



What We Have Here is a Failure to Communicate

by Ed Mattson – 19 September 2011

It is the same challenge every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday...deciding what my topic of discussion will be for the day's article. With veterans' issues, military issues, and of course, today's political landscape, there is no shortage of issues that need the "dirty underwear" aired.

Following weeks of hammering the Veteran's Administration over the Agent Orange claims of veterans, more counseling assistance needed for PTSD and veterans with suicidal tendencies (many veterans having written to me directly), and political faire dealing with the budget deficit and other issues that jeopardize the veterans' benefit programs, I wrote an article outlining how other nations "care for their veterans". My source was a GAO (Government Accounting Office) decade-old report. On it's face the report was an unbiased comparison document, nothing more. I felt that if we are going to have discussions about our benefits, we needed to know how veterans in other countries were treated.

Several email replies attacked me for the article, I guess, thinking the report was too favorable; while other wrote appreciating the information. Some claimed it had no relevance to how our VA treats our veterans, and others took it for the informational piece that it was. Understand, I didn't write the report, I reported about the report. In summary, our veterans' benefit programs are equal to or better than most countries, but that doesn't that doesn't mean a whole lot to the veteran who has been thrown under the bus with his/her claim, or has become homeless with nowhere to turn (i.e. Robert Rosebrock's battle against a corrupt VA of Greater Los Angeles healthcare system).

If a veteran has been denied a claim, is left out of the system or simply has "issues" with the VA, it is a concern for every veteran. If we don't stand up for each other, who will stand up for you when you've been denied your claim?



Strother Martin "The warden" in Cool Hand Luke

Anyone would be a fool to believe that the Veterans Administration is a well-oiled, smooth-running program with few faults. Any government run program, as well as programs that large bureaucratic corporations run for their employees, have problems in implementation regardless of what the policies and procedures may be. The “written word” as we’ll call a policies and procedure manual, has always been subject to interpretation by the person making decisions. In the corporate world, as in the public sector, it always boils down to “people dealing with people”. As Strother Martin’s famous quote from the movie Cool Hand Luke said, “what we have here is a failure to communicate”, has often played out in real life when a claim is made or a benefit denied. That can run both ways, but doesn’t always make one side right.

This past weekend, I received an email directly from a rank-and-file VA employee regarding the articles I have written taking her agency to task. It is from a 54-year old female VA employee as reads as follows:

“Please accept my apologies upfront for any I may offend. As a VA employee, I certainly don’t make what most think. My salary, like most of the ‘worker bees’ is about 1/4th of what has been stated. Try supporting a family on that and while the health benefits provide choices, they are not affordable for me, so neither myself nor my family have healthcare.

All veterans who enter the VA for medical care are taken care of, regardless of their service connections. If it is needed, it is obtained. As a taxpayer, and not a veteran, this comes from my taxpayer dollars. I WISH my husband would have been physically able to be accepted in his time period, as he has been provided LOUSY healthcare on the outside. IF any veteran bothers to take the time to OWN his healthcare at the VA, then he has no grounds for complaining. While a lot of veterans whine with the ‘you owe me’ mentality and don’t bother to inquire about their own healthcare benefits and coverage, those who LISTEN find they are very well provided for and grateful.

My dad is one. He was awarded 8 metals, including a purple heart for his Korean service at sea. Were it not for the VA, his needs would still be unmet. He has gone from 0 to 70% service connected, no longer pays for his visits, meds, and surgeries PLUS, gets PAID to go to the doctor. Can’t find that anywhere in the real world. If you want to know how your local VA works, then call, get enrolled and stop whining.

I do agree that the political world doesn’t care at all what happens to the vet, nor do they care about me. As taxpayers, you and I provide their meal ticket, healthcare and limos. It bugs me too almost to the point that I may stop voting, as I have been doing since 18. I am now 54. That’s a lot of votes (opportunities) to set the record straight; so you understand, the people you deal with at the VA Medical Centers have nothing to do with any claims. Blame the VBA (Veterans’ Benefits Administration) for dragging out claims. I also recommend this site to all veterans who will listen and want to know more. My father, son, son-in-law and uncle have all served. I am proud of their service and grateful for their return”.

My reply to her, like my replies to other mail I receive, both those in agreement, and even those bordering on “hate mail”, was to thank her for her input. Without dialog it is impossible to solve problems.

Her letter put a face on those who work at the VA. I think we can all agree that not all Veteran Hospitals are poor and uncaring, and that all VBA decisions are not good, or in fact, are made with all the facts being known...in many cases “we have a failure to communicate”. Like most veterans, I can name many (my own brother for example who has received life-saving medical treatment from the VA), who are well satisfied with the quality of care they have received under their benefit program, while others slip between the cracks. Many of us who write about the problems are deeply concerned when any of our veteran-brothers and sisters, don’t get a fair shake.

As my Senator chairs the Veterans Affairs sub-committee, I copy him on every benefit issue about which I write in hopes of eventually getting favorable results. Failure to act by our legislators is not because they can claim they were “unaware”. This is something we all must do, and then make changes on Election Day if we want better results. We can, we will, and we must make our voices heard through the ballot box. In the meantime, those of us who document the veteran problems and issues are working on a number projects, legal and otherwise, to change the status quo for a number of vets trying to crawl back from under the bus.

The rest of this week I’ll document some of their stories.

<http://www.veteranstoday.com/2011/09/19/what-we-have-here-is-a-failure-to-communicate/>