



The Communicator

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New interactive map helps 'blue water' Vietnam veterans locate ship positions

Patricia Kime

A new interactive map could help ill Vietnam veterans who served on U.S. ships during the war determine

whether they could be eligible for Agent Orange-related benefits.

A retired Navy chief radioman has teamed with a Florida-based law firm to make the map available to "blue water" Vietnam veterans, their widows and anyone interested in seeing where Navy and Coast Guard vessels served offshore during the decade-long conflict.

The information, said Ed Ball, director of research for Military Veterans Advocacy Inc., could be useful for determining whether a ship served in the waters designated by the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019.

The law, signed June 25 by President Donald Trump, allows former service members who served on a ship that operated within 12 nautical miles of a line of demarcation established by law and have an illness presumed related to herbicide exposure apply for health benefits and disability compensation.

Ball told Military Times he has worked on the map for four years, poring over Navy ship logs and plotting the vessels' coordinates along with the dates the ships sailed within the designated zone.

By clicking through the map, for example, veterans can learn that the aircraft carrier America served within the limits in December 1972 near Da Nang. The Coast Guard high endurance cutter Bering Strait crossed into the designated waters once in 1968 and three times in 1970.

"Over 1,700 deck logs have been plotted to date, and we continue to add new information from the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Association master list of deck logs," Ball said.

Continued on Page 3

This Month's Featured County

Kern County is a county in the U.S. state of California. As of the 2010 census, the population was 839,631. Its county seat is Bakersfield. Kern County comprises the Bakersfield, California, Metropolitan statistical area. The county spans the southern end of the Central Valley. Covering 8,161.42 square miles, it ranges west to the southern slope of the Coast Ranges, and east beyond the southern slope of the eastern Sierra Nevada into the Mojave Desert, at the city of Ridgecrest. Its northernmost city is Delano, and its southern reach expands just beyond Lebec to Grapevine, and the northern extremity of the parallel Antelope Valley.



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

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(202) 461-7600
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Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act claims now being determined

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will begin deciding claims for the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 at 12:01 a.m., Philippine Standard Time, Jan. 1, 2020. The Philippines is the farthest east VA regional benefits office.

The Act extends the presumption of herbicide exposure, that include toxins such as Agent Orange, to Veterans who served in the offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

Signed into law Jun. 25, the law specifically affects Blue Water Navy (BWN) Veterans who served no more than 12 nautical miles offshore of the Republic of Vietnam between Jan. 6, 1962 and May 7, 1975, as well as Veterans who served in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between Jan. 1, 1967 and Aug. 31, 1971. These Veterans can now apply for disability compensation and other benefits if they have since developed one of 14 conditions that are presumed to be related to exposure to herbicides. Veterans do not need to prove that they were exposed to herbicides. The specific conditions can be found by searching the term “Agent Orange” on www.va.gov.

“For six months, VA worked diligently to gather and digitize records from the National Archives and Records Administration to support faster claims decisions,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “These efforts will positively impact the claims process for Veterans filing for these benefits.”

To be eligible a Veteran must have served in the identified locations during the specified time period and currently have a condition(s) associated with herbicide exposures, such as Agent Orange. Blue Water Navy claims are being processed under current prioritization criteria; however, special priority is being given to Veterans who are over the age of 85 or have a terminal condition. Qualifying recipients include affected Veterans who are still living and certain survivors of deceased BWN and Korean DMZ Veterans.

Survivors can file claims for benefits based on the Veteran’s service if the Veteran died from at least one of the 14 presumptive conditions associated with herbicides such as Agent Orange. The law also provides benefits for children born with spina bifida if their parent is or was a Veteran with certain verified service in Thailand during a specific period.

The Act includes provisions impacting the VA Home Loan Program. Veterans have more access to obtain no-down payment home loans, regardless of loan amount, and the home loan funding fee is reduced for eligible Reservists and National Guard borrowers who use their home loan benefits for the first time. VA’s website describes the eligibility of certain Purple Heart recipients who do not have to pay a funding fee as well as other benefits.

Veterans who want to file an initial claim for an herbicide-related disability can use VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits or work with a VA-recognized Veterans Service Organization to assist with the application process. Veterans may also contact their state Veterans Affairs Office.

BWN Veterans who previously filed a claim seeking service connection for one of the 14 presumptive conditions that was denied by VA may provide or identify any new and relevant information regarding their claim when reapplying. To re-apply, Veterans may use VA Form 20-0995, Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim. As a result of the new law, VA will automatically review claims that are currently in the VA review process or under appeal. Visit Blue Water Navy Veterans benefits for more information or call 1-800-749-8387 for special issues

Continued From Page 1

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The map is hosted by the disability law firm Hill & Ponton. Numerous law firms vie to assist veterans in drafting and filing disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs; many veterans service organizations provide similar assistance free of charge.

Matthew Hill, managing partner at the firm said Hill & Ponton decided to support Ball's efforts to assist veterans. "Improving transparency and simplifying access to this data is essential as we support the Vietnam veterans ... now suffering the effects" of Agent Orange exposure, Hill said in a release.

As part of filing disability claims, veterans must show they served on a U.S. vessel when it traversed the congressionally drawn zone.

Data from the map is derived from the National Archives and ships logs as well as the Blue Water Navy law, according to Ball.

Hill said as veterans and family members send in additional data they have collected, the map will be updated.

I went on the sight to test out the map. On the right hand side of the screen is a drop down menu with all the ships that they have logged. Select the ship you are looking for and locations markers will pop up on the map. You can then click on the location marker and a latitude and longitude will display with a date. Try it out for yourself with the link below.

<https://www.hillandponton.com/blue-water-navy-vietnam-map-with-ship-logs/>

Homeless Navy Veteran Finds His Way Home

NIDANI BATAKO came to the United States from Togo, a small country in Africa, thirteen years ago. He loved his adopted country and wanted to do something to give back to his new home, so Bakato joined the Navy. He served for three years, toured the Pacific on aircraft carrier USS Nimitz, and was honorably discharged. He worked a few odd jobs in Los Angeles, but fell on hard times and became homeless. Without identification or proper paperwork, he lived on the streets for almost four years. He thought he was going to die outdoors and alone.

Enter L.A.P.D. Officers Gabriel Cohen and Taoufik Nkila, who befriended Batako and slowly gained his trust—he'd been sleeping near a transit line in West L.A. Officers Cohen and Nkila wanted to help this quiet, selfless veteran, who'd never fallen victim to drugs or crime, so they offered help. They bought him clothes and new shoes. They offered him food which he'd give to others who he felt needed it more than he did.

They called L.A. County Department of Mental Health outreach worker (and veteran), Mark Meeker for benefit assistance, who connected with Batako right away, and drove him to Bob Hope Patriotic Hall, a one-stop shop for veterans' services. Mark Meeker introduced Batako to Veteran Service Officer George Dixon from L.A. County Department of Military & Veterans Affairs. Batako had been told on a prior visit to the VA that he did not qualify for benefits or compensation, but Dixon knew better and started the process to provide Batako with service-related benefits.

In early January, the officers met and struck up a conversation with actress Maria Bello of CSI fame, who supports veterans. She offered to pay for a hotel room for Batako to get him off the street.

Batako had not seen his family or home country for thirteen years and wanted to return to Africa. Officers Cohen and Nkila made it their mission to send him home. They contacted the Togo Embassy for help. Officers Cohen and Nkila asked fellow officers to contribute enough money to fly Batako back to Togo.

Kudos to [PATH](#), who assisted the officers in locating, transporting and covering the cost of a few days of motel and food costs while working out an arrangement with Ms. Bello, and to [Hope of the Valley](#), for assisting with the motel transaction and donating clothing and other items.

Because Officers Cohen and Nkila went above and beyond, enlisting the help of many others, Nidani Batako returned to his family in Togo on January 23, 2019. The Officers didn't stop there, they are staying in touch with Batako to make sure he makes it all the way home.

See the local CBS news story here: <https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/video/4013257-homeless-navy-veteran-gets-new-lease-on-life-due-to-2-officers-hollywood-star/>





CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION
OF COUNTY VETERAN SER-
VICE OFFICERS

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM
2020

Additional Local Assistance Funding for CVSOs In 2020 the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers (CACVSO) will be seeking to raise the state's Local Assistance to counties for CVSO offices from the current \$5.6 million funding level to \$11 million. This brings the state in line with paying half of the funding needed to operate CVSOs throughout the state as per SB 419 of 2009. Currently, the counties pick up the majority of the funding. As part of this legislative effort, the CACVSO will continue to educate the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and the public on the importance and value of County Veterans Service Officers.

Other Legislative Priorities, 2020 Legislative Session

The CACVSO is realigning their priorities to focus on getting homeless veterans off the street and into housing including transitional and permanent supportive housing. CACVSO will work with CalVet to record and track all homeless contact, outreach activities and successful entry into a housing environment.

Support legislation that would require an individual, who is assisting a veteran with filing a claim for benefits, to notify that veteran if they are not a VA-accredited representative and make it a criminal offense to intentionally misdirect or mislead a veteran, or anyone acting on a veteran's behalf, concerning benefits or entitlements for their own monetary gain.

Support legislation that would grant the license plate fee waiver to all veterans rated at 100% either scheduler or through Individual Unemployability and separate the disabled placard and make it an option for veterans with mobility impairment.

Support legislation that would restore the veterans-only specialized license plate, so that there would be two plates available for sale — "Veteran" and "Honoring Veterans." Support the legislative priorities of the state veterans service organizations that are in-line with our own legislative priorities.

Support legislation that would exempt state income tax on military retirement pay for military retirees.

Support legislation that would reform the current system of property tax relief for disabled veterans by raising the current state dollar limitation on property tax relief for disabled veterans.

Support legislation that would support the awarding of state grants through CalVet to veterans service organizations and veterans service agencies that provide claims assistance and outreach to California veterans. Support legislation that would require that California Disabled Veterans Business Enterprises (DVBES) hire more disabled and non-disabled veterans. Currently, there is no requirement for DVBES to hire veterans.

Support legislation that would continue to support expansion of veterans treatment courts to more counties by providing state funding of veterans' treatment courts in California.

Support legislation that would reduce property tax assessment on veterans service organizations' posts and chapters. Support legislation that would expand laws to prevent dishonest vendors and businesses that prey on or scam veterans and active duty military personnel by criminalizing their activities.

Support legislation that would create a Governor's Memorial Certificate similar to the Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC). Include information directing survivors to the CVSOs. (PMC is a signed certificate by the President to the family of deceased veterans)

Support legislation that would create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) between CalVet Veterans Homes and Veterans Service Organization (VSOs) to provide volunteers to the state veterans homes similar to the e federal Veterans Administration Volunteer Service (VAVS) program.

CACVSO Federal Legislative Priorities, 2020 Support legislation that would provide increased access for CVSOs to USDVA information systems (i.e., VBMS, VACOLS, SHARE, MAPD, etc.) for use in developing and monitoring claims submitted on behalf of veterans, regardless of VA Power-of-Attorney (POA), to USDVA client and claims databases. Enhancing this access will result in better, timelier services to claimants and reduce the workload in USDVA call centers.

Support legislative, regulatory or policy changes that would create a federal/state/ local government partnership to reduce the USDVA veterans claims backlog and expand outreach services to veterans.

Support legislation that would authorize USDVA pharmacies to honor prescriptions written by non-USDVA physicians. Currently, the USDVA medical system will only provide prescription medication to eligible veterans if the prescription is written by a USDVA physician.

Support legislation that would eliminate the Means Test for veterans to qualify for USDVA medical care. These income limitations have excluded some veterans, who would otherwise qualify for enrollment, from obtaining their primary healthcare through the USDVA.



Upcoming Events

2020 Winter Conference

Sacramento

Monday, February 24—Friday February 28, 2020

<https://cacvsoregistration.regfox.com/2020-cacvso-winter-training-conference>

2020 Summer Conference

Crescent City, CA

Monday, June 22, 2020—Friday, June 26, 2020

<https://thelighthouseinn Crescent City.com/>

<https://www.flycrescentcity.com/>

DATES OF INTEREST

January 2020

- 10 Nobel Prize Day
- 12 National 12-Hour Fresh Breath Day
- 14 National Wreaths Across America Day
- 20 National Sangria Day
- 21 National Homeless Persons' Remembrance
- 25 Christmas
- 31 Make Up Your Mind Day

Awareness Weeks

- 15-21 Gluten-Free Baking Week
- 16-20 Cookie Exchange Week
- 26-1/1 Kwanzaa

Monthly Observances

- AIDS Awareness Month
- National Tie Month
- Universal Human Rights Month

