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Subject: Veterans Issues

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Sent: Sunday, April 10, 2011 1:59 AM

To: Bob/Carol Gaines

Subject: Fw: Veterans Issues

I received this on a web site to which I belong about a friend's situation. Thought it might be of interest to some of you.

Read especially the last article about monetary assistance for Veterans if they have to go into a nursing home.

The following article is reprinted from the Bay State Veteran Spring Issue of their newsletter wrote by Richard Levesque, Director, Chief Service Officer, Veterans Benefits Program, Mass. State Council, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.

The DD Form 214/WGO 53 -- A Most Important Document

He was an elderly World War II Veteran who, after the war, lived the American dream. The house, the two car garage, the kids and 2 and a half dogs behind a white picket fence.

Time passed, the kids grew up and they grew old. The Veteran retired and that thing that happens to so many retirees in their older years happened to him – he got sick. At age eighty-seven he passed away leaving an elderly wife. This is where our story really begins..

The Veteran had told his wife and family many times that he had earned his final honors, flag draped casket, firing squad, and most importantly he wanted to be buried in the National Cemetery in Bourne. The one thing he didn't do was to give someone in his family his military separation documentation; WGO 53 or as we affectionately call it, the DD 214.

For your information, the DD 214 as we know it did not come into being until the Korean Conflict (wasn't a war, remember? Tell my Dad that). The WWII Veterans were given the WGO 53 and it was a negative image (black & white) that carried all the Veterans information like a DD 214 does today. In many cases, on the reverse is the Honorable Discharge certificate.

In this case, our Veteran never gave one to any one in his family, not even a copy. Although wounded and decorated, he never used the Veterans Administration (VA) for anything. So, when the final arrangements were being made, the wife told the funeral parlor that she wanted his final honors and that she also wanted to respect his wishes that he be buried in the National Cemetery. The funeral parlor asked for his separation documents.

She didn't have them. The family went back to the house and looked everywhere for these documents. Nothing. He did not have his papers anywhere in the house that they could find. My office was called and with the information we had we checked with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

There was no record of his service. We checked with the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Missouri. I called the "special number" we have and spoke with an individual who was apprised of the situation. After checking their records and the records at the National Archives, there was no record of this Veteran.

They believed that his records were completely consumed in the Great Fire of 1973 at the NPRC and were totally lost. As we have said, there was no record of him with VA at all.

The Veteran was laid to rest without his flag covering his casket; without his final honors and; without his plot at the National Cemetery. To this day no one has ever found any documentation that he served in the US Military. Proof would have been found at NPRC except for that fire in 1973.

The Veteran has a brother and sister surviving him and they remember his service, but those statements are insufficient. In my own family we had a similar situation with my father-in-law who was a survivor of Omaha Beach. We never placed his Memorial Stone on his grave.

At the time of his death, VA was not issuing stones to Veterans who had deceased at that time (1994). We finally applied for his stone. I well remember his WGO 53 but for the life of me we couldn't find it in the house. I applied to NPRC for a replacement certificate. We were advised that his records had also burned up in the Great Fire of 1973.

But in my father-in-law's case, there were a few documents that survived the fire and we were able to get a Certificate of Service from NPRC that satisfied VA and his stone was placed on his grave. We lucked out!

The lesson: These are not the first situations where the records were misplaced, lost, or burned. And these were not and probably will not be the last time we have problems securing documentation of military service. The lesson is to please make copies of your WWI WGO 53, Honorable Discharge, or your DD 214.

Don't put it in a "safe place". Give it to your spouse or children (or both). These documents are important in many ways. They prove your military service and open the doors to all your final honors. They are the key that gets you into the National Cemetery or even the State Veterans Cemeteries. Without proof of your service, you will not get in.

Give them to someone. Don't want to part with the original?? Make copies and give them to your children and your spouse (if living). When the time comes, someone will have that document to give over to the Funeral Home. And don't procrastinate....do it right away. The Grim Reaper waits for no man.

Richard Levesque, Chief Service Officer
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MORE VET ISSUES:

"Aid and Attendance"

Regardless of your personal status, consider passing this along to all veterans, families of veterans or individuals with veterans in their family. "Aid and Attendance" is an underutilized special monthly pension benefit offered by the Veterans Administration for veterans and surviving spouses who require in-home care or live in nursing homes.

To qualify, a veteran (includes the surviving spouse) must have served at least 90 days of active military service, one day of which is during a period of war, and must be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

The veteran's benefit is \$18,234 annually (paid monthly) and increases to \$21,615 if a veteran has one dependent. The surviving spouse alone is \$11,715 annually. For more information, call [1-800-827-1000](tel:1-800-827-1000)

A little-known veterans' benefit for long-term care expenses is available to wartime veterans and their spouses. But the benefit is being overlooked by thousands of families, industry observers say.

<http://www.seniorcareforveterans.com/?OVRAW=Veterans%27%20Aid%20and%20Attendance&OVKEY=veteran%20aid%20and%20attendance&OVMTCS=standard&OVADID=21594888521&OVKWID=196955357021>

<http://newsok.com/article/3344150>

The Special Pension for Veterans' Aid and Attendance pays up to \$1,644 a month, \$19,736 annually, toward assisted living, nursing homes or in-home care for veterans 65 and older who served at least 90 days and one day during wartime - stateside or overseas. Veterans and their spouses can receive up to \$23,396 annually and spouses of deceased veterans, \$12,681. Yet, an estimated \$22 billion a year goes unclaimed, said Don Soard, a volunteer with Operation Veteran Aid in Oklahoma City . In 2007, only 134,000 seniors nationwide received the benefit, which was established in 1952. "Literally hundreds of thousands don't even know about it," Soard said. "Due to incomplete information, many disqualify themselves on income or assets or find the paperwork too burdensome." Streamlined process - Soard helps families complete the necessary forms, so that approval comes in four to six months. The process is streamlined for vets who are blind or have memory issues and widows with medical needs, he said. Most applicants qualify and payments are retroactive, Soard said. The few who are denied on excessive liquid assets can seek financial advice to qualify, he said. Soard started his volunteer mission two years ago, following the deaths of two family members who served in WWII. "If they'd known about this benefit, they'd have a much better quality of life in later years," he said. "Without it, many vets are forced to go on Medicaid." Oklahoma is one of nine states where the welfare program doesn't cover assisted living costs. Assisted living often can be an alternative to a nursing home when 24-hour skilled care is not an absolute need, said Willie Ferguson, executive director of Legend at Rivendell in Oklahoma City .. "But if someone just has Social Security and a small pension, it's not enough to live here," Ferguson said. According to a 2008 MetLife survey, assisted living in Oklahoma averages \$2,346 a month, while nursing homes cost \$153 a day for a private room. Of 73 Legend residents, nine receive the veterans' special pension, including Tom Bowen, 77, of Moore . Until I toured this operation, I had no idea the benefit was available," said Bowen, a retired engineer technician from the Federal Aviation Administration who served stateside during the Korean Conflict. Bowen recently moved into the Legend facility following several mini strokes and a diagnosis of short-term memory loss. "It's been pretty hard trying to handle expenses on my own and being able to replace savings," said Marie Bowen, his wife of 57 years. Finding a nearby facility and learning about the special veterans' pension has been a godsend, she said.