



**AMERICAN
LEGION**

Published exclusively for the members of

THE AMERICAN LEGION MATTHEW BLOUNT POST 555

VOLUME XII, ISSUE III MAY, JUNE, AND JULY 2025

THE TRIPLE NICKEL

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

As we had hoped, we were asked by Ms. Kourtney Coward with Eventive Sports to be Volunteers at this event that was held Friday through Sunday, May 2-4, 2025. I want to thank the following Post 555 members who went out of their way to help out with this event. The hours they worked added-up to a nice check from Eventive Sports as a "thank you" for helping out. Here are their names and the number of shifts they worked: **Bill Blank (four shifts), Kenn Fox (two shifts), Frankie Long (two shifts), Curtis Orse (two shifts), Vashone Smith (two shifts), Tim Vincelette (two shifts), Donald Walker (three shifts), and Pete Williams (all six shifts)**. This total came to **23 volunteer shifts** which enabled us to receive **\$900!!!** Thanks to each of these Post 555 Volunteers for helping with yet another event at Barber Motorsports Park.

ROVEO LUNCHEON AT MARGARITA GRILL

Several of our regular "ROVEOs" gathered again for our monthly lunch, and this month they went to the Margarita Grill which is owned/managed by one of our wonderful members, Javier Jerez. If you are looking for a great Mexican meal, atmosphere, and service, be sure to check-out this local restaurant. On Tues., May 6, 2025, the following ROVEOs enjoyed a great time with a great meal and camaraderie; **Joe Dunn, Javier Jerez, Ray Pata, Alan Phillips, Robert Sanders, and Eldon Woodie**. You know it's good when the owner/manager enjoys a meal with you!!!



L/R: Eldon Woodie, Javier Jerez (behind Robert Sanders), Alan Phillips, Joe Dunn, and Ray Pata.

MIAP SERVICE AT THE ALNC

If the acronym MIAP is unfamiliar to you, it stands for “Missing in America Project”. Eldon Woodie is heavily involved in this program where he visits funeral homes in hopes of finding Veterans’ cremains (cremated remains) that have not been claimed by anyone. He and several of his fellow Post 555 members do a lot of research to find out who the Veteran was and plans a service at the Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo. This Veteran’s name was Woodrow Vance Drake. Five members of Post 555 attended a service on Fri., May 15, 2025; **Chic Cecchini, Joe Dunn, Larry Strayer, Bonnie Woodie, and Eldon Woodie**. Below are some photos of how much work goes into these services, even if it is only one Veteran. Thanks, Eldon, and please thank everyone who helps you with MIAP.



Flyover in honor of Mr. Drake.



The Patriot Guard Riders always furnish flags to honor Veterans’ services. A great sight and tribute.



L/R: Mr. Herman Watkins, Administrative Director; and Ms. Deborah Kendrick, ALNC Director, honoring Mr. Drake’s passing with his urn and folded flag.

FLAG PLACEMENT PREPARING FOR MEMORIAL DAY AT THE ALNC

On Saturday, May 24, 2025, the Alabama National Cemetery was being “invaded” by Volunteers from Post 555 as well as several other Volunteers from Veteran Service Organizations, local school’s sports team, Boy Scouts, and anyone who was willing and able to reach down to place a flag in front of a headstone!!! Young people are ALWAYS welcome.....

The following Post 555 members were present for this event: **Bill Blank, Chic Cecchini, Henry Crist, Jim Darden, Skip Mize, Kenneth Paschal, Nancy Waller, Bonnie Woodie, and Eldon Woodie.** It was a great day for all to pay tribute to our Fallen Heroes and allowing our family members/guests to enjoy seeing a small American flag honoring their loved one(s).



This event always has a great showing, and this year's Volunteers came through again!



L/R: Kenneth Paschal, Jennifer Oliver (Montevallo Police Officer), Nancy Waller, Pete Williams, and Henry Crist.



Vintage plane flyover honoring all of our Fallen Heroes as their loved ones place flags at every headstone and at the Columbarium.

JUNIOR SHOOTERS' MEMORIAL DAY FUNDRAISER

As soon as I (Nancy Waller) was finished with helping with the flag placement in Section 8 (where Matthew Blount is interred), I headed to Helena to pick-up the meat order for the 2025 Junior Shooters' Memorial Day Fundraiser on Saturday, May 24, 2025. As in past fundraisers, Post 555 members came through with a TON of support. The following members ordered/purchased either butts, briskets, and/or chicken breasts: **Mary Ann Allison, Karryl Anderson, Bill Blank, Elizabeth Clopton (John Clopton's sister), John Clopton, Joe Dunn, Cheryl Gilliam, Frankie Long, Ronnie McGriff, Skip Mize, Curtis Orse, Alan Phillips, Dorian Ross, Vashone Smith, Vic Turner, Jimmy Watson, Pete Williams, Eldon Woodie, Ray Yokel, and John Zeiss.** The total funds donated to our Junior Shooters was \$1,360 thanks to each of these Post 555 Members!!! Thank you all.

MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY AT THE ALNC

Every year, the Support Committee for the Alabama National Cemetery (SCALNC) facilitates this wonderful ceremony and did a great job this year on Monday, May 26, 2025. The program was filled with VIPs from all walks of life and was an extraordinary event. The Guest Speaker was U.S. Army Lieutenant General (Ret) A.C. Roper. He was a phenomenal presence and did a great job at the podium with his Memorial Day address. Post 555 "workers" included **Chic Cecchini, Frankie Long, Dorian Ross, Tim Vincelette, Donald Walker, Nancy Waller, Pete Williams, Bonnie Woodie, and of course the SCALNC Chairman (and Post 555 member) Eldon Woodie.** The following members were present and deserve a thank you as well; **Bill Blank, Jim Darden, Skip Mize, Kenneth Paschal, Alan and Beth Phillips, and Conrad Stempel.** Being present at events like this is a wonderful opportunity for ALL Post 555 members to be there, no matter in what capacity. Thanks to all!!



L/R: Commander Skip Mize and Adjutant (Major in this photo) Nancy Waller during the ceremony.

Donald Walker and Pete Williams checking out the cannon for the firing at the end of the Ceremony.



L/R: Congressman Gary Palmer, VIP

LTG (Ret) A.C. Roper, Guest Speaker

AMERICAN LEGION ALABAMA BOYS STATE 2025

The 88th Annual Alabama American Legion Boys State was held at The University of Alabama from May 25th to May 31st. Since 1939, young men from all over Alabama have been participating in the immersive week-long program which features hands-on practical experience in forming and running a mock state government. Delegates are recommended and selected based on their character, leadership, moral conviction, and work ethic. The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 proudly sponsored five delegates from local area high schools.

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

The delegates from Post 555 this year were Lucas Kalba and Mason Six from Pelham High School, Brandon Cui from Oak Mountain High School, and Joel Langston and Cameron Monk from Hope Christian School. For more information, please go to <https://alboysstate.org/>.



Lucas Kalba

Mason Six

Brandon Cui

Joel Langston

Cameron Monk

Lucas Kalba was asked by Post 555 Commander Skip Mize to attend a Pelham City Council Meeting to share his experiences. The Pelham City Council gives funding to Post 555 to sponsor students from Pelham High School, so we wanted the Council Members to see how this very generous donation affects participants.

Lucas introduced himself, and thanked The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 and the Pelham City Council members for having him at this meeting. He explained what Boys

State is and the requirements to get into Boys State. He went into Boys State with the goal of becoming Governor, and was quickly humbled. He served as Circuit Judge and oversaw a mock trial. Lucas was very grateful to have made friends, and he became more interested in government and politics.

At the end of his week, Lucas was made aware of Veterans Affairs, and this is something that he would focus on if he serves in government. He ended by thanking all Veterans, Post 555 members present, and the wonderful City of Pelham.

AMERICAN LEGION ALABAMA GIRLS STATE 2025

Girls State was also held at The University of Alabama immediately following Boys State. The dates were June 1-6, 2025. Girls State is a week-long, fun-filled, hands-on learning opportunity for some of the best and brightest rising 12th graders in the State of Alabama. Sponsored by The American Legion Auxiliary (ALA), Girls State is one of the most respected and coveted experiential learning programs in the United States, teaching Delegates about how government works at the city, county, and state levels.

The Unit 555 Auxiliary sponsored two young women from Pelham High School; Amanda Orr and Elizabeth Foret. We invited both to share their experiences with members of Post 555 at a General Membership Meeting, and Amanda Orr was able to attend. Elizabeth Foret had training she had to attend, so she was unable to be there. Here are some of the comments that Amanda Orr shared with us.

"First and foremost, I would like to extend my gratitude to the incredible men and women who made it possible for me to attend Girls State. I am truly and forever grateful for the opportunity and privilege to be part of such an inspiring program.

At Girls State, I met amazing young women who I now consider life-long friends. When I look back on my time there, I am filled with joy, remembering the laughter, the teamwork, and the strong sense of community we built together.

I vividly recall the late nights spent with the girls from my "City", working on campaign posters and helping each other craft our speeches. Even when some of us were running for the same positions, we supported one another wholeheartedly. That spirit of encouragement and unity is something I will never forget.

I also remember the night before our Whistlestop questions began, for those of us running for executive positions. We were nervous and excited. Our counselors were nothing short of amazing – offering encouragement, compassion, and powerful pep talks that lifted our confidence and inspired us to be bold.

Girls State has strengthened my confidence, especially in public-speaking. I was honored to hear from incredible speakers such as Governor Kay Ivey and Senator Katie Britt; experiences that I will carry with me always.

I can now proudly say: "I am a Girls-Stater for life." This is thanks to all the extraordinary people who made this journey possible. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

FLAG REMOVAL AFTER MEMORIAL DAY AT THE ALNC

One week after flags were placed at every headstone and at the Columbarium, many Volunteers showed-up again to remove the flags and clean/store them for the next event when they will be brought out again for all to enjoy. Post 555 members who came to help were **Chic and Rita Cecchini, Henry Crist, Jim Darden, Conrad Stempel, Nancy Waller, Bonnie Woodie, and Eldon Woodie**. The entire process took only two hours which to me was absolutely amazing!!! The Bob Barefield Storage Building was full of Volunteers wiping flag

stems, putting them into bundles of ten, and storing them in large tubs for the next time they are needed. My “self-imposed” task was to gather all of the wiping cloths to take them home and give them a good bleaching wash so they TOO were ready for the next time.



L/R: The back of Eldon Woodie at the open roll-up door, Bonnie Woodie, Rita Cecchini, and Jim Darden hard at work.

A beautiful view of the ALNC after the flags have been removed, but the Avenue of Flags is still up; a beautiful sight for all.

ROVEO LUNCHEON

A small group of ROVEOs (Relatively Old Veterans Eating Out) met at the Golden City Chinese Restaurant on Tuesday, June 10, 2025 for a great meal and camaraderie. Vets who attended were **Ron Koonce, Robert Sanders, Nancy Waller, and Eldon Woodie**. We had a good meal and spent some time together sharing “war stories” then went our separate ways to enjoy the rest of the day. It is not the size of the group that matters; it is what goes on among the group. The very first ROVEO Joe Dunn coordinated had three people....., but since then we have had some groups that filled-up several tables at Café Trentuno and at other Pelham restaurants. We will continue meeting as long as our members and their spouses show-up!!!

AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT CONVENTION, MOBILE, ALABAMA

The Department Convention was held at the Renaissance Hotel in Mobile, Alabama, Thursday through Saturday, June 19-21, 2025. Post 555 members in attendance were **Skip Mize, Donald Walker, Rick Waller (representing the Department of Alabama as the Sergeant-at-Arms), and Nancy Waller**. We had separate meetings to attend, so not too much together time, especially for Skip Mize since he was representing Post 555 as our Commander as well as representing our Sons Squadron 555 with Donald Walker. We tried to cover as many meetings and as much training as possible to have some resources to share with Post 555 members. Thursday consisted of training such as “Post Officer Training”, “Post Grievances and Communication”, and “Post and District Finance”. Friday started with the “Legion Opening Session” followed by “Membership Awards”, “Commander’s Awards”, “Credentials Report”, “SAL Commander’s Report”, “Legion NEC Report”, and “Legion Commander’s Report”. A lot of good information was shared, some of which can be brought back to any members’ Post to share.



Commander Willie Rogers addressing the members.



Department of Veterans Affairs Commissioner Jeffrey Newton.



SAL Commander Blair Miles sharing his report.



Legionnaire Insurance Trust check being presented to the Department of Alabama in the amount of \$52,478.00!!!

SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP APPRECIATION COOKOUT

Shelby County Schools invited members of Post 555 to attend their Appreciation Cookout on Friday, June 27, 2025, and **Vashone Smith, Conrad Stempel, and I (Nancy Waller)** were glad to be there! It was held at the Shelby County Instructional Services Center in Alabaster and they really showed us a good time. There were hotdogs and all the condiments needed, they had a choice of chips and drinks, and a nice dessert. The purpose was to thank a lot of organizations in Shelby County and to “network” with each other. The Shelby County Sheriff’s Office was well-represented to include Sheriff John Samaniego who is a GREAT supporter of Post 555. They gave away some door prizes, but we did not win anything (darn!!!). It was a nice afternoon to be with other Shelby County supporters and it was very nice for Post 555 to be invited.

FIRE ON THE WATER AT OAK MOUNTAIN STATE PARK

Post 555 was invited to this event for another year due to our expertise with the presentation of the Colors at dusk. We had a good-sized group to help with the set-up, so thank you to **Bill Blank, John Clopton, Skip Mize, Curtis Orse, Dorian Ross, Tim Vincelette, and Nancy Waller**. Post 555 Past-Commander **Kenneth Paschal** came by to spend some time with us, and he was sure to talk to absolutely every person who walked by (that is why he is such a great State Representative). **Skip Mize, Tim Vincelette, and Nancy Waller** volunteered to do the presentation of the Colors so we made sure to get our uniform and flags ready to go in advance so as to not be late like last year.....OOPS!!! We even marched around in our restricted area over the water. I love doing D&C (Drill and Ceremony) so I had fun working with Tim (Air Force) and Skip (Navy). As the Army representative, I provided the cadence in an attempt to keep us on track the best we could. The bottom-line is that we did a GREAT job and received a nice round of applause (thanks to the suggestion of the MC)—HOOAH!!! Tons and tons of fireworks followed us!!!



Oak Mountain State Park Rep offering water!



Nancy Waller and John Clopton.

ROVEO LUNCHEON

Our next ROVEO Luncheon was held at Yamato's Japanese Steakhouse on Tuesday, July 8, 2025 with **Joe Dunn, Ron Koonce, Robert Sanders, Vic and Pat Turner, and Nancy** favorite of the other ROVEO Luncheons. We were also spread out at two tables, so hard to communicate with everyone. I look forward to the next ROVEO at another location.....



L/R: Ron Koonce, Robert Sanders, Vic Turner, Pat Turner, and Joe Dunn (Nancy Waller behind the camera).

FIRST RESPONDERS' AWARDS FOR 2025

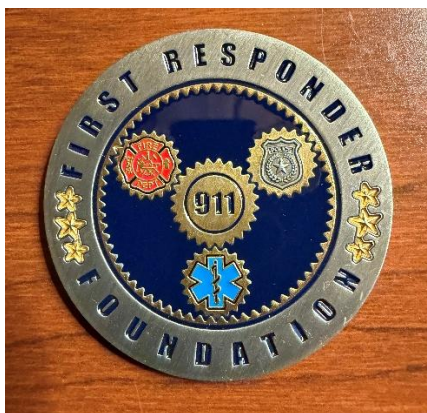
All members present at the Thursday, July 10, 2025 General Membership Meeting were honored to see the Matthew Blount Post 555 First Responders for 2025. The following individuals were introduced and awarded a plaque and a First Responder 911 Foundation Challenge Coin.

***Fire Medic Galen Smitherman, Pelham Firefighter of the Year
Deputy Brett Cobb, Deputy Sheriff/Law Enforcement Officer of the Year
Mrs. Jeanie Davis, Public Safety Telecommunicator of the Year***

These three honorees were accompanied by quite a few family members which really symbolizes their love and support for their awardee recipient. Also in attendance were the following community leaders to present their respective awardee their awards:

***City of Pelham, Fire Chief Mike Reid
Shelby County Sheriff's Office, Sheriff John Samaniego
Shelby County Sheriff's Office, Major Russell Bedsole
Shelby County Sheriff's Office, Chief Deputy Clay Hammac
City of Pelham Police Department, Captain Joey Pitts***

Before Commander Bill Blank presented the plaques and First Responder 911 Foundation challenge coins to each awardee, Adjutant Nancy Waller explained the meaning of the First Responder 911 Foundation coin.



“The First Responder 911 Foundation logo is based on the powerful Planetary Gears that drive many engines and motors. The center gear, called the sun, represents America’s population. The three outer gears, called spurs or planets, represent the First Responders. They all interact as they circle the sun responding to the turns, or emergency needs, of the population. One needs the other and vice versa. As a foundation, they are geared-up to be that central driving force on behalf of most Americans. Supported by a strong Board of Directors, Advisory Board, and lengthy list of Volunteers, they can affect positive change as it relates to the health and wellness of our vital emergency personnel. They are dedicated to their cause and take their responsibilities seriously.”

After all of the plaques and coins were presented, there was a standing ovation for these three awardees for being chosen by their respective organizations as the cream of the crop!! I look forward to facilitating this event in 2026 and cannot wait to meet the awardees!!!

AUGUST, SEPTEMBER, AND OCTOBER BIRTHDAY WISHES

August:	Brown-Leonard, Melissa, 08/13	Kernea, Doyle Jr., 08/12
	Burell, Andrew A. “Andy”, 08/14	Poole, Ronald, 08/29
	Coram, David W. Jr., 08/03	Taylor, William E. “Eddie” Jr., 08/30
	Hession, Thomas J. “Tom”, 08/14	Thompson, Robert G., 08/10
	Horsley, Robert L. “Bobby”, 08/04	Weldy, William, 08/30
	Kennedy, Edward D., 08/29	Wolf, William T., 08/24
September:	Ackley, Charles W. “Bill”, 09/22	Orse, Curtis, 09/06
	Cleveland, Kenneth A. “Ken”, 09/06	Patton, James H., 09/09
	Jones, James L., 09/04	Vonderau, Chris, 09/01
	Kaster, Richard T., 09/12	Watson, Steven J. “Jimmy”, 09/02
	Merritt, Sammy L., 09/15	Whitney, David N., 09/13
	Morris, Richard P. “Rick”, 09/15	Zeiss, John J., 09/01
October:	Austin, Earl L., 10/03	May, Mark, 10/11
	Bailey, Jason E., 10/20	Ott, Jonathan W., 10/02
	Burkowski, Michael, 10/03	Phillips, Dwight A. “Alan”, 10/10
	Cambron Coy D., 10/29	Pointer, Monroe, 10/12

Chacon, Frank, 10/02
Clopton, John A. III, 10/20
Crocker, Billy, 10/21
Dormuth, James M., 10/21
Grissett, Melvin A., 10/05
Hallford, Thomas J., 10/06
Long, Frankie, 10/15

Sanders, Robert L., 10/09
Stewart, Patrick E., 10/16
Turner, Thomas V. "Vic", 10/06
Waller, Nathan C., 10/03
Waller, Phillip S. "Sparkie", 10/24
Woodie, Eldon A., 10/07



If your birthday is in August, September, or October 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!!

POST LEADERSHIP FOR 2025 – 2026

Post Commander

Harry B. "Skip" Mize IV

First Vice Commander

Dorian Ross

Second Vice Commander

Henry L. Crist

Adjutant

Nancy J. Waller

Judge Advocate

Timothy "Tim" J. Vincelette

Finance Officer

A. Ronald "Ron" Koonce

Chaplain

Sylvester Ervin Jr.

Sergeant-at-Arms

Cheryl Gilliam

Service Officer

Curtis Orse

Sons of The American Legion

Donald L. Walker, Commander

Ronald "Ron" Koonce, Advisor/Adjutant

American Legion Rider's Director

Richard A. Kunath

Flag Team Coordinator

William H. "Bill" Blank

Boy Scout Troop 404 Coordinator

David W. Coram Jr.

Junior Shooters

Sam Richardson, Coach

Darrell Lawley, Coach

Baseball Director

Kyle Phillips

School Awards Program

Barry K. Blount, Chairman

Frank J. Lakotich Jr., Co-Chairman

Historian

Nancy J. Waller

Post Awards Program

Nancy J. Waller, Chairman

Public Relations Officer

Nancy J. Waller

Webmaster

Ronald "Ron" Koonce

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Vashone L. Smith (1 Yr.)

Frank J. Lakotich Jr. (2 Yr.)

Thomas M. "Tom" McDaniel (3 Yr.)

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Post Office Box 97

Pelham, AL 35124

wallernj@gmail.com

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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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