



American Legion
Joseph Q. Johnson Post 96
PO Box 7096
Surprise, Arizona 85374-0101



Newsletter No. 259

azalpost96.com

September 2025

Post 96 Officers			
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Second Vice-Commander:	Kelly Donlevy	602-299-5007	Membership: Mike Elliott & George Van
Finance Officer:	George Van de Langeryt	623-547-6668	Fundraising Chair: Kelly Donlevy 602-299-5007
Adjutant: (Acting)	Arnold Kohl		Service Officer: Kelly Donlevy
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Judge Advocate:	George Van de Langeryt		Photographer: Paul Satkowski 207-706-6250
Executive Committee:			Historian: VACANT
Mike Elliott, Arnold Kohl, Kelly Donlevy			Past Commander: Nancie Scalercio 623-826-3488
George Van de Langeryt, Nancie Scalercio			ALR Chapter 96 Director: Eddie Jenness 480-584-1145

The Surprise Post 96 Newsletter is the official publication of Joseph Q. Johnson Post 96

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

NEXT Post meeting 1800 September 25 at AZ Traditions

17225 N Citrus Rd., Surprise, AZ 85374

We meet in the Traditions Neighborhood Center 18265 Traditions Loop Rd E

PLEASE – ASK THE GATE GUARD FOR DIRECTIONS

Post Officer's meeting 1600 Thursday September 4 at the Commander's home

Voiture 1154 Promenade on 1000 Saturday September 27 at the Post 145 meeting room

Marty Schwab Memorial Breakfast 1000 Sunday September 21

Richi's Diner - 15609 W Bell Rd #100, Surprise, AZ 85374

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO THE US AIR FORCE ON SEPTEMBER 18



Dan Wiley (R) is sworn in as American Legion National Commander at the National Convention on August 28 at Tampa Bay, Florida.

COMMANDERS CORNER



Thank you to everyone who came to our July meeting, and I missed the rest of you who didn't come. Our August meeting was a little better attended. We had 10 attendees in July and 16 in August. We usually averaged 20-25 per meeting. I quote from Oliver twist: "Please, Sir I Want Some More".

We have new leadership in Arizona Legion. Starting at department level is Gary Vaughan as Department Commander, Next is Barry Laughlin as District Commander. Our National Commander is Dan K. Wiley. Dan hails from Kansas and will continue "Be The One" campaign and "Better Together".

For those who are not familiar with fall weather in Arizona, please stay hydrated because it will still be hot. I have suffered both extremes of too much heat and not enough. Please be careful.

For God and Country,
Mike Elliott, Legion Rider, Post 96 Commander

FROM THE FIRST VICE-COMMANDER



Have you heard about the Million Veteran Program (MVP)?

Are you a part of it?

The Million Veteran Program (MVP) is VA's largest research program. They study how genes, lifestyles, military experiences, and exposures affect health and wellness. Started in 2011 with the goal of more than one million Veterans joining the program, because genetic research works best with participation from large amounts of people from diverse backgrounds. On November 8, 2023, the one-millionth Veteran joined MVP—and they are not stopping there. Every Veteran who joins the program helps make discoveries to improve health for Veterans and, ultimately, everyone.

When Veterans join MVP, they provide a blood sample for analysis, complete surveys about health and wellness, and grant researchers secure access to their health records. MVP codes this information—which means they remove identifying details like names, dates of birth, and social security numbers from the data—and stores it in their secure database.

Approved researchers use the coded information in the database to study health conditions.

Researchers use information from MVP to study a wide range of topics that can help with the prevention, detection, and treatment of health conditions, which will help improve health for Veterans and, ultimately, everyone. MVP is the largest and most diverse genetic research program connected to a health system in the world, and because of its size and diversity, researchers can study how health conditions affect different populations.

Information from MVP is used to research conditions that matter to Veterans, like mental health, heart health, cancer, military exposures, PTSD, TBI, and many more. More than 400 scientific articles have already been published using information from MVP. To learn more about their research findings, visit Our Impact: In Research at mvp.va.gov.

The goal is for MVP's research findings to help improve health care for Veterans. Already, research findings from MVP are helping to inform future changes to clinical care, such as detection for prostate and breast cancer, how genes cause people to respond to different medications, including those for blood clots and diabetes, and how genes impact the success of knee and hip replacement surgeries.

Joining MVP (also called participating in MVP) means becoming part of their research program. To join MVP, you will (1) Provide informed consent; (2) Complete surveys about health, lifestyle, military experiences and other topics; (3) Provide a blood sample, either in-person at a participating VA facility or at home using a collection kit we will send you; (4) Grant our program ongoing access to your health records; and (5) Agree to be contacted in the future for additional research opportunities.

How can you join MVP? You can join MVP two ways: (1) In person at a participating VA facility, or (2) Online at mvp.va.gov.

I realize there are some who see a conspiracy theory behind every door. This is a volunteer program, so if you don't wish to participate, don't. I, however, believe the research being done is very important and I am part of the program and I hope you will at least consider participating.

Program information source:

<https://www.mvp.va.gov/pwa/faqs> and

<https://www.research.va.gov/mvp/>

For God and Country,

Arnold “Arnie” Kohl, 1st Vice Commander

FROM THE SECOND VICE-COMMANDER



I subscribe to a site called historyfacts.com and I regularly receive some interesting things that are hard to believe they did over 2,000 years ago. One was about medical beliefs from ancient Greeks and after reading it, I sure am glad we have progressed past the time of doctors like Hippocrates.

Hippocrates learned a lot to help progress medicine like discovering that illnesses had natural causes rather than being punished by their gods, he recorded patient symptoms, medical history and how they responded to treatment plus he developed a categorization of diseases, and these have laid a foundation for clinical medicine that we use today. However, back in the day, he would routinely taste his patient's urine, pus and earwax and smelled and examined their stools and vomit.

The Greek physicians also believed that women had a “wandering womb” and it could explain the physical and mental differences between men and women. They thought this wandering womb caused many conditions and it could be fumigated, or they could use foul- or sweet-smelling substances near the nose or groin to repel or entice the womb to move to its correct position.

They used hares' brains for teething and if they could not find a hare then lamb brain would work just as well. If neither of those were available, then one could place the tooth of a viper in an amulet and hang it around the baby's neck.

Music we now know is accepted as a type of healing therapy and the Greeks believed music could heal many ailments such as panic attacks, sciatica, fainting and epilepsy.

Poison was also used as a cure to treat many illnesses. They used nightshade, opium poppy, mandrake, hellebore and others but they used some that we still use today such as chamomile, wormwood, fennel and nettle.

Bloodletting, which dates back over 3,000 years believed to have originated in Egypt and then spread to Greece and Rome, was used to treat inflammation and fevers by releasing the overabundance of blood.

An amusing one was that they thought jumping backward seven times was a form of birth control. The most bizarre form of birth control though was recommending women drink the water used by blacksmiths to cool their metal.

After reading that, I and I'm sure many others are thankful, for the major progression in this area and for the VA hospital and medical centers where we can get the help we need. If you haven't checked it, out yet, go on to the website at va.gov or call them at 1-800-698-2411 and check out your health benefits. Of course, you can always contact one of our board members whose information is at the beginning of this newsletter for any help you need.

For God and Country,

Kelly Donlevy, 2nd Vice Commander

FROM THE FINANCE OFFICER AND JUDGE ADVOCATE



Remember, Post 96 dues are now \$50! While your 2025 Membership is valid to 12/31/25, we ask you please renew soon. National will keep sending renewal notices even after you have paid. We have complained about that because some members have paid twice. Check your membership card, if it is 2025 PLEASE PAY. You can pay online at Legion.org with a credit card, you can mail the Post a check or by cash at the meeting.

After payment, any member can go to Legion.org and print their membership card.

Semper Fi!

George Van de Langeryt

Finance Officer & Judge Advocate

Past Commander & Legion Rider

AZ Veterans Hall of Fame – Class of 2018

FROM THE CHAPLAIN

Chaplain John Chlopek is out of town.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

As of 8/30, we have 24 pay the post, 27 pay online,

and 35 PUFL for a total of 86 paid. That is 50.59% of last year's goal of 170. We have not been informed of a new goal yet.

Remember if you pay online, we DO NOT mail you a new membership card because you can print your own card online. Those members who have paid multiple years can print their own 2026 membership card online. If you want a card mailed, contact George.

The winner of the Membership Drawing in July was Jon Tarr, who, unfortunately, was not present to win a year's dues paid.

The winner of the Membership Drawing in July was William Turner, who, unfortunately, was not present to win a year's dues paid.

Have you moved, changed your phone number or email address? If so, please contact Mike or George. Give us the new information and we will update the records so you will continue to get your Legion Magazine and the Post Newsletter mailed or emailed to the proper address.

Mike & George

American Legion Riders Report



Riders Spotlight

Travis Cernetisch is a member of the American Legion Post 96 and Chaplin of the American Legion Post 96 riders group. He joined the Legion in 2021 when he moved to

Arizona from Texas. Travis is currently an active duty Staff Sergeant in the United States Air Force at 10 years of service.

Travis joined the Air Force in September of 2015 with an AFSC of Security Forces and was first stationed at Lackland AFB, Texas. He served there for 5 and a half years before being stationed at Luke AFB, Arizona where he has been for 4 and a half years. Travis and his family have orders to move to Moody AFB, Georgia and leave in September.

Travis has enjoyed his time in Arizona highly in part to his time with the Legion. The connectives to people and veterans in the community and the ability to serve others outside of his normal job has helped him grow as a person and an Airmen. One thing that

stands out to Travis about the Legion is the Family connectives. While here in Arizona, he and his wife Leslie had their daughter, and a few days after they got home members from the riders group rode to his house with baby baskets and supplies that they were very thankful for. Some events that he enjoyed working were the Brian Mancini Memorial Legacy Ride and the Marty Schwab Memorial Spaghetti Diner.



Travis and Leslie Cernetisch with their daughter.



While Travis and his family are sad to leave all his friends he has developed in Arizona, he is excited for his new adventures in Georgia. He wants to thank Post 96 for all the memories, friendships, acceptance for him and his family, and growth while he was

here. Travis cannot wait to find a new Post while in Georgia to continue his service outside of the Air Force.

Eddie "Brohammy" Jenness, Director ALR 96
alr96.president@gmail.com

FROM THE FUND RAISING CHAIRMAN



Hello everyone, our next fundraiser at Sam's Club, on Bell Road just off Loop 303, is coming up November 7-9. It is the weekend before Veterans Day and we will be collecting donations...

Friday 11/7, from 0900-1700

Saturday 11/8 from 0900-1700

Sunday 11/9 from 1000-1600

It is usually cooler than our Memorial Day fundraiser, so I hope to see some new faces out there. I will have chairs available, so no one must stand for the 2-hour period I ask you to be there interacting with customers to collect donations. Many of them are Veterans, which makes it fun to find some who may have served at the same base or just chat and share some stories of our service.

The plan is to hand out poppies on Friday and flags on Saturday and Sunday as we need to build up our general funds keeping in mind that we can transfer from the general account to the restricted account whenever we may need extra funds.

At the next business meeting, in September, I will have a signup sheet available. If you'd like to choose your spot early, you may call me or send a text at 602-299-5007.

For God and Country,
Kelly Donlevy, Fundraising Chair

September Calendar

Monday September 1 – Labor Day – Labor Day's history stems from the late 19th-century labor movement, where activists fought for better working conditions and a day to honor workers. The first celebration was a parade in New York City on September 5, 1882, organized by the Central Labor Union and the Knights of Labor. The holiday gained momentum as more states recognized it, culminating in President Grover Cleveland signing a law to make it a federal holiday in 1894, partly to mend ties with labor after the deadly Pullman Strike.

September 1, 1939 - At 5.30 a.m., Hitler's armies invaded Poland starting World War II in Europe.

September 2, 1864 - During the American Civil War, Atlanta was captured by Sherman's Army. "Atlanta is ours, and fairly won," General William T. Sherman telegraphed President Lincoln.

September 2, 1945 - President Harry Truman declared V-J Day (Victory over Japan Day) commemorating the formal Japanese surrender to the Allies aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

September 2, 1962 - Soviet Russia agreed to send arms to Cuba, leading to the October Missile Crisis after the shipments were discovered by the U.S.

September 3, 1783 - The Treaty of Paris was signed by John Adams, Ben Franklin and John Jay, formally ending the American Revolutionary War between Britain and the United States.

Wednesday September 3 – 0900-1000 - Veterans Coffee Hour at Surprise Funeral Care, 16063 W Bell Rd, Surprise, AZ. Every 1st Wednesday of each month, Veterans are invited to a free coffee hour, compliments of Dignity Memorial.

Wednesday September 3 – Senior Day at Fry's, Bashas' and Albertsons. 10% discount on your groceries.

Thursday September 4 – 1600 Post 96 Officers meeting at Mike Elliott's home.

September 5, 1774 - The First Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia with 56 delegates, representing every colony, except Georgia. Attendants included Patrick Henry, George Washington, Sam Adams and John Hancock.

September 8, 1974 - A month after resigning the presidency in disgrace as a result of the Watergate scandal, Richard Nixon was granted a full pardon by President Gerald R. Ford for all offenses committed while in office.

September 8, 2022 - Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain died at Balmoral Castle in Scotland, after a 70-year reign, the longest in British history. Upon her death, her son Charles, age 73, became the new monarch as King Charles III. Born on April 21, 1926, Princess Elizabeth was third in line to the throne, and became Queen in 1952, at age 25, after her father, King George VI died in his sleep. During her reign, the Queen met 13 U.S. presidents and visited over 100 countries.

Tuesday September 9 – 0900-1000 Veteran's Coffee Hour at Sunland Memorial Park. All vets and friends are invited for coffee and nibbles. Second Tuesday every

month. In the Chapel building at 15826 N Del Webb Blvd, Sun City, AZ 85351.

September 11, 2001 - The worst terrorist attack in U.S. history occurred as four large passenger jets were hijacked then crashed, killing nearly 3,000 persons. Four separate teams of Mideast terrorists, operating from inside the U.S., boarded the morning flights posing as passengers, then forcibly commandeered the aircraft. Two fully fueled jumbo jets, American Airlines Flight 11 carrying 92 people and United Airlines Flight 175 carrying 65 people, had departed Boston for Los Angeles. Both jets were diverted by the hijackers to New York City where they were piloted into the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The impact and subsequent fire caused both 110-story towers to collapse, killing 2,752 persons including hundreds of rescue workers and people employed in the towers. In addition, United Airlines Flight 93, which had departed Newark for San Francisco, and American Airlines Flight 77, which had departed Dulles (Virginia) for Los Angeles, were hijacked. Flight 77 with 64 people on board was diverted to Washington, D.C., then piloted into the Pentagon building, killing everyone on board and 125 military personnel inside the building. Flight 93 with 44 people on board was also diverted toward Washington but crashed into a field in Pennsylvania after passengers attempted to overpower the terrorists on board.

September 14, 1812 - Napoleon and his troops first entered Moscow as the retreating Russians set the city on fire. Napoleon found it was impossible to stay through the winter in the ruined city. He then began a retreat from Moscow which became one of the great disasters of military history. Fewer than 20,000 of the original 500,000 men with him survived the Russian campaign.

September 15, 1944 - The first entry of American troops into Hitler's Germany occurred as elements of the U.S. 7th and 5th Corps reached the southwestern frontier of Germany.

September 16, 1620 - The Mayflower ship departed from England bound for America with 102 passengers and a small crew. The ship weathered dangerous Atlantic storms and reached Provincetown, Massachusetts on November 21. The Pilgrims disembarked at Plymouth on December 26.

September 17, 1862 - The bloodiest day in U.S. military history occurred as General Robert E. Lee and the Confederate armies were stopped at Antietam in Maryland by General George B. McClellan and numerically superior Union forces. By nightfall, 26,000 men were dead, wounded, or missing.

September 18, 1947 - The U.S. Air Force was established as a separate military service.

Saturday September 20 - 0900 North West Valley Veterans Association meeting Sunland Memorial Park.

Sunday September 21 - 0900 Marty Schwab Memorial Breakfast at Richi's Diner, Bell & Reems. All veterans and family are invited to this informal gathering.

September 22, 1776 - During the American Revolution, Nathan Hale was executed without a trial after he was caught spying on British troops on Long Island, his last words, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

Tuesday September 23 - 1000 Disabled American Veterans Star Chapter 24 meets at Flagstar Bank, 14543 W Grand Ave., Surprise 85374. The meeting is held in the basement and there is an elevator. All veterans are invited.

September 23 - Autumn (Sept. 23-Dec. 21) begins in the Northern Hemisphere with the autumnal equinox, at 1:37 a.m. EDT. In the Southern Hemisphere today is the beginning of spring.

Thursday September 25 - 1800 American Legion Meeting. Come for the raffle prizes! Bring a guest. Post 96 meets in the AZ Traditions Neighborhood Center.

1800 -Social Hour and meet and greet. Sign in and get your raffle tickets.

1900 Business Meeting.

September 25, 1789 - The first U.S. Congress proposed 12 Amendments to the Constitution, ten of which, comprising the Bill of Rights, were ratified.

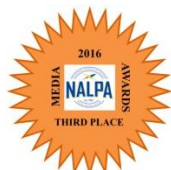
Saturday September 27 - 1000 40&8 Voiture 1154 Promenade at Arrowhead Valley Apartments. Henceforth, all Voiture 1157 Promenades will be on the fourth Saturday of each month.

September 30, 1949 - The Berlin Airlift concluded after 277,264 flights carrying over 2 million tons of supplies to the people of West Berlin, who were blockaded by the Soviets.

September 30, 1955 - Actor James Dean was killed in a car crash in California at age 24. Although he made just three major films, Rebel Without a Cause, East of Eden and Giant, he remains one of the most influential actors.

SAVE THE DATE

Veterans Day Fundraiser November 7-9.



FROM THE EDITOR

Please help us find new businesses or individuals to advertise in our newsletter. It is only \$5/month (\$60/year) and we give Legion Members a 20% discount.

George Van de Langeryt
Past Commander & Newsletter Editor

VA OFFERS YEARLONG COMMUNITY CARE AUTHORIZATIONS FOR 30 SERVICES

The Department of Veterans Affairs today announced it will improve Veterans' access to health care by extending the length of new VA community care authorizations to one year for 30 standardized types of care.

The change means Veterans referred by VA to community care for eligible standardized types of care will receive 12 full months of uninterrupted treatment at VA expense before having to obtain a VA reauthorization.

Veterans will benefit from uninterrupted access to essential specialty services, allowing them to focus more on their health and less on navigating administrative requirements. Community providers will be empowered to manage care with fewer administrative barriers and greater flexibility.

Prior to the change announced today, some VA community care specialty referrals were reevaluated every 90 to 180 days, increasing the likelihood of interrupted or delayed care.

"No Veteran should have their health care disrupted by red tape," said **VA Secretary Doug Collins**. "This change means better continuity of care, which leads to better health outcomes. It also improves convenience for Veterans and cuts administrative work for VA staff and community care partners."

With today's announcement, VA is now offering yearlong community care authorizations for the following standardized types of care:

- Cardiology
- Dermatology
- Endocrinology
- Neurology and Otology
- Otolaryngology or ENT
- Gastroenterology
- Urogynecology
- Addiction Psychiatry Outpatient
- Family & Couples Psychotherapy Outpatient

- Mental Health Outpatient
- Nephrology
- Neurology
- Nutrition Intervention Services
- Oncology and Hematology
- Neuro-Ophthalmology
- Oculoplastic
- Eye Care Examination
- Optometry Routine
- Orthopedic Hand
- Orthopedic General
- Orthopedic Spine
- Pain Management
- Podiatry
- Podiatry DS
- Addiction Medicine Outpatient
- Pulmonary
- Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (Physiatry)
- Rheumatology
- Sleep Medicine
- Urology

Veterans are encouraged to contact their local VA Medical Center Community Care Office for questions to see how these new updates may affect their care.



Wow! What an honor to meet a living legend!

On August 21, I had the privilege of attending the dedication ceremony for a plaque to honor Major Fannie Griffin-McClendon. Major Griffin McClendon is the last surviving member of the 6888 (Six Triple Eight) Central Postal Directory Battalion, the only unit of 855 black women, deployed to Europe in 1945. While there the battalion eliminated a 2-to-3-year backup of mail to our troops in just 3 months. An extraordinary feat.

Major Griffin-McClendon enlisted in the Women's Army Air Corps upon graduating from high school at the beginning of WWII and served 4 years. She returned home to New York and later reenlisted, serving a total of 26 years. She was the first woman to serve as Squadron Commander to an all-male squadron.

The ceremony opened with the Star-Spangled Banner by Britahn Newbill, a lovely rendition. There were many of her

family members as well as representatives from Arizona's Senate and House Legislators. The Mayor of Tempe, Cory Woods, presented a proclamation to her, declaring August 21 as Major Fannie Griffin-McClendon day for the city of Tempe. There was a large contingent of members of the Veterans Affinity organization as well as various posts of the American Legion and the VFW from the valley. There were other presentations as well, but I was unable to get the details of all of them

The ceremony was closed out by Senator Greg Stanton, recognizing all her contributions to not only the military but to women's rights, especially Black women, paving the way for generations of powerful women making great contributions to our country.

Major Griffin-McClendon is looking forward to her 105th birthday in September and seemed to be enjoying the event. The new bronze plaque will be on display at the Carl T. Hayden Veterans Medical Center in Phoenix. It was an honor to be able to meet her.

Submitted by Nina Olse, Legion Rider



There Will Be Picking and Grinning!

Exciting Opportunity for Our Veterans!

I'm honored to share that I've been selected as a volunteer guitar instructor for Guitars for Vets.

This is a national nonprofit offering free, structured 10-week guitar lessons to Veterans dealing with PTSD and service-related trauma. Upon completing the program, Veterans receive an acoustic guitar, accessory kit, and supportive community—completely free.

Research shows the program reduces PTSD symptoms by about 21% and depression by 27% while fostering renewal through the healing power of music.

If you know a Veteran who'd benefit—or if you'd like to support my instructor efforts—please reach out or visit guitarsforvets.org.

Let's make music and heal together!

Tom Frizzell, Member

Joseph Q Johnson American Legion Post 96

We have some photos from the May 22 meeting thanks to Post Photographer Paul Satkowski.



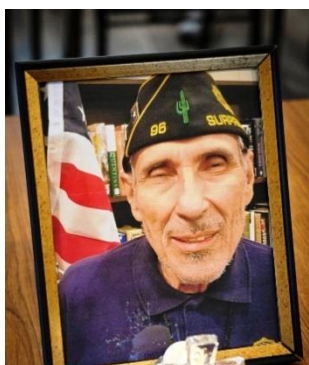
Post Officers are sworn in for the 2025-2026 Legion Year. Commander Mike Elliott, 2nd Vice Kelly Donlevy, Finance Officer George Van de Langeryt and 1st Vice Arnold Kohl.



Past Commander Nancie Scalercio officiated at the swearing-in.



Legion Rider Nina Olsen



A Memorial service was held to honor Julius Urshan Post Chaplain who died suddenly.



Lisa Malonado (R) is Chaplain Joe's daughter. She attended the meeting with her friend Dianne Decker.



Legion Rider Karina Burch and Tom Frizzell enjoyed a sandwich at the meeting.



New member Thomas Heil



2nd Vice Kelly Donlevy and Robb Donlevy



Nancie Scalerio congratulates 2nd Vice Kelly Donlevy

So, you thought it was just Agent Orange we were exposed to in NAM?

IT WASN'T JUST AGENT ORANGE:

The Rainbow Herbicides of the Vietnam War Era

					
AGENT GREEN 2,4,5-T	AGENT PINK 2,4,5-T	AGENT PURPLE 2,4-D; 2,4,5-T	AGENT BLUE Cacodylic Acid	AGENT WHITE 2,4-D; Picloram	AGENT ORANGE 2,4-D; 2,4,5-T
USED: 1962 PURPOSE: Defoliation of Jungle Vegetation IN VIETNAM: 365 drums (20,056 gallons)	USED: 1961-1963 PURPOSE: Defoliation of Jungle Vegetation IN VIETNAM: 1,315 drums (72,236 gallons)	USED: 1962-1965 PURPOSE: Defoliation of Jungle Vegetation IN VIETNAM: 12,475 drums (685,474 gallons)	USED: 1966-1972 PURPOSE: Crop Destruction IN VIETNAM: 29,330 drums (1,611,619 gallons)	USED: 1966-1972 PURPOSE: Defoliation of Jungle Vegetation IN VIETNAM: 101,800 drums (5,758,528 gallons)	USED: 1965-1970 PURPOSE: Defoliation of Jungle Vegetation IN VIETNAM: 208,330 drums (11,417,272 gallons)



WWW.VVA.ORG |||| 1-800-VVA-1316



August 28, 2025

BE THE ONE, AND 'BETTER TOGETHER'



By Steven B. Brooks. Dan K. Wiley of Kansas was elected 2025-2026 National Commander during 106th American Legion National Convention. Photo by Jennifer Blohm/The American Legion

Newly elected National Commander Dan K. Wiley pledges to continue highlighting Legion's veteran suicide prevention mission, calls for teamwork among American Legion Family.

Upon being elected 2025-2026 American Legion National Commander on Aug. 28, Kansas Legionnaire Dan K. Wiley took the stage at the organization's 106th National Convention and thanked all of those who helped him get to this day.

And then he told a story.

It was the story of a young attorney in Wiley's hometown who, due to various circumstances, was going through a difficult time – one he thought was just physical.

When the attorney went to his doctor for some cold medicine, the doctor noticed a difference in his patient and began asking questions: "Do you value your work? Do others value your work? Do you think you are doing good work?"

Puzzled, the attorney said he just wanted his cold prescription, but the doctor didn't let it go. He asked the attorney if he was considering self-harm and offered to provide some medication to address that.

After a week, the attorney admitted he could not think clearly, explaining, "It's like I'm driving a car, and it is foggy, and I cannot get the defroster to work. I can stay on task and get things done, but I can't see ahead." He then agreed to take the prescription for 30 days, which improved his condition considerably. He was then advised to continue to take the prescription for one year.

But a few months later, the attorney decided to apply for a vacant judgeship – but then realized that the application called for disclosing current medications taken, but not past medications.

"Well, you can see this train wreck coming," Wiley said. "It's the most attorney thing ever: 'I'm going to stop taking the medication, and then when I sign that form in 30 days, I don't have to disclose it.'"

"It's the stigma, right? It's the stigma of mental health that we're combating. Trying to let people know it's OK not to be OK."

The attorney called his doctor to inform him he was going to stop taking the medication. But the doctor wasn't hearing it, telling the attorney that those reviewing the application would judge the attorney based on his ability and character, and would see it as a positive as someone helping himself.

Then the doctor explained that roughly 20 percent of the population will have a depressive episode in their life. "You are not alone," said the doctor.

The attorney agreed, continued to take the medication and ended up becoming a state court judge. But that career now has come to end. Kansas Circuit Court Judge Dan K. Wiley is now American Legion National Commander Dan K. Wiley.

“That’s why the Be the One mission is important to me. It’s personal,” Wiley told convention delegates. “I can’t tell you that Dr. Richard Whitlow saved my life. I can tell you he made a difference in my life. He made it better.”

Continuing Be the One, the Legion’s suicide prevention program, is one of Wiley’s priorities for the upcoming. The others are his slogan “Better Together”, The American Legion legislative agenda; the Veterans and Children Foundation; celebrating America’s 250th birthday; and what he said are the three Cs: communication, community and camaraderie.

A U.S. Air Force veteran and cattleman, Wiley is a paid-up-for-life member of Byron H. Mehl American Legion Post 23 in Leavenworth and is a past department commander of the Kansas American Legion. He also served as Kansas’ National Executive Committeeman.

He spent Thursday’s remarks focusing on be the One and “Better Together.” “Be the One is a personal and passionate mission for me,” Wiley said. “Taking care of one another is what we do. It’s who we are.”

Wiley’s theme of “Better Together” focuses on the American Legion Family. “I am a big believer in the American Legion Family,” he said. “Those posts that are successful are the ones that are inclusive and not exclusive. They’re the ones that operate in unity with the units, squadrons, and chapters. Those are the successful posts: the ones that care about the mission and helping each other. Taking care of one another.

“But better together has an even deeper meaning. We use phrases like ‘I got your 6’ and ‘I got your back’. Those are not just nice sayings. It’s what we were trained to do when we served. It’s human nature. It’s who we are.”

To illustrate his point, Wiley told how in December 2023 he received a phone call from American Legion Past National Commander Jake Comer, who had received an email from a disgruntled former court litigant.

“My first reaction was that I’m not too worried about someone attacking me. I’m used to it as a judge,” Wiley said. “But when you start bothering my friends it upsets me. And I was mad.”

Wiley said he called Comer back, and that the past national commander could tell quickly Wiley was upset. “About 10 seconds into the conversation ... he said ‘Dan, we had that forwarded to you for your situational awareness. We’re not concerned about you. We know who you are,’” Wiley said. “And then the four words that mattered the most. He said, ‘We got your back.’ That is all I needed to hear. Powerful words in that moment.”

Wiley plans to pay that forward to the men and women he will lead over the next 12 months. “This next year as your national commander, I got your back,” he said. “The American Legion has had your back since 1919. The American Legion had your back in the 1920s when we advocated for the creation of the Veterans Bureau, which would eventually become Veterans Affairs. The American Legion had your back in 1944 when we advocated the GI Bill of Rights. The American Legion had your back in 1983 when we alone when we funded a study on the disastrous effects of Agent Orange, which culminated with Congress passing the Agent Orange Act in 1991.

“And most recently, The American Legion had your back with the passage of the PACT Act. The American Legion had your back yesterday. The American Legion has your back today. And The American Legion will have your back tomorrow. As long as America exists, and as long as there are veterans, there will be an American Legion, and we will have your back.”

Additional national officers elected or appointed Thursday during the national convention:

National Vice Commander Jan D. “JD” Larson, Disney-Bell Post 66 in Bowie, Md.

National Vice Commander Stephen T. Weismann, Sgt. Donnie E. Horton American, Legion Post 254 in Collinwood, Tenn.

National Vice Commander Benjamin E. (Ben) Headen, American Legion Roy Fourr Post 24 in Tombstone, Az.

National Vice Commander Jerry Landkamer, American Legion Post 16 in Norfolk, Neb.

National Vice Commander Ron LaRose, American Legion Post 19 in Bristol, Vt.

National Chaplain Michael Pollitt, American Legion Post 22 in Lebanon, N.H.

National Sergeant-at-Arms Gaylord K. Sanneman, American Legion Post 253 in Maquette, Kan.,

National Historian David W. Lockhart, Horace D. Washburn American Legion Post 533 in Corinth, N.Y.

Source: <https://www.legion.org/information-center/news/convention/2025/august>



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Proceeds will also help fund key American Legion programs, including Nursing Scholarships, Children and Youth initiatives for family support, illness prevention, and abuse recovery, as well as our Four Pillars Programs: Americanism, Scouting, Oratorical, Constitution education, JROTC scholarships and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation.

These programs provide opportunities for veterans to rebuild their lives, restore hope, and thrive as valuable members of our community after the challenges of military service to engage and build camaraderie.

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More Info and Sign up!



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