



**American Legion Post 543
General Membership Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, June 25, 2025**

Meeting Minutes

- 1) The meeting was called to Order at 7:00 PM –Commander Phillip McGhee
- 2) The Commander ordered the advancement of the Colors and a hand salute.
- 3) Opening Prayer – Chaplain.
- 4) The Commander welcomed the Guests and asked them to introduce themselves. No Veterans were attending for the first time.
- 5) The Commander recognized the POWs and those Missing in Action, as well as honored them by referring to the empty chair.
- 6) The Pledge of Allegiance was led by the Commander with audience participation.
- 7) The Commander led the Members in reciting the Preamble to the American Legion Constitution.
- 8) The Commander reviewed the four pillars and how the Post supports over 70 programs.
- 9) The Commander welcomed the Guest Speaker, author and Vietnam Veteran John Montalbano. Mr. Montalbano talked about how he came to write his book “Bullets in My Bottom Drawer”, which is a compelling anthology of short stories providing a unique lens into the Vietnam War. Mr. Montalbano made himself available after the meeting to autograph books for the Members. The Commander thanked John Montalbano for his presentation and presented John with an American Flag pin and an American Legion challenge coin.
- 10) The Commander inquired of the meeting attendees if there were any other Vietnam era Veterans in the audience who had not received their 50th Anniversary commemorative pin and certificate for their service. The Commander presented two Vietnam Veterans with their pins and certificates. Pictures were taken of the award presentation and will be posted on the Post 543 website.

- 11) The Commander declared the monthly meeting convened and took roll call. All Officers were present. The Commander declared a quorum was present.
- 12) The 1st Vice Commander requested the Chaplain brief the Membership regarding any sick call Members:
 - a. The Chaplain requested the Membership to remember Ron Burdoo in prayer.
- 13) The Commander called George Freeman (1st Vice Commander, District 9) to the podium to present the awards from the Department of North Carolina Convention that were awarded to Post 543:
 - a. Be The One Award – presented to Post 543 Chaplain Francka and his Ministry Team for their involvement and excellent support of Stop Soldier Suicide program.
 - b. Public Relations Media Newsletter Award – presented to Jim McCriskin for the outstanding job he and his team have done with keeping the local community informed of the Post 543 activities and support of the local community through the 70+ Post 543 programs.
 - c. Tar Heel 100% Membership Ribbon Award – presented to Bill Morgan for installation on the Post 543 Flag maintained and carried by the Post 543 Honor Guard.
 - d. A 100% Membership pin and special recognition was given to Gary Purcell and his Membership team for all their efforts to secure renewals and new Members.
 - e. A 100% Membership certificate was also awarded to Commander McGhee for Post 543 on behalf of the Department of North Carolina.
- 14) The Commander requested a motion be made to approve May 28, 2025 General Membership Meeting Minutes. **A motion was made to approve May 28, 2025, General Membership Meeting Minutes.** No discussion was required. **The motion carried, and the voice vote was unanimous.** – Commander.
- 15) The Commander informed all guests and non-members that they were to leave the meeting room at that time because the Post would be discussing and voting on proprietary information. The Commander thanked them for being at the meeting.

16) The Commander called for the Officer and Committee Reports to be presented:

17) Finance Officer Report – Mike Carton

a. The Finance Officer informed the membership that he would cover three topics in his Finance Report:

1. The May 2025 Finance Report.

a. Post 543 is 112% spent as of 6-25-25.

i. This is due to two major events held in 2025.

b. 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 expenditure that had been spent up to 6-25-25 against the four pillars. No questions or discussion were presented.

3. FY 26 Post 543 Budget.

a. The Finance Officer presented the FY 26 budget. He explained that ExCom had decided to cancel the FY 26 Baseball Program which was deemed too expensive. That resulted in \$20,000 being removed from the FY 26 budget baseball line item. This allowed the Post to provide this monetary support Youth and Americanism programs, as well as provide a \$500 donation to one of the other Legion Baseball teams.

b. The FY26 Budget is a balance budget and reflects the changes the Finance Committee recommended and approval by the Budget Leads and the ExCom.

c. A call for the Membership to approve the FY 26 Post 543 Budget to be approved was made. **A motion for the Membership to approve the FY 26 Post 543 Budget was made and seconded. No discussion or objection was presented, and a voice vote was taken. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.**

d. The Finance Officer thanked the Finance Committee, the ExCom and the Budget Leads for all their work on the FY26 Budget.

18) The Commander invited Gary Purcell (2nd Vice Commander, Membership) to the podium to provide the Membership with an update.

- a. Membership renewals are set to begin July 1st, 2025 and end December 31st, 2025.
- b. The Department will be sending out renewal notices (Gary presented a sample of the renewal notice that will be sent from Department to each Member. He informed Members "do not throw the renewal notice away".)
- c. There are 3 ways to pay for renewing Post 543 Memberships:
 1. Please check the back of the renewal notice to insure your info is correct.
 2. Pay online with a credit card.
 3. Pay cash or check to the Membership Committee at the monthly Post meeting.
 4. Mail a check to Gary Purcell at 3112 Inland Cove Dr., Southport, NC 28461
 5. **DO NOT** mail dues to the Post 543 address or to the American Legion.
 6. Any renewal not paid by December 31, 2025 will be considered delinquent.
- d. The Commander announced that the New Member Initiation Ceremony would take place. He requested the Sergeant-at-Arms to announce the individuals who would be participating in the initiation. The Sergeant-at-Arms announced the following names:
 1. James Bowling
 2. Darryl DeSerio
 3. Michael Galchus
 4. David Vickers
- e. The Commander conducted the initiation ceremony. Once completed, he invited the Chaplain (Chuck Francka) to explain the American Legion emblem to the new Members who had been initiated into Post 543. The Chaplain explained each of the elements of the American Legion emblem and what they represented as the overall mission and charter of the Legion.
- f. The Commander welcomed each new Member to Post 543 and presented them with an American flag pin, as well as an American Legion challenge coin.

19) The Commander invited Steve Muir (Post 543 Resource Officer) to give an update on the current active cases he is working on behalf of the Post.

a. Steve updated the Membership on Paul Witmer (Post 543 Member). Paul has been moved to an assisted care facility and is undergoing therapy for the stroke he experienced. Paul has shown some improvements but still has problems with his memory and speech. Please keep Paul in your prayers. Steve encouraged Members to reach out to Paul and send him a card or note. Steve will provide Paul's address to any Member who requests it.

b. General Joe Kinzer and his wife are now relocated and settled into the assisted care facility at Terra Bella in Southport. Steve thanked the Chaplain and his Ministry Team for visiting Joe and his wife and encourage any other Members to stop in and pay General Kizner a visit.

c. Ron Harper is another Veteran case that Steve has been working, along with Gary Crowden to relocate an Air Force Veteran into temporary housing at the Veteran's Welcome Home Resource Center. The Veteran was evicted from the house he was renting here in Southport. Gary Crowden and Steve were able to get the Veteran relocated into the temporary housing facility located in Little River, SC where he has been successful in making the transition. If the Veteran makes the transition successfully, he could be moved into one of the Program's Tiny Homes located there. The Post 543 Veteran's Assistance Team did provide the Veteran with some food cards.

d. The Veteran's Welcome Home Resource Center is looking to expand into Brunswick County in the future. Steve will request the Director of the program to visit the Post and be a Guest Speaker sometime later this year.

e. Steve Muir indicated he would brief the Membership next month on his attendance at the Department of NC Conference. He spent 3 days at the Conference and chaired the Legislative Committee meeting.

f. One item from the Department of NC Conference was that a new Department Commander was elected. Devell "Bo" Durham Jr. was elected as the statewide Commander. Bo brings a ton of energy to the Department and will again visit Post 543 soon. He was here previously last year. Bo was in the Marine Corps for 31 years and retired as a Sergeant Major.

g. In closing, Steve indicated he was impressed with the young man who won the Department Oratorical Contest and placed 2nd at the National Oratorical Contest in Michigan. The young man's speech was one of the best Steve has heard in his many years of being involved in the Oratorical Program. Steve believes this young man could win the National Oratorical Contest next year since he is only a Junior in High School. Steve encouraged all the Members to get involved in supporting the Oratorical Contest. As a direct result of this student's involvement in the Oratorical Contest effort, he has been able to amass approximately \$25,000 in scholarship funding.

h. Steve Muir indicated the Purple Heart Dinner would be held in Wilmington at the UNCW Campus on August 2, 2025. Any Purple Heart recipient, and a guest are welcome to attend at no charge. Anyone interested in sponsoring or attending this event should see Steve Muir or Gary Crowden for the information.

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

a. Doug Pratt invited Steve Clayborn to give the Active-Duty Support report since Steve had coordinated the most recent Camp LeJeune event. Steve reported that the Post 543 Active-Duty support team had supported a Paddle Board competition hosted by the Wounded Warrior Battalion-East at Camp LeJeune on June 12, 2025. The Post 543 Active-Duty Support team provided Subway sandwiches to the participants of the event. Headquarters Company, along with Alpha and Bravo Companies participated. LTC Wells presented a certificate of appreciation to Post 543 Active-Duty Support individuals at the event.

21) The Chaplain – Chuck Francka (End of the Year Chaplain Report)

a. The Chaplain indicated that the Ministry Team had spent 131.5 hours visiting and assisting homebound and assisted living Veterans the past fiscal year.

b. The Chaplain indicated the Ministry Team had spent 83.5 hours supporting local community service efforts in the past fiscal year.

c. The Chaplain indicated the Ministry Team had spent 27.0 hours supporting the Post 543 Americanism programs during the past fiscal year.

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

a. Rick thanked everyone who has supported his efforts this past year in his role as Sergeant-at-Arms and Post Historian. He personally thanked Mark Lieberman for supporting the monthly Membership Meetings with snacks and drinks, as well as the Honor Guard for help in setting up the meeting room each month.

b. Rick announced that on July 3rd, Southport will be hosting the annual flag retirement ceremony done by the Dave Holly and the Boy Scouts at 2:00 PM.

c. Rick encouraged all the Members to look in the State Port Pilot newspaper for the list of events for the Southport 4th of July celebration.

d. Rick announced that there will be a Veteran's Day Dance featuring Mike's Garage Band on November 14th, beginning at 5:30 PM at the Homer E. Wright Event Center. Wristbands will be sold at \$15 each for admittance into the dance. Look for wristband sales locations to be announced. All proceeds go to Post 543 to support the 70+ programs the Post supports throughout the local communities.

e. The Commander reminded the Members that on June 28th & 29th, the Sea Notes Patriotic Concert will take place beginning at 3:0 PM each day. The Post 543 Honor Guard will be presenting the colors, as well as the various service flags as the Post 543 bagpiper plays the service song. If you've never experienced this, you need to attend this concert. Post 543 Membership Team members will also be there signing up new Members. The concert will be held at the Odell Williamson Concert Hall on the Brunswick Community College campus.

23) The Veteran Memorial Brick Walkway Update – 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. He indicated he would hold off placing another order until he got at least 10 orders. He would attempt to get them delivered and installed before Veteran's Day. Members can contact him at tapicinich@ATMC.net or 201-218-8753. Brick order forms are also available at the Saint James Town Hall. Tom also thanked Jim McCrisky for keeping the brick sales effort visual to the community through the various advertisements in the local publications.

24) The Commander turned the meeting over to District 9 Commander Jim Torr to conduct the swearing in ceremony of the newly elected Post 543 Officers.

a. Commander Torr conducted the swearing in ceremony according to the guidelines contained in the American Legion's 2025 Officer's Manual.

b. The newly elected Post 543 Officers are as follows:

1. Post Commander – Mike Carton
2. Adjutant – Doug Pratt
3. Parliamentarian – Doc Liberty
4. 1st Vice Commander, Resource Development – Phillip McGhee
5. 2nd Vice Commander, Membership – Gary Purcell
6. Finance Officer – Tim Edman
7. Deputy Vice Commander, Active Duty – Dan Bennett
8. Deputy Vice Commander, Americanism – Chuck Blackburn
9. Sergeant-at-Arms – Rick Sessa
10. Resource Office – Steve Muir
11. Public Relations Officer – Jim McCriskin
12. Historian – Chuck Francka
13. Chaplain – Bruce Templeman

25) Previous Post 543 Commander Phillip McGhee turned over the gavel to the new Post 543 Commander Mike Carton.

26) Commander's closing comments – Commander Mike Carton

a. The new Commander thanked the Membership for their vote of confidence. He indicated that most things would remain the same because "if it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

b. Mike Carton indicated he would like to improve on what we have and enhance what the Post provides to the community. That includes Members, their spouses, their extended families and the Veterans of the local communities.

c. Mike operates on the three S's philosophy:

1. Service – all of us are servants.
2. Selflessness – taking care of the needs of those who need our help.

d. Mike Carton solicited any additional comments from the Membership.

1. Rick Sessa indicated the Post Members would like to recognize the many contributions of the Commander's spouses of both Phillip and Mike by presenting a bouquet of flowers for them to take home to their wives.

2. Doug Pratt reminded the Membership of the 4th of July parade and invited all the Members to participate by meeting at the Walmart parking lot at 9:00 AM on the 4th of July to be transported to the parade staging area.

3. Mike Carton reminded the newly elected Post 543 Officers that there would be a brief ExCom Meeting immediately following the closure of the General Membership Meeting.

27) General Membership Meeting Closing Prayer – Chaplain Timberman

28) The Commander requested the colors be retired – Commander Carton

29) The Commander's closing remarks (until we meet again) – Commander Carton

30) The General Membership Meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM. – Commander Carton



Douglas Pratt
Adjutant



Mike Carton
Commander