

**Minutes from the Vietnam War Commemoration Advisory Committee Meeting
Public Session
September 19, 2016**

The Vietnam War Commemoration Advisory Committee (VWCAC) and hereafter known as the “Committee” is a federal advisory committee within the Department of Defense (DoD) operating pursuant to the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, the Government in Sunshine Act of 1976, and other relevant federal regulations. The Committee meets three times a year and held its sixth public session on September 19, 2016 from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM at the U.S. Access Board, 1331 F St NW, Washington, DC, 20004.

VWCAC Members

Governor Tom Ridge, Chairman
Colonel (R) C.R. Anderegg
Commander (R) Everett Alvarez
LtGen (R) Ronald Christmas
Don Clarke
Morton Dean
Jeanette Early
General (R) Larry Ellis
Ann Mills-Griffiths
Vice Admiral (R) James Hull
Jerome Johnson
Command Sergeant Major (R) Andrew McFowler
Lieutenant General (R) Roger Schultz
Brig. Gen. (R) Wilma Vaught

DoD Sponsor

Michael Rhodes (Director of Administration, DoD)

DoD Staff:

Major General (R) James Jackson, Director
Larry Brom, Assistant Director
Mark Franklin
Michael Gable, Designated Federal Officer
Deborah Grays
LTC Nicole Hayes
Lacy Rourke

Public Session Attendees

1 member of the public attended the session.

Meeting Agenda:

- Certificate of Honor Program
- Communications Working Group Recommendations Briefing
- Committee Members’ Deliberation and vote on Communications Working Group Recommendations
- Closing remarks

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3:15 p.m. **Adjourn**

PUBLIC SESSION

At 1:00 pm., The Chairman, Mr. Tom Ridge opened the public session and explained the meeting agenda and specifically outlined how he wanted to address the Communications sub-working group recommendations.

Mr. Mike Gable (DFO) made administrative remarks and explained the procedures for conducting the meeting, noting that copies of the slides and a list of the advisory committees are available on the sign-in table at the entrance, there would not be a question and answer period for the public, nor an open discussion for the public; however, the public is invited to submit written comments as directed in the Federal Register notice.

Staff Presentations

Certificate of Honor Program, presented by Ms. Lacy Rourke

Ms. Rourke explained that as part of the Commemorative Partner program, we are rolling out the Certificate of Honor program. This program focuses primarily on four groups.

The first certificate and lapel pin is for eligible immediate family members of those listed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The second certificate and lapel pin is for eligible immediate family members of American military personnel listed as missing and unaccounted for by the Department of Defense from the Vietnam War. The third certificate and lapel pin is for former living American military POWs from the Vietnam War listed by the Department of Defense.

All three of these certificates and corresponding lapel pins are ordered by the Commemorative Partner through the Commemoration's Commemorative Partner Portal. There is a form that they fill out that provides information about the recipient, their relationship to the veteran, shipping address and other relevant information. The Commemoration Partner program will process those certificates.

The former POW and unaccounted for certificates are vetted through DOD sources. The In Memory Of certificate and lapel pin is checked against the veteran's name on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.

The fourth certificate and lapel pin with the blue star in the middle is for the surviving spouse at the time of death of a veteran who served in the U.S. Armed Forces at any time during the period of November 1st, 1955 through May 15th, 1975, regardless of location of service. This certificate is going to be available for the Commemorative Partners to download off of the Partner Portal. It's a fillable PDF that they will be able to put the recipient's name in, along with the date of the certificate presentation, and then they will be ordering the lapel pin through the event support request form in a similar way that they do the veteran lapel pin.

The Certificate of Honor program is the next step in recognizing the different communities of veterans and their family members.

Communications Working Group Recommendations Briefing, presented by Ms. Deborah Grays, Chief, Strategy and Engagement.

Ms. Grays explained that in reviewing the notes and minutes from the Communications Working Group's previous meetings, we identified seven recommendations.

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The first recommendation highlights some of the issues facing our Vietnam veterans, such as health care, disabilities, and suicide rates. The second recommendation focuses on developing public service announcements that television stations would be willing to air. The third recommendation specifically addresses our top ten Commemorative Partners, specifically; those that have the greatest reach and return on investments. The fourth recommendation deals with statistical facts in our messaging and making sure it remains as part of the backdrop, which includes the suicide rates. The fifth recommendation has to do with the potential publication of some sort of a book that the highlights of the Vietnam War generation. The sixth recommendation deals with our strategic messaging in terms of articles, with the NRA Magazine offered as an example. Finally, the seventh recommendation suggests we pursue a potential spokesperson for the Commemoration; one that represents the Vietnam veterans and one that represents the younger generation of Americans. Ms. Grays then addressed each recommendation in detail, which was followed by Committee deliberation and voting on the recommendations.

Deliberation and Advisory Group Recommendations

1. Issues facing our Vietnam veterans – (health care, disabilities, and suicide rates.)

Ms. Grays explained that while we agree these are significant and legitimate issues, the Commemoration is not the best entity to address these issues, and recommends that the Department of Veterans Affairs or other government agencies focus on these issues and allow us to continue within our Commemorative Partner outreach to comply with the congressional objectives.

LtGen Christmas stated that it is very appropriate that we are commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, and that we continue to highlight the difficulties that veterans of that war have, and furthermore, passing this on the Veterans Administration is the right agency.

Governor Ridge concurred and moved that we accept this recommendation and forward it on to the Secretary of Defense. All in attendance concurred.

2. Strengthen the text and focus of our Public Service Announcements (PSA) on Vietnam veteran issues.

Ms. Grays explained that our intent has always been to focus on the veteran, and offered several examples – Inspiration Network video and the Sam Elliott and Secretary of the VA PSAs – as examples of such efforts. She also played a more recent video developed internally by the Commemoration staff.

Deliberation of this recommendation focused on how best to distribute these and other PSA that we develop. It was determined that major networks would not air these PSA, and that a better approach would be to offer them to schools, VSO's and other Commemorative Partners who could play them for their constituents. It was also suggested that certain cable networks such as the military channel might be willing to air these PSAs.

The Committee voted unanimously to adopt this recommendation.

3. Engage the top 2-3 or even the top 10 CPs that give us the greatest return on investment.

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Ms. Grays explained we have implemented a “reach-back” project where we contact our CPs to ensure they are getting the support they need and to check on their progress to thank and honor Vietnam veterans. In doing so, we have included defense contractors and other corporations who are CPs, have expanded beyond the top ten, and continue to do so to make sure we are getting the greatest return on investment.

The Committee recognized the effort of the Commemoration’s reach-back program and offered other potential CPs such as J.D. Power (former Coast Guard veteran), and John Gioia (former Navy Vietnam veteran whose company is known for national hair products).

The Committee voted unanimously to adopt this recommendation.

4. Incorporate “facts” as a backdrop to our message (i.e. suicide rates among Vietnam veterans, number of amputees, disabled, etc.)

Ms. Grays reminded the committee that while we are sympathetic to all of our issues that are affecting our Vietnam veterans, our focus remains on our five congressional objectives.

The Chairman stated that while he was sympathetic to the mandate and framework under which we must operate, but there are hundreds of thousands of others that are amputees and disabled, and one could argue that post-traumatic stress is a disability and they ought to be included as well. He further stated that. . .“if you’re really going to highlight the veteran, at least speaking for myself, those who have returned with those particular lifelong challenges ought to be acknowledged.”

Command Sergeant Major (CSM) McFowler recommended to drop this one because these areas are addressed by multiple agencies within the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs and when you start trying to single people out and say one veteran is more disabled than another you open up a bigger set of problems.

Commander Alvarez and Ms. Mills-Griffith concurred with CSM McFowler that addressing these areas was beyond the scope and mission of the Commemoration, yet agreed there should be some way to acknowledge the “sacrifices” of those who returned disabled, whether physically or emotionally.

The Chairman called for a vote and the consensus was to withdraw the recommendation as written. The Chairman then proposed modifying the recommendation to state that the Commemoration acknowledge those Vietnam veterans who returned with disabilities in talking points and remarks, but not get into the specific statistics of suicide rates, number of amputees, etc. The Committee concurred and the Commemoration Director, MG(R) Jackson, offered to support any Committee member with talking points, etc., should they request it.

5. Encourage a corporate CP to publish a book on “The Vietnam War Generation” to put in schools.

Ms. Grays explained that the Commemoration has considered the production of a coffee table Commemoration book in the past. She cautioned that any such effort will have to be in compliance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation, (FAR), to make sure that the contracting process itself is open to fair and open competition to avoid any appearance of special status or favoritism.

Several Committee members believed that the material used for the Pentagon Exhibit could serve as the basis for such a book, but recognized that asking a corporate sponsor to create and publish such a book that was in compliance with the FAR will be a lengthy and cumbersome process.

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The Chairman noted that we should first decide what the Committee wanted this book to look like, and proposed that the Committee withdraw this recommendation pending further consideration.

The Committee voted to withdraw the recommendation pending further review and discussion.

6. Publish articles in magazines such as the NRA magazine.

Ms. Grays stated that the Communications Working Group recommended publishing magazine articles, and specifically mentioned the NRA magazine. She further explained that the Commemoration already has a magazine strategy, and could easily include the NRA in that strategy as well. She went on to provide the Committee with several examples of articles published in such periodicals as “Echoes”, which is the official U.S. Army newsletter with 1.15 million subscribers and we were hoping to publish an article in the American Legion magazine. Furthermore, D.C. Military magazine has agreed to publish a Director interview article in their next publication. She also informed that to date we have not had any success with publishing a Director’s op-ed in any of the national newspapers.

The Chairman proposed amending the recommendation to read, “Pursue the publication of articles highlighting the Commemoration in the NRA magazine and such other publications likely read with broad circulation rather than just by Vietnam veterans,” or something similar.

Other Committee members recommended dropping the reference to the NRA and keeping the recommendation generic.

The Chairman recognized that the Committee has unanimously agreed to amend the recommendation to make it generic, dropping the reference to the NRA, and that the recommendation, as amended, was accepted by the Committee.

The Committee also recognized the difficulty in getting national newspapers to print our op-eds and suggested we try connecting a major event (e.g. sporting event) that is honoring Vietnam veterans as the hook for a local newspaper to write a corresponding article or op-ed.

7. Select two national spokesperson’s for the Commemoration; one that could connect with the Vietnam veteran and one that could connect with the younger generation.

Ms. Grays explained that the Commemoration staff has discussed this and recognizes there could be some fiscal and legal constraints associated with this. She also offered that if the Committee knew of any potential candidates to recommend to us, we are open to pursue.

Brigadier General Vaught opined that until the election is over, it might be difficult to pursue this, because then we will have a new Secretary of Defense, and that’s somebody who ought to play a part in this if we’re going to have a national spokesperson. She further offered that it just seems impossible to get the media’s attention on anything at the present time if your name isn’t Trump or Clinton.

Commander Alvarez recognized that it’s fairly simple to identify a person that would connect with the Vietnam generation, but that he had difficulty conceiving who could connect with the younger generation.

The Chairman proposed that the Committee accept the recommendation and postpone making very specific recommendations until after the new Secretary of Defense is identified.

The Committee members concurred.

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Closing Remarks.

Mr. Gable informed the Committee that he was looking at dates for the next meeting to be held in 2017 and that the preference was for a meeting sometime in February.

The Chairman moved to adjourn, Commander Alvarez seconded and the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 pm.

A copy of the Advisory Committee's briefing and these minutes may be found at http://www.vietnamwar50th.com/vietnam_war_advisory_committee/

ADJOURNMENT

I hereby certify, to the best of my knowledge, that the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Ridge" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tom Ridge
Chairman
Vietnam War Commemoration Advisory Committee