



EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

FRANCE

The American Legion's Department of France spans the globe – with community posts in 13 countries, from Thailand to Ireland, including the only Legion post operating in exile. The American Legion, which was formed in Paris March 15-17, 1919, is the largest organization of U.S. wartime veterans, and in the Department of France, Legionnaires fulfill multiple services in support of veterans, military personnel, youth, Americanism, honor and remembrance.

FR Legionnaires



Paris Post 1 founder and first Department of France Commander Lt. Col. Francis Drake was instrumental in establishing European programs, efforts and services to pay homage to fallen U.S. troops in Europe. He helped

establish the American Overseas Memorial Day Association and connected The American Legion with the international Allied Veterans Federation.

U.S. Navy Adm. Mark E. Ferguson III, commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe from 2014 until his retirement in 2016, is a member of American Legion Paris Post 1.



Doug Haggan, a U.S. Air Force veteran and member of Rhein-Main Post GR-5 in Waldorf-Hessen, Germany, became the first Department of France member to be elected national vice commander, at the 2014 American Legion National Convention in Charlotte, N.C.



BIRTHPLACE of Operation Comfort Warriors

Operation Comfort Warriors, The American Legion's international program to provide recreational and comfort items to U.S. military personnel recovering from wounds and illnesses in DoD facilities, was born in May 2007 in Germany.

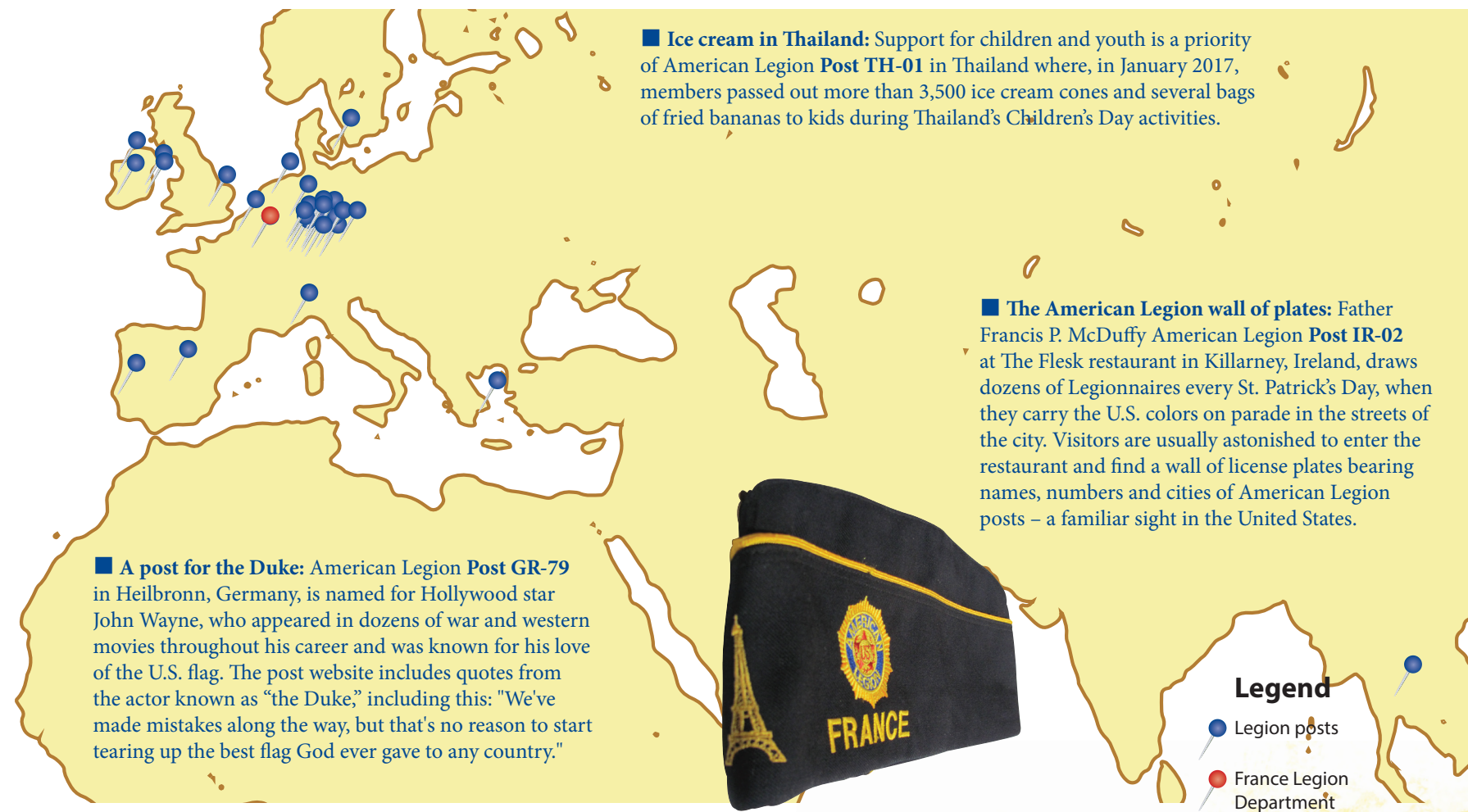
Then-American Legion National Commander Paul A. Morin was on his official visit to the Department of France and noticed at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center that war-wounded personnel lacked personal comfort items, some of the televisions were broken, and although the patients were receiving excellent medical care, they had little to occupy their time during long recovery periods.

When Morin returned to the United States, he called on the Legion to raise \$50,000 in a six-week period to purchase some new televisions, DVDs, iPods, books and video games. He called the fundraiser Operation Landstuhl.

Six weeks later, Legionnaires from around the world had contributed more than \$250,000 to the effort.

In late 2008, after learning of similar needs for comfort items at military hospitals and transition units, new American Legion National Commander David K. Rehbein expanded the program into Operation Comfort Warriors, which in its first complete decade has purchased millions of dollars' worth of comfort items, recreational experiences, art supplies, sporting goods, physical therapy equipment and more.

Operation Comfort Warriors continues to provide financial assistance to the Chaplain's Closet at Landstuhl, which purchases comfort items for recovering troops.



■ **Ice cream in Thailand:** Support for children and youth is a priority of American Legion **Post TH-01** in Thailand where, in January 2017, members passed out more than 3,500 ice cream cones and several bags of fried bananas to kids during Thailand's Children's Day activities.

■ **The American Legion wall of plates:** Father Francis P. McDuffy American Legion **Post IR-02** at The Flesk restaurant in Killarney, Ireland, draws dozens of Legionnaires every St. Patrick's Day, when they carry the U.S. colors on parade in the streets of the city. Visitors are usually astonished to enter the restaurant and find a wall of license plates bearing names, numbers and cities of American Legion posts – a familiar sight in the United States.

■ **A post for the Duke:** American Legion **Post GR-79** in Heilbronn, Germany, is named for Hollywood star John Wayne, who appeared in dozens of war and western movies throughout his career and was known for his love of the U.S. flag. The post website includes quotes from the actor known as "the Duke," including this: "We've made mistakes along the way, but that's no reason to start tearing up the best flag God ever gave to any country."

Legend
● Legion posts
● France Legion Department Headquarters

Department of France Attractions

Flanders Field American Legion Post BE-02 in Brussels launched and leads a grave-adoption program at the American Battle Monuments Commission cemetery at Waregem where 368 heroes of World War I are laid to rest. Within months of the program's launch in 2013, every grave in the cemetery had been adopted and a waiting list was filling up.

The cemetery, which receives more than 30,000 visitors a year and has a new interpretive center, gained international media attention after a 2014 visit and wreath-laying by U.S. President Barak Obama. American Legion national commanders have often visited the cemetery through the years since 1937, when American Legion Past National Commander Harry Colmery attended the chapel dedication ceremony of the site.

A video of that ceremony, which features a keynote address by Colmery and early Department of France Legionnaires, is posted on the American Battle Monuments Commission website at www.abmc.gov.



The American Legion Mausoleum in the cemetery at Neuilly was jointly funded by Paris Post 1 and the department. Finished in 1939, it entombs Post 1 veterans and family, whose names are etched in granite.

La Fiére Bridge Memorial: A plaque at the La Fiére Bridge memorial battle site near Ste. Mère-Église in Normandy, France, makes it clear that the hallowed ground and site of hundreds of American deaths after D-Day may not be used for any other purpose without the written consent of The American Legion, the City of Ste. Mère-Église and Amis des Vétérans Américains.



Manneken Pis in uniform: The world-famous Manneken Pis figure and fountain in Brussels is known for its diverse wardrobe (on the occasions it is dressed), from a U.S. Air Force uniform to prison stripes to, yes, an American Legion Department of France uniform and cap that have often been worn on Veterans Day through the years.

1919

1923

1924

1927

1929

1937

1940

1944

Lt. Col. Francis E. Drake is installed as Department of France "accredited-only" commander in November of The American Legion's first year.

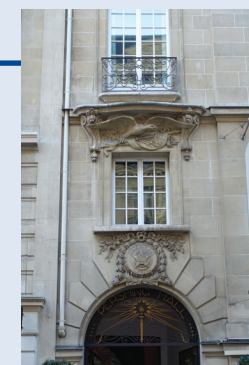
With only one active post in Europe – **Paris Post 1** – the Department of France is reconstituted to cover a region including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain and Sweden.

The Memorial Day Committee headed by Post 1 becomes the **American Overseas Memorial Day Association**, led by The American Legion with such participating organizations as the American Graves Registration Service, Red Cross, YMCA, Knights of Columbus and many others.

The Department of France receives its **official charter** in February.

The American Legion conducts a **September pilgrimage** to Paris on the 10th anniversary of U.S. entry into the Great War. Billed as a national convention, it really is not; the convention that year is conducted in New York after the Legionnaires return from France.

Pershing Hall in Paris is dedicated as The American Legion Building, Paris, Inc., and later becomes known as the organization's European Headquarters.



American Legion National Commander **Harry W. Colmery** is keynote speaker at the dedication of a new chapel at Flanders Field American Cemetery at Waregem, Belgium.

The American Legion Department of France begins six years as a **"department in exile"** during the majority of the German occupation in World War II.

On July 18, past American Legion Department of France **Commander George Aubrey**, also a past commander of Post 1, is killed by Nazi gunmen while on patrol with the French Resistance.

YOUTH!

The Legion & France



Austin Muraille of the International School of Brussels, sponsored by Flanders Field Post BE-02 in Belgium, went to Indianapolis and reached the semifinals of the American Legion National Oratorical Contest in 2015 and, after winning the department championship for the second straight time in 2016, advanced to the national competition once again the following year. An American Legion Boys State selection (participating through the Department of Maryland), he is also a former Boy Scout.



■ Junior Shooting Sports in Ansbach

David Chavez American Legion **Post 1982** at the U.S. Army Garrison in Ansbach, Germany, raised the money to buy top-quality competition air rifles, has assembled and coaches an American Legion Junior Shooting Sports team that's just one of many youth activities Legionnaires provide for families stationed there. In addition, the post puts on a kids fishing day each year and also supports the Junior ROTC program.

■ Legion Riders in Europe

The Riley Leroy Pitts American Legion **Post GR07** Riders Chapter in Mannheim, Germany, was chartered in April 2006, and may have been the first chapter of the Legion motorcycle program established outside the continental United States. Multiple other Department of France posts now have Legion Riders chapters, including John Wayne Post GR79 in Heilbronn; GR2 in Ramstein; GR14 in Buding; and Flanders Field Post BE02 in Brussels.

■ The late Rev. Ronald Moore, a **Post GR05** member and past Department of France commander, chaplain and Legion Riders coordinator, was a regular participant in the annual American Legion Legacy Run leading up to The American Legion National Convention in August in the United States. The run raises scholarship funds for children of military personnel who lost their lives or became 50 percent or more disabled since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.



CHINA POST 1: still operating "in exile"

Chartered on April 20, 1920, as Gen. Frederick Townsend Ward Post 1 at the American Club in Shanghai, American Legion China Post 1 is among the most intriguing stories in the organization. Since 1948, the post – also known as the Legion's "Soldiers of Fortune" post – has been "operating in exile," meeting at various locations and "watering holes" around the world. With more than 1,200 members, it is the Department of France's largest post.

Ward, the original post namesake, died in 1862 fighting for the Mandarins in the Taiping Rebellion. Ward was born in Massachusetts, but at 17 went off to sea and fought as a contract soldier with Italy, Austria, France and U.S. adventurer William Walker (who was executed by a Honduras firing squad in 1860) in Central America. Ward went on to China, where he was soon beloved for his calm, courageous leadership in the fight to quell the rebellion. After he was killed, he was entombed near Shanghai and made a saint on the Confucian calendar. The American Legion post became the caretaker of Ward's shrine in the 1920s.

The Japanese invaded China in 1937, but the Americans – and their American Legion post – remained open until the Pearl Harbor attack of December 1941. Adjutant Frank Mortimer camouflaged and hid Post 1's documents before he was sent off to the Pootung Internment Camp, where he remained until the end of World War II.

The post's second namesake, Maj. Gen. Claire Chennault, trained the famed "Flying Tigers" in China and led hundreds of successful air strikes during World War II with the 14th Army Air Force before he retired from service. He returned to China, where he served on the Post 1 executive committee until its departure.

As the situation in China worsened after World War II, Chennault ordered that all post records be forwarded to American Legion National Headquarters in Indianapolis. On Nov. 22, 1948, the post went into exile and since has called home "wherever two

or more members meet." Chennault's name was added to Ward's as post namesake after he passed away in 1958. Longtime post commander Cash Helseth was added to the namesake list after his death on Nov. 22, 1987. Thus, it is now the Gens. Ward & Chennault & Lt. Helseth China Post 1.

Until 1962, the post was affiliated with no department and reported directly to National Headquarters. To comply with the organization's constitution, the post had to pick a department and get accepted. It would go from the Department of Hawaii to the Department of New York to the Department of France, where it has been attached since 2005.



■ Never forgotten in the Netherlands

Margraten American Legion Post NL01 in the Netherlands has many programs and activities – from service officers to bowling night to a high school oratorical contest – but a quick glimpse of the post's Facebook page illustrates in 3D animation its deep commitment to never forget the more than 8,300 Americans from World War II who are laid to rest at the American War Cemetery and Memorial Netherlands. The post has been actively involved in a "Faces of Margraten" database project to collect and attach photos to the names on the markers of the fallen. www.fieldsof-honor-database.com



Did you know?

The American Legion Overseas Decoration Trust Fund provides U.S. flags free of charge for military graves at American Battle Monuments Commission-administered cemeteries and other memorials in Europe.



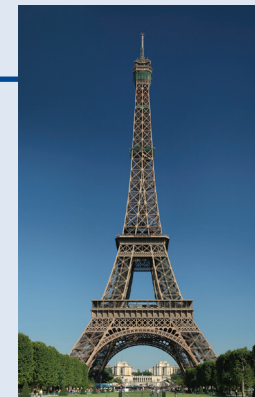
1961
The Department of France sends its first-ever competitor to Baltimore for the American Legion National Oratorical Contest. **Richard J. Stillman II**, 17, of Paris had previously competed in the national finals as a representative from Pennsylvania.

1972
Munich American Legion Post 8 leads efforts to welcome Legionnaires to Germany for the Olympic Games. German Veterans of Bavaria provide assistance for the Legion, and all posts in Germany and France have open houses during the games.

1976
Department of France leaders attend the casting of **The American Legion's Liberty Bell** replica in the Netherlands. It will be shipped to the United States and displayed on the Bicentennial Freedom Train before it is permanently placed at Union Station in Washington, D.C.

1978
American Legion Department of France members join U.S. President Jimmy Carter in a visit to the **Tomb of France's Unknown Soldier** at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and accompany him on a tour of the Normandy battle sites.

1991
Delegates at the Department of France convention in Bitburg, Germany, vote to make the **Eiffel Tower** the official symbol of the department.



1994
The **American Legion departments of Canada, Panama and Italy** are dissolved by a vote of the National Executive Committee, adding four posts to the Department of France.

2016
Helen Patton, granddaughter of famed U.S. Army Gen. George S. Patton, serves as a judge in the American Legion Department of France Oratorical Contest in Brussels.

Post-9/11 FR LEGION

Volunteerism is good for promotion points, and it's good for NCOs. It's free leadership training.

Oren Hammerquist, U.S. Army, George S. Patton American Legion Post GR-45 in Vilseck, Germany

Without volunteer services, the community is not as good as it can be. That's why I am trying to do my best to grow the Legion larger and larger.

Tyler Johnson, U.S. Army, Post GR-06, Stuttgart, Germany



We are analyzing the military installation map of Europe and planning our membership strategy from there. We know there are American servicemembers at NATO bases in places like Rota, Spain, but we don't have an American Legion post established there. Lakenheath (England) is a good example of what happens when you present the Legion's four pillars to active-duty communities.

Carl Hale, commander, Paris Post 1



Commemorative centennial coin

"This is where our veteran brothers first started our organization," said Nola Maloney, who after her election as National Executive Committee member from the Department of France immediately pushed to strike a commemorative department coin. The coin, which features the Eiffel Tower on one side and the American Legion Family of emblems on the other, are \$10 each and may be ordered by emailing her at NECMaloney@gmail.com.

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