

TO: The Michigan Humanities
Collaboratory;
Attn: Carceral State Project
(Conditions Team)

From: Jack S. Copeman

Re: Self-Initiated Initiative,
The Coronavirus Experience Within
the MDOC (No. 8 - The Memorial Day Installment)

Dear Reader,

When I first began this initiative in March, the Governor declared a state-of-emergency with 12 cases reported statewide. It is now Memorial Day weekend (Sat. 5/23) and there have been 54,000 plus confirmed cases in Michigan. As the CNN coronavirus map shows that we are starting to see a slight rise once again, while the death toll has reached 5704. Here in the microcosm, and as of the latest Day Representative (MDOC) update, they do not report totals other than

the departed, so as of Thursday (5/20/20), they are said to report the deaths of two more prisoners, bringing "59 prisoners in MDOC custody to pass away from the virus."

All of this spreading contagion and rapid transmission within just a couple of months! And we still have a long way to go yet — eight more at a minimum — if we're lucky! Even then with everything working, the vaccine or some other approved therapeutic will go to the V.I.P.s and the wealthy first, next in line will be everyone else before finally trickling down to the incarcerated. Bill Gates said as much to Anderson Cooper and Dr. Sanjay Gupta ^{during} ~~one~~ ^{one} of his appearances on CNN. Well... he didn't quite mention prisoners directly, however, the reference to the impoverished and powerless classes is all too clear. This shouldn't be surprising to anyone in this Country to understand the food chain and how it works. It is simply another example of the unequal treatment of the vulnerable populations once again. Really. And I will say this to conclude this intro: that the hot weather months are here; that people have had enough quarantine and want to get out to do stuff. Not to ~~the~~ mention economic and financial concerns

dominating or competing for prioritization against the virus; it appears we, as a Nation, are just as polarized as ever before. That it isn't helping to have a president who seeks to exploit this rift for his own advantage is directly making it worse; while the natural disasters attributed to climate change continue to wreak havoc around the world. It seems we have indeed entered a new era, one that will continue to test and challenge us with hardship and pain. The question then becomes not only of how we will cope with the environment, but one of how we react and deal with each other ~~and~~ moving forward? The answer to this, I think, will be ultimately what we will be remembered for once we make it through to the other side of COVID-19. Because that will finally be a time of truth, when all myths and self-deceptions will be swept away. Revealing once and for all who we really are and what we're really about.

In kind of a harsh way, given all that humanity has lost to the pandemic, the price will have been paid—to learn some very interesting stuff. That's how history works, I guess. Through tragedy.

If I Die In A Corrections Zone... 4

(Mon. 5/25/20) Memorial Day. It has been 10 Days since we were swabbed and the results have not been posted yet. For anyone else this would be egregious. For convicts, however, it's no problem. Making us wait for literally everything is all part of the gig. Just business as usual. Maybe we will learn something later on this week. You would think so, anyway.

Meanwhile, the latest count is 54,881 with 5,240 deaths here in Michigan. While I did learn that 1,100 of those to succumb were military veterans. So it does appear this status is being tracked. After all, there are death benefits to consider.

Here at SRF, those of us whom reside in the "Veteran's Unit" (800-Bldg.), honored the fallen with our annual gathering around the basketball court to watch the raising of the flag. This is something the administration supports as they play "Taps" over the intercom/public address system. We then bow our heads and share a moment-of-silence to remember fallen comrades lost to history. Once that's complete, a fellow veteran usually prepares a little speech about someone he served with or some other noted act of valor he read about.

5.

He then asks us if there is a name that we would like to shout-out in remembrance. And there are. This is the part of the impromptu little ceremony that holds the most meaning, at least for me, anyway, to hear these names offered along with their command designators and rank makes it all REAL once again. It makes it all solid despite the corrosion of time and age. Bringing us back to our unshakable past, when we were young and eager and doing incredible things while serving in the military. Sure, as prisoners living in tight quarters we grumble and bitch (and sometimes fight) about each other — a lot! But there's always going to be a core of respect for the fact that each man in this unit served in a branch of the armed forces and that's something that can never be impugned with but a showing of a bad conduct discharge (BCD). In the military and as vets, a BCD is known as the "Big Chicken Dinner." That's what we call it. To have one is a badge of dishonor, it means you're a piece-of-shit and don't deserve respect because you're so fucked-up, that you did something so bad that they threw you out! That you're so lousy that you couldn't

6.

even handle a few years of stability, of toughness, of integrity and character in order to complete an enlistment.

So when the **MDOC** (that is the Director, Heidi Washington) noticed other states had created veteran's units across the Nation, well... obviously she wanted to jump on that particular wagon and score any prestige ^{points} likewise. (Remember: These various correctional directors get together annually to share and discuss their operations.) Thus, in May 2017, the SRF (Saginaw) Veteran's Unit was created.

And to fill all 240-rooms, they put together fliers around each prison advertising special privileges and amenities for those who qualify.

The Warden, O.T. Winn, also a veteran, was tasked with over-seeing the project.

The Department had already been experimenting with a pilot-project, an agreement with Veterans Affairs (VA) and the newly created Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (M.V.A.A.) under Governor Snyder. This was around 2014 or so. The Memorandum of Understanding (M.O.U.) allows for eligible veterans to file claims for service connected disability with VA.* This is how I end up transferring here

* Note: Both the military (govt) and prisons love acronyms. They use 'em zealously! As I am a product of each, be prepared

back in 2015. The year I filed my initial claim. This was in May. And then began yet another waiting game—a long one—with exams, denials, appeals, remands and even more appeals. In fact, my case has just passed five-years of wending its way through the guts of bureaucracy; with maybe another year of court decision, remand, new exam, another decision by VA Regional Office (Detroit) and a final order to go. Which, is about average. So there's that, I suppose.

Inception. Since I transferred in before there was even the thought of a "veteran's only housing unit," back when 800-Bldg. was still full of general population prisoners that had to be transitioned out, I can describe how it came about and the process up to present.

Technically the MDOC created their Veteran's Unit in December 2016. As I remember listening to an announcement that stated: "If you are a veteran, report to the gym at 13:00" (one o'clock). ~~to~~ Upon arrival, the gym was arranged with chairs lined neatly into rows, seating upward of 200 or so. While all the housing unit staff and every member of the administration stood along

8.

the walls as the Warden stood front and center delivering a speech. Microphone in hand, Warden Winn is used to public speaking and can be quite entertaining as well as informational while passing a message. Given his "marching orders," he spoke of some stats, that Michigan was now the 14th State to have a veteran's unit in its prison system. That the cooperation and agreement between the MDOC and VA under the MOU was a success, that it was about to expire (after 5-years) and would be renewed. That the Department was now noting and tracking every prisoner that had served in the military,* gathering this data at its Reception and Guidance Center (RGC), which is the Intake process for every male prisoner within the State. That there were 2,200 veterans in the system at the time. That they were going to bring in more programming (PTSD, Résumé Workshops, Disability Claims, Support groups) in order to assist us with access to benefits. Preparing us for release.

After the speech Warden Winn answered some questions before informing us that we would also begin to meet regularly.

* There is now a box on our Prisoner Classification Reports that has a military Code designation initial listed for every prisoner. Mine shows an "H." This means "Honorable." The highest level of Separation from Service or character of discharge.

But the actual logistical matters: transfers (ride outs + ride ins), painting murals, bringing in vending machines, increasing transport and coordinating C&P (Compensation and Pension) exams at the Saginaw VAMC (VA Medical-Center, Alveda E. Lutz) would all take months to complete.

Officially the Veteran's Unit was opened in May 2017. As the Department first began transferring everyone that was not a veteran out of 800-Unit. Prisoner's that were "eligible" began to ride-in, filling up one-wing of the building at a time. Meanwhile, block painters were hired to create scenes depicting a military theme. Utilizing literally every wall, there are images just about everywhere, even a large mural on the floor in front of the officer's desk.

Now I would like to take a moment to discuss a distinction that I feel is important and relevant to understanding Why the law defines things. This is based on my experience with the legal system. Simply put: laws define words for clear and precise understanding of concepts. So when there are legal entitlements to rights and benefits, it

is helpful to know exactly what is intended and to whom these words or phrases apply. This is why Federal and State laws define the term "veteran" as someone who served in a branch of the armed forces and was not discharged dishonorably. This is critical to know here because apparently the vetting process for anyone claiming to be a vet was initially lax indeed. Having seen a whole lot of dubious individuals ride-in that had no business whatsoever to call themselves this in the least. And I mean **A LOT—dozens!** Hell, more than half the guys that transferred in (to be later scrutinized and verified by staff) were found to have minimal service and bad-character discharges. While those of us that are actual veterans would talk to them and learn that something didn't quite jibe with what we know to be correct and true as opposed to what they would say as fact. So the lies became readily apparent and they were immediately revealed as imposters; frauds. It was disgusting to see. Now, three-years later, the administration did manage to get rid of most of these poseurs—implementing a "Code of Ethics" that we are required to sign and agree to in order to be housed in the MDOC's Veteran's Unit. There's a list painted

11.

On the wall, titled: "Regaining Honor," which explains what we agree to, mostly staying misconduct free, that the Warden created as a means to extract some form of commitment of us. This did not go over well, of course. As the name implies that we had somehow lost our military honor being incarcerated. Despite having honorable service and DD-214s to prove it. Not to also mention that many of us are also vets with medals, awards and commendations during-WAR! So we found the whole bullshit contract degrading and insulting. There were many refusals. After all, history cannot be erased nor one bad act make an entire life. Such defiance pissed the Warden off. He then threatened to transfer out anyone refusing to sign. Time to play despot. Power corrupts.

Listen, I firmly believe that there are times when each and everyone of us has to compromise or sell-out their values. Whether peer pressure, greed, fear, selfishness or just plain stupidity - we all do it. There will come a time when it happens to everyone. That's just life.

So the truth is that everyone who is in this Unit now has signed the agreement. And anyone that transfers in while this building

remains dedicated to Veteran's-only-housing will either agree or be removed as well. You just have to decide what is more important and hope that you are making a good choice. Preferably one that has more advantages, benefits and opportunities than the alternatives. And so far, ~~that's exactly why we are still here~~ ~~we~~ waiting on our ^{own} individual things—once again.

Oh... and now trying to avoid COVID-19 as well.

The Nation now passing 100,000 deaths as of Wed. 5/27/20. The media using the words "grim" and "milestone" flagrantly. While also pointing out President Trump's silence on the matter. Maybe he was just distracted by the whole SpaceX thing to find time to make appropriate remarks.

No new MDOC JPay update. ~~#~~ Still no results posted regarding SRF swabbing. Time to bend and fold and mail—this installment is full. (Thu. 5/28/20).

See attachment

NEW 2017 VETERAN'S UNITS

- The MDOC is pleased to announce the creation of a veterans housing unit. SRF is converting a Level II housing unit into a Veterans housing unit.
- In order to qualify a veteran's discharge status must be Honorable or General (under honorable conditions).
- This is an opportunity to support your fellow vets as well as working with SRF staff to create an environment beneficial to you and other veterans in the MDOC.
- If you are interested in being on the ground floor of this new opportunity, please send a kite to your Veterans Facility Liaison at your facility. Include your Name, Number, Current Job and/or programming, and a brief statement regarding your military service.
- All applications will be reviewed to verify military service, security level, and programming needs.

Applying For Service Connected Benefits While Incarcerated

- Incarcerated Veteran who would like to file a claim for service connected disability kites Facility Veteran Point of Contact regarding wanting to file the claim.
- Facility Veteran Point of Contact communicates via e-mail or telephone SRF Point of Contact and communicates the prisoner's information.
- SRF Veteran Point of Contact Coordinates with other facility staff to schedule a video interview with the prisoner.
- SRF Veteran Point of Contact facilitates video interview, gathering information on prisoner's possible disability and military history.
- Any medical compensation disabilities indicated during the interview having documentation with MDOC health care will be verified by SRF Healthcare checking the Electronic Medical Record (EMR). Designated staff will communicate to SRF POC whether the diagnosis is documented. No actual health information is being exchanged.
- SRF Veteran Point of Contact communicates with SRF Transfer Coordinator to have the prisoner transferred in a natural transfer, as long as treatment or programming can be accommodated at SRF.
- SRF Veteran Point of Contact schedules and facilitates appointments at SRF between verified incarcerated veteran claimant and Michigan Veteran Affairs Agency POC to have veteran complete claim. Prisoner signs Power of Attorney (POA) to allow MVAA to act on prisoner's behalf for purposes of claim for service connected disability compensation. SRF POC assists with filling out any additional paperwork needed.
- MVAA Point of Contact Files claims for service connected disability compensation.
- VA Requests examination to be completed at the Aleda E. Lutz Veteran's Administration Medical Center in Saginaw per VA internal memorandum of understanding (MOU).
- Healthcare Staff Obtains Releases of Information from prisoner. Relevant medical information is shared between MDOC and the VA.
- MVAA Point of Contact Shares status of compensation award or denial with all parties for tracking and reporting purposes. If applicable, meets with prisoner to file appeal.

VETERAN LIASON LIST IS ON PAGE 13