



Vietnam Veterans Of America

Chapter One

www.vietnamvetschapter1.org

FEBRUARY 2026



MINUTES OF CHAPTER MEETING FEB. 11, 2026

I counted 22 people attending, 10 on Zoom and 12 in person. A new face was Norman VanCor of Spofford, N.H.

The November newsletter and minutes were approved.

President Bill Ellwood thanked the board members for their support of the chapter during recent weeks when he's been occupied with a family health matter. He also thanked Joe Donaldson for ongoing contributions.

Randall Dockstader, a longtime Chapter 1 member who lives in Hawaii, thanked the chapter for the 45th Anniversary Banquet medals that were distributed. Randall was one of the first 2,000 members of VVA.

Saying, "We've had a very good year to date," Treasurer Richard Reed reported the chapter's cash assets. The report was unanimously approved.

Bill Ellwood suggested the chapter could consider investing some more of its cash in a savings certificate, which pays up to 3.5 percent. The chapter currently has a chunk of its cash in a savings certificate.

Membership Chair Dick Doyle reported 177 members. Russell Brooks of Wells is our newest member. There are 20 members of our AVVA unit (Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America). "Two thousand twenty-five was a banner year for membership in our chapter," Dick noted, as membership is at an all-time high.

Dick called out Richard Reed who has wrapped up more than 26 years as a veterans service officer, representing vets with benefit claims before the Department of Veterans Affairs, notably for disability claims. "I can't even begin to tell you how many people he's helped in those decades," Dick said. "It's got to be a countless number of veterans." Richard said he's wrapping up some cases but not taking any new ones.



Wally Pratt (left) peeks out from behind a VVA flag he presented Feb. 11 to the chapter, assisted by chapter Vice President Larry Gold. Wally is our chaplain. The flag is a gift from VFW Post 648, where we have our office.

Bill suggested using social media to boost membership as part of a membership campaign, to include members of AVVA.

Stan Clark from Perkinsville made a motion to donate \$250 to American Legion Post 67 in Chester in consideration of the post allowing Chapter 1's Chester committee to use their building once a month. Seconded and passed unanimously. The Chester group has purchased a TV for the Legion and may eventually be able to hold its own Zoom meetings. Chapter 1 would assist that effort. It was suggested that other members of the now-disbanded Chapter 723 in Chester might be recruited to become active in Chapter 1 and the Chester committee.

Larry Gold reported that the Chapter 1 website, vietnamvetschapter1.org, has undergone a "major upgrade," part of a process that will continue. A few issues remain to be dealt with. He encouraged members check the site out.

Bill Ellwood is planning an effort to activate our AVVA unit to be more active in the chapter. That goal reflects the fact that in the future, when the national VVA disbands, Chapter 1 may continue as a combined VVA-AVVA organization.

Bill Ellwood reviewed recent donations from the chapter, including \$1,000 to the WSYB Christmas Fund, \$2,000 each to VFW Post 648 in Rutland and American Legion Post 87 in West Rutland for defibrillators for the posts to have to treat emergency heart stoppages, and \$2,500 for the Dodge House for transitioning homeless veterans into the community. He read thank-you notes from the Christmas Fund and the Dodge House.

Mike Murphy updated us on the outreach program of visits to shut-in veterans. The program, begun in October, has involved at least 12 members. He cited, in particular, Stan Clark's efforts in the Chester area and Dave Potter's work. Dave's efforts include driving a spouse from West Pawlet to visit her husband in a nursing home. Jack Crowther, Mike Burke and Jim Freese are visiting the RCLR home on Nichols Street. Louie Rousseau is visiting Genesis, and Larry Gold is lining up a luncheon at The Gables senior living facility in Rutland Town. Bob Paolucci, Mark Truhan and Wally Pratt are also making visits.

Larry reported that a luncheon for veterans will be held March 9 a 11:30 a.m. at The Gables, and he invited chapter members who are interested to join the group, which includes 6 to 8 resident vets. A subsequent gathering at The Meadows, an affiliated residence, is planned, Larry said. Anyone planning to attend should let Larry know at sellvt@gmail.com or 802-747-8094.

Mike Murphy encouraged anyone else interested in the program to contact him (email: greenmntains@gmail.com) or just start visiting vets. "I really think this is a big part of what we should be doing with our time and our money — helping other veterans," Mike said.

Jack Crowther suggested the chapter might give a blanket approval for refreshments bought by members conducting visits to shut-ins. We approved up to \$50 per visit for that purpose.

John Pisanelli, post commander of VFW Post 648, and a Chapter 1 member as well, is involved in plans to establish a memorial to Rutland area World War II veterans. The memorial will feature an eight-foot high slice of granite with a bronze plaque listing 159 veterans from Rutland County killed in the war. Cost is estimated at \$50,000-\$60,000. The City of Rutland is donating land for the monument, near the Rutland County Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Main Street Park. The design of the memorial is still in progress.

John said about \$5,000 has been raised so far. Checks can be made out to the World War II Memorial Fund, care of VFW Post 648, or American Legion Post 31. The goal is to have the monument up by July 4. Donations by Chapter 1 of \$5,000 and \$10,000 were suggested but no immediate action was taken. Bill Ellwood suggested a figure could be nailed down at the March meeting. The group was in general agreement to support the project.

The next topic was the Loyalty Day Parade May 3. Jack Crowther said if Dave Currier and Andy Megrath want to put their sports cars in the parade that would anchor a Chapter 1 unit, which other members could

then join as marchers. It looks like we'll take part, as we have the past two years. VFW Post 648 is the organizer. Stan Clark will look into the availability of an old army deuce-and-a-half (a two-and-a-half-ton truck) as a possible parade vehicle.

Jack Crowther made a motion to continue supporting the Save the Children fund at a level of \$200 a month but to reduce our support for No One Left Behind from \$500 to \$200 a month. He said that previous discussions about these charities seemed to raise questions about No One Left Behind, inasmuch as the \$500 a month was well above what we've donated to other charities. Both charities are rated four-star, the highest rating, by Charity Navigator, a charity rating organization.

No One Left Behind is the leading national organization dedicated to ensuring that America keeps its promise to U.S. interpreters and employees in Iraq and Afghanistan through the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) programs. Save the Children assists children in the world's trouble spots to protect their health, safety and ability to learn. Jack's motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Jack Crowther introduced Mandy Rigler, representing the local office of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants. She described USCRI's role as helping refugees and immigrants to "get settled" in this country and continue their lives. Unfortunately, suspension of the Special Immigrant Visa program by the Trump administration has halted the flow of immigrants. Nonetheless, USCRI's work continues with immigrants already here.

Chapter 1 made a \$1,000 donation to the USCRI operation in 2022. The group assists with finding housing and jobs and English language training. There are about 125 refugees in the area, including people from Syria, Africa, Yemen, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, as well as a group of men from Afghanistan. Under current U.S. policies, only whites from South Africa are being admitted. Mandy described the typical refugee experience as involving time, often years, in refugee camps before admission to the U.S. after extensive vetting (background checks).

Mandy's focus for Chapter 1 was to talk about three Afghan men who are currently looking for a place to live. The three assisted the U.S. military during our presence in Afghanistan. (The three currently bunk with friends.) They have just gotten jobs — temporarily to see if the jobs work out. She described the men as "very hard-working." Food assistance is given, some of it through Vermont's Veggie Van Go program.

In terms of a specific financial help needed, an apartment being investigated would cost \$1,650 per month. Typically a first and last month's rent, or a month's rent and a security deposit, are required by a landlord, though Mandy said she wasn't seeking a specific amount.

Besides financial assistance, Mandy said that anyone interested in becoming a friend to the Afghans would be welcome. There is "a bit of a volunteer process," including a background check required, but it's "not that hard," she said. Someone to talk to the refugees and "help them navigate" would be appreciated, she said. While their English is "not so good," Mandy said she was impressed with how well the Afghans get by, using a translation app on their phones. General USCRI volunteers are also welcome. "They're really a joy to work with," she said of the refugees. Mike Burke promptly volunteered.

Asked if any donation from Chapter 1 could be directed specifically to the Afghans, rather than the general expenses of USCRI, Mandy said she could see that it went to the Afghans. This could be accomplished by directing money to a landlord. (Chapter 1 avoids providing cash directly to a person in need, preferring to pay the provider of a specific service or item, such as furniture.)

Besides his offer to be a USCRI volunteer, Mike Burke also spoke up to say he could house the three in a space on his property, with some adjustment of the sleeping facilities (three beds instead of the current two). "I don't need to have rent," he said. "I'd like company."

Jack Crowther suggested that we see if Mike's offer of housing worked out. If so, Chapter 1 could then consult with Mandy to see what additional assistance it might provide. Bill Ellwood supported that idea. He asked if there were other Afghans in the area. Mandy said there were about 10 in the area, the three she had talked about had specifically sought help, and she has worked with two others. The other five she described as "pretty self-sufficient."

Chapter 1 will wait to see if Mike Burke and Mandy can work out a housing solution. If that works out, we can consider what other assistance we might provide the Afghans.

Richard Reed then requested support for the Veterans Legal Services Program, founded in 1981 by a former VA lawyer. Over his years as a veterans service officer, Richard has "gotten many, many hours of training with them, most of which have cost me nothing." The group, based in Washington, D.C., is not funded by the government. Richard proposed a \$2,000 donation to assist in their work.

Bill Ellwood moved to approve the donation. Seconded by Mike Murphy. Passed unanimously.

Richard then proposed a \$2,000 donation for Josh's House in Colchester, reminding the meeting of the VVA motto about not neglecting other generations of veterans. "We don't do a lot for the younger veterans as a chapter," he said, proposing the donation as "a step in the right direction."

Josh Pallotta, namesake for the charity, served in the National Guard. Following service in Afghanistan, he suffered from physical injury and PTSD. He took his life in 2014. Josh's House, according to its website, "is a Veteran-designed recreation and wellness space offering meeting and study spaces, a large communal kitchen, video games, and a state-of-the-art gym." It also offers classes and community events.

Dick Doyle moved to approve a \$2,000 donation. Seconded by Mike Murphy. Richard and Bill Ellwood cited the chapter's unofficial motto, "First in, last out," meaning we were the first VVA chapter formed and, perhaps will be the last one standing. Therefore, they argue, we should be expanding our reach outside our home base to assist other veterans assistance organizations. In urging support for the donation, Dick Doyle saw it as an affirmation for Richard Reed's donation of services as a veterans service officer for many years. Motion passed unanimously.

Norm VanCor of Spofford, N.H., was a member of the Brattleboro VVA chapter before it folded. He then transferred to Chapter 1. He requested \$2,500 to support the Building Bridges meals program, which seeks to provide free meals for veterans in all the New England states. It has 17 locations in all the New England states but Maine and Connecticut. Norm serves as chaplain for the group. The program provides a free meal for a veteran and guest weekly or monthly and is underwritten by the Episcopal Church in Massachusetts. At the Brattleboro location, 30-40 people show up each month.

Some discussion followed concerning support for a New England-wide organization versus a more "local" or Vermont-centered operation. Support was voiced for a more expansive role of Chapter 1 as VVA chapters close. Richard Reed opined that Chapter 1 would become a central force in VVA as time went on. Jack Crowther proposed a lower donation from the \$2,500 requested by Norm. That amount, \$2,500, however, was moved by Wally Pratt, seconded by Bill Ellwood. A head count resulted in 12 votes in favor, 4 against, one abstention. Motion passed.

Jack Crowther proposed a \$2,000 donation to the Farmacy program. Seconded by Wally Pratt. The program is a project of the Vermont Farmers Food Center in Rutland. It provides fresh vegetables during the growing season for residents, based on doctors' endorsement of the nutrition needs of their patients. Twenty veterans received shares under the program during the past year. Motion passed unanimously.

Bill Ellwood, noted that the evening's donations amounted to about \$10,500, allowing our cash balance to remain above \$200,000.

Bill again promoted the Honor Flights to Washington, D.C. These are free trips for veterans to visit the war memorials in Washington, D.C. There will be a flight in April and one in the fall. Applications for the April flight should be submitted fairly soon. Applications can be found at honorflight.org. Chapter 1 members have taken flights from both Plattsburgh, N.Y., and Albany in the recent past.

A handful of people expressed interest in a visit to the Dodge House in Rutland, mentioned earlier as a transitional home for veterans.

Mike Murphy, approving the donations made during the meeting, said he thought the chapter should be doing “more with our money,” rather than less. “I think we’re probably helping a lot of people with what we did tonight,” he said.

Dick Doyle followed that up by noting that only about 30 of our 177 chapter members are from Rutland.

Postponed was a request from Evergreen Cemetery, to whom we gave \$5,000 last year. At that time, the newly formed governing body sought to put the group, caretaker of Rutland’s largest cemetery, back on a viable footing. Evergreen Cemetery is the resting place of many notables, including many veterans.

Norm VanCor said the passing of his cousin has resulted in a 50-foot modular ramp becoming available to a veteran who can use it. The ramp can be a short-term loan or permanent donation. You can contact Norm at nvancor@gmail.com.

The March meeting will feature nomination of officers and board members for one-year terms.

Finally, members may want to read the two-page document, “VVA Transition Strategy” on Pages 22 and 23 of the current issue of The VVA Veteran. It was written by Dominick Yezzo, VVA’s general counsel. It outlines the three options open to VVA chapters and state councils, if and when national VVA ceases to exist. That (ceasing to exist) seems to be a looming certainty, though the timetable remains unknown.

The three options Yezzo outlines for chapters are:

- 1) Close up shop.
- 2) Continue your current status as a 501 (c) (19), described as a tax-exempt veterans organization for service, camaraderie, advocacy, and community programs. This format requires 75 percent of members have military service. It allows lobbying for veterans issues.
- 3) Continue but change to a 501 (c) (3) “public charity,” described as “a charitable corporation serving veterans and the public. Membership would be open to non-vets. Programs would focus on charitable and educational purposes. Political campaign activity would be prohibited.

Any of these options will require legal advice to comply with tax requirements and other laws.

Respectfully submitted,
Jack Crowther, Secretary

**The next meeting will be Wednesday, March 11, at 4 p.m. downstairs at VFW Post 648,
15 Wales St., Rutland. The Zoom link is:**