



# GulfNEWS

A bi-monthly newsletter serving the interests of Gulf War veterans

## President Clinton extends claim period for veterans

WASHINGTON (GulfLINK) — President Clinton has extended from two to 10 years the time in which veterans with undiagnosed illnesses stemming from the Gulf War may be eligible for benefits.

Congress enacted legislation in 1994 allowing veterans to receive compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the first time in history for "undiagnosed illnesses."

President Clinton extended the previous two-year time limit to 10 years — or until 2001 — in his White House announcement March 7.

"We aim to raise significantly the window for Gulf veterans to claim the compensation they have earned," Clinton said. "Gulf War veterans who became ill as a result of their service should receive the compensation they deserve, even if science cannot yet pinpoint the cause of their illnesses."

VA Secretary Jesse Brown said, "Gulf War veterans served honorably and some are now suffering. It will take time for us to find all the answers — but, until we do, we must provide them with the disability compensation they deserve."

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## What's behind this newsletter?

Many veterans of the Gulf War have been experiencing a variety of physical symptoms, collectively called Gulf War illnesses.

In response to veterans' concerns, the Department of Defense (DoD) established a task force in June 1995 to investigate all possible causes. In November 1996, responsibility for these investigations was assumed by the Investigation and Analysis Directorate, Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses.

As part of the overall effort to inform the public about the progress of DoD's collective efforts, DoD is publishing this newsletter, plus placing information on the Internet and elsewhere.

# Khamisiyah survey brings 30% response



*Khamisiyah*

WASHINGTON (GulfLINK) — About 30 percent of the U.S. troops identified as being near Khamisiyah when Iraqi chemical munitions were destroyed after the war have responded to a Pentagon survey requesting information and observations.

Col. Larry Cereghino, who is overseeing the survey conducted by the Pentagon's Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses, said his office will shortly begin to mail out second copies of the survey in an effort to boost the response rate above the current 30 percent. "We never expected to get 100 percent,"

Cereghino said, "but we want to encourage veterans to help us understand what happened at Khamisiyah. The involvement by veterans in our investigation of what happened in the Gulf is not only useful but extremely important to our effort."

Cereghino said the biggest surprise of the survey responses is how many of the veterans were unaware of the medical evaluation programs available through the Defense Department and Department of Veterans Affairs. The last question on the survey briefly describes the health programs and asks, "Did you know about these programs . . . ?" Cereghino said more than a third of those responding checked the box saying, "No, I did not know about these programs."

Cereghino said, "We've had a major effort — radio announcements, pamphlets, notices in publications aimed at vets — to get the word out. It's clear from the survey results that there are a lot of people out there we haven't reached despite all the effort."

The survey itself is aimed at reaching as many people as possible who were in units

within 50 kilometers of Khamisiyah, Iraq, during the first two weeks of March 1991. That was the period in which an Army engineer unit was demolishing Iraqi ammunition stocks at Khamisiyah — stocks which later turned out to contain chemical weapons. The overall purpose of the survey is: to confirm the location of military units during early March 1991; to identify demolition-related events which individuals may have observed; and to identify health problems which individuals believe may be related to service in the Gulf War.



*Salt Lake City Testimony*

*Anne Davis, director, investigation and analysis, and Dr. Bernard D. Rostker, special assistant for Gulf War illnesses, answer questions before the President's Advisory Committee at a public hearing in Salt Lake City, Utah, March 18, 1997.*

# Retired General Vesser named new deputy chief of GWI office

WASHINGTON (GulfLINK) — Lieutenant General Dale Vesser, who retired from the Army in 1987 after 33 years on active duty, has been named deputy special assistant for Gulf War illnesses by Secretary of Defense William Cohen.

General Vesser is a West Point graduate and Rhodes Scholar who wears the Purple Heart and Silver Star for combat service in Vietnam in the infantry.

General Vesser will assist Bernard Rostker in running the Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses, which was established last November to oversee all efforts within the Department of Defense dealing with Gulf War illnesses.

Born in Los Angeles and reared in Idaho, General Vesser held commands from company to division level and served on staffs from battalion through the National Security Council. In between these tours, he was a teacher at the Armor School and at West Point, where he taught economics, government and political philosophy.

At his last military post, General Vesser was director of strategic plans and policy for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In that

position, he was responsible for developing the nation's military strategy.

He also served two tours in Vietnam, first working with the Army of Vietnam to provide support for the pacification program. He later fought with the Big Red One (1st Infantry Division) and then the 1st Cavalry Division.

Then-Lieutenant Colonel Vesser was awarded the Purple Heart after being shot in an ambush during a resupply mission to one of his infantry platoons, which was under attack by a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) main force battalion. He was awarded the Silver Star for action during that same firefight when he took control



and directed the action until the NVA battalion withdrew some two hours later.

During the Gulf War, Vesser, a civilian, served as Assistant Deputy Undersecretary of Defense in the Pentagon, where he organized planning to support the forces in the Gulf. During this time he arranged for the loan of Fox chemical detection vehicles and heavy equipment transporters (HETs) from U.S. allies. He went to the Kuwait Theater of Operations during Desert Shield, and after the fighting, oversaw publication of the interim Gulf War history.

General Vesser described his new duties as "a unique challenge." He said, "The Gulf War illnesses are especially frustrating because we lack answers for basic questions. So many of our troops have been struck down, not by the enemy on the field of combat, but by something we don't understand."

"They ask, 'What have I got and how did I get it?' They deserve answers. But we haven't provided them. I hope I'll be able to help find some of those answers," the new deputy chief commented.

# Callback team cuts backlog

WASHINGTON (GulfLINK) — The Pentagon's Gulf War illnesses investigation team has reduced by 69 percent the backlog of 1,235 telephone calls that accumulated last year.

Marie Danco, who is in charge of the callback program, said, "We have 17 people — all veterans and some of whom served in the Gulf — working the phones to get back to everyone."

She said, "The backlog was 1,235 calls. As of April 23, we have gotten back to 850 of them, and we're doing very well on the calls to the rest."

Danco said, "Prior to January, there was no staff dedicated to interviewing all the veterans who wanted to report incidents that might be related to Gulf War illnesses. The messages piled up until the Pentagon established the Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses." The new office started making callbacks in January of this year.

The major part of the work in Danco's

office is interviewing veterans about their personal experiences in order to develop a body of factual material that the team of investigators and analysts can use as they try to build the record of what happened during the war that might be related to Gulf War illnesses. Danco said, "We are very anxious to talk to everyone, but we need current addresses and phone numbers, especially for veterans who called a few months ago. If they have moved and not yet been called, chances are we need a current number. They need to call the Hotline with their new number." The interviews are sources of information being used by the Office of the Special Assistant as it drafts case narratives detailing incidents and events in the Gulf War that could help us explain the origins and causes of Gulf War illnesses.

Danco urged veterans with any experiences that may be related to Gulf War illnesses to call the [Gulf War Hotline at 1-800-472-6719](tel:1-800-472-6719).



## Profile:

### Anne Rathmell Davis

Director, investigation and analysis directorate



Appointed in January to the post of director, investigation and analysis directorate, Anne Rathmell Davis is responsible for the

collection and evaluation of all information related to Gulf War veterans' illnesses.

She manages a large combined team of government employees and contractors tasked with investigating all possible causes of Gulf War illnesses, then reporting these reports to veterans, the Department of Defense, the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses, and Congress.

Davis has more than 20 years of active and Reserve duty experience as a legal

officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, in diverse assignments including land use, and environmental law. Mobilized for Desert Shield/Desert Storm, Davis was next assigned to the Base Structure Analysis Team before her release from active duty in 1993.

Prior to assuming her current position, Davis was the senior associate counsel for environmental and special programs with the Naval Air Systems Command, dealing with base closure, facilities and environmental matters.

## DoD announces townhall meetings

Bernard D. Rostker, special assistant for Gulf War illnesses, is going on an 11-city town hall tour during April and May to address the concerns of Gulf War veterans.

The tour is sponsored by the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion.

"These meetings are an important part of our outreach to veterans," said Rostker. "It's always best to hear directly from our veterans, so the immediacy of the personal interaction will be invaluable. I'd like to thank the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion for their assistance in

setting up these visits. These kinds of meetings would not be possible without the support of these fine veterans organizations."

Rostker said he'd try to arrange additional visits to other cities later this year.

Veterans unable to attend one of the meetings can still contact Rostker via the new interactive feature on the GulfLINK home page (<http://www.dtic.mil/gulflink>), or via standard mail at the Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses, 5113 Leesburg Pike, Suite 901,

Falls Church, VA 22041.

These informational forums will be held from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. local time. The dates and locations of the meetings are listed below:

**Sunday, April 20, 1997:** Cleveland, VFW Post 1863, 7040 Pettibone Rd., Chagrin Falls, OH.

**Wednesday, April 23, 1997:** Atlanta, American Legion Post 29, 921 Gresham Ave. NE, Marietta, GA.

*(continued on page 6)*

*(Townhall meetings- from page 5)*

**Thursday, April 24, 1997:** Boston, American Legion Post 440, 295 California St., Newton, MA.

**Monday, April 28, 1997:** Kansas City, VFW Post 1000, 10002 East 24 Highway, Independence, MO

**Tuesday, April 29, 1997:** Dallas, VFW Post 5076, 1906 East Miller St., Garland, TX.

**Monday, May 5, 1997:** Colorado Springs, American Legion Post 38, 6685 Southmoor Dr., Fountain, CO.

**Tuesday, May 6, 1997:** San Diego, VFW Post 2082, Memorial Center, 2115 Park Blvd., San Diego, CA.

**Wednesday, May 7, 1997:** Seattle, VFW Post 2995, 4725 148th Avenue NE, Bellevue, WA.

**Thursday, May 8, 1997:** Chicago, American Legion Post 1941, 900 South LaGrange Rd., LaGrange, IL.

**Monday, May 12, 1997:** Indianapolis, American Legion HQ, Indiana War Memorial, Meridian Street, Indianapolis, IN.

**Tuesday, May 13, 1997:** Columbus, American Legion Post 164, 3363 McDowell Rd., Grove City, OH.

From the desk of:

## ***Bernard D. Rostker*** Special assistant for Gulf War illnesses

When I was appointed special assistant for Gulf War illnesses last November, my first priority became the health and welfare of our Gulf War veterans. My mission has three parts. First, ensure all Gulf war veterans receive necessary medical care; second, thoroughly investigate why our veterans are ill; and third, apply our findings to future deployments.

We have a moral duty to our veterans and must learn what is making our people sick to help them now and in the future.

President Clinton's guidance is clear: "I want to assure all of you that we will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to investigate Gulf War illnesses, and to provide our Gulf War veterans with the medical care they need. There are mysteries still unanswered and we must do more."

I am making it my business to leave no stone unturned. I have built a proactive organization and completely revamped the way we do business. We have the investigators and analysts necessary to perform a full review of currently known exposures, and the authority to search out and



pursue reports of any new incidents.

We have initiated a proactive risk communication program with the Gulf War veterans as recommended by the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses. Any veteran calling our telephone hotline receives a follow-up call and interview by a trained

investigator. This information becomes part of a larger picture as we examine the incidents and events associated with Gulf War illnesses. We have already released our first report on Khamisiyah, which will be followed by others as investigations progress.

We are also building on the health program initiated by the Department of Defense. The comprehensive clinical evaluation program provides in-depth health evaluations for Gulf War veterans whether active duty, Reserve or National Guard members. These evaluations are available to anyone by simply contacting the program.

Without exception, we are completely committed to finding out everything we can about Gulf War illnesses. We intend to keep you up to date and well informed, so look for more news on these important issues through this newsletter, the media, and our GulfLINK web site.

# GulfLINK

Tired of “snail mail?” Try out our **GulfLINK** web site on the Internet. This service provides timely information on all Gulf War illnesses issues.

If you have your own computer, this is simple. Or, check your local public library to see if their computers have Internet access. Log onto the Internet, then type: <http://www.dtic.mil/gulflink/> to access this information-packed site.

You can find press releases, Congressional testimony, and detailed case narratives of Gulf War incidents.

There are also declassified intelligence documents and operational documents from all Services, JCS, CIA, and USCENTCOM. Best of all, this is available 24 hours a day.

If you want to communicate directly with us by e-mail, just send your comments to [brostker@gwillness.osd.mil](mailto:brostker@gwillness.osd.mil). We will reply.

## Editor's Notes

*GulfNEWS is produced by The Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses (OSAGWI), 5113 Leesburg Pike, Suite 901, Falls Church, Church, VA 22041. Send your comments and suggestions on this newsletter to the above address, or to: [brostker@gwillness.osd.mil](mailto:brostker@gwillness.osd.mil), attn: GulfNEWS editor.*

*Congratulations to our “Name the Newsletter” contest winner — Barbara Goodno! Barbara is a Public Affairs Specialist for OSAGWI.*



Your ticket to the information highway —  
Visit our GulfLINK web site at:

<http://www.dtic.mil/gulflink/>

Gulf War veterans seeking information on VA benefits of all types should call the Gulf War Information Hotline at:  
**1-800-749-8387**

Anyone with information on Gulf War incidents should call the DoD Incident Reporting Line at:  
**1-800-472-6719**

Are you a Gulf War veteran (or know one) with health problems? Call the DoD Gulf War Veterans Hotline at:  
**1-800-796-9699**