

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

**DEPARTMENT OF FLORIDA
GENERAL SESSION
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2017**

FLORIDA HOTEL, ORLANDO, FLORIDA

The General Session of the Department of Florida met at the Florida Hotel, 1500 Sand Lake Road, Orlando, Florida on Saturday, October 28, 2017 with State Commander Ken Corr opening the meeting according to the Ritual including the Prayer led by State Chaplain Harry Seiler followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL OF OFFICERS: State Adjutant/Quartermaster Gene Perrino conducted the roll call of officers; all officers were present or represented.

State Commander Ken Corr recognized National Council Member Dan Duffy; National Representative Adjutant General and Past C-I-C Brian Duffy; Past Commander-in-Chief's, all Past State Commanders.

NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER REPORT: National Council Member Dan Duffy touched base on the National Core Programs such as Sports Clip. During the 2016-2017 the Department had \$36,000 in Help a Hero Scholarships and the campaign runs through November 11th. Burger King and the Unmet Needs Program began November 1st. During the 2016-2017 term the Department of Florida received 67 grants totaling over \$160,988, and the Military Assistance Program for 2016-2017 raised \$7,288.70 through 11 events. Dan encouraged the members present to support these very important programs.

The second annual Day of Change Direction brought to National by Dan four years ago was discussed. Dan was put in touch with National Assistant General & Executive Director of the Washington office Bob Wallace to discuss the issue which brought about the upgrade in the response when calling the hospitals and/or clinics. Out of the 85 VFW hospitals and clinics in Florida five have the prompt hit 7 option for those having thoughts of suicide. Nationwide 400 facilities have the prompt 7 response. In Topeka, Kansas a veteran's crisis line center is being set up to help speed up the implementation of the prompt 7 response line. This will be a step in the right direction in helping veterans. Dan stated there are at least 20 – 22 veteran suicides a day with some veterans aren't even in the VA System therefore there could be many more not reported.

NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE ADJUTANT GENERAL/PAST C-I-C Brian Duffy brought greetings from Commander-in-Chief Keith Harman and Jr. Vice Commander-in-Chief "Doc" Schmitz who were in the Eastern Conference while Sr. Vice Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence attends the funeral services for Past Commander-in-Chief Bob Currieo of Arizona.

Brian talked about his visit to Florida following hurricane Irma and his travels with State Commander Ken Corr and District 13 Commander Richard Monroe which enabled him to report more affectively to national as to the needs in Florida. Brian came to Florida with \$20,000 cash to distribute funds where needed. Many VFW Posts and Auxiliaries stepped up to the plate and assisted fellow members and their communities as needed. The VFW and Team Rubicon worked together in assisting wherever help was needed. The VFW opened there kitchens to Team Rubicon and other organizations in the hurricane aftermath. Brian touched base on the efforts taking place in Puerto Rico and the efforts to get in touch with VFW Posts in Puerto Rico and /or members. Over a half million dollars was donated from Posts, Districts, Departments and individuals to national for disaster relief efforts.

Brian also touched briefly on the Day of Change Direction and the mental health issues facing veterans of all eras. All types of cancers are also being talked about more freely which opens up research, treatments and the mental issues that go along with it. Raising awareness to the mental health issues and other health issues among veterans and communities is the most important thing we as veterans can do.

National Representative Brian Duffy Continued:

The VFW National Foundation provides between the grants and programs over \$8 million worth of support to departments. More and more departments are establishing foundations and co-operation between the Departments and National is necessary. The funds in the National Foundation are from the development department such as mailers. \$45 million a year is used for those mailers with a return of \$60 to \$65 million dollars. Out of the profit \$8 million is sent to the departments and the balance is used to come up with new products and overhead. Less than 1% of individuals receiving the mailers will put a check for any amount and return it to national. If any department is soliciting funds with their own mailers they need to coordinate that with National to avoid overlapping in any campaigns. Corporate sponsors are also vitally important for raising funds. If someone no longer wishes to be on the mailing list notify national.

Brian touched base again on the late posts election reports and the stronger consequences that will go into effect next year. The Department of Florida had thirteen (13) Posts that were late on submitting their election reports. Next year the Posts will not be suspended they will be treated in a much harsher way and will not be just reinstated.

Brian talked about the important information on the OMS system. This pass year the Commander and Quartermaster manuals were sent directly to the home addresses as well as online.

WALGREENS REPRESENTATIVE Alex Russo briefed the membership on the history of Walgreens and service to veterans beginning with owner Charles Walgreen. During World War II Walgreens established a non-profit pharmacy at the Pentagon, the funds were given to the Pentagon Post Council which was then used to support food services at the complex. Walgreens has supported the military in several ways for many years. Since WWII Walgreens has made donations and held product drives to send comfort needs, and other items to deployed troops. Discounts for active duty military, veterans and their immediate families are provided on Memorial Day, Independence Day and Veterans Day. For the 5th consecutive year Walgreens is the only pharmacy to team up with the Veterans Health Administration to provide free flu shots to veterans. Walgreens returned to the Tricare network to continue serving the active duty military, retired veterans and their families with services. Alex stated Walgreens has a mission to champion everyone's right to be happy and healthy by addressing the mental health issues and what they can do to assist on this front by raising awareness, services and outcomes by connecting them with clinical resources. They are joining up with the VFW to help bring awareness of mental health issues in the veteran community and communicate about these issues as well as where to get help. Mental health issues are more common in the US than heart disease or diabetes effecting more than one (1) in five (5) individuals which is more than 40 million people each year. Alex continued to address issues of depression, anxiety, stress and other mental health issues presenting many stats. She also spoke briefly on PTSD among the veteran community and how to bring awareness. The same attention needs to be given to individuals with mental health issues as are given to individuals with a heart condition, diabetes or other issues. Alex went over the five (5) signs to make everyone aware of the red flags for possible mental health issues and the available resources especially for veterans. There is also the Veterans Crisis line that is available as well. In closing Alex asked everyone to familiarize themselves with the five signs of mental health issues and the available resources.

BUDGET & FINANCE REPORT: Chairman Dan Duffy stated the Budget & Finance report was presented to the Council on Friday. A motion was made at that time to accept the report as read, seconded and passed.

STATE AJDUTANT/QUARTERMASTER Gene Perrino made a motion to accept the 2016-2017 State Convention meeting minutes as published on the Department website, motion seconded by State Inspector Don Bult, motion passed.

STATE ADJUTANT/QUARTMASTER REPORT CONTINUED:

Gene made a motion to accept the 2017-2018, 1st Council of Administration meeting as published on the Department website, motion seconded by State Jr. Vice Commander Tony Purdy, motion passed.

Gene informed the membership donation checks for the National Home are to be sent to the National Home, Veterans Village donation checks are to be sent to the Veterans Village; Unmet needs donation checks are to be sent to National and Because We Care donations are to be sent to state headquarters. The National Home, Unmet Needs Program personnel and the Veterans Village send a post and district listing of what post and/or district paid to headquarters once a month for posting on the status report.

Gene reminded the membership of the due date for the September Quarterly Audits. He also thanked those that participated in the VFW Rays Game Day event which resulted in \$1370.00 from the ticket sale of 274 tickets. In order for the State Commander to be able to throw the first pitch at the game 500 tickets had to be sold, keep that in mind for next year. Gene thanked everyone for their support in the event.

STATE INSPECTOR Don Bult spoke briefly about being prepared when the inspector shows up for the inspections by having everything laid out ahead of time. Any discrepancies need to be correct and submitted to the State Inspector by March 31, 2018. The forms are on the Department website. Don touched base on the Quarterly Audits, if you are having a problem contact either him or State Quartermaster Gene Perrino. If the audit form isn't working correctly go back to the Department website and download the form again.

STATE SERVICE OFFICE REPORT: Director Jason Smith informed the membership of a new VA Identification card from the Department of Veterans Affairs for all honorably discharged veterans of all eras. This can be done online by registering with the VA and uploading a photo at Vets.gov. The 2015 law requires the VA issue a hard-copy photo ID to any honorably discharged veteran who applies. The card must contain the veteran's name, photo and non-Social Security identification such as a copy of a valid government photo ID, such as a driver's license or passport. No further information is available as to when in November applications will open; the turnaround time for the IDs or a specific address on the VA website where veterans can apply. The new IDs will not qualify as official government-issued identification for air travel or other uses. The VA already offers ID cards to some veterans.

Those who receive health care from the VA or have a disability rating can get a photo ID VA health card, also known as a Veteran Health Identification Card. Military retirees also hold an ID card issued by the Defense Department.

Beginning on Veterans Day veterans will be able to shop online at the following military exchange websites: ShopMyExchange.com; shopcgx.com; mymcx.com and mynavyexchange.com. The exchange sales will benefit programs. All honorably discharged veterans can go to the ShopMyExchange.com today to verify their eligibility to shop on the military exchanges.

Burial Eligibility – The Dept. of Veterans Affairs (VA) has implemented the pre-need burial eligibility determination program to assist anyone who would like to know if they are eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. The VA is promoting pre-need eligibility determinations to encourage Veterans and their eligible family members to plan in advance to use VA burial benefits that Veterans have earned through their military service. Planning in advance can eliminate unnecessary delays and reduces stress on a family at a difficult time. Burial in a VA national cemetery is open to all members of the armed forces and Veterans who have met minimum active duty service requirements, as applicable by law and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

STATE SERVICE OFFICE REPORT CONTINUED:

Members of the reserve components of the armed forces who died while on active duty under certain circumstances or who died while on training duty are also eligible for burials, as are service members and former service members who were eligible for retired pay at the time of their death. Spouses, minor children and under certain conditions, dependent unmarried adult children are also eligible for burial even if they pre-decease the veteran.

Upon request the VA will make eligibility determination for burial in a VA national cemetery in advance of need. Eligible individuals are entitled to burial in any open VA national cemetery which includes opening/closing of the grave, a government-furnished grave liner, perpetual care of the gravesite, and a government-furnished headstone or flat marker or niche at no cost to the family. Veterans are also eligible for a burial flag and Presidential Memorial Certificate.

Interested individuals may submit VA Form 40-10007. The VA will review pre-need burial applications and provide written notice of a determination of eligibility. The VA will store the pre-need application, supporting documentation, and the decision letter to expedite burial arrangements at the time of need. Individuals should keep the decision letter with the supporting documentation with their important papers and discuss the burial wishes and final arrangements with your loved ones or other representatives. Submission of a pre-need burial eligibility application does not obligate the Veterans of family member to burial in a VA national cemetery. Applicants may indicate a preference for a VA national cemetery on the application form, but a pre-need determination of eligibility does not guarantee burial in a specific VA national cemetery or a specific gravesite. At such time the next-of-kin, funeral home or other representative responsible for making the final arrangements should contact the National Cemetery Scheduling Office at (800) 535-1117 to request burial. The VA will locate the pre-need decision letter and validate the determination. Because laws affecting VA burial eligibility and individual circumstances may change, upon receipt of a burial request, VA will verify pre-need decisions in accordance with the laws in effect at that time including receipt of burial benefits.

STATE CHAPLAIN Harry Seiler informed the District and Post Commanders to have their chaplains email their reports to chaplain@vfwfl.org not to department. All the Chaplain reports are to be done in six (6) month increments with the first one due by December 31, 2017 and will be reported at the Mid-Winter Conference and the next six (6) months February through June at the State Convention. Harry stated national conductress Jean Hamil's father passed away; keep her in your prayers.

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR Glen Tilley introduced his two (2) assistants Billy Ray Maddox and Tom Randall Department is at 80.05% and was at 82.25% this time last year which calculates being behind 2500 members. Glen talked about the retention and its importance to keep membership moving forward. Glen informed the membership of the new membership contest which started July 1st. All the post have been divided into three groups and the winner in each group with the highest membership with new and reinstated members through April 30, 2018 with the tie breaker being membership percentage will be awarded \$200 for each post commander and post quartermaster to offset the cost of the Department Convention Hotel (must stay at that hotel) for two nights, Thursday + Friday or Friday + Saturday or all three nights. Glen congratulated District 8 Commander who will be opening a new post in Merritt Island. Glen also stated Assistant Membership Chairman Tom Randall of Post 99 (member-at-large) will be starting a non-canteen post in Hollywood. Glen will provide any help he can in regards to membership listing by zip codes, prior unpaid, expired members etc. to help ensure more members for the Department. There are many membership supplies available through the national membership department, membership applications are free but some other supplies may cost a little with some shipping charges. If you are recruiting you need to know what the VFW is offering and be able to inform that potential member.

COMMANDERS SPECIAL PROJECT REPORT: (Service Dogs for Vets) Chairman Ron Mills stated the Paws for Patriot's Program is in conjunction with a training camp in Palmetto, Florida. Ron asked the post to put together a fund raiser to help pay for breeding and training of these dogs which cost thousands of dollars. There are five (5) types of service dogs with no cost to the veteran; all they need to do is apply. The VFW and Auxiliary are both using Paws for Patriot's Program as their special project.

VETERANS VILLAGE REPORT: President Chester Pyatt introduced the current board members and the new board member Jose Rosa who replaced Fran Collum after he resigned. Also on the board are the State Commander Ken Corr, State Sr. Vice Danny Anderson and State Adjutant/Quartermaster Gene Perrino. On the Auxiliary side is Linda Burnette (the secretary of the board), Debbie McCollum, Debbie Thie, President Gail Hadley, Sr. Vice President Linda Seiler. Chester thanked everyone for their donations and reminded everyone the Veterans Village does not receive any state or local government funding only donations of Posts, Districts, Auxiliaries and friends of the Village. Chester recommended the posts put on a function for the Veterans Village and some or all of the board members will try to be in attendance. Post 7909 in District 6 put on a dice run raising \$4,000 for the Village. Chester stated the board recommended a rent increase beginning in October 2018 with a \$35.00 increase and will determine if a second raise is necessary in the future. Director Lugo sends the board members a monthly report to keep them informed. Forty-Four (44) units are rented with 66% occupancy but changes as individuals move in and out. Currently there are 61 residents. Chester also stated there is a balance on the Air Force wing of \$395,291 with a monthly payment of \$3,285.61. A discussion will take place with the State Commander, State Quartermaster, the line officers and the Council about the possibility of the Department paying off the loan. The budget of the Veterans Village had a budget of \$910,000 for the year, and came within \$32,000 of meeting that budget.

Director Al Lugo stated the Village is celebrating its 26th year which opened on October 13, 1991 and this is his 10th year as the Director. The Veterans Village has an unfunded budget and any other funds needed will have to be worked for. Al thanked everyone for their support over the years and announced the Annual Golf Tournament is on March 23rd with the picnic on the 24th. The funds raised at these two events provide the monies for the insurance of the Veterans Village. During hurricane Irma the doors were open to veterans in the community and others and every room was filled. The Village was without power for 8 days but due to the generator everything ran as usual. Al has reached out to National in regards to opening up the Veteran Village to veterans from the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to help them get back on their feet.

HOSPITAL REPORT: Chairman Chester Pyatt thanked everyone for their support in donations to the VAVS Representatives. Make sure each post has a hospital chairman and each hospital has their own account. Chester stressed the importance of entering the hospital reports on line; the work is being done but not being reported. There will be awards for each hospital and for hours again this year at the convention.

BECAUSE WE CARE REPORT: Chairman Dave Harris thanked everyone for making a difference by donating to the program. Dave briefed the membership on what the Because We Care program does to help veterans and their families in times of trouble. Donations were accepted at that time for the Because We Care Program.

COMMANDER CORR stated during the visit to the VFW Auxiliary meeting State Adjutant/Quartermaster walked around the room in a pink bra in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month and collected \$332.00 and then on the VFW side they were collected \$600.00 for the Commander's Special Project.

Commander Corr also stressed the importance of the Change of Direction Program for the Suicide Crisis Line and the five (5) signs to be aware of. If they aren't reaching for the phone we as comrades need to start a conversation with that person and try to encourage them to call the crisis line.

2016-2017 ALL STATE AWARDS – 2ND GROUPING

The following 2016-2017 All State Awards were presented.

District One:

Post 4437 Defuniak Springs – CDR Garland Wilmoth & QM Don Bishop
Post 5450 Crestview – CDR Kevin “Scott” Hice & QM Lyle Spangler
Post 7674 Ft. Walton Beach – CDR Russell Richardson & QM Jane Lowery
Post 11367 Mary Esther – CDR Michael Dorris & QM Nathan Horton

District Three:

Post 1966 Ft. Lauderdale – CDR Julius Sallette & QM Gary Pirtle
Post 8195 Hollywood – CDR Phillip Davis & QM Vernon Nelson

District Five:

Post 3559 Miami Beach – CDR Doug Morris & QM Robert Martens
Post 10068 Miami – CDR Robert Beard & QM James Blake

District Ten:

Post 12055 Bradenton – CDR Scott Bacon & QM George Johnston

District Twelve:

Post 8154 Zephyrhills – CDR Mike Wells & QM Glenn Shaw
Post 10140 Tampa – CDR Randall Boonstra & QM Tony Gardner

District Seventeen:

Post 10555 Panama City Beach – CDR Ken Waringa & QM Dennis Johnson

District Eighteen:

Post 4287 Orlando – CDR David Young & QM Ron Palfrey
Post 5405 Winter Springs – CDR William Smith & QM Robert Dunton

District Twenty-One:

Post 6180 New Port Richey – CDR Steve McDonald & QM Gary Motteler

2016-2017 ALL STATE DISTRICT COMMANDERS

District One: Commander Ronnie Holladay (4407)
District Three: Commander Jack Kelleher (5335)
District Eight: Commander Ronald Chapman (10131)
District Twelve: Commander Jon Thomas (8154)
District Eighteen: Commander Terry Guthrie (8207)

2016-2017 ALL AMERICAN AWARDS

The following 2016-2017 All American Awards were presented.

District One:

Post 4437 Defuniak Springs – CDR Garland Wilmoth

District Two:

Post 3308 Tallahassee – CDR Mark Alvarez

District Three:

Post 9610 Lake Park – CDR Robert McQuaid

2016-2017 ALL AMERICAN AWARDS CONTINUED:

District Five:

Post 10212 Miami – CDR Marco Gorrin

District Six:

Post 4761 – CDR Harold Baldwin

Post 5968 Orange Park – CDR Carl Yochelson

District Seven:

Post 8713 Brooksville – CDR James Batten

District Eight:

Post 3991 Melbourne – CDR Ray Jarvis

District Nine:

Post 4364 St. Petersburg – CDR Ova Moody

District Eleven:

Post 10066 Jensen Beach – CDR Harry Keat

District Twelve:

Post 4283 Dade City – CDR James Byrd

District Eighteen:

Post 5277 Clermont – CDR Kurt Schuh

Post 5405 Winter Springs – CDR William Smith

Post 10139 Chuluota – CDR Donald LaFlamme

District Nineteen:

Post 3282 Port Orange – CDR Jose Rosa Jr.

Post 8093 DeBary – CDR Medward Tessier

Post 10177 Crescent City – CDR Alexander

2016-2017 ALL AMERICAN DISTRICT COMMANDERS

The following 2016-2017 All American Awards were presented.

District 2 – Commander Eric King

District 3 – Commander John Kelleher

District 8 – Commander Ronny Chapman

District 9 – Commander Thomas McDonald

District 12 Commander Jon Thomas

There were no 2017-2018 Membership Awards.

District 8 Post 4225 in Kissimmee was presented their 50th Anniversary Citation from National Representative Past National Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy.

PAST COMMANDERS CLUB Chairman Katie Smailis stated their meeting will be held immediately following the current meeting. Any Commander who has held their first meeting is eligible for the Past Commanders Club, so be sure to join. GI Joe Awards form is on the Department website under resources then post forms with a deadline of May 14th and will be given out at the state convention.

STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA (SVA) Chairman Arden Battle spoke briefly about reaching out to the students instead of waiting for them to reach out to you. Let them know you are a resource for them, let them use your post for their meetings attend their meeting and give them your support and information. Let them know about the programs and once they hear what the VFW stands for many of them will join on their own. Arden suggested the post invite the students to participate in their Veterans Day event or to have them march in the parade with the VFW wearing their group shirts.

LEGISLATIVE Chairman Mark Alvarez stated the Florida Legislature completed their first committee meeting of the 2018 session with a few bills but is off to a slow start. Three (3) House Bills and seven (7) Senate Bills are on the table and this information is on the Department website. These bills have a lot to do with Veterans, their families and spouses, but not all of them will make it. Mark stated he is working with Congressman Neil Dunn who is working on twelve (12) bills he will be introducing on VA accountability. Mark touched base on the new Legislative Hand Book which is also on the department website to help show you how to approach your local legislators, how to write letters to them and how to make the proper phone calls; hopefully this will provide necessary guidelines. This year is an election year so bring the issues to them and be persistent but not rude. Mark is on the board of the Florida Veterans Foundation and along with Jason they are putting together the necessary paperwork to apply for a \$50,000 grant for transportation. Jason and Mark are trying to acquire grant money for the Commanders Special Project from the Florida Veterans Foundation as well. Any help the legislative team can provide contact Mark, his contact information is on the department website. In the October VFW Magazine there is an article about the VFW-SVA (Students Veterans of America) fellowship program and the legislative success it has had. Florida had two (2) students (Taylor and McGibben) that went to Washington and Marine Corp veteran Ryan Taylor was instrumental in getting an additional year under the Forever GI Bill for Stem Cell Research.

PROGRAM REPORT Chairman Tony Gardner briefed the membership on program reporting. Tony suggested District Commanders get with their Posts and make sure they know how to get into the reporting site. The deadlines for the Voice of Democracy, Patriot's Pen and Teacher of the Year and the State Chairmen's names for sending in the reports were provided. Reminders to complete the program report forms, which are on the department website, and where to send them. Tony spoke about the upcoming Veterans Day Parades and other events associate with it for reporting purposes. He stated a lot of the work is being done but isn't being reported. All Program reporting goes toward the All State Judging. The reports are also a good way to answer the questions of what the VFW does to potential members.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES REPORT Chairman Steve Schneider informed the membership of other youth activities such as Florida Youth Challenge, JROTC, and ROTC among many others. If a post has young people doing things around the post don't forget to report it. During the hurricanes many young people were helping veterans with the cleanup which qualifies as a report. If you don't report your programs chances of getting awards are slim. Having the JROTC come to the post to do projects not only makes the student feel proud about what they are doing but gives the post the opportunity to present the student with the VFW JROTC citation and medal in front of their peers. Air Service Medals, Civil Air Patrol, Sea Cadets are also available for awards.

State Commander Ken Corr stated the Veterans Day events are good for recruiting and reporting, plus setting up a table with VFW information during these events will also be a helpful tool for recruiting.

TEACHER OF THE YEAR PROGRAM Chairman Robert Hernandez gave the deadline dates for Post, District and State level submission. Robert went over all the required packet information necessary before submitting the packet. This information is available on the department website.

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY Chairman was unable to attend therefore Patriot's Pen Chairman Ron Chapman provided both reports. Deadline dates were provided for these two very important programs.

HOMELESS VETERANS SUPPORT Chairman Ron Chapman asked for information on any events in support of homeless veterans and he would try and attend.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINES:

Past Department Commander Amber Putnam requested the Departments support her in campaign for Jr. Vice Commander-in-Chief. Motion made by Past Department Commander Amber Putnam to start fund raising in the state of Florida for her campaign as a candidate for Jr. Vice Commander-in-Chief. Motion seconded by Past Department Commander Steve Surface, motion passed.

GOOD OF THE ORDER:

CANDIDATES FOR OFFICERS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

State Commander – Danny Anderson
State Sr. Vice Commander – Tony Purdy
State Jr. Vice Commander – Glen Tilley
State Quartermaster – Gene Perrino
State Judge Advocate – Bob Shepherd
State Chaplain – Harry Seiler
State Surgeon – Jack Kelleher, Ron Mills and Dani Hernandez
National Council Member – Benny Bachand, Ken Corr

Upcoming Events and Announcements were made at this time by State Adjutant/Quartermaster Gene Perrino.

Comments from the District Commanders and State Officers were taken.

There being no further business meeting was adjourned.