

VFW Applauds New PTSD Claims Decision

National commander is applauding the Department of Veterans Affairs

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of America's largest combat veterans organization is applauding the Department of Veterans Affairs for eliminating a requirement for veterans to explicitly prove that a traumatic event directly caused their post-traumatic stress.

"From this point forward," wrote VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki in a statement released today, "VA will not require corroboration of a PTSD stressor related to fear of hostile military or terrorist activity, if a VA doctor confirms a diagnosis of PTSD and the stressful experience recalled by the veteran adequately supports that diagnosis."

Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., the national commander of the 2.1 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries, called the VA secretary's decision to ease PTSD claims requirements a sea-change in the mindset of the VA. It follows numerous other decisions that increased the list of presumptions for diseases associated with Agent Orange exposure; increased services and programs for women veterans, veterans who reside in rural areas as well as the homeless; and reduced the size of the claims form from 23 to 10 pages. Tradewell said even the VA's outreach to patients possibly exposed to improperly sterilized equipment at a small number of its hospitals reflects the department's proactive, veterans' first attitude.

"This new decision recognizes that wartime service is extremely stressful and dangerous, regardless of military occupational specialty, and that each person internalizes their wartime experiences differently," said Tradewell, a combat-wounded Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis.

"The VA is acknowledging that mental injuries can be just as debilitating as any physical wound, and to no longer require veterans to relive their nightmares in great detail is a very

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positive step forward for veterans of all generations," he said.

"The VFW believes this decision will enable more veterans to seek the care that they deserve and have earned, and we hope the VA will also begin honoring PTSD diagnoses by civilian mental health professionals as this new regulation moves forward," said Tradewell. "We also salute Rep. John J. Hall (D-N.Y.) for championing the change through the House Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs he chairs."