happy new year
2017 Membership Drive & Current Standings. Here’s an update on our membership drive and current standings: As of the 1st of January, the Department of France has met its 80% membership goal – and done so more than two weeks ahead of schedule. But a word of caution is in order – the last 20% will be the hardest to complete.

There are two positive steps that Posts can take to build your membership and ensure that your members remain on board. (1.) All Post Commanders are asked to take a careful look at your membership roster on myLegion.org. Have you renewed all of your 2016 members and turned in your transmittals? Are you working your list of expired members from last year? (2.) Join the Department in the membership drives set for this spring to bring new members (and new Posts) on board. We’ve had a great reception from young and old veterans (and currently serving personnel) at each of these events. I want you to experience first-hand the excitement and interest that our new members bring to these events – and benefit from the results.

New Department Officers. Vice Commander Darren Dahlke has notified me that he is unable to continue in his office, due to the press of work commitments. I have accepted his resignation, with sincere thanks for his service, and appointed Chris Buchanan of Post GR-1982 to serve as a Department Vice Commander. Chris is well known to many of you from his service as the Department’s Sergeant at Arms. Under our Constitution, this appointment is subject to ratification by the DEC at its next meeting in March. I look forward to submitting his name to the DEC and that of a replacement for the Sergeant at Arms position, to be announced later.

Communications. As a candidate for Department Commander, I emphasized the importance of timely and effective communications within the Department. I said that we would use this Newsletter, the Department’s web page and our Facebook page to keep all members updated on a continuous basis with news and articles about veterans, the VA and the American Legion. I’m pleased to report that (1.) the Newsletter has been significantly expanded over the last six months, with a special word of thanks to editor David Greaux for his great work in organizing a lot of material each month, (2.) the web page has been completely redone and updated, with current items on all activities of the Department shown on it – and many thanks to PDC Doug Haggan for this, and (3.) our Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/ALDeptFrance) has become a regular and daily source of updated information, thanks in large measure to VCAL Joseph Schram, VC Carl Hale and PDC James Settle. I ask that you follow each of these sources for updates on Department activities and important news about the Legion and veterans.

Planning for the Legion’s Centennial. Our Department’s Centennial Committee met in Paris on 15 December to prepare a scope of work for the 2019 Centennial celebration in Paris. I am especially grateful to chairman Curtis Bartosik and the Committee for their interest in this event to date and for their work on behalf of our members to make this an outstanding event. Photos are shown below from the event, including French General Elrick Irastorza (Ret.) who joined us.
Awards Committee. A new Awards Committee is forming under the chairmanship of Jerry Aman, Commander of Post GR-09. Please get your Post records together now and look for details on the awards program and schedule to be announced in the February 2017 Newsletter.

Third DEC Set for Ansbach, Germany. The Third DEC for this year is set for Saturday, March 18 in Ansbach, Germany. Post GR-1982 is hosting this event and is eager to show off its new quarters at USAG Ansbach. We will also have Jeff Stoffer, Director of the Legion’s Marketing, Media and Communications Division joining us to begin making plans for events marking the Centennial of the American Legion and its origins in Paris in 1919. Please hold this weekend open as we will have a busy and full meeting agenda for this DEC.

Department Convention Site Selected. The Department will be holding its 2017 Annual Convention at the BEST WESTERN Leoso Hotel, Ludwigshafen, Germany, on 15-18 June, 2017. We’ve had a very successful convention here in the recent past (2015) and look forward to doing so again. Please mark your calendars and look for the Convention announcement and booking details in the near future.

Happy New Year. I want to wish each Legionnaire in the Department a very Happy New Year. Let’s make it so for our fellow Legionnaires and veterans by stepping up our efforts with member retention, enrolment and new Post development. What we do is important, and I want to recognize that by saying a very sincere “Thank You” to every one of you who make the work of the American Legion Family part of your life. I’m very grateful.

For God and Country, John
My Fellow Legionnaires, SAL Members, Auxiliary Members and all other VIPs;

I sincerely hope that you all had a memorable and blessed Christmas and a safe New Year’s!! I spent my Christmas with family members. Had a wonderful time but it was sad as we lost a brother unexpectedly on the evening of 21 December. I will say though I am happy the hustle and bustle of Christmas is over!

Along with this comes my sincerest wishes for a GREAT Legion Family 2017. May 2017 be filled with renewals, new members, successful programs, and continued comraderies in fulfilling our goals.

Speaking of renewals, I just got the latest Post report. WOW!! Some of you are way out there ahead of the game (😊)but others are way behind (😢). From 1 January to 1 June is the hardest time to keep our numbers up unless we are targeting our renewals and recruiting. Our renewals alone will not always carry us through as life events change in people’s lives; we need recruitment too if we are going to “Carry the Legacy Forward”.

Some of us will be plenty busy over the next few months as we make ready for the 3rd DEC and the upcoming National Group Tour. I am looking forward to see you at the 3rd DEC, along with as many Auxiliary Members as can attend.

I would like some assistance from several Post in areas the National Group will be in during their tour. Following are Posts I will need assistance from to make their tour more successful and memorable. I have not been told the date is for public knowledge yet. Though I cannot release dates yet, we can start thinking now on details we can capture. Five of the four “Ws” we can start on now – who, what, where and why; the when will come shortly. I do not have all details but from what I do know so far this is where I will need assistance:

- GR07 – In Wiesbaden we will need reservations for dinner at a local restaurant for 16 (I will sort this bill), plus Post, Auxiliary, SAL, and Legion Rider Members would like to join (pay for our own meal) – this could be for two nights so we would want different restaurants each evening. They also may want to eat on installation day of arrival – I will try to get clarification on that.
- GR01 – Dinner in local restaurant – Ramstein Village (NCDR Schmidt once lived there) – again reservation for 16 plus (I will sort this bill) Post Members who would like to join (pay for their own meal). At K-Town BBQ it be wonderful to see all GR01 Post members in local area, Auxiliary, SAL, and Legion Rider Members to join the National Groups for the K-Town Famous BBQ.
- GR01 Auxiliary - arrange for some members to take 3 to 4 ladies, possibly a gentleman or two, shopping while rest of party is in briefings all day. I would suggest an open market in the morning and then to indoor mall like setting, perhaps a local grocery store – give them an idea of what living in Germany is like. They may also want to see on installation facilities. I will try to get details of where they would like to go. If they go on the economy, it would be nice to give them a little history of the area – both local and US history of the area.
- FR01 – Find a designated place for the tour group to meet with FR01 member who can act as a tour guide. We will need a place for lunch this day as well as dinner that evening. From time of arrival (approximately 1000hrs) until check into hotel at 1600hrs the following is requested: Lunch, visit to Lafayette Escadrille Memorial, Site of the First Caucus, Paris Post 1 Mausoleum – not necessarily in this order. That evening dinner and visit to the Eifel Tower.
- BE02 – Evening of arrival to Brussels dinner reservations in local area for 16 plus Post Members who wish to join (PFYOM). Lunch and Dinner following day.
Please keep in mind, as I get more information numbers in party for dinners could change. Greatly appreciate if all the Posts Commander’s mentioned could assign a POC/s to work with me in their areas - organization is the key to success in any undertaking. p; please me email at NECMaloney@gmail.com to let me know whom your POC is, along with them being cc’d on same email. Thank you for your attention and assistance in this! A well taken care of visitor is a happy visitor with fond memories!

Just a reminder to the Posts to take advantage of the Overseas Graves Decoration Fund to assist you in honoring our brethren that are buried in private cemeteries throughout Europe. All it takes is a few minutes to write down the name of the veteran and address of their final resting place to make the request. The funds are limited so the earlier the request the better. Please see article submitted for distribution in December newsletter concerning Overseas Graves Decoration Funds. I will be very aghast to find out none of us took advantage of this program as most have comrades buried in the local areas. There are a few Posts who take advantage of this, but many who do not but could.

In last month’s Newsletter I told you our Department was awarded nine (9) Honorary membership appointments to the following standing Commissions: Americanism (1); Finance Commission (2); Internal Affairs (1); Membership & Post Activities Committee (1); Legislative (1); National Security (1); Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee (1); Veterans Employment & Education Committee (1). This is the most Honorary appointments we have had in a long time so I am hopeful we can fill them all with Department Members who are willing to learn more about what happens at the National level and use it to assist our Department and their Post. These are Honorary Memberships that have no duties at the National level and are never called in to national meetings; specific duties from time to time are assigned by the Department to assist with matters in their area. In addition you will receive information from the National office or myself to keep you abreast of what is happening throughout the organization. The more information we have to assist us in our Department and Posts helps us to stay strong, the information is designed to keep us informed and we in turn inform our members of issues or assist our Department in these areas. The Honorary Membership Letters, signed by National Commander Charles Schmidt, to each of these positions are ready to go out but I have not received any names of volunteers who are interested in filling these honorary standing Commissions/Committees to help us help ourselves.

The articles I requested from National Auxiliary have arrived in Germany in preparation of the Auxiliary meeting on same day as the 3rd DEC, 18 March 2017. I am looking forward to seeing many familiar faces and meeting new ones!! As the time gets nearer if you plan to attend please send Isolde Settle or me an email at isoldesettle@hotmail.com or NECMaloney@gmail.com. This is so we can make sure we have a room large enough to accommodate us all. We will strive to keep our meeting to 90 minutes so as not to inconvenience DEC Members to much…

I am submitting a Resolution for the newsletter that was passed during the National Convention in Cincinnati – may be important to some of our married folks who have submitted for VA Benefits. Check rest of newsletter for article on Resolution No. 124: Means Test for Married Veterans. Has not passed House or Senate yet but you need to be aware of it.

At this time folks I will close my article for the month to save you time to read the remainder of the great newsletter Comrade Greaux puts out for us each month!!

I want to wish you and your families all very safe travels, and a Happy New Year!!! May it be better than the last and may we have learned lessons that will stay with us all our days – that is progress!!!

Most Sincerely,
Your NECLady
NINETY-EIGHTH NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
Cincinnati, Ohio
August 30, 31, September 1, 2016

Resolution No. 124: Means Test for Married Veterans
Origin: Maryland
Submitted by: Convention Committee on Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
(Consolidated with Resolution No. 266 (IL))

WHEREAS, United States Code, Title 38 § 1722, subsection (b) authorizes income thresholds for veterans eligibility for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health-care benefits; and
WHEREAS, Veterans enrolling in VA health care are authorized additional income thresholds for each dependent they have in qualifying for health-care benefits; and
WHEREAS, VA’s means test threshold for calendar year 2014 for a single veteran is $31,443 or less; and
WHEREAS, VA’s means test threshold for calendar year 2014 for a veteran with one dependent is $37,733 or less; and
WHEREAS, A veteran with one dependent, with that dependent being a veteran eligible to apply for VA health care, the financial means test threshold is also $37,733 or less for financial test year 2013; and
WHEREAS, A veteran married to a veteran, where both are eligible to enroll in VA health care, are penalized by the means test threshold by not having both of their honorable service recognized; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion in National Convention assembled in Cincinnati, Ohio, August 30, 31, September 1, 2016, That The American Legion support legislation to amend Title 38, United States Code, Sections 1722, subsection (b) to increase the income threshold of a veteran married to a veteran by two times the financial means test of a single veteran for the financial test year applied for enrollment into the Department of Veterans Affairs health-care system.

Department of France Past Commanders Club

PCC President Anthony Giordano / PCC Secretary David Greaux

Who is eligible to join the Department of France Past Commanders Club?
PAST AND PRESENT Department Commanders, Department Vice Commanders At Large, Department Vice Commanders, Post Commanders, SAL Detachment Commanders, SAL Squadron Commanders, Auxiliary Department Presidents, Auxiliary Unit Presidents...so if you were just voted into office you are eligible to join

Initial dues for the Past Commanders Club is only $25.00
Renewal dues for the Past Commanders Club is only $10.00

Our next meeting is planned in conjunction with the Department of France Third DEC.
DETACHMENT OF FRANCE

Squadrons: GR01, BE02, GR06, GR07, GR14, GR42, GR79, CH01

Lee Preston… Detachment of France Commander “2017”

THE THIRD DEC WILL BE ON 04 MARCH 2017 HOSTED BY GR42.

IT WILL BE HELD AT THE GR30 POST HOME IN KITZINGEN, GERMANY.
NOW AVAILABLE !!!
The American Legion Centennial Coin

This special commemorative coin is issued by the Department of France, the birthplace of the American Legion from its founding in 1919.

The front of the coin is executed in a vibrant, deep blue, with gold lettering and the official logo of the Legion Centennial. The reverse shows the Legion family emblems against a bright gold background and the motto of the American Legion ringed in blue: **For God and Country – Still Serving**

**Coin prices:** €5/$5 each, plus €2/$2 shipping cost per coin, total €7/$7 for each coin if shipped. Send your order and US Dollar or Euro bank transfer payable to “Dept. of France, American Legion”

**Ordering By US Check (No European or Foreign Checks)**

**Send to:**
American Legion Post BE02
Attn: Centennial Coins
Unit 28100, Box 017
APO AE 09714

**Or:**
Joseph Schram
attn: Centennial Coins
Meersenstraat 33 C2
8310 Assebroek

- **PayPal:** Paypal.me/JosephSchram
- **Foreign Bank Transfer:** ING Account: IBAN: BE98 3774 3999 7693 -- BIC: BBRUBEBB
- **US Bank Transfer:** Andrews Federal Credit Union – Routing #: 255074111
  American Legion Post BE02 - Account #: 82019102

**Europe and All Outside USA**
**Contact:** Joseph Schram
American Legion Post BE-02
Unit 28100, Box 017
APO AE 09714
Email: vcal.schram@gmail.com
Phone: +32-479-178539

**All USA**
**Contact:** Nola Maloney
Department of France NEC Rep.
10095 N. Mill Crossing Way
Tucson Arizona 85743 USA
Email: NECMaloney@gmail.com
Phone: +1-928-235-1291
I would like to wish everyone a safe and Happy New Year.

In December, I travelled to Paris to participate in the centennial planning meeting. We had the opportunity to meet with Commander Ed Canady and comrade Curtis Bartosik from Paris Post 1. As this was the initial meeting, we limited the discussion to the scope and timeline of the event. We will meet again on 23 February in Paris. If you would like to become a participating member of the centennial committee, let us know. We do need the help.

During January and February, I will be assisting 4 Post with their Oratorical Contests: GR45, GR07, EG02 and BE02. This will be the first time that the high schools at Vilseck, Lakenheath and Wiesbaden will have had an Oratorical Contest. I am hoping that the Department will be able to expand next year the program to encompass all 19 American High Schools here in Europe.

In addition, I will be coordinating and helping officiate at the initial meetings of the new and newly revitalized Posts GR45, NL01 and EG02. Along with these meetings, I will assist with further recruitment of new members. Hopefully, 2017 will see 3 active Posts that will contribute to the overall success of our Department.

We are slowly achieving our Department membership goal of 3200 members. This is an increase of 300 compared to last year’s goal. So far we have successfully achieved the 55%, 75% and 80% cut-off numbers however that will still leave the Department with almost 600 members either to recruit or renew.

One of the basic problems that has been occurring is the retention of members especially those first year members. Visit Membership Retention Tips for ways of retaining your members: www.legion.org/membership/retentiontips

1. Have a program, not a campaign. Retention is a year-round priority and needs to be planned. Any post that is, or wants to be, successful at retention must be able to identify the specific steps it takes to increase its retention rate. In addition to having a series of activities that make up a retention program, your post should be able to identify resources that can be allocated to help implement the program.

I don’t know how many times I have encountered potential members who have stated that they did not know that the American Legion was here in Europe. The American Legion logo is a unique branding symbol. Just like many of the larger corporations like Nike and Coca-Cola, the American Legion needs to be seen. How do we do that: Wear your uniform cap to official functions in your community, publish article with the logo in the community’s newsletter and have a banner at the entrance of your military facility. As more potential members see the American Legion logo and hear about the American Legion accomplishments, the more they will reach out to us and join our ranks.

Make recruitment and retention a New Year’s resolution and help build a better and stronger Department. Thank you
42 Medal of Honor recipients will attend Veterans Inaugural Ball - Salute to Heroes

Rascal Flatts lead vocalist Gary LeVox joined by his top songwriters, Wendell Mobley and Neil Thrasher, will perform at the sold out event

WASHINGTON, December 19, 2016 — The American Legion and the Veterans Inaugural Committee will pay tribute to 42 Medal of Honor recipients and newly sworn in President Donald Trump during the Veterans Inaugural Ball - Salute to Heroes on January 20, 2017. The evening will feature a special performance by Rascal Flatts lead vocalist Gary LeVox, joined by songwriters Neil Thrasher and Wendell Mobley, presented by Songs for Sound.

“The Price is Right” host and comedian Drew Carey, who served in the Marine Corps Reserves, will emcee the event at the Renaissance Washington DC, Downtown Hotel. Since 1953, at the request of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Veterans Inaugural Ball - Salute to Heroes has provided an opportunity for the newly sworn in commander in chief to personally pay tribute to Medal of Honor recipients.

Guests at the Veterans Inaugural Ball will also include senior military officers, elected and government officials, celebrities, corporate citizens and other members of the Armed Forces. LeVox is participating in the evening’s events as part of his support of Songs for Sound, a supporter of The American Legion that works to enrich the lives of veterans through hearing loss detection and treatment.

“The American Legion is honored to lead the efforts for the Veterans Inaugural Ball - Salute to Heroes,” said Charles E. Schmidt, National Commander, The American Legion. “We are humbled to have 42 Medal of Honor recipients in attendance to celebrate the peaceful transition of governmental power on Inauguration Day. To have entertainers like Gary LeVox and Drew Carey is very exciting for everyone.”

American Airlines is the premier corporate sponsor for the event, joined by UPS which is sponsoring the dinner. The ball is hosted by The American Legion and organized by the Veterans Inaugural Committee. The committee is comprised of 15 congressionally chartered veterans service organizations including The American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Blinded Veterans Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the US, The Congressional Medal of Honor Society, AMVETS, The Retired Enlisted Association, Disabled American Veterans, Marine Corps League, Non Commissioned Officers Association, Reserve Officers Association, Jewish War Veterans of the USA, and American Ex-Prisoners of War. More information about the Veterans Inaugural Ball - Salute to Heroes can be found at www.Legion.org/veteransball.

About The American Legion
With a current membership of 2.2 million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism and youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 13,000 posts across the nation.
The VA Friend or Foe

As a veterans Service Officer I routinely encounter people who share their VA experiences with me. They normally fall into three categories those who despise the VA ratings system which they generalize as the VA as a whole. Those who have fought a long and arduous fight with the system and prevailed; these individuals hate the ratings system but typically love the VA. Lastly and in the minority there are those who can’t believe their good fortune and are overjoyed with what they are receiving.

I ask myself how can three different individuals who have very similar military careers have such a different perspective on the exact same system. I realized that each person has a different expectation on what the VA should provide them. Furthermore very few people understand the system, what is required to file a successful claim, or the language the VA uses in correspondence. In this series of articles I will try to explain what you need to file a successful claim, what the correct steps are to filing a VA claim, and provide some answers to common scenarios.

What you need to file a VA claim that has a reasonable chance of succeeding

There are three requirements to be entitled to veterans’ compensation benefits.

1. The veteran must have evidence of a current disability.
2. The veteran must also have a disease, injury or incident that occurred during his period of active military service. In some instances, such as a PTSD claim, a veteran’s statement or buddy letter of an incident can be accepted as proof of the incident.
   • Presumptive conditions don’t require an in-service event or diagnosis
3. Lastly, the veteran must have a nexus between the current disability and the in service disease injury or incident.

What is a Nexus?
A nexus letter is an opinion by a doctor as to whether your current condition is related to your military service. The phrasing that you are looking for is that your current disability is “as likely as not” a result of your in-service injury. Note that above I said two things “disability” you have to have something wrong with you today that is a result of what happened in the Military. So for example if you broke your arm in jump school; but it currently doesn’t hurt or hinder you in any way you don’t have a disability. Second the term “as likely as not” this is what is called in equipoise in legal terms. It means that there is a 50/50 chance that your in service injury caused your current disability. By law a tie goes to the veteran. This of course isn’t the best wording one could hope for in a nexus letter. See the list below from best to worse.

1. “is due to” (100% sure)
2. “more likely than not” (greater than 50%)
3. “at least as likely as not” (equal to or greater than 50%)
4. “not at least as likely as not” (less than 50%)
5. “is not due to” (0%) 

How do I get my Medical Records?
Medical records can be requested online at the following link:
https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records
You can mail in an SF 180 request for medical records to:
National Personnel Records Center
1 Archives Drive St. Louis, MO 63138
You can fax your SF 180 to: 314-801-9195
• Make sure to specify you are requesting all medical records to include in-patient, out-patient, dental, and psychological if appropriate.

Steps to Filling a VA Claim
In this section I will explore steps to filing a claim please keep in mind that there are numerous types of claims and different ways to file a claim.
1. On-line through eBenefits:
   https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/homepage
2. Over the phone. 1-800-827-1000
3. By mail. Pittsburg Regional Benefits Office, 1000 Liberty Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15222-4004
4. American Legion VSO (See your local VSO)
In all cases I recommend doing an “Intent to file” http://explore.va.gov/intent-to-file
An intent to file will establish an effective date for your claim and gives you one year to file the official claim.
The effective date is the date you will start getting paid from should your claim be approved. Your effective date is always the 1st of the month following the date you either file an intent to file, or medical evidence shows you were disabled whichever is later. As an example if on 19 March you did an intent to file your effective date would be 1 April. Let’s say you waited six months and then turned in your claim. If you were awarded a 50% disability you would have just made an additional $6000 by doing an intent to file.

Fully Developed Claim:
The fastest possible claim is a fully developed claim filed through eBenifits and sending me a VA form 21-22. A fully developed claim is one in which you are telling the VA here is all the medical evidence for my disability please rate me. In order to do a fully developed claim you should have a doctor fill out a “Disability Benefit Questionnaire” (DBQ) for your claimed condition.
http://www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/
http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/dbq_listbydbqformname.asp

Regular Claim:
With a regular overseas claim you would ideally file using eBenifits and sending me a VA form 21-22. You would then wait for the VA to set up your “Compensation and Pension Exam” (C&P). This is done through the U.S. Embassy who will contact you via mail and set you up with an appointment. It is absolutely critical that you make this appointment and come prepared to adequately discuss your disability. Study the link below to become familiar with how your disability is rated and identify what level of disability you have. Add any supporting evidence through eBenifits, give it to the C&P examiner, or send it in by mail to the Pittsburg regional office.
http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/search.php

Using a VSO:
Talk to an American legion VSO and they can assist you in filling out a VA form 21-22 and a VBA 21-526 this will allow the American Legion to work on your behalf. Your local VSO can then send the two documents to me and I will scan them to the regional office in Pittsburg. The American Legion office is conveniently co-located in the same building as the VA regional office in Pittsburg. Your C&P exams will be scheduled through the embassy and you would follow the same path as a regular claim.

Things to Note
- All overseas claims are done by the Pittsburg regional office
- Claims normally take about 9-12 months
- Disabilities are rated based on the “38 CFR book C, Schedule of rating Disabilities”
http://www.benefits.va.gov/warms/bookc.asp
- The ratings manual translated to layman’s terms can be found here.
http://www.militarydisabilitymadeeasy.com/search.php
- You can be rated for secondary conditions as well. These are conditions that are caused by your service connected disability. As an example if you compensate for a knee injury brought about by military service and your other knee is now disabled as a result of your altered gate it would be compensable.
- Medical costs for those residing overseas associated from your service connected conditions are compensable using the “Foreign Medical Program” (FMP) * You must register *
https://www.va.gov/purchasedcare/programs/veterans/fmp/
- Certain conditions are known as “Presumptive” this means if you have them it is presumed it was caused by your military service.
- Most joint disability is rated based on range of motion. When asked how far can you bend or twist etc. The first thing out of your mouth should be, “without increasing my pain”? A C&P exam isn’t the place to show how much pain you can take. The second you feel an increase in pain stop your movement and visibly show you are in discomfort.
**Post BE02 Holiday Party**

December started off with the Post BE02 commander volunteering to be Santa Claus at the annual Christmas event at the USAG Brussels community. The following day, the Post had their annual Holiday Party. A special thanks goes to comrade Laura Buckner and Auxiliary member Ester Miller for their assistance in preparing a dinner of turkey, ham, dressing, mash potatoes and gravy.

**Bastogne BBQ**

Members of the Flanders Field post BE02 family braved the freezing weather to hosted an American BBQ at the annual Nuts weekend in Bastogne. With the help of the membership and friends, the Post was able to raise over $700 for the upcoming Oratorical Contests scheduled throughout Belgium, Enland and Germany. The BBQ was visited by SGT Nick (comrade Mark Altmeyer) who give out candycanes.
Orphanage Christmas Party
Members of the American Legion Post BE02 prepared and served lunch for the 50 children of the La Fermette orphanage in Ath during a party held on Chièvres Air Base, Wednesday, Dec. 21, 2016. Santa later arrived and gave warm welcome each of the children. Each child received presents that were purchased by community members and the American Legion Post BE02. The American Legion members also planned lots of fun activities during the party.

Special thanks goes out to Post BE02 members 1st Vice Commander Paul Haney, 2nd Vice Commander Thomas Buckner, Finance Officer Laura Buckner, comrades Steve Williams, Roger Barrett, Fleming Outerbridge. A thank you also goes out to Auxiliary President Moran Buckner and Auxiliary member Ester Mille and her husband. We would also thank the Chris Mooneyham family and Santa (Rudy Van Hoy) for their help to make the event a complete success.
Any questions can be sent to Post adjutant Carl Hackworth (carl@hackworth.de)
Or
Post Commander Tony Giordano (eadg.gio@gmail.com)
GR 79 Heilbronn Homeless Christmas Dinner...26 DEC 2016
Legion Post GR1982 hosted their annual Legion Christmas Party on Saturday, 10 December in Wasserzell. There was a nice crowd, with 42 Legionnaires with spouses and five invited guests in attendance. Invited guests included the Garrison Commander, COL Benjamin C. Jones, Garrison Deputy Commander, Mr. Philip F Romanelli, and Garrison Command Sergeant Major, CSM Derek R. Cuvellier.

Commander Ken Aungst welcomed all and spoke briefly about the various Legion events of the past year. He stated that our Post members had participated in or supported 39 different events in the local Military Community. These included sending kids to Boys State and Girls State, conducting two Kids Fishing Days, supporting the Garrison Retiree Appreciation Day, Garrison Community Showcase, Independence Day celebration and conducting wreath-laying ceremonies on Memorial Day and Veteran’s Day. COL Jones presented Commander Aungst with a Commanders Coin in appreciation for the Legion work in the community.

It has been a busy year for Post 1982, and the Christmas Party was a good time to reflect on those good memories; but also, to start thinking about the new year and new opportunities to support soldiers, family members and the children and youth of our community.

VA to Let Vets Pre-Select Cemetery Burials Before Death

The Quantico National Cemetery spans 725-acres and was founded in 1983. The facility conducts more than 1,100 funerals annually. (U.S. Marine Corps photo/Tiffiney Wertz)
A rule change at the Veterans Affairs Department will allow veterans to apply for burial in national cemeteries before their death, rather than requiring family members to apply on their behalf after it.

Veteran burial benefits previously were approved at the "time of need." For families, that meant waiting until after the veteran died to apply for the benefits via fax or email by sending in a copy of the veteran's DD-214 or separation documents and then following up by phone.

The rule change instead allows veterans to be approved for burial in a VA national cemetery "pre-need," or before death, through a form submitted by fax, email or mail. The form can be filled out by the veteran or by someone else on his or her behalf.

More than four million people are buried in VA cemeteries. Burial locations are assigned based on availability at the time of need, VA officials said. Although veterans cannot reserve a gravesite, they can indicate on the form a cemetery preference. Doing so allows VA officials to predict need at cemeteries, and may help inform decisions for those choosing a burial site after the veteran's death, officials said.

The predetermination process qualifies veterans for burial in 135 cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots operated by the VA nationwide. The process does not include Arlington National Cemetery, which is operated by the U.S. Army and uses a different application system.

After receiving the burial benefits application, the VA will provide written notice of its decision regarding eligibility, officials said in a release. The decision and supporting documents will then be stored electronically by the VA to make burial arrangements faster when they are needed, they said.

The change is an easy way for the VA to simplify the burial process for grieving families, officials with the Veterans of Foreign Wars said, and allow veterans to put their affairs in order.

"We think it's something that's a no-nonsense, easy solution to ease the burden as people enter the later years of their lives," said Patrick Murray, an associate director for the VFW's national legislative service.

"We tell people to be proactive, but in this [the VA said], 'Oops, you can't do this, you have to wait until you die,' " he said. "We view this as a common sense solution for a problem we're glad is being taken care of."

Officials with the American Legion agreed.

"A predetermination is the right thing to do. It allows the veteran and their family a small measure of comfort at a time when they can use any comfort they can get," Lou Cell, the Legion's national director for veterans affairs and rehabilitation, said in a statement.

"The American Legion reviewed this policy when they were recommending these changes several months ago and assured the VA they had the American Legion's full support," he added.

In addition to burial in a national cemetery, the VA provides most veterans who were not dishonorably discharged with a government headstone or marker, a burial flag and a presidential memorial certificate after death. Some veterans’ survivors also qualify for burial allowances, designed to cover some burial and funeral costs.

Predetermination forms can be submitted by fax to 1-855-840-8299, email to Eligibility.PreNeed@va.gov or mail to the National Cemetery Scheduling Office, P.O. Box 510543, St. Louis, MO 63151, according to the VA.