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.

**BIRTHPLACE of Operation Comfort Warriors**

Operation Comfort Warriors, The American Legion’s international program to provide comfort items and personal 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, iPads, books and video games. He called the fundraiser Operation Landstuhl.

Six weeks later, Legionnaires from around the world had contributed more than $225,000 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 to 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.

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**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, is dedicated to preserving the memory of the fallen. American Legion national commanders have often visited the cemetery through the years since 1937, when American Legion Past National Commander Harry Colomy attended the chapel dedication ceremony of the site.

A video of that ceremony, which features a keynote address by Colomy 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.

**American Legion National Commander Barry W. Colomy** keynotes the dedication of a new chapel at Flanders Field American Cemetery at Waregem, Belgium.

**La Fière Bridge Memorial:** A plaque at the La Fière 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.

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

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**Every Department has a story**

**The American Legion of France**

The American Legion’s Department of France is dedicated to serving veterans, military personnel, youth, Americanism, honor and remembrance. It has a storied history that includes a diverse array of activities, from serving veterans to engaging youth and promoting Americanism. The department has a strong presence in Europe, with over 200 posts and clubs in France and other countries.

**FR Legionnaires**

Paris Post 1 founder and first Department of France Commander Lt. Col. Francis E. Ferguson III 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.


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

**1919**<br>**1923**<br>**1924**<br>**1927**<br>**1929**<br>**1937**<br>**1940**<br>**1944**

**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 Barry W. Colomy 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 Nazi 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 gunfire while on patrol with the French Resistance.**


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.

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.

The American Legion post GR-45 in Germany, vote to make the Eiffel Tower the official symbol of the department.

Carl Hale, commander, Paris Post 1

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.

The late Rev. Ronald Moore, a former Boy Scout.

Please contact The American Legion

Contact The American Legion of France

Hans Stockenberger – Department Adjutant

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www.amerlegiondeptfrance.org

Join The American Legion

www.legion.org/join

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.

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.

American Legion post GR07 at the American Club in Shanghai, American Legion National Headquarters in Indianapolis. On Nov. 22, 1948, Adjutant Frank Mortimer 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.

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. Nov. 22, 1948, the post went into exile and since has called home “somewhere too 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 had 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.

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The American Legion of France

1961

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

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.

Juliette Gordon Low 

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