



Vietnam Veterans Of America Chapter One

www.vietnamvetschapter1.org

APRIL 2019



MINUTES OF CHAPTER MEETING

APRIL 17, 2019

A nominal meeting of the Board of Directors took place. Directors present included President Andy Megrath, Secretary Jack Crowther, and Treasurer Richard Reed. No Board of Directors business was conducted.

The minutes of the March meeting were approved as printed in the newsletter.

Treasurer Richard Reed reported on the chapter's finances as of March 31. The total funds in all our accounts totaled \$84,401.56. Net income for the fiscal year beginning March 1, 2019, was \$3,158. The report was approved unanimously.

President Andy Megrath reported his recent trip to Silver Spring, Md., for VVA leadership meetings. Andy, who is vice president of the VVA State Council, attended with Perry Melvin, the State Council president. The meetings began April 11 with the state council presidents and continued over the following two days with meetings of the national VVA Board of Directors, regional directors, at larger directors, and committee chairs.

Among the news out of the conference was the fact that the so-called "blue water warriors" exposure to Agent Orange is NOT a "dead issue." See item 2 below. The issue concerns veterans who may suffer from the effects of Agent Orange even though their service was on vessels that remained offshore. It is argued that, due to the chemical nature of Agent Orange, sailors on ships could have been exposed, even off the coast of Vietnam. Action to compensate veterans suffering from Agent Orange illnesses would require action by Congress.



Robert Wilkie

Andy noted that the VVA attendees heard from Robert Wilkie, secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and Dr. Paul Lawrence, undersecretary for benefits. Wilkie presented VVA with a certificate of appreciation for its "dedicated service to veterans and their families since 1978."

Wilkie told the vets that one of his agency's top priorities is suicide prevention, currently claiming the lives of 20 veterans each day.

As for the VVA's legislative priorities for the current Congress, Andy handed out a sheet that included the following:

1. "Ensure that the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency . . . receives enhanced funding to investigate crash and burial sites in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, and endeavor to identify the remains."
2. "Work in concert with our fellow VSOs [veterans service organizations] and MSOs [military service organizations] and the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees, to enact, finally, the Vietnam Veterans Blue Water Navy Act, H.R. 299. This is VVA's Number 1 legislative goal."



Certificate of Appreciation awarded by the VA to Vietnam Veterans of America at recent meeting in Silver Springs, Md.

3. “Work with the VA to significantly improve outreach about earned benefits and health conditions potentially associated with toxic exposures to veterans, their families, and their survivors.”
4. “Monitor the VA’s compliance with the Toxic Exposure Research Act, P.L. 114-315.”
5. “Work with Congress/VA to fully implement caregiver benefits for pre-911 veterans as enacted in section 161 of P.L. 115-182.”

There are 10 other items on the list. A press release on VVA’s legislative priorities can be found at the national VVA website. Here is the link: <https://vva.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/VVA2019-Joint-HouseSenateVeterans-Affairs-Committee.pdf>

Andy Megrath and Richard Reed had a back-and-forth about the redesign of vet centers, which are incorporating video games to appeal to younger vets. They are “more open and light,” Richard noted.

VVA currently has about 80,000 members, Andy reported. There are 1,589 soldiers missing in action “still out there.” Also, more remains of Air America personnel are being found. According to Wikipedia, “Air America was an American passenger and cargo airline covertly owned and operated by the US government from 1950 to 1976. It was used as a dummy corporation for Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operations in Indochina.”

More national VVA data reported by Andy included a 4 percent increase in Facebook followers in the past year. The Faces of Agent Orange stats are up 11 percent, while the corresponding Twitter accounts for VVA and FAO are up 193 and 7 percent, respectively, Andy reported. The Faces of Agent Orange is a nationwide VVA effort to help people see those who were affected by Agent Orange in Vietnam.

Referring to VVA’s social media efforts, Andy said, “They’ve got a couple of young ladies in there that are really doing wonders with the social media. They were hired specifically for that.” VVA’s YouTube channel had 101,021 views and 531 subscribers as of April 1.

The national board also approved creation of a medal for the VVA to honor Boy Scout eagle scouts.

This meeting was our annual meeting, when we elect officers. Richard Reed moved that the current slate of officers be re-elected. They are: Andy Megrath, president; Dave Mathis, vice president; Richard Reed, treasurer; Jack Crowther, secretary; and Dick Doyle, Bill Whitney, George Henry, Jim Ficken, and Jon Pintello, directors. Richard Reed, Dick Doyle and Dave Mathis are our delegates to the VVA State Council. The motion was seconded by Andy Megrath. Passed unanimously.

The annual picnic at the Vermont Veterans Home in Bennington will be Saturday, June 29. Those volunteering to serve the residents at this event should plan to be present by 10 a.m.

We returned briefly to the topic of giving away the bust of the original soldier sculpture at the Rutland County Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The decision appears to be down to two finalists, the West Rutland American Legion and the Vermont Veterans Memorial at the Sharon rest area on Interstate 89.

A recent letter from Alan Decato, commander of West Rutland Legion Post 87, addressed a concern that the post might not be considered a “public” location. Alan’s letter pointed out that the post serves as a “defacto community center,” hosting many events that are open to the public as well as to members. These include dinners; holiday children’s events at Christmas, Halloween, and Easter; and other efforts that encourage members of the community to interact with veterans. Memorial Day features a free barbecue at the post following the annual parade. Basket parties, high school reunions, weddings, anniversaries, birthday parties and celebrations of life take place at the post “on most weekend days,” according to the letter.

In addition, Commander Decato notes that the sculpture has special meaning locally, as the two sculptors who worked on it, John Reno and Don Ramey, have local connections. The marble itself is evidently from the area, which is obviously noted for its marble quarrying and fabricating history.

Richard Reed will try to pin down the availability of the Sharon rest area as a site for the sculpture. Hopefully we can make a final decision at our June meeting.

No further action was taken on our plan for a scholarship for a deserving graduate of the Stafford Technical Center. The plan has been to award the first \$2,000 this year for a student or students to attend a trade school. Final details are being worked out.

Respectfully submitted,
Jack Crowther, secretary

**THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12, AT 6 P.M. AT THE CHAPTER OFFICES
AT THE VFW, 15 WALES ST., RUTLAND. A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
WILL PRECEDE THE REGULAR MEETING.**