



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

**SUBJECT:** General Membership Meeting Minutes

**DATE:** Wed., Sept 27, 2023.

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

- 1) Call to Order: Commander Phillip McGhee called to order the 09/27/2023, General Membership Meeting of the Richard H. Stewart, Jr., St. James, NC Post 543 at 19:00.
- 2) Presentation of Colors: The colors were then presented, saluted and put in place by the Post 543 Honor Guard, followed by:
  - a) The opening prayer by Chaplain Chuck Francka.
  - b) The Commander led the members in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.
  - c) The POW/MIA recognition was recited by Commander McGhee.
  - d) The Preamble to the American Legion Constitution was projected and Commander McGhee led the members in reciting it aloud.
- 3) Roll Call of Officers and Committee Chairs: (McGhee).
  - a) Officers Present:
    - Phillip McGhee, Commander
    - Bill Agnostak, Adjutant
    - Mike Carton, Finance Officer
    - Dan Bennett, Vice Commander Resource Development
    - Chuck Blackburn, Deputy Vice Commander Americanism & Youth
    - Doug Pratt, Deputy Vice Commander Active-Duty Support
    - Chuck Francka, Chaplain
    - Bob Davis, Sergeant-at-Arms
    - Jim McCriskin, Public Relations
    - Steve Muir, Service Officer
    - Gary Purcell, Vice Commander Membership
    - Rick Sessa, Historian
    - Arthur "Doc" Liberty, Judge Advocate
  - b) Officers Absent:
    - Leo Mercado, Athletics Officer
- 4) Sick Call: Chaplain Francka: 1 Member in Hospital; 2 sick. The Chaplain asked members to keep the family of Kirk and Donna Davis in mind as they faced the most difficult of life's transitions.

5) Approval of Minutes: The draft minutes of the Aug. 23, 2023 General Membership Meeting was approved as posted on the Post website.

6) Commander McGhee invited any new members or visiting veterans to stand and introduce themselves Ralph Gervinson stood and was recognized and warmly welcomed by the Post members.

7) Officer and Committee Reports.

a) Membership Report: Gary Purcell reported that Membership cards are now available and members can now pay their dues (\$45) for FY24 effective July 1, 2023. We are now at 63% of our Membership goal of 254; however, 93 have not yet paid. It is recommended that members pay the Post directly, as paying on-line to National affects the timely receipt of the Post's small share of each member's dues.

b) Finance Report: Finance Officer Mike Carton reported that the FY 23 audit was completed and there were no issues. For the year, FY 24 showed spending at 23.4% A motion to approve the report as presented was passed unanimously.

c) Active-Duty Support: Deputy Vice Commander Doug Pratt reviewed upcoming events that his team would be supporting:

i) The Sept 18, 2023 Fishing Trip with Ft Liberty SRU, Lead Aaron Largent, reported that, despite some logistics & finance issues, the trip was successful. As 4 troops were treated to a day of successful fishing, catching several flounder. This, despite the Commander's cap being used as bait. The craft was filled to capacity with 7 personnel & 1 beagle dog.

ii) SBHS Jr ROTC nominations are due by Sept. 25, 2023; Jeff Alano is the Lead.

iii) The Thanksgiving Event, where 110 troops from Camp Lejeune, are treated to a home cooked Thanksgiving dinner still needs hosts, as only 12 of the 55 needed hosts have volunteered. See Steve Claiborne for details.

d) Service Officer Report. (Steve Muir)

i) Steve presented updates on some of the 13 Veterans' cases he is currently tracking.

ii) VEAC will take place on Oct. 19-21 in Wilmington. Please volunteer.

iii) The Dental Smiles event was very successful and those in attendance were greeted by Cmdr. McGhee. There was also coverage by the local press.

iv) The VA has increased burial expenses. Pending seminar for survivor benefits.

iii) Post is considering hosting a 2d training session on Suicide Intervention for Post members and other VSOs in the county in early 2024.

- v) The PACT ACT, according to Steve, is the greatest piece of legislation since the GI Bill. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of the Over 430,000 claims or 380.000 have been processed. There has been great cooperation throughout the Wilmington area by Posts, VA, etc.
- e) Vice Commander Resource Development: Dan Bennett reported that the Oct. 23, 2023, "Pier to Peer," fishing event for disabled vets could use some assistance. Our Post's involvement is on the first day of the event.
- f) Veterans Memorial Committee: Tom Picnich reported that orders for new memorial bricks were needed by 10/05/23 to ensure that they would be available by Veterans Day.
- g) Post Historian, Rick Sessa, reported that the Post Display Case in the TOSJ Entrance Foyer was filled with Army Memorabilia. It has been quite the success. Next display will include Marine Corps memorabilia. So, Marines get your bayonets and other relics ready.
- h) Post Chaplain Chuck Francka noted the members of the Post Ministry Team are very active in their outreach to veterans of all conditions, especially those that are disabled, shut-in, hospice, spouse survivors, etc. Our Ministry Team members, he reminded, are so involved not for recognitions, but because Vet-to-Vet interactions are integral in keeping those less fortunate in our thoughts & prayers and in keeping spirits high.
- i) Public Relations guru, Jim McCrisken reported that he has been very successful in getting publicity out for the Post, as evidenced by the frequent newspaper articles. Additionally, IT assistance and webmaster help was needed especially for our Facebook presence.
- 8) Special Guest Speakers: Chuck Blackburn, Deputy Vice Commander Americanism presented two high school students who reported on their recent experiences as participants in "projects supported by Post 543."
- a) Raymond Rooks, who was nominated as CAP Cadet of the Year and as our representative to NC Student Troopers Program, spoke about his experiences. Noting that it was a very intense regimen, feeling as if he was in the military, from arising at 06:00, to classes, looking at helicopters, speaking with NC State Troopers, etc. Raymond wants to be a pilot hence his participation in the Civil Air Patrol
- b) Phalha Lupton, a Life Scout, who is currently working on her Eagle Service Project at The Mariners' Museum. talked about her experiences at Camp Humphries in Korea at the International Scout Jamboree. Some 50,000 were in attendance for the weeks long event. She said her 2-1/2 weeks were amazing. She had many interactions with people from all over, including other students, military families, and more. Cmdr. McGhee 's experiences at Camp Humphries were quite keen, as he spoke very highly of the installation.

9) Commander McGhee's Closing Remarks:

a) Reminder of upcoming Post 543 events:

- VEAC 19-21 Oct
- Pier to Peer Fishing Event 23 Oct
- Veterans Day Ceremony 11 Nov
- Thanksgiving for Lejeune recruits
- Challenge Coin Tree for St. James Club's Holiday Festival, 7-8 Dec
- Toys for Tots 16 Dec

b) Encouraged general membership to sign up for next Suicide Intervention Course

c) Asked for members to loan challenge coins and military service memorabilia for the Challenge Coin Patriotic Tree (formally Charlie Brown Christmas Tree) 7-8 Dec.

d) Asked members to loan military service memorabilia for display case at Town Hall.

**The next general membership meeting is October 25 ,2023.**

11) Closing Ceremony. Chaplain Chuck Francka offered a closing prayer.

12) Commander McGhee called for the Honor Guard to retire the colors.

13) Commander McGhee adjourned the monthly meeting at 8:58 PM.



Adjutant, Bill Agnostak



Commander, Phillip McGhee