Vol. 28 No. 6

THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
February 2018 A National Headquarters Publication

MEMBERSHIP

Photo by Samuel Schneider

'A PLACE TO BELONG, TO CALL HOME'

Persistence led one veteran to find the right American Legion post to join and a camaraderie he had missed since leaving the military.

By Abe Abrahamson, adjutant for The American Legion Department of Idaho

It started when I was in the U.S. Marines, deployed to Southwest Asia and sitting in my fighting hole waiting for mail call. The platoon sergeant threw a letter in my hole. The envelope said it was from American Legion Post 26. I opened the letter. It read, "Dear Sir, You are the newest member of American Legion Post 26. Come see us when you get back and we will buy you a beer."

I had just turned 21. There was not a drop of legal alcohol within 300 miles of my hole. This offer sounded pretty good to me. So when I completed my tour and returned to the States, I went to collect on that beer.

I went to the post meeting, found a chair and sat down. Some guys looked at me, strangely, over their drinks. Not one person approached or said a word to me, even after the meeting. I thought, "Even though I am a member, I guess I don't belong here." I left.

I knew enough about the programs and services of The American Legion to renew my membership, even though I didn't go back to that post.

After my wife and I moved to a different town she encouraged me to get involved with the VFW or American Legion again. I tried the VFW but had the same results ... no one talked to me. Two times now I had tried to be a veteran in a veterans organization and no one wanted anything to do with me. I thought, "Am I a person who doesn't belong?"

My wife suggested I try The American Legion post in our new town since I was already a member. The meeting day came and I walked in expecting the same results.

See 'A place to belong, to call home' on Page 4

NEWS ALERT

Washington Conference coverage

The American Legion's 58th Washington Conference is Feb. 25-28 in Washington, D.C. Follow coverage of the conference, such as stories, photos and videos, online at *www.legion.org/washingtonconference*.

Wear red to support the military, Legion

For many years, RED (Remember Everyone Deployed) Friday has been a national campaign to encourage Americans to wear red to show support for deployed military men and women. Red also symbolizes the blood spilled by those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.

The American Legion Family is encouraged to show their support for RED Friday. To do so, red American Legion Child Welfare Foundation (CWF) shirts are available for $10 apiece. All proceeds will benefit CWF, which awards grants to nonprofits that contribute to the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual welfare of children.

To purchase a red CWF shirt, while supplies last, call *(317) 630-1202*.

American Legion's 99th birthday

The American Legion will celebrate its 99th birthday on March 15. A speech is available at *www.legion.org/publications* for posts to use during events that commemorate this anniversary. Remember to use the hashtag #LegionFamilyDinner when promoting your event.

COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

A strong membership for continued service

Denise H. Rohan
National Commander

As an American Legion member, you will always be reminded that membership is the lifeblood of this organization. Because without strong membership numbers, our voice on Capitol Hill will not be heard. Our premiere youth programs, such as Boys Nation and Legion Baseball, will not put forth America's future leaders. Our financial support to those who need us, veterans and their families, will be diminished.

Asking someone to join may be one of the hardest things we do. So to support your recruiting and retention efforts, The American Legion has online resources available for the American Legion Family to use. I want to share a few:

The American Legion Magazine. Every American Legion post within the United States is currently receiving three complimentary issues of *The American Legion Magazine* every month. Post members can use the free magazine copies as a recruiting tool by showing potential new members one of the many benefits of Legion membership. They too can be left at the local VA hospital, veteran nursing homes, airport military lounges, dentist and doctors offices, and other areas that veterans frequent.

Recruiting tools. There are membership recruiting items such as door hangers, flyers, videos, presentations and more available for download at *www.legion.org/membership/tools*.

Vimeo channel. The American Legion has an abundance of promotional videos and public service announcements (PSAs) that help tell the Legion's story, as well as aid in membership recruiting, fundraising efforts, support for programs and events, and more. And it's all easily accessible on The American Legion's Vimeo channel at *https://vimeo.com/americanlegion*. The PSAs and videos housed on the Legion's Vimeo channel can easily be shared via mobile devices or downloaded onto a computer hard drive and shared without the need for Internet connection.

Through a strong membership, we can continue leading The American Legion into its second century and continue to serve and protect all veterans, servicemembers and their families.

Denise H. Rohan

MEMBERSHIP

Legion Family members eligible for 'Family First' incentive pin

American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan is extending her "Family First!" membership incentive pin to the entire American Legion Family.

Rohan will award her national commander incentive pin to any American Legion Family member who obtains any combination of three eligible new members into the Legion Family (The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion or American Legion Auxiliary).

A new member is any eligible person joining for the 2018 membership year who was not a member of the American Legion Family during the 2017 membership year.

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

Upon receipt, national membership staff will confirm the names and mail the pin directly to the person who earned it. Rohan's incentive program will end June 30, 2018, or when supplies are exhausted.

www.legion.org/commander/pin

MEMBERSHIP

National Commander Honor Ribbon

American Legion National Commander Denise H. Rohan will award her National Commander Honor Ribbon to any American Legion Family that achieves 100 percent membership by May 30, 2018.

For this award, the Legion Family is defined as a post and any combination of an Auxiliary unit, Sons squadron or Legion Riders chapter. Each branch must achieve 100 percent membership to qualify for the award.

The National Commander Honor Ribbon membership incentive program will end May 30, 2018.

Apply for the award online at *www.legion.org/commander/ribbon*.

NATIONAL ADJUTANT'S MESSAGE

Learn the story of your post's namesake

In honor of the services of African-American veterans, American Legion posts are telling the story of who their post is named after.

By Daniel S. Wheeler

As we honored Martin Luther King last month and now we enter the month of February, Black History Month, it's important to remember the sacrifices of the Buffalo Soldiers, the Harlem Hellfighters, the Tuskegee Airmen, the Marines of Montford Point, and the African-American men and women who have served their nation with honor and distinction. They are the substance that helped mold America into the nation that we are today. And I am proud that so many African-Americans continue to serve America in The American Legion.

During Black History Month, many American Legion posts are using this time of celebration and remembrance to learn about and tell the story of their post's namesake. The following are a few examples:

Otis Stone Post 354 in Evansville, Ind., was chartered in 1929. Stone, a Kentucky native who moved to Evansville when he was 20, went to France as an Army mess sergeant in June 1918. He developed pneumonia over the winter and died in January 1919. His name is on the city's World War I monument, dedicated in 1926, listed as "colored." Only one other name is listed the same. Last February for Black History Month, Post 354 Commander and Adjutant William VanHooks Jr. shared the history of Stone on a local radio station. He read a short bio of Stone and shared information about Post 354 today, including its programs and services.

Daniel W. Dowling American Legion Post 769 in Ambler, Pa., was founded in 1945 by a group of 18 African-American veterans returning from World War II. Post 769 is named for the first African-American from the area to volunteer for Civil War service with the Union Army's 24th U.S. Colored Troop Infantry Regiment. The post held its 11th annual Martin Luther King Junior Day breakfast with 400 in attendance.

Fred Brock Post 828 in San Antonio. U.S. Air Force veteran Al Alford joined The American Legion seven years ago and soon began to wonder about a name he encountered each time he stepped into Post 828.

Who was Fred Brock?

Al Alford holds a plaque about Post 828's namesake, Fred Brock, a World War II veteran. *Photo by Jeff Stoffer/The American Legion*

Through research, Alford, now commander of the 320-member post bearing Brock's name in District 20, learned that Brock was the first to lose his life while on duty with the Army's 92nd Infantry Division – the famed "Buffalo Soldiers" – during World War II. Brock was killed, Alford discovered, by friendly fire during a training exercise on Aug. 18, 1943, while installing lines for a field telephone system at Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

Alford learned that Brock had graduated from San Antonio's Wheatley High School in 1940 and enlisted in the Army. He was a model soldier and moving well through the ranks when tragedy struck. He received the Expert Rifle Marksmanship and Good Conduct Medals.

Post 828 sits along the route for San Antonio's annual Martin Luther King Day parade, which draws hundreds of thousands, making the name Fred Brock visible.

Post 828's centennial profile page at ***www.centennial.legion.org*** explores more of its history, and Alford is urging others to collect and share theirs as The American Legion's 100th anniversary nears.

The centennial profile page "is a very important tool – for retention, as well, because when you look at it and build a photo gallery you can show them: you're a part of this post's history now," Alford said. "In addition, many members don't know the history themselves. When they look at a centennial post, it gives them a sense of pride."

Have a membership success story?

Share: ***www.legiontown.org***

Dispatch

Published monthly.
Printed by PRINTING PARTNERS, Indianapolis, Ind.

All American Legion publications are entitled and encouraged to reproduce all staff-written stories within, but please credit *Dispatch* as the source.

A proud member of The National American Legion Press Association.

Correspondence and letters to the editor:
The American Legion Dispatch
P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206

Subscriptions/Customer Service:
(317) 630-1221

Email: **dispatch@legion.org**

Fax: **(317) 630-1280**

Online: **www.legion.org/dispatch**

EDITOR
Cameran Richardson

DESIGNER
Jason Reed

From 'A place to belong, to call home' on Page 1

I went in, sat down, and immediately a guy walked up, grabbed my hand, shook it and said, "I'm Frank. Who are you? What branch? What did you do? How long were you in?" Before I could answer, he introduced me to the commander and many others. Then he introduced me to the chaplain, who looked me up and down and asked, "Marine, huh? Do you have your dress blues?"

"Yes, I do, and they even still fit."

"Good. Come with me," he said.

We went in the back of the post and he gave me gloves, a hat and coat. "We have a funeral tomorrow, and I need you to wear your blues because you are presenting the flag to the family."

I was introduced to everyone that night; I met so many veterans and their spouses. When I went home I said to my wife, "I found it."

"Found what?" she asked.

"The camaraderie that I had missed since I received my DD-214."

They were not all Marines, but they were brothers and sisters in arms. I found a place to belong and to call home.

I have been a member of that post for several years now. I have buried some of those members who welcomed me that first night and suppose I will bury a few more in the years ahead. By then, I will have helped welcome in a new set of Legionnaires, introduced them to the commander, and offered them something to do like present the flag to the family of one who has left us.

I have developed friendships and bonds I will never forget. We do tell old stories, but we also create new ones. We share things from our biographies that even our families never hear. No matter what war era, Vietnam to Afghanistan, we Legionnaires are family.

I wanted to give up on the Legion, but I didn't. And I am glad because I finally found my home, where I belong, among my brothers and sisters.

Some Vietnam War veterans tell of a time when they were not welcomed in posts after they came home. Today, those veterans who were persistent enough to find the right Legion fit are leaders of The American Legion at every level. They know that a failed first impression can mean a member lost forever. Not everyone is as persistent as this Marine, and we, as Legionnaires, should not make the journey difficult or the destination unwelcoming.

As a post-9/11 veteran in a position of leadership in my department today, I strongly encourage all of my fellow Legionnaires to embrace the new generation, male or female, because a veteran is a veteran.

We often need each other, our communities definitely need us, and there simply is no good reason to turn a cold shoulder to any eligible veteran who could benefit from membership.

MEMBERSHIP

Send reasons to join and stay in The American Legion

Photo by Jon Endow/The American Legion

Anyone who has been a member of The American Legion for some time, or has recruited someone to join, can quickly list a few good reasons to become part of the nation's largest organization of wartime veterans – and to renew.

The reasons may be national in scope, such as:

- Strengthens the veteran voice in Washington for a more effective VA health-care system.
- Keeps the GI Bill updated and relevant for new generations.
- Provides substantial veteran oversight of congressional committees and agencies.

The reasons may be specific to an American Legion department, such as:

- Adds to the network of like-minded Legion Family members in my state.
- Ensures support, resources and training for American Legion department service officers who assist others who served.
- Builds future leaders through American Legion Boys State and other youth programs.

They may, of course, be local, such as:

- Young people in my community need Legion mentoring through Scouts, Junior ROTC, Junior Shooting Sports and other programs.
- Community memorials to those who served before must never be forgotten.
- The local Legion Riders chapter has a great time raising funds that matter in the community.

And, they may be individual, such as:

- Camaraderie with fellow veterans and patriotic Americans.
- The Legion helps me understand my VA benefits.
- The discount programs are valuable.

During the centennial year, The American Legion would like to remind eligible veterans and those who have let memberships expire "100 Good Reasons to Join and Renew in The American Legion." The best of those reasons will come from local posts and members. The multi-media campaign is set to launch in September 2018.

To help, members everywhere are invited to send their top 10 reasons by email to ✉ *dispatch@legion.org*. From those suggestions, the centennial campaign will be designed, fueled by the 100 best reasons from the combined submissions. Reasons should be limited to no more than one or two sentences each, including a specific local reference, if applicable.

As the ideas come in, look for them at 🌐 *www.legion.org*, in social media and other centennial promotions as the 100th anniversary of the organization unfolds.

100TH ANNIVERSARY

New Jersey post kicks off its centennial with a contest for high school students

Capt. James B. Scarr American Legion Post 106 in Hasbrouck Heights, N.J., will celebrate its centennial in September 2019. To kick off its 100th anniversary celebration, Post 106 is conducting an art/poster contest with high school students in the area. And $600 in prize money will be awarded to the top five winners.

Post 106's art/poster contest is challenging participants to create something that denotes the 100th anniversary of the post. Participants will upload a digital image of their artwork to the visitor's section of Post 106's Facebook page. From Feb. 16 to March 14 people can vote; winners will be decided by the most number of "likes."

The winners of the contest will have their artwork featured alongside the post's centennial timeline, which will be displayed inside the town's public library. Members of the post are currently working with Hasbrouck Heights High School teachers and students to create that timeline. "We are excited to see what the high school students come up with," said Post 106 First Vice Commander Patrick McCarthy.

Post 106 was chartered in September 1919 and is named after World War I Lt. James Bernard Scarr, who was posthumously promoted to captain. Scarr left his position as a teacher and athletic director at Hasbrouck Heights High School to serve in the Army. He was assigned to the 30th U.S. Infantry Third Division. On the evening of June 6, 1918, in France, Scarr was administering first aid to three wounded men when a high-explosive shell exploded nearby. Scarr was killed instantly; his broken watch marked the exact time of his death at 2:15 a.m.

Scarr's younger brother who was wounded in the war, Francis J. Scarr, served as Post 106's first commander.

McCarthy said the post was very active in its early years and that there's "a lot of history intertwined between the post and the community." The post sponsored boxing matches, a bowling league, junior baseball team, fairs, minstrel shows, dances and other entertainment all without a post home. Post 106 still doesn't have a home; members meet at the senior center. In his research of Post 106, McCarthy was amazed to learn that 1922 Post Commander Albert E. Browne went on to serve as the mayor of Hasbrouck Heights from 1938-1944.

The American Legion wants to hear how your post is celebrating its centennial. Share (what, where and when) by sending an email to ✉ ***dispatch@legion.org***.

DID YOU KNOW?

- A new post membership retention award was announced during The American Legion's National Membership & Post Committee meeting in Indianapolis on Jan. 12. Posts with 100, 95 and 90 percent membership retention rate will be eligible for the award, which will start with the 2019 membership year.

- If you live in or around Los Angeles then stop by the Bob Hope Patriotic Hall to see "The Greatest Legislation: An American Legion Centennial Salute to the GI Bill." This traveling exhibit features illustrated panels and more than 20 videos in touch-screen kiosks. It's been on display at the National WWII Museum in New Orleans, at the Student Veterans of America conference in San Antonio last month, and now at Patriotic Hall through March 2018. The GI Bill exhibit is part of the Legion's 100th anniversary celebration.

- The American Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors program provided a $30,000 grant to the VA Caribbean Health Care System to aid Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in hurricane recovery efforts. The OCW grant purchased Walmart and Home Depot gift cards to support veterans in their rebuilding efforts. National Commander Denise H. Rohan and leadership from the Department of Puerto Rico delivered the grant to VA staff.
  www.legion.org/ocw

DATELINE: CAPITOL HILL

Military discharge upgrade tool now available online

James W. Oxford,
Chairman, National Legislative Commission

Veterans with other than honorable (OTH) discharges – also known as "bad paper" discharges – do not qualify for VA benefits and services. However, it is clear that many OTH discharges can be attributed to undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury symptoms. Congress instructed the Department of Defense (DoD) to create a process through which these discharges can be appealed and, possibly, reversed.

Through a joint initiative, DoD and VA launched an online tool (*www.vets.gov/discharge-upgrade-instructions*) to help veterans with the discharge recharacterization process.

The site will ask veterans a few questions. By answering them, the veteran will know which board they need to go to, what form to fill out, any special guidance applicable to their case, where to send their application, and helpful tips for appealing their discharge.

President signs bill easing CDL rules for active-duty troops, reservists

On Jan. 8, President Trump signed into law **Public Law 115-105**, the Jobs for Our Heroes Act, which clarifies eligibility rules for active-duty servicemembers and reservists applying for commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) under U.S. Department of Transportation programs.

Previously, lawmakers had created a special program for veterans seeking CDLs, which allowed them to skip driving tests and some certification requirements if they had previous applicable experience from their time in the military. But those provisions did not include reservists who have not yet separated from the military or active-duty troops planning ahead for their post-service careers. Transportation officials created a two-year exemption to cover those groups, but the new legislation makes those changes permanent.

In addition, the new law also allows more VA medical professionals to perform required federal health examinations for the licensing processes. Because of current rules, only a small number of VA staffers meet the requirements for administering those tests.

President issues executive order addressing veteran suicide

On Jan. 9, Trump signed an executive order that instructed the DoD, VA and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to develop a joint plan addressing veterans suicide, especially in the first year after leaving military service. The departments have 60 days to develop a plan and must report on its implementation and effectiveness within 180 days of the signing date.

The order specifies that the plan should work to streamline access to mental health services throughout an individual's transition to civilian life and across the DoD and VA. The inclusion of the DHS means that the Coast Guard will be covered by these actions.

MEMBERSHIP INCENTIVES AND AWARDS

DISTRICT COMMANDER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

District commanders whose May membership target date exceeds the previous year's membership by at least the number of posts in that district will be awarded the District Commander Achievement Award certificate. The district also will receive a District Honor Ribbon for its district colors.

Download the District Commander Achievement Award application at *www.legion.org/membership/awards*.

BIG TWELVE COMPETITION

The American Legion's Big Twelve Competition recognizes departments that meet or exceed their pledged membership goal percentage by the March target date. The percentage does not include members gained through DMS.

The competition is broken into six categories. The winner in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $2,000. Runners-up in each category will be reimbursed for computer equipment purchases of up to $1,000.

The six categories in the Big Twelve Competition are:

- Departments of 100,000 or more members
- Departments of 65,000 to 99,999 members
- Departments of 40,000 to 64,999 members
- Departments of 25,000 to 39,999 members
- Departments of 10,000 to 24,999 members
- Departments of 9,999 or fewer members

The competition is featured in the National Membership Points Awards Manual at *www.legion.org/publications*.

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, 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

Dispatch

February 2018 | A National Headquarters Publication

THE AMERICAN LEGION
P.O. BOX 1055 • INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
THE AMERICAN LEGION

WHAT'S INSIDE

FEATURE STORY: 'A PLACE TO BELONG, TO CALL HOME'
Page 1

Commander's Message: A strong membership for continued service
Page 2

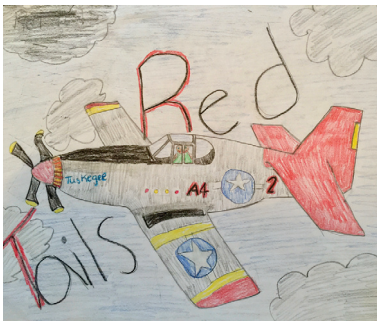
Adjutant's Message: Learn the story of your post's namesake
Page 3

Membership: Send reasons to join and stay in The American Legion
Page 4

100th Anniversary: New Jersey post kicks off its centennial with a contest for high school students
Page 5

HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Virginia post educates youth about contributions of black servicemembers



American Legion Post 157's Black History Month contest teaches youth in Madison, Va., about the significant military contributions made by African-American men and women throughout U.S. history. Last year's contest theme was the World War II Red Tails. This year it's the article "Fighting for Respect, African-American Soldiers in WWI," written by Jami Bryan with Army Historical Foundation publication.

Madison County youth in middle school through high school who participate in the February contest will draw a picture or write an essay that interprets what they learned from the article. Elementary students are asked to draw a picture of how they think the Underground Railroad helped save the lives of slaves.

Post 157 member Lisa Davis, who oversees the post's youth contests for Black History Month, Memorial Day, Constitution Day and Veterans Day, said Legionnaires have to get involved and teach youth, and sometimes even the teachers, about the sacrifices and contributions made by black veterans. "It's just too important and these kids have no idea," she said. "We are pretty proud of our contests."

The students are recognized for their participation with first-place medals awarded to each grade, along with honorable mention and participation certificates.

The American Legion wants to hear how your post celebrated Black History Month. Share your story on ***www.legiontown.org***.

PLANNER

March

1-2	Department Service Officers School, Washington, D.C.
14	90 percent membership target date
15	American Legion's 99th Birthday
18	Department certification of Oratorical Contest winners due to National Headquarters