

# Dying veteran, family get earned benefits - DAV

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**Former Marine with terminal cancer finds peace of mind with help from DAV**



After a terminal lung cancer diagnosis, U.S. Marine Corps veteran Melvin Gausling wanted to ensure his wife, Jody, would be taken care of after he passed. Gausling worked with the DAV National Service Office Supervisor in Las Vegas, Josh Rondini, and within 72 hours had his VA rating.

In 1971, a young Marine named Melvin Gausling left Vietnam with the belief that his experience with war was over. But nearly a half-century later, he found that the war had followed him home. The real fight—to ensure the financial security of his family—had just begun.

“I was coughing up blood and had no energy,” said Gausling. “It turned out to be lung cancer. When the doctor told me it was terminal, my wife, Jody, ran out of the room crying.

“I was so worried about her,” he continued. “I couldn’t sleep at all. Every night I just lay awake worrying what would happen to her when I died.”

Gausling’s doctor, familiar with his military service, suggested he visit DAV to determine if his illness was related to Agent Orange exposure from his time overseas.

The former sergeant did not expect to receive a disability rating. He had tumors in the past that were not found to be service-connected. But the veteran was willing to try anything in order to secure long-term support for his wife.

“Melvin came in to see me after his stage 4 diagnosis, and it was clear he wanted to ensure that his wife would be taken care of the rest of her life,” said Josh Rondini, National Service Officer Supervisor in Las Vegas.

Rondini, an Army veteran, collected background from Gausling on his military career and determined that the time and location of his service meant the cancer was, in fact, service-connected.



In 1971, Melvin Gausling left Vietnam thinking his experience with war was over. But nearly a half-century later, he found himself fighting a new battle—to ensure his family would be cared for after a terminal diagnosis of service-connected cancer.

Rondini then hand-carried the claim to the VA. The VA understood the urgency, and Gausling had his rating within 72 hours. Not only would the rating allow him to care for his family for the rest of his days, he learned that his wife would be eligible for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). DIC is a tax-free monetary benefit paid to eligible survivors of veterans whose death resulted from a service-related injury or disease.

“I was so thankful,” said Gausling. “My prayers were answered. I finally have peace of mind.”

Gausling urges fellow veterans to seek the help they need and see what services are available to them.

“Definitely go to DAV,” said Gausling. “They are there to help.”

“Each NSO has been on the other side of the table going through the claims process themselves,” said National Service Director Jim Marszalek. “They work tirelessly to help their fellow veterans receive the benefits they have earned through service, and when there is an absolute emergency—like cases with extenuating circumstances like Melvin’s—they can ensure the claim is processed expeditiously.”

DAV assists with more than 300,000 benefit claims annually. In 2015, DAV helped attain more than \$4 billion in new and retroactive benefits to care for veterans, their families and survivors.

“I do this job for situations like this,” said Rondini. “Knowing that a veteran’s life will be a bit easier, and I helped make that possible, means everything.”

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