

Veterans Culture

I am Ken Schoniger former member of the BOD of the Friends and member of the original team assigned to create the ordinance and policy designed to manage the monument and develop the infrastructure designed to enforce its policies.

Shortly after the Monument was dedicated Supervisor Jack Sweeney and Bernard Carlson expressed concern that continuing the unilateral management of the peoples property by a private 501c3 was problematic, but Veterans monuments are unlike other physical assets. They require veterans to have an ability to influence the culture of edifices created to honor them.

Difficulty aside, a team consisting of select members of the BOS, County Counsel, the CAO and the Friends spent six months negotiating the policy, ordinance and infrastructure that received unanimous approval of the 2007 BOS and the public at large.

To create management and enforcement organization structures our team researched other veterans monuments throughout the nation. In EDC policies analogues to those used at the Vietnam Veterans Monument in Washington DC were adopted. .

Military culture can be felt at the Vietnam Veterans Monument. Hushed tones of visitors, combat boots placed at the foot of the wall and tears welling in the eyes of many visitors. The same feelings of reverence used to be a part of the El Dorado County Veterans Monument. Ashes of our fallen comrades were sometimes discovered beneath the benches.

But the culture changed with the introduction of new management in 2015. Since then a private contractor has unilaterally defined the personal equivalent of a military cross or medal of honor, allowed monument honoraria to be determined by rank, expanded eligibility to be included in the monument to millions, selected themselves as auditor of their own actions, appointed members of their board of directors to the Veterans Affairs Commission and have operated with the impunity afforded by elimination of the enforcement and management structure created and approved by the 2007 BOS. Now we are engaged in changes to policy proffered by the violators to cover up their violations. Changes offered for consideration by the BOS today have one thing in common. They do not provide finite management and enforcement infrastructure that can be effectively administered. 2007 policy and law should continue in force until enforcement and consequences for past and future violators can be quantified. .

The Veterans Affairs Commission

I'm Allen Amaro, Co-founder of the EDC Veterans Affairs Commission, and commander of the Disabled American Veterans post 63 (DAV).

When we created the Veterans Affairs Commission in 1991 we did not imagine that any commission with primary fealty to a civilian Board of Supervisors that nominated and selected its members would be selected to have management participation in any organization configured to represent veterans culture. Accordingly, the VAC had no role in the management of the Monument.

But in 2015 new management decided that they where not subject to the rule of law and policy and recruited commissioners that agreed to support their autocracy. The BOS even allowed the Secretary of the Veterans Alliance to be chairman of the VAC eliminating any prospect of objective oversight of the private contractor charged with work on the monument. Compounding that problem the BOS selected radical idealogues including an alleged Proud Boy on the right and an abortion rights advocate on the left to be commissioners.

Now HHSA is advocating changes to policy that would facilitate further participation of the VAC in management of the monument. Clearly there can be no effective policy that does not provide for enforcement and consequences for violators, but we are engaged in a process to rationalize past violations and further diffuse our enforcement assets. We need to re-establish the management and enforcement structure advocated by the 2007 BOS today. Policy changes have no utility or effect unless they will be enforced by competent and unbiased authority.

I'm Bud Sweet Commander of the EDC Fleet Reserve

I spent twenty years of my life in the United States Navy during a time when junior ranks-initiated hand salutes to senior ranks except when engaging military service members who had been awarded the top three medals of valor. In those instances, everyone including admirals and generals initiated a salute irrespective of the rank of the awardee. This is done as a mark of respect for the extraordinary valor demonstrated by awardees of the medal of honor, military service crosses or silver stars and is not practiced for Awardees of lower indicators of valor and certainly not humanitarian acts or campaign medals.

Certainly, the sum of the rescue of 32,000 Vietnamese survivors and the award of a bronze star with V are deserving of significant recognition in the monument. The founder of the monument suggested several alternatives for Captain Jacobs, including a publicly funded obelisk that would have been more prestigious than a bronze plaque on the honor wall. All management had to do was propose honoraria consistent with the policy and ordinance approved by the 2007 Board of Supervisors but chose instead to ignore policy and denigrate the monument's founder.

In the parts of America that I came from, no one is above policy and law. An officer of a small private EDC contractor unilaterally determining who qualifies to be recognized as an exceptional military hero independent of the individual services, the joint chiefs of staff and the president should strike concern in the hearts of all of us who believe in honoring those who served the cause of freedom in a manner consistent with national convention.

Please act to restore enforcement and ability to administer consequences for violators defined by policy and ordinances approved by our past elected officials today.

I'm Dennis Kissinger a Marine Combat Veteran with 15 years of experience

In September 2007 the remaining spaces on the monument honor wall were reserved for El dorado County veterans who were awarded one of the top two military medals of valor by the President and Commander in Chief of the United States. In 2018, a private contractor used one of the spaces to memorialize a B-25 bomber that crashed near Placerville in 1943. The pilot was awarded one of the approximately 100 distinguished flying crosses distributed to EDC Veterans but, none of the occupants of the plane were from EDC. The plaque commemorating the plane crash is now positioned on the honor wall above a plaque honoring Sky Mote, an EDC Marine, who made the ultimate sacrifice to save his marine brothers and was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross by the president. Sky is one of 6 veterans in the 174-year history of EDC to receive the nations second highest military honor. His plaque is near the dirt at the foot of the honor wall.

In 2021 a plaque honoring the “greatest Humanitarian rescue” in the history of the Military was placed to the left of the airplane crash honoraria. The Captain of the USS Kirk along with dozens of other vessels in a flotilla recovered

Vietnamese combat helicopters and escorted the remnants of the Vietnamese navy to the Philippines and were awarded a humanitarian service medal by the Navy. The Captain of the USS Kirk, a resident of EDC, had also been awarded one of an estimated 736 bronze stars, awarded to EDC residents for heroism. His plaque is mounted above Andrew Le Peilbet who received a Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary heroism in Vietnam. Andrew's plaque is also located near the dirt at the foot of the wall.

If the Veterans Service officer had not neglected to convey that he was responsible for approving honoraria when his office was moved to HHSA this likely would not have happened.

Dawn Wolfson, Cameron Park

Changing the monument criteria to ANYTHING is premature. Currently we have a dysfunctional enforcement structure.

Example, the eligibility criteria for bricks. The intention of the monument founders was to honor El Dorado County Veterans. It was to honor El Dorado County veterans and yet approximately half of the last tranche of bricks placed on the monument was for veterans who have never lived in El Dorado County. Most of our 22,000 El Dorado County veterans who have passed on are not represented there, yet we're awarding bricks to non-residents.

Shouldn't we be verifying residency before awarding bricks? And shouldn't we be reaching out to our own veterans like pretty much every other monument in the US?

Since the monument was founded, the VSO has been moved under HHSA and the position has changed hands multiple times with no transition training. The VSO has stated himself that he doesn't have time to verify residency.

After the management of the monument changed in 2015, the new management claimed they were unaware of the criteria (a public document). Even if they truly were unaware up until 2021, they cannot claim that now. It has been brought to their attention many times.

And yet bricks for non-residents continue to be advertised and commissioned. Lack of enforcement has caused eligibility to skyrocket. What is the point of having criteria for governing the monument when it's not being enforced, and if you make changes to the criteria, what's going to ensure that those changes are enforced going forward?

Enforcement needs to be dealt with first. Once an enforcement structure is set up that the veteran community can agree on and that works, we can relook the eligibility criteria.

Thank you.

NO VAC