



**Richard H. Stewart, Jr.  
American Legion Post 543  
St. James, NC 28461**

**SUBJECT: General Membership Meeting Minutes**

**DATE: Wednesday, October 25, 2023**

**LOCATION: St. James' Community Center**

- 1) Call to Order: First Vice Commander Dan Bennett called the Post 543 Meeting to order at 19:00 on 10/25/23, and the Seargent-At-Arms closed the doors.
  
- 2) Presentation of Colors: The Colors were presented, saluted, and placed by the Post 543 Honor Guard. Followed by:
  - a) The Opening Prayer by Chaplain Chuck Francka
  - b) The Membership recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance
  - c)The POW/MIA recognition by Vice Commander Bennett.
  - d) The Membership recited the Preamble to The American Legion Constitution

3) Roll Call of Officers: Was made by the 1st Vice Commander:

a) Officers Present:

Adjutant

2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander Finance

Deputy Vice Commander Americanism & Youth

Deputy Vice Commander Active-Duty Support

Chaplain

Service Officer

Vice Commander Membership

Seargent-at-Arms

Public Relations Officer

Historian

\*\*\*District Commander Fagan

b) Officers Absent:

Commander, Absent due to Illness.

Judge Advocate: Excused absence.

4) Sick Call: Chaplain Francka reported that P. B. Tyler was on Sick Call.

5) Approval of Minutes: The Draft minutes of the September 27, 2023, General Membership Meeting were approved as posted on the Post website.

6) Vice Commander invited New Members or visiting Veterans to stand and introduce themselves.

## 7) Officer & Committee Reports:

a) Finance Report: Finance Officer Mike Carton presented a slide on how the Post budget is managed and a slide of the October Finance Status. A vote was taken to approve the October finance report and the report was approved unanimously by the membership.

b) Judge Advocate: Doc Liberty reviewed the Town of Saint James' Exhibitor Agreement for loaning military artifacts that would be displayed in the Town of Saint James Town Hall. As part of the process, the Judge Advocate drafted a Hold Harmless Agreement to cover Post Member's loan of military artifacts for the display case.

The Judge Advocate also drafted a Liability Waiver and Agreement which allows for the loan of five (5) 1903 Springfield Armory rifles from a private owner to the Post 543 Honor Guard.

c) Membership: Vice Commander for Membership, Gary Purcell reported that current paid membership for 2024 is 70% (177 members) of the 254-member goal set by the NC Department. 84 members in the post have not yet renewed, of which at least 77 are needed to meet the current goal. Any shortfall in the 77 will need to be made up with NEW members. He urged members to renew now, by paying tonight, mailing him a check or by renewing online themselves, although paying the POST directly is preferred. He also emphasized the need for members to recruit NEW members by sending a Legion brochure to an interested

veteran, inviting a veteran to a post meeting, or by giving the veteran's name and address to him so that we can contact them.

He also indicated that complementary memberships are available for WWII and Korean War veterans and for active-duty service members.

d) Active-Duty Support: Aaron Largent reporting for Deputy Vice Commander Doug Pratt Active-Duty Support.

Special Guest – Operation at Ease Chairman, Eric Holmes.

Operation at Ease provides Active-Duty Members and Family a place to stay, along with meals, Boat Rides, Pool privileges, etc. A volunteer meeting will take place on 19 Mar 2024. Aaron presented a \$500 check to Operation at Ease on behalf of the Post.

It was noted that the Saint James BLUE BOWS program supports the Operation at Ease Program.... In the past, the St. James Service Club provided the bulk of support for the Operation at Ease Program.

Aaron also reported on the Thanksgiving Day dinners to be hosted by St. James residents for Camp Lejeune recruits. Steve Claiborne reported that attendees were from the School of Infantry: Electrical or Combat Engineers. In total 110 GIs will be fed. The organizers were thanked for their continued support of this program.



Aaron also reported that all the logistics for the Oak Island Christmas Parade vehicle and trailer were finalized for the event, as well as reported on the Civil Air Patrol activities.

e) House & Entertainment:

Bob Davis reminded the members of the upcoming Post 543 events for November and December:

- Veterans Day Ceremony on November 11<sup>th</sup> at the Saint James Community Center. Refreshments will be served for all Veterans who attend the ceremony.
  - Veteran Day Refreshments Committee Lead Person is Deb Shaw.
- The Post 543 annual Army/Navy football game event will be held at the Bella Cucina Restaurant on December 9<sup>th</sup>, beginning at 3:00 PM.

f) Chaplain's Report: Chaplain Francka reported that Post Members had logged 62 hours of visits to shut-ins, hospice, etc., veterans over the past month. The Chaplain's team had eleven Veteran visits to those in assisted living, as well as one Hospice Veteran visit and two homebound Veteran visits.

g) Oratorical Events: Jim Hilty reported that the Post will host three Oratorical contests: The Post 543 contest will be held on January 13, 2024, followed by the district 9 contests on January 20, and the Division II contest on February 17, 2024. Scholarships will be awarded to the top three contestants in the Post contest, with the winner receiving a \$1,000 award.

Jim thanked those members who had volunteered in past years and asked for volunteers to support this year's events.

- h) Public Relations Officer: Jim McCrisken reported that Post 543 had voted in the recent Membership Survey that it would like the General Membership Meetings to be recorded. The EXCOM made the decision to ONLY audio record the meetings and make them available afterwards. The Excomm decision was to NOT simulcast the meetings due to the complexity of such an effort. This audio recording would begin at the October General Membership meeting, as noted by the Commander at the onset of the meeting. However, there were some technical difficulties with the system and the recording was postponed until the November General Membership Meeting.

The For Pillars of the American Legion will be advertised in the State Port Pilot during the Holiday period and will stress how they apply to our local community.

Jim McCrisken announced that Mike Yunker had volunteered to take over the role of Post 543 Webmaster, as well as the additional duty of the Post 543 Facebook Administrator. Jim thanked Kathy Ross for her many contributions during her time as the Public Relations Lead.

- i) Service Officer: Steve Muir reported that the VEAC program in Wilmington the past weekend was a huge success with 555 veterans assisted by VA officials and various Post volunteers.

Steve shared several heart-warming success stories from obtaining benefits for a Veteran's widow, to increased Survivor and Veteran benefits.

The PACT Act has resulted in over 874 cases filed and \$1.8 billion in retroactive payments as of the middle of August. Thirty-six thousand claims have been filed in NC alone, with over 21,000 final decisions issued, resulting in over \$80 million retroactive payments made to Veterans.

Steve is working on scheduling a Suicide Prevention Class for Post 543 Members that would be held in February 2024.

- j) Historian's Report: Rick Sessa outlined what the Historian's role to be for Post 543. Rick noted that the Memorabilia Cabinet in the Town of St James foyer was getting rave reviews and that the Army display would be replaced with the Marine memorabilia beginning January 1, 2024. He advised Marines to get ready to replace the current Army relics with their own treasures. Rick encouraged all Members to visit the Saint James Town Hall Lobby to view the display.
  
- k) District Commander Fagan: (& Past Post 543 Cmdr.) was on one of his planned visits to all Posts in District 9. He had a checklist of required items that each Post needed to be accomplished. Commander Fagan indicated that Post 543 was far-ahead of most other Posts in those required accomplishments.



Commander Fagan noted the great work done by the Post with VEAC, The Chaplain, MAD Tournament, parades, fishing outings, etc. Commander Fagan stated in his laudatory remarks, "that if there was a last Post standing in NC, it would be Post 543." At the conclusion of his remarks, he was heartily applauded.

l) Input from Member & Closing Remarks: None were made.

m) Commander's Review of Coming Events: Commander McGhee reminded the Membership that the next General Membership Meeting would be held on November 29, 2023, beginning at 7:00 PM. The Commander also informed the Membership that the Post 543 Thanksgiving meal hosting of Marines from Camp LeJuene was coming up on November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

n) Closing Ceremony:

- Chaplain's Closing Prayer.
- Retirement of the Colors by the Post Honor Guard.

o) Meeting Adjourned at 20:02



W. Agnostak, Adjutant



P. McGhee, Commander