100 YEARS FOR GOD AND COUNTRY
A CHRONOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN LEGION
1914 - 1918
“The American Legion’s grandfather was born in Costa Rica, Central America, in the early summer of 1914, before the outbreak of the World War.”

- Arthur Sullivant Hoffman, former editor of Adventure magazine, writing in the July 1934 issue of The American Legion Magazine

“In 10 years or less time, the U.S. is going to find herself in a man-sized fight. I vote that all of us drifting around, and who would ordinarily volunteer to fight for our country, begin to form some sort of volunteer organization now through Adventure. Then, if something turns up, we can all get together and volunteer in a body… Personally, when I get into a scrap, I like to know that fellows with me are not going to go up in the air when they get in a tight place.”

- E.D. Cooke, in a June or July 1914 letter to Adventure magazine, from Port Limon, Costa Rica, published in the November issue that year

June or July 1914

A letter from E.D. Cooke, postmarked from Port Limon, Costa Rica, for the “Campfire” section of Adventure magazine, proposes a volunteer force of military-trained men to unite as one body in the event the United States finds itself at war. At the time, the U.S. government has nearly no documentation of former military personnel, their training records or skills. The U.S. Armed Forces at this time consists of approximately 300,000 personnel, active-duty and National Guard combined.

November 1914

The letter from E.D. Cooke appears in Adventure magazine and within weeks, a roster of military-trained volunteers from throughout the country begins to take shape, administered in the magazine’s New York office. Editor Arthur Sullivant Hoffman loosely calls this emerging group the “Legion” and later terms it “American Legion, Inc.” Membership cards are produced and delivered to the volunteers.

Feb. 12, 1915

Adventures magazine editor Arthur Sullivant Hoffman and Dr. John E. Houseman, who left his job to serve free of charge as secretary of American Legion, Inc., meet with former Army Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood and others to discuss this fast-growing group of trained volunteers willing to defend their country and prepare others for military service if necessary.

About Feb. 19, 1915

The discussion with Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood paves the way for a meeting between the founders of American Legion, Inc., and former U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, who learns of the organization and writes a letter of endorsement for it.

March 1, 1915

Announcements appear in newspapers coast-to-coast recruiting members for American Legion, Inc. Former U.S. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, along with former Army Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood, are among the vocal proponents of this “American Legion” of military-trained, educated citizens who pledge their skills, time and assets— including automobiles, tools, boats, weapons and motorcycles if needed—to serve as a U.S. reserve fighting force in the event the United States is drawn into the war in Europe.

“The offices at 10 Bridge Street were at once swamped, not only with applications, applicants and reporters, but with people of all kinds who offered their services free to help handle the work. The pacifists went wild in the other direction.”

- Arthur Sullivant Hoffman, writing in the July 1934 American Legion Magazine, about the response from a nationwide recruiting effort for American Legion, Inc.

1915-1916

The 97th Overseas Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in England consists of U.S. volunteers known as “American Legion” who raise and lower the U.S. flag and play the “Star Spangled Banner” daily. The battalion is broken up into replacements before it is sent to fight in France. The term “American Legion” had also been used for various earlier military units and organizations dating back to an American Legion of Honor in Massachusetts that formed on Dec. 15, 1878, that lasted about 20 years. Revolutionary War traitor Benedict Arnold also led a company of crown loyalists, mostly deserters from the Continental Army, which he called “American Legion.”

“Theodore Roosevelt’s announcement that he intended to sail immediately to France with his own independently raised band of volunteers posed a serious political threat to Wilson’s wartime leadership.”

- Dr. Jennifer D. Keene, “Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America”

Jan. 1, 1917

Having grown to a membership of more than 24,000 volunteers, led in part by Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., the former president’s son, who trained under Maj. Gen. Leonard Wood at the Preparedness Movement-inspired Plattsburgh, NY, military camp for college men, American Legion, Inc., turns its roster and contact information over to the U.S. government. Among the Plattsburgh and American Legion, Inc., alumni, in addition to Roosevelt, Jr., are future founders of the organization Thomas W. Miller, Hamilton Fish Jr., William Donovan and Eric Fisher Wood. Gen. John “Black Jack” Pershing would later refer to the American Legion, Inc., roster for sorely needed officers as the United States drew closer to entry in the Great War. Two wartime aircraft maintenance regiments would come from the original American Legion, Inc., roster.
April 6, 1917
The United States formally enters the Great War. By a U.S. Senate vote of 82-6 and a House vote of 373-50, the declaration of war against Germany ends U.S. policy of isolation and neutrality. The troops who would become The American Legion’s first generation begin training for wartime service.

June 20, 1917
Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and his brother Archie sail for France after successfully arguing, with a letter of support from their father, for the opportunity to serve in the first wave of the American Expeditionary Forces under Gen. John Pershing. Roosevelt, Jr., enters the war as a major and soon distinguishes himself in battle, fighting through enemy fire and poison gas, and leading from the front. He receives high praise as a battalion commander and ultimately commands the 26th Regiment of the 1st Division through multiple battles.

May 28, 1918
Maj. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., successfully leads a 26th Infantry Regiment company in the first U.S. offensive of World War I, the Battle of Cantigny. He is gassed nearly to blindness and refuses evacuation, but his company’s raid is a breakthrough victory, and he receives the Silver Star. He is promoted to lieutenant colonel.

July 19, 1918
Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., is shot in the left leg with a machine gun during battle near Soissons, France. He is evacuated in the sidecar of a motorcycle before catching an automobile ride to a Paris apartment where his wife, Eleanor, a YMCA wartime volunteer, is staying. Roosevelt, Jr. tells his wife he wants no medical care. He asks for a bath, a hot meal and a quart of champagne. Against his wishes and at his wife's insistence, a surgeon arrives and, certain the wound will infect and force amputation, he transports Roosevelt, Jr. to a hospital and cuts an 8-inch incision behind his knee to clean it. Roosevelt, Jr., would limp for the rest of his life, having lost all feeling in his heel.

Nov. 11, 1918
A defeated Germany signs an armistice in a railroad car outside Compiegne, France, ending the Great War that killed nearly 10 million military men and women from around the world, wounded another 21 million and is estimated to have caused the deaths of an additional 5 million civilians. Some 4 million Americans have served during the war, 72 percent of whom were drafted. At the time of the armistice, fallen U.S. military personnel are buried in approximately 2,400 temporary cemeteries throughout Europe.

“The United States was no more ready for peace than it had been for war. The Armistice came sooner than expected, and little thought or planning had been devoted to plans for the post-war period, to assure veterans of an orderly return to civilian life.”

December 1918
Former Dallas Mayor Henry D. Lindsley is appointed first director of the War Risk Insurance Bureau three months before he and his fellow Great War veterans found The American Legion in Paris. Lindsley, who was appointed first national chairman of The American Legion following the St. Louis Caucus of May 8-10, 1919, leads the War Risk Insurance Bureau until 1920. In 1921, the bureau is consolidated with two other federal agencies, at the urging of The American Legion, to form the Veterans Bureau, predecessor the Veterans Administration.

“Lafayette, we are still here.”
- Reportedly repeated often by the four line officers who met in late January 1919 in Paris to discuss the launch of a veterans group that would become The American Legion
1919 - 1929
January 1919
At the end of the war, the U.S. Public Health Service had a total of 1,548 beds available for the sick and disabled veterans. By January 1919, some 74,500 veterans had been discharged for tuberculosis and mental illness alone. More than 120,000 were recovering from wounds and illnesses in Europe.

Late January 1919
Four line officers of the American Expeditionary Forces – Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.; Lt. Col. George A. White; Col. William Donovan; and Lt. Col. Eric Fisher Wood – meet in Paris to discuss the recent passing of former President Theodore Roosevelt, their imminent mustering out of service, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and what might happen at home when nearly 2 million newly discharged combat veterans, many disabled and shell-shocked, return to civilian lives. Roosevelt, Jr. had discussed the idea of a veterans organization among soldiers still stationed in Europe, whose morale was low as they remained camped there awaiting passage home. By this time, a U.S. group called Comrades in Service originated in Europe, led by American Expeditionary Forces Chief Chaplain Charles Brent, but it doesn’t get much traction among the troops, who are frequently absent without leave and occasionally causing mischief while awaiting orders to ship out.

Early February 1919
Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., meets privately with Gen. John Pershing to discuss the attitudes and behavior of the troops. Roosevelt suggests “a morale conference” and obtains the commanding general’s approval for a meeting to plan it.

Feb. 16, 1919

March 7, 1919
Stars and Stripes publishes an invitation to the Paris Caucus, calling on “Veterans in AEF in Liberty League.” Liberty League is Lt. Col. Eric Fisher Wood’s preferred name for the new association. Organizers expect about 300 to attend. Roosevelt, Jr., however, would not be one of them. He returns to the United States before the caucus is called to order, in part to begin promoting the yet-to-be-born American Legion.

March 7, 1919
What would become regarded as the first post of The American Legion, General John Joseph Pershing Post Number 1 in Washington, D.C., is organized and makes plans to apply for the first charter of the as-yet-unnamed organization. It receives a charter on May 19, 1919. The St. Louis Caucus of May 8-10, 1919, determines that Legion posts cannot be named after living persons, so Pershing Post 1 is renamed George Washington Post 1.

“Am inviting enlisted men.”
- Lt. Col. Eric Fisher Wood, in a March cable to Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., from Paris to New York, to report that the Paris Caucus “morale conference” would be bigger than the 300 attendees originally expected.

March 15-17, 1919
The American Legion is formed in Paris, France, at the American Officers Club, an old mansion at 4 Rue Gabriel, and Cirque de Paris, an amusement hall. Organizers, who originally expected about 300 to attend, are astounded when hundreds more pour in. Officially, 463 register for the caucus, but more than 1,000 are believed to have been there at some point during the weekend.

“Though some later remembered having signed attendance slips at the caucus, Pvt. George W. Munroe later said he ‘saw no evidence of registration at the caucus. As far as I could see, anybody who happened to wander in could sit down and take part. It was somewhat of a madhouse. When I reported to the Cirque de Paris, I presented my travel orders to the soldier on duty at the door, and he looked me over, handed them back, and directed me to the section reserved for the First Division. After that, I came and went as I pleased.”

The first session of the Paris Caucus is scheduled to start at 10 a.m., but confusion reigns, and the meeting does not begin until 2:55 p.m. Lt. Col. Eric Fisher Wood, a Plattsburgh Camp alum, presides. Among the recorded attendees are Pvt. Harold Ross, who goes on to become editor of The American Legion Magazine and, following that, founder of The New Yorker magazine; future Secretary of the Treasury Capt. Ogden Mills; and future father of American military intelligence, Col. William Donovan. The first four 15-member committees of The American Legion are: Convention, Permanent Organization, Constitution and Name.

Lt. Col. Lemuel Boles, who would become the first American Legion national adjutant, reports from the Constitution Committee the following intention:

“We, the members of the military and naval services of the United States of America in the great war desiring to perpetuate the principles of justice, freedom and democracy for which we have fought, to inculcate the duty and obligation of the citizen to the state; to preserve the history and incidents of our participation in the war; and to cement the ties of comradeship formed in service, do propose to found and establish an association for the furtherance of the foregoing purposes.”
The committee tasked with naming the new organization reports 12 nominations:

- Comrades of the Great War
- Veterans of the Great War
- Liberty League
- Army of the Great War
- Legion of the Great War
- Great War Legion
- The Legion
- The American Legion
- American Comrades of the Great War
- Society of the Great War
- The Great Legion
- American Comrades

**March 17, 1919**

Lt. Col. Thomas W. Miller of Delaware, a former member of Congress who enlisted as an infantryman in the Army after an unsuccessful re-election campaign, brings the final day of the Paris Caucus to order. Without a gavel to start the meeting, he pulls from his pocket an 1873 silver dollar, which he always carries with him, and raps it on a table. The day’s business includes choosing the organization’s name, membership eligibility criteria, establishment of an executive committee and the preliminary drafting of a preamble to The American Legion Constitution. Miller would later serve as a national Legislative Committee co-chairman, would co-author the organization’s federal charter, serve on the National Executive Committee both for Delaware and Nevada, and in 1968 would be elected Past National Commander by a vote of the 50th American Legion National Convention in New Orleans.

After much debate on the final day of the Paris Caucus, in a motion reportedly accelerated by hunger just before lunchtime, “American Legion” is chosen and adopted as a temporary name for the association.

“It was a great soldier who said that the army has not merely a body, but a soul and a conscience.”

- AEF Senior Chaplain Bishop Charles Brent, speaking at the Paris Caucus, March 17, 1919

In the Paris Caucus’ final hours, the first U.S. Navy sailor arrives to see what’s going on. In his 1923 book, Marquis James wrote that prior to his appearance “…there was present no delegate direct from the Navy. On the afternoon of the third day, a lone sailor wandered into the Cirque de Paris where the later sessions were held. He was immediately surrounded and asked whom he represented. ‘Nobody,’ stammered the embarrassed gob. ‘I thought there was a show going on in here.”

**March 17, 1919**

On the evening after the final session of the Paris Caucus, the first American Legion Executive Committee gathers, chaired by Milton J. Foreman of Chicago, with George A. White of Oregon as secretary and Richard C. Patterson as assistant secretary.

“They were to promote an organization which would not take form until the following November. They had no funds whatever, no offices, no staff, no literature. They had been named the temporary executives of a great idea.”


**March 19, 1919**

Lt. Col. George A. White of Oregon, who would later found The American Legion Weekly magazine, writes a letter to Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., saying the Paris Caucus had been “successful and wholesome” and was a rare opportunity for enlisted troops to openly express themselves. White would later rise to the rank of major general and command the Army’s 41st Infantry Division until his death in November 1941.

**March 28, 1919**

Stars and Stripes publishes the first story in which “The American Legion” is named as an organization of wartime veterans.

“No one can lay claim to originating the idea of a veterans’ association because it was a consensus among the men of the armed forces of our nation ... It was the result of what might be called the ‘spontaneous opinion’ of the Army, Navy and Marine Corps, caused by a fusing together in a common bond of the various elements of the service, just as spontaneous combustion is brought about by the joint action of certain chemical elements.”

- George S. Wheat, “The Birth of the Legion,” 1919, G.P. Puntam’s Sons

**April 7, 1919**

The American Legion’s final founding executive committee meeting in Paris is conducted under the leadership of Col. Milton A. Foreman, who calls for an equal balance of enlisted personnel and officers in leadership to ensure that all voices are heard without regard to rank. Following the meeting, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and other founding members set up a temporary national headquarters office for the organization at 19 West 44th Street, New York City.

**April 8, 1919**

The Chicago Tribune reports in a story datelined Paris one of the “lofty aims” of The American Legion, which the newspaper called a “new GAR” (Grand Army of the Republic) is “to fight for good government.”

**May 8-10, 1919**

The American Legion’s constitution is approved at the St. Louis Caucus, conducted inside the Shubert Theater. Before declining nomination to lead the new organization but serving as temporary chairman of the caucus, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., calls the session to order with a gavel made from the steamship Roosevelt’s rudder; the vessel had carried Adm. Robert Edwin Peary during his explorations of the North Pole. Roosevelt, Jr. rejects chants of “We want Teddy!” to serve as first national leader of the organization. Roosevelt, with plans to eventually run for elected office, does not want The American Legion to be politicized in any way. Former Dallas Mayor Henry D. Lindsley is instead named chairman of the St. Louis Caucus, and plans are
advanced to elect a commander at the first national convention of the organization.

“I want the country at large to get the correct impression of this meeting here. We are gathered together for a very high purpose. I want every American through the length and breadth of this land to realize that there is not a man in this caucus who is seeking anything for himself, personally, but that he is simply working for the good of the entire situation ... Now gentlemen, it is my absolute determination to withdraw myself.”
- Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., temporary chairman of the St. Louis Caucus of The American Legion, May 8, 1919

“Our first duty is, beyond the shadow of a doubt, to get this boy on his legs, and once we get it on its legs, it will be like the mighty Niagara Falls. There is not anything in the world can dam it up. It will be a power that shall be known, and with influence all over America, and for good all over the world. Let’s be quiet and let’s be sensible today until we get this boy on his legs. He’s just a recruit, a raw recruit, and he has to be trained, and we are going to do that thing now.”
- Chaplain John Inzer, Alabama, speaking about the formation of The American Legion at the St. Louis Caucus, May 10, 1919

By the end of the St. Louis Caucus, drafts of The American Legion preamble and constitution are approved, temporary officers chosen, a national convention site selected and the name of the organization becomes permanent.

“To the extent that I make a contribution to causes which have continuity, then I gain something which in itself has immortality.”
- Earl B. Dickerson, Illinois, founder and life member of Lt. George Giles American Legion Post 87 in Chicago, one of 25 African-American veterans at the 1919 St. Louis Caucus

“The example of the Grand Army of the Republic was to convince many World War veterans that a veterans organization must appeal to all without regard for political partisanship and that it must convince the public that veterans were interested in more than simply raiding the Treasury. In short, to be acceptable to the average citizen any new veterans organization had to be non-partisan and also had to be ready to give to the nation rather than take from it.”
- The History of The American Legion in Kansas, 1968, Richard J. Loosbrock, Page 5

May – November 1919

Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., of New York, John W. Inzer of Alabama and John Herbert of Massachusetts travel the country to promote the new American Legion, start posts and invite veterans to the first national convention, scheduled for Nov. 10-12 in Minneapolis.

June 1919

Eric Fisher Wood adapts a button being distributed by the War Department — including a star, a laurel wreath and the initials “U.S.” — into a temporary button for The American Legion.

June 27, 1919


July 4, 1919

Issue 1, No. 1 of The American Legion Weekly magazine is published. The introductory column is written by Gen. John “Black Jack” Pershing. George A. White, one of the four officers who met with Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., in January to begin plans for the organization, is identified as founder of the publication. “The Legion is destined to be of tremendous value in fostering the ideals and purposes for which we fought,” Pershing writes in the original issue.

“They had joined a long list of other Americans who participated in the wars of the Republic since the United States had declared its independence. These men had one thing in common: they had served their country in time of war and peril. They had also become different from those who stayed at home. After months of drill, discipline and battle, these soldiers would return to civilian life in America as veterans had always returned: proud, happy, yet feeling themselves to be strangers in a strange land.”
- The History of The American Legion in Kansas, 1968, Richard J. Loosbrock, Page 2

July 1919

The National Executive Committee adopts Wood’s design as the Legion’s official emblem until changed by the national convention in Minneapolis.

Aug. 27, 1919

The U.S. House of Representatives passes legislation to grant a federal charter to The American Legion.

Sept. 5, 1919

The Senate passes legislation to grant a federal charter to The American Legion.

Sept. 16, 1919

The American Legion is federally chartered, which authorizes the as-yet unincorporated organization to proceed to the adoption of a constitution and bylaws, elect officers “and do all other things necessary” as outlined in U.S. Code, Title 36, Chapters 41-50. Under Chapter 43, “Purposes of corporation,” much of the language is borrowed from the original draft Preamble to The American Legion Constitution with some notable deviations, such as “to promote peace and good will among the peoples of the United States and all the nations of the earth”
and “to cement the ties and comradeship born of service.” The original charter outlines the powers and authority of the organization, membership criteria, naming rights, exclusivity to manufacture and use The American Legion emblem, and a requirement that “the organization shall be non-political and, as an organization, shall not promote the candidacy of any person seeking public office.”

**Oct. 11, 1919**

SS *American Legion*, a 13.5-ton, 535-foot passenger and cargo vessel originally built to serve as a World War I troop-transport ship, is christened and launched, beginning 20 years of commercial service before a 1939 transfer to the War Department.

“Minnesota Legionnaires devoted a great deal of time and energy preparing to host the first national convention of The American Legion, but the weatherman failed to cooperate.”

- Ben Gimmestad, “Legion 50,” Ross & Haines, Minneapolis, Minn., 1970

**Nov. 7, 1919**

The American Legion Weekly reports that the Department of New York, by far, leads the nation in new American Legion post charters with 646, just eight months after the organization formed in Paris. Second is Pennsylvania with 411.

**Nov. 10-12, 1919**

Minneapolis is the site of the first American Legion National Convention. Temperatures dip to 11 degrees above zero, with light snow, during the convention parade, and weather is later blamed for Minneapolis losing its bid to become permanent home of The American Legion National Headquarters. Indianapolis is chosen instead, and Washington, D.C., finishes second in the voting. Despite cold temperatures and flurries, approximately 15,000 march in the first national convention parade, and the David Wisted Post of Duluth, Minn., which by this time has amassed a membership of 2,500, is declared The American Legion’s first official band. Among the veteran delegates attending the first national convention are 140 female members of the newly formed organization. Also marching in the first American Legion National Convention Parade is a Boston bull terrier named “Sgt. Stubby,” a celebrity dog that was smuggled overseas to serve alongside his master and best friend, James Robert Conroy of the Connecticut National Guard, on the western front. By the time of its first national convention, membership in The American Legion exceeds 684,000.

**Nov. 10, 1919**

The American Legion Committee on Auxiliaries meets and listens to a report from approximately 12 women of different organizations who express interest in forming an official American Legion Auxiliary. A report from the committee is delivered to the National Convention that “recommends that The American Legion recognizes an Auxiliary Organization, to be governed by the rules and regulations prescribed by the National Executive Committee, to be known as the ‘Women’s Auxiliary of the American Legion,’ to which shall be eligible, all mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters of members of The American Legion, and of all men and women who died honorable deaths in the military and naval service of the United States between the declaration and the formal conclusion of the World War.” In the months that follow, American Legion Auxiliary units spring into existence across the map.

**Nov. 14, 1919**

The American Legion’s Committee on Military Policy reports that it favors universal military training but “strongly” opposes compulsory military service during peacetime. The committee calls for a “relatively small regular Army and Navy and a citizen Army and Navy capable of rapid expansion sufficient to meet any national emergency.” The report begins by stating: “We have had a bitter experience in the cost of unpreparedness for national defense and the lack of proper training on the part of officers and men ... we realize the necessity of an immediate revision of our military and naval system and a thorough house-cleaning of the inefficient officers and methods of our entire military establishment.”

The American Legion would fight for another four decades for universal military training – or UMT – which it did not achieve but in the mid-1950s led to expansion of the Ready Reserves, including legislation that permitted the president to call to active duty 1 million reservists at any time of emergency. UMT was also the stimulus for The American Legion’s long involvement in the development and support of Junior ROTC in high schools.

**November 1919**

At that first national convention, an Emblem Committee is formed and given a year to find a permanent emblem for the Legion.

**Nov. 11, 1919**

Four American Legion members marching in an Armistice Day Parade in Centralia, Wash., are shot to death in the streets. Blamed, arrested and convicted are members of the Industrial Workers of the World (the “wobblies”), regarded as Bolshevik-aligned radicals. When one of the suspects is jailed, a mob breaks in, pulls the suspect out, hauls him away and hangs him from a bridge until dead. Eleven others associated with the wobblies serve sentences for their parts in the shooting. The shooting galvanizes the early American Legion at its first national convention in Minneapolis and hardens its position...
against the IWW, Bolshevism and other threats to democracy. Verna Grimm, widow of one of the Centralia shooting victims, Warren Grimm, in 1923 would accept the position as chief librarian for The American Legion National Headquarters in Indianapolis, where she would work until her retirement in 1957.

Nov. 12, 1919

Boy Scouts of America is the only youth program singled out for official recognition in the first American Legion National Convention in Minneapolis. The resolution of support reads: RESOLVED: The American Legion heartily commends the principles and achievements of the Boy Scouts and recommends that each post assist the Scout troops in its community in whatever manner practicable.

“"My word is simply this. We came here to work. Let us keep on working and not listen to speeches. I thank you.""

- The entire four-sentence acceptance speech of first American Legion National Commander Franklin D'Olier of Pennsylvania, a successful businessman who helped capitalize the Legion and volunteered his time to help organize it before it was chartered

“We are passing through dark and turbulent times just now and it is a wonderful comfort and reassurance to find this representative body of young men thinking clearly and speaking bravely and forcefully to support the essential principles of our government. The American Legion is the hope of the country.”

- Minneapolis Morning Journal editorial, following the first American Legion National Convention

Nov. 13, 1919

Lemuel Bolles, a founder and first national adjutant, packs all The American Legion’s official records into one dry-goods box and carries them the organization’s first national offices loaned by the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce at the Meridian Life Building, 307 N. Pennsylvania Street, in Indianapolis.

Dec. 9, 1919

Founding American Legion member Eric Fisher Wood is listed as the inventor and receives the official U.S. patent for an “emblem-button” design that remains in use today as The American Legion emblem. Prior to receipt of the patent, Wood wrote a letter, witnessed by two others and notarized, transferring all rights to the emblem to The American Legion. The Legion’s Emblem Committee had instituted a contest inviting design submissions but were not satisfied with any of the results, so Wood’s design became permanent.

Dec. 15, 1919

American Legion department commanders and adjutants gather in Washington, D.C., for what is known as the first “Rehab Washington Conference,” predecessor of today’s annual Washington Conference where members meet with congressional representatives to seek improvements in federal health care and benefits for veterans.

Dec. 16, 1919

The American Legion scores its first legislative victory in Washington. Newly elected National Commander Franklin D’Olier and his fellow Legionnaires from across the country are invited to dinner by members of the House of Representatives. The Legion, on its own, brings along several severely disabled veteran patients of Walter Reed Army Hospital. The disabled veterans speak at the dinner about their conditions and scant government support they receive – $30 a month for a full service-connected disability. The following day, revisions are made to the Sweet Bill, increasing compensation for totally disabled veterans by $50, to $80 per month. The amended bill, much to the surprise of its original sponsors, passes before Christmas.

Dec. 20, 1919

The American Legion National Executive Committee meets in Indianapolis and elects banker Robert H. Tyndall, a legendary figure in the Indiana National Guard who fought and led in the Spanish-American War, the Mexican Border War and France during World War I, as the organization’s first national treasurer. His mission is to immediately pursue funds to keep the new organization afloat and to pay back start-up loans. Tyndall Armory, across the street from The American Legion National Headquarters in Indianapolis, is named in his honor. He would go on to be promoted to major general, 38th Infantry Division, and would be elected mayor of Indianapolis in 1942.

Jan. 19, 1920

A newly formed national Committee on Americanism of The American Legion, along with department Americanism chairmen, appears before the Military Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives and presents an agenda that includes assistance in the naturalization and citizenship of immigrants to the United States.

March 3, 1920

The War Work Council of the Young Men’s Christian Association donates to The American Legion unconditionally $500,000, the first $400,000 is paid on this date with the remaining $100,000 delivered on Oct. 30, 1920.

May 30, 1920

Paris Post 1 Commander Col. Francis Drake represents The American Legion to help oversee Memorial Day observances for fallen U.S. military personnel buried in temporary cemeteries across Europe.

Early 1920s

The American Legion begins a nationwide effort to build swimming pools in communities across the United States in order to promote physical fitness and preparedness.

“To The American Legion, there is no east or west, no north or south, no Jew or Gentile, no Protestant or Catholic, no capital or labor, no em-
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Sept. 27, 1920

The poppy is named the official flower of The American Legion during the organization’s second national convention in Cleveland.

“The rapid growth of the Legion has been phenomenal. Such a thing has never happened before in either this or any other country. This great growth has been due first to the fact that our ideals as laid down last year are now proven to be not only right but also practical.”

- First National Commander Franklin D’Olier, speaking at the 2nd American Legion National Convention, in Cleveland, Sept. 27, 1920. By this time, American Legion membership nationwide had exceeded 845,000.

Sept. 28, 1920

The American Legion Auxiliary, already off and running in more than 1,300 communities worldwide, is given The American Legion’s official sanction as an affiliated organization and authorizes it to call for a national convention of its own, the following year in Kansas City.

Sept. 29, 1920

The American Legion Committee on Americanism becomes a national commission.

Oct. 1, 1920

Membership in The American Legion stands at 845,185, an increase of approximately 180,000 from the organization’s inaugural year.

Dec. 21, 1920

American Legion founding member U.S. Rep. Hamilton Fish Jr. introduces a bill in the 66th Congress to authorize a return to the United States the remains of one unknown soldier who lost his life fighting in the Great War. Less than a year later, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is dedicated at Arlington National Cemetery.

Jan. 7, 1921

The American Legion Weekly magazine announces among the members to serve a one-year term on the new national Americanism Commission is Fiorello H. La Guardia, future governor of New York and eventual mayor of New York City.

March 4, 1921


April 6, 1921

The American Legion is asked by President Warren G. Harding to state its position on care and compensation for disabled veterans. Speaking before the Committee to Investigate the Administration of the Law in Caring for the Crippled and Impaired Soldiers of the Late War, American Legion National Commander Frederic Galbraith says “the discharged veteran must be afforded medical treatment and hospital care as long as his physical condition can be improved thereby; cash compensation for the financial loss his disability occasions him and his dependents; and vocation training to enable him to overcome as far as possible the vocational handicap imposed by his disability.”

“We know the conditions and that they are deplorable. There are insane ex-soldiers in the jails and poorhouses of the country while hospital beds remain empty. The thing is to find a remedy.”

- Charles Dawes, director of the Bureau of the Budget, future U.S. vice president and American Legion member, setting the tone for the Committee to Investigate the Administration of the Law in Caring for the Crippled and Impaired Soldiers of the Late War, which he chaired.

May 30, 1921

Four unknown American soldiers of the Great War are exhumed from their graves in France. Sgt. Edward F. Younger, a highly decorated and combat-wounded veteran, selects the third casket from the left, whose remains are sent to Arlington National Cemetery for entombment. The other three are interred at the Meuse Argonne Cemetery in France, where they remain today. The chosen unknown soldier would lie in state at the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C., until ceremonies at Arlington on Nov. 11, 1921.

1921

The American Legion Department of Pennsylvania launches a School Award Medal Program to recognize character, service and citizenship among young people. The program is made national in 1926.

June 9, 1921

Highly decorated World War I Army Col. Frederic W. Galbraith of Ohio is killed in an automobile accident in Indianapolis while serving as second national commander of The American Legion. A revered leader in the fight for veterans benefits and care, his death makes national news, and thousands attend his funeral in Cincinnati, where a memorial now stands in his honor.

July 7, 1921

The National Education Association, at its annual meeting in Des Moines, accepts The American Legion’s offer “to cooperate with the NEA in securing for America a program of education adequate to meet the needs of the 20th century ... and which will make all,
whether native or foreign-born, good American citizens.”

At this time, only 15 million of the 27 million school-age children in America attend school daily. The Legion calls for no less than a high school diploma and two years of professional experience for teachers and urges that English should be primary language taught and that history and civics be added to curriculum.

**Aug. 9, 1921**

The American Legion claims a major legislative victory when the federal Veterans Bureau is created from the consolidation of three agencies – the War Risk Bureau, Federal Board for Vocational Training and Public Health Service. Col. Charles R. Forbes, an acquaintance of President Warren G. Harding, is chosen to lead the Veterans Bureau at a then-handsome salary of $10,000 per year, plus expenses. Forbes’ claimed credentials and qualifications for the position are later found be inconsistent with fact.

**Aug. 18, 1921**

A delegation of 200 American Legion members – who had traveled from the United States to France to dedicate a war memorial at Flirey, place a flag at the tomb of France’s unknown soldier and to meet with Marshal Ferdinand Foch – unveil a marble and bronze plaque in the town of St. Die-des-Vosges to commemorate the location where the name “America” was first published on a map, in 1507. The town, which called itself the godmother of America, took great pride in its place in history.

**Nov. 1-2, 1921**

The first American Legion Auxiliary National Convention is conducted in Kansas City. Edith Hobart of Ohio is elected as the organization’s first national president.

**Nov. 1, 1921**

The American Legion helps dedicate the towering Liberty Memorial in Kansas City during the organization’s third national convention. Kansas City is an early stop in the Allied Victory Tour across the United States with Gen. Ferdinand Foch of France. Joining The American Legion at the convention, the dedication ceremony and for portions of the U.S. tour, in addition to Foch, are Gens. John Pershing of the United States and Armando Diaz of Italy, as well as Adm. David Beatty of Great Britain. President Calvin Coolidge attends the ceremony in Kansas City. During its national convention there, The American Legion establishes the Distinguished Service Medal, and presents it to Foch, Diaz, Beatty, Lt. Gen. Baron Jacques of Belgium and M. Charles Bertrand of France, president of the Inter-Allied Veterans Association.

“Two white ‘doves of peace’ were released before the multitude, to fly to Washington with a peace message for the first Disarmament Conference about to assemble there. Years later, a committee confessed that no carrier pigeons had been provided, but at the last minute, some small boys hired by him had corralled two white pigeons in a public park. They were duly released at the dedication, rose and circled the site, and flew off – as far as the park where they lived. Perhaps it was a bad omen for peace.”

- Richard Seelye Jones, writing about the dedication of the Liberty Memorial during the Allied Victory Tour, at The American Legion’s 3rd National Convention in Kansas City, in 1921

**Nov. 11, 1921**

President Warren G. Harding and the Allied generals, flanked by American Legion members, dedicate the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery, the culmination of a Legion-supported legislative push by U.S. Rep. Hamilton Fish Jr., a Plattsburgh alum, former captain of “Harlem’s Hellfighters,” the famed all-black 369th Infantry Regiment, and founding member of The American Legion.

“What a fine thing it would be if this could be placed between France and Germany.”

- Marshal Ferdinand Foch, commanding general of the French army during World War I, viewing the Grand Canyon in late 1921 during a victory tour as The American Legion’s guest

**Dec. 4-10, 1921**

The American Legion and the National Education Association collaborate to address widespread illiteracy, advance the teaching of citizenship and conduct the first American Education Week to improve public schools.

**1922**

The American Legion reports having so far assisted more than 500,000 veterans in their efforts to obtain permanent employment and another 200,000 in finding temporary employment.

**March 20, 1922**

National Commander Hanford MacNider designates American Legion Employment Day. By June 1, 1922, the campaign is estimated to have gotten jobs for 500,000 out of 700,000 employment-seeking veterans.

**April 1, 1922**

The American Legion National Headquarters moves into its second temporary home, the Chalfant Apartment Building in Indianapolis.

“Securing government compensation for the civilian wages lost during the war required an effective lobbying organization, a role The American Legion assumed with gusto from 1922 to 1924, once its members made their wishes known… No one anticipated in 1917 how influential this generation of citizen-soldiers would become.”

- Dr. Jennifer D. Keene, “Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America,” 2001
June 2, 1922
The New York Times reports that an average of two veteran suicides are taking place per day. The article references C.J. Harris, a claims specialists at The American Legion’s national headquarters. The Times reports that “almost without exception, the men were in the battle lines in France. These soldiers, the Legion official contends, were discharged by Army doctors as normal. Since the war, however, the men, struggling for a living, have undergone mental anguish that their war-racked nerves could not withstand.” The article states that the Legion looks for newly passed legislation committing $17 million for new hospital construction to strengthen psychiatric care for veterans and calls on families to have ex-soldiers in their

Oct. 19, 1922
Gen. John “Black Jack” Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force in World War I, is presented The American Legion’s Distinguished Service Medal during the Fourth National Convention, at New Orleans. “I would rather have it than all the decorations that could possibly be bestowed by all the kings and potentates of the earth,” he says after receiving the award. A member of Post 1 in Washington, D.C., originally named for him but later changed to George Washington Post 1, Pershing announces he has no interest in leading The American Legion as an elected national commander but is happy to serve alongside his fellow veterans, among the ranks.

Oct. 20, 1922
In New Orleans, at the Fourth American Legion National Convention, a resolution is passed to study the feasibility of building and operating a national home for the children of Legionnaires who are orphaned or are destitute. This is the beginning of the national American Legion Child Welfare Committee.

“Nothing was said about the care of children in the formative meetings of The American Legion. The sub-

ject developed into a major Legion program by sheer natural law.”

June 14, 1923
President Warren G. Harding is the keynote speaker at an American Legion-organized conference in Washington to establish rules of respect and procedure for the U.S. flag. The National Flag Conference brings together 68 organizations, including military service branches, educators and government officials. The event is coordinated by The American Legion’s Americanism Commission.

“That piece of red, white and blue bunting means five thousand years of struggle upwards. It is the full-grown flower of ages of fighting for liberty. It is the century plant of human hope in bloom.”
- American Legion National Commander Alvin Owsley, 1923

Oct. 17, 1923
The American Legion National Convention in San Francisco passes a resolution (still in effect) that expresses its firm support of equal rights and opportunities “without distinction as to race, color, creed or class.” The resolution, which also condemns any individual, group or organization that “creates or fosters racial, religious or class strife among our people, or which takes into their own hands the enforcement of law, determination of guilt, or infliction of punishment, to be un-American, a menace to our liberties and destructive to our fundamental law.”

Oct. 18, 1923
The American Legion National Convention in San Francisco passes a resolution to reiterate earlier resolutions for “Congress to immediately enact a law providing for the erection of a suitable Archives Building” to house documents, artifacts and, emphatically, world war military records. “These non-replaceable records are now stored in buildings of such a character that their preservation is menaced through fire and other hazards, and certain of these records have already been destroyed,” the resolution states.

Oct. 18, 1923
Buoyed by an initiative called “The Iowa Idea” advocated by Past National Commander Hanford MacNider, the 11,000-post American Legion is abuzz with community service enthusiasm at its fifth national convention, in San Francisco. All American Legion posts are called upon to actively collaborate with civic organizations at the local level to improve “schools, recreation, park and playground facilities... medical clinics, municipal music concerts, public forums, community buildings, city planning, and all forms of better citizenship movements... every enterprise which will further the well-being, health and happiness of the community.” The National Americanism Commission is given lead responsibility and is tasked with creating a Community and Civic Betterment Bureau. The resolution fuels American Legion grassroots efforts already under way in communities throughout the nation and leads to a flurry of projects – parks, pools, theaters, health-care facilities and more – throughout the United States.

“We must continue to serve the country in the same spirit we had in war, and we can do that only if we have every post doing something for its community. The Legion can do things no other groups can do.”
- American Legion Past National Commander Hanford MacNider, introducing the “Iowa Idea” to accelerate community service projects as a national program for the organization

Jan. 14, 1924
American Legion member Royal C. Johnson is appointed chairman of the newly created House Committee of World War Veterans Legislation, predecessor to the modern House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs.
June 4, 1924

Ground is broken for The American Legion's permanent national headquarters building at 777 N. Meridian Street in Indianapolis. It is the first structure in a $10 million Indiana War Memorial development and represents the fulfillment of a promise made in 1919 when Indianapolis won the bid to become the organization’s permanent home base.

June 14, 1924

The second American Legion-coordinated National Flag Conference ratifies rules of respect and treatment of the U.S. flag. Across the country, the code is applied by states and local government, but it takes 19 years before Congress passes U.S. Flag Code, in 1942.

“The loss of this hand was the making of me. I set out to show my wife and children I wasn’t done for. I put so much heart into the effort that I showed myself I wasn’t done for.”

– James A. Drain, elected national commander in 1924, who had lost his lower right arm in a hunting accident in 1900 but went on to serve as an ordnance officer in the U.S. Army’s 1st Division in the Great War.

Sept. 12, 1924

The American Legion sponsors the first National Defense Day to emphasize the importance of military preparedness.

Sept. 19, 1924

Newly elected American Legion National Commander James Drain of Washington embarks on the daunting task to raise $5 million in one year to seed an endowment fund to help disabled veterans and disadvantaged children.

1925

Established to protect the headwaters of the Wisconsin, Flambeau and Manitowish rivers, the Northern Highland American Legion State Forest opens and occupies more than 232,000 acres in northern Wisconsin.

April 6, 1925

Thanks to more than 900,000 small donations from American Legion Family members around the world and a major commitment of funds from concerts performed by Polish pianist Ignace Paderewski, The American Legion Endowment Fund is established with a principle corpus of $5 million. National Commander James A. Drain, who led the fundraising effort, goes on to serve as first president of the American Legion Endowment Fund Corp. and works closely with legendary American Legion Child Welfare Director Emma Puschner to develop a “whole child” plan that seeks to ensure that the children of veterans have opportunities for “home, health, education, character and opportunity.”

June 17, 1925

American Legion National Commander James Drain formally accepts the new, permanent national headquarters building from Indiana Gov. Ed Jackson. The structure, first development in a $10 million project to build out the Indiana War Memorial Plaza, would serve as American Legion National Headquarters for the next 25 years.

June 25, 1925

The American Legion assists with patrols to provide order and relief amid the chaos and destruction of a massive 6.8-magnitude earthquake that rocks Santa Barbara, Calif., claiming 13 lives.

“Every day, there are more Legionnaires who understand, ‘Why the American Legion?’”

– National Commander James Drain, June 1925

July 17, 1925

The idea of American Legion Baseball originates in Millbank, S.D. Sioux Falls attorney and South Dakota American Legion Department Commander Frank G. McCormick invites Maj. John L. Griffith to speak at the department convention. At the time, Griffith is commissioner of the Western Conference (later the Big Ten). He speaks to Legionnaires about the importance of athletics in the development of youth. That leads to the establishment of the first American Legion Baseball teams that summer in South Dakota. The idea spreads quickly across the nation, and a resolution at the 1925 national convention in Omaha in October makes it a national program, set to begin in 1926.

“You remember it was only a few years ago we commenced hastily and earnestly to take stock of our boy power and manpower... because we realized in those days that it is the nation of physically fit men who would win the war, that we as a people were not physically fit for the last war, and we must cure that condition... If the 12,000 American Legion posts could do that, I can think of nothing of greater importance or consequence in these days.”

– Maj. John Griffith, a World War I veteran and commissioner of the Big Ten, speaking to The American Legion Department of South Dakota Convention in Milbank, S.D. A department resolution passed there was advanced to national and was passed, giving birth to American Legion Baseball in 1926.

Oct. 8, 1925

Passed at the 7th American Legion National Convention in Omaha is a resolution calling for the national Americanism Commission to develop a plan to formalize a collaboration with the American Red Cross to provide natural disaster relief when and where needed. Posts nationwide by that time have already developed and begun executing disaster-relief programs of their own, often working with Red Cross.

March 16, 1926

Sgt. Stubby dies in his sleep. The only known canine to become an official – rather than honorary – member of The American Legion, the celebrated bull terrier was a stray who wandered into a training camp of the 102nd Infantry...
Division at Yale University in the spring of 1917. Attracted to the availability of regular chow from the soldiers, he closely befriended Cpl. James Robert Conroy. Stubby soon learned to salute officers with his paw, was smuggled overseas and served alongside Conroy in the Yankee Division. He is recorded as having been involved in no fewer than 17 battles. He famously alerted his unit of a mustard gas attack in time to save them. Gassed himself in one German assault during the war, the Army designed a custom gas mask for him. He located wounded troops on the battlefield and comforted the dying. He was wounded by a grenade and, after recovering in the rear, returned to the front where he was in fact credited with rousing a German from the bushes and chasing him – barking and snapping – to his unit where he was taken prisoner. Following the war, Stubby made headlines nationwide, met with top military leaders and presidents of the United States. He marched in the first American Legion National Convention in Minneapolis in November 1919 and was made an official member of Eddy-Glover American Legion Post 6 in New Britain, Conn. Also after the war, he served as the Georgetown University football team mascot. Stubby wore a medal-covered vest and harness, with which he could carry a U.S. flag, in his appearances at veterans event, including several early American Legion national conventions. Included on his vest are distinguished guest badges from early American Legion national conventions and the Iron Cross from the German he captured. He was later stuffed and displayed at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., where his vest is today kept. An animated movie, “Sgt. Stubby: An Unlikely Hero,” debuted in theaters nationwide in April 2018.

**March 26, 1926**

Following vandalism at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and picnicking and other less-than-respectful activity there by random visitors, sunset-to-sunrise surveillance of the site by armed military personnel begins, at the urging of The American Legion.

**Oct. 15, 1926**

At the 8th American Legion National Convention in Philadelphia, Gen. John “Black Jack” Pershing and Marshal Ferdinand Foch of France receive an honor bestowed upon no one else – election as honorary commander of The American Legion. “Legionnaires, it is a great pleasure to be here, and I want you all to know you can always count on me as one of you, as standing shoulder to shoulder, as we did together during the war,” Pershing tells the crowd after receiving the recognition.

“We are in a national period, apparently, of relaxation. Under such circumstances, that this great patriotic organization, The American Legion, has kept so alive and active is fortunate, for the organization contains greater potential capacity for national usefulness than any other civilian organization in our country.”

- U.S. Vice President Charles Dawes, American Legion founding member, and co-recipient of the 1925 Nobel Peace Prize as author of the Dawes Plan to help Germany stabilize its economy, speaking at the 1926 American Legion National Convention

**Nov. 9, 1926**

Originating five years earlier in Pennsylvania posts, the American Legion School Award program becomes national, honoring outstanding eighth-grade boys evaluated on five points: honor, courage, scholarship, leadership and service. The American Legion Auxiliary offers a similar award for girls on the basis of courage, character, service, companionship and scholarship. In its first year, 1,046 medals are awarded throughout the country. By 1943, the number would soar to 13,302.

**Oct. 15, 1926**

The team from American Legion Cook Post 321 of Yonkers, NY, defeats Pocatello, Idaho, by a score of 23-6 in the first American Legion Baseball World Series in Philadelphia. More than 1,100 spectators attend. The cost of running the world series, however, leads to a two-year hiatus until adequate funding can be obtained.

“I have done my best to maintain among my countrymen the memory of our brotherhood in arms, and I am certain that this brotherhood will continue in peace, as alive and strong as ever, for the good of our two countries.”

- M. Raymond Poincare, Premier of the Republic of France, in a message to the 8th American Legion National Convention, Oct. 11, 1926, in Philadelphia

**SOMETIME IN 1926**

American Legion Post 1 in Havana, Cuba, is founded initially by veterans who served in World War I and the Spanish American War. The post dedicates a mausoleum, still intact, at Colon Cemetery in 1926. The mausoleum contains the remains of veterans from the U.S. Civil War (Union and Confederate), Spanish American War and World War I. A Canadian tourist recently visited the mausoleum and shot video of the site, where emblems of the United Confederate Veterans, Grand Army of the Republic and United Spanish American War Veterans are still visible.

**July 1, 1926**

Due to budget troubles, The American Legion Weekly magazine goes to monthly publication.

**Oct. 15, 1926**

“**The Ossuary of Verdun will in truth be a lighthouse for the world. It will be looked upon as one of the world’s most noble structures, noble in the associations it recalls and noble in its own architectural grandeur.**”

- American Legion National Commander J.R. McQuigg, in an American Legion Weekly (June 18, 1926) appeal to posts everywhere to act on a Spring 1926 National Executive Committee resolution and contribute funds to the memorial in France and another in Liege, Belgium, to commemorate the allied sacrifices necessary to regain peace in World War I.
Jan. 7, 1927

Originally sponsored by George L. Giles American Legion Post 87 in Chicago and known as the South Side Giles Team, the all-black basketball stars who would become the Harlem Globetrotters make their debut in a game at Hinckley, Ill. Later sponsored by the Savoy Ballroom and known briefly as the “Savoy Big Five,” the Harlem Globetrotters would go on to entertain more than 144 million fans in 122 countries worldwide.

April 1 – May 30, 1927

Members of Winfred Fairfax Warder Post in Cairo, Ill., begin assisting the National Guard to patrol levees in what becomes the most devastating flood in U.S. history, to date. Lasting most of two months and extending from Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico, the Mississippi River flood of 1927 tears out levees and dams and leaves some 400,000 residents homeless by the end of May. The American Legion post in Aubra Township, Ky., establishes a refugee camp, and members search the flooded areas for survivors on rooftops, in trees and on the tops of barns. Legionnaires in Greenville, Miss., serve up to 9,000 meals a day, and all posts in the Department of Mississippi are mobilized to search for survivors, many of whom are African-American farm families who lost everything they owned. The American Legion Departments of Arkansas and Louisiana likewise mobilize as the floodwaters destroy hundreds of homes and farms. Following the disaster, an American Legion Central Flood Relief Committee is formed, in collaboration with the Red Cross, to help those who had lost homes. Future American Legion National Commander Roane Waring of Memphis is named chairman of the committee.

April 26, 1927

U.S. Navy Lt. Stanton Hall Wooster and Lt. Cmdr. Noel Guy are killed in a practice flight of a Keystone Pathfinder plane named American Legion as they prepare to attempt the first transatlantic flight from New York to Paris. Three weeks later, U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve pilot Charles Lindbergh completes the flight, earning the Medal of Honor.

May 2, 1927

The Alaska Legislature adopts as its official territorial flag a design by Benny Benson, a 13-year-old seventh grader from Mission Territorial School near Seward, Alaska. Benson’s design features the Big Dipper and the North Star against a field of “forget-me-not” blue to win first place in an American Legion-run contest that attracts 142 entries. The Alaska Territorial Legislature offered $1,000 to the boy so that he could take the flag to Washington, D.C., and present it to President Calvin Coolidge, accompanied by Alaska Legionnaires. Unfortunately, Coolidge was not available, so the Legionnaires took the flag with them aboard the SS Leviathan on the 1927 Paris Pilgrimage to Europe, displaying it prominently in the ship’s dining room, and then returned it to the Last Frontier State’s Historical Library and Museum. The territorial flag of Benson’s design became the state flag in 1959.

July 16, 1927

The initial 213 acres of what would become The American Legion and People’s State Forest in the Pleasant Valley area of Connecticut are donated to the state by the organization. Legionnaires of the First World War make the donation to demonstrate from their experiences in Europe the proper way to manage a forest.

Sept. 10, 1928

Montgomery-Ward American Legion Post 5 of Oakland, Calif., sweeps Worcester, Mass., 4-0 and 12-2 to win The American Legion Baseball World Series at Chicago’s Comiskey Park. On hand to congratulate American Legion Americanism Director Dan Sowers and the championship players is Major League Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, who revived the national program that year after a one-summer hiatus, with a $50,000 pledge of funds from pro baseball.

March 23, 1929

When the Emory River floods the town of Harriman, Tenn., power is knocked out, freight trains and factories are washed away, dozens drown, and a concrete bridge collapses. An 8-foot wall of water blasts through Harriman, and members of Newman-Davis American Legion Post 53 are sworn in as police officers, patrol the town and area, search for survivors, create a relief shelter, feed refugees and work with the Red Cross for 11 straight days and nights.

Summer 1929

Every U.S. state and the District of Columbia fields an American Legion Baseball program.

1929

The Legion’s commitment to what would become known as its national security pillar begins to take clear shape in 1929 when two committees – Military Affairs and Aeronautics – are
consolidated into one National Security Committee. That committee grows to its present-day form, as a full commission, by action of the National Executive Committee in 1947 and the 1948 National Convention.

“The American Legion has finished its first decade of unselfish service to the disabled, the war widows and orphans and to the community, state and nation. It has entered its second decade of service with increased strength and renewed vigor. It has taken its place as a great national institution.”

- Paul V. McNutt, National Commander of the Legion, Sept. 30, 1929, at the 11th National Convention, in Louisville

Oct. 2, 1929

The American Legion’s Committee on National Defense recommends a “progressive program for training the youth of our nation in rifle marksmanship.” The committee calls for local posts to organize competitions and have the program supervised by the national Americanism Commission “to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to and security to the community, state and nation.”

Dec. 1, 1929

American Legion posts nationwide begin sponsoring soup kitchens to feed the hungry during the Depression. Post 81 in New Jersey serves more than 14,000 meals in less than 15 months. Posts in Memphis, Tenn., provide food, fuel and clothing to more than 12,000 needy residents. Hundreds more posts provide necessities for needy members of their communities in the years to come.

Dec. 23, 1929

The American Legion-supported “Rogers hospital bill” (so-called due to tireless advocacy from Rep. Edith Nourse-Rogers, R-Mass.) commits $16 million to construct federal veterans hospitals nationwide. At this time, frustrated veterans are waiting for health care throughout the country, including a list of 14,000 patients at one hospital alone. With only 53 designated veterans hospitals nationwide, tuberculosis and mental illness are widespread among veterans who are relegated to insane asylums, jails and tuberculosis colonies in deserts.

“I have been very glad to sign the bill authorizing the construction over a term of years of further hospitals for war veterans. The load seems likely to still further increase, and it is desirable that we should know the extent of it, and the policies which should be pursued. We are also in need of more coordination between different government agencies engaged in hospitalization.”

- President Herbert Hoover after signing H.R. 234, known as the Rogers veterans hospitalization bill, Dec. 23, 1929
1930 - 1939
**1930**

Former American Legion National Publicity Director Marquis James, a prolific staff writer and editor for The American Legion Magazine, receives the Pulitzer Prize for biography with "The Raven: A Biography of Sam Houston." He would receive the prestigious award in the same category in 1938 for "The Life of Andrew Jackson, 2 Volumes." James had been an Army captain in the Great War.

**May 1930**

The American Legion signs an agreement with the Department of Labor to use local posts across the country to screen veterans for job placement.

**June 30, 1930**

American Legion Memorial Bridge is completed in Traverse City, Mich., crossing the Boardman River. It is placed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 2000.

**July 21, 1930**

The Veterans Administration is established after persistent pressure from The American Legion for one scrupulous, mission-driven federal agency to address the health-care, disability and pension benefits of veterans.

**Sept. 18, 1930**

Star singer Rudy Vallee leads the Maine American Legion delegation in a parade at the National Convention in Boston. An NBC radio broadcast of the parade reaches approximately 50 million listeners nationwide. An estimated 150,000 attend the convention, which at the time ranks as the largest convention of any kind in U.S. history.

**Oct. 6-9, 1930**

In a written report to the 12th National Convention of The American Legion in Boston, newly appointed National Marksmanship Director Frank J. Schneller of Wisconsin says 188 American Legion rifle clubs have been organized and chartered, including 77 in 1930 alone, with programs in all but 17 departments.

**Nov. 11, 1930**

Philadelphia celebrates Armistice Day for the first time with a football between an American Legion all-star team and the Quantico Marines. The Philadelphia Council of The American Legion invites some 12,000 high school students to the game, which the Legion team wins on a long pass play in the final seconds. Some 40,000 spectators take in the game at Franklin Field, and proceeds are divided between the Marines to help fund a school at Quantico and The American Legion for county welfare work.

**Summer 1931**

After a trip to Michigan to learn how that state’s highway patrol was using special lights for patrol cars – at a time of high auto fatality rates across the country – American Legion Post 37 Highway Committee member Phil Damon successfully tests such lights with the Ames, Iowa, Police Department, which adopts them as standard equipment.

**July 1, 1931**

Membership in The American Legion breaks 1 million for the first time.

**1932**

Top American Legion officers and staff fight on Capitol Hill to protect benefits for disabled veterans which are on the chopping block as part of the Economy Act.

**May 1932**

World War I veterans in Portland, Ore., begin the movement known as the "bonus march." They gather momentum, crossing the country, collecting thousands of other veterans, many of them destitute, to demand early adjusted compensation for their wartime service, the so-called "bonus." Bonds to cover the opportunity costs of those who served during the war were set to mature in 1945, but the Depression fuels a desperate call for early payment. The American Legion is divided on the matter of the bonuses and calls for peace and order when veterans descend on Washington, D.C., where they are ultimately turned back by U.S. military forces led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur. More than 43,000, including 17,000 World War I veterans, are estimated to have participated in the march, which influences Herbert Hoover’s defeat in the presidential election that year to Franklin D. Roosevelt. A year later, a second attempted bonus march is halted by a loosening of restrictions on Civilian Conservation Corps workers.

“We believe that America will never seek a war and that a war will never seek a prepared America.”

- American Legion National Defense Committee Chairman Albert Cox, North Carolina, reporting to the 14th National Convention, Portland, Ore., September 1932

**Sept. 12-15, 1932**

Sons of The American Legion is founded at The American Legion National Convention in Portland, Ore., following three years of study by national committees. Within 10 years, SAL membership surpasses 37,000. In June 1933, Bruce P. Robinson Squadron 133 in Indianapolis is credited as the first local Sons of The American Legion squadron.

**March 10, 1933**

American Legion members in southern California spring into action following a deadly earthquake in Long Beach. Legionnaires provide food, water, emergency law enforcement, first aid and shelter. An American Legion building is used as a field mortuary for 47 dead.

**June 6, 1933**

The Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933 is signed into law, laying the groundwork for the U.S. Employment Service and establishes a nationwide network of offices dedicated to finding employment for veterans.

**1933**

Under economic stress from the Great Depression, Major League Baseball pulls its annual sponsorship of Amer-
ican Legion Baseball. Americanism Director Dan Sowers turns to Chicago Daily News publisher Frank Knox, a former American Legion department commander and future World War II Secretary of the Navy. Knox donates $5,000 to American Legion Baseball and writes letters imploring other publishers around the country to help. The Omaha World-Tribune, the San Francisco Chronicle, the Indianapolis News, the New Orleans Item-Tribune and the Atlanta Journal combine to raise $28,500 in addition to Knox’s gift.

Nov. 17, 1933
Through a National Executive Committee resolution, The American Legion formally opposes diplomatic recognition of the communist Soviet Union as the legal government of the people of Russia.

March 28, 1934
The Legion records one of its most significant legislative victories ever by driving forward Public Law 141, which is vetoed by President Roosevelt but later overridden by Congress, protecting disabled veterans and their benefits from federal budget cuts under the Economy Act.

“If all children of veterans of the World War could be born into homes of plenty and reared in the comforts and advantages of life, there would be no child welfare problem. But there are the disabled veterans, who never had a full chance to provide for their children. There are the increasing numbers of youngsters to whom Daddy is only a memory. From many homes, both parents are gone, and orphans have to look elsewhere for support and nurture. Misfortune strikes, hunger threatens, poverty intrudes through the back door.”

- Orland K. Armstrong, American Legion Department of Missouri Child Welfare Committee Chairman, writing in the July 1934 American Legion Monthly, during the heart of the Great Depression

Oct. 22, 1934
The American Legion National Convention in Miami, Fla., is conducted in open air. Policy and legislative direction on the adjusted compensation bonuses, an issue that has divided the Legion, is the convention’s most pressing concern. Future National Commander Harry Colmey, who would later draft the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, leads a committee to forge new legislation, approved at the convention, to call for the federal government to fully and immediately pay the bonuses, bonds to compensate veterans for their wartime service, due to mature in 1945.

Nov. 23, 1934
American Legion Past National Commander James Drain is appointed to serve both as the organization’s national treasurer and as national judge advocate at the same time.

Dec. 31, 1934
The Gary, Indiana, American Legion Auxiliary unit reports having served more than 36,000 meals to under-nourished children in 1934 alone.

Jan. 14, 1935
U.S. Rep. Fred M. Vinson, a Kentucky Legionnaire, introduces The American Legion’s bill to fully and immediately pay the adjusted compensation “bonuses” to veterans of the Great War and replace the original 1924 legislation that had established interest-bearing bonds that would mature in 1945.

Jan. 21, 1935
American Legion Legislative Committee Vice Chairman John Thomas Taylor appears on the cover of TIME Magazine. The World War I combat veteran who participated in the Paris Caucus of 1919 goes on to become the Legion’s chief lobbyist in Washington and fights off Depression-driven proposed cuts in veterans benefits. Believed to have worked to pass more than 600 bills to assist veterans, Taylor is later recalled to active duty in World War II, promoted to brigadier general and serves under Gen. George S. Patton in Africa, Italy and France.

Jan. 24, 1935
Child movie star Shirley Temple, 6 years old, becomes the youngest “honorary colonel” and official “little sister” of American Legion Post 43 in Hollywood. The honor is bestowed on top Hollywood performers who support the military and veterans. She is, at the time, one of the most beloved stars in America and a symbol of hope for the future during the Great Depression.

Feb. 11-12, 1935
Springfield, Ill., American Legion Post 32 leads what becomes a national tradition – the annual Pilgrimage to the Tomb of Abraham Lincoln on the anniversary of his birthday. Conceived to honor the 16th president of the United States and veterans of the Civil War still living in Springfield at the time, the pilgrimage invites The American Legion national commander, American Legion Auxiliary national president and Sons of The American Legion national commander from that point forward, on an annual basis.

1935
The Major League Club Owners Association restores $20,000 in funding to American Legion Baseball.

June 23, 1935
Legionnaires Harold Card and Hayes Kennedy organize the first American Legion Boys State at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield. Meant to counter the Soviet Union’s communist Young Pioneer camps, Boys State quickly catches on as a program to teach young Americans their rights, privileges and responsibilities as franchised citizens, as they set up their own city, county and state governments and elect representatives. Each participant is instructed in the duties of public office, learning its function, powers and limitations.

Sept. 23-26, 1935
Delegates at The American Legion National Convention pass Resolution 205 opposing Nazism, communism and fascism, all of which are gaining steam
in Europe, recruiting adherents in the United States and ultimately leading the world to war.

Jan. 27, 1936
Congress overrides President Roosevelt’s veto of the Adjusted Compensation Payment Act – a redrafted version of The American Legion’s bill that had been introduced by U.S. Rep. Fred M. Vinson. The House had passed the measure 356-59 and the Senate approved it 74-16, enough support to override an expected veto from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt’s Jan. 24 veto is quickly overridden. Immediately following the law’s enactment, American Legion National Commander Ray Murphy sends by airmail the forms necessary for veterans to file for the payments and broadcasts to a national radio audience the procedure for doing so. By April 25, 1936, approximately 2.9 million applications for the bonds are filed by veterans.

May 6, 1937
After a study of the different department styles of uniform caps, the National Executive Committee approves a resolution specifying that caps be worn by officers on all levels, and the blue cap with gold lettering is the standard for rank-and-file membership.

Jan. 19 – March 11, 1937
The American Legion raises over $250,000 and delivers it to the Red Cross to help victims of floods on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. As with the 1927 flood, American Legion posts and volunteers transform into relief centers and emergency workers in the devastated areas, distributing some 5,000 tons of food and 3,000 tons of clothing. Hundreds of Legionnaire-owned boats are deployed to search for victims, and a mobile radio unit from a Jamestown, NY, American Legion post is among many called into service when other communications are knocked out. More than 1 million lose their homes in the floods, which take the lives of approximately 350 people.

“if other people and other nations prefer communism, fascism or Hitlerism, that is their business. Our business is preserving the form and institutions of government which in a mere century and a half have carried us to a place of leadership and contentment.”
- American Legion National Commander Harry W. Colmery, in a live Memorial Day broadcast on CBS Radio, May 31, 1937

June 1937
A 31-year-old war horse named Sandy is granted membership in William G. Haan Red Arrow American Legion Post 151 in Flint, Mich. The horse, which was attached to Michigan’s 32nd Division during World War I, continued to serve after the war with the 106th Division, Michigan Cavalry, National Guard. More than 800 Michigan National Guardsmen were on hand when Sandy’s membership emblem was hung around his neck.

July 2, 1937
The American Legion fights for, and gets, approval for 24-hour guarding of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. The “sentinels” of the tomb are members of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, known as “The Old Guard,” which originated in the Revolutionary War. From midnight July 2, 1937, through today, the tomb is continuously guarded, regardless of conditions.

Sept. 21, 1937
The American Legion National Convention Parade in New York City draws national media coverage and lasts nearly 18 hours. More than 250,000 marchers and spectators line up for the event.

Sept. 18, 1938
Paramount releases the 60-minute feature film “Sons of the Legion,” featuring such future stars as Donald O’Connor (“Singin in the Rain”) and William Frawley (Fred Mertz in TV’s “I Love Lucy”), about a group of young men who cannot start a Sons of The American Legion squadron in their local post because they discover their father received a dishonorable discharge.

June 30, 1939
The Sons of The American Legion reaches a pre-World War II membership high of 72,633. A large percentage of those members would go on to serve in World War II and become members of The American Legion, leading to a sharp decline in membership that would hit a low of 5,631 in 1953. In the years and decades to follow, the Sons would grow steadily, to an all-time high of more than 365,000 members by the end of 2017.

Columbia Pictures releases “Squadron of Honor,” a murder mystery Hollywood film set at an American Legion National Convention. Promoted as “100,000 Legionnaires on a Manhunt!” the film stars Don Terry as “Blaine,” a young Legionnaire who wants to find the real culprit after police wrongly suspect a pacifist munitions executive. The film includes actual footage from an American Legion convention.

“Many of us who served in war so that democracy might survive are perplexed by the things that we see in the world today. To act intelligently as citizens, it is necessary that you shall have practical knowledge of the manner in which your government is operated. It is necessary that you shall be given the means of determining for yourselves that our form of government made it possible to build the greatest nation in existence today.”
- American Legion Past National Adjutant Russell G. Creviston, speaking in 1938 to delegates of the most recent American Legion Boys State programs, which by this time has increased to 18 throughout the nation
Sept. 25, 1939
As war engulfs Europe, The American Legion National Convention in Chicago passes a resolution to immediately expand the U.S. Armed Forces “to maintain our neutrality.” The American Legion’s top priority is clear: strengthen a Depression-depleted military in the event the United States is called to war, as it was in 1917.

Dec. 19, 1939
The U.S. War Department accepts transfer of the commercial vessel American Legion and begins using her as USAT American Legion, a troop-transport ship.

“The American Legion is an important bulwark of our national security. Today your organization takes on an added significance in a period of emergency when all real Americans are united in a determination to protect our nation. Fortunately, the nation can depend upon you. You have been proven in the crucible of experience.”
- FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, speaking to the 23rd American Legion National Convention, Boston, 1940

“A nation that neglects to strengthen the security of its families, on which the future soundness of its own citizenship will be founded, cannot long maintain itself as a democracy.”
- Emma Puschner, longtime director of The American Legion Child Welfare Division, writing in the National Legionnaire, March 1941
1940 - 1949
April 18, 1941

Future U.S. Sen. Frank Church of Boise, Idaho, wins The American Legion National Oratorical Contest in Charleston, S.C. For his top-judged oration, “The American Way of Life,” he receives a $4,000 scholarship, goes on to serve in the Army during World War II, and attends Stanford University where he receives his law degree. He would go on to serve more than 30 years in the U.S. Senate, including his final two years, 1979-81, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Aug. 22, 1941

The U.S. Navy commissions the USS American Legion, and her World War II career begins, including landing some of the first troops at Guadalcanal, supplying a hospital, conducting rescue missions and training exercises. American Legion receives two battle stars during World War II before she is decommissioned in 1946 and sold for scrap two years later.

“If this is our war, let’s get in. If this is not our war, let’s get out. Let the President and the Congress tell the people that this is our war, or it is not our war. Then there will be unity in America.”

- American Legion Past National Commander and former U.S. Ambassador Hanford MacNider, speaking three months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941; a veteran of the Mexico Border War, World War I and commanding general of the Buna Task Force in New Guinea during World War II, MacNider was twice wounded, and later led the 158th Regimental Combat Team before retiring as a major general in 1951

Dec. 7, 1941

Japan’s attack at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, brings the United States into World War II. Soon, more than 150,000 members of The American Legion (World War I veterans and career officers) return to wartime service. In addition, nearly 400,000 Legionnaires serve as air-raid wardens, 300,000 as volunteer police officers and 50,000 as volunteer firefighters to fill wartime needs in their communities.

Jan. 1, 1942

The American Legion Magazine, published just three weeks after the Pearl Harbor attack, features a call to action for all members of the organization to “give our utmost to our beloved country.” National Commander Lynn Stambaugh reports in the magazine that he has assured President Roosevelt that the Legion stands ready to serve under the direction of civil and military authorities.

June 22, 1942

Congress passes Public Law 77-623, Chapter 435 – U.S. Flag Code. The federal guidance for rules on the display and care of the U.S. flag are nearly identical to those established by The American Legion flag conferences of 1923 and 1924. Many states, municipalities and schools have already enacted flag codes, based on the Legion conferences and massive promotions through the years, by the time Congress codifies them in federal law.

May 1, 1942

The American Legion National Executive Committee passes a resolution, as wartime demand soars, to expand local blood-donation efforts across the country. Thus is born the Legion’s organization’s No. 1 priority. The Legion eventually becomes the No. 1 donor of blood to the Red Cross throughout the nation.

Sept. 19-21, 1942

The American Legion National Convention votes to change the Preamble to the organization’s Constitution for the first and only time during its first century, pluralizing “association” and “war” to “associations” and “wars” to reflect the fighting of World War II and the imminent addition of a new generation of veterans in the organization.

Oct. 29, 1942

Congress approves a change in The American Legion’s federal charter that will make eligible for membership World War II personnel and honorably discharged veterans who served in the U.S. military beginning Dec. 7, 1941.

Feb. 3, 1943

The USAT Dorchester is struck by a German torpedo and sinks in the north Atlantic Ocean. Onboard are four Army chaplains – Methodist Church minister George L. Fox; Reform Rabbi Alexander D. Goode; Reformed Church in America minister Rev. Clark V. Poling and Roman Catholic priest Father John P. Washington – who give up their own life jackets to others. They drown after helping dozens of soldiers onto life boats. Their final act is a prayer together, arms locked. Of the 904 onboard, 675 perish. The bravery of the four chaplains leads The American Legion to call for their Medal of Honor recognition. American Legion posts worldwide continue to conduct annual Four Chaplains Day ceremonies in early February to honor them.

June 20, 1943

Ten crew members of the USS American Legion lose their lives near New Zealand’s Paekakariki Beach after their landing craft – which had been separated from the ship during a fierce storm – capsizes. Fifteen survive, and the deadly incident prompts orders requiring all Navy personnel on landing crafts to wear life vests.

Sept. 23, 1943

With more than 600 unpassed bills languishing in Congress that aim to address the needs of disabled World War II veterans coming home to a lack of support at a rate of about 75,000 per month, newly elected American Legion National Commander Warren Atherton of California makes the correction of this problem the organization’s No. 1 priority. The Legion
soon determines that one omnibus bill is needed to tackle the various educational and economic needs of transitioning war veterans, disabled or not.

Nov. 26, 1943
American Legion National Commander Warren Atherton calls on service officers nationwide to collect and wire testimonies of cases where newly discharged, disabled veterans are lacking government support. In less than 24 hours, 1,536 such testimonies arrive at national headquarters.

Nov. 29, 1943
Armed with hundreds of case studies from across the country, representing nearly every congressional district, American Legion National Commander Warren Atherton presents to the House Veterans Affairs Committee voice after voice of disabled GIs awaiting word on benefits, unable to get medical treatment, relying on their families, churches, charities and Legion posts for whatever help they can get. His goal is to gain support of an omnibus bill to assist military veterans in the readjustment process to civilian life.

“Even a convict who is discharged from prison is given some money and a suit of clothes. The veteran, when he is discharged from a hospital or separation center, is given neither.”
- American Legion National Commander Warren Atherton of California, testifying before Congress in November 1943

Mid-December 1943
American Legion Past National Commander Harry W. Colmery consolidates - writing in longhand on Mayflower Hotel stationery in Washington, D.C. – dozens of resolutions and congressional measures into 10 key provisions that become the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, soon called the “GI Bill of Rights.” The 10 provisions would be: educational opportunity, vocational training, readjustment compensation, home and business loans, discharge review, adequate hospitalization, prompt settlement of disability claims, mustering-out pay, veteran employment services and concentration of all veteran services under the Veterans Administration.

“Never again do we want to see the honor and glory of our nation fade to the extent that her men of arms, with despondent heart and palsied limb, totter from door to door, bowing their souls to the frozen bosom of reluctant charity.”
- American Legion Past National Commander Harry Colmery, who in December 1943 assembled from multiple resolutions and proposals what would become the 10 planks of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944

March 17, 1944
The American Legion’s Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 unanimously passes in the Senate.

1944
Emma Puschner, director of The American Legion’s Child Welfare Division, appears as herself on the popular radio program “The Guiding Light” to discuss solutions to juvenile delinquency problems throughout the country.

May 18, 1944
The House, after a racially motivated debate over the “52-20” provision to pay all newly discharged veterans $20 a week for a year, finally passes the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, by a unanimous vote. The American Legion does not budge from its position that the benefits must apply equally to all honorably discharged veterans, regardless of skin color.

June 6, 1944
American Legion founding leader Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., 56, lands on Utah Beach in the first wave of the Allied D-Day invasion of World War II. His Higgins boat misses the landing area by approximately a quarter-mile, and Roosevelt, Jr., is famously quoted as telling his men, “That’s OK. We’ll start the war from here!”

June 9-10, 1944
The American Legion works feverishly to find U.S. Rep. John Gibson, who is at home in Georgia while the fate of the GI Bill is hung up in a House-Senate conference committee in Washington, deadlocked 3-3. If the tie cannot be broken, the legislation will die in committee. The Legion gets through to an operator in Atlanta who calls Gibson’s home every five minutes until he answers at 11 p.m. The Legion, assisted by military and police escorts, take Gibson on 90-mile high-speed trip through a rainstorm to the Jacksonville, Fla., airport where he is flown to Washington, arriving shortly after 6 a.m. He casts the vote to send the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 to the president’s desk and promises to make public those who vote against it, along with their reasons.

June 22, 1944
President Franklin D. Roosevelt, flanked by The American Legion special committee that drafted the bill and supportive members of Congress, signs the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944.

July 12, 1944
Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., and founding leader of The American Legion, dies of a heart attack in Normandy, France. He is buried in a temporary cemetery at Ste. Mere-Eglise. His body is later moved the Normandy American Cemetery at Colleville sur Mer.

July 18, 1944
Past American Legion Department of France and Paris Post 1 Commander George Aubrey is shot and killed by Nazi soldiers, during World War II German occupation of Paris, while on patrol with fighters of the French Resistance.

June 27, 1944
The Veterans Preference Hiring Act is signed into law after fierce lobbying from The American Legion. The battle to give veterans additional points when pursuing federal employment had gone on for several years, dating back to the 1920s. The Veterans Preference Hiring
Act is seen as a breakthrough and a foundation for future veteran employment policy by the U.S. government.

**Sept. 20, 1944**

The 26th American Legion National Convention passes Resolution 138, primarily as a plan to educate and enthuise World War II veterans about the organization they are rapidly joining. Summarized as “at least two weeks” of an “intensive course of study for selected World War I and World War II Legionnaires,” the first actual American Legion College, with a class of 63, would not begin until 1946 at the national headquarters in Indianapolis. By 1954, American Legion departments are conducting their own Legion Colleges, which become the preferred method of leadership training, and the national program is suspended. Forty-five years later, national American Legion College is resurrected and continues today.

**Sept. 28, 1944**

American Legion founder Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., is posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on D-Day at Utah Beach, having repeatedly led groups of soldiers across the beach and past the seawall, without concern for his own safety, under fire.

**October 1944**

Building off a program begun in the aftermath of World War I, the Ford Motor Co., working in unison with The American Legion at “Camp Legion” (a 500-acre facility for training amputees and other disabled veterans), reports that it is employing more than 11,300 veterans with disabilities. Veterans at Camp Legion, according to promotional materials, stay at the facility “growing strong, preparing themselves for more skilled jobs (until they are) mentally, physically and skillfully ready to take a job.”

**Nov. 8, 1944**

Germans seize, pillage and set ablaze the French town of St. Die-des-Vosges, where a delegation of 200 Legionnaires had unveiled a plaque in 1921 commemorating the place where the term “America” was first published on a map in 1507. A week after the German rampage six months before the end of World War II, American troops arrived to find the ruins, followed later by many of the women and children of the town who had been left homeless and were starving. Upon learning this, American Legion posts and units throughout the United States collect hundreds of packages of food, clothing and supplies and ship it urgently to the town.

“Your subcommittee has considered the foregoing questions and associated contingencies and recommends disapproval of this venture as not being in the interest of The American Legion.”

- American Legion Resolutions Subcommittee Chairman William G. McKinley, reporting to the National Executive on Nov. 18, 1944, following a proposal from Voiture 145 of the 40 & 8, an American Legion subsidiary organization, to purchase the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The national commander was encouraged to take the matter to the national 40 & 8 leadership “to dissuade Voiture 145 in carrying out this project.”

**Jan. 22, 1945**

Lt. Eric Fisher Wood, Jr., of the 106th Infantry Division – son of American Legion founding member Brig. Gen. Eric Fisher Wood, who led the Paris Caucus and patented the organization’s emblem in 1919 – is killed after over a month of stealthy battle and leadership in the final months of World War II. The Legion founder’s son is credited with killing more than 200 enemy fighters, leading a group of Americans who had slipped into the forest and operated without communications, listed as missing in action for nearly a month. He is posthumously awarded the Cross of the Knight of the Order of Leopold with Gold Palm, Belgium’s equivalent to the U.S. Medal of Honor. Brig. Gen. Eric Fisher Wood served on active duty, having been recalled at the beginning of World War II, through the war’s end.

**April 12, 1945**

Harry S. Truman, a member of Tirey J. Ford American Legion Post 21 in Independence, Mo., becomes the first Legionnaire to serve as president of the United States. Vice president under Franklin D. Roosevelt, Truman steps in after Roosevelt’s death, during the final weeks and months of World War II, seeing it end in Europe on May 8, 1945, and in the Pacific Theater Aug. 14, 1945. Truman becomes the first – and so far, only – world leader to authorize the use of atomic weapons, ending the war in Japan. He later authorizes U.S. military forces to defend South Korea in what becomes the Korean War and during his presidency is credited with desegregating the U.S. military.

“Congress was made to see that a very sizeable and vocal proportion of American womanhood, at least, was not in favor of trusting the future of the United States to the good will of nations like Germany and Japan. The pacifist organizations could no longer claim the solid support of American women.”

- American Legion Auxiliary National Secretary Gwendolyn Wiggins MacDowell, reflecting in 1945 on the Auxiliary’s position of support for military preparedness and The American Legion’s national defense efforts between the world wars.

**May 8, 1945**

Nazi Germany surrenders, unconditionally, to the Allies of World War II. Known from that point forward as V-E Day, American Legion posts worldwide recognize the end of World War II in the European Theater.

**Aug. 6, 1945**

The United States drops the first atomic bomb, code-named “Little Boy” on the Japan city of Hiroshima. President Truman “a rain of ruin the like of which has never been seen on this earth” if Japan does not surrender immediately.
Aug. 9, 1945
The United States drops the second atomic bomb, code-named "Fat Man" on the Japan city of Nagasaki.

Aug. 10, 1945
The Japanese Foreign Ministry announces Japan's intention to surrender unconditionally, provided the emperor is not removed.

Aug. 11, 1945
The Allies accept Japan's surrender, ending World War II.

Aug. 14, 1945
Allied nations announce to the public the surrender of Japan, as does the emperor. The date is proclaimed as V-J (Victory-Japan) Day in newspapers worldwide.

Sept. 2, 1945
President Truman declares this date as the official V-J Day, the date upon which Japan signs surrender papers in a ceremony onboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

Nov. 18-21, 1945

Nov. 21, 1945
Former Illinois Gov. John Stelle, a key figure in the effort to pass the GI Bill, is elected national commander of The American Legion.

"The men of World War I, through The American Legion, created the Veterans Administration by recommending and demanding its passage by Congress – the same as we did the G.I. Bill of Rights. As leader of this team of veterans of both World Wars. I say now that The American Legion demands a liberal interpretation of these laws for the benefit of the veteran."
- Newly elected American Legion National Commander John Stelle, in his acceptance speech at the 27th National Convention, in Chicago

April 8, 1946
Gen. Omar Bradley, at this time head of the Veterans Administration, establishes an advisory council, led by The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Veterans of Foreign Wars to develop a massive new volunteer network for VA health-care facilities. Out of this comes the VA Volunteer Service (VAVS). More than 7,000 American Legion members now contribute more than 700,000 volunteer hours a year in VAVS. The overall program saves an estimated $20 million a year in federal spending.

May 29, 1946
Dr. Leonard Rowntree, chairman of The American Legion's Medical Advisory Committee, presents a check for $50,000 to a little-known and financially struggling non-profit organization called the American Heart Association. The Legion's National Rehabs Committee had been authorized to spend $25,000 to help the AHA, and the American Legion Auxiliary raises $25,000 to match it. At the time, as heart disease is accounting for one in four U.S. deaths, The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary seize the opportunity to "inaugurate a nationwide program in the study, prevention and treatment of rheumatic heart disease." The funding leads to American Legion-sponsored heart research and provides the AHA a springboard to life-saving work that continues today.

June 30, 1946
Omaha, Neb., American Legion Post 1 achieves a membership of 22,966, believed to be the largest local post in the history of the organization. Lincoln, Neb., Post 3 hits an all-time high of 9,287 the same year, also among the biggest local posts of the Legion's first century.

July 1, 1946
American Legion membership hits a national all-time high of 3,326,556.

Aug. 9, 1946
President Harry Truman, a life member of The American Legion, greets participants in The American Legion's Boys Forum of National Government, a federal version of the successful Boys State programs across the country, on the final day of the event. The first forum is conducted at American University in Washington, D.C. Three years later, in 1949, the program is renamed American Legion Boys Nation.

Jan. 3, 1946
The American Legion pushes for, and gets, the Veterans Administration to introduce the Department of Medicine and Surgery, forerunner of the Veterans Health Service and Research Administration, to conduct research, develop and introduce new prosthetic limbs.

Sept. 29, 1946
A.R. McAlester Memorial Band of Harrowed Post 5 in Joliet, Ill., claims its first Lemuel Bolles Trophy, awarded annually to the first-place band in The American Legion National Convention contest. Post 5 would go on to win the trophy 22 of the next 24 years, and Joliet Post 1284 would claim first place at the convention 11 times between 1971 and 1997, and Joliet Post 1080 would win it in 2003, 2006 and 2007, making Joliet the perennial home of American Legion band championships.

Sept. 30, 1946
Famed entertainer and devoted USO touring star Bob Hope receives The American Legion's Distinguished Service Medal during the 28th American Legion National Convention in San Francisco. There, American Legion Past National Commander John R. Quinn calls Hope "the personal jester of every man and woman in uniform ... Wherev-
er they were – in foxhole, Quonset hut, jungle or warship – he administered the toxin of cheer and laughter … He has flown one-half million miles to perform in the din of the front lines as well as in the hush of hospitals.”

Aug. 9-14, 1947
The American Legion Auxiliary conducts its first Girls Nation program in Washington, D.C. Legionnaire President Harry Truman greets the participants of the program’s first class of future leaders.

Nov. 1, 1947
The American Legion Child Welfare Committee is elevated to commission status.

Feb. 4, 1948
The American Legion National Security Commission meets for the first time, in Dayton, Ohio, following a 1947 reorganization that gave the new commission supervision of six standing committees: aeronautics, civil defense, merchant marine, military affairs, naval affairs and universal military training.

Nov. 22, 1948
Gen. Frederick Townsend Ward Post 1 in Shanghai, China – named for a Massachusetts-born mercenary who was revered by the Mandarins during the Taiping Rebellion of 1862 – goes into exile. As tensions mount in the aftermath of World War II, and communist rule is assumed, officers hide, camouflage and then ship to National Headquarters in Indianapolis all post records and documents. Since then, China Post 1 has been operating “in exile” and calling its home “wherever two or more members meet.” It becomes the largest post attached to the Legion’s Department of France, with more than 1,200 members worldwide.

“Nothing was said about the care of children in the formative meetings of The American Legion. The subject developed into a major Legion program by sheer natural law.”

“Build America Plan.” Craig, the first national commander whose service came entirely during World War II, is honored by Gov. Henry F. Schricker who proclaims Nov. 3 as George N. Craig Day.

No. 3, 1949
Newly elected American Legion National Commander George N. Craig’s homecoming event in Brazil, Ind., (population 9,000 at the time) includes a parade that extends six miles in length and draws more than 30,000 visitors. The event gives Commander Craig a national media stage to promote the Legion's community-improvement

for the people of the United States, through national preparedness.”
- Perry Brown, Texas, chairman of the newly organized National Security Commission, reporting at the 30th American Legion National Convention, Oct. 18-21, 1948, in Miami, where Brown would be elected national commander

Jan. 1, 1949
American Legion National Commander Perry Brown of Texas serves as grand marshal at the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena.
1950 - 1959
Jan. 28-29, 1950

American Legion National Commander George Craig calls an “All-American Conference” and invites other organizations to join in the effort to put up a united front against communism. Sixty-six groups participate, sending more than 150 delegates representing an estimated 60 million members of various associations.

May 1950

The American Legion Magazine publishes a 16-page, point-by-point objection to the Hoover Commission argument to reduce federal support of veterans — including 16,000 hospital beds in a construction program already under way — and to restrict VA health care only to those who came home with service-connected disabilities. This report becomes the organization’s official position on the Hoover Commission and its Citizens Committee, which was working to enact cost-cutting measures through Congress and executive orders. The American Legion launches a nationwide campaign to protect veterans benefits and health care from the Hoover Commission intention to “economize” and reduce federal spending. The campaign is in full swing and making headlines from Washington to rural America when, on June 25, at 4 a.m. Korean time, communist forces cross the 38th Parallel and invade the Republic of Korea. Within days of the invasion, U.S. military forces, under the blue and white flag of the United Nations, are back at war. The American Legion’s battle to protect the VA from a massive, budget-driven reduction would be delayed but by no means canceled.

May 4, 1950

American Legion donations help launch the National Association for Mental Health.

Aug. 20, 1950

A new American Legion National Headquarters building is dedicated in Indianapolis. The 100,000-square-foot $2.5 million structure greatly expands capacity for the nation’s largest veterans organization, on State of Indiana property known as “American Legion Mall.”

Sept. 13, 1950

Backed by a $25,000 grant approved by The American Legion National Executive Committee on May 4, 1950, the National Association for Mental Health is established.

Oct. 12, 1950

Erle Cocke, Jr., of Dawson, Ga., who was wounded three times and escaped German captivity three times during World War II — once having been shot multiple times and left for dead among the corpses of his fellow soldiers — becomes the youngest American Legion national commander. He is 29 years old when elected at the 32nd National Convention, in Los Angeles. His father, Egbert Erle Cocke, Sr., was an American Legion national vice commander in 1922 and 1923.

Dec. 28, 1950

Public Law 895 is enacted, extending American Legion membership eligibility to veterans of the Korean War.

May 9, 1951

A 21-year-old combat veteran of the Korean War is denied admission into the Tucson, Ariz., VA Hospital because, as the director tells the media and American Legion members who take up the veteran’s cause, “no returned veteran from Korea is eligible for hospital benefits unless he has been discharged from the service because of a duty disability.” This nationally publicized story leads National Commander Erle Cocke, Jr., to call on Congress to expand VA health-care services, disability benefits and pensions to veterans of the Korean War to an equal footing as those received by World War II veterans. A joint resolution to that effect is swiftly passed and signed into law May 11, 1951.

“We are balancing on the perilous brink of World War III ... The forensic vapors of rhetoric will not run the engines of war. Nor will they train our boys.”

- American Legion National Commander George N. Craig, speaking to CBS about the need for Universal Military Training, July 23, 1950, less than one month after the North Korean invasion of South Korea

June 19, 1951

President Truman signs into law the nation’s first-ever Universal Military Training and Service Act, introduced earlier in the year as S. 1, The American Legion’s long-desired solution to a lack of wartime preparedness. A massive grassroots lobbying effort and support campaign, as with the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, comes from the Hearst newspapers and helps push the measure through both houses of Congress at the same time U.S. troops are fighting on the Korean peninsula. For more than 30 years, The American Legion had fought for UMT — which was not to be confused with UMS, or compulsory Universal Military Service. The bill may have been passed into law, but implementation would require further legislation that would prevent it from full and immediate adoption. Civilian or military authority questions, the shelf life of the program (the Legion sought for it to be permanent) and its compatibility with the Selective Service mired implementation legislation and on March 4, 1952, the House sends the long-awaited UMT enactment legislation into the vortex of more study.

“Recommit this bill for further study? How many years of study have we had on this subject? Do we not have the moral fortitude and courage to meet this issue? If we are not ready today, when will we be ready?”

- Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, arguing against further study of UMT after a move to defeat its implementation altogether loses by a narrow 196-176 margin on March 4, 1952, but a motion passes 236-162 later in the day to send it to the House Armed Services Committee ... for further study
Aug. 14, 1951
President Truman dedicates a 39,000-square-foot, seven-floor building at 1608 K Street in Washington, D.C., as the new American Legion National Headquarters in the nation's capital. Attached to the building's façade is a statue the national media called the "Sentinel of Freedom," which is a composite of a World War I doughboy and World War II GI. World War II Medal of Honor recipient Hulon B. Whittington was the model for the statue, which was sculpted in Bedford, Ind., transported and installed in Washington at a total cost of $5,200. Whittington, who as a platoon sergeant, led a courageous and death-defying defense against a German tank attack in France, was later commissioned as an officer and was a major in 1960 when he was assigned to Vietnam as an adviser to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. He died at age 47 and is laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery.

July 16, 1952
The Veterans Adjustment Act is signed into law as a readjustment benefits package for those who served in the U.S. Armed Forces during the Korean War. The 52-20 unemployment benefit is reduced to $26 for 26 weeks, rather than $20 a week for 52 weeks, as provided under the original GI Bill. Funds are also no longer dispersed directly to institutions but are paid to individual veterans at a flat rate of $110 per month, to cover tuition, fees, books and living expenses while they are at college.

Jan. 20, 1953
At the request of newly elected President Dwight Eisenhower, The American Legion organizes and leads the first of what becomes the "Salute to Heroes Inaugural Ball," inviting all living Medal of Honor recipients to greet the new president on the day the oath of office is taken. Eisenhower, a member of James R. Cutler American Legion Post 39 in Abilene, Kan., and Supreme Allied Commander-Europe in World War II, goes on to serve two full terms in the White House.

June 18, 1953
Persistent lobbying by The American Legion reverses a $279 million cut in VA health care. "It is just incredible that anybody would suggest breaking faith with the nation's disabled defenders at a time when battle casualties are still mounting," American Legion National Commander Lewis Gough says following the decision.

Aug. 30, 1953
"To foster and perpetuate in a social way the good fellowship between the veterans groups of the United States and Canada" a formal charter is issued by the Canadian Parliament establishes ANAVICUS (Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada – United States Unit). The organization raises funds for eight scholarships and funded a memorial in 1983 to honor American Legion Past National Commander Harry W. Colmery, which is displayed at National Headquarters in Indianapolis. The U.S. unit is formalized after less official connections between Canadian veterans and The American Legion, which began to take shape in 1948. ANAVICUS (Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada) is the oldest Canadian veterans group, tracing its roots back to 1840, formed by those who had served in the Napoleonic campaigns.

Oct. 15, 1953
An American Legion committee is approved to study the feasibility of a special fund for children's programs after former American Legion Department of Arkansas Commander Dr. Garland Murphy, Jr., offers to the national organization fractional rights to 10,000 acres of oil-rich land he owns in the Williston Basin of Montana and North Dakota. In return, Murphy asks that proceeds from the contribution be used solely to serve children. Out of this contribution is born the American Legion's Child Welfare Foundation.

July 9, 1954
The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc., is established as a separate non-profit corporation to benefit young people with physical, mental or environmental challenges.

Aug. 10, 1955
President Eisenhower signs into law the Reserve Forces Act of 1955, essentially the outcome of nearly 40 years of American Legion lobbying for Universal Military Training (UMT). The measure authorizes the president to call 1 million reservists up for active duty in a time of emergency and for a massive increase in personnel: nearly 3 million in the Ready Reserve and another 2 million in a Standby Reserve to go along with a nearly 2.9 million active-duty force. Seeing the law as
a step in the right direction but by no means compulsory UMT, American Legion posts nationwide meet with their schools to help recruit volunteers to join the Reserves and take in the mandatory six-month military training program that came with it.

“These former doughboys had vivid memories of what a lack of military training meant. Some recalled how they had reached the front-line trenches before being taught how to load their rifles, close the bolts, and attach bayonets.”

- The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989, Thomas Rumer, in reference to the renewed call for UMT after the Korean War began

1955

Thirty-year American Legion member U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles establishes a State Department American Legion post in Washington, D.C.

October 1955

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation, Inc., awards its first three grants, totaling $22,500, to the Delinquency Control Institute, the National Association for Retarded Children and the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness.

Aug. 3, 1956

President Eisenhower signs a bill to select and honor the unknown military personnel who died fighting in World War II and the Korean War, who will be added to the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery in 1958.

Oct. 27, 1957

“Responsible citizenship” is the theme for a year-long observance to honor what would have been the 100th birthday of President Theodore Roosevelt, born Oct. 27, 1858. A National Executive Committee resolution urges all departments and posts to plan and execute appropriate programs and ceremonies to honor the 26th president and his belief in a well-prepared, properly educated citizenry that is willing to voluntarily serve in whatever capacity is needed.

May 30, 1958

The remains of unknown soldiers from World War II and the Korean War are interred at Arlington National Cemetery, alongside their World War I comrade. President Eisenhower bestows upon them the Medal of Honor.

March 15, 1959

World War II “Purple Heart Girl” Frances Langford, a Hollywood singing and acting star, pays tribute to The American Legion’s 40th birthday on her NBC TV network show “Frances Langford Presents.” The one-hour episode features such guests as Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Jack Benny and Julie London.
1960 - 1969
Jan. 20, 1961
World War II Navy veteran John F. Kennedy, a member of Crosscup-Pishon American Legion Post 281 in Boston, is inaugurated as president of the United States. During the war, Kennedy had command of two patrol torpedo (PT) boats, the 109 and the 59. He survived an attack by a Japanese destroyer and swam to safety, towing along with him a badly burned member of his crew. After serving in Congress from 1947 until 1960, he is elected president, defeating another Legionnaire, Richard M. Nixon, in one of the closest presidential races in history.

April 19, 1961
World War II veteran Howard Anderson, commander of American Legion Post 1 in Havana, Cuba, is executed by a firing squad after a so-called “show trial” by the Castro regime. American Legion National Commander William R. Burke interrupts an official visit to the Department of New York to fly to Miami to lead approximately 2,500 Legionnaires in a memorial service for Anderson.

March 2, 1961
NBC’s Robert W. Sarnoff is first to receive The American Legion National Commander’s Public Relations Award.

July 23, 1962
Pitching phenomenon Bob Feller of Iowa – known as the “heater from Van Meter” – is the first alumnus of American Legion Baseball inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame at Cooperstown. A teen prodigy, he was a farm boy who could throw a curve ball at the age of 8 and was playing American Legion Baseball at 10. At 17, he would skip the minor leagues altogether, and sign with the Cleveland Indians in the majors. He took four years away from baseball after enlisting in the U.S. Navy during World War II – the first professional athlete to do so – and quickly returned to form after his tour of duty. He would ultimately pitch 3,827 innings over 18 seasons and hold the record for most strikeouts in a game, 18, at the time of his retirement. He threw three no-hit-shutouts and 12 one-hitters. Some of the game’s greatest hitters described him at the best pitcher in baseball history.

May 6, 1965
The National Executive Committee approves Resolution 46 stating that a Legionnaire is considered to be in uniform whenever wearing a Legion cap.

March 3, 1966
President Lyndon B. Johnson signs into law the Veterans Benefits Readjustment Act of 1966, the so-called “Cold War-Vietnam GI Bill.” The program, as unemployment among Vietnam War combat veterans was on the rise and making headlines, would go on to educate some 5.5 million Vietnam War veterans, 76 percent of whom used at least some portion of their college benefits.

“We are saying to the brave Americans who serve us in uniform, in camps and bases, in villages and jungles, that your country is behind you; that we support you; that you serve us in time of danger.”

- President Lyndon B. Johnson, at a White House ceremony to sign the Veterans Benefits Readjustment Act of 1966

Sept. 1, 1966
At The American Legion National Convention in Washington, D.C., delegates vote to extend membership eligibility to veterans who received honorable discharges since Aug. 5, 1964, welcoming in the Vietnam War generation.

July 25, 1967
Alan Keyes of San Antonio, Texas, the son of a Vietnam War veteran, follows his April 1967 American Legion National Oratorical Contest championship with election as president of American Legion Boys Nation three months later. At 16, he is the youngest national oratorical champion to date, and is the first youth to claim top honors in both Americanism programs. He goes on to earn two degrees from Harvard University, serves as a U.S. diplomat, author, broadcaster and three-time U.S. presidential candidate. In 1999, he receives The American Legion National Commander’s Public Relations Award. In 2018, he returns to the National Oratorical Contest to serve as a guest judge in the final competition.

Nov. 5, 1968
Richard M. Nixon, a U.S. Navy and Naval Reserve veteran of more than 20 years who served in the Pacific Theater of World War II and eventually retired as a lieutenant commander, is elected 37th president of the United States. A member of Whittier, Calif., American Legion Post 51, he is a frequent speaker at national American Legion conventions and events through his years of political office. He is now the namesake of American Legion Post 679 in Yorba Linda, Calif., which meets at the Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, on the same property as Nixon's childhood home.

**Nov. 24-30, 1968**

The American Legion joins forces with Indiana high school basketball coach Sam Wiley in the development and promotion of National Family Week, an effort adopted by multiple community and faith organizations to strengthen the American family at a time of increasing divorce rates.

**March 9, 1969**

The American Legion's national champion color guard from Chicago's First National Bank Post 985 and the Ray Block Orchestra appear on CBS' The Ed Sullivan Show to perform a special composition honoring the organization's 50th anniversary. Meredith Wilson, best known for having written the book, music and lyrics for the Broadway hit "The Music Man" is the composer of the anniversary piece, titled simply "The American Legion."

**March 15, 1969**

The U.S. Postal Service officially issues a 6-cent commemorative stamp to honor The American Legion's 50th anniversary. Sales of the stamp begin on March 17, the 50th anniversary of the end of the Paris Caucus that formed the organization.

**March 15, 1969**

Legionnaire President Richard M. Nixon flips the switch to permanently light the Tomb of the Unknowns and the amphitheater temple façade at Arlington National Cemetery. Nearly $200,000 was raised for the project, promoted as The American Legion's 50th anniversary Gift to the Nation.

**May 30, 1969**

Cabin John Bridge, which opened in 1962 to connect Fairfax County, Va., with Montgomery County, Md., across the Potomac River, is renamed American Legion Memorial Bridge during the organization's 50th anniversary commemoration. Today, nearly 250,000 travelers a day cross the bridge, which has five lanes in both directions, as part of Interstate 495, the Capital Beltway.

Poem recited by American Legion National Commander William C. Doyle, written by National Sergeant at Arms C. Howard Larsen, on the 50th anniversary of The American Legion

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Rise the Great American Legion
FIFTY YEARS AGO

For God and Country was their aim
To help the helpless face the game
To them the war-time widows came
FIFTY YEARS AGO

They fought for better legislation
To help the veterans of our nation
In their ranks there was no station
FIFTY YEARS AGO

Now two score ten has passed them by
Slowed their step and dimmed the eye
They build it well, their hopes were high
As you are now, so once was I
FIFTY YEARS AGO

So younger shoulders must bear
The programs fostered with such care
For great to be a Legionnaire
Tho' FIFTY years have gone.

---

"I am reaching that upper bracket in years and know that they are numbered. But I can close out, when the sun goes down, with the feeling that my participation in the program that was born in Paris in 1919 has left the communities where I've been a little better than they would have been if we hadn't brought this organization into being and helped it grow."

- Dr. Alpha Kenna, who was present at the Paris Caucus, looking back in 1969 after 50 years of membership and service to The American Legion

**Aug. 17, 1969**

Hurricane Camille devastates the Gulf Coast, killing 259, destroying communities and causing nearly $1.5 billion in damages. Many American Legion posts are obliterated and veterans are left homeless after a 24-foot storm surge

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Poem recited by American Legion National Commander William C. Doyle, written by National Sergeant at Arms C. Howard Larsen, on the 50th anniversary of The American Legion

FIFTY YEARS AGO

The war was over, life was sweet
No formations, no retreat
No hobnob shoes to blister feet
FIFTY YEARS AGO

The nation's warriors came home again
As boys they left – came back as men
No GI Bill awaited them
FIFTY YEARS AGO

Their sixty dollars MQP
Bought a suit of clothes and a cup of tea
They'd saved the world for democracy
FIFTY YEARS AGO

Their money spent, they faced the fact
They'd have to make their own way back
Tho' work was scarce and jobs were slack
FIFTY YEARS AGO

Then – like the sun in springtime season
Across the land from every region
---
and flooding that extends as far north as Virginia. Restoration is expected to take several months, if not years. The disaster leads The American Legion to establish a reserve fund for relief, offering up to $1,500 for displaced veterans and up to $5,000 for posts that are damaged or destroyed. The reserve account is the genesis of what will become the National Emergency Fund, which is formally established 20 years later. Camille’s destructive force is illustrated by the fact that the flagstaff from Joe Graham American Legion Post 119 in Gulfport, Miss., is later found about 80 miles away, buried in mud near Hammond, La. American Legion Posts 5 and 111 in Tampa, Fla., which narrowly missed the hurricane’s path, fly more than 4,000 pounds of emergency supplies to Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Miss., for the recovery effort. Legionnaires, gathered for the national convention in Atlanta, raise $61,000 on the spot for the relief fund.

“In Memory of the Dead
In Honor of the Living
Of all Wars”
- Enscribed on the wall inside The American Legion National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., near an eternal flame that was presented to the organization in 1969 by John F. Kennedy Post No. 287, Department of Maryland
1970 - 1979
Aug. 31, 1970
Predicting a massive war protest at The American Legion's 52nd National Convention in Portland, Ore., authorities organize "Vortex 1: A Biodegradable Festival of Life" rock concert 30 miles away from the convention center, where embattled President Richard M. Nixon is scheduled to speak. Laws against nudity and narcotics are overlooked at Vortex 1, which does the trick and lures some 35,000 would-be “confronters” away from the convention. American Legion Magazine Editor R.B. Pitkin’s account of the convention in the November 1970 issue describes a disappointed national media entourage that “came looking for blood. Months earlier, it had been predicted in the press that as many as 50,000 militants, hippies, activists, peace demonstrators or, as some would call them, youths, would stage a massive confrontation with the Legion in Portland. However, there were more youths taking part in the convention than confronting it... the major consequence of the ‘confrontation’ was better-than-average news coverage of the convention in the press and on TV, and better knowledge of the Legion by some newsmen.” Pitkin’s account mentions that “a few small knots of radicals heckled the parade at a few points and passed out leftist literature.” Nixon canceled his convention appearance and sent Vice President Spiro T. Agnew to speak on his behalf, further disappointing the media and demonstrators.

Jan. 3, 1971
In a move strongly urged and promoted by The American Legion, the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs is born, transferring Senate responsibility of veterans issues from the Finance and Labor committees into a nine-member panel of its own. U.S. Sens. Ted Stevens of Alaska and Howard Cannon of Nevada, both Legionnaires, introduced legislation in February 1969 to establish the committee, which was described at the time as “a major goal of The American Legion.” American Legion National Commander William J. Rogers sends telegrams, following a proposal to make the Senate panel a subcommittee under the Human Resources Committee, to every member of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee, successfully arguing for the Senate Committee in Veterans Affairs to stand on its own. The committee has since grown from nine to 15 members.

May 19, 1971
The Wall Street Journal publishes an article quoting critics who describe The American Legion as “slowly fading away... an anachronism, an echo from a past left far behind” that is losing influence and struggles to recruit Vietnam War veterans for membership. Eighteen years later, in 1989, The American Legion would begin a seven-year stretch of membership exceeding 3 million, fueled largely by increases among Vietnam War veterans. While the 1946 membership of 3,326,556 was an all-time high, the record was nearly snapped in 1992 when membership hit 3,115,340. Membership increased about 500,000 over the 25 years after the 1971 article was published.

May 1, 1972
The American Legion launches an unprecedented national Halloween safety program and guide for parents.

May 3-4, 1972
The American Legion National Executive Committee authorizes the expenditure of $125,000 for the creation of a statue of Gen. John Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces of The American Legion’s founding generation, in Washington, D.C.

“To endorse blanket amnesty for those who chose to run away to exile rather than serve our country would dishonor these fine men, and all those who gave their lives and indeed all who served in these trying times.”

- American Legion National Commander Joe L. Matthews, as a group of former U.S. POWs was released in 1973 and the question of pardoning those who dodged the Vietnam War draft was on the national agenda

Aug. 25, 1972
American Legion Post 1 in Paris sustains minor damage and no injuries in a bombing perpetrated by “individuals seeking to intimidate the American government and people, along with the Legion,” American Legion National Adjutant William F. Hauck says in a press release the following day. The attack comes as part of a series of bombings of U.S. military and civilian installations in western Europe.

Aug. 9, 1974
Gerald R. Ford, a World War II Navy veteran and member of Furniture City American Legion Post 258 in Grand Rapids, Mich., is appointed to serve as the 38th President of the United States, filling out the term of Richard M. Nixon, following his resignation.

Jan. 17, 1975
Representatives of The American Legion’s Department of France, the United States and The Netherlands gather at a 300-year-old foundry in Aarel-Rixtel, Holland, to pour molten metal into a mold to cast the Freedom Bell. A double-scale replica of the historic Liberty Bell, the 8.5-ton symbol, mostly of copper, it is scheduled is scheduled to travel on the artifact-filled “Freedom Train” throughout the continental United States over a 21-month period beginning April 1, 1975, in honor of the 200th anniversary of American independence. The bell is tuned one octave lower than the Liberty Bell to the key of F, for “freedom.” Approximately 7 million visit the 28-care train during its tour, and tens of millions more watch it pass along tracks throughout the country. The American Legion’s Freedom Bell is later given a permanent home on Columbia Circle outside Union Station in Washington, D.C.

Aug. 19, 1975
The American Legion announces a major fundraising collaboration with the American Cancer Society. The program has three main thrusts: education about early detection and treatment of cancer, service and assistance for sufferers and research.
**April 25, 1976**

During a Major League baseball game between Chicago and Los Angeles at Dodger Stadium, two protesters run onto the field and attempt to set a U.S. flag on fire. Cubs centerfielder and former American Legion Baseball standout Rick Monday rushes to rescue the flag and prevents it from being burned. ESPN later describes Monday’s act that day as one of the top 100 plays in Major League Baseball history. Monday, who played 19 seasons of Major League Baseball, would in 2006 join The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance to testify on Capitol Hill in support of a constitutional amendment to protect the flag from deliberate desecration. Before he entered professional baseball, Monday played American Legion ball for Santa Monica Bay Cities Post 123 in California.

**May 1976**

The newly established National Committee on Education informs The American Legion on developments and problems in education, recommends policies and programs, and encourages dialogue between the organization and educators, students and others concerned with the well-being of the U.S. education system.

**1976**

A senior-to-be from Spencer, Iowa, named Michelle Johnson attends the American Legion Auxiliary’s Bicentennial Celebration in Washington, D.C., after falling short of election for governor of American Legion Auxiliary Hawkeye Girls State that year. Inspired by Girls State, however, and by her first plane ride to the event in Washington, Johnson decides to serve her country in the U.S. Air Force. She is accepted in the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1977, becomes a Rhodes Scholar and rises to the rank of lieutenant general. In 2013, she accepts command as superintendent of the Air Force Academy, the first woman to hold that office.

**Nov. 2, 1976**

Jimmy Carter, a member of Americus, Ga., American Legion Post 2, 1946 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and officer at the beginning of the U.S. nuclear submarine program in the 1950s, is elected to serve as the 39th President of the United States.

“The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary vehemently protest and unalterably oppose your proposed pardon/amnesty plan for draft evaders, military deserters and those receiving less than honorable discharges during the Vietnam period. We continue to urge that each case be judged on an individual basis through the existing judicial and administrative channels currently open to those individuals.”

- American Legion National Commander William J. Rogers, in a letter to President-elect Jimmy Carter, Jan. 14, 1977

**Jan. 21, 1977**

Newly elected President Carter signs Executive Order No. 1 granting a full, complete and unconditional pardon to those who had violated the Selective Service Act between 1964 and 1973, including approximately 9,000 convicted of draft evasion. The American Legion had been vocal in its opposition to any form of amnesty granted to anyone who dodged the draft while others went to war. Carter had outlined his plan to pardon the violators at the 1976 American Legion National Convention in Seattle. The Legionnaires, many of whom booed the announcement, were strongly opposed to amnesty of any kind and explored legal and constitutional violations if such a pardon were to occur. Following President Carter’s order, the pardons are issued, and American Legion leaders publicly warn what such a move will mean for national security in the event of a future draft.

“The combatant left Vietnam as he came, alone. He boarded the freedom bird with his cohorts, not his company or platoon. Time in Vietnam was the single necessary similarity among passengers. The guys they knew best were either back in the world, back in the Nam, or dead. Back in America at last, no fanfare awaited them. Only faceless, expressionless clerks processing their papers to thrust them back into the world as fast as they were plucked out of it... most Americans were oblivious to his return.”

- Charles R. Figley, Ph.D., Purdue University, "American Legion Study of the Psychological Adjustment Among Legion Veterans" 1978

**March 15, 1977**

Future U.S. Vice President Mike Pence wins the Indiana American Legion Oratorical Contest.

**April 1978**

“American Legion Study of the Psychosocial Adjustment Among Legion Veterans” by Purdue University Dr. Charles R. Figley reveals psychosocial challenges faced by Vietnam War veterans adjusting to civilian life. Working with Robert W. Spanogle, national director of Internal Affairs and future American Legion national adjutant, Tom Haynes and Lloyd Wignall of the national staff, with support from National Commander William J. Rogers, Figley’s survey of 681 Legionnaires leads to a set of recommendations:

1. That The American Legion “mobilize a national effort” to encourage more research on the psychosocial conditions of veteran adjustment
2. Encourage the VA to offer research grants, fellowships and other types of funding on the adjustment process
3. Encourage the VA and National Institute of Health to sponsor national and international research symposia on the process
4. Encourage the administration to form a commission to set policy for veterans to include programmatic mental health research
5. Bring to the VA’s attention the importance of the military experience, especially wartime experience, as a factor in future psychological functioning.

6. Fund a six-month feasibility study to establish a Center for Veteran Studies to unite research efforts, raise attention about the U.S. war veteran and develop effective adjustment programs.

This work – which documents such symptoms among veterans as long-term sleeping problems, anger and discomfort in the company of non-veterans – is presented by The American Legion to then-VA Administrator Max Cleland, and ultimately leads to expansion of VA Vet Centers around the country and to the February 1980 acceptance of post-traumatic stress disorder as an official diagnosis, according to the American Psychiatric Association, which is later given status as a service-connected disability eligible for benefits.

Sept. 7-13, 1978

For the 15th consecutive time, The American Legion National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., is host site of the annual Armed Forces Chess Tournament.

Oct. 18, 1978

The American Legion National Executive Committee passes a resolution in support of studies into the health effects of the defoliant Agent Orange and other toxic agents during the Vietnam War. The resolution offers the Legion’s assistance in finding exposed veterans and calls on service officers nationwide to help veterans develop and file appropriate claims with the VA.

Nov. 29, 1978

The American Legion of Iowa Foundation is incorporated, inspired by Past National Commander Hanford MacNider of the Hawkeye State, whose “Iowa Idea” triggered thousands of community improvement projects across the country over 50 years earlier. The foundation raises and distributes funds for worthy local projects on a grant basis. Over the next 30 years, the foundation awards nearly $2.5 million for activities ranging from Junior ROTC to medical supplies for clinics to museum exhibits to remember POWs and MIAs and college scholarships.

July 18, 1979

Long promoted by The American Legion, National POW/MIA Recognition Day is accepted, to be recognized annually on the third Friday of September. The day of commemoration aims to honor the commitment and sacrifices made by this nation’s prisoners of war and those still missing in action, as well as their families.

“He was a verifiable legend in our time and his name will live forever in the history of The American Legion, the nation and the world.”


Dec. 20, 1979

Congress orders VA to study the long-term health effects of exposure to dioxin, a component of Agent Orange.
1980
The American Psychological Association publishes in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder.

August 1980
The Veterans Administration calls on American Legion volunteers “with a demonstrated empathy toward this veteran group and the long-term readjustment problems being experienced by a number of its members” to help out in newly established VA Vet Centers.

Nov. 4, 1980
Ronald Reagan, a U.S. Army Air Forces veteran during World War II and a member of Palisades American Legion Post 283 in Pacific Palisades, Calif., is elected 40th president of the United States. He goes on to serve two terms and leads the United States through the heart of the Cold War, a mission that culminates with the tearing down of the Berlin Wall in 1987.

“A very special group of veterans has joined our ranks: veterans who accepted the responsibility of their citizenship and served in the armed forces even as many of their contemporaries actively – and stridently – denied that responsibility... The Vietnam veteran, in short, has taken the test of patriots and passed with flying colors.”
- National Commander Michael J. Kogutek, writing in the December 1980 American Legion Magazine

Sept. 3, 1981
The American Legion National Convention in Honolulu, Hawaii, passes a resolution stating the organization’s policy on Agent Orange, which by this time has been linked to numerous cancers and other illnesses contracted by Vietnam War veterans, along with birth defects among their children. Deadly dioxin in the chemical mix of Agent Orange is blamed, and The American Legion urgently supports studies “to proceed without delay using all resources available to ascertain with scientific validity the effects of Agent Orange on veterans who were exposed to it during their active military service.” The Legion calls for the studies to be conducted by independent scientific authorities, not by the UCLA School of Public Health, commissioned under a 1981 contract with the VA. The Legion resolution reveals that veterans suffering with conditions presumably linked to Agent Orange have filed for VA benefits but that “very few claims for service connection have been granted... (and) a significant number of Vietnam veterans have expressed displeasure with the manner in which they were attended to during their Agent Orange examinations at VA medical facilities.” The resolution calls for an independent epidemiological study, a mechanism to establish presumption of service connection for certain disabilities traced to Agent Orange exposure, close monitoring of the long-term health effects of exposed veterans and proper treatment during VA examinations.

“I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I’ve lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I’ve been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I’ve failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.”
- Michael Jordan, 1980 American Legion Tar Heels Boys State participant from Wilmington, N.C., who went on to star in basketball at the University of North Carolina where his 1982 team won the NCAA championship and in 1984 he was named College Player of the Year, before he went on to win six National Basketball Association championships with the Chicago Bulls, be named the NBA’s most valuable player five times and become one of the world’s most recognized figures, in sports or otherwise

Aug. 26, 1982
The American Legion, at its national convention in Chicago, presents a check for $1 million to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, making it the single largest contributor to the monument on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The road to its dedication is rough and complicated. Following congressional authorization to raise funds for the memorial on two acres of National Park property in Washington, D.C., the design of Yale architecture student Maya Ying Lin, 23, is chosen twice by two separate panels of judges. Her design, announced as the winner on May 6, 1981, however, had been met with vocal and influential criticism, followed by an initial refusal by the Department of Interior to break ground. The stalled project led The American Legion to call a meeting with Secretary of the Interior James Watt and launch a letter-writing campaign seeking President Reagan’s intervention. The Legion is ultimately credited for ending the government impasse over the design, which finally leads to groundbreaking.

Nov. 11-14, 1982
The American Legion sponsors a four-day “National Salute to Vietnam Veterans,” the highlight of which is the formal dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Nov. 13, attended by thousands. The Vietnam Wall would by 2017 be engraved with the names of more than 58,300 military personnel who died as a result of their war wounds, primarily between 1959 and 1975. It eventually becomes the most attended veterans memorial in the nation, receiving more than 3 million visitors per year.

July 21, 1983
The American Legion announces its official collaboration with Columbia University epidemiologists Drs. Jeanne and Stephen Stellman on an independent study that ultimately disproves government conclusions claiming that exposure to the defoliant Agent Orange are not responsible for adverse health conditions among Vietnam War veterans.

May 28, 1984
Legionnaire and U.S. President Ronald Reagan acts as next of kin and accepts the interment flag for a then-unknown soldier of the Vietnam War,
whose remains are added to the crypt at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery.

Aug. 28, 1985

The 67th American Legion National Convention passes a resolution to study the feasibility of a National Junior Law Cadet "Law and Order" program to stimulate respect for law enforcement, patriotism and responsible leadership. By this time, some American Legion departments offer summer youth law-enforcement cadet programs, Nebraska is identified specifically in the resolution, for high school students interested in pursuing careers in law enforcement.

Aug. 27, 1985

Resolution 288, adopted at the 67th American Legion National Convention, calls for designating a POW/MIA Empty Chair at all official meetings of The American Legion as a physical symbol of the thousands of American POW/MIs still unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States. The message, recited in prayerful solemnity from local posts to national conventions, is as follows:

This table, set for one, is small, symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner, alone against his or her suppressors. The tablecloth is white, symbolic of the purity of their intentions to respond to their country's call to arms. The single red rose in the vase signifies the blood they may have shed in sacrifice to ensure the freedom of our beloved United States of America. This rose also reminds us of the family and friends of our missing comrades who keep the faith, while awaiting their return. The yellow ribbon on the vase represents the yellow ribbons worn on the lapels of the thousands who demand, with unyielding determination, proper accounting of our comrades who are not among us tonight. A slice of lemon on the plate reminds us of their bitter fate. The salt sprinkled on the plate reminds us of the countless fallen tears of families as they wait. The glass is inverted. They cannot toast with us this night.

The chair is empty. They are not here. The candle is reminiscent of the light of hope which lives in our hearts to illuminate their way home, away from their captors, to the open arms of a grateful nation. Let us pray to the supreme commander that all of our comrades will soon be back within our ranks. Let us remember and never forget their sacrifices. May God forever watch over them and protect them and their families.

Oct. 9, 1985

The American Legion National Executive Committee passes Resolution 16 calling on the Department of Interior, Fine Arts Commission, National Capitol Planning Commission and all others to dedicate an area near the Vietnam War Memorial "to erect a statue honoring the women who have served during the Vietnam War."

"It is most appropriate because the flag of the United States flies high as a symbol of hope and freedom in a threatening world where the privileges of democracy must not be taken for granted."

- Robert S. Turner, chairman of the Legion's Americanism Commission and future national commander, responding to passage of a joint resolution in late 1985 declaring 1986 to be the "Year of the Flag."

May 12, 1986

President Ronald Reagan proclaims 1986 the Year of the Flag and directs all government agencies to fly the U.S. flag in honor of Flag Week, the week in which Flag Day occurs.

Aug. 29 – Sept. 3, 1986

The American Legion National Security Commission delivers a portfolio of military-strengthening resolutions to the national convention floor. Passed are measures of support for President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, procurement of C-17 aircraft and modernization of the Merchant Marines, Navy and Coast Guard.

Jan. 26, 1987

The American Legion announces that a top priority in Washington will be to fight a $3,800-employee reduction in the Veterans Administration and oppose plans to impose new fees on veterans using VA-guaranteed home loans that could raise closing costs on an $80,000 home by nearly double, to more than $6,000.

May 1, 1987

Membership in The American Legion reaches a 30-year high of 2,751,930. The new direct mail campaign brings in more than 180,000.

Fall 1987

The American Legion Department of Minnesota launches a $1 million fundraising campaign to establish a University of Minnesota brain research chair at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center. With matching funds, the effort leads to the establishment of the Brain Sciences Center, which makes multiple medical breakthroughs for veterans suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder, Gulf War Illness, Alzheimer's Disease and other conditions. The goal is achieved in January 1989, and on June 21, 1991, a plaque is installed at the center, which reads: "In recognition of the cooperative effort between The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, University of Minnesota and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in establishing the Chair for services, research and education in the Brain Sciences Center located in this building." The chair would be filled by renowned Johns Hopkins medical researcher Dr. Apostolos P. Georgopoulos, who would lead the program for more than 25 years and, in 2017, receive The American Legion's prestigious Distinguished Service Medal.

1988

The American Legion drafts the Veterans Reassurance Act, which leads to the
launch of the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals in 1989 to improve the process of adjudicating disputed VA decisions.

July 11, 1988
American Legion National Commander John P. “Jake” Comer joins top leaders of Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans in a joint statement of “our mutual concern and increasing frustration relating to the inadequate funding and management” in the Veterans Administration. Among the issues are slow benefits decisions from regional offices, inadequate bed numbers at hospitals and “critical shortage” in operating funds.

Oct. 25, 1988
The American Legion lobbies successfully to elevate the Veterans Administration to Cabinet level status, making it the Department of Veterans Affairs. Signed by President Reagan, it is enacted under President George H.W. Bush on March 15, 1989.

Nov. 21, 1988
Pennsylvania American Legion Housing for Homeless Veterans, Inc., purchases four townhouses in Alleghany County to provide transitional residence and support for veterans who have no place to live. The program soon becomes a national model, expanding into Philadelphia in 1995, followed by Ephrata and Harrisburg. The program produces an 85 percent success rate of keeping veterans off the streets and on to decent jobs. The project, led by future American Legion National Commander Ronald F. Conley, began with a conversation in October 1987, followed by memorandums of understanding between VA and The American Legion in the summer of 1988.

Jan. 20, 1989
George H.W. Bush, a Houston American Legion member who served as a naval aviator during World War II, is inaugurated as the 41st U.S. president. He would go on to serve as commander-in-chief during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield, the Gulf War that would bring the United States into military conflict with Middle Eastern dictatorships and terrorists.

June 21, 1989
The U.S. Supreme Court rules 5-4 in Texas v. Johnson that deliberate acts of U.S. flag desecration are protected under the First Amendment, a decision that triggers outrage from The American Legion and leads to a campaign for a constitutional amendment to return to states the power to protect the flag.

Oct. 16, 1989
After years of intense lobbying from The American Legion, the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals is established to give veterans disputing their federal benefits decisions a place in the federal judiciary to have their cases heard and decided.

Aug. 31, 1989
In just 60 days, The American Legion completes the collection of more than 1 million signatures on a petition supporting a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from deliberate acts of desecration.

Oct. 19, 1989
Devastation from Hurricane Hugo of late September 1989 and the northern California earthquake five weeks later leads The American Legion National Executive Committee to officially re-establish its Disaster Relief Fund. “I can think of no better way for our members to say, ‘Yes! We care about our fellow veterans,’” National Commander Miles Epling writes in a letter published in the December American Legion Magazine. The NEC authorization paves the way for the National Emergency Fund and makes it an ongoing campaign, with an initial seeding of $50,000 and a $1 million goal for the permanent endowment.

“Nations that have no Legionnaires should invent them. They are the best custodians of a nation’s most cherished ideals.”
- Nigerian journalist Okey Ifionu speaking at the 1989 American Legion National Convention in Baltimore

“As each of us knows, no one is immune to the destructive powers of nature. In an instant, any one of us could find ourselves without a home, a job or vital assets. If that happens, help will be available.”
- American Legion National Commander Miles Epling, announcing plans to raise $1 million for the newly authorized National Emergency Fund
1990 - 1999
June 11, 1990
The U.S. Supreme Court overturns the Flag Protection Act of 1989, a legislative response passed on Oct. 28, 1989, that falls to the constitutional precedent set by the Texas v. Johnson ruling.

Aug. 2, 1990
The American Legion, for the first time in its history, sues the U.S. government. The Legion and Vietnam Veterans of America file lawsuit on the same day in U.S. District Court against the federal government for failing to complete a congressionally mandated study into effects of Agent Orange exposure on veterans. The Departments of Veterans Affairs and Human Services and the Center for Disease Control are named in the case. At this point, more than 36,000 veterans have filed claims contending that the toxic defoliant caused medical diseases for them and birth defects among their children.

Oct. 11, 1990
The American Legion Family Support Network is formed to provide local volunteer help for the families of military personnel deployed to Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

“Our nation deserves to have an answer to the question of what Agent Orange caused.”
- Lt. Col. Richard Christian, U.S. Army, Ret., who worked for The American Legion as researcher and devoted advocate for justice regarding Agent Orange exposure among veterans

Feb. 6, 1991
President George H.W. Bush signs into law the Agent Orange Act of 1991 to analyze evidence and begin presumption that non-Hodgkin lymphoma, soft-tissue sarcoma, chloracne and some acneform diseases among Vietnam War veterans who served in southeast Asia between 1961 and 1975 are service-connected, and qualified sufferers are eligible for benefits. This new law is the result of more than 12 years of hard work by The American Legion, National Commander Robert S. Turner says, “We overcame numerous obstacles to get this far, and we intend to build on this victory.”

June 15, 1991
Richard Wilson of Arizona and Everett Miskelly of Mississippi take home the titles from the first American Legion Junior Shooting Sports national championships, at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. Wilson scores a 2,201 to take the Sporter Division honors, and Miskelly fires a 2,335 to win the Precision title.

Jan. 20, 1993
Bill Clinton, who famously met President John F. Kennedy during his participation in American Legion Boys Nation 30 years earlier, is inaugurated into office as the 42nd president of the United States. During his administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs undergoes a major overhaul, dramatically improving quality of health-care services and opening eligibility to VA medical care to all who honorably served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Fall 1993
In Garden City, Mich., Chuck “Tramp” Dare and Bill “Polka” Kaledas, commander of American Legion Post 396, start an association to bring all American Legion Family members together to share a common love for motorcycles. At a regular meeting, Post 396 members pass a resolution for the new program to be known as the “American Legion Riders,” which today has chapters throughout the country and around the world, raising funds for scholarships, veterans and other interests of The American Legion. The Legion Riders lead the annual Legacy Run to The American Legion convention city and have helped raise more than $12 million to provide college funds for the children of military personnel who lost their lives on duty, or became 50 percent or more disabled, following the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

Nov. 11, 1993
The Vietnam Women’s Memorial, designed by Texas sculptor Glenna Goodacre, is dedicated on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The project, spearheaded by American Legion member Diane Carlson Evans, a Vietnam War U.S. Army combat nurse, culminates more than a decade of lobbying, fundraising and overcoming bureaucratic and governmental obstacles. Carlson Evans, buoyed by an October 1985 American Legion national resolution supporting the memorial, had participated in the 1982 dedication ceremony for the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington and came away feeling that the more than 10,000 women who served during the Vietnam War were not adequately represented. In the final hearing after more than 30 to get the project approved, she testifies to the Department of the Interior: “Our wall would be much higher and much wider without the contribution of these brave women.” In 2013, Carlson Evans is selected to serve on The American Legion’s 100th Anniversary Honorary Committee and on Feb. 27, 2018, is presented the organization’s prestigious Patriot Award for her military service, dedication and persistence to honor America’s military women.

Aug. 24, 1994
The American Legion forms a coalition of organizations to help fight for a constitutional amendment to protect the flag from desecration. The Citizens Flag Alliance quickly grows to more than 140 groups.

“We live with memories of war that humble us and fill us with a sense of spiritual connection to the freedom that Americans enjoy. We have a stake, if you will, in seeing our country live on and grow strong because we witnessed so many give their blood and sometimes their lives toward this end.”
E. Ray Stone, South Carolina, elected Past National Commander by a vote of the 1987 National Convention, in a September 1994 American Legion Magazine article that was entered into the Congressional Record Sept. 12, 1994
Jan. 30, 1995
In response to public outcry led by The American Legion, The Smithsonian Institute announces plans to cancel “The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II,” a National Air and Space Museum exhibit featuring a portion of the B-29 bomber Enola Gay, which dropped the war-ending bombs on Japan, on Aug. 6 and Aug. 9, 1945. Plans to present the exhibit in a biased way – highlighting the death and destruction of the U.S. bombing without context about the years of death and destruction perpetrated by the Japanese during World War II – had led to a May 1994 American Legion resolution opposing exhibit plans as proposed. The American Legion worked with the Smithsonian for several months – including a line-by-line negotiation of the display text with American Legion National Commander William Detweiler and American Legion Internal Affairs Commission Chairman Herman Harrington – until decision was made to cancel it. The NASM later plans and executes a display of the full Enola Gay, without biased interpretation, for display at the National Air and Space Museum at Dulles Airport in Chantilly, Va. The historic aircraft has been there since 2003.

July 28, 1995
Electronics giant Samsung chooses The American Legion to administer a scholarship fund of $5 million, as a gesture of appreciation for U.S. military personnel who came to South Korea’s aid to fight communist forces in the Korean War. The first 10 scholarships are awarded on Sept. 16, 1996, the anniversary of The American Legion’s federal charter approval. Seven to 10 scholarships of $20,000 each are awarded annually to high school juniors who complete either an American Legion Boys State or American Legion Auxiliary Girls State program and are direct descendants of U.S. wartime veterans. Applicants who are descendants of Korean War veterans receive special consideration.

“Veterans need a place to live.”
- Bill Czmyr, president of American Legion

Oct. 1, 1995
The American Legion forms a Persian Gulf Task Force to address issues specific to those who served in Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm and other theaters in the Middle East that followed.

Dec. 12, 1995
Following a June vote of 312-120 in the House – 22 votes more than necessary for a supermajority – the Senate fails by just three votes of hitting the two-thirds mark necessary to pass a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from intentional physical desecration. The measure is introduced in every subsequent Congress from that point forward, spurred by The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance.

June 11, 1997
Cash grants distributed from the American Legion National Emergency Fund exceed $1 million after floods in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Minnesota and North Dakota.

July 1997
American Legion National Commander Joe Frank expresses American Legion support for President Bill Clinton’s White House announcement to expand NATO to include Hungary, Poland and Czech Republic. Support for the expansion had been passed in the form of a resolution at the 78th American Legion National Convention in Salt Lake City in 1996.

Sept. 3, 1997
At the 79th National Convention in Orlando, Fla., Cpl. William T. Rhodes of Huntingdon, Pa., receives the first-ever American Legion National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award.

May 14, 1998
The remains of the Vietnam Unknown are exhumed May 14, 1998, at Arlington National Cemetery. Based on mitochondrial DNA testing, DoD scientists identify the remains as those of Air Force 1st Lt. Michael Joseph Blassie, who was shot down near An Loc, Vietnam, in 1972. The crypt that contained the remains of the Vietnam Unknown remains vacant.

April 18, 1999
Kevin Sladek of San Marco, Texas, wins The American Legion National Oratorical Contest less than a year after his election as president of Boys Nation, only the second young man to have reached the top in both programs. Alan Keyes, also of Texas, did it in 1967.

November 1999
Forty-five years after it last operated at the national level, American Legion College is revived in Indianapolis.
2000 - 2009
March 28, 2000
Contributions from The American Legion Family – The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion – stand at over $2.7 million to help build a new National World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. By the end of the year, the figure will exceed $3.4 million.

Sept. 5, 2000
The American Legion presents its first “Spirit of Service” awards to active-duty military personnel who conduct volunteer community service in their off time.

2000
The American Legion Auxiliary begins a long-term relationship of involvement and support for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. The annual festival’s purpose is to help veterans heal through the therapy of art, dance and music, and the American Legion Auxiliary becomes presenting sponsor, along with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Oct. 18, 2000
The American Legion Overseas Graves Decoration Trust Fund is authorized to send $25,000 to help repair and restore the 1928-built Lafayette Escadrille Memorial near Paris. The site, a massive memorial crypt containing sarcophagi of 68 American aviators who died fighting with the French as part of the unique squadron, would be restored in 2015 and 2016, and in 2017, its ownership would be transferred to the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Nov. 7, 2000
Texas and Alabama Air National Guard veteran George W. Bush is elected 43rd president of the United States. A member of John R. Burkett-Beverly E. Miller American Legion Post 77 in Houston, he leads within his first year the nation’s military response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and serves as commander-in-chief for Operations Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Iraqi Freedom in Iraq.

Aug. 28-30, 2001
Less than two weeks before the terrorist attacks that lead the United States back to war, The American Legion National Convention approves a resolution to rekindle the Blue Star Service Banner of earlier decades for display by families of deployed military personnel.

September 2001
Terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, destroy the Downtown Athletic Club American Legion post in lower Manhattan, and the Kim Lau American Legion post in Chinatown serves as a relief station for first responders. When a Canadian radio station airs the request from a young girl to send stuffed animals and toys to New York to comfort the children there, an 18-wheeler arrives in Chinatown, and the stuffed animals are housed in the basement of the post before distribution to kids. In Washington, D.C., National Commander Richard Santos is 23 minutes away from delivering testimony before a joint session of Congress when the Pentagon is attacked, and everyone is ordered to evacuate. The commander’s son, Steffen, is among the fire fighters who respond to the attack at the Department of Defense headquarters. Killed in the attack at the Pentagon is U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Timothy Maude, an American Legion member and the highest-ranking officer to lose his life in the attack. Near Shanksville, Pa., where Flight 93 was flown into the ground after passengers seized control from hijackers, American Legion Post 257 Commander Dick Pristas is among the first responders at the crash site.

“I walked out in front of our fire truck and saw what looked like a hardback book on the ground. I picked it up, and it was a Bible. It was just a little tattered, but it was OK. I had such mixed emotions, that a Bible would be the only thing to survive something this awful. It served as a sign to me that these victims were now with God. I took the Bible and put it on the front of the bumper of our first engine to arrive. Eventually, an in-

vestigator asked me where I found it and collected it as evidence. Since then, I’ve spoken with many victims’ family members, and it’s very meaningful to them that the Bible was found. They consider it a miracle of sorts.”

- American Legion Post 257 member Dick Pristas, a first responder at the Flight 93 crash near Shanksville, Pa., on Sept. 11, 2001

Sept. 12, 2001
The American Legion re-activates its Family Support Network to provide assistance to military families with loved ones deployed to service, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Oct. 10-11, 2001
The American Legion National Executive Committees passes a resolution authorizing The American Legion Sept. 11 Memorial Scholarship Fund to provide college assistance for the children of American military personnel who have died on active military duty on or after Sept. 11, 2001.

Oct. 21, 2002
President George W. Bush signs into law legislation to accept the design of Jefferson, Iowa, American Legion Post 11 member Bill Kendall as the official flag for the Medal of Honor. A retired U.S. Army Special Forces sergeant, Kendall stitched the prototype of the flag by hand, in honor of Capt. Darrell R. Lindsay, a World War II veteran from Iowa who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.

Nov. 8, 2002
The American Legion launches the “I Am Not a Number” campaign to collect testimonies from veterans waiting long periods of time for VA health-care appointments and benefits decisions. More than 5,000 personal testimonials pour into National Headquarters, and their accounts help launch the national System Worth Saving program.
May 2003
The American Legion Sept. 11 Memorial Scholarship Fund is renamed The American Legion Legacy Scholarship.

Aug. 23-25, 2005
The American Legion National Convention passes Resolution No. 169 expressing support for the warrior and the war against terrorism alike. To accompany the resolution, The American Legion produces a guide to public awareness that documents acts of terrorism leading to the declaration of war. The guide calls on The American Legion to provide home-front support for troops deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq and to be a voice not only for them but also for their mission. The resolution is reaffirmed by the national conventions in 2006 and 2007.

Aug. 29, 2005
Hurricane Katrina blasts into the Gulf Coast, and the storm surge that follows breaks through levees in New Orleans. The storm and floods take more than 1,800 lives and cause more than $125 billion in damages. Destroyed are all but the top two floors of the New Orleans VA Medical Center, and veteran patients have to be triaged in makeshift clinics around the city and beyond. The American Legion National Emergency Fund distributes more than $2 million in cash grants to assist the displaced, and posts throughout the Southeast transform, including one that becomes a kidney dialysis clinic. Following Katrina, Hurricanes Wilma and Rita cause further devastation, making the storm and its aftermath the most destructive weather event in a century in the United States.

June 27, 2006
By the closest margin to date, the Senate comes just one vote short of the necessary supermajority to pass a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from deliberate desecration. The tally is 66 for the flag amendment and 34 against. In the effort by The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance to pull the supermajority, former Major League Baseball star Rick Monday, the American Legion Baseball alum from California who saved a flag from burning by demonstrators during a game in 1976, brings the flag he rescued to Capitol Hill and testifies in support of the constitutional amendment.

Jan. 4, 2007
On his first day in office, newly elected U.S. Sen. James Webb of Virginia, a Vietnam War combat veteran and American Legion member, introduces a new kind of GI Bill, one that aims to produce the same kinds of effects on the economy, nation and families of those who serve, as the original Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.

“My attitude about the world changed, and I know the attitude about the world from a lot of folks here in America changed. It reminded me that the most solemn duty of your federal government is to protect the American people from harm. The most solemn duty we have is to protect this homeland. I vowed that day that we would go on the offense against an enemy ... the best way to defeat this enemy is to find them overseas and bring them to justice so they will not hurt the folks here at home. In other words, we don’t have the luxury of hoping for the best, of sitting back and being passive in the face of this threat. In the past, we would say oceans would protect us and, therefore, what happened overseas may not matter here at home. That’s what changed on September the 11th.”

May 2007
Broken television sets and a general lack of comfort items for wounded U.S. service members recovering at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany lead American Legion National Commander Paul Morin to call on the organization to raise $50,000 within six weeks to purchase items not normally provided by the Department of Defense. The American Legion Family raises more than $257,000 within the six weeks, which is used to buy new television sets, stereos, long-distance calling cards, pool tables and other items in what is called Operation Landstuhl.

Oct. 18, 2007
Legion Riders becomes an official American Legion program of the national Internal Affairs Commission.

January – June, 2008
The American Legion works with U.S. Sen. James Webb, a Virginia member of The American Legion, to improve the Post-9/11 GI Bill he introduced, to overhaul education benefits for veteran students and to install the ability to transfer them to the family members of those who served.

May 2008
The American Legion National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., provides free office space for a new organization called Student Veterans of America, co-founded by Derek Blumke, a Legionnaire from Michigan. SVA, which advocates

June 30, 2008

Oct. 28, 2008
The Indianapolis International Airport is renamed to honor Col. H. Weir Cook, a World War I flying ace who served many years on The American Legion’s national Aeronautics Committee alongside his 94th Aero Squadron friend, Capt. Eddie Rickenbacker. Cook, who helped create the U.S. Army Air Mail Service and was a transcontinental mail carrier, returned to service in World War II, where he crashed into a mountain and died while searching for an enemy bombing target. The Indi-
anapolis Municipal Airport had been named in Cook's memory until it became an international airport in 1976. A major reconstruction of the airport, finished in 2008, presented the opportunity for Cook's return as namesake.

**December 2008**

Hearing of needs at other military hospitals and warrior transition units, American Legion National Commander David K. Rehbein expands Operation Landstuhl, renaming it Operation Comfort Warriors, to provide comfort items, recreational experiences and more for recovering in military personnel.

**Aug. 1, 2009**

Provisions of the Post 9/11 GI Bill are enacted under the administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Aug. 19, 2009**

Midland, Mich., Post 165 sweeps the field, wrapping up The American Legion Baseball World Series championship with an 11-4 victory over Medford, Ore., Post 15. For the first time ever, the series is streamed live on legion.org, the newly revamped national website. Over five days, more than 18,900 viewers logged on to watch the 83rd American Legion World Series online.

**Aug. 22, 2009**

Harrisburg Post 472 in Houston, Texas, begins a six-year winning streak at The American Legion Nation Convention Color Guard Contest. The six-year run ties Speedway Post 500 in Indiana for most continuous national titles in the contest, which claimed it from 1993 to 1998.

**Oct. 7, 2009**

The American Legion's Burn Pit blog site receives an email from one survivor from a deadly Oct. 3 ambush at Combat Outpost Keating in Afghanistan's remote Nuristan province. The soldier, Bravo Troop 361 Cavalry out of Fort Carson, Colo., reports that 'most people back home don't even know... no one gives a s#it' after he and 55 other survivors escaped with just their weapons and the clothes on their backs, having lost all of their personal belongings in the attack. Eight were killed. The Legion's COP Keating Relief Fund raises more than $50,000 in less than a week, followed by $50,000 worth of laptop computers from Computer Science Corp., and $50,000 in gift cards and merchandise from Target Corp. The support items arrive in Afghanistan in time for Christmas.

**Oct. 13, 2009**

The Department of Veterans Affairs announces that it will recognize three additional health conditions – ischemic heart disease, Parkinson's Disease and hairy cell leukemia – as presumptive service-connected illnesses caused by exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. More than 200,000 veterans are expected to receive benefits and treatment from VA as a result of the decision, which is based on an Institute of Medicine report. The American Legion, although pleased with the decision, continues to fight for acceptance of conditions suffered by veterans who served at sea, in the air and stateside who were exposed to Agent Orange, not only those who came into contact with it on the ground in the Vietnam War. More than a year will pass before VA's published addition of the diseases is reviewed and approved by Congress, in late 2011.

"We will continue to work with medical experts to explore connections between Agent Orange and respiratory disorders such as asthma, pleurisy, pneumonia and tuberculosis, as well as gastrointestinal diseases, liver toxicity, thyroid disease, homeostasis, endometriosis and others. It should be remembered that Agent Orange exposure was not limited to just 'boots on the ground' in-country. Veterans exposed to Agent Orange included blue-water Navy sailors, among others. They, too, deserve the care and benefits to be afforded other victims."

- American Legion National Commander Clarence Hill, Oct. 14, 2009, in response to VA Secretary Eric Shinseki’s decision to increase the number of diseases believed to have been caused by Agent Orange exposure in the Vietnam War.
2010 - 2019
Feb. 28, 2010

Operation Comfort Warriors beats more than 700 other charities in Pepsi’s “Refresh Everything” online community service competition. The American Legion program receives $250,000 for receiving the most online votes in the promotion, and the money is used to purchase more comfort items for recovering service members.

“The loss of a parent makes an incredible impact on a family, both financially and emotionally. The American Legion makes it possible for the unfortunate families to continue to educate the children of a fallen soldier. I am honored to receive the scholarship.”

- Brandon Laureta of Troutdale, Ore., a 2010 recipient of The American Legion Legacy Scholarship, awarded to the children of U.S. military personnel who lost their lives on duty after 9/11

May 5, 2010

The American Legion National Executive Committee selects Shelby, N.C., to be the host city of The American Legion Baseball World Series at least through 2014, potentially becoming a permanent site for the tournament. More than 100 supporters of Shelby traveled to Indianapolis to make their case over Bartlesville, Okla., which was second in the bid to serve as home of the tournament. The water tower in the North Carolina town is soon repainted, “Shelby, Home of The American Legion Baseball World Series.” Keeter Stadium is redesigned, new lights are installed, and in 2012, The American Legion announces through a Fall NEC resolution that the Shelby contract would be extended through 2019.

October 2010

The American Legion convenes a special committee to study and make recommendations for treatment of what have become known as the “signature wounds” of the Global War on Terrorism: post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

Feb. 27, 2011

The last American veteran of World War I, Frank Buckles of Charles Town, W. Va., dies at the age of 110 and is later buried at Arlington National Cemetery. “I never thought I’d be the last one,” he said in an interview after it was known that he was. Enlisting at age 16, Buckles, a Missouri farm boy went to Europe aboard the Carpathia, which had rescued survivors of the Titanic sinking in 1912, and served as an Army ambulance driver in France. As a civilian contractor during World War II, he was later taken prisoner by the Japanese. He was a member of The American Legion for nearly 80 years and in his final decade fought for the creation of a World War I national memorial in Washington, D.C. It did not happen in his lifetime.

May 4, 2011

The American Legion National Executive Committee passes a resolution to establish The American Legion Amateur Radio Club in support of the organization’s disaster-preparedness program, in association with the Department of Homeland Security. The ham radio club is authorized a budget of $1,000 to get started.

May 5, 2011

The American Legion National Executive Committee passes a resolution formally establishing the Junior Law Cadet Program under the national Americanism Commission. Three years later, the program’s name would be changed to the American Legion Youth Cadet Law Enforcement Program, which by 2016 would be operated in 19 departments nationwide and be authorized a full national committee to oversee and expand it.

May 30, 2011

The 10 World War II sailors of the USS American Legion who died off the coast of New Zealand in June 1943 are honored in a ceremony at Kapiti, near Paekākāriki Beach. A memorial monument to honor them is installed the following year, on the 70th anniversary of the tragedy.

Oct. 12, 2011

The redesigned American Legion office, printing and distribution center at 5745 Lee Road at Fort Harrison in Indianapolis is dedicated in memory of American Legion Past National Commander John H. Geiger of Illinois. Geiger, who led the organization in 1971 and 1972, was instrumental in the siting, architecture and construction of the 64,000-square-foot facility, which would house Emblem Sales and Information Technology divisions of the organization, as well as mass-mailing operations, membership and fundraising services. Geiger passed away Jan. 10, 2011.

“I can see why they call this program a week that shapes a lifetime, but I don’t think it’s just our lifetime. I think it’s our generation and other generations to come. Talking to and sharing experiences with 97 of the best and brightest in the country, there is nothing like it.”

- Nimit Jindal, 2012 New Jersey Boys State and Boys Nation participant

“The military invests millions in training service members, making these young men and women truly experts in specialized and valuable skills. Unfortunately, due to miscommunication and bureaucracy, these skills are not always applied as they should be in the civilian workplace.”

- American Legion National Commander Fang A. Wong, following the June 1, 2012, establishment of a Military Credentialing and Licensing Task Force under the Department of Defense

July 23, 2012

President Obama signs into law The American Legion-backed Veterans Skills to Jobs Act that makes it easier for qualified, military-trained veterans to gain certification and licensure in specialized career fields. Two months earlier, Obama announced the establishment of Military Credentialing and Licensing Task Force in the company of
American Legion Department of Minnesota Commander Charles Kruger and Department Adjutant Randy Tesdahl. The task force and new law represent a major breakthrough in The American Legion’s long battle for fair transfer of military training experience into credits in specialized fields like commercial driving, hazardous materials handling and emergency medicine.

**Aug. 4, 2012**

Former American Legion Junior Shooting Sports national champion Jamie Lynn Beyerle (Corkish) sets Olympic records in the women’s 50-meter rifle event of the 2012 Games in London, four years after finishing fourth in the women’s 10-meter air rifle competition and fifth in the 50-meter event at the Summer Olympics in Beijing. Her score of 2475 in the 2002 American Legion Junior Shooting Sports national championships, shooting for the Palmyra Junior Rifle Team in Pennsylvania, tied her for most all-time in the Precision category.

“Veterans are part of those hundreds of people on the podium who I thought about, who helped me win that medal. Every person I came across had some type of influence on me; with The American Legion program, those veterans had a huge influence on me. I wouldn’t have gotten that college scholarship if it weren’t for those veterans willing to give their time to the community.”

-Olympic gold medalist Jamie Corkish, a former American Legion Junior Shooting Sports competitor and national champion, in a 2018 interview with The American Legion Magazine

**Oct. 17, 2012**

Theodore Roosevelt IV, grandson of American Legion founding member Theodore Roosevelt Jr., is named chairman of the organization’s 100th Anniversary Honorary Committee.

“The American Legion – what it has done, what it is doing and what it will continue to do – is exactly what my grandfather and his fellow co-founders intended to achieve.”

-Theodore Roosevelt IV, American Legion 100th Anniversary Honorary Committee Chairman, speaking to the National Executive Committee, Oct. 17, 2012

**March 23, 2014**

Led by the American Legion Auxiliary, hundreds of American Legion Family members gather on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., for a “flash mob” social media performance of “It’s a Grand Old Flag” in honor of the U.S. Armed Forces. Within hours more than 37,000 see smartphone videos and photos of the performance on YouTube.

**May 5, 2014**

Following nationally publicized revelations that veterans died waiting for unscheduled appointments at the Phoenix VA Medical Center, American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger calls for the resignation of VA Secretary Gen. Eric Shinseki, Under Secretary for Health Care Robert Petzel and Under Secretary for Benefits Gen. Allison Hickey.

**May 16, 2014**

One day after testifying in a Senate hearing about the steps necessary to repair employee accountability problems at VA, Under Secretary for Health Robert Petzel resigns, amid growing pressure over the Phoenix appointment scandal.

**May 30, 2014**

Gen. Eric Shinseki resigns as VA secretary three weeks after The American Legion calls for him to step down. Additional cases of VA appointment falsification around the country are revealed by whistleblowers. President Obama appoints Sloan Gibson interim secretary.

**June 9-13, 2014**

The American Legion conducts the first in a 15-month nationwide series of town hall meetings and assistance efforts to help veterans facing difficulties with VA. The first stop in the series is Phoenix where 590 veterans receive...
face-to-face, firsthand American Legion help with their VA health-care and benefits problems. Called a Veterans Crisis Command Center, the Phoenix event extends American Legion assistance on VA enrollment, appointment scheduling, benefits applications and appeals representation. One veteran discovers at the Legion activity that she is eligible for $60,000 in retroactive disability compensation that was due to her.

**June 24, 2014**

The American Legion conducts a symposium at the Institute of Medicine in Washington titled "Advancing Care and Treatments for Veterans with TBI and PTSD" and reveals February 2014 survey results that show 59 percent of veterans receiving care for the conditions felt no improvement or worse after treatment. The survey also finds that 30 percent terminated their treatment programs before they were complete, validating findings announced earlier by the American Legion TBI-PTSD Committee.

**Aug. 26, 2014**

The American Legion Legacy Scholarship Fund grows by a record-breaking $1 million at the national convention in Charlotte, N.C. The American Legion Riders raise more than $435,000 for the fund on its largest Legacy Run ever, attracting more than 600 riders. An additional $510,000 is presented from the convention floor, and American Legion Charities adds $53,000 to exceed $1 million. Among the local posts donating to the record-breaking year is Converse, Texas, Post 32 with a contribution of $32,000.

**Aug. 27, 2014**

In the aftermath of the VA patient-appointments scandal, The American Legion presents its prestigious Patriot Award to both chairmen of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans Affairs, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., and Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla. Both congressional leaders praise the leadership of The American Legion for helping expose the problem nationwide after the Phoenix scandal and for taking pro-active steps to solve it. “You leaned forward at a time when people did not want to step out, make comments, make recommendations – but that’s exactly what needed to happen in order to bring the problem to the forefront,” Miller said after receiving the award. Said Sanders, who would soon go on to make a strong run for the Democratic nomination in the 2016 presidential election: “The cost of war continues until the last veterans – and that could be 70 years after his or her services – the cost of war continues until that veteran receives all of the care and all of the benefits that he or she has earned.”

**Aug. 29, 2014**

Hawkeye American Legion Auxiliary Girls State alum Michelle Johnson of Spencer, Iowa, is named American Legion Auxiliary Woman of the Year. Calling Girls State “transformational” for her in 1976, she was accepted into the U.S. Air Force Academy, became a lieutenant general and ultimately the first female superintendent of the academy. Following retirement in October 2017, she becomes senior vice president and head of referee operations for the National Basketball Association.

**Sept. 29 – Oct. 2, 2014**

After 11 successful Veterans Crisis Command Centers throughout the country – from Charlotte, N.C., to Honolulu – The American Legion shifts the message of its outreach program to better reflect efforts by local VA staff to assist frustrated veterans. Renamed “Veterans Benefits Centers,” the events continue through much of 2015. Hundreds of veterans and their families receive firsthand assistance and more than $1 million in overdue retroactive disability benefits are paid to veterans whose cases were bogged down in the system.

“The American Legion picked me up when I was broken. Without them, I would probably be homeless.”

- U.S. Navy veteran Christopher Li, who received American Legion assistance at a 2015 Veterans Benefit Center event in Long Beach, Calif.

“We’ve received 8,000 smiles in the past week. If you’re in a position to help humanity, you do it. That’s what we do at our post, because we love this community and the people.”

- Puerto Vallarta American Legion Post 14 Commander Dennis Rike after he and his fellow Legionnaires distributed toys and gifts to more than 200 low-income school children in the Mexican city in 2015

**Oct. 16, 2015**

Embattled VA Under Secretary for Benefits Brig. Gen. (ret.) Allison Hickey resigns from her position after an Inspector General’s report says she helped two employees manipulate the VA hiring system for personal gain.

**Nov. 30, 2015**

The U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland rules that even though the Bladensburg World War I Veterans Memorial, a 40-foot-tall monument erected by The American Legion in 1925, takes the shape of a cross, its purpose is not primarily religious and does not violate the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The American Legion, working with First Liberty Institute, is listed as a co-defendant in the case to protect the Bladensburg “peace cross” where Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies continue to be conducted.

**April 18, 2016**

The U.S. Postal Service issues the 20th Forever Stamp in its “legends of Hollywood” series. Featured on the stamp is Shirley Temple, “honorary colonel” and official “little sister” of Hollywood Post 43, who later, as Shirley Temple Black, was a distinguished State Department diplomat and U.S. ambassador to Czechoslovakia and to Ghana. A Post 43 color guard opens the ceremony at the Geffen Playhouse in Los Angeles to unveil her stamp.

**June 1, 2016**

The American Legion’s “Celebrating Our Communities” float is judged winner of the Checkered Flag Award for the May
28 Indianapolis 500 Festival Parade. The largest Memorial Day weekend parade in the nation, the event is viewed by more than 300,000 spectators in person and over 1 million television viewers. Nearly two dozen veterans join American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett and American Legion Auxiliary National President Sharon Conatser on the three-mile route through Indianapolis, home of The American Legion's National Headquarters.

"Before I ever became a veteran, before I was ever wounded, before I ever knew that I was going to need help, the Legion was there... And yes, other Legionnaires before you have done this job, and there will be other Legionnaires after you."
- U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, member of American Legion Post 1995, Centreville, Va., who lost both legs after the helicopter she was piloting in Iraq was hit with a rocket-propelled grenade

Aug. 16, 2016
By a score of 8-6, Texarkana, Ark., Post 58 defeats Rowan County, N.C., Post 342 in 12 innings to win The American Legion Baseball World Series in Shelby, N.C. The eight-team tournament, aired live on television by ESPN, is attended by an all-time record crowd of 120,000.

Nov. 11, 2016
American Legion Riders in Freehold Borough, N.J., see a man alongside the road next to his motorcycle, which has a dead battery and won’t restart. They ride up to him and offer to help. The stranded rider is none other than rock and roll hall of famer Bruce Springsteen, who as a high school junior participated in New Jersey’s American Legion Boys State program. "He was just one of the guys, a basic down-to-earth kind of guy," said Dan Barkalow, a Sons of The American Legion member and Legion Rider attached to Post 54 in Freehold Borough, where Springsteen grew up. Facebook photos about the Veterans Day encounter go viral, reaching millions and getting attention on CNN, Billboard, the Today Show and the Howard Stern Show.

June 23, 2017
Created to hold VA employees more accountable, with American Legion support, the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017 is signed into law at the White House. The act gives the VA secretary greater authority to terminate the employment of staff and managers who fail to meet the needs of veterans in the VA health-care system.

Aug. 16, 2017
The Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 – also known as the "Forever GI Bill" because it removes time limits for veterans who wish to use it for college – is signed into law by President Donald J. Trump. The legislation is named for The American Legion past national commander who in the winter of 1943-44 drafted the Servicemen's Readjustment Act that changed the nation after World War II.

Aug. 23, 2017
President Donald J. Trump signs the Veterans Appeals and Modernization Act of 2017 on the 99th American Legion National Convention, in Reno, Nev. The measure offers three courses of action for veterans to appeal decisions on their disability benefits claims in an effort to reduce the number of pending appeals – at this point more than 470,000 nationwide – and speed up the process. It is the first time in history a U.S. president has used an American Legion National Convention stage to sign a bill into law.

Aug. 24, 2017
Army veteran Denise Rohan of Wisconsin is elected national commander at the 99th American Legion National Convention, in Reno, Nev., the first woman to hold the highest office in the largest organization of wartime veterans.

"To make a difference in someone's life, you don't have to be brilliant, rich, beautiful or perfect. You just have to care enough to be there."
- American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan in her acceptance speech at the 99th Nation Convention in Reno, Nev., Aug. 27, 2017

Aug. 31, 2017
The American Legion's seven-year-old national amateur radio excerpt exceeds more than 3,200 members operating at more than 30 local posts, making it one of the largest ham radio networks in the nation. The American Legion Amateur Radio Club has regular broadcasting events throughout the year and promotes the program to assist with local natural disaster preparedness operations.

Sept. 25, 2017
The House of Representatives passes H.R. 2519 by unanimous consent, authorizing the striking of an American Legion 100th Anniversary Coin by the U.S. Mint. The Senate approves the measure three days later, and President Trump signs it in early October.

Oct. 6, 2017
Congress passes Public Law 115-65 allowing the U.S. Mint to strike and issue commemorative coins to honor The American Legion's centennial in 2019. Approved are 50,000 $5 gold coins, 400,000 silver dollars and 750,000 clad half-dollars. The coin designs are later unveiled at the August 2018 100th American Legion National Convention and set to be sold in March 2019.

Oct. 18, 2017
The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th District rules 2-1 that the Bladensburg, Md., Peace Cross honoring the memories of those who died fighting in World War I "has the primary effect of endorsing religion and excessively entangles the government in religion." The monument, erected in 1925 by members of The American Legion, appears destined for a showdown in the U.S. Supreme Court, which has been unclear in its rulings about veterans memorials with symbols perceived as religious on public ground.
Dec. 31, 2017
Sons of The American Legion achieves an all-time high of 369,861 members nationwide.

Jan. 1, 2018
American Legion National Judge Advocate Philip B. Onderdonk, Jr., retires after 35 years as the organization’s chief legal counsel. He is the longest-serving national officer in the history of The American Legion. The Liberty Institute’s Philip B. Onderdonk Award, introduced in 2015, is presented annually to national leaders who protect veterans memorials with religious symbols from legal decisions that could remove them from public sight. Onderdonk, who was surprised to be named the first recipient of the Liberty Institute award bearing his name, filed numerous amicus briefs for The American Legion during his tenure to defend such veterans memorials as the Bladensburg Peace Cross and the Mount Soledad Memorial in California.

“When you explore the original purposes of The American Legion – support for veterans, defense, youth and patriotic values – a common denominator emerges. The American Legion was built to strengthen America.”

- American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan, in testimony before a joint session of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans Affairs, Feb. 27, 2018

“The GI Bill meant the freedom to go to school wherever I wanted to go. Service was something my family did, so that was kind of a no-brainer. The fact that there was a GI Bill was an added bonus of service. I didn’t realize how amazing it was going to be until I got out and there was an opportunity to go to a private college.”

- U.S. Army veteran and American Legion member Vanessa Vinson, a student at St. Edwards University in Austin, Texas, reflecting on the GI Bill at a Legion centennial exhibit telling its story at the 10th centennial exhibit telling its story at the 10th

March 1, 2018
The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th District refuses to reconsider an October 2017 decision and rules 8-6 that the Bladensburg Peace Cross honoring 49 men of Prince George’s County, Md., must either be removed or altered. The memorial was built in 1925 by The American Legion, which is represented by First Liberty, whose deputy chief counsel, Hiram Sasser, promises to fight the appeals court decision. “If this decision stands, other memorials – including those in nearby Arlington Cemetery – will be targeted for destruction as well,” Sasser explains.

April 1, 2018
“Sgt. Stubby: An American Hero,” an animated movie telling the story of the World War I combat canine who became an American Legion member and frequent national convention participant after his service on the front in France, is released in theaters nationwide by Fun Academy Motion Pictures.

“Today, without fanfare, we took refurbished power wheelchair number 200 to the Army Surplus store in Idaho Falls. They are mounting it on a pallet, wrapping it in moving blankets and shrink wrapping it. They will then ship it to a homebound Vietnam Veteran in Burbank, CA, who is in desperate need, having not left his home for months. Thank you, Army Surplus and crew for helping us give this hero freedom and mobility! Two hundred power wheelchairs refurbished and delivered in two years and four months, each with its own special story. Proud of our team! Now, on to the next one hundred.”

- May 10, 2018, Facebook post from Idaho American Legion Riders Director Frank Smith, who leads a non-profit program to refurbish and distribute power wheelchairs to veterans, spouses of veterans and children in need

May 5, 2018
A $50,000 grant from the American Legion’s Operation Comfort Warriors fund goes to purchase 1,000 new-baby welcome kits for VA hospitals in 32 states and the District of Columbia.

May 28, 2018
William (Tony) Workman American Legion Post 294 in Missouri City, Texas, dedicates a 5-foot granite monument to the organization’s 100th anniversary in the city’s 21-acre American Legion Park. “My personal vision today is that 100 years from now, on the 100th anniversary of this ceremony, another generation of veterans will gather on this spot and will dedicate a monument to the bicentennial of The American Legion;” Rehbein said. “We don’t know the legacy they will create because it is yet to come. We know that the programs and services of The American Legion are likely to be very different over the next 100 years, as they were over the last 100 years. Change is accelerating. I think we can safely say that whatever those programs and services are, they will be founded on the same values that The American Legion was founded on, in 1919.

June 6, 2018
President Trump signs into law the sweeping VA MISSION Act – officially the John McCain III, Daniel K. Akaka and Samuel R. Johnson VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Outside Networks Act – which includes a number of American Legion resolutions to improve VA healthcare services. The measure expands benefits and services for caregivers of disabled veterans from the pre-9/11 era, strengthens VA’s ability to recruit and hire qualified providers, improves the process of using non-VA providers where services are distant or difficult to provide due to high demand and strategizes infrastructure changes to bring facilities into compliance with the needs of 21st century veterans.

July 14, 2018
The American Legion’s Department of Texas, gathering for its summer
convention in San Antonio, unveils a $75,000 monument honoring the organization’s centennial and buries a time capsule to be unearthed 50 years later.

Aug. 24-30, 2018
The American Legion’s 100th National Convention is conducted in the city of its first national convention, Minneapolis.

Oct. 17, 2018
Promoting it as a “renewed commitment to the future,” The American Legion Endowment Fund begins doing business under a new name, The American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation.

March 15-17, 2019
The American Legion celebrates its 100th birthday in Paris, France, throughout the United States and around the world.

Aug. 23-29, 2019
The American Legion celebrates its 100th anniversary during its 101st National Convention, in Indianapolis, home of the organization’s national headquarters.