Veterans Affairs Commission and Veterans Alliance Dysfunction

Ken Schoniger, Former Secretary of the Friends

Unlike neighboring Placer and other counties where Commissioners are nominated by the veterans they represent, Veterans Commissioners in El Dorado County are nominated and elected by the Board of Supervisors. Consequently, they are frequently at odds with the county's Federally recognized veterans organizations and the veterans that embody their membership.

Consistent with the construction of the veterans monument in 2006-07 a committee was formed to draft policy, ordinance, and recommended organizational structure for consideration by the Board of Supervisors. The objective was to insure sustaining a veteran culture, ambiance, and quality for future generations independent of management change. The result was formation of a 501C3 non-profit corporation of the "Friends of the Veterans Monument completed February 6, 2007, and a proposal for "Co-Management of the Veterans Monument" completed on February 15, 2007. The proposal was endorsed by six members of the Veterans Affairs Commission, all of the commanders of the Federally recognized veterans organizations and 131 of its members.

During the ensuing six months of negotiations and iterations of the Co-Management proposal with the Chief Administrative Officer, County Counsel, staff, and the BOS it was agreed that because of the disparate nature of the VAC they would be prohibited from any direct management function relating to the monument. Accordingly, the Veterans Service Officer and the General Services Department were selected for management oversight and approval functions. The Commanders of the Federally Recognized Veterans Organizations were designated to arbitrate disputes and, of course the BOS retained final approval consistent with the Constitution's non delegation protocol.

BOS negotiations manifested in ratification of "Ordinance 4743" and associated "Criteria for Military Honoraria and Civilian Recognition on September 11, 2007. Those documents were made available to the public along with ancillary publications on the date of their approval by the BOS. Notable is the fact that some current members of the Board of Directors of the Veterans Alliance were active members of the Friends during the development of those documents as was a current member of the VAC.

Unfortunately, in April 2023 the Veterans Alliance wrote that the documents were "were filed away and quickly forgotten" .....the Veterans Alliance was both not aware of the Criteria and used different procedures ..... Is this a reality?

Dawn Wolfson

Daughter of a Korean War Veteran

Member of Friends of the Monument 2.0

Eligibility Criteria

The intent of the ordinance and policy governing the monument was to honor El Dorado County veterans - the 39,152 who have been classified as active duty veterans by the Department of Defense (both dead and alive). If you ask anyone who was there when the ordinance was written - the word "country" in the ordinance was a typo that should have read "county". If we try to honor every American veteran who served the cause of freedom, millions and millions of American veterans, this would exceed the limits of the monument and likely result in not honoring any of them. No other veteran's monument in the US that we are aware of does this.

Eligibility to be Memorialized at the Veterans Monument

	2007 Original Intent	2023 Alliance Proposal
Living EDC Veterans	17,000	12,264
Dead EDC Veterans	21,722	15,671
Living eligible NG Veterans	189	315
Dead eligible NG Veterans	241	402
Blood Relative NG Veteran [1.]		81,176
Blood Relative EDC Veteran [1.]		3,139,584
Friends of EDC Veterans [2.]		106,918
Pre American Revolution Veterans		29
Total	39,152	3,356,359

1. Seven Generations of Grandparents only. Omits all other relatives including siblings etc.
2. Each veteran having an average of 8.5 friends.

The Veterans Alliance proposal, which potentially includes any veterans who are friends and family of El Dorado County residents, is antithetical to the intent of the El Dorado County Veterans Monument and should be rejected. Regarding those additions already installed by the Alliance in violation of the STILL IN FORCE 2007 policy, their disposition needs to be determined by the VSO and Commanders of the Federally approved veteran's organizations subject to the approval of the VSO and the BOS.

The Alliance, which has been unilaterally violating policy since its hostile takeover from the Friends in 2015, should not be allowed to retroactively change policy to align with their violations. This policy would bypass the commanders of our Federally recognized veteran's organizations without ever having gotten their approval.

The VAC, which has never had authority over the monument as per General Collins' recommendation which was approved by the BOS, cannot legitimately vote to give itself final authority over decisions regarding the monument. With all due respect to the commissioners, you were appointed by politicians who may not always represent the apolitical nature of military culture that puts veterans first, you were not appointed by veterans.

Not only should this policy be rejected, but awarding of honoraria for the monument needs to be removed from the Alliance and awarded to a group that agrees to respect and follow the rules. If these changes are approved, you will be misleading the board and the public into believing that any changes to the 2007 board approved ordinance and policies were ever justified.

Thank you.

Improperly placed Special Bronze Plaques

During and prior to negotiations to finalize and approve the "Criteria for Military Honoraria and Civilian Recognition" it became apparent that then five (now six) El Dorado County Veterans had been awarded a military cross, second only to the medal of honor. The award process was thorough investigation by each of the military services responsible for such research, their recommendation was forwarded to the Joint Chiefs of Staff who then provide their findings to Congress who in turn make a recommendation to the President and Commander in Chief. Generally, people who receive such awards are not into self-promotion. Some do not want to be reminded of their heroism. Two of the recipients were members of the circa 007 board of directors of the Friends who recused themselves. Accordingly, the 2007 BOS agreed that remaining spaces for special bronze plaques on the honor wall could not be used for lesser awards. I repeat; COULD NOT BE USED FOR LESSOR AWARDS. But in 2018 the Veterans Alliance unilaterally used one of the remaining spaces to memorialize a military plane crash in Placerville, one of over 15,000 non-combat military aviation accidents. None of the occupants had ever lived in El Dorado County. Neither the VSO or the BOS was asked to approve the Alliance's intent to violate policy. The VAC was fully informed of the Veterans Alliance intentions and did nothing. The EDC process seems to be to have the officers and BOD of the Veterans Alliance overrule the Military services, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Congress, and the President at their sole discretion with no oversight.

This needs to stop!

Bud Sweet

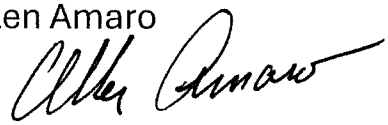
More abuse of the rules for use of the wall

In 2021 the Alliance announced their intention to again unilaterally violate Board ratified policy with a second special bronze plaque to be improperly mounted on the wall in space reserved after September 11, 2007, for the County's 6 military cross awardees.

Accordingly, the founder of the monument filed a formal appeal consistent with process defined by the 2007 BOS ratified criteria. The appeal stipulated that the monument contains other means to recognize the candidates service, but he did not meet the criteria for the placement of a bronze plaque on the wall i.e. the award of a military cross or medal of honor. The candidate was defined as a hero by virtue of his bronze star with V and other aspects of his long service, particularly his leadership in the rescue of 32,000 Vietnamese refugees. There existed no motive to unilaterally violate BOS approved policy He could have been awarded privately funded honoraria reflecting the "sum of his in-service accomplishments" consistent with governing Criteria which his family might consider even more prestigious than a bronze plaque improperly occupying space specifically reserved for medals of honor or military crosses.

During the ensuing appeal for appropriate honoraria three of the five eligible commanders of the counties federally recognized veterans organizations voted to allow the plaque on the wall but within a few days they realized that they had been duped into thinking that the argument was the relative heroism of the candidate compared to the those awarded by the President of the United States. Accordingly, they wrote personal letters to the BOS asking that their votes be reversed. That should have ended the matter but unfortunately, the BOS ignored their letters and ordered a second appeal to be heard by them. Once again, the Veterans Alliance mislead the audience. Consequently, a plaque awarded to Sky Mote, EDC's latest Navy Cross awardee who made the ultimate sacrifice is mounted below the airplane plaque on the wall. What might Sky be saying to our consciences?

Allen Amaro



Honoring Those That Served the Cause of Freedom is Everyone's Job

Bob Hanisee

I'm Bob Hanisee a retired financial analyst, Army veteran and member of the Friends of the Veterans Monument 2.0. Reading past arguments and written proposals of the Veterans Alliance is troubling. As a past board member of several Defense companies and particularly the NASA advisory council, I have heard the typical arguments by contractors that government specifications are counterproductive to progress. It was interesting being on both sides of that issue. I believe that proper management is a balance between the public and private sectors. My experience with the brotherhood of veterans else ware is very different than what I am experiencing in El Dorado County. The Veterans Alliance's desire to reduce influence of the Commanders of the Federally Chartered Veterans organizations is antithetical to the veterans culture represented by Veterans monuments everywhere. Criteria governing the Veterans monument in a manner that would enable consistency despite future management changes should govern. Unfortunately, the EDC monument ambience has changed from " a place for individuals to engage in quiet contemplation, reflection, meditation and consideration of the veterans and their service," as described in ordinance 4743, to a place containing honoraria prejudiced by military rank. Eligibility to be recognized in the monument is not always controlled as prescribed by ordinance and criteria. A private contractor, the Veterans Alliance, now claims sole authority. The Board of supervisors has transferred enforcement authority to HHSA, a department to which the VSO now reports and no longer has direct access to the BOS. Clearly the Veterans Affairs Commission is a rubber stamp for whatever is proposed by the Veterans Alliance. One of whose directors is also a commissioner. Is this a conflict of interest? The recently retired Chairman of the VAC was also a Secretary Treasurer of the Veterans alliance. Was this a conflict of interest? Consequently, the Veterans Alliance has consistently violated ordinance and policy with impunity and rationalized their violations with specious claims The monument requires a balance between veteran influence and civilian authority consistent with the constitutions non delegation protocol. In 2007 BOS approved such governing documents. Board approved policy and ordinance should be enforced, and unilateral autocratic violations should have consequences. Let today mark the first day of a return to the Core Values of our brother and sister hood. Duty, Integrity, ethics, honor, courage and loyalty. Please reject the changes proposed by the Veterans Alliance.

Sustaining Veteran Culture in EDC

Among many changes to the Criteria for Military Honoraria and Civilian Recognition, September 11, 2007, is a suggestion that; "Decisions rendered by the Veterans Affairs Commission relative to this policy are final" Such a change would subjugate the Commanders of the Federally recognized veterans organizations and violate the constitutional non delegation protocol governing actions of elected officials responsible for oversight of the peoples property, but it is the thought process of the request that is most alarming The VAC was founded by Allen Amaro and James R Ramos in 1991 The intent was to nominate commissioners who would advocate for veterans and convey concerns and requests to the BOS But the Board of Supervisors refused to allow veterans to nominate their own commissioners Consequently, the BOS selects applicants who might not be consistent with the apolitical nature of military culture and lean towards representing the BOS against the Veterans of EDC In 2007 Maj General Collins C0-Authored Ordinance 4743 and the Criteria for Military Honoraria and Civilian Recognition Although he was a Veterans Affairs Commissioner as were five other members of the "Co-Management of the Monument" proposal, they advised, and the BOS approved, that the VAC would have no authority over any management function delegated to the Friends of the Veterans Monument Accordingly, the Commanders of the Federally Chartered Veterans Organizations were assigned responsibility to arbitrate disputes

Over time the VAC has become staffed with commissioners representing radical ideologies on both the far right and left In essence they represent the wishes of their supervisors which are often at odds with the veterans community The changes proposed by the Veterans Alliance represent an opportunity to revisit several past proposals to have the BOS to either ask the Veterans organizations to endorse commissioner candidates or have veterans organizations to nominate them for appointment

The changes recommended by the Veterans Alliance should all be denied All of them are rationalizations for unilateral violations of policy and law and are methods of misleading the BOS and the community that any substantial changes to the 2007 approved policy and ordinance were ever justified

~~Ron~~ Young, Former Combat Marine
JOE

GOOD AFTERNOON. YOU HAVE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TODAY TO MAKE MINDFUL CHOICES; DO NO HARM TO THE MONUMENT'S LEGACY AND GOVERNANCE, RESPECT THE COOPERATIVE CHOICES OF VETERANS AND THIS COMMUNITY THAT CREATED THAT FRAMEWORK 18 YEARS AGO, AND ENSURE THE PRESERVATION OF A PUBLIC MONUMENT WHOSE TESTAMENT IS GREATER THAN ANY OF US.

I SUPPORT THE MONUMENT AND THOSE THAT CREATED IT, ESPECIALLY THE PERSONAL VOW OF A MARINE LANCE CORPORAL WHO WAS AWARDED THE NAVY CROSS - TO NEVER FORGET HIS FELLOW MARINES AND NAVY CORPSMAN. WE SHOULD BE FOREVER GRATEFUL, AND RESPECTFUL, OF THEIR SERVICE AND THE MONUMENT THAT IS GROUNDED IN THEIR MEMORY.

I SUPPORT MORE RECOGNITION OF VETERANS BY THE ALLIANCE ALSO, BUT NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF THE MONUMENT AND ITS PRINCIPLES. THEY DESPERATELY WANT SOLE CONTROL OF THE MONUMENT FOR THEIR PURPOSES AND GOALS. BUT THE REALITY IS THAT THE MONUMENT CAN NEVER RECOGNIZE ALL EL DORADO COUNTY VETERANS AND WE SHOULD STOP FIGHTING OVER THAT. TODAY, ALL THE SPACE ON THE PLAZA WALL IS FILLED, THERE IS NO MORE PRACTICAL SPACE TO INSTALL MORE BENCHES, AND THERE ARE ROUGHLY 700 BRICKS LEFT TO BE ENGRAVED.

IF THE ALLIANCE WANTS TO RECOGNIZE VETERANS IN THEIR OWN WAY, JOIN ME IN ENCOURAGING THEM TO DO WHAT THE MONUMENT'S FOUNDERS DID...DESIGN THEIR OWN PLACE AND SYSTEM FOR MILITARY HONORARIA, SEEK PUBLIC SUPPORT AND FUNDING, AND CREATE THAT FOR THE PUBLIC'S BENEFIT. I WOULD SUPPORT THAT, BECAUSE IN THE END, THE ALLIANCE CAN DO WHAT THEY WISH APART FROM THE MONUMENT, MORE VETERANS CAN BE RECOGNIZED, AND THE MONUMENT CAN BE

PRESERVED AS DESIGNED AND MANAGED BY THE FRIENDS GROUP. THE MONUMENT ALONE CAN'T BE EVERYTHING FOR EVERYBODY.

TODAY, THE ALLIANCE INSISTS ON SUBMITTING A UNILATERAL PROPOSAL THAT IS DIVISIVE, LACKS PUBLIC SUPPORT, HAS NO REASONED JUSTIFICATION FOR COMPLETELY OVERTURNING THE MONUMENT'S EXISTING POLICIES AND STANDARDS, AND LACKS ANY ENDORSEMENTS. THERE'S NO ALLIANCE SIGNATORIES TO THE PROPOSAL, NOR ANY OTHERS IN THE PUBLIC RECORD.

WHY, THEN, WOULD YOU WANT TO FORCE A CONFLICT OF THE ALLIANCE'S OWN MAKING UPON THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, INSTEAD OF ASKING FOR A UNIFIED PROPOSAL THAT EVERYONE AGREES TO? YOU WOULD BE DOING A GREAT DISSERVICE TO THE MONUMENT AND THIS COUNTY BY ENDORSING CONFLICT TODAY RATHER THAN COOPERATION.

IT'S POSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE A BETTER OUTCOME, BUT YOU HAVE TO BE PART OF THAT SOLUTION - TODAY, DECISIVELY, AND MINDFUL OF THE GREATER GOOD. SO I ENCOURAGE YOU TO SAY NO TO THE ALLIANCE PROPOSAL AND CALL FOR THE HHSA LEADERSHIP TO RECONVENE THIS MATTER IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE BOARD'S 2021 DIRECTION.

LET'S COMMIT TO RESOLVING THIS RESPECTFULLY AND COOPERATIVELY, RIGHT NOW AND WITHOUT RESERVATION. I AM, AND I ASK YOU TO DO THE SAME AS MINDFUL LEADERS.