

**SD Veterans Commission Meeting
2-3 February, 2004 SD National Guard Museum
Pierre, South Dakota**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Bill Locken at 1:00 p.m. at the SD National Guard Museum in Pierre, South Dakota. He led those assembled in the "Pledge of Allegiance".

Introductions were made followed by announcements from Director Dennis Foell. These included a welcome to Roland Benson, the newest Veterans Commissioner, taking the place of Keith Goodhope; the invitation to attend the VFW Reception at the VFW Post Home following the afternoon session; 1:30 pm starting time for the Veterans Council Meeting on Tuesday, February 3rd; and a 2:00 demonstration of the model train set up at the National Guard Museum by Jerry Cutshaw of Pierre, SD.

The changes to the agenda were the following:

1. Add Report of Gene Eiring, Superintendent of the SD Veterans Home;
2. Move Al Janzen up to Monday afternoon to accommodate his schedule;
3. Omit Bob Poe, Director of the Black Hills National Cemetery, who was involved in training out-of-state.
4. Add Report from Gene Murphy re: "SHIINE", VA Billing on Tuesday morning.

Murphy moved to accept the agenda with the changes, second by Evenson. Motion carried.

Don Loudner requested that the following be added to the Minutes of the October 2-3, 2003 Minutes.

"Don Loudner was absent from the Veterans Commission Meeting due to attendance at a meeting in Washington, DC."

Murphy moved to accept the amended minutes of the October 2-3, 2003 Meeting, second by Benson. Motion carried.

MG Michael Gorman gave his report on the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. Everything is going well. Regarding the 05 Budget, most has been approved in spite of the tight monies. The Appropriations Hearing is scheduled for February 5, 2004. The Department is supporting an amendment to make the end of conflict open-ended, "a date to be determined by the Legislature." HB 1305 is the Veterans Bonus Bill sponsored by the Governor, which will cost approximately \$4.2 million to fund and covers the time from January 1, 1993 up to and including the present "Iraqi Freedom." This allows for a \$500 maximum for hostile area service and \$240 maximum for service in a non-hostile area. For the Guard there are tuition-related bills on the State level and on the federal level the Tri-Care issue is being followed closely.

General Gorman went through the various deployments, returns, numbers serving, units serving, and missions of the units serving. Roughly 2,100 South Dakota Guardspersons have been serving in Phase I military service and about 1,000 will be involved in Phase II. Our troops have been very successful in maintaining equipment, missions, etc.

The new troop movement is the biggest since World War II. One issue of concern is the "body armor". Manufacturers are not able to keep up with demand, but our troops should have it upon arrival in Kuwait, if they are not supplied at the mobilization site. The newer troops are receiving training in "Stability and Support" which is not necessarily in their main field of training. Tactics, Techniques, Procedures-the new training is based on experience gained in Iraq to this point. This means they will probably have a different mission in Iraq.

For those troops transitioning back into life at home, the military is trying very hard to anticipate problems and give the troops the needed information to ease into home life again and deal with issues that may come up. The public is encouraged to be aware that some of these persons will need additional help.

Overall numbers of service people serving/involved in the present conflict is over 3,000 up to 5,000 from South Dakota.

Through the Governor's Office there is again a writing campaign for students to send Valentines to the SD Units and they will also have mailings for St. Patrick's Day and Easter Greetings. Through State Government and throughout the State there was a most successful fund raised to help develop avenues of communication for the activated SD Guard Units, i.e. phone cards and digital cameras for the units and others within the family support on the home front.

There is also work being done on the Korean War Memorial Dedication scheduled for September 18, 2004. It will be modeled after the World War II Memorial Dedication and the veteran service organizations are encouraged to participate as the information and opportunities become known.

The major processing done for demobilization is at the demob stations. There is also a "welcome" at the home station and Earl Schultz of the Department of Labor encouraged the Guard people to contact him to be a part of this transitioning. Jerry Lolley with the experience of the 109th return felt that meeting with the soldiers AND the families was very beneficial. Also of great importance is having the DD214's ready for the soldiers upon release so they have them for the paperwork they will have to do for medical and dental care specifically. The VA Directors present all said the mandate is out at the VA Facilities to care for the veteran and do the paperwork later.

Al Janzen, President of the Association of County and Tribal Veteran Service Officers presented his report highlighting the National Convention and Training which will be held in Rapid City May 23-28, 2004. MG Gorman is the keynote speaker for the event. Bill Locken and Jerry Lolley are the co-chairs for all the work that is involved. They are predicting over 200 will be in attendance and there will be approximately 20-25 from South Dakota planning to attend the training. The SD members will have the option of attending either the national program or the annual State Benefits School in August of this year.

Mount Rushmore will be included on their program. Donations from the several service organizations have been received and are greatly appreciated. His other comment went to Joe Dalpiaz that he was hearing good things coming from VAMROC in Sioux Falls.

Peter Henry, Director of the Black Hills Health Care System presented his report. Please see the attached handout. Following his report he fielded questions and comments regarding Prescription Care, erasing the backlog, Category 8, Primary Care Service-average of 1300-1500 patients per physician, co-pay which is 10% of the VA budget, and PTSD counseling in the not handicap accessible VA domiciliary, the Veterans Construction Team in McLaughlin, CARES Commission-will there be extra time due to inundation of correspondence regarding the closing of certain facilities, and CBOC-very successful in most cases and soon to work also with mental health. Other questions pertained to veterans employment, will there be more marketing, i.e. Voc Rehab; MCCF, Third Party Reimbursement; Prescription Service-filling another doctor's prescription without having any knowledge of patient records; and finally the question are the VA facilities prepared for the influx of 3,000 to 5,000 veterans and what is the process they should follow-call the County Veteran Service Officer and the VA.

Following a short break Maeve King from Senator Daschle's Office had a report on federal legislation supported by Senator Daschle and then she too fielded questions and comments about Body Armor; the Guard Readiness and Retention Act to allow every reservist health care benefits; concurrent receipt; disability claims processing; Code Talker Bill; Mandatory Funding for the VA; support of the 13 member Commission on the "Line-Of-Duty"-Daschle got a DAV representative on the Commission; access to the service wounded individuals at the Military Hospitals is not open to service representatives; and cost of prescription drugs-lower prices in Canada; TriCare for Guard and Reserve-Active duty person but it is terminated at receipt of DD214 in spite of 2 year "duty" call-up time.

Joe Dalpiaz presented his report on VA Medical and Regional Office Center. See attachment. He observed that despite all that has happened at VAM&ROC the employees are very veteran-focused. He fielded questions and comments pertaining to doctor/primary care numbers; C&P exam teams-travel with medical teams to Reservations; Projected cuts in personnel-hindrance to progress in handling backlog; Pharmaceuticals-there is a formulary which regulates the offerings through pharmacy; Thank you from Loudner for hearing/working/traveling with him to Reservations.

Rob McDivitt presented his report on VISN 23 Network. See attachment. In the OMNIBUS Bill passed, Network VISN 23 should get approximately 14% increase. Breakdown of the funding is not yet complete. Mr. McDivitt fielded questions and comments about CARES Report-this will probably become a part of the Strategic Planning for VA; CARES Report dealing with decreases not increases in veterans; VA Advantage "Priority 8" and VERA; VA dealing with problems of DU "Depleted Uranium" cases-Agent Orange is not even comparable; Veterans who tried to get into "Priority 8" after January 16, 2003.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM to be reconvened at 8:00 AM on 3 February, 2004.

The Veterans Commission Meeting was reconvened at 8:05 AM, 3 February, 2004, by Chairman Bill Locken. Announcements were presented by Dennis Foell and he also opened the three discussion items listed as #8 on agenda. Strengthening Veterans Preference in all levels of government (State, County and City) was the first. It was felt the State did observe the Veterans

Preference statutes, but county and city hiring policies often did not adhere. Comments and recommended actions follow:

- ~ USERA should be reintroduced/refreshed to county and city governments;
- ~ The CVSO's attend Commission Meetings-they should make them aware of such policies;
- ~ Prosecuting County Officials for "ignoring" the statutes, following a letter to re-educate; this would bring people to task-make them accountable.
- ~ The various Tribal Governments also do not adhere to veterans' preference statutes.

The course of action for the Veterans Commission will be that since they, as a Commission, are taking a look/interest in this aspect of the statutes, they should:

- ~ Prepare a position paper on the statutes dealing with veterans' preference with the assistance of Todd Kolden and Earl Schultz of the Department of Labor.
- ~ Prepare a letter to the County and City Commissions to re-educate/refresh memories regarding veterans' preference;
- ~ Gather the policies from the counties and larger cities for study;
- ~ Review who has the accountability to enforce these statutes and what recourse does a veteran have;
- ~ Contact with the surrounding states to see what enforcement procedures they have;
- ~ Determine "what deems a person qualified?-is it prior to or after an interview?"

The second discussion issue concerned a State Veterans' Cemetery in East River, South Dakota. Points of discussion were:

- ~ Federal government will pay 100% of set-up cost, but the roughly \$350,000 annual expense thereafter belongs to the State;
- ~ The question at this point was "is this how we choose to spend this \$350,000; because you cannot abandon the project later?";
- ~ The ones promoting this cemetery issue need to "do their homework"; they need resolutions showing support from veterans' organizations, communities, and counties among other things. They need to provide details not just an idea before the Commission can even formulate a policy;
- ~ Priorities for State dollars need to be set;
- ~ Where would this be located?
- ~ S final comment was that the Veterans' Cemetery at the SD Veterans' Home should be brought up to federal standards before establishing another veterans' cemetery.

The third discussion issue was the veteran license plate. Because 2005 will be the time to make any changes, the issue must be brought out now. The question is whether there will be an organization plate using a decal or a veteran plate embossed much as those for the Native Americans and the Marine Corps League.

- ~ Need a deadline and specifications from Division of Motor Vehicles; Deb Hilmer will be consulted regarding possibility of a Veteran Plate as opposed to an organizational plate; she will be invited to next Commission Meeting;
- ~ Need to be careful of the State Policy/Statute defining "veteran" status;
- ~ Could have a contest for the veteran plate design; D Wherry had some possibilities to view;
- ~ For a veteran's plate there should be documentation needed in order to purchase, i.e. DD214;

- Question on whether there is a rebate back to State Veterans organizations for veteran plates purchased, and why should there be a rebate-why not just have it as an honor for the veteran.

Following these discussion points, Gene Eiring, Superintendent of the SD Veterans' Home made his presentation. Please see the attached report. He fielded questions dealing primarily with the food service provider who will be under a State contract and veteran's employment numbers. Mr. Eiring does hire the veteran when he has that option.

Number 9 on the agenda is the reports of the Division of Veterans Affairs. Director Foell began and touched on the following:

- Korean War Memorial Dedication on September 18, 2004, in Pierre;
- September 11, 2004 is the tentative Veterans Day at the State Fair in Huron;
- Phil Ringstrom has written a \$250,000 grant request to work with homeless: SD DVA wrote a letter of support;
- Training for Division Staff will include two to the American Legion National Training in March and three to the VFW National Training in April;
- The Budget for 2005 looks good and positive for Department;
- The current budget status was distributed, see attachment 9A-1, it is pretty much on schedule;
- The Emergency Loan applicant is usually given the benefit of the doubt, if there is any ability to repay.

Dave Wherry had a report from the SD DVA Claims Office highlighting the upcoming new C/TVSO training for about nine new VSO's. There will be use of the Claims Office Staff not VA Staff which will then be used at the annual Benefits School in August. There was a proposal from Wherry asking consideration of sending two CVSO's to attend National Training on a volunteer basis. Mr. Wherry fielded questions dealing with claim processing time which is ahead of national average in Sioux Falls ROC. There is a VBA hiring freeze, but for people retiring, are they rehiring to replace them?

Locken commented that the C/TVSO's need to provide fully developed/complete claims! The adjudicators need ALL the information. He suggested using the geographic monetary distribution sheet to show value to County and State.

Gene Murphy moved, seconded by Don Loudner, to support proposal to send two volunteer C/TVSO's to National Training. Motion carried.

Rick Barg, VFW State Adjutant, had copies of the VFW State Budget to present. He could not promise but commented that the VFW should be able to help with budgeting national training funds for the C/TVSO's. They are in the process of updating the VFW State Headquarters, computer technology.

Larry Person, Field Supervisor, had a report primarily concerning training for 9-10 persons in May. He also mentioned that in Perkins County there is only one CVSO to replace the two that had been functioning there. The Mini-Conferences will be April 5 and 12 probably in Rapid City, Pierre, Watertown and Salem, with the focus of training on the returning veterans. The dates for the annual Benefits School will be August 30 - September 2, 2004 in Pierre. The agenda will include National Guard Personnel again focusing on returning Guards people.

Person fielded questions and comments pertaining to the recent CVSO change in Jerauld County, where the incumbent was never officially notified; and Buffalo County and the Tribe are going to work together for Veteran Service Officer to be hired by the first of March.

The Veterans Education report was given by George Summerside. He highlighted the following:

- ~ Summerside handles veterans education, Tom Murphy handles OJT and apprenticeship programs and claims;
- ~ Del Johnson is still a resource person-former ELR;
- ~ ELR's are weak and there have been 4 in the last year;
- ~ National Website for NASSA's is handled by a subsidy from the VA;
- ~ There are 45 of 51 school programs which are active; 49 institutions of higher learning, 1 flight school and 5 non-degree institutions;
- ~ 1,700 students involved, 1,465 were school students;
- ~ Last year \$675,000 in benefits from OJT and Apprenticeship programs;
- ~ Outreach which is now required by VA is being handled by Summerside working with the C/TVSO network so the newly returning veterans have services needed. Three brochures are being revamped and "Uncle Sam" posters are being used to promote use of veterans benefits;
- ~ Benefit Tips are 1) Must apply, 2) Need to cancel a former direct deposit, 3) if benefit not received, the applicant needs to check.

Gene Murphy had information regarding veteran billing. There is a pilot program called "SHIINE" with a goal of answering third party billing questions. They are starting in Sioux Falls and hoping to expand statewide and then nationally. It is a new service to enhance the work of the CVSO. And they work with the County Extension Office as well.

Earl Schultz had a report to make. See attachment.

Todd Kolden also with the Department of Labor presented information dealing with:

- ~ 1,000 more job seekers this year than last year in the VA/Vet Svc Organization/CTVSO/DVOP network;
- ~ Goodwill Industries has a pilot program in Sioux Falls to help incarcerated with short term training before leaving prison;
- ~ Department of Labor preference is to support veterans in training first;
- ~ They are presently 20% above average in employment of veterans;
- ~ Target is now the handicapped or those with barriers in job/training search;
- ~ Encouraging more use of on-line applications-revamping to accommodate that;
- ~ They are providing Transition Assistance Classes at the demob stations

The several veteran organizations had comments:

The American Legion was represented by Wayne Vetter, the State Commander, who highlighted:

- ~ 8 Veterans Forums which had been held with approximately 135 attendees and there are 4 remaining. He thanked the Division, Peter Henry and West River people for their assistance.
- ~ On February 6-8, 2004 will be the American Legion Mid-Winter Conference in Oacoma.
- ~ He mentioned the National Training and that K Ducheneaux, B Akkerman, and M Holzhauser would be representing South Dakota.

- ~ The State Headquarters has again been named winner of the Big 12 Competition, whereby they receive \$2,000 for technical equipment to use at the State Headquarters.
- ~ They have received 30 applications for assistance from families of servicemen with children under 18, with 25 approved.
- ~ The new DSO will be named on February 7. The Guard will be at all National Guard Activations to let them know "we're there for them".
- ~ A Gerlach and D Foell were thanked for their briefing at the Legion Meeting on 29 January.

The DAV report was given by Gene Murphy, please see attachment. He highlighted the upcoming State Convention at the Alex Johnson in Rapid City, April 29 - May 1. They will spotlight a Veterans Townhall Meeting at this State Convention. Mr. Murphy also reported for the PVA that all is going well.

Dave Jungemann gave a report on TREA, (chapter is now 20 years old and the national organization is 40) mentioning their major projects:

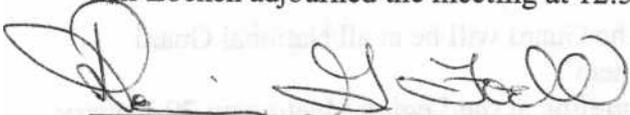
- ~ Bingo operation has now moved to their new building;
- ~ They provide scholarships for children/grandchildren of members;
- ~ They have programs at the VS Hospitals and at the SD Veterans' Home;
- ~ They have an honor guard, in fact can provide two at the same time;
- ~ The national legislative office in Alexandria, VA is active in Veterans Coalition;
- ~ Tree's website is very informative along with two newsletters including *The Voice*;
- ~ There is work being done to take care of those veterans in the "Notch" and to provide CLIP (Cost of Living Increase to Elderly), and work to affect cost of drugs, as well as TRPASCL (Sr. Citizen League);
- ~ The Auxiliary is very active with a project at the SD Veterans' Home and encouraging children to do valentines which are distributed then at VA Hospitals and the Home; assistance to the Black Hills Children's Home and Ditty Bags at Christmas along with WEAFF (Widows Emergency Assistance Fund);
- ~ Tree has also worked on the Avenue of Flags at the Black Hills National Cemetery;
- ~ And has presented D Loudner with a \$1,000 check toward the Code Talkers Memorial.

Phil Ringstrom had a report on the VET Center in Sioux Falls. They have tripled production over six years and they also partner with the VET Center in Fargo to serve the American Indian population. He was pleased to announce that the VET Center has the authority to hire (unfortunately not permanently) a person who would work primarily on the various reservations and possibly be housed at SD DVA. They have helped with Stand-Downs on the Lower Brule, Crow Creek and Pine Ridge Reservations. Their work with the incarcerated veterans leaving the prison system is shared with the "Step Up Program" established by the Goodwill Industries- here is where the \$250,000 grant monies would be going. This is also worked with the help of the Salvation Army to get these newly released veterans through a transitional time. The VET Center is working to cross-train people to assist with benefits applications so the counselors can counsel.

Don Loudner wanted to commend D Foell on his work with the Native American Honoring Program at the Oyate Challenge Basketball Tournament in Huron on 30-31 January, 2004. The

purpose was to list and thereby honor all those Native Americans now serving in the Armed Forces wherever that may be.

Bill Locken adjourned the meeting at 12:50 PM on 3 February, 2004.

 2-27-04

Dennis Foell, Director, SD Division of Veterans Affairs

Beverly Mickelson, Secretary

**Attendees for the February 2-3, 2004 SD Veterans Commission Meeting
National Guard Museum in Pierre, South Dakota**

<i>Attendee</i>	<i>Representing</i>	<i>City</i>
Dennis Foell, Director	SD DVA	Pierre
Bill Locken, Chairman	SD Veterans Commissioner	Spearfish
Roland Benson	SD Veterans Commissioner	Ft Pierre
Don Loudner	SD Veterans Commissioner	Mitchell
Gene A. Murphy	SD Veterans Commissioner	Sioux Falls
Paul A. Evenson	SD Veterans Commissioner	Sioux Falls
Donald Clarke	SD Veterans Commissioner	Wessington
Michael Gorman, Dept. Secretary	Military & Veterans Sffairs	Rapid City
Dave Jungemann	Tree, Chapter 29	Rapid City
Larry Person, Field Supervisor	SD DVA	Pierre
Michael Birnbaum	SDNG	Rapid City
Randall Meyers	SDNG	Rapid City
Andy Gerlach	Military & Veterans Sffairs	Pierre
Larry Price	American Legion	Redfield
Marshall Michels	SDNG	Rapid City
Al Janzen, President	Codington County/C/TVSO Association	Watertown
Lionel Torgrude	Brookings County/C/TVSO Association	Brookings
Bob Voeltz	DAV/VFW	Pierre
Wayne Vetter, State Commander	American Legion	Cresbard
Earl Schultz, Director	VETS, USDOL	Aberdeen
Dave Wherry, Supervisor	SD DVS Claims Office	Sioux Falls
Jerry Lolley	Meade CVSO	Sturgis
Peter Henry, Director	VS Black Hills Health Care System	Sturgis
Joe Dalpiaz, Director/COO	VSMROC	Sioux Falls
Dave Morgan	State Fair Veterans Building/PVS	Huron
Rob McDivitt, Deputy Director	VISN 23 VA Upper Midwest Network	Minneapolis
Todd Kolden	SD Department of Labor	Aberdeen
Dave Parr	SD DVA	Sioux Falls
Phil Ringstrom, Team Leader	VET Center	Sioux Falls
Ron Boyd, State Adjutant	American Legion	Watertown
Beverly Mickelson, Secretary	Military & Veterans Affairs	Pierre