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1. **CONTACTS:** To help you obtain information about claims or other needs:

- **VETERANS CRISIS LINE:** Veterans and loved ones can call (800) 273-8255, 24/7 and then press 1 with total anonymity to speak to a professional counselor. A Houston Vet Center counselor, James Bailey, is available in Don Montoya's office on Thursdays for veterans and their families. Call Don's office at (979) 532-1311 for an appointment to see James Bailey.
- **Dwight Winkler,** 2254 CR 291, East Bernard, TX 77435; (979) 335-4464; lerwinkdd@aol.com
- **Don Montoya,** Wharton County Veterans Service Officer, 1017 N. Alabama Road, Wharton, TX 77488; (979) 532-1311, don.montoya@co.wharton.tx.us; **NEW OFFICE HOURS:** M, TUES, THUR (Wharton), 8:00a.m.-12:00 noon & 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.; FRI (Wharton), 8:00a.m.-12:00 noon by appointment only & 1:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. (Administrative time); On WED (El Campo library), 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
- **Vanessa Hicks-Callaway,** (Congressman Blake Farenthold's Veteran Advocate), (361) 894-6446, Vanessa.Hicks-Callaway@mail.house.gov
- **Matt Minor,** (Texas State Representative Phil Stephenson's Veteran Advocate), (281) 232-7900, Matt.Minor@house.state.tx.us
- **VA INQUIRY ROUTING & INFORMATION SYSTEM (IRIS),** <https://iris.custhelp.com>

2. **WIRELESS CARRIERS SALUTE YOUR SERVICE:** Veterans can receive a 15% discount on their monthly wireless service by contacting a participating VERIZON dealer just as I told you about AT&T last month. Call CELLULAR SALES in Sealy at (979) 885-6819 for more information. Bob Supak found a web site that mentioned Sprint/Nextel and T-Mobile as offering discounts as well as AT&T and Verizon. Contact your wireless carrier to see if they offer any discounts for veterans.

3. **TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI) IMPROPER TESTING BY THE VA:** The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has admitted that was improperly testing for traumatic brain injuries from 2007-2015. The VA has sent out letters to all veterans that they believe

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may have had an improper testing. If you are a veteran or know of a veteran that is concerned about a TBI exam, you can call (800) 749-8387. There are an estimated 1,800 veterans from the DeBakey Houston Regional Medical Center that may have been improperly tested.

4. **COST OF LIVING ADJUSTMENT (COLA) 2017:** Military retirees and individuals receiving veterans benefits will see only a 0.3 percent (That is 3/10 of a percent!!) cost-of-living increase in benefits in 2017. If you are receiving \$1,000.00 in either social security compensation, retiree pay or disability compensation, your increase will amount to \$3.00 !!

5. **POWER OF ATTORNEY (POA):** When a veteran files a disability claim, he/she submits a form with the claim called APPOINTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION AS CLAIMANT'S REPRESENTATIVE or VA Form 21-22. The organization that helps you complete your claim is your POA representative. The POA allows you or your representative organization to obtain information about your claim. If Don Montoya, Wharton County Veteran Service Officer, helps you complete the forms, your POA is the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC). The POA does not allow the representative organization to access your bank account or other personal information. There are 94 organizations that are recognized by the VA as being a POA representative.

6. **AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER:** The VA sends out a newsletter periodically (usually once a year) called AGENT ORANGE NEWSLETTER, INFORMATION FOR VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES. I received mine on October 13, 2016. I have a subscription form on my desk if you did not receive a copy and want to receive one. In this four page publication were articles on "Research to Improve VA Policies and Health Care, VA Plans to Expand Benefits Eligibility for Camp LeJeune Veterans, The Fastest Way to Get a Disability Claim Decision, VE-Heroes Studying the Health of Vietnam Veterans, and Agent Orange Exposure Locations." There were six locations mentioned in the newsletter. I have told you about **(1)** Vietnam "boots on the ground veterans" and veterans who served on a ship while it operated on the inland waterways of Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975, **(2)** Blue Water Veterans or veterans who served on open sea ships off the shore of Vietnam, **(3)** C-123 Airplane crews. The veterans in (1) are "presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange" and DO NOT NEED TO SHOW ACTUAL EVIDENCE OF EXPOSURE TO RECEIVE DISABILITY COMPENSATION (PRESUMPTIVE DISEASES). The veterans in (2) are not presumed to

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have been exposed to Agent Orange UNLESS THE VETERANS SERVED ABOARD SHIPS ON VIETNAM'S INLAND WATERWAYS BETWEEN JANUARY 9, 1962 AND MAY 7, 1975. The veterans in (3) that served aboard C-123's that were used to deliver Agent Orange MAY QUALIFY FOR BENEFITS RELATED TO AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE. Three other locations where veterans may have been exposed to Agent Orange are: (1) the Korean DMZ- Any veteran who served in the military between April 1, 1968 and August 31, 1971, in a unit operating along the Korean DMZ is PRESUMED to have been exposed to Agent Orange; (2) Thailand Military Bases- Vietnam-era veterans who served on the perimeters of military bases in Thailand anytime between February 28, 1961, and May 7, 1975, MAY QUALIFY FOR VA BENEFITS; (3) Herbicide tests and storage outside Vietnam- Agent Orange used in Vietnam was tested or stored elsewhere, including some military bases in the United States. The VA has a list of dates and locations of herbicide tests and storage.

Go to <http://go.usa.gov/cuxyx> for more information on these six locations.

Go to www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/publications/index.asp to read the Agent Orange Newsletter online.

7. **VETERANS DAY FREEBIES:** The following list is NOT all inclusive. CONTACT THE RESTAURANT OR BUSINESS before you go, to obtain the information to prove you are a veteran and entitled to the benefit. All freebies are for 11/11/2016 unless stated otherwise.

- APPLEBEE'S - free meal
- Carrabba's - free appetizer
- Chili's - free meal
- Denny's - free Grand Slam 5AM-Noon
- Golden Corral - Free meal 5PM-9PM
- HOOters - free meal and eye drops
- IHOP - free pancakes
- Little Caesars Pizza - free pizza 11a.m.-2p.m.
- Long Horn Steak House - appetizer and non-alcoholic drink
- Olive Garden - free meal and 10% off meals for visitors with the veteran
- Red Lobster - free appetizer or dessert
- Red Robin - free meal
- Starbucks - free coffee
- Texas Roadhouse - free lunch
- TGI Fridays - free lunch