

VFW Post 12135

Post Commander – State of Post

(20 July 2022)

VFW Comrades, Warriors and Friends – thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be your VFW Post Commander for another (second) year. As I opened last year - I've been part of and have led many organizations in my time, but I can think of none finer than an organization whose purpose is wrapped around the concept of assisting worthy (veteran) comrades with a "hand up" while assisting in maintaining patriotism and the institutions of American Freedom. **"We need more of that today!!"**

First – let us all take a moment to smell the roses and think of all the **VFW Post 12135 accomplishments from last year (2021-2022)**! As you've recently heard we've received official notification from National VFW Commander-in-Chief Matthew "Fritz" Mihelcic, that 1st Lt Alexander Bonnyman Jr., VFW Post 12135 has been awarded All-American status for the 2021-2022 year! Few VFW Posts earn this National VFW designation - and even fewer can say their VFW Post has been awarded that honor "for three years running"! I've received the final rankings and what you have not heard is our Post **finished number three in the nation** for our size VFW Post! In parallel, our Post was awarded TN All-State Status for the 2021-2022 year!

You should all be proud of both the All-American and All-State designations because they are true "Team Awards". As I stated in my Post End of Year (EOY) report to the VFW leadership; "The secret to our success this past year is simple – the VFW is a volunteer organization, and **the Tellico Village "VFW Community" collectively stepped up, volunteered and were involved and engaged the entire year**. The willingness of the Tellico Village VFW Members to donate time and effort was unsurpassed this past year! **All of us should be proud of the huge difference we've made in the lives of our Veterans and the local community.**" Quite frankly - in my mind that is "award" enough! Now that we've been notified of earning All-American & All-state status - that is just icing on the cake!

What we accomplished..

Comrades – I hope all of you have had time to go onto the Post website and read the Post 12135 annual report that was forwarded up our chain! It is eye watering when you think about what we've accomplished this past year! And – I'll say it again – all of you should be proud of what we have accomplished! Because - as a team we met and exceeded all our stated 2021-2022 Post goals!

- Directly supported Veteran's with direct assistance or a financial "hands up" to the tune of over \$23,000. Additionally we donated ~\$6000 to Organizations who directly support Veterans or in assist in maintaining patriotism and the institutions of American Freedom! Examples are the Smokey MT Service Dogs (SMSD), Vonore Veterans Park, Veteran & homeless shelters, VSO (gift cards for Veterans), etc..

- Held numerous key events honoring our Country, Military and veterans to include;

- - Veterans Day, Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day and 4th of July Concerts & Celebrations – all with appropriate honors

- - Signature Event - BoatRides 4Vets (just held)

- - Monthly Breakfast with Vets – just a group of warriors telling stories over eggs – but brings comradery!

- - Expanded into the local community – our VFW Post is a face to the local community and we continued to embrace it. Over this past year our Post has become known as one of the largest volunteer organizations in the Village! At the same time, we expanded our community support with youth programs (BSA Scouts and Vets in the Classroom), and adopted a local military unit (Army Guard 253rd MP CO in Lenoir City)

- - Continuing a community service in collecting and retiring of US Flags – this past Flag Day we retired well over 1000 Flags

- - Honoring our own Post Veterans with VoM articles, QoV presentations - and creating a Post Golden Heart Award and then presenting to the person identified as our Veteran's significant supporter

Moving forward..

Every leader I've ever met starts out by identifying their individual focus and goals. I am no different. As with last year - I do not take this position lightly! During my 2nd year, I will work to continue to improve our Post's culture and climate to ensure an atmosphere of:

- one of inclusion!
- one of comradery!
- one of searching out, identifying, and helping veterans in need!
- one of community – our VFW Post is a face to the local community and we need to continue to embrace it!

What we propose..

Fellow VFW Post 12135 Members – we enter the new VFW Program Year on a roll having met and exceeded all our stated 2021-2022 goals! We also enter the new year financially strong – and – we still have two major fund raisers ahead of us! We have grown as a Post and are Membership strong (118). We have become more recognized a a volunteer organization and are positionally strong within our community. Building upon all this momentum and success – and - working with your newly elected/appointed EXCOM members, I have brought forward a 2022-2023 calendar action plan which outlines recommended **2022-2023 Post goals for your consideration. These include;**

- **Goal** - continue to emphasize our primary goal of “providing a hand up” to Veterans in need, with an increased goal to increase our total financial support to over \$35K in 2022-2023....
- **Goal** - I propose we expand on our successful 2021-2022 signature events:
 - - BoatRides for Vets – let's build to our 9th annual event
 - - Veterans Day Commemoration – last year we brought close to 200 community members to a first-class commemoration – let's do it again!

- - Build upon/continue our Post's signature event; the Veteran suicide education and prevention program! We made a difference last year – let's build on this by continuing the journey.

- - Add/continue our Post's signature event to provide Veterans a powerful "hand up" through support of the Multi-County Veterans Resource Fair – this year scheduled on 16 Sept 2022. Last year we openly voiced... Just think how powerful this would be if we were to bookend our Veteran suicide education program by joining forces for a local community Veteran's job fair!! We have – we are partnered with 4 other veteran organizations – John Lacko is the event lead! Let's not stop there!

- **Goal** – continue and expand our programs focused on bringing patriotism to our community youth. Rich Laverdure is our Youth Schools program lead – Otto Stutz is our BSA Scout Program Lead! Let's help them..!

- - Get into the schools and support the scholarship opportunities available through the Patriots Pen and the Voice of Democracy programs

- - Get Veterans into the classrooms via our Vets in classroom program

- - Support our three BSA Scout Troops with general projects and Eagle Scout projects

- **Goal** – as we work to achieve the above goals, let's also keep focus on the goal of taking care of ourselves. Remember listed as the VFW #1 Purpose is to preserve and strengthen comradeship among its members. That's all of us – so I say we should build upon last year's Post social events – and more! We've already formed a "winning team". Now, let's continue "making it funner"!! (Yes, that's a noun, verb & adjective!!)

Please note – as with last year... Qualifying for All-state of All American Post – **is not one of my goals..** I never set a goal just to receive an award or trophy. However, I believe if we keep moving forward, proactively promoting the VFW's mission, helping Vets and keeping focus on our goals – including, reminding ourselves it's good to be us – then a 4th year as a TN All-State and National All-American Post is very achievable.

OK.. Every year, we should stop for a moment and ask each other to “Remember” what we’re about... (so, from da’ book)

VFW Mission Statement: The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States believes America is defined by how it treats those who sacrificed to protect it; we believe in protecting and fighting for those who were brave enough to fight for us. Whether on Capitol Hill or in our communities, the VFW fights and defends the rights of America’s veterans by lobbying for veteran’s rights, helping veterans get the benefits they deserve, and assisting veterans further their education with scholarships and living assistance for them and their families. To do less, would be an unconscionable betrayal of our responsibilities as Americans and veterans.

Therefore – as our country changes - Being a *member* of the VFW means being an agent of change. Our goal is to assist any Veteran in need – regardless of any form of diversity (color, religion, or gender). If a Veteran has an honorable discharge and is in need – then we are in position to assist! I am proud to have been part of a generation where women joined us in battle – **and I’m proud to see female veterans eligible for and joining our Post! They have earned that right!**

In parallel with the VFW Mission Statement there are seven (7) stated VFW Purposes – we need to embrace each of them!

- to preserve and strengthen comradeship among its members
- to assist worthy comrades
- to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to assist their surviving spouses and orphans
- to maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States, and fidelity to its Constitution and laws
- to foster true patriotism
- To maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom, and
- To preserve and defend the United States from all enemies

OK – let’s actually talk about “How will we work together”? Are you aware that a **VFW Post is almost a pure democracy** and (yes) nearly all of its programs depend

upon its volunteers. Unlike any military organization, the Post CDR does not have 51% of the vote. Rather - Post “decisions” are made by vote of its members (you) who are informed on the subject - and then all actions are carried out by volunteers. As a result, if there is not a set of hard and fast rules to follow and a clear understanding of fields of responsibility and limits of authority there are going to be misunderstandings and irritations which create dissension and detract from the purpose of the organization. The master set of rules for the guidance of all Post activities is the VFW National Bylaws and Manual of Procedure. The Bylaws are the basic rules and the Manual of Procedure goes into further detail. These govern all activities of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and are by definition inflexible in how we do organize & do business.

However – the VFW National Leaders are smart – they realize that Posts need to be flexible and responsive to meet the everchanging National environment – so they provide a detailed Commanders Guide which shows they are also flexible, they embrace change and are looking for “Leaders” to flex with them. I’ve read both books – and will employ both..

So, why did I take the time to go through all of this up front - tonight?? The Members of this Post have elected me to lead this Post for the next year! **I will do that!** I, and the EXCOM – 8 officers elected by you, along with 5 appointed Members - will work to keep this Post in forward motion. **As part of that job** we are **bringing forward a Post Calendar and a Plan of Action (POA) for your approval – and then, once you’ve approved it - to put it in motion. And then, to ensure its success by removing obstacles from the Committee and Project leaders who have stepped up to execute key actions you’ve approved. We will do that!**

My job – the CDR’s job - is also to ensure we enforce all the VFW & Post laws and bylaws. **I will do that!** That said – Post Commanders are given specific leeway here! Sec 218 (a) (1) (d) states the Post CDR “shall” decide all questions of law and usage within the Post. **I will also do that!** In addition, the VFW CDR’s Guide specifically asks Post CDRS if they are: **“courageous enough to abandon the past”?** They offer that - When challenging the status quo, it’s easy to say “we can’t change that because it’s tradition!” or “why change when we’ve always done it this way?” Modern leaders (to include Department VFW Leadership)

understand that in order to succeed in our mission - and - to grow, we must not only be willing to change - we must embrace it. Changing times call for changing practices, and in our dynamic society this inevitably means that failure to change is often the failure to thrive.

Comrades – please understand – that **I embrace this concept of “change “where it is warranted”, and where you will have voted approval to support it (to include resources!)!** So, that means there will be times where we will not “all” always agree! That’s ok – let’s bring forward our ideas in harmony – lets debate this at our committee and EXCOM meetings – and - where approval is required – at Post meetings before Post Members. But, once decided - let’s all agree to go forward and work in harmony. As you inject yourself into a discussion, please ask yourself if you are part of the solution or part of the problem. Then also ask yourself – am I just sitting on the sideline armchair quarterbacking – or am I ready to inject myself as a volunteer into the fray! (Note – if you just sit on the sidelines and shoot darts - I will openly challenge you with that question!)

From the Commanders’ Guide - When the Veterans of Foreign Wars was first organized, it was primarily an association of individual groups all working toward common goals of veteran’s legislation, veterans’ benefits, veterans’ rehabilitation and patriotism. **While these remain as our major goals, the interests of the Veterans of Foreign Wars have broadened at the local Post level & have grown far beyond the original purpose – to now include; youth activities, civic betterment, humanitarian projects, and community service!** Speaking the obvious – for a Post to branch out to embrace these wider interests means it also requires a tremendous amount of resources including individual volunteer effort, administrative support and yes, money. You cannot have one without the other.

Comrades – As I stated last year - **How far this Post will reach or branch out will be your choice – not mine.** [I have worked with the EXCOM to bring forward a 2022-2023 Post “Plan of Action” which will outline our VFW Calendar year to include proposed key events and actions. Note: within this POA are the goals I’ve voiced this evening. Later there will be a motion on the floor to approve this POA.](#) What we actually execute will only be limited by our collective imagination, common sense and allocation of resources (funding and volunteers).

Closing

Let me close by thanking each of you, just for being members of the Post! Yes – being a member is a benefit each of you have earned! But – as we recently heard from our department leadership - Your membership is more than a card in your wallet. Your membership is veteran fellowship, it is giving back to your community and veterans in need. And it represents a voice - your membership is a collective voice that echoes in the halls of Congress. Just being a member makes a difference. So, while we always welcome all who want/can support our committees and events – we thank everyone of you who have already spoken loudly - just with your membership!

Please keep in mind - In each town throughout Tennessee today, there is a veteran who received a disability claims rating, education benefits, or is looking to leverage a VA home loan. Also, in each of those towns is the loved one of a veteran who has lost their beloved hero and laying their veteran to rest using the burial benefit. We exist to help any and all of them!

Blue skies,

Shawn

Shawn R. Tallant
Post Commander
Tellico Village VFW Post 12135