

Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans

Terms of reference

Inquiry into Veterans' Affairs' Legislative Framework and Supporting Architecture for Compensation and Rehabilitation for Veterans (Serving and Ex-serving Australian Defence Force Members)

“whether the compensation and rehabilitation system that is currently available for veterans in Australia is fit for purpose now, and whether the system is likely to effectively and efficiently support veterans and their families in the future.”

To the Productivity Commission

My submission is based on my personal experience. My ultimate emphasis is on the interpretation of rules that are applied to claimable conditions and thus the compensation paid for successful claims. I believe you need to know about actual cases to help you in your determinations. All my statements are provable, I can give you my Veterans affairs File Number, pension information, specialist details, RSL officer – you can request and check all of these, I have nothing to hide.

I served with the Australian Army Medical Corps in South Vietnam in 1968. In August 1968 I reported loss of hearing in my right ear and it was dismissed by an Australian Army doctor in Saigon who said there was nothing wrong after looking in my ear with an otoscope. I took my discharge (expiration of my 3 years' service) later that year, and in 1969 I went totally deaf in the right ear. I had reconstructive surgery to free-up the malleus, incus and stapes bones that were frozen with infection (one bone could not be saved and the other two were joined together by the surgeon). I also had a new eardrum grafted in place as the original had disappeared. Unfortunately the surgery did not restore my hearing.

A subsequent claim (and also an appeal in 1973) to Repatriation Department for compensation was not allowed because in their opinion my hearing loss was due to an infection 3 years prior to 1968, and that had caused my problem. That decision absolutely floored me, if I had an infection 3 years prior why was I accepted for Army service in the first place, and, in my medical prior to service in South Vietnam why was I accepted for service in a war zone!

At no time did anybody at the Repatriation Department suggest nor imply that I could claim for aggravation of an existing condition. With the help of a RSL Pensions

Officer I did get a successful claim for aggravation of the hearing condition on November 8, 2016. No backpay to 1968, nor to the early 1970's either.

At the time of my discharge in 1968 I was being treated for chronic tinea in the feet and groin as a result of my service in South Vietnam. That tinea problem is ongoing. At no time did anybody (not even Army personnel) suggest nor imply that I could claim on the Repatriation Department for my tinea condition. I subsequently developed a chronic skin condition all over my body.

With the help of a RSL Pensions Officer I did get a successful claim for Tinea and Chronic Solar Skin Damage on May 31, 2001. No backpay to 1968 either.

I developed a Depressive Disorder in the year 2000, after years of lack of self-worth. The depression caused me to plan/attempt suicide on 3 occasions over the next few years, after which I sought help from the then known Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service. The VVCS was my salvation, and after many sessions with them I was referred to a psychiatrist who took over my treatment. The treatment was for PTSD.

I did not know that Veterans Affairs would pay for depressive disorder treatment expenses, regardless if caused by war service or not, no-one told me that, I also discovered at that time that Veterans Affairs would also cover treatment expenses for cancer whether caused by war service or not. So, I eventually was able to claim for my Depressive Disorder expenses and that continues to this day as I still need to consult my psychiatrist

My claim on Veterans Affairs for compensation for Depressive Disorder was rejected on May 31, 2007 and again on November 8, 2016. The reason for the rejection was because the depressive episode was not evident within 5 years of the onset (being 1968). Again, those decisions floored me just as the hearing loss decision floored me.

In summation, I would like to point out that the acceptance of claimable conditions, and the timing of (including backdating) compensation has been abominable in my situation. In addition, timely promulgation of information on claimable conditions was not evident for Vietnam Veterans (or any veteran for that matter) and certainly not in my case. It may have improved since my time, I don't really know, but it should be very high on the agenda for Australia's Armed Services and the Veterans Affairs Department.

Veterans Affairs should have properly trained people to assess claims, people who do know about war service and what it can do to you, and not just assess from a word document.

Thank you, from

Leslie Moore