

June 13, 26, 2014

To: Secretary of the Veterans Administration
From: Master Sergeant Everett B. Lattimore, U.S.M.C. (Retired)
Subject: Denial of Disability Benefits/Suspected Fraud and Abuse

CC: The Honorable President of the United States, Barrack Obama
Chairman of the Veterans Service Committee, Mr. Bernie Sanders
Veterans Administration, Inspector General (IG)
Chairman of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Association
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
South Carolina, United States Senator, Lindsey Graham
South Carolina, United States Senator, Tim Scott
South Carolina Governor, Niki Haley
South Carolina Congressional Representative, Trey Gowdy

Sir/Mamn,

My Name is Everett B. Lattimore, a retired Marine from Spartanburg, South Carolina. I retired on Dec. 31, 2000. I have requested VA disability compensation three separate times and been denied three separate times. This is my story:

My career began on July 24, 1973. I was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I served with H&S Company in an 81 MM mortar platoon. We went into the field every Monday morning. My gun bipod weighed 42 pounds, M-16 rifle 11.2 pounds, flack jacket 5/6 pounds, and a 7 day field pack, cartage belt, all together over 100 pounds. We did 10 miles out and 10 miles in. My body weight was 150 pounds. We did battalion force marches every 90 days, fully combat loaded, 4 miles per hour for 25 miles. All this at the time the Viet Nam War was still an issue.

I was placed on terminal leave July 03, 1975, It was July 4th weekend. I hitched hiked from Camp Lejeune to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. My family and my wife's family were at the beach celebrating my separation from military service and the holiday. On the way home July 05, 1975 my wife was killed in the car we were coming home in. It was a terrible situation to try and re-adjust.

I attended Spartanburg Technical College with help using my Veterans GI Bill. I received a welding certificate. I welded pipe for over 5 years. The Three Mile Island Nuclear accident caused nuclear projects to be shut down, Twelve thousand welders were out of work in South Carolina. I had just gone through a divorce so I decided to seek re-enlistment in the Corps. On February 21, 1981 I began my 2nd tour of duty. I re-entered active duty as a Private First Class. I was twenty-seven years old at the time.

While serving aboard Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, South Carolina, I had an opportunity to attend Army Airborn Jump School aboard Fort Benning, Georgia. At that time I was a forty-four year old Master Sergeant Select. Why would someone my age subject himself to such rigorous training? I was in excellent physical condition, 3 mile run in 19 minutes, 20 dead hang pull ups, and 120 sit ups in 2 minutes. Having aspirations of becoming a First Sergeant in an Infantry Battalion was my reasoning for attending Army Airborn Jump School. As you are aware the selection process for First

Sergeant/Master Sergeant in the Marine Corps is highly competitive. I wanted to end my career where it began.

I proceeded to meet all requirements necessary to attend jump school. An age waiver granted by Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, and an airborne physical fitness test were required. An age waiver was also required from Commanding General, Fort Benning, Georgia. An EKG heart test was administered. Meeting necessary requirements, I was allowed to check-in. I was now ready to complete school and receive my jump wings!

Two weeks of training complete, jump week was here. Five jumps must be completed to earn your wings. The final jump was a night jump. It was in July. The Para loft was 110 degrees! We arrived 4 hours early. Once the Jump Master checks your parachute and equipment you cannot touch yourself. You are told to leave if found touching any part of your equipment. Six hundred Army, Marine, Navy Seals, and Air Force service members, in full combat gear, sweltering in the heat!

As twilight approached the command was given to board the planes. I was the third member in the stick. The jump light lit, bright red! The expression jump up, buckle up shuffle to the door, turn & burn, the adrenalin rush began. Jump Master pops you on the rear and out the door you go, In theory! As soon as I turned the Jump Master stopped me. We were over trees. The pilot issued the warning to hold up. Just about a minute later the Jump Master popped me to go out the door. I was startled and lost my tight jump position. The prop wash of the C-130 aircraft blew me against the side of the plane. My parachute opened, my head was tilted back, not tight against my chest. The heavy aluminum buckles on my parachute busted my nose and loosened two of my teeth. You're in the air twelve seconds. I could see the tree line approaching. Our aircraft was over tree tops. I began pulling on my parachute risers to slip away from the trees. The ground was coming up extremely fast. It was dark, you could see shadows and silhouettes. I released my combat load as the ground rushed forward. Thud, I landed in about 4 feet of water. **I felt a sharp pain upon impact.** This was the beginning of my annoying lower back pain.

I returned to Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island after completing jump school. Within a week I was experiencing severe lower back pain. I was given muscle relaxers for pain relief. I took muscle relaxers for my remaining 2.5 years of my tour of service.

I received orders to report to, Combat Assault Battalion, 3rd Marine Corps Division, Okinawa, Japan. This was very upsetting! Orders to Okinawa meant I had to stay overseas for 18 months. Having served (2) years previously on Okinawa, (1) Year in the Western Pacific Ocean, (.5) years on a Caribbean Deployment and (9) months In South West Asia, Desert Shield/Desert Storm, and countless deployments to 29 Palms California located in the Mojave Desert. I chose to extend my enlistment (.5) years to shorten my tour of duty in Okinawa. This allowed my rotation date be (1) year instead of (18) months. I wanted to be close to my Wife and (2) children.

My last tour of duty required I receive a Humanitarian Transfer to Reserve Marine Ammo Company, Greenville, South Carolina. The transfer was due to my wife's health.

I reported to Naval Station, Atlanta, Georgia for my final physical. The physical exam was a complete joke. No Chest X-ray's, no prostate check and no back x-ray's. The physical existed entirely of questions and a stethoscope check. I asked the doctor about

my lower back problems he said, **“The Veterans Administration Would Take Care of Me.”**

Soon after my retirement we were attacked on 9/11. I tried to re-enlist to go to Iraq but couldn't. I had been given a re-enlistment code that would not allow me to be re-called due to my wife's health.

Approximately six months later I awoke one morning and couldn't walk. I was assisted to the Emergency Room, ANMED Hospital, Anderson, South Carolina. There I began a long process of strong pain killers, primary care physicians, Nero Surgeons, MRI's and pain doctors. My Nero Surgeon wanted to perform out-patient surgery, which I wouldn't allow. I chose a series of epidural injections. After the third injection I stopped taking the pain medication. The damage had already been drastic! The depression caused by my back injury had brought on alcohol and substance abuse.

My wife and I's relationship slipped into a volatile situation. It is said PTSD is caused by prolonged exposure to a combat environment. Try retiring from military service having been responsible for millions of dollars worth of equipment, safety and training for hundreds of Marines, raising and caring for a family, and trying to start a new career. My type A personality and work-aholic style had taken me to the edge. I was served a restraining order and told to leave my home. Gone were my children, my dogs, and a home. I had already invested \$40,000 into what I thought was my final move. Now I'm homeless with severe medical and mental problems. Tell me about PTSD!

I moved back to Spartanburg, South Carolina into my sister's home. I managed to find a mobile home, now paying for (2) residence. I went through a period of extreme substance abuse. I lost the mobile home I was renting so I thought, time to seek professional help. This is where my **“VA fiasco began!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”**

I traveled to Dorn VA Medical Hospital located in Columbia, South Carolina. I was seeking help with my medical and psychological condition. The date was sometime around September 2002. I checked into the medical facility and was told I had to be interviewed by their psychologist. Medical test were administered before my interview. The interview complete, I felt no one was interested assisting with my problems. I started to leave and was told I couldn't. I was escorted to the psychiatric unit by two orderlies. This wasn't a ward for substance abuse patients but the ward for the Mentally Insane. They kept me there for seven days. I was interviewed several times while in confinement. I was told that I would receive assistance with job placement and temporary lodging when dismissed. On Friday, the day of my discharge, no one would see me. I was discharged late Friday afternoon with no food or lodging. I was told the Salvation Army may give me food and lodging? I proceeded to the Salvation Army. The person in charge told me they were full. I hung around for several hours. Another extremely kind gentleman got me into the system. Now here I am, a retired homeless veteran, released with absolutely no assistance from the VA. I stayed at the Salvation Army for approximately (4) months. During this time the “Sally” Salvation Army assisted me with appointments. Salvation Army volunteers assisted filing disability claims for veteran's assistance and compensation. It took about a year before I received correspondence from the VA. My claim had been denied, **“NOT SERVICE CONNECTED!”** My lower back disorder, my feet & knee problems, PTSD, and physiological disorders were not service connected. All the long hikes with heavy back

packs, hours of physical training and thousands of 18 hour workdays, **"How Could My Injuries Not Be Service Connected?"**

I remained clean for about six months. I started using again. Anger and hostility reared its ugly head. Having been convicted on several drunk and disorderly charges, I attempted to seek help again. This time I would travel to Oteen VA Medical Hospital located in Ashville, North Carolina. This was around the spring of 2004. Oteen VA had a much better substance abuse program than Dorn VA located in South Carolina. Their program consisted of thorough counseling and behavioral evaluation. The program lasted (30) days. Upon completion of the program lodging and out patient counseling were provided.

Only one problem, the program was full for two months. They allowed me to stay at their lodging facility in downtown Ashville, North Carolina. I attend out patient counseling, and was required to attend (1), NA meeting each day. I did well, found a job, and attended meetings every day. After (60) days of sobriety, counselors decided not to enroll me in the (30) lockdown at the hospital. I was to continue out patient counseling and mandatory NA meetings. I remained sober and stayed in the program for six months. The counselors and staff at Oteen VA hospital were very professional and assisted me in submitting my claim for veteran's benefits. It took about a year to receive information on my claim. Because I was from South Carolina, North Carolina VA suggested I file my claim in South Carolina. Another year wasted.

My final attempt at sobriety and assistance with my health issues began in December, 2009. Still unable to handle my medical/mental issues, I again sought help through DORN Veterans Administration Medical Facility in Columbia, South Carolina. I was sent to an affiliated substance abuse facility located in Travelers Rest, South Carolina. I attended a seven day detoxification program. I was given medication for depression that dangerously lowered my blood pressure. I was falling and couldn't walk. Throughout the week I can't remember a counseling session. This was a detoxification environment only. I returned from Travelers Rest to Dorn VA Medical Center. I experienced resentment from the homeless veteran's staff again. No assistance was available. I was told to go to the **"Winter Shelter"** a homeless shelter located in downtown Columbia, South Carolina. This was a state run facility. Ten Foot barbed wire fences, stench and filth, the shelter housed about (300) people daily. You may or may not have a bed the next evening. People were turned away every evening.

The following day I returned to the VA. Again I encountered resistance from the staff of the homeless veterans program. **Lodging was not available for homeless veterans except "For Profit" facilities. That sent up a red flag. Could the money dedicated to the homeless veterans program be spent on other projects? Maybe the governor's pet peeve, "The Winter Shelter?"** Maybe the IG needs to investigate these allegations thoroughly! States Governors could easily siphon funds from their Veterans Administration's Budget. Citing homeless military veterans funding could be spent on non military related projects.

I had been exposed to a totally different "Patient Friendly" environment at Oteen Veterans Hospital in Ashville, North Carolina. I wondered, how two facilities, in the same system, could be so different. I started asking questions about written orders and guidelines required to facilitate the program. I was informed **"Written Orders Did Not Exist or Were Not Required To Manage The Homeless Veterans Program."** How

was the program funded? How do you achieve goals and objectives without written orders? The Marine Corps executes every successful operation using the "Five Paragraph Order" format. Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration and Logistics, Command and Signals, (SMEAC) are applied when writing operation/standing orders.

I began complaining to my patient advocate about my treatment and frustrations. The young gentleman seemed concerned but his supervisor seemed not concerned at all. I spoke with the same patient advocate on several occasions, to no avail.

Another night at the winter shelter, I was devastated!

Returning to the shelter, on Christmas Eve, I began convulsing driving down the road. I immediately stopped the truck! My arms and legs began jerking profusely. This lasted for about a minute and I settled down.

The following day, Christmas Day, I returned to Dorn VA Medical Center, concerned about the medication I had been prescribed. I was sure the medication was responsible for my convulsing attack. I had been prescribed two different medications for depression and anxiety. The drugs prescribed were Paxil and Zoloft. Both drugs caused similar effects. I was told to continue the medication. It made me angry. I stopped taking the medication that Friday, Christmas Day.

I returned to the hospital after the holidays. One of the head psychologists interviewed me that day. This interview was not encouraging at all. Medical tests were ordered to check my vital organs. It began to seem hopeless. I was still a homeless veteran. Poor medical diagnosis, and the confrontational experiences, caused my anxiety and depression to increase.

I was determined to seek medical treatment through other means. I began by requesting copies of my patient advocate notes. My request was denied by the head of the department. She implied, "**Patient Advocate Notes Were Confidential!**" I proceeded to patient records. My request for copies of my medical records, again denied. I proceeded to the Veterans Administration Directors Office. I was told the director was out of town. Two, well dressed gentlemen were in the directors office. I began to explain my entire situation beginning from the time I arrived for treatment. After I finished my story, I told them I was going to report the Dorn Veterans Administration, and then, Governor Mark Sanders to the Inspector General Comptroller for misappropriations of government funds and fraud. The "**For Profit Homes**", assigned to take veterans money for lodging seemed entirely illogical. How could this program affiliated with homeless veterans.

After my intentions were made known the two gentlemen in the director's office acted as though they were going to have me locked up, "**For My Safety,**" yea right! I bolted out of the director's office. I didn't look back! I drove directly to Anderson, South Carolina by way the "**Crow Flies.**" I feared making allegations against a sitting governor whom was in charge of the VA may jeopardize my freedom. This is where the story thickens!

After arriving in Anderson, South Carolina my friend had an acquaintance, a doctor friend whom had worked at a Veterans Administration Hospital in Augusta, Georgia. The doctor had also run for the South Carolina State Senate representing the Anderson District. I told him my story and intentions hoping he may have some suggestions assisting in my complaint/accusations. Little did I know the doctor worked at ANMED Hospital and was a close friend of Mark Sanford.

I reported to ANMED Hospital, my wife was with me. They placed me in a room directly in front of admissions. While waiting I observed a well dressed female with a brief case. She began talking to the admissions nurse. They made gestures and looked back toward the room I was waiting in. My wife noticed the event as it happened. The lady with the brief case left. The nurse returned and I was refused treatment. I was told to leave the emergency room. I still receive billing statements from ANMED Hospital. I'm sure the hospital charged Humana Military Tricare \$600.00 for the ER visit. They have continued to bill me a \$30.00 copayment for no service rendered.

About three days past, I received a phone call from the Homeless Veterans Department at Dorn VA Medical Center. They were trying to encourage me to return to the VA for treatment. I denied their request due to the treatment I received in the past. Approximately two weeks after I returned to the Anderson area I received portions of my medial records. My psychiatric evaluation was missing. I did not receive copies I requested from the Patient Advocate Department. I had the feeling they were trying to cover up their mistakes. For months South Carolina State Law Enforcement Division (SLED), who also worked for the Governor, had me under surveillance. The governor at that time had presidential aspirations. He was covering his **(SIX!)** Later Governor Sanford was forced from office for his lies and deceit!

It's June 2014 and my problems have brought me extreme pain and suffering. In the past four years I have been arrested two times for driving under the influence of alcohol. While under the influence of alcohol I threatened the life of a public official, the arresting officer. Now a convicted felon I can no longer vote. My more than twenty years of dedicated service to this country meant nothing at my trial. Individuals with no military service seek opportunities to smite those who have. I'm currently on thirty days house arrest, three years probation, eighteen months drug & alcohol counseling and thousands of dollars in fines and restitution. I've paid sixteen thousand dollars to lawyers for legal fees. I cannot drive, cannot hold down a job for various physical/mental reasons, and the depression is unbearable.

I cannot blame anyone but my self for the poor choices I have made. The substance abuse began because of issues I could not handle. I do feel, had I gotten the help I sought, maybe things would be different. I'm currently seeking help from the Veterans Administration, this time with legal council

The current scandal involving the Veterans Administration is why I am speaking out! No one wants to assume responsibility for the debacle. Government officials will never/rarely admit when mistakes are made or failed policies implemented. All who I have addressed in this letter are at fault. The lack of proper inspections of the entire administration caused the system to fail. A "**Chimpanzee,**" could have seen this coming after Iraq and Afghanistan! If these young men and women, who proudly served, are treated no better than I, it will be a travesty of epic proportion!

All I have said, happened as I said, I swear on my mothers grave! Anyone wishing to comment/contact me at the below address:

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Sincerely,
Everett B. Lattimore
USMC Retired

