



EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

KANSAS

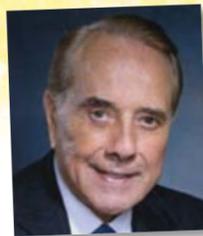
The American Legion Department of Kansas – whose members through the decades have included President Dwight Eisenhower, U.S. Sen. Robert Dole and GI Bill architect Harry W. Colmery – has a rich and storied history. The World War I generation, led by Colmery of Kansas, made the American Dream come true after the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 was passed into law. In diverse communities large and small, nearly 300 American Legion posts are stitched into the fabric of the Sunflower State where patriotism and honor for those who served in the military have been deeply rooted, generation after generation, for a century.

Kansas Legionnaires



Retired Air Force Gen. Richard B. Myers, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is a member of American Legion Post 17 in Manhattan. After joining the Air Force through the Kansas State University ROTC program, Myers became a command pilot, logging 4,100 flying hours, including 600 combat hours in the F-4 during the Vietnam War.

Medal of Honor recipient Charles Hagemeyer, who was drafted into the Army in his home town of Lincoln, Neb., went on to receive the Medal of Honor for his actions March 20, 1967, exposing himself to a hail of enemy fire in the Vietnam War to provide medical aid to his fellow soldiers of the 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division (Air Mobile) and destroying enemy positions. He was commissioned as a lieutenant colonel before retiring from the Army. He is a member of American Legion Post 23 in Leavenworth.



Sen. Robert J. Dole, a combat veteran and member of American Legion Russell Post 99, received two of the organization's highest honors – the Distinguished Service Medal in 1997 and the Distinguished Public Service Award in 1996. Dole led the campaign to construct the National World War II Memorial in Washington. The American Legion was a major contributor to the project.



The Erie Bean Feed

The tradition began in 1873 among Union veterans who had come to Kansas on the government's offer of farm land in gratitude for honorable Civil War service. Called the "Old Soldiers and Sailors Reunion," the mid-July event formerly coordinated by the Grand Army of the Republic was later turned over to American Legion Post 102, which has kept the bean-pot fires burning every summer since. Each year, the Kansas American Legion department commander dips the ceremonial first spoonful of beans for the feed. More than 50 kettles are filled with some 4,000 pounds of beans and cooked over open fires for the free meal and get-together. Thousands show up with bowls, pots and coolers to fill. A multi-day festival, the Erie Bean Feed/Old Soldiers and Sailors Reunion includes games and activities for children, a parade, rodeo, live music, fireworks and reunions of all kinds from throughout the country.



Post 70 Avenue of Flags

Each Memorial Day, volunteers from Post 70 in Oberlin gather at the break of day to install nearly 400 U.S. flags and poles along the cemetery's roads, while the Auxiliary unit and others place smaller flags at the graves of veterans buried there, in advance of the annual remembrance ceremony.



Legend

- Legion posts
- Kansas Legion Department Headquarters
- Kansas American Legion posts on Indian reservations include **Horton Post 415** on the Kickapoo Reservation and **Mayetta Post 410**, Pottawatomie Reservation.



- **American Legion Post 270 in Nicodemus** was founded by members of the famed all-African-American "Buffalo Soldiers." Other traditionally black posts in Kansas are **No. 94 in Leavenworth** and **No. 273 in Wichita**.
- **Kansas City Post 213 – the Argentine Eagles Post** – is traditionally Hispanic and was chartered shortly after the end of World War II. A 1951 flood destroyed the post home, which members later rebuilt, along with a baseball field. The post building, however, went empty for years until it reopened in 2012.

Sunflower State Legion Attractions



Veterans Memorial Amphitheatre and Walk of Honor Frontenac Post 43 led efforts to build the \$1.3 million plaza at Pittsburg State University, which includes a half-scale version of the Vietnam War Memorial.



Eisenhower Presidential Library More than 70,000 artifacts, 335,000 photos and 26 million pages of documents can be found at the Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum and Boyhood Home in Abilene.



Harry Colmery Memorial Plaza Dedicated in a ceremony on June 22, 2016, near the state capitol building in Topeka, a monument to the architect of the GI Bill, American Legion Past National Commander Harry Colmery, commemorates the world-changing impact of the legislation that built a half-century of U.S. economic prosperity. "He was a living example of every founding principle of The American Legion – support for veterans, strong national security, mentorship for youth and American patriotism," Department of Kansas Adjutant Jimmie Foster said at the ceremony.

Marysville American Legion Post 163 maintains what is considered the oldest military monument in the state, a marble statue of a Civil War soldier. The \$1,350 cost of the monument was raised by the Grand Army of the Republic's Post 9.



1919

Among those in attendance at The American Legion's founding **Paris Caucus** March 15-17 were 15 U.S. troops from Kansas. By November, the number of Kansas Legionnaires soared to nearly 20,000.

1927

The Kansas Department Convention is conducted in a tent city at **Fort Riley**.



1929

Three years after the introduction of the American Legion Baseball program on the national basis, Kansas fields more than 300 teams..

1930

Ralph T. "Dyke" O'Neil of Topeka Post 1, a highly decorated Army combat officer of World War I, is elected national commander of The American Legion.

1936

Harry Colmery becomes the second member of Topeka Post 1 to serve as national commander of The American Legion.



1945

Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, a member of the Abilene post, receives the Legion's prestigious Distinguished Service Medal.

1949

Harry B. Dorst Post 24 in McPherson wins the national American Legion Basketball Tournament.

1951

President Truman awards the Medal of Honor to De Soto native **Stanley T. Adams**, later of Post 153 in Olathe, who led a fierce bayonet and hand-to-hand charge against 250 enemy soldiers in the Korean War.

SWISH!

Legion & Basketball

Hutchinson has been home of the National Junior College Athletic Association Division 1 men's basketball championship tournament since 1949. And that's not going to change anytime soon. The American Legion and the NJCAA signed a new 25-year agreement in February 2016 to continue a relationship that has connected some of America's top basketball talent with the nation's largest veterans organization, specifically Post 68 in Hutchinson.



Post 68 summons an army of more than 200 local American Legion Family members, all serving on various committees, to coordinate the event each year. To keep the event in town, a local sales tax was passed in 2015 to complete a nearly \$30 million two-year overhaul of the Hutchinson Sports Arena.

The event generates over \$1.3 million in local economy.

By the winter of 1945-46, Kansas American Legion Basketball had no fewer than 48 teams across the state.



The American Legion National Executive Committee passes a resolution in 1971 establishing the **Dr. Irvin "Click" Cowger Award** for The American Legion Baseball player who has the most runs batted in during national tournaments through the end of The American Legion Baseball World Series. Cowger, a highly decorated World War I veteran and long-time adjutant of The American Legion's Department of Kansas, was a dentist from Sterling who moved to Topeka in 1937 hoping he could return to his practice a year or so later after getting the department going in the right direction after a rough couple of years. His dentistry equipment remained in storage for the next 25 years as he continued to guide the department.

Pro Football Hall of Fame running back **John Riggins** grew up in Centralia where he and his brothers Frank and Bill also played American Legion Baseball.



A historic escape from the Philippines

Ralph W. Newquist never talked much about his role in one World War II's most bizarre and amazing escapes. Newquist, a 1939 graduate of Cawker City High School, was one of 18 American sailors who planned and executed a daring month-long journey through enemy-infested waters and skies in May 1942 after the Japanese took Manila and fortified islands around it. The success of the 18 saved them from the infamous "Corregidor Death March" endured by hundreds of U.S. sailors and Marines captured there.

The skipper, Lt. Cmdr. John Morrill, and crew of the U.S.S. *Quail* scuttled the minesweeper and commandeered a 36-foot uncovered motor launch for what would be a 2,000-mile uncharted voyage, guided by stars, poor maps and a homemade sextant, to Darwin, Australia. Along the way, the sailors had to work constantly as a team to avoid being seen from air or sea, camouflaging the boat, and receiving help from native Filipinos along the way. En route, the sailors had to rebuild the vessel's diesel motor.

The ordeal was recounted in the December 1942 *Saturday Evening Post* under the title "Eighteen Men and a Boat." Morrill wrote a book about it in 1943 while in Australia, "South from Corregidor," which was republished with new maps and other materials by Mike and Tim Deal in 2013 (the book can be ordered online). Also in Australia in 1943, Newquist met and married his wife Dorothy. He went on to spend 20 years in the Navy before returning to Goodman, where he lived and farmed for the rest of his life.

Mentorship for children in need

The American Legion's Department of Kansas has been advocating on behalf of young people in need of guidance since the earliest days of the organization's formation.

W.P. McLean, the first commander of Post 1 in Topeka, was also superintendent for the Industrial School for Boys in the city, which taught young men who had gotten into trouble with the law trades, skills and citizenship. When the state failed to budget what McLean thought was adequate budget for food and clothing for the boys, The American Legion intervened, lobbied for better funding, and established a "Big Brother" program in which boys could be "paroled" to local Legion posts.

"With its solicitude for passing the virtues of the present generation on to the youth of the next, the Legion was especially interested in those who lacked parental influence, or who had gotten into trouble with the law," wrote Richard L. Loosbrock in "The History of The American Legion in Kansas," published in 1969.



On Jan. 28, 1923, Department Commander W.P. McLean announced that Mr. and Mrs. D.A. Dabney of Independence offered up a 400-acre improved farm plus \$25,000 in cash to The American Legion of Kansas to convert the property into a home for dependent children of World War I service members, in memory of their sons, Earl and Charles, who died after returning home from the war. The department raised \$100,000 of its own to equip and maintain the children's home, named **Legionville**, which opened in September 1925 with 20 children.

Did you know?

Of approximately 6,300 students at Kansas State University in the spring of 1947, veterans represented 4,132, two and one-third times higher than the previous year, thanks largely to the GI Bill. Of the veterans at KSU at the time, 2,621 were single and 1,511 were married. Thirty-five of the unmarried veterans and 19 of the married veterans were women.

Post-9/11 KS LEGION

"I walked in not knowing what to expect. I was still uneasy with a lot of people. You walk into a meeting full of people you don't know, don't know what's going on, don't understand what they're talking about, and instead of the looks and, 'What happened to you?' – they stuck their hands out and introduced themselves. I thought, hmmm, good start. By the end of the meeting, we were American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and American Legion Riders members."

Hutchinson American Legion Post 68 Adjutant **Jeremy Ehart**, who suffered severe burns during a Marine Corps training accident and came home to find comfort, camaraderie and a shared sense of purpose among his fellow veterans. He and wife **Kristy** are both active Legion Riders.



Kansas has produced three **American Legion National Oratorical Contest** winners: Cliff Thompson in 1952, Jack McNeas in 1954 and Larry Unruh in 1960.

The **Patriot Guard** was formed in Mulvane in 2005, an initiative of American Legion Riders Chapter 136 and other motorcycling veterans who continue to provide security at military funerals.



Contact The American Legion of Kansas

Jimmie Foster – Department Adjutant
1314 SW Topeka Blvd.,
Topeka, KS 66612

785.232.9315 www.ksamlegion.org

Join The American Legion

www.legion.org/join



1958

In order to jazz up Kansas department conventions, a **Miss American Legion** competition is introduced. The competition is suspended two years later.

1966

Vietnam Memorial Post 155 in Wichita is the state's first post to target any particular war era for membership.

1970

The Legion Family and the Kansas Highway Patrol begin a Cadet Law Enforcement Academy, one of the earliest programs of its kind, for high school students interested in law-enforcement careers.



1975

Harry Gordon Wiles of Post 53 in St. John is elected national commander of The American Legion. As a young man, Wiles was a track star at the University of Kansas where his conference record in the 220-yard low hurdles held up for 22 years.

1986

U.S. "**Udie**" **Grant** of American Legion Post 24 in McPherson is named president of the Legion's national Child Welfare Foundation, which assists groups that help kids in need, and leads it for the rest of his life, through 2004.

2004

Neal Warnken of Hutchinson is elected national commander of the Sons of The American Legion.

2006

U.S. Air Force veteran **Patricia Culver** of Post 136 in Derby is the first woman to be elected American Legion of Kansas department commander.



2015

World War II combat veteran and **U.S. Sen. Robert Dole** joins his fellow Legionnaires for a shift in an American Legion information booth at the Kansas State Fair.