The
AMERICAN
LEGION

Volume 14 / Issue 2
February 2016

DEPARTMENT COMMANDER  Keith Abernathy

The Department Oratorical will be held at the Brussels American High School, in Brussels, Belgium on Saturday, 20 February 2016 at 1400 hours this year’s Oratorical will be hosted by American Legion Post BE02.

For some of us this is a long drive. I for one would have over a seven-hour trip. That would entail getting up at 3:30 and leaving at 5:00 o’clock. I originally planned to drive up and back on Saturday, but, the. Misses put the brakes on that idea, so, I’ll be staying overnight.

We have Three (3) Candidates vying for First (1st) place this year. They are from Posts BE02, GR01 and GR1982. Three (3) out of six (6) is not a good average. There’s no good reason why there are no candidates from our other three (3) schools. Next year I hope we will do a lot better. We should start looking for candidates when the new school year begins. I was asked why can’t other posts support another student from the same school. The rule is one (1) school one (1) candidate. You cannot have two (2) winners from the same school. A winner and a runner-up, is the rule. If the winner cannot go to the Oratorical, then the runner-up goes in the winner’s place. I supported by another post the runner-up would also be a winner. Two (2) winners from the same school is a “NO GO”.

I missed the PEL at Stuttgart Post GR06 on 13 January 2016 because of snow up here in Little Siberia. I shoveled snow four (4) time Wednesday and am truly sick of it. Sorry I missed it GR06.

Membership, membership, membership: The Department stands at 86.290% as of 28 January 2016. On 30 January 2016 The Department conducted a Legion Awareness Drive at the Food Court in the Post Exchange at Ramstein Air Base. Along with me were VCAL and Membership Chairman Charly Brown, Alt Necman Ron Moore, Department Vice Commanders Casby Logan and Quincy Foster along With Mike Young, 2nd Vice from GR01 and Russ Junkin a Legion Rider also from GR01. Thank you all for such a good job. We had a nice day and recruited ??? new Legion Members I’ll let the Membership Chairman tell you the exact number when he does his article complete with pictures.

I also want to thank Mike Sitrin the Food Court Manager for providing us the space and equipment to complete our drive. Thank you Mike and your staff for the place and the help. We will be helping with a Legion Awareness Drive at Post Gr1982 on 13 February 2016.

Keith Abernathy / Department Commander / Keithabernathy1942@yahoo.de
Dear Legion Family Members and Friends,

Among the freedoms many Americans enjoy is the right to vote for our elected officials. This year, of course, is generating intense interest because a new president will be elected. Additionally, voters will elect every single member of the U.S. House of Representatives and one-third of the U.S. Senate.

Right now we are entering a critical and exciting juncture as the two major political parties begin to hold primaries and caucuses to determine the front-runners for their nominations. Strong opinions can be found everywhere. Unfortunately, so too can some mistruths. Many political groups were created specifically to spin facts, distort reality and twist words to propel their candidates into office.

The American Legion, as a nonpartisan organization, assumes a role of neutrality amid the storm of political rhetoric and images.

As individuals, we are free like anyone to vote as we wish and support the candidates we think best.

But as Legionnaires, we have a duty to participate in the election process and encourage others to exercise one of the most important freedoms we, and those who served in uniform before us, fought to protect: the freedom to vote.

On the local level, an American Legion post can take on a greater role in its community by organizing and hosting a political forum or debate among candidates. Remember that any such event must be open to all who are running for a particular office, and the Legion cannot promote any one candidate. When posts are using their facilities for such events, they should remove the emblem and Legion flag to avoid the impression of endorsement for any candidate. (Note that renting out hall space to a political campaign is still fair game, as long as it is not presented as an American Legion-sponsored event.)

Here are some reminders from the Legion’s Get Out the Vote brochure:

1. When hosting a voter registration drive, information and applications must be offered and available to all eligible voters.

2. Legionnaires may express partisan views, but they must do so when they are not wearing the Legion cap or other Legion attire, and without a direct connection to an American Legion post.

3. American Legion posts may coordinate forums or debates. However, posts cannot endorse or oppose a candidate, or coordinate activities with a candidate without giving his/her opponent the same opportunity.

Following these guidelines will keep the Legion above the fray without sacrificing any member’s right to participate in the democratic process. It is my hope that each of you do participate in the election process individually, and posts take the lead in their communities by arranging fair debates or “meet the candidates” forums to help all of our citizens fulfill a right too often taken for granted.


Dale Barnett
National Commander
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<th><strong>Department Officers - 2016 Membership Year</strong></th>
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| **COMMANDER**  
Keith Abernathy  
keithabernathy1942@yahoo.de |
| **ADJUTANT**  
Maxwell Rice  
colwichboy@yahoo.com |
| **NECMAN**  
John Miller  
miller-rot8@t-online.de |
| **ALT. NECMAN**  
Ronald Moore  
gypsy_moore@yahoo.de |
| **VCAL**  
Joe D. Brown  
vcalbrown50@gmail.com  
GR07 GR20 GR42 CH01  
DK01 NL01  
TH00(Thailand) Post9999  
& New Post Development |
| **VICE COMMANDER**  
Lyndon Hudson  
lyndonandmargaret@yahoo.com  
GR03 GR06 GR09  
GR13 GR79 BE02 |
| **VICE COMMANDER**  
Quincy Foster  
quincy@karluandra.com  
GR01 GR02 GR14 FR01  
IR01 FR05 IR63 |
| **VICE COMMANDER**  
John Shanahan  
johnshanahan@gmail.com  
IR02 IR03 IT01  
PO01 GC01 SP292 |
| **VICE COMMANDER**  
Casby Logan  
casby@hotmail.com  
GR05 GR30 GR45 GR1982 |
| **CHAPLAIN**  
Jimmie Dale  
jimmiedale.87@gmail.com |
| **HISTORIAN**  
Michael Keating  
michael.keating@t-online.de |
| **FINANCE OFFICER**  
Gary Miller  
billsfan_gary@hotmail.com |
| **SERVICE OFFICER**  
Paul Claybough  
profjordier72@yahoo.com |
| **JUDGE ADVOCATE**  
James M. Settle  
james.settle@kabelbw.de |
| **SERGEANT-AT-ARMS**  
Christopher Buchanan  
GR1982  
christopherbuchan@hotmail.com |

Please send all input for the Department Newsletter to my email address at the latest three days prior to the end of the month. If possible. Constructive suggestions to improve the Newsletter are also welcome.

If you want to stay informed on what is happening with YOUR Department you can also visit the following sites,  
www.legion.org/fodpal

Thank You…the Editor

David N. Greaux / davidgreaux@t-online.de
SUBJECT: 2016 Oratorical Finals

The Department Oratorical Contest will be held on Saturday, 20 February at the Brussels American High School. The contest will begin at 1300 and contestants are asked to be there at 1200.

Address:
Brussels American High School
J.F. Kennedylaan 12, Zaventem

My fellow Legionnaires, Auxiliary, and S.A.L. Members and the communication within the Department. I challenge all of us to do better job in this area, so that we can better support, and guide the Posts, and accomplish the Department missions. In addition, we need to support each other, that is, if you need help just ask. I am sure with the wealth of knowledge we have within this Department someone is capable and willing to help Department of France. If you assistance with holding a membership drive, tell me and I will help you reach your 100% membership goal.

Remember this year 2016 the Oratorical contest will be in Belgium. We currently have 3 contestants from GR01, GR1982 and BE02. DEPT made the 85 % target date. We still have posts out there that have not transmittal any members for 2016. The posts that made 100%, my cap off for you for the good work. The 100% Posts are BE02, DK01, GR 05, GR79, TH01, IR01, GR20, GR07 and NL01.

Department conducted a Membership Awareness drive at Ramstein Food Court on 30 January, with Commander Abernathy, Vice Commander Foster, Vice Commander Logan and 2nd Vice Commander Young from GR 01, thanks for their help we recruited 18 new member for GR 01.

The 3rd DEC will be in Ansbach, Germany hosted be GR1982. I need your awards packet by 8 April 2016. You can also bring it with you to the 3rd DEC. We must remember the ideals of what the American Legion stand for, justice, freedom and democracy. We are here to support our veterans, their families, our communities, widows and the care of our veterans through the programs set out at the National Level. Many of our Posts need to be more involved with those programs. Post Commanders, when you have your general membership meetings you should display your POW-MIA table, the American Flag and your Post Colors. We have posts out there do not setup their meeting room properly, or recite the Pre-Amble, Chaplain prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance.

If you have a Legionnaires in your Post that are ill, in the Hospital or Deceased, please e-mail the Department Adjutant and the Department Chaplain.

As always, remember if you need to contact me, I am just an E-mail away vcalbrown50@gmail.com, M-0170-1888034. In closing, please keep those in harm's way and their families, not only in your thoughts but your prayers as well.

Membership Chairman / Vcal / Charlie Brown
### France Membership by Post

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At FORT RED LEG GR 79

[Image of people at Fort Red Leg GR 79]

Department commander and vice commander at gr 79 Gmm

[Image of people in a group]

GR 79. Gmm

[Image of people in a group]
Membership Awareness drive at Ramstein Food Court on 30 January 2016
Department Vice Commander John Shanahan

Who and Why We Are. We are the nation’s largest veteran’s organization. We exist, very simply, to be the advocacy and voluntary support system behind our nation’s historic commitment to veterans, as outlined by President Abraham Lincoln in his Second Inaugural Address: “To care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan…” Nobody knows the challenges of military service – and especially combat service – better than a veteran. And nobody understands its challenges to military families better than a veteran. We exist to promote, support and enable the system of caring that President Lincoln outlined all those years ago in the aftermath of a terrible war that literally tore the United States apart.

About Caring. When we commit ourselves to caring for our brother and sister veterans, we embrace a programme of “love in action.” Caring comes from the Latin, “caritas,” what we transcribe today as “charity.” And charity, indeed, is love in action – focused on our brother and sister veterans and their families. When we love our fellow veterans – and we are called by our mission to do that – then we seek to ensure that their needs are met. What are those needs? Medical and psychological care. Recovery from trauma, both physical and mental. Housing. Employment. Further education. Care and support for families. And very importantly, welcoming and respectful acceptance into a peaceful and caring society. We must look at everything we do in the context of these challenges. We must ask ourselves and the institutions set up to serve America’s veterans (the VA is a prime example), “Are we doing what we should do? Are we doing enough? Are we doing it well enough?”

Examples of Caring in Action. With this as background, I’ve tried to look carefully at the needs of my fellow veterans in our Post. I’ve tried to understand their service backgrounds and how they’ve transitioned into civilian life. For some, they bring strengths and accomplishments that can carry over into assisting and supporting fellow veterans. For others, still bearing the burdens of service and combat, there are individual needs to be met and things that we can do – indeed, we must do – to support these veterans. Just a few days ago, Legionnaire Bob Kane, a member of Post IR-01, reported on what’s been done for a member of his former unit: “Eleven years ago this past Tuesday, Jan. 26th 2005, a patrol from Archangel Company, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division was ambushed in Baghdad, Iraq. The attack killed SPC Taylor Burk, wounded the TCSG Earl Barrett and severely wounded the gunner, SPC Roberto Reyes. SPC Reyes has spent the last 11 years in a VA hospital in NY. Last year an outstanding charity called Homes For Troops stepped in and built Reyes and his family a special home to meet his needs so he could come home.”

During this past December, Legionnaire Greg Heiderman of Post IR-01 played a key role in organizing fellow members of Irish Charities of Maryland to support and participate in “Wreaths Across America,” a national effort to memorialize America’s war dead at Arlington Cemetery.

We’re All In This Together. The lesson here is that all of us are Legionnaires for one purpose – to care for one another. No questions asked about creed, colour, religion, politics – nothing. If you’re a veteran, we’re here to help. Period.

A Renewed Commitment to Caring. Let’s use these thoughts as we gather up our members, renew their annual subscriptions and answer the question, “What are we going to do this year?” The answer – very simply – is that we’re going to care for one another.

With best wishes to all,
For God and Country, John
DEPARTMENT VICE COMMANDER  Lyndon Hudson

Comrades, on the 10th of January I attended Post GR79’s stated meeting and I attended GR13’s meeting on the 16th. Both post had good turn outs and I certainly enjoyed being at both. I’m looking forward to getting up to Brussels next month for the Oratorical and I certainly encourage all members to make the trip to support this Department level competition.

Regards, Lyndon Hudson VC

Military Quotes to inspire You

Winston Churchill… We sleep safely at night because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would harm us.

Department of France Past Commanders Club

Jimmie Dale… President “2016”

Who is eligible to join the Department of France Past Commanders Club?

PAST AND PRESENT Department Commanders, Department Vice Commanders At Large, Department Vice Commanders, Post Commanders, SAL Detachment Commanders, SAL Squadron Commanders, Auxiliary Department Presidents, Auxiliary Unit Presidents… so if you were just voted into office you are eligible to join

Initial dues for the Past Commanders Club is only $25.00
Renewal dues for the Past Commanders Club is only $10.00

Our next meeting will be prior to our Department Third DEC

HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE… David Greaux… PCC Secretary “2016”
Pillar 3: Americanism

The nation’s cultural, moral and patriotic values have been under attack for decades, a disheartening trend that continues today. Prayer has been removed from schools. The U.S. Flag is no longer protected from desecration. The Boy Scouts of America have faced serious legal challenges in some communities they serve. Immigration laws are defied. References to God on U.S. currency, in the Pledge of Allegiance and on public monuments have been challenged by a minority of voices whose vision for America is far different than that of our founding fathers.

The American Legion is an organization dedicated to God and country, with a membership of military veterans who take deep pride in the U.S. Flag and all that it means. Since its inception nearly 100 years ago, the Legion has been a stalwart champion of patriotic values, morals, culture and citizenship. The Legion’s pillar of Americanism embodies its devotion to law and order, the raising of wholesome youth, an educated and law-abiding citizenship, and respectful observance of patriotic holidays and remembrances.

Americanism Defined

Americanism is love of America; loyalty to her institutions as the best yet devised by man to secure life, liberty, individual dignity, and happiness; and the willingness to defend our country and Flag against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

It is a vital, active, living force. Americanism means peace, strength, the will and the courage to live as free men in a free land. It means a friendly hand to people everywhere who respects our institutions and our thinking. It is not a word; it is a cause, a way of life – the best way of life ever known – a challenge and a hope in this world.

Americanism is an ideal of loyal patriotism, religious tolerance, righteous freedom, fearless courage, honest integrity, abiding faith in the commanding destiny of the United States, and a fathomless love for the principles that led our forefathers to found this country.

It is complete and unqualified loyalty to the ideals of government as set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. It is respect for, and ready obedience to, duly constituted authority and the laws of the land. It is freedom without license, religion without bigotry, charity without bias, and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty for our nation and for our posterity.
Hello Fellow SAL Members

I first want to apologize for not submitting a newsletter article for December. I am not going to get into the reason but, I had a lot going on towards the end of the month. Therefore, I would hope that everyone had a wonderful Christmas and rang in the New Year safely. I have seen the numbers for our membership and want to congratulate all of the Squadrons for their efforts during this membership year. The Detachment is number 3 at National with 105% for 2016. I would also like to thank our membership chairman Comrade Brown for his work on membership throughout the year. We should be getting out the call to our 3rd DEC which will be held in Morfelden by Frankfurt on 5 March 2016. I hope to see a good turnout for this DEC. Yes, we are at that time of year for the 3rd DEČ and the annual convention is also just around the corner. I would hope that our membership would be thinking now of positions that they could run for to help our Detachment grow and prosper. This year is going by very quickly and we should always have some idea as to the folks that would fill and run our Detachment for the upcoming year. Please take the time to think about opening your schedule to help move our Detachment forward. Bring your newest members to the DEC and let them get indoctrinated into the Detachment level business and spur them into dedicated service to the Sons of the American Legion, our veterans, and our communities. Our Detachment can only survive by getting our newest and youngest members involved and dedicated to the organization. So, let’s have a great turnout for our 3rd DEC and I can’t wait to see everyone there.

Lee Preston/Detachment Commander
What is the IAVA? My understanding is this is a veteran’s organization that was just founded for the veterans of Iraq & Afghanistan. They are already 125,000 strong and growing. Why is there such a group? And why hasn’t The American Legion met their needs so they would not have to form such a group?

The IAVA stands for “Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America”. They are an organization of veterans who served during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

It is not uncommon for special interest organizations like IAVA to spring up after wars and conflicts. It happened, for example, after the Vietnam War with the Vietnam Student Organizations on college campuses. The IAVA exists because of special interest funding and generational interests. If history repeats itself, their members will join other veteran service organizations because we all have similar interests. There are significant differences between The American Legion and IAVA. An Iraq-Afghan veteran can join IAVA free of charge. IAVA has no structure and no programs other than legislative issues. It is basically a social network community that has no grassroots presence like The American Legion. They are not chartered by Congress or recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs for veteran’s claims representation.

It may appear to some that The American Legion does not meet the needs of these veterans because we do not reach out to them consistently on the local level. We need to be there when they join the military service, when their unit deploys overseas, when their families need help, and when they return from assignment. We have the structure, the programs and we have 2.5 million members in over 14,000 posts to extend a helping hand. We are a grassroots, community-based organization, not just a social network of computers. We have service officers to help them with their needs. We are there to help; we must see to it that they know this. Every American Legion member needs to extend a hand and thank these young veterans. Welcome them home and help them with their issues—healthcare, scholarships, housing and employment, just to name a few.
Post BE02 level Oratorical Contest
On Saturday, 23 January, the American Legion “Flanders Field” Post BE02 conducted their 3rd Annual Oratorical Scholarship Contest. After delivering the speeches, the judges moved to a secluded area to determine the winners of the contest. Our first place winner is Austin Muraille from the International School of Brussels with Beautiful Lawson from SHAPE American High School taking a close second.

We would like to thank the judges who contributed their time to assist us in conducting the oratorical contest: Marie-Lise Baneton, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Army Garrison Benelux, Conrad Payne, DOD Financial Manager, U.S. Air Force Retired, Tracy Moreno, Community Liaison Officer, U.S. Embassy and William Bergman, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army Retired

Department Of France level Oratorical Contest
The Department of France Oratorical Contest will be held on Saturday, 20 February at the Brussels American High School. The address for the school is:

Brussels American High School
JF Kennedylaan 12
1933 Sterrebeek

There is some construction occurring near the high school, so be prepared for a short delay. We ask the contestants to be at the High School at 1200 so that we can start the contest at 1300.

If you require accommodations, please refer to the Booking.com site for appropriate hotels in the area of the High School. The Brussels American High School is only a short distance from the Brussels International Airport so there is a plethora of hotels to be found.

On Saturday, 23 June, the William D. Nelson Post GR 09 bi-monthly meeting was well attended by its members which was fitting as those present were witness to two “firsts”. Not since its formation has the post had an opportunity to initiate two new members simultaneously but a significant dynamic change was also experienced when the Post initiated its first female member. Both inductees have been long time residents of the Neu-Ulm community and had distinguished themselves in serving the Neu-Ulm, military and civilian community and it was to GR 09’s benefit that they decided to join their local fellow Americans at the American Legion. With the induction of these two new members GR 09 will again have obtained a 100% membership for the 2016 – 2017 membership year.

During the meeting Post Commander Aman also presented a Paid-Up-For-Life certificate to Jason Helsene. Jason becomes the 26th PUFL member and puts GR 09’s PUFL membership at 54% of its total membership.
My war... Vietnam infantryman remembers his war

Barry Goldwater ran for president against Lyndon Johnson in 1964 and I was just old enough to vote. We were warned not to vote for Goldwater because we’d get involved with a war in Vietnam. Well, I voted for Goldwater and sure enough, before I knew it, I found myself in a U.S. Army uniform, climbing off a troop transport plane in Saigon. I had a duffle bag on my shoulder, an M14 rifle in my hand and a patch that read “1st Infantry Division” on my sleeve.

I learned fast about what it’s like to be in a war – from the inside out. We didn’t have TV or even radio. News came in letters from our mothers, most of whom wrote to us every day. We waited for those daily messages and devoured news about home and about the war.

Our mothers told us that some guys were running to Canada to escape the draft. We all knew one or two of them from home. We weren’t surprised and it didn’t bother us. We knew them to be physical cowards. They never played varsity sports and didn’t stand up for anything. They never mattered. In fact, we were happy to see them flee the country.

Little did we know that later Jimmy Carter would give them amnesty and let them come back to the country from which they ran. It broke our hearts.

And letters from our mothers told us of the demonstrations back home. The people we were fighting for blamed us and called us bloodthirsty baby killers. We couldn’t understand. And, unless you were there, you can never come close to comprehending the crushing impact on our sense of self-respect and confusion about right and wrong. My mother wrote that she was sure I was not a part of any of that. Small consolation.

There were some heart-moving moments. Bob Hope came at Christmas time with his troupe. That was a real morale bump for us. We were asked to loan Army vehicles and drivers to move the entertainers from the air strip to the stage and back. I sent my jeep and driver, and when he returned there was a clean white handkerchief on the passenger seat. As I approached, my driver leaped to his feet, dramatically swept the cloth away and said, “Sir, the last fanny on your jeep seat belongs to Anita Bryant.” Martha Raye was there and showed up everywhere. Johnny Unitas and Willie Davis spent days there. They tossed the football with us, told stories and treated us like teammates. God love ‘em. Somebody cared.

Then my year was up and it was time to ship home. Happy day. I was jepped to Tan Son Nhut Air Base and waited three days for a plane ride to the U.S. Meanwhile, I bought a khaki uniform and got it laundered and starched. Next stop: Oakland, Calif.

I remember the trip as about 20 hours in the air, but I was so excited there was no sleep. Before deplaning, I put on my khakis and felt good walking down the airport concourse. A group of rowdy young people saw me in my uniform and it started. The booing and name-calling. Words can’t describe my feelings then so I won’t try. I found the nearest restroom and put on some wrinkled civvies I had at the bottom of my duffle bag.

That was my first welcome home. There have been others that were much better. In fact, the best happened when we Vietnam vets marched as a group in a fall festival parade.

As we stepped onto the parade route, the crowd saw our banner and erupted up to their feet from the grass and out of their lawn chairs. They applauded. They waved. They shouted, “Thank you.” My eyes filled with tears and I was paralyzed. The crowd stood and applauded the entire mile of the parade. They guy next to me wiped a tear and said, “I’d fight for these people any day.” And we would.

Mike Kirchen is retired and lives in Wisconsin with his wife, Linda. He served in Vietnam with the U.S. Army 1st Infantry Division.

Submitted by: Mike Kirchen
A Kentucky American Legion team is shown at the U. S. Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba during an October trip to help service members. From left, Stevie Ray of Madisonville, leader Peter Trzop of Bardstown, Pam Blain of Shepherdsville, Frank Thompson of Bardstown, Bobby Craven of Shepherdsville, past national commander Mike Helms from Nebraska and Mark Kennedy of Elizabethtown. (Photo: Courtesy of Peter Trzop)

As the topic of U.S. and Cuba relations continues to simmer, along with the fate of the military detention center at Guantanamo Bay, the American Legion of Kentucky is poised to make Cuba-related news.

A proposal to open a Kentucky-affiliated American Legion post there will be on the agenda for a vote when the Louisville-based American Legion Department of Kentucky holds its winter conference Friday and Saturday at the Crowne Plaza Hotel near the fairgrounds in Louisville.

The plan also would need to be approved by the nearly 100-year-old national American Legion organization based in Indianapolis, which is expected to vote on it at its next meeting in May, said Ted Austin, Kentucky's department adjutant, whose office is in Memorial Auditorium, 970 S. Fourth St., in Old Louisville.

"We're working on the premise it's going to happen," Austin said.

The concept of a post that would be part of Kentucky's network of Legion posts is an outgrowth of a week-long "overseas deployment" trip in October by a Kentucky Legion team. Led by veteran Peter Trzop, of Bardstown, the team went to the U. S. Naval Station at Guantanamo Bay, where the detention center is located, to help service members stationed there.

Another trip is planned in April, and Kentucky Legion donors also are offering to pay expenses for youth living at the naval station as part of military families to attend the legion's longtime Kentucky Boys State and Girls State leadership training and governmental education programs June 5-10. During the April trip, the Kentucky legion team also will help youth submit applications for Boys and Girls State, Trzop said.

Participation by Guantanamo base youth in the Kentucky program would be a first, said Trzop, executive director of the Boys State, who started Kentucky's "overseas deployment" program three years ago to provide service members with help filing paperwork related to disability claims, housing, GI loans, educational benefits, medical help and other needs.

The Guantanamo trip was the third, after a first three years ago to Djibouti, Africa, where a National Guard unit from Bardstown was deployed at the time, and a second to Royal Air Force bases Lakenheath and Mildenhall in England, staffed by the U.S.

If the Kentucky post is started at Guantanamo, members would hold meetings and plan activities at some type of existing location at the base, just as some U.S. posts meet at libraries, churches or other community spaces. Members of the Guantanamo post would be trained to provide the services that were provided by the Kentucky team, Trzop said. It was his first trip to Cuba, and he was struck by the beautiful
setting and described the base as "small town USA."

Being there "was like living in a small town in Kentucky," he said. The base has an outdoor theater and a beautiful library, he said, but Internet service is not very good and the feeling of isolation is heightened by restrictions against leaving the base and going out into the coastal waters. The team flew in on a plane used by the military and took a ferry to the main part of the base. They only saw the outside of the prison.

The confining circumstances are one reason it's important to provide services and opportunities to the families stationed there, he said. As a "military brat" growing up in Heidelberg, Germany, where his father was stationed in the Army, "I didn't get those opportunities," Trzop said. "The least we can do is to support them. Those are our service members, and we're going to take care of them."

Cuba and the United States restored diplomatic relations last summer, after they were severed in 1961 during the Cold War. But the U.S. maintains a commercial, economic and financial embargo.

The network of Kentucky Legion posts includes these in Louisville: Dixie on Crums Lane, Highland on Bardstown Road, Iroquois on Woodlawn Avenue in Beechmont, G I Joe on College Drive in Jeffersontown, Peter Salem on Greenwood Avenue in west Louisville, Portland on N. 27th Street in Portland, Shawnee on West Main Street and Zachary Talyor on Shelbyville Road in St. Matthews.

Trzop, who started the legion's Post 42 in Bardstown, retired from the military 10 years ago after serving in the National Guard, the Army and the Air Force. The others on the seven-member team that went to Guantanamo Bay were Bobby Craven and Pam Blain with Post 157 in Shepherdsville, along with Stevie Ray from Madisonville, Frank Thompson from Bardstown, Mark Kennedy from Elizabethtown and Mike Helms, a past national commander from Nebraska. Blain, a licensed massage therapist, provided therapy to service members at Guantanamo.

The 75-year-old Boys State program will be at Campbellsville College in Campbellsville and younger Girls State at Cumberland College in Williamsburg. During the week, delegates set up a fictional state, elect their own government leaders and study how laws are passed and other matters.

The boys and Girls State application period starts this month, and students who are juniors and will be seniors next school year are eligible to apply. Oldham County schools and Trinity and St. Xavier Catholic high schools in Louisville have shown interest, among others, and Trzop said he hopes for more interest among Jefferson County public schools, too. Alex Grove, a Louisville Collegiate School student, also was the Kentucky winner of an American Legion Samsung college scholarship in the fall.

The Boys State program -- which costs $200 for the week -- will be able to accommodate hundreds this year, after a 125 limit was lifted after last year, Trzop said. The program used to be held at the Wendell H. Ford Regional Training Center for the Kentucky Army National Guard in Greenville, Ky., and last year all the participants made a trip to Frankfort to the Old State Capitol building.

The non-profit American Legion, billed as the largest veterans service organization in the country, was chartered by Congress in 1919, according to legion.org.

Reporter Martha Elson can be reached at 502-582-7061 and melson@courier-journal.com. Follow her on Twitter at @MarthaElson_cj.
Post Elections will be held on 10 February 2016 at our new location. Guests are always welcome!

K&A Cafe Rheingold
Bahn Hof Str. 1
64654 Büdingen

POW/MIA Update…

Marine Cpl. James D. Otto, 20, of Los Angeles, was buried Dec. 8, in Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington D.C. In November 1943, Otto was assigned to Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, which landed against stiff Japanese resistance on the small island of Betio in the Tarawa Atoll, in an attempt to secure the island. Over several days of intense fighting, approximately 1,000 Marines were killed and more than 2,000 were wounded. Otto was reported killed in action on the first day of the battle, Nov. 20, 1943.

In the immediate aftermath of the fighting on Tarawa, U.S. service members who died in the battle were buried in a number of battlefield cemeteries on the island. In 1946 and 1947, the 604th Quartermaster Graves Registration Company conducted remains recovery operations on Betio Island, but Otto’s remains were not recovered. On Feb. 10, 1949, a military review board declared Otto non-recoverable.

In June 2015, a nongovernmental organization, History Flight, Inc., notified DPAA that they discovered a burial site on Betio Island and recovered the remains of what they believed were U.S. Marines who fought during the battle in November 1943. The remains were turned over to DPAA in July 2015.

To identify Otto’s remains, scientists from DPAA used laboratory analysis, to include dental comparisons, which matched Otto’s records, as well as circumstantial and material evidence.
Serving in the U.S. Army, Terrence Sund drowned while searching a tunnel in Vietnam 1967. His body was sent home and was cremated. Then, his cremated remains were interred in a room at a cemetery in Wisconsin for decades.

Thanks to Department of Wisconsin American Legion efforts, Sund received a full military burial last summer. And the department has helped draft a bill that will ensure the remains of veterans not claimed by family members will be released so that the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) can arrange a military burial at one of the state’s veteran cemeteries.

According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Legionnaire Steve Conto was able to raise funds so that Sund could get the funeral he deserved. Since then, the Department of Wisconsin has set up a fund to assist with burial costs for similar deceased veterans.

Department Adjutant Dave Kurtz said the effort has been a partnership between the Legion, Gov. Scott Walker and the WDVA. Waukesha County Veterans Service Officer Tom Ludka was instrumental in helping with the legislation, and Department Vice Commander Cooper “has really picked up the torch on this effort,” Kurtz said.

Cooper, a member of Post 80 in New Richmond, said he couldn’t get the Sund story out of his head. He formed a committee tasked with seeing if there were any other veterans’ remains in similar situations in Wisconsin’s District 10.

Finding three, Cooper then expanded his search to the rest of the state, reaching out to more than 650 funeral homes. More than 40 such remains have been found. “I know there are more,” Cooper said. “There are a couple funeral home directors who have just started going through their records, or their records are in really bad shape.”

Of the remains that have been located, their situation usually falls into three categories, Cooper said: 25 percent have no known next of kin, 25 percent’s families have been unresponsive, and 50 percent have families who are happy to have the Legion help with the burial.

“To me, these guys are as important as POWs or MIAs,” Cooper said of the veterans’ remains. “They just happen to be on American soil. Everyone deserves a final resting place. These happen to be veterans who deserve full military honors. I’m going to make damn sure they get it.”