

NAVY DEPARTMENT BRANCH 181
Thursday July 2, 2015, 1800

OPENING CEREMONIES: Meeting convened at 1803 hours.

Attendance: Stephen Tassin, President; Orin Hatton, Vice President (excused); PRPEC Chris Slawinski, Sec/Treasurer; PRPEC Robert Washington, Sr., Junior Past President (excused); Al Thompson (BOD); NEDE Joe Barnes (BOD); NED Tom Snee (BOD); Benjamin Young (BOD) (excused); Honorary Shipmate James Short.

June Minutes distributed. Minutes stand approved.

BOD Recommendations: None

REPORTS OF STANDING COMMITTEES:

Americanism Essay Contest:

No report.

Audit, Budget & Finance:

No report

Hospitals, Welfare, and Rehabilitation:

Notification of the passing of the following Shipmates:

Terry M Finkle 8100 Ocean Creek Dr Apt H3 Myrtle Beach, SC 29572-5754 on 02/06/2015

Spouse: Mrs. Nancy Finkle

Richard G Bacon 000536225 2380 Mitchellville Rd Bowie, MD 20716-1577 on 03/19/2014

Legislative Service: At a press conference in Albany, New York, FRA National Executive Director (NED) Tom Snee stood beside U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (N.Y.) as she announced a new push to pass bipartisan legislation to ensure thousands of Navy Vietnam veterans are eligible to receive the disability and health care benefits they have earned. These so-called "Blue Water" vets were exposed to the powerful toxin Agent Orange (AO) while serving off the coast of Vietnam and are currently ineligible for VA benefits for medical conditions related to AO exposure. Gillibrand is rallying support for the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (S. 681) legislation, which would clarify existing law so that blue water veterans would be fully covered by the VA if they served within 12 miles of the Vietnam shoreline. FRA was one of only two Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) in attendance at the conference. Several local TV stations and local print media covered the event. RPNE/NENG Floyd Hunt was also in attendance.

A Vietnam veteran himself, Snee is passionate about this issue. He's testified before Congress on this issue multiple times and is a strong advocate for blue water veterans of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard. "Most of these veterans are now senior citizens and the time to help them is now! Vietnam was not the most popular war or conflict in this nation's history. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the peace treaty that ended the American involvement in the war. It divided us as a nation, socially, psychologically, politically and even within families. It's not about the POLITICS. It's about the VETERANS," said Snee.

Currently, veterans must prove they had "boots on the ground" in Vietnam or served on the "brown water" rivers of the country before the VA will presume they were exposed to the herbicide and provide disability benefits for diseases related to that exposure. Gillibrand's bill, introduced with Senator Steve Daines (Mont.) in March, would presume

exposure for blue water vets, allowing the VA to process their claims for service-connected conditions and alleviate a portion of the VA's backlog.

FRA supports both the House and Senate versions of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act (H.R. 969/S. 681) and believes that the status quo regarding disability claims of these veterans is unacceptable. FRA consistently cites the 2011 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report that validates a 2002 Royal Australian Navy study confirming the desalination process used on Australian and U.S. Navy ships actually magnified the dioxin exposure in the ships' water supplies. Recent presumption rulings that now include Air Force personnel who carried and distributed AO also strengthen FRA's call for legislative change. Members are strongly urged to use the FRA Action Center (action.fra.org/action-center) to ask their legislators to support these proposals.

The House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a hearing to review how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) could have a \$2.6 billion budget shortfall for the current fiscal year (FY 2015). The VA claimed that the shortfall is mainly because of increased demand by veterans for health care, including new life-saving treatments for Hepatitis C.

Deputy VA Secretary Sloan Gibson told the HVAC that VA health care sites experienced a 10.5 percent increase in workload for the 12 month period that ended in April. Gibson said an antiquated accounting system made it difficult to determine the shortfall and that the VA needs flexibility from Congress to reduce the budget gap and pay for what he calls "an untenable situation" in which demand for health care far exceeds resources available. Gibson also said the VA completed 7 million more appointments for care in the past year compared to the previous year, but said veterans still face increased wait times in Phoenix, Las Vegas, and other sites.

Central Liaison Committee:

The next CLC meeting is on Saturday, July 18, 2015 at 1400, hosted by Branch 93, Pax River, MD. A motion was made to purchase 10 Redskin Season Tickets raffle tickets from Branch 182 for the Branch. If the Branch wins, there is an option to take the value of tickets (approximately \$2000) Motion carried.

Membership and Retention:

Current members as of June 30, 2015	<u>293</u>		
Past Due	<u>9</u>		
Members in Good Standing	<u>284</u>	(+1.43	% / 280)

Installation/Holiday Brunch:

A discussion was had to have a Branch picnic at NED Tom Snee's home sometime at the end of August. Auxiliary members of Unit 181 would be invited.

Next event is the Branch Christmas Brunch; Secretary will contact Spates Community Club to secure a room in early December.

Treasurer's Report:**As of June 30, 2015**

PCT	6/18/2015	June PCT	\$393.00
Interest			
Corp.	6/1/2015	Br. 181 Corp. Donation	\$1,000.00
TOTAL INCOME			\$1,393.00
PREVIOUS			
BALANCE		(BUDGET - EXPENSES + INCOME)	\$8,500.00
TOTAL MONTHLY INCOME			\$1,393.00
TOTAL MONTHLY EXPENSES			\$1,234.88
ENDING BALANCE			\$8,658.12
		SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	\$158.12
CASH IN THE BANK		As of 7/1/2015 (Online)	\$3,827.55
CHECKING BALANCE		As of 7/1/2015 (Online)	\$2,222.06
PCT. BUDGET EXPENDED		\$1,234.88	15%

Correspondence:

- Award Letter for Shipmate NED Snee
- Award letter for Shipmate PRPEC Slawinski
- NP SL 6-15 Convention Call
- NP SL 7-15 Site for FRA's 88th National Convention
- NP SL 8-15 Convention Donations to Ed. Foundation/Disaster Relief

Unfinished or Deferred Business:

President Tassin announced that the Branch has established a web site www.frabranch181.org. The site is smart phone compatible, and approved Branch minutes and events will be posted.

Work continues on the Public Service Announcement. Copy for the voice-over is being finalized.

New Business:

Motion was made that the Branch again makes donations in the amount of \$200 each for the FRA Disaster Relief Fund and the FRA Educational Foundation to be presented at the 88th FRA National Convention in Spokane, WA. Motion was approved.

Good of the Order:

Shipmates and Protocol guests were given the right to speak on any topic.

NEDE Barnes spoke that the Foundation finalized the scholarship awards for 2015, totaling over \$95,000.

Time and Place:

Central Liaison meeting is Saturday, July 18, 2015 at 1400, hosted by Branch 93, Lexington Park, MD.

East Coast Regional Convention convenes at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Fayetteville, NC, on Friday, July 24, 2015 at 1300. First Business session is at 0900, Saturday, July 25, 2015.

Next Branch meeting will be Thursday, August 6, 2015 @ at 1800, Thursday, June 4, 2015 at The American Legion Post 139, 3445 North Washington Blvd., Arlington, VA.

Meeting adjourned at 1847 hours.

Stephen M. Tassin
FRA Branch 181 President

Christopher J. Slawinski
FRA Branch 181 Secretary/Treasurer