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 WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548
 ... Branch, OAS

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VA

RELEASED

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Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with your request of November 25, 1970, and subsequent arrangements made with your office on December 7, 1970, we have reviewed the circumstances surrounding the reemployment of Mr. Donald E. Stahl in September 1969 at the Seattle Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital, after his discharge from active military service, and the efforts made by VA to place him in a position that would better utilize his military training and experience and education. We discussed this matter with Mr. Stahl and appropriate officials of the VA and the Civil Service Commission, as you suggested, and reviewed pertinent records and other data made available to us by your office and VA.

We conclude that, from the time Mr. Stahl was reemployed until he resigned on December 3, 1969, VA did not make any special effort to better utilize his skills, training, and education at the Seattle VA Hospital. Our review showed, however, that during this period there were not any positions available at the Seattle VA Hospital in which his services could have been better utilized and still have allowed him to remain a full-time student at the University of Washington. Our findings are discussed below.

On May 12, 1969, Mr. Stahl notified the personnel office at the Seattle VA Hospital that he would be released from active duty in September 1969. In his letter he stated:

**** I am in this letter notifying you of my intent to request restoration to my old position in the Diet Service or to a position to which I am qualified by virtue of my military training or civilian training and experience."

**** I hold the rank of Captain in the Army Medical Service Corps and the duty MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] of Nuclear Medical Science Officer."

By letter dated May 20, 1969, the Acting Personnel Officer at the Seattle VA Hospital informed Mr. Stahl that VA

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planned to reinstate him in his former position. This letter did not indicate whether VA would consider Mr. Stahl for any other position, nor was Mr. Stahl requested to provide an updated Personal Qualification Statement (SF-171) showing the experience and education that he had acquired after he left VA employment in 1965.

Mr. Stahl furnished you copies of his May 1969 correspondence with VA; however, his personnel records at the hospital contained neither copies of, nor reference to, such correspondence.

Officials of the hospital personnel office told us that they did not recall whether Mr. Stahl was considered for any other positions more suitable to his qualifications in May 1969; however, these officials advised us that the only position at the hospital requiring a degree in physics (Mr. Stahl's major field of study in college) was filled at the time Mr. Stahl requested reinstatement.

Mr. Stahl told us that, shortly after his discharge on September 11, 1969, he had visited the hospital and had met with the Chief, Dietetic Service, and officials from the personnel office to seek a full-time night position, because at that time he had been accepted to attend the University of Washington. Mr. Stahl stated also that he was informed by personnel officials that full-time night positions were not available.

Officials of the hospital personnel office informed us that they recalled meeting with Mr. Stahl in September 1969 and discussing with him the requirements for reinstatement, but they did not recall whether Mr. Stahl had inquired about a full-time night position. They stated, however, that, had he requested a full-time day position in dietetic service, he would have been given that position.

Subsequent to his meeting with hospital officials, Mr. Stahl requested reinstatement to his former position as food service worker in dietetic service and on September 29,

1969, was reinstated. Mr. Stahl informed us that he had requested, and had been granted, the afternoon shift (2:30 to 7 p.m.), because he had planned to attend morning classes at the university. After his reinstatement, Mr. Stahl furnished the VA personnel office an updated personal qualification statement that showed that he had experience in administrative and procurement matters while in the military.

In a letter to you dated November 21, 1970, Mr. Stahl contended that he had been denied a normal promotion--from the part-time position held prior to his military service--to a full-time position when he was reemployed. He cited a section of the Federal Personnel Manual relating to reemployment of persons inducted into the Armed Forces, which states, in part, that the person:

"should be restored in such a manner as to give him such status in his employment as he would have enjoyed if he had continued in such employment continuously from the time of his entering the armed forces until the time of his restoration to such employment."

Our interpretation of pertinent sections of the Federal Personnel Manual is that a transfer from part-time status to full-time status is not considered a promotion. An official of the Civil Service Commission confirmed our interpretation. Furthermore, records at the Seattle VA Hospital showed that on September 23, 1969, VA converted a full-time position in dietetic service to two part-time positions in order to reinstate Mr. Stahl. On December 5, 1969, 2 days after Mr. Stahl's resignation, VA reconverted the two part-time positions to one full-time position.

On the basis of Mr. Stahl's statement that he had requested the afternoon shift so that his job would not interfere with his morning classes at the university, VA's conversion of a full-time position to two part-time positions so that he could be reinstated, and the inapplicability of the section of the Federal Personnel Manual referred to by

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Mr. Stahl, it appears that VA did not deny him a normal promotion when he was reinstated to a part-time position.

We were unable to find any evidence at the hospital that the personnel office had made any attempts to better utilize Mr. Stahl's services during the period of his reemployment (September to December 1969). To determine whether Mr. Stahl's services could have been better utilized, we compared his training and experience with qualification standards for positions available at the hospital during the period of his reemployment. We identified full-time positions for two nursing assistants, a purchasing agent, and a procurement clerk, that were filled during this period, for which Mr. Stahl might have qualified; however, nursing assistants were required to work rotating shifts and the other two positions were for daywork only. As stated previously, Mr. Stahl was seeking a full-time night position so that he could attend day classes at the university. Also, the hourly wage of all of these positions was lower than the hourly wage of his position in dietetic service.

Since Mr. Stahl's resignation, the VA hospital in Seattle has initiated procedures to assist discharged veterans experienced in medical specialities to obtain employment that utilizes such experiences. The VA hospital obtains from VA's Medical Discharge Specialty Listing the names and addresses of veterans returning to the area and sends each veteran a letter explaining that he can find out about employment opportunities with the Seattle VA Hospital by completing and returning an enclosed postcard. If the veteran is interested and if a position is available in his specialty, the veteran is requested to prepare a personal qualification statement and to visit the hospital for an interview.

As of December 21, 1970, the Seattle VA Hospital had sent letters to 135 returning veterans and, as a result, had employed one returning Vietnam veteran as a dental assistant.

We have not obtained formal comments from VA on the results of our review.

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We plan to make no further distribution of this report unless copies are specifically requested, and then we shall make distribution only after your agreement has been obtained or public announcement has been made by you concerning the contents of the report.

Sincerely yours,



Assistant Comptroller General
of the United States

The Honorable Olin E. Teague, Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House of Representatives