

1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR MAY 2021



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Notes of Interest;

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.

For the last twenty years, veterans of the Persian Gulf War of 1991 have been complaining of a range of ailments, including pain, fatigue, and problems with memory and concentration. And for just as long, the causes have remained uncertain and there has been a tendency by the military to attribute the complaints to post-traumatic stress disorder. Now a long-term study at the University of Texas in Dallas has used a new technique to measure blood flow in the brains of sufferers and has detected "marked abnormalities" in brain function that can probably be attributed to low levels of exposure to sarin nerve gas. This abnormal blood flow has persisted or even worsened over the eleven years of the study.

Senators Thom Tillis and Maggie Hassan have reintroduced a Bill to reform how veterans exposed to toxins receive health care and benefits and requires the use of new scientific evidence to establish whether some health problems are connected to toxic exposures. The Toxic Exposure in the American Military, or TEAM, Act improves access to health care by providing consultation and testing through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for eligible veterans exposed to toxic substances, expanding training on toxic exposure issues for VA health care and benefits personnel, and by requiring VA to develop a questionnaire for primary care appointments to help determine whether a veteran might have been exposed to toxic substances during service. It was first introduced in 2020. The TEAM Act also requires VA to respond to new scientific evidence regarding diseases associated with toxic exposure within an established time, establishes a scientific commission to research the health effects of toxic exposure in veterans and report the commission's findings to the Department of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to conduct scientific studies regarding associations between diseases and exposure to toxic substances during military service.

Did you know many veterans think that is not necessary to hire an accredited VA lawyer because it's free to apply for VA disability benefits? But you should remember that VA is a government agency, so the process can move slowly...very slowly. According to hundreds of VA accredited attorneys, "The agents working at the VA don't work for veterans directly, meaning they are not your representatives or lawyers because they are simply doing their assigned job." A veterans' disability attorney has your best interest in their hearts. Their goal is to work quickly and get all the disability benefits that you deserve. With that goal in their minds, your attorney can develop a strategy that improves your chance of success.

Among the great unknowns of the COVID-19 vaccines now in use against the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus is how long immunity lasts and whether booster shots will be needed over time. Scientists at the VA's Office of Research and Development in White River Junction, Vermont, have found that the vaccines can provide immunity for at least seven to nine months -- a time frame similar to the immune response generated in

people who have had COVID-19. The study examined antibodies in some of the 240,000 veterans who have contracted COVID-19, Dr. Richard Stone, VA's acting under secretary for health, said recently. "The evidence is that between seven and nine months, we can feel comfortable that you are still protected. We think it will be longer than that. That is not a limitation."

The decision to move into a nursing home or assisted living facility is often a difficult one.

Veterans who don't want to live in an institutionalized environment and would rather receive care in a private care home and get one-on-one individualized care, may prefer an accredited VA Foster Home. The program is designed for veterans who would otherwise need a nursing home or assisted living placement, but opt for specialized foster home care. VA medical foster homes typically house between one to three veterans. Those veterans are then placed in the VA's Home-based Primary Care Program. That's where the doctors and nurses go out and visit veterans in the foster home. Veterans living in these foster homes would have their medical appointments come to them. Veterans pay their own way through their benefits to cover the costs, typically between \$1,500-\$3,000 a month. VA Aid & Attendance Pension benefits are also available for homeowners. Veterans who are interested should contact their local VA Medical Center and ask for the Foster Care Coordinator.

Depending on the arrangements, funeral services can cost veteran-families thousands of dollars putting some in a tough spot financially. Well, FEMA wants to help with those expenses. The government agency's mission is to be there before, during and after disasters. The COVID-19 Funeral Assistance program is FEMA's way to help ease some of the financial stress created by the deadly virus. Starting Monday, **April 12, 2021**, FEMA is offering to reimburse veteran-families up to \$9,000 for COVID-19 related funeral costs, per funeral and a maximum of \$35,500 per application.

It is an unfortunate reality that many veterans who experience a debilitating service-connected disability, such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), also suffer at some point from psychological and emotional conditions related to the disability. The secondary conditions that manifest from the service-connected disability aren't just from psychological conditions, but, physical conditions as well.

For many veterans, aging, along with changes in their physical health makeup, declining health, and severe income adjustments, makes them eligible for many benefits they previously didn't qualify for when they were younger. Surprisingly, to many veterans when they become aware of grants, scholarships, and free monetary compensation, they are shocked! The shock transitions to acceptance that they are eligible to receive all sorts of compensation. Not just from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), their home state, but, from many user-friendly organizations that have their best interest in mind. For your information, here's a brief overview about a few programs that are currently available to aging veterans.

Vietnam veterans with "Parkinson-like symptoms," but without a formal diagnosis of Parkinson disease, should, for the most part be considered eligible for presumption of exposure to Agent Orange, just as Parkinson's disease is connected to service in Vietnam. A recent federal court ruling allowing class-action suits against the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) could lead to a host of new legal options for veterans who share similar illnesses, service records or bureaucratic headaches. An eight-judge panel on the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals ruled that in "appropriate cases," class-action lawsuits against VA will be allowed.



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

