



June 26, 2014

NC National Guard Headquarters

Present: Dale Badgett, Saskia Barnard, Archie Barrow, Cindi Basenspiller, Glenn Batten, Jessie Bellflowers, Saskia Bernard, Carmen Borunda, Johnny Borunda, Brenda Brubaker, Shawn Chase, Eric Crawford, Gary Cunha, Lisa Delgado, Paul Dillon, Jeff Doyle, Lane Dyer, Jim Frink, Bob Goodale, James Gorham, Judy Harmon, John Harris, Patricia Harris, Joel Hibbard, James Hicks, Ernest Hoopii, Charlene Irvin, Victoria Johanningsmeier, Daniel Joy, Kerry Kane, Kenneth Kempf, Colleen Kenny, Stan Kimer, Harold Kudler, MD, Becky Lane, Kimberly Lindsay, Bobbie Lowe, Randy Marsh, Austin McCrary, Dr. William Merritt, George Miller, Lynn Miller, Terry Morris, Patty Muehlberger, Tom Nichols, Ilario Pantano, Brad Rashford, Cheryl Rawls, Jean Reaves, Jason Rich, Chuck Sanchez, Judy Sanderson, Rob Sherwood, Jeff Smith, Tony Sowards, William Squires, Nancy St. Claire, Flo Stein, Annette Stevenson, Doug Taggart, Tameka Vaught, Brian Volk, Lucas Vrbsky, Brian Warren, Julie Webb, Albert Welcher, Melvin Williams, GEN Cornell Wilson, Kyle Winder, and H.C. Woodward

Dr. Kudler welcomed everyone and mentioned that he is taking a new position as Acting Chief of Mental Health for the entire VA system. He will be housed at the VA Central Office in DC. After all attendees introduced themselves, Mr. Pantano then introduced Tom Nichols, State Commander of the NC Veterans Council, who is chairing the day's panel on Veteran Services Organizations. Mr. Nichols stated that there are 11 VSOs in the State, and all are represented on the Council. All work on legislative issues, which they prioritize and then lobby the General Assembly. Panel members include SGT Patricia Harris, immediate past Commander of the American Legion; Jean Reaves, past Department Commander of AMVETS; James Hick, Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart; Jessie Bellflowers, State Senior Vice Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars; and Brenda Brubaker, Vietnam Veterans of America and WAVES.

SGT Harris is a second generation Legionnaire and was encouraged by her parents to get involved in community affairs. She showed a brief video about the American Legion. Established in 1919, the American Legion focuses on four initiatives: rehabilitation, national security, youth programming (e.g., Legion baseball, Girls and Boys State), and legislative issues (they are a strong voice on Capital Hill). They also support the GI Bill and VA health care system and help veterans in filing claims to the VA. In NC, the American Legion tries to assist veterans; this year they are providing temporary cash support to veterans and their families. To be eligible, the veteran must have a school-age child who can be up to 22 years of age. Since last year, the NC American Legion has provided \$1M in financial assistance (for more information, go to <http://nclegion.org>). Due to bad VA press about long wait times for appointments, VA selected Fayetteville as the second command crisis center. SGT Harris participated in the center's activities; 787 veterans were served. The State has 50,000 American Legion members.

Ms. Reaves was a past department commander in 2000-01 and served as state legislative director for 12 years. She is also a Navy veteran. AMVETS is open to all veterans as long as a person has served honorably. AMVETS officially formed the first woman veterans committee; this is a very active committee in the State. AMVETS was chartered by Congress shortly after World War II due to lobbying by war veterans. It has a service foundation, with national service officers at the bases (e.g., Fort Bragg, Camp Lejeune, Cherry Point, and New River) as well as four national service officers located in Winston-Salem; they help with claims processing. They also have programs for youth (e.g., ROTC, scholarships,

summer Camp Corral, Freedom Foundations Program for youth leadership development), teachers, spouses (e.g., Ladies Auxiliary), Sons of AMVETS, Junior AMVETS, AMVETS Career Centers (e.g., teaches jobs skills and provides education and online classes), and legislative and advocacy initiatives. The National Commander works with Joint Veterans Affairs, developing a legislative agenda each year. NC has a strong advocacy team at local posts and the State level; AMVETS informs veterans of legislative and advocacy issues that may impact them. They have asked the Acting Secretary of the VA to speak to veterans and listen to their input. AMVETS has about 5,000 members in the State.

Mr. Hicks is the Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. Unlike other Veteran Services Organizations, no one can volunteer to join their organization. Discussed by GEN George Washington in 1782, events led to the 1932 Medal of Honor, which is awarded to combat wounded veterans. NC has 11 chapters, with less than 2,000 members. Each chapter covers 6-7 counties. They are in the process of trying to make each of the 100 counties a Purple Heart county. August 7 is Purple Heart Day; about 80 counties have signed this proclamation. He noted that there is no additional charge for the Purple Heart designation on car license tags.

Mr. Bellflowers represented the oldest veterans organization, Veterans of Foreign Wars or the VFW (www.vfw.org). In addition to serving as Senior Vice Commander, Mr. Bellflowers is also the national liaison and the state liaison for the Student Veterans of America (SVA). A SVA chapter has been established at each of the 58 community colleges and many of the 4-year colleges. VFW has 40,000 members in NC, with 189 posts. VFW service officers work hand in hand with the American Legion and other VSOs, with one goal in mind: to take care of veterans and their families. VFW is located at all VAMCs. He recently spent time with Acting VA Secretary Sloan Gibson and found his "speech inspirational and his passion genuine" and thought that Sloan has "a great and deep regard for our nation's veterans". VFW recommended formation of a local advisory committee of VSOs at ALL VAMCs. This committee must be engaged and active and meet with the VA regularly. Gibson was receptive to this proposal as a national initiative. Mr. Bellflowers also works at the All-American Veterans Center at Fayetteville Technical Community College (FTCC), which is a collaboration of the VFW and the Student Veterans of America. FTCC was recognized as having one of eleven "Outstanding Student Veteran Centers" in the country and has the first All-American Veterans Center. The VFW will continue to work with other CCs and 4-year colleges as there are 3500 student veterans on NC campuses. Mr. Bellflowers noted that VFW works closely with other VSOs on legislation and other issues. When asked what VFW does with SVAs, he responded that they streamline the process for returning veterans to apply to colleges. They advise on education, college transfers, prior credit, and applying for benefits. There are 12 SVA chapters across the State, and other campuses are interested in starting a chapter with Brunswick and Robeson coming on board soon.

Ms. Reaves said that there is a certifying officer on each campus to certify courses that each student veteran takes for the VA. The certifying officer also provides extra guidance and support to student veterans. Through this process, student veterans are assured of receiving their monthly check from the VA processing center in Atlanta.

SVAs also help faculty and staff understand issues facing student veterans. For example at Wake Tech, there was an instructor who gave students a zero if they were absent. A student veteran had a doctor's appointment, which was not a choice but a necessity since the veteran had had to wait to get the appointment. Through education, the instructor became more flexible about meeting the needs of student veterans.

Ms. Brubaker represented Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) (www.VVA.org) and the WAVES. She summarized a 2011 survey, which indicated that the public perceived veterans as drunk old men who liked to play bingo. For 30 years, they have been trying to change this perception. Currently, there are over 21M veterans, 1,600,000 are women. Forty-five percent are over 65 years of age, from the Vietnam, Korean, and World War II (WWII) eras. The 36-64 age group is about 46% of the remaining veterans, with only 10% under the age of 35. Seventeen percent have a service connected disability and only 4% have a predetermined right to VA care (over 70% disability). Only 25% of veterans receive their care or benefits through the VA system. The VA needs to reach the other 75% of veterans. The VVA has a monthly remembrance ceremony and September 19 has been designated as Remembrance Day. They are involved in political action (e.g., homelessness, POWs and MIAs, Agent Orange, PTSD, water safety, personality disorder) and veterans affairs; disseminating information about VA benefits (e.g., health care, education, burial services for veterans and their spouses) and special services; finder services; and have a household goods program. Founded in 1978, the VVA is the only organization that provides services to veterans who served between 1964-1975 and for those who were in country beginning in February 1961. VVA has over 70,000 members and 650 chapters. It is the only VSO that allows those with a less than honorable discharge to join. The VVA has developed a book on Agent Orange which addresses the top three conditions resulting from Agent Orange: ischemic heart disease, prostate cancer, and diabetes, and they encourage children and grandchildren of individuals with Agent Orange to register birth defects and with the VA. They have working groups on PTSD, suicide risks, and women veterans. They have developed a white paper on personality disorder. The VVA has 18 chapters in NC, with the newest one in Ahoskie (<http://myplace.frontier.com/~bru6/ncvva/id23.html>).

WAVES has national, regional, state, and local offices. It was established in 1979 by a group of WWII women veterans who hadn't been recognized as veterans up until that point.

Ilario thanked the presenters. Before opening the floor to attendees, he stated that the NC Division of Veterans Affairs is currently undergoing reform at both the interagency and intra-agency levels. They are going from 12 service locations to 20 and moving their headquarters to NC National Guard building. They are rebranding to NC4VETS.

Ms. Stein pointed out the new logo and banner for the Governor's Working Group on Veterans, Service Members, and their Families. She noted that the website is being updated.

Mr. McCrary says that his organization—the US Veterans Corps (<http://myusvc.com>) out of Cary—is a community service organization that benefits military personnel. They focus on community projects such as building tables for the Cary Veterans Memorial; changing NCSU challenges course so that it is ADA adherent for wounded warriors; and housing (they have built 7 Hero Homes for combat wounded warriors and hope to finish the 8th one by 9/11).

Ms. Stein thanked the Veteran Point of Contact at each MCO for attending. She also noted that NAMI is providing training on Mental Health First Aid for Veterans. The Governor may attend one of these trainings. She also mentioned that Mr. Harris has been involved in the training of veteran peer specialists.

Mr. Taggart announced that a June 16 law requires public schools to collect data on students with military connection beginning in the fall of 2015 (optional for 2014). The Corporal Pruitt Rainey Brass to Class Act is going into effect on July 1. It directs the NC Board of Education to streamline rules for awarding credits to veterans for relevant military service experience. If the veteran has already

earned an undergraduate degree, one full year of credit is awarded for every year of relevant full-time military experience. If the veteran hasn't yet earned an undergraduate degree, one year of credit is awarded for every two years of full-time relevant military experience. The Board of Education is also expected to study the possibility of providing student teaching stipends to veterans and offering a licensure requirement reductions for veterans who are already certified instructors.

Mr. Kimer reported for Kimberly Lindsay. She will conduct a workshop on work that she is doing in the area of hiring veterans at a September conference for 500 HR managers in NC.

Ms. Irvin works for the Coastal Care MCO, a 5-county region around Wilmington. They hold monthly crisis MH consortiums in each county, which has facilitated a decrease in the amount of time that veterans are in the emergency room. Referrals to inpatient units are also more expedient. They are working with the Fayetteville VAMC and linking on issues such as mental health and homeless veterans.

Dr. Kudler complimented the State Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services and the NC Department of Public Instruction for the services that they provide to veterans and their families. In light of the fact that 70% of Veterans seek health care through community health programs, the Association of American Medical Colleges is training medical students about military-connected health issues and culture and certifying practices in communities that are military and veteran friendly. This summer the VA is conducting national outreach through Mental Health Summits at each VAMC. Dr. Kudler encouraged everyone to contact the local points of contact and get invited to the Summit.

NORTH CAROLINA MENTAL HEALTH SUMMITS

Location	Date	VA MH Summit Coordinator	Duke EPIC POC
Charles George VA Medical Center Asheville	August 8, 2014	Laura D. Tugman 828.298.7911 Laura.Tugman@va.gov	Grahme.Smith@duke.edu
Salisbury VA Medical Center	August 28, 2014	Shanyn Aysta 704-638-9000 Ext. 4190 Shanyn.Aysta-Isaac@va.gov	Grahme.Smith@duke.edu
Durham VA Medical Center Durham Arts Council 120 Morris Street Durham, NC 27701	September 4, 2014	Cynthia Woods 919.286.0411 Ext:6026 Cynthia.Woods@va.gov	William.Kincaid@duke.edu
Fayetteville VA Medical Center	September 10, 2014	William Castillo William.Castillo2@va.gov (910) 488-2120 x7396	Grahme.Smith@duke.edu

Mr. Williams, Office of Civil Rights, Department of Transportation, is trying to attract more veterans into highway construction. Currently, the average age of highway workers is 55 so it is critical that they get younger individuals into the work. Contractors for roads and bridges are mandated by the State to provide job opportunities to minority, women, and disadvantaged groups. They are setting up on-the-job training academies in four Tier 1 counties (counties in NC are ranked on three tiers, with Tier 1 being the most distressed—see <https://www.nccommerce.com/research-publications/incentive-reports/county-tier-designations>). The first academy will take place this fall in a high school in Warren county.

Ms. Morris stated that her organization, Vets to Vets United, Inc., provides service and companion dogs to disabled veterans. Established two years ago in Durham, they currently have 8 pups in program (tmorris@vetstovetsunited.org). Ms. Basenspiller, Charlotte Bridge Home, has three medically diagnosed veterans who need service dogs so the two of them will contact each other.

Mr. Smith, VLC Cares, stated that on Memorial Day, Governor McCrory, from the deck of the Battleship North Carolina, announced \$4.2M funding for their project, the Veteran Life Center. They plan to house up to 150 homeless veterans by next summer.

Mr. Sherwood said that the NC Foreclosure Prevention Fund Veteran Assistance Program recently changed its eligibility requirements so that any veteran separated from service since January 2008 may apply for 36 months of financial assistance as long as they can demonstrate need. Since January, they have helped 200 veterans.

Dr. Merritt presented on his organization, Timebanks USA (<http://timebanks.org/>). Started in 1995, Timebank communities are now in 43 states. Timebanks give individuals an opportunity to earn, use, and give hours of community time. They view veterans as assets who can contribute time as well as receive it.

Dr. Kudler mentioned the National Resource Directory (<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/nrd>), which is intended to connect “wounded warriors, service members, veterans, their families and caregivers with those who support them.” He encouraged attendees to submit their resource on the National Resource Directory website. The website is sponsored by the DoD, VA, and US Department of Labor.

Ms. Rawls is the director of Winston-Salem regional office for the VA (<http://www.veteranprograms.com/id1461.html>). The office is responsible for processing claims. It takes an average of 145 days (or nearly 5 months) to process claims in her region. They currently have about 300 claims that are over a year old.

Mr. Borunda is with the Joint Veteran Crisis Response Team and works in partnership with the American Red Cross, the VA, and law enforcement on suicide prevention. To date, they have intervened with about 50 veterans and linked them with VA services. Consisting of all volunteers, they have 5 phones that automatically ring, including Borunda’s (919-907-0577).

Mr. Pantano mentioned the VA tip line (844-NC4-VETS), which his office set up so that individuals could report their concerns regarding the VA. NC had sites that triggered investigation. Over 500 calls and emails have come into the VA tip line. The NC DVA is working with the VA.

The next meeting of the Working Group will be held in the Emergency Situation Room of the National Guard Headquarters in Raleigh on July 24. Due to security, participants must register by July 21 in order to attend the meeting in person.