

Gulf War Illnesses presumptive period extended

Nearly 150 American military personnel lost their lives, and more than 450 more were wounded in response to Iraq's invasion and annexation of Kuwait.

But for many veterans of the Persian Gulf War era, another war is still being waged decades after their return.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, more than a quarter of the almost 700,000 American military personnel who deployed in support of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm have experienced a myriad of medically unexplained chronic symptoms. And until recently, a looming deadline in the Code of Federal Regulations was about to make their fight for benefits more complicated.

The VA's Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses found a mix of persistent health problems that have plagued veterans for years after their return from the conflict. Fatigue, cognitive difficulties, joint pain, indigestion, insomnia, dizziness, skin rashes and respiratory disorders were just some of the otherwise unexplained symptoms impacting the men and women who deployed to the Southwest Asia theater of military operations.

For veterans of that war who experienced any of the aforementioned illnesses – or were diagnosed with fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome or functional gastrointestinal disorders – the VA presumed these related to service with a minimum of a 10 percent disabled rating.

After several prior extensions, that presumptive period was slated to come to an end on December 31, 2016, despite continued military operations in the Southwest Asia theater, and with no end date for the Gulf War established by Congress

or the president.

“DAV continued to help Gulf War veterans file claims for illnesses that followed them home long after they left the battlefield,” said DAV National Service Director Jim Marszalek. “The conclusion of this presumptive period would make it difficult for veterans to receive the assistance they earned through service to an area of operations that made them sick.”

VA and other investigators continue to conduct research into how service during the war is linked to the illnesses impacting veterans. The National Academies of Science published a report in February 2016, which continued to conclude that there is sufficient evidence of an association between Gulf War deployment and the variety of chronic symptoms known as “Gulf War Illnesses.”

As a result, a final rule change was published in the Federal Register extending the end date five years to December 31, 2021.

“The men and women who served in the Persian Gulf answered their country’s call to duty during tumultuous times without hesitation,” said DAV National Adjutant and Gulf War veteran Marc Burgess. “This presumptive period extension ensures that men and women are able to access benefits they earned through their service and sacrifice overseas.”

If you or a veteran you know served during the war and experienced illnesses outlined in this article or as outlined by [VA’s site on Gulf War Illness](#), contact a DAV National Service Officer for assistance filing a claim. Find your local NSO at www.dav.org/veterans/find-your-local-office/.