

RECOMMENDATION NO. 7

The Commission recommends payment of career service type benefits, at the same rates as those in the DIC program, to widows of members or former members of the Armed Forces with 30 or more years of active duty and whose death was from causes unrelated to service.

Background to Recommendation:

The underlying purpose of the compensation program is to make up for the loss of a veteran's earning capacity due to service-connected disability. In death cases, service-connected benefits are intended to provide support to the widow, children, or parents of a veteran whose death was related to service or to service-connected disability.

In cases where the veteran's full quota of productive years were expended in the service of his country, it is clear that he had little opportunity to provide for the care of his family after his death. He was not able to earn entitlement to Social Security or other plans in an amount which would adequately contribute to support of dependents. If a veteran's death is not related to service or to his service-connected disability, the veteran's family is not eligible for VA death benefits, except perhaps pension. Although there is a Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan, its conditions for establishing entitlement tend to discourage general participation. As a result the veteran's widow is usually in financial straits.

It is therefore recommended that widows of servicemen, or retired servicemen, who had 30 years or more of active duty and who died from nonservice-connected causes, be eligible to receive a career service type benefit at the same rates as those provided in the DIC program, provided the deaths are not a result of misconduct.