



 **AMERICAN
LEGION**

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THE AMERICAN LEGION MATTHEW BLOUNT POST 555

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THE TRIPLE NICKEL

MESSAGE FROM DEPARTMENT JUDGE ADVOCATE, TOM LONG

Good day to all my Veteran brothers and sisters. We are a third of the way through the fourth calendar quarter of the year with a busy several months ahead. At the first of the year or shortly thereafter, each Post, District, and the Department will be concerning themselves with who will lead these pieces of our state Legion. As you have already seen, there are resolutions in for Jr. Vice Commander of the Department as well as two Division officer candidates already declaring. There will be many more in the next few months leading up to our Mid-Winter Conference in January 2025. These are extremely important positions. With that being said, probably more importantly, are those Legionnaires you will be selecting to lead your Posts and Districts. We are a bottom-up organization as I have said many times before. The strength of our organization and the thousands of Veterans in Alabama we support, begins at the Post level. They are the foundation for a great American Legion Department of Alabama.

That brings me to the primary subject of this short article. I know many of you will say "I have heard this before", and hopefully you have. I know I have said it many times to whoever will listen to me. Officers, regardless of the position, should be selected for their ability to perform the work of the office to which they are elected. They should not run for office due to any real or perceived social prestige or what color hat they will wear. Having knowledge of the work of the Legion and having enthusiasm for its purposes is extremely important. They should also have an innate sense of fairness, justice, and courtesy as well as open-mindedness, moral courage, and the ability to get along with people. Every level of the Legion should be working towards the goals, mission, and objectives of the organization. Understand, "willingness to serve" is not enough. You should ask are the candidates fit to serve? What does that mean? That means they will be able to carry out the duties of the position and lead at that respective level. What are other considerations? They must be a member in good standing and have sufficient knowledge of The American Legion history, policies, and programs. Be assured, whatever position a Legionnaire is running for, at some point, you will be asked to explain to a non-member "what is the Legion all about" and "why should I join". Additionally, candidates should demonstrate regular attendance at their respective Posts. Having a good working knowledge of the activities and the financials of the Posts, etc., is also a must.

In short, we as Legionnaires should put much thought into who will be our candidates for election and ultimately, our officers. We, as members, hold this responsibility in our hands. It is up to us to make it a reality and participate in the growth of our American Legion. Thank You and God Bless each of you and God Bless America.



*Tom Long
Judge Advocate
Department of Alabama
American Legion*

FLAG RETIREMENT AT AMERICAN VILLAGE

Pelham Boy Scout Troop 404 sponsored a flag retirement ceremony at American Village on Saturday, November 2, 2024, and was led by Troop 404 Scoutmaster John Windham. This was just one part of a weekend-long jamboree with all BSA Troops in Shelby County being invited. Interested scouts could attend an instructional session and earn public service hours and a merit badge. There were two sessions, one at 8:30 a.m. and another one at 1:30 p.m.

This was my very first flag retirement ceremony so I really had no idea what to expect. I attended the afternoon session and was also met by our very own Post 555 member and State Representative, Kenneth Paschal. The ceremony took place in a field just past the Washington Memorial at the end of the Freedom Trail.



Flags at the American Village Washington Memorial.

The park constructed a temporary fire pit for burning the flags. There were two scouts in attendance to learn about flag etiquette, including flag retirements. As John explained, the flags are first “rendered” by cutting each one into four pieces ensuring that the blue section is left intact. Symbolically, it is no longer a flag, although the pieces still require the same care. Next, the flag pieces are placed in the burn pit until each and every piece is completely burned. This is the “retirement” phase. After all of the flags have been retired, a scout stands guard until the fire burns itself out. At that point, all of the ashes are collected and buried in a suitable location.



Scout Troop 404 Scoutmaster, John Windham on the left. Scout is “rendering” the flag by cutting between one of the red and white stripes.



Scoutmaster John Windham helping a young scout put the flag into the temporary burn pit.

John told me that they have been receiving a large number of flags made of synthetic material. Burning materials such as nylon and rayon produce some pretty dangerous smoke. They no longer retire these but still collect them from the community and they are taken to a facility that can safely handle them.

*For God and Country,
Harry B. “Skip” Mize IV
1st Vice Commander*

ROVEO LUNCHEONS GOING FOR TWO FULL YEARS!!!

The ROVEO “Regulars” continued again in November and December. Believe it or not, Chaplain Joe Dunn started this tradition on January 10, 2023 and we have not missed a month since then!!! Luncheon number 23 was on November 12, 2024 and number 24 was on December 10, 2024. Number 25 is scheduled for January 7, 2025 at 11:30 a.m.; location TBD at the January 2, 2025 General Membership Meeting. **Be there to vote on your favorite restaurant!!!** We went from three members on January 10, 2023 to almost 20 a few months after that. The number fluctuates depending on what else is going on in the community or in personal lives, but even if only two members show up (like on December 10, 2024 when **Robert Sanders and Pete Williams** went to King Buffet), we will keep it going as long as members are interested in getting together to share “war stories” or anything else. Sometimes I have overheard members comparing their illnesses or surgeries so I try to steer clear of those conversations since I have been blessed to not have any illnesses or surgeries to share.

On November 12, 2024, the group met at Cozumel, but due to a memorial service for Ron Haygood being scheduled the same day at the Alabama National Cemetery, several ROVEO "regulars" paid tribute to Comrade Haygood in lieu of the luncheon. Since neither Chic Cecchini (photographer) nor I attended, there is no record of photos in SmugMug and I have no idea who attended, but I know some people met there. If someone who attended this luncheon would please get back with me via e-mail to wallernj@gmail.com, I would like to keep the tradition going of reporting the attendees, restaurant, etc.

On December 10, 2024, only two members showed-up at King Buffet. **Robert Sanders and Pete Williams** were there, but again, due to another big conflict for other ROVEO "regulars", only these two gentlemen kept the tradition going—**THANKS TO ROBERT AND PETE!!!** December 10th was the day for two loads of wreaths delivered to the Alabama National Cemetery for the Wreaths Across America Ceremony on Saturday, December 14, 2024. Article a little later in this newsletter.

SHELBY COUNTY RSVP AND VOLUNTEERS IN SERVICE 2024 AWARDS AND RECOGNITION CHRISTMAS BRUNCH

That is the LONGEST title I think I have had in any newsletter so far!! This is an annual event and honors all Shelby County RSVP members (of which Post 555 has a total of 31 members; some very active every month and some that contribute when they can; every hour counts). The highlight of this event was that Post 555 received top award entitled the Achievement Station Award for 5,000+ Hours!!! Luckily, there were ten Post 555 members present to go up front to receive this most prestigious award from Shelby County RSVP. **Chic Cecchini, Ron Koonce, Frank Lakotich, Helen Moman, Alan Phillips, Vashone Smith, Nancy Waller, Derek Winters, and Bonnie and Eldon Woodie.** We received a plaque that I showed to everyone at the December 5, 2024 meeting, and will be placed in our display case for all to see. The brunch was much better than last year so that was a nice change. We were also honored with all other Veterans and we each received a nice pin.

Several of our members received pins for their service: **Barry Blount, 10 Years of Service; Frank Chacon, Harry Sessamen, Vashone Smith, and Eldon Woodie, 5 Years of Service; Vashone Smith, Gold 500+ Hours; and the entire Post received the plaque.**



L/R: Gloria Gilmer, Host; Helen Moman, Frank Lakotich, Derek Winters Sr., Ron Koonce, Eldon Woodie, Nancy Waller, Alan Phillips, and Vashone Smith. Bonnie Woodie was there, so not sure where she went. As usual Chic is taking the photo.

WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA WREATH DELIVERIES TO THE ALNC!!!

The weather was terrible, but Chic was there to take photos, so SmugMug had photos of **Ray Pata, and Bonnie and Eldon Woodie** (of course, **Chic Cecchini** was behind the camera). Chic said it rained almost all day and to top that off, there were TWO TRAILERS of wreaths!!! They transferred 600 boxes of wreaths and were totally soaked and exhausted at the end of their day!!!



Ray Pata is in the back of the open semi putting on a rain jacket, and Eldon Woodie is standing on the ground in the red long-sleeved shirt.



Eldon Woodie taking a break with two other Volunteers; always a smile on his face!!!
Way to go, Eldon!!!



One of the three semis involved in the wreath delivery. No WAA emblem though.

On December 11, 2024, Volunteers were asked to report to the SCALNC Storage Building at 12:45 p.m. We soon found out that the truck was in Cullman, so the wait began. The Post 555 group consisted of **Ray Pata, Conrad Stempel, Nancy Waller, and Eldon Woodie**. Instead of standing around, we had a few Volunteers loading a flatbed trailer with folding chairs, and another group was sent out to put up the Avenue of Flags. That saved us

from having to do that early Saturday morning, so that was a great thing to take care of. When the truck finally showed-up, we went to work transferring 295 boxes from one semi to the other in about an hour. I will admit that I had to take an Aleve before I went to bed that night because I knew some body parts would be sore. The Aleve helped!!!



I do not know everyone in this photo so I cannot list “L/R”, but you can see me (Nancy Waller) next to the driver, and Ray Pata the second to last person on the right. Eldon is taking the photo.

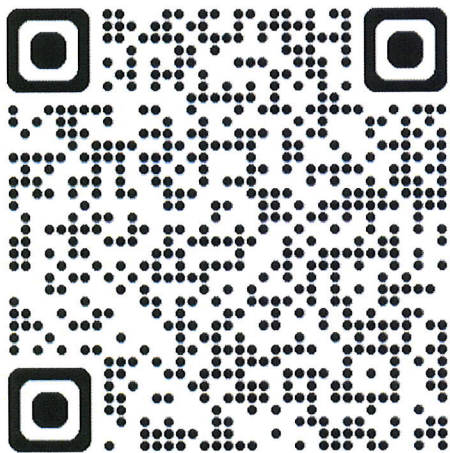
SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION: “GROWING THE LEGION FAMILY WITH SOCIAL MEDIA”

It's no secret that the American Legion Family accomplishes a lot to support our military, Veterans, and their families, our communities, and the youth of our nation. I wrote a separate piece about some of the SAL's accomplishments over the past membership year. None of that would be possible without Legion Family members (you!) but we need your help to keep that family growing.

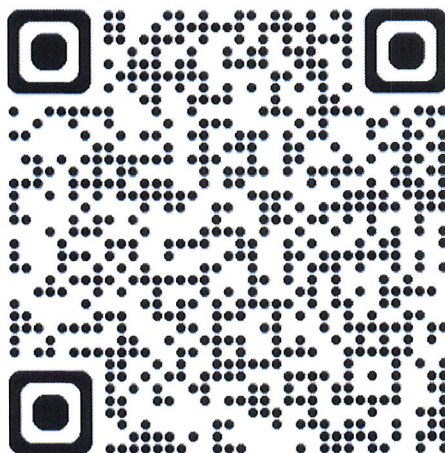
Good news – it's easy and free. If you're on social media, you've probably noticed that your default feed has changed. Rather than updates from friends and pages that you follow, it's now filled with seemingly random posts from who knows where with a little sprinkling of things that you care about. I'll spare you the murky and convoluted details, but this is due to changes in algorithms that prioritize other content over content that you actually follow. Social media posts with more engagement (likes, comments, shares) show up in people's feeds, the rest gets buried. That means that, even if you follow Triple Nickel pages, you might not see much of their posts. Your friends definitely won't see it. With all the great things that the 555 Family does, if nobody knows about it, it's tough to gain new members to keep doing it. [Sad trombone noises.]

That's why we need a favor from you... If you're on Facebook, please follow the Post and Squadron Facebook pages. Whenever you see a post from them, hit that Like button. Leave a comment, even if just to say “hi.” You can also share the post to your own timeline. Post 555 Page: fb.com/alpost555; Squadron 555 Page: fb.com/AlabamaSAL555.

When the Triple Nickel's posts get that kind of engagement, it not only lets us know that the signal is getting through, but it also helps it show up in more people's feeds... like potential members and Veterans that we can help.



Like, Follow, and Share!
SAL Squadron 555 is on Facebook.



Like, Follow, and Share!
Post 555 is on Facebook.



WHAT DO THE SONS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION DO?

SAL by-the-numbers – 2023-2024 CSR Results SAL NVC Butch Ray recently sent out a Thanksgiving message to the Sons, thankful for all that they have accomplished over the past year. Those accomplishments are backed up with the numbers from Consolidated Squadron Reports (CSRs) from squadrons nationwide. I wanted to share some of those accomplishments with the Triple Nickel Family. None of this would be possible without our members. If you're eligible for the Sons, or have family members who are, I encourage you to join us! According to the report that NVC Ray sent, with only 35% of squadrons reporting for the 2023-2024 year, SAL members nationwide donated \$10,656,134 to support Legion causes and volunteered 5,455,332 hours worth \$182,699,074*. That includes the following: ----- \$4,807,821 donated toward the Americanism Pillar. 4,644,639 hours (worth \$155,548,974*) volunteered toward Americanism. \$1,506,463 donated toward Children & Youth (C&Y) Pillar. 131,541 hours

(worth \$4,505,761*) toward C&Y. \$2,281,859 donated toward Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R) Pillar. 200,523 hours (worth volunteered toward VA&R. \$6,715,524*) \$61,757 donated for Veteran Employment & Education (VE&E) 33,610 hours (worth \$1,125,599*) volunteered toward VE&E. Programs that fall under those umbrellas include Operation Comfort Warriors, VAMC, State Veterans Facilities, Homeless Veterans Projects, Boys/Girls State, Scouting, Junior Shooting Sports, National Emergency Fund, Special Olympics, Children's Miracle Network, Ronald McDonald House, Fisher House, and many others. It's no wonder that SAL members have volunteered over 500,000 hours at veterans hospitals, raised more than \$1,000,000 for VA hospitals & homes, and, since 1988, raised more than \$9 Million for the Child Wellbeing Foundation (CWF) – making SAL the largest single CWF contributor each year. Squadron 555 has already received our 100% CWF banner for the 2024-2025 year. With Thanksgiving having come and gone and the rest of the holiday season quickly following, I'm especially proud of and thankful to be a part of such a great organization. I hope you can join us to help keep it going "SALSTRONG".

Don Walker Commander, SAL Squadron
555 Vice Commander, SAL Detachment of
Alabama *Value of one volunteer hour

\$33.49 as reported by Independent Sector
as of April 2024.

*For God and Country,
Donald L. Walker
Squadron 555 Commander*

CHAPLAIN'S UPLIFT

I was a missionary for 11 years in Papua New Guinea, and I also served at our International Missionary High School (pictured below) as the Sport Master (Athletic Director). We had sports teams for boys and girls' Soccer, Basketball, Volleyball, and fast pitch Softball, but the Papua New Guineans, or "Nationals," LOVED to play Rugby. Below is our school's sports field, and they are getting ready to play a game.



Of course, they are all black. But when the game starts, two white guys on the field knocking heads with them — without helmets and pads — will be my son Joel and me. I was using sports to teach the boy that we can show the love of God **not just** by what I preach on Sundays, but we can also show them that we truly care by doing the things that they love to do — like getting down in the trenches, sweating, and playing our hardest to help our team win!

They bathed once a week in an ice cold river. They had no clue what deodorant was, and most of them had never owned a pair of shoes. That didn't matter to me, though, because my greatest joy was showing my son that the Nationals KNEW deep down that they were Loved by what we **did** and not just by what we said.

When Joel graduated, he became a high school football coach in Florida. One day I was talking to his quarterback who was white, and to David, a big black lineman who went on to play at Florida International University on a scholarship. Joel trained him so well that he was recruited from a small Christian high school! I asked the two of them what they liked about Coach Dunn. They said things like, "He's a good coach." "He works us hard." "He doesn't cuss us out when he's mad," etc. I said to them, "You know what I like about Coach Dunn?" "He **DOESN'T** see color." I knew that the years I spent teaching my son how to "love" the Nationals on the rugby field would some day pay great dividends. And it did!

By the way, there are several of those men who will be with us forever in Heaven because they accepted God's offer of Divine mercy and forgiveness through the blood of Jesus on the cross. You see, they believed that my son and I had the "real disease," and they bought into it!!

My fellow Vets. Let me challenge you to make an effort to give yourselves to another, who will then make a real difference in the years to come. You'll never regret it, and they will thank you for it.

*For God and Country,
Chaplain Joe*

JUNIOR SHOOTERS' FUNDRAISER FOR SUPER BOWL FESTIVITIES!!

Our Junior Shooters' will be getting back into the "meat smoking business" and are offering some butts, briskets, and chicken breasts for you and your family to enjoy during the upcoming Super Bowl game scheduled for Sun., February 9, 2025.

The meat prices are the same as in past fundraisers (\$40 for butts, \$60 for briskets, and \$35 for 5 ea. chicken breasts). The **deadline for placing your orders is Mon., February 3, 2025** so either complete a sign-up sheet at the January 2, 2025 General Membership Meeting, send an e-mail to Adjutant Nancy Waller (wallernj@gmail.com), or call her at 251-554-6986.

The **pick-up date is Sat., February 8, 2025 at the Pelham Senior Center at 1:00 p.m.** Please put this date on your calendars so I do not have to call and remind you to pick-up your meat!!! Bring exact cash or checks made payable to "Matthew Blount Post 555" with "Junior Shooters' Fundraiser" on the memo line to help Finance Officer Ron Koonce. Thanks to all for your continued support of our Junior Shooters!!!

NOVEMBER BIRTHDAY WISHES

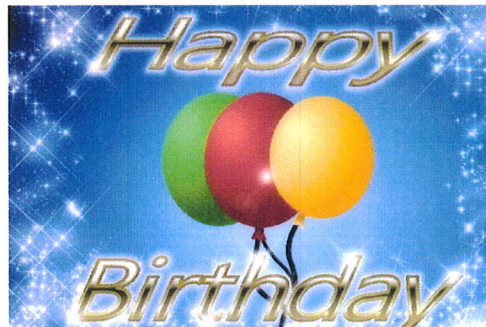
Anderson, Karryl K., 11/01
Kane, Marion M., 11/01
Lowe, Neil M. "Marcus", 11/01
Curtis, Wayne C., 11/02
Sawyer, Mark R., 11/04
Seaward, Vincent H., 11/04
Louis, Marc T., 11/06
Smith, Jerry, 11/06

Inglis, David W., 11/07
Miller, James I., 11/11
Blue, James R. "Jimmie", 11/13
Maxwell, Matthew B., 11/16
Long, Thomas A. "Tom", 11/18
Carter, James F., 11/22
Shinbaugh, Robert L., 11/26
Watts, Christopher R. "Chris", 11/28

DECEMBER BIRTHDAY WISHES

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

Fitts, Donald W. "Wayne", 12/12
Rancher, Yolanda F., 12/13
Aaron, James E. Sr., 12/18
Crist, Henry L., 12/23
McDaniel, Thomas M. "Tom", 12/28
Topping, Daniel C. "Dan", 12/28



If your birthday is in November or December 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

The next Post 555 General Membership Meeting is scheduled for ***Thurs., January 2, 2025*** at the Pelham Senior Center (50 Racquet Club Parkway, Pelham, AL 35124) with our fellowship meal hosted by Texas Roadhouse in Pelham at 6:00 p.m. followed by our meeting at 7:00 p.m. This month we will host Ms. Millie McCormick, one of the two representatives from Pelham High School who were sponsored by Post 555 to attend the recent Girls State. Come and hear what Ms. McCormick learned during Girls State and perhaps how it may have changed her career path! Hope to see you on the 2nd and Happy New Year!!!

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

Vacant

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

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Letters to the Editor must include name, address, and telephone number. Names will be withheld upon request.

Send e-mail to: wallernj@gmail.com

Photos by Chic Cecchini, Post 555

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