

Vietnam Veterans of America

Chapter 324 - PO Box 18631 - Milwaukee, WI 53218

In Service to America



Meeting Notice

No meeting in December

Elks Lodge

5555 W. Good Hope Rd.

Board Meeting 6:30 p.m.

Chapter Meeting 7 - 8 p.m.

Future Meetings TBA

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National web page: www.vva.org

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John is listed in the phone book - good luck finding one

NO MEETINGS TILL FURTHER NOTICE

NPRC Military Records Reduced Operations

Kevin Lilley, MOAA News Article, November 23, 2020



The National Personnel Records Center's Military Personnel Records facility is operating at less than 10% of normal capacity because of worsening COVID-19 conditions in the St. Louis area—a status that limits records requests to emergency needs only. The facility's on-site staff will continue its work to accommodate veterans or family members who need records in relation to:

- Burial honors
- Life-threatening medical emergencies
- Homeless veterans seeking entry to shelters
- Any “comparable emergencies,” per the

center's website <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records-0>.

The center entered this emergencies-only status 23 MAR, but began a gradual reopening on 24 JUN as COVID-19 cases slowed. This reopening process allowed a 20% operational capacity for most of October, but “on-site exposures to staff” led to a regression to emergency-only levels on 7 NOV.

Individuals with emergencies can submit a Standard Form 180 via fax to (314) 801-0764. Even emergency requests face delays under this process. Families seeking records to confirm burial eligibility in a VA national cemetery can visit <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility> for detailed information. Casketed interments will be prioritized over cremated interments. The majority of burial requests can be approved without access to National Personnel Records Center materials. MOAA Premium and Life members can download Your Guide to Military Burials.

Visit <https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2020-news-articles/dd-214-and-beyond-how-to-track-down-your-military-records> for more background on the records center, including contact information.

VA Disability Claims Backlog Spiked to 300,000 During Pandemic

By Richard Sisk, Military.com, 17 Nov 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a backlog of about 300,000 new disability claims at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the head of the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) said Tuesday.

“We’ve got to get this backlog down,” VBA Chief Paul Lawrence said in an interview with Military.com. “We’re really trying hard to figure this out.”

By last November, the department had succeeded in processing claims at a high rate and brought the new claims backlog down to an all-time low of 64,000 cases, he said. In March 2013, the backlog of new disability claims at the VA had reached a peak of 611,000.

From January through the end of March this year, the number of backlogged claims increased slightly, to 70,000. Then, the spike began, as restrictions were imposed across the government in an effort to limit the spread of COVID-19, wiping out the progress the VA made last year in processing new claims, Lawrence said. On April 1, the VA announced that “as concerns about COVID-19 infections increased and the president declared a national emergency, VA suspended its in-person medical disability examinations for its compensation and

pension (C&P) programs.”

The VA did not restart in-person exams until late August, and then only on a limited basis.

In addition, COVID-19 restrictions at the vast National Archives warehouse in St. Louis limited the VA’s access to records needed to verify veterans’ claims, Lawrence explained.

“That really set us back in terms of the ability to grant benefits,” he said. “The two bits of information we need are the C&P exams and the personnel records.”

To break the logjam, the VA began sending its own personnel to assist the National Archives.

“We actually have people in their warehouse in St. Louis [going through the files and] getting them scanned into our records,” Lawrence said.

At one point, the VA had 48 of its own personnel working in the National Archives warehouse, he said.

Encouragingly, the increase in backlogged new cases appears to have leveled off in recent weeks, Lawrence added.

“We’re processing at about the same rate we’re receiving,” he said. “Now, we’re looking forward to the fall and beyond when we can drive it back down.”

VA Health Care Ask Not Get Not

Steven Lucas, Together We Served, November 2020

Many veteran’s that have VA benefits may not know that the VA provides complementary treatment items such as CPAP machines, hearing aids, custom fit orthotic shoe inserts, Marsona sound conditioning machines (for masking tinnitus), prescription eyeglasses, and many other items to help provide injury relief. Sometimes veterans have to ask for such equipment.

- A veteran that is struggling to fall asleep due to ringing or buzzing ears can ask a VA audiologist for a Masona sound conditioning machine that may help mask the tinnitus enough to fall asleep.

- A veteran with sleep apnea will have to participate in a sleep clinic and be tested. If sleep apnea is determined then, the VA will hand the veteran a high-quality modern CPAP machine that is much smaller than the older versions and easier to keep clean.

- Also, some VA clinics offer Chronic Pain Management and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

(CBT), which may be helpful for some veterans that are struggling to maintain relationships and experiencing declining work performance.

- The VA will supply a veteran who has been diagnosed with vitamin D deficiency-free vitamin D supplements if asked. Many veterans are vitamin D deficient. Vitamin D is extremely important for good health.

- Some veterans struggle with joint pain, and the VA will provide Voltaren topical gel for relief if asked.

- Some clinics provide ultrasound physical therapy for plantar fasciitis relief if asked. Veterans with VA benefits sometimes have to ask. There’s no harm in asking for relief products. The harm comes when veterans don’t ask for relief items. You are not taking away from another veteran if you ask for relief items. These items are stockpiled and do no good for anyone if they are not distributed and providing relief. Ask not. Get not.

A Journey Home Through The Highground

Gary Kmiecik, Minocqua, WI

“I started singing on the drum when I returned from Vietnam. One of my most memorable times singing was at the dedication of The Highground in 1988. The Highground is a memorial park that pays tribute to veterans. They were going to dedicate the “Fragments” statue—a Vietnam veterans’ tribute—and they asked if we would be there for the ceremony. We sang a Vietnam veterans’ song that had been given to us. They draped a South Vietnamese flag over the memorial, and as they slowly removed that flag, we sang the song.

On the day of the ceremony, the sky was blue and there were some intermittent clouds. Hundreds, if not thousands, of people, were there for the dedication. A lot of bikers, a lot of Vietnam vets, their families, and children. Four helicopters came, and they flew in each of the four directions. And they kind of tilted themselves toward the ground a little bit, almost like they were honoring what was taking place there.

As soon as our drum group started singing, it started to rain. I remember it was such a mystery, where did the rain come from? My thought at the time was that God was crying. The Creator was crying for all the lost people on both sides. The senseless deaths for no reason. I still don’t know why we were there, or if we accomplished anything.

I am bald now, but when I was in Vietnam, I had black hair, and the Vietnamese would point to their hair and skin, and point to mine, and say, “Same, same.” I tried to explain that I was a Native American. I remember this one woman who looked at me and said her husband was in the South Vietnamese army, and she was thankful that we were there helping to support the South Vietnamese army. But, she said, “The U.S. has destroyed our land with the bombs and Agent Orange. We had an economy, and the U.S. ruined that economy. And you turned our young girls and women into prostitutes.” Let me tell you, that

was a powerful thing to hear. It was a major turning point in my life spiritually and morally. It had a major impact on my sense of justice. I felt guilty about what I had been part of.

Here was a group of Indigenous people, just living their lives, you know, farming, trying to make a living. Just being alive, doing what they needed to do to be happy and to make ends meet, no threat to us in this country at all. And then we invaded their country, and they fought us, and they won. I felt like I had joined the Seventh Cavalry. And I was there helping to kill those Indigenous people the same way the Seventh Cavalry killed our Indigenous people.

Because I was the only Vietnam veteran on the drum that day, I was really emotional. I started crying. I can remember seeing my teardrops fall on the head of the drum with the raindrops, and they were all dancing. They were moving up and down on the drum. They took the flag off of the statue slowly because we were going to sing it four times through, and when we got done singing, the sun came out. You couldn’t

script this in a movie. I thought it was religious. There was so much meaning in that. And then each of those helicopters peeled off and moved into the west. And in the west, from one side of the sky to the other, there was a rainbow. And every one of those helicopters flew through that rainbow. It was unbelievable. There’s a lot of spirituality here.

I feel that way whenever I am at The Highground. A lot of people feel that it is a sacred place. A lot of good things have been done at The Highground—other statues and an effigy mound have been added. Any time I’m over in that area, I’ll stop in and just walk around the trails. It’s a peaceful feeling. They have a lot of benches and even a little treehouse. It’s a place of healing for a lot of us. It’s nothing magical; I think it’s more spiritual. You feel good while you’re there, and you carry that feeling away with you for a while.

I think a place like The Highground is important because of the different traumas that veterans go through. When I’m at The Highground, I just feel peaceful. It’s a place where we can go and find peace and healing.”



Agent Blue haunts Vietnam War vets its poison keeps on poisoning forever

By MIKE THARP, Asia Times, DECEMBER 7, 2020

Add one more primary color to the poisonous palette of Vietnam: Agent Blue.

Agent Orange, its toxic defoliant cousin, has become well known in the US for its lethal effects on American troops who served in the war 1965-75 – and on their offspring.

Agent Blue, an arsenic-based herbicide, is becoming known because it has no half-life – in other words, it lasts forever in soil, sediments, rivers, canals and public water supplies.

Once it is in the environment, its toxicity is magnified as it moves up the food chain, slowly killing and disabling humans as it accumulates in the body.

Kenneth Olson, professor emeritus of soil science at the University of Illinois and a US Army Vietnam-era veteran, has studied and published on the soils and sediments of South Vietnam, the roles they played in Vietnam warfare and the legacies left behind. Bottom of Form

Olson's recently released paper, "The Fate of Agent Blue, the Arsenic Based Herbicide Used in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War," is co-authored with Larry Cihacek, also a US Army veteran, who is professor of soil science at North Dakota State University. It is their most recent in a series of papers on Vietnam soils and sediments and herbicide persistence in the environment.

"Agent Blue was sprayed on 100,000 hectares (one hectare is about 2.5 acres) of mangrove forests and about 300,000 hectares of rice paddies just before rice harvest time," Olson said. That "resulted in destroying the standing crop and contaminated soils and water sediments with arsenic."

Six "rainbow" herbicides, commonly called Agents Orange, Green, Pink, Purple, White, and Blue, were sprayed on wetlands, rice paddies, forests, mangroves, bamboo groves and military base perimeter fences to defoliate vegetation, reveal guerrilla hiding places and destroy the food supply of enemy troops.

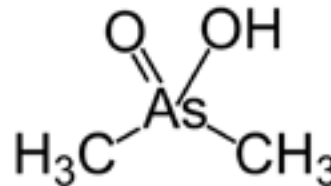
South Vietnamese farmers, US and South Vietnamese military personnel and communist insurgents were exposed to those herbicides with immediate and longer-term impact on personal health, civilian food security and population-wide famine.

Cihacek, a soil chemist, said, "Agent Blue was the most effective of all the rainbow herbicides in killing rice and grasses and persisted in the soil after

the crops were destroyed."

Manufacturing of this acid began in the late 1950s in the United States at the Ansul Company chemical plants in Marinette, Wisconsin, and Menominee, Michigan. During the Vietnam War, oceangoing ships were loaded with 205-liter Agent Blue barrels and shipped via the Saint Lawrence Seaway to the coast of South Vietnam.

Arsenic is a naturally occurring element found throughout Southeast Asia deltas, including the Mekong Delta. Today, arsenic-contaminated rice and groundwater are growing concerns as neither naturally occurring arsenic nor anthropic arsenic has a half-life and neither can be destroyed.



Agent Blue. Source: Wikipedia

According to Olson, "It is urgent that elevated arsenic concentrations in water supplies and agricultural products be identified and mitigated through better runoff control and groundwater management; improved rice genetics and alternate crop selections; shifts in crop management associated with tillage, fertilization and phosphorus use; and systematic monitoring of food and drinking water."

In 2001 the US Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry ranked arsenic as number 1 on its list of hazardous substances at Superfund sites – polluted areas needing cleanup of hazardous contaminants.

Olson's early published work on Vietnam soils was the result of a 2016 trip to South Vietnam to study the Cu Chi and Iron Triangle soil tunnels in an attempt to determine why those tunnels were so resilient and stable, so hard to destroy with bombs during the Vietnam War. The answer was in the nature and properties of the soils.

When the soil tunnels were aerated and dried, the soil wall took on properties similar to concrete and no additional wooden external support beams were needed to hold up the ceilings.

Olson and Lois Morton's co-authored soil tunnels paper "Why Were the Soil Tunnels of Cu

Continued next page

Agent Blue continued

Chi and Iron Triangle in Vietnam So Resilient?" was published in the Open Journal of Soil Science in 2017. It attracted considerable attention from US and Vietnam veteran groups, military historians and Vietnam War archivists in both the United States and Vietnam.

A follow-up by Olson and Morton published in 2019, "Long-term Fate of Agent Orange and Dioxin TCDD Contaminated Soils and Sediments in Vietnam Hotspots," examined the persistence of dioxin in South Vietnam soils, sediments, water and

Vet Retirement Earnings

Vietnam Vets Earn Nearly as Much as Their Civilian Counterparts

Jim Absher, Military.com, October 6, 2020

A study published by the Congressional Budget Office found that Vietnam-era veterans earned nearly as much in retirement as their civilian counterparts, with those over the age of 72 actually making more, on average, than civilians of the same age.

According to the Census Bureau, there are nearly 15 million American males between the ages of 63 and 78, of that number approximately 5.5 million are Vietnam-era veterans. The newly published study examined the total personal income of nearly 246,000 males born between 1940 and 1955, using data from the U.S. Census Bureau. Of that number, approximately 178,000 were non-veterans and 68,000 were vets.

The study found little difference between races or those with or without college degrees. Since fewer than 4% of those who served during the Vietnam era were women, only men were included in the study. The report cited two studies, one conducted in 2008, when most Vietnam-era veterans were still in the workforce, and one from 2018, when most of them had retired. The studies took into account five sources of regular income:

- Wages and earnings
- Social Security
- Retirement plans
- Investment income
- VA disability payments

When all these sources of income were added together, most Vietnam-era veterans actually earned more than their civilian counterparts in retirement, even though they earned less than civilians while in the workforce.

the food supplies. Both publications were gratefully received by veterans who had served on Vietnam soil. Several, after reading this work, contacted Olson to better understand his research and the implications for soldiers serving during the Vietnam War and Vietnamese civilians.

As a result he began to informally convene an unofficial Band of Retirees (mostly Vietnam, Vietnam-era veterans and university agriculture professors) to discuss, fact-check and collaborate on research and writing projects, especially this most recently published paper on Agent Blue.

While employed, the sampled veterans had an average total income of \$50,000 in 2008 -- 20% less than non-veterans in the same age range, who earned an average of \$62,200. However, in 2018 when most Vietnam-era veterans had reached retirement age, the difference was much less.

In 2018, a 65-year-old veteran earned an average of \$56,300, compared to the average civilian income of \$66,900. That difference narrowed as age increased; by the time they reached age 71 (the median age for a Vietnam-era veteran), vets had an average total income of \$65,600, compared to \$65,700 for non-veterans. After that age, veterans had significantly more income than non-veterans in their age group. At 72, veterans earned \$5,000 more annually than non-veterans; by age 76, a veteran made an average of \$68,600 compared to \$56,800 for a non-veteran.

The study also found that veterans in the study group were less likely to remain in the workforce once they reached retirement age. Nearly 10% more non-veterans continue to work after age 65 than veterans do.

Veterans also had less income disparity than non-veterans, meaning that more vets were solidly middle class with fewer of them being either very rich or very poor. Approximately 15% of veterans were in the lower one-quarter of earners, compared to 22% of non-veterans; 17% of veterans were in the upper one-quarter of earners, compared to 21% of non-veterans.

Another tidbit of information contained in the report said that nearly 3 million of the 9 million veterans receiving VA health care were Vietnam vets. The health care those veterans received cost taxpayers an average of \$11,400 annually. You can see the full report on the Congressional Budget Office's website.



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