



MINUTES OF CHAPTER MEETING

Vietnam Veterans Of America

Chapter One

www.vietnamvetschapter1.org

SEPTEMBER 2019



MINUTES OF CHAPTER MEETING
SEPT. 4, 2019

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

Members Bill Ellwood and Tim Lonergan were also present.

President Andy Megrath could not be present and had asked Secretary Jack Crowther to preside over the meeting.

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

Treasurer Richard Reed presented his report. The total in all our accounts is \$82,553.73. Income from ripoff tickets sold at Tomasi's bar in Fair Haven stands at \$19,912 for the fiscal year beginning in March. Expenses for the tickets have been \$4,064, leaving a net income from ticket sales of \$15,848. The report was approved unanimously.

Jack Crowther said he was interested in deciding what to do with the bust we preserved from the original sculpture of the Rutland County Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Consideration by the chapter had come down to placing it at the Sharon rest stop on Interstate 89, which houses the Vermont Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, or the West Rutland American Legion.

Richard Reed had checked on interest at the rest stop. "The state doesn't want it," Richard reported, explaining that the site was "all full up on memorabilia." In light of the state's position, Jack Crowther invited a motion to donate the sculpture to the West Rutland American Legion Post 87. The westside Legion uses its facility for a number of public gatherings, such as community dinners, so the sculpture will continue to have exposure to the public. Post Commander Alan Decato has described the Legion post as a "de facto community center."

Richard Reed moved that the sculpture be donated to the West Rutland Legion, "as previously discussed." Seconded by Tim Lonergan. Passed unanimously. It was agreed the chapter will provide a description of the sculpture to go with its display.

It was noted that a memorial walkway at the Vermont Veterans Cemetery in Randolph has been named for the late Brig. Gen. Michael T. Heston, who served as deputy adjutant general for the Vermont National Guard from 2012 to 2018. In addition to his service in Vermont, Gen. Heston served multiple tours in Afghanistan. He died last year of cancer.

Richard Reed noted that Gen. Heston's position made him responsible for the state Office of Veterans Affairs, which he, Richard, headed for a number of years. Dedication of the walkway was scheduled for Sept. 7.

Under old business, Chapter 1 member Tim Lonergan, presented a report on activities sponsored by Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports, with whom Tim, serves as a volunteer. Tim had previously approached the chapter for financial support, noting Vermont Adaptive's sponsorship of events for veterans. The chapter had expressed

interest and a wish that more of the vets activities be held in the southern Vermont area. Tim responded with a list of Veteran Ventures activities including several in this area. A number of activities free to vets included a “charity run” bicycle day, trail walks and paddling at Kent Pond, a gondola ride up Killington followed by a walk around the mountaintop, and a “mountain bike retreat. The latter included able-bodied and disabled vets. Farther north a couple of Vietnam veterans sailing outings have been held in Burlington this year. Vermont Adaptive also supported Project Healing Waters at Plymouth State Park on Echo Lake, where the group provided kayaks and equipment. A picnic lunch and flycasting instruction were part of those activities.

Following the discussion, Richard Reed moved to donate \$1,000 to Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports for support of its Veteran Ventures events. Seconded by Dick Doyle. Passed unanimously. It was suggested that this donation might be repeated on an annual basis.

Bill Ellwood reported on his work on a project with Jack Crowther to preserve important Chapter 1 records and memorabilia. The Rutland Historical Society has agreed to train us in the use of their digital scanning equipment. The society also introduced us to archive.org, a free website the society uses for storing information. Likewise, Chapter 1 can store the information and pictures it will be scanning on this website, which then becomes available to everyone with access to a computer.

Bill and Jack invite everyone who is interested and willing to help to come forward and assist with the work. Bill winters in Florida but will be here until December. The Historical Society’s equipment can handle documents up to 11 inches by 17 inches. By saving the scanned material in a JPEG format, it can be searched using key words. That is to say, one could search for the name “Smith” or a location, such as “Lai Khe, Vietnam,” within the records, and the computer would find them.

The Historical Society will also offer us a small box to store a few physical items, such as our charter as the first VVA chapter in the nation.

Anyone interested in helping can email Bill Ellwood at wellwood1950@gmail.com.

Richard Reed reported on the VVA State Council meeting in June at the Vermont Veterans Home in Bennington. The meeting featured the traditional cookout. Richard reported on the chapter’s scholarship program for Stafford Technical Center students planning further training after high school.

As a still active service officer helping veterans process claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Richard is especially interested in VVA national’s program, which he thinks may be on the way out. “I have a lot of questions about our chief counsel in Silver Spring (site of national VVA headquarters in Maryland). “She’s very sharp, she knows her stuff, but I believe she sees her job as shutting down the service officer program,” Richard said. “Which is fine,” he continued. “I mean it really should be, as we head toward dissolution, that’s one of the things that should be disassembled early. But I asked Perry [Melvin, Vermont VVA State Council president] to get together a subcommittee to discuss this and what the State Council wants to do with this, now that they’ve been out to the big meeting in Seattle, Washington [actually Spokane, Wash., in July], where this was going to come up again. Nudge ’em again before winter sets in.”

“Nobody wants to talk about this except me,” Richard observed. By way of further explanation of his remark about the chief counsel, he explained, “Well, I want to know what the intent is, because the reality is, if I take your claim today, it may take us five years or so before we’re all done. And if the organization is gone in five years, for example, then I no longer have any standing at the VA, so what happens to your case?” Richard gets his official standing as a service officer from the Vermont VVA State Council, which is obviously a part of the national VVA organization. “This is the first general counsel we’ve had that I’ve not felt support from,” Richard said, “and I’ve been through several of them.”

“I’ve actually stopped taking claims as a VVA service officer . . .,” Richard said. “I’m taking claims but I’m doing it on my own hook, pro bono.” Richard said he received only a mileage allowance for his work as a VVA service officer. As a VVA member, he cannot be paid. The issue will be delved into at a State Council subcommittee meeting in the future, Richard indicated. He said the State Council has to “decide what they want to do with the program,” since it is a State Council program, rather than a national program. “I do believe we have a certain amount of self-determination,” Richard said.

Jack Crowther relayed word from President Andy Megrath that Vice President Dave Mathis was no longer interested in serving in that role. "I think we can say we have an opening," Jack said. Any member who is interested should let Andy or an officer or director know.

Dick Doyle indicated he'd like to present a request for assistance from a Brattleboro-based housing program for vets. He'll see if a representative of the group can come to our meeting.

Richard Reed won the \$50 drawing among those who attended the meeting.

**THE NEXT MEETING WILL BE WEDNESDAY, NOV. 6, AT 4 P.M.
AT THE VFW, 15 WALES ST., RUTLAND. A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
WILL PRECEDE THE REGULAR MEETING.**