



**American Legion Post 543
General Membership Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 26, 2025**

Meeting Minutes

- 1) The meeting was called to Order at 7:00 PM – Commander.
- 2) Opening Prayer – Chaplain.
- 3) The Pledge of Allegiance was led by the Commander with audience participation.
- 4) The Commander welcomed all the guests and requested any first-time visiting Veterans to stand, state their name and what branch of service they served in. Two Army and one Navy Veteran were visiting for the first time.
- 5) The Commander recognized Brett Bloomquist of the Honor Flight of the Cape Fear Area program and his son Carter who was visiting Post 543 to present an Honor Flight video and invite Members to participate in future flights.
- 6) The Commander led the Members in reciting the Preamble to the American Legion Constitution.
- 7) The Commander recognized the POWs and honored them by referring to the empty chair.
- 8) The Commander reviewed the four pillars and how the Post supports over 70 programs. He also referred to how Steve Muir serves on a National Council for Veterans.
- 9) The Commander declared the monthly meeting convened and took roll call. The Judge Advocate and the Service Officer were excused absences.
- 10) The Commander requested the Chaplain brief the Membership regarding any sick call Members:
 - a. Pom Pomeroy was ill and unable to attend the meeting. The Chaplain requested the membership keep him in their prayers.

- b. Richie Ewing had surgery this month and is recovering at home. The Chaplain requested the membership keep him in their prayers.
- 11) The Commander requested any Vietnam Veteran who had not yet received their Vietnam Era Veteran Recognition Pin and certificate to come forward. Three Vietnam Era Veterans received Recognition Pins and certificates from the Commander.
- 12) The Commander requested Brett Bloomquist of the Honor Flight of the Cape Fear Area come to the podium and talk briefly about the upcoming flight on April 26th. Eric then showed a video of the 2022 Honor Flight. At the end of the video, Brett asked how many Post 543 Members had been on an Honor Flight – three Members raised their hands. Aaron Largent spoke briefly about his experience with the 2022 Honor Flight and how worthwhile it was.
- 13) The Commander invited Eric Holmes to the podium and Eric outlined how the organization brings active-duty members and their families to Saint James for a weekend of Rest and Restoration. The program furnishes everything from food, fishing, entertainment, and lodging. Eric thanked the Post for their continued support of the program. The Commander and Doug Pratt presented Eric with a Post check for \$1,000.
- 14) The Commander invited the guests to depart the meeting prior to conducting the Post 543 official business. Brett and his son Carter departed.
- 15) A motion was made to approve November 20, 2024, General Membership Meeting Minutes. The motion carried, and the voice vote was unanimous. – Commander.
- 16) The Adjutant took the podium and announced that the Post Commander had won the Department Commander of the Year Award and presented him with the Department Award plaque. The Commander indicated that it was the Post who won the award.
- 17) The Finance Officer Report – Mike Carton
 - a. The Finance Officer informed the membership that he would cover three topics in his Finance Report:
 - 1. The February 2025 Finance Report.
 - a. Post 543 is 65% spent as of 2-26-25.
 - b. Post 543 is on target to meet the budget.
 - c. Post 543 will incur some unplanned expenses, but these will be near the end of the fiscal year.

- d. The Commander requested a motion to approve the Finance Report, a motion was made and seconded, no discussion was needed and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

2. Post expenditures by pillar.

- a. The Finance Officer reviewed the chart reflecting the Post expenditures that had been spent up to 2-26-25 against the four pillars.
- b. The Post is in a good position as a non-profit in respect to the Post's fund-raising activities.

3. The FY25 Budget Mid-Year review.

- a. The Finance Officer reviewed the end of the 2025 Fiscal Year Budget and explained how all the scholarships the Post supports all have been rolled into a new single account.
- b. The Finance Officer requested a motion be made to approve the adjustments made to the FY 2025 Budget. The motion was made and seconded, no discussion was needed and the motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

4. The Finance Officer informed the Post Members that there were two policy adjustments that require Membership approval.

- a. A few minor wording changes were completed to Post 543 Policy 005 and one major change which outlines the policy for sharing financial information with individuals of the Post. This change in policy outlines the process for Members to request and receive access to the Post financial information. This can be done via a letter to the Commander or Finance Officer to arrange an appointment to see the documentation. A motion was made to approve the policy changes as written. The motion was seconded, and no discussion was needed. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

b. The second policy change involves the Post 543 Policy 007 which is the investment policy that applies to limiting investments in CDs only. The revision of the investment policy provides the Financial Officer the flexibility to evaluate the various CD rates at the time and make the decision in conjunction with the Financial Institute Advisors as to which ones to invest the mature CDs in for the best return for the Post. Also, the policy change would allow the Finance Officer to deposit the interest from the CDs into the Finance Institute's Money Market account which would pay more interest than the normal bank savings account. A motion was made to approve the policy changes as written. The motion was seconded, and no discussion was needed. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

5. The Finance Officer announced the FY26 budget development schedule as outlined below:

- A budget call will take place between April 1 to April 30th.
- FY26 budget & finance/budget lead input takes place between May 1st and May 22nd.
- A budget lead/ExCom final review will take place on June 12th at 1:00 PM at the Homer E. Wright Event Center at Saint James.
- The ExCom will do their final review and approve the Post 543 budget on June 16th.
- The FY26 budget will be presented to the Post 543 Membership at the June 25th General Membership meeting and the FY26 budget for approval.

18) The 2nd Vice Commander, Membership Report – Gary Purcell

- a. Gary indicated that four members had renewed their membership prior to the start of the meeting, getting the Post to 241 paid members. The Post had now achieved 91% of the Department assigned goal of 264 paid members. That puts the Post in the top 4 posts, out of the 19 Posts in our district. Two new members joined before the meeting.

- b. The Post has 23 members to go to meet the goal. We have 36 former members who have not renewed so the Membership Committee is working diligently to contact those 36 former members – but we still need new member recruitment to continue to keep pace with those members who pass away on an annual basis. Gary encouraged all Members to recruit new Members for the Post. Gary read some of the names on his list and a few of the attending Members informed Gary of those who had moved.

19) The Deputy Vice Commander, Active-Duty Support Report – Doug Pratt

- a. Doug reviewed the Post 543 support of the upcoming 2025 USO Camp Lejeune Family Annual Carnival and Easter Egg Hunt on April 5th. Post 543 will provide 1800 pre-filled plastic Easter eggs with candy and toys.
- b. Doug then presented the ExCom slate of Officers and the organizational structure chart. He also introduced the names of the Election Committee members and how to contact them. He encouraged any Member who might be interested to contact he or one of the Committee Members.

20) The Americanism Report – Chuck Blackburn

- a. Chuck informed the Members that he would be giving the report for Jim Hilty who was traveling and not able to attend.
- b. Chuck reviewed the process of recruiting students for participation, as well as outlined the events for the Post, District and Division contests. He informed the Members that Levi Spencer won all three of the contests to date and would be going to the Department contest representing Post 543.
- c. Chuck also recognized Sue Fagan for her continued support of the Oratorical Contests and her contribution of \$3,000.00 in support of scholarships.
- d. Chuck requested all the Members who served as volunteers during the Oratorical Contests stand and be recognized. A round of applause was given.

21) The Service Officer Report – Aaron Largent & Paul Witmer (for Steve Muir)

- a. Aaron Largent informed the Members that Steve Muir had furnished hard copies of the following documents that are excellent references, and the documents would be on a back table for the Members to take with them. The Members were encouraged to take copies with them.

- 2025 Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents, Survivors and Caregivers Manual.

- The new PACT Act guide.
- The VA new sign-in process guide for signing on-line to the VA.
- A Toxic Exposure Screening process document.
- The American Legion 2025 Legislative Priority Listing.

b. Aaron Largent informed the Membership that the VEAC event will take place at the National Guard Armory at Wilmington Airport from May 8th to May 10th.

c. Aaron Largent also briefed the Membership that the Service Officer and his team had provided aid and assistance to over 51 local Brunswick County Veterans during the Calendar Year 2024.

d. Aaron Largent introduced Paul Witmer to speak about VEAC.

- Paul outlined what the VEAC event does and the need for Volunteers to sign up in support of the VEAC event in May. He informed the Membership that there were clipboards on the various tables with signup sheets for all three days of the event. Members could choose whichever days they were available to help. Paul also invited any Veteran who currently has a file in process or those who might qualify for benefits and have not yet filed to attend the VEAC event in May. He made sure to inform them of the various documentation they would need to bring with them.
- Paul gave an update on a couple of the cases currently being handled by the Service Officer and the team.

22) The Sergeant-AT-Arms/House & Entertainment Report – Rick Sessa

a. Rick Sessa invited all Members to the upcoming District 9 quarterly meeting that will take place at the Homer E. Wright Event Center at Saint James on March 26th at 11:00 AM. Rick informed the Members that lunch would be served as part of the meeting. All Posts within District 9 should have representatives attending this meeting and will share the various events and programs they support. It's important that Post 543 as the host has a good showing.

b. Rick announced that the US Navy Band will be conducting a concert at the Odell Williamson Auditorium at 7:00 PM on March 31st. Tickets are FREE.

c. Rick also announced the UNC Wilmington Military Appreciation Day ballgame at 6:00 PM on April 11th. Food is provided to Post Members. All Post

Members are encouraged to participate. Attendance for Post Members is FREE.

d. Rick reviewed the Veteran's Memorial Reef program and invited all Members to attend a special presentation on April 23rd at 6:00 PM at the Homer E. Wright Event Center at Saint James.

e. Rick also reviewed the Veterans Who Are About to Go on Eternal Patrol program and invited all Members to attend a special presentation on April 23rd at 6:30 PM at the Homer E. Wright Event Center at Saint James. The program has been known as "I'm gone, now it's your problem!". The program helps surviving spouses of Veterans plan and prepare for when the Veteran is gone.

f. Rick outlined a future event that will encompass a bus trip to Fort Bragg. This event is in the planning stages and will keep the membership informed.

23) Post Historian Report – Rick Sessa

a. Rick is currently filling the Post Historian position in addition to his other duties due to the loss of the ExCom Member who was managing it previously. The Post is looking to fill this position as part of the ExCom Member recruitment. Rick brought the Post History Book to the meeting and had it on display at the front of the room for any Member who wanted to view it. Several Members had the opportunity to view the book prior to and after the meeting.

24) The Memorial Committee Report – Tom Picinich

a. Memorial brick sales continue. Tom encouraged any Member who might be interested in a memorial brick for themselves or a loved one to get in touch with him as soon as possible so he can consolidate the next order.

b. Tom also informed the Members that a plan has been underway for some time to improve and modify the current Veteran's Memorial at the Homer E. Wright Event Center at Saint James. Tom indicated that contractor's bids had been received by the Committee, the bids presented to the ExCom and the ExCom had selected a contractor and approved the improvement to move forward.

25) Commander's closing comments – Commander

a. The Commander reviewed the upcoming events list with the Membership. He reminded the Membership of the upcoming District 9 meeting, and the next General Membership Meeting will take place on March 26th. The

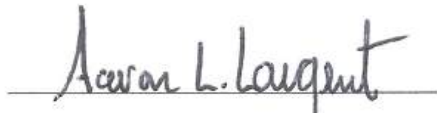
Commander solicited any additional comments from the Membership. There was none.

26) General Membership Meeting Closing Prayer – Chaplain

27) The Post 543 colors remained posted. – Commander

28) The Commander's closing remarks (until we meet again) - Commander

29) The General Membership Meeting was adjourned at 8:10 PM. – Commander


Aaron L. Largent
Adjutant


Phillip E. McGhee
Commander