



**AMERICAN
LEGION**

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

VOLUME X, ISSUE XI DECEMBER 2023/JANUARY 2024

THE TRIPLE NICKEL

**A FOND FAREWELL TO
STEPHEN McFADDEN COMBS
1944 - 2023**



Steve's wife, Sally, wanted to start this remembrance of her husband, who was very patriotic, and she wanted to relate a hospital episode with everyone.

"When asked if he would like a Chaplain, he was enthusiastic about it. When the Chaplain arrived, he announced that he was of the Jewish faith. Steve immediately went into "political mode" and announced his support of Israel. The Chaplain expressed his gratitude and gave a generic prayer then sang a song in Hebrew and English which was pretty amazing." Sally stated that this was typical of Steve.

A speaker we once heard asked, "How did you live your "dash"? The – is the mark between one's year of birth and year of death. Steve Combs lived his dash with vigor and variety. As a pre-adolescent, he had an ice cream cycle, started a neighborhood newspaper, showed movies in the family garage, and assisted his best friend, Jim Underwood with a neighborhood radio station (unfortunately the FCC shut it down!). He

experienced grade school and middle school in Terre Haute, Indiana; attended and graduated from Culver Military Academy; then attended Rollins College where he was editor of the college newspaper. Upon graduation, Steve entered the Indiana National Guard. He married his college sweetheart in 1967 and moved back to Indiana where he continued his journalism career as the sports editor of The Plainfield Messenger. He later landed the job as editor of the Greenfield Daily Reporter. He acquired a master's degree in journalism at Ball State University. While in Greenfield, Steve became a certified EMT and worked for the Wishard Hospital Ambulance Service in Indianapolis. Later, he and his wife had their own ambulance service to relieve the local fire department from purely transport runs. He and the family moved to Florida in the early '80s and Steve became a tax accountant. He researched and co-authored a book Road Dog about a serial killer. He then found a profession that was a perfect fit: he taught Freshman Composition at the local junior colleges. He was a member of Oasis Lutheran Church in Lake Mary, Florida and maintained that membership after he moved to Alabama to be closer to family. He was an active member of The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 in Pelham, Alabama. He was the proud father of two sons, Charles and Christopher; two daughters-in law, Melanie and Judy; and three grandchildren Kay, Jack, and Jordan. Steve Combs ended his days in peace.

*In Memory of Steve Forever,
Sally Combs
Loving Wife and Mother*

RSVP VOLUNTEER WINTER RECOGNITION EVENT

On Tues., December 5, 2023 at 9:00 a.m., several Post 555 members attended (with some being honored) at this event held at the Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Parish. Present were **Barry Blount, Bill Blank, Nancy Waller, Frank Lakotich, Chic Cecchini, Ron Koonce, Tom Long, and Jerry McClain. Harry Sessamen**, a member of Squadron 555 of The Sons of The American Legion was also present. Post 555 received the 5,000+ Hours Achievement Station Award that was gladly received by me as the Station Manager. **Ron Koonce** and **Harry Sessamen** received awards for being on the Shelby County RSVP Advisory Council for two years with Ron being the President and Harry being the Secretary. Congratulations to both gentlemen and to all Post 555 RSVP Members whose hours sealed this award for us!!!



L/R: Nancy Waller receiving the Post 555 5000+ Hours Station Achievement Award from Heather Lamex, Director of RSVP and Positive Maturity



L/R (for only the Post 555 members; other individuals are unknown): Bill Blank, Tom Long, Nancy Waller, Chic Cecchini, and Frank Lakotich. These individuals are Veterans that were being honored at the RSVP event.

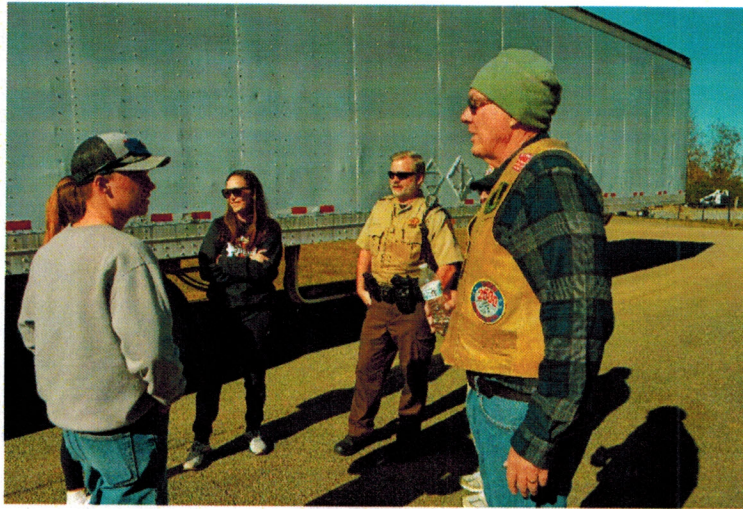
*For God and Country,
Nancy J. Waller
Adjutant*

WREATHS ARRIVING AT THE ALNC FOR WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA

This year, there were three different loads of wreaths from Maine to place on the headstones of our Fallen Heroes during the Wreaths Across America Ceremony Scheduled for Sat., December 16, 2023. The trucks arrived **Sat., December 9, 2023 at 11:00 a.m., Mon., December 11, 2023 at 1:00 p.m., and the last one Thurs., December 14, 2023 at 11:00 a.m.** There was a total of 819 boxes that were in a very different configuration than in the past. Each box held 12 wreaths and weighed about 40 pounds each. I was only able to help with the final load and was apprehensive of the size and weight of the boxes, but when we got lined-up inside the semi and started handing the boxes from one person to the next, it was not as hard as I thought it would be. Doing things like this is really a lot of fun due to everyone doing the same thing over and over and over with pretty much no complaining. As always, Post 555 was well-represented.



Jimmy Watson having WAY too much fun!!!



Eldon Woodie sharing a story (undoubtedly).



L/R: Conrad Stempel, Eldon Woodie, Nancy Waller, and Ray Pata. Ray told me he was not smiling because he had worked HARD that day. Jim Darden was somewhere, and Chic Cecchini took the photo.



TONS of Volunteers!! Ray Pata is in between the two semis, and I see myself in the middle, and Eldon Woodie and Jim Darden at the right end.

PELHAM “CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD” PARADE

The Pelham “Christmas Around the World” Parade took place through our city on **Sat, December 9, 2023**. **Jerry McClain** led the charge of getting all the floats into the staging area with the help of Post 555 Volunteers. Check out the great photos!!



L/R: Kenneth Paschal (he had his own float), Mac Braid, Eldon Woodie, Robert Sanders, Dorian Ross, and the leader of this illustrious group of Volunteers, Jerry McClain. Also working this event was Ray Yokel and Bill Blank (as noted in another photo with them on the float).



Leading the way for the Post 555 float is Riders Director, Doug McDaniel. Not sure who that “dude” is riding with him, but I like all of the decorations!!!



Cannot quite tell who everyone is, but I see several members of Scout Troop 404, Ray Yokel, and Bill Blank. I think Ray brought his entire family with him; glad to see them on the float as well.

FLAG RETIREMENT CEREMONY WITH SCOUT TROOP 404

On Sun., December 10, 2023, members of Post 555 joined Scout Troop 404 for a Flag Retirement Ceremony at the Pelham Cemetery. Members present were ***Kenneth Paschal, David Coram, and Chic Cecchini*** taking the photos. These each were given several opportunities to place a piece of a flag in the burn pit to turn it into ashes to be processed later. A very nice ceremony to dispose of these American flags properly, and teaching these Scouts the right way to take care of old and damaged flags.



L/R: Kenneth Paschal and David Coram.



This is the Flag Retirement Center located in the Pelham Cemetery, and this person is NOT being burned. He is in there away from the flames, but managing the fire.

BIRMINGHAM VA HOSPITAL CHRISTMAS CARAVAN PREPARATION AND ACTUAL EVENT

On Mon., December 11, 2023, I had the pleasure of meeting and taking a photo with Mrs. Neville Peacock, the Chairman of the Veterans Committee of the George Maris Chapter of the Colonial Dames XVII Century. This organization was looking for a Veteran organization that they could help with during the holidays, and she reached out to the generic phone number for Post 555 which comes to my personal cell phone. She and I conversed and determined that her ladies could donate 100 ea. pairs of socks for our Birmingham VA Hospital Christmas Caravan goodie bags. She came to the Pelham Senior Center the evening of the 11th and brought a HUGE bag of brand new packages of socks!!! What an extremely generous donation for the Veterans!!!



L/R: Christmas Caravan Chairman, Nancy Waller and Neville Peacock

The next phase of the “operation” was to fill 100 ea. gift bags with a pair of socks, a myriad of personal hygiene items donated by **David Coram**, and several Christmas cards from Post 555 and other thoughtful people. Members present for this were **Harry “Skip” Mize IV, Ray Pata, Chuck and Karla Kiser, Nancy Waller, and behind the camera this time was NOT Chic Cecchini; it was Beth Phillips**. Thanks, Beth!!!



L/R: Harry “Skip” Mize IV, Ray Pata, Chuck Kiser, Karla Kiser, and Nancy Waller. Beth Phillips took the photo, so she also played a key role in this event.

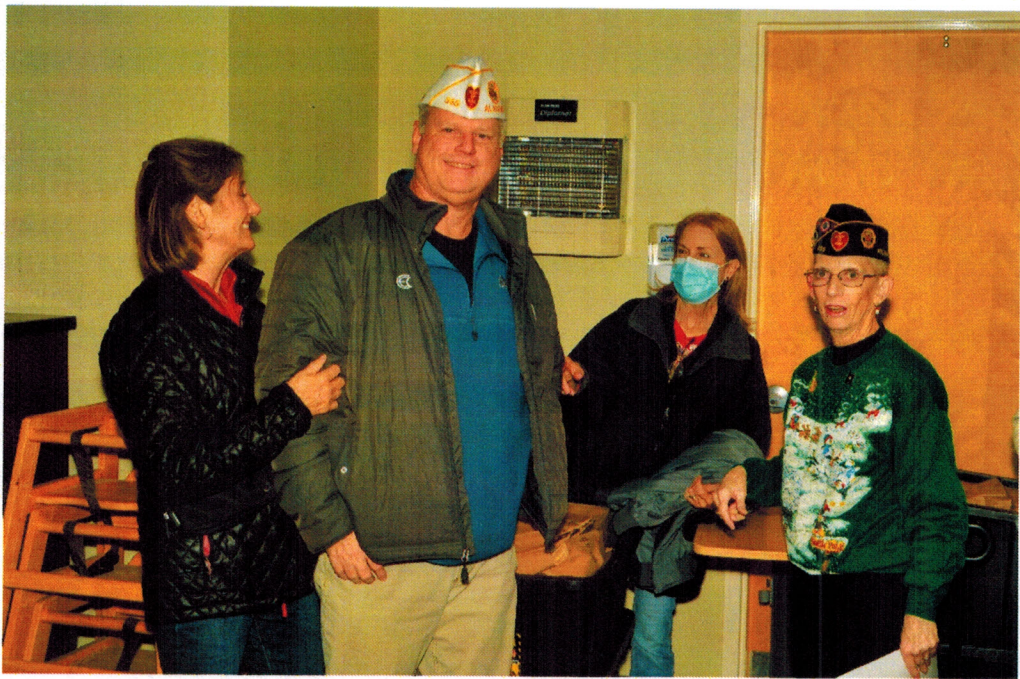


L/R: Beth Phillips (I told you she was there helping!!!) and Ray Pata.



This will give you an idea of what went into each of the 100 gift bags. As stated earlier, the socks were donated, David Coram donated all of the personal hygiene items, the Christmas cards were hand-made, and the gift bags themselves were donated by Tom Long, so this entire endeavor cost the Post absolutely nothing except a little bit of “man and woman power” for which I personally was very thankful!!!

Then, on Tues., December 12, 2023, Alan and Beth Phillips, Chic and Rita Cecchini, and I met in the cafeteria of the VA Hospital, unloaded the tubs of bags out of my SUV, and thawed out for a little while (yes, it was a very cold evening) as we went through some protocol prior to heading to visit the Veterans.



L/R: It appears that Alan Phillips was the only one who knew Chic Cecchini was taking a photo. Beth Phillips and Rita Cecchini are laughing and talking, and I am not sure what I was looking at, but it looks like I was in a trance.....

We finally left the cafeteria in a herd with everyone going to the same elevators at the same time. We were obviously in no rush, but the schedule we received as far as what floors/units to go to and in what order was the exact same for everyone. There may need to be a little better planning for next year to have some go from the top floors down and some go from the bottom floors up. Just a thought.....



L/R: Nancy Waller, Rita Cecchini out in the hall, Santa Claus, and a very happy and appreciative Veteran.



L/R: Nancy Waller, Rita Cecchini, Beth Phillips, and a wonderful Veteran.

I have to tell you a little about this young lady. When we were talking with her, she mentioned she was in the Army and I asked her what unit. When she said the name of the unit, I recognized it to be a unit in the Alabama Army National Guard!!! I served for 29 years in the National Guard so I got to know a lot of units throughout the state. We had a great conversation with her and she said she was going home soon, but still dealing with some health issues. We wished her well in her recovery and treatment.

All in all, we had a great time meeting and talking to the Veterans. About a week or so after this event, I received a phone call from a gentleman with whom we had shared a

gift bag and conversed, and he wanted me to thank everyone at Post 555 for thinking of him! How cool is that for him to take the time to let us know how much he appreciated what we did for him and the other Veterans. If that doesn't warm your heart, I don't know what will. Great couple of days working with my fellow Post members in preparation for this event, as well as the actual event at the VA Hospital. I look forward to next year!!!

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

ROVEOs PATRONIZE “SHONO’S JAPANESE GRILL”



L/R: Robert Sanders, Alan Phillips, Nancy Waller, Chic Cecchini, and Joe Dunn.



L/R: Robert Sanders, Alan Phillips, Rita Cecchini (she was behind the camera in the other photo), Chic Cecchini, and Joe Dunn.

At the end of the November ROVEO Luncheon, the group decided to try a new restaurant for the December ROVEO Luncheon so on **Tues., December 12, 2023, 11:30 a.m., we met at Shonos Japanese Grill.** There were mixed opinions about the food, so I don't think we will be returning as a group, but the week after we ate there together, I went back. I thoroughly enjoyed the shrimp and vegetables.

No discussion took place about the next ROVEO Luncheon scheduled for **Tues., January 9, 2024, 11:30 a.m.,** so during the January 4, 2024 General Membership Meeting, I asked several "ROVEO Regulars" what they thought about the next luncheon. The decision was made to meet at Bama Burgers, so we did. I heard good comments around the table about the food, and the best part of the afternoon was that someone paid our tab!!! When we first arrived, some gentlemen from a stump/tree removal company were raving about how appreciative they were of the military and Veterans, so we "assume" they were the ones who took care of our meals. How excellent was that??? We need to find out where else they eat lunch.....

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

WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA CEREMONY

On Sat., December 16, 2023, Volunteers arrived at the Alabama National Cemetery anywhere from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. to help with several different "jobs" such as moving boxes of wreaths from the semi-trailers onto the ground of each of the sections, lining them up at the sections for the family members to use before the rest were laid by Volunteers, loading 1,000 chairs onto trailers at the Storage Building, unloading 1,000 chairs at the ceremony site, setting-up 1,000 chairs in the ceremony area, setting-up the sound system, making sure the service flags were in the right order and exact distance from each other, getting the wreaths for each branch of service ready for someone to honor them during the ceremony, managing the several parking areas, etc., etc. As you can see, there was no shortage of tasks to be completed to make this wonderful ceremony the best it could be, especially for the family members of their Fallen Heroes who deserved the absolute best that the Support Committee for the Alabama National Cemetery could provide.

As always, Post 555 members came through, so I would like to mention them with a HUGE thank you to each one; **Chic Cecchini, Henry Crist, Jim Darden, Harry "Skip" Mize IV, Ray Pata, Conrad Stempel, Larry Strayer, Nancy Waller, William Wheatley, and Eldon Woodie.** Tom Long represented Post 555 as well as the Patriot Guard Riders. Visitors representing Post 555 were **Karryl Anderson, A.J. Blount, Barry Blount, Richard Kaster, Chuck Kiser, Frank Lakotich, and Kenneth Paschal.** A.J. Blount was given the honor of saluting the U.S. Army wreath.



Henry Crist helping with the off-loading of wreaths and placement at each section.



A.J. Blount, Barry Blount, and children/grandchildren laying a wreath on Matthew Blount's headstone.

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

PRESENTATION TO CITY OF PELHAM

On Mon., December 18, 2023 at 7:00 p.m., **Bill Blank** stepped-up to the microphone at the Pelham City Council meeting to donate the acrylic Declaration of Independence that he won during the Thanksgiving Dinner/Meeting. He wanted it to be in a place where people could enjoy it versus having it in his own home; very, very generous offer. Also present from Post 555 were **Frank Lakotich, Nancy Waller, and Donald Walker** who also spoke to the Council members and the audience about the upcoming events that Squadron 555 was working on for our "Open House". Other Post members who are sitting Council members were present; **Mayor Gary Waters, President Pro-Tempore David Coram, and City Manager Gretchen DiFante.**



**L/R (front): Frank Lakotich, Bill Blank, Mayor Gary Waters, and Donald Walker.
L/R (back): President Pro-Tempore David Coram, Councilman Chad Leverett,
Council President Maurice Mercer, Councilwoman Mildred Lanier-Reed, and
Councilman Rick Wash.**

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

NEW YEAR'S JR. SHOOTERS' FUNDRAISER ANOTHER SUCCESS!!

On Sat., December 30, 2023, 15 Post 555 members arrived at the Pelham Senior Center to pick-up their orders for butts, briskets, and/or chicken breasts as a show of support for our Junior Shooters. I was told by the Director, Sam Richardson that we tied with two other groups as having the most orders this time, SOOOOO, next time, we need to be the group with the MOST orders; no second place for Post 555—HOOAH!!! I want to thank the following members for their orders and support for this event; ***Karryl Anderson, Bill Blank, Barry Blount, Chic Cecchini, Richard Kaster, Marcus Lowe, Curtis Orse, Ray Pata, Alan Phillips, Dorian Ross, Harry Sessamen, Nancy Waller, Jimmy Watson, William Wheatley, and Eldon Woodie.*** The total for our order was **\$935!!** Great job to all!!!



Darrell Lawley, Coach for the Junior Shooters, manning the smoker.



Director/Coach Sam Richardson and Photographer Chic Cecchini solving all the problems in the world.

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

ADJUTANT'S AREA

The last 2023-2024 Membership Report I received from the Department of Alabama has us having 176 renewals out of the goal they set for us of 220 which equals 80% which was for the month of December. The next goal is 85% (187 renewals or new members) for January 31, 2024. Renewals processed the month of December were as follows: **George D. Brown, James F. Carter, Daniel P. Cody, Henry L. Crist, Alan Farmer, Eric P. Fort, Frank J. Lakotich Jr., Thomas Glee, Ronald W. Gofourth, Edward A. Healey, Robert "Bobby" Horsley, Javier E. Jerez (owner of Margarita Grill), Jesse E. Jowers Sr., Daniel M. Kerins, Neil "Marcus" Lowe, Brian K. Newton, James L. Posey, Ferrell Stephens Jr., Jack Turner, Harvey C. Wilkins, and Gary E. Wright.** Those who renewed so far in the month of January were as follows: **Richard A. Argo, Gretchen DiFante, Durall Dobbins, David W. Inglis, Daniel G. Manuel, and Steven M. Smith** who also got caught-up for 2023 so that he could retain his continuous years; great job, Steve!!! I have been working closely with the 40 members who have not renewed for 2024 in hopes that they will stay with us. Every single member is important which is why I do not give up on making sure that our members receive e-mails from me, some of which come from the Commander, so that everyone stays informed of events, members needing prayers for health issues, meeting notifications, etc. I am honored to be a part of Post 555 and I will continue to serve you for as long as I am able and am appointed to stay as the Adjutant!!!

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

DECEMBER BIRTHDAY WISHES

Nale, Harold B., 12/04
Manuel, Daniel G., 12/05
Fox, James "Jamie" W., 12/08
Stephens, Ferrell F., 12/08
Kerins, Daniel M., 12/09
Paschal, Kenneth, 12/09
Fitts, Donald "Wayne", 12/12

Rancher, Yolanda F., 12/13
McClelland, Robert "Bruce" Jr., 12/17
Aaron, James E. Sr., 12/18
Crist, Henry L., 12/23
Smith, Steven "Steve" M., 12/23
McDaniel, Thomas "Tom" M. Jr., 12/28
Topping, Daniel "Dan" C., 12/28

JANUARY BIRTHDAY WISHES

Tarazon, Troy L., 01/03
Monson, James B., 01/07
Samper, Octavio, 01/09
Glass, Samuel, 01/10
McGriff, Ronnie M., 01/10
Jowers, Jesse E. Sr., 01/13
Oelschlager, Theodore H., 01/15
Monday, Jeffrey "Jeff" H., 01/17
Blount, Andrew "AJ", 01/19
Darden, James W., 01/19

Smith, Dencil "Clay", 01/19
Born, Floyd "Butch", 01/20
Cooner, Douglas H., 01/20
Littlefield, Earl W., 01/21
McDaniel, Douglas "Doug" W., 01/21
Turner, Jack R., 01/21
Aguilar, Alberto, 01/27
Broxson, Donald G., 01/27
Ross, Dorian, 01/29



If your birthday is in December or January and your name is not on this list, it is because it is not listed in MyLegion.org or you did not reply to an e-mail I sent out ages ago asking for updates, so please send it to me so I can wish you a Happy Birthday next year!!!

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

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

We meet the first Thursday of the month, so our next meeting is scheduled for **February 1, 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 focus for this meeting will be our Post Everlasting Ceremony where we will be honoring six members who left us since our last ceremony.

POST LEADERSHIP FOR 2023-2024

***Post Commander
Barry Blount***

***First Vice Commander
Bill Blank***

***Second Vice Commander
Dorian Ross***

***Adjutant
Nancy Waller***

***Judge Advocate
Tom Long***

***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

Finance Officer
Ron Koonce

Chaplain
Joe Dunn

Sergeant-at-Arms
Anita Bennett

Service Officer
Curtis Orse

Historian
Shauna Hadley

Public Relations Officer
Nancy Waller

Post Trustees
Chris Combs (1 Yr.)
Tom McDaniel (2 Yr.)
Vashone Smith (3 Yr.)

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
Barry Blount, Chairman
Nancy Waller, Co-Chairman

Webmaster
Ron Koonce

The Triple Nickel

is published monthly for members of Matthew Blount Post 555
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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

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