



**American Legion Post 543  
General Membership Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, May 28, 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. Four 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 Alicia Corlew. Ms. Corlew served as a nurse in Vietnam. She shared how she became interested in serving as a Nurse in the military and some of her experiences during her assignment in Vietnam. The Commander presented Ms. Corlew with a Vietnam Veteran challenge coin, as well as an American Legion challenge coin. Photos were taken of the challenge coin presentation and will be posted on the Post 543 website. Ms. Corlew thanked the members of Post 543 for their service.
- 10) The Commander inquired of the meeting attendees if there were any other Vietnam era Veterans in the audience who had not received their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary commemorative pin and certificate for their service. The Commander presented five 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 introduced Doug Pratt, the Deputy Vice Commander, Active-Duty Support. Doug then outlined the recognition of Civil Air Patrol Cadet MSgt Ammon Kreuser for his outstanding achievement in scholastic and military excellence. With the Post 543 Civil Air Patrol Leadership Cadet of the Year recognition came certificates of recognition and a plaque, as well as a \$1500 scholarship.
- 12) The Commander invited Rick Sessa to the podium. Rick Sessa was filling in for Chuck Blackburn who was traveling. Rick reviewed the Post 543 scholarship program and indicated that three (3) candidates for the Early College High School scholarship winners for 2024-2025. All three candidates did very well during the interview process and made it very difficult to pick one candidate. Therefore, Post 543 awarded all three scholarships. The first recipient was Emmy Russ. Emmy was awarded the Rodney Johnson Memorial Scholarship for \$1,000. Unfortunately, Emmy was unable to be in attendance to the Post 543 General Membership Meeting. The second recipient was Annika Hayden. Annika won the Post 543 Scholarship of \$1,000. Annika was in attendance and was presented with the scholarship certificate. The third scholarship recipient was Summer Scott. Summer won the second Post 543 Scholarship of \$1,000. All three recipients will attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the fall. Pictures of the Scholarship recipients will be featured in the Post 543 Newsletter and the Post 543 Facebook page. Next, Rick Sessa reviewed the Richie Hat Trick Scholarship program. Rick introduced the first scholarship recipient Conner Walls who was presented with a \$2500 Richie Hat Trick scholarship. Rick then introduced the second scholarship recipient Hayden Slater who was presented with a \$500 scholarship. Rick then introduced the third scholarship recipient Piper Geddings who was presented with a \$1,000 scholarship. Two of the other Richie Hat Trick Scholarships were unable to attend the meeting. They were Addison Baldwin and Gannon Herring. Rick also reviewed that Post 543 had awarded an Alternative Education Scholarship to Catherine Prevatte who was unable to attend the Post 543 General Membership Meeting. Pictures of the scholarship recipients will be featured in the Post 543 Newsletter, as well as on the Post 543 Facebook page. Rick closed the presentation by reminding the Post 543 Membership that the Post had given out over \$20,000 in scholarships the past year.
- 13) The Commander announced that the Post 543 Past-Commander George Freeman had been elected as the new American Legion District 9 Vice Commander. The Commander indicated that George Freeman will bring a great deal of experience and energy needed to District 9. Vice Commander Freeman will continue to be an active member of Post 543, supporting many of the Committees bringing service to the local communities.
- 14) The Commander excused any of the Guests who might not want to sit through the Post's standard business portion of the meeting.

15) The Commander declared the monthly meeting convened and took roll call. All Officers were present except Dan Bennett (1<sup>st</sup> Vice Commander, Resources), Gary Purcell (2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander, Membership), Chuck Blackburn (Deputy Vice Commander – Americanism) and Steve Muir (Post Service Officer). All were excused absences. The Commander declared a quorum was present.

16) The 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Commander requested the Chaplain brief the Membership regarding any sick call Members:

- a. The Chaplain requested the Membership to remember Tom Miller who was in a car accident but is doing well.
- b. The Chaplain also indicated that Wayne Van Pelt was recovering from double pneumonia and asked that he be remembered in prayer.

17) The Commander requested a motion be made to approve the March 26, 2025 General Membership Meeting Minutes. A motion was made to approve March 26, 2025, General Membership Meeting Minutes. No discussion was required. The motion carried, and the voice vote was unanimous. –Commander.

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

19) 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 95.86 spent as of 5-28-25.
    - b. Post 543 is on target with no issues.
    - c. 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 5-28-25 against the four pillars.

- b. A question was raised regarding the difference between the budget and actual expenditure line for the Veteran & Rehabilitation item on the chart. The Finance Officer explained that the Memorial renovation was not included in the original budget line and that is the difference.

3. The FY25 Budget Mid-Year review.

- a. The Finance Officer reviewed the end of the 2025 Fiscal Year Budget development schedule.
- b. The Finance Officer informed the Post Officers and Committee Leads that their input to the budget were sent to the Budget Committee on the weekend of April 25th.
- c. A final budget review with ExCom and the Budget Leads will be conducted on June 10<sup>th</sup>, with a vote by ExCom to approve the FY26 budget on June 16<sup>th</sup>.
- d. The FY 26 budget will then be presented to the Membership for approval at the June 25<sup>th</sup> General Membership meeting.
- e. Mike Carton explained that there will be some irregularity due to some of the expenditures for SJMAD will occur in 2025 but the revenue will not be realized until FY 2026.
- f. A question was raised from the Membership regarding whether the Post would conduct another poppy distribution event. The answer was no. The Post conducted a very successful poppy distribution over the Memorial Day weekend. The Commander thanked all the Members for their participation, as well as recognized the JROTC and Civil Air Patrol Cadets for their support. The Commander indicated that the Post had exhausted its supply of poppies and that the ExCom had approved the purchase of another 5,000 poppies for next year.

20) The Commander invited Teresa Brookover who was filling in for Gary Purcell (2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander, Membership) to provide the Membership with an update.

a. Current membership is at 264 out of the target of 264, which is at 100% renewal rate. Compared to the rest of the Department, we are 2<sup>nd</sup> out of 19 Posts, with only one post higher than our Post. Congratulations to all who helped reach this goal!

(b) The Department will be setting our new 2026 Membership number in June.

(c) Enrollment of new members will not begin until after July 1<sup>st</sup>. That will kick off our new year membership drive. The Department will be sending out notices directly to the previous year's members in July.

d) Teresa informed the Membership that David Long who owns "Have a Shirt Made" is selling his business and that the new owners will continue to offer Post 543 clothing as David had done for so many years.

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

a. Doug Pratt then informed the Members that he would be briefing them as the Post 543 Officer Election Committee Chairman.

b. Doug Pratt informed the Membership that the new slate of Officer nominations had been fulfilled and reviewed the list of candidate's names and Officer positions.

c. The Deputy Vice Commander reminded the Membership that the nomination process had been closed at the April 25<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting and that the slate of Officers had been filled.

d. Doug Pratt then briefed the Members that a formal vote needed to be conducted, and the newly elected Officers would be sworn in at the June General Membership meeting. Doug thanked those Members who had assisted as part of the Election Committee as well as those who stepped up and volunteered to fill the open ExCom Officer positions.

e. Doug reviewed the election voting procedures as outlined in the American Legion Officer's Guide 2024 (Page 103) "**Election by Voice** - The election to office may be by voice, and vote taken on each candidate separately, or the assembly may, by a majority vote, order the vote taken on the ticket as a whole when there is but one candidate for each office." That was the case in this Post 543 election. Doug Pratt reviewed the slate of Officers for 2025-2026, prior to voting.

f. The slate of Officers nominated for the Post 543 FY 2025-2026 terms is as follows:

Commander:	Mike Carton
Adjutant:	Doug Pratt
Judge Advocate/Parliamentarian	Doc Liberty
1 <sup>st</sup> Vice Commander-Resource Development	Phillip McGhee
2 <sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander – Membership	Gary Purcell
Finance Officer	Tim Edman
Deputy Vice Commander Active Duty	Dan Bennett
Deputy Vice Commander Americanism	Chuck Blackburn
Sergeant-at-Arms	Rick Sessa
Resource (Service ) Officer	Steve Muir

Chaplain  
Public Relations Officer  
Historian

Bruce Templeman  
Jim McCriskin  
Rick Sessa

g. The Election Committee Chairman called for a voice vote to approve the slate of Officer for the FY2025-2026 term as presented.

h. A voice vote was taken. The ayes voice vote was unanimous, with none opposed. The Election Committee Chairman announced the FY 2025-2026 slate of Post 543 Officers had been approved by unanimous voice vote.

i. The Election Committee Chairman announced that the swearing in of the new Post 543 Officers would take place at the July 2025 General Membership Meeting.

## 22) Public Relations - Jim McCriskin

a. Jim McCriskin went through the newly adapted QR code for the Post activities where you can register for events, buy tickets to SJMAD events or to donate money for Post 543 activities.

b. Jim McCriskin outlined the process required to work through the Givebutter site.

c. Jim McCriskin asked the Commander to review the SJMAD bowling tournament arrangements. The Commander reviewed the date, place and time as follows:

- June 19, 2025
- Planet Fun - Shallotte, NC
- Registration starts at 11:00 AM

- The question was asked about an individual signing up and the Commander indicated the single person would be put on a team with 3 others. The object is to have fun and socialize, while donating to a good cause.

d. The Commander encouraged all members to come out and participate, whether you bowl or not. Food and beverages will be provided.

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

a. 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. However, Rick asked for a show of hands of those Members who might be interested in going on this special tour of Fort Bragg. Approximately 25 raised their hands so Rick will investigate what it would cost to get a bus larger than 15 passengers. Rick requested a show of hands for those who were interested if they were asked to donate funding to assist with the cost of the bus rental. The same number of Members informed Rick they were interested.

24) 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 has identified a candidate to fill the Historian position. In the meantime, Mark Lieberman and Chuck Francka have been assisting Rick in managing the display case in the Saint James Town Hall. Rick requested any Air Force Veteran who had Air Force memorabilia they would be willing to display in the case at the Town Hall to contact Chuck Francka or Mark Lieberman to coordinate. The Air Force memorabilia will be displayed through the end of June 2025. After that date, the display will transition to the US Coast Guard memorabilia.

25) 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](mailto:tapicinich@ATMC.net) or 201-218-8753. Brick order forms are also available at the Saint James Town Hall. Tom also thanked Jim McCriskin for keeping the brick sales effort visual to the community through the various advertisements in the local publications.

26) Commander's closing comments – Commander

a. The Commander solicited any additional comments from the Membership.

i. The Commander thanked Bill Morgan and the Honors and Ceremonies team for their Memorial Day Ceremony at the Homer E. Wright Event Center. Commander McGhee indicated it was a world class event.

ii. The Commander requested that Bill Morgan (SJMAD Co-Chair) if he would bring the Membership up to date on the SJMAD various events:

- Bill Morgan indicated that the Post was currently in the middle of the neighborhood and business solicitation campaign.
- Members should see “Donate Here” signs in their neighborhoods, as well as have received either a flyer in their newspaper box or an email regarding the SJMAD activities. If a member has not received either of these, please contact Bill Morgan or Steve Ratti.
- This year, the scope of the activities has expanded dramatically from years past. On June 8<sup>th</sup>, a pickleball tournament will be held. A bowling tournament will be held on June 19<sup>th</sup>. A tennis tournament will be held on June 20<sup>th</sup>. Two different golf tournaments will be held this year. Both golf tournaments will have a “shotgun start” at 11:30 AM on June 21<sup>st</sup>. The first golf tournament will be held at the Players Club. This golf tournament is an individual competition where the players will be organized in flights based upon their GHIN handicaps. The second golf tournament is the usual 4-person team scramble at the Members Club. Those who play in the golf tournaments will have a ticket to the dinner included in their packages.
- A big tent will be set up at the Members Club driving range and around 3:30, the cash bar will be opened. An Italian style buffet will be served around 5:15 PM. Mike’s Garage Band will be playing for the event as they have in the many past years.
- Bill Morgan encouraged the Members that are unable to participate in the events to support the effort through donating via the QR code. The funds go to support the many programs Post 543 is involved in, to include not only the scholarships but helping Veterans of the local communities.
- Bill Morgan introduced Paula Kallay who runs the Business Team for Saint James Military Appreciation Day events. Bill reminded the Membership that there will also be an on-line auction of higher end items as part of the SJMAD fund raising event, along with a silent auction at the dinner, immediately following the golf tournaments. One of the on-line auction items is a trip to Saint Andrews, Scotland.



- Online sign up for the golf tournaments will begin on June 1<sup>st</sup>. You will need to include your branch of service. Veterans will be given preference to play in the golf tournaments. Non-club members can play in the tournaments as guests with other members.
- Bill Morgan encouraged Members to purchase SJMAD clothing which benefits Post 543 directly since Troon passes on the money through to the Post.
- Bill Morgan indicated that he was expecting 450 attendees at the dinner.
- Bill Morgan reminded the Membership that the money raised through these events, stays locally in supporting not only the children but also the various Active-Duty programs and local Veterans.

iii. The Commander thanked Steve Muir for his efforts in assisting and supporting many of the homeless Veterans of Brunswick County. Steve Muir was unable to attend the General Membership Meeting, but the Commander wanted to recognize he and his team for their service to others.

iv. The Commander solicited any additional comments from the Membership.

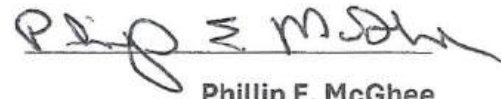
- The Adjutant reminded the Membership that the author John Montalbano would be the Guest Speaker at the June 25<sup>th</sup> General Membership Meeting. The Adjutant encouraged the Membership to invite a guest to come to hear this author's interesting story about war memories as outlined in his book "Bullets in my bottom drawer".
- George Freeman encouraged the Membership to utilize Bella Cachina restaurant in Southport due to the owner being a member of our Post, along with the fact that the construction on Southport-Supply Road has caused a major drop in the restaurant business. George indicated that Members who patronage the restaurant should let the server know they are a member of Post 543 and are there supporting the owner as a Veteran.

27) General Membership Meeting Closing Prayer – Chaplain

28) The Commander requested the colors be retired – Commander

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

30) The General Membership Meeting was adjourned at 8:38 PM. – 1<sup>st</sup> Commander

  
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**Aaron L. Largent**  
Adjutant  
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**Phillip E. McGhee**  
Commander