

MONTANA STATE VETERANS CEMETERY
- ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING -
May 11, 2011

The meeting was called to order by Joe Foster, Administrator for the Montana Veterans Affairs Division. The meeting was held in the Helena Armed Forces Reserve Center, and present at the meeting were:

Alma Dickey, Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary/Prisoners of War
Irma Paul, VFW Auxiliary
Sandy Runkel, American Legion Auxiliary
Bill Furois, Disabled American Veterans
Larry Malby, Marine Corp League
Chris Denning, Department of Military Affairs, Facilities
Denny Lenoir, Montana Army National Guard Honor Guard
Joe Foster, Administrator, Montana Veterans Affairs Division
Wayne Carlson, Cemetery Program Manager – Montana Veterans Affairs Division
June Rychalski, Scribe – Montana Veterans Affairs Division

The meeting opened with Joe leading the group in the Pledge of Allegiance. Each attendee then introduced him/herself.

Joe then asked if everyone had received a copy of the minutes of the October 13, 2010 meeting, and if there were any corrections to be made. With no further corrections or changes to be made Irma Paul moved to accept the minutes; Sandy Runkel seconded. The minutes were approved.

Joe next drew the Council's attention to the Budget Report which had been passed out before the meeting. Joe pointed out the three cemetery accounts – license plate revenue, SB 401 revenue, and Patriot plate revenue. SB 401 and Patriot plate revenue do not fund the cemetery program. However, Patriot plate revenue could be transferred to the cemetery program if necessitated, but Joe stated he did not feel we would need to.

Wayne Carlson then addressed the group on the plot allowance and donations. Good news is that the plot allowance for our veterans will increase from \$300 to \$700 in October. That will be a big help in maintaining the cemetery. However, we will keep the charge to bury the non-veteran spouses at \$300. He stated he is doing his best to keep cemetery costs down. Donations are very good for this cemetery. Donations are not as regular in the other two cemeteries, but burials are increasing.

A question was raised regarding a new cemetery in northern Montana. Joe stated if any other region in Montana was interested in a veterans cemetery, they would have to follow the example of Yellowstone County and get revenue from a county mill levy. We do not have money to support another state cemetery. Larry Malby pointed out Great Falls has two cemeteries that have large veterans sections. Any cemetery can have a section just for veterans and what presumably they are doing is to apply for the VA plot allowance to assist in maintaining the cemetery. This is the procedure Yellowstone County follows.

Joe briefed the Council on the issues from the last legislative session. The first challenge came in the form of a 5% budget reduction overall, to include the cemetery program. We were able to get that amended out before it went to the Appropriation Committee.

Another bill, House Bill 375, was specific to special revenue accounts, which includes our Cemetery program. It mandated a 10% reduction to the appropriations, it would have hurt us very badly. We were able to get that amended out as well. The bottom line is that by the time the Session ended, our agency budget was maintained. Discussions followed concerning the positive results obtained from having the support from the veteran service organizations during the legislature.

Construction Update: Wayne Carlson reported the policy of having floral decorations removed the 1st of May in order for the cemetery to be mowed and trimmed for Memorial Day. Decorations are then allowed to be placed after May 20th. The Memorial Day service will be the May 30 at 1 pm. The Civil Air Patrol will come on the 28th and place the American Flags. They will be back the June 4 to take them down. This is a big job and we are grateful for their assistance.

Some improvements have been made on the irrigation system. Number 2 & 3 wells have been deepened and the pump has been replaced. This will provide much better water pressure during the summer months.

There have been 157 internments this year. There have been 75 at the Western Montana State Veterans Cemetery and 35 at the Eastern Montana State Veterans Cemetery.

An Eagle Scout has offered to do a project for the cemetery to complete his Eagle Scout Award. The project will be one to raise settled markers. This Boy Scout will put a crew together and raise the headstones so they are level with the sod. It will greatly affect the professional appearance of the cemetery and we sincerely appreciate the offer.

Wayne had reported at the October meeting that a ceremony will be held at our cemetery sometime in June or July to honor the two Montana Sailors who were killed while serving aboard the USS Frank B. Evans during the Vietnam War. In calling his point of contact he was told this will still occur and further details will be forthcoming. The two Montana Sailors were BT Fireman Apprentice Robert James Searle of Great Falls and Seaman Michael Kale Clawson of West Yellowstone. Since this did not happen during combat, those killed cannot be added to the Vietnam War's Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. The USS Frank B. Evans Association is funding the memorial and a memorial tree. The council will be notified when the ceremony's date and time are set.

Joe reported on the state cemeteries update. He stated Montana will be receiving VA funding to build an additional columbium in Missoula. The existing one is almost full.

Also, as stated in previous meetings, there is interest in construction of a columbium at this cemetery. We had had also submitted a pre-application grant to include the completion of Section D. Realistically we are not going to get the type of funding to do this project. But with the additional plot allowance funding to begin in September, we will be able to accumulate an additional approximate \$100,000 per year enabling us to complete the project in a couple years with our own funds.

Open Discussion

Joe explained that this would be the last Montana State Veterans Cemetery Advisory Council Meeting. The Governor's Office has discontinued advisory councils and boards

which are not specifically required in State of Montana statute. This particular initiative serves to reduce travel and time expenses to state agencies, while recognizing state government's serious and continuing budgetary challenges. Therefore, since the two-year term of service of those serving on this Advisory Council terminates in September, this will be the Montana State Veterans Cemetery Advisory Council's final meeting. Joe further stated that he and the cemetery staff will always be available and receptive to any concerns or recommendations which you may have in the future. The hallmark of this advisory council and our cemetery program has been mutual respect and support, always with a clear vision for the future. So very much has been accomplished since the first interment on September 8, 1987!

Alma Dickey proceeded to explain how the Council originated. She had suggested the council be formed and consist of a member from each service organization (there were 15 units at the time). This was imperative in order to plan how the cemetery would be formed and maintained. Wayne added his appreciation for the support both he and the cemetery have received from the Council.

Joe announced to the group that Wayne Carlson will be retiring as of July 1, 2011. He further stated Wayne has done an outstanding job and will be greatly missed. The Council whole-heartedly agreed!

Bill Furios expressed his concern that the agency no longer receives a listing of the number of license plates sold by each county. He feels that is an important issue in keeping adequate funding for the cemetery. He offered to make contact with friends of his who might have authority to have these reports provided the division. Joe stated he had addressed this issue with the auditors and would pursue the concern. If he does not have any success, he will contact Bill for assistance. Joe did explain that the number of license plates sold would not balance with the funding the cemetery receives. The cemetery no longer receives the full \$10 from the sale of each plate. In 2005, the legislature changed the manner of distribution. Now the cemetery receives .64 % of the general fund revenue that goes into motor vehicle division. That revenue comes from license plate sales etc. Then that .64% is broken down to 24% going to our cemetery program and 76% going into the veterans service program.

With no further issues or discussion, the final meeting of the Montana State Veterans Council was adjourned at 2:30 pm.