



Vietnam Veterans Of America

Chapter One

www.vietnamvetschapter1.org

JUNE 2020



MINUTES OF CHAPTER MEETING JUNE 30, 2020

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.

Member Bill Ellwood was also present.

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



Bill and Beth Higgins were among those attending Chapter 1's 25th Anniversary Dinner in 2005.

Chapter 1 was saddened in May by news of the death of Bill Higgins of Castleton, a life member of the chapter. With his wife, Beth, who produced many of the early newsletters of the chapter, he played an important role in chapter activities and served on the Board of Directors and in the color guard. As noted in his obituary, he attended the Thursday night POW-MIA vigil in Fair Haven for many years. Chapter 1 President Andy Megrath was part of Bill's funeral as a bearer and member of the Patriot Guard Riders, a motorcycle escort club.

Treasurer Richard Reed reported that the chapter has a total of \$50,055 on hand. His report was approved. The sharp drop in funds from March is the result of two major legacy donations noted in the last newsletter: \$40,000 approved for an endowment for the Chapter 1, Vietnam Veterans of America, Scholarship for the Stafford Technical Center; and \$15,000 to

beef up the Rutland County Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund for perpetual care of the memorial.

Established last year with a \$12,000 donation from Chapter 1, the Stafford scholarship endowment now has \$50,000 to sustain it and provide approximately \$2,000 a year in perpetuity. The scholarships will allow selected Stafford graduates who have a veteran parent or grandparent to continue their technical educations.

Andy read a thank-you letter from the Rutland Public Schools Foundation for the recent contribution.

The letter noted the funds would assist “generations of Stafford graduates as they pursue advanced training in their chosen fields.” It was signed by Mary Noonan of the Foundation board.



Andy Megrath, center, Peter Mayhew, and Beth Foor were among members of the Patriot Guard Riders, a motorcycle club, that placed a wreath at the Rutland County Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Rutland on Memorial Day, May 25.

Ironically, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted school graduations and attendant rewards this spring. Further effort will be made to select a scholarship recipient or recipients for 2020.

Andy also read a thank-you from a veteran for whom Chapter 1 had purchased a bed for \$425 from Vermont Bedrooms. The request had come from Richard Gallo, outreach specialist at the Vermont Veterans Outreach Program. The veteran was moving into an apartment and lacked furniture.

Gallo appeared at our meeting this time with a vet who had been laid off from Rutland Regional Medical Center and was continuing his education to help his employability. The

man faced several other challenges, adding up to a heavy financial burden. After the man, a veteran of regular and National Guard service for many years, and Gallo left, Jack Crowther made a motion to donate \$716.22 to purchase a computer and printer to assist the man’s educational efforts. Seconded by Bill Ellwood. Passed unanimously. As with other other assistance of that type, the money will be paid directly to the vendor, in this case to the computer seller, Dell.

There was some discussion of the future of the national VVA organization, that is, what is the future of our single-war organization as our members die off and become less active. Alternatives seem to be to let VVA die with the “last man standing,” or transform and rename it to accommodate veterans from the post-Vietnam military. Andy Megrath, who is vice president of the VVA Vermont State Council and has contact with the national organization, speculated that current national President John Rowland would like to head up a reorganized VVA into the future.

All VVA members receive The VVA Veteran magazine, which takes up the matter of VVA’s future in the March/April 2020 issue. The Letters section includes seven letters from veterans, all opposed to changing the name and eligibility requirements. Also helpful is a column on Page 8 by Rex Moody, chair of the Conference of State Council Presidents. Moody explains Resolution GA-21. The resolution would: “Require VVA’s Officers and Board of Directors to investigate the requirements to change the name of Vietnam Veterans of America to a name that would entice Post-Vietnam era veterans to join the renamed organization and then open up membership to these newer veterans. The proposed changes would be presented to the delegates to the 2021 Convention for ratification.”

Moody emphasized that the resolution only directs the VVA national officers and Board of Directors to *investigate* the changes, not to actually make them. Actually making the changes would require a change to the VVA Constitution, which requires a two-thirds vote at a National Convention, according to Moody’s column.

As further comment on the possible shape of future operations, Andy quoted Vermont State Council President Perry Melvin as saying that if the Vermont State Council of VVA chapters were to go “belly up,” individual chapters could continue to operate under the national organization.

On another matter, after brief discussion, Jack Crowther moved that the chapter donate \$1,500 for this year’s fireworks display sponsored by the Paramount Theatre. The history of the contribution is this: The chapter had previously approved a donation of that amount to sponsor a patriotic concert at the Paramount by one of the country’s military musical groups, of which there are a number. That never got off the ground, but recently Eric Mallette, the Paramount’s former program director and now its director, asked if the chapter might put the money toward a fireworks display, since the previous sponsor, the Rutland Region Chamber of Commerce, chose not to do it this year out of fear of spreading the coronavirus.

The fireworks will be held, as usual, at the Rutland Fairgrounds, but residents will have to watch from outside the grounds to maintain social distancing.

The motion passed unanimously.

In other business, Bill Ellwood reported on the Archiving Project. He and Jack Crowther are heading up the project to sort through Chapter 1 documents and memorabilia, scanning into digital files the items that lend themselves to scanning and preserving a few physical items that the Rutland Historical Society is able to store.

Bill noted that some Chapter 1 material is already on the historical society website, rutlandhistory.com. To access the material that’s out there, go to the website, find the Site Map in the top menu. The site map is an alphabetical listing of Historical Society topics. Go to the letter “V” and find “Vietnam Veterans of Rutland County.” That will lead you to what eventually will be a large quantity of information, including about 30 years of newsletters. Some of the material will be stored on archive.org, which is able to handle quantities of material too extensive for the Rutland Historical Society website. But it all will be accessible through rutlandhistory.com.

Bill also mentioned his interest, in the future, in giving Chapter 1 members a chance to record memories of their service as part of the preservation of chapter history.

Jack Crowther reported that the Rutland Recreation and Parks Department, through Bob Peterson, parks director, has graciously agreed to take over watering of flowers and plants at the Rutland County Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Bob has also taken responsibility for replacing the American and POW-MIA flags at the memorial. Thus the transition to city maintenance has begun, although the Rutland Garden Club and Chapter 1 are still involved with planting and upkeep. As mentioned above, Chapter 1 set up a trust fund for future maintenance of the memorial. The fund now has \$25,000 from Chapter 1. The chapter has also offered to pay for an access ramp on the west side of the memorial from the street that runs between the memorial and houses to the west, but there may not be a cost to us. The ramp will facilitate wheelchair access to the memorial. At present, a wheelchair can only enter far down the park where the sidewalk meets the street.

Andy turned the meeting over to Nominating Committee Chair Jack Crowther for election of officers, normally done at the Annual Meeting in April. Due to the coronavirus, there was no meeting in April. With Tim Lonergan agreeing to serve as vice president and Bill Ellwood agreeing to become a director,

the nominees for office were as follows: president, Andy Megrath (who has served 16 years as president); vice president, Tim Lonergan; treasurer, Richard Reed; secretary, Jack Crowther (who has served as secretary for 22 of the last 23 years); and directors Bill Ellwood, Jim Ficken, Bill Whitney, Dick Doyle, Frank Wetherby, and George Henry. Richard Reed moved to elect the slate of officers. Seconded by Bill Ellwood. Passed unanimously.

Jack Crowther won the \$50 drawing among those who attended the meeting.

**THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 9, AT 4 P.M.
AT THE VFW, 15 WALES ST., RUTLAND. A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
WILL PRECEDE THE REGULAR MEETING.**