



Air Force Veteran from Leavenworth, Kan., Elected National Commander of The American Legion

TAMPA, Fla. (Aug. 28, 2025)—A retired Kansas district court judge was elected national commander of the nation’s largest veterans organization during The American Legion’s 106th national convention today.

Dan K. Wiley, an Air Force veteran, served 28 years on the bench in Leavenworth, Kan., and is a past department (state) commander of the Kansas American Legion. Wiley, who owns a cattle farm in Leavenworth, is a paid-up-for-life member of Byron H. Mehl American Legion Post 23. He has served in numerous offices at every level of The American Legion, including terms on the organization’s National Executive Committee (board of directors). After being appointed by the Kansas governor as a district court judge in 2008, Wiley helped establish and preside over the Leavenworth County Veterans Treatment Court. He has been active in his community and is a past president of the Leavenworth / Lansing Chamber of Commerce, a past chairman of the Leavenworth County Veterans Day Parade Committee and a member of the Unified School District 453 School Board.

Following an enlisted tour in the U.S. Air Force, Wiley earned a business degree at the College of Great Falls in Montana, and a law degree at the University of Kansas.

As national commander, Wiley is a strong advocate for The American Legion’s “Be the One” outreach mission to prevent veteran suicide. He emphasizes inclusivity in The American Legion Family through the theme, “better together!”

Wiley and his wife, Sonia, have two children, Austin and Christy, and one grandson. The national commander and his son, Austin Wiley, are charter members of Sons of The American Legion Squadron 36 in Oskaloosa, Kan. Sonia and Christy are members of the American Legion Auxiliary.

Eric Beal Service Officer

Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) National Goals

- ALL Claim backlog from beginning of July 2025 =900K
- Current Backlog July 2025 =725KB
- Backlog compensation claims beginning 2025 =237K

PACT Act National claims 8/10/2022 to current

- Through June 2025 = 2.4 compensation claims submitted
- Through June 2025 = 2.7 compensation claims granted
- 74% Grant Rate with 11B in retro payments

PACT ACT Montana 8/10/2022 to current

- Through June 2025 = 12K compensation claims submitted
- Through June 2025 = 11K claims completed
- Through June 2025 = 8K claims granted
- 80% Grant Rate with 63.2M retro payments

VA announces expanded burial benefits JULY 10 2025

WASHINGTON

— The Department of Veterans Affairs announced today it has temporarily expanded burial benefits for certain Veterans, per the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act. The new law specifies eligible Veterans are those who are discharged from VA-provided medical or nursing care to receive VA-provided hospice care at their home and who pass away between July 1, 2025, and Oct. 1, 2026. Previously, Veterans who died at home under VA hospice care after discharge from VA-provided medical or nursing care were not always eligible for a full VA burial allowance. The Dole Act addresses that gap. “VA is working hard to fully implement the many provisions of the Dole Act,” said VA Secretary Doug Collins. “We’re excited to offer this expanded benefit, which better supports Veterans who choose to spend their final days at home, surrounded by their loved ones.” Families and caregivers of Veterans receiving hospice care at home following discharge from VA-provided medical or nursing care are encouraged to contact their local VA for information about eligibility and how to apply for burial benefits. Visit VA burial benefits or call 800-827-1000 for more information and see here for details on the legislative language authorizing this change.

Medicare Open Enrollment: Resources for Legionnaires

Dear Trust Directors, Department Adjutants, and Valued Department Members,

With Medicare Open Enrollment just 10 weeks away, now is the time to remind Legionnaires that trusted healthcare coverage is within reach. The Legionnaire Insurance Trust (LIT) is here to help members take control of their healthcare decisions and prepare for the October 15 – December 7 enrollment period.

Medicare Options Through LIT

The LIT Medicare Plan Finder provides American Legion families with access to top-rated Medicare Supplement and Advantage plans. These plans offer nationwide coverage and dedicated support, making them a smart choice for members turning 65 or those already enrolled in Medicare.

August Spotlight: Emergency Assistance Plus® (EA+®)

Medical emergencies can happen anytime, anywhere. EA+® is an annual membership that provides cardholders with critical protection while traveling.

What it covers:

- Emergency medical evacuation
- Transportation home after hospitalization
- Nurse escorts
- Return of vehicles
- Travel coordination for family members during extended hospital stays

Why it matters: EA+® ensures that members are never left stranded in a crisis by handling logistics, transportation, and support.

Department Adjutant Duane Cunningham

As we roll into a new membership year, it is an opportune time for each of us to take a hard, honest look at our Posts and ask a simple question: What are we doing in our communities to carry forward the mission of The American Legion? Is our Post an active member of both the community and our founding pillars?

It is easy to gather for meetings, plan a fundraiser, or hang a new plaque on the wall. But our true measure as Legionnaires is found in whether we are advancing the Four Pillars of The American Legion:

1. Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
2. National Security
3. Americanism
4. Children & Youth

These are not just words to be recited at convention or printed in a manual. They are the foundation upon which this organization was built, and they remain the responsibility of every Post today. Each activity we undertake whether it be supporting a veteran's claim, raising funds for scholarships, conducting a flag education program, or engaging in community service should tie back to these pillars. If it does not, we must ask ourselves why we are doing it.

At the same time, we cannot overlook the necessity of growing our membership and developing leadership within our ranks. New members bring new energy, new ideas, and new opportunities to serve. But recruiting alone is not enough. We

must be equally committed to training and mentoring new officers so they are ready to step forward when the time comes. A Post that fails to prepare its future leaders is a Post that risks fading away.

Equally important is our duty to stay current with the requirements and changes coming down from National. Too often, Posts fall behind simply because they do not keep pace with updates on membership processing, reporting deadlines, and program requirements. These details matter. They are the backbone of accountability and the framework that keeps our organization strong nationwide.

Has your Post become "Postified"? Meaning, we are a Post, but we don't participate in the community, we don't send a representative to District meetings or Department Convention to get the latest information for our members; we don't promote Americanism Programs such as Oratory or Boys and Girls State. We don't get involved with Department fundraisers that support those very programs, because well, somebody else will do it. We are just a bar or a group of Veterans who call ourselves a Legion Post.

As Legionnaires we should be asking our Post membership tough questions, like "why the hell not?" Why do we have the same Post leadership every year and why don't we participate? If this is your Post, your Post has been "Postified", and in reality, no longer meet the American Legion mission. I have been your Department Adjutant for 5 years now, and there are Posts that I have never seen at

a District or Department meeting, never had participation in a Legion program from,

and never had so much as a question as to what the American Legion was doing. Is it time we consider merging and closing inactive Posts? Do we need guidelines and requirements that spell out what is a minimum of acceptable participation in an organization we all honor and respect? As Veterans and Legionnaires this should serve as both a wake-up call and a call to service.

I urge every Post this month to pause and reflect: Are we serving veterans and families, or simply keeping the lights on in a building? Are we growing leaders, or holding too tightly to tradition while the next generation waits for a chance? Are we living the Four Pillars, or just quoting them?

The answers may be uncomfortable but that is the point. Growth comes when we are willing to ask hard questions and do the work to strengthen not just our Post, but the entire American Legion family.

Let us hold ourselves to the highest standard, because our communities, our veterans, and our youth deserve nothing less.



The Birthday Brawl: Tankers Hold The Line At Khe Sanh

By: Kyle Watts

Posted on July 15, 2025

First Lieutenant Harris Himes stabbed holes around the side of an empty C-ration can. He ignited a heat tab inside and warmed his breakfast over the flame. The alien aroma of beans and weenies flared his hunger pangs, gratefully supplanting the reek of diesel fumes thickening the air. Two of his tanks idled on the road nearby. Himes commanded the 1st Platoon of “Bravo” Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, with five tanks under his charge. Infantrymen bustled about the area preparing for the mission at hand. Each had begun their day long before dawn. Now, a tired sun stirred on the eastern hills, reluctantly ascending over the battle-scarred landscape of Khe Sanh Combat Base.

Corporal Fred Kellogg waited impatiently outside the supply hooch, holding his M3 submachine gun. A line of grunts formed ahead. The sergeant in charge doled out bullets like a munificent millionaire dispensing Halloween candy from the portico of his mansion. When his turn arrived, Kellogg approached with his antiquated weapon extended, an empty bucket desperate for a treat.

“Good morning, Sergeant. I really need some new magazines for this grease gun. The springs are all worn out. They won’t hardly feed anymore.”

The sergeant glared at Kellogg. This was not the first time the tanker had come whining about his worthless weapon.

“Corporal, if the Marine Corps wanted you to have new magazines, it would have given you new magazines! Now get the hell out of my tent!”

A litany of profanity hounded Kellogg back to his tank and trailed off below the rumbling diesel engine. Kellogg climbed aboard and dropped into the tank commander’s (TC’s) hatch, tossing the grease gun aside with a slew of opinions about the supply sergeant. He ignored the looks from the rest of his crew as he prepared to roll out. Kellogg positioned his tank, call sign B-12, on point leading out the Khe Sanh gate. Cpl Adrian “Buzz” Conklin com-manded B-13 in line behind him. The remainder of Himes’ platoon staged behind in a separate supply convoy. The two lead tanks would accompany an advance party of grunts from Fox Com-pany, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, sweeping ahead in search of mines laid overnight or an enemy ambush lying in wait. Today, of all days, that prospect felt surely to become reality.

It was May 19, 1968, Ho Chi Minh’s birthday. Intelligence reports streamed in over the preceding week. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) around Khe Sanh seemed hell-bent on blocking the road out of the base and perhaps, after months of siege warfare, finally overrunning the American encampment as a gift for their leader.

The infamous siege of Khe Sanh was already over in the eyes of the world. The combat base and surrounding hill outposts had held. The NVA had failed. Much of the air support so critical to sustaining life through the siege was diverted. Virtually all the media attention shifted elsewhere. To the Marines who remained, however, a steady dose of enemy rockets and mortars belied the prevailing attitude.

Just the month prior, American commanders organized Operation Pegasus for the overland relief of Khe Sanh. Marines and 1st Cavalry Division soldiers struck out westward from their base at Ca Lu, while the defenders of Khe Sanh surged from their fighting positions in a coordinated effort. By mid-April, engineers cleared or rebuilt the impassable stretches of the main supply route between the two combat bases, called Route 9.

read more at: <https://www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck/the-birthday-brawl-tankers-hold-the-line-at-khe-sanh/>

Membership Minute

Who's Eligible? National Guard & Reserve Members and the DD-214 Confusion

How federal service—*even one day*—can qualify you for The American Legion

Basic Eligibility Rule

To join The American Legion, a veteran must:

- Have served at least one day of federal active duty (under Title 10),
- During a recognized war era (Dec. 7, 1941 – Present),
- And have received an honorable discharge or currently serve honorably.

What Qualifies as Federal Service?

Title 10 Orders – Subsection 672 or 12301

If your basic training or initial duty was under these federal orders—even for just one day—you qualify.

Title 32 Orders – State-Controlled Duty

Time served on Title 32 orders (weekend drills, annual training,

or state missions) does not qualify because it's not federal active duty.

What If My DD-214 Says “0 Days”?

That doesn't always mean you're ineligible.

- Many Guard/Reserve members don't receive a full DD-214 for short federal service.
- Even if your DD-214 lists 0 days, your activation orders or training records might prove eligibility.

Acceptable supporting documents include:

- Title 10 Activation Orders showing Subsection 672 or 12301
- DA Form 1059 (training completion under federal status)
- Basic Training certificates with Title 10 references

What to Submit

If your DD-214 doesn't confirm eligibility, include:

- Title 10 orders for training (Subsection 672 or 12301)
- Other supporting military documents
- Discharge paperwork showing

honorable status (if separated)

Final Thought

Even one day of federal service under Title 10—such as attending basic training—makes you eligible to stand among Legionnaires. If you or someone you know served, reach out and verify. We're here to help.

Sources & References

- The American Legion Membership FAQs: <https://mylegion.org/personifyebusiness/Membership/Frequent-Questions>
- NY Legion Membership Details (PDF): <https://nylegion.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Membership-Eligibility-Details-2019.pdf>
- Post 833 NY – Membership Info: <https://www.alpost833ny.org/membership>
- Post 1044 Membership Resources: <https://jmp1044.org/membership-info>
- VA – Guard/Reserve Federal Service Guide: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/guardreserve/active-reserve.asp>

SAVE THE DATE – September 26 – 29, 2025 National Americanism Conference

This September the Americanism Commission will again be hosting its annual National Americanism Conference. This year's segments will be offered in-person in Indianapolis, Indiana. Online registration for conference segments is now open. A link to book your stay at the Sheraton Circle Centre Hotel will also be provided. Detailed agendas regarding each conference segment will be made available on the Legion website by early September. The point of contact regarding conference registration is Americanism staff Stacy Cope or Steve Cloud. Inquiries regarding program agendas may be directed to each respective Program Manager in the Americanism Division. Department Program Directors, Chairmen, staff, and volunteers across the entire nation are invited to participate in the 2025 National Americanism Conference. Conference attendees will be responsible for their own lodging, meals, and transportation costs associated with attending the conference.

Registration for the National Americanism Conference is now open at:
<https://register.legion.org/cacregistration>

Strengthening the Legion: Highlights of the 62nd National Membership Workshop

Indianapolis, August 8–9, 2025

The 62nd Annual National Membership Workshop was held in Indianapolis on August 8–9, 2025, bringing together Legion leaders from across the nation. The event served as a platform to share strategies, strengthen recruitment and retention efforts, and reinforce the Legion’s mission of service to veterans, their families, and local communities.

A Focus on Growth and Outreach

Throughout the two-day workshop, participants engaged in group sessions designed to foster collaboration and actionable learning. Topics included:

The “Be the One” initiative, focusing on veteran suicide prevention.

Effective recruiting and retention methods.

Welcoming and onboarding new members.

Legislative priorities affecting veterans.

Revitalization of posts and districts.

Expanding outreach to veterans and communities in need.

These discussions reflected the Legion’s ongoing commitment to not only growing its membership but also ensuring meaningful engagement and support for all veterans.

Montana’s Delegation

Representing the Department of Montana at this national gathering were:

Richard Klose, Membership Chair.

Brian Carpenter, American Legion Riders Director.

Duane Cunningham, Department Adjutant.

Together, they carried Montana’s voice into the national conversation, contributing insights and ideas while learning new strategies to bring back home. Their participation highlighted Montana’s dedication to strengthening membership, empowering the American Legion Riders as a community-driven force, and ensuring strong administrative leadership.

Significance for Montana

For Montana, the workshop was an opportunity to align with national strategies while addressing the unique needs of veterans across the state. The focus on revitalization and outreach is especially significant for Montana’s rural communities, where Legion posts often serve as essential centers of support and connection.

Klose, Carpenter, and Cunningham’s involvement ensured Montana remains at the forefront of national membership efforts, reinforcing the department’s commitment to service, growth, and veteran support.

Looking Ahead

The workshop set the stage for continued progress as leaders look toward the 106th American Legion National Convention later this month in Tampa. By carrying forward the lessons learned in Indianapolis, Montana’s delegation is well-positioned to strengthen posts across the state and continue advancing the Legion’s mission.

Media & Communications Division

Director: Jeff Stoffer jstoffer@legion.org 317-630-1333

Aug. 8, 2025

Top Highlights:

- **USA 250 Celebration and Challenge:** Director Jeff Stoffer and Deputy Director Henry Howard presented to the National Membership & Post Activities Committee

about the overall USA 250 Celebration and the American Legion Family USA 250 Challenge, highlighting how posts and individuals can play roles in each.

Eventgroove produced a video on how to record miles, hours, etc. for participants in the challenge. The issue of tracking has been the most often asked question, so this should help walk participants through the steps. The video is being shared via email, socials, website, our YouTube channel, etc. USA 250 Challenge content this

week included a story on a father-son team hiking for their fitness goal, an ALA member who shared her story on Legiontown and more. Additionally, plans were locked in for the special USA 250 Challenge promotion at national convention, where the goal is to sign up a minimum of 250 more participants.

- **Be the One:** In the past week, the division has posted and shared the opportunities

to participate in Be the One during convention and in September training sessions. Will continue to promote those in all media. Also published was a story on a Legion post's initiative that aims to address mental wellness through coffee and doughnuts gatherings.

- **External media:** A suburban newspaper aligned with the Chicago Tribune covered

the System Worth Saving town hall in Gurnee, Ill. Among the press releases and statements dispatched last week were a national commander statement on the Fort Stewart shooting, an advisory on the claims clinic at national convention and more.

- **Podcast:** This past week's podcast guest was Bree Fram, a 23-year servicemember now with the Space Force, who discussed her transgender status. In coming weeks guests include retired Gen. Mark Graham, who leads Vets4Warriors; Scotty Hasting, wounded veteran who will sing the national anthem and emcee the national convention this year; and last but not least award-winning documentary filmmaker Ken Burns.

- **American Legion Magazine:** The October issue is in layout, leading off with the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Navy and a profile of the incoming American Legion national commander.

- **Dispatch:** The Digital Dispatch went out this week, leading off with six departments earning national membership retention awards.

- **E-newsletters:** Another extremely strong cycle for open and click-through rates.

Most-visited via the Legion's e-newsletters were:

1. New Legion backed law helps thousands of veterans with delinquent mortgages: 12,876
2. Field set for 2025 American Legion baseball regionals: 12,391
3. 5 Things to Know 08/04: 7,696

Staying Safe and Informed Together

The American Legion has always been about community, trust, and looking out for one another. As we continue to grow and connect—whether it's at the Post, at events, or even on-line—it's important we all stay mindful of how we support our Legion Family.

About Fundraisers

One thing we want everyone to remember: the American Legion will never ask members to buy gift cards or send money through secret or unusual requests. If you ever get a message that doesn't feel right, don't ignore your instincts. Reach out to your Post leadership or call the Department office. There are no "silly questions" when it comes to protecting yourself and our organization.

On Social Media

For Posts that run social media pages, please take a moment to keep an eye on who is following and posting. Lately, we've seen a rise in people offering "special deals" on American Legion merchandise. These sellers aren't connected to our Posts, and they don't have permission to use our logos. Buying or sharing from them not only hurts our official programs.

Looking Out for Each Other

At the end of the day, our Legion Family is strongest when we watch out for each other. If you're unsure about a fundraiser, a post, or a product, take a minute to check in. A quick conversation can save time, money, and stress and keep our focus where it belongs: serving veterans, their families, and our communities.



American Legion Riders – Summer Appreciation & Season Wrap-Up

Statewide Chapter Appreciation

A heartfelt thank-you goes out to every American Legion Riders chapter across Montana that organized and hosted events this season. From memorial rides and veteran fundraisers to poker runs and community breakfasts, your dedication strengthens the Legion Family and inspires others to get involved. Fellowship, safe riding, and veteran support remain the backbone of who we are—and you’ve shown that in every mile.

Closing Out the Riding Season

As fall settles in and cooler weather arrives, many chapters are hosting their end-of-season rides. These rides aren’t just about logging miles—they’re about celebrating a season of safe journeys, the friendships we’ve built, and the mission that unites us on two wheels.

The crisp air, changing colors, and shorter days make fall a special time to ride, and many chapters cap off the season with gatherings afterward—sharing meals, swapping stories, and planning for the year ahead. It’s also a chance to welcome new members, thank those who put in the miles, and recognize the posts that worked hard to make these rides possible.

Though the 2025 riding season is drawing to a close, the camaraderie and purpose we share continue year-round. Let’s finish strong, ride with pride, and carry the spirit of the Riders into every community we serve.

2025 Department Needles Ride – Thank You, Post 119!

A special thank-you goes to American Legion Post #119, Billings Heights, for hosting an unforgettable “ROMP” (Ride on Military Pride) through the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Eighteen bikes, twenty riders, and countless memories were made on the open road. Riders joined from Havre, Great Falls, Lewistown, Livingston, and Cody, coming together with the Billings Heights crew for an outstanding event.

Your hospitality, organization, and dedication made this year’s ride a true success. We look forward to seeing everyone’s mileage totals and to riding together again next year.

Final Thoughts

To every ALR chapter that kept the rubber on the road this season: thank you for living the mission. Your rides, events, and community support truly make a difference in the lives of veterans and their families.

The season may be winding down, but the pride we carry and the purpose we serve are year-round. Until next season—wheels down, eyes up, and spirits high.

See you down the road.



Hello Fellow Auxiliary members,

Happy August everyone. I accepted the position of ALA Girls State Chairman at our Convention in June. I look forward to working with the American Legion BS Chairman, Lowell Long, the Director, Jen Delyrymple, Duane and Erin, and all of our Units to make this next years ALALABGS the best yet. As when I was the ALA Department President my phone is available to call for questions. We have made great progress this past year and I look forward to making it a greater year.

Your ALA 2025-2026 Girls State Chairman, Yvonne Kostelecky



The Legionnaire Insurance Trust

The [Legionnaire Insurance Trust](#) is your trusted provider for **Medicare Supplement** and **Medicare Advantage** solutions, offering protection designed for American Legion members.

Medicare Open Enrollment period:

[October 14-December 7, 2025](#)

For those turning 65, or already eligible, this is your time to review and enroll.

No Cost to Legionnaires

Veterans protected our Nation - now LegionCare protects them at No Cost, by Department design. Please ensure all eligible members activate their no cost coverage today.

 VOA NORTHERN ROCKIES
**FREE RETREAT FOR FEMALE
VETERANS HEALING FROM MST**

Moral Injury: Healing Military Sexual Trauma (MST)

1 in 3 female veterans have experienced MST. Moral injury may occur when a person experiences betrayal by a trusted person or a person in a position of authority.

Moral injury isn't PTSD but it is related. Moral injury is an invisible wound of the soul that can result in intense shame, agonizing guilt, grief, depression, substance abuse, relationship struggles, anxiety, and suicide.

SOUND LIKE YOU? YOU ARE NOT ALONE. WE CAN HELP.

Join us for a Female only retreat where you will meet other women who have experienced MST and are working through their own healing.

Retreat Location

Absaroka Mountain Lodge, Cody Wyoming
September 26-28, 2025

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE RETREAT AND TO APPLY, CONTACT US AT:

 **EMAIL** MORALINJURY@VOANR.ORG
 **WEB** VOANR.ORG/SERVICES/MI-RETREATS

FUNDED BY STAFF SERGEANT PARKER GORDON FOX SUICIDE PREVENTION GRANT

