



# EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

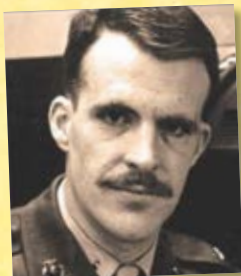
# VIRGINIA

*Virginia's membership delegation has footprints in the halls of Congress, the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency and other high-profile institutions in the nation's capital. Past National Commander Dan Daniel, for example, was elected to Congress. At the same time, posts throughout the commonwealth exemplify the Legion's Four Pillars at the grassroots level with activities in their communities. A prime example of the Legion's commitment to youth occurs every summer when 98 Boys Nation participants descend on Marymount University for a week of leadership training, bonding and fun, overseen by American Legion volunteers and staff members.*

## VA Legionnaires



**John J. Wicker**, who served as department commander in 1923-24, was among the founders of The American Legion at the Paris Caucus. He was a member of Post 1.



**Robert Bowen** is a past national vice commander and well-known photojournalist during the Vietnam War.



World War II veteran **George Blume**, who served as department commander, is well known for his commitment to the Boys State program. Blume attended Boys State as a youth in 1941 and after the war commenced a decades-long role with the Virginia department program.



## Buck's cannon

Virginia is a state rich with history and full of American Legion members dedicated to preserving memories of past wars. It should be no surprise that an American Legion post worked tirelessly to restore an artifact dating to World War I, the time of the organization's founding.

American Legion Post 104 in Appomattox Court House has dedicated a World War I-era cannon, a project that united local veterans and the community. The dedication was more than a year in the making as the cannon was restored after being acquired by James "Buck" Owen, a past post commander.

Owen discovered the cannon on a property near his home during a walk. After the landowner passed away, the family donated it to Owen.

Much of the cannon was rusted. The wheels' wooden spokes were rotted. Birds' nests filled the barrel. Post members, including Owen, began to restore it, disassembling the iron pieces using an acetylene torch and impact wrench. The post reached out to an expert who does restoration work for the Smithsonian Institute; he rebuilt the wheels using the original rims and hubs.

Post members wire-brushed every part before priming, then researched to find the correct olive drab paint.

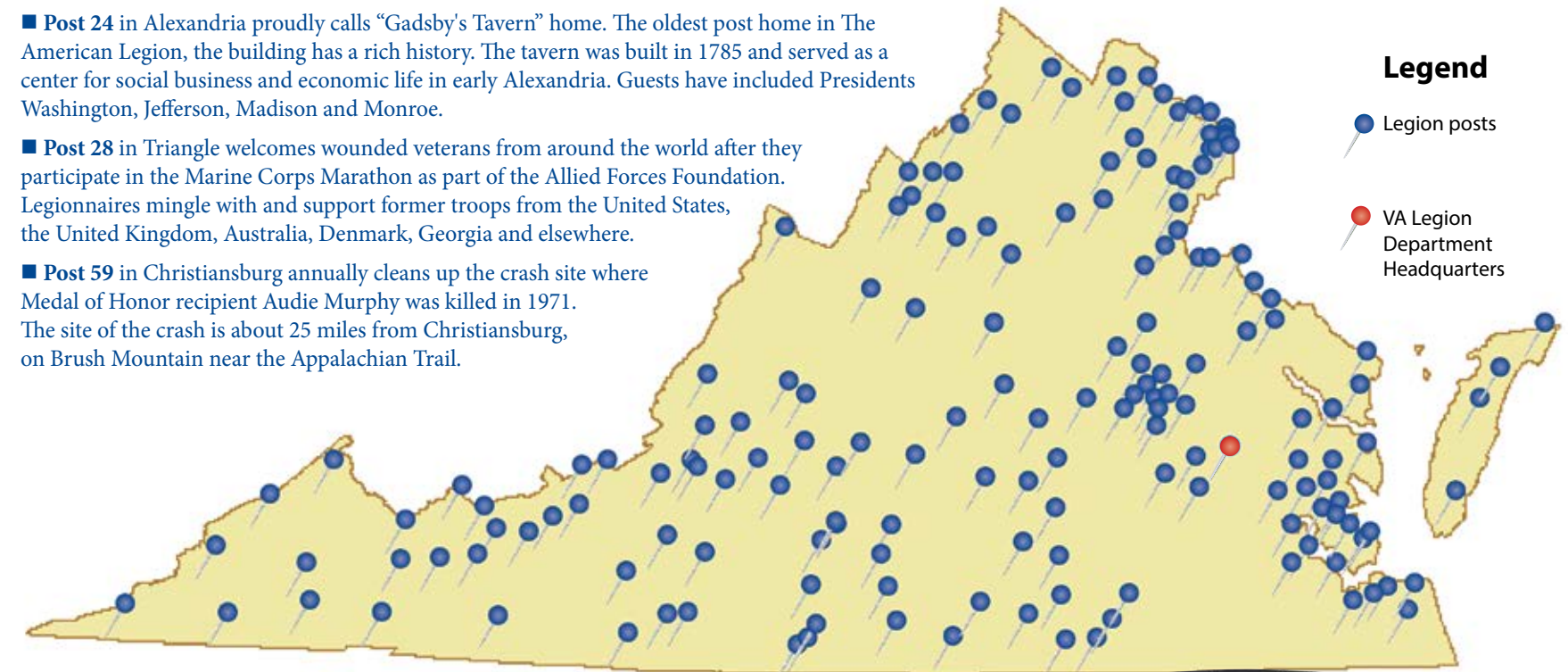
After thousands of hours of labor and about \$16,000 in costs, the 3-inch field gun went back on the cannon. It was not restored to look new, but to look authentic.

"We left all the bullet dings in it and everything," Owen said. "We wanted it to look the part."

■ **Post 24** in Alexandria proudly calls "Gadsby's Tavern" home. The oldest post home in The American Legion, the building has a rich history. The tavern was built in 1785 and served as a center for social business and economic life in early Alexandria. Guests have included Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Madison and Monroe.

■ **Post 28** in Triangle welcomes wounded veterans from around the world after they participate in the Marine Corps Marathon as part of the Allied Forces Foundation. Legionnaires mingle with and support former troops from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Denmark, Georgia and elsewhere.

■ **Post 59** in Christiansburg annually cleans up the crash site where Medal of Honor recipient Audie Murphy was killed in 1971. The site of the crash is about 25 miles from Christiansburg, on Brush Mountain near the Appalachian Trail.



### Legend

● Legion posts

● VA Legion Department Headquarters

■ **Post 270** in McLean lists a who's-who in U.S. military history among its members, including Gen. Alexander Haig, a former White House chief of staff and former Secretary of State; former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel; and Gen. Colin Powell, former Secretary of State.

■ **Post 364** in Grundy has a long-running Boys Scout Day at the Breaks Interstate Park in southwest Virginia. More than 200 Scouts and their leaders attend the event, where the post handles everything from meals to awards.



## Old Dominion Attractions



**Arlington National Cemetery:** In Arlington, across the Potomac River from the nation's capital, 624 acres of hallowed ground house the final resting places for the nation's war dead.



**The Carillon Tower:** The American Legion supported and helped fund the 240-foot, 56-bell tower, a memorial to the 3,700 Virginians who died fighting in World War I. The Richmond landmark can still be played today. A carillonneur strikes a pedal keyboard just below the bell chamber.



**Virginia War Memorial:** The American Legion hosts both Veterans Day and Memorial Day events at the Virginia War Memorial in the heart of Richmond, 621 S. Belvidere St. The Legion was instrumental in the memorial's creation from a support role and contributed \$1,000. The memorial features a museum and education center named for American Legion member and former POW Paul Galanti. The Paul and Phyllis Galanti Education Center features exhibits featuring all of America's wars, 18 award-winning movies in its theater and the Shrine of Memory, which has the names of more than 11,600 Virginians killed in war.

1919

Facing a dire financial situation, John J. Wicker persuades the Virginia General Assembly on its last day of meetings to appropriate a bill of \$5,000 that allows the department to continue and expand operations. Ninety-one posts are established by the first state convention Oct. 6-7 in Roanoke.

1920

Post 83 in Mathews County donates \$500 for the county's first library, where it meets from 1930-73 before moving into its own post home.



1923

Post 25 in Newport News conducts a community service project as part of the city's Homecoming Week. The Legion post leads a tree-planting campaign to plant more than 1,500 shade trees around the city.

1946

Gen. George C. Marshall, former Army Chief of Staff, dedicates the new post home for Post 140 at Appomattox Court House, which is still being used today.



1976

Alexandria Post 24 saves the historic Gadsby's Tavern from destruction when the city wanted to demolish it. Today, the building houses the post, a tavern and a historical museum.

1979

Charles Wilson is elected department commander, becoming the only blind person to hold the office.

1985

Post 186 wins the American Legion World Series, the only post team in the state to do so. Post 186 has sponsored a Legion Baseball team since 1961.



# PROGRAMS in Virginia



**Joint Leadership Council (JLC):** The American Legion Department of Virginia leads a group of 23 veterans service organizations that meet throughout the year and devise a wish list for the state legislature. While the Legion still advocates directly with state lawmakers, the JLC represents all veterans throughout the state. Its wish list prioritizes the issues on behalf of more than 250,000 veterans. Among the JLC's successes: pushing through legislation that reduced tuition rates for state veterans.

**Legion Baseball:** Houston Astros starting pitcher Justin Verlander, who won the American League Most Valuable Player and Cy Young awards in 2011, played American Legion Baseball for Powhatan Post 201. Verlander has returned to his roots to throw out the first pitch at various Legion Baseball games.

**Oratorical contest:** Virginia boasts two winners of the national Oratorical contest, Jeanne Mann Dickinson of Roanoke in 1951 and Keith R. Finch of Blacksburg in 1983.



## VA Claims Builder

Service officers in Virginia voluntarily assist veterans with getting their health-care claims taken care of efficiently. Service officers are assisted by a digital tool helps them improve the accuracy and timeliness of VA claims.

The Mil-Vet Advocacy Project, Inc. website, which ensures privacy, walks service officers through a series of questions with veterans for a comprehensive review of their claims. The information, which can be saved and updated later, is private – each veteran selects a personal identification number to log in to their information.

In the first few months of using the digital tool, service officers were able to file nearly 300 claims – a much higher rate than before. It can be used to help veterans from all war eras, whether or not they are already in the VA system.

## Past national commanders



**Eldon James,**  
Post 31 in Hampton



**Butch Miller,**  
Post 364 in Woodbridge



**Dan Daniel,**  
Post 1097 in Danville



**Dan Dellinger,**  
Post 180 in Vienna

Led by Post 24 in Alexandria, there is a strong American Legion presence in the city's annual Presidents Day Parade. The mile-long parade is the nation's oldest and largest celebration of the first U.S. president's birthday.



## Did you know?

**Capt. Lloyd W. Williams**, who commanded the 51st Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, is the namesake of Post 41 in Berryville. In June 1918, Williams and his unit arrived to support the retreating French and British at Belleau Wood. Upon their arrival, Williams was handed a note ordering them to retreat. The Marine officer told the Frenchman, "Retreat, hell! We just got here." Even though Williams died in the battle nine days later, the Marine regiment uses his slogan – "Retreat, hell" – as its motto today.



# Post-9/11 VA LEGION

**When I came back from Iraq and Afghanistan, one thing that I didn't have to deal with is getting spit on at airports, people calling me names, that sort of thing. I received a warm welcome when I came back from my deployments. The reason that happened is because a lot of Vietnam and Korean War veterans did not receive that warm welcome and they are not going to stand idly by and let that happen to other veterans.**

**Devin Bright**, a member of Post 177 in Fairfax

When Devin Bright returned from the War on Terrorism, he found camaraderie at Post 177 in Fairfax. Bright wanted more than friendship, however. He wanted to express his gratitude to the veterans who came before him, so he volunteered to help the post and its Riders chapter.

For years, Post 177 and its Riders chapter have played a significant role in the remembrance events on Memorial Day weekend. The post regularly serves as a staging area for the pre-dawn journey to link up with other Rolling Thunder participants.

"It's a huge event, it's the cornerstone event for the American Legion Riders chapter we have here," said Bright, the chapter's head road captain. "We do a lot of other things, veterans outreach and more, but this is probably number one for us."



## Secretaries of the Navy:

Two former Secretaries of Navy – John Warner and Sen. Jim Webb – were members of The American Legion.



John Warner



Jim Webb

## Contact The American Legion of Virginia

**Dale Chapman – Department Adjutant**  
1708 Commonwealth Avenue  
Richmond, VA 23230  
804.353.6606 [www.valegion.org](http://www.valegion.org)



## Join The American Legion

[www.legion.org/join](http://www.legion.org/join)

**Sept. 11, 2001**

American Airlines Flight 77, hijacked by terrorists, crashes into the Pentagon in Arlington. The Pentagon Memorial is dedicated on the attack's seventh anniversary to honor the 184 killed on the flight and in the building as part of the attack that thrust the United States into the War on Terrorism.



**2001-02**

The department hits its highest membership total since 1945 with 56,683. The department also reaches new highs in 2005-06 (57,823), 2006-07 (59,086) and 2007-08 (59,941).



**2002**

Danville Post 325 hosts the American Legion Baseball World Series.

**2007**

President George W. Bush delivers a nationally televised speech at Fairfax Post 177 related to a bill for funding the Iraq War.

**2009**

Medal of Honor recipient and Legionnaire Van Thomas Barfoot is ordered by his homeowners association to remove a 21-foot flagpole from his property in Henrico County. Thanks to support from The American Legion, other military groups and the public, the association drops its request in less than a week.

