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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
St. Petersburg Regional Office
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FEB 17 2017

February 10, 2017

Honorable Lois Frankel
Member, United States
House of Representatives
2500 North Military Trail, Suite 490
Boca Raton, FL 33431

In Reply Refer To: 317/VSC/21PC/LA

Dear Congresswoman Frankel:

This is in response to your inquiry received February 6, 2017.

Blue Water Veterans and Agent Orange Exposure:

Veterans who served on open sea ships off the shore of Vietnam during the Vietnam War are sometimes called "Blue Water Veterans."

Exposure to Agent Orange:

Blue Water Veterans are not presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides. Some of the open sea ships docked to the shore of Vietnam, operated in Vietnam's close coastal waters and sent smaller vessels ashore, or conducted operations on the inland waterways of Vietnam.

These Blue Water Veterans, who did not set foot in Vietnam or serve aboard ships that operated on the inland waterways of Vietnam anytime between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, must show on a factual basis that they were exposed to herbicides during military service to receive disability compensation for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure. These claims are decided on a case-by-case basis.

VA maintains an evolving list of U.S. Navy and Coast Guard ships associated with military service in Vietnam and possible exposure to Agent Orange based on military records. The latest version of the ships list can be found on VBA's "Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange" Web page. Veterans who stepped foot in Vietnam or served on its inland waterways anytime between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, are presumed to have been exposed to herbicides when claiming service-connection for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure. Veterans in these circumstances can find the ship(s) on which they served in the list as well.

HMD report on Agent Orange exposure:

VA asked the Health and Medicine Division (HMD) (formally known as the Institute of Medicine) of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to review the

2

medical and scientific evidence regarding Blue Water Veterans' possible exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides.

HMD's report Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans and Agent Orange Exposure was released in May 2011. The report concluded that "the committee was unable to state with certainty whether Blue Water Navy personnel were or were not exposed to Agent Orange."

VA benefits:

Eligible Veterans may receive the following VA benefits:

- **Health care benefits:** A full range of medical benefits. There are many ways that a Veteran may qualify for VA health care benefits.
- **Disability compensation:** A monthly payment for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure. Blue Water Veterans who did not set foot in Vietnam or serve aboard ships that operated on the inland waterways of Vietnam must show on a factual basis that they were exposed to herbicides during military service in order to receive disability compensation for diseases related to Agent Orange exposure (other than non-Hodgkin's lymphoma).
- **Other benefits:** Home loans, vocational rehabilitation, education, and more

Surviving spouses, dependent children and dependent parents of Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange and died as the result of diseases related to Agent Orange exposure may be eligible for survivors' benefits.

Need help determining exposure?

VA can help determine Agent Orange exposure or qualifying service in Vietnam after the Veteran files a claim for compensation benefits.

Sincerely yours,

Julianna M. Boor
Director