decision. These claims will almost certainly be denied unless they can show that their ship operated within the inland waterways of Vietnam or entered port in Vietnam. While ships logs do not routinely show crewmembers leaving their ship, they will show whether the ship entered an inland waterway (e.g. the Saigon River) or put into port. VA will generally concede the issue if service records show a veteran was attached to a ship during the period that the ship put into port in Vietnam. The negative decision in the Haas case does not relieve VA from the responsibility of making a legally correct decision that discusses all pertinent evidence and the reasons and bases for the

decision. The VA in their written decision should specifically address the evidence of service in or visitation to Vietnam. They must discuss ships' movements either shown by ships' history or logs. If the veteran has admitted never setting foot in Vietnam, VA must also discuss whether evidence shows that the ship operated in the inland waterways of Vietnam.

The Haas decision does not apply if a claimant has alleged exposure to herbicides on a direct basis, such as loading drums of defoliant on board helicopters or decontaminating aircraft or helicopters, VA must discuss such allegations and resolve them. Claimants who are denied have several legal moves available to them. They can ask the Court of Appeals to review the case using all the judges on the Court. While the Court may decide to conduct an en banc review it do not have to. Failing that, they could appeal to the Supreme Court. During any given year the Supreme Court takes up only about 1 in 20 cases to decide. Success at the Supreme Court is a long shot. [Source: TREA Washington Update & NVS Update 9 May 08 ++]



Army Spc. Brian Deur and his son, Sean Goeke, enjoy watching a video Deur made while serving in Iraq. On Tuesday, Deur made a surprise visit to Sean's school, Royalview Elementary in Willowick.

Home from Iraq, dad makes surprise visit

Sandra M. Klepach

The fatigues Sean Goeke wore to school Tuesday, which he often wears to bed, match those of his father, Army Spc. Brian Deur. After his dad left for Iraq in January, Sean pressured his mom to buy him matching fatigues, so she did. Deur, who'll be home until May 27, said his son was excited for "some sort of military celebration" at Royalview Elementary School in Willowick on Tuesday, even though the terms weren't quite clear. But at 1 p.m., as classes rehearsed for their upcoming musical, the fifth-grader's mouth dropped open, his shoulders fell and his eyes grew glassy at the sight of his dad, dressed in matching fatigues and combat boots, in the doorway. Sean's mother, Jessica, said every moment with his dad means the world to him. "He's very withdrawn, (keeps) to himself and (is) worried a lot" when his dad's away, Jessica said. "He talks about it a lot. He really doesn't understand why he has to go back." Deur, a reservist out of Parma, began training at Fort Bragg, N.C., in October, but he came home on Christmas for the induced birth of his son, Christian.

Even though Christian was only 10 days old when Deur left, the 41/2-month-old instantly recognized him from pictures around the house, Jessica said. "I have to pinch myself

when I wake up and he's next to me," she said. "It's been 160 lonely nights, and I have 190 left to go when he's gone, but we're a very close family, and the love that we share helps." Deployed as psychological operations specialist stationed in Bernstein, just south of Kirkuk, Deur befriends Iraqi adults and children in the hopes that the friendships will be mutually beneficial.

He occasionally sends videos and pictures to Sean's class, which writes back. A few students even challenge him to duels on PlayStation 2. "It's amazing to see what they know, as far as weaponry, but I guess it's the video games," he said. Upon entering the gym Tuesday, he taunted the class: "My team entered a base tournament for Halo 3 and won, so apparently we're the best Halo 3 players on the base, in case any of you still want to play." Then he showed a montage he filmed in Iraq. "Hopefully when you guys are a bit older, you can come over and visit Iraq," he said on the video, featuring chow halls, generators and Humvees. "It'll be a lot safer then." Deur hopes to be home for Christian's first birthday, then home for at least two more years.



Care Package Operation Resumes

Operation Gratitude's fourth "Patriotic Drive" to send care packages to troops serving overseas begins this week. Volunteers began assembling the packages during the Memorial Day weekend and will continue to do through July 1, 2007. The group has shipped more than 210,000 packages in the last four years and expects it will send another 50,000-60,000 packages during this drive. The organization welcomes donations of all items on our wish list and especially would like donations of DVDs, CDs, Beanie Babies, "Bandana Cool-ties" or mini

fans, small packages of beef jerky, and personal letters of appreciation.

NAUS encourages anyone who wants to provide support for our troops and is unsure what they can do, to become involved in this worthwhile endeavor. For more information, visit the [Operation Gratitude website](#).

Please don't send packages. A simple letter or card of thanks will do.

Your letters of support and encouragement could mean the world to a soldier recuperating from an injury. Whether that injury is life-threatening or one that will heal in time, your letter could be the hope a soldier clings to. It could be the very letter that means the most to someone who gave all so we have the right to say, "Thanks."



Memorial Day

By DUNBAR, PAUL LAURENCE

Why deck with flow'rs these humble mounds?

Why gather round this fast decaying mold?

Why doth remembrance keep her solemn rounds and wrap these sleepers in her loving fold?

Why kneel, ye silent mourners, here to drop the reverential tear?

Flesh is but dust when parted from the breath.

Flesh is but dust, but worth of soul is gold!

'Tis not the dust we honor, but the brave and noble spirits that it once did hold.

So kneel we weeping at the grave, as at the door through which have passed, to enter into mansions vast, the heroes who have gone to meet

A dearer destiny than dirgeful death.

FACTS ON POLICY: Profile of Veterans

from the Hoover Institution
November 6, 2007

Did you know...?

8 percent of the U.S. population is veterans.

In 2006, there were 23.9 million veterans in the United States.

Of that number,

- 33 percent served in Vietnam;
 - 18 percent served in the Gulf War;
 - 14 percent served in World War II;
 - 13 percent served in the Korean War.
- the largest group—38 percent—are over 65.
 - Another 25 percent are ages 55 to 64;
 - 16 percent are ages 45 to 54;
 - 12 percent are ages 35 to 44.
 - The smallest group is the under-35 age group: 8 percent of veterans are under 35.

- one-quarter (6.1 million) are disabled.

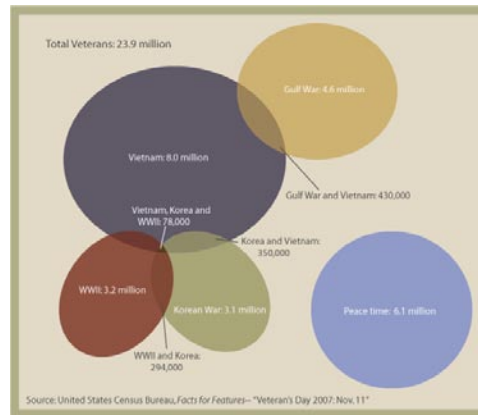
- roughly 7 percent (1.7 million) are female.
 - Most female veterans—40 percent—served in the Gulf War.
 - Another 15 percent served during the Vietnam War.
 - 9 percent of female veterans served in World War II.
 - The fewest—4 percent—served in the Korean War.
 - The rest—32 percent of female veterans—served during times of peace.

- 85 percent are white; 10 percent are black; slightly under 5 percent are Hispanic. (The rest are Asian, Pacific Islander, or other races.)
 - Of the different racial/ethnic groups, Pacific Islanders have the

largest proportion of female veterans: 12 percent, while whites have the smallest proportion of female veterans: 6 percent.

- 2.2 million live in California, home to the greatest number of veterans.
 - Other states with large veteran populations (in descending order) include Florida, Texas, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.
 - Maine and Montana had the largest proportion of veterans in their population: 11 percent.

Figure 1
Total number of veterans, by period of service



Sources:

- [U.S. Census Bureau, Facts for Features: “Veteran’s Day 2007: Nov. 11” \(October 2007\).](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau, “National and State Population Estimates, Annual Population Estimates 2000 to 2006.”](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2007, Section 10: National Security and Veterans Affairs \(October 2006\).](#)

[U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Veteran data by state.](#)

Fact Sheet 16-4 January 2008 Combat Veteran Eligibility

On January 28, 2008, “Public Law 110-Enhanced Eligibility for Health Care Benefits¹⁸¹” titled the “National Defense Authorization Act of 2008” was signed into law. Section 1707 amended Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), Section 1710(e)(3), extending the period of eligibility for health care for veterans who served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, (commonly referred to as combat veterans or OEF/OIF veterans). Under the “Combat Veteran” authority, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides cost-free health care services and nursing home care for conditions possibly related to military service and enrollment in Priority Group 6, unless eligible for enrollment in a higher priority to:

- **Currently enrolled veterans and new enrollees who were discharged from active duty on or after January 28, 2003,** are eligible for the enhanced benefits, for 5 years post discharge.
- **Veterans discharged from active duty before January 28, 2003, who apply for enrollment on or after January 28, 2008,** are eligible for the enhanced benefit until January 27, 2011.

Combat veterans, while not required to disclose their income information, may do so to determine their eligibility for a higher priority status, beneficiary travel benefits and exemption of copays for care unrelated to their military service.

Who’s eligible: Veterans, including activated Reservists and members of the National Guard, are eligible if they served on active duty in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, and have been discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.

Documentation used to determine service in a theater of combat operations:

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

Health benefits under the "Combat Veteran" authority:

- Cost-free care and medications provided for conditions potentially related to combat service.
- Enrollment in Priority Group 6 unless eligible for enrollment in a higher priority group.
- Full access to VA's Medical Benefits Package.

What happens after the enhanced eligibility period expires:

Veterans who enroll with VA under this authority will continue to be enrolled even after their enhanced eligibility period ends. At the end of their enhanced eligibility period, veterans enrolled in Priority Group 6 may be shifted to Priority Group 7 or 8, depending on their income level, and required to make applicable copays.

What about combat veterans who do not enroll during their enhanced authority period:

For those veterans who do not enroll during their enhanced eligibility period, eligibility for enrollment and subsequent care is based on other factors such as: a compensable service-connected disability, VA pension status, catastrophic disability determination, or the veteran's financial circumstances. For this reason, combat veterans are strongly encouraged to apply for enrollment within their enhanced eligibility period, even if no medical care is currently needed.

Copays: Veterans who qualify under this special eligibility are not subject to copays for conditions potentially related to their combat service. However, unless otherwise exempted, combat veterans must

either disclose their prior year gross household income **OR** decline to provide their financial information and agree to make applicable copays for care or services VA determines are clearly unrelated to their military service.

Note: *While income disclosure by a recently discharged combat veteran is not a requirement, this disclosure may provide additional benefits such as eligibility for travel reimbursement, cost-free medication and/or medical care for services unrelated to combat.*

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:

- 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 certificate of discharge or release **does not** bear a certification that the veteran was provided, within the 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 within 180 days of discharge or release

Additional information: Additional information is available at the nearest VA medical facility. VA facilities listing and telephone numbers can be found on the internet at www.va.gov/directory, or in the local telephone directory under the "U.S. Government" listings. Veterans can also call the Health Benefit Service Center toll free at 1-877-222-VETS (8387) or visit the VA health eligibility website at www.va.gov/healtheligibility.

Department of Veterans Affairs Strategic Goals

February 2008

Goal 1 -- Restore the capability of veterans with disabilities to the greatest extent possible, and improve the quality of their lives and that of their families.

Goal 2 -- Ensure a smooth transition for veterans from active military service to civilian life.

Goal 3 -- Honor and serve veterans in life, and memorialize them in death for their sacrifices on behalf of the Nation.

Goal 4 -- Contribute to the public health, emergency management, socioeconomic well-being, and history of the Nation.

Enabling Goal -- Deliver world-class service to veterans and their families through effective communication and management of people, technology, business processes, and financial resources.

Benefits

More than half of Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) budget (nearly \$86 billion in obligations in 2007) is paid directly to veterans in the form of statutory benefits.

Over 3.7 million veterans and beneficiaries receive compensation or pension benefits from VA. In 2007, VA processed nearly 825,000 claims for disability benefits and added almost 250,000 new beneficiaries to the compensation and pension rolls.

Approximately 523,000 students received education benefits in 2007; 20 percent of them are first time recipients of VA education benefits. VA guarantees an average of 11,109 loans a month for veterans realizing the American dream of home ownership.

Department of Veterans Affairs
Strategic Goals Cont. page 4

VA currently guarantees 2.2 million active home loans to veterans. Those loans total \$243 billion.

Over half of VA's home loan guarantees went to first time home buyers. Approximately 90% of the loans use the "no down payment" feature that makes the VA loan guaranty so effective.

VA will pay 1.2 million veterans insurance policy holders \$369 million in dividends this year. VA will also pay \$2.5 billion in life insurance beneficiary claims to 105,000 survivors of veterans and service members.

Approximately 200 children and widows of Spanish-American War veterans still receive VA survivor benefits. There are three survivors of Civil War veterans still receiving VA benefits.

There are 4 million veterans or service members insured under VA-administered life insurance programs.

The average basic insurance amount is \$240,000. All policies have a total face value of \$1 trillion, an amount higher than the gross domestic product of most countries.

Average annual amounts paid to veterans or survivors under various benefits programs: disability compensation, \$9,811; pension, \$8,509; Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, \$13,612; and death pension, \$3,829.

As of September 2007, 223,564 Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans filed for disability claims, 89% received claims decisions and 11% are waiting for claims decisions.



Health Care

VA's healthcare mission covers the continuum of care providing inpatient and outpatient care; and a wide range of services, such as pharmacy, prosthetics, and mental health; long-term care in both institutional and non-institutional settings; and other health care programs such as CHAMPVA and Readjustment Counseling. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) healthcare and research budget (\$37.3 billion in obligations) constituted 43% of the VA's total obligations in fiscal year 2007.

VHA delivers health care through 21 Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs) that manage 153 medical centers, 731 community-based outpatient clinics, 135 nursing homes, 209 readjustment counseling centers (Vet Centers) and 47 domiciliaries.

In 2007, VHA provided healthcare services to approximately 5.5 million unique patients, up from 3.8 million in 2000. VHA staff is treating more outpatients than ever before, increasing from 53.4 million outpatient visits in 2006 to 55.7 million in 2007. VHA has also enhanced overall mental health resources by over \$500 million in FY 2007 to meet the influx of veterans of all service eras with mental and emotional health care needs.

The most recent American Customer Satisfaction Index survey gave VA patient satisfaction scores of 84 and 82 out of 100 for inpatient and outpatient care, respectively. VA scores are 5 points and 4 points higher than the corresponding private sector scores.

VA led the way in care for traumatic brain injury (TBI) veterans by developing a mandatory TBI training course for select VA health care

professionals. Additionally, VA instituted a program to screen all patients who served in the combat theaters of Afghanistan or Iraq for TBI.

VA hired suicide prevention counselors at each of its 153 medical centers to help support the national suicide prevention hot line. The hot line puts veterans in touch with trained, caring professionals who can help them cope with emotional crises. The hot line is available 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.

VA established 100 new patient advocate positions to help severely injured veterans and their families navigate VA's systems for health care and financial benefits, providing a smooth transition to VA health care facilities.



Memorial Affairs

The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) honors veterans with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service to our Nation.

NCA maintains more than 2.8 million gravesites at 125 cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico, as well as in 33 soldier's lots and monument sites.

The nation's 125th national cemetery, South Florida VA National Cemetery, began operation in April 2007. VA is planning six additional cemeteries to serve the areas of Bakersfield, CA; Birmingham, AL; Columbia, SC; Jacksonville, FL; Sarasota, FL; and Southeastern PA.

Department of Veterans Affairs
Strategic Goals Cont. page 5

Of the 125 national cemeteries in operation, 65 are open to all interments; 21 can accommodate cremated remains and family members of those already interred; and 39 are closed to new interments but accommodate family members in occupied gravesites.

Annual interments in VA national cemeteries have increased from 36,400 in 1973, when VA took responsibility for national cemeteries, to 101,200 in 2007, including dependents. More than 67,500 veterans were laid to rest in a VA national cemetery in 2007.

Since 1973, NCA has provided nearly 9.9 million headstones and markers. In 2007, NCA furnished more than 61,000 headstones and markers. In 2007, NCA provided more than 423,000 residential Memorial Certificates to the loved ones of deceased veterans.

Since 1980, the State Cemetery Grants Program has obligated more than \$312 million to 36 states, plus Guam and Saipan, for the establishment, expansion or improvement of 69 states veterans cemeteries. In fiscal year 2007, VA supported state veterans cemeteries by providing more than 22,000 interments.

VA estimates that more than 686,000 veterans died in 2007. About 13 percent of veterans choose to be buried in VA national and state cemeteries.

In 2007, volunteers donated approximately 366,000 hours at national cemeteries and more than 8.1 million people visited them.

OEF/OIF Initiatives

- In 2007 prioritized claim processing for OEF/OIF veterans,

finalizing claims received in an average of 110 days.

- Hired 100 new outreach coordinators to provide services to returning OEF/OIF veterans.
- Created an Advisory Committee on OIF/OEF Veterans and Families to advise the Secretary.
- Coordinated 8,236 transfers of OEF/OIF service members and veterans from a military treatment facility to a VA medical facility.
- Received 39,000 referrals from the Post Deployment Health Reassessment (PDHRA) initiative.
- Participated in 805 PDHRA On-Site and 247 Call Center events since November 2005. A total of 32,321 referrals were made to VAMC and 15,842 to Vet Centers.
- Contacted 91% of severely-injured or ill OEF/OIF service members/veterans, by a VA case manager, within 7 days of notification of transfer to the VA health care system.

OEF/OIF veterans' statistics:

- 48% are Active Duty, 52% are Reserve/National Guard
- 88% are men, 12% are women
- 65% Army; 12% Air Force; 12% Navy; 12% Marine
- 34% were deployed multiple times
- 52%, largest age group, is 20-29 years old
- 69% of those who filed disability claims received service-connected disability compensation award

Veteran Population

There are about 23.8 million living veterans, 7.5% of whom are women. There are about 37 million dependents (spouses and dependent children) of living veterans and survivors of deceased veterans. Together they represent 20% of the US population.

Most veterans living today served during times of war. The Vietnam Era veteran, about 7.9 million, is the largest segment of the veteran population.

In 2007, the median age of all living veterans was 60 years old, 61 for men and 47 for women. Median ages by period of service: Gulf War, 37 years old; Vietnam War, 60; Korean War, 76; and WW II 84. Sixty percent (60%) of the nation's veterans live in urban areas. States

with the largest veteran population are CA, FL, TX, PA, NY and OH, respectively. These six states account for about 36% of the total veteran population.

Helpful Information

- Benefits 1-800-827-1000
 - Education & Training 1-888-442-4551
 - Life Insurance 1-800-669-8477
 - Special Issues 1-800-749-8387
 - Health Care 1-877-222-VETS (8387)
 - Headstones/Markers 1-800-697-6947
 - VA Inspector General 1-800-488-8244
 - Suicide Prevention Hot line 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
 - TDD 1-800-829-4833
- <http://www.va.gov>

Produced by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS).

VA Leadership

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- Under Secretary for Benefits** – Daniel L. Cooper
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- Assistant Secretary for Congressional & Legislative Affairs** – Christine Hill (Acting)



Navy Marine Corps Relief Society – Quick Assist Loans

A \$300 loan with no interest and no questions asked.

No, it's not free money — you have to pay it back in 10 months — but the Navy Marine Corps Relief Society's new Quick Assist Loan program offers service members a quick financial fix and an alternative to predatory lenders.

QAL cuts the usual paperwork and aims to get the \$300 in the hands of active-duty Navy or Marine Corps personnel within 15 minutes from the time they walk in the door.

And, with no questions asked, QAL can be used for payments — like credit card and cellular phone bills — that NMCRS standard assistance cannot cover.

Failure to repay the \$300 loan could result in wage garnishments. Service members can lose their security clearance, or worse, their jobs due to debt.

The program starts Jan. 23, 2008

NMCRS is funded through contributions, loan repayment, thrift shop operations and interest from the group's investment portfolio. The group provides combat casualty assistance and education support through the dollars earned on investments, but its principal mission provides no-interest loans

and financial counseling to service members in a pinch.

The Military Lending Act, which went into effect Oct. 1, 2007, capped interest rates at 36 percent and prohibited payday loans, vehicle title loans and refund-anticipation loans. But lenders have already found loopholes, like using a third party to set up an allotment.



How QAL works

1. Enter an active-duty Navy or Marine Corps personnel in good standing (no alerts and no outstanding loans with NMCRS) with their military identification card and latest LES statement.
2. Fill out the QAL form. Speed up service by bringing in a completed form. It's online at www.nmcrs.org
3. The information is entered into the system.
4. The \$300 check is cut.

Besides the money, the service member goes away with a money-wise guide, a spending log and an NMCRS pamphlet.

The no-interest loan is due back to NMCRS within 10 months.

Other QAL facts

QAL will not be offered on ships — sailors and Marines must go to one of NMCRS' 53 full-service locations.

A sailor or Marine cannot receive more than two QALs in a 12-month period, and the first QAL must be paid off before another is given.

Three or more QALs will be subject to individual examination, because loans are not meant to be recurring or chronic.

Spouses, retirees and weekend-drilling reservists are not eligible for QAL.



Fact Sheet 16-2

February 2008

Beneficiary Travel Benefits

Benefit Description: If you meet the criteria below, you may be eligible for VA beneficiary travel benefits associated with obtaining VA health care services. In most cases, travel benefits are subject to a deductible. Deductibles **do not** apply for compensation and pension examinations and for travel by an ambulance or a specially equipped van.

You Qualify If:

1. You have a service-connected (SC) rating of 30 percent or more, or
2. You are traveling for treatment of a SC condition, or
3. You receive a VA pension, or
4. Your income does not exceed the maximum annual VA pension rate, or
5. You are traveling for a scheduled compensation or pension examination

You Qualify for Special Mode Transportation (Ambulance, wheelchair van etc.) If:

1. Your medical condition requires an ambulance or a specially equipped van, and
2. You meet one of the eligibility criteria in 1 through 4 above, and
3. The travel is pre-authorized (authorization is not required for emergencies if a delay would be hazardous to life or health)

Note: OEF/OIF Combat Veterans must meet one of the qualifying eligibilities or conditions noted above.

Mileage Rates: General

Travel-\$ 0.285 (28.5 cents) per mile

Scheduled appointments qualify for round-trip mileage. Unscheduled visits may be limited to return mileage only.

Deductible:.....\$7.77 one-way (\$15.54 round trip)

- Deductible requirement is subject to a monthly cap of \$46.62. Upon reaching \$46.62 in deductibles, travel payments made for the balance of that particular month will be free of deductible charges.
- Veterans whose projected income in the year of application will not exceed the applicable VA pension rate may request a waiver from the deductible requirement.

NOTE: Mileage reimbursement claims for travel prior to February 1, 2008 will be processed at the previous rates of 11 cents per mile for travel in relation to health care and 17 cents per mile for recalls due to an insufficient lab, EKG, x-ray, etc. in relation to a Compensation and Pension examination ("Convenience of the Government") with deductibles of \$3 per one-way trip; \$6 for a round-trip; with a maximum of \$18 per calendar month.

Supersedes Fact Sheet 16-2, dated April 2007 which will not be used

New VA Rules for Specially Adapted Housing Grants Program Aids Most Seriously Injured

A change in the law that allows certain seriously injured veterans and servicemembers to receive multiple grants for constructing or

modifying homes has resulted in many new grants, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced 1/4/08.

Before the change, eligible veterans and servicemembers could receive special adaptive housing grants of \$10,000 or \$50,000 from VA only once. Now they may use the benefit up to three times, so long as the total grants stay within specified limits outlined in the law.

To ensure veterans' and servicemembers' needs are met and grant money is spent properly, VA works closely throughout the entire process with contractors and architects to design, construct and modify homes that meet the individuals' housing accessibility needs.

Eligible for the benefit are those with specific service-connected disabilities entitling them to VA compensation for a "permanent and total disability." They may receive a grant to construct an adapted home or to modify an existing one to meet their special needs.

VA has three types of adapted housing grants available.

1 - Specially Adapted Housing grant (SAH) - currently limited to \$50,000, is generally used to create a wheelchair

-accessible home for those who may require such assistance for activities of daily living.

2 - VA's Home Loan Guaranty program may be used with the SAH benefit to purchase an adaptive home.

3 - Native American Direct Loan program may also be used with the SAH benefit to purchase an adaptive home.

4 - ALL OF THE ABOVE requires ownership and title to a house.

Other VA Grants are:

1 - Special Housing Adaptations (SHA) grant, currently limited to \$10,000, is generally used to assist veterans with mobility throughout their homes due to blindness in both eyes, or the anatomical loss or loss of use of

both hands or extremities below the elbow. (Requires ownership and title to a house.)

2 - Temporary Residence Adaptation (TRA) grant, is available to eligible veterans and seriously injured active duty servicemembers who are temporarily living or intend to temporarily live in a home owned by a family member.

(Title and ownership are not required. This allows veterans and active duty members who may not yet own homes to have access to the adaptive housing grant program.)

If the veteran IS eligible under the SAH program they would be permitted to use up to \$14,000 of the maximum grant amount.

If the veteran IS eligible under the SHA program they would be permitted to use up to \$2,000 of the maximum grant amount.

Each grant counts as one of the three grants allowed under the new program.

Other VA adaptive housing benefits are currently available through Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service's "Independent Living" program, the Insurance Service's Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance program, and the Veterans Health Administration's Home Improvement and Structural Alterations grant.

For more information about grants and other adaptive housing programs, contact a local VA regional office at 1-800-827-1000 or local veteran service organization. Additional program information and grant applications (VAF-26-4555) can be found at <http://www.homeloans.va.gov/sah.htm>



Soldiers' hearts Poetry and warfare mix in West Point professor's hands

Sunday, May 25, 2008
Reviewed by THOMAS USKALI
Special to the Press-Register

"Soldier's Heart" captures the scope of the West Point experience, from the small details of friendship on up through the command structure that undergirds both the institution and the Army as a whole. What's notable about the book is that it was written by a civilian English professor, Elizabeth Samet, who began teaching at the United States Military Academy in 1996.

Samet writes, "My ongoing conversations with students, some of which began when men and women who are now lieutenants and captains were plebes, reveal the ways in which literature helps them to understand their own increasingly complicated lives." When they enter West Point at 18 or 19 years old, they're still high school students who are coping with ridiculously arcane rituals, trying to please both the upperclassmen and their instructors. Squeezed alongside classes in mathematics, science and military tactics are Samet's courses in literature — a place where poems take center stage.

In Samet's class, cadets are encouraged to ask questions, to challenge the text — in other words, to do what they're not allowed to do the rest of the day. She adds, "This is a story about my intellectual and emotional connections to military culture and to certain people in it, but the real drama lies in the way the cadets I teach and the officers with whom I work negotiate the multiple contradictions of their private and professional worlds."

The word "contradictions" captures much of what's to admire about "Soldier's Heart," with its contrasts of youth and adulthood, civilian life versus the military, being "at attention" and "at ease." Samet comments: "Sometimes the sheer variety of their experiences causes cadets to become confused about

what it is they are supposed to be. One asked me whether West Point wanted him to be a soldier or a scholar. If it wanted him to be both, he added, the days needed to be much longer."

Samet is drawn to the first-year students, the "plebes," "to the ease with which they are disarmed, and to their wonderful willingness to encounter new ideas and new truths." She notes that at the end of one lesson in which they spent the entire hour on the first quatrain of an Elizabethan sonnet, "one plebe, looking up in amazement at the clock, said with chagrin, 'Ma'am, we must be really stupid. We just spent an hour on one sentence.' It hadn't occurred to him that finding an hour's worth of things to say about four lines was in fact pretty smart."

Samet's own path to teaching at West Point began with undergraduate work at Harvard and a Yale doctoral program. During a year of study on a fellowship, the writings and life of Ulysses S. Grant became the focus of Samet's dissertation. The fact that she found herself at West Point, where he had graduated, seemed oddly appropriate to her. She saw the job listing on the Modern Language Association's list in fall 1996, noting, "Military experience was not required, the job description said, but applicants should have 'a genuine concern for the development of competent, committed, military officers.'" Samet's father served in the Army, but she says that her decision to pursue the position at West Point had little to do with that — it was curiosity that drew her to her interview on campus.

"Soldier's Heart" centers on the lives of "her" cadets and what they experience once they move into the ranks of military service. One also gets a sense of West Point's deep historical resonance and its traditions, both the solemn and the merely odd.

September 11, 2001, and its aftermath are treated in an understated manner. Samet wisely avoids walking through each step of that day, focusing instead on how life changed on campus — more stringent security, of course, but more significantly, the ways that each cadet found himself or herself

confronting what was to come after graduation.

Samet's facility in the world of ideas makes this a truly engaging read. She can make the esoteric relevant, as when she explains to some upperclassmen: "I like to think I'm arming you with something you may need, something of value. I hoped that we were becoming travelers of the sort Montaigne describes, wayfarers who visit 'foreign lands' not 'the way the others do so, but mainly learning of the humours of those peoples and of their manners, and knocking off our corners by rubbing our brains against other people's.'"

"Soldier's Heart" is strongest when at its most autobiographical. When Samet moves into the larger comparisons, as in Chapter 6, "The Courage of Soldiers," it becomes more cumbersome, carrying a lot of philosophical and metaphorical weight — a jarring shift from the rest of the narrative. One can appreciate what she's trying to explain, but readers will find themselves waiting for the next story from the classroom, leaning forward to see what these young soldiers will do or say next.

The term "soldier's heart" is what's now called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) — but as Samet thinks of it, it also reminds her of Henry V, who prays that God will "steel my soldiers' hearts ... Possess them not with fear!" And that is the fundamental lesson of this book and of Samet's time with her young soldiers. Words are neither empty nor all-powerful. They're words — tools for argument, exposition, poetry, as well as the blunt communication of the military battlefield.

What comes through clearly is that Samet believes that the study of literature and soldiering are not mutually exclusive. One of her senior students echoed the words of her beloved Ulysses S. Grant: "As for me, I'll have the company of a thousand characters to walk with me into the future ... Should I fall into enemy hands, I will have the Greek tragedians to offer me perspective: Prometheus' fate will be forever worse."

Thomas Uskali is a freelance writer who lives in Fort Lauderdale.

FRANKLIN COUNTY
VETERANS SERVICE
COMMISSION
250 W BROAD ST
COLUMBUS OH 43215-2787

