



EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

MONTANA

Montana's remarkable representation in World War I history can largely be traced to a federal mistake. Montana led all states, per capita, with a total of 11,700 volunteers under arms during the Great War, including a 14-year-old boy from Butte, Mike Mansfield, who lied to get into the Navy and later went on to become the longest-serving Majority Leader in the U.S. Senate. The federal mistake was an incorrect population estimate that drafted another 27,567 Montanans during the war. Thus, in addition to leading the nation in per-capita combat deaths, Montana produced more than 35,000 veterans who came home to charter American Legion posts in nearly every community of the state. The American Legion Department of Montana has 132 active posts, including one in in Calgary, Alberta.

Montana Legionnaires



Charles E. Pew, Helena, Montana's first department commander, Pew became a national leader in The American Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation program, pioneering the organization's service officer program and pushing Washington to pass the Rogers Act to build badly needed veterans hospitals nationwide.



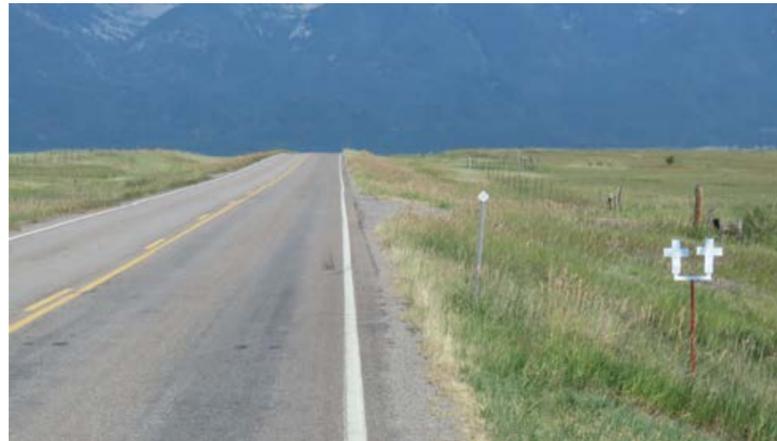
Helen Dawson, a Navy clerk at Pearl Harbor during World War II, started the first all-women's American Legion post in Helena following her discharge



James F. Barfknecht, a Legionnaire for more than 70 years, flew 70 missions from the USS *Yorktown* in the Pacific Theater of World War II. He later joined the Montana Army National Guard and led the 163rd Infantry Regiment and the Aviation Company of the 163rd Armored Cavalry.



Ryan Zinke, American Legion Boys State alum, became the first Navy SEAL elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2014. In Operation Iraqi Freedom, he was deputy and acting commander, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-Arabian Peninsula, leading more than 3,500 troops.



Highway Fatality Marker program

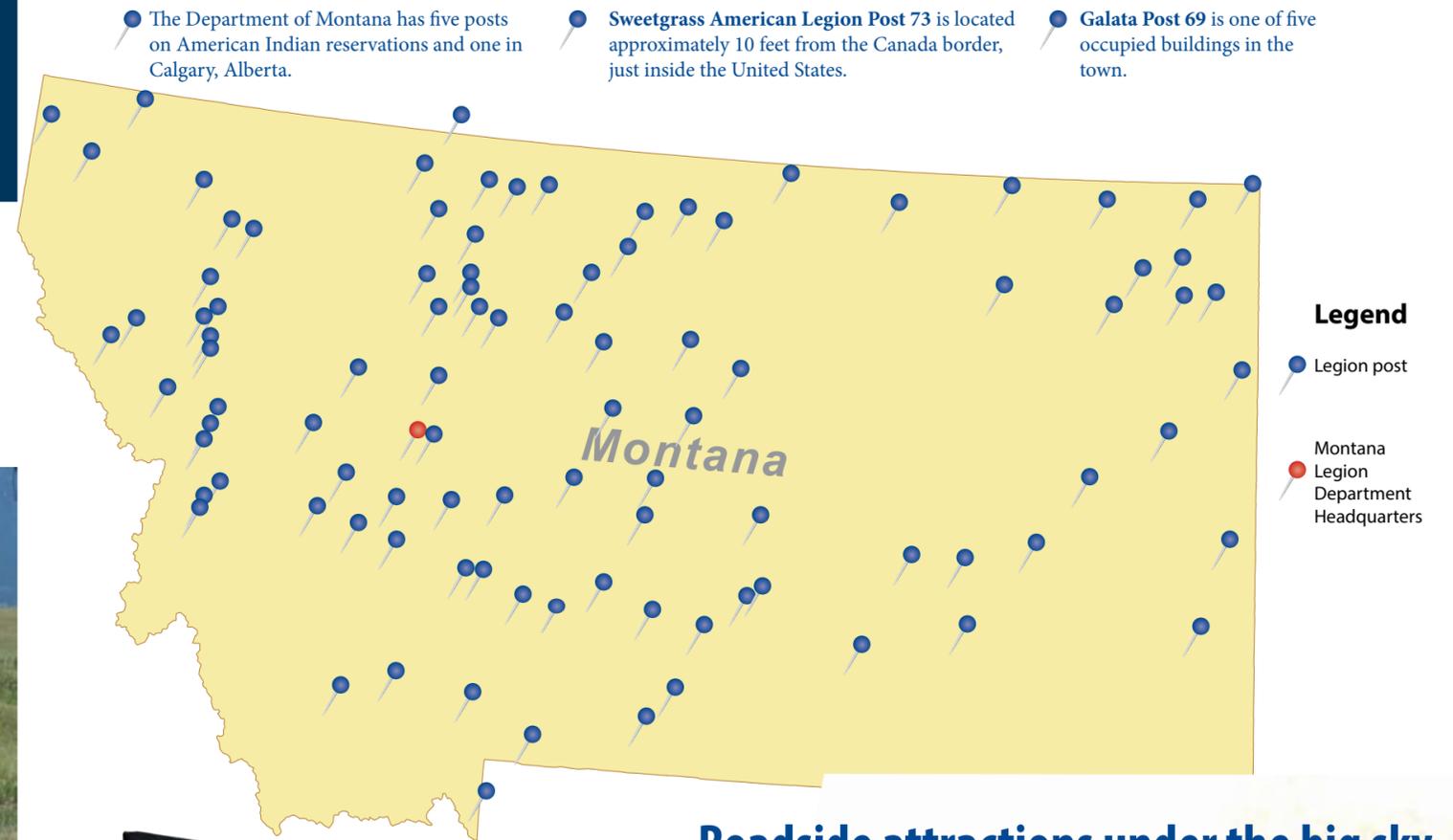
In 1952, Hellgate Post 27 Legionnaire Floyd Eaheart was deeply troubled by an unusually high Labor Day weekend fatality report: six lives were lost in automobile crashes in the Missoula area alone. Thus was born The American Legion White Marker Highway Fatality Program. It started out as a local effort to identify with white crosses the locations of fatal crashes in an effort to remind drivers to slow down and pay close attention to the road. The following year, the program was formally adopted by the Montana Highway Commission, with the blessing of Gov. J. Hugo Aronson.

Originally called the White Cross Safety Program, it soon was adopted across The American Legion's Department of Montana.

Most American Legion posts across the state participate, and more than 2,000 markers line the highways. The program was not officially acknowledged by the state until a 2001 letter of instruction about how to paint and maintain the markers came from Montana Department of Transportation Director Jim Lynch.

Later renamed the Highway Fatality Marker program, it was promoted on the official Montana Highway Map starting in 2007 under the heading: "White markers show fatalities and serve as a reminder to drive safely, drive sober and wear seat belts. LEARN FROM THOSE WHO PASSED THIS WAY." Lynch later approved signs explaining the program and acknowledging The American Legion at all 25 highway entry points to Montana.

American Legion posts furnish, install and maintain the markers throughout the state.



■ Five Montana governors, two U.S. senators and one member of the House of Representatives were all participants of **American Legion Boys State in Montana.**

■ **Lewistown Post 16** sponsors five guided elk hunts for disabled veterans each year.

■ Two of the last four surviving **Doolittle Raiders** of World War II were Montana natives and members of The American Legion – David Thatcher, born in Bridger, and Edward Saylor of Drussett. When Saylor died in 2015, just Thatcher and Richard E. Cole, of Ohio, survived from the daring Tokyo bombing raid of 1942.

Roadside attractions under the big sky

Soldiers Chapel at Lone Mountain, about 45 miles south of Bozeman, was built as a memorial to the World War II fallen of Montana's 163rd Infantry Regiment. Constructed of native stone and timbers in 1955, it remains a sacred place of reflection, ceremony and remembrance in the breathtaking beauty of the Gallatin Valley.



Sons of The American Legion Squadron 16 in Lewistown helped lead the restoration and display of a Minuteman I – known locally as "the lonely missile" – in the town's Main Street park.

The Montana Military Museum on the Fort Harrison Complex in Helena covers two centuries of the state's history in service to the nation. Built and staffed by volunteers, the museum offers a chronological journey in art, artifacts, documents, military equipment, weapons and uniforms.

www.montanamilitarymuseum.org



1919

Jan. 10: The Army and Navy Association forms in Butte, soon followed by the Soldiers and Sailors Club of Helena, and nearly two-dozen others. The Butte and Helena groups call for state caucuses of World War veterans.



March 15-17: Walter L. Verge of Choteau is Montana's lone representative at the **Paris Caucus** where The American Legion is born. Eighteen of Montana's 22 World War veterans groups agree to place their membership under The American Legion emblem.

June 30-July 1: Malta is the site of the first American Legion Department of **Montana Convention.** Gov. Sam V. Stewart addresses the veterans.

Sept. 19-20: Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., known as "the father of The American Legion," travels through Montana, stopping to speak in Helena, Butte and Anaconda to raise awareness about the new veterans group he helped found.

Silver Bow Post 1 in Butte starts a "Get Out the Vote" program that ultimately is adopted by posts worldwide as a national initiative.

Montana Legionnaires travel to France and parade in chaps and sombreros for the national convention in Paris

During World War II, Legionnaires supported a Montana Power Company program **to give knives to troops** crossing the state by train. Some 1,200 were presented. The blades were cut and shaped by the Anaconda Company. MPC employees at Black Eagle ground and sharpened the blades, and workers in Great Falls cast the aluminum handles.



1921

1927

1942-43

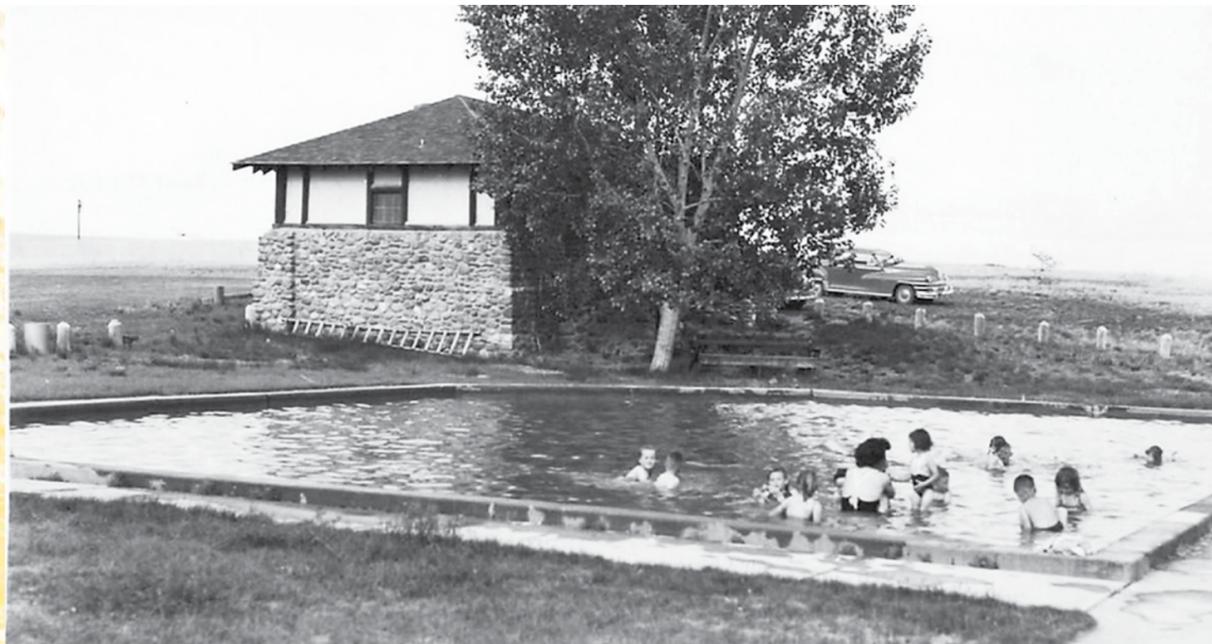
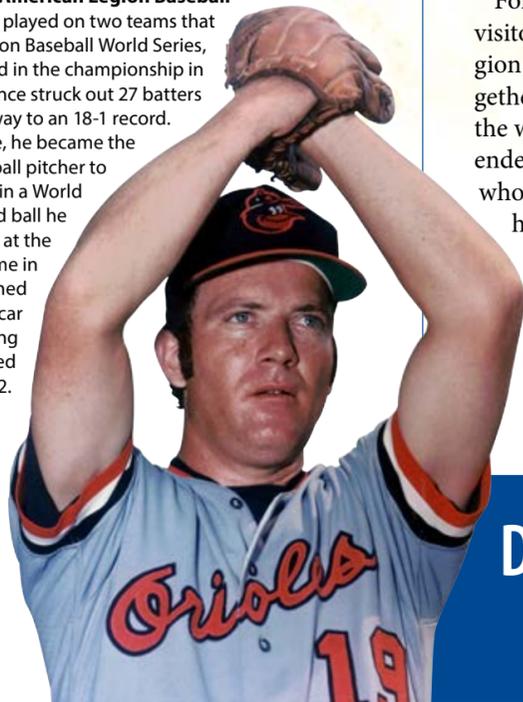
MONTANA Legion Baseball

■ Because there is no high school baseball in Montana (due to the long winters), **American Legion Baseball** is the only game for teens. The department program has 59 teams, including seven in Alberta and one in British Columbia.

■ The George W. Rulon American Legion Baseball Player of the Year for 2004 was **Nolan Gallagher** of Red Lodge. He went on to pitch collegiately at Stanford and for three seasons in the Seattle Mariners system.

“School would let out, and immediately we would go on a five-, six-state tour in our air-conditioned bus. Not only did we have our local Legion post behind us, but everybody else in town too. A good team would come into town and we’d draw 4,000 to 5,000 people.”

Billings Royals Post 4 American Legion Baseball star Dave McNally, who played on two teams that reached The American Legion Baseball World Series, including one that played in the championship in 1960. That year, McNally once struck out 27 batters in a single game on his way to an 18-1 record. Later, as a Baltimore Oriole, he became the only Major League Baseball pitcher to hit a grand-slam home run in a World Series game; the bat and ball he used are enshrined at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y. He returned to Billings and owned car dealerships after retiring from baseball. He passed away in 2002.



The Saco Plunge

The American Legion Health Plunge Resort sprang into existence near Saco in the early 1930s a few years after a wildcat gas driller struck hot water more than 3,000 feet beneath the surface of the earth.

For years, water and gas bubbled to the top and mixed; visitors could light the well water on fire. American Legion posts in Saco, Hinsdale and Malta soon worked together to obtain federal funding to separate the gas from the water, and it became a Works Project Administration endeavor supported by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had found therapeutic relief from polio soaking in hot springs elsewhere in the country. WPA workers built stone pools there, and the Saco Plunge became an institution on the High Line.

The Legion operated the resort until 1957 when a hot-water well casing collapsed about 1,000 feet down. Today, after massive renovations and modernization, the former Legion resort is attracting soakers once again, under private ownership as the Sleeping Buffalo Hot Springs, so named for a distinctive rock along Highway 2 that resembles a sleeping buffalo.

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■ **Twin Bridges Post 31**, which has no post home, led local efforts to build and maintain a community pond and sponsors an annual youth fishing derby there with multiple prizes for various age groups. Twin Bridges has been cited as the possible home of Sgt. William Patterson, a wounded World War I soldier who met Theodore Roosevelt Jr. at an Army hospital in France and helped inspire the formation of The American Legion.



See a post profile: www.legion.org/centennial

Did you know?

French Gen. Ferdinand Foch received a special gift from Montana Legionnaires at the 1921 National Convention in Kansas City – a young female bobcat. Foch reportedly traveled the country with the cat, which he intended to domesticate. He ultimately got her to Paris where she was placed in the famous Jardin Des Plantes. A plaque there tells her story.

Post-9/11 MT LEGION

My entire life, I wanted to be a soldier. I wanted to serve. With the military, there is a point where you retire. I want to serve my country, my family, my nation. Now, The American Legion really gives me that opportunity, to serve veterans, to focus on my community, my state and my nation. That’s what I see The American Legion does. We’re still trying to serve, to make our communities better.



Helena American Legion Post 2 Commander Josh Clement, Army and Montana Army National Guard veteran, who deployed to Iraq, Bosnia and Kuwait; he graduated from national American Legion College in 2015 and served as commander of three Montana posts.

■ **Five Montana American Legion posts** are named in honor of U.S. military personnel who have made the ultimate sacrifice since 9/11: Jeremy S. Monroe Post 38 in Darby; Andrew Bedard Post 68 in Missoula; Kristofer Stonesifer Post 124 in Frenchtown; Trevor J. Johnson Post 44 in Colstrip; and Andrew Pearson Post 117 in Billings.

■ Helena is the birthplace of the modern Special Forces. The U.S.-Canada unit of elite fighters assembled as the **1st Special Service Force** was a top-secret, highly trained group of hand-picked warriors who would later become known as “The Devil’s Brigade” or the “Black Devils” who used their mountaineering and rough-country training skills to dislodge German artillery positions in Italy and pave the way to Allied advance into Rome in 1944. Many of the the Force returned to live in Helena and the surrounding area after the war and became prominent members of The American Legion.

■ **Montana’s 163rd Infantry Division** distinguished itself in the Pacific Theater of World War II, fighting bloody, tropical battles against well-positioned Japanese forces in New Guinea and the Philippines.

■ In 2005, the **Augusta American Legion Rodeo** was named Montana’s Tourism Attraction of the Year. **American Legion Post 125** in Drummond launched a \$100,000 extreme makeover of its historic rodeo arena, home of an annual 4th of July pro rodeo, in 2014. **Choteau Post 6** owns and operates the rodeo arena there and hosts a pro event each summer.

Contact The American Legion of Montana

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1951

A new \$4.5 million VA hospital is dedicated in Miles City. More than 3,000 attended the grand opening.

1961

The Veterans and Pioneers Memorial Building in Helena, seeded with a portion of boxing ticket sales after the sport was legalized in the state in 1919, is **finally dedicated**. Gov. Don Nutter, a Legionnaire, died in a plane crash five days after commending The American Legion for its work and dedicating the Trophy Hall of the building in January 1962.

1963

After nearly 25 years of relentless effort by the Montana American Legion, a **new** 160-bed \$4 million **VA hospital** is built at Fort Harrison.

1996

The American Legion provides **free memberships** to military personnel serving on the nuclear submarine USS Helena



2008

The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The American Legion **lead efforts to complete a \$1.8 million Liberty House** near the Fort Harrison VA Medical Center to provide housing for families of veteran patients at the hospital

2011

A gas explosion levels the Bozeman American Legion post. Members raised the necessary funds to rebuild it.

2015

American Legion Riders lead a caravan of veterans from Helena to West Yellowstone to rededicate the route as the POW/MIA Memorial Highway through Montana.

