



GEORGE W. OWINGS III
SECRETARY, MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

George W. Owings III began his “service to his country”, as he likes to say, in 1964 when he joined the Marine Corps. Having spent his freshman year at the University of Maryland in College Park and faced with the possibility of the draft, he volunteered for the Marine Corps in November of that year.

He arrived in Da Nang, RVN in November, 1965 and after two additional extended tours in February, 1968, left Vietnam as a Sergeant. Among his awards are the Presidential Unit Citation, Navy Unit Commendation with Bronze Star Device, Navy-Marine Corps Medal, and Vietnam Service Medal with Silver Star Device. In 1985 at age 40, he exemplified “once a Marine, always a Marine” and re-entered the Marine Reserves and served two years as an active reservist. In 1987 his career in service took a new path when he was appointment by then Governor William Donald Schaefer to the House of Delegates. He began his first term in 1988.

After seventeen years in the House of Delegates, ten years of which were as the Majority Whip, Owings left the House to join the Ehrlich Administration as the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs in 2004. Governor Ehrlich’s decision for selection was based on Owings’ record as an advocate for veterans in Maryland and his willingness to serve his constituents.

Owings immediately put his fingerprint on the Department through his unique blend of effective management, knowledge of the legislature, and passion for veteran issues. He was responsible for getting legislation passed that restructured the agency making it more efficient and accountable. Additionally he was responsible for creating the agency’s Outreach and Advocacy department. From the beginning, Secretary Owings launched an aggressive initiative to communicate with the state’s 480,000 veterans; the majority of them having no connection to the services and benefits available to them. He was responsible for the creation of the agency’s monthly newsletter which now reaches tens of thousands of Maryland veterans. Another major concern was land available for the out years for those to be buried in one of Maryland’s five Veteran cemeteries. He instituted land transfers for two of the cemeteries where space was crucial and he made sure that burial sites at the other three state owned cemeteries were sufficient before his appointment were to end.

Veteran issues are apolitical to Secretary Owings, and after the 2006 election he was asked to remain on the job for the new administration’s first legislative session. He agreed to do so and retired in June of 2007 ending another chapter in distinguished service to his state and its veterans.

On February 21, 2015, Owings was sworn in a second time as the Secretary for the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs under Governor Hogan’s leadership and continues the good work that began so many years ago.