

## · Informal Information Paper ·

# Post-US Military Service Veterans Affairs (VA) Disability Compensation Process

(July 1, 2013)

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* <b>Disclaimer:</b> For current, expert assistance contact your Accredited Representative or the VA. *	

## 1. Overview.

· This **general information** is intended to help **YOU** obtain the **full [VA Disability Benefits](#)** you **may** be entitled to. It's based largely on personal experience, highlighted in a few instances through the use of open sources to illustrate a point. The VA disability process may naturally seem foreign to you at first, but once you start living the process (stateside or overseas), the pieces will begin to fall into place--the online links in the e-version of this paper help to make understanding the process much easier. For speedier claim adjudication the VA is advising Veterans to gather and submit all relevant medical records and file a **[Fully Developed Claim \(FDC\)](#)** in **[eBenefits](#)**. (Note: Even if you file a Fully Developed Claim the VA may sometimes still request a C&P Physical Examination).

· In most cases the VA disability process begins with your **service treatment records** (from the day you join the military) and the medical conditions written in them (and **frequency**) to prove **chronic history**. (**[Presumptive medical conditions](#)** don't require your service treatment records--unless of course those records are needed to help prove your presence in a specific geographic location). Generally speaking, a **\*chronic condition\*** is the treatment of a medical condition over a period of six months or longer. Attachment 2 (Establishing Service Connection) helps to shed some light.

· Dealing with the VA after military service often requires a major shift in thinking. If your primary goal is to make a **\*quick buck\***, you can just about forget it. If for health reasons you're serious about pursuing VA Disability Benefits, **YOU** must be very **PROACTIVE** and **patient** at the same time; **\*Hurry-up and Wait\*** comes to mind. It's critical that **YOU** remain on top of what are strictly **YOUR** personal responsibilities in this process. In the end, only **YOU** can help **YOU**!

· **The Good News!** The gouge in this information paper will give you an edge in the VA disability process long before your **\*case file\*** is assigned to a VA adjudicator. ***Are you ready to learn more?***

## 2. VA Application for Compensation and/or Pension (C&P).

- The VA encourages Veterans to nominate an \*[Accredited Representative](#)\* (representative or agent) (advocate) to represent you with your servicing VA Regional Office (VARO). Also Visit: [Directory of Veterans Service Organizations \(VSO\)](#).
- [Fully Developed Claim \(FDC\)](#). **Per the VA:** Claims are considered to be “fully developed” when Veterans submit **all** available supporting [evidence](#), like private treatment records and notice of federal treatment records, to VA at the time they first file a **formal claim** and certify they have no more evidence to submit. This is the information that VA needs to make a determination on a disability claim. The FDC program supports the sharing of best practices across [Veterans Service Organizations](#), who help thousands of Veterans each year with their compensation claims, to identify up front all evidence necessary to support a Veteran’s claim. Veterans then certify that they have no additional evidence to submit, and VA can **process the claim in half the time** it takes for a traditionally filed claim. Veterans filing a Fully Developed Claim will receive **priority processing** over the traditional claims process. There is no risk to Veterans in filing a Fully Developed Claim.
- [How to Apply for Disability Benefits](#). [VA 21-526EZ](#) (Fully Developed Claim), or [VA 21-526](#) – (Application for Compensation and/or Pension). You may also apply online using VA’s [eBenefits](#)--your **confirmed** time of receipt at VA is **NOW!** If filing a supplemental claim use [VA 21-526EZ](#), or [VA 21-526b](#) (Veteran’s Supplemental Claim for Compensation).
- By **filing electronically** via [eBenefits](#), any compensation benefits that are awarded will be effective back to the date the Veteran started entering their claim information in eBenefits. From that initial claim establishment date, each Veteran has up to a year to gather all necessary records and hit “submit” to preserve their original date of claim.
- **Military Service Treatment Records** (and/or other military records) are used to help complete your Disability Compensation application. **Be thorough!** Ensure that everything you want to goes on your application. As applicable, also ensure your claim is appropriately annotated by the VA with “**Persian Gulf War Vet**”, “**Vietnam War Vet**”, etc. The VA is specially screening **Persian Gulf War** Veterans--if eligible contact your servicing VARO for more information.
- Ensure any/all private treatment records (while you were in military service) are copied and officially merged into your service treatment records (STRs). If you previously served in a different branch of service, obtain a copy of those treatment records too. You may also ask the VA to request your prior STRs on your behalf--90-day average turnaround if you request, longer if VA requests. (Note: Depending on your date of separation the VA may already have your prior STRs).
- **Military Medical and Health Records**  
<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/medical-records.html>
- **Military Service Records and Official Military Personnel Files (OMPFs, DD Form 214):**  
<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/>
- Technically, you aren’t required to include a copy of your **service treatment records** at the same time with your Disability Compensation application (unless you’re filing a Fully Developed Claim), **but** in most cases you must eventually submit them or ask the VA to retrieve them for you. If you

don't have your service treatment and/or personnel records on-hand, and as you attempt to complete your Disability Compensation application, bear in mind that you may find it very difficult trying to recall from memory **all** of your medical conditions that you wish to claim disability for. Conversely, you'd be establishing your claim at an earlier date by not waiting the 90+ days for your records to arrive. Just remember, the VA dates a claim on the date they **receive** it.

- Again, ensure that everything you want to goes on your Disability Compensation application. Some Veterans, experienced with the VA's \*older\* way of doing things may advise you not to claim everything at once; however, my National Service Officer (NSO) advocate advised me it's easier to manage a single claim. **Suggestion:** Nominate an Accredited Representative (representative or agent) as early as possible in the process.

- Once you have copies of **all** of your treatment records, make a copy that goes to the VA with your Disability Compensation claim. Page count between your treatment records and the copy going to the VA to ensure not a single page is missing! You may also include pertinent **private treatment records** since you retired/separated from service, plus **Witness Statements, Photographs**, and any **Personal Statements** you wish to make--via letter or [VA 21-4138](#) (Statement in Support of Claim).

- If applying by mail, submit your **Disability Compensation application form, Service Treatment Records**, and your **DD-214** (**all**, if issued more than one) to your servicing VARO (or to your accredited representative for them to review and submit). Your servicing VARO is based on your address. E.g., if using an overseas address (local or APO/FPO/DPO) with the VA, then [Pittsburgh](#) is your servicing VARO (unless you reside in the [Philippines](#)). If the VA requests you undergo a **C&P Physical Exam** it typically will be scheduled 3-6 months after you apply for disability--if it's earlier, great! The **C&P Exam** is structured to the medical condition(s) you claimed.

### **3. Prior to Your VA Compensation & Pension (C&P) Physical Exam.**

- **You** have to prove a current medical condition exists; you incurred it during military service, or that it is service-connected, and; in most cases, you must show a causal relationship between in-service and the condition you're now claiming (**medical nexus**).

- **[Your Choice]** Visit a doctor(s) for any/all of your medical conditions (injury, disability, or condition) prior to your **C&P Examination**. Doing this helps to establish another layer of **medical evidence**, making it harder for the VA to deny you disability later on for a particular medical condition when the words **\*chronic \_\_\_\_\_\*** are consistently entered in your treatment records.

- For each medical condition ensure the doctor writes something like this: "Service treatment records show he/she first experienced this condition of \_\_\_\_\_ in Month Year while in military service" (some examples in attachment 2). These small details now will later increase your chances of the VA awarding you the **full** disability ratings you **may be entitled to**. This **technique** also applies to your **C&P Exam** and anytime you seek medical treatment. Thorough evidence **now** can save you significant time and stress later by helping you to avoid the VA appeals process.

- If you haven't already done so it's a good idea to create a cross-reference product listing all of your documented medical conditions (injury, disability, or condition, including dates), to bring with you to your **C&P Exam**. Doing this saves a great deal of time when you and your doctor review your treatment records **together**, and it greatly lessens the chance of something being missed that you

wanted to discuss and have correctly entered in your **C&P Exam Report**. (It stands to reason that you're not helping yourself if you simply dump a pile of loose records on your doctor or the VA).

- It's also helpful at this stage to number each page of your treatment record copy (initially in pencil in case of error) and add the pertinent page numbers to your cross-reference product (if you created one). Having a detailed cross-reference product greatly speeds up the process when your doctor needs to review entries in your treatment records during your **C&P Exam**. Also consider digitizing your treatment records into an image file (certainly digitize if you e-file your claim); doing so allows you to carry your entire record on a USB flash drive when you visit the doctor (in case of questions).

- If you're truly feeling **Proactive**, read pertinent areas of the VA's [C&P Service Clinician's Guide](#), [Disability Benefits Questionnaires](#), and [38 CFR, Book C](#) (more on these later) to arm yourself with details and buzzwords the doctor should include in your **C&P Exam Report**.

- If filing a \*traditional\* disability claim, sometime before your **C&P Exam** the VA may send you correspondence asking if you wish to add any **new evidence** to your claim--e.g., **New Treatment Records, Witness Statements** (from people who see you daily--family, friends, co-workers), **Photographs, Personal Statements** (via letter or [VA 21-4138](#) - Statement in Support of Claim), etc.

- **Retiring / Residing Overseas:** Veterans residing in most **overseas** areas, and using an overseas address (local or APO/FPO/DPO), are serviced by [Pittsburgh VARO](#), unless you coordinate with the VA otherwise. Veterans residing in the Philippines are serviced by [Manila VARO](#). Likewise, if you anticipate being scheduled for a **VA C&P Physical Exam** and wish to have it done at a stateside VA facility, be sure to request that well in advance with your **servicing** VARO. (This is another example of when having an **Accredited Representative** to advise and assist you is invaluable, especially when you live thousands of miles from your servicing VARO. Ultimately though, nominating an **Accredited Representative** and asking them to assist you is strictly **your** decision to make). VA Disability Claims Process: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/process.asp>.

#### **4. VA C&P Physical Exam.** (See Attachments 1 & 2 for more information)

- Stateside, VA **schedules** you for a **C&P Physical Exam** (to prove **service-connection**) and notifies you at your address on file. In Thailand for example (if using a Thai address or APO AP 96546 with the VA), the C&P Exam notice will be sent to you via US Citizen Services (ACS, US Embassy), and then you will also receive it via mail directly from the VA 1-3 weeks later. Expect your C&P Exam notice to be 3-6 months after applying for disability. I had my **C&P Physical Exam** at a private hospital in Bangkok. I was contacted via letter by ACS who, by my request, recommended a local hospital/doctor for me. After I researched, then approved the choice, ACS sent to my examining doctor the VA's applicable **exam protocol** from the [C&P Service Clinician's Guide](#) and Disability Examination Worksheets (VA now uses [DBQs](#) for C&P Exams). My doctor followed the protocols to conduct the physical exam and write the **C&P Physical Exam Report** (see attachments 1 & 2).

- When I received my **Disability Rating Decision** (decisions on complex claims can take over two years) certain conditions were awarded disability, others denied--7+ years later I continue to submit **new and material evidence**--some examples: Medical Reports, Witness Statements, Emails/Letters sent home, Photographs, News Articles, Information on the Internet, Personal Journal, and [VA 21-4138s](#). (As well, dates, locations, names of units served in, your commanding officers, names and addresses of hospitals where you were treated, and any other details can make the difference).

- **Note:** In most cases, bring to your C&P Exam a hardcopy of your treatment records if the exam is at an overseas private facility. If you're examined at a VA facility bringing your copy is also a good idea to ensure something isn't missed. Suggest you also bring the [Disability Benefits Questionnaires](#) pertinent to your C&P Exam. It's all about checks and balances to protect **YOUR** interests.
- **BE HONEST WITH YOUR EXAMINER!** For Example: If you're claiming chronic back pain, and you're well-tanned (indicative of outdoor activity), the examining doctor may ask something seemingly benign like, "Are you enjoying golf more, now that you're retired?"<sup>1</sup> Don't be surprised at the question, and most importantly, be **truthful** with your answer! Frivolous claims slow the claims process and directly hurt the **honest** Veterans who desperately need timely award of benefits.
- If you're having a stateside **C&P Physical Exam**, your doctor submits a report of the findings to your servicing VARO (that is going to adjudicate your claim). Overseas at a private hospital, ask your doctor to give you the original signature report (or a copy), or ask the doctor to send it to ACS. Some doctors will, for integrity reasons, send the original signature report to ACS. I submitted my **C&P Exam Report** directly to my DAV NSO advocate via certified mail (see page 10). Also, ACS will send your C&P Examination Report to the VA via the trackable pouch from the Embassy...free.
- **VA gives a great deal of weight to the findings in the C&P Exam Report -- You Should Too!**

## 5. Rating Decision.

- The VA will notify you in writing of their **Disability Rating Decision**. The VA uses [38 CFR, Book C](#) to award disability ratings--it behooves you to become familiar with these *before* your exam.
- **Note:** The *Appeals Process* begins when you disagree with any part of the VA's rating decision. While the VA gives you **one year** from the date of the rating decision letter to file a **Notice of Disagreement (NOD)**, don't delay or forget! A **NOD** is a simple letter to the VA stating you disagree with their rating decision; e.g., "*I respectfully disagree with the VA's decision denying service-connection for my Spine Condition (or rating of 0%, 10%, etc.). I request a rating of 10% (or 20%, 30%, etc.) based on the evidence.*" Concurrently, you may request a "*De Novo*" review.
- A *de novo* review is far easier and timelier than pursuing a formal appeal. A *de novo* review is a new and complete review of the appealed issue with no deference given to the decision being appealed. This review leads to a new decision, which may be a full grant, partial grant, clear and unmistakable error, or no change ([M21-1MR](#), pg 5-C-11). A claimant may not have more than one review under this section of the same decision ([38 CFR/BookB/Part3/SubpartD/3.2600](#)). **Important:** Closely read all VA correspondence taking careful note of action required suspense dates so as to **preserve your right to appeal**.

## 6. Conclusion.

- Your **health** is the most **important** aspect of your life once you complete your **service obligation**. At day's end, a lone VA caseworker is the sole **hurdle** standing between **YOU** and you being awarded the full disability benefits you may be entitled to. Convincing VA adjudicators--by precisely following their rules--to be awarded the **full** disability **BENEFITS** you may be **ENTITLED** to, is crucial! I hope this paper helps you do exactly that! *Thank You For Serving!*

## Attachment 1

### • VA Compensation & Pension (C&P) Examination •

· **Note:** Even when you file a [Fully Developed Claim](#) the VA may sometimes still schedule a C&P Physical Exam. If you file a traditional claim the VA will almost definitely schedule a C&P Exam.

· Overseas, **any licensed doctor** technically can administer the C&P Exam--you just have to ask them--there is no formal VA certification or qualification program for foreign private providers. When I received my **C&P Physical Exam notification** (from the VA through ACS, US Embassy) I was a brand new expatriate to Thailand. And, while I had previously done my due diligence on basic health care availability (incl. TRICARE and VA health care benefits) before I moved to Thailand, I had not yet had an urgent need to visit a local medical care provider. Therefore, I phoned the ACS POC in the notification letter and she set up my exam with a local hospital in Bangkok. **Note:** Take close notice of any time suspense from the VA for you to complete your **C&P Exam**.

· You should get all of your **ducks lined up** before you make the appointment. I was [mostly] prepared when I received a surprise phone call from my exam doctor telling me she'll see me in less than 2 days. **Crikey!** (That particular doctor no longer administers VA disability physical exams).

· Your **PCM** (Primary Care Manager) will conduct the overall **C&P Physical Examination**, but they **should** have **specialists** evaluate you, as needed. If you feel your examining doctor should refer you for a consultation with a specialist, but hasn't, first **POLITELY** ask him/her to do so. Remember, **First Impressions!** Immediate impressions will likely be recorded and used by the VA in the decision process to **award** or **deny** you disability benefits.

· Be sure to do some prep work for your exam, such as writing down any/all questions and bringing those with you--also consider bringing a friend along to \*help\* you remember, especially if you're already experiencing memory challenges. Further, consider researching and preparing supporting information from [The National Institutes of Health](#), [Institute of Medicine](#), medical journals, etc., and ask your doctor to include it as part of their Exam Report. What's also **absolutely critical** is how your **\*disabilities\*** **impact** your **daily life**, so be sure to prepare/state in your own words, and share that with your PCM/specialists, and also make sure that gouge makes it into your final report. **Some Examples:** Difficulty walking up stairs because of pain in both knees; Difficulty sleeping due to back pain; Difficulty turning my head to the left when driving a car, etc. Are you **\*worn out\*** due to pain? That's an important detail. Do you experience side effects from treatment or medication?<sup>2</sup> Do you know someone with the same medical condition? They may have helpful advice -- Ask!

· For accuracy and expediency it's helpful to **page number** your **treatment records** and **cross-reference** your medical conditions to the corresponding pages--as mentioned earlier, I built and use an MS Excel spreadsheet. You may also extract/copy applicable pages from your treatment records for each particular medical condition--that's my current technique for when I see my doctors--saves the time and hassle of tabbing each applicable page and thumbing through the entire record. I also carry my service and private treatment records on a USB flash drive should it be necessary to clarify an issue. In one instance, a medical examination report went missing from my private record--hospital staff printed a replacement copy on the spot from my flash drive and placed it in my record. (**Note:** If you're presently not a good record keeper, it's best that you soon become one!).

· Concerning your records, more than a few Veterans have told their C&P examining physician that, "*My records are in a box in the States*" (while the Veteran is here in Thailand). Frequently, a Veteran will also say, "*The VA has a copy of all that stuff.*" That's a dangerous and ultimately self-defeating assumption Veterans shouldn't make. It's always best to presume the VA doesn't have any of your history. Reality: The VA has at times experienced *\*significant challenges\** with client records management. Again, if your examining physician is unable to review your records, how do you realistically and truthfully expect them to write a complete, and hopefully beneficial, disability exam report? As well, even when you're undergoing an examination for a *\*presumptive\** medical condition, your physician reviewing your treatment records with you may also find one or more additional medical conditions you had long forgotten about or perhaps hadn't even considered. **Bottom line**: Bring all service and private treatment records with you to the C&P Physical Exam. Be **smart** and be **proactive** ... Help your doctor to help you!

· **Stay Focused During Your C&P Physical Examination!** When undergoing a VA-directed C&P Physical Exam (or a *\*self-requested\** disability physical exam), keep in mind that the examining physician's sole purpose is to conduct your examination. Remember, you're there to be examined--you're not there for medical treatment. **Keep unrelated dialogue to a minimum.** Let the examiner concentrate on conducting your examination. A chatterbox Veteran (or worse yet, *\*a complainer\**) is likely not going to give the examiner a favorable opinion. You also risk distracting the examiner and causing relevant and important evidence to be missed. Plus, the limited time you have with your examiner is then wasted by irrelevancies. To be clear, having a thorough medical dialogue with your examiner is indeed very important, just be sure to **keep it relevant** to your examination.

· The [Disability Benefits Questionnaire\(s\)](#) (DBQ) you read about earlier **is** the C&P Examination Report(s) once your doctor completes and signs it. In addition to the DBQs available online, the VA will sometimes request that an examining physician also complete a *\*Physician Only\** DBQ that the VA specifically provides for the examination (not available online). In any event, it's **smart** and **proactive** to review a DBQ(s) prior to a C&P Exam for the **common sense** reason that you prepare **accurate** and **thorough** answers to questions that your examining physician is going to ask you.

· When I've explained to Thai medical providers what the VA is and what I'm pursuing, I frame it in terms of *\*government medical insurance\** for injured military Veterans. I tell my doctors that if the VA accepts my claim, I receive 100% medical care for that **service-connected medical condition**, if not, I have expensive co-pays and deductibles with my normal military medical *\*insurance\** (TRICARE). If there's an easier or better way of explaining the VA to Thai doctors, I'm all ears. Lastly, I've used the same hospital ever since for most of my medical needs--patient familiarity **\*aids the process\***, therefore, you may consider choosing a provider you wish to establish a long-term relationship with should it subsequently become necessary to appeal a rating decision(s).

· The overall point is, whatever your level of **self-initiative**, try to **not** let your **C&P Physical Exam Report** (or any subsequent medical reports) leave the doctor's office without you first **reviewing** it, and requesting **revision** if needed (**be polite**--some doctors are sensitive to being asked to make changes), and getting a copy for yourself (**keep a copy of everything you submit!**). The **C&P Exam FOREVER** sets the initial tone and level of success with the VA. **First Impressions!**

## Attachment 2

### • Establishing Service Connection •

1. What the VA needs to establish service connection is each of the three following items:
  - a. A clear diagnosis of a condition.
  - b. A medical nexus providing a link to military service.
    - (1) All that is required is a determination as to whether it is likely that the condition could be linked to service or to a service-connected disability.
    - (2) The Veterans Administration is not trying to attach responsibility to a doctor--they are simply trying to get a medical opinion.
  - c. Proof of an in-service occurrence.
  
2. According to VA legal precedent, the phrase “**at least as likely as not**” does not mean “within the realm of medical possibility.” Rather, it means that the weight of medical evidence both for and against a conclusion is so evenly divided that it is as medically sound to find in favor of causation as it is to find against causation.
  
3. You must of course have a doctor to state that they have reviewed the service medical records and that it is their medical opinion that the conditions you suffer from today are due to injuries sustained in service. When asked to give an opinion as to whether a condition is related to a specific incident during military service, the opinion should be expressed as follows ([Clinician’s Guide](#), para. 1.16):

- “is due to” (100% sure)
- “more likely than not” (greater than 50%)
- “at least as likely as not” (equal to or greater than 50%)

#### Examples:

1. I have been treating Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ for a xxxxxxx condition. After careful review of the veteran's service medical records, it is my professional medical opinion that the condition stated above is more likely than not caused by the incidents which occurred in service. I base my opinion on this because: \_\_\_\_\_.
  
2. I have reviewed Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ veteran's service medical records and the current treatment records, and it is my opinion that “**it is at least as likely as not**” (or “**it is more likely than not**”) that the veteran’s xxxxxxx condition is related to his/her military duty. Whereas, I see that he/she was treated on dates of treatment for xxxxxxx condition. I base my opinion on this because: \_\_\_\_\_.
  
3. I have reviewed Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ current treatment records and it is my opinion that “**it is more likely than not**” (or “**it is at least as likely as not**”) that the veteran’s xxxxxxx condition is secondary and/or aggravated by the veterans service connected xxxxxxx condition. I base my opinion on this because: \_\_\_\_\_.

These are primary examples of what is needed in order to secure service connection for a disability from service.



## Attachment 3

### • More Hints, Tidbits & Web Links •

- **File Management.** Keep a GOOD copy of EVERYTHING you submit *and* receive! Personally, I maintain two files: One (1) Electronic file on the computer (backed-up of course!); and One (1) Paper file I keep in a three-ring binder. Whatever your preferred method, be thorough and be diligent about file upkeep. I speak from experience when I say detailed file management is essential.
- **Informal Claim.** Time is money! If not applying via eBenefits, it may be in your best interest to file an **\*Informal Claim\*** to establish a **claim date**. Subsequent correspondence from the VA will inform you of the **due date** to make your claim **\*Formal\***. Normally, the **VA dates a disability claim on the date it's received by them**. **Exception:** If a claim is filed (and received by the VA) **within one year of Release from Active Duty (ReLAD)**, the **claim date** is the same as your active duty release date. If awarded 10% or greater disability you'll be paid retroactively back to the **claim date**. An **\*Informal Claim\*** can be submitted on [VA 21-4138](#), via letter, or even a tissue. **Basic:** *"My name is John Q. Public, SSN 123-45-6789. I have been diagnosed with Heart Disease and am claiming service-connected disability. My address is xxxx, and phone number is xxxx. Sign/Date."*
- **Filing a Claim \*After\* One Year from ReLAD:** E.g., if it's the 28th of the month typical **snail-mail** will cost you a month of compensation if the VA **receives** your claim on/after the 1st.
- **Submitting Evidence.** In addition to using [eBenefits](#), there are other methods for **submitting evidence** to the VA, including using a combination of methods to ensure the VA can't say "we didn't receive it" or "we didn't receive it within the allotted time." Place your full Name, SSN and VA File # (if already assigned a VA File #) in the upper right hand corner of each and every piece of evidence you submit to the VA. **Sign your documents and get them to the VA:**
  - **To Accredited Representative or VA:** Fax, Certified/Express Mail, FedEx, DHL, UPS, etc.
  - **To VA only:** [IRIS](#) message. (Note: [IRIS](#) is information only--attachments are prohibited).
  - **Example:** Fax to Pittsburgh VARO (412-395-6091 or 6057) works well with a follow-up message to Pittsburgh through [IRIS](#) (gives you proof of submission--print hardcopy or .PDF).
- **Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC).** [CRSC](#) should not be overlooked in the case of military retirees retired for length of service--it too **must be applied for** (via your branch of service).
- **Subsequent Claims.** [VA 21-526b](#) (Veteran's Supplemental Claim for Compensation) (available in [VONAPP](#)) was developed to enhance clarity and consistency in processing subsequent claims. This form more clearly describes information needed to support claims when seeking increased benefits for conditions already service-connected by the VA. You may also use [VA 21-526EZ](#).
- **Foreign Medical Program (FMP).** No doubt you'll need medical attention for the medical condition(s) on your disability claim until such time the VA approves it--perhaps a year or more. In the case of a retroactive VA adjudication of service-connection (disability claim approved), if you save your medical receipts you may file an FMP claim retroactive to your disability award effective

date. (Note: FMP may also pay travel, lodging and meals for a C&P Exam). **FMP Handbook:** <http://tinyurl.com/FMP-Handbook>. **Timely Filing of Claims:** <http://tinyurl.com/FMPTimely-ClaimsFiling>.

• **Veterans Service Organizations (VSO).** I earlier mentioned using the DAV as my Accredited Representative. To clarify and expound further, as VSOs go, in Thailand only the VFW has service officers (most are **non-accredited**). To some Veterans it makes a big difference to be able to sit one-on-one with someone when they have no conceptual idea of where to begin. Nothing prevents you from seeking general information from the VFW in Thailand, and then requesting an Accredited Representative to assist you. Who you ask to help you, if you ask anyone at all, is strictly **your** decision to make. **Accredited Representative:** <http://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp>.

**• Disabled American Veterans (DAV) - Pittsburgh, PA Office •**

<b>Disabled American Veterans</b>	Phone: (412) 395-6241   Fax: (412) 391-3085
VA Regional Office, Rm. 1606	Email: <a href="mailto:DAVForeign.vbapit@va.gov">DAVForeign.vbapit@va.gov</a>
1000 Liberty Avenue	Client Hours: M-T-Th-F, 0730-1630 & W, 0730-1130 (ET)
Pittsburgh, PA 15222	Disabled American Veterans (DAV): <a href="http://www.dav.org/">http://www.dav.org/</a>

**• Web Links:**

- Agent Orange - Exposure During Military Service (incl. [Thailand Military Bases](#), [Blue Water Veterans](#), [Korean DMZ](#), [Tests/Storage](#)): <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/militaryexposure.asp>
- Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA): <http://www.bva.va.gov/>
- C&P Service Clinician's Guide: <http://tinyurl.com/Clinician-Guide>
- CFR 38, Book B - Review of Benefit Claims Decisions: <http://tinyurl.com/Review-Claims-Decision>
- CFR 38, Book C - Schedule for Rating Disabilities: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/warms/bookc.asp>
- Disability Benefits Questionnaires: [http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/dbq\\_disabilityexams.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/dbq_disabilityexams.asp)
- DRO Review Process Overview (M21-1MR, Part I, Ch. 5, Sect. C): <http://tinyurl.com/DRO-Process>
- eBenefits: <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal>
- Foreign Medical Program (FMP): <http://www.va.gov/hac/forbeneficiaries/fmp/fmp.asp>
- Gulf War - Veterans' Health Initiative: <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/vethealthinitiative/gulfwar.asp>
- Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS): <https://iris.custhelp.com/>
- Institute of Medicine: <http://www.iom.edu/>
- Notice of Disagreement (NOD) (M21-1MR, Part I, Ch. 5, Sect. B): <http://tinyurl.com/VA-NOD>
- The National Institutes of Health: <http://health.nih.gov/>
- VA Veterans Benefits Administration: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/>
- VA Disability Benefits: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/types-disability.asp>
- VA Disability Benefits - How to Apply: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/apply.asp>
- VA Fully Developed Claims (FDC): <http://www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/>
- VA Home Page: <http://www.va.gov/>
- VA Medical Facilities: <http://www.va.gov/health/MedicalCenters.asp>
- VA Publications: <http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/>
- VA 21-22 - Power of Attorney: <http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-22-ARE.pdf>
- VA 21-526 - Application for Compensation/Pension: <http://tinyurl.com/VBA-21-526-ARE-pdf>
- VA 21-526b - Veteran's Supplemental Claim (Compensation): <http://tinyurl.com/VBA-21-526b-ARE-pdf>
- VA 21-526c - Pre-Discharge Claim: <http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-526c-ARE.pdf>
- VA 21-526EZ - Fully Developed Claim (Compensation): <http://tinyurl.com/VBA-21-526EZ-ARE-pdf>
- VA 21-4138 - Statement in Support of Claim: <http://tinyurl.com/VBA-21-4138-ARE-pdf>
- Veterans On-Line Application (VONAPP) Direct Connect: <http://tinyurl.com/eBenefits-VONAPP>
- Veterans Service Organizations: <http://www.va.gov/VSO/>

## Attachment 4

### • Additional Veteran-Related Resources •

#### • Official •

- **National Gulf War Research Center**  
<http://www.ngwrc.org/>
- **National Resource Directory**  
<https://www.nrd.gov/>
- **Schedule for Rating Disabilities (Title 38 - Pensions, Bonuses, and Veterans' Relief)**  
[http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title38/38cfr4\\_main\\_02.tpl](http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title38/38cfr4_main_02.tpl)
- **VA - My HealthVet**  
<https://www.myhealth.va.gov/index.html>
- **VA - Office of Public Health & Environmental Hazards - Hazardous Exposures**  
<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/index.asp>
- **VA - Returning Service Members (OEF/OIF)**  
<http://www.oefoif.va.gov/>

#### • Unofficial •

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| • <b>A to Z Guide to VA Disability Benefits</b><br><a href="http://jimstrickland912.com/">http://jimstrickland912.com/</a> | • <b>Veterans Benefits Network</b><br><a href="http://vets.yuku.com/">http://vets.yuku.com/</a>          |
| • <b>HadIt.com Veteran to Veteran LLC</b><br><a href="http://www.hadit.com/">http://www.hadit.com/</a>                     | • <b>Veterans Information</b><br><a href="http://www.veteransinfo.org/">http://www.veteransinfo.org/</a> |
| • <sup>1,2</sup> <b>VA Watchdog dot Org</b><br><a href="http://www.vawatchdog.org/">http://www.vawatchdog.org/</a>         | • <b>VetsHome</b><br><a href="http://www.vetshome.com/">http://www.vetshome.com/</a>                     |

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