

Testimony of CMSgt Daryl Cook, USAF 145 MSG

Good morning Chairman Roe, Dr. Dunn, Congressman Hudson and Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. It is truly a pleasure to be provided the opportunity to share my experiences as it relates to the Veterans Administration and more importantly share many positive experiences. I will also provide some issues within the program I feel are recommended areas of improvement. While I currently serve as the Installation Fire Chief assigned to the 145th Airlift Wing my testimony are my views and not those of the 145th Airlift Wing or the North Carolina National Guard.

Introduction

As mentioned, I serve as the Installation Fire Chief to the 145th Airlift Wing in Charlotte where we mutually respond with Charlotte Fire Department to emergencies at Charlotte Douglas International Airport, the sixth busiest airport in the country. Additionally, our mission includes providing emergency services support for Stanly County Airport. I have 32 Drill Status Guardsmen and 24 North Carolina State Employees to assist in providing coverage to these locations.

Background

With a varying number of personnel between military and civilians I have the opportunity to serve with many individuals who deal with the Veterans' Administration and typically information I receive is positive in nature. Close to 100% of my personnel have deployed so many have direct interaction with the VA prior to and after their deployment. Most of the information I provide is positive in nature but as with any program, improvement to the process and overall goal of providing the best care to our veterans can always get better.

Input from the Field

MSgt Christopher Johnson is also assigned to the 145th Airlift Wing and when asked about his interaction and service with the VA, he had nothing but favorable comments about his experience: staff was very friendly/professional and informative with the services they provide; facilities utilized were clean and in good condition; was able to get referred to a nutritionist and eye doctor in a timely fashion and when he needed services from the Emergency Department in Charleston, SC he received prompt and excellent service.

CMSgt (R) Pete Hazleton previously assigned to 145th Airlift Wing now assigned as a State Firefighter with the Air National Guard utilizes the VA's medication program and primary physician program with positive success. There are difficulties and concerns in scheduling appointments; it takes excessive time to get an appointment, may be months out, and the process for making the appointment and getting a referral is not an easy one. When directed to have lab work done it typically takes an extended period of time and many times orders are not there when you arrive to have the labs.

MSgt (R) Donald Willis previously assigned to the 145th Airlift Wing now assigned as a State Assistant Fire Chief with the Air National Guard. In January of 2017, he contacted the Veteran's Administrator of Catawba County to ask questions about the VA benefits that came with retirement. He was informed by them that his finances made him ineligible for the VA medical care benefits.

He retired from the NC Air National Guard on 10 Jun 2017. He went to the VA office in Charlotte in September 2017 to ask about applying for service related injuries. He filled out the paperwork and the VA representative made him an appointment with the VA clinic in Charlotte on 26 October 2017. He went to the appointment and his medical records were transferred to the VA. He started his paperwork for the service related

disability. The VA clinic made his next appointment for one year later, 26 October 2018 at 1000 hours.

He received a letter in the mail on 19 March 2018 from the VA advising him that his appointment for 26 October 2018 had been cancelled, and providing him some numbers to call and find out why. He called the 800 number given and spoke to a representative who looked up his appointment. The representative stated that his appointment was in fact cancelled. He asked her what the reason was for the cancellation. She checked the system and stated that it was probably because he made too much money. He did receive letters from the VA telling him they were looking into how much he made annually.

Conclusion

In closing I want to thank you for the concern and the effort you've put forth in ensuring our veterans receive the best care available. I appreciate the House Veterans Affairs Committee being proactive and seeking out ways to better serve our nation's veterans. Additionally, I would like to thank those who have served before me, those I've had the opportunity to serve with, and those who will serve after me. It is truly an honor to serve this great nation. God Bless this committee and God Bless the United States of America.