

Who are the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 941?

In the early 1970s, veterans enrolled in colleges in Minnesota met first in Duluth and then in Marshall, Minnesota to work on issues common to Vietnam Veterans. The war was ending, many anti-war protesters were blaming the service members and veterans for what was happening in the war. A large percent of the veterans did not admit to being in the military because of the anti-war mentality. Service organizations such as the American Legion and VFW were not interested in recruiting Vietnam Veterans as members. One of our local female veterans who served in the Navy attempted to join the American Legion. Although she met all the requirements of membership, she was told that she should join the auxiliary because her father was a WWII veteran. It was against this backdrop that local and state Vietnam Veterans met. In January 1978, a small group of Vietnam veteran activists traveled to Washington, D.C., searching for allies to support the creation of an advocacy organization devoted exclusively to the needs of Vietnam veterans. VVA, initially known as the Council of Vietnam Veterans, began its work. At the end of its first year of operation in 1979, the total assets were \$46,506. Today, Vietnam Veterans of America has a national membership of approximately 65,000, with 617 chapters throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, and the Philippines. VVA state councils coordinate the activities of local chapters. VVA places great emphasis on coordinating its national activities and programs with the work of its local chapters and state councils and is organized to ensure that victories gained at the national level are implemented locally.

Several former members of MSUM's Vets Club met at the VFW in Moorhead (where Buffalo Wild Wings is now located) and formed a local VVA chapter. The chapter honored Allen "Corky" Ritter by naming the chapter after Corky. Corky was a Moorhead High School graduate who was killed in action on May 22, 1966. Recently, Ritter along with the other four soldiers who entered the service from Moorhead, were honored with a plaque at Moorhead High School. Those men are Daniel Aamold, Robert Larson, Melvin Stockdale and Lawrence Hirschberger. VVA members were the driving force in getting the plaque placed at the high school.

The Moorhead VVA chapter had a difficult time recruiting members and finally merged with the VVA chapter 941 in Fargo, ND. As a merged club, chapter 941 has become a very active organization with membership over 200 veterans. The chapter provides color guard duties at home MSUM ballgames, marches in parades throughout the region, does presentations for local school history classes, holds a 4th of July 10K/5K run at Bonanzaville. Our chapter members volunteer at the VA hospital, visit retirement homes and provide some funding to local organizations serving veterans. Chapter president Larry Nicholson and I have been to several schools including a fifth grade class in Hawley. When Larry told the class that he served in Vietnam, one of the students said "My uncle Mike was in Vietnam, do you know him?" We find the students to be very respectful, interested and ask very good questions. All of us who present to classes feel rewarded by the experience. Upcoming articles will provide information on other local service organizations. Contact Les Bakke at lesbakke@gmail.com