

Tuesday, April 20, 2021 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present Ms. Patricia Ross, Chairman
By Phone: Ms. Takosha Swan, Secretary
Mr. John Kubinec, Member
Mr. Dan Cravey, Member
Mr. Shawn Hanley, Member
Mr. Eddie Whitted, Member
Mr. Mike Roby, Commissioner

Visitors: Mr. George Canavaggio, Assistant Commissioner, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present by Mr. Mark Bannister, Assistant Commissioner, Administration, Health & Memorials
Phone: Mr. Kerry Dyer, Director, Operations Division, GDVS
Ms. Catherine Graeber, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Dale Bell, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Mr. Doug Middleton, Chair of the Veterans Service Foundation, Inc.
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
Mr. Bob Norman, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
Ms. Shelly Ann Simpson, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. Eddie Asberry, Commander, American Legion, Department of Georgia
Ms. Carolyn Small, State Commander, DAV, Department of Georgia
Ms. Belinda Beldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home
Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, GWVH, Milledgeville, GA
Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Dan Holtz, Secretary, GMOAA
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information Division, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Director of Women Veterans Office, GDVS
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Mr. Drew Craig, Veterans Experience
Mr. Mark Demers, GDVS, Appeals Division
Mr. Steven Fay, Training & Professional Development Division, GDEVS
Ms. Debbie Gregory, Administrative Specialist
Ms. Mary Aukerman, Confidential Secretary to Commissioner Mike Roby, GDVS

On Tuesday, April 20, 2021, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held by video/tele-conference.

Ms. Ross called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.

Ms. Swann gave the invocation. Ms. Ross led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Ms. Ross welcomed the guests and performed a "roll call" of people listed above.

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Mr. Whitted made a motion to approve the April Agenda. Mr. Cravey seconded the motion. The motion passed by roll call vote.

Mr. Kubinec made a motion to approve the March minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Whitted seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

The following reports were submitted from the Veteran Service Organizations:

Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and VetLanta:

VETLANTA. John Phillips, Co-Founder and Vice-President of VETLANTA was inducted into the Georgia Veterans Hall of Fame on April 4th. We thank you for this honor recognizing his many accomplishments, but particularly in his great emphasis on making Georgia a #1 destination for veterans.

Activities this month included a VET-TALKS virtual panel recognizing outstanding veteran across Georgia with their words of wisdom. VETLANTA also collaborated with the US Department of Labor in a webinar on March 31st supporting the Office of Federal Contract Compliance which seeks to ensure more contract opportunities for veteran-owned businesses. April 5th, I was a co-speaker for UPS Veteran Resource Group on Veteran Mental Wellness. The VETLANTA Health Pillar also met virtually this past month. We are planning a health-focused seminar for 2022. VETLANTA is still doing all activities virtually. We look forward to whenever that can change.

Georgia Military Women. First, I would like to say thank you for the great honor of receiving the Yellow Rose Award on March 16th from State Senator Dr. Kay Kirkpatrick and the Georgia Legislators Women's Caucus in recognition of my work supporting and advocating for veterans. Georgia Military Women continues to grow and we are currently past 4100 members in Georgia. About 75% of the members actively participate each month. Meet-up and on-line activities continued. We are doing small meet-up groups at restaurants. We have also started doing COVID safe meetings at local state parks to get veterans out of isolation as they have become vaccinated. Several of our members (including me) have been volunteering at COVID vaccine clinics either at the Atlanta VA or at Public Health clinics. We are fully advocating for getting shots into arms for all veterans. Additional major outdoor GMW activities planned for April include attending an Atlanta Braves game and participating in a Veteran Fishing Tournament.

Mr. Mark Demers, Department Service Officer, American Legion:

The following information is submitted for this month's board meeting:

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- The Department Service Officer attended the American Legion Department Executive Meeting on March 19, 2021 at 1800 at the Sonesta Hotel in Duluth, GA. Points of discussion were internal American Legion business.
- The Department Service Officer completed the American Legion Department Service Officer School on March 26, 2021 instructed by Bergmann & Moore.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta RO Realignment- GDVS Review and Transition Planning on March 29, 2021 at 1430. We discussed the upcoming renovations in June 2021, layout of our new area in the RO, and moving coordination that must be done.
- The Department Service Officer attended American Legion "Training Tuesday" event regarding the MyLegion.org website and its new functionality on March 30, 2021 at 1900.
- The Department Service Officer attended the GDVS Appeals Division MS Teams meeting on March 30, 2021 at 1030 regarding RO realignment and preparations for the move that we need to make prior to construction taking place.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta VA HCS Quarterly VSO call on March 31, 2021 at 1130. Points of discussion were: Eagles Nest, COVID vaccines, new CBOC openings, phones, new call center, healthcare enrollment and face to face appointments. (provided summary).
- The Department Service Officer attended the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony on April 3, 2021 at 1500 at New Town Park, Johns Creek, GA— Commissioner Roby was inducted into the GMVHOF.
- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 10 veterans with VA benefits related inquires this month.

VFW Report submitted:

1. The Veterans of Foreign Wars completed its Voice of Democracy (VOD) competition on April 1, 2021. Established in 1947, our **Voice of Democracy** audio-essay program provides high school students with the unique opportunity to express themselves in regards to a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay. Each year, nearly 64,500 9-12 grade students from across the country enter to win their share of more than \$2 million in educational scholarships and incentives awarded through the program.

The national first place winner receives a \$30,000 scholarship paid directly to the recipient's American university, college or vocational/technical school. A complete list of other national

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scholarships range from \$1,000-\$16,000, and the first place winner from each VFW Department (state) wins a minimum scholarship of \$1,000.

This year Deymon Fleming Jr., a senior from Greater Atlanta Christian School, Norcross was the 8th Place winner and received a \$4,000 scholarship from the National Organization.

2. The Patriot's Pen (PP) competition was also completed on April 1st. Each year more than 165,400 students in grades 6-8 enter the VFW's **Patriot's Pen** youth essay contest for a chance to win their share of more than \$1.4 million in state and national awards. Each first place state winner receives a minimum of \$500 at the national level, and the national first place winner wins \$5,000!

The essay contest encourages young minds to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern American society, by drafting a 300- to 400-word essay, expressing their views based on a patriotic theme chosen by the VFW Commander-in-Chief.

This year Westley Vickers, an eight-grade student from Stephens County Middle School, Toccoa received a \$500 scholarship from the National Organization

3. The VFW State Convention is June 17-20, 2021 in Macon at the Edgar H. Wilson Convention Center. Commission Roby will address our Joint Session on Friday morning, June 18th. The Joint Session opens at 8:30 am. The Commissioner Roby will be the first guest speaker.

Ms. Belinda Beldoe, VFW:

The following information is submitted for this month's board meeting:

- The Department Service Officer hosted a VFW GA Post Service Officer – Make-up training course via Zoom training held on March 16, 2021 from 6PM-7PM. The Department Service Officer hosted training on eBenefits and MyHealth eVet to the VFW GA Post Service Officers
- The Department Service Officer participated in a VFW GA Recruiting Drive at the Jackson County Fairgrounds held on March 20, 2021 from 12PM-4PM. The Department Service Officer provided information to veterans and their family members on federal and state benefits.
- The Department Service Officer participated in a VFW GA Recruiting Drive at the Jackson County Fairgrounds held on March 21, 2021 from 12PM-4PM. The Department Service Officer provided information to veterans and their family members on federal and state benefits.
- The Department Service Officer participated in a VFW GA Recruiting Drive at the Former Gwinnet Mall held on March 27, 2021 from 11PM-4PM. The Department Service Officer provided information to veterans and their family members on federal and state benefits.

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- The Department Service Officer participated in a VFW GA Recruiting Drive at the Former Gwinnet Mall held on March 28, 2021 from 11PM-4PM. The Department Service Officer provided information to veterans and their family members on federal and state benefits.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta RO Realignment meeting. Update briefing on the renovation plans for the Atlanta RO 1st floor and the temporary location of the VSOs during the renovation. The Zoom meeting was held on March 30, at 3PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department Commander's COA meeting via Zoom on March 31, 2021 at 10AM. During the meeting we discussed the projects the Department is sponsoring that helps veterans and their family.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta VAHCS VSO board teleconference Webinar meeting with Director Brown held on March 31, 2021 at 1130AM. The Director provided an update on the COVID-19 vaccination program, Save Live Act, Health Care operational status, Community Care and the Hospital telephone system, A summary of the meeting was provided to the VFW Commander, Staff, and community.
- The Department Service Officer attended a GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Atlanta Vet Center Vietnam Appreciation event at 1800 Phoenix Boulevard Building 400 Suite 404 College Park, GA 30349 held March 31, 2021. The Vet Center hosted a drive-thru appreciation day for Vietnam Veterans.
- The Department Service Officer attended a Webinar hosted by the FDIC – Exploring Opportunities for Consumers to Open Affordable Bank Accounts. The speakers presented information on the benefit to having a bank account. The presenters indicate that many of their financial institutions are participating in the Veterans Benefits Banking Program (VBBP). The webinar meeting was held April 02, 2021 from 11AM – 12PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Military Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony. The ceremony was held on April 03, 2020 at 2PM-4PM at the Mark Burkhalter Amphitheater located at 3125 Old Alabama Road, Johns Creek, GA 30022. Commissioner Roby and several others were inducted into the GA Military Hall of Fame.
- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department via Zoom meeting held on April 06, 2021 at 7PM. During the meeting we discussed the projects the Department is sponsoring that helps veterans and their family.

GMOAA, Mr. Dan Holtz:

The following is the April report for the Georgia Military Officers Association of America (GMOAA):

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The GMOAA is mourning the passing of COL (R) Arthur "Art" Carey, a member and former president of the Atlanta MOAA Chapter and a resident of Jonesboro, Georgia. Upon retiring from the Army, COL Carey went to work for the Georgia Department of Revenue (GDOR) working on state income taxation issues. Following his retirement from the GDOR, he, along with the late LTC (R) Mel Wilkerson, was instrumental in organizing the Georgia Federal Military Retiree Coalition (GFMRC), a partnership between the Georgia Chapter of the National Association of Retired Federal Employees (NARFE) and the GMOAA. The mission of the GFMRC was to promote an income tax exclusion for federal retirees and military retirees who were not included in the then state law that only excluded retired state employees from paying Georgia state income taxes. Failing to achieve a change to the state law through political action, the GFMRC filed a lawsuit in the federal courts that was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court and resulted in the state law being declared unconstitutional because it singled out one group of retirees (state employees) for an exclusion and not all retirees, which violated the due-process clause of the state's constitution. This resulted in the situation we now have in Georgia where the first \$35,000 of retired pay is excluded from paying state income taxes after retirees reach age 62 and then after they reach age 65 the first \$65,000 is excluded (O.C.G.A. Section 48-7-27 [a] [5] [D]). COL Carey was 85 at the time of his passing and was preceded in death by his wife Alice. He is survived by his two daughters and one son.

The GMOAA will hold its first in-person Mid-Year meeting since the pandemic began last year. We will be meeting on Saturday, May 8, 2021 at the Comfort Inn & Suites Robins AFB in Warner Robins, Georgia. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 8:00 A.M., and will end at noon to be followed by a BBQ lunch.

The GMOAA is planning to hold its annual conference/convention in October 14-17, 2021 to be hosted by the Ft. Benning Area MOAA Chapter. Several events have been planned to be hosted by the Army post at Ft. Benning (an infantry class graduation ceremony, an Oktoberfest event Friday evening, a banquet Saturday evening and a Memorial Service Sunday morning honoring members of the GMOAA chapters and spouses who have passed away since the last virtual conference/convention in October 2020) and a tour of the Infantry Museum.

The GMOAA is anxious to get back to face-to-face gatherings. Zoom meetings have worked for the GMOAA, but not all of the chapters, so we believe face-to-face is better.

DAV, Ms. Carolyn Small, State Commander:

Due to safety concerns for our veterans, our Department Convention, which will be held at the Macon Marriott City Center, 240 Coliseum Drive, Macon, Georgia 31217, will only be for one day this year. Our opening session will begin on Sunday, 6 June, at 8 a.m. We will work until all business is accomplished.

Chairman Ross asked for the Commissioners report.

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Commissioner Roby stated GDVS has been very busy and a lot of changes coming up. Mr. Whitted asked about the new presumptive conditions for under Agent Orange. Mr. Canavaggio stated hypothyroidism, bladder cancer and Parkinsonism were the new ones added. The VA said no to hypertension because most people 35-50 usually get some kind of hypertension.

It was asked about permanent homes for women veterans. Currently there are no permanent homes for women veterans however, women veterans can go to Ft. McPherson for shelter. The VA does not fund family shelters.

Commissioner Roby said Mr. Ron Cason was moving to the Athens Office as manager and Mr. Mark Demers will be transitioning over to Veterans Training Division under Ramona Roper.

Ms. Shelly Ann Simpson stated the VA Regional Office building in Decatur should be opening back up in July so our employees in the Appeals Division would be able to return to the building then.

Mr. Kerry Dyer reported GDVS will be honoring Ms. Kim Williams as employee of the Quarter on April 27, 2021 at 12:30 in front of the Floyd Veterans Memorial Building. Ms. Williams passed away from Covid in January 2021.

Ms. Ross said Ms. Aukerman was retiring at the end of May and thanked her for her service.

Commissioner Mike Roby, Georgia Department of Veterans Service:

On Thursday, March 25, 2021, Commissioner Roby and senior staff went to the Capitol where Senator Doc Rhett introduced SB 87 to Senator Kay Kirkpatrick and her committee. SB 87 is a veteran bill that allows veterans to donate \$1.00 from state income tax for service organizations to assist veterans.

On Thursday, March 25, Commissioner Roby and Mr. Kerry Dyer went to the National Guard Headquarters in Marietta, Georgia, and attended a Women's History Month Celebration.

On Friday, February 26, 2021, Commissioner Roby held a Department Director's meeting.

On Saturday, March 27, 2021, Commissioner Roby spoke at the Blinded Veterans of America State Convention that was held virtually.

On Monday, March 29, 2021, Commissioner Roby and Mr. Kerry Dyer attended a drive-by commemoration ceremony on the Anniversary of the Vietnam War held at the Lawrenceville Vet Center.

On Tuesday, March 30, 2021, Commissioner Roby, and senior staff attended a virtual meeting with Chairman Ross of the Veterans Service Board and discussed possible Merit Based Incentives Program.

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On Tuesday, March 30, 2021, Commissioner Roby attended the Southeast Region (NASDVA) virtual meeting.

On Wednesday, March 31, 2021, Commissioner Roby attended the National Association State Directors of Veterans Administration (NASDVA) virtual 2021 Winter Conference.

On Thursday, April 1, 2021, Commissioner Roby and senior staff went to the Transition Center, Fort Benning, Georgia and met with Mr. Eddie Perez to discuss possible office space for our department to have an employee on site to assist veterans and family members. We are finalizing all the details and will keep the board informed.

On Saturday, April 3, 2021, Commissioner Roby and his family, Chairman Ross, Board Member Thom Mash, and many employees from the department attended an induction ceremony for the 2020 class of the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame. I am humbled to be selected as one of the inductees.

On Wednesday, April 7, 2021, Commissioner Roby attended a virtual meeting with Chairman Ross and staff from an organization named Unite US that can provide various programs to assist veterans.

On Friday, April 9, 2021, Commissioner Roby and senior staff went to Columbus, Georgia, to attend the opening of the Columbus VA Downtown Clinic Open House where he spoke briefly.

On Wednesday, April 14, 2021, Commissioner Roby attended an Agency Head meeting with Governor Kemp at 1:00 p.m.

On Thursday, April 15, 2021, Commissioner Roby attended a virtual meeting with Middle Georgia College Advisory Counsel.

On Friday, April 16, 2021, Commissioner Roby held a Department Director's meeting.

Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, Field Operations and Appeals:

GENERAL

- On March 31, 2021, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, participated in the Atlanta Vet Center drive through parade in Commemoration of the Anniversary of the Vietnam War. Ms. Winona Franklin the Vet Center Director and I handed out over 100 Saluting Georgia's Vietnam Veterans Proclamations signed by the Governor.
- On April 9, 2021, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, Commissioner Mike Roby, Assistant Commissioner Mark Bannister, and Director of Operations Kerry Dyer attended a ribbon cutting ceremony at the new VA clinic in Columbus, Georgia.

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- On April 13, 2021 Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, Director of Operations Kerry Dyer and Director of North Georgia Region Dale Bell met with the Director of the Lawrenceville VA clinic (CBOC), to discuss our request for additional space at the Lawrenceville CBOC. We were shown several offices and were told that we could have one of the offices for an additional Veterans Service Officer. The veteran traffic at the Lawrenceville CBOC warranted the request for additional office space. Over fifty thousand veterans live in the area.
- Welcome Home Letters:
 - 1 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in the month of March 2021.
- Department Electronic Claim's Assistance Processing System (Vetra Spec) currently 304,623 entries, this is an increase of 806 from March 24, 2021.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in Appeals, Waycross, Decatur CBOC, Columbus.

Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- March 18, 2021 Ms. Brooks participated in the Connections Matter Workshop presented by the Cobb Collaborative and spoke with 7 veterans.
- March 19, 2021 Ms. Brooks participated in the Connections Matter Workshop presented by the Cobb Collaborative and spoke with 6 veterans.
- March 22, 2021 Ms. Brooks participated in *The Governor's Challenge Site Visit Day 1*.
- March 23, 2021 Ms. Brooks participated in *The Governor's Challenge Site Visit Day 2*, and spoke with 8 veterans.
- March 24, 2021 Ms. Brooks had a BVA Hearing with a veteran, spoke with 6 veterans.
- March 25, 2021 Ms. Brooks had a BVA Hearing with a veteran, spoke with 5 veterans.
- March 26, 2021 Ms. Brooks had a BVA Hearing with a veteran, participated in the women veteran homeless meeting with Birdwell Foundation and spoke with 4 veterans.
- March 29, 2021 Ms. Brooks participated in an online *The Governor's Challenge Implementation Academy*, Online Birdwell Foundation Board Meeting, and spoke with 5 veterans.
- March 30, 2021 Ms. Brooks participated in Mental Health First Aid Training and spoke with 12 veterans.
- March 31, 2021 Ms. Brooks spoke with 9 veterans.
- April 1, 2021 Ms. Brooks spoke with 7 veterans.

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- April 5 to 9, 2021 Ms. Brooks participated in tornado clean-up in Newnan and hosted a veteran resource office, as well as basic needs distribution center in partnership with Coweta Veteran Club. Ms. Brooks assisted 22 veterans during this week's by filing claims and changing addresses.
- April 12, 2021 Ms. Brooks participated in *The Governor's Challenge and Mayor's Challenge Team Lead Call*. Ms. Brooks spoke with 77 veterans.

Current committees

- Women's Veterans Health Committee (monthly meetings and joint outreach events)

Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division:

- March 24-present, 2021, continued Mentoring Program weekly
- March 27, 2021, Ramona Roper participated in the Georgia Blinded Veterans Association Annual Conference via Zoom
- March 29, 2021, Ramona Roper made a site visit to Augusta GWVH while renewing PIV Card.
- March 29, 2021, Steven Fay made a site visit to the Newnan Field Office
- April 3, 2021 Ramona Roper and Steven Fay attended the induction ceremony of Commissioner Roby into the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame
- April 5, 2021, Ramona Roper, Steven Fay, and members of leadership conducted interviews for the vacant Trainer 3 Position. Mark Demers selected.
- April 6, 2021, Ramona Roper participated in the Atlanta Vietnam Veterans Business Association (AVVBA) conference via Zoom.
- April 8, 2021, Ramona Roper, and Steven Fay attended the Veteran and Veterans VSO Organization Meeting via MS Teams with the Department of Veterans Affairs leader.
- April 9, 2021, Steven Fay made a site visit to the Conyers Field Office

Upcoming Events:

- Continued ongoing support and monthly trainings to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices.
- Ramona Roper requested to participate in the CDC's veteran employee benefits conference in June 2021 via Zoom.
- Ramona Roper requested to participate in the Florida Blinded Veterans Association Annual Conference via Zoom. Dates to be determined.

Shelly-Ann Simpson, Director of Appeals

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- The total number of actual hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for March 2021 was 73.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for March 2021 was 274, while post-hearing actions was 71.
- The total number of correspondence conducted by the Appeals Division was 2086 (with veterans, BVA/VA employees, and VSO field offices) during the month of March.
- As of March 1, 2021, the Atlanta VA Regional Office completed the following claims for the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	98,958	\$165,667,675
DIC	2,698	\$3,874,023
Survivor Pension	915	\$674,688
Veteran Pension	1,914	\$2,000,282
Grand Total	104,485	\$172,216,669

NORTH GA, Dale Bell, North Area Director

- On April 7th, Marie Lundquist of Oakwood participated in a Claims Clinic at American Legion Post #127 in Sugar Hill. She assisted 21 veterans with various compensation and pension issues.
- February 2021 total retro awards reported by North Georgia Offices: \$1,060,489.00. Included in that total is a single award of \$110,951.00 reported by Belinda Wise of Marietta.
- Director Site Visits / Inspections: Augusta, Canton, Decatur VAMC, Lawrenceville
- North Region Gains/Losses:
 - None
- North Georgia Region Veteran Population: 443,313
Office Visits

*Total Monthly Office Visits includes Remote Work: phone calls and emails.

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Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		March-21					
A	B	C	D / E		G / E		
			D	E	F	H	
					Average	Total	Average
			Total	Work	Office	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Per	VA	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	58	15,017	1,037	14.48	2,446	2.36
Number of Offices:	34	Average Visits/Office:			441.68	Average Claims/Office:	71.9411765

SOUTH GA. Vincent Pritchett, Director South Region

- On April 1, 2021, Vincent Pritchett met Commissioner Roby, Assistant Commissioner Bannister, and Director of Operations Dyer at the Soldier for Life Center on Fort Benning. The Soldier for Life Center is offering GDVS space in the facility to open a new Field Office. Opening the new office on Fort Benning will provide convenient access for veterans and retirees working or shopping on the post as well as help reduce the workload on the current Columbus Field Office.
- On April 6, 2021, Courtney Jenkins (Valdosta Field Office) reported a retroactive payment for one of her veterans of \$14,849.00.
- On April 8, 2021 Vincent Pritchett attended the Veteran and Veteran Service Officer (VSO) Meeting hosted by Mike Stoddard. Panelists addressed Medical Disability Examinations (MDE), the Veterans Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP), and the e-benefits migration to www.va.gov. The main takeaway from the MDE presentation was how VSOs could help our veterans by letting them know how and who would be contacting them for examinations. Many veterans will not answer the phone if they do not recognize the number. The VRRAP program is an economic stimulus program targeting veterans between the ages of 22 – 67 who are unemployed and do not have GI Bill eligibility. VRRAP participants receive up to 12 months of tuition, fees and a housing allowance based on Post 911/GI Bill rates. The e-benefits migration to www.va.gov has been ongoing for a few years and is nearly complete. Veteran Service Officers will be able to use their Stakeholder Enterprise Portal credentials to log into www.va.gov.
- On April 9, 2021, Roger Futch (St. Marys Field Office) reported a retroactive payment for one of his veterans of \$20,296.28.

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- On South Region Gains/Losses: Ronnie Simmons resigned effective April 15, 2021.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 244,963
- Office Visits for February: South Georgia offices handled 6,755 phone calls and emails.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		March-21					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E	G	G / E
			Total	Work	Average	Total	Average
			Monthly	Days	Office	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Office	In	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	Month	Per	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	VA	To VA
			Visits	Month	Day	Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	40	2,502	845	2.96	1,784	2.11
Number of Offices:		29	Average Visits/Office:		86.28	Average Claims/Office:	
						61.52	

Public Information Division, Charlotte May Director

Public Information Division Contacts (Since January 1, 2020)

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 2,155
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 960
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 175

GOVERNOR'S (VIETNAM VETERAN) CERTIFICATE of HONOR PROGRAM-

- The latest and most accurate End of Year (2019) totals (since March 2015) –

State Certificates of Honor issued via GDVS – An estimated 28,690
 (Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 22,975

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 343

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 256

Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education and Training Division (State Approving Agency):

VETERANS STATE APPROVING AGENCY

- The approval and compliance surveys of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 1,769 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill educational benefits.
- Congress has extended the COVID-19 In-Residence Housing Allowance for veterans normally in a classroom that have been moved to on-line learning until December 21, 2021. Originally this was set to expire on December 23, 2020.
- SAA Staff to resume in-state travel effective May 3rd, 2021

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	391
Approved Training Establishments	1,378
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	21,261

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, March 2021.

Mr. Russell Feagin:

Veteran Service Board Report for Health and Memorials Division

There have been several significant events within the Division since the last Board meeting. These include changes in funding for the Homes as well as changes in policies due associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the 2021 Georgia Legislative session a bond in the amount of \$2,035,000 was approved for funding of furniture, fixtures, and equipment for the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville. The bond sale is projected for June 8, 2021. Acceptance of this bond requires approval of the Veterans Service Board. Attached is a resolution prepared by the State Attorney General's office accepting this offer. The following is their guidance: "The General Assembly has appropriated certain funds so that the Department of Veterans Service may request the issuance of general obligation

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debt for certain projects. Attached you will find the resolution that the Veterans Service Board should adopt, requesting the Georgia State Financing and Investment Commission issue general obligation bonds for such projects. Please do not revise or change the document without consulting with me. In view of the emergency conditions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, we will not require that you deliver paper copies of the executed resolution. You may also obtain fax or electronic signatures from the Chair and Secretary if necessary." It is requested this resolution be approved during the April 20th meeting to allow timely processing. We have received word that a VA grant in the amount of (approximately \$1.5 million) has been approved for projects to reduce the spread of COVID-19 at both Homes. These funds will be used to establish automatic thermal scanners at entry ways; place Plexiglas screens in appropriate locations; add UV lights and ionization devices to heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, etc. We are also on the priority list for funding (approximately \$1 million) for Information Technology (IT) projects for each Home. This will allow us to develop the network necessary for Electronic Medical Records as well as improve existing IT. As a result of new guidance from the Governor's office and the CDC, COVID-19 restrictions have changed. The shelter in place restriction has been lifted and new visitation policies are being established. Both indoor and outdoor visitation will be allowed in the Homes. Masks will still be required, and most visits will not take place in the resident's room. People entering the Homes will still be screened using the established screening procedures, e.g., temperature check, health questionnaire, etc. As a result of the new guidance indicated above, the State cemeteries have also restarted committal services. These services will be conducted in the enclosed committal buildings. Since these services are indoors, families are still encouraged to wear masks, maintain social distancing, and limit the number of attendees. Military honors will be provided at the discretion of the appropriate branch of service.

During the 2021 Georgia Legislative session appropriated funds in the amount of \$1,000,000 were approved for development of a new State cemetery in Augusta, Georgia. Final approval and construction of the cemetery is dependent upon the National Cemetery Administration's approval and awarding of a VA grant for construction.

There are no current cases of COVID-19 for residents or staff at the Georgia War Veterans Home. Vaccinations continue at the facility. Attached is the statistical data as of March 31, 2021. We will continue to provide weekly updates as requested.

Mr. Mark Bannister, Administration, Health, and Memorials:

FINANCE

Accounting

Routine operations are continuing.

Budget and the General Assembly

The 2021 General Assembly legislative session was completed on March 31, 2021. The General Assembly passed the FY 2022 appropriations and budget law; however, the Governor

has not, as of this writing, signed it into law. Most likely it will be the middle of May 2021 before it is signed.

House Resolution 77 - The General Assembly approved as part of the appropriation and budget legislation, state funds in the amount of \$1,000,000.00 dollars to create a state veterans cemetery in Augusta, Richmond County. Although approval of the initial funding for the proposed cemetery paves the way for architectural planning, surveying of the property and purchasing of the land, the next phase in the process will involve securing funding (an annual federal grant) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and state supported dollars for the purposes of construction of the cemetery, purchasing of equipment, and future hiring of personnel to operate the proposed cemetery.

Budget Analyst 2

Our new Budget Analyst 2, Mrs. Camala E. Ball, joined the GDVS team on Monday, April 5, 2021. Mrs. Ball transferred to GDVS from the GA Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) and brings over 7 years of state government experience in accounting and budget preparation knowledge. Please join us in welcoming Mrs. Camala Ball to the GDVS family.

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through April 9, 2021)+

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	97	119	216
Service Connected *	18	43	61
Total Patients	115	162	277
Last Month			
Regular Patients	91	116	207
Service Connected *	18	41	59
Total Patients	109	157	266

* One-hundred percent of the cost of these services is paid by the VA. No state funds are involved.

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from March 12, 2021 through April 9, 2021.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home – Augusta

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia War Veterans Home – Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

State Veterans Cemeteries,

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Burial Statistics (Through April 9, 2021)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	1,823	1,832	9
Milledgeville	4,320	4,349	29
Total	6,143	6,181	38

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from March 12, 2021 through April 9, 2021.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

OPERATIONS

Human Resources

Routine operations are continuing.

Personnel Actions (Gains / Losses)

(March 16, 2021 – April 9, 2021)

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Milledgeville Cemetery	Grounds Maint Tech 1	Resignation	Charles Quinn	03/16/2021
Appeals Division	VACO-1	Resignation	Teak Wilson	04/02/2021
Warner Robins	Office Manager	Resignation	Ronnie Simmons	04/15/2021
Appeals Division	VACO-1	New Hire	Gracie Hooks	04/01/2021
Milledgeville Cemetery	Grounds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	Richard Dotherow	04/01/2021

Tuesday, April 20, 2021 at 12:30 p.m.
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Central Office	Budget Analyst 2	New Hire	Camala Ball	04/05/2021
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Properties

Routine operations are continuing.

Information Technology

Routine operations are continuing.

Records Management

Routine operations are continuing.

Vehicle Management

Routine service and maintenance are performed as required.

Veterans Service Foundation Board

The Office of the Secretary of State – Corporations Division renewed the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation, Inc., on February 17, 2021. The Foundation Board Chairman, Mr. Doug Middleton, is working with a financial institution to establish a bank account to begin accepting donations.

OLD BUSINESS:

Chairwoman Ross stated the Board needs to reaffirm the election of Ms. Trish Ross as Chair, Ms. Takosha Swan as Vice Chair and Mr. Shawn Hanley as Secretary for terms beginning April 1, 2021, and ending March 31, 2022, in accordance with Title 38, Chapter 4, Article 1(a) of the Official Code of Georgia that was done at the March meeting. Mr. Hanley made a motion to reaffirm the March 2021 election. Mr. Kubinec seconded the motion. The motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Bannister brought before the Board the Resolution for the sale of General Obligation Bonds in the amount of \$2,035,000 for construction projects at the Milledgeville Nursing Home in Milledgeville, Georgia.

Ms. Ross asked the Board members who was in favor of this Resolution. Mr. Cravey, Ms. Swan, Mr. Whitted, Mr. Kubinec, Mr. Hanley and Ms. Ross all voted yes in favor of the Resolution. It required two signatures, Ms. Ross, Chair and Mr. Hanley, Secretary.

There was discussion about the May board meeting. Mr. Kubinec made a motion to have the next Board Meeting on Tuesday, May 25, 2021, at 12:30 p.m. by video conference call. The motion was seconded by Ms. Swan. The motion passed. It was reminded that May was the quarterly budget meeting only.

Tuesday, April 20, 2021 at 12:30 p.m.
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Trish announced Mr. Thom Mash resigned from the Veterans Service Board over the weekend. She thanked him for his service not only to the board but to Georgia veterans as well.

Mr. Kubinec made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hanley. The motion passed by voice vote.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:23 p.m.

SIGNED:

Patricia Ross
Patricia Ross, Chairman

ATTEST:


Shawn Hanley, Secretary

The next Veterans Service Board meeting will be held via video/telephone conference call on Tuesday, May 25, 2021, at 12:30 p.m. The WEB X link and password is:
<https://cgtc.webex.com/join/patricia.ross>
Or by calling 1-408-418-9833 Access Code 120 651 8132.