

***THE CENTRE COUNTY VETERAN'S NEWSLETTER***  
***By Holly Serface***  
***April 2, 2009***

Welcome to the second edition of The Centre County Veteran's Newsletter. Changes and updates in Veteran's Affairs are occurring at a very fast pace. I hope the information presented here will be of assistance to all of our veterans in Centre County. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at the Centre County Veterans Affairs office at 355-6812.

**VA Changes Global War on Terror Claims Priority:**

In 2007, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) made the decision to grant priority status in claims processing to veterans of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). The decision was based on the fact that GWOT veterans were in the process of transitioning from the service, whereas veterans from other periods had already completed their transition. Since that time, many GWOT veterans have benefited from this prioritization. Most of these veterans have completed their transition. Like veterans from other periods, some are now reopening their claims to request an increase in benefits.

Currently both original and supplemental (reopened) claims are handled on a priority basis. In an effort to be consistent with the original reasoning for establishing a priority, VA is adjusting its prioritization criteria. Accordingly, for all claims received on or after February 2, 2009, the following criteria will apply to establish GWOT prioritization for compensation and pension claims and appeals:

1. A claim from a GWOT veteran within six months of separation.
2. A supplemental claim from a GWOT veteran for PTSD where PTSD is not already service connected.
3. An appeal from a GWOT veteran of his/her initial claim following GWOT service.

There will be no change to the way GWOT claims from very seriously injured (VSI) and seriously injured (SI) GWOT veterans are processed. No changes are being made to GWOT prioritization in any other Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) program.

## **NEW STATE LAW PROVIDES CDL SKILLS TEST WAIVER FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL AND VETERANS:**

A new state law allows PennDOT to waive the Commercial Driver's License Skills Test for Pennsylvania residents who are active duty military or recent honorably discharged veterans with at least two years experience operating a commercial motor vehicle as part of their military job requirements. The waiver applies to CDL applicants who will be operating vehicles similar to those they operated in the military. CDL applicants who are active duty military or recent honorably discharged veterans must still complete all applicable knowledge tests.

For more information about the CDL Skills Test Waiver or to find out if you are eligible for the waiver, a fact sheet is available on PennDOT's Driver and Vehicle Services Web site under the Military Personnel/Veterans Information Center at [www.dmv.state.pa.us](http://www.dmv.state.pa.us), under the Veterans/Military Personnel Information Center.

## **Philipsburg Bridge Renamed Veterans Memorial Bridge:**

The US Route 322 Bridge in Philipsburg near the state Route 53 intersection was officially renamed and dedicated as the Veterans Memorial Bridge. In June 2008, the Pennsylvania Senate passed Senate Bill 999, naming the bridge as the Veterans Memorial Bridge. The legislation was signed into law (Act 60 of 2007) by Governor Edward G. Rendell in late June.

## **IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS & WEBSITES:**

Veterans Benefits Information: 1-800-827-1000 or [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)  
Health Benefits Eligibility: 1-877-222-8387 or [www.va.gov/elig](http://www.va.gov/elig)  
Education Benefits: 1-888-GIBILL-1 or [www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)  
Afghanistan and Iraq Health News: [www.va.gov/EnvironAgents](http://www.va.gov/EnvironAgents)  
Women Veterans Health Care & Benefits: [www.va.gov/wvhp](http://www.va.gov/wvhp) or [www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Topics/Women](http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Topics/Women)  
DoD Military Family Support: [www.nmfa.org](http://www.nmfa.org)  
DoD Deployment Information: [www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil)  
DoD TRICARE: 1-888-363-5433 or <http://Tricare.osd.mil>  
DoD Guard & Reserve Affairs: [www.defenselink.mil/ra](http://www.defenselink.mil/ra)

## **LOU GEHRIG'S DISEASE:**

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), also called Lou Gehrig's Disease, has become a presumptively compensable illness for all veterans with 90 days or more of continuously active service in the military. Those veterans with ALS now may receive support for themselves and their families. A report called "Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis in Veterans: Review of the Scientific Literature, analyzed and concluded that "there is limited and suggestive

evidence of an association between military service and later development of ALS.”

The VA is working to identify and contact veterans with ALS, including those whose claims for ALS previously were denied, through direct mailings and other outreach programs. If you are a veteran with 90 days or more of continuous active duty and you have been diagnosed with ALS, please contact me at the Veteran’s Affairs Office.

### **NEW GI BILL INFORMATION:**

With the anticipation of the new GI Bill that is supposed to take effect in August 2009, there have been many questions and concerns raised about how it will be implemented and who will be able to use it. Here is a brochure that has been released by the VA in reference to the new bill. This should answer some of the questions for those who will be eligible to use these benefits.

[http://www.gibill.va.gov/pamphlets/CH33/CH33\\_Pamphlet.pdf](http://www.gibill.va.gov/pamphlets/CH33/CH33_Pamphlet.pdf)

### **RETURNING SERVICE MEMBERS (OEF/OIF):**

Please share this website with all the service members and veterans you know that have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. This is a great one-stop shop for VA information that welcomes them home and keeps them informed.

<http://www.oefoif.va.gov/>

### **TRICARE HEALTH MATTERS, ISSUE I, 2009:**

For those of you eligible for Tricare, click on this link for the latest issue of Tricare Health Matters:

[https://www.hnfs.net/res/tricare/beneficiary/home/pdf/2101406123/Bene\\_News\\_2\\_2009\\_V5\\_I1.pdf](https://www.hnfs.net/res/tricare/beneficiary/home/pdf/2101406123/Bene_News_2_2009_V5_I1.pdf)

### **DIABETES MELLITUS:**

The occurrence of Type 2 diabetes is increasing, especially for the Vietnam veteran. Veterans of Vietnam have a statistically higher incidence of Type 2 Diabetes than other veterans. VA declared a link between Vietnam service and Diabetes Type 2. If you served in Vietnam and have Type 2 diabetes, you may be eligible for a service-connected disability compensation. Please call our office if you meet this criteria to set up an appointment to file a claim.

### **VET CENTERS:**

Vet Centers provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to all veterans who served in any combat zone. Veterans have earned these benefits

through their military service. Readjustment counseling includes a wide range of services provided to combat veterans in an effort to make a satisfying transition from military to civilian life. Services include individual counseling, group counseling, marital and family counseling, bereavement counseling, medical referrals, alcohol/drug assessments, information and referral to community resources, military sexual trauma counseling, and outreach/community education.

VA's readjustment counseling is provided at community-based Vet Centers located near veterans and their families. There is no cost for Vet Center readjustment counseling. If you feel you are in need of readjustment counseling, call the Williamsport Vet Center at 866-787-0101 or the DuBois Vet Center at 888-750-2955.

### **CAMP LEJEUNE WATER STUDY:**

Did you live or work at the Marine Corps Base in Camp Lejeune in 1987 or before? If so, please register with the Marine Corps by visiting [www.marines.mil/clsurvey](http://www.marines.mil/clsurvey) or by calling the Camp Lejeune Historic Drinking Water Call Center at 877-261-9782, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST. In the early 1980's, two solvents, trichloroethylene (TCE) and perchloroethylene (PCE), both unregulated at the time, were found in two water systems serving the Tarawa Terrace and Hadnot Point areas. Certain drinking water wells were identified as the source of the chemicals and were taken out of service in 1984 and 1985. The Department of the Navy is funding two independent research initiatives. The Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is determining if there is an association between exposure to the water and certain adverse health effects. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is evaluating specific health risks associated with exposure. Upon completion of the research, the Marine Corps will directly notify those on the registry through direct mail and email. Camp Lejeune water meets or exceeds all environmental standards today. Drinking water wells at Camp Lejeune are tested four times a year for volatile organic compounds (VOCs), in addition to monthly drinking water sampling. The base is in compliance with all federal and state laws and regulations to ensure safe drinking water.

### **HEARING LOSS:**

Hearing damage is the No. 1 disability in the war on terror, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs; and some experts say the true toll could take decades to become clear. Nearly 70,000 of the more than 1.3 million troops who have served in the two war zones are collecting disability for tinnitus, a potentially debilitating ringing in the ears, and more than 58,000 are on disability for hearing loss, the VA said.

The Hearing Loss Association of America is an excellent resource. Follow the link [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org) to the home page. There is a tab for OEF/OIF veterans.

### **VA INCREASES MILEAGE RATES:**

Eligible veterans will see an increase in the mileage reimbursement they receive for travel to VA facilities for medical care. The mileage reimbursement has been raised from 28.5 cents per mile to 41.5 cents per mile for all eligible veterans. Service-connected veterans, veterans receiving VA pensions, and veterans with low incomes are eligible for the reimbursement.

### **COMBAT VETERAN VOLUNTEERS NEEDED:**

Resources for Human Development is looking for combat veterans that are interested in leading discussions among other combat veterans about their experiences while being deployed. Interested persons should contact Frank Plescha at (757) 478-0517 or email [frankp@rhd.org](mailto:frankp@rhd.org).

### **OPEN ENROLLMENT FOR VA HEALTH BENEFITS:**

ATTENTION Veterans.....On April 21, 2009 from 9:30 to 3:30, two Health Benefits Advisors from the Altoona VA Hospital will be at the Philipsburg VFW to assist with the application process for VA Health Benefits. No appointment is necessary. Please join us and get enrolled in the VA Health Benefits System to see if you are eligible.

### **POST 9/11 G.I. BILL:**

The Department of Veterans Affairs plans to start accepting eligibility applications from veterans for the new Post 9/11 G.I. Bill on May 1, 2009. The eligibility determination process will take up to 24 days after your application is submitted; however, the VA will not begin paying claims until after August 1, 2009. If you plan to attend college in the fall, you can apply for your GI Bill education benefits via VONAPP (Veterans Online Application). The Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act guarantees full tuition payments for any state college or university in the United States. You can access the VONAPP website at <http://www.vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>

To access the Centre County Veteran's Newsletter online, please visit the Centre County Government website at [www.co.centre.pa.us](http://www.co.centre.pa.us)