

VFW Helps VA Battle Claims Backlog

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Washington - In a push to break a 1.9 million-claim backlog by the year 2015, the Department of Veterans Affairs has recently been pushing “Fully Developed Claims.” As an active partner in the claims process, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is supportive of any initiative that helps veterans gain faster access to their earned VA programs and benefits.

VFW National Commander William A. Thien said his nationwide cadre of 1,200 VA-accredited service officers has always strived to submit fully developed claims because the VFW knows how long it takes for a new claim just to get seen. VFW reemphasized fully developed claims by training its nationwide network of service officers a year ago.

“We want every claim to be as fully developed as possible,” said Thien, a Vietnam veteran of the U.S. Navy. “This is especially important because it normally takes well over six months for a new claim to get adjudicated, and if denied for insufficient documentation, two years or more just for the appeal. The VFW supports this initiative because a fully developed claim can cut the initial time in half, which helps speed the delivery of VA programs and services to deserving veterans, and helps to reduce the VA’s overall claims workload.”

The VA considers claims to be “fully developed” when all available supporting documentation or evidence within the control of the veteran is submitted with the application. Such evidence includes private treatment records, supporting statements and other documentation. The VA is still obligated to obtain records under government control, such as service treatment records and VA hospital reports, and the VA might also schedule an exam, if necessary. The VA will not, however, consider a claim to be “fully developed” if additional evidence within the veteran’s ability to provide is still required.

Since the onus is on veterans to prove a service-connection, Thien said veterans can help speed the filing process by being better prepared when they meet with VFW service officers. “VFW service officers last year helped 125,000 veterans to recoup an organizational record \$3.7 billion in earned compensation and pension, and half way through the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2013, almost 22 percent of all VFW-assisted claims filed were considered fully developed,” he said. “We are in business to provide an expert, free service to all eligible veterans, and to prove that no one does more for veterans than the VFW.”

For more on the claims process or to request VFW service officer assistance, go to <http://www.vfw.org/NVS/>.

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