

**Board Minutes**  
**October 10, 2014**  
**American Legion Headquarters**  
**7465 East 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue #D, Denver, Colorado 80230**

Robby Robinson, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 0930 hours. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed for our POW, MIA, troops in battle or harm's way and all service members.

There was no introduction of members as no guests were present.

**Board Members Present:**

William "Robby" Robinson, Chairman  
Dana Niemela, Vice-Chairman  
Rene Simard, Secretary- Not Present  
Kathleen Dunemn, Member  
Christopher Holden, Member  
Wendy Sue Chiado, Ph.D., Member  
Duane Dailey, Member

**DMVA Staff Present:**

Mickey Hunt, DMVA, Deputy Director  
Ray Z. Dissinger, VTF Administrator  
Reuben "Ben" Mestas, CDVA Director  
Tamara Edmond, CDVA Admin. Asst.  
Gail Hoagland, DMVA VAG Administrator

**Guests Present:**

No Guests Present

**Approval of Minutes from September 19, 2014**

Unanimously accepted as written.

**Board Member Comments**

Chris Holden: Last year we some of you were able to attend the Board meeting hosted in Colorado Springs at Excelis Headquarters. Now that company has branched off and we are proud to have Vectrus, the largest company in Colorado Springs, traded publically on the New York Stock Exchange. I would like to open an invitation to host the Board meeting if you can

give me a couple of months' notice. I will be attending the Association of U.S. Army Convention and if there are any veteran activities you want me to address, let me know.

Kathleen Dunemn: UNC has the military friendly designator now. With the conservative atmosphere, this is really something. This designation is for universities and colleges that have to meet certain criteria and they have military friendly thinking. This is a good move for UNC. Education is purposefully moving in health care to integrate the care principles of military friendly families and joining forces with designators who are military friendly. When schools advertise online they are drawing in more military students and their families. I have also been contacted by Sen. Udall's Office to be on the Military Academy Selection Committee.

Wendy Chiado: No comment.

Duane Dailey: I attended the Town Hall meeting held at the VA Hospital in Denver. I was disappointed in the lack of notice and the poor attendance by the military. One positive was the Benefits Manager was there from the VA Regional Office. Some of the points brought up were mileage for rural veterans and concern for lack of mental health services available for rural veterans. In my area, veterans are reimbursed for travel to the Fort Collins clinic but the trouble is that for 8 months out of the year that route is inaccessible. I am disappointed that the VA has not taken the lead on pushing for more mental health care availability.

*General discussion on mental health care availability and how it is difficult for rural veterans to get mental health care.*

Duane Dailey: Another frustration has to do with having a notary public available for veterans at the VA Hospital. I brought in a vet who was terminally ill and he needed some documents notarized. I called a notary public at 8:00am in the morning and he was supposed to be there at 10:00am but he did not show up until after 2:00pm. It was very frustrating for the veteran. They do not have a notary public at the VA Hospital. I brought it up with the Patient Advocate and they said when they had someone before available as a notary public then more of the VAMC employees would come down to use the notary service than veterans so they decided to do away with offering the service.

Mickey Hunt: Our Department can support you with a notary if you need it.

Ben Mestas: It cost \$35.00 for someone to become a notary public. I will talk to the patient services and see if they can work something out. I will look into it.

Dana Niemela: In response to Duane's comments on mental health, in my experience the number of combat veterans needing mental health care who are homeless is not very high. Approximately 80-90% of veterans who need mental health care are mostly due to early childhood trauma. A lot of them need grief and loss support. There are a lot of mental health professionals outside of VA Mental Health who are perfectly qualified to meet the mental

health needs of these veterans. Whatever I can do to increase access to mental health care, I will do. In our Department, we use Community Health Navigator to identify resources that are available for these veterans. This aids in referral of non-VA eligible veterans for any kind of care.

Robby Robinson: To summarize, of the homeless veteran population, very few are combat vets. Most of the veterans have mental health issues due to early childhood trauma. The VA is the best when it comes to post-traumatic stress.

*General discussion on veteran mental health issues attributed to early childhood trauma and the need for substantial research in this field.*

Kathleen Dunemn: There is some foundational work done at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany, that identified more severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) linked with previous trauma in childhood.

Dana Niemela: Building resiliency goes into combating stress and mental illness. The Veteran's Treatment Court in Colorado Springs had released that they were finding more of the veterans with mental health needs had experienced early childhood trauma.

Robby Robinson: We would like Lynette to re-address VA Mental Health Care availability for veterans.

Duane Dailey: The last two guys I took to the VA, it took an explosive situation to get some help. One of them talked to me for seven hours one night and then called and threatened me because he could not get VA benefits. When they go ballistic, they need attention. When I was part of the County Commission, I had the opportunity to take some first responder training. I would really like to have at least minimal first responder training for mental health intervention.

Dana Niemela: The objective is to get them to care as quickly as possible and this is especially relevant in rural communities.

Kathleen Dunemn: Some of the visits at Cheyenne VA, they use the tele-health system to connect with veterans. People don't want to talk to a box. The notion of tele-health was for the younger generation who were more tech savvy. In the case of mental health care, this is not true.

Robby Robinson: If you are going to a psychologist, for the patient/doctor relationship to work there has to be rapport and that cannot happen with a box, it needs to be in person.

Kathleen Dunemn: You don't get that with the box. There is a rapport that develops between a patient and doctor. There are also non-verbal cues, facial expressions, and body posture that cannot be detected through tele-health.

Mickey Hunt: They have that in Alamosa. In my experience working with the rural counties, the younger vets seemed okay with talking to the screen but the older veterans were not very happy about it. There are more of the older veterans in that area. One veteran reported that when they were having the tele-health conference with their doctor, the whole time the doctor was looking down writing notes and did not even make eye-contact. So it was not an effective way to use the technology. I would encourage you as a Board to get on Lynette's calendar regarding health care in rural Colorado.

In the second meeting follow-up after meeting with the folks in Alamosa, we discussed PC3 regarding outsourcing; Lynette said it was out of her hands. She said she would be okay with healthcare but not mental health care.

I spoke with Daniel Warvi and he said the VA employees felt threatened when they had the town hall down at Alamosa and all future meetings would be on VA property with VA police. I have been invited back to a meeting down there for January 15, 2015. We will see how it goes. They are very hostile down there, so we will test the waters. When I went down there a few months ago, they yelled at me for about an hour, got the anger out of their system, and then we had a productive meeting. Rural Colorado accounts for about 42% of the veterans in Colorado and most of them are the older veterans.

Duane Dailey: With my experience on the front line, each and every veteran with a mental health challenge, they put a lot of trust in me. I think it is because we have all been there and done that. I think that is the common denominator. I need to be trained as minimally as I can be to work with these veterans.

*General Discussion of training for individuals working with veterans with mental health challenges.*

Wendy Chiado: Since I have been appointed to this Board, I get a lot of questions from people at Peterson AFB with different issues, such as: Why don't we have a Colorado Springs Veterans Cemetery? As a new member, I understand your frustrations in a rural area. I would really like to do some training on what this Board is supposed to focus on.

Robby Robinson: We can focus on anything we want to focus on. We are a volunteer organization. Given the number of issues that are out there, we have to pick and choose what we want to focus on. That leads me to the Annual Report, we can put into writing items that are not getting attention. We don't focus on the Big VA; we tend to focus on what Colorado is doing for Veterans, CDVA, etc. From the discussion so far, what I am hearing is mental health issues and homeless issues. If we pick only 2 or 3 issues, it can be more effective.

Chris Holden: Since our point of contact is public, I tend to get a lot of calls as well from veterans with different issues. What I have done in the past is if I can't work it myself internally, then I send them over to Robby or CDVA.

Dana Niemela: Colorado Springs Stand Down is October 16<sup>th</sup>, at the Colorado Springs Auditorium on 221 E. Kiowa Street from 9:00am to 3:00pm.

*General Discussion about veterans with PTSD and how veterans are stereotyped.*

Robby Robinson: I agreed to go speak at the Grand Junction Veteran's Day ceremony. Next month, we will have Volunteers of America do a presentation. Richard Sandrock could not be here today, so there is no report from the Governor's Office.

DMVA

Mickey Hunt: General Edwards and I met with the Governor to submit a Budget Request and it is in process. As soon as I know something, I will report it. I will be in Grand Junction on Monday and Tuesday over in Glenwood Springs then on down to Carbondale.

I will be attending the Stand Down in Colorado Springs on Thursday. I will attend the Stand Down on Friday in Fort Collins. The Stand Down in Pueblo was last Friday and we had representation there. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, I will not be able to make the Grand Junction Stand Down. The Denver Stand Down on November 6<sup>th</sup> held at the Denver Armory, also, on November 20<sup>th</sup> at the Longmont Stand Down.

General Edwards and I did the Facilities Tour a couple of weeks ago in the Blackhawks. I will be at the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for the Colorado Springs Readiness Center on October 19<sup>th</sup>. This facility will host 2 companies about 390 soldiers, HQ Company and Alpha Company. This is an amazing facility.

Those facilities would not have been built without the support of the Board. The first four facilities with the support of the Board were able to engineer a statute to use the VTF to assist with that project. The VTF money has been repaid with interest. This was a win-win to save the VTF and the National Guard Facilities.

On the Army side, Brig. General Laucirica is the new Assistant Adjutant General for the Army. Does anyone have any questions?

Veterans Trust Fund

Ray Z. Dissinger: Wendy, do you have a signed Conflict of Interests Statement? Thank you. We are trying to roll into a form with the multiple signature blocks so we can automate the form.

We are working on the Audit response. For FY 14/15, \$17,500 for Longmont DAV has been turned down due to unstable membership issues and they would not have been able to execute the grant. I will need a motion from the Board to abrogate the \$17,500 which would have been taken out of this year's grant. The remaining \$35,975.53 could be used by the cemetery or by the nursing homes.

Another issue for the new grantees is implementing Direct Deposits; they will have to be issued underneath the CORE system. They would go to electronic processing. There has been difficulty with the processing. I have to go back with all of those electronic transfers and review them manually. Also, under the Smart Government initiative, there is going to be a different

format for the VTF Annual Report. I have submitted the format to the team. We are on top of it and working together.

Duane Dailey: When do you know when next year's funds become available?

Ray Z. Dissinger: The Long Bill is signed in May. Usually February or March, we know the amount. It should not affect what the grantees want to request. Based on past history, we fund at approximately 50% if approved. I recommend that they show increments in how the money will be implemented.

Robby Robinson: \$830,000 for the Veterans Trust Fund and \$970,000 for the Veterans Assistance Grant.

Ray Z. Dissinger: They can only apply for one of the grants, not for both.

Kathleen Dunem: Can't they apply as early as January?

Ray Z. Dissinger: 1 December for initiating for both with 1 March as the Deadline for applications. In theory, we would like to have them signed by 1 July. Gail will be administering both grants. Does that answer your question?

Duane Dailey: Yes, thank you.

Dana Niemela: I move that the money from the Longmont DAV to be abrogated.

Robby Robinson: The motion is for DAV Post#16 to allow the money to be abrogated based on the request of the Post.

Dana Niemela: So moved.

Duane Dailey: Second that motion.

Robby Robinson: All in favor say, "Aye." Any opposed? That passed **unanimously**.

Veterans Assistance Grant

Gail Hoagland: Things are moving along. It was a slow start due to the lateness in most of programs getting contacts. Another aside, Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the federal entity that oversees AmeriCorps, Retired Senior Volunteer Corp (RSVP) and other programs made changes to the grant requirements for RSVP and is now requiring that veterans and their families are part of the RSVP effort. The RSVP grant administrators have found that no one knows quite what to do with this requirement once the awards are made and published. Each county/region will likely have an RSVP program that is funded under these new guidelines. If you have any thoughts or ideas on helping them implement this requirement

it would be a good opportunity. I will let you know the RSVP providers in your area once funding announcements are made.

Dana Niemela: What would you say is the major hold up with the Veterans Assistance Grant?

Gail Hoagland: The contracts went to the grantees fairly quickly. Some of the delay was in returning the paperwork or in returning only partial paperwork. Also there is CORE. All of the information entered in to CORE and the whole process has been delayed.

Ben Mestas: Cemetery construction has been approved. I signed the contract two days ago. This will go to repairing the irrigation system and to one columbarium by December. It is the same contracting firm that was used in 2001 so they are familiar with the process. Kurt Hester is the new hire at the cemetery. New numbers of the veterans in Colorado are out from the VA. They are down because of the WWII Veterans and the Korean Veterans. Based on the U.S. Census, we are hitting 60,000 veterans. My goal for this office is to increase outreach, particularly to homeless and rural veterans.

*General Discussion of VA Census numbers and the accuracy of veterans reported in counties. The fact that a large number of the veteran population may not require VA Benefits was brought up along with outreach, enrollment, and long term projections for community impact.*

Ben Mestas: The goal of my office is that if you have a need and the VA can fill that need, then we want to make sure you are aware of VA benefits.

Mickey Hunt: We are now on social media, on Facebook.

Ben Mestas: We are constantly looking at ways to reach Post 9-11 veterans. We now have Facebook and we are working on upgrading the website.

Dana Niemela: A lot of people for Cold War and Gulf War veterans, many who have been told they are not eligible for VA benefits we are referring them to VSO's. Again, the lack of time in service and characterization of service are making them ineligible. There is a huge population of in-betweeners.

Ben Mestas: There is the Means Test for Eligibility for Health Care. They may not have been employed but now they have employment.

Discussion/Action: Annual Report of the Board

Robby Robinson: The Annual Report of the Board is required by law. There is a copy in your folders. Input will be required from some of you.

VTF- Ray Z. Dissinger

VAG- Gail Hoagland

Division of Veterans Affairs- Ben Mestas  
 Veterans Cemetery- Dick Gigliotti  
 VSO's- Ben Mestas

We will also be redoing policies in accordance with the findings of the Audit. We have requested letters from other departments and I will put them in the report when I receive them. We need to get this done by the end of November.

In the cover letter, we address several issues:

1. Big VA particularly the length of claims and the processing time.
2. VSO's – improving/raising payment for CVSO's
3. Homeless- still a priority for the Governor with Fort Lyon.
4. Audit outcomes
5. Access to care for rural veterans

Greg Dorman helps me with the formatting and some of the language. He wants it by the end of November.

#### Future Meetings

5 November 2014, 9:00am at Wings Over the Rockies, "Salute to Veterans" 7711 E. Academy Blvd., #1, Denver, CO 80230

5 December 2014, 09:30AM, American Legion HQ, 7465 E. 1st Ave #D, Denver, CO 80230

9 January 2015, TBA

#### Old Business

Duane Dailey: Is there a current publication of the Strategic Plan?

Mickey Hunt: The Strategic Plan is a requirement of the Smart Act and it will have to be put into CORE.

*General discussion of developing a new Strategic Plan and the amount of money it cost for the development. It was agreed to be addressed in the future.*

#### New Business

Chris Holden: I would like to host a session of the Board in Colorado Springs. If I can have several months' notice to plan, it would be helpful. We would like to have representatives from each of the Services Transition Assistance Teams. It would be great to host you at the new company, Vectrus.

Wendy Chiado: The Virginia Class Submarine has been re-commissioned the *USS Colorado*. It might be nice to have some of the members there.



Chris Holden: Most of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and its 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Combat team have redeployed, with only a small fraction remaining in Afghanistan.

Mickey Hunt: There will be a departure ceremony on 21<sup>st</sup> October at the County Fairgrounds for Colorado ANG troops to Guantanamo Bay.

Meeting adjourned at 11:06am.