



PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT

Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War

Office of the Commander

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(To be read in camps and retained in camp records)

Brothers,

When installed a commander is charged to faithfully, honestly, and impartially perform all duties of the office without fear or favor. He is instructed that grave trusts and cares await him. In most matters of day to day administration there is no difficulty in this. Sometimes subjects are brought to the commander's attention that makes it absolutely essential to hold tight to these directions because the fond regard for a friend or the desire to make a quick and easy choice tempt us to ignore that which should not be ignored. Worse yet, he might choose to compound poor choices with further poor choices in order to avoid being made to look a villain.

It is the duty of a department commander to act to protect the department from harm. Whenever there is a threat to the department he must intervene to prevent or minimize the damage. Issues of this nature are not always clear-cut and easy to navigate. Sometimes one must weigh two evils, one against the other, and choose the lesser of the two. This is a common difficulty of command and leadership.

This past month has presented several questions and difficulties that cannot be easily addressed. All the more so as it puts many of the people I would normally go to for advice in a position of advocating the choices that have caused the difficulties. It has forced me to seek out other sources of impartial opinion and expert advice.

Because of the nature of the issues I am going to take them one at a time in an order of priority. Otherwise it would needlessly confuse what is already a complex issue. This Department Order is addressing the question of the Department Annual Encampment location. The other issues will be addressed in subsequent orders as they are finished.

The 2015 Encampment was placed in Franklin, PA outside of Oil City in Venango County. This decision has created a tremendous amount of angst and consternation throughout the Department. This action was taken by now former members of the Sites Committee and reported to the encampment in Williamsport in June of 2014. Normally this would not be any cause for concern and at the time it was not an immediate worry because it had been eclipsed by the debate over moving to a one day business meeting and the subsequent outrage from the ladies organizations over the misunderstanding in the wording “*business meeting*” being exchanged for the word “*encampment*”.

Before we had left the site of the 2014 Encampment I began to be bombarded with concerns over the location for 2015. Since the majority of these concerns were over the distance of travel, I was not inclined to do more than point out that members from the Western region are also put to the same difficulties when an Encampment is held in the east. If this was the only basis for the objection it was not a very persuasive one and we must be mindful that on the years the Encampment is held in either the extreme eastern or extreme western region those brothers and sisters from the opposite end of the state are always going to face this difficulty.

After a short time I began to be taken aside at every event I attended across the State to be questioned about the location. Both brothers and sisters of the Allied Orders began to tell me that should the encampment remain in Franklin they were not going to attend. Again, this was not a persuasive argument to relocate. Every brother and sister must decide for themselves what they can afford to do and how far they are able and willing to travel. If an encampment that is properly set up is called and someone finds it impossible to attend, that alone is insufficient cause to relocate the encampment. So again I was not inclined to take any action as there did not appear to be any just cause to do so.

On several occasions I have advised those making the complaints about location that they would have to demonstrate a clear and undeniable danger to the SUVCW, the ASUVCW, and the DUVCW if I were to agree to take any sort of action. No such evidence was presented so I left the issue alone because it is a sites committee issue and not the job of the Department Commander to dictate where the encampments should be held.

At the Mid Year Meeting then Sites Committee Chair Richard Orr resigned citing personal issues and work loads. A volunteer was readily at hand to replace him. The appointments were made and that should have been the end of the issue. In the following weeks I began to seriously investigate the status of the sites committee to ensure all was progressing as it should considering the new committee members had no experience and might have questions.

What I discovered was alarming. The state of affairs was a shambles. Things were to a point that would ensure a probable failure of the 2015 encampment and no action at all had been taken to plan the 2016 encampment which should be well underway by this time.

The two factors threatening the 2015 encampment are the complaint of distance which has reduced the number of regular attendees to little more than fifteen staying overnight. Of these fifteen brothers we can only account for eight rooms. Some of these brothers are only staying over one night and not three as traditional.

The reason the brothers that are coming are not all remaining for three nights is because of the second factor impacting attendance. This is the trial run of the one day business meeting. With a one day meeting on Saturday the brothers asked in the local area have stated they have no intention of staying at the hotel at all. Of others within a few hours drive, they may stay one night but not two or three.

At this point we began asking many sisters of the ASUVCW and DUVCW who regularly attend what their plans were. The results were even worse. Due to the outrage over the one day business meeting issue that remains unresolved and the distance of travel many ladies are refusing to attend. Of the ladies of the ASUVCW we can account for no more than an additional five rooms. The DUVCW add about another eight rooms to the number.

All told we come to a count of 21 rooms for at least one night. Of which about 18 are expected to be for three nights. This leaves us with a total of 58 room nights over three days. The contracted room nights needed for the encampment are 120 in order to get the meeting rooms free. As the math clearly shows, unless something very drastic occurs, we will fall short on our commitment by as much as 62 room nights.

At an average price of \$95.99 per night this leaves us short on our commitment by \$5951.38 in room rates. These figures do not yet include our commitment to lunches or banquet plates sold. With the additional losses added in we are looking at numbers well in excess of \$8000. The Allied Orders will be responsible for any losses and or penalty fees caused by low turnout.

This has happened before at Exton in Chester County and cost the SUVCW \$1000 and the ASUVCW and DUVCW both had to pay \$500 each. Such a blow is heavy enough to the SUVCW but to the ladies organizations it is devastating. To follow the same formula for this encampment would cost the SUVCW \$4000 and each of the ladies orders would be charged \$2000.

This is unacceptable and constitutes a legitimate threat to the Department. Once this information was made clear the Department Commander took an active role in looking for a resolution. Further investigation has determined that not only is the financial issue facing the sites committee, but no encampment badge has been designed or ordered and the program book which is meant to raise the funds for the encampment deposits and expenses has not been started. Beyond that, there is no work underway to plan the 2016 encampment that should already be located and in negotiation.

When we add all of this to the unresolved tense relations between the SUVCW and the ladies orders caused by the one day business meeting vote there is no doubt that we have a very real and very serious crisis on our hands. After conferring with the presidents of the ASUVCW and the DUVCW it has been decided that the leadership of the three orders are going to intervene. The PA Dept Council has been consulted and agreed that the Department should be willing to absorb the penalties for moving the encampment to avoid the much higher fees we face in having the encampment at the current location.

Our first choices for new location were designed to avoid any slight to the western camps, auxiliaries, and tents by keeping the encampment in a more western location that is more accessible to the remainder of the state. We investigated Johnstown, Ligonier, and State College as possible locations. All three locations failed to work out due to lack of availability or excessive cost. No slight or offence to the western camps is intended but given these failures to locate a suitable location on short notice we have had to cast about for any location that will work with us.

The Genetti Lycoming Hotel in Williamsport has made an offer to assist us. Repeat locations two years in a row are not what any of us would choose to do given other options. We are against the wall for a solution and are not in a position to turn away so generous an offer. Therefore we have opted to accept the offer from the Genetti Lycoming and are proceeding in moving the encampment to this location.

It cannot be stressed enough that there is absolutely no intent to offend any camps, tents, or auxiliaries. There is no favoritism in this decision. We have made this decision based upon the financial reasons and not upon any preferences of the Commander or the Presidents. We have worked to find the best solution to meet all the issues presented to us. This has been a joint decision that has been debated and researched in great detail. There have been no easy or universally good choices and we have done the best we can with the time and resources given us.

There has been a claim made that the decision to move the encampment violates an action on a report to the 2007 Encampment ordering a rotation of locations around a 6 section division of the State. The requirement of the encampment to follow the plan dividing the Department into 6 sections as presented to the 2007 Encampment has no validity for the following reasons.

- 1) The report of the committee was never referred to the Bylaws committee. Therefore the action died at the end of the 2007 encampment.
- 2) The report was not ratified by the camps of the Department for inclusion in the Bylaws.

3) The 6 section rotation pattern has not been followed at all. In 2007 when the report was presented the encampment was at Bethlehem, PA which is section 4, in 2008 Fort Ligonier, PA section 6, 2009 New Oxford, PA section 5, 2010 New Cumberland, PA section 5, 2011 Scranton, PA section 3, 2012 Greensburg, PA section 6, 2013 Gettysburg, PA, section 5, 2014 Williamsport, PA section 2. With no prescribed pattern beyond the numeric division in the actual report the numeric progression should have started in 2008 section 5 and then proceeded 6,1,2,3,4. The pattern of 6,5,5,3,6,5,2 does not resemble anything close to this.

4) The counter argument, that the report being voted on places it under the category of special rules not Bylaws by assigning the authority to the sites committee to determine location and times of meetings, is also not valid for the following reasons.

a) Such a rule would have been out of order because the sites committee is a combined committee of brothers and sisters of the SUVCW, ASUVCW, and the DUVCW over which only the SUVCW may be governed by a special rule made by an SUVCW encampment.

b) The ASUVCW assures me that they never ratified or agreed to this rule. Action at the ASUVCW National Encampment in Kansas removed the requirement for the ASUVCW to meet at the same place and time as the SUVCW.

c) The DUVCW has never had any such required ties to the SUVCW and would have never been bound to such a rule.

d) Since we have no legal means to direct the ladies organizations where to meet any more than they can dictate to us, no rule that does so can be valid so long as we have a joint sites committee which must agree on a course of action, here again, the 6 section rotation rule would be out of order.

5) In 2009, then Commander John McNulty and Ivan Franz, PDC scoured all past encampment proceedings since the last Bylaws update in the 1990's for any missing referrals to the Bylaws committee. This resulted in the major updates to the Bylaws ratified by the PA camps and approved by then CnC Leo Kennedy in 2010. The 6 section rotation was not found to be in the list of pending Bylaws referrals at that time. This would rule out any chance of a clerical oversight to the inclusion of this 6 section rotation plan.

Therefore it is the opinion of the Department Commander that the 6 section rotation rule is not valid and holds no authority over the sites committee or the Commander or presidents of the allied ladies organizations.

Our hopes are to get our new sites committee members up to speed on their duties in order to prevent any future occurrences of this nature. The Commander and the Presidents are committed to rebuilding the fraternal relations of the sites committees and resolving the ongoing questions of encampment length and location. These are questions that must be answered together if all the Orders are to continue to meet together. No one Order may tell the others what they must do for encampment and meeting length.

An answer will be found and that answer will be found together. The answer will respect fraternal relations between the organizations and respect the needs of all the orders. We are "Allied Orders" of the G.A.R. On behalf of the Commander and the Presidents I thank you all for your understanding and cooperation as we get things back on track and work toward a mutually satisfactory solution.

So ordered this 23rd day, November, 2014.

Douglas P. McMillin commanding,
Pennsylvania Department
Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War