



**Vietnam War Commemoration
Advisory Committee**



FISCAL YEAR 2019 REPORT

*A grateful Nation thanks and honors
our Vietnam veterans.*

Tom Ridge

9 April 2019

Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick M. Shanahan
United States Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Sir,

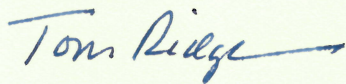
On behalf of the Vietnam War Advisory Committee, I am writing in regard to the Committee's FY2019 Report on the types of commemoration events the Vietnam War Commemoration Office (VWC) should consider supporting through 2025. I have enclosed recommendations for a national event to be held in March 29, 2023, National Vietnam War Veterans Day, with state, local, and regional commemorative events held in the year preceding and during 2023. The Committee supports activities that inspire the nation to join together in honoring and remembering the contributions of Vietnam veterans and their families.

We provided additional recommendations to maintain the effort to provide resources related to the Vietnam War Commemoration and several of the VWC's objectives. These objectives remain important to complete the Vietnam War story.

The VWC has made a huge difference in the lives of many veterans using the initiatives and recognition programs to date. The impact of these efforts is far-reaching. The VWC has properly focused on those who served our nation during the Vietnam War. Further, the participation of thousands of Commemorative Partners around the country has been absolutely remarkable and of great credit to the relentless effort of the VWC staff.

We believe the Department can enhance its work to thank and honor Vietnam veterans by considering the recommendations in the Report. The Committee stands ready to provide further information or clarification on these recommendations if requested.

Sincerely,



Tom Ridge
Chairman Vietnam War Commemoration Advisory Committee
First Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Former Governor of Pennsylvania

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The terms of reference for this FY 2019 Vietnam War Commemoration Advisory Committee Report was approved by Mr. John H. Gibson II, then the Department of Defense Deputy Chief Management Officer, on August 18, 2018.

Background

The United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration officially began with the inaugural planning phase kick-off event at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. on Memorial Day, May 28, 2012, and will conclude on Veterans Day, November 11, 2025, as directed by Presidential Proclamation. As the President stated, "...we, as a nation, will commemorate the 50th anniversary over a long period of time, as many Americans served and sacrificed over that long period of time."

For the purposes of this Commemoration, November 1, 1955 to May 15, 1975 is the period being utilized to recognize the service and sacrifice of those who served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, regardless of service location. November 1, 1955 was selected to coincide with the official designation of Military Assistance Advisory Group-Vietnam (MAAG-V), and May 15, 1975 marks the end of the battle precipitated by the seizure of the SS Mayaguez.

The Committee's deliberation and ability to provide advice and recommendations on the completion of the Commemoration required the VWC to provide more information about its approach to phasing out activities from 2023 thru November 11, 2025, to include completion of the report to Congress in 2025.

Deliverable and Methodology

The Committee was tasked to provide the Secretary of Defense a single report of recommendations, no later than April 2019, addressing the specific types of closing event(s) that could be supported or directly sponsored by the VWC, taking into account these factors when deliberating on the recommendations:

- a) Determine the scope of the events to possibly include local, state, and/or national levels.
- b) Consider a variety of proposed locations (cemeteries, Veteran's parks, State Capitals, Vietnam veterans' memorials, etc.)
- c) Consider themes or connections to influential historical events (e.g., Operation Homecoming-2023) for each recommended closing event.
- d) Focus each recommended event on Vietnam veterans and their families.
- e) Suggest events that are "home-town" centric.

The Committee was authorized to access, consistent with law, relevant documents to its research or fact-finding under this Terms of Reference from the Vietnam War Commemoration Office, as directed by paragraphs 5.1.8. and 5.3.4. of DoD Instruction 5105.04, "Department of Defense Federal Advisory Committee Management Program," and in conformance with applicable security classifications.

The Committee was convened on September 20, 2018 and February 8, 2019 towards the development of recommendations that address the VWC's closing events. Further, the Committee made additional recommendations that can be found at the end of this Report.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDED GOALS FOR THE VIETNAM WAR COMMEMORATION

The VWC is cautioned not to send the message that the nation is taking a break from commemorating the Vietnam War and honoring its veterans: Do not imply that Vietnam veteran recognition will be complete in 2025. The VWC should insure that Vietnam veterans are remembered long after the culminating event for the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War. Similarly, the VWC should not use the term ‘closeout’; instead we have used phrases such as “national” and “local” events to be held up to and during the year 2023.

The VWC should choose activities that are simple and profound for the national event, as well as meaningful, to be done throughout the nation.

NATIONAL EVENT RECOMMENDATIONS

National Capitol event inclusive of and centered at the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial (also known as “The Wall”). The VWC should sponsor an event of national significance on the national day of recognition for Vietnam veterans: Wednesday, March 29, 2023. Long after the 50th Commemoration is over, March 29th will still resonate with the American public as National Vietnam Veterans Day. The Committee unanimously supports this date. The VWC should promote a national event in the Washington D.C. area that involves the public and communities to demonstrate their support of the Commemoration.

Theme and Key Activities. The theme of the event should be “A grateful Nation thanks and honors our Vietnam veterans.” The ceremony should be led by the President of the United States and involve formal activities such as the National Anthem, a missing man flyover honoring those Vietnam veterans still missing and not yet returned, and the playing of taps.

The national event should hopefully include a moment of silence/prayer and other symbolic activities that reflect the veterans’ service and sacrifice. The VWC should promote these events, via the states and territories, national cemeteries, the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial, local Vietnam War monuments, military installations, classrooms, school auditoriums, and the Vietnam War corridor at the Pentagon.

Event planners must coordinate with candidates for guest speakers and the White House to determine speaker availability and ability to bring visibility to the event. Event planning should involve:

- *Targeted audience.* Vietnam veterans and their families. Prisoners of War (POW), their families, and the families of servicemen and civilians still missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War.
- *Medal of Honor Recipients.* The 51 Vietnam War Veteran Medal of Honor recipients should be major players in the national event.
- *Other Federal agencies.* Other Federal agencies such as the Smithsonian and National Archives and Records Administration. The VWC should work with the Transportation Security Administration to post announcements about the national event in airports across the nation.
- *Our allies.* Invite representatives from allied nations to participate in the national event.
- *Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs).* The national level officials of VSOs should be major players in the national event. There is a capacity for outreach that can only be obtained through their audiences.
- *Commemorative Partners.* Commemorative Partner events could be timed to focus national attention on March 29th, National Vietnam War Veterans Day. Thus, Commemorative Partners

would hopefully give us the “every hometown in America” participation the VWC seeks. Commemorative Partners with larger geographic footprints have the ability to team up to ensure there is a large-scale event in each state. The VWC should formally and officially recognize the efforts of Commemorative Partners.

- *Department of Defense (DoD).* The DoD Secretary, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Chiefs of Staff, service secretaries, by virtue of position, should be major players in the national event to honor and remember Vietnam veterans and maintain commitment to the POW and missing-in-action accounting mission.
- *DoD, Active Duty and Reserve Military Organizations.* The final national and regional events will require complete DoD, active duty and reserve military organizations support for ceremonies. The national event should include the support of the ceremonial units of the Military District of Washington.
- *Congress.* Congress and state legislatures should be major players for the national, state and local events across the country. A day of recognition should be coordinated in both the U.S. House and Senate.
- *Governors, State Veterans Affairs (VA) Directors, Adjutant Generals.* The VWC should encourage governors, State VA Directors, and Adjutants Generals to host state-level events. Events should be encouraged in each state capital. The members of the Committee, acting as private citizens, can help promote the national Commemorative event(s) to the governors. The VWC should also collaborate with the National Governors Association and the United War Council for successful promotion of the national Commemoration event at their annual meetings.
- *D.C. National Guard.* The Guard and its Soldiers and Airmen are extensively involved in public events in the D.C. area and often participate in, or support, the events they sponsor. The Guard includes the states, territories and the D.C. Guard.
- *Museums & VA Facilities.* Encourage Smithsonian and the Armed Services national and base/post museums to feature the Vietnam War during the period leading up to and beyond the national event. The VWC should target museums, bases, and VA facilities for distribution of printed materials.
- *The Vietnam War Commemoration Advisory Committee.* The Vietnam War Commemoration Advisory Committee should be invited to attend the national event and possibly serve in special role.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ONE-YEAR PERIOD PRECEDING/DURING 2023

The VWC should promote local and regional commemorative events via the states and territories throughout the year preceding/during 2023 through state governments and commemorative partners.

Calendar Notations. National Vietnam War Veterans Day should be added to calendars to remind the Nation to honor Vietnam veterans and support our Nation’s efforts to achieve the fullest possible accounting for America’s unreturned Vietnam veterans. Thank every publisher who marks March 29th as Vietnam Veterans Day.

Wall Street. The VWC should coordinate to have a day set aside for selected Vietnam Era veterans to Ring the Opening Bell and the Closing Bell on Wall Street.

Service Birthdays. Each Military Service has a birthday. These could be additional opportunities to focus attention on the Commemoration, as well as returned POWs and those still listed as missing and unaccounted-for from the Vietnam War from each Service.

Key Commemorative Partners. The VWC must keep its programs focused on the basic elements; make plans easy for participants across the country to implement.

Vietnam Era Reunion Groups. The VWC should continue to reach out to Vietnam War Era reunion groups conducting anniversary events; these have proven to be excellent opportunities to pin Vietnam veterans.

Materials. The VWC should consider unique memorabilia to provide all partners.

COMMUNICATION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a comprehensive communications plan that addresses all aspects of the media with the purpose of seeking assistance in sharing our message while informing the public two years prior to March 29, 2023.

National Commemorative Partners. National Commemorative Partners who are media advertisers could be helpful in continued joint production and perhaps more importantly in promotion of placement with outlets where they have major advertising budgets and clout.

Social Media. Get social media, e.g., Facebook and Twitter, on board with the Commemoration's mission. Social media initiatives only work with ongoing efforts. The VWC must be dedicated to continuing the current messaging initiatives and stay alert for new forms of social media.

Wide Variety of Media. The communication plan should reflect the VWC's use of a wide variety of media, including:

- a. Radio, television networks
- b. Social media
- c. Local and community newspapers
- d. Newsletters and magazines of veterans organizations
- e. Major magazines (American Association of Retired Persons Publication, Sports Illustrated, etc.)
- f. Flyers distributed at major events
- g. The Ad Council

Public Service Announcements. Public service announcements (PSAs) should be used to inform the public about national Vietnam War Commemoration events and related activities (e.g., bell-ringing). Every major network should produce a PSA (14-15 major networks).

Wide support: Seek out possible support for local, state and national level public service announcements leading up to the national event, including from the President of the United States.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a secondary focus on the other 4 objectives of the Commemoration. The VWC should build a digital packet of all of its materials to be shared with museums, academia, Department of Veterans Affairs, and K-12 schools. The VWC should increase its poster, teacher and museum toolkits for distribution as early as 2021. The VWC should create a “Museum Tool Kit,” keeping in mind that small museums must concentrate on small displays.

Continue Existing Commemorative Objectives. The Committee recognizes there were multiple objectives to be met, as mandated by Public Law 110-181 Section 598. Though the focus of this Report is on the promotion of a national celebration, the VWC should also continue to pay tribute to the following groups and activities:

- *Pay tribute to the contributions during the Vietnam War made on the home front by the people of the United States.* The VWC needs to review how well it has paid tribute to the contributions made during the Vietnam War on the home front by the American people. These are family members (spouses, parents, brothers, sisters, etc.) who represent the real strength behind Vietnam veterans.
- *Highlight the Advances in Technology, Science, and Medicine Related to Research Conducted during the Vietnam War.* The VWC should review how well it has covered the numerous scientific advances made during the Vietnam War.
- *Recognize the Contributions and Sacrifices made during the Vietnam War by Allies of the United States.* The VWC needs to review how well it has recognized the contributions and sacrifices made during the Vietnam War by allies of the United States.
- *Highlighting the service of the Armed Forces.* *The VWC has highlighted the service of the Armed Forces in large measure.* The VWC should review the actual performance of other Federal agencies and non-governmental organizations’ service during the Vietnam War and work to highlight their contributions. The VWC must be mindful of the “Army behind the Army.”

Long-lasting requirements of the Commemoration. The VWC must have a lasting commitment to our Veterans. The VWC should plan to transition programs that have an enduring quality such as materials provided to schools and Veteran Service Organizations to remain active after the national event in 2023 and shutting down in its operation in 2025.

Similarly, tasks such as making pins available to Vietnam veterans or managing the Vietnam War Commemoration exhibits and informative website have long-lasting requirements. The VWC should plan for the transition and continuation of certain Vietnam War commemorative activities after it shuts down in 2025. The VWC should identify the resources, (financial, space, human resources, etc.) required to operate a commemorative program as part of the transition.