

# Helping Veterans Get Their Due

Many American military veterans and even their widowed spouses are entitled to benefits but don't know it. Other veterans (or their spouses) apply for benefits to which they are entitled but wait many months, even years, for their claim to be approved. It is not unusual for an older claimant to have passed away by the time a decision is rendered—in which case any monies that would have gone to the claimant go not to the family but back into government coffers.

Anthony Enck describes the process of dealing with the Department of Veterans Affairs as “a bureaucratic nightmare,” and his job is to help guide area veterans and their spouses through it. Mr. Enck is a military affairs caseworker on the staff of Rep. Mike Fitzpatrick. “Veterans and their problems are important issues to Mike,” said Mr. Enck. “He is one of the very few Congressmen who have assigned two veterans advocates to his staff.” (Mr. Enck's colleague Chris Matarangas shares the caseload.)

Mr. Enck, himself a former U.S. Marine who did three tours in Iraq, is quick to point out that the VA is not the enemy. “There are many great people at the VA but far too often their hands are tied by cumbersome rules and regulations. Plus, the sheer volume of claims is staggering. The Philadelphia VA Office alone must deal with 240,000 pieces of mail per day related to claims.”

Those who served in America's military, as far back as World War II, may be entitled to various forms of assistance, whether medical or financial; and in many cases the surviving spouses are eligible as well. They often need help, however, to “navigate the maze,” as Mr. Enck puts it. As part of Rep. Fitzpatrick's mission to raise awareness among area veterans about benefits that may be available to them, Mr. Enck regularly visits senior centers and other community meeting places to present the information in down-to-earth language.

A typical question that Mr. Enck hears from veterans and spouses is this: “I applied to the VA for benefits 3 months ago (or 6, or 12) and haven't heard anything. What's going on?” Typically, Mr. Enck is able to get a clear accounting from the VA



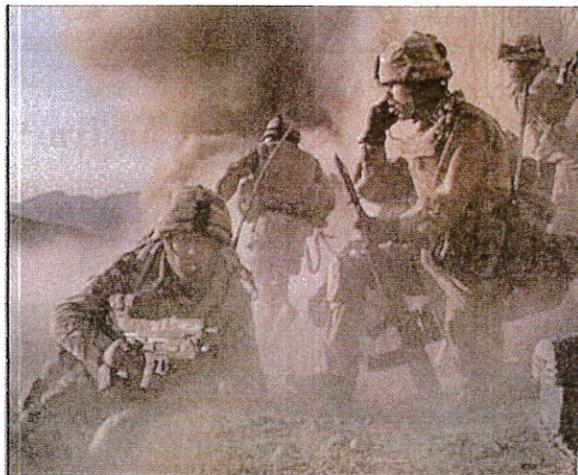
as to the status of a claim.

Just as important are the benefits that go unclaimed because an eligible veteran or spouse does not know that the assistance may be available to them. In an interview with a Levittown Leader reporter on April 9, Mr. Enck described three important types of benefits of which many veterans and spouses are unaware.

1) For a veteran whose household income is under \$54K (combined vet and spouse income), the veteran (but not the spouse) may be eligible to enroll in the VA Health Care system, which could provide for reduced rates on prescription medicines, etc. If the veteran lives alone, the cutoff number is \$51K.

.....

2) A monthly cash payment may be available for veterans or their spouses living “close to the poverty line.” This may be due to low income; but even those with decent incomes may meet this qualification if they are saddled with crippling expenses. “There are people who, on



paper, should be living comfortably,” said Mr. Enck. “But due to heavy medical expenses, nursing home expenses or perhaps home care costs, their available income is onerously low. The monthly payment can help offset the cost of their care.”

.....

3) Some veterans may be eligible for benefits due to service-connected disabilities. Mr. Enck cautioned that it can be difficult to prove that one's condition stems from one's time in the military. “If there is not surviving evidence and records, it will be difficult to succeed in this claim,” he said. He mentioned an elderly Korean War veteran who believed his back problems began when he was thrown from a jeep during the war; since there were no existing records of his having reported an injury, his claim was denied.

The burden of proof, however, is less stringent for many Vietnam veterans, said Mr. Enck. “For Vietnam vets who were actually in country, there is a list of 14 medical conditions which the government will assume are related to their military service. These medical conditions include diabetes, prostate cancer, lung disease, and ischemic heart disease. The government will generally give the benefit of the doubt in these cases, mainly because of the widespread use of Agent Orange and other defoliants during that conflict, the effects of which are not fully understood.”

Very often, the Vietnam veteran does not even know he was exposed to Agent Orange. “In Vietnam, bomb craters would fill up with rainwater and American soldiers would sometimes bathe in them,” said Mr. Enck, “not realizing that Agent Orange might be present in the water. Decades later, that exposure began to manifest itself in serious health issues.”

In younger veterans, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is an increasingly common problem, which can render the veteran unable to function. “The cost of treatment and medication is prohibitively high for most,” said Mr. Enck, “especially since the unemployment rate for veterans aged 22-32 is triple that of civilians. They can't get VA financial help until their claim is decided, and that can often take 14 months.” When a claim is awarded, it pays retroactively to the date of the claim, but that is small comfort to the veteran who is racking up huge medical debts in the meantime.

“What too many young veterans don’t realize is that they are entitled to some assistance right away. From the day a veteran’s active duty ends, assuming an honorable or general discharge, you are entitled to five years of health care through the VA Health System. This can keep the costs manageable while the claim is being processed.”

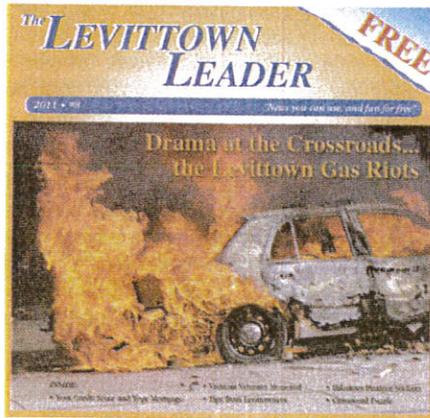
.....

Those who believe they might be entitled to benefits should first contact the Bucks County Veterans Affairs Department for instructions. In Levittown, the nearest office is at 7321 New Falls Road, near 5 Points. Karen Mayer is the Veterans’ Assistant, at 267-580-3560. After this first step, those who need additional help or information about their claim may contact Anthony Enck (shown below) at Rep. Fitzpatrick’s offices by calling 215-579-8102 or by emailing to [anthony.enck@mail.house.gov](mailto:anthony.enck@mail.house.gov).



## Never Miss Another Issue!

Get every new issue of *The Levittown Leader* by email—for free. You can flip through the pages and enlarge any page for easy reading. And you can browse back issues, too—just by clicking on “Archive.” Just go to [www.LevittownLeader.com](http://www.LevittownLeader.com) and click on “Free Digital Delivery” at top left of the screen. And rest assured—we will never share your email address with anyone, ever. ■



**Attention Veterans!** Bucks County’s Office of Veterans Affairs has launched a program which will entitle county veterans to get exclusive discounts from participating local businesses. All veterans and active duty personnel are eligible, but only those who get a Photo ID card from the Bucks County Recorder of Deeds office may receive the discounts. Visit [www.BucksCounty.org](http://www.BucksCounty.org) or call 267-580-3560 for information. ■

## DEAD ANT

### Termite & Pest Control

Your local experts for  
Ants, Bedbugs, Termites, Fleas  
and all other common pests!

### We Do Inspections

Certifications & Treatments

Radon • Mold • Air Quality • Lead  
Wood Destroying Insects • Fungi

**\$25 OFF**

any wood destroying treatments or  
pest control service

**215-269-6522**

164 Lincoln Hwy., Fairless Hills, PA 19030

### Sak’s Driveway Sealcoating

- Blacktop Sealcoating
- Hot Tar Crack Filling
- Parking Lots & Striping
- Commercial & Residential
- Protects & Beautifies
- Enhances Property Values

Quality Work that Stands the Test of Time!

Call Joe Sakalauskas today for a **FREE Estimate**

**215-945-5241**



### The American Legion

Serving God, Country and Community

### American Legion Post 834

has much to offer the whole community

- **Bingo** every Monday night, with progressive jackpots.
- **Dances, picnics and special events.**
- **Banquet Hall and Outside Grove** ideal for weddings, parties and other gatherings, available for rentals.

300 Yardley Avenue  
Fallsington, PA 19054

**Cheese Steaks**  
every 1st & 3rd Wed.

**Wings**  
every 2nd & 4th Thurs.

**215-295-9858**

[www.AmericanLegionPost834.org](http://www.AmericanLegionPost834.org)

## IMAGINE LIFE WITHOUT PAIN!



ALL NEW PATIENTS  
RECEIVE

**FREE**  
CONSULTATION  
EXAMINATION

81 Crabtree Drive & Levittown Pkwy.  
Levittown, PA



FAIRLESS HILLS  
HEALTH CENTER

**CHIROPRACTIC**

**215-949-3720**

[www.fairlesshillshealthcenter.com](http://www.fairlesshillshealthcenter.com)