UDVMA History
History of the Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs

The Utah Department of Veterans Affairs (UDVA) origins are difficult to trace accurately. Awareness of Veteran issues and benefits was incomplete at best in the state's early formation. However, two world wars and the Korean and Vietnam wars prompted various governors to take steps to create an entity that would be responsive to the needs of the growing number of Veterans in Utah.

The first, in 1919-21, was a **Board of Soldier Settlement**. Returning World War I soldiers were a concern for the entire nation, and there was a movement nationally to try to obtain land for them in order to help their reintegration into society. The documentation about the board's activities is sketchy at best, and the institution itself was short-lived.

Utah then created its **State Department of Public Welfare** in March 1935 which supplanted the Board of Soldier Settlement. This department coordinated the distribution of federal aid to Utah Veterans, but by 1937 it had been charged with administering all forms of public assistance and welfare activities in the state. The Department was replaced by a three-member **Public Welfare Commission** in 1941. Within the Commission a Veterans Rehabilitation Division existed from 1944 until 1947 when its functions were transferred to the new **"Department" of Veterans Affairs**. It was tossed about to various agencies until the late 1960s.

In 1973 the **Office of Veterans' Affairs** (OVA) was created within the Department of Social Services — the actual date is unverifiable. OVA was to "provide counseling on veterans' benefits; assistance to veterans or their dependents in presenting claims against the United States or in establishing their rights to benefits or compensation to which they are entitled under federal or state law; and informational and advisory services to agencies."

One individual, Bob Ramos, is largely responsible for moving things into a new era. A letter from the National Job Service sparked the state to create a **Utah Veteran's Office** largely to address the problem of unemployment among its Veterans, especially from the Vietnam War. With the support of influential Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) such as the VFW and the American Legion, this essentially led to the true beginning of what was then the **Utah Office of Veterans Affairs**.

Bob's story is an interesting one. Then-Governor Calvin Rampton initiated the Governor's Task Force on Veterans Employment. As well-intended as it was, the state had very little in the way of financial resources to set up and maintain the operation of the new agency. So, Governor Rampton suggested that Ramos contact Maurice Warshaw, the founder of Grand Central Stores in Utah, to see about help from the private sector. He did so, and Warshaw invited him to come to his home (at the Hotel Utah). After breakfast, they went to see the governor.

Governor Rampton proceeded to reinforce his desire to help Veterans find jobs and access to other benefits to which they are entitled, but told Warshaw he did not have money for Ramos to proceed. Warshaw told him not to worry; he would provide whatever he needed to get underway. He gave Ramos a letter of introduction and a list of people to contact, asking them to give him whatever he needs.

The Office of Veteran Affairs office was renamed the **Office of Public Service Careers** within the Department of Social Services. Its agenda was to develop programs to help Veterans and other disadvantaged women and men. The office stayed busy filing claims with the US Department of Veterans Affairs, doing outreach, and counseling all Veterans who found their way to it.

In 2000, influenced by the efforts of Bill Christoffersen and Bob Ramos, the Legislature created a **Division of Veterans Affairs** and placed it under the authority of the Utah National Guard. The new Division was charged with the development, operation, and maintenance of the Utah Veterans Cemetery and Memorial Park, and a newly-planned Veterans Home.

On 1 July 2007, the Utah Division of Veterans Affairs officially transitioned to the **Utah Department of Veteran Affairs**. This transition withdrew the Division office from under the auspices of the Utah National Guard and made it a state Department, making then-Executive Director Terry Schow, a member of Governor Jon Huntsman's Cabinet.

On Monday 2 July the ribbon was cut for the new Department, not in a literal sense, but with a ceremony at the Governor's Mansion. This exclusive ceremony was attended by those very active in the Utah Veterans community and also those who were instrumental in the process of creating the Department.

At this ceremony, Governor Huntsman laid out the three main goals he had set for the new Department to: (1) reach out to Utah Veterans and ensure that they and their families are aware of state and federal benefits; (2) create and maintain a database of services and benefits available; and (3) educate about federal money and rights available to Veterans.

"The services we are obligated to provide will continue," said Governor Huntsman, "we are a nation at war and we have a commitment to the men and women in the current war to provide certain services and assistance for themwhen they return home. This Department is an important step in providing those services, which include benefits counseling, advocacy, and assistance in understanding and using existing state and federal benefits."

In 2013 the Department underwent another revision under the guidance of Gov. Gary Herbert and became the **Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs** in order to partner with and service Utah's active duty, Reserve, and National Guard entities. This new partnership should enhance all services to Veterans and military in the state.

Gary Harter, the new Executive Director, says that his vision is to "have Utah be the best state in the country for military members and Veterans and their families." Under the department — formerly known as the Utah Department of Veterans Affairs — Veterans services, military