

MOAA Surviving Spouse Virtual Chapter
MINUTES
Chapter Meeting, 16 March 2021

Contact: mssvc02@gmail.com

Attendance: 58, by Zoom

Recorded by Zoom, available for download at:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7xaoy0lsybc5y10/AACV39AbRc_fPZvoBVfoUwxfa?dl=0

Members introduced themselves and chatted informally as they joined the meeting.

Micki Costello called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM EST. Micki thanked Les Niblock, president of Micki's local MOAA chapter for sharing his Zoom account for this meeting. After leading the chapter in the Pledge of Allegiance, Micki reminded the attendees of the purposes of the chapter:

- *Provide information and exchange ideas
- *Find solutions to problems or issues affecting surviving spouses
- *Be a resource for surviving spouses
- *Reach out to younger surviving spouses and to those living where MOAA chapters are not available
- *Be an enhancement to regular chapters—the virtual chapter does not take the place of a regular MOAA chapter.

Barb Smith reported on membership of the Surviving Spouse Virtual Chapter. There are currently 157 members from 32 states.

Micki reported that MOAA has added a Public Health Service Officers virtual chapter to expand its outreach. MOAA wants to add a virtual chapter for Chaplains. Jeri Graham has more information on this. She can be reached at jjgrahamusa@gmail.com. Jeri advised the members that the virtual chapter for chaplains is not only for credentialed chaplains but for lay chaplains as well. Jeri added MOAA is working to establish a Virtual Council for the virtual chapters.

Micki reminded the group that today's meeting is a sharing meeting, and we would like to hear from the members about their concerns, problems, and success stories.

Gail Joyce welcomed the members.

1. She announced upcoming training sessions. Trainings are developed specifically for surviving spouse liaisons, but all surviving spouses are welcome to attend.
Will have updated information and help for liaisons to do their job
 - April 31/May 1: Virtual, Northeastern States, but anyone can join
 - August 27-28: Virtual, Upper Midwest, again all are welcome
 - September 17-18: In person, Raleigh North Carolina
 - November 19-20: In person, Southern California
2. Gail gave an update on death certificate issues related to COVID-19 deaths of those with underlying service-connected conditions. MOAA has written President Biden about issues affecting the military. Among those issues are the problems arising when a veteran with an underlying service-connected condition succumbs to COVID-19. It is important that contributory service-connected conditions be listed on the death certificate in order prevent

denial of survivor's DIC eligibility. MOAA is also working with congressional members to support death certificate review, including Illinois Congressman Mike Bost, ranking member, House Veterans Affairs Committee. Check the MOAA website and newsletter for more information.

Vivianne Wersel added that it is important to locate and preserve the veteran's DD-214. She also reported she has a new "Guide to When Your Veteran Dies" coming out, and it will be important to have the chaplains provide this guide to families. She will provide more information on the Guide as it is available.

Gail reported that the MOAA Foundation COVID-19 Emergency Financial Relief Fund has helped veterans and their families in communities across the US. She read a thank you letter from a MOAA COVID-19 Relief Fund recipient. She urged us to encourage our MOAA colleagues to donate to the MOAA Foundation and the Relief Fund. She said it is easy to donate—go to MOAA.org/donate.

Micki opened up the floor for an open forum to hear from the members.

Judith Thomas shared about a young Gold Star wife who was not receiving her compensation. MOAA made contact with the Army, and ultimately the young wife's issues were worked out. Sometimes a phone call to MOAA helps.

Micki reminded the group that while MOAA's membership targets officers, MOAA's focus is across the board, not just officers. MOAA provides scholarship loans and grants to children of retired enlisted as well as assistance to veterans of all ranks and their families in times of need.

Kathy Prout noted that MOAA, VA and DFAS have many resources. Reach out to them. She noted that there is confusion about SBP eligibility, the SBP-DIC offset, reinstatement of SBP, SSIA, and Post 9/11 eligibility. Encourage those who have served to contact VA, and get the disability rating established. Get discharge and service documents together.

Janet Oglesby asked about SBP benefits. Kathy Prout explained the amount of SBP depends on choices the retiree made when signing up for benefits. If a spouse did not sign up for Survivor Benefit Plan at the time of retirement, then there are no benefits. She re-iterated the need to show service-connected cause on the death certificate.

The importance of keeping track of the DD-214, or other discharge papers, was noted.

It is also important to be persistent in working through VA issues. Like any agency it can be both tough and easy to deal with.

Estherose Heyman asked how to find other surviving spouses in her state who belong to the virtual chapter. Contact Barb Smith at mssvc02@gmail.com

Micki noted that work on a web page is progressing, with special attention to safeguarding privacy.

Anne Christian-Dold, whose sponsor was a reserve member killed in a motorcycle accident, shared her success story in working with DFAS to get back-pay benefits.

Jeri Graham noted that the MOAA website has a chapter locator for those interested in joining a local chapter. Local chapters are a great place for surviving spouses, as chapters need members and they need people to fill leadership roles!

There was lengthy discussion about meeting monthly, alternating a business meeting one month and a group discussion meeting the next. Members discussed dates and time. Micki noted that there is a speaker lined up for May, and April is really busy, so the group can begin meeting monthly in June as follows:

All meetings will remain the 3rd Tuesday of each month.

Alternate months, beginning with the June meeting, will be for Discussion/Social time at 5:00 PM Eastern Time

Regular meetings with program will remain 1:00 PM Eastern Time

Micki reported the three topics to be emphasized for MOAA's Advocacy in Action (which is the new name for storming the Hill) this May,

-Toxic Exposure (includes Agent Orange, burn pits in Afghanistan and Iraq, fire-fighting chemicals, contaminated drinking water and others)

-Tricare for Young Adults (insuring that military families have the same health care protections for their young adult children as their civilian counterparts covered by commercial plans). HR 475, The Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act of 2021, addresses this inequity.

-Basic Needs Allowance, particularly for junior enlisted families.

Gail emphasized the importance our advocating for these families to get the support and help they need.

There was a lengthy discussion about disseminating a virtual chapter member contact list, sharing phones, emails, etc., and attendant privacy issues. Discussion addressed various methods to address privacy issues: specific requests for contact information, consents, electronic signatures, opt-in/opt-out systems, request and pay. Micki is aware of all these issues and will contact MOAA IT for input.

Sherry Brown asked about Veterans who have Alzheimer's and how to deal with VA claims. Several members suggested contacting a VSO (Veterans Service Officer) who could help process the appropriate forms.

Micki thanked all for attending and participating.

Meeting adjourned 1439 EST

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Bowman
Recording Secretary