

Report On The VVA National Convention

The sixth national convention has come and gone and to the best of my knowledge there were no fatalities. There was, however, a great deal of heated discussion over changes to the constitution and resolutions that will direct our national leadership over the next two years. I was extremely impressed by the professional manner in which the business of the convention was conducted, it was democracy in its purest form, and by the amount of hard work required by, and willingly done, by the delegates to the convention. Anyone who thinks that the convention is one big party is greatly mistaken! Pete Duerr and I will be reporting in depth on the convention at the September 23rd general meeting but we wanted to pass on a few things in this newsletter.

First of all the results of the elections. Incumbent president Jim Brazee won a substantial victory over his opponent. The race for the vice presidency was another story. Incumbent Jack Clark won out over challenger John Tillman, but only after a run-off election on the last day of the convention. Region 9, of which we are a part, saw several of its candidates to the national board of directors get elected. This will help us in getting the concerns of our area heard by national. Bud Hamilton of New Mexico will be our new Region 9 director and, from our exposure to him, we believe he will do an excellent job. By the way, a Region 9 meeting will be held in Phoenix in October. I would suggest attending if you are in the least interested in what makes this organization tick.

As always, the POW-MIA issue was one of the most contentious. The committee meetings were packed and the resolutions worked and reworked. In the end, the decision agreed upon was that for the next two years VVA will continue to push for complete resolution of this issue before any concessions are made to the Vietnamese government. A movement is underway to have POW-MIA stamp issued. We will have petitions for this stamp available at the general meeting for those who would like to sign and for anyone who would like to circulate one among their friends. In conjunction with this, the delegates gave very strong approval to the Veterans Initiative project which will collect information that any of us may have on NVA-VC casualties and POW's and forward it to the Vietnamese government. This direct exchange may do more to bring final resolution to this issue than anything yet attempted. If you have information concerning NVA or VC losses write to: Veterans Initiative - c/o VVA POW/MIA Committee - 1224 M St., NW - Washington, DC 20005-5183. Be as specific as you can concerning the number killed, whether or not they were buried, the date and location, and their unit if you know it. If you have letters, photographs or other documents taken from Vietnamese you may send copies or originals. Unit histories might help too. You may send things anonymously if that is a concern for you. If you can clear up a single unresolved case and set even one family at rest, it will mean a lot.

Another area that saw a lot of action was the Agent Orange/Dioxin issue. The National Academy of Sciences just released the results of their study and it definitely, beyond any shadow of a doubt, connects AO/Dioxin exposure with at least five diseases. It seemed clear to me that if the VA fails to act on this one that our rights as vets are being totally denied and that it would be time for a major shake-up in our government. I brought back some info on this and we purchased an Agent Orange/Dioxin flag to be flown along with our other flags to ensure that this issue stays very much in the public eye. George Claxton, Chair of the VVA national committee on Agent Orange, will be at the Region 9 meeting in October. George is deeply committed to this issue and I suggest that if you or anyone you know is concerned or affected that you attend the meeting and get to know George.

The resolutions covered are much too numerous to report here, but we will try to do them justice at the September meeting. We made a lot of valuable contacts and got very excited about the viability and effectiveness of VVA at the convention. So much so that both Pete and I purchased life memberships while we were there. We want to thank all of you for making it financially possible for us to attend and represent you. As a result, I was able to attend the ground breaking for the Vietnam Womens Memorial and we were both able to visit the Wall for the first time. It meant a lot to me and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

YOUR BROTHER IN ARMS - Terry Rollinger

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