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# RUNNELS County

## VETERANS COUNTY SERVICE OFFICE

*SERVING THE VETERANS AND DEPENDANTS OF RUNNELS COUNTY*

**Date:** January 23, 2020

**TO: Runnels County Register**

VBA and Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) researchers recently discovered military records confirming the participation of Air Force personnel who deployed to Vietnam for Operation Babylift. Since many Veterans' personnel files didn't include participation in this operation, these Veterans could not prove Republic of Vietnam service. The discovery has led to VA awarding retroactive benefits to eligible Operation Babylift participants and survivors. Operation Babylift began during the evacuation of Saigon from April to June 1975. Hundreds of Air Force security, police and other service members went on temporary duty (TDY) orders to travel from Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines to Tan Son Nhut, to evacuate US, Vietnamese and other third-country nationals at the end of the Vietnam War. Clara Beheler, a VBA Quality Review Specialist at the Roanoke Regional Office, was working a claim for an Air Force Veteran who stated that he was sent TDY to Vietnam in support of these operations. She was unable to verify the Veteran's participation based on the documents in his personnel file, service treatment records, or through extensive online research. Beheler, however, was not deterred. She contacted Barry Spink, a researcher from AFHRA at Maxwell AFB, Ala., to assist her in finding records for this event. After an exhaustive search of archival records that lasted many months, Spink found the records that confirmed participation. "I was so excited for all of the Veterans and survivors that I knew would be helped by finding these records," Beheler said. "Whenever I can find information that places a Veteran in Vietnam, it makes my whole day." The TDY orders that Beheler and Spink found didn't just confirm Vietnam service for the Veteran whose claim she was working, it also confirmed in-country service for hundreds of other Veterans—many of whom had claims previously denied due to a lack of documentation. The list included the names of 296 security forces personnel that supported Saigon airlift. As a result of the find, VBA was able to grant the first claim. It paid benefits to the 87-year-old surviving spouse who was previously denied [Dependency and Indemnity Compensation](#) in 1988. Ironically, the spouse had also participated in Operation Babylift. She lived at Clark AFB at the time and greeted the women and children as they stopped there on their way to the United States. Beheler's team didn't stop there. With this new-found information, the records research team began examining other similar claims. "Finding these records are life changing for so many people," Beheler said. To date, VBA has awarded nearly half a million dollars in retroactive benefits to 16 Veterans or survivors—with more coming in the next few months. For more information, contact Sandra at the Veterans Service Office at 602 Strong Ave on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10am to 3pm, or call 365-3612.

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