

VA Pittsburgh Health Care System
Military Order of the Purple Heart
7180 Highland Drive 118-VH
Building 1, Room 6023W
Pittsburgh, PA 15206



STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART

For Combat Wounded Veterans
“In War there is no substitute for Victory”

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PURPLE HEART NEWSLETTER

Editor – Jim Lang
State Commander – Joe Serenka

Assistant Editor – Dan Wilhelm
State Finance Officer – Harry Clark

NEW STATE NEWSLETTER UPDATE

The state newsletter will be compiled and circulated on the website by Chapter 455, our offices are located at VA Healthcare System, at 7108 Highland Drive, Bldg. 1, Rm 6023w, Pittsburgh, PA 15206. The phone number is 412-954-5165 – Fax – 412-954-5171 **WEB SITE—**www.chapter455.org

E-Mail—moph455@yahoo.com.

VA TO SURVEY VETERAN HOUSEHOLDS

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki announced the Department of Veterans Affairs has launched a national survey of Veterans, active duty service members, activated National Guard and reserve members, and family members and survivors to learn if they are aware of VA services.

“By hearing directly from Veterans and their family members, we gain valuable information to help us serve them better. We hope those who receive the survey will respond to it,” Secretary Shin-

seki said.

In addition to assessing awareness levels, the National Survey of Veterans will collect important health care, benefits, employment, and demographic information that VA will use to inform policy decisions and improve benefits. Recognizing a broader client base than just Veterans, this is the first time VA has included others, such as Veteran family members, in its survey population.

VA is mailing out survey “screeners” to more than 130,000 households to identify potential survey participants. The screener asks if anyone in the household is a member of one of the identified survey groups-Veterans, family members and survivors, active duty, Guard or Reserve members. Eligible survey participants then may be requested to participate in a full-length survey.

Participants will be able to select a preferred survey method: through U.S. mail, telephone or a password protected Internet address. VA expects approximately 10,000 Veterans to complete the full-length survey.

VETERANS WRONGLY TOLD THEY HAVE FATAL DISEASE

Former Air Force reservist Gale Reid received a letter from the Veterans Affairs Department that told her she had Lou Gehrig's disease, and she immediately put herself through a battery of painful, expensive tests. Five days later, the VA said its "diagnosis" was a mistake.

Letters were sent to 1,864 veterans about disability benefits for those with ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, and a "small number" have contacted the VA indicating they received the letters in error, VA spokeswoman Katie Roberts said Monday night.

However, the National Gulf War Resource Center said Reid was among at least 1,200 veterans who received the letter, even though they hadn't been diagnosed with the illness. Veterans were initially suspicious, but still went through the pain not knowing whether they had the degenerative disease, which typically kills people within five years.

The Resource Center said at least 2,500 letters informing veterans of disability benefits for ALS sufferers were sent, with almost half a mistake. Roberts said the number sent was not that high and that only less than 10 people had called to say they had gotten an ALS benefits letter but didn't have the disease.

The veterans group president Jim Bunker said it stood by its figures.

Those who received the letters have undiagnosed neurological disorders, according to the Gulf War veterans group, which provides information, support and referrals about illnesses to people who served in the military.

No one knows for sure exactly how many letters were mailed to veterans treated at VA hospitals and how many were a mistake.

"VA is immediately reviewing the individual claims files for all the recipients of this letter to identify those who received the notification in error," the VA said in a statement.

Former Army Sgt. Samuel Hargrove cried Sunday after opening his letter.

"I can't even describe the intensity of my feelings," said the father of two from Henderson, N. C. "With so many health issues that I already have, I didn't know how to approach my family with the news."

So, at first, he didn't. Hargrove later discovered the mistake after talking with fellow veterans in the resource center and online. He was angry, as is Reid.

"I've been through a week of hell, emotionally, physically and financially," she said.

Denise Nichols, vice president of the resource center, said her group has received calls and e-mails from panicked veterans in Alabama, Florida, Kansas, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

"Our fear was this could push somebody over the edge," said Nichols, who worried the news could lead already fragile veterans to commit suicide. "We don't want that to happen."

Jim Bunker, president of the veterans group, said he talked to someone at the VA and was told the mistake was caused by a coding error. The VA uses more than 8,000 codes for various diseases and illnesses and veterans with undiagnosed neurological disorders, which can range from mild to severe.

Nichols said she suspected something was amiss because some of the veterans she knew who received the letters did not exhibit any symptoms. Hargrove said he became suspicious because the letter didn't come from his doctor, and Reid said she sought a second opinion even though she believed the letter wasn't the right way to inform patients of a diagnosis.

"We are trying to work with the VA because we realize it was an error and they were trying to do something right for the people who were diagnosed with ALS," Nichols said. "Basically this was a good effort that ended badly."

A LITTLE KNOWN STORY ON 09/11/2001

This is little-known story from the Pentagon on 09/11/2001.

“During a visit with a fellow chaplain, who happened to be assigned to the Pentagon, I had a chance to hear a first-hand account of an incident that happened right after Flight 77 hit the Pentagon. The chaplain told me what happened at a daycare center near where the impact occurred. This daycare had many children, including infants who were in heavy cribs. The daycare supervisor, looking at all the children they needed to evacuate, was in a panic over what they could do. There were many children, mostly toddlers, as well as the infants that would need to be taken out with the cribs. There was no time to try to bundle them into carriers and strollers.

Just then a young Marine came running into the center and asked what they needed. After hearing what the center director was trying to do, he ran back out into the hallway and disappeared. The director thought, well, here we are on our own. But in about 2 minutes the Marine returned with 40 other Marines in tow. Each of them grabbed a crib with a child, and the rest started gathering up toddlers. The director and her staff then helped them take all the children out of the center and down toward a park on the Potomac near the Pentagon. Once they got about 3/4 of a mile outside the building, the Marines stopped in the park, and then did a fabulous thing—they formed a circle with the cribs, which were quite sturdy and heavy, like the covered wagons in the Old West. Inside this circle of cribs, they put the toddlers, to keep them from wandering off. Outside this circle were the 40 Marines, forming a perimeter around the children and waiting for instructions. “There they remained until the parents could be notified and come get their children.”

The chaplain then said, “I don’t think any of us saw or heard of this on any of the news stories of the day. It was just incredible story of those Marines responding willingly and quickly to a tactical problem that presented itself” But would we have expected any less of them?”

Remember Ronald Regan’s great compliment: “Most of us wonder if our lives can make any difference. Marines don’t have that problem.

MOPH LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

On Nov. 11, 2009, the day that honors all veterans, the *Military Order of the Purple Heart* launched a completely revised website which you can visit at the same address, www.purpleheart.org. It has new formats, more photos, additional features, and is easier to navigate.

The revised site was made possible by a grant from the *Military Order of the Purple Heart Service Foundation* which allowed purchase of design and software services from American Eagle, one of the more capable firms in website design. MOPH HQ worked for months with American Eagle to ensure that the new site meets both current and future needs of the Order. Please visit our new site and send your comments to: webmaster@purple.org

XEROX IS DOING SOMETHING COOL

If you go to this website www.LetsSayThanks.com you can print out a thank you card and Xerox will print it and it will be sent to a soldier that is currently serving in Iraq. You can’t pick out who gets it, but it will go to a member of the armed services.

How AMAZING it would be if we could get everyone we know to send one!!! It is FREE and it only takes a second.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if the soldiers received a bunch of these? Whether you are for or against the war, our soldiers over there need to know we are behind them.

This takes just 10 seconds and it’s a wonderful was to say thank you. Please take the time and please take the time to pass it on for others to do. We can never say thank you enough.

Thanks for taking time to support our military!

**MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A
HAPPY NEW YEAR**

HEALTH CARE REFORM**NOVA National Organization of Veteran's
Advocates, Inc.**

A report from Agence France Presse (AFP) indicates that the number of American veterans who died in 2008 because they didn't have health care, is 14 times higher than the military death toll in Afghanistan, for the entire year. Two Harvard medical researchers analyzed data, comparing US combat-related deaths in Afghanistan, with the number of veterans who died because they lacked the ability to seek out adequate health care and access medical services. All of the veterans surveyed were under the age of 65. The study was released to coincide with the Veterans Day holiday, when those who died fighting overseas are honored and recognized. It clearly indicates that in spite of care from the Veterans Administration, many American veterans remain without coverage. The AFP report states that the analysis utilized census data to determine how many U. S. veterans lack both private health coverage and VA care. Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School, David Himmelstein, is also the co-founder of Physicians for a National Health Program, which co-authored the study. He said the veterans represent a group of about 1.5 million people.

Along with co-author Stephanie Woolhandler, who is also a Harvard medical professor, Himmelstein compared that figure with an additional study that examined the mortality rate that accompanies a lack of health insurance. He told AFP, "The uninsured have about a 40% higher risk of dying each year than otherwise comparable insured individuals. Putting that all together you get an estimate of almost 2,300—2,266 veterans who die each year from lack of insurance." He cites how some veterans down into 8 "priority groups" and this can lead to delays in treatment. "The priority eight group, the lowest priority, are veterans above the very poor group who have no other reason to be eligible and that group is essentially shut out of the VA," Himmelstein said. It is not clear how the study will affect the US Senate's decision on health care reform legislation.

Veterans Benefits and Personal Injury Lawyer *Michael Zimecki* is a member of NOVA. The mission statement of NOVA is to develop and encourage high standards of service and representation for all persons seeking benefits throughout the federal benefits system. The organization NOVA was founded in 1993 and has provided continued support for disabled American veterans.

NOVA is a national organization of Veteran Benefits Attorneys who represent disabled veterans of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard who are disabled due to injuries or diseases from active-duty service. The members of NOVA are admitted to practice before the United States Court of Veterans Appeals.

If you have been denied your Veterans Benefits, call 1-877-456-4251 or [e-mail](#) the Veterans Benefits Attorney Michael Zimecki at the law firm of Berger and Green. You have the right to representation by a veteran disability attorney who will fight for your benefits.

If you have questions regarding your veteran benefits or if your claim has been denied please contact the veteran benefits attorney at Berger and Green. If you are suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI), amputations, or any other service connected physical or mental disability we would like to speak to you.

For more information about our services, or to speak with a veteran benefit lawyer regarding your claim please contact Berger and Green at 1-877-456-4251.

Free case evaluations—NO attorney's fees or costs unless we recover a settlement, benefits, or verdict in you case.