|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| VA IRIS Inquiry: 191226-000344  |  |

Thu, Dec 26, 2019 10:11 am

|  |
| --- |
| Dept of Veterans Affairs iris\_service@custhelp.comHide  |
| To  | rolszewski rolszewski@aol.com |

|  |
| --- |
| U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs |
|   |
|

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|

|  |
| --- |
| The Department of Veterans Affairs has received the Inquiry you submitted via the Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS). You should expect a response from us within 5 business days.If you wish to update your inquiry, please reply to this email. Click Reply, type the additional information you wish to provide, and then click Send. Please note that we do not accept attachments via this system.Thank you. |
|

|  |
| --- |
| **If you are in immediate danger, please call 911. Please do not use a VA IRIS inquiry for urgent needs or medical emergencies.** |
| For immediate help in dealing with a suicidal crisis, please call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat/), or text 838255. |

 |

 |

 |

|  |
| --- |
| Recently you requested assistance from VA. Below is our response.If you wish to reopen this issue, you may do so within the next 14 days.Thank you for allowing us to be of service to you. |
| Response By Email (Dept of Veterans Affairs) (01/21/2020 12:40 PM)Dear Mr. Olszewski:This is in response to your inquiry to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) dated December 26, 2019.Thank you for your service to our country.We apologize for the delay in responding to your inquiry.  We are currently experiencing a large volume of inquiries and are working as quickly as possible to respond to each in a timely manner.VA has established a special team specifically designated to research military and service treatment records and to determine whether a Veteran served in the eligible offshore waters of the Republic of Vietnam. To help us make that determination, VA encourages claimants to file a claim and submit any information of service in the Republic of Vietnam for any length of time between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, aboard a U.S. military vessel that operated less than 12 nautical miles from the demarcation line of the waters of Vietnam and Cambodia. The specific area is defined in the Blue Water Navy Act of 2019. More information about Blue Water Navy Veterans can be found at <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardousmaterials-exposure/agent-orange/navy-coast-guard-ships-vietnam/>.For security reasons, we do not provide the name or email addresses of any representatives within VA. You may communicate with VA via direct mail, fax, phone, or via this inquiry system.  Any information about claims or pending VA benefits is generally updated in our electronic system, whereby all VA representatives will be able to assist with your questions and concerns.Thank you for contacting us.  If you have questions or need more help with the information in our reply, please respond to this message or see our other contact information below.Sincerely yours,J. BillingtonNational IRIS Response Center Managerjas How to Contact VA:Online:[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov/)[www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov/) By phone:(800) 827-1000(844) MyVA311 (698-2311)Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) 711 By fax:Toll Free: (844) 531-7818Local: (248) 524-4260 By mail:Department of Veterans AffairsClaims Intake CenterPO Box 5235Janesville, WI 53547-5235 |

I forwarded the above to former Tunny crew member and Radioman Bob White and here is his response:

Thanks Ray.

I checked the link that the VA sent you and it is currently returning “Sorry — we can’t find that page”   Figures!

I was on the phone with serval VA folks the last few days to no help.  They just told me that my claim was still in Remand and they have no idea how long it will nor can they make sure it is put before the Blue Water Navy task group.  Everyone has their own feelings on if I should fill out the form that was sent out to everyone that has been denied and wants to open a new claim but not one of them can give me an official stand on if I should.

Any movement of claims from any of the other Tunny Vietnam era crew members?

How is your hearing claim going?

Bob

Here is what I sent back to the VA in response:

J. Billington;  First, thank you for the reply and the offer to respond.  Second, I tried the link you provided and here is a snapshot of the response.  Perhaps, you or your IT Team could look into the problem with the link.  There is more...

Third, I am a Navy Veteran and I myself do not have an issue regarding Agent Orange or the need to submit a claim to the VA for that particular issue.  However, I am speaking on behalf of several former submarine crew members who are known to have operated in the Vietnam coastal waters during the Vietnam War Era.  These submariners served on the USS Tunny (APSS/LPSS-282) from 1966 through 1969.  The Tunny conducted fourteen (14) Special Operations (SPECOPS) in support of the Navy's Unconventional Warfare missions delivering UDT Teams/Seals to locations within North Vietnam.  As I have pointed out in my book USS TUNNY: A History, Tribute, and Memoir and the attached paper I wrote, these crew members were exposed to Agent Orange chemicals while operating in Vietnam's Coastal Waters, but their vessels are not included in the Blue Water Navy or the Brown Water Navy lists.  Yet, their submarines were operating within the North Vietnam's 12 nautical mile limits as evidence by precise locations and times found in Deck Logs that we have uncovered.

There are a number of former Tunny Veterans who have submitted claims to the VA relative to their Agent Orange exposure they are suffering from, but the VA continues to tell them to prove they were in waters that exposed them to the AO's chemicals.  We have done that for you and in the Tunny's case, we have the evidence and it can be found published on my personal website ([www.olszewskienterprises.com](http://www.olszewskienterprises.com)).  Specifically, the locational information that puts Tunny inside the 12 nm limit can be found by [clicking here](http://www.olszewskienterprises.com/USSTUNNYandAgentOrangeExposureInformation.htm).

There is more evidence to be found if the VA would merely obtain the classified patrol/mission reports the Navy holds.  As I pointed out, the VA is in a better position to obtain classified information than the veteran is.  But it appears the VA seems unwillingly or incapable of doing such research/investigation.  So, as found in [the website](http://www.olszewskienterprises.com/USSTUNNYandAgentOrangeExposureInformation.htm), we have done this for the VA at the unclassified level.

As I pointed out in my initial communications with the VA using this IRIS system, I wanted to know who in the VA is responsible for the creation and maintenance of the Navy's Blue/Brown Water Listing that was published in November 2019 which I believe is the last one that was published.  To add to this, there is also the USS Perch (APSS-313), and USS GRAYBACK (LPSS-574) who operated in Vietnam wars conducting the same operations as the Tunny, i.e., delivering UDT/SEAL Teams.

Relative to the paper I wrote in addition to my website, I have to share with you that I sent a copy of it to Senator Amy Klobuchar's office (D-Minnesota) and received a "not interested" response.  Again, that paper is attached for the VA's Special Team's review that you mentioned. And, oh by the way, there is one former Tunny crew member who is still waiting to hear a positive response from the VA to his "several" appeals claims for AO exposure.  He is mentioned in this paper.

So, out of frustration, I originally made the inquiry using the IRIS System as to "Who" is responsible in the VA that I needed to communicate this information with.  They need to see what "we" have done and that the VA can't seem to do and get the Blue Water/Brown Water lists updated and put the three submarines on those lists.

I look forward to hearing back from you,

Ray Olszewski

And, then here is the VA’s response back to me:

|  |
| --- |
| Recently you requested assistance from VA. Below is our response.If you wish to reopen this issue, you may do so within the next 14 days.Thank you for allowing us to be of service to you. |
| Response By Email (Dept of Veterans Affairs) (01/23/2020 03:41 PM)Dear Mr. Olszewski:This is in response to your inquiry to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) dated December 26, 2019.Thank you for your service to our country.We apologize we are unable to view attachments sent to VA via this inquiry system.  As such, we did not receive the information you attempted to submit.  Please send all evidentiary information, forms, claims, appeals, and change of phone or address forms to the VA intake center, below.For purposes of deciding Blue Water Navy claims covered by the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, determinations of qualifying service in the offshore waters of Vietnam are made on a claim-by-claim basis. The best possible way to ensure a ship or submarine is included on the list is for Veterans who served aboard the ship to file disability compensation claims.If this does not cover the scope of your request, please respond to this message with additional information. You may also contact us at the toll-free number listed below.Thank you for contacting us.  If you have questions or need more help with the information in our reply, please respond to this message or see our other contact information below. Sincerely yours,J. BillingtonNational IRIS Response Center Managerjas How to Contact VA:Online:[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov/)[www.ebenefits.va.gov](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov/) |

Here is what I wrote out of frustration and sent to Bob White and copied the IRIS Manager:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| To  | rwwhite rwwhite@sbcglobal.net |
| Cc  | iris\_service iris\_service@custhelp.com |

Hey Bob, check out the response I received from the IRIS\_service.   Check out the second paragraph.  Are these people not willing to do anything except move emails?  Therefore, this will **never** get resolved, Tunny, Perch or Grayback will **never** get on the List.  Why, because the VA has made this a Catch-22 situation.  What I am reading is that only a claimant can get a ship on the list?  It is obvious, they do not want to do the work themselves so they put the job on the claimant who has to prove his ship was exposed? Have you not already sent in the evidence to the "Intake Center" located in Janesville, WI?  So, if that's the rule, what isn't Tunny on the List as you have already submitted the evidence that Tunny was in Vietnamese Territorial waters and its crew was exposed to Agent Orange.  So, why isn't it on the List?  What planet are these people on that their system can't receive attachments? And, oh yes,

Best, as always - - - Ray