

**ADVISORY BOARD ON VETERANS SERVICES  
MINUTES**

A/V Conference Meeting at  
Oahu – Tripler Hospital, VBA E-Wing, New VTC Room, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Big Island (Hilo) – 1304 Kekuanaoa Street, Hilo, HI 96720  
Kauai – 1-3460 Kaunualii Highway, Hanapepe, HI 96716  
Maui – PFC Kaho’ohanohano Armory, 2701 Maui Veterans Hwy, Kihei, HI 96753  
Friday, December 7, 2018  
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

**ATTENDANCE**

Board Members: Mr. Clay Park, Acting Chair  
Ms. Bridget Komine, Vice Chair, Audio  
Mr. Michael Lilly  
Mr. Harold Bugado by Audio / Video  
Mr. Jim Traxler by Audio / Video  
Ms. Chelsea Fernandez by Audio  
Mr. Wilbert Pereira by Audio

OVS Staff: Mr. Ron Han, Director, OVS  
Ms. Heather Ho, Recorder

Ex-Officios: Ms. Nessie Shores, Acting Director, VBA  
Mr. Craig Oswald for Ms. Jennifer Gutowski, Director VAPIHCS

Guests: Mr. Gene Maestas, National Cemetery of the Pacific  
1Lt. Shao Lee, State of Hawaii DOD - Engineering by Audio  
Mr. Wade T. Ishii, State of Hawaii DOD – Engineering by Audio  
Mr. Juan Babiak, Liaison Yukio Okutsu Veterans Home in Hilo  
by Audio

Absent: Ms. Ann Greenlee, Chair  
Mr. Jim Horton, VA – Director, National Cemetery of the Pacific  
Ms. Aiko Shibuya  
Ms. Amy Rohlfs, PAO/VHA  
Mr. Carlos Santana – Senator Mazie Hirono’s Office  
Department of Health  
Department of Human Services  
Oahu Veterans Center

**I. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & CALL TO ORDER – A Moment of Silence**

Acting Chair Park led the Pledge of Allegiance and after a moment of silence, called the meeting to order at 0904 hours.



## **II. MINUTES**

The Board reviewed the November 2, 2018 minutes. Minutes were unanimously accepted by the Board Members.

## **III. COMMUNICATIONS**

None

## **IV. BOARD MEMBER'S REPORTS**

1. Hilo – Mr. Harold Bugado - No change to submitted report.
2. Kona – Mr. Jim Traxler - No change to submitted report.
3. Kauai – Mr. Wilbert Pereira - No report submitted. No additions.
4. Maui – Ms. Chelsea Fernandez - No report submitted. No additions.
5. Oahu – Mr. Michael Lilly - No report submitted. No additions.
6. Oahu – Mr. Clay Park - No report submitted. No additions.
7. Oahu – Ms. Bridget Komine, Acting Chair - No change to submitted report.
8. Oahu – Ms. Ann Greenlee, Chair - No change to submitted report.

## **V. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

A. Legislative Committee  
No report.

B. By Laws and Procedures  
No report.

C. Recognition and Awards  
No report.

D. Women's Committee  
No Report.

E. Project and Events Committee

- a. Rededication of the WWII Memorial in 2018 – Komine Liaison  
No update but still on the radar. Deferred to 2019.

- b. Maui Veterans Cemetery Blessing/Dedication Event in 2018 – Fernandez Liaison. No update. Carlos Santana talked to Ms. Fernandez already about her question on the One Stop Shop guidelines. Acting Chair Komine asked if Mr. Santana understood the question and he answered in the affirmative.
- c. Dedication of the East Hawaii Korean War Memorial – Bugado Liaison. No report.
- d. WWI Centennial Commemoration 2018 – Han Liaison  
Invitations have gone out. Parking will be limited. Some parking along the corridor and the rest will be around the Waikiki Shell. There will be shuttle buses running between the venues. There will be something out next week regarding the parking. It's a joint partnership with the City and County of Honolulu and there is no Punchbowl Ceremony nor State Veterans Ceremony that day. The core event is about 11:00 am to 12:30 or 1:00 pm. It is open to the public. Please carpool or catch the bus.
- e. State Veterans Summit – Han Liaison  
Acting Chair Komine asked about the State Veterans Summit. Director Han relayed that they are looking at June 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, Friday and Saturday. They still need to put the team together, looking at Dr. David Brown, Secretary Wilke if Director Gutowski and Senatorial forces concurs. Mr. Santana has been fielding a lot of questions.

## **VI. DEPARTMENT REPORTS**

**Acting Director Nessie Shores, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs – Benefits** - No change to submitted report.

Director Gooden announced that they have a VRC coming on board and they have re-advertised for additional VRC's. Trying to post out for a Guam VRC so they can help with the overseas case load. They managed to obtain an additional supervisor for VRC in VR&E to help Deborah Boehm of HR to help with the additional employees and get it classified. We will also have another PSA in that division. Director Gooden will be leaving the Hawaii office. December 9, she will be reporting as the SES Director of the Louisville Office. She will wait until the Secretary does his announcement. She has truly enjoyed working with everyone and everyone feels like family. One of the most awesome working experiences she's had with the collaborations, working together and supporting the regional office to help drive the mission for the veterans. She will let the person who follows know that they will have a team of awesome advocates and support

partners to work with. Acting Chair Komine expressed that on behalf of the Governor's Advisory Board on Veterans Services, whoever comes in will have big shoes to fill and the VA appreciates your collaboration and teamwork in helping our veterans. Mr. Park expressed that he would still like to call Director Gooden and ask her questions! Best wishes from everyone.

**Mr. Craig Oswald for Director Jennifer Gutowski, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs – Medical – No change to submitted report.**

On the healthcare side, press release sent out about our end of year hospital star ratings that evaluates benchmark quality care delivery at VAMC's across the nation. We were one of the facilities that made positive strides in the benchmark. Maintaining a 2 out of 5-star rating. What she focuses on with staff is if they are improving as an organization and not so much on the star rating. When you compare data from a year ago they have seen improvement in our overall quality.

A couple of areas that we have seen some improvement in HETUS metrics or our outpatient quality metric. VA Pacific outperforms the VA nationally in diabetic retinal screening, testing diabetics for kidney disease, depression screening, treatment for acute depression, breast cancer screening, cervical cancer screening, pneumococcal immunization, screening and referral for alcohol mis-use, offers medication referral and counseling for tobacco use, and suicide risk and evaluation for veterans who screen positive for PTSD. Lots of good things happening from that perspective.

Also, to note, is that we achieved a significant improvement in our delivery of mental health care. VA Pacific Islands is one of 11 sites across the country that introduced the Open Access for Care Model. Open access allows for same day care. We have the highest use for these clinics. It is being used as a national model across the nation. Hired Dr. Shawn Knapik, the first pulmonologist and we are also looking to hire a cardiologist.

With support from the Oahu Veterans Center, more job fairs have proven to be very successful based on new leadership in the HR staff. Extended 29 same day applicants' jobs as LPN nurses, social workers, administrative, medical support assistants, etc. Happy employees means a happy patient. Still struggle as we are at the bottom 20% who consider it the best place to work. Good news is that we went up. Last year we were at 51% to 55% this year. Our goal is to continue to move forward on that and to improve the employee engagement. We have some improvements on our intranet site. We will be launching a "Talk to the Director" program/icon so people can e-mail her directly.

Mr. Park has issues that he needs to address with Director Gutowski. He hasn't heard anything about the questions he has been asking regarding the Minority Veterans Program planning for the next year. Director Gutowski apologized. She said that she had thought the women's coordinator was going to be at the last meeting and that the Minority Veterans Program coordinator would be here at this meeting and that she will make sure the information is at the next meeting.

Next issue from Mr. Park was that veterans are not receiving their prosthesis in a timely manner. Have a new prosthetics chief, Ray Madrid from Miami. He is working with the team and Fresno to address the consult backlog. She could ask Mr. Madrid to present to this group as well and provide an update. Added 2 additional prosthetics agents. There are other concerns for space for inventory. Mr. Park would appreciate more information. Director Gutowski did speak to Stephanie Birdwell regarding the minority veterans issues who Mr. Park put her in touch with and had a very good conversation with her and she will fill Mr. Park in on the conversation separately, offline.

**Mr. Ron Han, Director, OVS** - No change to submitted report. – See Attached  
Very sad to see Director Gooden leave, she has built a very strong program. Director Gutowski has been working hard and it is great that she talked about seeing the improvements every day and knowing that they are on an upward trend. The benefits RO's are great. Talking to John Kelly they are 4<sup>th</sup> out of 57<sup>th</sup> RO's as related to timeliness and processing claims. Memorial services are doing great in exhuming the Korean War Veterans and opening more plots for new burials.

For Mr. Pereira on Kauai, VA National cemetery authority will be coming out on November 14<sup>th</sup> and Engineering will also be there for the Expansion Project at Kauai Cemetery. Would like Mr. Pereira to join also if he has time. Will let him know the details separately.

Wade will brief more on Maui grave restoration project and we were #1 in the nation on West Hawaii Columbarium Addition in terms of money acquired.

We briefed Director Gutowski on the Veterans home. Looking at a 4<sup>th</sup> site. Aiea site had other plans for the area in their master planning. Will brief the Board once the 4<sup>th</sup> site goes further along. The promissory 44.4 million dollars letter is conditional from the VA. Appreciate the help of Senator Hirono's office and Director Gutowski.

On Maui, Ms. Fernandez, there will be a special recognition ceremony for veteran Mitchell Lani. In 1952 he untangled the aerial gunnery tow target system in the open ocean from a Coast Guard Cutter. Coast Guard will award a special medal at 10:00 am, Monday, November 12<sup>th</sup>. Representative Lynn DeCoit and Representative Tulsi Gabbard will be there and the recognition will be in front of his family and the community on Maui. The ceremony will be held at the USCG Small Boat Harbor in Maalea. Mr. Lilly asked about the Makawao Cemetery.

**Mr. Carlos Santana - Senator Mazie Hirono's Office** – No Report.

**First Lieutenant Shaoyu Lee and Mr. Wade T. Ishii, Department of Defense, Engineering Office, Interim Chief Engineering Officer** - Submitted report

No updates on Veterans Services Funding Spreadsheet.

Update to Grant in Aid Project. Civil Air Patrol project is closed, Ken Nakagawa is waiting for the return of unspent funds in the amount of \$56,100.

Pacific Aviation Museum

Pacific Fleet Submarine Museum

Veteran Services Projects:

On Oahu -

HSVC Gravesite Restoration Project and upgrade improvements.

Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery Tree Trimming and Removal – Phase 2. May need to terminate the contract since the contractor is not performing.

Hawaii State Veterans Home, 11-28-18 met with the Kapolei Neighborhood Board and State and the project will move forward.

Island of Hawaii - Cemetery #2 and upgrades in Hilo, construction is in progress and the anticipated completion date is February 22, 2019.

West Hawaii Veterans Center anticipating Office of Environmental Quality Control (OEQC) publication on December 8, 2018.

West Hawaii Veterans Cemetery Additional columbarium units project awarded November 24, 2018 to Kaikor Construction. Need to issue a Notice to Proceed to the contractor by February 22, 2019. However, we are encountering problems with issuance of a building permit due to the Cemetery being in a conservation district. Needs Conservation District Use Permit to obtain the building permit. Columbarium exceeds the amount allowed in the original Master Plan. Hopefully the issues are resolved before the NTP date of February 22, 2019. Options are to delay and understand the Contractor may increase costs or start with permit to come later.

County of Kauai – Kauai gravesite restoration project.

County of Maui - The Maui Multi-Service Centers comments on the MOA provided by OVS and the VA were sent to the DOE and then they were forwarded to Principle Yap and CAS (Complex Area Superintendent) Dimino for discussion.

On Molokai the Contractor was issued a 74-day extension and the new date is November 2, 2018 which is today. A new contract extension will probably be issued since they are not finished.

Maui Veterans Cemetery Gravesite Restoration NTP has been issued but the contractor will start onsite work on November 13, 2018 Phases 1, 2 & 3. Hopefully the gravesite lawsuit is resolved before Phase 3 is completed.

Director Han noted that realignment requires that we go down to 1 vase per grave. There are 1,500 graves with multiple types of vases. Ms. Fernandez will probably have feedback on that. Contractor concerned that complaints on removal of vases should not go to them.

Director Han wanted to thank Engineering since all monies require a matching State infusion to the Federal monies that Engineering pushes for. HSVH in Kapolei, right below Walmart doubled in acreage from the Aiea site from 3.5 Acres to 7.0 acres.

**Mr. Juan Babiak, Liaison Yukio Okutsu Veterans Home in Hilo** - No submitted report.

There are new developments and procedures. They are still working on upgrading the alarm system to prevent wandering. It has been overall a great year but marred with the elopements. Looking into mental health issues for veterans. Clay asked if a Certified CPI instructor that does non-violence training has been at the site. Juan responded that there has been one but not for a couple of years and he's not sure if it has been on or off the campus. Ron thanked Juan for his help and input because the briefing for Kapolei was based on his insight. The neighborhood board especially liked that there would be no cigarettes allowed due to the oxygen restrictions and the early bed times for the veterans. Next week they will meet with the State certifier for care facilities on the project.

**Department of Health** – Not present. No submitted report.

**Department of Human Service** - Not present. No submitted report.

**Department of Labor and Industrial Relations** - Not present. No submitted report.

**U.S. Department of Labor, VETS** – Present. No submitted report.

Bureau of Labor & Statistics just released numbers that show that Veteran employment is 3.1% down from 4.3%. Veteran unemployment rate is trending lower than non-veteran unemployment.

**Mr. Gene Maestas, National Cemetery of the Pacific – Public Affairs Specialist**

Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs for the National Cemetery Commission Randy Reeves visited and was very impressed with the staff and Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery. Undersecretary Reeves is also very concerned about how the veterans feel about the planned Interpretative Center since the center will result in busloads of tourists coming up to Punchbowl and disturbing the solemn atmosphere that they try to provide for the ceremonies. Please ask the veterans in the community on how they feel about this and get back to him at [gene.maestas@va.gov](mailto:gene.maestas@va.gov) Director Horton will be talking at Oahu Veterans Center next week Saturday about this. The funding has been allocated but the project has not been approved yet. This is a step in the approval process. On Saturday, December 15, 2018, The National Memorial of the Pacific will be participating in the Wreaths Across America Program that will start at 8:00 am. Please come out and join and or help out.

**Veterans' Centers** – Not present. No written report submitted.

**VII. NEW BUSINESS**

None

**VIII. OLD BUSINESS**

None

**IX. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**X. WORKING SESSION – OVS / Advisory Board Issues / Ideas**

Vice Chair Komine brought up changing of the Agenda order to have the Department Reports appear before the Board Member's Reports and the Committee Reports. Motion was brought by Mr. Michael Lilly to change the Agenda order to have the Department Reports appear before the Board Member's Reports and the Committee Reports and it was seconded by Vice Chair Komine and unanimously accepted by the Board Members.

Mr. Park brought up the last Stand Down and if any information was received. Vice Chair Komine said that documents were provided by E-mail to the members this morning by Heather. Heather later provided hard copies of the e-mail to those at Tripler

**XI. ADJOURN**

Motion to adjourn by Mr. Michael Lilly and seconded by Mr. Jim Traxler. Motion carried, meeting adjourned at 0955 hours.

Heather Ho - Recorder

Attachments