GULF VETS

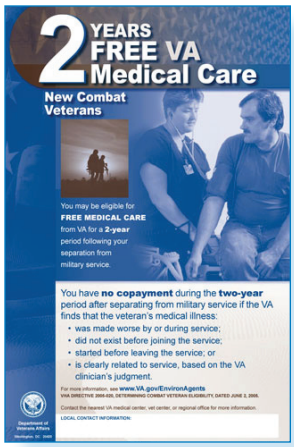
Gulf War Review

www.VA.gov/GulfWar

Information for Veterans Who Served in Desert Shield/Storm and Their Families

Vol. 14, No. 2 July 2006

New Poster Highlights 2-Year Rule: Combat Vets May Be Eligible for Free Medical Care



You may see a new poster (officially known as VA POSTER 10-125) at your local VA facility that alerts recent combat veterans to a relatively new health care benefit. Military personnel who recently served in a combat zone or in an area of hostilities comparable to that seen during combat may be eligible for two years of free (**no co-payment**) medical care from VA for conditions that may be related to their military service. You can also see the new poster online at **www.VA.gov/EnvironAgents**.

Combat (as well as other) veterans were previously required to prove that a medical problem is connected to their military service to receive free VA care for that condition, or they must have relatively low incomes. However, since November 11, 1998, VA has been

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VA/University of Texas Partner for Extensive Research Effort on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

On April 21, 2006, top Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) officials signed a partnership agreement with leaders of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas for research related to illnesses experienced by some veterans of the Gulf War.

"VA partnering with this prestigious medical center is great news for veterans," said Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin, then VA's Under Secretary for Health. "This clear commitment to research will help us explore new ways to provide the best possible care to our veterans," Perlin added.

U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, who also attended the signing ceremony, sponsored legislation that directed VA to dedicate $15 million in research funds annually for 5 years toward research on Gulf War illnesses. Hutchinson chairs the Senate Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs. She represents Texas in the United States Senate.

"Senator Hutchinson's commitment to the problems of Gulf War veterans–and her dedication to a wide range of other VA-related issues–have improved VA's benefits and programs for all veterans," Perlin said.

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providing free medical care for 2 years after an honorable discharge to veterans who served in a combat theater or similar area. They do not have to prove either a service-connection for their health care problems or that they have low incomes.

The benefit does not cover treatment for medical problems clearly unrelated to military service, such as care for common colds, injuries from accidents that happened after discharge from active duty, and disorders that existed before the person joined the military.

How It Works

To receive free medical care, veterans must be able to show that they served since November 11, 1998, in a theater of combat operations or in combat against a hostile force. It applies to VA hospital care, outpatient services, and nursing home care. National Guard and Reserve personnel, who serve alongside their active duty comrades in combat will, in most cases, be eligible.

After 2 years, these veterans will be subject to the same eligibility and enrollment rules as other veterans, but this program allows these veterans 2 years to find out if their condition is service-connected.

Disability Compensation Rates for 2006

Percent Disabled	No Dependents	Veteran & Spouse
10%	$112	—
20%	$218	—
30%	$337	$377
40%	$485	$539
50%	$690	$757
60%	$873	$954
70%	$1,099	$1,193
80%	$1,277	$1,385
90%	$1,436	$1,557
100%	$2,393	$2,528

These rates were effective December 1, 2005 in accordance with Public Law 109-111, enacted November 22, 2005. Veterans with disability ratings of at least 30 percent are eligible for additional allowances for dependents. Dependents include spouses, minor children, children between ages 18 and 23 who are attending school, children who are permanently incapable of self-support because of disability arising before age 18, and dependent parents. The additional amount depends on the disability rating.

Veterans with certain severe disabilities may also be eligible for additional special monthly compensation. For additional rate information, see compensation tables online at **www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Rates/comp01.htm.** **Legislation is pending in Congress to increase the rates.**

How to Get Disability Compensation from VA

Veterans exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides used in Vietnam are eligible for monthly payments, called disability compensation, from VA if they are suffering with illnesses or injuries that VA determined to have been incurred or aggravated during active military service. Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation also have special access to disability compensation for illnesses or injuries related to exposure to ionizing radiation. The service of the veteran must have been terminated from military service through separation or discharge under conditions that were other than dishonorable.

The amount of disability compensation varies according to the degree of disability and the number of dependents. Benefits are not subject to Federal or State income tax. The receipt of military retirement pay, disability severance pay, and separation incentive payments known as Special Separation Benefits (SSB) and Voluntary Separation Incentives (VSI) also affects the amount of VA compensation paid. Under current law, the payment of VA compensation will affect the amount received in military retirement pay, disability severance pay, SSB, and VSI.

The disability ratings range from 0 to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). For example, in 2006: a veteran with a disability rating of 10 percent receives $112; a veteran with a disability rating of 50 percent gets $690; and a veteran who is totally disabled and therefore, evaluated at 100 percent, receives $2,393 monthly.

Veterans with disability ratings between 30 and 100 percent are also eligible for monthly allowances for a spouse ranging from $40 to $135, and for each child, $20 to $98. (The amount depends on the disability rating of the veteran.)

A veteran who is in need of regular aid and attendance of another person, or who is permanently housebound, may be entitled to additional benefits. VA must make the determination before the veteran can get these benefits.

To determine the eligibility of Vietnam veterans for disability compensation, VA adjudicators consider each case individually, looking at a number of factors, including the various exposures, duration of these exposures, elapsed time between exposure and onset of the disease, gender, family history, age at the time of exposure, the extent to which a nonservice-related exposure could contribute to the disease, and the relative sensitivity of exposed tissue.

For a given individual, VA will consider the possibility that various diseases were caused by exposures to numerous risk factors, if supported by medical/scientific evidence. To be eligible for compensation, VA must determine that it is at least as likely as not that a veteran's illness was caused by his/her exposure to toxic substances during military service.

Must Apply to Be Considered

Compensation is not automatically given to any veteran. VA veterans service representatives (VSRs) can provide the necessary application and assist veterans who need help in completing it. VSRs are located at all VA Regional Offices, in VA medical centers, and at most VA clinics. For help in locating a VSR near you, call the following toll-free telephone number: **1-800-827-1000**. You may also apply online at the Web site listed below.

Other Benefits

In addition to the compensation program described above, individual veterans may be eligible for health care and the full range of other benefits offered by VA, including education and training, vocational rehabilitation, home loan guarantees, life insurance, pension, burial benefits, and more.

To learn more about VA's programs, veterans and other interested parties can visit the VA home page ***http://www.VA.gov****, or call* ***1-800-827-1000****.*

Conditions Automatically Recognized for Service-Connection

Three health conditions suffered by some Gulf War veterans are presumptively (automatically) recognized by VA for service-connection. These are fibromylgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and irritable bowel syndrome.

Enacted in 1994, Public Law 103-446 allows VA to pay compensation to Gulf War veterans with certain chronic disabilities resulting from illnesses that VA could not diagnose that appeared during active duty in the Gulf War or within a specified time period after Gulf War service, which led to a degree of disability of ten (or more) percent.

In 2001, Public Law 107-103, expanded the definition of "qualifying chronic disability" to include the 3 conditions listed above.

VA encourages veterans with any of these conditions — including those denied service-connection before this law was passed — to apply for VA disability compensation.

Special Eligibility for Certain Disabled Military Retirees

The following article was submitted on behalf of the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard by Barry W. Craigen, Combat Related Special Compensation Program Manager, HQ Air Force Personnel Center.

Military retirees have funded their own disability compensation from within their military retired pay for the 100 years preceding 1999. Congress approved the Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) program for implementation in June 2003 to replace some or all of the monies offset from military retirees' pay by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for disability compensation for qualifying disabilities.

In determining basic program eligibility, retired members should answer the following questions:

- Am I retired with 20 (or more) years of active duty uniformed service or retired at age 60 from the Guard or Reserve?
- Am I receiving military retired pay?
- Do I have a compensable VA disability rating of 10 percent or higher?
- Is my retired pay offset by VA disability payments (VA Waiver)?

If you answered "yes" to **ALL FOUR of the above** and have not submitted your CRSC application, you could be missing an opportunity for **additional tax-free compensation**. The program focuses on VA rated "combat-related" disabilities incurred from armed conflict as well as hazardous service (aircrew, EOD, parachuting, diving, etc.), under conditions simulating war, or through instrumentalities of war (military-unique vehicles, munitions, Agent Orange, etc.).

VA may also link Southwest Asia theater of operations service during the Gulf War (and forward) to a variety of presumptive conditions that could qualify under CRSC. Specifically, an undiagnosed illness, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromylgia, irritable bowel syndrome, or any other illness that the VA Secretary determines meets the criteria for a medically unexplained chronic multi-symptom illness or any diagnosed illness that the Secretary determines in regulations prescribed under 38 USC 1117(d) warrants a presumption of service-connection.

The amount payable is directly related to the rating percentage assigned to VA service connected combat-related disability(ies) **that qualify under CRSC criteria (not all disabilities qualify)**, but cannot exceed the amount of withheld retired pay. It costs you the postage to mail your application with supporting documentation and a few minutes of your time to apply – let your Service CRSC experts make the call on your eligibility. Many people are extremely surprised to learn their disabilites qualify under the program! Since 2003, the Services have processed over 100,500 applications as of 31 March 2006 with an average approval rate of 65 percent.

Your CRSC team (the Service from which you retired) needs your completed DD 2860 (CRSC Application), all DD 214(s)/retirement order as well as your VA rating decision letter(s) and any other available medical or personnel documentation to support your claim for combat-related disabilities. CRSC applies to all of the military Services and the Coast Guard. Any of the Service teams can explain the program and discuss the documentation required. The application is available online through the Defenselink Web site or by contacting any of the Services for a paper or email copy. Note: for those retirees under the Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payment (CRDP) program, you may **only** receive compensation under one program – CRDP or CRSC – at a time. If approved for CRSC, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service will initially determine which program is most financially advantageous to you – and you'll have the option of changing between the two every year during the annual open season.

DoD Defenselink
http://www.defenselink.mil/prhome/mppcrsc.html

AIR FORCE
HQ Air Force Personnel Center
http://ask.afpc.randolph.af.mil/
1-866-616-3775 toll-free
(select option 5, then option 1)
or 210-565-1600

ARMY
Army Human Resources Command
http://www.crsc.army.mil/
1-866-281-3254 toll-free

COAST GUARD
Coast Guard Personnel Command (adm-1)
http://www.uscg.mil/hq/cgpc/adm/adm1.htm
1-866-307-1336 toll-free

NAVY AND MARINE CORPS
Naval Council of Personnel Boards
http://www.hq.navy.mil/ncpb/CRSCB/combatrelated.htm
1-877-366-2772 toll-free (prerecorded)

GW Research Advisory Committee Meets

On May 15-16, 2006, the Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses met in Washington, DC, to discuss (1) various Gulf War-related health studies, (2) the recently approved legislation authorizing $15 million for research at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, and (3) the implications of these new funds.

About the "Review"

The *Gulf War Review* is produced by VA's Environmental Agents Service (EAS) to provide information on long-term health issues and other concerns of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm veterans, their families, and others. The "*Review*" describes actions by VA and other Federal departments and agencies to respond to these concerns and gives updates on a wide range of VA programs for veterans. For earlier issues of this newsletter and related information, see our Web site **www.VA.gov/GulfWar**. The most recent issues of this newsletter are dated May 2005 and November 2005. For information regarding the current conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, please see the *Operations Iraqi Freedom/ Enduring Freedom Review* on our Web site at **www.VA.gov/EnvironAgents**.

This is the 38th issue of the *Gulf War Review*. The first 35 issues were mailed to veterans on the Gulf War Registry. Last year due to budgetary problems, the newsletter was transformed into an **internet only** publication. EAS anticipates publication of the *Gulf War Review* newsletter once or twice a year, depending on the amount of news on this subject. This issue was completed in middle June 2006, and does not include developments that occurred after that time.

Comments, questions, and suggestions for future issues are encouraged and can be sent to the *Gulf War Review* Comments, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Nicholson was scheduled to address the advisory committee but canceled to attend the funeral of former, longtime House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery.

A complete list of advisory committee members, including the six recently appointed by the Secretary, was published in the November 2005 issue of the *Gulf War Review*. This was the first meeting since the appointment of the new members. Information concerning the history of the committee, membership, previous meetings, and recommendations, can be found in earlier issues of this newsletter.

IOM Completing Work on Fourth Volume of GW Risk Factors

The National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine (IOM) is nearing completion of its fourth major report, entitled Gulf War and Health, which assesses the possible link between various exposures and veterans' health problems. This report, expected in late September 2006, will focus on selected infectious diseases and the physiologic, psychosocial and psychologic effects of deployment-related stress.

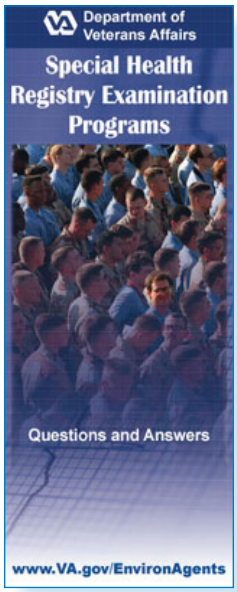
In 1998, Congress passed legislation (actually two separate laws: Public Law 105-277, the Persian Gulf War Veterans Act, and Public Law 105-368, the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act), which directed VA to contract with the independent non-governmental National Academy of Sciences (NAS) for an evaluation of the scientific/medical literature regarding associations between illness and exposure to toxic agents and environmental or wartime hazards, or to medicines or vaccinations associated with service in the Gulf War. This was based on earlier legislation, Public Law 102-4, which provided for similar evaluations of the health effects of herbicides used in Vietnam.

The NAS assigned the Gulf War project to its Institute of Medicine (IOM). The legislation provided for consideration of a wide array of biologic, chemical, and physical agents exposures. Because of the large number of agents to study, IOM divided the projects into several reviews. IOM has completed three comprehensive reviews: in 2000, Gulf War and Health,

Volume 1: Depleted Uranium, Pyridostigmine Bromide, Sarin, and Vaccines and Gulf War and Health; in 2002, Insecticides and Solvents; and in 2005, Fuels, Combustion Products, and Propellants.

Recently, IOM also conducted an update of the sarin review in their report, "Updated Literature Review of Sarin." All of these reports are available online at **www.nap.edu** and summaries are at **www.VA.gov/EnvironAgents**.

New Brochure Explains Registry Programs



Health Registry Brochure

VA's Environmental Agents Service has produced a brochure, entitled "VA Special Health Registry Examination Programs" that provides useful information about the various health registry programs it administers, including the Gulf War Registry.

Among other things, the publication explains or describes the health registry exams, why VA has registries, how a veteran gets on a registry, the benefits and limitations, where registry examinations are available, and how many veterans have participated in the various VA registry programs. The brochure is available online at **www.VA.gov/EnvironAgents.**

The brochure helps make clear what these programs can do for veterans, including the relationship between the registries and the disability compensation claims process. The registries are separate from claims. While the registry examination results might yield useful information for the adjudication of a claim, participation in the registry does not mean that a claim is filed. The filing of a disability claim is a separate process, and importantly, does not require a registry exam.

The brochure can be identified as Information Bulletin number 10-57. It is expected to be available from the Environmental Health Coordinator at all VA medical centers by early September 2006. It can be seen at **www.VA.gov/EnvironAgents.**

Gulf War Health Registry Statistics

Initial Examinations

2003 –	2,195
2004 –	3,385
2005 –	3,560
January 2006-May 2006 –	1,010
1990-May 2006 –	96,592

Followup Examinations

1990-May 2006 –	5,476

Total (Initial & Followup)

1990-May 2006 –	102,068

Total (Initial & Followup)

Agent Orange Registry Examinations

1978-May 2006 –	453,581

Depleted Uranium (DU) Examinations*

1991-May 2006 –	559

***There are no DU followup examinations.**

Operation Enduring Freedom Veterans are not eligible for a Gulf War Registry examination because, technically, they are not Gulf War veterans. If they spent any time in the Iraqi Theater of Operations they would be eligible. Moreover, they may be eligible for a similar health exam.

Questions & Answers

The "*Review*" occasionally includes a question-and-answer feature in which VA officials respond to inquiries from readers regarding the Gulf War experience, problems encountered by these veterans and their families, and VA and other government programs designed to help them.

Q. Some time ago, VA offered a free health examination to the spouses and children of Gulf War Registry participants. Does VA still offer these examinations? If not, why?

A. Authority from Congress to conduct these examinations expired several years ago, and it was **not** renewed. Those who initially pushed for this examination did so in the hopes that the examination would reveal something significant about the health of these individuals.

The program only offered the health examination. Any necessary medical treatment of spouses and children was not covered.

Questions on Gulf War health issues and related matters should be sent to *Gulf War Review* Questions, Environmental Agents Service (131), VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20420. We cannot answer all the questions in the newsletter, but will include as many as we can.

Mather Retires, Deyton Takes Charge as Chief Public Health and Environmental Hazards Officer

Dr. Lawrence R. Deyton

January 2006 saw a change in leadership at the Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, the office responsible for overseeing VA's medical care program for Gulf War veterans as well as a number of other important programs. After more than 15 years as head of the office and more than 26 years of Federal service, Susan H. Mather, M.D., M.P.H., retired. One of her top officials, Lawrence R. Deyton, M.S.P.H., M.D., was quickly named as her replacement.

As Chief Public Health and Environmental Hazards Officer, Mather led VA's program to provide high-quality health services to veterans of Operations Desert Storm/Shield. She was also responsible for a wide array of "hot topics" including smoking, immunizations, Legionnaires disease, women veterans' health, HIV/AIDS, mustard gas, cold injury, atomic radiation hepatitis, and Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam.

Mather was the driving force behind implementation of the Women's Veterans' Health Program. Her commitment and dedication to improving health care for women veterans was recognized when she received the 2003 Good Housekeeping /Wyeth Award for Women's Health.

One of only a few women graduating from the University of Maryland School of Medicine in 1965, Mather later earned a Master's Degree of Public Health and Epidemiology from the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health. She worked 26 years in VA Central Office.

A few days after Mather retired, Dr. Deyton was named as her successor. Deyton was Chief Consultant for the public health programs of the office since 1998, building policies and programs in HIV, hepatitis C, and emerging infectious diseases on behalf of health care providers and patients in the VA health system. Before that, he led research programs in the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) at the National Institutes of Health for 11 years, formulated policy for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health of the Department of Health and Human Services for 6 years, and served as a legislative aide with the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Health and the Environment.

Deyton also teaches—he is Associate Professor of Medicine and of Health Policy, George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences, and practices medicine—he holds a weekly clinic at the Washington, DC VA Medical Center caring for veterans with HIV, infectious diseases and hepatitis C. He is a graduate of Kansas University, the Harvard School of Public Health and the George Washington University School of Medicine and has over 100 publications in peer-reviewed journals on AIDS clinical trials, clinical trials methodology, and public health aspects of HIV.

Straight from the Source: VA's Environmental Agents Service is Serious About Communicating With Veterans

Communication is an important part of every relationship. For nearly 25 years, VA has been communicating with a special group of veterans who might have been exposed to environmental hazards while serving in combat (that is with veterans who served in Vietnam).

Debuting in 1982, the *Agent Orange Review* was the first VA national newsletter designed to inform Vietnam veterans of health issues specifically related to their military service. It quickly proved to be "an invaluable

resource of information veterans and others," according to Layne Drash, former director of Environmental Agents Service in Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards.

Back in the early 1980s, there was little knowledge in the veterans community about Agent Orange and the long-term effects of exposure to dioxin, Drash noted. So the newsletter was filling a communication void.

But to be effective, it had to present complicated information in easy-to-read format. This was one the toughest challenges, according to the newsletter's first editor, Donna St. John, who now works for the USO.

The VA Office of Public Affairs published the *Review* throughout the mid-1980s. In 1989, responsibility transferred to Donald Rosenblum in Environmental Agents Service. Under his watch, the concept of communicating directly with veterans has blossomed. "Veterans want and need this information to protect their health (and understand the VA benefits available to them). We give them as much information as we can find," he explained.

Today, Rosenblum produces four national newsletters for veterans who may have been exposed to environmental hazards: the *Agent Orange Review*, *Gulf War Review*, *Operation Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom Review*, and *Ionizing Radiation Review*. Each newsletter is published about twice a year, depending on the amount of new information available. (In 2000, these newsletters also became available online, at **www.VA.gov/EnvironAgents.**)

The newsletters are sent directly to veterans registered on VA's four health registries, which offer physical examinations tailored to address specific health issues, as well as VA medical centers, Vet Centers, regional offices and other interested parties. (Veterans can also choose to get the newsletter electronically.)

The first issue of the *Gulf War Review* mailed was released in October 1992. It was originally called the *Persian Gulf Review* but the name was changed in 1997 to be sensitive to individuals of Persian ethnicity. It offers up-to-date information on new clinical programs and the research agenda concerning health issues that arose during and after the 1991 Gulf War.

In 2003, Rosenblum began working on a newsletter for veterans of the (current) wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, because their environmental exposures differed (in some ways) from veterans of the first Gulf War. So far he has produced three 12-page issues with information on the possible long-term health consequences of (and other issues relating to) military service in Iraq and Afghanistan.

With the publicity on Agent Orange and Gulf War health concerns, a group of veterans involved in the testing of nuclear weapons after World War II recently contacted VA to urge creation of a newsletter relating to their health concerns. In response, Rosenblum started the *Ionizing Radiation Review*.

Veterans seem to appreciate and benefit from the newsletters. One who receives the *Ionizing Radiation Review* responded in a reader survey that he liked having research findings compiled into a single source. He previously had to sift through reams of literature to find information and sometimes had to turn to "relatively obscure sources."

To read editions of all four newsletters, visit **www.VA.gov/EnvironAgents**.

For more information, contact
Donald J. Rosenblum, Deputy Director,
Environmental Agents Service (131)
VA Central Office
810 Vermont Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC, 20420

Donald Rosenblum with the newsletters he produces for veterans who may have been exposed to environmental hazards.

The above article was jointly prepared by Environmental Agents Service intern Tiffany Anzalone, then a graduate student at Louisiana State University, and Matt Bristol, Assistant Editor of the VA's Employee magazine VAnguard. It appeared in the September/October 2005 issue of the VAnguard.

VA to Survey Veterans for Centers of Excellence Award Program

Later this year, VA will make the second awards of the coveted Environmental Health Center of Excellence Awards. These awards are based on survey responses received from veterans about the quality of care they received from VA.. The individual veterans being sent the survey had received the Agent Orange, Gulf War, or Ionizing Radiation Registry examination at a VA medical facility.

The survey will ask veterans to name a VA staff person, including a Registry clinician or coordinator, that has provided them with "outstanding customer service". Veterans may wish to acknowledge the facility rather than an individual.

The following 13 centers were identified as "exceptional" in the 2004 survey:

- VA Medical Center (VAMC) Boise, ID;
- VAMC Cheyenne, WY;
- VAMC Durham, NC;
- VAMC Fargo, ND
- VAMC Fresno, CA;
- VAMC Grand Junction, CO;
- VAMC Manchester, NH;
- W.G. (Bill) Hefner, VAMC Salisbury, NC;
- VAMC San Francisco, CA;
- VAMC White River Junction, VT;
- VA Outpatient Clinic (VAOPC) Oakland Park, FL;
- VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic Williamsport, PA; and
- VAOPC Winston-Salem, NC.

Lawrence W. Deyton, M.S.P.H., M.D., recently appointed Chief Public Health and Environmental Hazards Officer, will sign each certificate and request that the Center Directors arrange for display in areas where it could be easily recognized.

Environmental Agents Service (EAS) Director, Mark A. Brown indicated that EAS has decided to open up the process and welcome nominations from registry participants who do not receive a formal survey. Consequently, any veteran who has received excellent service from VA in the last year or two and would like to share his or her experience with EAS officials, can write to EAS, AWARDS, VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, N.W., DC 20420. We welcome your input. Please be specific.

Denver VA Health Administration Center Gets High Marks

The VA Health Administration Center (HAC) in Denver ranked among the best health insurance organizations in the American Customer Service Index annual survey. While VA health care, in general, scored much higher than similar private services, the HAC scored 86 out of 100 points possible. That is 14 points more than the federal government average, and is the third highest overall for the entire government.

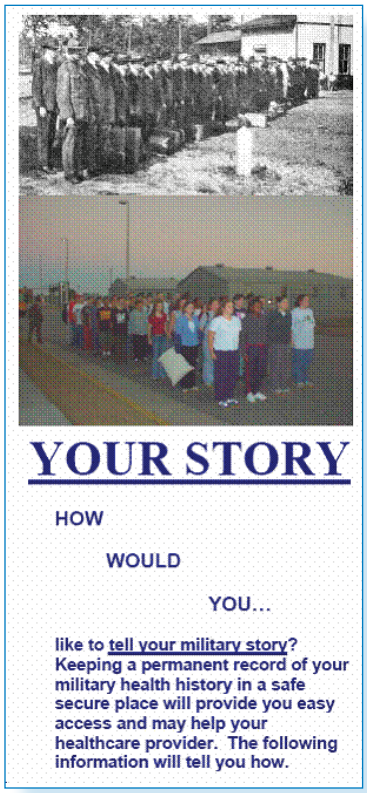
The independent study compared the HAC to other civilian health insurance industry leaders. The HAC was scored 24 points higher than the nearest private sector organization. The HAC administers a number of programs that benefit Vietnam veterans and their families. They include the Civilian Health and Medical Program of VA (CHAMPVA), the spina bifida health care program, and the health care program for certain disabled children of women Vietnam veterans.

The HAC also administered the (now defunct) Gulf War veterans' spouse and children health examination program, and currently runs the foreign medical program (which provides services to veterans living or traveling throughout the world), and the Fee program (which provides services to veterans who need care not available within a nearby VA medical center).

Veterans Can Record Their Own Military History Online

The Veterans Health Administration, the largest component of the Department of Veterans Affairs, recently distributed to every VA Medical Center, Vet Center and Regional Office a new brochure that explains how a veteran can record his or her military history online with "MyHealtheVet." The brochure is also available online at **www.VA.gov/EnvironAgents.**

MyHealtheVet is a VA Web site that provides a great deal of health information for veterans and others. It is located at **www.myhealth.va.gov/.**



The program lets veterans record their personal military history in privacy and at their convenience. The information is permanently and confidentially retained in MyHealtheVet.

If they wish, a veteran can choose to share their history with their health care providers and others. This is a totally voluntary program. Veterans are not required to participate.

In particular, details of incidents that may involve exposures to occupational and military hazards, including exposure to a wide range of environmental hazards encountered during military service, can be of value to veterans and to their health care providers as part of understanding a veteran's medical problems and complaints, and to help establish rapport.

The new brochure, titled "Your Story: How would you like to tell your military story," describes how to log on to "MyHealtheVet," and to record information about incidents that took place during a veteran's military career. According to VA officials responsible for maintaining the MyHealtheVet Web site, the personal military history feature is the most popular item on the site.

The program provides an online military history form that allows a veteran to easily record details including the time and location where an incident occurred, branch of service, military occupation and specialties, assignments, military or occupational exposures that may have occurred, and other relevant details.

Providing the opportunity to record a personal military history is part of VA's effort to reach out to veterans by listening. A related effort is the Military Service History pocket card, which suggests some key, basic questions that a provider may ask a veteran about their military service (available at **www.VA.gov/oaa/pocketcard**).

Newsletter Editor Rosenblum to Retire in September

After nearly 34 years of Federal Service, including about 32 years with VA, the writer/editor of the *Gulf War Review*, Donald J. Rosenblum, is retiring. This is his final issue of the *Gulf War Review*. He has been the chief writer and editor of the newsletter since its beginning in 1992.

Rosenblum has been working on issues related to environmental hazards since he joined the Agent Orange program in September 1980. As noted elsewhere in this issue, he also prepares the *Agent Orange Review*, *Operations Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom Review*, and *Ionizing Radiation Review*. In addition, he has authored numerous Information Bulletins (brochures, pamphlets, fact sheets), co-edited two books in the Veterans Health Initiative series, assisted in the development of various posters, exhibits, and videotape programs, and responded to thousands of letters.

He is the recipient of numerous awards (including the Word-master Award, three times) and commendations from VA and wide array of organizations for whom he has volunteered.

The newsletter will continue!

Where to Get Help and Additional Information

Active duty military personnel with questions or concerns about service in Southwest Asia (including Operations Desert Storm, Desert Shield, Iraqi Freedom, and Enduring Freedom) - contact your commanding officer or call the **Department of Defense (DoD) Gulf War Veterans' Hotline** (**1-800-796-9699**) for information. DoD also offers the "**Direct Veterans Hotline,**" with the toll-free number **1-800-497-6261**.

ODS, OIF and OEF veterans with concerns about their health should contact their nearest VA medical center. The telephone number can be found in your local telephone directory under Department of Veterans Affairs in the "U.S. Government" listings. Medical care is available, and a Gulf War Registry examination for ODS and OIF veterans is also available on request.

The **VA Gulf War Information Helpline** can also provide information and assistance. The toll-free telephone number is **1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387)**.

Check our Web sites for more Gulf War information on health care and other benefits at **www.VA.gov/GulfWar** and **www.VA.gov/EnvironAgents**.

Gulf War veterans in need of **marital/family counseling** should contact the nearest VA medical center or VA Vet Center, also listed in your phonebook under Department of Veterans Affairs in the "U.S. Government" listings. For additional information about these programs call the **VA Gulf War Information Helpline at 1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387)**.

Gulf War veterans seeking disability compensation for illnesses incurred in or aggravated by military service can contact a Veterans Benefits Counselor at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility at **1-800-827-1000**, or call the **VA Gulf War Information Helpline** at **1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387)**. You can also start a claim online at **www.VA.gov**.

Gulf War veterans interested in learning about the wide range of benefit programs administered by VA should contact a Veterans Benefits Counselor at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility at **1-800- 827-1000**, or call the VA Gulf War Information Helpline at **1-800-PGW-VETS (1-800-749-8387)**.

Representatives of **veterans service organizations**, including the American Legion **(1-800-433-3318)**, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States **(1-800-VFW-1899)**, Disabled American Veterans **(1-877-426-2838)**, etc., have been very helpful to Gulf War veterans, especially veterans who are seeking disability compensation. *(These organizations are cited as examples. There are many other excellent organizations. VA does not endorse or recommend anyone group over another.)*

County Veterans Service Officers also have been of great help to many military veterans, including those who served in the Gulf War, who are seeking benefits they earned through their service to the Nation.

For additional **Federal benefit** information, see *VA's Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents* booklet. It is updated annually to reflect changes in law and policies. It is available for purchase from the U.S., Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, DC 20402, Web site: **www.bookstore.gpo.gov**. VA's World Wide Web pages are updated throughout the year to present the most current information. The VA home page **(www.VA.gov)** contains links to selections on compensation and pension benefits, health care benefits and services, burial and memorial benefits, etc.