

# VFW NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE



HONORING THE DEAD BY HELPING THE LIVING ★ FEBRUARY 2010



## VA Plans Additions to Agent Orange Illness Presumptions List

The VA has announced that three new illnesses are now linked by medical evidence to the herbicide defoliant Agent Orange, which was used extensively during the Vietnam War.

In October 2009, the VA announced its intent to add hairy cell leukemia, Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease, which raises to 15 the total number of "presumed" service-connected illnesses the VA considers linked to Agent Orange.

"This is very significant," said VFW National Commander Thomas J. Tradewell, Sr. "The VA is saying 'We believe you,' which will enable more

veterans to receive the health care and benefits they earned and deserve."

Regulations must be written, published for public comment and republished before this change will be effective. However, veterans can file claims now for these disabilities. ★

*If you, or a veteran you know, suffer from hairy cell leukemia, Parkinson's disease or ischemic heart disease, please contact a VFW service officer. A complete directory can be found at [www.vfw.org/vetservice](http://www.vfw.org/vetservice).*

## VFW is Fighting for VETERANS!

VFW National Veterans Service works to ensure veterans receive every entitlement available to them from their government. Our nationwide network of service officers was established to help veterans and their families file claims with the VA. This service is available at no charge—and made possible through donations. Visit [www.vfw.org/vetservice](http://www.vfw.org/vetservice) to learn more.



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**Thank You for Your Support**  
 We realize that much of our work would not be possible without your generous and dedicated support, and we would like to let you know how much we recognize and appreciate your continuing contributions.

# 29 Years Later, Widow Gets Justice

Jim and Marion Gillespie were married in October of 1968. Jim was ready to start a family. These plans were put on hold when the newlywed was drafted and sent to fight in Vietnam.

“Jim never wanted to fight, but he answered his country’s call,” said Marion.

Following the war, Jim returned home, got his MBA degree and settled into a promising career with Supermarkets General. Little did he know that Agent Orange exposure would lead him to a premature death.

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In February 1977, just seven years after his return, Jim was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML). In just three weeks, the disease took his life. Marion was left with two young daughters, ages 18 months and 3 years old.

Shortly after Jim passed, Marion applied for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), but was denied because the VA didn’t view AML as a service-connected disease.

“The doctor who diagnosed Jim asked us if Jim worked around chemicals,” said Marion. “At first we said ‘no’ because it had been almost eight years since he served. It wasn’t until later that it hit me.”

She tried again in 1990 and a third time in 2004. Although she was denied all three times, Marion never gave up the battle for benefits.

“I’ve always been a very persistent person, especially when I know I’m right,” said Marion. “Plus, when you have two children, you just do what you have to do.”

After three failed attempts and more than two decades, Marion met New Jersey VFW State Service Officer Bernard McElwee in 2006.

McElwee urged Marion to appeal the claim because if Jim had lived just a few more months, his AML would have turned into Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL), which *is* considered service-connected. He informed Marion that she would need four letters



Jim and Marion Gillespie were married in 1968. In 1977, Jim died of Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML). VFW helped Marion receive Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC).



New Jersey State Service Officer Bernard McElwee

from blood specialists who affirmed this theory.

Marion sent out 100 letters to hematological oncologists.

“Eight of them wrote back in agreement,” said Marion. “Luckily, one of the doctors wrote a very long letter stating that there was no doubt in his mind.”

Once the theory was backed by specialists, Marion appealed the earlier decisions. The VA agreed with her claim, and compensation was finally awarded.

Marion had hoped for retroactive benefits dating back to 1977, but because the claim she appealed was submitted in 2004, she only received

two years worth of retroactive benefits.

“It was still worth it,” said Marion. “I finally succeeded.”

“It was great to be able to help this woman win her 29-year-long fight,” said McElwee. “Her biggest concern was justice. She just wanted the cause of her husband’s disease to be acknowledged.”

Marion was so grateful to McElwee that she wrote him a heartfelt letter of appreciation.

“It was comforting to know that you were able to summarize my claim in a concise and forceful manner,” wrote Marion. “From the bottom of my heart, thank you.” ★

## ALS Linked to Any Military Service

In the November issue of this newsletter, we reported that the VA had linked ALS, or Lou Gehrig’s Disease, to Agent Orange exposure. In fact, ALS is now a presumptively compensable illness for all veterans with 90 days or more of continuously active service in the military (not specifically Agent Orange exposure). If you, or a veteran you know, need help filing a VA claim, please contact a VFW service officer. A complete listing can be found at [www.vfw.org/vetservice](http://www.vfw.org/vetservice). ★

# VA Announces Major Study on Women Veterans

The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki, announced the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has launched a comprehensive study of women veterans who served during the Vietnam War.

The research will explore the effects of their military service on their mental and physical health. The study is considered the most comprehensive examination of women Vietnam veterans to date.

“VFW has been at the forefront advocating for the needs of women veterans, and this study represents another major step forward,” said William Bradshaw, Director, National Veterans Service. “I encourage all women veterans contacted by the VA to participate in this landmark study.”

About 250,000 women veterans

served in the military during the Vietnam War, and about 7,000 were in or near Vietnam.

The VA estimates there are approximately 1.8 million women veterans in the United States. ★



Vietnam Women's Memorial, Washington, D.C.

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*The study is considered the most comprehensive examination of women Vietnam veterans to date.*

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## We Asked...You Answered

### **Do you think the government has done enough to compensate veterans for the harmful effects of Agent Orange exposure?**

About 92% of our readers feel that the government has not done enough to compensate veterans for Agent Orange exposure:

- “I have several diseases, and it took years to get identified.”
- “There are a lot of veterans still suffering.”
- “The government takes too long to clear any veteran for compensation.”
- “It seems the VA is now on the right track.”

**Thank you for voicing your opinions. Visit [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org) for the latest on key veterans' issues!**



*“The VFW was instrumental in the creation of the VA in 1930, and we continue to have a vested interest in the proper conduct of their operations. A successful VA takes care of veterans, and I pledged to the secretary [of the VA] that the VFW would be an active partner in helping them accomplish their mission.”*

**Thomas J. Tradewell, Sr.,  
VFW National Commander**



*“... And just as you have not forgotten your missing comrades, neither, ever, will we. Our servicemen and women have been doing right by America for generations. And as long as I am Commander-in-Chief, America's going to do right by them. That is my message to all veterans today. That is my message to all who serve in harm's way. To the husbands and wives back home doing the parenting of two. To the parents who watch their sons and daughters go off to war, and the children who wonder when mom [or] dad is coming home. To all our wounded warriors, and to the families who laid a loved one to rest. America will not let you down.”*

**President Barack Obama,  
in his Veterans Day  
remarks at Arlington  
National Cemetery**



## From the Director

There is cause for celebration! Last October, the President signed a bill that will let the VA know its budget a full year in advance. What an important victory for the men and women of our nation's military.

And it's about time. For nearly 25 years, VA funding has been the victim of Capitol Hill budget battles. Funding arrived 30, 60—sometimes over 100 days late! There was no way the proper planning or preparation could take place.

I say the VA was the "victim." But, I think we all know who the real victims were. Who really suffered as a consequence?

America's veterans, that's who.

Without a firm budget, the VA couldn't fully plan to hire important medical and research staff. They couldn't fully anticipate equipment upgrades and much-needed repairs.

Now they can. In the words of VFW National

Commander, Thomas J. Tradewell, Sr., "The Advanced Appropriations issue has always been about doing what's right to properly care for our nation's defenders."

I couldn't agree more. Our country's leaders are taking action to protect veterans.

Of course the VFW has advocated—has fought tirelessly for—this legislation. With the support of dedicated members like you, we've entered the ring to battle for veterans' rights time and time again. Our unwavering commitment paid off.

We commend the President and Congress for this critical legislation. That said, we realize the fight is not over. As long as America's sons and daughters are in harm's way ... as long as selfless heroes engage the enemy to protect our freedoms, the VFW will remain vigilant.

I offer my word that our resolve will not falter, that we will remain steadfast in this noble mission. ★



William Bradshaw, Director,  
National Veterans Service

## The Job That Never Sleeps

For VFW Service Officer Scott Langhoff, a day's work isn't finished until he's tucked into bed.

"I'm notorious for taking my work home," said Langhoff. "In my opinion, true service officers are only off work when they're sleeping."

With over 547,000 veteran households in Southeastern California, it's no wonder Langhoff is putting in overtime.

"In the last year alone, I helped 1,800 veterans claim \$21.2 million in benefits," said Langhoff. "My office as a whole gathered a total of \$81 million in the same 12-month period."

The largest amount awarded to one of Langhoff's clients was more than \$316,000.

"I caught word of an ex-Marine who suffered from Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia (CLL) caused by his service," said Langhoff. "He had been denied by the VA many years ago, so I called him right away. When he told me he didn't drive, I asked for his address. If he couldn't come to me, I would go to him."

Once the paperwork was submitted, the claim was awarded, and retroactive compensation was awarded.

These numbers are impressive, but numbers didn't do it for Langhoff. He wanted to make a more far-reaching difference. He wanted to spread the word about benefits to all veterans.

In the summer of 2008, Langhoff was approached by Wiley Publishing Co. to review a proposed "Veterans Benefits for Dummies" book, which was



Photo Credit: Joann Palmieri

The VFW team in San Diego from left to right: Assistant Department Service Officer Mark Barrett, Department Service Officer Scott Langhoff, Administrative Assistant Marilyn Maxwell and Assistant Department Service Officer Terry Jensen

released this past spring.

"It's all about getting the word out," said Langhoff. "This book allowed me to give valuable advice to veterans and families across the country."

With the success of the book, Langhoff became the go-to guy.

"When someone has a problem they come to me, trusting that I will send them in the right direction," said Langhoff. "I work hard to hold up my end."

In June 2009, Langhoff asked fellow veteran Jimmy Valentine, former Producer of the Roger Hedgecock Show on KOGO AM 600 Radio, what it would take to start a talk-radio show aimed at veterans.

Langhoff is now broadcasting with co-host Valentine on the show, which also came to be named "Veterans Benefits for Dummies" on wsRadio.com under the "Military Network" tab.

"I want to help as many veterans as I possibly can," Langhoff concluded. "There is nothing more powerful than knowledge." ★

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*"In my opinion, true service officers are only off work when they're sleeping."*

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