



**American Legion Post 543
General Membership Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 23, 2025**

Meeting Minutes

- 1) The meeting was called to Order at 7:00 PM – 1st Vice Commander Bennett.
- 2) The 1st Vice Commander ordered the advancement of the Colors and a hand salute.
- 3) Opening Prayer – Chaplain. The Chaplain recognized the passing of Michael Scott who was the father of the SB JROTC Cadet that was to be recognized at that evening's meeting.
- 4) The 1st Vice Commander welcomed the Guests and asked them to introduce themselves. Four Veterans were attending for the first time: Dave Vickers (Marines), Darryl Desario (Navy), Ashley Meyers (Navy), Pat Lanigan (Navy, and a non-Veteran Rosie Greer (Toys for Tots).
- 5) The 1st Vice Commander requested George Cassella to come to the front of the meeting room and be awarded the Korean War Commemorative pin to the Veteran.
- 6) The Pledge of Allegiance was led by the 1st Vice Commander with audience participation.
- 7) The 1st Vice Commander led the Members in reciting the Preamble to the American Legion Constitution.
- 8) The 1st Vice Commander recognized the POWs and those Missing in Action, as well as honored them by referring to the empty chair.
- 9) The 1st Vice Commander reviewed the four pillars and how the Post supports over 70 programs.
- 10) The 1st Vice Commander called for Joe Kinzer to come forward and be recognized for his many years of service in the military and as a charter member of Post 543. Unfortunately, Joe's health prohibited him from being at this meeting so the recognition and certificate of appreciation will be postponed until the May 2025 meeting.

- 11) The 1st Vice Commander invited Rosie Greer from the Toys for Tots program to come to the podium and give a program update, as well as present the Post with certificates of appreciation. Rosie informed the Members that the local Toys for Tots program was able to deliver over 21,000 toys to Brunswick County children at Christmas time in 2024. Items included toys, bicycles, helmets, books and other such items. These items were delivered to over 1500 needy children. Rosie also talked about the various other fund-raising events they were involved in such as helping impacted families who lost everything during the tropical storm that hit Boiling Springs. Rosie thanked Post 543 for their contribution and support for that effort. Ms. Greer presented three Marine Corps Reserve Recognition Awards. The first award went to Jim McCriskin for his assistance in Public Relations efforts for the Toys for Tots program. The second award was to Candy & Commander Phillip McGhee for their contributions in helping organize support and supporting the Toys for Tots program event. The 1st Vice Commander accepted the second and third awards on behalf of the Commander.
- 12) The 1st Vice Commander introduced Doug Pratt, the Deputy Vice Commander, Active-Duty Support. Doug then outlined the recognition of JROTC Cadet Major Jackson Scott for his outstanding achievement in scholastic excellence. With that recognition came certificates of recognition and medals, as well as a \$750 scholarship. Cadet Scott was invited to the front of the meeting room and awarded the two medals and certificates. Cadet Scott was also nominated by the South Brunswick High School JROTC for the Post 543 Cadet of the Year for 2025. He was awarded a certificate and plaque. This is the second time Cadet Scott was nominated for Post 543 Cadet of the Year. The first time (2023), he was awarded Cadet of the Year by the American Legion Department of North Carolina for the entire state.
- 13) The 1st Vice Commander called the Adjutant (Aaron Largent) to the podium who reviewed the upcoming Honor Flight to Washington DC on Saturday. Aaron Largent introduced the four (4) Veterans who will be going, as well as that the Adjutant would be going as a Guardian for Doug Pratt. Aaron Largent encouraged all the members to join their Veteran Members at the Wilmington International Airport for their return Saturday evening.
- 14) The 1st Vice Commander excused any of the Guests who might not want to sit through the Post's standard business portion of the meeting.
- 15) The 1st Vice Commander declared the monthly meeting convened and took roll call. All Officers were present except Phillip McGhee (Commander), Doc Liberty (Parliamentarian), and Chuck Blackburn (Deputy Vice Commander – Americanism). All were excused absences. The 1st Vice Commander declared a quorum was present

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

a. The Chaplain requested the Membership to remember Joe Kinzer and his family in their prayers. They recently lost their son, and Joe Sr has been having medical issues.

17) The Commander requested any Vietnam Veteran who had not yet received their Vietnam Era Veteran Recognition Pin and certificate to come forward. None were identified.

18) A motion was made to approve March 26, 2025, General Membership Meeting Minutes. The motion carried, and the voice vote was unanimous. – 1st Vice Commander.

19) The 1st Vice Commander invited Chaplain Francka to the podium to conduct the Four Chaplains Remembrance Ceremony. Chaplain Francka explained the history behind the four Chaplains and four Members of the Post read a brief bio of each Chaplain and lit a candle in remembrance of each one. A video was shown that highlighted their ultimate sacrifice in the face of death as their ship sank and the four Chaplains gave their life vests to others to save other's lives.

20) The 1st Vice Commander called for the Officer and Committee Reports to be presented:

21) 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 72.65% spent as of 4-23-25.
- b. Post 543 is slightly ahead of the goal to meet the budget.
- c. The Saint James Military Appreciation Days solicitations are starting to come in.
- d. The 1st Vice 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 4-23-25 against the four pillars.

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 inputs to the budget will be 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 12th, with a vote by ExCom to approve the FY26 budget on June 16th.
- d. The FY 26 budget will then be presented to the Membership for approval at the June 25th General Membership meeting.

22) The 1st Vice Commander reviewed the slide for the Membership Report due to the 2nd Vice Commander – Membership's (Gary Purcell) absence.

a. Current membership is at 250 out of the target of 264, which is at 95% renewal rate. The Post has signed 14 new Members this year. We only need 7 more new members to reach the Department assigned membership goal to be 100%. Compared to the rest of the Department, we are 2nd out of 19 Posts, with only one post higher than our Post.

(b) On May 3rd, the Department will be sending out another notice to all those previous Members who have not renewed. Hopefully, the Post will get some more renewals from that.

(c) The 1st Vice Commander reviewed the various processes available to renew the membership.

23) 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 they reviewed the list of candidate's names and Officer positions.

c. The 1st Vice Commander then opened the floor for any other nominations of Members who had not yet expressed an interest in serving on the ExCom. According to protocol, the 1st Vice Commander voiced a request for additional nominations three (3) separate times. There were no additional nominations from the membership. The 1st Vice Commander then called for a motion to close the nomination process. A motion was made and seconded, with an invitation for discussion and there was none. A voice vote was completed and the motion carried unanimously.

d. Doug Pratt then briefed the Members that a formal vote would be conducted at the June General Membership meeting and the new Officers would be sworn in at the July 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.

24) The Service Officer Report – Steve Muir

a. Steve Muir provided sign-up sheets for the upcoming VEAC event for May 8th through May 10th at the Wilmington National Guard Armory next to the Wilmington International Airport. He explained how important this event is to Veterans who have not been able to register for benefits or the VA Health System. He encouraged all the Members to participate.

b. Steve indicated the Service Committee has processed six consultations in the past month. However, he wanted to highlight two cases that are late news breakers.

i. Steve reviewed the first case which most Members had been made aware of during previous General Membership meetings – a World War II and Korean Veteran who needed his mobile home remodeled and new decks with ramps built. The Veterans Assistance team had been working with this Veteran for the past year, with an emphasis on getting him the benefits he so aptly deserved due to his military service and the injuries he suffered. The past week, the Veteran was notified that he had been awarded a 100% disability rating by the VA and the benefit payment would be retroactive to the original filing date which was May 2024. This was especially good news for the Veterans Assistance team due to all the long hours and efforts that went into getting the Veteran properly registered and his claim properly filed. A special thank you was given to Paul Witmer, Jim McCriskin, Phillip McGhee, Chuck Francka and the other Members who participated and assisted in this worthwhile effort.

ii. Steve Muir reviewed the second case involving a Veteran who had been deployed three times and suffered with PTSD. He is a local landscaper who has been referred to in our Post via a friend in Winding River (non-Veteran). Steve, along with other Members of the ExCom, have been working with the Veteran to find housing and to modify his discharge to register him for benefits. Paul Witmer has helped this homeless Veteran by finding a home for him to rent in Supply. The Post will donate \$1400 for the Veteran's first two months' rent, as well as help coordinate a meeting with the local VA office. That meeting is supposed to take place on Friday, April 25th. An update will be provided at the next General Membership meeting. Steve informed the Membership that this Veteran has a handyman LLC and is a good worker. He encouraged any Member who might have a need for a handyman, including landscaping to see Steve and he would provide the Veteran's contact info.

c. Steve Muir indicated that these success stories continue to build the fact that Post 543 has a strong reputation in the Brunswick County community for the high level of support, not only from a benefits knowledge perspective but also from a Veteran financial support effort.

d. Steve reviewed the status of the VEAC event in Wilmington. He informed the Membership that Washington had approved travel and overtime for the VA employees, but the status of the medical personnel needed to process the medical effort was still in limbo. Steve should know something more affirmative from his meeting next week.

e. Steve Muir closed by informing the Membership about the Poppy Distribution program coming up on Memorial Day next month (May 24th & 25th) at Lowes Hardware Store in Southport. The Post enlists the help of both the South Brunswick JROTC Cadets, as well as the Cape Fear Composite Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol Cadets to assist Post Members in handing out Poppies and collecting donations those two days. The Post collected over \$3,000.00 last year in donations from the Poppy Distribution. Members' participation is welcomed. This year, the Post will attempt something new. Volunteers will be able to process donations electronically using a QR code via phone or I-Tablets at the Lowes Hardware site. Of course, cash is always welcome as a donation.

f. Steve also informed the Members about the Junior Legion College program. Several Members attended the Post 10 event recently and Steve highly recommended it for anyone who wants to learn more about the American Legion. Jim Williams, who recently joined the Veterans Assistance team, attended the recent Junior Legion College event and spoke highly of it.

25) Public Relations - Jim McCriskin

a. Jim McCriskin congratulated Steve Muir and the Veteran Assistance Team on accomplishing the 100% disability rating for the World War II and Korean Veteran.

b. Jim McCriskin introduced the new app used by the Post for all future purchases and donations. It opens a wide variety of payment options which will greatly benefit the Post. Steve Ratti was using this app for purchase of the surplus SJMAD merchandise at the meeting April 23rd. Jim McCriskin plans to alert the local community a few days prior to the Memorial Day weekend to help get the word out so that donations can be made through the app. His goal is to incorporate the app as part of a way to renew American Legion memberships so that all the funds go to the Post.

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

a. Rick also announced that the UNC Wilmington Military Appreciation Day ballgame on April 11th was great but disappointing that not many Post Members were in attendance.

b. 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.

27) 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 him or Chuck Francka to coordinate.

28) Adjutant Report – Aaron Largent

a. The Adjutant informed the Membership that the Post was required to nominate and vote on Delegates to attend the 2025 Department of NC Mid-Year convention in Raleigh which is scheduled for June 18th through June 21st. The Adjutant informed the Membership that the following ExCom Officers had been nominated and that a voice vote was required to approve the Delegates. A motion was made and seconded, with no discussion made. A voice vote was conducted and the motion carried unanimously.

b. The Adjutant encouraged all Members to review the Upcoming Events lists that are posted with the General Membership meeting minutes on the Post 543 website each month so they can be aware of what is going on outside the monthly Membership Meeting.

29) 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 needs to get the order for the bricks submitted as soon as possible to have the bricks received and installed prior to the Memorial Day Ceremony at the Homer E. Wright Event Center. 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 McCriskin for keeping the brick sales effort visual to the community through the various advertisements in the local publications.

30) Commander's closing comments – Commander

a. The 1st Vice Commander solicited any additional comments from the Membership.

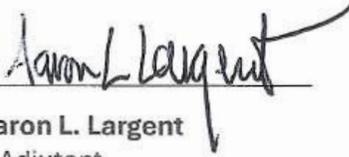
i. Jim Hilty informed the Membership that Levi Spencer who won the Post contest, as well as the District and the Division contest placed 4th in the Department (State) contest. As a result, Levi Spencer won an additional \$1,000.00 in scholarship funds. Jim Hilty, who chairs the Oratorical Committee, informed the Membership that he was soliciting Volunteers to join the Committee because some one of his past committee members would not be able to continue next year. He asked anyone who might be interested in working with students and enjoying the Constitution to please contact him directly.

31) General Membership Meeting Closing Prayer – Chaplain

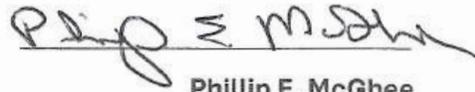
32) The 1st Vice Commander requested the colors be retired – 1st Vice Commander

33) The 1st Vice Commander's closing remarks (until we meet again) – 1st Vice Commander

34) The General Membership Meeting was adjourned at 8:22 PM. – 1st Vice Commander



Aaron L. Largent
Adjutant



Phillip E. McGhee
Commander