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THE AMERICAN LEGION MATTHEW BLOUNT POST 555

VOLUME IX, ISSUE XIV FEBRUARY 2023

THE TRIPLE NICKEL

85th ANNUAL AMERICAN LEGION HIGH SCHOOL ORATORICAL SCHOLARSHIP CONTEST



L/R: Anita Bennett, Vashone Smith, Eldon Woodie (back), Nancy Waller, Richard Kaster, Bill Blank, Jerry McClain (back), and Curtis Orse.

On Friday, January 27, 2023, **Post 555 Oratorical Scholarship Chair, Jerry McClain**, led the way for Post 555 to facilitate yet another successful event. Post 555 Volunteers arrived at Pelham High School at 7:45 a.m. to prepare for the contest scheduled to begin at 9:00 a.m. sharp. These Volunteers included **Nancy Waller, Moderator; Eldon Woodie and Leroy Raymond, Timekeepers; Anita Bennett and Vashone Smith, Escorts; and Bill Blank and Curtis Orse, Ushers**. As the **Vice Chairman of the Department of Alabama High School Oratorical Scholarship Committee, Richard Kaster (also 2nd Division Commander)** mentored **Jerry McClain** through the process which was a great experience for everyone in attendance. There were two contestants, Lucas Kalba, a 9th grader at Pelham High School; and Katherine Villa Nicolas, an 11th grader at Pelham High School. They both demonstrated their oration talents on both their Prepared Orations as well as the Assigned Topic Oration. **Moderator Nancy Waller** explained to me how amazing it was that these two young people could

remember as much material as they did for the 8-10 minute Prepared Oration and then 3-4 minutes for the Assigned Topic.

The winner of the Post-level contest was Mr. Lucas Kalba with Ms. Katherine Villa Nicolas placing second. They both received a Certificate of Distinction from Post 555 as well as a medallion that will be engraved and returned to them at the Post 555 General Membership Meeting on Thursday, February 2, 2023 during a special presentation for them and their parents. Lucas will also receive a check for \$300 and Katherine will receive a check for \$200. Lucas will move on to the next level of competition at the 23rd District High School Oratorical Scholarship Contest scheduled for Saturday, February 18, 2023, 9:00 a.m., at the Pelham Senior Center. Everyone is welcome to attend and cheer Lucas on as he competes at the District-level contest.

*For God and Country,
Jeffrey H. Monday
Commander*



L/R: Jerry McClain, Gina Womack (Judge) (standing-in for Ainsley Allison), Councilman Maurice Mercer (Judge), 2nd Place Contestant Katherine Villa Nicolas, 1st Place Contestant Lucas Kalba, Councilwoman Mildred Lanier (Judge), Amy Bradley (Judge), and Richard Kaster.



L/R: Bob O'Neill (Judge) and Jerry McClain.



Top to Bottom: Judges Amy Bradley, Mildred Lanier, Bob O'Neill, Maurice Mercer, and Gina Womack doing their scoring at the end of the competition.



L/R: Jerry McClain, 1st Place Winner Lucas Kalba, and Richard Kaster. Curtis Orse “photo-bombed” the photo!!



L/R: Jerry McClain, 2nd Place Winner Katherine Villa Nicolas, and Richard Kaster.

WREATH REMOVAL AT THE ALNC

On Saturday, January 7, 2023, several members of Post 555 headed to the Alabama National Cemetery to assist with the huge project of removing over 9,000+ wreaths from headstones and at the columbarium as well as taking down the Avenue of Flags. As usual, Post 555 Volunteers were all over the cemetery either removing wreaths, disposing of them in trucks/cemetery equipment, or driving trucks and pulling trailers with wreaths to the disposal area by the Storage Building. Volunteers were **Karryl Anderson, Chic Cecchini (wreath removal and photographer), Henry Crist, James Darden, Jerry McClain, Doug McDaniel, Leroy Raymond, Dorian Ross, Vashone Smith, Conrad Stempel, Dan Topping, Nancy Waller, Jimmy Watson, Eldon Woodie, and John Zeiss**. What seemed like an overwhelming job ahead of them, it really did not take too long. Several Volunteers had rakes and brooms on which to put the wreaths so they could carry several at a time to the side of the road. There were other Volunteers with a wheelbarrow and a cart; anything that will hold wreaths WORKS!!!

After the wreath removal and disposal was complete, several Volunteers working on removing the Avenue of Flags which also did not take too long because there were Volunteers and cemetery staff up and down the main road. Teamwork worked well with the different missions that had to be done such as lowering the flags, folding them, bringing the flag poles down and getting them loaded into trucks, and replacing the “plugs” into the holes in which the flag poles were inserted. We even had members of the “Southern Cruisers” and “Legion Riders” helping with this process; thanks to them as well!!!

There is something that I need to pass on to all Post 555 members for future volunteer requests at the Alabama National Cemetery. Pam Nichols, the Chairman of the Support Committee for the Alabama National Cemetery (SCALNC), briefed the SCALNC members during the recent quarterly meeting that if an event is scheduled for Volunteers to report to the cemetery at a certain time, that is the time they need to report; **not earlier**. Volunteers' enthusiasm is admirable, but when Volunteers who have traveled a long distance to help and arrive at the prescribed time find that whatever was planned that day is already completed, it is very discouraging to them. Please report at the time that is set by Chairman Nichols so that all Volunteers will be able to be a part of the “mission”. Thank you!!



L/R: Dorian Ross, Karryl Anderson, John Zeiss, Nancy Waller, Cliff Windham (Boy Scout Troop 404) (behind Nancy), John Windham (Boy Scout Troop 404), Leroy Raymond, Vashone Smith, Kelly Windham (behind Vashone), Jerry McClain, Jay Mann (son of Jimmy Mann, Post 555 member and Boy Scout Troop 404), and Ashlee Mann (wife of Jimmy Mann).



Nancy Waller pulling a rake full of wreaths in Section 8.



Dorian Ross being "smart with a cart" (I thought that sounded cute).



Vashone Smith always enjoys helping with volunteer activities, and always shows-up with a beautiful outfit with hair to match. You're the BEST!!!



L/R: John Zeiss and Doug McDaniel after "mission accomplished".

DEPARTMENT OF ALABAMA MID-WINTER CONFERENCE, MOBILE, AL

Thursday through Sunday, January 19-23, 2023, the Department of Alabama hosted the Mid-Winter Conference at The Admiral Hotel in Mobile, Alabama. With Mobile being about as far from where our members live as possible, the Post 555 attendance was low but not unexpected. However, those who were present represented Post 555 in the professional manner that we expect from our members. Newly appointed **Post Service Officer, Curtis Orse**, attended the required Post Service Officer training he needed to fulfill the requirements of his position, and we are thankful for him traveling all the way to Mobile and back so as to be able to learn everything about his position that the Department of Alabama requires of him. **Donald Walker, our Squadron 555 First Vice Commander and Alabama SAL Detachment Historian**, left his home at 3:00 a.m. to make it to his Sons of The American Legion training/meeting that started at 9:00 a.m., and believe it or not, he returned home right after his meeting!!! Is that dedication, or what? Thanks to both Curtis and Donald for their commitment to Post 555!!! Make sure you check-out Donald's report later in this newsletter in the "Sons" section.

There was one more member of Post 555 who attended which was **Adjutant Nancy Waller**. She informed me that she sat-in on the majority of the meetings on Friday and Saturday and made notes to share with the Post. The attendance, in her opinion, was low, especially on the day she expected the meeting room to be packed which was Saturday. Perhaps with the meeting being so far south that a lot of members who can normally make meetings in Birmingham and Montgomery, cannot afford to travel as far as to Mobile. Hopefully the next scheduled meeting will have a better attendance.



L/R: Donald Walker, Curtis Orse, and Nancy Waller

AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL STARTING SOON!!!

We had Kyle Phillips, the Director of Baseball for Post 555, speak to us at the Executive Committee Meeting on Thursday, January 27, 2023 so he could update us on the upcoming season. I will also share some information about the report that Alan Phillips, the Director of Alabama American Legion Baseball, gave at the Mid-Winter Conference.

Kyle's goals are as follows: To connect players and families with Veterans/Legionnaires by promotion Patriotism and sharing our stories with them. He urged Legionnaires to attend practices and share stories then and to encourage Americanism. He also wants to increase the player's skill levels and to enjoy baseball and perhaps look forward to college ball. He stated that another important goal is to leave a positive impact on players and families.

Season Overview: The season starts June 1, 2023 with games being played at Pelham High School. Post 555 will host the Mid-South Regional Baseball Tournament for the third year, so be prepared to be a Volunteer again this year OR if you have never participated in this great event, **TRY THIS YEAR!!!** Alan Phillips shared some more important dates at the Mid-Winter Conference. He reported that registration is open now for teams to sign-up. Players can register starting February 1, 2023. Varsity and Junior Varsity games are in mid-July, 19U games are late July, and August is the Regional Tournament.

Kyle informed us about new "branding" for our team, as well as using social media as a recruiting tool (i.e., players of the week, showcase players, etc.).

Working the ticket gates is a great way to connect with families, so try to make time to work at the ticket gates this year and talk to family members, welcome them, and let them know that Post 555 is proud to be their sponsor.

The last thing that Kyle presented to us was to host a dinner with players, parents, and Legionnaires to receive information about The American Legion, Patriotism, and Americanism. Commander Jeff Monday stated that attendance at this event should be mandatory to make sure that the players understand what Post 555 is all about and that they learn to respect and understand Patriotism and Americanism.

Watch for more details as the baseball season approaches, and please take part in any of the events that interest you to demonstrate that Post 555 Legionnaires are involved.

*For God and Country,
Eldon Woodie
Second Vice Commander*

CHAPLAIN'S UPLIFT

“Give Yourself a Mulligan”

The first time I ever heard the term “mulligan”, I had no idea what it meant. I am not a golfer, so I had to look up the term. Basically it means to “take another shot” when you have hit one poorly. It’s like saying, “Give yourself a break”, or “Do it again”, or “Go easy on yourself”. Anyone that has been married knows how many times they hoped that their spouse would give them a “mulligan”!

When a new year starts, though, most people are not thinking too much about “mulligans”. Rather they are thinking much more about New Year’s resolutions – most young people, that is. From ages 18-34, around 59% of the population are determined to make a change in their lives. If you tell them that 80% of all resolutions end up in failure, it does not matter to them. They are resolute in their resolution, or determined to make a change. Actually, only about 16% of people make a long-lasting change in their lives, and if a person in that age groups fails, well, it’s not a problem. They will try again next year, and perhaps try even more “resolutely”.

It is interesting that in the age group of people 55 and up, only about 19% make a New Year’s resolution. Why is that? Perhaps they are tired of trying, knowing that in the long run, they just cannot seem to pull it off. Perhaps they know that the truth is that resolutions really do not work. Nobody is on top of things 24/7, 365, that is, every minute of the year. In fact, there are many days in a year when we just do not do what we know deep down we should do, and what we promised ourselves we would do.

What is my New Year’s resolution? To hand-out many more “mulligans” to people all around me, including myself. The Bible calls it “Grace”; giving someone something that they do not deserve and are not required to pay back. Did you ever think that the “Grace” you give someone in any given situation may be the only “mulligan” they receive all day?

God gives “mulligans” all the time to us who are certainly unworthy and so often unthankful. That is especially true when it comes to being forgiven for everything we have ever done! The blood Jesus shed on the cross was GOD’s blood, a “Grace Gift” that is offered to anyone who will accept it. No strings attached, no probation. That is QUITE A MULLIGAN!

*For God and Country,
Chaplain Joe*



Adjutant's Area

Effective July 1, 2022, our new membership drive began. The Department of Alabama gave all Adjutants a list of goals to strive to reach or exceed between July 31, 2022 and May 31, 2023. Here is what they are asking us to do as far as membership numbers. You will notice that unfortunately I had to use the red highlighting because we fell short of the October, November, and December goals, but do NOT give up; **RENEW!!!**

Check out January's results at the end of all of this red highlighting—HOOAH!!!

Cut-off Dates:

- **July 31st = 40% membership (need 90 members renewed/joined) – WE MET AND EXCEEDED THIS GOAL BY ACHIEVING 42.22% WITH 95 MEMBERS RENEWING FOR 2023—THANKS!!!**
- **August 31st = 50% membership (need 113 members renewed/joined) – WE EXCEEDED THIS GOAL BY ACHIEVING 52.44% WITH 118 MEMBERS RENEWING FOR 2023—THANKS AGAIN!!!**
- **September 30th = 55% membership (need 124 members renewed/joined) – AS OF THE WRITING OF THIS ARTICLE, WE HAVE 55.56% WITH 125 MEMBERS RENEWING FOR 2023—WE DID IT AGAIN!!!**
- **October 31st = 65% membership (need 146 members renewed/joined) – AS OF THE DEADLINE, WE HAD 61.33% WITH 138 MEMBERS RENEWING FOR 2023. WE NEEDED EIGHT MORE, SO WE MISSED THIS ONE. LET'S SEE HOW WE DO WITH THE NOVEMBER 30TH GOAL OF 75%.**
- **November 30th = 75% membership (need 168 members renewed/joined) – AS OF THE DEADLINE, WE HAD 65.77% WITH 148 MEMBERS RENEWING FOR 2023. WE NEEDED 20 MORE, SO WE MISSED THIS ONE, BUT WE ARE MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION!!!**
- **December 31st (Happy New Year) = 80% membership (need 180 members renewed/joined) – AS OF DECEMBER 24, 2022, WE HAVE 72% WITH 162 MEMBERS, SO WE MISSED THIS ONE BY ONLY 8%. WE NEED 18 MORE MEMBERS, WHICH IS A CHALLENGE, BUT I SENT E-MAILS OUT TO EVERY MEMBER WHO IS PAID THROUGH 2022 TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO RENEW ASAP TO RETAIN THEIR CONTINUOUS YEARS AND ALL LEGION BENEFITS. SO FAR, MARCUS LOWE AND ALAN FARMER RENEWED—THANKS TO BOTH—AND THERE IS STILL A WEEK UNTIL THE END OF THE YEAR TO GET CLOSER TO THE DEPARTMENT GOAL; THERE IS HOPE!!!**
- **January 31st = 85% membership (need 191 members renewed/joined) – AS OF JANUARY 26, 2023, WE HAVE 85.78% WITH 193 MEMBERS SO WE MET THE GOAL!!!! I WANT TO THANK MICHAEL MAY, CURTIS ORSE, AND ELDON WOODIE FOR VOLUNTEERING TO CONTACT ALL 2022 EXPIRED MEMBERS TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO RETURN, AND QUITE A FEW DID; THANK YOU TO THESE THREE VOLUNTEERS AND A HUGE THANK YOU TO THE RETURNING MEMBERS!!!**
- February 28th = 90% membership (need 202 members renewed/joined)

- March 31st = 95% membership (need 213 members renewed/joined)
- April 30th = 100% membership (225 members renewed/joined)
- May 31st (Happy Memorial Day) = 103% membership (231 members renewed/joined)

I would like to highlight the members who returned to us, and several who joined our ranks from the Administrative Post 1983. I will be formally welcoming all of them with a nice welcome letter and packet, and look forward to bringing them into the fold of Post 555. The members who renewed/joined in January after being contacted either via phone, e-mail, or replied to the renewal that was mailed to them were as follows: **Paul F. Borge (transferred from Administrative Post 1983), George D. Brown (new member), Donald G. Broxson, Andrew C. Davis, Michael Dulaney, Joyce Franklin, Leon G. Franklin, Thomas Glee (transferred from Administrative Post 1983), Thomas Goodridge (transferred from Administrative Post 1983), Hugh D. Holloway Jr., Kurt Honbarrier, David W. Inglis, Javier Jerez, Jesse E. Jowers Sr., James L. Jones, David C. Lee, Mildred Lowe (transferred from Administrative Post 1983), Jacqueline M. Lucas, Kimball Maull (transferred from Administrative Post 1983), Gary Rathbone, Nicholas A. Schiavone Jr. (transferred from Administrative Post 1983), Dencil “Clay” Smith, Glennis D. Smith, Jerry Smith, Ferrell Stephens Jr., Jack Turner, Duffy Vanderford (transferred from Administrative Post 1983), and Chris Vonderau.** This is a TON of members; THANKS TO ALL!!!

Please plan on attending the February 2, 2023 (Ground Hog Day) meeting to meet the two contestants from the Pelham High School Oratorical Scholarship Contest. They and their parents will be honored and the contestants will receive their engraved medallions as well as their respective winnings for first and second places. See you Thursday!!!

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



***Sons of The American Legion
Squadron 555***

Membership is improving slowly. The Squadron welcomes new member, Michael Walker, along with a few renewals making current membership at 68% of our 2023 goal. Please be reminded that your 2022 membership expired January 1, 2023. We encourage all our members to renew for 2023. Your membership is important to the Squadron. Your 2023 renewal is only \$20 payable to “Matthew Blount Post 555”.

Mail to: Sons of The American Legion
50 Racquet Club Parkway
Pelham, AL 35124

January has not been as busy as December; however, activities are being planned for the future. Donald Walker, First Vice Commander, attended the Mid-Winter Conference in Mobile, AL on January 21, 2023 (refer to his report at the end of this). The Squadron is working with the BSA Troop 404 on a project to build a retired U.S. flag receptacle for a local location. On February 4, 2023, the Squadron will participate in a flag raising at the Sage Bar and Grill in Calera, AL. The Squadron continues to meet on the second Tuesday of the month at the Pelham Senior Center, 7:00 pm. You are encouraged to attend and be a part of the activities. We look forward in seeing you on February 14th.

For God & Country
Ron Koonce
Adjutant

On Saturday, January 21, 2023, I attended the SAL Detachment of Alabama Mid-Winter DEC and Conference in Mobile. This was my first trip to Mobile and my visit for the Conference was enjoyable and productive. Much news came out of the Sons' meetings.

Past Department Adjutant Braxton Bridgers gave us an update on the Alabama War Memorial restoration effort and the steps being taken to not only restore but also improve the Memorial. Given the costs of the project, PDA Bridgers indicated that this effort will be an All Hands on Deck push to not just raise funds on a local level, but to also contact state leadership to encourage funding at that level as the state did for the original construction.

During the meeting, SAL Advisor and PDC Ron Haygood rose to recognize the service of "Dual Members" – members of both the SAL and The American Legion. As First Vice Commander of Squadron 555, I would also like to recognize the Dual Members of our Squadron such as Commander Bill Blank, Adjutant Ron Koonce, Chaplain Jeff Monday, among others. Further, I would encourage Post 555 members who are eligible to join Squadron 555 but are not yet members to join. Likewise, sons and grandsons of current Post members are eligible and we would love to have them in our ranks. Squadron 555 dues remain at only \$20 per year.

SAL National Vice Commander for the Central Region, David Mennel, was also in attendance at the meetings. In addition to reporting that Detachment of Alabama membership is healthy, Mennel also shared the SAL National Commander's two main priorities for 2023: Support of The American Legion's *Be The One* program to help Veterans in crisis, and the *Veterans & Children Foundation* (V&CF). There are several ways to support these programs, including the *100 Miles for Hope* program to support V&CF in which Squadron members participated for 2022. I hope to see more participation for the 2023 event, so please keep that in mind for this spring through summer.

Numerous additional topics were presented by speakers including American Legion Auxiliary's Arletha Tucker, SAL Detachment Commander Krigbaum, NEC Glander, Alternate NEC Miles, SAL National Chaplain Gibson (AL), and Department Senior Vice

Commander Marsh. The subject of these discussions will be covered at our next Squadron meeting on Tues., February 14, 2023 at 7:00 p.m. at the Pelham Senior Center. Current, new, and potential SAL members, as well as guests, are welcome to attend and I hope to see you there.

As a project of The American Legion Post 555, Squadron 555 appreciates the continued support of the Post and I look forward to continuing our mission of supporting Veterans and our community with your help.

*For God and Country,
Donald Walker
First Vice Commander*



Sons of The American Legion meeting at the Mid-Winter Conference, January 21, 2023, Mobile, Alabama. Looks like a very active and energized group!!

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAY WISHES FOR OUR MEMBERS

Jeffrey E. Ward, 2/01
Sylvester Ervin Jr., 2/07
David Schlueter, 2/10
Kenneth M. Fox, 2/15
James "Leon" Posey, 2/16
William Carroll, 2/17
Ronnie C. Hamilton, 2/17

Timothy J. "Tom" Vincelette, 2/19
Hugh D. Holloway Jr., 2/20
Donald H. Boner, 2/21
Billy G. Sanders, 2/21
Archie H. Clark Jr., 2/26
Robert Hollenbeck, 2/28
Steven B. Loftin, 2/28



If your birthday is in February 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!!!

***Nancy J. Waller
Adjutant***

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

We meet the first Thursday of the month, and our next meeting is scheduled for February 2, 2023 with our fellowship meal at 6:15 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. Please join us as one of your New Year's Resolutions to get back to being involved with Post 555!!!

POST LEADERSHIP FOR 2022/2023

***Post Commander
Jeff Monday***

***First Vice Commander
Bill Blank***

***Second Vice Commander
Eldon Woodie***

***Adjutant
Nancy Waller***

***Judge Advocate
Vacant***

***Finance Officer
Andrew J. "AJ" Blount***

***Chaplain
Joe Dunn***

***Sergeant-at-Arms
Derek Winters***

***Service Officer
Curtis Orse***

***Unit 555 Auxiliary President
Caroline Culpepper***

***Sons of The American Legion
Bill Blank, Commander
Ron Koonce, Advisor/Adjutant***

***American Legion Riders Director
Doug McDaniel***

***Flag Team Coordinator
Vacant***

***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***

Historian
Shauna Hadley

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Dorian Ross

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Tom McDaniel (3 Yr.)

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Barry Blount, Chairman
Nancy Waller, Co-Chairman

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Ron Koonce

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Send e-mail to: editor@alpost555.com
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