

**VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION
MINUTES
FEBRUARY 20, 2001
ALBANY, NEW YORK**

Attendees:

George P. Basher, Director, DVA
General John (Jack) H. Fenimore V, Adjutant General, DMNA
Nita Chicatelli, State Associate, State Operations
Harvey McCagg, Executive Deputy Director, DVA
Ann Baglio, Retired US Air Force, American Legion Post Adjutant & Chairperson
James Haggerty, Department of Labor, Korean Veteran
Herman Harrington, WWII Veteran, Past State American Legion Commander
Peter Iodice, Former Westchester County Veterans Service Agency Director
Ben Peets, Retired Army 45 year term
Dorsey Whitehead, Military Retiree, Vietnam Veteran
Mary Quay, Secretary DVA, Recorder

OPENING COMMENTS

Director George Basher thanked everyone for attending the Veterans Affairs Commission meeting. Director Basher also stated the legislators were unable to attend because they were not in session.

Director Basher spoke on the State Ethics Commission request for each member of the Veterans Affairs Commission (VAC) to file the proper paperwork with the Ethics Commission. The information submitted is strictly confidential.

AGENDA TOPICS

Division of Military and Naval Affairs' (DMNA) Oral History Initiative

General Fenimore gave a synopsis of the Governor's initiative regarding the Oral History Project. Currently, DMNA is focusing on interviews with WWII veterans. The interviews will be digitized and archived. Each war era veterans group will have the opportunity to share their stories. This information will be distributed to schools, colleges and the general public. The web site for further information is <http://www.dmna.state.ny.us/veterans/index.html>.

Update on the New York State Veterans' Service Coalition

Director Basher distributed a draft handout outlining the Coalition's initiatives (copy on file). Governance of this Coalition is the directors of the two VA Health Care Networks, the directors of the two VA Regional Offices and the Division of Veterans' Affairs director. Under the directors are four committees entitled; Clinical, Benefits, Housing and Employment. This organization is acting as a clearinghouse to generate good ideas and innovation throughout the state. (Details on Initiatives will be printed and distributed).

DVA's meeting with Civil Service

DVA will have a number of retiring State Veteran Counselors within the next six months because of the recently signed veteran's buy-back bill. In order to replace the retirees the Division must go through the process of the Civil Service exam. The new state veteran counselor's exam will be given in September 2001. Civil Service agreed to evolve education qualifications and other areas of the exam's requirements.

Another issue discussed with Civil Service was the combination of job titles within the Division. It was suggested by Director Basher to combine the titles of Claims Supervisor and Senior Counselor. This will build a more open career path for Division's state veterans counselors.

NYS World War II Memorial

Herman Herrington stated that currently the project is moving right along. The project received \$1 million in the budget.

NYS Veterans Home at Montrose

In January 2001 Director Basher toured the future Montrose Home. The Home's construction is on schedule and currently they are in the process of hiring staff. The Montrose Home's Director's name is Oscar Carter. He has a long history with the Department of Health. The Home is expecting to move residence in beginning late summer.

Syracuse Resource Center

The building has designed blueprints completed. The key issue now is getting the site for this project in order. Also, financial arrangements are in the works.

VA TRIPS training for DVA Staff

The two VA Regional Offices will supply TRIPS training for DVA counselors.

Open Discussion

1. A question was asked regarding the attendance of the Division to the conventions for veterans organizations in Washington DC. Director Basher replied that the Division attends the State conventions. Director Basher added that he attends the National State Convention for State Directors which is held in Washington DC in the spring. During this convention ideas are expressed and thoughts are shared in regards to all state DVAs.
2. Another concern was expressed that M1's are in need of repair. General Fenimore stated that he will assist with this request.
3. The next topic was the Honor Guard for the deceased veteran. General Fenimore declared that this is a huge program. The Honor Guards are attending an average of approximately 120 funerals a week. Funeral Directors have complete information regarding Honor Guard information.
4. Henry Johnson is slighted for the Medal of Honor. The credit should go to the 369th Veterans Association.

NEXT SCHEDULED VAC MEETING

May 21, 2001 – 1:00 p.m.

Division of Veterans' Affairs Central Office, Albany

GPB/mq

Enclosure: Listing of VAC Members

Veterans Affairs Commission Minutes
December 11, 2001
Albany, New York

ATTENDEES

VAC Members:

Harry Cronin
Dorsey Whitehead
Charles H. Nesbitt
Major General Thomas P. Maguire, Jr., TAG-NY

Associated Members:

George P. Basher, Director, NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs
Harvey J. McCagg, Executive Director, NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs
BG William C. Martin, Division of Military and Naval Affairs
Col. Robert H. von Hasseln, NYS Military Museum
Mary Quay, Secretary/Recorder, NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs

OPENING REMARKS

Director Basher introduced Major General Thomas B. Maguire, Jr., the Adjutant General, (TAG) of the NYS Division of Military and Naval Affairs, as the new Chairman of the Commission. Also introduced as the new head of the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga is Col. Robert H. von Hasseln. And, the last introduction was BG Bill Martin as the Deputy Adjutant General of the NYS Division of Military and Naval Affairs.

AGENDA TOPICS

Review of the impact of the World Trade Center disaster

TAG Maguire stated that he failed to attend the last Veterans Affairs Commission meeting scheduled September 13th because of the World Trade Center disaster.

TAG Maguire opened the meeting with a review of the actions that took place on September 11, 2001. Guardsmen were immediately deployed to the WTC (Ground Zero). Within a 24-hour period there were 4,500 guardsmen on duty at Ground Zero, increasing to 8,000 throughout New York State. Missions included guarding train stations, bridges, nuclear stations, etc. One of the major issues during the terrorist attack was the lack of communication. All cell phones were not functioning, landlines were useless, and the satellite phones only work when there are on the outside of a building. TAG Maguire also gave an overview of numerous heroic events.

The Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA) has since been trying to balance all the normal workload with running a large agency. TAG Maguire stated, "September 11, 2001 has tested each of us in our strengths."

Financial Impact of September 11, 2001

1. Director Basher reviewed the Division's "baseline" budget, which was significantly reduced prior to the terrorists' attack. Previously the Division was working on a DD214 Project, which was to be funded through the Office of Technology. This project would have created a central location for all veterans' DD214 discharge papers beginning in the year 2000. As of yesterday, the Director stated the project has been placed on hold until further notice.
2. There has been two lines incorporated in the Division's budget submission for next year that will allow the Division to accept federal appropriations.
3. Through the federal US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), wherever a NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs state veterans counseling office is located in a VA Medical Center, or a clinic, the federal government is paying the Division's telephone bills and rent. This indicates the Division exists for free in a VA facility. Outreach to veterans is important to the VA and this is a way for the VA to contribute to the cause.

Director Basher stated that we need to improve services to veterans by utilizing funding from other organizations and keep New York in the forefront in taking care of their veterans. This is how the Division is dealing with the challenges of the budget issue.

Other Federal Issues

Federal Claims Task Force Report is another initiative that Director Basher is examining. The Director stated this is a program that Secretary Principi has set up to review the claims processing procedure at the VA. This is an effort to reduce the back log of veterans' claims, along with increasing the efficiency for veterans to receive their benefits in a timely manner. This Task Force has since made 40 recommendations.

Director continued by informing the Commission members that he has been elected as one of the vice-presidents of the National State Directors' Association. During a recent executive committee meeting in Washington DC one of the proposals that the committee made to Secretary Principi was that states' contract with the VA to do more of the case development. A meeting with the Secretary regarding this proposal is scheduled for next week.

Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA) Update

1. BG William C. Martin gave a graphic report to the Commission regarding supporting the citizens in New York State in terms of what is required of DMNA. Recruitment is a major issue with fiscal problems.
2. Assemblyman Charles Nesbitt questioned BG Martin regarding the college tuition program for recruitment purposes. The Assemblyman questioned the program itself.
ACTION:
BG Martin will inquiry regarding concerns and/or problems regarding the college program.
3. The Assemblyman also questioned the six-month deployment and the financial difficulties that accompany the extended leave; is their assistance/funding for those individuals in need? BG Martin stated that they are working with the enlisted guardsmen who are able to have extended leave for the six months. Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve was also signed by President Bush in support of the enlisted.

4. Assemblyman Nesbitt noted that approximately one year ago he submitted legislation that would change the requirement that postmark is no longer required by military ballots. The ballot would simply require signature, date and a witness. That date must be a qualifying date for that particular election. This is now law.

The Assemblyman wanted the Commission members to know that issues that are brought up during the VAC meetings are taken to the floor along with Tocci's and the Legion's assistance.

Dorsey Whitehead spoke on the Tuition Assistance Program with New York State being noted as the best recruiting state in the union. BG Martin gave credit to the legislature for the program's success.

ACTION

Commission members will contact the members that were not in attendance to give them an overview of the meeting. Director Basher will also touch base with the members not in attendance.

Presentation by R.H. VonHasseln

Director Basher asked R.H. von Hasseln, Director of the NYS Military Museum and Veterans Research Center if he could present his report at the next VAC meeting. He agreed.

Closing Remarks

BG Martin suggested that in the future DMNA could host a VAC Meeting possibly at an airbase. The NYS Military Museum and Veterans Research Center could be another location.

NEXT VAC MEETING

March 12, 2002

Location to be announced