



# EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF

# WYOMING

Wyoming's rich history of military service, patriotic values and commitment to youth is illustrated year-round by the state's American Legion members. Fifty-seven American Legion posts can be found across Wyoming's sprawling landscape. The influence these posts have had on young people is more than profound. Wyoming's American Legion Boys State, American Legion Baseball, Junior Shooting Sports and Oratorical competitions have produced leaders and champions, including one U.S. vice president. The American Legion's involvement in the Wyoming High School Rodeo program is unparalleled anywhere in the country. And, if you should happen to see a patch on a leather vest depicting a walrus on a motorcycle, that's The American Legion in Wyoming, too.

## Wyoming Legionnaires



**Emil A. Blackmore** of Wyoming was the first World War II veteran to become national adjutant of The American Legion. He held the office from July 1, 1956, until his death on April 21, 1967. Born in Rawlins, he served in the U.S. Navy from 1943 to 1946. He worked as VA contact officer and was the service officer at American Legion Travis Snow Post 5 in Torrington after the war.

**Jim Whipps**, a Vietnam veteran and Post 29 member, has been a major force supporting the Wyoming High School Rodeo program. This includes bolstering a college scholarship program that now awards tens of thousands of dollars each year to Wyoming's top high school rodeo competitors.



**Todd White**, Vietnam War Army veteran, spent 29 years with the Wyoming Department of Transportation, and has served in multiple American Legion national capacities including: National Executive Committee, National Vice Commander, National Public Relations Commission, Veterans Preference Committee, National Legislative Council, Foreign Relations Commission, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission and National Commander's Advisory Committee. A member of Floyd Minch Post 44 in Worland, he has served on the national System Worth Saving Task Force since 2004.

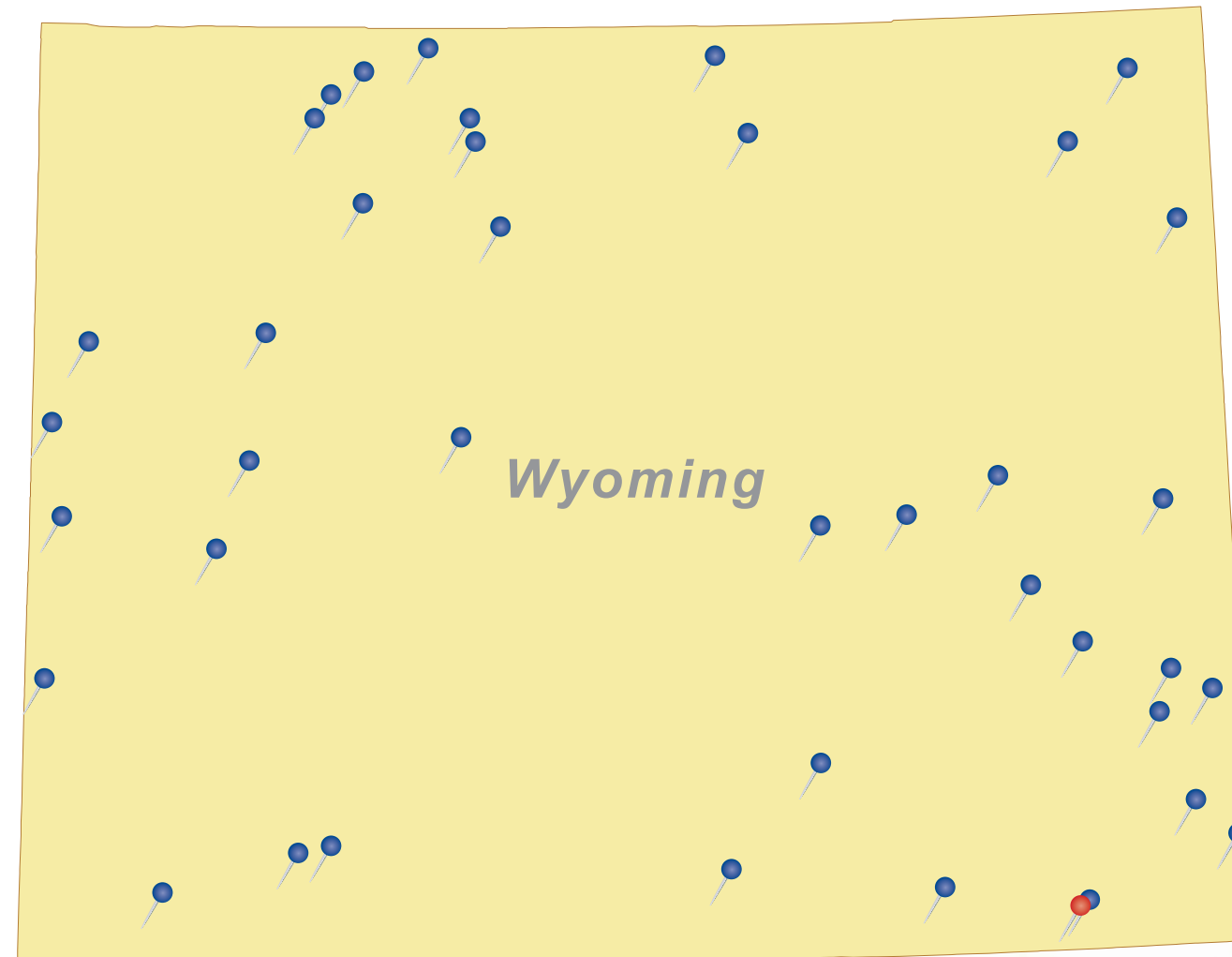


## High school rodeo and the Legion

Wyoming's High School Rodeo program was the outgrowth of competition started by World War II veterans in the southwestern part of the state in the early 1950s. It became an official program of The American Legion Department of Wyoming in 1959, the only one of its kind throughout the nation. Today, it produces some of the top rodeo talent in the country, tens of thousands of dollars in college scholarships, camaraderie, independence, and confidence for young people.

"This is the strongest youth organization the Legion can be involved with," longtime Casper College rodeo coach Tom Parker told *The American Legion Magazine* in 2012. "Every member of The American Legion in Wyoming has the same goal in mind – to help kids, support them and encourage them to become leaders."

The American Legion Department of Wyoming helps fund college scholarships for rodeo participants. **Donations can be made to WHRSA Scholarships, c/o American Legion Department of Wyoming, 1320 Hugur Ave., Cheyenne, WY 82001.**



### Legend

- Legion post
- Wyoming Legion Department Headquarters



If you see a walrus in Wyoming, chances are it is not native to the state. More likely, it's found on the leathers of an American Legion Rider. The Wyoming American Legion Riders for the U.S. (WALRUS) is one of the department's fastest growing and most popular programs.

## Attractions in The Cowboy State



The Wyoming American Legion cap depicts a bucking horse and rider on the right side and the Legion emblem on the front. The Department of Wyoming was granted an exception when the cap design changed.

The three largest Wyoming American Legion posts in 1927 were No. 2 in Casper with 314 members, No. 6 in Cheyenne with 256 and No. 37 in Midwest with 201 members.

When American Legion Post 26 in Powell was chartered on Dec. 23, 1919, it had 31 members, and dues were a hefty \$12 a year, or nearly \$167 a year in 2016 dollars.

**American Legion Peak**, elevation 13,205, is located in the Wind River Mountain Range.



**Ferdinand Branstetter Post No. 1 – Van Tassel:** Wyoming veterans say this is one of the first American Legion posts. The Van Tassel post was named for a homesteader who was the first soldier from the area killed in World War I.

**Veteran, Wyo.,** population 28, got its name from the fact that it's located in Goshen County – the last land opened to homesteading in the continental United States. Legend says the only American Legion post with veteran in its name was located here. Traces of a World War II POW camp still remain.



1919

**Vernon J. Baker** is born in Cheyenne. Baker became one of the most highly decorated black World War II veterans and received the Medal of Honor in 1996 for his heroism along the Gothic Line in Italy in April 1945.



1922

The **Bureau of Health** opens a 300-bed hospital in Sheridan for World War I veterans suffering from what is now known as PTSD. By the end of World War II, it had 900 beds. Today, this VA hospital has more than 200 beds.

1930

Fort Russell's name is changed to **Fort Warren** in honor of Francis E. Warren, Wyoming's first U.S. senator. Warren received the Medal of Honor at age 19 for his heroism during the Civil War.

1948

The first **Wyoming Boys State** is held on Casper Mountain in rustic log buildings near Beartrap Meadow. It snowed the entire week.

1954

**Wyoming High School Rodeo program** – sponsored by The American Legion – holds its first statewide finals competition. An outgrowth of an event started by World War II veterans in southwestern Wyoming in the late 1940s, the program annually produces some of the best rodeo talent in the country. Through the years an estimated 90 percent of participants have gone on to college.

1958

**Dick Cheney**, who would go on to become Defense Secretary during the Gulf War and vice president during the George W. Bush administration, is a Wyoming Boys State delegate from Casper.



# FIGURES IN WYOMING Legion History



**Jerry Hand** was one of eight delegates from Casper to attend the first Boys State in Wyoming in June 1948 on Casper Mountain. Hand and his four brothers and two sisters had been featured in a photograph in the

Pacific edition of *Stars & Stripes* during World War II because of the war bonds they bought with money they earned selling popcorn and other snacks at the park across from their home in Casper. Hand and his four brothers all served in the Army. He became the first University of Wyoming law school graduate to clerk for a justice on the U.S. Court of Appeals. He served as Natrona County prosecuting attorney from 1959 to 1967 and municipal judge in Casper from 1967 to 1979. He has been on the Boys State staff for more than 40 years.

**Dick Cheney** was a 1958 Boys State delegate from Casper. He went on to work in the White House during the Nixon and Ford administrations, and then served as Wyoming's lone U.S. representative from 1979 to 1989. Cheney was Defense Secretary under President George H.W. Bush and vice president from 2001 to 2009.



**Ed Herschler**, known as "Gov. Ed," was Wyoming's only three-term governor, serving from 1975 to 1987. Herschler served with the Marine Corps in the South Pacific during World War II and was a member of American Legion Post 55 in Kemmerer. He was active in American Legion Boys State.

**Leonard Robinson** served in the 200th Coast Artillery in the Philippines during World War II. He survived the Bataan Death March and endured more than three years as a POW in a Japanese death camp. He later earned a doctorate in divinity and became pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Casper in 1973. A member of American Legion Post 2 in Casper, he was one of the most popular presenters at



Boys State until his death in 2014 at age 95.



## The 7th Cavalry Drum & Bugle Corps

When the 7th Cavalry Drum & Bugle Corps was started in 1929 by members of American Legion Post 7 in Sheridan, its members performed in parades, rodeos and competitions wearing their World War I uniforms. That changed in 1954, when they received congressional approval to wear replicas of the uniforms worn by the 7th Cavalry in the 1870s. They turned out in their new uniforms for the first time in June 1954 on the 78th anniversary of Custer's Last Stand, which took place less than 100 miles from Sheridan. The group is one of a dwindling number of Legion drum and bugle corps in the nation and was invited to march in the Memorial Day Parade in Washington, D.C., in 2006. It continues to perform throughout the region.

Wyoming is the least populated state in the nation at a little over 500,000 permanent residents, a number that fluctuates with oil prices. Among them are more than 40,000 U.S. wartime veterans, of whom nearly 7,000 are members of The American Legion.

There were an estimated 18 World War II prisoner of war camps in Wyoming, including main camps in Douglas and Cheyenne and satellite camps in Basin, Dubois, Ryan Park and other areas. The Heart Mountain Relocation Center was one of the camps the World War II Japanese interment camps.

Wyoming's iconic bucking horse and rider silhouette has a place in the state's military and American Legion history, although the origin of the image has been the source of historical debate. According to the Wyoming Secretary of State website, the logo found on license plates and University of Wyoming sports apparel "was used as an insignia worn by members of the Wyoming National Guard in France and Germany during World War I." It was later used by Wyoming units serving in the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

The Automobile License Plate Collectors Association traces the image back to a 1909 postcard of a rodeo bronc rider in an almost identical pose but facing left. The rider is believed to be Clayton Danks, who died in 1970, on the legendary Steamboat at the 1909 Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo.

The postcard image was apparently flipped to face right when former Secretary of State and future Gov. and U.S. Sen. Lester Hunt proposed legislation to make the horse and rider the official Wyoming license plate art. Hunt, a World War I veteran, was a prominent member of The American Legion and served on national committees from the Department of Wyoming.

The bucking horse and rider debuted on Wyoming license plates in 1936 and was trademarked. In 1990, the image was made the official mark of the Wyoming Centennial Celebration. It's also found on the Wyoming State Highway shield and on the state quarter.



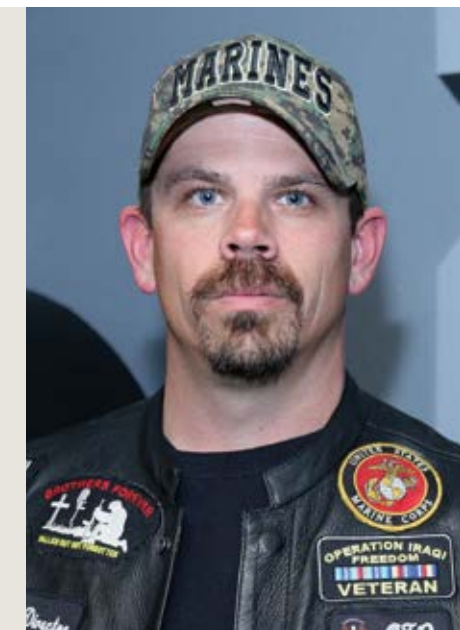
## Did you know?

Wyoming was the first state to grant women the right to vote, had the first woman governor (Nellie Tayloe Ross) and the first female justice of the peace (Ester Hobart Morris).

## Post-9/11 WY LEGION

It's important to have a post here in Green River to help the local veterans. Not all veterans know where they can go to seek help if they have issues, whether it's VA or car problems or even just trying to put food on the table. It allows discreet communication. It isn't just the Legion here in Green River, but Legions across the countryside.

American Legion Post 28 member **Marshall Burt**, Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran who was part of the revitalization of the post in Green River, originally known as the Toll Gate Post, named after a rock formation in the area



In 2014, southwestern Wyoming veterans successfully revived and rebuilt Tom Whitmore American Legion Post 28 in Green River, which had been dormant for so long most people did not know it ever existed. By Labor Day that year, a firearms raffle conducted by the young veterans who wanted to revitalize the post raised about \$30,000, from which they could purchase a building and renovate it.

Like many post homes chartered or revitalized by post-9/11 generation veterans, Post 28 was to be smoke-free, with a family section twice as big as the bar and a community center open to the public. Post 28 also started a new American Legion Auxiliary unit, a Sons of the American Legion squadron and an American Legion Riders chapter. The post sponsors a baseball team, works with a local Boy Scout troop, started a Junior Shooting Sports program and supports the high school rodeo team. Nearly half of Post 28's members served in the Global War on Terrorism. Membership grew from an initial 18 to nearly 200 in approximately 18 months.

To see an online video about the resurrection of Post 28, visit [www.legion.org/legiontv](http://www.legion.org/legiontv).

## Contact The American Legion of Wyoming

1320 Hugur Ave.  
Cheyenne, WY 82001

307.634.3035 [www.wylegion.org](http://www.wylegion.org)



## Join The American Legion

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

1961

**Mike Enzi** is a Boys State delegate from Sheridan. Enzi has since served as mayor of Gillette, followed by 10 years in the Wyoming Legislature and has been a U.S. senator from Wyoming since 1997.



1967

The **Emil A. Blackmore Museum** of The American Legion is established at National Headquarters in Indianapolis following the death of the longtime national adjutant from Wyoming.

1968

Future Wyoming Gov. **David Freudenthal** (2003-2011) is a Boys State delegate from Thermopolis and also a Boys State governor.

1981

**Marvin Garrett** is a Boys State delegate from Hulett. He later establishes himself as a rodeo legend with four world bareback riding championships.

2003

The **Cheyenne VA Medical Center**, with support from Wyoming Legionnaires, fends off a proposition to eliminate in-patient services and sending acute-care patients to Denver or the private sector.

2009

"Taking Chance," a film about **Lt. Col. Mike Strobl**, pictured right, escorting the body of 19-year-old **Chance Phelps** from where the Marine was killed in Iraq to his burial place in Dubois, Wyo., is released. The film starred Kevin Bacon as Strobl. Strobl was recognized in 2009 with The American Legion Patriot Award.



2010

**Rock Springs** veterans open an impressive new home for American Legion Post 24 on Broadway Street. Legionnaires renovated the vacant warehouse with volunteer labor.