

## VETERANS CORNER

Welcome back to the Veterans Corner. I want to tell you about qualifications for service-connected disability benefits. Applying soon after discharge makes it much easier to prove your disability is service-connected.

Generally, you must have three supporting items to claim a service-connected disability with the VA: medical evidence of a current disability; evidence of having suffered a disease or injury while on active service; and evidence linking the two.

When filing, your claim will fall under either direct or presumptive service connection.

Direct service connection will meet all three of the above conditions. If you injured your knee while in the service and sought treatment for it, the treatment was documented in your medical record. Upon discharge, your knee problem may have continued, and you sought treatment from your personal doctor. In this case, two of the requirements for the VA are now met. The last item can come from your personal doctor making the link with a statement that the current injury is “more likely than not” related to the original injury sustained in the service. Just that you have sought further treatment can serve as evidence of a chronic disability.

Presumptive service connection refers to disabilities that may relate to health conditions from possible exposures while in service. For example, a Vietnam veteran exposed to Agent Orange (AO) may have a recognized disability. Exposure to AO itself not considered a disability, but studies suggest that exposure can be linked to some disabilities, which may make them service-connected. When filing this claim, there is no requirement that your doctor link the two; the VA will presume that your exposure caused the disability.

The VA requires your first claim be filed on a specific form in order for it to be considered legal; our office can help you complete the correct form and submit it to the VA to get the process started.

*Ken Cruickshank, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Services Officer for Tulare County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 205 N. L St., in Tulare, by calling 684-4960 or emailing [kcruicks@tularehhsa.org](mailto:kcruicks@tularehhsa.org).*