

# The AMERICAN LEGION

# Department of France



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March 2016



## DEPARTMENT COMMANDER *Keith Abernathy*

As you all know by now, the Department Annual Oratorical was held at Flanders Field Post BE02 in Brussels, Belgium at the Brussels American High School. It took me eight hours to get there with stopes in Stuttgart and Landstuhl to pick up people who attended with me. I put 1368 KMs on the rental car that I went in. The Oratorical started on time (1300 hrs.) and the Department was represented by myself, VCAL Charlie Brown, VCs Lyndon Hudson, Casby Logan, John Shanahan and Doug Clemens, the Department Oratorical Chairman. In addition, Marcus Briscoe from Stuttgart Post GR06 was in attendance. The event was well organized and carried out. Congratulations to Cmdr. Schram and BE02 for a job well done.

The 1st place winner was a repeat winner from last year, Austin Muraille a Senior at Brussels American High School. 2nd place went to John Casey Jr, a Junior at Kaiserslautern American High School, and last but not least 3rd place went to Juliana Sanders a Junior at Ansbach American High School.

The Department awarded the candidates \$500.00, \$250.00 and \$100.00 respectively. In addition, John Wayne Post

GR79 gave the winner \$175.00 that was presented by Comrade Charlie Brown on behalf of GR79. Thank you GR79.

There was only 1 point separating 1st and 2nd place. I only know two of the judges (Lyndon Hudson and Helen Patton, the Granddaughter of General Gerorge S. Patton Sr.) but they all did an outstanding job. AFN was on hand to record the event.

Flanders Field Post BE03 deserves a big thank you for the excellent hosting and staging of this year's Oratorical. Thank you BE02. We only had three of our six schools represented. Hopefully next year we'll have six candidates.

Do not forget the upcoming SAL DEC on 5 march 2016 at GR05 in Waldorf. If you have a SAL Squadron you should be in attendance. On 19 March 2016 is the Department 3r DEC, I hope to see you all there.

Membership: We supported David Chavez Post GR 1982 this past weekend during a Legion Awareness Drive. Eight new members were recruited for the post. What that does for the Department standing will have to come from the Department Membership Chairman.

Keith Abernathy  
Department Commander  
keithabernathy1942@yahoo.de

## MILITARY QUOTES

**Douglas MacArthur...**Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword obviously never encountered automatic weapons.



# Keep fueling a culture of Legion growth

*By National Commander Dale Barnett*

The American Legion is fast approaching the dawn of its second century. The centennial presents an exciting opportunity to build on a rich legacy of accomplishments: the formation of VA, establishment of the U.S. Flag Code, unparalleled troop support, relief for veterans suffering from service-related health conditions, career and education opportunities, and youth programs that improve lives in amazing ways generation after generation. There's a lot to build on.

While traveling the country this year, I have been inspired not only by young people who respect what The American Legion has accomplished in the past, but more so by what The American Legion is accomplishing now and is poised to accomplish in the future.

Post-9/11 veterans are stepping into Legion leadership roles everywhere, adding 21st-century talent and energy to our time-honored values. The newest generation is invigorating local posts with healthy activities, from mountain biking, horseback riding and kayaking to fishing trips for families of men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice. Legion posts are routinely providing free Wi-Fi and computer access. Just last year, nearly 1,000 posts reported coordinating at least one local veteran employment event. Behind the scenes, our service officers helped hundreds of thousands get answers to their benefits questions. American Legion leaders are leveraging Facebook and Twitter as tools of instant connection, communication and camaraderie.

In nearly every state and community I have visited, American Legion Family members were at work revitalizing districts, transferring national members into local posts and persuading young

veterans to join our ranks and help guide our future. Some departments are on track to grow for the first time in a decade. Where Legionnaires are working to achieve a culture of membership growth, growth is happening. That's progress.

I was delighted that 52 out of 55 American Legion departments had reached or exceeded their 2016 membership goals by Jan. 20, the best performance in recent years. And the Legion now has nearly 100,000 post-9/11 members, and increasing.

But what's happening here is not just about numbers. It's what the people behind those numbers are doing: taking active roles as champions of their fellow veterans, regardless of war era, on such issues as transferability of military training hours into credits for specialized career fields, better treatment of PTSD and traumatic brain injury, improved benefits processing, enhancing the GI Bill and making significant progress in the way our nation cares for women veterans. That's just some of what our members are doing for veterans and their families.

What I sense today is momentum. I see Legionnaires making growth plans and successfully executing them. They're using electronic and social media, but haven't forgotten the power of knocking on doors and shaking hands. Those who believe in a bright future are inviting post-9/11 veterans to join the Legion and taking the next step of inviting them to help lead. I can think of no greater 100th-anniversary gift than this shift in culture, a shift toward growth that we all have to stimulate for the Legion to keep accomplishing great things, long into its second century.

# Department Officers - 2016 Membership Year

<b>COMMANDER</b> <b>Keith Abernathy GR79</b> <i>keithabernathy1942@yahoo.de</i>	<b>ADJUTANT</b> <b>Maxwell Rice GR79</b> <i>colwichboy@yahoo.com</i>	<b>NECMAN</b> <b>John Miller GR1982</b> <i>miller-rotb@t-online.de</i>	<b>ALT. NECMAN</b> <b>Ronald Moore GR05</b> <i>gypsy_moore@yahoo.de</i>
<b>VCAL</b> <b>Joe D. Brown GR79</b> <i>vcalbrow50@gmail.com</i> GR07 GR20 GR42 CH01 DK01 NL01 TH00(Thailand) Post9999 & New Post Development	<b>VICE COMMANDER</b> <b>Lyndon Hudson FR01</b> <i>lyndonandmargaret@yahoo.com</i> GR03 GR06 GR09 GR13 GR79 BE02	<b>VICE COMMANDER</b> <b>Quincy Foster GR05</b> <i>quincy@karssandra.com</i> GR01 GR02 GR14 FR01 IR01 FR05 IR63	<b>VICE COMMANDER</b> <b>John Shanahan IR63</b> <i>jbsbanaban@gmail.com</i> IR02 IR03 IT01 PO01 GC01 SP292
<b>VICE COMMANDER</b> <b>Casby Logan GR07</b> <i>casbyj@hotmail.com</i> GR05 GR30 GR45 GR1982	<b>CHAPLAIN</b> <b>Jimmie Dale GR07</b> <i>jimmiedale.87@gmail.com</i>	<b>HISTORIAN</b> <b>Michael Keating IR02</b> <i>michael.keating@t-online.de</i>	<b>FINANCE OFFICER</b> <b>Gary Miller GR06</b> <i>billsfan_gary@hotmail.com</i>
<b>SERVICE OFFICER</b> <b>Paul Claybough GR1982</b> <i>profsoldier72@yahoo.com</i>	<b>JUDGE ADVOCATE</b> <b>James M. Settle GR42</b> <i>james.settle@kabelbw.de</i>		<b>SERGEANT-AT-ARMS</b> <b>Christopher Buchanan GR1982</b> <i>christoperbucb@hotmail.com</i>



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.AmerLegionDeptFrance.org](http://www.AmerLegionDeptFrance.org) / [www.Facebook.com/ALDeptFrance/](http://www.Facebook.com/ALDeptFrance/) / [www.legion.org/fodpal](http://www.legion.org/fodpal)

Thank You...the Editor

David N. Greaux / [davidgreaux@t-online.de](mailto:davidgreaux@t-online.de)

## DEPARTMENT VICE COMMANDER AT LARGE / MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN *Joe D. Brown*



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 the Department of France. If you need assistance with holding a membership drive, tell me and I will help you reach your 100% membership goal.

The Month of February was a busy month for me. I visited the Past Commander from GR01 Comrade Purdy in the Hospital with the first Vice Commander from GR01 Mike Young. Past Commander Purdy was in good spirits. He's a strong fighter, let us all say a prayer for him. I attended GR 05 general membership meeting and met with the new Auxiliary President Mrs. Moore.

From the 19<sup>th</sup> until the 21<sup>st</sup> we went to Brussels for the Oratorical Contest hosted by Post BE02. We had 3 contestants from GR01, GR 1982 and BE02. The first place was Austin Muraille from Flanders Field Post BE02, Second Place was John Casey Jr. from Kaiserslautern Post GR01 and third place was Juliana Saunders from Chavez Post GR1982. All candidates were outstanding and did a very good job. The special Guest was General Patton's granddaughter, who helped present the awards, together with the department Commander Abernathy, also on hand were vice commander Logan, vice commander Hudson and vice Commander Shanahan. Also in attendance were from Post GR01 Curley Morgan, GR06 Commander Douglas Clemence, second vice Commander GR06 Marcus Briscoe and GR1982 first vice Commander Chris Buchanan. GR79 donated \$ 175 to the winner. AFN was on hand with an interview of vice Commander Shanahan and he did an outstanding job for the Department. FR01 Boy scout was also on Post and Department Officers visited the Football field where they were camping out at and we discussed things they needed, we will present their needs at the

3<sup>rd</sup> DEC in Ansbach. The Scoutmaster was past Commander from FR01 Carl Hale and he had a nice turnout at this campground.

The 27<sup>th</sup> of February myself, the Department Commander Abernathy, Vice Commander Logan, Vice Commander Foster were in Ansbach for a Legion Awareness Drive. Kudos to the Post Commander GR1982 Aungst and first vice Commander Buchanan for their good work.

The 2nd Detachment Executive Committee Meeting will be the 5th of March 2016 13:00 at GR05 Post home Gaststätte zur Sonne on Langstr. 28, 64546 Waldorf, Mörfelden.

Department 3<sup>rd</sup> DEC will be in Ansbach hosted by GR1982 Hotel-Gasthaus Windmühle. If you plan on coming to the 3<sup>rd</sup> DEC in Ansbach, you can bring your Awards package with you and if you have a transmittal you can bring that also but don't forget my electronic copy. We still have Posts out there that have not transmitted any Members this year, so is time to start. For all the Posts that made a 100% thank you very much. We must remember the ideals of what the American Legion stands 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-Ambles, Chaplain prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance.

If you have Legionaries 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 [vcalbrowns50@gmail.com](mailto:vcalbrowns50@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







DEPARTMENT VICE COMMANDER *Lyndon Hudson*



This past weekend I participated as a judge in the Department Level Oratorical Contest. I was very honored to be asked to serve as judge, one of four. Over all there was a decent turn out as parents, Legionnaires, and distinguished guests watched the three contestants battle for first place. Each gave their all and performed exceptionally well. It took a lot of courage to get up on stage and do what they did.

Afterwards, while still on Brussels High School grounds at Sterrebeek, myself, Commander Abernathy, VCAL Brown, Department VC Logan, Post GR06's Commander Clemence and 1st Vice Briscoe, and Department VC/Post IR01 Commander Shanahan paid a visit to the local Boy Scouts. Commander Abernathy and VC Shanahan answered a plethora of questions from the Boy Scouts as requisite tasks in earning merit.

And, last, but not least, honorable mention goes to Post BE02 for their outstanding job hosting this year's Oratorical. I'd like to say that I received several laudable comments from members of the audience about what a good job BE02 did. Way to go, guys!

See everyone in Ansbach, VC Hudson

## Detachment of France Third DEC

Saturday 05 March 2016  
Meeting starts at 13:00 hours

GR 05 Post Home  
Gaststätte Zu Sonne  
Langstr. 28  
64546 Walldorf. Morfelden, Germany



## 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"*

# Department of France Second DEC

Saturday 19 March 2016  
Meeting starts at 13:00 hours



Hosted by GR1982

Hotel-Gasthaus Zur Windmühle  
Rummelsberger Str. 1  
91522 Ansbach



## AMERICAN LEGION

March 15-17. On March 15, 1919, the first Legion caucus, held by members of the American Expeditionary Force, convened in Paris.

# THE AMERICAN LEGION: A QUICK GUIDE FOR LEADERSHIP ON FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why doesn't The American Legion establish a male auxiliary or allow male spouses of female veterans to join The Sons of The American Legion?

Female veterans are most certainly welcome in The American Legion and have been since 1919 and well before women could vote in this nation. Your issue is with their spouses who have not joined the military.

The Sons of The American Legion was established in 1932 as a program, comprised of male descendants, adopted sons, and stepsons of members of The American Legion. Sons of female veterans who are eligible to join The American Legion are qualified for The Sons of The American Legion. In 1972 and 1973, the National Executive Committee (NEC) created a National SAL under the full supervision and control of the NEC with over watch delegated to the Internal Affairs Commission. The key to eligibility is male lineage of a veteran parent or grandparent as outlined above.

According to the Veterans Administration there are 1.5 million female veterans. A study conducted in 2005 by the Defense Department Advisory Committee on Women in Services states that 81% of male spouses of female veterans have served in the military. Based on these statistics and adjustments for marriages after leaving active duty, there could be slightly over 30,000 male spouses of female veterans who could not join The American Legion based on their own eligibility. However, a sizeable number of these male spouses could be eligible for the SAL based on their father, grandfather or step father eligibility for The American Legion. This estimated population is significantly smaller than 30,000.

The corporate process to make changes starts with a resolution from the post level where individual thoughts are distilled into a formal recommendation. The resolution makes its way through department to the National level where it is reviewed and the Constitutional Amendments or Credentials and Internal Affairs Convention Committee(s) make(s) their recommendation for a change to the Legion Constitution to the almost 3,000 National Convention delegates from all 55 departments.

Over the last few years, Internal Affairs has had three resolutions on male spouses of female veterans (two to join the SAL and one to establish a separate male auxiliary) that were considered by the various Convention Committees and all three were rejected.

In all cases they have validated the basic principles that The American Legion should not establish a male auxiliary or change the lineage for the Sons of The American Legion. The process as described above has served The American Legion well since 1919 where it takes individual thoughts/opinions and by a systematic procedure turns them into a corporate policy.

*Post Everlasting*



*It is my sad duty to report to you that Comrade Bobby F. Preston of Omar Bradley Post GR42 reported to Post Everlasting on 02 February 2016. Comrade Preston was a PUFLL Member of GR42 with 12 years*

# DETACHMENT OF FRANCE

*Squadrons: GR01, BE02, GR06, GR07, GR14, GR42, GR79, CH01*

*Lee Preston... Detachment of France Commander "2016"*



Calling All Sons of The American Legion

I guess that you are wondering why I would begin my newsletter input this way. Well, we are into the month of March and time for our 3<sup>rd</sup> DEC. We will hold the 3<sup>rd</sup> DEC at the GR05 Post Home which I will put the address at the end. I believe that this DEC will be close enough for many more members to attend and hope that we get a good turnout. I am planning on making some changes to the budget for membership year 2017 and would like to get this out at the DEC so that the vote on the 2017 budget can be completed at our convention in June. Budget wise, we are sitting on difficult times and need to adjust to keep our Detachment viable financially. In order to do this, I need a strong showing from our membership so that all members get the word from their Squadrons. Last month I mentioned the need for members to step up and take positions at the Detachment level; there is still a need and hope that we have some members that will indicate that they will be running for office at our convention in June. I will be the first to announce my candidacy for a 2017 position; please, let someone else be the second, third, fourth, and so on. The only way to get DEC's and the convention in other locations is to have members show up and request that those meetings be held in their location. We have Squadrons located in Kaiserslautern, Mannheim, Stuttgart, Heilbronn, Bidingen, Schweinfurt, China Post 1, and Belgium, why can't we go to 4 different locations during the year to hold these meetings. This would make a meeting less of a problem with travel at least once for each Squadron during the year. I do understand that we have members that are not in the best of health but, my hat goes off to John Odom who made it to the last convention even when he is in very bad health. John, thank you for your support, you have been the main rock in this foundation for quite some time. The only way we can please everyone is to have everyone show up for our DEC, have great discussion, and vote on locations with members that want to set things up and host these functions. Join me in making our Detachment again the best at National. We can only do that with participation and dedication. Please join us at the 3<sup>rd</sup> DEC located at:

Gaststatt Zu Sonne	1200-1255	Registration
Langstr 28	1300-TBA	DEC
64546 Waldorf, Morfelden		

I understand that Charly is trying to get some food setup for everyone which will be pay as you go. There will be a \$5 registration (*50/50 raffle included*) and I hope that we can get a great turnout.

*Lee Preston/Detachment Commander*



On Sunday, 07 February, the Flanders Field Post BE02 hosted a 4-Chaplains display at the AAFES PX on Chièvres Airbase.

The Department of France's Oratorical Contest was hosted by the Flanders Field Post BE02 on Saturday, 20 February at the Brussels American High School. The Contest results:

First Place Winner Austin Muraille, Flanders Field Post BE02 Senior, International School of Brussels

Second Place Winner John Casey Jr., Kaiserslautern Post GR01 Junior, Ramstein High School

Third Place Winner Juliana Saunders, David Chavez Post GR1982 Junior, Ansbach High School

Serving as judges were:

- (1) Joseph Rees, Customs and Border Protection Attaché at the U.S. Mission to the European Union and at the U.S. Embassy to the Kingdom of Belgium
- (2) Lyndon Hudson, US Army Retired, Vice Commander, Department of France
- (3) Helen Patton, granddaughter of General George Patton of WWII fame
- (4) Garrett Jones, Lieutenant Colonel, US Army, Deputy Chief, Office of Defense Cooperation for Belgium & Luxembourg
- (5) Bernardo Fuller, Staff Sergeant, US Army, Broadcast Journalist, American Forces Network Benelux

An AFN radio announce of the Oratorical Contest can be heard at the following link:

[www.dvidshub.net/audio/43253/oratorical-contest#.VtG8k\\_krKMg](http://www.dvidshub.net/audio/43253/oratorical-contest#.VtG8k_krKMg)





# SGT William D. Nelson Post GR09

## GR 09 honors victims of WW II plane crash

Neither rain, sleet nor snow stopped 20 Legionnaires and members of the Ulm Traditional German Artillery Association from participating in a wreath laying ceremony on 20 February at the site of a B-17 Flying Fortress bomber that crashed during a bombing run on Ulm, Germany on 22 February 1945. The plane which had been "patched up" after being hit with flak on a previous flight encountered turbulence when descending to 17,000 feet and plunged to the ground when the fuselage of the plane broke apart. Three crewmembers were able to parachute to safety but seven were unable to exit the spiraling aircraft and perished.

The nearby town of Pfaffenhofen erected a stone monument at the crash site in 2012 and GR 09 members have pledged to maintain it and ensure that its appearance would always be fitting for a memorial honoring these seven American heroes.

Snow was swirling around the feet of all present but no one appeared to be uncomfortable as they were dressed for the occasion. After a brief speech by GR 09's Post Commander Pfaffenhofen's Bürgermeister Walz thanked GR 09 for organizing this event. Following a closing prayer by Post Chaplain Snook everyone rushed to the warmth of their cars.



GR 09 Legionnaires Courtney and Hernandez and Traditional German Artillery Association president Miene placing floral arrangement at foot of monument honoring seven WW II Americans.



Group photo before heading to warm cars



# Department of France Third DEC

**Saturday 19 March 2016  
Meeting starts at 13:00 hours**

**Hosted by GR1982**

**Hotel-Gasthaus Zur Windmühle  
Rummelsberger Str. 1  
91522 Ansbach**



Every year on March 17, the Irish and the Irish-at-heart across the globe observe St. Patrick's Day. What began as a religious feast day for the patron saint of Ireland has become an international festival celebrating Irish culture with parades, dancing, special foods and a whole lot of green.

# Legion to Congress: VA accountability means action, not just words

By Steve B. Brooks



On Feb. 18, The American Legion launched a Thunderclap campaign (#Accountable2Veterans) calling for action, not just words, when restoring accountability at the Department of Veterans Affairs. More than 4,800 social media users signed up to support the campaign, creating a reach of more than 1.5 million.

On Feb. 24, American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett took that same message to Congress.

“We can only achieve accountability to America’s veterans if we work together – honestly and transparently – to prove that a grateful nation will put real execution behind all the words,” Barnett told a joint session of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans’ Affairs. “Congress, VA, the DoD and veterans service organizations must show those who have served in uniform that America can be as accountable to its veterans as veterans have been to America.”

In front of a dozens of Legion family members who filled both a hearing and overflow room, Barnett expressed disappointment over recent reversals of disciplinary actions handed down to VA employees who were found to have abused their positions.

“You cannot imagine how disappointed I and my fellow American Legion members were on Oct. 21, 2015, when five senior VA witnesses failed to appear at an accountability hearing, and the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs had to issue subpoenas to summon them,” Barnett said, adding that once two did show up, they invoked the Fifth Amendment to avoid explaining findings from the Inspector General that they had manipulated the system to the tune of about \$400,000 in unscrupulous relocation costs and practices.

“Our disappointment only grew after additional hearings established wrongdoing, and punishments were imposed, only to be overturned in the appeals process,” Barnett said. “Veterans do not see this as accountability.”

Barnett said the United States has a moral contract to care for its veterans in a compassionate and efficient manner that is easily accessible. That includes proper staffing, a timely and accurate benefits adjudication and appeals process, and a seamless Choice Program that creates no additional burden to the patient.

And, Barnett said, it means “VA executives, managers and employees who fail to perform in a responsible or competent manner – or, worse yet, abuse their positions for personal gain – should be appropriately disciplined, to include termination. The American Legion, Congress and VA all supported the Accountability Act because it made clear that dereliction of duty would have consequences.

“The words are all there. Execution is the problem.”

In the area of treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, Barnett urged the government to look at treatment methods beyond prescription drugs. “The American Legion supports no fewer than six bills in the 114th Congress to recognize different ways to succeed in the battle to help veterans with PTSD and TBI,” he said. “All of these open the door to treatment that does not depend on drugs. I call on Congress to move bills such as these through the process and into law. You have The American Legion’s support.”

During his testimony, Barnett presented the Legion’s other legislative priorities to the committees. Those include providing effective assistance to military personnel transitioning into the civilian world, jobs and business opportunities that match the skills and training of those transitioning servicemembers, gaining passage of a constitutional amendment to protect the U.S. flag from physical desecration, and the budget resources necessary for the U.S. military at war today.

“Veterans and Americans at war today are looking to their nation for nothing less than action and accountability to back up those priorities,” Barnett said. “Too often, what they’re seeing is the assignment of blame over an inability to execute.

“We need to find different ways to succeed. It’s time to expand the definition of accountability.”

Following his testimony, Barnett, Legion staff and other Legion leadership went through a question-and-answer sessions with members of both committees. Several issues were discussed, including:

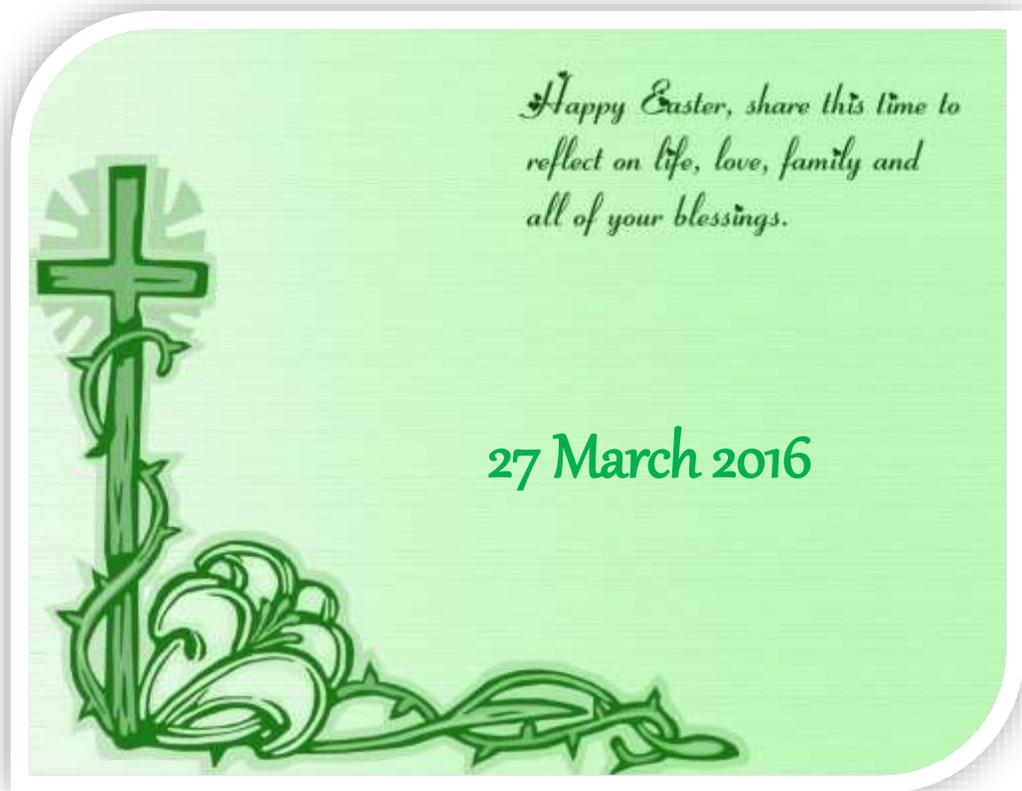
- VA’s claims appeals process. Barnett said the Legion wants to be a partner in helping reform the process, “but we need to make sure that our veterans continue to have full due process of law in any reform of that appeals process.” Louis Celli, director of the

Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division, said confidence was an issue. "Our veterans do not have enough faith in (VA's) adjudication system to know their claim was processed accurately the first time," Celli said. "If we can get that adjudication system improved and processed the first time, we wouldn't have 440,000 appeals. We have to fix the adjudication process from Day 1." And Barnett said the use of American Legion service officers to file claims on behalf of veterans also will make a difference in the appeals process. "You need to have a service officer advising you," Barnett said. "If you think you're going to go into the claims process without a service officer, you are a lost cause. They're a key to the solution."

- Privatizing veterans health care and the future of VA. "If you listen to some people, they're ready to shuck the VA now and send every veteran out into the community," Bozella said. "We certainly don't support that. Veterans need total health care. VA understands veterans. They understand the whole person. They understand the mental health aspects, as well as the physical health aspects and emotional health aspects, that go on to treating the whole person."

- PTSD-TBI treatment. Barnett said prescribing drugs isn't the only viable treatment plan. "We've got to do better than that," he said. "There's so many innovative ways out there. I've been with the equestrian therapy, dog therapy. It doesn't work for every person. But we need to be innovative because our veterans deserve that. We should be looking at ways (to treat them) – not looking at ways NOT to treat veterans."

- Transition assistance for servicemembers entering civilian world. James Oxford, chairman of the Legion's Veterans Employment & Education Commission, said efforts to employ newly discharged veterans should begin earlier in the process. "We need to bring employers into the active-duty bases and ... let them help those active-duty people transition," he said.



# Social Security filing strategy deadline nears

By J. J. Montanaro



Deciding when to start collecting your Social Security benefits is about to get easier. And while easier is usually better, there is a trade-off: the changes could shrink your potential lifetime Social Security income.

Last year's budget bill will soon put a halt to two Social Security filing strategies for couples that we have previously discussed in this column: file-and-suspend and restricted application. Let's review the strategies:

**File-and-suspend.** By filing for and immediately suspending benefits at full retirement age, a person allows his or her spouse to draw spousal benefits while his or her own benefit increases through delayed retirement credits by up to 8 percent per year until the person reaches 70. Just the act of filing opens the door for the spouse to receive benefits based on the suspender's record.

**Restricted application.** Someone who has reached full retirement age could elect to restrict his or her application to only spousal benefits. This allows benefits based on the person's own record to accrue delayed retirement credits, but still provides some income. When used in conjunction with the file-and-suspend strategy, there's a potential for a large boost to lifetime Social Security benefits.

Those currently using one of these strategies will not be affected by the new rules. However, if neither you nor your spouse is claiming Social Security come May 1, the file-and-suspend strategy will no longer be an option. Those 66 and older can use it until April 30; after that, you'll still be able to suspend benefits, but no one else (spouse or child) will be able to claim benefits based on your record if you're not receiving them.

There's a little more leeway with the restricted application rules. If you turned 62 last year, you'll still be able to file a restricted application for only spousal benefits at 66 – allowing your own benefit to grow larger. But to do this, your spouse must be receiving a benefit.

These changes will not affect survivors, who will still have the ability to claim a reduced survivors benefit at 60 and allow their own benefit to continue to grow. Alternately, survivors can claim benefits at 62 based on their work records and allow the survivors' benefit to grow.

With the elimination of these two strategies, the options around Social Security filing shrink, but the decision of when to begin benefits remains an important part of retirement planning.

*J.J. Montanaro is a certified financial planner with USAA, The American Legion's preferred provider of financial services. Submit questions for him online.*



## 2016 Department of France Convention

*Bastogne*

Flanders Field Post BE02 will be hosting the 2016 Department of France's Annual Convention from 16-19 June. The convention will be held at the Hotel Ol Fosse d'Out, in Houffalize, Belgium which is about 10 miles north of the city of Bastogne. In addition to the meetings, we are planning activities in the Bastogne such as a visit to the Bastogne War Museum. To make this event successful, we need help from the membership, specifically with transportation, greeting the Department membership when they arrive. And other tasks. This is the opportunity to show the Department how well we work as a team. If you can help, contact Commander Schram.