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AMERICAN LEGION MATTHEW BLOUNT POST 555
PELHAM, ALABAMA

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THE TRIPLE NICKEL

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Matthew Blount
Post 555



2021 IN a few PICTURES

IN GOD WE TRUST



COMMANDER'S CORNER



Jeff Monday
Post Commander



The "A Pelham Hometown Christmas" parade was quite an undertaking for Post 555. I was tasked with several "missions" for the committee which included the staging of the floats the evening of the parade which was Saturday, December 11, 2021. As you heard, this was the First Annual Pelham Christmas Parade, and looking back on the preparation and the event itself, I think everyone did a great job EXCEPT for one thing. I was asked to prepare numbers for the floats for each of the four lines in which they would go to in preparation for the start of the parade.



Those of us in Post 555 who were involved with this soon realized that as the floats came in, it was virtually impossible to put them in order because if they were float number 24 in the second line and there were supposed to be several other floats in line ahead of them, how in the world could this be done when no one knew the sizes of any of the floats!!!! After a while of trying to stage them in numerical order, we told them to go to their lane (one through four) and just set-up their floats and be ready to go when told to do so. It worked out fine because it really didn't matter who was where as long as they were there!! Live and learn, right? Other than being pretty cold, it was a fun event for all. When you read the "Acting" Second Vice Commander's article, there are some more details in there.

The other significant event for December (in which many Post 555 Volunteers participated) was the

2021 Wreaths Across America event on Saturday, December 18, 2021 at the Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo. Even though we had rain on and off during the ceremony, the entire event went very well, and there was no rain when the family members and Volunteers were laying the wreaths. Each of the branches of service are always recognized and this year the newest one was represented by the U.S. Space Force Commander, Col. Niki Lindhorst. Another individual who was recognized was Mr. Newton Duke, a U.S. Army Veteran and a Korean War POW for 27 months. The Master of Ceremonies, Ms. Janice Rogers of WBRC Fox 6, shared the hardships that Mr. Duke endured; quite remarkable.

In 2022, we are going to try something different in regards to Wreaths Across America donations. In past years, we always wait to start asking for donations a month or two out from the event which sometimes puts a burden on some members when we continue to ask for help. What I would like to start in 2022 is to ask for donations at all of our meetings as well as events so that when time comes to give our donations to Blue Star Salute, we have collected throughout the year so as not to overburden you, our most generous members, in only a few months. I think this will be a little easier on everyone to donate for one or two wreaths once a month instead of all at once as the end of the donation time approaches.

Thank you to everyone who donated this past year because as you may already know, we exceeded our amount that Financial Officer Barry Blount set for us by a long-shot!! You donated a total of \$4,880 toward this amazing program, and we look forward to another tremendous year in 2022!!!

Jeff Monday
Commander, Post 555
For God and Country

1ST VICE'S COMMENTS



Bill Blank

1st Vice Commander



Well, here we are at the end of another year! Behind us we leave the fun and tragedy of year 2021.

Combined with many of the usual events were two new and exciting events. Post 555 and Pelham high school hosted, for the very first time, the American Legion Southeast Regional tournaments; a very busy and hectic event and exciting to say the least. I believe we were very successful in hosting this event, and looking forward to hosting the Southeastern Regional Tournaments again in the upcoming year. Please stay tuned and plan on joining us. Volunteering was a lot of work as well as it was a lot of fun.

This year Pelham had their very first Christmas parade and Post 555 was a part of this event. A big thank you to our commander Jeff Monday, and the city of Pelham, for inviting Post 555 to take part in this parade. Though the weather was not very accommodating, the parade was a success. A big thank you, goes out to Doug McDaniel's and his team for preparing the float and displaying it in the parade.

There were many exciting and fun events; there was also tragedy that raised its ugly head. A hurricane that hit New Orleans and the very destructive tornado that devastated Mayfield, Kentucky, among other places in the middle of the country. Many of the District 23 Posts came to the aid of the victims of both cities. We collected many items, from clothing to personal supplies, which were provided and distributed to the victims of those two cities. Post 138 provided

the collection point. The 23rd District Commander Paul Gonthier, organized the collection effort along with commanders of posts throughout the 23rd District. I personally thank all of you who participated in this effort.

Now is the time to look forward to the upcoming year, filled with many exciting events and preparing for tragedies that may occur. We should all look forward to supporting our communities and helping those in need. After all, isn't what the American legion is all about? This coming year has one expectation from me: To see many new faces volunteering to help in our efforts to support our communities.

Thank you
Bill Blank
First Vice Commander, Post 555





*2nd Vice's
Interim Report
Nancy Waller*

The events in which we participated in December went very well and had a lot of participants from Post 555. Here is a sort of "AAR" (After Action Report) for December, and a quick look at January 2022.

Sat., December 11, 2021: The first annual "A Pelham Hometown Christmas" parade and Christmas tree lighting was a huge success!!! Be sure to give Commander Monday a big thank you when you see him because he was the Post 555 Representative on the Christmas Parade Committee and did a fantastic job keeping us informed. Doug McDaniel and I arrived at the prescribed time to the VIP Parking Lot on the day of the parade only to find no one else there. Between Doug and I calling and texting people, we finally found out that the parade had been pushed back one hour (from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m.) due to the rain, cold, and wind. Doug stayed to contact Volunteers and I went to Starbucks to get a "boost" to help me through the rest of the afternoon/evening. When I got back, Jeff Monday was there getting things together, and we never stopped after that. Post 555 Volunteers were in charge of staging the floats so we greeted the cars/trucks as they arrived, gave them a number for their dashboards, and told them where to go in one of four lines. We soon realized that having them try to go in their respective lanes with floats that had not yet arrived, and would possibly be in front of them, was not working. So, we did the best we could in getting them at least to their lines. The parade started at 6:00 p.m. and traveled through Pelham and returned back to the Pelham Civic Complex for a tree-lighting. I had the honor of riding on the back of Past Commander Barry Blount's "trike" throughout the parade, and must have waved and said "Merry Christmas" five hundred times, but it was worth every minute. It was a fairly good turn-out for the first year (and due to it being cold), so I know I personally cannot wait until next year's parade.

Wed., December 15, 2021: The Post 555 members who are also members of the Support Committee for the Alabama National Cemetery received notification from Pam Nichols, Chairman of the Support Committee, that the semi-trucks would be arriving at 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday and that we should be there around 8:00 a.m. to be ready to transfer the boxes of wreaths from one semi-truck to another for storage until the 18th. I put the word out to all Post 555 members for help and received a good response from the following members: Eldon Woodie, John Zeiss, Ray Pata, Bill Blank, James Darden, Doug McDaniel, Jerry McClain, myself, and of course Chic Cecchini who took photos AND helped transfer boxes. Tom Long was part of the Patriot Guard escort team who led the trucks to the cemetery, so thank him for that very important part he played. It was a lot of hard work transferring boxes, but meeting new and old friends made it enjoyable. The last thing we needed to do was put up the Avenue of Flags,

which in itself is a lot of fun and in some cases, a challenge to figure out how to get each section of the flag pole to go up when it is supposed to. I took two Aleve when I got home that day and I am sure there were a lot more pain-relieving medications taken from other Volunteers as well!!! Great day with great friends.

Sat., December 18, 2021: Early the morning of the 18th (7:00 a.m.), we all gathered at the Alabama National Cemetery to assist with offloading boxes of wreaths from the semi-truck to the sections of the cemetery. As soon as the boxes were offloaded in Section 8 (our section where Matthew Blount is interred), I started working with opening the boxes and laying out the wreaths for later. We had the Pelham High School Baseball Team and their coaches help in Section 8 who did a superb job. It was so good to see young people involved, and I asked the coach if we could award these wonderful young men with a Post 555 Certificate of Appreciation, and he said yes. We will coordinate for a presentation in January when everyone returns to school. Our Post 555 Volunteers for this day were Eldon Woodie, Tom Long (also representing Blue Star Salute), Frank Chacon, Ray Pata, Clarence and Linda Johnston, James Darden, Larry Strayer, and Jeff Monday (also participated in the "Flag Line"). Barry Blount was there for the ceremony and to place a wreath on his son's grave in Section 8. Very emotional time for him, as you can guess. The ceremony was very well-done, even though we were rained on several times, and the wreath-laying was a very special time for everyone. If you have never been to the Alabama National Cemetery to volunteer beforehand, at least try to get there for the actual ceremony. It is a sight to behold with beautiful green balsam wreaths with red bows at every single grave site. We are honored to have such a beautiful cemetery so close to our homes so that we can honor our Fallen Heroes whenever we want.

Thurs., December 23, 2021: After a few days of dry weather so that the flags could dry out before being taken down from the Avenue of Flags at the Alabama National Cemetery, several Volunteers took care of this task in about 45 minutes, among them Eldon Woodie and Frank Chacon who reported to me. I was unable to attend, but I appreciate Frank and Eldon stepping-up to help. Not sure who else was there, but if anyone else was there from Post 555, thank you.

Wed., January 19, 2022: The Pelham High School Oratorical Contest is scheduled for January 19, 2022 at 8:30 a.m. in the Pelham High School Auditorium. If you have an interest in volunteering to help, let Richard Kaster or me (Nancy Waller) know (he is still the point of contact but will be working with Jerry McClain to do a hand-off to him). I helped with my first Oratorical Contest a good while ago and will be the Emcee again this year, and it was very interesting and a rewarding experience. The students who participated were amazing!! **Get involved!!**



ADJUTANT'S AREA

Nancy Waller
Adjutant

Before we get down to business, I hope that each of you had an enjoyable Holiday Season and are looking forward to an even better New Year in 2022. Since the Birmingham VA Christmas Caravan was not scheduled again for this year, the items that were donated from several organizations were gathered together by Frank Lakotich and donated to the Disaster Relief Efforts in which Post 555 participated in December. I sent e-mails to all Post members with the dates and location of the donations so I hope you had the time and ability to assist the people in Kentucky whose lives were changed in an instant with the horrible attack from tornadoes destroyed homes, towns, Christmas plans, and even 80+ lives. If you donated, thank you so very much.

Here is how we are doing with our membership numbers. As of the most current Department report (December 21, 2021), we have 170 members paid through 2022 (including the 11 PUFL members), and 59 paid through 2021 (in other words, these members have not renewed as of yet). These are my "target" members!!! There are also 19 members who are paid through 2019 and 28 members who are paid through 2020. ALL of these members can be contacted to return to us even though their "continuous years" will start back at "1" which is a terrible shame for them. Hopefully we can convince them to come back to Post 555.

So far this year, we have been doing very well with the requirements that the Alabama Department set :

September 15, 2021's target was to have 50% of our goal of 218; we had exactly 50% (109), even without the PUFL members that were left off for some reason.

September 21, 2021's aim was to have 55% of our goal of 218; we were at 55.5% which DID include the PUFL members, so we were good-to-go there.

November 3, 2021's objective was to have 65% of our goal of 218; we had 65.14% (142) so we met the goal.

December 3, 2021's target was to have 75% of our goal of 218; which would be 164 members paid through 2022; as of today, we have 158, six short to meet our target. **December 21, 2021's** report did not have a specific goal, but the 23rd District Commander, Paul Gonthier, asked all Posts within his district to shoot for 100% by the end of this calendar year. As of right now, we have 170 total paid members for 2022 which puts us at 77.98%, so unless we receive 48 new or renewed members by De-

cember 31, 2021, we will have missed our goal of 100% which would have been 218 members. **If you are one of the members whose membership will expire on December 31, 2021, please, please renew so you can remain on our rolls, and more importantly, retain your continuous years and the benefits that all members of The American Legion earned and deserve.**

There are two ways to renew with one being to mail your \$45.00 check made payable to **Matthew Blount Post 555** to 50 Racquet Club Parkway, Pelham, AL 35124. Ron Koonce will get them out of the mailbox at the Pelham Senior Center, deposit your check, and send me a copy of the "Dues Notice" for me to update your membership in MyLegion.org as a 2022 paid member! I will then send your 2022 membership card via USPS along with a nice letter thanking you for your Service and continued support of Post 555. I cannot wait to send you my nice "thank you" letter and your 2022 membership card with my signature on it; that is the best part of my job as Adjutant; taking care of YOU!!!

The second way to renew is to pay with a credit/debit card. Please go to legion.org and join on-line. I check that report almost on a daily basis, so I would LOVE to see your on-line renewal if you like renewing from the comfort of your own home. I just pulled-up a report from MyLegion.org and there are six members who renewed, so THANK YOU!!!

If you are a current R.S.V.P. (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) member, don't forget to report your volunteer hours for the month of December when you come to the January 6, 2022 Post 555 meeting. I submit the hours by the 10th of the next month. If you are not yet an R.S.V.P. member, the only criteria is that you are age 55+ years young. You need to complete an application and supply a copy of the front of your driver's license (proof of age). There is a copier at the Senior Center that I can use to make a copy of your driver's license for you. Every month you will record your volunteer hours anywhere you serve, including Post 555 meetings and events. Just let me know if you would like an application!!

For God and Country
Nancy J. Waller
Adjutant

SERVICE OFFICER NOTES



Jerry McClain
Service Officer



Dr. Whitney J. Scifres (right), Deputy Chief of Staff, Tuskegee Campus, accepts a donation from the Auburn Student Veterans Association (left) on Dec. 22 in Tuskegee, Alabama. Inpatient Veterans (middle) helped unload items that would benefit them and their comrades. (Photo by Tramel Garrett, CAVHCS Public Affairs)

2021 Service Officer Review:

- ✓ 21 veterans 1st time enrollment in the VA
- ✓ 53 Service connected disability claims
- ✓ 13 Requests for Service Connected Increases
- ✓ 60 Hours of Training and Education of Veteran's Benefits
- ✓ 76 referrals to Veteran's Service Officers in Jefferson and Shelby County
- ✓ 9 Burial and Memorial Benefits Support
- ✓ 2 Ceremonies of Missing In America Projects (MIAP)
- ✓ 7 homeless veterans provided household goods
- ✓ 19 Veterans assisted with getting Covid-19 Vaccines
- ✓ 3 Survival Spouses and Dependents Support from Post 555
- ✓ 3 Memorial Legion Riders Escorts
- ✓ 3 Memorial US Flags Display for Deceased Veterans

Service Officer's Vision For 2022

- ✓ Increase Enrollment into the VA System
- ✓ Provide New Pamphlets for Federal and State Benefits
- ✓ Provide More Training and Education About Accessing Earned Benefits
- ✓ Getting Veterans Service Connected through Service Connected Disabilities
- ✓ Getting Veterans to Prepare Wills for their spouses and dependents
- ✓ Getting Veterans to organize their VA papers for handoff to their spouses
- ✓ Increase knowledge on survivor's benefits and pensions
- ✓ Encourage Veterans to Pre-Plan burial, cremation, location and Special requests
- ✓ Increased participation in the Missing In America Project (MIAP)
- ✓ Increase ability to stay current on the issues affecting veterans.

Operation Iron Ruck (see above photo)

During our fundraiser, Operation Iron Ruck, we received canned goods, hygiene products through student Veterans from the University of Alabama and Auburn University to bring awareness to Veteran suicide, mental health and all the battles Veterans have during their transition out of the military," said Vice President Operations Chief of Auburn Student Veterans Association Ricardo "Gunny" Garcia.

Operation Iron Ruck is a fundraiser which takes place each fall where students from Auburn University and the University of Alabama walk approximately 150 miles to the visiting team's stadium.

"The march is completed in shifts and consists of rotations between marching, resting and supporting. Each shift lasts the time it takes the current marching shift to complete the approximately 7 miles (around 2.5 hours). **Participants carry a 22-pound rucksack** to coincide with the **'Mission 22 suicide campaign'**. The ruck will consist of toiletries, undergarments and other items collected by the athletics and Veteran's organization departments to be donated to local Veteran organizations," Garcia added.

Bringing a smile to the face of a Veteran who may need a little help this holiday season is significant in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although we want everyone to be safe, it is important to give back to your community. Many Veterans struggle during the transition out of the military. Kind gestures such as donations give them hope during difficult times.

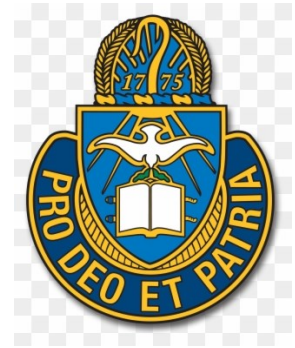
va.alabama.gov



CHAPLAIN'S UPLIFT



Joe Dunn
Post Chaplain



Another year has gone! Oh how we hoped for 2021 to be a promising year, yet even before the year had left, we were hit with two new variants of Covid!

I'm also sure that many people made New Year's resolutions last January, perhaps thinking that this is the year that they can surely make their resolutions stick. How'd that work out for you? Probably not so good.

It's been said that 83% of people will ditch their resolutions by the middle of February?!

I want to encourage you with 4 New Year's resolutions that you just might be able to keep. There are two things that will **greatly** help you in your pursuit of resolution success.

You must think through whether the resolution is a **preference** or a **conviction**.

- 1) A **Preference** is something that you would like to see happen. It would be nice, if you can pull it off, but it's not the end of the world if it "slips away."
- 2) A **Conviction** is when the Doc tells you your heart is getting weaker, and that you **MUST** exercise 20 minutes a day, 4 days a week; you decide that's a mountain that you "Will Die On." That is, **YOU WILL** do what the Doc says, because you want to live!



We may have serious "convictions," but we still need help because we're human. The greatest chance of sticking to it is to have a buddy who has the same attitude that you do, so that you can be a help to each other.

Example: You're determined to walk or run for 3 months with a buddy, You find that there are days when you won't feel like getting out of bed, but you know your buddy is waiting on you. That commitment goes a LONG way!

RESOLUTIONS THAT WE CAN CONTROL: (list)

POST 555 WORK AREAS

*Triple Nickel
Riders*



Auxiliary Unit 555



Ridin' at the First Pelham Christmas Parade



Sons of the American Legion

Squadron 555 roster continues to grow with two new members during the month of December, James & John Johnson, setting the Squadron's roster total at fifty-six to date that includes both active and inactive members. The Squadron has gained eighteen new members since July 1, 2021. Current membership is at 140.7% of the 2022 National goal. Many thanks to those that continue to recruit new members for Squadron 555. Application is available on the Home Page of www.alpost555.com. Select the "Join the Sons of American Legion" tab to access a printable application.



The December meeting was suspended due to the Holiday Season. The Next meeting will be January 11, 2022, 7:00 pm at the Pelham Senior Center. The Future regular meeting nights will be on the second Tuesday of the month, 7:00pm at the Pelham Senior Center. Guests are welcome.

During the month of December, the squadron participated in Pelham Christmas Parade along with Post 555 Family. Some members have participated in Wreaths across America activities.

The Squadron continues to support Sgt. Tanner Aldridge while deployed overseas. The squadron shipped an additional package in December along with Christmas cards and has been in touch with his family.

Some Squadron members assisted in obtaining disaster relief items for Kentucky storm victims and delivered to the Alabaster Veterans Center collection site.

Hope to see a lot of our members at the January 11th meeting.

Wishing everyone a Happy New Year.

*For God & Country
Ron Koonce
Adjutant*



MATTHEW BLOUNT POST 555



Meets first Thursday of the month.

The January Membership Meeting will take place on Thursday January 6 at the Pelham Senior Center. Dinner at 6PM and Meeting at 7PM... bring a friend!

Post Leadership 2021/2022

Post Commander Jeff Monday	Caroline Culpepper
1st Vice Commander Bill Blank	Sons of Legionnaires Bill Blank, Comm.
2nd Vice Commander TBD	Ron Koonce, Advisor
Adjutant Nancy Waller	Legion Riders Director Doug McDaniel
Asst Adjutant Ron Koonce	Flag Team Coordinator TBD
Judge Advocate Tom Long	Boy Scouts Coordinator David Coram
Financial Officer Barry Blount	Jr. Shooting Director Darrell Lawley
Chaplain Joe Dunn	Baseball Director Jon Freeman
Sergeant-At-Arms Derek Winters	School Awards Program Frank Lakotich, Chr.
Post Service Officer Jerry McClain	Awards Program Barry Blount, Chr.
Historian Shauna Hadley	Webmaster Ron Koonce
Public Relations Officer Dorian Ross	Triple Nickel Editor Frank Chacon
Post Trustees Frank Lakotich	Photography Chic Cecchini
Robert Horsley	
Chris Combs	
Auxiliary President	

The Triple Nickel

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Items for publication are accepted on Executive Committee approval and available space.

Submit articles prior to the 10th of the month for publication the following month. We reserve the right to edit any submissions for the purpose of publication.

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

Send email to: Editor@alpost555.com

Photos by Chic Cecchini, Post 555

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**HAPPY
NEW YEAR
2022**