

Meeting Minutes

Idaho Medal of Honor Commission

Thursday, July 29, 2004

10:00 a.m. MDT

Intergovernmental and Fiscal Law Division
Idaho Attorney General's Office
700 W. Jefferson St., Rm. 119
Boise, Idaho

Present: Bill von Tagen, Megan Ronk, and Melissa Ward (*physical meeting location*)
Bill Douglas, Mike Becar, Doug Borah, Blair Olsen, and Joe Rice (*via conference call*)

Absent: Ron Anderson

The initial meeting of the Idaho Medal of Honor Commission was called to order by Commission Chairman, Bill von Tagen, at approximately 10:05 a.m. MDT. Mr. von Tagen stated that this would be a short organizational meeting to get the newly-formed commission underway. He suggested that the commission seek to award the first medals during Law Enforcement Week in May 2005 and that the group should spend the next couple of months compiling essential information, such as the criteria for awarding of the medals. He asked Bill Douglas to provide an overview of how this commission came to be formed.

Bill Douglas explained that he worked on a murder case with a member of the Washington State Attorney General's Office, Gary Fox, who heads up the Washington Medal of Honor Commission. Mr. Fox inquired as to whether Idaho had a similar commission. Separate counties and the Idaho State Police give their officers awards for heroism, but there was no entity organized to provide such recognition on a statewide level. Bill Douglas floated the idea to the law enforcement community in Kootenai County, the Idaho Prosecutors Association, and Attorney General Wasden. With much positive feedback, he crafted legislation, similar to Washington's governing statute, with one difference, including Idaho firefighters as eligible award recipients. The legislation (Senate Bill 1260) was introduced in the Senate State Affairs Committee. It was sponsored in the Senate by Senator Bailey and in the House by Representative Andersen, and Senator Darrington was a driving force in getting this legislation passed. The only concern raised during the legislative process was that of funding. It was decided that, at least initially, award costs would be the responsibility of the nominating agencies and/or applicable associations. In the legislative purpose set out in the legislation, sponsors noted the accentuated role of police officers and firefighters in our society in these times and thought it important to establish statewide recognition of their heroism. Idaho now has the honor of being one of only a few states that has established a means for such recognition. The State of Washington issues their awards during Law

Enforcement Week in May, and Mr. Douglas suggested that our awards coincide with the ceremonies at the Idaho Peace Officers' Memorial at Idaho State Police Headquarters in Meridian.

Bill von Tagen suggested the formation of subcommittees to coordinate: medal design, vendors, award criteria, creation of a nomination form, nominee investigation/background check, time and place for ceremonies. The commission will make the final decision as to recipients, and the Governor will present the awards.

Mike Becar mentioned that the Idaho Peace Officers' Memorial event is now held the week before or the week after Law Enforcement Day, which is May 15th, as that is the day services are held at the national level, and, in the past, families of fallen officers have been torn in having to choose which event to attend.

Bill von Tagen stated that medals need not necessarily be awarded for an act of heroism that occurred in the year of the award, but that the commission can go back ten years, five years, etc. We might be playing "catch up" the first couple of years to ensure proper recognition is made for sacrifices made in the past. He suggested the commission hold its first official meeting on September 21, 2004, in Coeur d'Alene, to coincide with the Idaho Association of Counties meeting. Perhaps Mr. Fox would be available to address the group; we understand he has a video presentation.

Bill Douglas stated that Washington has offered the use of their forms in creating our own and has given special recognition to Idaho for the passage of our bill and formation of our commission. He noted that the ceremony there is very touching, similar to the services held each year at the Idaho Peace Officers' Memorial. Our Medal of Honor awards, however, will include firefighters, as well. Mr. Douglas stated that he could head up the subcommittee to create the nomination form.

Bill von Tagen inquired as to whether the September meeting date and Coeur d'Alene location would be convenient for commission members.

Bill Douglas stated that he could help with arranging for accommodations and that, if it would be more convenient for everyone, Gary Fox could fly down to Boise instead.

Blair Olsen indicated that he would be in Coeur d'Alene that week, so the meeting would be convenient for him.

Mike Becar, as well, will be there and is in favor of this arrangement.

Bill von Tagen said to plan on this date and location. The Idaho State Police has a similar award, does it not?

Mike Becar explained that, indeed, the Idaho State Police does present heroism awards and that he would be happy to serve on the subcommittee to determine award criteria.

Blair Olsen stated that he would also check with the National Sheriff's Association regarding their award criteria.

Bill von Tagen asked that commission members e-mail commission secretary Melissa Ward with agenda items for the September meeting. He inquired as to whether reimbursement of travel costs would pose problem for anyone.

Doug Borah indicated that he will present these costs to his association for reimbursement consideration.

Megan Ronk explained that there is no funding under the new law for travel costs but that if anyone finds this to be a challenge, to contact Bill von Tagen or her, and they will check around for possible resources.

Bill Douglas mentioned that Southwest Airlines is currently offering a \$39 one-way fare between Boise and Spokane and that the AmeriTel Inn would probably offer a good rate. Also, a local silver company has already done some other work for the State. He plans to present some ideas and sketches for medal design at the meeting.

Bill von Tagen pointed out the importance of complying with state laws. For instance, we don't want to end up leaving some private foundry with a trademark that becomes a profit center for them.

Bill Douglas inquired as to how far back in time the commission should research for award nominations.

Blair Olsen mentioned that a company in Utah had done some work in his part of the state, with badges, for instance, and he would inquire as to their services. What is the section of Idaho Code that forms and regulates this commission?

Title 67, Chapter 88.

Bill von Tagen stated that the elevated status this award deserves calls for "tight" award criteria. For instance, death in the line of duty might not be an automatic qualification. There certainly may be pressure on the commission to select individuals for awards, and the commission will need to adhere to established guidelines.

Mike Becar agreed that it will be important to "keep tight" on selection criteria. There have been battles in the past over the Idaho Peace Officers' Memorial. He also mentioned that he has already looked into rooms at the Coeur d'Alene Resort, the site of the IAC meeting, and it is completely booked, as is the AmeriTel.

Bill Douglas mentioned that Mike Becar will be a great resource, particularly on historical perspective.

Doug Borah stated that he has collected some information regarding criteria.

Blair Olsen stated that he is excited to be a part of this commission.

Joe Rice stated that he is proud to represent Idaho chiefs of police. He is, however, unavailable for the meeting in September and hopes a conference call connection might be available.

Megan Ronk thanked everyone for their willingness to serve on the commission and stated that Governor Kempthorne is looking forward to these award presentations.

Bill von Tagen stated that he would see most everyone in September and reminded the members to e-mail the commission secretary with agenda items.

The meeting adjourned at 10:37 a.m.