

Military Officers Association of America
El Paso Chapter



Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
June 2020

A meeting of the El Paso Chapter of the Military Officers Association (MOAA) was held 27 June 2020 via conference call.

Attendance:

President: COL (RET) Mike Hester
Secretary: Col (RET) Steve Barrett
Treasurer: ROTC/JROTC: LTC (RET) Dave Powell
Chaplain/Surviving Spouse Liaison: Ms. Connie Sullivan
Legislative Liaison: CW2 (RET) Dave Garcia
Programs: Col (RET) Bob Pitt
Public Relations/Door Prizes: LTC (RET) Martha Caldwell
Publications/Newsletter Editor: COL (RET) William Oseles
Membership Chairman: CPT (RET) Steve Mendoza
Marketing Manager: CPT (RET) David Thackston
Chapter Staff Emeritus: COL (RET) Lennie Enzel
Outreach Foundation Vice-President: LTC (RET) John Robbins

1. Administrative: The meeting was called to order at 0803. Chapter Chaplain Ms. Connie Sullivan provided the invocation.
2. President's Remarks: COL (RET) Mike Hester had no opening comments.
3. Old Business:
 - A. Secretary: Col (RET) Steve Barrett provided minutes from the May 2020 BOD meeting which were approved as written.
 - B. Treasurer: LTC (RET) Dave Powell provided multiple updates:
 1. The Chapter had a net loss of \$522.10 in May. There was extremely limited income for the month and the major expense was the professional liability insurance payment of \$525.00. The Outreach Foundation will reimburse the Chapter for half of that payment (\$262.50).
 2. There has been no real income in multiple months due to COVID-related cancellations of Chapter activities.
 3. The new Chapter account should be opened at GECU next Monday; once open, LTC (RET) Powell will acquire debit cards and checks and he will also deposit the pending funds previously reported.
 4. LTC (RET) Powell brought up a request to add Building 452 to the agenda next month; he would like to discuss whether the Chapter should continue to use the facility in the future.
 - i. LTC (RET) John Robbins indicated he was not familiar with the facility, but the Outreach Foundation might be interested in holding future meetings there.
 - ii. COL(RET) Lennie Enzel reminded all that we have shared the facility with other groups (SMW, MOWW, NAUS) and those groups also have materials stored there.
 - iii. CW2 (RET) Dave Garcia asked what files had to be maintained per MOAA National.

- iv. LTC (RET) Powell stated the renewal with Ft Bliss is due in November so he would in fact like to discuss it at next months meeting.
- 5. The BOD approved the treasurer reports as submitted.

C. Immediate Past President: No report, COL (RET) Forrest Smith was absent.

D. Membership: CPT (RET) Steve Mendoza thanked LTC (RET) Powell for bringing the membership materials to him last month. He stated he has never been to Building 452 so if there are any membership materials stored there, he would like someone to bring them to him. There was a very lengthy conversation about CPT (RET) Mendoza's desire to print out membership material; LTC (RET) Powell advised him that there was a significant amount of information on the website and there was general consensus he might not realize how much material he was wanting to print. All agreed the Chapter needs a local membership trifold but it has to be generated locally so that is an effort that CPT (RET) Mendoza could lead as the Membership Chairman.

E. Programs: Col (RET) Bob Pitt reported the Underwood Golf Course is now open for inside service with a maximum of 30 occupants; masks and social distancing are required. He reported the Centennial Club is open with the same protocols. The BOD agreed to postpone the previously scheduled August Luncheon and will revisit the October Luncheon plan at a future meeting.

F. Legislative Liaison: CW2 (RET) Dave Garcia reported he reviewed the MOAA National website and reported that the COLA Benefits legislation had passed the House; Senate and POTUS approval are usually mere formalities however the COVID crisis has delayed those actions. The amount of the COLA increase is still to be determined. The following input is a recap of items CW2 (RET) Garcia shared during the May and June meetings:

1. H.R. 6933, the Caring for Survivors Act of 2020, would increase payments for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) for surviving dependents and would change eligibility to allow additional survivors to receive the benefit. Specifically, the measure would:
 - i. Increase the DIC rate to make it more equitable with rates provided to federal civilian employee survivors. The base rate of DIC would be increased to 55 percent of the rate of compensation paid to a totally disabled veteran.
 - ii. Expand eligibility for DIC by replacing the "10-year" rule with a graduated scale of benefits that begins at five years for initial eligibility at 50% and gradually reaches the full benefit at 10 years after determination of disability. If a veteran is rated as totally disabled for five years and dies of a nonservice-connected cause, a survivor would be entitled to 50% of the DIC benefit.
 - iii. Reduce from 57 to 55 years, the age a surviving spouse may remarry and maintain their benefits, consistent with eligibility for other federal benefits for survivors.
 - iv. To view the video for the release of this bill, [please click here](#).
2. Representative Chris Pappas introduced H.R. 6591 to ensure that veterans do not have to worry about seeking emergency COVID-19 care during the current public health emergency.
 - i. Even under normal circumstances, veterans using the VA health system often experience problems with billing for emergency care because of administrative and bureaucratic hurdles. This can cause a significant financial burden for the veteran and their family. Moreover, even if VA agrees to reimburse the treating facility for the veteran's care, veterans may be held liable if VA does not pay them timely.
 - ii. To address these problems, H.R. 6591 would temporarily ease current requirements, which include the veteran must have received care from VA within the last 2 years, preauthorization from VA for emergency care, and that the veteran must be transferred to a VA facility once their condition is stabilized. Finally, the bill would make VA the primary payer for that care even if the veteran has private health insurance, Medicare, or TRICARE (although VA may still seek reimbursement from these insurers).

3. VA's Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program was established in 2011 to provide support and services, such as caregiver education and training, health coverage and a monthly stipend, to primary family caregivers of eligible veterans who were seriously injured in the line of duty on or after September 11, 2001.
 - i. In March 2020, VA proposed new caregiver regulations to expand access its Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program by redefining eligibility to include all service-connected veterans whose serious disabilities are caused by illnesses, rather than just injuries-a policy change DAV has advocated for a decade. Changes were also proposed to the stipend payment methodology, definitions for financial planning and legal services and procedures for revocation and discharge, to include advance notice requirements aimed at improving communication between VA and program participants.
 - ii. These proposed regulations would change in many ways how the Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program currently operates and has increased the level of complexity of the Information Technology (IT) software needed to fully support and manage the program. It also challenges VA's ability to meet the IT certification requirements to expand eligibility of the program to caregivers of veterans severely injured before 9/11, included in the VA MISSION Act of 2019 (Public Law 115-182).
 - iii. VA notes it is working hard to meet its intended IT certification target of June 2020, but with this anticipated change in IT requirements, now estimates the start of full expansion could be delayed to late summer/early fall of 2020. DAV has expressed our serious disappointment about this news and has been urging VA to make every effort to meet the earlier deadline as many seriously disabled veterans and their caregivers have gone without the proper support for decades and will likely be in even greater need as the nation continues to battle the COVID-19 outbreak.
- G. Publications/Webmaster: COL (RET) Bill Oseles reminded everyone that inputs for the next Border Bulletin were due 3 July. Since there was no luncheon and associated pictures that usually form the centerfold, he will continue to run stories like the recent one submitted by Col (RET) Bob Pitt. The entire BOD shared their "two thumbs-up" for Bob's first story and encouraged the sharing of additional Col (RET) Pitt "there I was" stories.
- H. Public Relations: LTC (RET) Martha Caldwell did not submit any announcements since all luncheons are currently postponed.
- I. JROTC/ROTC: LTC (RET) Dave Powell reported that EPISD and YISD will transition to year-round instruction this fall; the calendars for JROTC and other extracurricular events are still to be determined.
- J. Auxiliary/Surviving Spouse Liaison: Ms. Sullivan had nothing significant to report.
- K. Door Prizes: No change in status due to the COVID-related cancellation of luncheons.
- L. Marketing: CPT (RET) Dave Thackston reported he has had limited reach out capability during the COVID crisis. He also reported he will become the MOWW Commander next month and serve from July 2020 – June 2021. In his new position, he hopes to set up an annual planning call in the near future. He is also hoping to coordinate the Annual Massing of the Colors; 17 October is the current date reserved with El Paso Community College (EPCC) for the event however EPCC has not yet resumed coordinating dates for in-person events. CPT (RET) Thackston also shared that he is on the Flags of America committee and advised everyone that group has been displaying state and service flags on holidays at the Northeast WWII Flag site; he thinks that site might be a worthy consideration for an outdoor meeting venue. CPT (RET) Mendoza asked if EPCC charged for the Massing of the Colors. When CAPT Thackston responded "no", CPT (RET) Mendoza said he believed the ceremony used to be held at Kidd Field on UTEP and that might be a better option to consider given the additional space and social distancing opportunities it provides. CPT (RET)

Thackston stated that UTEP now charges a fee and that is why EPCC is the more desirable option. Additionally, the Ft Bliss Color Guard and Band require significant advance notice of the date and location so the 17 October date at EPCC will remain the current plan for the time being.

M. EP MOAA Outreach Foundation Update: LTC (RET) Robbins provided the following updates:

1. COVID Impacts. Most programs have been canceled; the UTEP ROTC Commissioning Ceremony did go as LTC (RET) Powell previously mentioned. None of the Vet Programs are active at this time, Two of the Soldier programs were funded, SKIES (active in 1st Quarter, using Video Classes until they can open again) and the YMCA Jr Enlisted Food Bank. The Bataan Death March and other events were canceled. As a result, we are in the process of reopening Grant Opportunities in September for October awards. Funds are limited.
2. Foundation By-Laws require a long overdue review. Hope to accomplish it in late 2020 to early 2021 -- need some Chapter participation. Our BOD made one badly needed change; old By-Laws limited voting authority to the Exec BOD; made it hard to get a Quorum and those doing the work did not have a vote. We added Director positions with voting authority and extended voting authority to Chairpersons of Standing Committees.
3. You may be aware that over the past 2 to 3 years the Grant funding of programs has exceeded the Foundation Income—so we have been slowly eating into the initial reserve built up in early years. If this continues obviously Grants will go away. As COL (RET) Bill Oseles noted, we are updating members on Programs with articles in each BB—COL (RET) Lennie Enzel did the first one, our ROTC update is ready for the August Bulletin and others are in the works---each beginning to mention the importance of Giving Day which as you know is our primary sense of funds. You may not be aware that in the last 2 years less than 20 Chapter members have contributed funds to the Foundation. Maureen Lofberg has joined the Board and will head our Giving Day effort; she is working with Krystyle Hopper, our Marketing lead, on the possibility of establishing a 2nd annual fund-raising event starting in Summer 2021.
4. We will have a new Foundation Brochure, our first, and Sponsor literature package ready for distribution in August. We would be interested in sharing the costs of a “mass” mailing with the Chapter Membership committee sometime in late Sept-Oct prior to Giving Day. If the Chapter would like some “graphics” help with a new trifold, we might be able to help.
5. Local ROTC scholarships were not awarded this semester due to limited applicants.
6. CPT Ashley Sperry has become the Foundation’s Secretary and CPT (RET) Thackston has assumed the role of Ambassador to liaison with local organizations and agencies.

4. New Business:

- A. COVID-19 Updates: COL (RET) Enzel shared that none of us should change anything we were doing in March and April regarding protecting ourselves and each other during this COVID crisis. The main transmission mode is via droplets so wearing masks, and wearing them properly over our noses, is extremely important. Everyone should also continue to wash their hands regularly and use sanitizer gel when able. She also reported that contrary to some reports there are many local testing sites available. A growing concern is that a significant portion of the increased surge in local cases has been in the 20- and 30-year old categories; everyone does not seem to be taking this crisis as serious as they should be. COL (RET) Enzel, who remains a member of the virtual Military Nurses Chapter, has contacted Congresswoman Escobar and her staff to request Ms. Escobar support efforts to not cut 18,000 medical positions as previously announced; military medical personnel are playing a key role across the country during this COVID crisis and their positions are critical to maintain the level of medical coverage necessary to treat our active duty and veterans. She has unfortunately not received the courtesy of any reply at this time. COL (RET) Enzel also reported that WBAMC was starting to “open up” to increase non-COVID procedures. On a related note, the VA is still largely doing phone appointments and there is a concern many veterans may be deferring their annual health care checkups which could in turn lead to cancer and other conditions not being identified in a timely manner. She encourages everyone to make and keep their appointments and to stay in touch

with their medical team. COL (RET) Enzel closed her comments by once again reminding all of the importance to be smart, remain vigilant and adhere to the safety guidance in order to try and stay safe and reverse the current rapidly increasing upward trend of cases.

- B. Retiree Appreciation Day (RAD): COL (RET) Enzel sits on the Army Chief of Staff's Retiree Council and attended a recent meeting via Microsoft Teams (and they are planning their annual meeting 20-24 July to be conducted via MS Teams as well). She shared that many locations around the country are cancelling their RAD activities this year due to COVID concerns and restrictions. She has reached out to MG (RET) Greer to get his input and recommendation to either proceed or cancel the local event. CW2(RET) Garcia advised he would try to call MG (RET) Greer on Monday to seek his feedback.

C. Alibis:

- a. CW2 (RET) Garcia shared that he had attended the VA Town Hall last week and encourage everyone to go the website to get additional information. He reminded all that if they need to go to the Emergency Room, they should definitely do so however the veteran must remember to contact the VA at 844-872-7842 within 72 hours. During the Town Hall, all were reminded that as of 21 July, Tri-West will no longer be scheduling local appointments and VA Community Care Services will assume responsibility for scheduling outside referrals.
- b. CPT (RET) Thackston advised he is still planning to travel to Houston in a few weeks to attend the Texas Republican Convention. He is driving and will stay with friends along the way with hopes of minimizing exposure during the travel portion of his trip. Organizers advise the event will be safe however there are usually 7,500 plus attendees so CPT (RET) Thackston stressed he will try to do his part by wearing his mask and will try to remain at least 6 feet socially distanced.
- c. Today is CPT (RET) Thackston's birthday so the BOD sang him a rousing, but likely forgettable, off key verse of Happy Birthday.

5. President's Closing Remarks: COL (RET) Hester encouraged everyone to stay motivated and then he also reminded everyone he would appreciate any input to help with his Border Bulleting articles. He also referenced the recent social unrest around the country and asked if MOAA should have an official position on the situation.

6. The meeting was adjourned at 0926.

Respectfully submitted by:

Col (RET) Steve Barrett, Secretary

MIKE HESTER
COL, USA, Retired
MOAA President, El Paso Chapter