

VA Benefits a Total Surprise for Elderly Veteran

He had no idea someone was still fighting for him

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“This veteran’s claim came across my desk for appeal review,” said VFW Service Officer Mary Bandini of California. “I could not get in touch with him for months, but I continued to work the case on his behalf.”

The veteran is John Rizzo*, a Marine in the Battle of Guadalcanal and Air Force pilot in the Korean War. During Air Force training, Rizzo’s plane crashed, breaking his back and ending his accomplished military career.

Rizzo was medically discharged and filed his first VA claim way back in 1954. He was denied. In 2008, he submitted another claim. This time for a wheelchair ramp. Again, denied. The unjust denial cost him a broken hip ... twice.

“With the help of our National Veterans Service team, we were able to argue for the secondary conditions that required Rizzo to use a wheelchair,” said Bandini. “When I finally got word that his claim was headed to the court, I submitted a written statement of support. I still couldn’t reach him, so I relied solely on his file.”

Rizzo didn’t ask for much. All he wanted was a ramp. What he got was full benefits and six-figure retroactive pay dating back to 2008.

When Rizzo’s check arrived in the mail, he was skeptical. This must be a clerical error, he thought. He had no idea that someone was still fighting for him.

When Bandini was finally able to reach Rizzo, who is 90 years old, she assured him the check was not a mistake and that his claim had been accepted after all these years. He was beyond elated.

“He wanted to meet so he could thank me personally, but I feel like he’s the one who deserves the thanks for his service,” said Bandini.

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“Seeing a veteran get approved after so many years is the best part of the job,” said Bandini. “I was not able to get him a ramp, but I did get him enough money to build one. The contractor starts working on it next week.”

Bandini is passionate about her job and helping veterans stand their ground against the VA ... against the system that so many veterans have gotten lost in.

Veterans should put as much priority on advocating for themselves now as they once put on protecting this nation. They have earned that right,” Bandini concluded.

*Name changed to protect privacy.