THE AMERICAN LEGION
# Dispatch
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HONOR AND REMEMBRANCE

World War II veteran and Wisconsin Legionnaire Julian Plaster is deep in thought at the main attraction of his Honor Flight trip, the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC. *Photo by Visual Image Photography*

# 'HONOR FLIGHT' FILM STARS LEGIONNAIRES

*The award-winning film follows living World War II veterans to D.C. memorial.*

By Henry Howard

"Honor Flight," a new documentary about the program that takes World War II veterans to Washington, D.C., to view the memorial that was constructed in their honor, features two Wisconsin Legionnaires — Julian Plaster and Joe Demler.

Plaster, a member of Post 23 in Milwaukee, joined the Navy in 1942. On Dec. 7, 1941, Plaster was working as a lumberjack in Canada and didn't learn about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor until months later. After training, he was assigned to burial patrol on Roi-Namur Island in the Marshall Islands.

Joe Demler, a member of Legion Post 82 in Port Washington, Wis., was captured in the Battle of the Bulge. When Demler was liberated from a German POW camp, he weighed 70 pounds and was photographed in Life Magazine as the "Human Skeleton." In the film, he says he learned two things in captivity: "How to pray in a Nazi prison camp. And every day is a bonus."

"Honor Flight" won Best Documentary Feature during the GI Film Festival in May. The film details how a Midwest community of volunteers worked together to honor World War II veterans with a trip to the memorial, and it shows the range of emotions expressed by the veterans and their loved ones.

The American Legion spoke with Plaster about his service, the memorial and the movie:

**Q: What was your first war experience?**

**A:** I was in a landing craft with 15 other sailors when we got on a beach. They gave us a shovel and gloves and said, 'Start digging and bury the dead.' I thought I would be going to war to be a hero, and here I was burying the dead: American and Japanese. We buried the dead for three to four days. War is horrible. When I was burying the dead, I was burying a Japanese soldier who was clutching a photograph of a woman. His thoughts were at home, the same as mine. The smell of the dead stayed

*See 'Honor Flight' on Page 6*

## NEWS ALERT

### Register for Legacy Run

Riders participating in the eighth annual American Legion Legacy Run will depart from Wayne Post 64 in Indianapolis Aug. 18 and will finish Aug. 22 in Houston — host city of the 95th National Convention. For registration and route details, visit:
*www.legion.org/riders*

### Honor & Remembrance Facebook page

The American Legion has launched a new Facebook page to coincide with its web page dedicated to honor and remembrance: *www.legion.org/honor*
"Like" the Honor & Remembrance Facebook page:
*www.facebook.com/TheAmericanLegionHonorRemembrance*

### Flag questions answered

Ask the Legion's flag expert your questions, read the top 10 U.S. flag myths, and receive half-staff flag notifications by signing up for the Legion's free e-newsletter:
*www.legion.org/flag*

### How to write a resolution

The resolution booklet has been developed to assist Legion members with composing and writing resolutions. Download the booklet:
*www.legion.org/resolutions*

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

# Relief after enduring devastation

**James E. Koutz**
*National Commander*

The American Legion is committed to the welfare of all veterans and their families when a disaster like a tornado, snowstorm, hurricane or flood strikes. A natural disaster can strike at any time, as we just witnessed in Moore, Okla., devastating the lives of men and women who honorably served our country. While we can't prevent a disaster, the Legion can and does provide relief to veterans and their families affected by devastation through its National Emergency Fund (NEF) program.

The Legion's National Executive Committee created NEF immediately after Hurricane Hugo struck Florida in 1989, leaving nearly 100,000 people homeless. The program helps with out-of-pocket expenses, including, but not limited to, temporary housing, food, water and clothing. Since its inception, NEF has provided nearly $8 million in direct financial assistance to American Legion posts, Legionnaires and their family members.

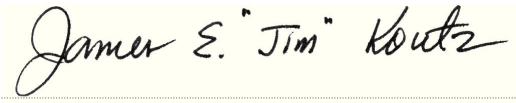
I've been a member of The American Legion for 42 years, and I'm still in awe of the donations given toward the NEF program and the donations disbursed to disaster victims.

When Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma devastated the Gulf Coast in 2005, Legionnaires were on-site to process NEF grants — 2,512 grants were processed totaling more than $2.1 million. When Superstorm Sandy affected the entire eastern seaboard from Florida to Maine last October, 450 Legion Family members and posts received NEF grants totaling $426,087. And now, we are faced with the aftermath of the tornado that struck Moore, Okla., on May 20, killing 24 people, destroying or damaging nearly 13,000 homes, and affecting more than 33,000 people's lives. Again, the Legion was on-site to provide veterans and their families with financial emergency assistance — 200 grants have been processed totaling $200,000, and applications for assistance are still arriving at national headquarters.

Through the NEF program, we can't take away all the pain caused from a natural disaster, but I believe we can and do give a fresh start to many posts, veterans and their families. We help posts keep their doors open, and we rebuild the homes and lives of Legionnaires. It's the least we can do for those who have already endured so much.

Like many Legion programs, 100 percent of all NEF donations go directly toward helping a fellow Legionnaire or post. Administrative costs are covered by national headquarters.

Visit *www.legion.org/emergency* to download a NEF application or to donate to the program. Remember, The American Legion is here to help veterans in their time of need.



FUNDRAISING PROGRAM

## OCW goal: $750,000

Operation Comfort Warriors is National Commander Jim Koutz's primary fundraising program. At the Spring Meetings, Koutz raised the goal to $750,000. Donations go directly toward the purchase of comfort items for wounded warriors.

**Donate:**
*www.legion.org/ocw*

## NEF Commander's Challenge

American Legion department commanders are challenged to assist in fundraising efforts for the Legion's National Emergency Fund. The departments currently in first place for their respective membership category include:

- Category 1 (100,000+): Florida
- Category 2 (65,000+): California
- Category 3 (40,000+): Maryland
- Category 4 (25,000+): Arizona
- Category 5 (10,000+): Louisiana
- Category 6 (9,999-): Rhode Island

*www.legion.org/emergency/challenge*

MEMBERSHIP

# Recruiters to be honored with 'Every Day Is Veterans Day' pin

During the 2012-2013 membership year, National Commander Jim Koutz will award his national commander pin to any Legion Family member who obtains a minimum of three headquarters post transfers, and also obtains an additional combination of 10 new members, renewals and headquarters post transfers to equal a combined number of 13.

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2013 membership year who was not a member of The American Legion during the 2012 membership year.

Each member listed must be eligible for membership in The American Legion. Forward names of SAL members or Auxiliary members to your detachment or unit for use in their respective incentive programs.

To maintain the integrity of the national commander's pin program, only one pin will be awarded per individual.

Upon receipt of the certification form, national membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. Commander Koutz's "Every Day Is Veterans Day" pin incentive program will end June 30, or when supplies are exhausted.

Also, Legionnaires who recruit one new member from each eligible war period will receive a certificate.

*www.legion.org/documents/pdf/LUCKY13PININCENTIVE.pdf*

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

# Helping veterans find jobs online

*Ohio post sets up a computer kiosk to help local veterans with employment, writing and email services.*

By Daniel S. Wheeler

The act of submitting your résumé for a job via snail mail is almost non-existent. The Internet has enabled us to send résumés electronically, search for jobs online and network through social media. However, many returning servicemembers or veterans do not have immediate access to computers. American Legion Post 81 in Jackson, Ohio, remedied this by setting up a computer kiosk with printing capabilities. Local veterans can use a computer for job searching, résumé writing and email services. The post also offers free Wi-Fi for veterans who have their own computers.

"As Legion members, we looked at our community and decided that the most pressing need that we can offer in assistance to our veteran brothers and sisters was job services and Internet access," said Post 81 Commander Wendell Brunton. "We hope to expand our services to employer job fairs and employability consulting in the future."

Along with computer and Internet access, Post 81 offers résumé writing tips and career-building services. Veterans can use the post's computer by calling to make an appointment or stopping by during meeting times.

Post 81's computer kiosk is a great example of the many ways The American Legion is helping veterans and returning servicemembers achieve long-term employment. We understand that looking for a career requires technical savvy, as well as strong interviewing skills and a marketability plan to attract prospective employers. That's why we offer valuable online job resources and sponsor career fairs across the country. Visit ***www.legion.org/careers*** to seek job-search advice, find career opportunities and see upcoming career fairs.

Veterans, servicemembers and their families are also encouraged to sign up for The American Legion's Veterans Career Center Newsletter — an electronic mailing that offers a comprehensive listing of military job fairs around the country, information on career resources, and updates on legislation that affects veterans employment or education benefits. Sign up online: ***www.legion.org/careers/enewsletter***

## Veterans in the classroom

Do you have advice for veterans who want to speak to students in the classroom about their military experience?
Answer at:
***www.legion.org/dispatch***

Dispatch

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MEETINGS

# National Convention planned events

The 95th American Legion National Convention is Aug. 23-29 in Houston at the George R. Brown Convention Center. Legionnaires and family members attending can participate in many of the activities planned, including:

**National Commander's Banquet**, Aug. 27. Tickets are $45 apiece and can be purchased by contacting your department adjutant. Entertainment during the banquet is The Temptations Review, featuring Dennis Edwards. Edwards became the lead singer of the Temptations in 1968, leading the band to award-winning hits including "My Girl," "Just My Imagination" and "Papa Was a Rollin' Stone." Edwards has earned 14 gold albums, six platinum records, seven Grammy Awards and is a member of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Alabama Hall of Fame.

**American Legion Family Night**, Aug 23. National Commander Jim Koutz will throw out the first pitch during the Houston Astros game at Minute Maid Park. The Astros play the Toronto Blue Jays. Discounted tickets are available for Legion Family members. Reserve seats now: *www.astros.com/legion*

**Parade**, Aug. 25. The National Convention parade gets under way at 4 p.m. It begins at the intersection of Louisiana Street and Clay Street, and ends at the intersection of Dallas Street and Smith Street.

For more information regarding travel discounts, hotel accommodations, transportation needs, tour opportunities, medical services, parade route and more, visit: *www.legion.org/convention*

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

Tracy L. Davis
*Department Service Officer, Missouri*

# Missed compensation, pension exam

***Q. I missed my compensation and pension VA exam. What should I do?***

*A.* After you've applied for disability compensation and pension, you will receive a letter or phone call telling you when and where to report for an exam. During a compensation and pension VA exam, a doctor will evaluate your medical condition(s) and then send a report to the VA regional office where your claim will be processed. It's the VA regional office, not your doctor, who decides your disability compensation and pension eligibility.

The Veterans Healthcare Administration (VHA) has only two options for noting your attendance to a compensation and pension exam: reported or failed to report. If your exam notification was returned by mail, you received notice after the exam date or you didn't attend for various reasons, "failed to report" is still noted in the system. I advise you to ensure that your local VA hospital or clinic has your current mailing address and phone number on file. Otherwise, you may not receive your compensation and pension exam notice.

If you missed your exam, you may or may not be able to reschedule it by calling the compensation and pension unit at the VA hospital or clinic. You can explain in writing to the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) why you missed your exam and request a new one. Or, contact the VA regional office. If VHA has returned mail or other proof that you were not completely notified of the exam, it can help you in your request to VBA for a new one.

Please contact your American Legion accredited service officer for further assistance with this matter. To find a Legion service officer in your state, visit: *www.legion.org/serviceofficers*
Have a claims question? Email it to: *askso@legion.org*

TAPS

## Franklin C. Ward

***Freeport, N.Y.***

Franklin C. Ward of Post 1765 (Department of New York) passed away May 7 at 90. He was a World War II Army veteran. Mr. Ward served as department commander from 1991-1992, department vice commander from 1977-1978, National Executive Committee alternate member from 1995-1997, National Executive Committee member from 1997-1999, National Finance Commission Liaison Committee member from 1998-1999, National Foreign Relations Council vice chairman from 1978-1980 and 1999-2000, and National Internal Affairs Commission Liaison Committee member from 1997-1998.

## Rex Bass

***Salt Lake City***

Rex Bass of Post 132 (Department of Utah) passed away May 7 at 86. He was a World War II Navy veteran. Mr. Bass served as department commander from 1992-1993, department vice commander from 1976-1979 and 1991-1992, and National & Homeland Security Council vice chairman from 1990-1997.

## Honor loved ones

The American Legion's Honor & Remembrance web page (**www.legion.org/honor**) is dedicated to honoring and remembering those who served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Families are encouraged to submit obituaries by going to the web page and clicking on "In Memoriam." Fill in the deceased's name, the obituary and upload a photo (optional), and hit the save button. Those who knew the deceased are encouraged to leave their condolences in the comments section of the obituary.

*www.legion.org/honor*

YOUTH SCHOLARSHIPS

# Students tested on patriotism

Veer

The American Legion Department of Wisconsin's Americanism and Government Scholarship program has been testing youth statewide for the past 23 years on their knowledge of U.S. citizenship, the U.S. Constitution, flag etiquette and government at the federal, state, county and city level. The test is offered to students in grades 10 through 12, who are either home-schooled or enrolled in a public, private or parochial school within the state of Wisconsin. Thirty-two scholarships are awarded, 10 $250 scholarships to both sophomores and juniors, and 12 $500 scholarships to seniors.

The test moved from paper-based to an online format this year, allowing eligible students to take the test at their convenience during the 12-day testing period in April. "This being our first year utilizing computer-based testing in our high schools, versus the old method of direct mail and Legionnaires visiting the schools, has greatly enhanced visibility and participation," said Wisconsin Department Commander Wayne Jensen.

Three separate email blasts were sent to public and private schools starting in January to promote the new online test. And the success was overwhelming. Nearly 4,400 students from 162 schools took the test by accessing it from the department's website: *www.wilegion.org*

The scholarship test is comprised of 50 multiple choice and true or false questions, followed by a 300 word or fewer essay question. The essay question validates the students test. Students were allowed one hour once they began the test, and they were not able to restart or pause during the test, use notes or resources, or change answers to questions. Test scores were viewable upon completion.

Once the testing period ended, the Americanism and Government Committee chairman meets with district chairman to select the scholarship recipients.

"This was an important strategic initiative reward that enhanced participation in all our Americanism and Children & Youth programs," Jensen said.

# Did you know?

Five award-winning music artists will kick off the 2013 American Legion World Series in Shelby, N.C., Aug. 16-20. The artists include country music singers Sara Evans and Ronnie Milsap, and contemporary Christian music artists MercyMe, The Afters and Aaron Shust. *www.legion.org/baseball*

If you were unable to watch the live streaming of the National Executive Spring Meetings in May, you can still tune in. Visit *www.legiontv.org* and click the "On Demand" tab.

LEGION LEADERSHIP

# Checklist for new district commanders

Every year, more than 750 Legionnaires across the nation are elected to the position of district commander, but very few have experience with the position. To ensure a smooth transition for incoming district commanders, American Legion Department of Pennsylvania Commander Joe Cocco created a checklist.

**The list includes contact information for:**

- District officers and deputy district commanders;
- Committee chairs;
- Key people at department and national headquarters;
- Department and county veteran service officers;
- Local veteran employment representatives and disabled veterans outreach representatives;
- VA medical center;
- Local media;
- State representatives and senators;
- Chamber of Commerce and congressional offices, including the veterans constituent service representative and veteran liaison;
- Veteran financial aid officer or veteran's coordinator at each college within the district; and
- Charities helping veterans.

**The checklist also has:**

- Post addresses and contacts within each post;
- Posts with current issues that need immediate attention;
- Minutes of district meetings for the last three years;
- District meeting dates and places; and
- Dinners and meetings that the district commander should attend.

The American Legion provides a District Commander's Guide, which can be found online under Internal Affairs: *www.legion.org/publications*

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with me for years; every once in awhile I get a sense of what the smell was like.

**Q: How was your World War II Memorial visit?**

**A:** The first time I went to see it (with Honor Flight), it was so huge and I felt so small. Then I went back last December with an Honor Flight and when I walked down to the memorial, I felt the same way. For my third time, I was on the inside looking out through the pillars in a circle. I was standing in the center and to me I was thinking there were two big arms that were reaching out to me, and I felt like I belonged there.

**Q: What was it like to attend the documentary's premiere?**

**A:** That was amazing. After the show, people stopped me wanting my autograph or to take photos with me. It was humbling. They thanked me for my service and thought the film was wonderful.

The whole world depended on the U.S. to save them (during World War II). When people thank me for my service, I am humbled. I represent the 16 million who served in World War II. When they thank me, I take the thanks for the 16 million. It was a job. We – the generations that were raised in the '30s and '40s - were looking for a job. When we entered the service, it was a job. When we came back home and the job was done, we packed up and looked for another job.

**Q: What else do you want people to know?**

**A:** We cannot forget the people who served after World War II and the servicemen (and women) we have now. We always seem to forget the mothers, fathers, husbands, wives and their kids. When someone goes off to war, they (family members) suffer a great deal, too.

"Honor Flight" can be downloaded and watched on iTunes or Amazon.com. Learn more about the film online at:

www.honorflightthemovie.com

And 'like' it on Facebook: www.facebook.com/HonorFlightTheMovie

Visit the Legion's web page dedicated to honor and remembrance:

www.legion.org/honor

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Kenneth F. Governor
*Chairman, National Legislative Commission*

# President signs Stolen Valor Act into law

On June 3, **H.R. 258**, the Stolen Valor Act of 2013, was signed into law by President Barack Obama as **Public Law 113-12**. The bill passed the House of Representatives on May 20 by an overwhelming vote of 390 to 3. And on May 22, the Senate passed the legislation by unanimous consent.

According to the White House, the new law "makes it a federal crime for an individual to fraudulently hold oneself out to be a recipient of any of several specified military decorations or medals with the intent to obtain money, property, or other tangible benefit."

Rep. Joe Heck, R-Nev., a Legionnaire, introduced the bill in January after the start of the 113th Congress. At the time of its consideration on the floor, the bill had 127 co-sponsors. Sens. Dean Heller, R-Nev., and Jon Tester, D-Mont., introduced the Senate companion bill (**S. 210**).

The U.S. Supreme Court overturned the original Stolen Valor Act of 2005, deeming it unconstitutional because it was, in the justices' opinion, too broad in scope and violated the right of free speech. Heck and the Legion worked together to draft a new Stolen Valor Act, and the Supreme Court saw Heck's new legislation as constitutional because it focused on those who seek to benefit from misrepresentations of military service and awards.

Heck's bill states, "Whoever, with intent to obtain money, property, or other tangible benefit, fraudulently holds oneself out to be a recipient of a decoration or medal shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than one year, or both." The legislation covers issues such as lying to receive veteran or health-care benefits, obtaining a government contract only eligible for a veteran or service-disabled veteran-owned business, or getting a job reserved for a veteran.

On May 22, the House Appropriations Committee gave voice approval of the draft fiscal year (FY) 2014 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill. The legislation provides FY 2014 funding for two accounts: (1) Military construction funding for the infrastructure to house, train and equip military personnel, provide construction funds for projects pertaining to the quality of life of troops and their families, and for military base structure; and (2) Veterans Affairs (VA) funding for veterans benefits and programs. The measure now goes to the full House for passage.

The measure totals $73.3 billion in discretionary funding, which is $1.4 billion above the enacted level for FY 2013, and approximately $2.4 billion above the current level caused by automatic sequestration spending cuts, which do not affect the veterans spending portion of the bill.

# MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

## GOLD AND SILVER BRIGADE

Renamed "Koutz Scouts" for the 2013 Membership Year, the Gold and Silver Brigade program will honor 2012 Gold and Silver Brigade Award recipients who bring an increased number of members in 2013. For every additional member, a 2012 Gold or Silver Brigade recipient obtains in 2013 over their 2012 total, they will receive a monetary award. Gold Brigaders will receive $3 per member they obtain over last year's total; Silver Brigaders will receive $2 per member they obtain over last year's total.

National Headquarters will continue to accept submissions for the traditional Gold and Silver Brigade award program, but hopes that those trying for either award will push themselves extra hard to get new members into The American Legion with this cash incentive. National Headquarters will also offer certificates, coins and lapel/cap pins to those who exceed last year's goals.

The program will be continued through 2019, so any Legionnaires who want to participate in next year's enhanced Gold and Silver Brigade can participate in 2014 for the new members they signed up during the 2013 membership year.

For more information, contact the Membership Division:
*(317) 630-1327* or *ksingleton@legion.org*

## DISTRICT LEADERS REWARDED FOR POST VISITS

The District Commander Post Visitation Award is an incentive for personal visits to posts by district commanders and vice commanders. Personal contact at this level sets the example for post membership workers to make the personal contacts necessary for a successful membership program.

**Criteria.** The district commander and/or vice commanders must visit each post in the district during their year. For districts with more than 30 posts, the district vice commanders can assist in making visits, but the district commander must visit at least 30 of the posts personally.

**Certification.** A list of posts in each district can be obtained with the assistance of department headquarters. At the completion of the 100 percent visit requirement, the district commander will send the completed spreadsheet to the department, which will forward it to National Headquarters by Aug. 2.

**Awards.**

- Category 1 (up to 20 posts), $100
- Category 2 (21 to 35 posts), $200
- Category 3 (36 to 50 posts), $300
- Category 4 (51 to 65 posts), $400
- Category 5 (65 or more posts), $500

*www.legion.org/commander/districtpost*

# POST EXCELLENCE AWARD CONTINUES

The Post Excellence Award program honors posts that show excellence in membership participation, youth activities, community service, and support to veterans and U.S. troops.

**Criteria**

- **Membership.** Post membership must be at least one member more than the previous year. A post officer must attend district meetings.
- **Youth activities.** The post must sponsor and actively participate in at least one primary youth program: Boys State, Legion Baseball, the Oratorical Contest, Boy Scouts of America or Junior Shooting Sports.
- **Community service.** The post must organize a community service project that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or Sons of The American Legion. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.
- **Service to troops or veterans.** The post must organize a project supporting troops or veterans (for example, Family Support Network or Operation Comfort Warriors), that involves members of the Legion, Auxiliary or SAL outside the post. A monetary donation may only be one part of a project.

**Certification.** District commanders must certify posts as having fulfilled the four specified criteria, and submit a list of the post's name, number, address and commander's name to department headquarters. If possible, accompany with copies of press releases submitted to local media that raise awareness for the projects and enhance the Legion's public image.

**Awards.** Each qualifying post, as well as district commanders whose districts have at least 50 percent of posts reach certification, will receive a certificate of recognition.

*www.legion.org/commander/postexcellence*

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POST ACTIVITIES

# An overdue welcome home

Many American Legion posts and communities nationwide are giving Vietnam War veterans the proper welcome home that they deserved 50 years ago.

Recently, Post 291 in Newport Beach, Calif., hosted a "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans" party where post members wore their military uniforms from the Vietnam War and other attendees dressed in '60s attire — a prize was given for best attire. Inside the post hung jungle camouflage netting, a map of Vietnam for veterans to place a pin where they were stationed, and photos of the veterans from their Vietnam days. Music from the era was played, and attendees had their picture taken next to the donated armored personnel carrier. A military police vehicle and assault weapons from the Vietnam War era were also on display. Nearly 200 people attended the event.

"Our Vietnam vets might not have had a warm homecoming back in the '60s and '70s, but it was celebrated in style at Newport Harbor Post 291," said Post Commander Jess Lawson. "It was truly a great event!"

## PLANNER

### *JULY*

4 Independence Day

19-26 Boys Nation, Washington, D.C.

### *AUGUST*

1 Samsung Scholarship applications due to National Headquarters

2-4 National membership workshop

6-10 Junior Air-Rifle Shooting Sports Competition, Colorado Springs, Colo.

16-20 Legion Baseball World Series, Shelby, N.C.

18-22 Legacy Run

23-29 National Convention, Houston

*www.legion.org/dispatch/calendar*