



VETERANS ADMINISTRATION

Corpus Christi, Texas
March 29, 1948

YOUR FILE REFERENCE:

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Dr. Hector P. Garcia
Texas Building
Corpus Christi, Texas

Dear Dr. Garcia;

Permit me to compliment you on the forceful and energetic way in which you conducted a veteran's meeting Friday night last, and to congratulate you on your election as President of the American G.I. Forum which was formed and brought into being that night. From personal freindship and a pretty clear insight into your character over two years of close working relationship, I feel sincerely that the group could not have found a man with a more sincere desire to help them than you have, nor one with a more comprehensive knowlege of their problems. Your record as a leader of what you term a minority group , the Latin Americans in this community, proves this.

Thank you for your expression of good will and the complimentary remarks you made in behalf of the Corpus Christi VA Office. Certainly no one is more aware than you of the long work hours worked by the staff wrth no chance of monetary reward, in order to process as rapidly as possibly veteran's claims for all types of benefits. You also remember the space in the Texas building, how inadequate it was, and how that fact added to the burden immeasurably. Believe me, the chief aim of the staff is to improve the welfare of veteran applivants by the use of every facility at our command.

Please do not think that in the remarks that follow I am in any way making light of or ignoring the obvious hardship engendered by delays in hospital admissions, subsistence payments, or other benefits. It is my desire to give you as clear a picture as possible of VA procedures, with a hope that such little addition to your knowlege may assist you in advising veterans who come to you for assistance in their claims.

First, let me point out that the Administration sustained a substantial cut in personnel September last, based on reduced Congressional appropriations. As of today a further cut has been made in personnel. Over 8000 VA employees throughout the nation will lose their jobs today. Locally, the staff has been reduced by the loss of 2 stenographers, 1 Typist, 2 Training Officers, 1 Contact Representative. The San Antonio staff has been reduced in like manner as has, in fact, every VA installation throughout the country. This fact may account for some of the delays under discussion.

Delays in payment of subsistence ckecks are one of the largest problems facing the VA today. Considering the picture as a whole, however, the number of delayed checks as compared to the number of checks issued on time is pretty small. For instance, when I was in San Antonio a week ago there were but 75 complaints being processed, all involving delayed payments. Compared to the vast number of veterans in training, this number is pretty small. Of course, any delay in this respect works hardship, since these payments enable veterans to pursue training, and are counted on to meet living costs.

Each such case constitutes a separate problem. A great number of the delays are the fault of the veterans themselves, for failure to submit properly prepared documents requested by the Regional Office. In this respect, I am sure you are familiar with legal requirements for the establishment of dependency. Certified copies of the court records of birth certificates, marriage or divorce certificates and the like are legal requirements. Although assistance is given veterans in the procurement of these documents by Contact Representatives and others on request, it is primarily the responsibility of the individual veteran to present this evidence. In the case of rural Latin Americans, you know only too well the delays which may result, particularly since some of these documents must be secured from records in Mexico.

I am in receipt of the list of names of men who responded to your call at the meeting for those who were awaiting subsistence checks. This list will be checked against our records, and I can assure you that all possible will be done to secure early payment.

One of the cases you cited at the meeting is a good example of a delay caused by the man himself, of course through lack of knowledge of procedures. This man called on a Training Officer about 4 months after he had enrolled in a literacy class, complaining that he had received no subsistence payment. He carried in his hand a small cloth sack in which were several letters from the VA, unopened. Among these papers was his Certificate of Eligibility, a form which should have been completed by him and the school when he entered, and sent without delay to the San Antonio Office as the basic document which would place his name on the subsistence pay-roll. Without this basic document, it was not possible to pay him. In fact, the Regional Office had no knowledge that he had enrolled in school. There are other examples of men carrying unopened letters from the VA for months, unopened and unread.

It should be remembered that the Administration operates under laws established by the Congresses. Adjudication Division personnel, including (or I should say particularly) Rating Board members, must have a thorough knowledge of these laws. Believe me, a vast number of laws and amendments have been passed since the American Revolutionary War! Disability or pension ratings are made under the provisions of one or more of these laws. Only men of very wide experience in this highly specialized field are selected as Rating Board members. The boards are permanent for reasons just explained, and any rotation of such boards such as you suggested would appear to be impracticable. There just aren't enough qualified men to permit of such a plan.

Certainly, with the vast number of claims for disability or pension ratings processed by the San Antonio Regional Office mistakes are bound to occur. The Contact Service of the VA has as one of its chief reasons for existence the proper presentation of all claims, and assistance in clearing up errors that occur. All veterans with complaints in this or any other respect insofar as their rights as veterans are concerned are urged to take advantage of this service. Contact Representatives are skilled in ways of getting at the source of the trouble and having errors corrected.

Ratings are raised or lowered in some cases according to medical data secured by VA physicians at scheduled examinations, or according to reports furnished by private physicians based on knowledge gained through treatment or examination. These data are considered carefully by rating officials before adjustments are made.

MARCH 28, 1948

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I believe that you will be the first to admit that until very recently it has been fairly simple to secure immediate admission to the US Navy Hospital here, for bona-fide hospital cases. You yourself have gained admission for hundreds of veterans by the simple expedient of telephoning the medical OD and explaining the case, whether emergent or not. Despite the fact that the official quota of beds there has been from 120 to 125 for over a year, the hospital authorities have accepted veteran patients in excess of the quota without question. They accepted all types of patients, service connected or not, except TB and NP cases which were held pending transfer, and including many chronic cases. Considering the fact that the Navy agreed to accept only emergent cases, and did not agree to treat post-diagnostic cases, it is most apparent that the local Navy officials have, by their lenient and friendly attitude contributed immeasurably to the success of the veterans' medical program in south Texas.

Early this month the Hospital Commander informed Dr. Earle T. Norman, Chief Regional Medical Officer, and the writer that his staff and corps personnel had been reduced to a point where it is impossible to exceed the bed quota of 120. The census of VA patients then was 152. In order to arrive within the quota, he requested that only really emergent cases be sent, and that the staff reserve the right to determine whether an emergency existed in any given case of sufficient gravity to warrant admission. It was agreed that all cases other than these be referred to the Regional medical officers for admission to other hospitals. It is hoped that the present situation is a temporary one, and that immediate admissions for VA patients will be available soon again.

One of the worst problems facing us is the hospitalization of tuberculous patients. There just aren't enough beds. After present construction of TB facilities is completed there should be some relief in this respect.

Dr. Norman informs me that the Administration has made arrangements with a local TB specialist to examine all service-connected TB cases in the area for evaluation and treatment planning.

I trust that this lengthy and not too clear picture may be of some slight use to you in assisting those Latinos who certainly need the intelligent guidance you are so well qualified to give.

I will transfer within a week to the San Antonio Regional Office. I deeply regret leaving my friends here, particularly those who helped during the really rough times to get the program operating, and with very little to operate with. Believe me, I consider you as one who did more unselfish work during those days than any other, and I appreciate it deeply.

Remember, Hector, whatever facilities I may have in my new duties are at your command. Won't you call on me there when you need help with these problems?

Most Sincerely

Joe F. Geiger
Manager In Charge