

NEWS FOR VETERANS

New Effort To Provide Services To Former POWs

(NAPSA)—More than 23,000 former prisoners of war (POWs) already receive some form of compensation for their wartime experience. There are, however, many who do not.

That's why the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is asking former prisoners of war not currently using their benefits to contact VA to find out if they may be eligible for disability compensation and other services.

This year, the department mailed information about benefits to 4,700 known ex-POWs not on its rolls. However, it is estimated there could be as many as 11,000 additional POWs for whom it does not have an address.

Former POWs not receiving benefits should call the department at 1-800-827-1000. This is important since new policies are in place to cover an increasing number of former POWs as new illnesses have been found related to wartime captivity.

The administration is pressing to get even more compensation and medical care benefits for former POWs. According to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi, "These veterans sacrificed for their country in time of war, and it's the nation's turn to serve them, to help them determine if they are entitled to compensation, health care or other services."

Nine out of 10 former POWs are veterans of World War II whose service predates the use of Social Security numbers as a military identification number. Coupled with the decades that have elapsed since their service, that makes it difficult for VA to track down those who have not opened a file with VA in recent years.



The Department of Veterans Affairs wants to provide services to former prisoners of war not currently receiving benefits.

"VA is asking veterans and all Americans who know of a former POW to help spread the word that benefits and services may be just a phone call away," Principi said.

The most recent expansion of VA benefits for former POWs was the addition of cirrhosis of the liver to the list of diseases to which entitlement to disability compensation is presumed for former POWs.

Similar policies making it easier for former POWs to obtain compensation have been enacted for POWs detained for 30 days or more who develop specific illnesses.

Former POWs have special eligibility for enrollment in VA medical care and are exempt from making copayments for inpatient and outpatient medical care. They have the same copay rules as other veterans for medications and for extended care. Free dental treatment for any dental condition is available to former POWs held for more than 90 days.

More information about VA services for former POWs is available at www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/ or call 1-800-827-1000.