

State of West Virginia

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Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.

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From The Commander

Subj: Notes on District Realignment

During the Southern Conference there was both a meeting on realigning the Districts of the State and a Council of Administration meeting. In each meeting the aspects of the number and the boundaries of the proposed Districts was discussed. Additionally, for my part, I have reviewed all correspondence forwarded from the field. I have read and reread each letter, often with disappointment. It should be understood that we currently have two Districts with only five Posts each. We additionally have one District with only 560 members. In both cases these are below the standards for a District to be issued a charter. Reference By-Laws Section 401. During the redistricting meeting conducted on 7 November three proposals were reviewed; two were for a six District plan and one for a five District plan. Again, the committee selected the five District configuration. The committee vote was three in favor of the five District plan and two against. It needs to be noted that this plan is not new. It has been on the books, but shelved, for eight years, being developed when the state went from 12 Districts to the present nine. As a Commander, I would be lax in attending to duty and negligent in failing to recognize the need to accomplish District realignment. Accordingly, I have consulted with other States and have listened to their problems and success. Notably, the year after Georgia accomplished redistricting; they had four All American Districts. I will now address areas of consideration from both the field and the State.

1. The single largest complaint from Posts and Districts was the geographic area to cover and time and distance to travel. In response and with respect, I must state that time and distance for travel cannot be the first consideration for configuring a District. A District Commander is responsible for Commanding a large segment of the State. He or she

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often begins the journey to becoming a State Commander by way of being a District Commander. A District Commander having commanded a District of 15 to 20 Posts would be far better prepared to achieve Department Commander than one who has commanded 5 Posts.

2. In June of 2004 the State had 21,619 members. As of June 2009 we had 17,641 members and as of June 2014 we had only 15,109 members. Accordingly, over the last 10 years, we have lost 6,510 members and have no indication of any near term recovery. The nine District configuration was based upon the 21,619 membership. Having suffered the shown losses in membership and resulting loss of income it must be recognized that the State can not continue to support the current number of Districts either administratively or financially. I have repeatedly reported a loss of income exceeding \$18,000, specifically, from the loss of 1200 members during the 2013/2014 year. At the same time operating costs continue to rise. Provided the proposed realignment is passed it will accommodate a planned long term organizational solution. In the event realignment is not accomplished, the State will continue with a fragmented deterioration causing costly forced and unplanned course correction.

So what will happen in going from nine Districts to five Districts?

1. The competitive playing field between District Commanders will be leveled. Today we have Districts with only five Posts and others with twelve or fourteen Posts competing for awards and working to achieve target dates. Bringing all Districts to a complement of 15 to 20 Posts creates an air of fairness.
2. We will go from 27 District meetings per year to 15 District meetings per year.

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3. We will fund five District Commanders for attending Conventions and S.O.I. meetings as opposed to nine.
4. Competition among Districts relative to programs such as VOD/PP will be among five Districts as opposed to nine.
5. Certainly, Districts will have greater strength resulting from an increased number of Posts and experienced membership to draw upon.
6. District Commanders will be better prepared to assume Senior Department leadership positions should they pursue such.

In view of the above, I believe we must move the State forward and I ask that past and present Commanders support this change. Personal preference should not a factor. It is what is good for the organization that we must pursue. Leadership is often difficult and calls for the making of hard decisions.

Doug Knotts, Commander
Department of West Virginia