

Andrea Michele Neutzling, Veteran

I, Andrea M. Neutzling, have written the following statement.

In December of 2007, my father applied for HEAP, I live with him so I have someone to take care of my daughter while I am in school, and he was denied HEAP benefits because I made too much the year before. From June 2005 to August 2005 I was in New Jersey preparing to deploy. August 2005 until August 2006 I was stationed at Camp Bucca, Iraq. Upon returning I was kept at Fort Dix New Jersey to get my shoulder injury taken care of. I was released from Active duty June of 2007. The HEAP office called and spoke directly to me to inform us that we would not be receiving HEAP benefits. When I was told why, I got upset and even asked why it seemed that we were being punished pretty much because I served in a war. They said that wasn't the reason at all, it was because I made too much the year before, I replied with I was in Iraq and then being treated for an injury that year. All she could say was I'm sorry you feel that way ma'am.

From January 2008 into March 2009 I was attending Ohio University on the MGIB. I took a break from school from April 2009 until just this past January; I attend the University of Rio Grande. Before I began classes this year I talked to the VA Education rep at my school, was informed that I would probably get more money from the Post 9-11 GI Bill than I got from the MGIB. I did the paper work to switch over. When I began school and started getting my monthly payment I found I went to getting less a month under the new GI Bill. There should have been a way to find out how much under both I would have gotten before I switched, so I could go with the better one.

My county's Veterans Service Officer has told me about numerous programs available to me as a veteran; including the Military Injury Relief Fund. I haven't tried for anything other than the HEAP, Medical Card, and Food Assistance.

Most of my issues lay within the VA itself. In order for me to receive my care, I have to travel to Chillicothe VA, which is a 2 hour drive for me; yes there is an outpatient clinic in Athens, a 30 minute drive away. Some of the Veterans in my county can't afford to make the drive to Chillicothe. Yes we can get a ride to there through the county VSO, but we have to give them at least a week notice. I'm bit forgetful so I don't remember about my appointment until the day before when the VA would call me. If we could get some more VA outpatient clinics, or even have the VA send us to a local doctor instead. Even for things like orthopedics and certain surgeries we have to travel to places like Columbus or Huntington, when there are places like Holzer and Pleasant Valley Hospitals closer for us.

My shoulder injury has never fully recovered; I've had one surgery on it while I was in New Jersey on Medical Hold orders. I get prescribed Flexoril as a muscle relaxer, but it doesn't do any good for me. I developed very high tolerance to it while I was in Iraq. Most other muscle relaxers can make a person's blood pressure drop. I already suffer from Low Blood Pressure, it's even documented into my medical records, and the only other muscle relaxer I've found to work for me and not mess up my BP is Metaflaxin a.k.a. Skelaxin. But I can't get it from VA because it's not Formulary. It doesn't help that the VA rated me 0% for my shoulder, saying I had no loss of my range of motion, which I have. I'm currently seeing a civilian orthopedic doctor, so I can submit paperwork for a reevaluation.

I couldn't be rated for PTSD because the VA couldn't gather sufficient support. When I went to file for it, they wanted me to recount everything. At that time I wasn't ready to discuss, let alone write down my accounts of being raped, having a British soldier die in my arms, and seeing what happened after detainees would beat the life out of each other. The few times I went to Mental Health, I had one doctor ask me if I had all these problems with the military why I wanted to stay in. I told him, it wasn't the military I had problems with; it was some of the people.

The VA won't determine if I even have a Mild TBI. When I injured my shoulder I blacked out; I'm not sure for how long unfortunately. I just know that ever since then my moods change drastically, and if it's not military related I tend to forget things I just learned earlier in the week. This makes it even harder for me at school.

Before I was sent to Iraq I was attending Hocking College in Nelsonville Ohio, taking police science classes. I was working on becoming a police officer. But when I injured my shoulder, I could no longer do sit-ups and then my push-ups became a problem also. Those two things are mandatory for becoming an officer in the state of Ohio. I was using my GI Bill for this. I lost \$5000 of my GI Bill, because I couldn't continue. I tried to get into the VEAP program. I had to go to Columbus and take numerous skills test, and then they said I would have to talk to people in my potential job field and ask them questions about things like what the benefits are, the pay, and duties. I plan on going into a government job once I get my Bachelors degree; I know I can't just go up to one of those types of agency asking questions. So I was denied that benefit. I'll run out of my GI Bill benefits before I get my degree. But many younger veterans will be facing that problem anyways, because the GI Bill was designed when school cost \$50,000 for 4 years of an education.

The VA in Chillicothe has designated a specific team for women vets, but unlike Columbus VA there are men in the area. Chillicothe doesn't have a permanent Mental Health doctor that is a woman. This makes it harder for any female vet with a Military Sexual Trauma (MST) to go in and talk to them.

Ever since I was in Iraq I've had problems with my lungs. I worked downwind from the burn pits on my camp. But the VA is mostly concentrating on the Balad burn pits. Camp Bucca had a burn pit directly upwind from the Internment facility, for the first 9 months I was over there. I had even contracted pneumonia within those first 9 months. Now anytime I develop an upper respiratory infection, I have to go and get a shot of antibiotics and oral antibiotics to take, to prevent it from developing into pneumonia. But since I can't prove I was downwind from the bit I can't claim it to the VA.

I grew up looking forward to serve my country from the time I was about 8 years old. I'm the Granddaughter of a Korean War vet, and I don't want to be disillusioned by the VA like my grandfather is. I expect the US Government to take of all veterans no matter what generation they are in. My daughter, who is almost seven, plans on going into the military, either Air Force or Army, she hasn't decided. I hope that the VA will be more adequately prepared for that time than they are now. The VA seems to be stuck in thinking about how we fought wars in WWII, instead of advancing in preparing for the way the world changes and how wars are fought change with the times also.

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