



VAVS Representative
MARINE CORPS LEAGUE

4 Aug, 2019

From: Michael W Miller
Marine Corps League
National VAVS Representative

To: National Commandant & National Adjutant

Subject: 2019 Annual VAVS Report

Marines,

First, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of your MCL National VAVS Deputy Representatives, Rex Hopper and Jack Prosh. These Marines are a terrific benefit to me and the VAVS National Committee. It is a real honor to work with two Marines that are so dedicated to our Veterans.

Our League has over 1200 volunteers in our medical centers. They stand tall as VA welcome representatives, escort veterans around the VAMC, dedicate time in our CLC's, volunteer as DAV drivers, and assist at the medical center's coffee mess. These are the heroes.

MCL Volunteers:

Volunteers, as defined by the VA, are members of the community, who after passing initial training, are placed throughout a VA medical facility to assist veterans. There are two types of volunteers – **Regular and Occasional**. Regular volunteers are those MCL members who have a set schedule and/or specific assignment. Occasional volunteers are those who do not have a schedule, but volunteer when they're needed for special events. VAVS Reps are considered occasional volunteers.

“Once a Marine Always a Marine”

MCL Regular Volunteers are widely represented in the VA system. According to the latest VA hours report, our Marine Corps League regular volunteers donated 58,415 hours of their time in the first half of FY 19.

The bad news is there are fewer number of Marines volunteering than there were a few years ago. The number of veterans using our VA medical system continues to grow, and therefore the need for volunteers grows with that increase. We should all be concerned with any downward trend of volunteers or total volunteer hours at our VA Hospitals.

Here is an example: Because of its large veteran population, Texas has 7 VA Health Care Systems, 5 VA Medical Centers, 18 Outpatient Clinics, and 38 Community Based Outpatient Clinics. Texas is a big state with lots of veterans. How many? In 2017, there were 1.6M vets in Texas, and of those about 24,000 are Marines.

Yet, in the entire state of Texas there are only four regular MCL VA volunteers! I'm not *Messin' with Texas* but am highlighting this Department to make a point. MCL representation at our VA facilities needs the focus of Detachment Commandants whose AOO lies within a VA catchment. Additionally, this should also be a high priority of Departments and Division Commandants. If you use the VA Medical system, and enjoy the help of a volunteer, we can no longer look to other organizations to do the work for us.

VAVS Representative and Deputy Representative Committee Presence:

According to the National VA Volunteer Director's Report of 31 Mar 2019, there are 152 VA Facilities and 1400 Outpatient Clinics in the VA Medical System. Marine Corps League members volunteer at 153 of these facilities (primarily at the large medical centers) and have active VAVS Committee Representation at 80 of the facilities. That's almost half of all facilities without MCL representation.

Of the 73 medical facilities without VAVS representation, nearly 60 have MCL regular and occasional volunteers. This number of VA facilities without VAVS Representation is larger than last year and is disturbing trend. Each year the number of MCL volunteers and facilities where we have VAVS Committee Reps decrease.

Volunteering is important, but VAVS Committee representation is equally as important. MCL Representatives and Deputies are the eyes and ears of our League at the VA facility. The VAVS Rep:

- Coordinates the volunteer needs of the VA Facility with the local MCL Detachments,
- Ensure MCL volunteer hours and donations are correctly credited,
- Are the first avenue for resolving volunteer/staff problems, and
- Have advisory responsibility concerning the VA volunteer office's budget.

“Once a Marine Always a Marine”

In areas where the MCL has the largest membership, we have the greatest need. Here is a list of Departments where the VAVS Rep need is greatest.

Department	Number of VA Facilities	Number of VA Facilities with Representatives
Alabama	5	2
California	8	3
Colorado	5	1
Florida	16	9
Georgia	4	2
Kansas	3	1
North Carolina	5	2
Ohio	6	3
South Carolina	2	1
Texas	12	1
West Virginia	5	2
Total	71 VA Facilities	27 Facilities w/VAVS Representation

These Departments have no volunteers and/or VAVS Committee representation.

Alaska	Maine	New Jersey	Vermont
Connecticut	Nebraska	Oklahoma	Wyoming
Idaho	New Hampshire	South Dakota	Washington, D.C.

How do we correct this trend? Volunteer! **You are best at what you focus on.** I am confident that if Division or Department Commandants made VAVS Representation a priority, and made volunteering at the local VA a priority, this trend would reverse itself.

Detachment Commandants, who meet within the same area as a VA facility, can expect a call from my committee, with the expectation that the need will be filled by a member of your detachment. Be proactive and select a member before I call.

“Once a Marine Always a Marine”

VAVS Committee Awards:

Every year the VAVS Committee awards the PNC Rosen Distinguished Service Award(s) to MCL Volunteers, who are recognized by their Commandant and the VA Facility, for their selfless dedication and outstanding support of our veterans. This year, the committee received four nominations. Awardees will be announced either Tuesday during the VAVS Presentation or Thursday during the Commandant's/Jr Vice Award presentation.

Additionally, the Committee recognizes Detachments who demonstrate noteworthy acts in serving our veterans at VAMCs. This year there were two nominations. That award will be announced either Tuesday, during the VAVS Presentation or Thursday, during the Commandant's/Jr Vice Award presentation.

Certifications and Representative/Deputy Rosters:

The challenges reported in the last annual report have been overcome. 100% of our VAVS reps are properly certified. Additionally, this committee created a VAVS training power point, and an updated SOP available at the MCL's website/library. I encourage all Department Commandants or VAVS Reps to use this training during their Department conventions.

Annual Joint Reviews (AJR's)

No other VA required report is more valuable to our Marine Corps Volunteer team than the AJR. This annual report (usually prepared in February) documents hours, monetary donations, and value of non-monetary donations contributed by a local Detachment. They also identify a VA Facility's needs and recommendations to existing challenges. **It is a both a report card and guiding document for local VAVS Representatives.**

This year, about 75% of our VAVS Reps completed the report. For the 25% of VAVS Rep who do not complete this report, when talking to the VA Facility's Volunteer Services directors, they say those MCL VAVS Reps:

- Do not respond to invitations from their office to complete the review
- Refuse to sign the report
- Refuse to participate in the review

This is both puzzling and unacceptable. It is an easy report. It is generated by the VAMC. The only action for the VAVS Rep is his/her signature. Not signing the report or not showing up for the review **is a failure of our most basic responsibility.** A responsibility explained to each Marine before they accepted the VAVS position.

“Once a Marine Always a Marine”

VAVS Committee Minutes and Attendance

Minutes: Besides the AJR's, the only other report required to be forwarded to the MCL VAVS National Committee is a copy of a facility's Quarterly VAVS minutes and attendance roster. When we corrected the certification problem, we were added to the VA facility's VAVS Committee distribution list. We now receive all attendance rosters.

Attendance: The **VA Facility is required** to dismiss any Veteran Organization from the VAVS Committee that misses three consecutive meetings -- that's no meetings in nine months. **This is a VA rule, not the Marine Corps League's.** Formal dismissal from this important veteran assistance committee is a black eye for our League. There were three MCL Reps who were dismissed for lack of attendance last year.

MCL Department VAVS Representatives: **There is no requirement for a Department VAVS Rep position**, but some departments do have a Marine in this position. My roster reflects 25 Departments with Department VAVS Representatives (and Deputies). Department Commandants, would you please send me your Dept VAVS Rep/Dep and their contact information to: VAVSRep@MCLeague.org.

National Advisory Committee I am a member of the VA's National Advisory Committee. I attended the annual training conference in May 2019. The after-action report for this event is on the MCL Website/library.

Finally, I would like to congratulate all Detachments and volunteers and thank them for their unselfish dedication to our Hospitalized Veteran Patients and residents. Keep up the **GREAT!** Work Marines. We are blessed to have so many exceptional Volunteers representing our organization.

Respectfully Submitted,



Michael W Miller
Marine Corps League
National VAVS Representative

“Once a Marine Always a Marine”