

What does the Country Owe the Soldiers?

The victory parades were over. The soldiers had all come home. Now, the true cost of war would be tallied: missing limbs and stolen and disrupted lives. No pension could repay such a debt. But the disabled veterans would take whatever they could get. From the first battles with George Washington's troops (Washington designed the original purple heart medal.) to present day veterans applying to the Veterans Administration for service related health problems, this has become the after-war process.

December 13, 1862 was a frigid day by Virginia standards. Civil War blue-clad men in heavy overcoats surged toward the Confederate works at Fredericksburg in a double line, their heavy breathing puffing out frosty clouds. The heavy fire from the Rebel batteries staggered the attack, and the color-bearer of the 21st Massachusetts Infantry went down. But Sergeant Thomas Plunkett snatched up the fallen colors and, with head and colors held high, raced toward the front. Despite the withering barrage he pushed on toward the enemy – getting closer than any other Federal soldier would get that day. When the Union charge stalled a few rods short of the Confederate line, Plunkett raised the flag over his head to rally his comrades. At that moment a shell tore both his arms away. He survived... he was a hero. He received the Medal of Honor. But, he was disabled for life.

When the Plunkett's of the Civil War requested help from their government, the leaders in Washington, DC had to stop and ask themselves a question; what is owed to the wounded soldiers of the Civil War? And, what is the responsibility of the government toward the great masses of men who had volunteered to battle the enemy and had saved the Union? Were soldier's mere hirelings to be discharged without a second thought when their work was done? Or were they owed a debt for their sacrifices? How was the country to measure that debt? And should all soldiers share equally in the nation's gratitude? These questions would take years to resolve, and the answers would not always come easily or unanimously.

Some cases like Plunkett's were easy to decide: clearly, he deserved government help in return for his sacrifice. But not all cases were so clear-cut. Take, for instance, the case of Albert Woolson who, as a youth of 17, had enlisted as a drummer boy in Company C, 1st Minnesota Heavy Artillery, on October 4, 1864. Woolson said he became head drummer boy in the regiment by "knocking the block [off]" another drummer boy. Ironically, that fistfight proved to be his most intense combat experience. As soon as the company was mustered in, it went on garrison duty in Tennessee. Woolson arrived in time to beat his drum during the Confederate attack on Nashville, but "heard only a dozen shots fired."

Woolson's case was representative of the countless anonymous men in the Union army who endured months, if not years, of tedium, interrupted by brief moments of pure combat hell. What was the federal government to do for these men when they applied for pensions?

Another case perhaps more typical of the average pension applicant was that of Lieutenant David J. Hussey of the 174th Ohio Infantry. While at Camp Stoneman near Washington, D.C., in February 1865, one of the coldest winters in many years, Hussey had lain half-conscious in his tent, suffering from the combined effects of dysentery and catarrhal pneumonia. This was not uncommon. During the Civil War, more than twice as many men died from disease as from enemy gunfire, and frequently the regiments that saw the least combat had some of the highest percentages of losses due to illness. Of those soldiers who did survive – such as Hussey – many were crippled for life or suffered poor health for the remainder of their all-too-frequently shortened life spans.

In total, approximately 275,000 Union soldiers sustained nonfatal combat injuries. Most of them were wounded in the extremities (wounds to the head and torso were more likely to be fatal). Amputation was the treatment of choice for limbs with shattered bones or lacerated arteries. Union surgeons performed nearly 30,000 amputations during the war, cutting off everything from fingers and toes to complete arms and legs. The survival rates varied from almost 98 percent for those who had fingers amputated, to less than 15 percent for those who had legs taken off at the hip. More than 12,000 Federal soldiers lost a leg; more than 7,000 lost an arm. Not all wounds resulted in the loss of limb, but muscle and nerve damage and fused bones in injured joints were common.

Providing pensions for American injured veterans was not a new concept. Our government had long recognized its responsibility to provide for men who had been permanently disabled by military service. The first military pension law of the United States was passed in 1789, and a bureau was established within the Department of the Interior to process and authorize payment of military pensions. From the beginning, however, the pension laws allowed for payment only because of death or disability resulting from specific wars or military actions. Occasionally, Congress passed special acts to grant pensions to particularly deserving soldiers or their surviving families.

As the Civil War dragged on, the number of men being killed and disabled climbed steadily, until it became obvious that the existing pension laws were inadequate to address the situation. The first pension law specific to the Civil War was passed by Congress in March 1862. Several more laws followed shortly thereafter. As originally written, these laws granted pensions only to those permanently disabled by wounds received in battle, or to widows and dependent children of those who died while in Federal military service.

If the soldier was not killed outright in battle proving that a death was the direct result of military service could be difficult and frustrating for the surviving family. By the war's end, the Pension Bureau was referring an average of 1,550 cases per month to the surgeon general's office for "official evidence of cause of death." The bureau was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of pension applications – not only from widows and dependents, but also from disabled veterans.

The war's effects, and the veterans' need for assistance, continued for years after the final shots were fired. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers were crippled by the war or

suffered from chronic pain or illness, but only a fraction of them were visibly maimed. Thomas Plunkett had no trouble securing a government pension for the loss of his arms, but other men had a more difficult time proving that their health had been permanently impaired by their military service. A wound received in combat did not automatically entitle a veteran to compensation; he first had to prove that it had resulted in a permanent disability.

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton asserted in late 1865 that “some provision for the aid and relief of wounded and disabled soldiers” must be made and that “the country [owed this duty] to patriots who have suffered in the national defense.” He admitted that “opinions differ” on “whether relief can best be afforded by an increase of pension, or by establishing homes” for veterans, and he deferred to “the wisdom of Congress” to settle the matter.

Before the war’s end, Congress had established monthly pensions for “permanent specific disabilities,” including \$25 for the loss of both hands or both eyes, and \$20 for the loss of both feet. A rate of \$18 dollars per month was to be “proportionately divided for any degree of disability established for which [the law] makes no provision.” By 1866 the list of eligible disabilities was amended to include \$15 for the loss of one hand or foot and varying amounts for other specified injuries.

Further pension benefits were based on the inability to perform manual labor and were granted to disabled Union veterans according to the rank at which each was serving when he sustained the injury. The monthly rate for total disability was \$30 for lieutenant colonels and above, \$25 for majors, \$20 for captains, \$17 for first lieutenants, and \$8 for enlisted men. The navy employed a similar scale for its veterans.

The soldiers were mindful of this sliding pension scale. In February 1865, Elisha Hunt Rhodes – recently promoted to lieutenant colonel of the 2d Rhode Island Infantry but not yet mustered at his new rank – prepared to fight at Hatcher’s Run, Virginia. His superior, Brigadier General Frank Wheaton, aware of the disparities in pension amounts, warned Rhodes: “Take good care of yourself today, for if you are wounded it will only be a Captain’s pension.”

Disabled veterans quickly learned that a substantial amount of evidence was necessary to win a pension. In addition to the application, the Pension Bureau frequently requested affidavits from commanding officers, fellow soldiers, and the attending doctor or surgeon. The law required that:

- If the claim is made because a wound or injury, the declaration should set forth the nature and locality of the wound or injury, the time when, the place where, and the circumstances under which it was received, and the duty upon which the applicant was engaged.
- If the wound or injury was accidental, the applicant should state whether it happened through his own agency, or that of other persons, and he should minutely detail the circumstances under which it was received.

- If the claim is made because disability from disease, the applicant should state in said declaration when the disease first appeared, the place where he was when it appeared, and the duty upon which he was engaged at the time. He should also detail the circumstances of exposure, and the causes, which, in his opinion, produced the disease. Whether the application be made because disability from wound, injury, or disease, the claimant should state the names, addresses, and localities of all hospitals in which he received medical or surgical treatment, giving the dates of his admission thereto, as correctly as he may be able.

The pension Bureau was not able to seek out eligible recipients for the various benefits, so each veteran bore the individual responsibility of knowing which of the many pension laws were applicable to his case.

Complying with the pension application requirements was no easy task, nor was help provided for the overwhelmed applicant. One former soldier in 1879 wrote to ask for the current address of the chief surgeon who had treated him in 1864 at the general hospital in Annapolis, Maryland. Dimmed by the intervening 15 years the soldier mistakenly asked about a Dr. Vanderbilt rather than Dr. Vanderkief. With typical bureaucratic arrogance, an unsympathetic official noted in the government's file that the soldier "insists that the officer's name was Vanderbilt. The 'bilt' is built only on his imagination, a poor foundation for facts."

To avoid such wrangling over the documentation of their claims, most veterans engaged private attorneys who specialized in pension law to act as their agents. The law set maximum fees agents could charge their clients, but the speed with which a pension was processed depended, in part, on the attorney's diligence and knowledge of pension laws.

Because of the large number of pensions being processed in the years following the Civil War, the Pension Bureau grew to be one of the largest agencies of the federal government. By 1883, the government's expenditures for military pensions was nearly \$100 million, roughly a quarter of the country's yearly revenues.

To meet the demands placed upon it, the Pension Bureau employed 1,500 government workers – many of them wounded or disabled former soldiers. One of these clerks was Dr. David Hussey, hired in 1881 for an annual salary of \$1,200. The former lieutenant had survived his wartime illness and had gone on to complete his studies at the Chicago Medical College. He had practiced as a physician in Cherry Valley, Illinois for more than 10 years, but continued poor health forced him to give up his small-town medical practice and move to Washington, D.C.

When Hussey first arrived, the Pension Bureau occupied several scattered, cramped, fire-prone, and notoriously unhealthy rented buildings. Congress, to improve efficiency, in 1881 authorized the construction of "a fire-proof building of brick and metal sufficient for the Pension Office." Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs designed a revolutionary new building to house the bureau, boasting that he would produce "a building the like of which is not to be seen anywhere else in the country."

The largest brick building in the world when it was built, the pension building was constructed with red mortar to match the bricks' color. A three-foot-high terra-cotta frieze depicting a marching column of troops circled the exterior above the first floor. The four-story building incorporated innovative designs for heating and ventilation, and a large sky-lit central court. Stairs had low risers and wide treads to make it easier for the handicapped veterans employed there to maneuver them. It would be proved beneficial. In 1884, the first year of the building's occupation, workers' absences due to illness decreased by 8,622 days – an average of 5.75 days, or slightly more than one week, per employee.

The Pension Bureau wasn't the only resource for disabled Civil War veterans. Within a few years of the war's end, veterans began forming fraternal organizations, the largest of which was the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.). The G.A.R. was open to any Union Civil War veteran with 90 days military or naval service and an honorable discharge. As a united voting block, the G.A.R. wielded such political power that during its heyday in the latter part of the 19th century, it was a major force in getting favorable pension legislation passed. By "waving the bloody shirt" and proclaiming their patriotism, skilled political orators commanded more than 400,000 votes of G.A.R. members in the peak membership year of 1890. Blunt partisan tactics caused some critics to muse that G.A.R. stood for "Generally All Republicans."

Between 1862 and 1923 Congress passed more than 164 pension acts. Most benefited Civil War veterans or their dependents (although some were specific to other conflicts, such as the Indian Wars, the Spanish-American War, the Boxer Rebellion, and World War I). The G.A.R. is credited with passage of laws that disbursed more than \$8 billion over the years. Because of pension increases, Thomas Plunkett's pension for the loss of both arms was increased from \$25 per month to \$31.25 in 1872, \$50 in 1874, and \$72 in 1878.

Unfortunately, as a result of heavy-handed politics, the majority Republican Party became embroiled in scandal in the 1870s and 1880s. Inevitably, the pension rolls fell victim to fraud. Many healthy veterans claimed to be unfit for work, and widows continued to collect government money after they had remarried.

Despite the rampant fraud, not all veterans received pensions. Some, like twice-wounded Major Eban Hutchinson of the 2d Maine Cavalry, did not even apply for the pensions to which they were, in Hutchinson's words, "honestly and justly entitled." Hutchinson explained, "I was abundantly able to take care of myself, and did not need or require any assistance from the Government of my country... [No} man should ask pecuniary aid from his Government, who is young and able to take care of himself."

Hutchinson's attitude mirrored that of Democratic presidential candidate Grover Cleveland. Cleveland had stood up to the G.A.R. and its attempts to push through liberal pension legislation, but his reputation for good government carried him into the White

House in 1885. He was opposed to those who would gain their pensions through fraud, but was a friend to those who were truly deserving.

Cleveland's no-fraud policy won its supporters among the veterans. One wife, Maria Smith, whose husband "was shot in the hip and now carries a bullet in his head," wrote in 1886 to thank the new administration for promptly granting her husband's pension and thereby "doing justice without expense and without delay to an old and disabled soldier without money and without influence." Although her husband had been a Republican for 10 years, former administrations "scarcely paid attention to his letters." Now that the pension was finally granted, she said, her husband "blesses the day Cleveland was elected, although to his regret now he voted for Blain[e]... We know now who is the soldier's friend."

With the return of a Republican administration in 1889, the G.A.R. successfully lobbied for even more liberal pension laws that expanded the rolls of eligible veterans. In 1890, the Dependent Pension Bill extended coverage to all disabled veterans, if their disabilities related to military service. Men like Albert Woolson, who had no service-related disability, could claim a pension for other, more recent, ailments. Eventually, old age itself was recognized as a "permanent specific disability." The Law of 1907 allowed veteran pensions based on age alone. By then nearly all-surviving Civil War veterans were old enough to be eligible.

Congress amended the pension law in 1897 to allow soldiers who had been promoted but not yet mustered at their new rank at the time they were injured to be pensioned at the higher rate. Another amendment in 1912 allowed all veterans disabled in the line of duty and unfit for manual labor to be paid the maximum of \$30 per month without regard to their rank at the time of disablement. By 1920 the maximum rate for "permanent specific disabilities" had climbed to \$100, with lesser rates ranging down to \$6 for the loss of an index finger.

Another pension-related law took effect in 1916. That year, Congress passed the Medal of Honor Roll, establishing a special pension of \$10 per month for men over 65 who had been "awarded a medal of honor for having in action involving actual conflict with an enemy distinguished himself conspicuously by gallantry or intrepidity, at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty."

In the 20th century, the G.A.R. – its membership declining through death or disinterest – became less of a political machine and more of a fraternal organization, as it was originally designed to be. But as the G.A.R.'s power waned, the old veterans discovered they had a staunch ally in Congress.

Charles E. Fuller, beginning in 1902, was elected to 12 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. The former Illinois state senator and circuit judge turned down several opportunities to serve on more powerful committees so he could remain with the House Committee on Invalid Pensions and ultimately become chairman.

Fuller's hometown newspaper in Belvidere, Illinois, reported that he was "known throughout the length and the breadth of the land as the faithful friend of the old soldier, their champion and supporter." He had been too young to fight in the Civil War, but as a boy he had watch the troops march away and witnessed their broken and decimated ranks return four years later.

Fuller considered the Act of May 1, 1920, to be his crowning achievement. It was the most liberal pension measure in the history of the United States to that time. Aged veterans were now entitled to \$50 a month, or \$72 if they were so disabled as to require the regular personal aid and attendance of another person. Amounts for widows were increased, and for the first time since the war, army nurses were given proper recognition. Special provision was also made for helpless and dependent children after the death of the mother.

Despite Fuller's more than 20 years of pressing for liberal pension legislation, in 1926 he was severely criticized because no action was taken that year to pass a new bill to increase pensions all along the line. Leading the attack, according to Fuller, were "the professional pension people of the National Tribune, a paper published in the city of Washington ostensibly in the interest of the veterans."

Fuller was a pragmatist. He knew that money for pensions had to come from somewhere. "I am for pensions," he stated on the House floor in April 1926. "If it did not cost so much, I would be for more pensions; but it occurs to me that there must be a limit somewhere, and in granting pensions we must take into consideration where the money is coming from to pay the pensions."

One of the key people behind the Tribune attacks was John Clem, the onetime "Drummer Boy of Chickamauga." As a retired major general in the 1920s, Clem had become involved with the Tribune in advocating increased pension benefits. The paper solicited \$2 subscriptions and other donations, claiming that the money would be used to influence favorable pension legislation. When Fuller took exception to these tactics, the Tribune published a front-page editorial cartoon that claimed veterans were dying while waiting for him to approve a pension increase. By then the youngest Civil War veterans were in their mid-70s. Most were well over 80.

Fuller was furious. "I resent the implication that I am responsible for the death of veterans and widows. After the service I have rendered here, after what I have done, it is rank injustice from these people."

The paper clearly implied that every piece of pension legislation for 40 years had been the direct result of the efforts of the Tribune's untiring advocacy. The Act of May 1, 1920, it claimed, was the fruit of a long, hard fight by the Tribune.

"Now that was the Fuller bill," the congressman responded incredulously. "That was the bill that I drafted and put through, and here I am held responsible because the soldiers or veterans and widows are dying in their old age... They [the National Tribune]

are more interested in getting cash from the veterans and widows than for them. Their claim of great influence in securing pension legislation is false... Why, Gen. Johnny Clem comes around here telling members of my committee how to force bills out of the committee, and tells them what to do – not that they want any more bills passed, but to get more subscriptions for that vile paper.”

Soon, however, Civil War pensions would cease to be an issue. As the years marched by, there were fewer and fewer veterans left to march with them. The G.A.R. held its last annual encampment in 1949. Six of the 16 Union survivors attended, including former drummer boy Albert Woolson. The youngest survivor was 100 years old.



DECLARATION FOR ORIGINAL INVALID PENSION.



TO BE EXECUTED BEFORE A COURT OF RECORD OR SOME OFFICER THEREOF HAVING CUSTODY OF ITS SEAL.

State of Ohio }
County of Tullon } ss

On this 28 day of June A. D. one thousand eight hundred and eighty seven personally appeared before me, Clerk of the Common Pleas Court of record within and for the County and State aforesaid, Myron O Ford aged 47 years, a resident of the Town of Fayette, County of Tullon, State of Ohio, who, being duly sworn according to law, declares that he is the identical Myron O Ford who was ENROLLED on the 29 day of December, 1863, in Company A of the 128th Regiment of Ohio Vols commanded by Capt. O. J. Stump and was honorably DISCHARGED at Camp Chase, Ohio, on the 13 day of July, 1865; that his personal description is as follows: Age 47 years; height 5 feet 9 1/2 inches; complexion, dark; hair, dark brown; eyes, blue.

That while a member of the organization aforesaid, in the service and in the line of his duty at Johnson Island, in the State of Ohio, on or about the 15 day of April, 1864, he contracted Chronic Quinsy caused by exposure to incident to pneumonia. Also had lung fever at Cleveland, Ohio about 15th 1864. He claims Pension on account of said Chronic Quinsy and effects of said lung fever.

That he was treated in hospitals as follows: Ward "A" Cleveland Ohio. Hospital I was treated twice a day from about 19th day of Feb. to the 1st day of March 1864. That he has not been employed in the military or naval service otherwise than as stated above.

That since leaving the service this applicant has resided in the Fayette Tullon Co. Ohio in the State of Ohio, and his occupation has been that of a Farmer. That prior to his entry into the service above named he was a man of good, sound, physical health, being when enrolled a Farmer. That he is now much disabled from obtaining his subsistence by manual labor by reason of his injuries, above described, received in the service of the United States, and he therefore makes this declaration for the purpose of being placed on the invalid pension roll of the United States.

He hereby appoints, with full power of substitution and revocation, Martin Bond of Washington, D.C. his true and lawful attorney to prosecute his claim. That he has never received nor applied for a Pension. That his Post Office address is Fayette, Tullon, Ohio.

That the service was, whether prior or subsequent to that stated above, and the date at which it began and ended.

Claimant's signature, Myron O Ford

ATTEST: H. F. Paulsen, A. J. Kennedy

Myron O Ford

Woolson was the sole living Civil War veteran. "I am proud to be rearguard of such a gallant group of men," he said when informed that he was the last Union survivor. Woolson answered the long roll himself in August 1956 at the age of 109. His yearly pension at the time of his death was \$1,620. Though he was outlived by three Confederate pretenders (whose spurious claims to veteran status have since been proven false), and by numerous widows' pensions that would be paid for many more years, his was the last Federal pension for a true Civil War veteran. Life magazine reflected on the end of an era: "Taps are sounded, lights are out, the soldier sleeps," and the Grand Army of the Republic came to an end... A chapter in our nation's history is closed.

In reviewing the pension process over the years, it's funny how some things never change. Basically, only the form name and number is truly different for today's veterans. Many are told to just not apply, while others start the process and begin a greater battle than the one fought while in the service or on active duty. What it has become is an endless trail of paperwork, frustrated by the loss of necessary data from personnel files. It has also become almost a given fact that you will be denied on the first attempt to obtain benefits due to you.

A current issue that is becoming a National effort is using the name "concurrent receipt." What this boils down to is this. If you receive a retirement payment from years of dedicated service to your country, and you have a disability- that disability income amount is deducted from your retirement pay. Put simply, if you were wounded or made ill by your military service, the Government penalizes you if you work for that Government – even if you were hired as a disabled veteran. It doesn't matter if you gave a limb, body organ or suffered major health problems due to biological or chemical damage that will stay with you for the rest of your life – the penalty is still there.

Some have asked, are they telling current and future defenders of our democracy that if you want or need to be compensated for your scars or wounds, please don't expect to work for that same government or it is going to cost you. Oh, yes, you can work for private industry and not be penalized, but be prepared to lose money if you work for the government that sent you into battle.

Another issue that is apparent to Vietnam veterans and now to Gulf War veterans is that health problems caused by chemical agents used by either side will not be recognized. Agent orange (and other defoliants) used in Vietnam, Korea, and elsewhere continue to cause health problems ranging from skin rashes to cancer and many other major health problems. For Gulf war veterans the questions range from chemical issues to reactions to injections that were supposed to make them safe from chemical attack. Yet the Veterans Administration continues to deny any correlation to exposure to toxic materials or injections given to protect soldiers have created more health problems.

Side note, the Veterans Administration currently recognizes 41 illnesses from Agent Orange (defoliants). and fewer than 10 health issues to the "Gulf War Syndrome."

In talking to Veterans from Vietnam, Johnson Atoll, and some other locations that are “known” areas of Agent Orange use, I have personally found many more unexplained problems. One is the strange coincidence of many Vietnam Vets to have tumors/cysts growing on their left kidney and some renal organs. The VA has, on some occasions, removed the infected organs when health or pain issues become major problems. Even with the surgery the V.A. doesn’t recognize this as an issue of concern. Yet within a year or more the tumors/cysts begin appearing on the opposite side. The families of affected veterans have no family history of this illness. The one thing they do have in common is their exposure to Agent Orange and other defoliants. Where is the “equal” in equality?

This needs to become an issue for all veterans; past, current and future. While I can’t speak for every veteran, I know that for me I was told that if I served my country honorably, especially in war (I served five tours of duty in Vietnam) I would have health care for life. I do understand and have no problem with the fact that free treatment should be limited to those that are injured or become ill from conditions during their military service. This “health care for life” was also granted for all military retirees once they complete 20 years or more of honorable service. This was a definite consideration for many career veterans, “Do I stay in or get out?” The promise of lifetime health care was, in many cases, the deciding factor. But even that benefit is not as it was promised. As the military draws down, hospitals and clinics go away – but the need for health care for retired veterans lingers and gets more urgent as time advances. They served when asked, but they were never asked if they were willing or able to give up that care that was promised. There never has been an enlistment contract that says – “care will be provided until down sizing or Tricare (for which they must pay) occurs.” Dignity for an individual under circumstances of ill health and financial problems can be an illness upon itself. If that dies, the family is presented a flag, but what that flag can stand for is a broken promise. The vet gave his country his youth – the country returned that gift with a broken promise

It is never too late to right a wrong. Write your congressman, senators, and any government officials and let them know that, “Duty, Honor and Country” do not stop at the end of active service. These individuals gave much for their country and its freedom; the least we can do is take care of them. After all, they have saved our dream of freedom so we can share it with our children, and they with theirs.

Some of the information in this article came from research in various magazines, the input of individual veterans, as well as from fact sheets from the Veteran’s Administration. I thank each of them for the efforts and for their service to our country.

****Side notes****

What about the Other Guy?

In the Decades after the Civil War, Union Veterans received increasingly generous government benefits. Not so the former Confederate Soldiers. One confused Texan whose application was rejected could not understand why he, as a Confederate veteran,

was not entitled to a Federal pension. He reasoned, the country was now reunited and he had suffered just as much while doing his duty, as had the Yankee soldiers. The need for some form of assistance for the disabled Confederate veterans was obvious, but the southern economy was in ruins after the war, there was no room or budget for them. In 1867, Alabama and North Carolina became the first states from the former confederacy to offer limited benefits certain disabilities to its Southern veterans. Slowly over the years other southern states began providing token benefits to its Confederate veterans. Later even granting benefits to the widows and indigent veterans as well.

The amounts were never equal to that of the former Union Veterans. In 1893 the average Confederate widow or veteran received 38.50 per year each. While the Union veterans received \$165 per year. Newspapers ran stories and articles to try to bring to the public eye that all Veterans should be treated the same. By the time of the Depression, some of the older men tried to obtain a pension under false pretenses. They would state the files were lost. Many times, they would add years to their birth date to fit the time period required to match their claims. This fell off as the older true veterans began dying off and the media of the time waited to see who would be the last surviving member from each side to die off. These younger phonies were caught by not being in the proper (obvious) age bracket the last confederate veteran was Pleasant Crump of the 10th Alabama he died on December 31, 1951. The 1st Confederate widow lives in Elba, Alabama. The last "Northern" widow died a few months ago. Pensions are still in place under state taxes.

Now we have the issue of Veterans from other countries that we supported and even in many cases evacuated to our country when their government fell.

When Saigon fell into the hands of the North Vietnamese Communists, the South Vietnamese Armed Forces had lost more than 230,000 soldiers killed in action, more than 300,000 others wounded with permanent 30 per cent disability, several thousands missing in action. About 3,000 to 4,000 are suffering blindness or amputation of one to four limbs, classified as "100 per cent disability" by the former South Vietnamese Veterans Ministry.

They fought and died and got wounded for 16 years as soldiers of a republic. They were not cowards as portrayed in some slanderous reports during the Vietnam War.

After 1975, waves of boatmen and later the Orderly Departure Program have brought many tens of thousands of former South Vietnamese military personnel, mostly officers, to the Western countries. The majority of them have resettled in the USA. However, many thousands of South Vietnamese disabled enlisted men and poor families of the South Vietnamese KIA's have been unable to leave Vietnam. They have suffered the most from the war and deserved the best assistance, but so far, they have been mostly forgotten.

Since 1975, they have been completely ignored by the Communist authorities. The Communists even discriminate against them and their families. Many of them are leading a dog's life, taking shelter under eaves or makeshift awnings against walls along the

suburban sidewalks, in market places, or even in cemeteries on roofed tombs at night, and begging for food and money in the daytime.

Those South Vietnamese soldiers lost their lives or parts of their bodies in war, not only for Vietnam but also for the security of the Southeast Asian countries. Domino or not, if Vietnam had been overrun in 1965, Thailand and Malaysia at least, would have been invaded, according to reliable information from many high ranking North Vietnamese officers.

Moreover, the sacrifices of the South Vietnamese soldiers also served the interests of the USA as an outpost of the US-led Free World. Although having no legal responsibility for its once close ally, the US government is still under spiritual obligation to the comrades-in-arms that wore uniforms of the same color and followed the same ideals of freedom and democracy.

During the last few years, there have been several groups of Vietnamese émigrés in the USA and other Western countries who raised funds within the Vietnamese communities to send help in cash and in kind such as wheelchairs to the South Vietnamese disabled veterans who are leading the life of extreme miseries in Vietnam.

As of this writing “Operation Iraqi Freedom” is under way so the new “Gulf War veterans will soon be fighting for benefits also, make sure the legacy ends. Do what you can to help pass legislation and tell them “Welcome Home” Vietnam Veterans did not get this option-We began it for all including ourselves as a greeting or acceptance

Please contact the groups mentioned above for more details.

Article done by

Bob Nelson and Paul Kasper

Both Combat Veterans of the Vietnam era.

Some of this appeared in the book, "Wages of War"