

# Change at the Top



MATTHEW BORKOSKI

In the biennial national elections at the VVA National Convention in Greensboro, North Carolina, in November the delegates chose Jack McManus as President; re-elected Tom Burke as Vice President and Bill Meeks as Secretary; and voted in Linda Schwartz as Treasurer.

In doing so, the delegates continued Vietnam Veterans of America's unique method of governance. Alone among the nation's congressionally chartered veterans service organizations, VVA's four Officers work with its Board of Directors (who also are elected at the National Conventions) to oversee day-to-day operations of the entire national organization.

When VVA formed in 1978, founder Bobby Muller ran the ship as executive director. At VVA's First Convention in 1983, he was chosen as VVA's first president; John Terzano as vice president; Tom Leckinger as secretary, and Steve Casteel as treasurer. The first Board of Directors included Medal of Honor recipient Gary Beikirch and future eight-term VVA President John Rowan.

Muller, a former Marine lieutenant who was severely wounded in the war, was succeeded by Mary Stout, who beat out John Musgrave in 1987 to become the first woman elected to lead a U.S. veterans service organization. Stout, who served as an Army nurse in Vietnam in 1966-67, had been national secretary in 1985. She was re-elected pres-

ident in 1989, then she, too, stepped down after completing two 2-year terms.

Jim Brazee, Jr., who served in the Judge Advocate General's Corps during the Vietnam War, succeeded Stout in 1991. Brazee resigned in January 1997 and was succeeded by Vice President George Duggins.

VVA made history once again when Duggins—who served two tours in Vietnam with the Army Security Agency in Phu Bai and Pleiku—became the first African-American president of a national veterans service organization. He was elected to a full term in 1997, then re-elected in 1999.

Tom Corey, who had been VVA's treasurer since 1987, was elected president in 2001. Corey was drafted into the Army in 1966, was severely wounded in 1968 in Vietnam, and—like Muller—was confined to a wheelchair. Corey was re-elected president in 2003.

John Rowan, a former U.S. Air Force linguist who served in Vietnam and Okinawa during the war, won the 2005 presidential election at the National Convention in Reno. Rowan was re-elected seven times to the VVA presidency.

Jack McManus, who also served in the Air Force in the Vietnam War, defeated Rowan to win the election in November 2021. It was the first time that a sitting VVA president lost a re-election bid.

—Marc Leepson