

**The  
American  
Legion**



*For God and Country*

★ MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS ★ P.O. BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206-1055  
★ (317) 630-1253 ★ Fax (317) 630-1368

# The American Legion 98<sup>th</sup> Birthday 2017

The American Legion  
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Carry the Legacy Forward. It's the theme chosen by National Commander Charles Schmidt during his year leading the nation's largest and most influential veterans organization.

And as we observe the 98<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of The American Legion, we would be remiss not to reflect on the momentous struggle that redefined the world and ultimately gave birth to the organization that we honor today.

World War I was the war to end all wars. At least that's what many hoped its legacy would be. With technological advances such as machine guns, poison gases and explosives of greater intensity ... with nearly 10 million killed worldwide...with almost 30 million wounded and injured, surely nations would be too sensible and too decent to repeat such a horrific tragedy.

Captain Roy Hudson was a dentist from Killeen, Texas. During the war, he commanded a medical detachment in France. In a 1918 letter to his wife Kate he wrote, “the American public will never know, for words cannot possibly express the awfulness this present war means and what our boys as well as the Allies have gone through and put up with...I will have to tell you later.”

Fortunately, Captain Hudson was able to tell his wife what he experienced, for he did return home, where he became an early member of American Legion Post 76 in Austin, Texas.

As a Legionnaire, Dr. Hudson recited the Preamble to The American Legion Constitution which included the pledge to “preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great War.” The promise was later pluralized to include World War II and subsequent wars, the only change ever made to that eloquent mission statement.

Like Roy Hudson, Legionnaires everywhere were able to share their memories with Americans in their communities. Post 76 attracted a crowd of 25,000 at a 1937 Fourth of July picnic, according to the Austin American Statesman. By comparison, in an age of modern transportation and greater population, the average attendance at an NBA basketball game last season was just more than 17,000.

Those early Legionnaires, the veterans whose legacy we are entrusted to continue, had a missionary zeal to ensure that no veteran, no widow and no orphan would do without the care and comfort of a grateful nation because of the sacrifice that they had made.

One of the most prominent Legionnaires of that era was Harry Colmery, the primary author of the GI Bill. He had started a law practice in Utah when he enlisted in the Army Air Service in 1917. Immediately commissioned as a lieutenant, he became a combat pursuit pilot and logged more than 500 hours in the air. He didn't deploy because he was instead assigned to training other World War I aviators.

This experience using early "combat flying machines" led to a lifelong advocacy of proper equipment and safety for U.S. military personnel. It also unleashed the leadership potential of the young veteran who would later be elected National Commander of The American Legion.

Numbers, dedication and tenacity are the reasons that Commander Colmery and The American Legion wielded enough influence to pass monumental legislation such as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.

The American Legion was born in Paris, France, in March 1919, after which a caucus in St. Louis was held. The organization was chartered in September and held its first convention in Minneapolis in November 1919.

Virtually unknown due to its infancy, The American Legion had more than 843,000 dues-paying members by the end of its first year. This was an especially remarkable feat in a world without the Internet, televisions, telephones and other media that we take for granted today. There was no interstate highway system and car ownership was still not widespread.

Yet The American Legion grew to become the largest and most powerful veterans organization because its message resonated. While many veterans groups and other associations prohibited women from joining, The American Legion was open to all eligible wartime veterans regardless of gender, race or religion. Women were able to vote for the National Commander of The American Legion before they could legally vote for the president of the United States.

Founded on the Four Pillars of care for veterans, strong national defense, Americanism, and the wholesome development of youth, The American Legion offered its members the opportunity to continue to serve America long after they hung up their military uniforms for good.

It is service that continues in communities throughout the country today. Last year, American Legionnaires volunteered more than 645,000 hours to the VA Voluntary Service Program. Posts of The American Legion sponsored more than 2,400 Scouting units benefiting approximately 61,000 young people. More than 75,000 pints of blood were donated by Legionnaires, according to the latest consolidated post reports. Post service officers also processed 149,216 benefit claims for veterans, free of charge and regardless of American Legion membership status.

Ninety-eight years is a remarkable stretch of service for an organization whose founders hoped that it would one day have to close due to the end of all war. That idealism was replaced by realism and while veterans love peace, they love their country more.



But even something as destructive as a world war was able to produce a light. That light shined upon four pillars and a large group of veterans who continued to serve their communities. Those veterans were called Legionnaires and For God and Country we associate ourselves for the following purposes:

To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America;

To maintain law and order;

To foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism;

To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars;

To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation;

To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses;

To make right the master of might;

To promote peace and goodwill on earth;

To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy;

To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

Not a bad legacy. It's up to us to carry it forward.

Thank you, God Bless America and God Bless The American Legion.

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