

Solano Veterans Scene – March, 2016

By Ted Puntillo, Veterans Services Director, Solano County

VA disability compensation for Gulf War Veterans

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Institute of Medicine (IOM), approximately 250,000 of the 696,000 U.S. servicemen and women in the 1991 Gulf War continue to suffer from chronic, multi-symptom illnesses. Commonly referred to as "Gulf War Syndrome," chronic symptoms include fatigue, headaches, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, dizziness, respiratory and memory problems.

Solano County veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War and suffer from chronic disabilities resulting from undiagnosed illnesses may receive disability compensation from the VA. Benefits may include free, comprehensive medical examinations, including laboratory testing and other diagnostic tests to determine the chronic illness and associated care to treat symptoms.

According to studies conducted at the University of San Francisco (UCSF), symptoms that cannot be easily quantified are sometimes incorrectly undiagnosed or dismissed as insignificant and therefore receive inadequate attention by the medical and scientific community. Veterans who suffer from a cluster of multi-symptom diseases deserve the very best that modern medicine can provide in order to speed up the development of effective treatments.

Gulf War veterans, aside from the physical and psychological issues involving any war and deployment, may have been exposed to a unique mix of hazards not previously experienced during wartime, including medications designed to protect against nerve agents, oil and smoke hazards, swarms of insects and pesticides, high powered microwaves and radiation poisoning. These unique hazards are thought to cause the multi-symptom chronic illnesses veterans suffer as a result of their service.

In addition to receiving disability compensation and benefits from the VA, Solano County veterans may be eligible for a variety of other benefits, including a Gulf War Registry health exam, the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, health care and disability compensation for the disease or diseases they suffer from related to military service.

The VA and other research institutions like UCSF continue to conduct research and investigate how military service in the Gulf War is linked to illnesses Gulf War veterans have suffered. It took the VA nearly 20 years to presumptively connect the service of military veterans to the use of Agent Orange and will no doubt take just as long to prove the effects of exposures in the Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan.

I encourage all Solano County veterans who served in the Persian Gulf War to visit my office to see if you may qualify for medical and compensation benefits related to your service. Even if you don't suffer from chronic, multi-symptom illness related to the Gulf War, you may know someone else who does. My office is here to help you get connected to the benefits and services you deserve for your service to our country. We look forward to serving you, and, as always, thank you for your service.

Ted Puntillo is Director of Veteran's Services for Solano County. Reach him at (707) 784-6590 or tepuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran's Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

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