

Eyes Right

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New tools make filing faster

Gathering military records for veterans is now a much quicker process for the Veterans Service Commission (VSC) thanks to the introduction of new, innovative tools. One such tool is the Defense Personnel Records Image Retrieval System (DPRIS). Previously, military records could only be requested from a National Personnel Records Center, and it took an average of four to six weeks for those records to arrive by mail. With DPRIS, VSC service officers can pull full military records in as little as 10 minutes, which expedites the process in a way that was not possible before.

The implementation of more efficient electronic tools, such as DPRIS, adds unmatched speed as yet another benefit of working with the experts at the VSC. Along with offering services to veterans free of charge and ensuring that a veteran's claim is complete and accurate, the VSC can also coordinate the whole process at a much faster speed than veterans filing independently.

And that innovation is only expected to improve. In the near future, the VSC will be able to file electronically instead of by paper, allowing its officers to bypass traditional mail altogether. Another tool to speed the process for veterans is already in use. Service officers now have an encrypted emailing system that is secure enough to transfer sensitive files, such as medical information or

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Faster VA benefits for veterans

VSC moves eBenefits quickly

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers eBenefits, a website that is intended to assist veterans who want to apply for and access their benefits and VA claims quickly. While eBenefits may seem like a fast track for those veterans wishing to file independently, any oversight or error in paperwork could create an unexpected delay instead of a faster rating decision.

Claims without the necessary information are often placed aside, adding to the backlog. Something as simple as neglecting to put a zero in an income field on an application could hamper the process. If the claim is added to the backlog, veterans may not hear back for more than a year, at which time they may be told to gather more information and resubmit their forms. The professionals at the Veterans Service Commission (VSC) can access files just as quickly as a veteran using eBenefits. They can also help move claims along smoothly to avoid delays and at no cost to the veteran.

At the VSC, experts work one-on-one with veterans to file their

claims and apply for benefits.

Because of their knowledge and expertise in handling VA claims, VSC service officers can streamline the application process and verify that all of the documentation is complete and accurate before submitting. In fact, service officers go through two years of comprehensive training before they can take a test to become certified. This ensures they know all of the finer points involved in taking a VA claim from start to completion.

Service officers at the VSC participate in continuing education each year at a district, regional and, in some cases, national level. In the fall and spring, they also take part in all-day training sessions dedicated to keeping them up-to-date with the latest changes in VA regulations and requirements.

"As a service officer, you're dealing with codes and regulations, so there can be updates and changes to processes and evidence requirements," said David Burden, project manager at the VSC. "The knowledge we gain in this area allows us to help veterans file correctly." When applying

independently through eBenefits, there is no guarantee that a veteran's claim will go to a local office. Rather, the claim is sent to the next available agency, meaning a veteran who filed in Ohio may have his or her claim reviewed in California. This distance could make it much more difficult to track down veterans when additional evidence or information is needed. On the other hand, if a veteran files through the VSC, that claim stays local and goes directly to the Cleveland office for review.

Veterans working with the VSC also receive personal attention to their specific needs. In addition to VA claims, service officers may be able to direct veterans to other resources available through the VA or VSC that may be useful, including employment, transportation and counseling services to name a few.

More information about the VSC and the services it offers can be found at www.VSCsummitOH.us. For specific details on how the experts at the VSC can assist with filing claims and obtaining benefits, please call 330-643-2830. ★

E.Y.I.

AMVETS Memorial Day events

Fairview Cemetery
3990 Brecksville Rd.
7:45 a.m. – Assemble
9:00 a.m. – Services

West Richfield Cemetery
4219 Broadview Rd.
9:30 a.m. – Assemble at Historical Building (Old Town Hall)
10:00 a.m. – Services

Bath Memorial Services
(Across from the schoolhouse)
11:45 a.m. – Services

Submit Memorial Day events

Know of a Memorial Day event that you think other veterans may be interested in as well? Please send all pertinent event information to dburden@VSCsummitOH.us to be posted on the VSC website.

Discount to the Summit County Fair

The Summit County Fair is offering \$1 admission to Summit County veterans on Wednesday, July 23 with valid proof of service. Non-veterans may bring a canned good item for the canned food drive to receive \$1 admission until 4 p.m. The fairgrounds are located at 229 E. Howe Road in Tallmadge. For more information, visit www.summitfair.com/fair.html or call 330-633-6200.



Volunteers needed for Memorial Day

On the Saturday before Memorial Day, volunteers from the Summit County veterans' posts visit our county's cemeteries and honor veterans by placing a flag on each grave site. Volunteers of all ages are welcome to help with this tradition or to volunteer in a different capacity. Please complete the volunteer form available on the VSC's website at www.VSCsummitOH.us or contact David Burden at 330-643-7636.

Follow the VSC on social media

Get the latest news and updates from the VSC by following us on social media. We are always updating our Facebook and Twitter with info about upcoming events for veterans and their families. Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/summitcountyvsc or Twitter at www.twitter.com/VSCsummitOH

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military records, without risk. If the a VA employee is reviewing a claim and finds that required medical evidence is missing, he or she can contact the VSC. The VSC officers, in turn, can gather that information and submit it via email, shaving off days to weeks involved with using traditional mail.

Other benefits that the VSC has used in the past to move a claim from

A to Z will continue to play a role. For instance, the VSC has long had access to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) file system. This allows them to pull up information relevant to a veteran instantly, which is most often used to check the file and status of a claim. If you need assistance with benefits or claims, please contact the experts at the VSC at 330-643-2830. ★

Director's Corner

New housing grants for service-connected ALS



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently announced that grants are available to veterans and active duty military personnel with service-connected amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease. As a result, these veterans and service members will be deemed medically eligible for Specially Adapted Housing grants provided by the VA, and they will be able to receive the maximum grant amount of more than \$67,000. These grants can be used to construct or modify a home to meet the unique housing needs of those with ALS as the disease has rapid and debilitating effects. Grants are also available to help eligible individuals purchase adapted homes or pay toward mortgages on homes that are already adapted.

The VA estimates this change will save approximately 12 months in the overall process of applying for and receiving an SAH grant. In 2008, the VA established an ALS service connection presumption for any veteran who develops ALS at any time after separation from service, making him or her eligible for monthly VA disability compensation benefits. That disability rating scale was amended in January 2012 to assign a 100 percent disability evaluation for veterans with service-connected ALS. The VA adapted its rules so these veterans no longer have to file multiple VA claims for increased benefits as their condition progresses.

Previously, many of these veterans and service members with ALS were ineligible for SAH grants and couldn't begin modifications on their homes to accommodate their rapidly progressing conditions because they did not yet have symptoms debilitating enough to affect their mobility. (Studies have shown that veterans and military members are nearly twice as likely to develop ALS as those who haven't served.) The experts at the VSC can assist eligible veterans in filing the paperwork to receive these grants. To contact the VSC, please call 330-643-2830 or visit the offices at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron for a walk-in meeting with a service officer. For more information, visit www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/adaptedhousing.asp.

Thank you for your service,

Larry D. Moore

Executive Director



VSC Services for Vets

We assist veterans in need with their basic living needs. These services are available to eligible veterans, their dependents and widows.

Financial Assistance

- Mortgage payments / Homeowner's insurance
- Rent
- Utilities
- Roofs
- Furnace (replacement and repair)
- Stove and Refrigerators
- Food
- Children's clothing
- Adult work clothing
- Car payments, repairs and insurance (limited)

- Medical / Dental (including dentures, glasses and hearing aids)
- Regularly scheduled transportation to VA medical facilities and Ohio Veterans Home
- Grave markers and flags

Veterans Affairs Assistance

- Assistance applying for Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits

- Preparation of VA forms and paperwork
- Supportive documentation of claims and pertinent data
- Proper submission of claims to the VA
- Service connected compensation
- Non-service pension
- Widows pension
- Burial benefits
- Headstones

If you are a veteran in financial need or need help with your VA claim, please visit us at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd., Akron or call 330-643-2830.

Veterans receive post-duty recognition and honors

When service men and women are leaving the military, they are often focused on the family and friends to whom they are returning. They aren't contemplating the medals they should have received or lamenting high school diplomas they had to forego. Yet, as time passes, the value of these metal and paper mementos from their lives might become more obvious, and veterans or their family members may want to receive them.

Fortunately, it's not too late and collecting these marks of distinction may be easier than they think. The VSC is able to request reviews for any veteran's military service, through which the VA can determine whether the veteran earned any medals or other awards from their period of service. When owed medals are discovered, the VSC will often host a special presentation ceremony where they present the medals and honor the recipient in front of his or her family and friends.

Education is another area with important milestones, and a high

school diploma is a common rite of passage for many Americans. Many veterans, however, left high school to join the military before receiving their diplomas. Through the Ohio Revised Code, veterans of World War II, the Korean conflict or the Vietnam conflict who are Ohio residents or were students in Ohio high schools can obtain an honorary diploma. This law also provides the same opportunity for women who meet the residential requirements and left high school to join the war effort. The diplomas are issued with the year they were requested, and some schools will even invite veterans to walk with the rest of the graduating class during the ceremony.

The VA also offers posthumous honors that may grant a similar sense of peace to family members of veterans who have passed away. One such honor is the Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC). This document is an engraved paper certificate conveying the country's appreciation and gratitude to the deceased veteran, and it is signed



with the signature of the current President of the United States.

The VSC is dedicated to helping veterans receive the medals and recognition they earned during their service in the military. To learn more

about how to obtain any of the items mentioned above, please contact the VSC at 330-643-2830 or visit the headquarters at 1060 E. Waterloo Road in Akron for a walk-in meeting with a service officer. ★



Tip of the **H.A.T.** *Helping America's Troops*

Honor guards provide a hero's send-off

Every military member takes an oath to defend and support the rights and freedoms that form the basic foundation of the United States. They make sacrifices for their fellow Americans, and when a veteran passes away, he or she deserves special recognition for that service.

Military honors can be performed at the funeral of an eligible veteran to demonstrate the nation's gratitude to the departed and his or her family. Some very dedicated veterans in Summit County ensure that this happens for all of their fallen comrades.

Honor guards are comprised of volunteer veterans who donate time to assist with military honors at funerals. Those wishing to participate undergo training and receive certification from the military for honor guard duty. They attend the funeral in special

honor guard uniforms and can perform all parts of the ceremony.

Two VSC commissioners, Sonny Cool and Bob Panovich, belong to honor guards in Summit County. Panovich has been in the Copley Veterans Post honor guard for 12 years and has performed all of the different roles, including flag bearer, rifle squad, bugler, flag folder and flag presenter.

"All honorably discharged veterans are heroes, and heroes should be honored, especially in death," said Panovich. "When the veteran provided service to the United States that service included a commitment that could necessitate giving his or her life. It is an honor for their veteran comrades to provide military honors for them and their families."

Sonny Cool, president of the VSC, has been performing these ceremonies since 1976. Cool

estimates that he has attended between 8,000 - 10,000 military funerals in that time, including the burials of his two brothers-in-law. He currently serves in the Firestone VFW Post 3833 honor guard.

"I never know who I'll be handing the flag to until the funeral director tells me. It could be a parent, wife, husband or sweetheart," Cool said. I take it personally every time I present the flag to them. It's an honor and a privilege to serve our fallen comrades."

Funeral homes make the arrangements by contacting the military to coordinate the ceremony. At least two uniformed officers must be present, one of whom must be from the veteran's



Copley Veteran's Honor Guard (formed by American Legion Frank Bender Post 473 and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7971).

branch of service. The folding and presentation of the military burial flag, playing of Taps and a 21-gun salute are among the ceremonial honors. While only two officers are required for the ceremony, having additional service men and women on hand helps the memorial ceremony run seamlessly.

For more information about other burial benefits for eligible veterans, please contact the VSC at 330-643-2830 or visit www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits. ★

1060 E. Waterloo Rd.
Akron, Ohio 44306
p: 330-643-2830
f: 330-643-8779

www.VSCsummitOH.us



Veterans Service Commission of Summit County (VSC) provides comprehensive support services to Summit County residents who have served in any branch of the military. Veterans and their families who demonstrate need receive free financial, transportation and medical assistance as well as coordination and processing help with Veterans Administration (VA) claims and benefits. The agency was created in 1886 to aid veterans upon their return home from duty.

Commissioners

A.W. "Sonny" Cool
Bruce Hestley
Byron Morris
Robert Panovich
Mike Stith



Executive Director

Larry D. Moore

Service Officers

David Burden
David Donaldson
Clarence Drake
Robert Giannone
Penny Haynes
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Daren Williams

Support Staff

Sharon Ameser
Mark Anderson
Karen Benfield
Gordon Dean
Marcie Howes
Jennifer Pelfrey
Carl Richardson
William Schnering
Yvonne Summers
Gail Warley

Job Boot Camp

The Job Boot Camp is a free three-day workshop for Summit County veterans seeking employment or a change in career. Please join us May 7-9 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day at the VSC Headquarters (1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron). Veterans will receive tips on resume building, interviewing skills and much more from local professionals. All participants must register. Please call 330-643-7636 or visit www.VSCsummitOH.us to register. ★

Your Health

Contamination at Camp Lejeune

Past water contamination could be the source of many medical conditions affecting military families who once lived or worked at Camp Lejeune, a U.S. Military Corps Base in North Carolina. From 1953 to 1987, those on the base were exposed to dangerous chemicals in drinking water such as trichloroethylene (TCE), perchloroethylene (PCE), benzene, vinyl chloride and other compounds. The contamination is likely the result of a dry cleaner on base dumping chemicals. Evidence suggests a correlation between these chemicals and 15 diseases, including several types of cancer, infertility, miscarriages and neurobehavioral effects among others.

It is estimated that hundreds of thousands could have been affected by this contamination. Veterans who were on the base for more than 30 days between August 1953 and 1987 may be eligible to receive compensation if they have one of the conditions listed below:

- Bladder cancer
- Breast cancer
- Esophageal cancer
- Female infertility

- Hepatic steatosis
- Kidney cancer
- Leukemia
- Lung cancer
- Miscarriage
- Multiple myeloma
- Myelodysplastic syndromes
- Neurobehavioral effects
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Renal toxicity
- Scleroderma

To be considered for compensation, the veteran or family member applying must not have a dishonorable discharge and must have served during the contamination period. He or she must have a current disease and medical opinion indicating that the disease is a result of contamination at Camp Lejeune. Disability claims related to water contamination at Camp Lejeune can be submitted and will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

If you have one of the specified conditions, you can take preparatory steps before filing. Call 1-877-222-8387 to be added to the VA's database for Camp Lejeune and collect documents indicating your residence on base for 30 days or more during the covered



date range as well as marriage licenses or birth certificates for family members who were also at Camp Lejeune. Veterans should also keep receipts for expenses that relate to health care for one of the conditions from March 26, 2013 and on.

For more information or to learn more about compensation, please contact the experts at the VSC at 330-643-2830. Service officers can answer eligibility and coverage questions, while also assisting with preparing paperwork needed to submit compensation claims. ★