

‘Some of the Best Resources We Have in Our Corner’

Vietnam veteran finds friendship and support through the VFW's National Veterans Service program

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Anthony R. Hansen, 71, lives in Alaska with his wife of 50 years, Debi. Proud parents of four, the two enjoy watching their kids build families of their own.

“They have grown to be very wonderful adults, and all have married and now have children,” said Hansen. “So, you can see that this part of my life has been, and still is, very rewarding.”

Family has always been an important influence in Hansen’s life. He grew up in a rural community in Roswell, South Dakota, with 16 siblings. He was the youngest of five boys. Like his older brothers, Hansen enlisted when he was of age.

“In November of 1968, I joined the Army at 17 years old,” he said. “I was eager to join because I come from a long line of service people. My grandfather served in the Navy in World War I. My father was in the Army in World War II.”

At the time he enlisted, all four of Hansen’s brothers were serving in Vietnam, so he was not permitted to do the same. Instead, he deployed to Thailand.

While serving, Hansen broke his right leg. A surgery that was meant to fix the injury resulted in lifelong complications instead.

“It mended in such a way that it left me with a five-eighths of an inch shorter leg and a foot that was not properly aligned,” said Hansen. “As time went on, this caused me severe back, knee and hip problems and often caused problems with my ability to work.”

Hansen’s condition has worsened in recent years.

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“I started experiencing severe leg and abdominal cramping, which caused my whole body to ache most of the time,” he said. “What I was not aware of was my exposure to Agent Orange and the effects it was having on me.”

In 2018, Hansen underwent several tests and received a diagnosis.

“I was told I had stage three, almost stage four, prostate cancer,” he said. “When I inquired with the VA, I was told that because my military service was in Thailand and not Vietnam, it could not be Agent Orange related.”

A friend familiar with VFW’s National Veterans Service program suggested Hansen reach out for claims assistance.

“Wow was I shocked!” recalled Hansen. “My first contact with NVS was with an outstanding person by the name of Mary Beth. She put me in touch with Lisa Robinson — what a champion!”

Robinson, a VFW Accredited Service Officer, got Hansen’s disability rating increased from 40% to 60%. Currently, she is helping Hansen appeal the VA’s findings regarding his cancer diagnosis and claims that it could not be due to Agent Orange exposure.

Throughout the process, Daniel Luby, another VFW Accredited Service Officer, has also provided support.

“Daniel and I got along great,” said Hansen, “and what a wealth of information and a friend he has turned out to be.”

Hansen encourages others to take advantage of similar support.

“I would just like to say to my fellow veterans that the people who work for these organizations — the VFW, etc. — are not our enemies, but they are, in fact, some of the best resources we have in our corner,” he said. “If you haven’t done so yet, you really should contact them.”

Learn more about the [VFW's National Veterans Service \(NVS\) program](#).