

**VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICE
OF LEXINGTON COUNTY**



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VET NEWS

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LEXINGTON MARINE KILLED IN IRAQ



Marine LCPL Joshua Torrence was killed in Iraq on March 14, 2005. Torrence, a graduate of White Knoll High School, was buried at Boiling Springs United Methodist Church on Thursday, March 24. The funeral service was held at Saxe Gotha Presbyterian Church.

LCPL Torrence's family was presented the US and State flag as well as letters of commendation from Governor Sanford and the SC General Assembly. His family also received the Purple Heart Medal.

Participants in the funeral service included members of the Marine Corps and Civil War reenactors from the 3rd SC Infantry.

VETERANS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Lexington County VA Office has established a Veterans' Advisory Committee to deal with issues of interest and concern to Lexington County veterans. Representatives from each veterans organization will meet on a quarterly basis. The next meeting will be June 13, 2005 at 7:00 p.m. in the Auditorium of the County Auxiliary Administration Building.

LEXINGTON COUNTY VETERANS VAN

At its initial meeting on March 22, the Advisory Committee supported the purchase of a van through the DAV van purchase program.

The van will be utilized to transport veterans to appointments at Dorn VA Medical Center.

Vans are purchased through a program of the Disabled American Veterans at a cost of \$10,000-12,000 each. The vans are titled to the VA Medical Center which then accepts responsibility for maintenance, fuel, and insurance.

The Committee is asking each veterans organization to contribute \$500 or more to the program between now and July 1. Personal donations can also be made.

Donations can be made to the Lexington Veterans Fund, PO Box 421, Lexington, SC 29071.



NEW PHONE NUMBERS

The Lexington County Veterans Affairs Office has new phone numbers. Call 1-803-785-8400 for an appointment, M-F, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. We are open during the lunch hour to answer your questions or to take messages. The new FAX number: 1-803-785-4105.

CVAO MEETING

The claims staff of the Lexington County VA office will be attending the spring training conference of the County Veterans Affairs Officers in Camden on April 14-15. A staff member will be in the office during this time period to handle any inquiries.

APRIL OUTREACH PROGRAM

April 5th: 8-12, Batesburg-Leesville

April 12th: 9-12, Chapin

April 19th: 8-12, Swansea

The Outreach programs have been effective with veterans taking advantage of the opportunity to meet locally with VA Office staff.

VA HEALTH CARE ELIGIBILITY

- Eligibility for most veterans' health care benefits is based solely on active military service in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines or Coast Guard (or Merchant Marines during WWII), and discharged under other than dishonorable conditions.
- Reservists and National Guard members who were called to active duty by a Federal Executive Order may qualify for VA health care benefits. Returning service members, including Reservists and National Guard members who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations have special eligibility for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for two years following discharge from active duty.
- Health Care eligibility is not just for those who served in combat.
- Other groups may be eligible for health benefits.
- Veteran's health care is not just for service-connected injuries or medical conditions.
- Veteran's health care facilities are not just for men only. VA offers full-service health care to women veterans.

Most veterans are required to complete an annual financial assessment or means test to determine if they qualify for cost-free services. Veterans who qualify for cost-free health care and/or medications is based on:

- Receiving a Purple Heart Medal, or
- Former Prisoner of War Status, or
- Compensable disabilities that are service-connected, or
- Low income, or
- Other qualifying factors including treatment related to their military service experience.

Income Limits for VA Health Care Benefits

Veteran With Dependents	FreeVA RX & Travel Benefits	Free VA Health Care	Deduction from non-reimbursed medical expenses reported
0	\$10,162	\$25,842	\$494
1	\$13,309	\$31,013	\$647
2	\$15,043	\$32,747	\$732
3	\$26,777	\$34,481	\$817
4	\$18,511	\$36,215	\$901
For each over 2 add:	\$1,734	\$1,734	\$86

Effective January 1, 2005



1 MILLION NEW WAR VETS

More than 214,000 GIs who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan had been discharged by August 2004. VA reported that nearly 33,000 had sought health care.

Psychological disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), were diagnosed in 20% of Iraq vets and 18% of Afghanistan vets. Some 1,641 Iraq vets were diagnosed with PTSD, compared to 183 Afghanistan vets.

MOST COMMON AILMENTS		
	Afghanistan	Iraq
Musculoskeletal diseases	30%	30%
Digestive system diseases	22%	25%
Ill-defined conditions	22%	21%
Nervous system Diseases	20%	19%
Psychological Disorders	18%	20%
Respiratory System diseases	15%	13%

MORE IRAQ VETS SEEKING VA CARE

Of those eligible, 16% of Iraq vets had received treatment compared to 11% of Afghanistan vets as of July 22, 2004.

Discharged Iraq Vets	168,528
Received VA treatment	27,556
Discharged Afghan vets	45,880
Received VA treatment	5,113

- Burial in a VA National Cemetery
- Employment Assistance
- Survivors' Benefit Programs

Want more information?

Call Toll Free: 1-800-827-1000



BENEFITS & SERVICES FOR WOMEN VETERANS

As of January 20, 2005, 33 women had been killed in Iraq and five in Afghanistan. More than 250 had been wounded in action. Some 224,000 women make up about 16% of the active-duty military.

With the ever-changing roles of women in the military comes the need for more diverse, adequate VA health care. VA estimates that by 2010, 10% of the veterans population will be made up of women.

Women veterans may be entitled to one or more of the following benefits. Contact the VA office for more information.

- Disability Compensation for service related disabilities
- Disability Pension for non-service related disabilities
- Education Assistance Programs
- Work-Study Allowance
- Vocational Rehabilitation & Counseling
- Insurance
- Home Loan Benefits
- Medical Inpatient and Outpatient care
- Substance Abuse treatment and counseling
- Sexual Trauma and Assault Counseling
- Nursing Home care
- Burial Benefits

EVENT TO HONOR VIETNAM VETS

Branson, MO is staging *Operation Homecoming USA* between June 13-19 to honor Vietnam veterans nationwide. The tribute includes a festival of Vietnam-era entertainers and unit reunions. For further information, contact: *Operation Homecoming USA*, 1756 Bee Creek Road, Suite E, Branson, MO 65616; Tel.: 1-888-265-8387.

E-mail: info@operationhomecomingusa.com

Website: www.operationhomecomingusa.com

FUNERAL PREPLANNING

The death of a loved one is more stressful if little or no advance thought is provided concerning funeral arrangements. Did the loved one want a traditional funeral with a burial, or a cremation service with ashes scattered at sea? What music should be played? Where should the service be held? Who should preside?

Preplanning may reduce some of the stress the family experiences upon a loved one's death. In addition, if the wishes of a loved one are known, emotional overspending is often avoided. Planning ahead enables comparison shopping without time constraints, facilitates discussion of important final decisions, and removes some of the burden from the family.

There are two resources available to start the preplanning process. The *Benefits of Preplanning a Funeral or Cremation Service* and *10 Things All Veterans Should Know About Their Funeral and Cremations Benefits* are both

available free by calling 1-800-821-2606, selection *option 4*.

GRIEF COUNSELING FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is now authorized to provide grief counseling to families of service members who die while on active duty. Counseling services are provided at all 206 community-based Vet Centers throughout the United States, including Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. 412 relative—from spouses to children to siblings, parents and even grandparents—of 276 service members killed have taken advantage of the program as they struggle to cope with the loss of their loved one. Most of those killed were deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. The bereavement support line is (202) 273-9116. Call (202) 273-8967 to request general information at the Veterans Center. Please find one of the 206 Vet Centers in the blue pages (federal government) under Veterans Affairs or the white pages under “Vet Center” or on the web at www.va.gov/rcs.

Ordering a Headstone or Marker for a Deceased Veteran

To receive a headstone or marker for an eligible veteran or service member, one must apply on a VA form 1330. Information may be found about VA’s headstone and marker program on <http://www.va.gov/> and by calling 1-800-827-1000. Most funeral homes have blank VA-1330 forms and will assist in filing for a headstone or marker.

THE PRESIDENTIAL MEMORIAL CERTIFICATE

A veteran’s family member can receive a posthumous Presidential Memorial Certificate from a “*grateful nation in recognition of devoted and selfless consecration to the service of our country. ...*” This program was established in 1962 by President John F. Kennedy and has been continued by every

subsequent President. The engraved certificate, which is signed by the President, honors the military service of the deceased veteran.

To request a Presidential Memorial Certificate honoring the military service of a deceased family member, please provide the following information and return it to: *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration (403A), 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20420.*

Provide the Veteran’s Full First Name, Middle Name, and Last Name (no nickname, military rank, or civilian titles); other distinguishing info (Social security number, date of birth, date of death, etc). Include the name of the person to whom the certificate is to be provided, mailing address, and daytime phone number, including area code.

VETERAN’S AFFAIRS OFFICE

Many veterans are completely unaware of a fantastic free resource that is available to assist them in getting the vital benefits they need and deserve. This resource is your Veteran’s Affairs Office.

Your local Veteran’s Affairs Office is located at 605 West Main Street, Suite 101, Lexington, SC 29072 in the Lexington County Auxiliary Building. Hours are from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Phone: 803-785-8400. Please call for an appointment between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

You will need the following to file a claim:

- ✓ copy of your DD-214 or discharge
- ✓ copy of all marriage licenses
- ✓ copy of all divorces
- ✓ income from Social Security, interest, checking account balance, IRA, stock and bonds, mutual funds
- ✓ medical records pertaining to your claim.



DATES TO REMEMBER

- 1st Okinawa invasion began (1945)
- 9th Fall of Bataan (1942)
- 11th Persian Gulf War official cease fire (1991)
- 18th Doolittle Raid on Japan (1942)

UPCOMING EVENTS AT SC MUSEUM

April 15-16: Collector's Fair and I.D. Session. World War II collector's fair and public ID session of family heirlooms featuring items from three collectors, Alan Branham, Bruce Cotner, and George Feindel III. 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. in the Vista Room.

April 23: Military History. Stoney Hilton, a retired U.S. Navy submariner and a volunteer at the H. L. Hunley conservation project in Charleston, will discuss the first submarine to sink a ship in battle at 11:00 a.m., noon, 1:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m., and 3:00 p.m. Hunley replica, fourth floor.

Current Exhibition

Breaking through the Atlantic Wall, D-Day, 6 June 1944. Commemorating the 60th anniversary of D-Day, this exhibit looks at the Allied invasion of Nazi-controlled Europe and the role South Carolinians played in it. Its programs are sponsored in part by the Humanities Council SC. March 25-July 3, 2005.



HOME LOAN PROGRAM

Pursuant to the Veterans Benefit Act of 2004, the VA has increased the limits on guaranteed home loans to veterans. VA-guaranteed home loans are made by banks and mortgage companies to veterans, servicemembers, and reservists, with the VA guaranteeing a portion of the loan. The loans are made at favorable interest rates with no down payment required. The maximum home loan guarantee rate has been increased from \$60,000 to \$89,912. In addition, veterans with permanent and total service-connected disabilities due to the loss of—or loss of the use of—both upper extremities are now eligible for a specially adapted housing grant of up to \$50,000. The grant may be used to improve an existing residence to accommodate the veteran's disability.

AGENT ORANGE UP-DATE

The list of presumptive service-connected health problems caused by exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides now includes:

- chloracne (a skin disease);
- Hodgkin's disease;
- multiple myeloma (a cancer of the blood cells);
- non-Hodgkin's lymphoma;
- porphyria cutanea tarda (a skin disease caused by a defective liver enzyme);
- respiratory cancers (lung, bronchus, larynx, and trachea);
- soft-tissue sarcoma (cancer of the muscles and tendons);
- acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy (weakening of the nervous system);
- prostate cancer;
- chronic lymphocytic leukemia; and
- adult-onset (Type 2) diabetes.





VFW Post #8738 chili cookout contest, Saturday, March 12, 2005. From left to right: Jerry Steele, Deborah Crawford, Linda Gunter, Mitch Crawford, Betty DeShong, Hugh Gunter, Betty Carson & Fred DeShong

INFORMATION FOR SURVIVORS OF RETIRED MARINES

The Marine Corps **only** provides casualty assistance to the primary next of kin (NOK) of Marines who die on active duty for training, inactive duty training, and those who transferred to the Temporary or Permanent Disability Retired List (T/DPRL) and dies within 120 days of separation.

Questions pertaining to and assistance in understanding benefits and completion of claim forms may be available through a variety of agencies such as the:

- Veterans Service Officer (VSO) or Retired Activities Officers, located aboard most military installations,
- Department of Veterans Affairs at 1-800-827-1000,
- Marine Corps Casualty Section at 1-800-847-1597,
- Marine Corps Retired Activities Office at 1-800-336-4649.

Notification of the Marine's death should be provided immediately to the following agencies (if applicable):

Defense Finance and Accounting Service—Cleveland, OH at 1-800-269-5170. This call will generate the annuity application process and application for arrears of pay.

If the Marine was a Civil Service or Federal Employee Retirement System

retiree, notify the office of Personnel Management at 724-794-8690. Inquiries should be made concerning Civil Service SBP, casualty and Federal Group Life Insurance.

If the Marine was also retired from employment in the private sector and a retirement plan is involved, notify that employer or pension plan administrator.

Your lawyer, trust administrator, or executor of the estate.

Banks and stock brokerages that has an individual or joint account in the name of the Marine. Have account number available, if known.

All life insurance companies. Have policy numbers available, if known.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Office. This call could initiate application for potential VA benefits, i.e., burial, application for headstone or marker and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). Some surviving spouses will qualify for these benefits; many may not. Allow the VA to make eligibility determinations.

The VA administers most benefits available to survivors of deceased retired personnel. It is recommended that the survivor schedule an appointment with the VA for counseling and completion of claims forms, as soon as possible.

Social Security Administration (SSA). A family member or other person responsible for the Marine's affairs should:

Promptly notify the SSA of the Marine's death;

If monthly benefits were being paid via direct deposit, notify the bank or other financial institution of the Marine's death. Request that any funds received for the month of death and later be returned to Social Security as soon as possible.

If benefits were being paid by check, **DO NOT CASH** any checks received for the month in which the Marine died or thereafter. Return the checks to Social Security as soon as possible.

COMBAT-RELATED SPECIAL COMPENSATION

CRSC is designed to provide compensation for military retirees with combat-related disabilities. The [Combat Analysis Team \(CAT\)](#) is responsible for verifying that an applicant's disability is directly connected to combat or combat related operations as defined by DoD Program Guidance.

When sending in supporting documentation be sure it provides specifics about each disability AND the combat-related event(s) that identifies and documents the origin of the disability.

Combat-related disabilities that qualify were incurred either:

(1) As direct result of armed conflict

The disability is a disease or injury incurred in the line of duty as a direct result of armed conflict. The fact that a member incurred the disability during a period of war or an area of armed conflict or while participating in combat operations is not sufficient to support a combat-related determination. There must be a definite causal relationship between the armed conflict and the resulting disability.

Armed Conflict includes war, expedition, occupation of an area or territory, battle, skirmish, raid, invasion, rebellion, insurrection, guerilla action, riot or any other action in which service members are engaged with a hostile or belligerent nation, faction, force, or terrorists.

Armed conflict may also include such situations as incidents involving a member while interned as a prisoner of war, or while detained against his or her will in custody of a hostile or belligerent force, or while escaping or attempting to escape from such confinement, prisoner of war, or detained status.

While engaged in hazardous service (e.g., flight, diving, parachute duty)

Such service includes, but is not limited to, aerial flight, parachute duty, demolition duty, experimental stress duty, and diving duty. A finding that a disability is the result of such hazardous service requires that the injury or disease be the direct result of actions taken in the performance of such service. Travel to and from such service, or actions incidental to a

normal duty status not considered hazardous are not included.

(2) In the performance of duty under conditions simulating war (exercises, field training)

In general, this covers disabilities resulting from military training, such as war games, practice alerts, tactical exercises, airborne operations, leadership reaction courses, grenade and live fire weapons practice, bayonet training, hand-to-hand combat training, rappelling and negotiation of combat confidence and obstacle courses. It does not include physical training activities such as calisthenics and jogging or formation running and supervised sport activities.

Through an instrumentality of war (combat vehicles, weapons, Agent Orange, etc.)

Incurrence during actual period of war is not required. However, there must be a direct causal relationship between instrumentality of war and disability. The disability must be incurred incident to a hazard or risk of the service.

An instrumentality of war is a vehicle, vessel, or device designed primarily for Military Service and intended for use in such Service at the time of the occurrence or injury.

A determination that a disability is the result of an instrumentality may be made if the disability was incurred in any period of service as a result of such diverse causes as wounds caused by a military wearer in accidents involving military combat vehicle, injury or sickness caused by fumes, gases, or explosion or military ordinance, vehicles or materials.

LEXINGTON COUNTY VETERANS MONUMENT

This Monument is located at the entrance of the Virginia Hylton Park on S.C. 6 Hwy. One side is for World War II, one side is for Korea, one side is for the Vietnam Era, and the fourth side is for the Homefront. Flags of each service plus the United States, South Carolina, and POW/MIA flags fly over the monument.

Engraved bricks are still available in remembrance or honor of a loved one. For further information contact Stuart Ford at 1-803-951-4637. Each brick may contain ONLY 14 characters per line and there is a limit of two lines per brick. See application form attached.

