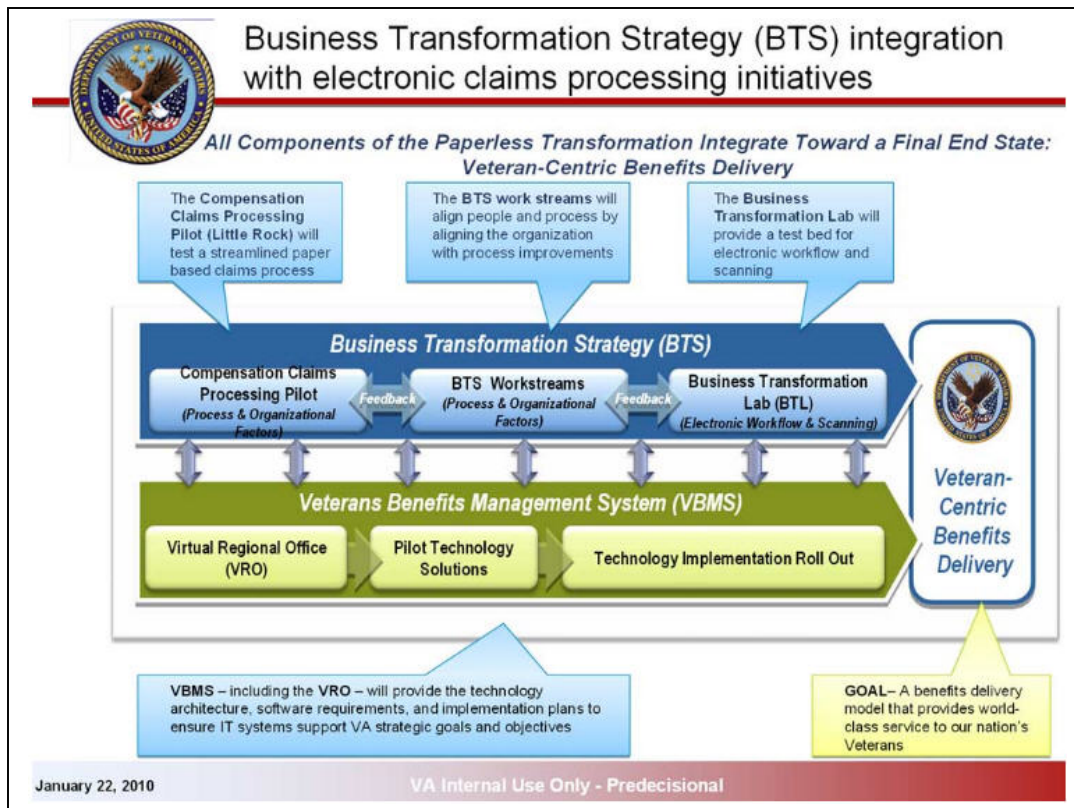




VA UNVEILS PLANS TO STREAMLINE DISABILITY BENEFITS SYSTEM



VA claims new Veterans Benefit Management System (VBMS) will be faster, more efficient, more transparent and paperless (Don't worry if you don't understand it, no one else does). To accomplish this, a comprehensive plan is in the process of being executed that will:

- Target deficiencies across the adjudication process to maximize efficiency enabling the veteran to receive their benefits in a timely and efficient manner as well as giving them oversight into the status of his/her benefits.
- Build a solution that provides a unified content, process and compliant environment.
- Provide interoperability to the databases, applications, operating systems, portals, security, servers, storage, systems management tools and Web server environments.
- Deploy a Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) shared services platform to help reduce

operations costs and simplify IT infrastructure.

- Provide operational efficiency across the organization by creating a common interface for building and deploying content and process applications.

Here are some of the comments from people who attended the meeting:

"All this system does is try to make the old system work better ... and, the old system is broken. It is not a new system."

"Nothing in the new proposal demands quality of claims adjudication ... it just emphasizes increased production."

"Verbiage in proposal is obtuse to the max ... many in attendance did not understand the Gov-Speak gobbledygook."

"And, they want to use the Baltimore Regional Office for the pilot program. Baltimore is, unarguably, one of the worst Regional Offices in the VA benefits system."

Disability Claim Backlog

Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL-01), a committee member, recently met with Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki about the claim backlog that is surging with the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. "The disability-claims backlog has become a deteriorating issue for the Department of Veterans Affairs and is in need of much improvement," Miller said. The department's spending bill that Congress approved in DEC 09 included \$1.7 billion

to hire 1,200 new claims processors, in an effort to reduce a backlog with nearly 397,000 claims pending, according to the Disabled American Veterans. But veterans seek more help for a system that has suffered for years. Claims grew by almost half between 2003 and 2006, when appeals averaged 657 days to resolve, according to the Governmental Accountability Office.

"The disability-claims backlog has become a deteriorating issue for the Department of Veterans Affairs and is in need of much improvement."

VA Co-payment

A \$1 increase in co-payments for outpatient medications for veterans who do not qualify for free prescriptions is being delayed for six months while the Veterans Affairs Department reviews its options. Co-payments are required for a 30-day supply of medication provided on an outpatient basis to people being treated for disabilities or conditions that are not related to military service. Co-payments are not charged for veterans who have service-connected disabilities rated at 50% or more, regardless of whether they are being treated for a service-connected issue, and co-payments are waived for some low-income veterans. The current charge of \$8 was supposed to rise to \$9 on 1 JAN 2010 under regulations that call for prescription drug charges to keep pace with prescription drug charges in the private sector. But on 31 DEC, VA officials announced in the Federal Register that they were delaying the increase until 1 JUL so they could reconsider how increases are calculated. This delays both the \$1 hike and a \$120 increase in the \$960 co-payment cap on drug costs for veterans who have service-connected disabilities but are being treated for nonservice-related medical issues. "We need time to determine whether an increase might pose a significant financial hardship for certain veterans and, if so, what alternative approach would be appropriate relief for these veterans," the statement says.

Created in 2002, the co-payment cap began as a \$2 fee for a 30-day prescription but increased to \$7 in 2008 and to \$8 in 2009. Under VA rules, the drug co-payment is supposed to increase each 1 JAN based on the increase in the prescription drug portion of the Medical Consumer Price Index, a measurement maintained by the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics. The drug index, known as CPO-P, called for an automatic \$1 increase that can be delayed under current law but still has to take effect at some point. VA officials called their action a "temporary freeze," with the expectation that the increase will take effect this summer unless a new way of calculating and applying the co-payment is found.



Blue Water Claims

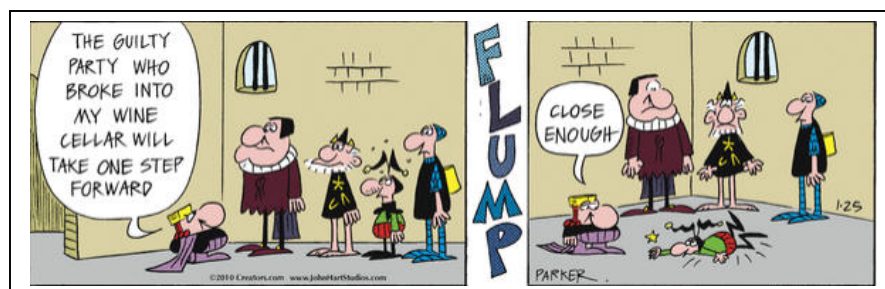
The VA Compensation and Pension (C&P) Service has initiated a program to collect data on Vietnam naval operations for the purpose of providing regional offices with information to assist with development in Haas related disability claims based on herbicide exposure from Navy Veterans. To date, they have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

All vessels of Inshore Fire Support [IFS] Division 93 during their entire Vietnam tour

- a.) USS Carronade (IFS 1)
- b.) USS Clarion River (LSMR 409) [Landing Ship, Medium, Rocket]
- c.) USS Francis River (LSMR 525)
- d.) USS White River (LSMR 536)
- All vessels with the designation LST [Landing Ship, Tank] during their entire tour [WWII ships converted to transport supplies on rivers and serve as barracks for brown water Mobile Riverine Forces]
- All vessels with the designation LCVP [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel] during their entire tour
- All vessels with the designation PCF [Patrol Craft, Fast] during their entire tour [Also called Swift Boats, operating for enemy interdiction on close coastal waters]
- All vessels with the designation PBR [Patrol Boat, River] during their entire tour [Also called River Patrol Boats as part of the Mobile Riverine Forces operating on inland waterways and featured in the Vietnam film “Apocalypse Now”]

- USS Ingersoll (DD-652) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, OCT 24-25, 1965]
- USS Mansfield (DD-728) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River AUG 8-19, 1967 and DEC 21-24, 1968]
- USS Richard E. Kraus (DD-849) [Destroyer] [Operated on coastal inlet north of Da Nang, JUN 2-5, 1966, protecting Marines holding a bridge]
- USS Basilone (DD-824) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, MAY 24-25, 1966]
- USS Hamner (DD-718) [Destroyer] [Operated on Song Lon Tao and Long Song Tao Rivers, AUG 15-SEP 1, 1966]
- USS Conway (DD-507) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, early AUG 1966]
- USS Fiske (DD-842) [Destroyer] [Operated on Mekong River, JUN 16-21, 1966]
- USS Black (DD-666) [Destroyer] [Operated on Saigon River, JUL 13-19, 1966]
- USS Providence (CLG-6) [Cruiser, Light, Guided Missile] [Operated on Saigon River 3 days during JAN 1964]
- USS Mahan (DLG-11) [Guided Missile Frigate] [Operated on Saigon River OCT 24-28, 1964]
- USS Okanogan (APA-220) [Attack Transport] [Operated on Saigon River JUL 22-23, 29-30, 1968 and AUG 5-6, 1968]
- USS Niagara Falls (AFS-3) [Combat Stores Ship] [Unloaded supplies on Saigon River and Cam Ranh Bay, APR 22-25, 1968]. Also, Cam Ranh Bay is a qualifying location for "inland waterway" service.

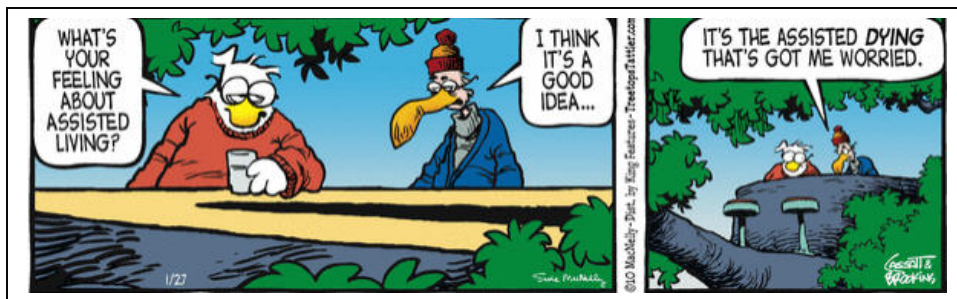
If you served on any of those vessels during the times specified, you will be granted, without further development and delay, a presumptive exposure to herbicides for the purpose of health care and monetary compensation. **Note:** This list is not complete. If you served on a ship that entered the inland waterways of Vietnam, please contact navy@bluewaternavy.org with as much detail as possible so they can provide this information to the DVA for processing and inclusion in their data base [Source: Compensation & Pension Service Bulletin Jan 2010 Policy 211 ++]



FDA Scam

The FDA is warning the public about another scam in which criminals are posing as law enforcement personnel as part of an international extortion scam. The criminals call the victims-most of whom had purchased drugs over the Internet or via "telepharmacies" and identify themselves as special agents for the FDA, DEA, FBI, U.S. Secret Service, or U.S. Customs Service, as well as for U.S. and Dominican prosecutors and judges. They tell the victims that purchasing drugs over the Internet or the telephone is illegal, and that law enforcement action will be pursued unless a fine or fee ranging from \$100 to \$250,000 is paid. The criminals request that the money be sent by wire transfer to a designated location, usually in the Dominican Republic. Victims who refuse are often threatened with a search of their property, arrest,

deportation, physical harm, and or incarceration. Recipients of such calls should refuse the demand and call the FDA's Office of Criminal Investigations Metro Washington Field Office at (800) 521-5783 to report the crime. The FDA warns consumers to use caution when purchasing prescription drugs over the telephone or the Internet. In addition to the increased risk of purchasing unsafe and ineffective drugs from Web sites operating outside the law, there is the danger that personal data can be compromised. Victims have also had fraudulent transactions placed against their credit cards. For more on FDA's concerns about unlawful drug sales on the Internet, refer to www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ProtectYourself/default.htm.



Stop Loss

WASHINGTON (AFNS) -- The fiscal 2010 defense budget extends payments to servicemembers involuntarily extended on active duty under the so-called "Stop Loss" program, but those who received a bonus for voluntarily re-enlisting or extending their service no longer qualify for retroactive stop-loss pay. Defense Department officials put the new policy into effect Jan. 5, modifying eligibility for retroactive special pay to comply with Section 8108 of the 2010 Defense Department Appropriations Act, which took effect Dec. 19. Servicemembers affected by the new policy who already received stop-loss payments will not be required to repay them, defense officials said. However, all outstanding applications from affected servicemembers will be returned, along with an explanation of the change in law that makes them no longer eligible to receive the payments, officials said. Department officials announced in March their

intention to eliminate the stop-loss policy, which kept servicemembers on active duty beyond their contracted end-of-service date. While the services work to phase out the policy, officials authorized a special pay of \$500 a month for anyone retained on active duty due to stop loss. Retroactive payments applied for anyone who served on active duty between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2009, and the fiscal 2010 defense budget extended that authority through September 2010. Servicemembers were able to begin submitting their claims for retroactive stop-loss special pay on Oct. 21. Army/ National Guard and Reservists should visit <https://www.stoplosspay.army.mil> . Navy personnel should send and email to NXAG_N132C@navy.mil . Marine Corps personnel should visit <https://www.manpower.usmc.mil/stoploss> . Air Force personnel should visit <http://www.afoc.randolph.af.mil/stoploss> .

Rockland County Detachment of the Marine Corps League will hold its annual Iwo Jima Luncheon at the Platzl Brauhaus, 127 Call Hollow Rd. Pomona, N.Y.

Friday February 19
Cash Bar 1130 Hours
Luncheon 1230 Hours
\$40 in advance, \$45 at the door
All are welcome

4 Chaplains Service
Sunday February 7
9 am
New City Jewish Community Center
Old Schoolhouse Rd.
New City, N.Y.

If anyone knows of a homeless veteran, contact this office. From time to time, we know of people who are willing to provide shelter.

Free One Year Rotary Membership for a recently discharged OEF/OIF Veteran Someone Locally Self-employed Or involved in a family business. Contact this Office for Details

Code 3 for veterans discount on Verizon Cell Phones is : 117818

**ROCKLAND COUNTY
VETERANS SERVICE
AGENCY
638-5244
20 SQUADRON BLVD.
SUITE 480
NEW CITY, N.Y. 10956**

Office Hours
Monday to Friday
9 to 5

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