

True story of a 92 year old Korean War veteran submitted by Tom Howe

In 2018 I listened to an 89 year old US Marine veteran tell a powerful story about a combat experience in Korea. As a US Marine combat veteran of the war in Vietnam, I immediately knew the story was real. He called me "Devil Dog". We became friends.

I am keeping his name out of this story because he is now 92, and I do not want anybody trying to contact him. He deserves to just live his way. He has earned it.

After multiple shrapnel wounds in 1952 and a MASH unit stabilizing him, this Marine was medevacked to Japan for surgery. He received his Purple Heart at the Naval Hospital in Yokosuka before being shipped home and was out of the military in 1953. He had surgery five years later at a VA hospital to further repair his injuries. He was told he would receive VA combat injury related compensation benefits.

He had never received any VA combat related injury compensation payment benefits after many requests. In spite of existing records of his Purple Heart, he was told that he could not prove his injuries were service connected. I asked him if I could look at his records of the requests for benefits. He said that he had become so frustrated that he could not stand to have the records around, and he had thrown them all away.

However, someone had gotten him to resubmit a request in 2017 for VA compensation payments. He said he might not pursue it. There was a hearing with a veteran law judge scheduled. I encouraged him to go. He had shown me a black and white photograph of him receiving his Purple Heart at the Navy hospital in Japan. He clearly remembered that important moment in 1952 as we spoke 66 years later in 2018. I made a copy of the photo along with the name and rank of the officer who presented the Purple Heart to him and a brief quote of what that officer said to him. I asked him to take that photo with the related information to the hearing with the veteran law judge.

In 2018, the most recent previous denial decision for VA compensation was remanded based on new material evidence. After some additional VA review and processing, in 2019, the Korean War veteran, 67½ years after his combat Purple Heart awarded injuries, received his first VA compensation check. He told me it was not about the money. It was about being recognized by his country as a combat injured veteran. He also said he wished his wife had lived long enough to share the joy of his being recognized as a combat injured veteran.

In 2020, the pain was so severe in the serious shrapnel injured knee, the 91 year old Korean War veteran received a complete knee replacement at a VA hospital. He was home where he now lived alone within 12 days. The physical therapy teams at the VA and in the town where he lives both told him they had never seen a more focused and dedicated person wanting to walk as soon as possible after a full knee replacement. He is the toughest human being I know. After a year of 100% VA compensation for the surgery recovery period, the VA compensation was increased from 60% before the surgery to 70% after the year of 100%.

In 2020, an additional benefit request was submitted. The veteran asked me to drive him to the VA interview related to the newest request. He wanted me with him in the room for the interview. After the interview, the Korean War veteran received notice of an increase in VA compensation from 70% to 80%.

I suggested to him that he should not submit any more requests or to allow anyone to get him to sign another request for additional VA compensation. Although some shrapnel was removed and some worked its way to the surface of his skin to be relatively easily removed over the years, he still has shrapnel in his body. This Korean War combat veteran is another of the thousands of almost completely unknown veterans who served with courage and honor and a sense of service to others above self.