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PELHAM, ALABAMA

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INSIDE ...

Commander's Desk	2
1st Vice's Page	3
2nd Vice's Comments	4
Adjutant's Area	5
Veteran of the Year	6
Chaplain's Uplift	7
Post's Work Areas	8
Post Leadership	9
A Member Spotlight	10
Frank Lakotich, continued	11
WAA Update	12



IN GOD WE TRUST



Matthew Blount Post 555

In Memory

Richard "Dick" F. Paxton

February 3, 1927 ~ November 25, 2020

(age 93)



Richard "Dick" Paxton, 93, passed away peacefully at home on November 25. Dick grew up in Greenwood, Indiana where he met his first love Patricia Ann Craft. They were married for 53 years prior to her passing. He met his next love Gloria Hudson and they have been married 15 years.

He was a World War II veteran and served in the US Navy in the Asiatic Pacific Campaign as a Seabee stationed in Saipan. Dick was a faithful charter member of The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 in Pelham, AL. After leaving the Navy he worked for Conn Music Co in Elkhart, Indiana. He then began a sales career with Nabisco Brands retiring after 33 years of service.

Funeral services were held on Tuesday, December 1, 2020 at Currie Jefferson Funeral Home, Hoover.

Interment was at the Alabama National Cemetery.

COMMANDER'S CORNER



Barry Blount
Post Commander

Despite the Covid19 Pandemic, Alabama AL Post 555 continues working to serve the membership and the Veteran Community. We are now meeting in person at the Harley Davidson HOG Hall, our temporary meeting location. We're (usually) following the Governor's Covid19 Safe guidelines, so masks are required. Join us for dinner and membership meeting to follow on Dec 10 at 6PM. *And may you and your family have a safe and very merry Christmas!*



1ST VICE'S COMMENTS



Jeff Monday

1st Vice Commander

A Photo Collage of Post 555 members and family serving at the Alabama National Cemetery placing flags in preparation for the celebration of 2020 Veterans Day, and a week later removing and storing the flags.





2nd Vice's Report.

This month's article is focused on two events that actually took place!! I am excited to give everyone a very, very positive report on what several Post 555 members did for the Veterans interred at the Alabama National Cemetery (ALNC).

On November 6, 2020, 10:00 a.m., the Support Committee of the ALNC coordinated flag placements for all Veterans currently interred at the ALNC in Montevallo to give them all the honor they deserve on Veterans Day. It wasn't the normal procedure of asking a bunch of Volunteers to show-up to place flags because of the COVID-19 precautions required per the National Cemetery Administration. Plus, we could only have a specific number (25) of people for each section, so the Volunteer list had to be "just right".

As the Support Committee Secretary as well as Events Coordinator for Post 555, I volunteered to be responsible for Sections 8 (where Matthew Blount is interred) and Section 5. Finding Volunteers from Post 555 was easy and I want to thank each and every one of them in this article: Karryl Anderson (this was his first event in which to participate since he joined the Post), Bill and Pat Blank, Chic Cecchini, Frank Chacon, Don and Linda Colvard, Caroline and Heather Culpepper, Charles Geter, Dick Hartsock, Chuck Kiser, Jerry McClain, Tom McDaniel, Tom and Jean McMahon, Nancy and Sparkie Waller, Mayor Gary Waters, Derek Winters, and Eldon Woodie. There were other Volunteers who helped: Peggy Eckert, Natalie Galvan and her two children Lillian Hanson and Nathaniel King, and Charon Rivers. Just as a side note, SFC Natalie Galvan is currently serving full-time in the Alabama Army National Guard and took a day of "leave" to participate in this event with her children.

Face masks were required to be worn by everyone at all times. All Volunteers (except those two team members from the same household or safe friend/family duo) will maintain social distancing from other Volunteers, cemetery visitors, and cemetery staff. The hole-punchers, flags, water, and hand sanitizers were made available to all, and with the 25 Volunteers I had in both sections, the job was completed in less than an hour!!!

We were again asked for Volunteers for flag removals on November 13, 2020, 10:00 a.m., BUT with the flags and sticks being wet after several days of rain, the flag removal was changed to November 14, 2020, 11:00 a.m. to allow for drying time. Once again, Volunteers were easy to get from Post 555, and the number of Volunteers was not as restricted, but the same COVID-19 guidelines were still followed by all. The Post 555 Volunteers who helped with this event are as follows: Bill and Pat Blank, Frank Chacon, Heather and Cliff Culpepper, Dick Hartsock, Jerry and Charla McClain, Tom McDaniel, Tom and Jean McMahon, Larry Strayer, Mayor Gary Waters, Derek Winters, and Eldon Woodie. I was unable to join this wonderful group due to a previously scheduled National Guard briefing to Soldiers at a unit in Jasper, Alabama, but I knew that the mission would be accomplished!

Thank you to all of these great Veterans and family members who made my job easy to fill the requirements for two very important events that we hope to continue to do for years to come. Nothing is more important than honoring those who gave the ultimate sacrifice in the defense of this great country, and placing flags at their graves is one way to show our appreciation for their service. Hope to see you at our next General Membership Meeting scheduled for December 10, 2020 at the HOG Meeting Room behind the Heart of Dixie Harley Davidson dealership with a fellowship meal at 6:00 p.m. and final meeting for 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

*Nancy Waller
2nd Vice Commander*



ADJUTANT'S AREA



Ron Koonce

We are happy that we are able to continue our "in person" meetings at our temporary meeting location at the Harley Owners Group (HOG) Clubhouse at the Heart of Dixie Harley Davidson store, 333 Cahaba Valley Parkway North, Pelham, AL. It is a spacious venue that allows for good social distancing. Masks are required. Meal will be served at 6:00 pm, with meeting beginning at 7:00 pm.

We have been fairly successful in our effort to keep the meeting to one hour. Plan to join us on December 10, 2020. Guest are welcome and bring a veteran with you.

The 2021 membership renewals are going well but have slowed during the month of November ending with 61% which is falling short of our 65% goal by the end of the month. I encourage all Post 555 members to recruit at least one new member or transfer to Post 555 and earn Post 555 Commander's Recruiting Pin. Three new members will earn you a National Commander's Pin. Applications are available on Post 555's website www.post555.com. Select the "join" button on the home page to view and print the document.



If you have not submitted your 2021 membership, consider submitting it prior to your 2020 membership expiration date January 1, 2021.

As a reminder, if you have any benefit programs through the American Legion, such as various types of insurance, it is only valid as long you are in good standing with your membership.

The annual renewal remains \$45 payable to **Matthew Blount Post 555**, mailed to **American Legion, 50 Racquet Club Parkway, Pelham, AL 35124**. You can also renew online at www.legion.org.

4 ways to be a member of our Legion family

- ☐ American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555
- ☐ American Legion Auxiliary
- ☐ Sons of the American Legion
- ☐ American Legion Riders (must be members of one of the 3 above)

Contact Information (Please Print)

NAME: _____
 CITY: _____
 CELL PHONE: _____ HM: _____
 EMAIL: _____
 MILITARY BRANCH: _____
 REFERRED BY: _____

JERRY MCCLAIN RECIPIENT OF GOVERNOR'S ALABAMA VETERAN OF THE YEAR AWARD

PELHAM — Jerry McClain, a Pelham resident and veteran, recently received the special honor of receiving the Governor's Veteran of the Year for the State of Alabama award, which highlights outstanding achievements by veterans.

The award's purpose "is to honor an outstanding veteran in the United States each year who has made the greatest contribution to further the patriotic interests of veterans and veteran organizations throughout the country," according to the National Veteran's Day Organization, which administers the awards. It was McClain's work within the American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 that led to him receiving the award, according to American Legion 23rd District Commander Richard Kaster.

"He has been an outstanding member of the American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 in Pelham," Kaster explained. "Because of his many accomplishments, he was selected as the Legionnaire of the Year 2020 for Post 555, therefore, we at the 23rd District approved and recommended Legionnaire McClain to the 2nd Division, consequently, the 2nd Division Commander approved Jerry McClain to be elevated to the American Legion Department of Alabama for consideration."

McClain has gone out of his way to have a positive impact on the community and seeks to spread the goals of the American Legion, as well as lessons he learned while serving his country, to make his community a better place to live in. "Besides being an active member of Post 555, he has done many community projects as he is actively involved as the senior pastor at Kingdom Christian Church in Pelham, while also helping as a Whole Health Peer Facilitator at Birmingham Veteran Affairs Medical Center, a member of the Hoover Metro Kiwanis Club, a former president of the Clergy Team of Pelham, a member of the Pelham Drug Prevention Impact Team and a member of the Hoover area Chamber of Commerce," Kaster explained.

Fellow members of the American Legion saw his service to community and country as a vital source of leadership and example setting for others, which is why they were led to nominate him for this award.

"As you can see Jerry McClain is a special person that balances many different areas by multi-tasking and prioritizing what is important," Kaster said.

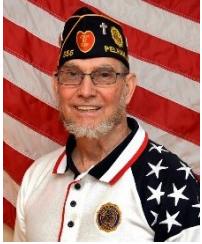


va.alabama.gov



ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF
**VETERANS
AFFAIRS**

CHAPLAIN'S UPLIFT



Tom McMahon
Post Chaplain



Chaplain AL Newsletter 12/2020

Our Republic, our America, our Home is now being attacked like never before. Shadowy places and criminal faces have sent forth works of evil upon our homeland. In this year of Twenty Twenty, we have heard Macbeth's demons chanting: "...*double, double toil and trouble; fire burn and cauldron bubble.*" The spirit of Liberty is being shaken on its foundation. Our anthem squelched and Old Glory scorned. The human brain is under strain. What can I, a soldier and citizen do?

We can, with patriotic and prophetic vision see America advancing. We are not to look for more material prosperity and wealth, but to turn our thoughts and hearts toward faith and spiritual wellbeing. We are faced with an abounding opportunity. A good soldier knows this phrase: should we live or should we die – to God be the glory, but shall we succumb to dread and depression? No! Rather we must return to the 'faith of our fathers.' Our fathers, early settlers and founders have very solidly established the fact that faith in Almighty Providence is the driving and sustaining force of the phenomenon known as the American Republic.

Let us not allow our minds to fear possible outcomes when contemplating our future state. Think on this quote from *"The Present Crisis,"* (1844) by James Russell Lowell:

"Behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own."

This time of year you will remember the song *"It Came Upon A Midnight Clear."* It reminisces of a message some two thousand years ago given to earth from the God Who watches over us:

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,

From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:

"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men from Heaven's all gracious King."

Move current crises and chaos aside for this season and rejoice in knowing that our future and our lives are in Good Hands. Be a blessing and you will receive a blessing. You can quote me on that...

Thanks again to our Buddy Callers: Buddy Check numbers this month are as follows: Total calls attempted – 161, Conversations/Left Messages - 123, Needs - 3.

As we say here at Matthew Blount Post 555, "For God and Country."

Chaplain McMahon

POST 555 WORK AREAS

*Triple Nickel
Riders*

The Triple Nickel Riders will be riding in support of "Toy Hill 2020" sponsored by 95.1 The Fox Radio, U.S. Military Vets Motorcycle Club, and VFW Post 4572 in Wetumpka, Alabama. Unwrapped toys for the U.S. Marines' Toys for Tots Program will be accepted at VFW Post 4572. We will meet at the Alabaster Dunkin Donuts at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday, December 6, 2020; Kick Stands Up (KSU) at 10:30 a.m. All are welcome!!

For more information, contact Riders Director Doug McDaniel at bama27530@gmail.com.

Auxiliary Unit 555

Greetings to You,

I pray your Thanksgiving was special even though this year has been crazy. My family was together, and that is a blessing. My 24 lb. turkey turned out well. I wish you could have seen Heather helping me prepare it. She was not a fan of sticking her hand in the bird and digging out the pieces. However, she sure did eat it.

Christmas is upon us soon. I hope and pray this season will be one of peace and joy for you and your family. As I am writing this, I am staring at my decorated tree. The tree has been with us for 18 years. There are many fond memories that come to mind. Even in this time of uncertainty, I smile because our joy comes from Above and I plan on creating more fond memories this year, as I hope you do. May God Bless You and your family this Holiday Season.

Merry Christmas,

Caroline



Toy Hill 2020 Sponsored by 95.1 The Fox
US Military Vets Motorcycle Club & VFW Post 4572 – Wetumpka
Are collecting Unwrap Toys for

US Marine Corps - Toys for Tots Program
Please Drop off Toys at VFW Post 4572 – Wetumpka AL
On **Dec 6th, 1:30 pm**, We will be taking the donated Toys to Toy Hill
Located at Capital Chevrolet, Montgomery AL
So come Ride with us and help us support this worthy cause
Merry Christmas to All!

*Sons of The American Legion*

The Squadron currently has 38 members on the roster.

Squadron 555 renewals are at 45% of our target which is ahead of the Detachment's goal of 35% for the month of November. However, we have a way to go to reach our 100% goal.

Please send your 2021 SAL membership renewal as soon as possible if you have not already done so.

2020 memberships expire January 1, 2021. Do not wait to the last minute.

Submit your \$20 renewal payable to "Matthew Blount Post 555" to:

The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555

50 Racquet Club Parkway,

Pelham, AL 35124



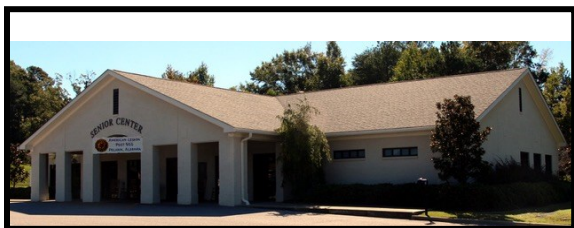
MATTHEW BLOUNT SQUADRON 555

JOIN OR
RENEW
TODAY

Visit alpost555.com and select the "About" tab for applications

Mission: The Sons of The American Legion (S.A.L.) exists to honor the service and sacrifice of Legionnaires. The S.A.L. is made up of all male descendants, adopted sons and stepsons of members of The American Legion or of deceased veterans, during times specified by the American Legion.

MATTHEW BLOUNT POST 555



Meets first Thursday of the month.

Dec 2020 Meeting
will be held

Thursday 10 December at the
Harley Davidson HOG Hall

Post Leadership

Post Commander
Barry Blount
1st Vice Commander
Jeff Monday
2nd Vice Commander
Nancy Waller
Adjutant
Ron Koonce
Asst Adjutant
Shauna Hadley
Judge Advocate
Larry Strayer
Financial Officer
Chuck Kiser
Chaplain
Tom McMahon
Sergeant-At-Arms
Derek Winters
Anita Bennett
Post Service Officer
Jerry McClain
Historian
Shauna Hadley
Public Relations Officer

Vacant
Post Trustees
Bill Blank
Frank Lakotich
Robert Horsley
Auxiliary President
Caroline Culpepper
Sons Commander
Robert Horsley
Legion Riders Director
Doug McDaniel
Flag Team Coordinator
Ron McGriff
Webmaster
Ron Koonce
Triple Nickel Editor
Frank Chacon
Photography
Frank Chacon
Ron Koonce



The Triple Nickel

is published monthly for members of Matthew Blount Post 555.

50 Racquet Club Parkway
Pelham, AL 35124
205-678-1375

commander@ALpost555.com

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

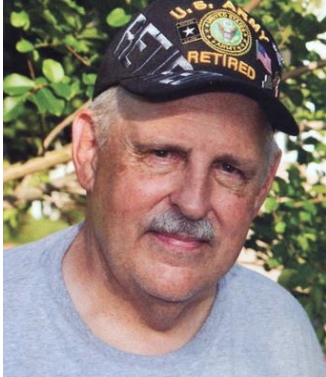
Photos by Frank Chacon /Ron Koonce Post 555

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American Legion Post 555



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: FRANK LAKOTICH

Helena resident, Frank Lakotich, grew up in Joliet, Illinois. Frank's buddy decided they would go into the service after graduating from high school on the Buddy Program, but when the buddy failed his physical in Chicago, he got sent home for a skin rash and Frank boarded a plane for Lackland AFB, Texas, where he went through eight weeks of basic training. "I was in the best shape of my life after those eight weeks," said Frank.



Frank was selected for the Radio/TV Production career field, but the school for that at Lowery AFB, Colorado, was temporarily closed, so they sent him to Keesler AFB, Biloxi, Mississippi. The new television studio was not completed there yet, so the Air Force staff sent Frank to 16 weeks of electronics school instead. "This was in 1961. I got orders to Osan AFB, Korea, just after completing the electronics school. After a few days at Osan, I was reassigned to Pusan, Korea, where I worked on a U.S. Army radio station as an announcer," said Frank. Turns out he had gotten lots of on-the-job broadcasting training for that at Keelser AFB working the "Bed Pan Circuit", as they used to call it (the studio was in the hospital there).

"I cued-up records and did announcing during my time in Korea. From our site at Pusan, our sound-waves broadcast on water out about 500 miles. After my tour was over, I applied for duty in Weisbaden, Germany, but a week after arriving there, I was reassigned to a Joint Air Force/Navy Air Station in Turkey. A room in the barracks served as our studio for the half-watt FM radio station. We were not supposed to broadcast off the perimeter of the Air Station, but I know for a fact that our music reached Istanbul via the surrounding sea. I later heard some of our American music played back and Radio Istanbul did not edit out our announcing intros over the beginning of the songs," Frank laughed. "They just loved American music."

Frank was in Turkey about nine months before receiving a temporary duty assignment (TDY) to Iraklion Air Station, Crete, in 1964. It was on Crete that Frank become roommates with another Air Force DJ who went on to have a movie written about him featuring some of the experiences he would have later in Vietnam, Adrian Crounauer. (*Good Morning, Vietnam* where Adrian was played by Ron Williams.)



"Adrian had joined the Air Force to avoid the draft; he already had a professional broadcasting career before joining," said Frank. "He did the morning shows and I manned the mic in the afternoon. He taught me a lot. We did all of our own jingles. At 6:00 p.m., he did live television news and I did the sports on the Air Force television station. Adrian had a chance to go to Korea or Vietnam after Crete, and he chose Vietnam where he served from 1965-66." Frank said he kept in touch with Adrian some in later years, and that Adrian said he had tried to sell his experiences in Vietnam as a television series, like MASH, but once a producer signed Robin Williams to the starring role, the movie *Good Morning, Vietnam* was pretty much set in stone.

Adrian told Frank that the movie was about 60% true. The bombing in the hotel was real. Adrian signed-up for a 12-month tour, which he completed and went home. There was no re-enlistment drama as portrayed in the movie.

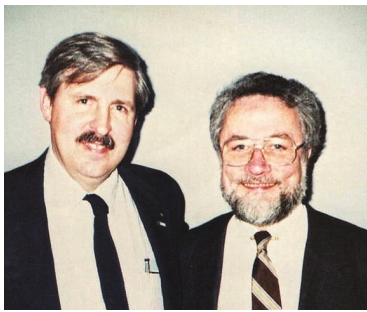
It was back to Turkey after Crete for Frank, and when his tour was up the next year, he was sent to Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, where he re-enlisted for four more years. "I worked part-time, while off-duty, on Sundays for a Country Western radio station in Montgomery called WMGY. I also bar-tended Friday and Saturday nights on-base at the Airman's Club." It was during this stint in Montgomery that Frank met his wife, Janet, also in the Air Force working in Medical Administration. "I had just earned my E-5 stripes and after a conversation with her, asked her if she would sew them on for me. She obliged. We had dinner and started dating." (Continues on page 11)

FRANK LAKOTICH ... CONTINUES

It wasn't long before Frank was ordered back to Turkey. "I didn't want to leave the Wisconsin girl alone here in Alabama," Frank said with a grin. "So, I asked her to marry me. She said yes, so we went up to Wisconsin for the wedding. We came back through Joliet to see my family and spend Christmas, and then shipped off for Turkey as a family in late December."

Talk about culture shock, we had Christmas in Illinois and New Year's in Turkey with their strict Islamic culture. The Air Station at which we were stationed was in the rural part where they hold to a very strict adherence to their traditions. We had music shipped-in once a week from Los Angeles. It was all tame with none of the protest music of the time, of course. We were required to play every type of music to please every audience."

Frank and Janet had their first daughter, Regina, while in Turkey. It wasn't long before the family was reassigned back statewide, and Frank was sent to Bergstrom AFB, Austin, Texas, where he prepared hometown news releases he would record after interviewing war Veterans returning home from Vietnam and Thailand. He would send the recorded audio tapes to their hometown radio stations. He says the one he did on Doc Blanchard, an Army officer who received a medal in Vietnam, is probably the one he remembers best (during Doc's college years at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Doc was the first junior to win the Heisman Trophy). "He only wanted to discuss the war and was not much interested in talking about football, is the one thing that sticks out most," said Frank.



With Adrian Crounauer of
"Good Morning Vietnam" fame

"Our son, Frank III, was born in Texas. He enlisted in the Air Force and served 30 years with several tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He retired in 2017 as an E-9 after serving at Andrews AFB, Maryland.

After Frank's Air Force days, he says he had a job offer at a radio station in Joliet, but it did not come with insurance, so Frank found himself working at the Joliet Works of U.S. Steel. He worked in their Personnel Department taking photos and doing press releases and things like that for them. The couple had their third child, Jenifer, about a year later in Joliet. "I would offer the military as a great way for a young person to get a step up in life these days," said Frank. "I received an Associate's Degree at Joliet Junior College, my Bachelor's Degree at Lewis University, and continued on from there, working nights while getting my Master's Degree in Business there, too, all on the GI Bill. You cannot beat that."

Transferred within the steel industry, Frank and Janet made several moves before finally retiring in 2010 with O'Neal Steel in Birmingham as their Corporate Safety Manager. "We settled on our home when I joined O'Neal in a new subdivision in Helena, called Dearing Downs back in 1990," said Frank. Since retiring, Frank works part-time for the National Safety Council teaching defensive driving courses. He is a Volunteer with the Friends of the Helena Library and the Pelham Library Guild. Frank is very active in The American Legion Matthew Blount Post 555 which serves the Pelham, Helena, and Alabama area primarily. He is currently a Post 555 Trustee, is on the Events Committee, and is a member of the Post's Flag Team. Frank is also a member of the Blue Star Salute Foundation and the Support Committee for the Alabama National Cemetery, Montevallo, Alabama, both groups that put flags and Christmas wreaths on military graves and help with other remembrance activities.

Frank and Janet have four grandchildren and six great grandsons. Janet takes care of the grandchildren and does a beautiful job with the yard.

Thank you to the Lakotichs for their outstanding service to our great country.
Salute!!



WAA UPDATE

OUTSTANDING!!!

Post 555 2020 Wreaths Across America Campaign Wrap-up

I am pleased to report the conclusion of yet another record-breaking Post 555 Wreaths Across America Campaign. This marks the fifth consecutive year of exceeding the annual goal set for the campaign.

This year our goal was set at \$3,600.00 or 20% above last year's total raised. Then COVID-19 hit, and our goal was severely challenged. This is because historically, we raised between 40 & 50% of our annual goal at the Family Thanksgiving dinner which we were not able to have due to COVID.

In 2020, we had to resort to other means to achieve our goal. I was fortunate to have two co-chairmen to assist in this effort – Nancy Waller and Eldon Woodie. We were able to enlist the support of the Exchange Club of Shelby County, Exchange Club of Mobile County, Military Vets Motorcycle Club, and our own Triple Nickel Riders.

The donations raised this year totaled \$4,490.00. This was \$1,535.00 or 52% above last year and \$890.00 or 125% of the goal set for 2020. A heartfelt thanks to all who donated wreaths this year. Your generosity is deeply appreciated.

Chuck Kiser

Support Committee for the Alabama National Cemetery
Twelfth Annual Wreaths Across America at the Alabama National Cemetery*
December 2020 (***see below - public ceremony canceled - wreaths will be laid*)



Every year during the Christmas season, live Maine Balsam Wreaths are placed on each Veteran's grave at the Alabama National Cemetery (ALNC) located at 3133 HWY 119, Montevallo, AL. This would not be possible without the generosity of donors. The cost of each wreath is \$15.00. In 2020, over 7,500 wreaths are needed. Traditionally, family members of those buried at ALNC, as well as donors and volunteers, participate in the wreath-laying ceremony.** For those unable to attend, volunteers are present to lay your wreath.

To sponsor wreaths for ALNC, please complete this form and return it, along with payment, to our fund raising partner, Blue Star Salute Foundation, Inc., PO Box 661, Chelsea, AL 35043. Make your checks or money orders payable to BSSFI, for: Wreaths Across America (WAA). Donor requests for names provided below to be included on the "Honor/Memory" display board for 2020, must be received no later than November 30, 2020.

Wreath donations are accepted throughout the year and are tax deductible. For donations of \$250 or more, an acknowledgment will be sent to the email address provided below.

The Support Committee for the ALNC plans & coordinates the WAA Ceremony & wreath laying with logistical support from the Civil Air Patrol. For more information on the ceremony, or to volunteer, please visit: www.scalnc.org.** *Please note that due to COVID 19 restrictions, the public wreath laying ceremony originally scheduled for Dec. 19 is canceled, however, wreaths will be laid on alternate dates & times, in compliance with CDC and local health guidelines. A private ceremony will be broadcast on social media).** Please visit our website and/or Facebook page(www.facebook.com/scalnc) for updates for 2020.