



EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

OREGON

OR Legionnaires



George A. White, longtime adjutant general of the Oregon National Guard, served on the Western Front in World War I and helped lead the Paris Caucus that created The American Legion in 1919. White was first national vice commander of The American Legion and first editor of *The American Legion Magazine*. When he died in 1941, he was commanding general of the 41st Division. American Legion Post 192 in White City, Ore., is named after him.



Charles Schmidt was elected national commander of The American Legion at the organization's 98th National Convention in Cincinnati in September 2016. Schmidt served in the Air Force from 1965 to 1983, with duty stations ranging from Oregon and Montana to the Philippines and Vietnam. A member of Harney County Post 63 in Burns, he has led at every level in the Legion, including Department of Oregon commander and National Executive Committee member.



Judy Johnston was among the first enlisted women to be deployed to a combat zone when she went to Vietnam with the Army in February 1967 to work in communications. Johnston went on to a career with the National Guard from 1975 to 1993. She has also given years of service to The American Legion. She was the first female commander of Frederick & John Ravin Post 134 in Portland, which she joined in 1975, and has served as district commander nine times.



T. Les Galloway was a World War II Navy veteran and member of The American Legion in Oregon starting in 1946, having served as National Executive Committee member for the Department of Oregon for 28 years. He also served as commander of Clatskanie Post 68, department commander, and on national committees including Americanism, National Security, Legislative and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation.

Oregon was home to World War I veteran George A. White, a leader of the Paris Caucus that led to the creation of The American Legion. The Sons of the American Legion also owes its beginning to a resolution passed at the 14th National Convention in Portland in 1932. The state has been called upon to host World War II Army Air Corps training bases, Cold War radar installations, and the Umatilla Army Weapons Depot that ultimately became the site of an extensive chemical weapons disposal initiative. And the Oregon National Guard is frequently summoned to pull injured climbers off Mount Hood. In 2016, Charles M. Schmidt was elected to serve as the Legion's first national commander from Oregon.



Boys State across the street

When American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett visited Salem for his veterans walk in December 2015, he took notice of how fortunate Oregon youth are that Willamette University is just across the street from the Oregon State Capitol and the chambers of the state Legislature. That's just one reason Oregon's American Legion Boys State program stands apart. Not only does proximity give Boys Staters an authentic setting, it opens the door to visits from state elected officials and leaders who are happy to share their knowledge of government and the democratic process. Each year, high school students from Hawaii also participate in Oregon Boys State.



■ American Legion Post 43 in La Grande dedicated its new annex in 2016 in memory of Sgt. 1st Class John Scott Stephens, who died March 15, 2007, from wounds sustained in a roadside bomb attack while he was on patrol in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

■ In 1941, construction of the Umatilla Army Ordnance Depot began west of Hermiston. The 20,000-acre site stored Army munitions in 1,000 bunkers and supplied U.S. forces during World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Operation Desert Storm. The area also served as a chemical weapons depot from 1962-1969. The facility later converted to a chemical weapons disposal facility where 12 percent of the nation's chemical weapons are stored.

Beaver State Attractions

Oregon Coast Aquarium – Located in Newport, this world-class facility once was home to Keiko, the killer whale who starred in the film "Free Willy." It features an array of plants and animals of the Oregon coast.



Mount Hood – This spectacular volcanic peak rises 11,250 feet and is home to 11 glaciers, six ski areas and the historic Timberline Lodge, built by the WPA during the Great Depression.



Nez Perce National Historic Park – Includes more than three dozen sites in Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Washington that celebrate the history and culture of the Nez Perce Tribe, including the Nez Perce War of 1877 and the flight of one of the tribe's best known figures, Chief Joseph.

■ **Prairie City Post 106** was chartered in 1922 and grew to the point where a meeting hall was needed in the early 1930s. "The snow was deep, but the men were determined," one historian said of the need to cut logs and haul them with horse teams to the desired location, still in use.

1919

1921

1932

1942

1943

1945

Fourteen Oregon American Legion posts apply for temporary charters on July 28. This includes **American Legion Post 1** in Portland, which begins with more than 5,000 members.

The **U.S. Public Health Service** opens a hospital for veterans in Portland, which later becomes the Portland VA Medical Center.

A resolution establishing the **Sons of the American Legion** passes at the 14th annual American Legion National Convention in Portland.



Henry J. Kaiser opens a major shipbuilding operation in Portland and nearby Vancouver, Wash., that goes on to build Liberty ships, Victory ships, attack transports, troop transports, LSTs and tankers. By 1943, Kaiser shipyards are producing one Liberty ship every 42 days, on average.

Construction of **Camp White** – named for George A. White, one of the founders of The American Legion – begins near Medford. It trains engineering, medical and artillery units during the next three years.

Portland native **Hazel Ah Ying** becomes the first Chinese-American to join the Women Air Force Service Pilots. Ying earns her pilot's license in 1932 but is turned away by both the U.S. Army Air Corps and the Chinese Air Force before joining the WASPs in September 1943. She dies of injuries sustained in an aircraft collision near Great Falls, Mont., the last of the 38 WASPs to die in the line of duty.

The 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion – a segregated unit composed entirely of black soldiers – is stationed in Pendleton. By the end of the year, the so-called Triple-Nickel participates in 36 firefighting missions involving more than 1,200 individual jumps in Oregon, California, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Canada. The 555th is later absorbed by the 82nd Airborne Division.

OREGON Youth Programs

The American Legion Department of Oregon has long been known around the state as a presence of mentorship for children. Programs include holiday parties, student award programs and bookmarks American Legion posts donate to schools with the Pledge of Allegiance on one side and the American flag on the other. Oregon also provides direct help for military and veteran families with minor children at home through the Legion's Temporary Financial Assistance program.

The American Legion Department of Oregon received its first **Frank N. Belgrano Jr. Trophy** in 1951 for outstanding support of Boy Scouts of America. Oregon earned the award again in 1952 and 1954.

In 2015, The American Legion Department of Oregon launched a **Law Enforcement Career Camp** in Salem for youth ages 15-17, in collaboration with the Oregon State Police.

Medford's baseball trophy case

Two-time American Legion Baseball World Series runner-up **Medford Post 15** has racked up numerous state and regional tournament titles, as well as an impressive list of player achievements in recent years.

The Mustangs won 16 state titles, tied with Portland Post 102, through 2018. Five Medford teams have gone on to claim regional American Legion Baseball titles, advancing to the World Series, including two that went on to play for the championship game, in 1997 and 2009.

Twenty-four of Post 15's former players were drafted into the Major Leagues through 2018, including first-round pitchers Brad Arnsberg in 1983 and Braden Shipley in 2013.

The Bob Feller American Legion Pitching Award for most strikeouts in a world series went to Jordan Ragan in 2015, Matt Skundrick in 2002 and Steve Bechler in 1997.

The Dr. Irvin "Click" Cowger Memorial RBI Award for most runs batted in during a world series went to Medford's Micah Brown in 2014 and Brian Facht in 1997.



Vortex 1: Legion-inspired concert for protesters

A clash between Vietnam War protesters and veterans seemed inevitable when newspapers announced The American Legion's national convention was heading to Portland in the fall of 1970 with President Richard Nixon as the keynote speaker. Some 25,000 Legionnaires were expected to attend the convention. The FBI told then-Gov. Tom McCall to plan on 50,000 protesters. Exaggerated fears were fueled by the fact that the Legion convention was scheduled to take place just months after National Guardsmen killed four student protesters and wounded nine others at Kent State University in Ohio.

Some enterprising peace activists calling themselves "The Family" and an aide to the governor came up with an alternative: a free Woodstock-style music festival close enough to Portland to attract the would-be protesters and far enough away to spare the city a major conflict. Ed Westerdahl, chief of staff to Gov. McCall, settled on Milo McIver State Park, 30 miles from Portland, for the show. Law enforcement agreed to ignore illegal drug use and nudity.

What was billed as "Vortex I: A Biodegradable Festival of Life" was a huge success. Some 35,000 people partied peacefully throughout the weekend and then headed home without bothering the Legionnaires. Two smaller low-key protests were held in Portland without incident.

As for Nixon? He was a no-show. He cancelled at the last minute and sent Vice President Spiro Agnew in his place.

Today, Vortex I is called the only state-sponsored rock festival in the history of the United States. That may seem a little bold. But then, so was the whole idea of holding a concert to defuse an anti-war protest.

Highways of Honor

Two Legionnaires from Stevens-Chute Post 4 in Bend know how to put veterans on the map.

In addition to a 451-mile stretch of U.S. Highway 20 from Newport eastward to the Idaho border dedicated as the Medal of Honor Highway, Bob Maxwell and Dick Tobiason have worked to persuade the Legislature to name five other Oregon highways in honor of military service, including the World War II Veterans Historic Highway, connecting eight wartime training sites in the state; the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway; the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq Veterans Memorial Highway; and the Purple Heart Trail along Interstate 5.

No taxpayer funds have gone toward the six highway designations. The Bend Heroes Foundation raised \$110,000 to pay for the 79 highway signs along what is now 2,500 miles of roads recognizing Oregonians' military service. Drivers crossing the state will encounter a highway sign honoring veterans about every hour, Tobiason says. This includes approximately 500,000 Oregon veterans who have served in five major conflicts since World War I – 6,022 who were killed and 15,000 who were wounded.



Junior SHOOTING SPORTS



There are so many good shooters in the country, and these are the top 15. These are the top dogs. You just have to have confidence.

Taylor Gibson of Salem, who won the American Legion Junior 3-Position National Air Rifle Precision Championship in 2016. Gibson was fairly new to competitive shooting when she took the Legion title, but the years since then have been little short of astounding: in addition to returning to Legion national competition in 2018, she holds the Legion precision final score record, three Army JROTC records and the Junior Club precision final score record. The 2019 North Salem High School graduate signed a letter of intent to shoot for the University of Memphis' NCAA rifle team, and has a goal of shooting at the Olympics.

■ **James P. Dutton Jr.** of Eugene received The American Legion's General Muir S. Fairchild Award in 1991 as the "graduating (U.S. Air Force Academy) cadet who demonstrates the highest proficiency in all academic subjects."



■ **Air Force veteran Kent Erickson** — having spent every Friday for eight years delivering comfort items, personally visiting veterans and assisting the American Legion Auxiliary with its Christmas shop in the Portland VA Health Care System — was The American Legion's 2016 National VA Volunteer Services Worker of the Year. A member of American Legion Post 158 in Tigard, he was honored at the organization's 57th Washington Conference on Feb. 27, 2017.

Contact The American Legion of Oregon

Louis J. "Lou" Neubecker – Department Adjutant

30450 SW Parkway Ave.

P.O. Box 1730

Wilsonville, OR 97070

☎ 503.685.5006 ✉ hq@orlegion.org



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Did you know?

Five Oregon teams have finished runner-up in The American Legion Baseball World Series. Medford Post 15 took second in 2009 and 1997. Post 92 of Lake Oswego was runner-up in 1974, as was Klamath Falls Post 8 in 1968 and Portland Post 102 in 1957.

1964

U.S. Sen. Wayne Morse, D-Ore., casts one of two votes against the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which opens the door to the Vietnam War.

1968

Duane D. Hodges of Creswell is killed when a North Korean vessel fires upon USS *Pueblo* during the capture of the spy ship; a memorial to him is later erected in his hometown.

1983

The U.S. Air Force selects a site in **Christmas Valley** in eastern Oregon for a radar defense installation. But as the Cold War winds down, the facility closes in 2005.

1988

The new **Portland VA Medical Center** hospital opens.

2001

After years of planning, the federal government constructs the **Umatilla Chemical Agent disposal facility** for \$395 million. Chemical weapons incineration begins in 2004 and finishes in 2011.

2013

Oregon's first air war ace and former Flying Tiger pilot **Ken Jernstedt** passes away at age 95. An original member of the American Volunteer Group when he resigned his officer's commission to join the Flying Tigers in 1941, Jernstedt and other pilots with the 3rd Squadron fought the Japanese over the Burma Road. Jernstedt was credited with downing more than 10 Japanese aircraft.



2017

Members of **American Legion Post 134** turn their building into a free warming shelter for hundreds of Portland's homeless residents amid a brutal cold snap. Donors bring soup and other food. Clothing and blanket donations come from as far away as the East Coast. Former Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski, a Marine Corps veteran, stops by and gives his winter coat to one of the homeless men.