

Minutes

June 18, 2020

Executive Committee

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the South Carolina Military Base Task Force convened on June 18, 2020 at 2:30 PM by way of conference call.

A notice of the meeting was posted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

The following people were in attendance: Secretary Will Grimsley (SC Dept of Veterans' Affairs), Joe McLamb (Chief of Staff, SC Dept of Veterans' Affairs), Bill Bethea (Chairman), Dan Beatty (Vice Chairman), Jim Wegmann (Beaufort), George Ramsey (Charleston), Mary Graham (Charleston), Carl Blackstone (Columbia), Steve Creech (Sumter), Maj Gen (Ret) Scott Zobrist (Sumter), Brandon Wilson (Public Information Director, SC Dept of Veterans' Affairs), and Sandy Claypoole (Program Manager).

Bill Bethea introduced Secretary Grimsley. In his remarks, the Secretary stated the SC Department of Veterans' Affairs needs to continue its work in helping Veterans and their families get the benefits they've earned but also needs to be more broadly focused to include assistance with issues such as jobs, veteran owned businesses, education, substance abuse, suicide, and homelessness. Secretary Grimsley wants the new Veterans' Affairs Department to be a one-stop-shop for the needs of Veterans.

The Secretary also introduced Joe McLamb as the Chief of Staff for the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Recently retired Maj Gen Scott Zobrist also joined the call. He was the Commander of the 9th Air Force and is now working with the Department of the Army as a Senior Mentor at Fort Leavenworth and in Community Relations at Shaw.

Reports from Communities

Jim Wegmann – Beaufort

The bases in Beaufort continue to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. All three bases have changed command recently. The Military Enhancement Committee (MEC) charter has changed to include representation for South of the Broad. This allows MEC to cover the entire county of Beaufort.

George Ramsey – Charleston

In January there was a charter signing for the Lowcountry Defense Community Partnership Council. There will be partnership service agreements for disaster response, medical care, workforce training, and a gun range.

In February the US Coast Guard Commandant, Admiral Karl Schultz, gave the State of the Coast Guard address in Charleston. He announced three new defense cutters would be coming to the Coast Guard station. He also announced the Coast Guard will be consolidating their operations on the Cooper River and North Charleston. By the end of the decade, the Charleston region will have the largest concentration of Coast Guard assets in the country.

There was a virtual Change of Command in May when Col Marc Greene replaced Col Terrence Adams at Joint Base Charleston.

Bill Bethea introduced Mary Graham, a member of the Air Force Civic Leader program. Mary worked with the Task Force before and has begun her work with us in the Charleston area again after returning from Canada.

Carl Blackstone – Columbia

Fort Jackson reports they are at 95% production. The limited access to post has eased slightly. Charter buses and planes have been used to transport soldiers. Based on DoD recommendations, use of commercial transportation will begin soon. Graduation rates have increased from 90% to a record high of 97%.

Virtual graduations are affecting businesses in Columbia. On average, 5000 people a week come to Columbia for Fort Jackson graduations. That is not happening during the pandemic.

BG Beagle will stay on one more year as Commander of Fort Jackson.

Steve Creech – Sumter

General CQ Brown will succeed General Goldfein as Chief of Staff of the Air Force, making him the first African American Service Chief and the second African American to sit on the Joint Chiefs. He was at Shaw previously for three years as a Colonel and then again as an AFCENT three star.

Col Larry Sullivan has come in as the new Wing Commander at Shaw. AFCENT command will change this summer and for the first time in eleven years the AFCENT flag will move from Qatar back to Shaw and the three star will reside in Sumter again.

Shaw underwent a new program on F-19 maintenance. Today 72 of 79 airplanes are mission capable.

Bill Bethea gave a brief on legislative initiatives. S. 455 (Armed Services Members and Spousal Professional and Occupational Licensing Act) passed the House and was signed by the Governor in May. We are working to expedite teacher credentialing and to get a hearing with the Senate Finance Committee on H. 3135 (Workforce Enhancement and Military Recognition Act) which is in its last year of the phase-in. Seven Senators have agreed to sign a petition to Senator Leatherman to support that hearing.

George Ramsey said he would contact Senators Grooms and Bennett regarding H. 3135.

Bill Bethea suggested rescheduling the Governor's Commanders Briefing for the fall. We will have to decide whether to have the meeting in person or by video conference.

Bill Bethea offered his letter of resignation effective June 30 but will continue to work on legislation through the current session. He proposed that Dan Beatty, current Vice-Chairman, take his place as Chairman. Secretary Grimsley said he would speak with Governor McMaster about Bill's resignation and moving Dan into the role as Chairman. The Secretary also said he would suggest to Governor McMaster that Bill Bethea be named Chairman Emeritus.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandy Claypoole