

‘He Is Truly an Inspiration and My Hero’

VFW Accredited Service Officer helps Vietnam veteran receive full benefits

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Retired Air Force Col. Jerry Miki had never filed a VA disability claim. After having been exposed to Agent Orange throughout his helicopter missions in Vietnam, he would eventually develop stage IV prostate cancer later in life, as well as bilateral hearing loss and tinnitus.

It wasn’t until Miki reached out to VFW Post 3830 Commander and Department of Hawaii Service Officer Ben Fuata that he submitted his first claims to help treat his cancer. Miki’s hesitancy to file a claim came from a concern of potentially taking benefits and resources away from other veterans. Fuata assured him this would not be the case.

“Mr. Miki was a particularly meaningful case,” Fuata said. “[He] was humble, kind and deeply concerned about taking benefits away from other veterans whom he felt were more deserving.”

Although the two veterans lived more than 100 miles apart, with Miki residing in Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, and Fuata residing in Mountain View, Hawaii, the distance was “never a barrier to work together.”

It was soon realized, after the two began to work together, that they shared a connection within the military.

“During the process, we discovered a shared background in Army and Air Force aviation,” said Fuata. “He was qualified in both rotary and fixed-wing aircraft, while I served as a rotary-wing Army aviator. That common ground built immediate trust and a strong working relationship.”

Fuata built a strong case for Miki by locating old service and marriage records, as well as coordinating with oncologists. In January, Miki’s medical conditions were officially

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recognized as a result of Agent Orange exposure from his service in Vietnam.

According to Fuata, Miki was awarded “a 100 percent permanent and total disability rating,” which will officially begin in May 2026.

“Ben Fuata has been a godsend to me and my wife,” Miki said. “He patiently guided us through a labyrinth of military red tape I thought I had left behind decades ago. This outcome would not have been possible without him.”

Fuata was recognized through VFW’s #StillServing initiative with his efforts in helping secure benefits for Miki.

Today, Miki is still battling prostate cancer, which has spread to his bones and other areas of his body. Despite this, he remains very positive and is determined to beat the odds.

“[Miki] is a man of exceptional character and strength,” Fuata said. “Helping him secure the benefits he earned was both an honor and a privilege. He is truly an inspiration – and my hero.”

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