

Our History

March 15-17, 1919

The American Legion is founded in Paris at the first caucus by members of the American Expeditionary Force.

May 9, 1919

Caucus meeting in St. Louis adopts "The American Legion" as the organization's official name. The Legion's draft constitution is approved, and so is its preamble, which begins: "For God and Country, we associate ourselves together. . ." The preamble, with its heartfelt dedication to freedom and democracy, is still recited today at official gatherings of The American Legion.

June 9, 1919

The National Executive Committee of The American Legion adopts the Legion Emblem.

Sept. 16, 1919

The U.S. Congress charters The American Legion.

Nov. 10-12, 1919

The American Legion convenes its first annual convention in Minneapolis.

Nov. 10-12, 1919

The American Legion's Constitution and Preamble are adopted at the convention in Minneapolis.

Nov. 10-12, 1919

The American Legion passes resolution supporting the Boy Scouts of America. Today, the Legion is the chartering agency for more than 1,700 scouting units that involve 64,000 youths.

Nov. 11, 1919

Delegates to The American Legion's first annual convention in Minneapolis vote 361-323 to locate the Legion's National Headquarters in Indianapolis, Ind., rather than Washington, D.C.

Aug. 9, 1921

The U.S. Veterans Bureau, forerunner of the Veterans Administration, is created as a result of efforts by The American Legion. Today, the Legion continues to lobby for adequate funding of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

June 15, 1923

The first "Flag Code" is drafted during a conference called by The American Legion in Washington, D.C. The code eventually was adopted by Congress in 1942. Today, the Legion is at the forefront of efforts to gain a constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from physical desecration.

July 17, 1925

American Legion Baseball program is created. Today, more than 60 percent of professional baseball players are graduates of The American Legion Baseball program. About 89,000 high-school-age youths play on Legion-sponsored teams each year.

1931

Membership in The American Legion increases to more than one million veterans.

June 23, 1935

The first American Legion Boys State is convened in Springfield, Ill., to help youths gain an understanding of the structure and operation of American government. The first Boys Nation was organized in 1946.

June 1, 1938

The final round of The American Legion's first annual National High School Oratorical Contest is held in Norman, Okla. Today, more than 25,000 high school students from around the country compete annually in the contest designed to develop a greater understanding of the U.S. Constitution. Winners are awarded thousands of dollars in college scholarships.

Sept. 19-21, 1942

The Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion is changed for the first and only time since its creation in 1919 -- the word "War" is changed to "Wars."

Oct. 29, 1942

The American Legion's charter is amended to allow veterans of World War II to join the organization.

Dec. 15, 1943

Harry W. Colmery, past national commander of The American Legion, writes in longhand on hotel stationery the first draft of what will later become the "GI Bill of Rights", the Legion's greatest single legislative achievement. Today, the Legion is at the forefront of efforts to improve benefits for this nation's newest veterans, those who've served during Desert Shield/Desert Storm and are serving today in a variety of peacekeeping roles.

June 22, 1944

The GI Bill is signed into law by President Franklin Roosevelt.

May 29, 1946

A \$50,000 grant from The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary is presented to a small, struggling organization, the American Heart Association, to inaugurate a nationwide program for the study, prevention, and treatment of rheumatic heart disease.

Aug. 28, 1946

Legion membership surpasses three million.

Sept. 1, 1949

The first World War II veteran is elected national commander of The American Legion.

May 4, 1950

The American Legion votes to contribute funds to the field of mental health with the provision that the three major mental health organizations then in existence be amalgamated into one. They accepted this provision and the National Association for Mental Health was born.

Dec. 28, 1950

Korean War veterans are approved for membership in the Legion.

July 9, 1954

The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation is formed. Since that time, the foundation has awarded \$4 million to youth-oriented organizations and projects designed to help America's children.

Sept. 1, 1966

Vietnam War veterans are approved for membership in the Legion.

Sept. 1, 1966

The American Legion voices great concern over the fate of POWs in Vietnam. Today, the Legion continues to press for a full accounting of POW/MIAs and has formed a special group from among the nation's major veteran's organizations to take the lead on this issue.

May 1, 1972

The American Legion implements the Halloween safety program for children. Today, it remains the only national program of its kind.

Aug. 26, 1982

The American Legion presents a \$1 million check to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund toward the construction of "The Wall" in Washington, D.C. The Legion, which had solicited donations from its members, eventually became the largest single contributor to the project.

Aug. 25, 1983

The first Korean War veteran is elected national commander of The American Legion.

July 21, 1983

The American Legion announces its sponsorship of an independent study on the effects of exposure to Agent Orange on Vietnam veterans. The results of "The American Legion-Columbia University Study of Vietnam-era Veterans" were presented to Congress in 1989.

Sept. 8, 1988

The first Vietnam War veteran is elected National Commander of The American Legion.

Jan. 1, 1989

The new Department of Veterans Affairs, elevated to cabinet-level status, begins operations. The American Legion had fought hard for the Veterans Administration to become a cabinet-level department, arguing that veterans -- as an important segment of society deserved representation in the highest councils of government.

Oct. 16, 1989

The longstanding objectives of The American Legion to improve adjudication procedures for veterans' claims are achieved as the U.S. Court of Veterans Appeals begins operations. Most of the provisions contained in the law creating the court originally were included in the Veterans Reassurance Act, which was written by the Legion and introduced in Congress in 1988.

Aug. 2, 1990

The American Legion files suit against the federal government for failure to conduct a study, mandated by Congress, of the effects of Agent Orange on the health of Vietnam veterans.

Oct. 11, 1990

The "Family Support Network" is formed by The American Legion to assist the families of military personnel deployed during Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm in the Middle East. The Network stepped in to help in a myriad of ways, from offering financial assistance to mowing lawns to baby-sitting to providing a sympathetic ear. Today, the Legion's Family Support Network continues in existence to assist America's newest veterans, particularly with employment, as they return to civilian life.

Oct. 30, 1990

Veterans of Lebanon, Grenada and Panama hostilities are approved for membership in the Legion.

June 15, 1991

The American Legion's first annual Junior Shooting Sports National Air Rifle Championships are conducted at the Olympic Training Center at Colorado Springs, Colo. Each year more than 600 high school students enter the contest, which is designed to teach gun safety and marksmanship.

Dec. 3, 1991

Veterans of Desert Shield/Desert Storm are approved for membership in The American Legion. Today, the Legion continues to press for improved educational and medical benefits for Gulf War veterans.

April 5, 1993

The first class of recently discharged veterans begins training in Sterling, Va., for eventual placement in well-paying jobs in the construction industry. The landmark training and job-placement program is a joint effort by The American Legion and the Laborers' International Union of North America to assist veterans returning to an uncertain job market.

Aug. 24, 1994

The American Legion announces creation of the Citizens Flag Alliance, a coalition of organizations and individual citizens, to work for a constitutional amendment to protect the American flag from physical desecration.

Sept. 24, 1994

The American Legion announces partnership with the Air and Space Museum to develop an exhibit for the bomber Enola Gay, which dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Previous museum plans had drawn intense criticism from veterans, scholars and the public.

Jan. 30, 1995

The American Legion announces Legion's acceptance of a scaled-down exhibit "without political commentary" for the Enola Gay, ending the greatest controversy in the Smithsonian Institute's 149-year history.

March 21, 1995

Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Howell Heflin (D-AL) introduce Senate Joint Resolution 31, calling for an amendment to the US Constitution to protect the American flag from physical

desecration; Representatives Gerald Soloman (R-NY) and G. V. "Sonny" Montgomery (D-MS) introduce a similar bill, House Joint Resolution 79, in their chamber.

April 22, 1995

Hawaii state lawmakers adopt flag memorializing resolution becoming the 49th state to do so; Vermont is the only state not to pass the measure.

June 28, 1995

HJR 79 clears House 312-120; 290 votes were needed for the two-thirds majority required for passage of a constitutional amendment.

July 20, 1995

SJR 31 passes Senate Judiciary Committee in a 12-6 vote.

Oct. 1, 1995

The American Legion forms its Persian Gulf Task Force to enhance TAL's service to America's newest generation of wartime veterans, thousands of whom suffer from illnesses linked to their service in the region.

Dec. 12, 1995

Senate rejects SJR 31 by a vote of 63-36, three votes short of required two-thirds; The American Legion pledges to continue the fight for the amendment.

Feb. 13, 1996

Reps. Gerald Solomon (R-NY) and William Lipinski (D-IL) introduce HJR 54, a flag-protection constitutional amendment.

Sept. 16, 1996

The American Legion awards a \$20,000 postsecondary scholarship to each of the 10 inaugural Samsung American Legion high school scholars.

June 11, 1997

The American Legion National Emergency Fund surpasses the \$1 million mark in cash grants given in 1997 to flood victims who belonged to The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion. Most of the grant recipients reside in the Ohio River flood plains of Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana as well as in Red River flooded areas of Minnesota and North Dakota.

June 12, 1997

US House passes HJR 54, a flag-protection constitutional amendment, by a vote of 310-114.

Sept. 3, 1997

The American Legion presents its first ever National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year award to Cpl. William T. Rhodes of Huntington, Pa., during its 79th National Convention in Orlando, Fla.

Sept. 23, 1997

National Commander Anthony G. Jordan testifies before members of the US House and US Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. US Rep. Robert Stump (R-AZ) promises congressional hearings would be held on the GI Bill of Health, TAL's plan to improve the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system.

Feb. 4, 1998

Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Max Cleland (D-GA) introduce S.J. Res. 40. The amendment has 61 co-sponsors to date.

Oct. 7, 1998

Sen. Majority Leader Trent Lott brings SJR 40 to the floor of the U.S. Senate asking for unanimous consent to proceed to debate and vote. Senators Robert Kerrey (D-NE) and Patrick Leahy (D-VT) objected to consideration of the resolution, citing lack of time to sufficiently debate the amendment. With that the measure was lost in the 105th Congress.

Feb. 24, 1999

Reps. Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-CA) and John Murtha (D-PA) introduce H.J. Res. 33, a constitutional amendment which would return to the American people the right to protect their flag. Rep. John Sweeney (R-NY), who replaced retired Congressman Gerald Solomon, is also leading the co- sponsor drive by shoring up support among newly elected members of Congress.

Mar. 17, 1999

Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Max Cleland (D-GA) introduce S.J. Res. 14. The amendment has 54 cosponsors. In all, sixty-four Senators have pledged their support of the amendment.

June 24, 1999

The U.S. House of Representatives, by an overwhelming majority, passes H.J. Res. 33 by a 305-124 margin, 15 votes more than was needed for the two-thirds majority required for passage of a constitutional amendment.

March 29, 2000

Senate Joint Resolution 14, the Flag Protection Constitutional Amendment, falling four short of the necessary 67 votes, is lost 63-37 in the United States Senate. Once again a clear, but insufficient, majority supported it. Once again, a small number of US Senators made it clear they place no trust in the American people and have a mere spoken regard for the importance the people place on the Flag of the United States.

For the remainder of the year, the Citizens Flag Alliance focuses in two broad areas: recognizing supporters in the 106th Congress and determining the position of every candidate seeking a seat in the 107th. Three hundred sixty-eight members of Congress (305 Representatives and 63 Senators) receive a formal, personal thank-you and a small memento from the CFA groups in their state. More than 1,000 candidates for federal office are queried on their support for a flag protection amendment. When election returns are finalized, more than 300 Representatives and 60 Senators are seated and on the record as flag amendment supporters.

March 2001

The CFA produces another in a continuing line of video pieces that depict the importance of the flag and call to action, during the 107th Congress, the 141 Organizations that make up the Citizens Flag Alliance.

March 13, 2001

A press conference is called in Washington, DC, to announce the introduction of the flag protection amendment in both chambers of the 107th Congress. Senators Max Cleland (D-GA)

and Orrin Hatch (R-UT) become the Chief Cosponsors in the US Senate, while Representatives Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-CA) and John Murtha (D-PA) champion the cause in the US House of Representatives. The House resolution, HJR 36, enjoys official co-sponsorship from more than 100 members. In the Senate, SJR 7 counts 40 official cosponsors. Efforts toward a cosponsor drive in both chambers continue.

Sept. 11, 2002

The American Legion takes lead in conducting "A Day to Remember" events to mark the anniversary of the terrorist attack on the nation.

November 2002

The American Legion launches national "I Am Not a Number" campaign to identify and document the delays veterans face in obtaining earned medical care benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

April 2003

The American Legion turns up the effort to eliminate the Disabled Veterans Tax, known as 'concurrent receipt' in political circles. As the last quarter of the year begins lawmakers continue to search for a solution as they feel the pressure from their constituents.