



# EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

# WASHINGTON

Washington's veterans have played key roles in the history of The American Legion, from the Paris Caucus that led to the creation of the nation's largest veterans service organization to the shooting at Centralia where four Legionnaires were killed during the first Armistice Day Parade in 1919. Washington Legionnaires elected the first female state commander, and the Evergreen State also was first to name a woman to lead its state Department of Veterans Affairs. Washington Legionnaires developed a seamless process for helping servicemembers transition to civilian life with their VA benefits in place and today are attracting Post 9/11 veterans into their ranks by focusing on family friendliness and service.

## Washington Legionnaires



**Lemuel L. Bolles** made his mark during the Legion's founding Paris Caucus in March 1919 by calling on his fellow service members to put aside military rank as they worked to form what became The American Legion. Bolles coordinated the first national convention in Minneapolis, where he was named the Legion's first national adjutant. The Lemuel Bolles Trophy is today awarded to the winner of the band competition at each national convention.

**Paul W. Houser, Sr.**, was a veteran of the Spanish American War and World War I, who served six years in the Washington House of Representatives and 12 in the state Senate. Houser was one of the founding members of American Legion Frank Hancock Post 19 in July 1919 in Renton and served as the post's first commander.



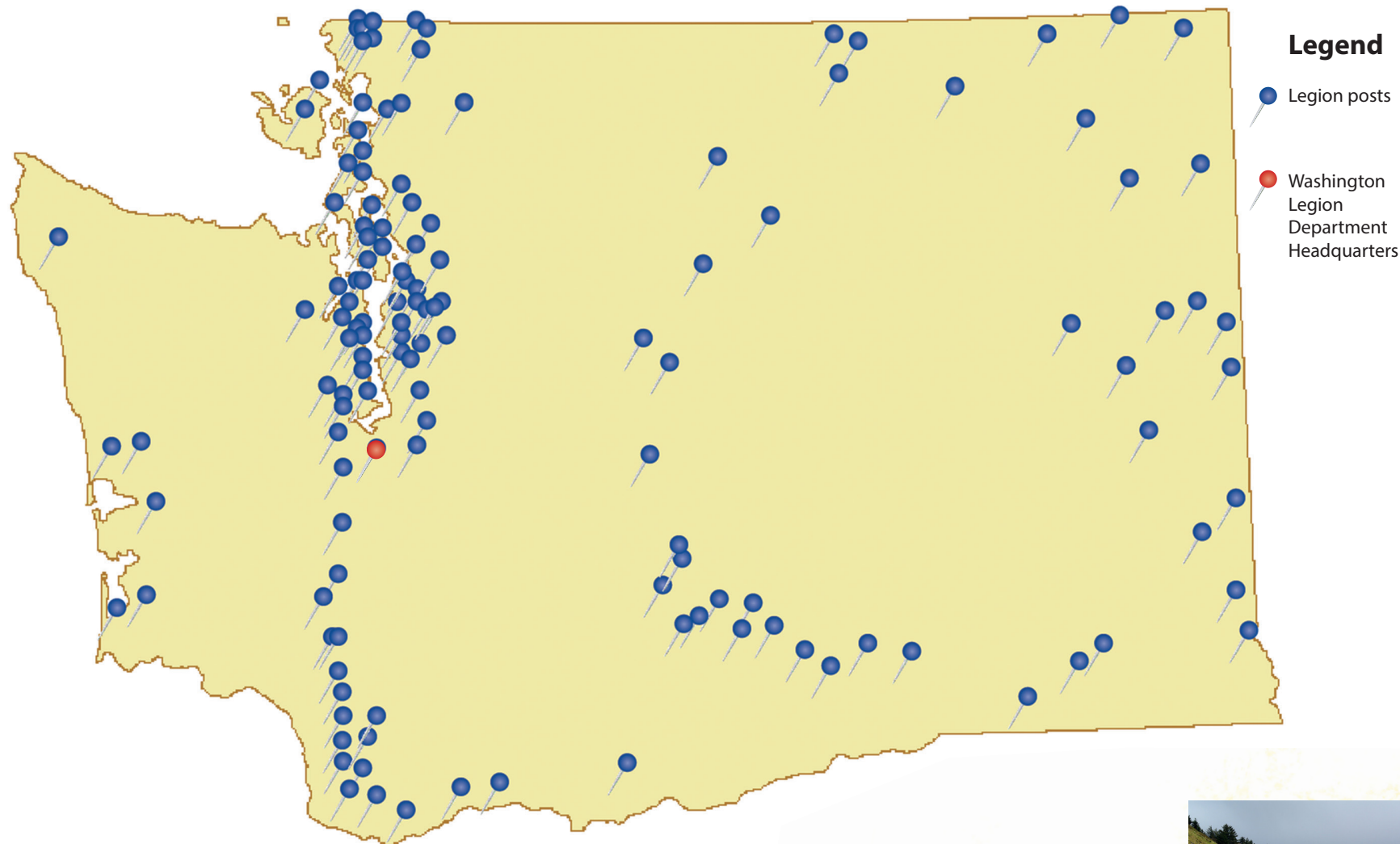
**Doris Gross** made history as the first female American Legion department commander when she was elected to lead the state in 1978. The World War II Navy veteran went on to become a national vice commander in 1986. "Women do well if they get the chance," Gross told *The Seattle Times*. She co-founded American Legion Service Girls Post 204 in West Seattle, worked on the national World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., and helped bring a national veterans cemetery to Kent. She died in 2015.



## Support in times of disaster

When natural disasters strike, members of The American Legion Department of Washington step up. A good example: the 2015 wildfire season that scorched a massive swath of the Evergreen State. American Legion Post 157 in Electric City became a relief center for hundreds of people chased out of their homes by wildfires. Members and volunteers rounded up food and clothing for those who were stranded. They also provided energy drinks, snacks and personal supplies for hundreds of firefighters and support crews, supplied breakfast cereal to an American Red Cross shelter and diapers for the local hospital. Post member and Vietnam veteran Ben Alling was on the fire lines. Other Legion volunteers delivered more than 500 pounds of supplies to the firefighter camp at Nespelem.

American Legion Auxiliary Unit 10 in Wenatchee also launched relief efforts as a dozen major wildfires caused emergency evacuations that included American Legion posts in Twisp and Winthrop



### Legend

- Legion posts
- Washington Legion Department Headquarters

## Evergreen State Attractions



**Fort Vancouver National Historic Site:** Also known as the Vancouver Barracks, it was established in 1849, the first U.S. Army post in the Northwest. Ulysses S. Grant, Philip H. Sheridan, George B. McClellan, George Pickett and O.O. Howard became generals here.

**Heritage Flight Museum:** Just west of Burlington, Wash., the museum was started by the family of Apollo 8 astronaut William Anders in 1996. Its holdings include everything from an Stearman biplane to an A-1 Skyraider.



**Grand Coulee Dam:** The largest concrete structure ever built, the dam generated electricity for Hanford Nuclear Reservation and aircraft and aluminum plants that were part of the effort to win World War II. "Probably Hitler would have beaten us in atom bomb development if it had not been for the hydroelectric development of the Columbia, making possible the big Hanford project which brought forth the bomb," Vice Presidential Candidate Earl Warren said in 1948.



**Cape Disappointment:** On the north shore at the mouth of the Columbia River, the cape earned its name after Capt. John Meares was unable to cross these waters in 1788. It was visited by the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805. The military post at Cape Disappointment was established in 1862 to protect the area from foreign invasion and from Confederate troops. It was later part of a three-fort defense at the entrance of the Columbia River and then turned over to the state in the 1950s for use as a state park.

1919

On June 20, **Elmer J. Noble Post 1**, named for a former University of Washington football star who was killed in the Argonne Forest, becomes the first officially chartered American Legion post in the Evergreen State.

1921

**Fort Walla Walla**, first established in 1856, is turned over to the Veterans Administration and later becomes the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial VA Medical Center.

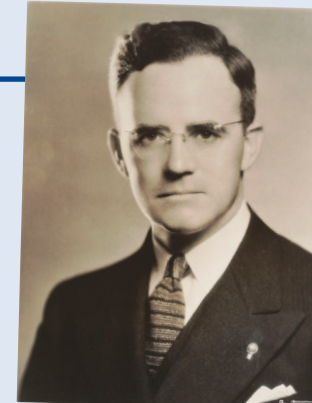


1924

**James A. Drain** of Post 9 in Spokane is elected national commander of The American Legion. He would raise \$5 million in one year to start The American Legion Endowment Fund.

1938

**Stephen F. Chadwick** of Post 18 in Seattle is elected national commander of The American Legion. During his tenure, he met at Arlington National Cemetery with Cuban dictator Col. Fulgencio Batista.



1943

The U.S. government secures 530 square miles of land in south central Washington to produce plutonium for an atomic bomb code-named "Fat Man." It was detonated over Nagasaki, on Aug. 9, 1945. Japan surrendered a week later, ending World War II.

1966

Congress designates **Fort Vancouver** as a national historic site. The Hudson's Bay Co., established it as a fur-trading post in 1842. The U.S. Army built the Fort Vancouver Barracks in 1849. It became a national monument in 1948 and a national historic site in 1966.





## Yakima's legacy of Legion success

Few American Legion Baseball programs have been as successful as the Yakima Pepsi Beetles over the last century. The team has won three American Legion World Series championships (1953, 1975 and 1979), four Northwest Regional tournaments and 24 state titles. Through the years, nearly 40 Beetles have gone on to play Major League Baseball. Parker Field in Yakima was also the host diamond for three American Legion Baseball World Series tournaments before the event was moved to a permanent site in Shelby, N.C.



## Legionnaires in Veterans Affairs

**Lourdes E. Alvarado-Ramos** became the first woman named director of the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs in January 2013. Alvarado-Ramos served 22 years in the Army, retiring in August 1993 as command sergeant major at Madigan Army Medical Center at what is now

Joint Base Lewis-McChord. She joined the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs in 1993 and was named deputy director in 2005. She is a member of American Legion Post 264 in Rainier.

**Gary Condra**, deputy director of the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, is a member of American Legion Post 110 in Lacey. Condra previously served as chief financial officer at WDVA. He joined WDVA in June 1998 as the associate superintendent of the Washington Soldiers Home in Orting. He oversaw construction of the first State Veterans Cemetery in Medical Lake. He earlier spent 20 years in the U.S. Army Medical Service Corps and retired in 1998 as a lieutenant colonel.

**Mary Forbes**, assistant director for veterans services at the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, was recognized as a Champion of Change during a White House ceremony in 2014 honoring women veteran leaders. She served 26 years with the Army and the Washington Army National Guard. She is a member of American Legion Post 53 in DuPont.

**John E. Lee**, former director of the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, had a 21-year Army career that included the Vietnam War. He retired as command sergeant major at Fort Lewis in 1990, and in 2008 received VA's prestigious Diamond Award for service to veterans. He is a member of American Legion Post 3 in Olympia.



## The American Legion and the Wobbly War

It stands as one of the most tragic events in the early days of The American Legion. Four unarmed World War I veterans were killed by members of the International Workers of the World – known as the Wobblies – during the 1919 Armistice Day parade in the western Washington logging town of Centralia.

Some accounts hold that the Legionnaires were doing nothing more than participating in a patriotic event when they were gunned down. Others say that the Wobblies started shooting after veterans broke from the parade and charged the IWW hall in Centralia. No matter which is accurate, the Wobblies were to blame, *The American Legion Weekly* reported. "None of the ex-service men carried weapons, and the careful preparation of the trap by the IWW precludes any possibility that they were hurriedly resisting an attack."

The altercation started when the parade reached the IWW hall and "the sudden fusillade of rifle and pistol shots poured into the ranks of marching, unarmed war veterans," the magazine reported. Three Legionnaires were killed – Warren O. Grimm, Ben Casangranda and Arthur McElfresh. A fourth Legionnaire, Dale Hubbard, was killed a short while later as he pursued one of the Wobblies. Hubbard's accused killer, Wesley Everetts, was lynched by unidentified assailants later that evening. Seven members of the IWW were convicted of second-degree murder.

A bronze statue of a World War I soldier was erected in Centralia's George Washington Park in 1924 to remember the four Legionnaires killed during in the massacre. A plaque at the memorial reads, in part, "Slain in the streets of Centralia, Washington, while on peaceful parade wearing the uniform of the country they loyally and faithfully served."

## Did you know?

**American Legion National Commander James A. Drain of Spokane rose to brigadier general in the Washington National Guard and led reforms that would be adopted nationwide. He later served as adjutant under Gen. John Pershing in World War I and was a leader in the development of a U.S. tank program. He lost his right hand in a hunting accident in 1900 but never let that stop him. His 1929 autobiography was titled "Single Handed."**

## Washington Legion helped build model for separating personnel

The American Legion's Department of Washington has been instrumental in helping active-duty members of the military make seamless transitions to civilian status and the VA system. The Department of Washington formed an alliance with DoD, VA and the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs called the **Fort Lewis VA Pre-Separation Benefits Center**. Beginning in February 1997, American Legion service officers and volunteers have been working with state and federal agencies to address VA claims, get compensation and pension exams and deal with other issues beginning six months before a service-member's discharge date. The effort has meant that service-members were able to leave the military with their VA claims already approved in nearly all cases.

The program earned the Governor's Award for Service and

Quality Improvement in 2000. Vice President Al Gore also presented the program with the Golden Hammer Award.

Mary Davis, initially hired as secretary for the center, went on to become the American Legion Pre-Separation Office manager, then the Pierce County supervisor for The American Legion Service Division. In 2006, she became the Department Service Division training officer, instructing hundreds of Legion Family members how to assist veterans with the VA benefits process, until she retired in 2014. She was elected national president of The American Legion Auxiliary in the fall of 2016.

Although the Legion is no longer directly involved in the program, "we proved that the model worked, and VA is still doing it," says Dale Davis, former adjutant for the Department of Washington.

## POST-9/11 WA LEGION

**There's no secret recipe for engaging post- 9/11 veterans. You just have to have to seek out what that veteran is passionate about. What makes them tick. If they are passionate about fishing, then you sit down and you produce a program that allows that veteran to include his fellow veteran in fishing. If they're passionate about riding motorcycles, you let them know how they can engage their fellow veterans as American Legion Riders.**



**Washington Department Adjutant Leo Gruba**, former Pat Tillman Memorial American Legion Post 53 and 4th District Commander.

It's no surprise that Pat Tillman Memorial American Legion Post 53 in DuPont is one of the fastest growing Legion posts in Washington and that it's successfully adding younger veterans. Post 53 is focused on family, community service and caring for fellow veterans. "The main thing you are going to have to do to get younger guys to join is to show them there's a benefit to them and their family to being involved," says Past Department of Washington Commander Bob Schwartz, who went door-to-door recruiting new members beginning in 2007. "We are defining success by making it a family affair." "Prior to having kids, I spent my entire adult life away from my family," says former Post 53 Commander Leo Gruba, now the adjutant for the Department of Washington. "Now when I walk out the door because I want to serve, I want to include my family."

The DuPont community knows Post 53 as the go-to service organization for sponsoring Little League teams, raising money for scholarships or gathering donations for the food bank. Legionnaires also lend a hand to Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, host candidate forums, and regularly clean up a highway interchange. Providing direct support to high school cheerleaders was one way the post has gotten to know parents, some of whom joined the Legion Family. "These are people who wanted to be active because they realized we are there for our local community," Gruba says.

## Contact The American Legion of Washington

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## Join The American Legion

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

1982-83

**The American Legion and Canadian Legion** join forces to build and dedicate a friendship marker on the U.S.–Canada border to show and remind all Americans and Canadians that the friendship between the two countries will never diminish.

1992

A Native American-centered PTSD treatment program opens at **Camp Chaparral** on sacred Yakima Nation land in central Washington to offer spiritual medicine and tribal approaches to healing.

2004

VA's CARES Commission recommends closing the inpatient unit of the Jonathan M. Wainwright Memorial **VA Medical Center in Walla Walla** despite protests from The American Legion.

2007

**American Legion Post 44** in Ridgefield – founded in 1922 – is revived by Legionnaires. Notable past members of the historic post include Dorothy Dwyer, who served on Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's staff in North Africa.



2009

**American Legion Post 100** in Lacey / Tumwater opens and is named in honor of Sgt. Justin Dean Norton, who was killed in Iraq in June 2006.

2012

The Lower Elwha Klallam tribal community celebrates the opening of American Legion **Elwha Post 121**. The post was started by Jerry Charles and William Sanchez, who wanted to create a post for tribal veterans.

2013

**Growing Veterans** starts the first farmer's market at the Seattle VA Medical Center. Founded by Marine Corps veteran Chris Brown and organic farmer and counselor Christina Wolf in 2012, the market helps veterans dealing with PTSD.

