VVA Applauds Navy Sec. Mabus for Implementing Protections for Sailors and Marines with Invisible Wounds of War

(Washington, D.C.) – “We are encouraged by Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus’s recent policy directive aimed at increasing protections for Sailors and Marines suffering as a result of the service--from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, or any other diagnosed mental health condition. This new Navy policy requires that these invisible wounds of war be considered before the veteran is separated from service,” said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America.

Effective immediately, Sailors and Marines being processed for any type of involuntary administrative separation who have a diagnosed mental health condition may be referred into the Disability Evaluation System. Additionally, if the Sailor or Marine is being administratively processed under provisions that authorize a characterization of service of other than honorable, the case must be referred to the first general officer/flag officer in the chain of command for a final determination. Sailors and Marines with mental health diagnoses who have already been inappropriately discharged can appeal to the Boards for Corrections of Naval Records under the new directive.

“This is a good first step, however it is just one of many the Navy must take to protect its ill and injured Sailors and Marines from receiving less-than-honorable discharges,” said Rowan. “This new directive is a welcome departure from previous Navy regulations, which allowed commanders to abruptly terminate Sailors and Marines for alleged acts of misconduct, without consideration or regard for the mental health of the veteran. We have written to Defense Secretary Ash Cater, Secretary of the Army Eric Fanning, and Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James, urging them to follow the Navy’s lead and to implement this policy service-wide.”

Said Rowan, “Vietnam Veterans of America has been fighting for veterans with ‘Bad Paper’ discharges since our inception, fighting to get their status upgraded. Bad Paper prevents the veteran from being able to seek care at the VA; Bad Paper forces the veteran into a broken appeals process that typically takes years to navigate, and despite convincing medical evidence proving service-related conditions, appeals boards have a pattern of denying veterans the honorable discharge that they deserve. Bad Paper is for life, forever stigmatizing the veteran.”