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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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What is a C-file, why it's important to your claim for VA Compensation Benefits and how to use it to help you win?

This article will be about the importance of your C-file, why you need it, and other evidence you may want to get to put into this file.

One of the reasons I am writing this article is because many of the veterans who have come to me for help with their claims do not know what a c-file is or why it is important to their claim. I have had veterans come to me after years of appeals and they never saw their own c-file. I will first explain what your C-file is. I will then discuss what you can expect to find in your C-file. I will also discuss what will probably not be in your C-file that may be important to your case.

All of your evidence that the VA attains or that you got for your claim is kept in your C- file. It is extremely important to get this file by requesting it from your local regional office and to review it thoroughly. The VA will base its decision on the evidence that is in this file. Many veterans assume that the people making the decisions at the VA are making that decision with all of the evidence the veteran assumes they have. Even if you provide the VA with all the necessary information including dates, medical facilities you were treated at, where you were serving, the unit you were in and other information requested by them you cannot safely assume that the VA got all the information necessary for your claim. Most of you are aware of the VA's duty to assist. However, I can tell you it is very rare that all the information that can help your claim will be found in your file. If you leave it up to the VA to get all your evidence to prove your claim you do so at your own risk. By getting a copy of your file you will be able to see exactly what those who are going to decide your case are looking at to make their decision.

So what will you find in your C-file? You will usually find all your correspondence with the VA and the claims that you have made. You will also normally find your DD 214 and military medical records. You will also usually find your entrance and separation exams. You should also find any C&P exams performed on you. There is very little structure to the C-file. They can be extremely large and require a great deal of time to go through every page. Unfortunately, you must go through the entire file and read every page. If you do not think you have the ability or knowledge to do this than find a representative or lawyer who will. I have often found very important pieces of evidence in the middle of many pages that don't seem relevant at all to your claim. On a few occasions, I have seen one page of a report at the beginning of the file and the rest of the pages of the report scattered throughout the rest of the file. When you review your file you should take notes and tab the pages that are important to your case. I do this by scanning the entire file onto the computer and then I use Adobe to bookmark important pages while I make notes on a separate Word document. This may seem like a lot of work, and it is, but you have to look at it from the view of the person who is deciding your claim. The person at the VA who is deciding your claim has a huge caseload with each file he or she has to look at numbering

hundreds of pages each. Chances are if you review your own file and take notes and you are able to present your case as briefly as possible, you can make it easier for them to find in your favor by pointing out exactly in the file the evidence that is favorable to you. The easier you make their job the better chance you have of winning your claim.

If after reviewing your file, you find that there is important information missing you should request the VA obtain the information. You should also try and get the information yourself if you have the means to do so. Often times, you will not find in your file your military personnel records which includes things like how you performed in your duties, what your unit did, and any awards and decorations. You will also probably need to update the medical information in your file. You may also want to seek to get nexus letters or reports from your present treating doctors. You may also want to request a C&P exam if your particular case calls for one or more. Looking through the file and not finding medical records you know should be there or records that you sent in that are not in the file is the easy part. Knowing what evidence you need to get to give yourself the best chance to win can be the more difficult task. This is where professional help can make a difference. Not everyone needs a lawyer or representative to get the benefits they are seeking. If you review your file and become knowledgeable of VA law you will be able to assess whether it is something you can handle or something that you need help with.

I will now talk about some types of evidence that can be helpful for your claim that you may or may not have considered.

If you're trying to get unemployability and you are currently on Social Security Disability benefits then your Social Security Disability file can be important to your claim. This is particularly important when you were found disabled by Social Security for the same medical conditions that you are service-connected for. The VA is not bound by this evidence but it is strong evidence in your favor. Also in regards to unemployability claims, you may also want to include documents regarding your job history, much of which can be found in your Social Security records. In claims for unemployability you may also want to consider getting the opinion of a vocational expert. For all type of claims you may want to consider getting statements from family and friends or people you served with. These statements can help in different ways for different claims. They can sometimes help prove an incident or give a better picture of how your condition affects you. A letter or e-mail to someone back home while you were serving can help to verify an incident or help prove you were somewhere that you say you claimed to be but there is no record of (a letter from a base in Vietnam to home to show you were in Vietnam for example). There is no limit to the different types of evidence that could help your claim and often times even with the help of a lawyer or representative only you will know of some piece of evidence that you may have lying around or that you can get that will help you win your claim. What you should take away from reading this article is your need to request by certified

mail from your regional office your C-file and service medical records, review every page, take notes, determine what is missing and what additional evidence you need to get to win your claim. You then need to take all this information and explain as briefly as possible why you are entitled to the benefits you seek and point out the evidence in the file that is favorable to your claim. Remember make the person deciding your claim's job as easy as possible to find in your favor. Lastly, if you find this overwhelming or even if you're unsure seek help with your claim.