

South Dakota
VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING
12 - 13 July, 2006 PVA, North Central Chapter Home
Sioux Falls, South Dakota

The meeting was convened at 12:00 by Chairman Paul Evenson in the North Central Chapter Home of PVA in Sioux Falls. The Chairman led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance. He then welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked PVA for the use of their facility.

Dennis Foell was then invited for opening comments. He thanked everyone for attending and also for the many expressions of concern for him during his medical leave of absence. He also asked that the meeting be adjourned upon the arrival of Governor M. Michael Rounds for the presentation he was going to make. The announcement was made that all were invited to the PVA luncheon at noon on Thursday (13 July), and that the coffee, sodas, water, cookies and rolls for refreshment during the meeting would be furnished by them as well. Mr. Foell had bracelets and pin/tie tacks which are for sale as fund raisers for the Vietnam War Memorial Dedication. Earl Schultz is not able to attend but Todd Kolden will report for him.

G. Murphy moved the agenda be approved as printed with the one change and D. Clarke seconded. The motion carried.

G. Murphy moved to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting, approving them as printed with the second from M. Birnbaum. The motion carried.

MG Gorman was asked to report on the Department of Military & Veterans Affairs. He explained that he is now often back in Washington, D.C. because he is the treasurer of the Adjutant's General Association, as well as working to be on top of National Guard issues at NGB. The deployments include 13 Air Guard Airmen at Baghdad; C Battery 147th FA Brigade in Southern Baghdad; 14 from the 147th FA Brigade to Iraq and Afghanistan; the Public Affairs unit is deployed, part in Iraq and part here in the States. The 235th MP Company is on alert with 135 Soldiers to deploy to SW Asia in the fall. There are 400-500 Airmen on a Southwest Border Mission.

The report on two wounded Soldiers (Guardsmen) was that SGT Knigge is at Walter Reed, in healing and doing well. SGT Cory Briest had a traumatic head injury, has been at Bethesda, in Minneapolis and is now in California for rehab. Joe Dalpiaz from the Sioux Falls VA said both VA facilities in South Dakota stand ready to do everything they can for any of those injured returning home.

MG Gorman made a trip to Iraq in May with SCSM Mike Bekaert. He was very pleased to be able to visit the units themselves. The Airmen are a part of the security at Baghdad International Airport. All the Soldiers in Charlie Battery are working hard and doing a good job—training Iraqi Police forces. They are developing relationships and helping them establish a real police force. They have good living conditions but “outside the wire” it is dangerous. They learn by any mistakes.

A comprehensive program was developed to work with mental health issues and the third Mental Health Summit was held in May in Pierre to stay on top of these concerns. It is a very individual problem to deal with them just as it is with a medical problem.

He addressed the “depleted uranium bill” which was introduced at the last Legislative Session. He felt the Guard personnel do not really fall into groups that seem to be at risk. The Active Duty is an unknown. Personnel do have the option to have the appropriate testing done. A media campaign in unity with all veteran organizations would be an effective way to address this issue of exposure to depleted uranium.

A reminder the Vietnam War Memorial Dedication is the 15th and 16th of September was his final note.

A question was raised about the training of VA and DOD to know more about depleted uranium. J. Dalpiaz commented that troops exposed, during clean-up especially, can request testing.

A question was raised about equipment being supplied to troops in the field, specifically helmet enhancements which are going to the Army personnel. The Marines were not receiving them but with the media coverage, they should soon have these enhancements, too.

A question about Walter Reed Hospital—the location for the most seriously injured personnel. The attitude of those Servicemen is “really up”! MG Gorman commented too that each of the members of Charlie Battery receives “Combat Life Save Training”—immediate response care in the field. For example they do not have a stretcher, but rather a back board to use and because of the immediate care lives are saved.

Steve DiStasio was called upon for a report on the VA Black Hills Health Care System. (See handout.) He made special mention of the VA National Creative Arts Festival to be held in Rapid City. He heartily recommends attending. There will be a “stand-down” at Eagle Butte in November sponsored by VA Black Hills. There were questions to him. Is the family of a significantly injured Serviceperson made to bear the cost of either direct or indirect care? Could he please clarify the Winner CBOC issue of the incumbent selected over the obvious low bid. The question was raised because the second party had underbid the selectee. For DiStasio’s estimation, he did not feel the non-selectee understood their full responsibility. The selectee with four years of experience has been absolutely stellar, above VISN requirements in all aspects. The contracting services in VA have stringent rules and regulations which must be met. A request was made of DiStasio to provide statistics of Veterans applying for VA positions versus those hired.

Director Foell was directed to formulate a letter for the Chairman’s signature to the former commission member who had questioned the selection of the Winner CBOC clinic, to determine if the service aspect now is up to standard.

Todd Kolden asked for clarification on why the flat line of 26% of the VA staff percentage of veterans when he has employers with 40-60% who are veteran employees. The explanation is partly due to the set of requirements for many of the positions advertised. Kolden would like to

see the concern of veterans applying versus veterans hired addressed as well as hiring Chapter 31 veterans.

Joe Dalpiaz, Director of the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center, had a report on that facility. (See handout.) He did point out that Sioux Falls is in the top 10 of the VA Facilities nationally with OIF and OEF growth—enrollment and providing services. When Dr. Lundeen comes on board that facility will be fully staffed in primary care doctors. The proposed CBOC at Spirit Lake has been formally approved and that puts the CBOC's in Wagner and Watertown at the top of the list in VISN 23. Business plans are requested by August 12, 2006 for these two locations.

D. Clarke wished to express what a good experience he has had with the overnight pharmacy service (automated refill system) and also a phone call returned from the Pierre CBOC. Clarke deals with the Fort Meade pharmacy.

B. Locken requests having the Priority Group 7 enrollees by month for South Dakota this year. He would also like to have the Medical Facility reports reflect budget shortfall.

John Smith, Director of the Dakotas Regional Office in Sioux Falls, reported that they are trying to increase the number of vocational rehab counselors and add an employment counselor—staffing levels. (See handout.) The goal is help get the person back into the workforce. Smith was asked about the VA laptop which was stolen, but which has been located and after preliminary checking it indicates no breach of security. There was some talk of a one year credit monitoring for affected veterans, but due to two class action law suites that may not be an option.

There was not representative from the Black Hills National Cemetery available to report.

Rob McDivitt from VISN 23 noted there will be a change in the senior level of Veterans Health venue with the resignation of Dr. Pearlin. (See handout.) There is still no service for the Category 7 and 8 Veterans. Mandatory Funding is the way to go to get all Veterans included.

Senator Johnson's Office was represented by Amy Bilka-Skillbred who highlighted the work on the Mandatory Funding Bill; VA Care, especially Mental Health; the Code Talkers Bill which has 50 co-sponsors (Loudner reported 72) and with 67 it is veto-proof and an up or down vote can be requested; Commemorative Coin Bill which passed the Senate on May 26th—to authorize the Secretary of the Treasury to have a coin struck—a Commemorative Coin for Disabled Veterans. Gene Murphy is treasurer of the Disabled Veterans Life Memorial and sales of this coin will help fund this memorial.

Representative Herseth's Office was represented by Emy Carlson. Clarence Wolf Guts is meeting with Stephanie Herseth today in Washington, D.C. She is working on HR 4791 Adaptive Housing Grant for Disabled Veterans; Code Talkers Bill; HR 5444 which is Thune's Veteran's Disability Automatic COLA Bill; Concurrent Receipt through which a veteran can draw both retirement and disability. There is presently a 10 year phase-in for concurrent receipt, with the exception of the retired and 100% disabled Veteran for whom the phase-in was waived. Representative Herseth held an Oversight Hearing for the military funding bill and a review of veterans education (GI Bill). This was at Ellsworth AFB near Rapid City on June 19, 2006.

There were at least two Department of Military & Veterans Affairs personnel providing testimony.

Todd Kolden had report for Earl Schultz (federal DOL) as well as his report from the SD DOL. Schultz's secretary, Sandy Dosch, passed away and it is likely an Iraqi Freedom Veteran will be hired for this position.

Kolden also testified at the Oversight Hearing at Ellsworth. He also talked about the TAP Workshops, which spouses are also welcome to attend. They are trying to improve access for spouses. It is providing assistance for transition from a military to civilian life. The emphasis is on the recently separated veterans, but this can be misleading—for the unemployment survey that is done, a question to be included should be “Unemployed and looking for work?”. There is a better unemployment rate for veterans than non-veterans.

The State is eligible to apply for the federal DOL dollars to fund the Stand Downs. Kolden is planning to apply for two (Sioux Falls and Rapid City) and perhaps for on reservations, too, and then SD DOL would be the administrator of the funds. The Stand Downs are for all veterans, not just the homeless; if there is a question or just interest; Guard personnel are also invited. The Vets Calendar runs January through January and it will include DOL information, M&VA and VA information.

The new budget request is an increase of \$25,000. The marketing of veterans continues with “Why Hire A Vet?” and also for the veteran there is help to match the veteran applicant to an employer. There is special assistance to anyone with any barrier to employment—disabled or those most in need or the newly discharged veteran. Kolden would encourage brain-storming on how to get qualified veterans applying and hired by the VA specifically.

There is a bill in the House to make licensure and certification for “job training” in the service mandatory which should be of benefit. T. Kolden is grateful for the cooperation between DOL employment people and DVA people and the VA who all do need to work together.

Dennis Quigley was introduced and had a report from the Sioux Falls Vet Center. They are experiencing a large influx of the Iraqi veterans (OEF/OIF) and the staff is stretched pretty thin. New staff member will hopefully be on board by August. There are a lot of readjustment issues and PTSD issues.

Many of the clients are concerned that coming in for counseling will cause termination of Guard time. Some of the active duty members are getting lost, the recently separated veterans. Some reserve personnel need to have contact about benefits and the Vet Center is working to reach them.

G. Murphy moved that the South Dakota Veterans Commission go on record to request an explanation of travel policy that limits travel to 70 miles or no overnight for the Vet Center; and also to request the hiring practices for veterans and appointment of Team Leader for Sioux Falls. There should be copies furnished to the Congressional Delegates from South Dakota. The motion was seconded by B. Locken and the motion carried.

MG Gorman wanted to thank the people of the Vet Center(s) for their help and support over the years, which is above and beyond the call of duty.

Todd Otterberg is the SDNG Benefits Advisor. He is with a contracting agency that provides assistance with education benefits, TriCare benefits, employment benefits. He is working on the pre-mobilization briefs, the demob briefs, veterans health benefits, veterans education and veterans employment. He also provides transition assistance and disability transition assistance. He still needs to work on outreach to the Reserve and Active Duty personnel. The VA Hospital is sending out letters to any recently returned Guard Veterans, if they have not registered. Otterberg finds the cooperation among all entities in the Dakotas is already well organized.

Wayne Vetter is the president of the SD C/TVSO Association. That organization wants to make a proposal to the State to increase the State Supplement for C/TVSO's. They are also trying to determine what to do for counties with dwindling veteran population. They are assisting in their respective locals to arrange for transportation for Vietnam Veterans to attend the dedication. The Annual Benefits School is coming up and he could compare this school's training with the national training—it is every bit as good. After this school these C/TVSO's will be wearing caps for identification/recognition purposes. These service officers are encouraged to attend veteran organization meetings in order to update them on any veteran issues.

Superintendent Larry Wilcox from the SD Veterans Home had a report. (See handout.) First he made it known that Randy Meyer is recovering from a serious ATV accident in which his chest was crushed. It has been passed that some veterans may be paid per diem to stay in nursing home care—paid by the VA IF there is no State Veterans Home.

The public hearing for the proposed rules changes for the Veterans Home will be July 27th for the residents. Right now the census is 119 and that has been a steady count. The key to increasing the census is outreach/publicity.

The administrative announcements are:

1. 8:00 AM July 13, 2006, the Veterans Commission will reconvene.
2. Attendees are encouraged to wear casual dress.
3. There are stand down posters to be posted.

The meeting was recessed at 5:35 until 8:00 AM, Thursday, July 13, 2006.

At 7:59 AM on July 13, 2006, Chairman Evenson called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Shanna Purcell was introduced. She is the newly appointed State Women Veterans Coordinator. Aaron Pollard and Jon Gohn were also introduced. These three persons are the new staff at the Division Claims Office in Sioux Falls. Administrative announcements included a reminder about the noon luncheon hosted at and by PVA, North Central Chapter.

The Claims Officer report was given by David Parr. (See handout.) The office is busy, but the work could not be done without the network of County/Tribal Service Officers and the Field Officers.

George Summerside was asked for his report on Veterans Education. He provided the Commission with sample letters, a copy of his testimony at the Oversight Hearing at Ellsworth; OJT/Apprenticeship Handbook; other brochures and booklets used within the SAA for outreach and information. He explained the newest comprehensive booklet/reference guide had input from South Dakota on content and development. The webpage is continually updated and enhanced. He talked about the ListServe—1 page/1 issue e-mails are recommended and requested for this communication link among veteran organization headquarters, C/TVSO network; veteran reps in DOL, Army and Air Guard; and the SD Division of Veterans Affairs. There would be a possibility of including a newsletter through a link.

For the Oversight Hearing Summerside stressed the missed opportunities for veterans and the education liaison process. He felt promotion to and education of the veteran about his/her benefits were key and DOD and the VA needed to do more with these issues. DOL reps when assisting veterans should make direct referrals in order to ensure more veterans know of their OJT or apprenticeship benefit opportunities. The regional approach to handle education benefit processing should be reviewed. In many cases the liaison has not been adequately prepared for his responsibilities.

Summerside also explained SB 2694 which would reduce funding for the SAA over the next four years. This would have a dramatic effect in South Dakota alone. He asked the Commission's support for his campaign against this Bill with signatures on prepared letters (Copies of signed letters attached.) that will go to our South Dakota Congressional Delegates to not decrease the funding cap at \$19 million now.

The motion to sign the prepared letter supporting no decrease in the funding cap for SAA which is at \$19 million now was made by G. Murphy, the second was D. Clarke and the motion carried.

The SAA is looking to the future and necessary changes in benefit distribution to fit the changing times especially considering the non-traditional student. South Dakota is a leader in the nation in use of the education benefits.

Shanna Purcell had a report about the annual National Women Veterans Conference in Reno, NV, which she attended. (See handout.) She was a Guardsperson in the 1742nd which was deployed to Iraq in the first wave. At the Conference topics addressed related not only to the "woman veteran" but also to the new generation of veterans. There is a difference of needs of Active duty Soldiers; Guard and Reserve Soldiers; the specific needs of women veterans; early detection for mental health counseling; and of course the physical rehabilitation for the wounded Soldiers. For the issues of PTSD and Military Sexual Trauma (MST) each has its own difficulties with which to contend. Purcell ended her comments by saying she was available for outreach on these issues.

From the Commissioners came a request that she track women veteran claim submission. At this time there are an estimated 481 women veterans.

Ryan Nelson came to represent Senator Thune's Office. He reported that the House VA Funding Bill has passed out of committee at 77.9 billion dollars. The stolen laptop file issue report should

be out this week. The Flag Protection Amendment failed by 1 vote. Thune has introduced a bill for Veteran Automatic COLA Adjustments. He is supportive of veterans' issues. Nelson reported there was a very nice ceremony recognizing and honoring Clarence Wolf Guts as a Code Talker. He received a Star Quilt.

A question was raised from the audience that came from the Oversight Hearing dealing with transition issues. Public Law 105399 states that after three (3) years of honorable service, the veteran is eligible for a federal government job. Why 3 years?

Dennis Foell had a report on the veterans license plate. This passed in the Legislature this year, and Ron Boyd was instrumental in pitching it in committee and we thank him for his efforts. The license plate is embossed with each respective Branch of Service decal. The forms, which must be notarized, are available but he was not sure the actual license plates were done. Some personalization is optional—"retired", "combat", "WWII", etc. The veteran must procure the regular license plate at the regular cost to have in the vehicle at all times, then there is a \$10 fee, (plus a \$4 shipping fee) for the new veteran plate. Some discussion followed and a consensus felt the vehicle licensing offices needed to publicize the military plate.

Vietnam Memorial posters were distributed for attendees to take to be posted. Foell reported 7,000 plus Vietnam Era Veterans are registered and approximately 20,000 people are expected to accompany them. There are about 1,000 tickets still available for each of the concerts. Everyone is tasked with encouraging the veterans to register, even if they are not planning to attend.

For Field Operations there has been a great deal of turn-over in the C/TVSO network and field officers are trying to get the training done and assistance provided as possible. The annual Veterans Benefits School is open to any who wish to attend and it will be held August 28 – 31, 2006 at the Ramkota Inn in Pierre. The Commissioners requested that they too be notified of any turn-over in the VSO network and they should also get one of the new directories that are distributed at the benefits school.

For the Vietnam War Memorial Dedication event there are rooms reserved for the Commissioners at the Holiday Inn Express, Ft. Pierre. Information will be coming out. The event is 15 – 16 September (Friday and Saturday).

Foell had some information regarding Division staff of 20 FTE's. Of those 10 personnel are within 10 years of retirement age. That data prompted the Commission to ask for information on what the surrounding states pay for similar jobs.

A question was raised also about the definition of "veteran" versus what qualifies as "veteran" in "veteran preference". The Commission will look at that law at the next meeting and should have it in advance so they can be prepared. They would also like copies of the definition used by the federal government.

The service organizations were asked for their reports and comments. Commander Gunner Baatrup, Huron, of the American Legion told of the American Legion programs to serve and

assist veterans upon their return and serving and assisting the families of deployed service personnel. The Veteran Forums will continue; they are planning to have three Legislative Lobbyists and a Legislative Reception during the next session; there is an employment assistance program; and the education programs within the local communities would include SD Boys State.

Doris Ann Werlinger is the State American Legion Auxiliary President from Rapid City. They sponsor Girls State, and Christmas Gift Shops at the Veterans Homes and such facilities, and they are also supporters of the Creative Arts Festival. Her homecoming is in Piedmont Valley on July 15th.

Russel Dramstad is the State Commander of the VFW and he brought greeting on behalf of himself, the VFW and the State Auxiliary President Mrs. Carol Gross. They celebrated their 75th Anniversary this past year. They help provide leadership training and they work with local deployed troops providing phone cards and a few computers as part of "Operation Link-Up" which was begun in 1996. At their annual conference, the SD Job Service Office in Huron was awarded the top award or recognition for work with veterans. They still have the baseball program with 177 teams this year for youngsters 12 years and under. The National VFW Training is also paid for some of the SD Division of Veterans Affairs staff. There is a program of veteran hospital volunteers and they also have a display at the SD State Fair in the Veterans Building manned by members from around the State.

The DAV State Commander Loren Murren was unable to attend due to a death in his family. A report was given by Gene Murphy telling of the new vans in Watertown, Lemmon and Winner. He also provided everyone with a copy of their latest newsletter. Cedar Shores is the site for the fall conference. He reminded people that anytime anything is sold by SD DAV the proceeds go to the transportation system. Murphy is probably going to use the \$23,000 presented by Governor Rounds to replace one van at Webster and put one in Mobridge. Just for information purposes, the transportation system was started in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in 1985 and picked up nationally in 1987. This year they are ahead of last year's reports. The DAV is grateful to all veterans organizations for donations of money and volunteer drivers.

Murphy moved the Commission go on record opposing the federal legislation, which allows lawyers to be introduced into the veterans' claims process. D. Clarke was the second and the motion carried.

PVA, North Central Chapter, welcomed everyone to their Chapter Home. They have a great deal of refurbished, recycled equipment provided to members and veterans and they will accept donations of wheelchairs, etc. They are a small group but mighty. He offered PVA's qualified assistance to any who might have American Disability Act—accessibility issues. He reminded of the invitation to the social event—picnic lunch today.

The National American Indian Veterans, Inc. was represented by Don Loudner. Another of the South Dakota Code Talkers, Charles White Pipe has died. Another Code Talker from South Dakota addressed the National Education meeting, Clarence Wolf Guts, a resident of the SD Veterans Home. As a Representative, Thune introduced the Code Talkers Bill. There were 29

Navajo Code Talkers who received gold medals but 200+ were trained and they received silver medals. However, 19 of the tribes who had Code Talkers were not recognized. Mr. Wolf Guts will address the full House. The Code Talkers in World War I were Choctaws.

The national charter for the Native American Indian Veterans, Inc. is not necessary to be recognized by the VA. This and Korean War Veterans Charter is being held-up in Committee. A House Resolution 601 called Native American Indian Veteran Act would authorize a national cemetery to be located on a large reservation. The first National Conference will be held at Window Rock, AZ this fall and it will be attended by the Secretary of the VA along with other high level VA personnel. This is the possible site for a new national cemetery.

This organization is working on a Direct Home Loan for American Indians, which would be available for those not able to get local "bank" loans.

Woodrow Keeble of the Sisseton Area was recommended for the Medal of Honor in World War II and again in Korea, except that the paperwork was "lost". The Deputy Secretary or an assistant was going to have the Secretary pass his story on to the President.

Loudner restated that members of the Native American Indian Veterans, Inc. are encouraged to hold membership in other veteran organizations.

Myron Zeek from the SD Marine Corps League was introduced.

The next meeting of the SD Veterans Commission will be 1-2 November, 2006 at the SD Veterans Home in Hot Springs. Future meetings will be set for 2007 in April, July, and October.

Under unfinished or new business Joe Dalpiaz offered video conferencing about depleted uranium. The October meeting shall include discussion of the definition of "veteran" in South Dakota Codified Law. The Commission asked if there was pending or passed legislation in other states for the new young veterans of the War On Terror. Any other Legislative issues or questions should be forwarded to D. Foell.

G. Murphy moved that the meeting be adjourned. M. Birnbaum was the second and the motion carried. The SD Veterans Commission was adjourned at 11:05 AM.



Dennis Foell, Director SD Division of
Veterans Affairs



Beverly Mickelson, Recording Secretary

9-14-06

Date