



Vietnam Veterans Of America

Chapter One

www.vietnamvetschapter1.org

JUNE 2026



MINUTES OF CHAPTER MEETING JUNE 10, 2026

I counted 17 people attending, 3 on Zoom and 14 in person. It was good to see two AVVA (Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America) members, Louise Clarino and Janelle Faignant; at the meeting.

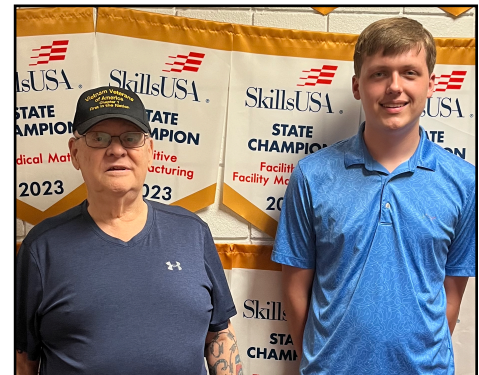
Thanks to the magic of internet technology, we began with a video of a 104-year-old veteran playing the Star Spangled Banner on the saxophone. We followed with the Pledge of Allegiance.

The April newsletter and minutes were approved. In recognition of his long service as secretary of Chapter 1, Jack Crowther was presented with a writing table for taking notes.

Under his “president’s remarks” portion of the agenda, Bill Ellwood expressed support for members stepping up over the past year to assist in functions of the chapter, as he handled personal family issues. His wife Joan, an AVVA member, recently completed a series of 33 cancer radiation treatments.

As an intro to encouraging members to share their stories, Bill related one of his, noting that 55 years ago on June 9, he turned 21 in Vietnam, having put in 12 months of a 13-month tour. He was married and had a daughter that he had yet to see. Due to leave in about a month, he recalled a truism: “The shorter (closer to leaving) you get, the more nervous you are about getting out of there.”

Housed in a largely unfortified barracks at Da Nang, Bill was later days away from leaving on July 4, when the base received a rocket attack about 9 p.m. Rockets struck another barracks, mere yards away from his own, killing a number of soldiers. “But I made it back, obviously. And I have to say I thank God every day since I’ve got back for being alive and being able to do stuff. And that’s one of the reasons I do this type of stuff, is to see what we can do for good out there in the world.”



Aaron Chambers (right), from Mill River Union High School and an engineering student at Stafford Technical School, is the winner of Chapter 1’s annual \$2,000 scholarship for Stafford students. Aaron plans to study aerospace engineering at Clarkson University. Chapter 1 member and former president Andy Megrath is at left.

Treasurer Richard Reed presented the financial report, including net income from the sale of break-open tickets at Tomasi’s Tavern in Fair Haven. Bill Ellwood praised the report, which is now showing more detail on expenditures, including major donations, along with smaller credit card charges. Richard noted that the report “gives you, hopefully, some idea of the amount of money we’ve put out into the world every month, which is substantial.” Nonetheless, the chapter continues to have a “good balance” at the credit union. The report was unanimously approved.

Membership Chair Dick Doyle reported 180 members, an all-time high by a large margin. He is hoping to reach 200. Newest member is Patrick Trombley of Brattleboro. Dick acknowledged the presence at the meeting of Mark Truhan, a charter member of the chapter back in 1980. Mark was Chapter 1's third president.

It appears that there has been no response to a membership recruitment card sent out to VVA members whose chapters have closed, making them eligible to join Chapter 1. Dick and Mike Murphy sent out 40 cards about three weeks ago to members of the Brattleboro and Chester chapters of VVA, inviting them to join Chapter 1 if they were so inclined. So far, however, there have been no takers.

Stan Clark from the Southeast Special Activities Committee, embracing chapter members from the Chester area, said his group is awaiting notification of a date for their annual "cookie drop" at the Sharon rest area on Interstate 89. The rest stop is site of the Vermont Vietnam Veterans' Memorial. Sale of the cookies on a designated date provides funds for flag replacement. The Southeast group meets the second Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m.; at the American Legion in Chester. Any Chapter 1 member is welcome. Stan is also Chapter 1's leader when it comes to visiting shut-in veterans, reporting on his activities month by month. He is currently visiting 17 different veterans each week.

Mike Murphy, who coordinates the veteran visitation effort, ran through a list of other chapter members taking part, including Jim Freeze, Mike Burke, Jack Crowther, Larry Gold, Mark Truhan, Louis Rousseau, and Bob Paolucci. Norman Hawley has made phone calls to vets he knows.

Larry Gold, head of the technology and social media efforts of the chapter, noted that our website has undergone a major upgrade. He, Bill Ellwood and Jack Crowther received some training from Laurie Wright, our graphic artist, on how to add content to the site. Larry invited members to peruse the site, vietnamvetschapter1.org, and offer suggestions on content that could be added.

Bill noted that Norm VanCor and Ken Crews have written books about Vietnam. Kate Ross, sister of the late Dennis Ross, an early and active Chapter 1 member, is working on a book that covers her brother's and father's military service in relation to her own life. Jack Crowther said he is currently reading books lent by Chapter 1's Larry Young covering experiences of soldiers, including himself, in D Troop, 1/10 Cavalry from 1966-1971. The outfit operated in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

Beth Higgins, an AVVA member, has donated a picture to the chapter. It is a copy of a well-known photograph of a veteran by The Wall, the Vietnam memorial in Washington, D.C. A legitimate digital photo art, the picture shows a veteran with his hand on the granite memorial with a reflection of soldiers seen on the stone.

Bill noted the chapter's policy is to reimburse AVVA members half of the \$100 lifetime membership fee. The chapter has set aside \$2,000 for AVVA to carry out projects of its own creation.

Paul Patten has joined the Liaison Committee to be a contact with the Civil Air Patrol squadron in our area, a group that Bill Ellwood is also involved with.

Jack Crowther invited members to attend a meeting Thursday, June 25, at 11 a.m. at the Chapter 1 office at the VFW with Allison Hasser, chief development officer of No One Left Behind. That group seeks to bring to the U.S. Afghans who assisted our military during the Afghanistan war in roles such as translators. When the U.S. pulled out, these collaborators' lives were at risk. Chapter 1 was a regular contributor to NOLB until we encountered a snag in reducing our contribution. We subsequently terminated our donations. Allison will brief us on NOLB's recent activities.

Dave Potter, a retired teacher and driver's ed instructor, has had contact with two Afghans, former translators for the U.S. military. He introduced them to driving in the U.S. Both men, in the course of their service to our military, "took a bullet," that is, were wounded, during their service. "I strongly support the fact that if those people are indicative of people that came from Afghanistan, in my opinion we owe them something because they personally each took a bullet. Because they would go out in the field with the troops. So if we can get back on track (with donations to NOLB), in my opinion, with my experience, it would be well deserved." Bill Ellwood added, "I think it's a worthwhile thing to reconsider again." He encouraged members to attend the meeting.

Bill reported that about a dozen members, spouses and AVVA members attended an open house May 16 at the Dodge House, a transitional housing program for homeless vets in Rutland.

Bill further reported on a chance encounter at a yard sale with Dawn Daley of Rutland, who turned out to be the daughter of Donald Bodette, the first president and driving force behind the founding of Chapter 1. Dawn said she was starting to go through her father's papers. Bill offered our assistance in that process. He also invited her to the Dodge House open house, which she attended.

Chapter member Mickey Young is promoting the Honor Flights, which are free air trips to Washington, D.C., to visit the various war memorials. A collaborator in the project from Bennington will be invited up to Chapter 1 to describe the program. We settled on July 22 from 4 to 6 p.m. at 15 Wales St. for the presentation. We are hoping to provide refreshments. Bill made a motion to approve \$200 for refreshments. The meeting will be open to any veterans who want to come by. Due to current airline prices, there is a question whether the October flight will happen, but it's assumed the program will continue. Meals and transportation are all free. The motion for refreshments was seconded and passed unanimously.

The annual picnic at the Vermont Veterans Home in Bennington will take place Saturday, June 27, at 10 a.m., followed by a meeting of the Vermont VVA State Council. VVA members from around the state are encouraged to attend, help prepare the meal for residents and then eat with them. If you need more information, you can contact Bill at our email address: vietnamvetschapter1@gmail.com or call Jack Crowther at 802-775-1182.

Bill discussed the recent poll sent out to Chapter 1 members as to their preferred structure for VVA and its chapters in the future. As current members die off and age out, future plans are at the top of VVA's agenda. Briefly, the choices involved: 1) Remain a veterans organization under a 501(c)(19) legal framework, 2) Operate as an open-to-all non-profit under a 501(c)(3) structure, or 3) shut down completely. Bill indicated that so far the first option seems to be the preferred one. He said he was interested in the view of AVVA members (although they don't officially vote), because they will be affected by what is done. Bill said he had received about 30 responses to the poll.

Bill said the two things he would push for as part of the future VVA are free membership for all current members and a continuation of Chapter 1. "It's just a poll," he said of the survey. Final decisions are likely to be made at the 2027 VVA National Convention.

Dick Doyle declared the VVA would not simply fold up, noting that it has \$19 million in assets. "They're gonna figure out something," he said.

Larry Gold said Mendon will have a ceremony July 4 to install a plaque honoring Mendon veterans. The public is invited to the 10 a.m. event at the Mendon Town Hall.

Bill Ellwood noted with approval that VVA's national president, Tom Burke, who visit Chapter 1's anniversary banquet a year ago, was visible on television at the National Memorial Day Ceremony in Washington, D.C. "And I just wanted to point out that he's out there working for us," Bill said.

Moving on, Bill referred back to the story he told about his harrowing final time in Vietnam, saying, "We need to get our stories down." Praising AVVA member and journalist Janelle Faignant, he suggested we make an arrangement to record interviews with Chapter 1 members about their experiences. "For those who would like it, maybe even have a copy for your family. Do you want us to put it in the historical record archives? We would do that, but get your story out."

Dick Doyle related his experience at a military reunion in Indianapolis at which an interviewer and videographer recorded an hour and a half of his recollections, which he was then able to share with his children. "Okay, let's see if we can get something going in the future," Bill said.

Jack Crowther shared an invitation from Robert Congdon Jr., president of the Rutland County Agricultural Society, which runs the Vermont State Fair, to have a table at the fair's July 4 event. He offered free space to set up in the fair's Industrial Building. However, perhaps due to other plans, no one stepped up to lead such an effort. Bill mentioned that he's talked about the chapter having a presence at the fair itself, though that would require a commitment over several days. "It might be something in the future," Bill said.

As it is, Andy Megrath and Dave Currier will be driving sports cars in Brandon's Independence Day parade, which is actually Saturday, July 3. Anyone interested in marching with the cars or driving another vehicle can contact Andy at 802-775-1745 or vthogman@gmail.com.

On July 8th, the 250th anniversary of when the Declaration of Independence was first read publicly, there will be a reading of the Declaration in Main Street Park in Rutland at 6 p.m., followed by a concert sponsored by the Rutland Recreation Department.

Bill noted that the Dodge House is “running strictly on grants” at the present time. They are facing some major repairs. “They do, at times, have to scramble to get food for the people, transporting them, and so on so I would like to do another donation to the Dodge House to get them through until they get some grants.” He proposed a donation of \$5,000, the motion seconded by Larry Gold. The chapter has been a regular and longtime supporter. “They’re very fiscally responsible. . . I have not doubt that they’re using the money to the best of their ability,” Bill said. With further discussion and expressions of support, the motion passed unanimously.

Bill then proposed another donation to the local Civil Air Patrol Squadron. While supported by the U.S. Air Force and benefitting from donated building space, the group has other needs, and Bill proposed a donation of \$2,500. He said the group has grown from about 10 youngsters — cadets 12 to 18 years old — and two or three adults to about 20 cadets and eight senior members. Needs include uniforms, maintenance of the meeting space, tables and chairs, a sign to mark their presence at the Rutland-Southern Vermont Regional Airport, and scholarships to help cadets attend an annual encampment. Chapter 1 donated \$2,500 in February 2025. Motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

On another matter, artist Tom Barber has offered to donate to Chapter 1 a Vietnam-themed painting, “Help Without Hassle,” that has been displayed at the Vet Center in White River Junction since 1988, but it’s “in a building that’s not being used,” according to Bill. He expressed doubt that the chapter had a space to display the large painting — 44” X 56” or 36” by 48” according to two different descriptions. A couple other locations were suggested, and Richard Reed will provide contact info for someone who may have suggestions, which are welcome from Chapter 1 members.

As a final item, we heard from Tom Shanahan and Marian McDonough, who requested help providing flag holders for graves of veterans at Calvary Cemetery, which is off Meadow Street in Rutland. In surveying graves of veterans, they found 142 graves of veterans whose flag stands are missing or broken. On holidays like the recent Memorial Day, volunteers place flags in stands by veterans’ graves, but many have no holders for the flags, which are then just stuck in the ground. Lacking a precise cost for the holders, Jack Crowther proposed a donation of \$1,000 to help with the effort at Calvary. Motion seconded and passed unanimously. Tom mentioned that two Medal of Honor soldiers are among those buried at Calvary.

FINAL NOTE: A Veteran Assistance Expo will be held Saturday, June 27, from 9 to 11 a.m. at the VA Medical Center in White River Junction. The promo flier for the event states: “You’re invited to get assistance enrolling in VA health care, applying for disability compensation, and accessing other benefits you’ve earned. At the Medical Center, the event will be located at the Freedom Building and outside.

Respectfully submitted,
Jack Crowther, Secretary

**The next meeting will be Wednesday, Aug. 12, at 4 p.m., downstairs at VFW Post 648,
15 Wales St., Rutland and by Zoom.**