

# Identity Theft: The G.I. Blues

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*Article by: Daryl Campbell*

Tom Nelson retired from the military almost twenty years ago. In that time, Nelson has spent many years living and working overseas. "If my VA ID is fraudulently used by someone in the States, one: it could take me months to find out the theft has occurred and two: if it did happen God knows how long it would require to fix it from overseas", Nelson told the Seattle Post Intelligencer.

On May 22 Nelson and 26.5 million U.S. veterans awoke to the news their personal information including name, address and social security number had been stolen from the home of a Department of Veteran Affairs' employee.

Why the employee took this highly sensitive information home is anyone's guess and according to the FBI the computer disc containing this information was subsequently recovered. What infuriated veterans however wasn't the actual theft but that the theft went unreported for two weeks.

The news is shocking yet many veterans groups are not surprised. They point to Congress' Computer Security Report Card which year after year has given the VA a failing grade. Government auditors also warned of possible security breaches at the agency. Through all of this the VA took no action.

VA Secretary Jim Nicholson's recent proposal of free credit monitoring for veterans up to one year was shot down by the Bush Administration. According to the Washington Post the decision is based on the opinion of the FBI which stated it had a "high degree of confidence" that thieves had not accessed the files containing the names, Social Security numbers and birth dates of millions of veterans and active-duty military personnel. Hopefully they're right but for many veterans its now a time of wait and see.

Veterans can however request a credit freeze. Yes it stops the victim from easily opening a new account but a credit freeze is the most effective weapon against identity theft. Checking your account every other day isn't a bad idea either. For further information and assistance veterans can call 1-800-333-4636 (1-800-FED-INFO).

Peggy Foster, a veteran and VA services asst at the University of Colorado-Boulder, told the Colorado Daily, "It happened to me before and everything was stolen. Now I'm very cautious about giving my information out."

"The government bombards us with so much in the military. It's important when you're a veteran to pay more attention."

With the glut of information in our 24 /7 world, Ms Foster's advice applies not only to military personnel but the rest of us as well.

Daryl Campbell's website <http://fightidtheft.winthemarket.com> provides free tips,resources, featured articles from experts and up to the minute news concerning identity theft and fraud.