



Published exclusively for the members of
THE AMERICAN LEGION MATTHEW BLOUNT POST 555

VOLUME XI, ISSUE IV MAY / JUNE 2024

THE TRIPLE NICKEL

POST 555 MEMBERS SPEAK TO STUDENTS AT HOPE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL



Harry “Skip” Mize IV and **Tom McDaniel** were invited by Candous Langston to speak to members of the Christian Honor Society (CHS) at Hope Christian School. Candous is the school sponsor of the CHS in addition to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes and the Student Government Association. Candous, along with eleven students in grades 10-12, attended the meeting on Friday March 22, 2024 at Riverchase Community Church. Skip began by talking a little bit about his background in the Navy and his service on submarines. He then discussed the purpose of The American Legion, the Four Pillars in which it was formed, and how he came to join The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 back in 2022.

Then he went on to talk about some of the programs in which the Post participates including Boys State, baseball, shooting sports, oratorical, and the Boy Scouts. He also spoke at length about Boys State, the qualification and selection processes, Post sponsorship, scholarships available, and the benefits of attendance. One of the CHS members present, Christian Monk, was sponsored by the Post and attended last year. He gave his first-hand account of what attending Boys State was like and some of the activities in which the attendees participated.

Another individual in attendance was Andrew Monson who attended both the Post and 23rd District Oratorical Scholarship contests. Andy, as he is called by his classmates, is a 10th grader this year and is not eligible to attend Boys State this summer. But, there is a very strong possibility he will want to attend next summer when eligible. Skip wrapped-up his presentation by speaking to the teens about the Sons of the American Legion and its membership requirements. When questioned, over half of the attendees said they had a family member who were Veterans.

Tom McDaniel then discussed many of the positive impacts of attending Boys State and how it can be life-changing. He spoke about how many of The American Legion programs are about building-up the individual to make them better people and citizens. He gave a couple of examples of how the youth sponsored by the Post for Boys State and Oratorical personally benefited by participating.



Tom McDaniel and Harry “Skip” Mize IV among some extraordinary young people at the Hope Christian School.

POST 555 MEMBER ROBERT “BRUCE” McCLELLAND IN THE VIETNAM WAR “SON TAY RAID”

The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 member, **Mr. Robert “Bruce” McClelland**, supported the famed Vietnam War Son Tay raid as an Air Force Linguist flying on an RC-135 Airborne Command Post. On April 1, 2024, the Air Force Association and the Air University Foundation hosted a luncheon for the Son Tay Raiders and a viewing of a new documentary titled “27 Minutes at Son Tay” at Maxwell Air Force Base. McClelland was invited to attend and to be part of a panel on stage answering questions from the audience. Due to a health issue, Bruce needed a driver who could spend the day at Maxwell Air Force Base, so

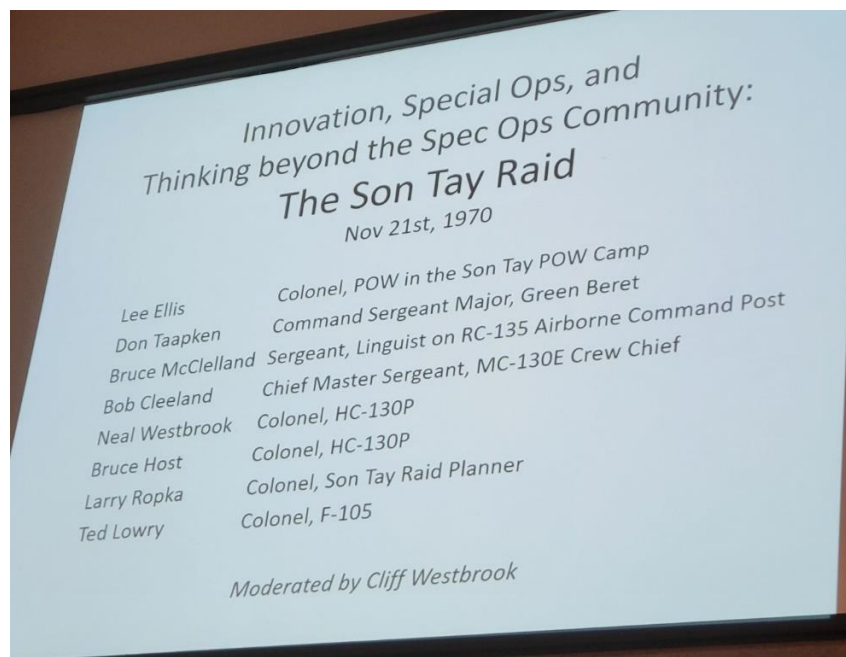
fellow Matthew Blount Post member, **Eldon Woodie**, became Bruce's driver and attended the day's events with Bruce. The luncheon format placed one of the Son Tay Raiders at each table and they were joined by Air Force officers with backgrounds in combat rescue and special operations.

Following the luncheon, the raiders were transported to Polifka Auditorium for the viewing of the new documentary. The audience included Air University Commander and President, Lieutenant General Andrea D. Tullos; Command Chief Master Sergeant for Air University, Chief Master Sgt. Stefan Blazier; and Air University faculty and students. Mr. McClelland and the Son Tay Raiders enjoyed answering questions about the raid and expressed their appreciation for the release of the recent film accurately documenting their daring raid.

Eldon Woodie came away with a deeper appreciation for our Vietnam Veterans and the Son Tay Raid. No doubt having Bruce and other Son Tay Raiders interact with current military professionals contributed to national security and the larger American Legion mission.



View of Polifka Auditorium from the stage. The audience was largely combat-tested active-duty officers with Special Operations and Rescue experience.



Introductory slide for the question and answer session.



L/R: Moderator Cliff Westbrook; Colonel Lee Ellis, POW in the Son Tay POW Camp; Command Sergeant Major Don Taapken, Green Beret; Sergeant Robert “Bruce” McClelland, Linguist on RC-135 Airborne Command Post; Colonel Larry Ropka, Son Tay Raid Planner; Colonel Ted Lowry, F-105; Chief Master Sergeant Bob Clelland, MC-130E Crew Chief; Colonel Bruce Host, HC-130P; and Colonel Neal Westbrook, HC-130P. It was amazing how clear the recollections of the Raiders were concerning the preparation, execution, and aftermath of the Son Tay Raid.



L/R: Green Beret Command Sergeant Major Don Taapken explaining action on the ground and Sergeant Robert “Bruce” McClelland, Linguist RC-135 Airborne Command Post, listened intently.



Portrait of General Curtis LeMay, famed WW II airpower leader, father of Strategic Air Command, and Chief of Staff of the Air Force is “visited” by Matthew Blount Post 555 member Eldon Woodie.

JROTC MEDALS AWARDED TO STUDENTS AT THOMPSON AND VINCENT HIGH SCHOOLS

Annually, The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 proudly participates in presenting American Legion Medals for Scholastic Achievement and Military Excellence to local Junior ROTC Cadets. This year, Ron Koonce ordered the medals and Commander Barry Blount produced beautiful certificates. Thompson High School Air Force Junior ROTC (AFJROTC) instructor CMSgt (Ret) Keith Long provided the names for the medals and invited Post 555 to present. The THS AFJROTC Awards Ceremony was held in the Thompson High School cafeteria on May 2, 2024 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The event was well attended. The crowd included the JROTC students, parents, administrators, and presenters from several organizations including the Sons of Union Soldiers, Daughters of the American Revolution, and The American Legion. Eldon Woodie presented The American Legion Scholastic Award to Cadet CMSgt Lane Mitchell. He also presented The American Legion General Military Excellence Award for Leadership to Cadet Major Colby Prosser. The evening closed with a change of command and promotions for next year’s Air Warrior leaders.

Vincent High School’s Senior Army Junior ROTC (AJROTC) instructor, MSG (Ret) Marshall Thomas provided the cadet names and served as the event master of ceremony. The VHS AJROTC Awards ceremony was held in the high school gym, May 9, 2024 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30p.m. The ceremony was also well attended by the cadets, families, friends, and presenters. Eldon presented The American Legion Scholastic Award to Cadet Jordynne Rose. He also presented The American Legion General Military Excellence Award for Leadership to Cadet MaKayla Perkins. This evening also closed with an introduction and promotion of next year’s awesome group of cadet AJROTC leaders.

The four students were universally honored to receive the handsome American Legion medal with ribbon. The students’ families expressed appreciation for the

recognition and certificates. Both communities and school administrators support the JROTC programs and their superb JROTC cadre. Recognizing the achievements of these students encourages citizenship, scholastic achievement, and leadership in our local youth. It also makes all involved proud of The American Legion.



L/R: CMSgt (Ret) Keith Long, Lt Col (Ret) Jason Davis, THS Air Warriors AF JROTC AL-932 Change of Command to welcome next year's leaders!



L/R: Thompson High School Cadet CMSgt Lane Mitchell being presented The American Legion Scholastic Medal from 555 Legion member, Eldon Woodie.



L/R: Thompson High School Cadet Major Colby Prosser being presented The American Legion Military Excellence Medal from 555 Legion member, Eldon Woodie.



L/R: Vincent High School Cadet Jordynne Rose being presented The American Legion Scholastic Medal from 555 Legion member, Eldon Woodie.



L/R: Vincent High School Cadet MaKayla Perkins being presented The American Legion Military Excellence Medal from 555 Legion member, Eldon Woodie.



Salute to the Senior Instructor for Vincent High School Army JROTC, Master Sergeant (Ret) Marshall Thomas served as Master of Ceremonies. He models the highest standards and is respected by his students, fellow teachers, administrators, and parents.

2ND ANNUAL BLUE STAR SALUTE FOUNDATION MOTORCYCLE CHARITY RIDE

On May 4, 2024, four members of The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 showed up to support the 2nd Annual Blue Star Salute Foundation Motorcycle Charity Ride. Post 555 member and President of the Blue Star Salute Foundation, **Tom Long** served as Ride Captain. Tom also organized folks as they arrived and supervised the post-ride activities. Post member **Vashone Smith** showed up to welcome the riders. **Ray Pata and Eldon Woodie** rode in the event. In addition to scenic backroads, the ride included a solemn procession through the Alabama National Cemetery where the group gathered around the main flag for a moment of reflection and the playing of Taps. 100% of the funds raised will be used to support local Veterans and their families. Post 555 members supporting the non-profit Blue Star Salute Foundation showed our local community that The American Legion cares, and we want to partner with other VSOs and non-profit organizations in serving Veterans. Pre-event, the ride was covered by local television and Tom Long was interviewed. We appreciate the Blue Star Salute Foundation and expect this well-organized charity ride to grow in future years.



L/R: Ray Pata, Eldon Woodie, and Tom Long. Triple Nickel, ready to roll!



The cost of freedom can be seen here. While listening to TAPS, this was the view of the beautiful Alabama National Cemetery for the Riders participating in the Blue Star Salute Foundation Motorcycle Charity Ride on May 4, 2024.

CHILDREN'S OF ALABAMA INDY GRAND PRIX EVENT AT BARBER MOTORSPORTS

On April 26-28, 2024, Post 555 was asked to help as "Tram Safety Volunteers" at the Children's of Alabama Indy Grand Prix event. We had a TON of Volunteers for this event, so let's recognize them all: **Bill Blank, Andy Burell, Ray Evans (friend of Dorian Ross), Kenneth Fox, Doug McDaniel, Harry "Skip" Mize IV, Helen Moman, Curtis Orse, Ray Pata, Leroy Raymond, Dorian Ross, Vashone Smith, Donald Walker, Nancy Waller, and Pete Williams.** With a total of 29 shifts, we were given a check in the amount of \$1,450 from Kourtney Cowart with Eventive Sports! Each Volunteer designed into which Legion Family's account they wanted their portion of the donation to be deposited. The Post received \$775, the Riders received \$200, the Auxiliary received \$200, and the Sons received \$275. Having these opportunities to "work" at Barber Motorsports is priceless for Post 555, so please keep volunteering!!!

MOTO-AMERICA EVENT AT BARBER MOTORSPORTS

On May 17-19, 2024, Post 555 was once again called upon by Kourtney Cowart at Eventive Sports to help with "Tram Safety Volunteers" at the Moto-America race at the Barber Motorsports Park. We came through again with the following Post members offering their time to help: **Bill Blank, Andy Burell, John Clopton, Helen Moman, Curtis Orse, Ray Pata, Vashone Smith, Tim Vincelette, and Pete Williams.** With the 21 shifts these Volunteers worked, they earned Post 555 **\$1,260** which was divided as they requested among the Legion Families. The Post received \$630, the Riders received \$300, the Auxiliary received \$180, and the Sons received \$150. **THANKS TO EACH VOLUNTEER!!!**

ALABAMA TRIBUTE TO AMERICA'S PATRIOTIC SERVICE (TAPS) CEREMONY AT THE ALABAMA NATIONAL CEMETERY

Every year, the staff of the Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo honors all Fallen Heroes who did not receive military honors when they were interred, possibly due to not having any family members present. On May 23, 2024, several members of Post 555 were present to support this event on behalf of several family members who attended ceremony. **Nancy Waller, Chic Cecchini, Conrad Stempel, Ray Pata, Eldon and Bonnie Woodie, and Ronnie McGriff** were in the audience to observe the ceremony. Names were read of all Fallen Heroes who were honored; 30 representing the U.S. Army, 14 representing the U.S. Navy, 16 representing the U.S. Air Force, seven representing the U.S. Marine Corps, and one representing the U.S. Coast Guard. Military honors (flag folding, playing of TAPS, and flag presentation) were performed by members of the Alabama Army National Guard Military Funeral Honors Team. Very nice ceremony performed with respect and dignity for the few family members present, as well as honoring the 68 Fallen Heroes. Many thanked the staff of the Alabama National Cemetery.



Member of the ALARNG Military Funeral Honors Team getting ready for the TAPS Ceremony.



Flag-Folding ceremony completed; will be presented to a family member of a Fallen Hero.



ALARNG Funeral Honors Team member presenting a flag to a family member.



The ceremonial bell that is rung for all of the Fallen Heroes in each branch of military service.

FLAG PLACEMENT FOR MEMORIAL DAY AT THE ALABAMA NATIONAL CEMETERY

To get the ALNC ready for the Memorial Day Ceremony, Post 555 Volunteers took part in the Flag Placement on Sat., May 25, 2024 starting with a short ceremony at Committal Shelter #3. The Volunteers who participated were ***Chic Cecchini, Don Colvard, Tom Long, Harry "Skip" Mize IV, Kenneth Paschal, Ray Pata, Leroy Raymond, Conrad Stempel, Donald Walker, Nancy Waller, and Eldon Woodie.*** After the family members placed their flags and spent time with their Fallen Heroes, the Volunteers continued to place flags in front of every headstone and columbarium in the ALNC (approximately 11,000 flags placed. This

project did not take much time due to a huge amount of Volunteers from several different organizations. Great effort from all!!!



Huge amount of family members and Volunteers for the Flag Placement.



Harry "Skip" Mize IV working as a "one-man team" to place flags at the ALNC.



Kenneth Paschal placing a flag in front of Matthew Blount's headstone.

JUNIOR SHOOTERS' FUNDRAISER FOR MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

Sam Richardson, the Director of the SCSSA invited us to participate in another fundraiser in which we can purchase butts, brisket, or chicken breasts. After putting sign-up forms out in a General Membership Meeting and sending out a flyer, once again Post 555 members came through with 14 orders of meat totaling **\$1,330** to be given to our Junior Shooters. The members who contributed to this fundraiser were **Karryl Anderson, Barry Blount, Joe Dunn, Cheryl Gilliam, Tom Long, Curtis Orse, Ray Pata, Harry Sessamen, Vashone Smith, Larry Strayer, Jimmy Watson, William Wheatley, and Eldon Woodie**. Post 555 looks forward to future fundraisers to continue to help fund our Junior Shooters!!



Containers with meat for Post 555 members who purchase butts, briskets, and/or chicken breasts! I was too busy to take photos of people!!!

MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY AT THE ALABAMA NATIONAL CEMETERY

The 16th Annual Memorial Day Ceremony at the Alabama National Cemetery was held on Mon., May 27, 2024. It was supposed to begin at 9:00 a.m. but due to bad weather that caused power outages and tree damage, it was delayed until 10:30 a.m. There were still a great audience to enjoy this ceremony. The Patriot Guard and American Legion Riders were there to welcome all of us, and there was a flyover by the Patriot Flyers. The Master of Ceremonies was Ms. Bailyn Murphy who was the Division Winner of The American Legion Oratorical Contest. Guest Speaker was MG (Ret) David Burford who always gives a great talk to groups like this. We were honored to have "Homeland" entertain us with the service medley that they always do, God Bless the USA, and How Great Thou Art. The audience really enjoyed their music. We are so lucky to have them with us again!! At the end of the ceremony, we had a cannon volley near the pond followed by the playing of TAPS. A wonderful end to this ceremony.

We had a ton of Post 555 Volunteers to help with set-up, helping during the ceremony, and tear-down/storage: **Bill Blank (cannon), Chic Cecchini, James Darden, Bobby Horsley (cannon), Tom Long, Harry "Skip" Mize IV (cannon), Helen Moman (cannon), Kenneth Paschal, Ray Pata, Harry Sessamen, Vashone Smith, Conrad Stempel, Donald Walker, Nancy Waller, Jimmy Watson, and Eldon Woodie**. Thanks to everyone!!



L/R: Unknown person (sorry)..., Eldon Woodie, Harry "Skip" Mize IV, Bill Blank, and Helen Moman.



Homeland entertaining us as only they can.



MG (Ret) David Burford, guest speaker. Always a pleasure hearing his message.



View of the entire audience. Not as much as in the past, but I am sure the bad weather kept some people at home.

FLAG REMOVAL AFTER THE MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY AT THE ALABAMA NATIONAL CEMETERY

On Thurs., May 30, 2024, all flags were removed from almost 11,000 grave sites. The start time was scheduled for 9:00 a.m., but when I arrived, Section 8 was totally empty and the majority of the rest of the cemetery was being finished very quickly. I think there was a possibility of rain, so everyone must have been instructed to just pick-up the flags and get them transported to the Support Committee Storage Building to be wiped, bundled, and stored for the next event. The Post 555 Volunteers were as follows: ***Chic Cecchini, Henry Crist, Conrad Stempel, Nancy Waller, and Jimmy Watson.*** There were at least 10-15 total Volunteers working on this, so we were finished fairly quickly; great efforts from all.



Chic Cecchini helping with flag bundling.



Conrad Stempel with his bag of rubber bands.



Henry Crist with one of a zillion bundles of flags.



Flags everywhere, but there were plenty of Volunteers!!!

2024 ALABAMA AMERICAN LEGION BOYS STATE

The 87th Annual Alabama American Legion Boys State was held at Troy University from May 26 to June 1, 2024. Young men from all over Alabama arrived to participate in the week-long program which featured hands-on practical experience in forming and running a model state government. Delegates are recommended and selected based on their character, leadership, moral conviction, and work ethic. The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 proudly sponsored four delegates from local area high schools.

The young men are all appreciative of being sponsored by Post 555 and are honored that they were selected to attend. During this activity-packed event, the boys have very little downtime. They were tasked with forming city and state governments. Separated into two fictional parties, they developed political platforms, created budgets, and passed legislation. The boys enjoyed the challenge as well as spending time with other like-minded students.

The delegates from Post 555 this year were Grant Gillespie and Niko Varoutis from Oak Mountain High School, Cliff Windham from Pelham High School, and Thomas Graham from Cornerstone Christian School.



Grant Gillespie

Thomas Graham

Niko Varoutis

Cliff Windham

For more information, please go to <https://alboysstate.org/>.



Thomas Graham, sponsored by Post 555, looking quite at home at the podium of the 87th Annual Alabama American Legion Boys State at Troy University.

CHAPLAIN'S UPLIFT

With the Memorial Day weekend behind us, I found myself thinking more deeply about our motto, "For God And Country." I know that so many people, Veterans especially, still have a Love for America. I have always believed, though, that generations from the past had a stronger love for, and a deeper commitment to the good ole' USA. That's been especially true in the South.

One reason for that is because of the revivals that broke out in southern camps during the Civil War. With so many men dying, and with the South gradually losing, they got a lot more serious about eternity, and one by one they began to accept God's offer of Divine Mercy and Forgiveness. Many entrusted their souls to God who came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ and paid the price for their rebellion against Him by shedding His own blood on a cross, satisfying His wrath against them. And so, as men returned to their home states, there were many more Christians who brought their faith to the South.

But now, look how things have changed! I can hardly stand it when people rip on our country on TV and Social Media. And when I hear that some people cannot even fly the American flag in America, I think, "ARE YOU KIDDING ME?!" I still love the chorus from an old Merle Haggard song:

"WALKIN' ON THE FIGHTIN' SIDE OF ME"

"Walkin' on the fightin' side of me,
Runnin' down a way of life our fightin' men have fought and died to keep.
If you don't love it—LEAVE it!
Let this song that I'm singin' be a warnin',
Cause when you're runnin' down my country hoss,
You're walkin' on the fightin' side of me!"

Everything teaches. EVERYTHING! That's why when people speak out against "God and Country," people who are SO unthankful and have NO IDEA of the price that was paid for them to be able to even say that—well, just look at the effect it's having on our young people. My fellow Vets; we cannot change our whole country, but we CAN speak-out against the evil vitriol that spreads like gangrene, and poisons those around us. I for one will not lie down and refuse to fight for those I love and for those with whom I have to do in life. Remember this:

"BOLD HEARTED MEN AND WOMEN ARE ALWAYS CALLED MEAN-SPIRITED BY COWARDS."

*For God and Country,
Chaplain Joe*

ROVEO LUNCHEON # 16!!!

The "ROVEO Regulars" continue to get together every Tuesday after the General Membership Meetings, and the 16th lunch was held on May 7, 2024 at Creekside BBQ. We had **Karryl and Becky Anderson, Ron Koonce, Alan Phillips, Robert Sanders, Nancy Waller, Bonnie Woodie, and Eldon Woodie**. Food was very good, but a little pricey, so I do not think we will be going there again, but the conversation was good as it always is when Post 555 members get together. If anyone new would like to join us, we would love to have some "new blood"!!!



L/R: Karryl Anderson, Alan Phillips, Ron Koonce, Eldon Woodie, Bonnie Woodie, Robert Sanders, and Becky "Sweetie" Anderson. Yes, Nancy Waller is behind the camera.....

*For God and Country,
Nancy J. Waller
Adjutant*

MAY "BELATED" BIRTHDAY WISHES

Davis, Andrew C., 05/02
Maull, Kimball, 05/02
Dulaney, Michael A., 05/04

Wilkins, Harvey C., 05/06
Miller, Alan B., 05/13
Ginn, Gerald G., 05/16

JUNE "BELATED" BIRTHDAY WISHES

Dunn, Joseph A., 06/01
Wheatley, William, 06/03
Cody, Daniel P., 06/06
Pata, Bernard "Ray", 06/06
Braid, Dr. Malcolm "Mac", 06/07
Quebodeaux, Jimmy, 06/08
Kennedy, Patrick E. Jr., 06/15

Winters, Derek P. Sr., 06/15
Thomas, Robert H., 06/17
Wright, Gary E., 06/19
Lawley, Darrell K., 06/20
Stempel, Conrad F., 06/25
Parker, Johnnie, 06/25
Lakotich, Frank J., 06/26



If your birthday is in May or June and your name is not on this list, it is because it is not listed in your profile in MyLegion.org. Please send me your birthday so you can be included in future Happy Birthday wishes!!

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

We normally meet the first Thursday of the month, but with the 4th of July being the first Thursday in July, we moved the July meeting to the next Thursday, so please join us on **Thurs., July 11, 2024** with our fellowship meal (hosted by Texas Roadhouse) at 6:00 p.m. and the meeting starting promptly at 7:00 p.m. at the Pelham Senior Center at 50 Racquet Club Parkway, Pelham, AL 35124. The highlights of this meeting will be the honoring of our 2024 First Responders as well as having several young men who just completed Boys State share their experiences with everyone.

POST LEADERSHIP FOR 2024 – 2025

Post Commander

Bill Blank

First Vice Commander

Harry “Skip” Mize IV

Second Vice Commander

Dorian Ross

Adjutant

Nancy Waller

Judge Advocate

Tom Long

Finance Officer

Ron Koonce

Chaplain

Joe Dunn

Sergeant-at-Arms

Jerry McClain

Service Officer

Curtis Orse

Historian

Nancy Waller

Public Relations Officer

Nancy Waller

Post Trustees

Tom McDaniel (1 Yr.)

Vashone Smith (2 Yr.)

Frank Lakotich (3 Yr.)

Sons of The American Legion

Donald Walker, Commander

Ron Koonce, Advisor/Adjutant

American Legion Rider’s Director

Doug McDaniel

Flag Team Coordinator

Bill Blank

Boy Scout Troop 404 Coordinator

David Coram

Jr. Shooters

Sam Richardson, Director

Darrell Lawley, Coach

Baseball Director

Kyle Phillips

School Awards Program

Barry Blount, Chairman

Frank Lakotich, Co-Chairman

Awards Program

Nancy Waller, Chairman

Webmaster

Ron Koonce

The Triple Nickel

is published monthly for members of Matthew Blount Post 555
50 Racquet Club Parkway
Pelham, AL 35124
205-678-1375

commander@alpost555.com

Items for publication are accepted upon Executive Committee approval and available space. Submit articles prior to the 10th of the month for publication the following month if approved. We reserve the right to edit any submissions for the purpose of publication. Letters to the Editor must include name, address, and telephone number. Names will be withheld upon request.

Send e-mail to: editor@alpost555.com

Photos by Chic Cecchini, Post 555

Copyright 2022, American Legion Post 555