

# NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office  
St. Petersburg, FL



February 2013

The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at <http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>.

**VA/DOD CONTINUE TO IMPROVE ONLINE ACCESS TO BENEFITS INFORMATION** (VA News Release January 28, 2013) WASHINGTON - The Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense (DoD) just released improvements to the functionality of *eBenefits*, a joint self-service web portal that provides registered users with secure online information and access to a variety of military and Veterans benefits resources.

The latest release, *eBenefits* 4.3, allows for easy navigation of the online disability compensation claim submission process using interview-style questions and drop-down menus similar to tax-preparation software, instead of a traditional fill-in-the-blank form. The latest release also pre-populates the application with information from a Veteran's record in VA's secure database. Veterans can view processing times for each phase of their claim.

Other site improvements include a tool to help determine if a Veteran has eligibility for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment benefits, a calculator for military reservists to determine retirement benefits, and a search function that identifies a claimant's appointed Veterans service representative, with links to Google Maps indicating the location of their nearest representative's office. Service members and Veterans can also access records like Post-9/11 GI Bill enrollment status, VA payment history, and DoD TRICARE health insurance status.

The *eBenefits* application is a key component of VA's ongoing transformation to a digital environment for Veterans' benefits delivery and fully supports VA's Veterans Relationship Management initiative that provides Veterans with the ability to access information about their benefits anywhere, anytime and empowers them to manage those benefits through self-service capabilities. Additional functionality and features will continue to be added to the site throughout the coming months.

To access *eBenefits*, Veterans and Service members must obtain a DoD Self-Service Logon (DS Logon), which provides access to several Veterans and military benefits

service is free and may be obtained in person at a VA Regional Office, DoD ID Card station or online at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov).

There are currently 2.2 million users with access to *eBenefits*, and VA is on track to meet the 2013 agency priority goal of 2.5 million users, as outlined for VA on [www.Performance.gov](http://www.Performance.gov).

With the most-recent release, *eBenefits* has successfully completed 13 consecutive quarterly releases since October 2009 with 47 self-service features enabling Service members and Veterans the ability to download copies of their official VA and military correspondence—to include Veterans civil service preference, service verification, and benefits verification letters; military records; and VA home loan certificates of eligibility, just to name a few.

For more information about VA benefits go to <http://www.benefits.va.gov> and *eBenefits* at [www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov).

**VA ISSUES NEW REPORT ON SUICIDE DATA** (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a comprehensive report on Veterans who die by suicide. In the past, data on Veterans who died by suicide was only available for those who had sought VA health care services. The report also includes state data for Veterans who had not received health care services from VA, which will help VA strengthen its aggressive suicide prevention activities. The report indicates that the percentage of Veterans who die by suicide has decreased slightly since 1999, while the estimated total number of Veterans who have died by suicide has increased.

VA has implemented comprehensive, broad ranging suicide prevention initiatives, including a toll-free Veterans Crisis Line, placement of Suicide Prevention Coordinators at all VA Medical Centers and large outpatient facilities, and improvements in case management and reporting. Immediate help is available at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net) or by calling the Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (push 1) or texting 838255.

The full report can be found on VA's website along with a summary response from VA Under Secretary for Health, Dr. Robert A. Petzel.

Suicide Data Report 2012 final:  
<http://www.va.gov/opa/docs/Suicide-Data-Report-2012-final.pdf>

Veterans Health Administration Response - Suicide Data Report 2012:  
<http://www.va.gov/opa/docs/Response-and-ExecSum-Suicide-Data-Report-2012-final.pdf>

**VA AND ANCESTRY.com PARTNER TO INDEX HISTORIC BURIAL RECORDS** (VA News Release)  
WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs has partnered with the internet-based genealogy research firm Ancestry.com to bring burial records from historic national cemetery ledgers into the digital age. The effort will make the collection—predominantly of Civil War interments—accessible to researchers and Ancestry.com subscribers undertaking historical and genealogical research.

From the 1860s until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. Army personnel tracked national cemetery burials in hand-written burial ledgers or “registers.” Due to concern for the fragile documents and a desire to expand public access to the ledger contents, VA's National Cemetery Administration (NCA) duplicated about 60 hand-written ledgers representing 36 cemeteries using a high-resolution scanning process. The effort resulted in high quality digital files that reproduced approximately 9,344 pages and 113,097 individual records. NCA then transferred the original ledgers to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) where they will be preserved. In addition to the NCA's ledgers, NARA was already the steward of at least 156 military cemetery ledgers transferred from the Army years ago.

In 2011, NCA initiated a partnership with Ancestry.com to index its cemetery ledgers, allowing the data to be searched or browsed in a variety of ways. Ancestry.com spent more than 600 hours indexing NCA's records at no charge to the government. Ancestry.com has assembled the digitized and indexed NCA burial ledgers with those at NARA into a new collection, "U.S. Burial Registers, Military Posts and National Cemeteries, 1862-1960." The burial records contain information such as name, rank, company/regiment, date of death, age at death, date of burial and grave number.

The collection was posted on the ancestry.com website on Veterans Day 2012. The information can be accessed free of charge by VA personnel as well as by employees of the other federal agencies that maintain national cemeteries, the Departments of the Interior and Defense. Ledger data will also be available for free at all NARA facilities, and at public libraries that subscribe to Ancestry.com. The general public will have access to the database on their personal devices through Ancestry.com's regular subscription service.

## **VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:**

### **SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255**

**National Call Center for Homeless Veterans**  
1-877-4AID-VET (1-877-424-3838)

**VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg** - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

**Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA** (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022  
1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)  
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications  
1-877-823-2378

**VA EFT Information Hotline** (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

**Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline** (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

**VA Health Revenue Service** (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

**VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia** (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

**VA Health Administration Center** (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) 1-800-733-8387  
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023; CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024  
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025

### **National Cemeteries**

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426  
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 352-793-7740  
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 561-649-6489  
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 904-766-5222  
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846  
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840  
104 Marine St, St Augustine FL 352-793-7740

**National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs** (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

**Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center** (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120  
1-888-244-6711

**Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD)** - 711

### **INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:**

**VA Web Site:** [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

**VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS)** [www.warms.vba.va.gov](http://www.warms.vba.va.gov)

**VA Workload and Performance Reports;**  
<http://www.vba.va.gov/reports/>

**St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:**  
<http://www.benefits.va.gov/stpetersburg/>

**Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes):** <http://va.equator.com>

**Florida Dept of Veterans' Affairs:** [www.FloridaVets.org](http://www.FloridaVets.org)

**Library of Congress (information on pending legislation)** [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)