

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

Saturday April 8, 2017

The Department of Illinois Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission met at Legion headquarters in Bloomington, Illinois on April 8, 2017. The meeting was called to order at 10:00. The following members were present:

Rodger Bennett (4th. Div.) Chairman
Tom Nebgen (3rd. Div.)
Raymond P. Toczek (1st. Div.) Secretary
Ashley “Dave” Davis (2nd. Div.) Vice-Chairman
Charles E. Lee (5th. Div.)

Guests: Randy Prunty VAC Woodford Co. & Mike Monroe 18th District.

Department Commander Cheri Stanton stopped by to thank this commission for its hard work and appreciated all Divisions represented. Sr. Vice Bob Henderson also stopped in and gave his regards.

Motion made and passed to accept minutes of previous meeting and make Ray Toczek Secretary.

Several members of this commission attended the DC conference and highlights were discussed. They are also available in the Department April newsletter “Did You Know” article. Major emphasis will be placed on reducing the appeals backlog and the Choice program will continue. VA is now 99% paperless and if they went back to paper the forms in one month would stretch 161 miles and weigh 20,000 lbs. The new VA Secretary Shulkin comes from a medical background and should be an asset to the VA. He also recently visited the Chicago Regional Office and gave them good reviews. The newest State Veterans Home should be up and running by 2018. It is located on the Northwest side of Chicago near Oar Park and Irving Park Rd. A new National cemetery for cremated remains is also scheduled for the Chicago area for some time in 2019. All veterans are urged to be tested for Hep. C at their local Veterans Administration hospital.

The Chicago VA&R office has again lost one of its full time service officers. She took a different job. Her replacement is the former 9th District Commander, Al Pizarro. He is fully trained and ready to go. He served in the Army and has a heart for veterans.

This commission then discussed three major changes; they are:

BRONZE MEDALLION

Most of us know by now that when we pass away we are entitled to a free government headstone. Many veterans, for various reasons, are interred in a private cemetery. It could be for religious reasons, to be close to a deceased spouse or family plot or for the shorter distance to visit the grave. Often times a headstone is purchased privately and there is no indication on those stones that a veteran occupies the grave. Until recently the Veterans Administration would furnish a Bronze Medallion to mark the grave BUT the veteran's death had to be after October 31, 1990. That law was changed and now any veteran who died since World War I can get this Medallion which can be placed on the private headstone. All branches of service are recognized and the sizes range from 2" x 1 1/2" to 6 3/8" x 4 3/4". The proper form to request this is 40-1330M and can be obtained by calling the National Call Center (1-800-827-1000) of the Veterans Administration. And by the way, this change was a direct result of one of our resolutions that was submitted by a Post in the 1st Division. It was passed at our State Convention and went on to our National Convention where it was also passed and became part of our legislative agenda!

PRE-NEED DETERMINATION FOR BURIAL IN A NATIONAL CEMETERY

Prior to this change, a veteran's family had to wait until the veteran passed away to determine eligibility for burial. Often times discharge papers were missing or misplaced and veterans ended up being buried in a private cemetery. Now a veteran can apply for eligibility ahead of time. After the proper form is processed the Veterans Administration cemetery system will keep a permanent record of eligibility. Upon a veterans death the Funeral Director need only call the Veterans Administration cemetery and furnish the Social Security number. You can also apply for pre-approval for your spouse. Once I heard of this law change I applied for both myself and my spouse. We are now on file! And remember, even if pre-approved you or your family can always change their mind and be buried privately. The correct form number is 40-10007 and can also be obtained at the above telephone number.

CAMP LEJEUNE DISABILITY PRESUMPTIVES

The regulations are now in place. If you served at Camp Lejeune for a minimum (cumulative) of 30 days between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1986 you may now qualify for possible Veterans Administration service-connected compensation. This includes Reserve and National Guard members. The following conditions have been approved:

adult leukemia Parkinson's disease kidney cancer
aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes

bladder cancer non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
liver cancer multiple myeloma

This last one we can use your help. If you know of a veteran who meets the above requirements but died and left a widow or widower, that surviving spouse may qualify. Please have them contact the Chicago office as-soon-as-possible!

The due date for resolutions to be considered for the state convention is June 24th. Posts should start working on them now and remember if your Post passes one it can be sent directly to Department to be considered at convention.

The budget was discussed. Motion made and passed as follows:

3 meetings (mileage) @ \$300 per meeting	\$ 900
3 meetings (per diem) @ \$105 per meeting (\$35 per day)	\$ 315
Postage	\$ 40
DC conference	\$3,000
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	\$4,255

Breakdown on the DC conference; the maximum cap per person is as follows:
If 5 attend, \$600 each, 4 @ \$750, 3 @ \$1,000 and 2 @ \$1,500.

Discussion then centered on the definition of "veteran". First of all per our National bylaws any National Guard or Reservist who did their six month active duty for training qualifies to join the American Legion. However that does not automatically give them veterans' status for Veterans Administration benefits. There are a lot of exceptions so interested parties should contact our VA&R office in Chicago for guidance.

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The next meeting will be held at convention on Wednesday, July 12th. at 4:00. We will convene in the old Hilton Hotel restaurant.

Having no further business the meeting was adjourned at 10:45

Respectfully submitted,

Raymond P. Toczek
Secretary, VA&R Commission