



AMERICAN LEGION POST 46
NEWSLETTER
April, May, and June 2012

"In Memory of Those Who Served and to Honor Those Who Are Serving."

To All Fellow Legionnaires of American Legion Post 46

The Post 46 newsletter exactly one year ago started with a lament as to how much longer the cold winter weather of March would continue. What a difference a year makes!! Not only was this past winter one of the mildest in many years, but a strong tornado, supposedly a result of unusually warm weather, recently ripped through parts of Dexter, Michigan, uprooting trees and tearing roofs off buildings. Fortunately, however, we understand that no one was seriously injured by the tornado which was somewhat of a minor miracle considering the extensive damage that it caused.

This issue of the Post 46 newsletter contains a number of recent news items involving the rights or interests of veterans, many of which have a local flavor or connection of some kind or another. One such news event was reported in the Post 46 newsletter exactly one year ago involving the abduction and disappearance of Ann Arbor native, Sgt. Altaie, in Iraq many years ago. The conclusion to this long drawn-out saga is reported below. Another item involves the continuing commitment by two Michiganders to select, train and place service dogs with veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder. I hope you will enjoy reading about the beneficial effects which these animals have on the lives of our wounded warriors. Another item involves the legal efforts by The Thomas More Legal Center here in Ann Arbor to preserve the Mt. Soledad Cross in San Diego, California. The American Legion is also heavily involved in this litigation which is on its way to the U.S. Supreme Court this spring and should be of great interest to all Legionnaires.

Another recent news item which is of considerable concern to all veterans is last week's report of the alleged killing of 16 Afghan civilians by Staff Sgt. Robert Bales. Although it is too early at this time to learn of all the facts involved in this tragedy, it has been reported that Sgt. Bales had served three tours in Iraq and had then been sent on a tour in Afghanistan after believing his overseas assignments were finished. It was also reported that he suffered traumatic brain injury and severe financial problems at home. Obviously, the stress and strain on combat veterans can be overwhelming, particularly over a lengthy period of time. On the other hand, however, his alleged actions of gunning down a large number of supposedly innocent civilians cannot be easily excused. The full investigative process of this tragic incident will surely point fingers in many directions and our next issue of the newsletter will contain a more in depth report of the events as they unfold.

On a more pleasant note, spring does, in fact, bring many of us out of the inactivity of our winter blahs. I urge all of you, therefore, to consult the Calendar of Events for Post 46 for the next three months which is included in the newsletter and again ask that you make plans to become active and participate in some of our events. Also note the addition to the Calendar of the Veterans Seminar on April 18th courtesy of Dignity to which you must RSVP if you plan to attend.

This calendar not only includes dates of luncheon meetings and Regular Post Meetings but also includes dates for our annual presentation of ROTC scholarships at the University of Michigan, our annual poppy sales dates, bingo dates at the Ann Arbor Veterans Hospital and information about the opening day for our Post 46 Baseball Team. Get involved, get active, participate and get some value from your membership in Post 46! Veterans who volunteer are not only a valuable resource to other veterans and their community but they also then remind themselves that they are capable of flying the flag and that they can still make a positive contribution to society. Post 46 activities also put you in contact with some of your fellow veterans of Post 46. Most of them are pretty special people. If you can volunteer for any of these activities, please call me or our Commander, Steve Duncan, at 734-997-9485 to let us know when you are available to help us out. Any contributions you can make of time or money (or both) to Post 46 and its various missions to serve our veterans, active service personnel and our community will be gratefully appreciated.



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- April 2 Regular Post Meeting
Directors Room, Weber's Inn, 7:00 p.m.
- April 3 ROTC Awards Ceremony, Rackham Auditorium, 6:30 p.m.
- April 16 Washtenaw County Council of Veterans, 8:00 p.m.
Milan American Legion Post 268.
- April 18 Luncheon Meeting
Classic Cup Café, Jackson Road, 11:45 a.m
- April 18 Dignity Memorial Veterans Seminar
6:00 p.m. Damon's Grill, 3150 Boardwalk, Ann Arbor 48108
NOTE: A MEAL WILL BE SERVED AFTER THE SEMINAR COURTESY OF
DIGNITY. IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND, YOU MUST R.S.V.P. TO MARK
CHAMP AT EITHER 734-663-3375 OR
MAURICE.CHAMP@DIGNITYMEMORIAL.COM !!
- April 20 Bingo - Ann Arbor VA Hospital, 7:30 p.m.
- May 7 Regular Post Meeting
Directors Room, Weber's Inn, 7:00 p.m.

- May 16 Luncheon Meeting
Classic Cup Café, Jackson Road, 11:45 a.m.
- May 17, 18 and 19 Poppy Days
(See more poppy details later in this Newsletter)
- May 20 2nd District Meeting – Memorial Service 12:30 P.M.
Regular Meeting 2:00 P.M. at Tecumseh American Legion Post 34.
- May 21 Washtenaw County Council of Veterans, 8:00 P.M.
Location to be announced.
- May 28 Memorial Day
- June 4 Regular Post Meeting
Directors Room, Weber’s Inn, 7:00 p.m.
- June 5 American Legion Post 46 Baseball Team Season Begins
(See more baseball details later in this Newsletter)
- June 18 Washtenaw County Council of Veterans, 8:00 P.M.
Location to be announced.
- June 20 Luncheon Meeting
Classic Cup Café, Jackson Road, 11:45 a.m.

LUNCHEON MEETINGS

As always, our luncheon meetings are held each month at the Classic Cup Café on Jackson Road, Ann Arbor. It is an opportunity for all members to get together, relax, enjoy a meal and get to know other members of Post 46 in an informal setting. It is always a welcome surprise when members we have not seen in some time attend and renew old friendships. If you would like us to invite any particular speaker or special guest to one of our luncheons, please let us know.

POPPY SALES

Post 46 will again be selling poppies on behalf of our veterans who are patients at the Ann Arbor Veterans Hospital. We plan to conduct poppy sales for three days on May 17th, 18th and 19th. The proceeds of our poppy sales are earmarked (if that word is still politically acceptable) to cover the expenses which Post 46 incurs for providing entertainments, prizes and other items to our hospitalized veterans. Our Post 46 Poppy Chairman is Karl Meyer. He and other members will be calling to ask you to volunteer for one or more two hour shifts to sell poppies at one of our locations. Karl’s telephone number is: 734-945-0490 or contact Steve Duncan at 734-997-9485 or Duncanssm@comcast.net to volunteer to participate in this important annual fund raiser.

Our schedule generally calls for 2 hour shifts between 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Surely, everyone can make the time to volunteer for at least one shift for such a worthwhile cause. You will note that our Calendar of Events is quite full for the next three months. We need volunteers to fulfill these obligations more than ever before if Post 46 hopes to continue these activities on behalf of our community, veterans and those on active service. A poppy will also be enclosed with each copy of the newsletter. All donations of either time or money are greatly appreciated. Please get involved one way or the other!!

BINGO AT VA HOSPITAL

As the Calendar of Events indicates, our next bingo night at the VA Hospital is April 20, 2012. As always, we expect our Commander, Steve Duncan, to be present to operate the new computer generated number machine (no more bouncing balls) and to announce the numbers. Steve will need help to hand out the hospital gift shop tickets which we award as bingo prizes to the hospitalized veterans so please make it a point this year to contact Steve to let him know you will be there to help out. As they say, do it today!!

POST 46 AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL

Believe it or not, our Post 46 baseball team will soon be back in action. Commander Duncan has submitted the following report:

The Post 46 baseball team will begin play the first week of June. Its first tournament is scheduled in Troy, Ohio from June 8-10. Chelsea High School diamond continues to be the home field and, when the schedule is complete, we will mail out the schedule with a map of the location of the field to all who request it. Otherwise, this information is provided on our website with a link to <http://www.post46baseball.com> If you are interested in donating to support the team, send your donation to American Legion Post 46, P.O. Box 2192, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All donations are tax-deductible as permitted by law. Please make your checks payable to American Legion Post 46 Baseball.

On Tuesday, June 26, we are planning a Veterans Appreciation game to be played at Eastern Michigan baseball diamond on Hewitt Street near St. Joseph's Hospital. We are inviting three or five teams to participate so that two or three games will be played. Once again, as soon as plans are completed, a schedule will be mailed to those who request it and details will be posted on our website. There will be a special ceremony before the game to recognize all veterans attending the game. Please come to as many games as you can and support the Post 46 baseball team. If you have any questions, please contact Commander Duncan at 734-997-9485 or duncanssm@comcast.net.

THE MISSING ANN ARBOR POW-MIA -THE FINAL CHAPTER

The Post 46 newsletter sent to you this time last year contained an item which began with the following paragraph:

"As you are all aware, when members of Post 46 gather together, we designate an empty chair on which we place our POW-MIA banner in memory of those who are unaccounted for either as prisoners of war or as missing in action. One of the longest and most puzzling cases involving a missing soldier is the continuing mystery regarding the disappearance of a former resident of Ann Arbor, Ahmed Kousay Altaie."

As was then promised to all Post 46 newsletter readers, this newsletter brings you the conclusion to that lengthy saga primarily through the courtesy of the Wall Street Journal dated February 27, 2012, which

devoted some four or five columns to describe the entire story dating back some 5 or 6 years. Much of the background of the sudden disappearance of Ahmed Altaie in Baghdad was contained in last year's newsletter and I hope some of you have it available to you. If not, back copies of the newsletter are available on our Post 46 web site at Americanlegionannarbor.com.

On December 18th of last year, the last column of U.S. combat troops drove out of Iraq and an army that takes pride in leaving no man behind did in fact leave one man behind – Ahmed Altaie. As most of you will recall, somewhere in Iraq was U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Ahmed Altaie, who was snatched by militants from a Baghdad street back in 2006 and was the last American soldier in the war listed as missing or captured. By way of background, Altaie grew up in Iraq but fled the country with his family when he was in his teens. The family finally settled in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His mother said that her son, like many Iraq exiles, was eager to help rebuild his homeland after the U.S. invasion. The ouster of Saddam Hussein gave him renewed focus and he joined the Army Reserve program for native speakers of Arabic and was deployed to Iraq in November, 2005. He was assigned to a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Baghdad until he was kidnapped the following year while on his way on a motorcycle to visit his Iraqi wife who was still then living in Baghdad. As an American soldier and a Sunni Muslim, Altaie had two strikes against him when he left the safety of his base inside the Green Zone, a well guarded area within Baghdad.

For the missing sergeant's mother and father, Nawal and Kousay Altaie of Ann Arbor, Michigan, the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq was yet another blow in a five and one-half year ordeal in which certain hints of their son's survival – a tip received, an arrest made, a body or bones delivered, an image of their son flickering on the Internet – was eventually snuffed out. During this entire time, a well staffed office in Baghdad, the Personnel Recovery Department, received and investigated false and misleading reports as to Sgt. Altaie's whereabouts even to the extent of performing DNA tests on bodies and bones alleged to be those of Sgt. Altaie and sending out military units to dig up graves purporting to contain his body. During this period of time, the Wall Street Journal reporter visited the Altaie home in Ann Arbor and he described how he could "feel the sadness throughout the home." Photos of Ahmed were prominently displayed throughout the home and his mother showed the reporter a Syrian inlaid Koran box in which were a stack of handwritten letters which she had written almost every night pleading for his release but which she had never sent due to her fears that they might have offended his kidnappers.

Unfortunately, this story does not have a happy ending. Two or three weeks ago, there was a knock on the door of the Ann Arbor Altaie family home with the dreaded news that the body of Sgt. Altaie had been delivered by a militant group to the U.S. Army a few days earlier. The Altaie family can take very little comfort that confirmation of their son's death has finally brought "closure" to their continued hopes for his survival; however, their long ordeal should remind all Post 46 members to pay particular respect to the designated empty chair on which we place our POW-MIA banner the next time you attend a Post 46 meeting or other American Legion function.

MAN'S BEST FRIEND AND POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER ("PTSD")

All dog lovers will find much to appreciate in this local story demonstrating how man's best friend can contribute to the healing process of veterans who suffer from PTSD. Jennifer Petre of Howell and Donna Fournier of Garden City have teamed up under the name "Stiggy's Dogs, Inc" to select dogs from humane societies and other shelters and train them to be service dogs to veterans suffering from PTSD.

These particular dogs would otherwise have been euthanized so that Stiggy's motto is: "Rescuing one to rescue another."

Ms. Petre's husband's nephew who was known as "Doc Stiggy" was a Marine corpsman who was killed in Afghanistan in 2009. Ms. Petre's commitment to training dogs to become companions to veterans with PTSD was something she committed to do to honor his memory.

One fortunate veteran who has been a recent beneficiary of this program is Terran Frye, a veteran from Westland, who served two terms of duty in Iraq and who returned home in 2005 with PTSD and had become dysfunctional. After being treated by the Veterans Administration for many years and with many drugs to alleviate his anxiety attacks, he met Ms. Petre in 2010 who persuaded him to take Hershey, a female black lab and beagle mix she had rescued and trained, into his home. Frye was understandably very doubtful that a dog could help with his PTSD but Hershey has apparently had a very positive influence in his life. "Once I got Hershey, it helped a lot more than the treatments I had been getting or even in-patient treatment," Frye said. Besides being able to improve the handling of his own personal life, Frye and Hershey have begun volunteering to help other veterans both through Stiggy's Dogs and through the Freedom Center, a welcoming center for veterans at Detroit Metro airport.

The dogs selected and trained by Ms. Fournier and Ms. Petre can be almost of any breed. Each dog is paired with a veteran based on interviews which assess the needs of the particular veteran. The veterans come to Howell to train with their dogs for one or two weeks and it is the responsibility of each veteran to take his or her dog through the Canine Good Citizen certification program. In the next phase, the veterans spend one to three months on-site, training their dogs for the Service Dog Public Access Test. After passing this test, the pair goes home together; however, Stiggy's Dogs will continue to monitor their progress as needed.

In their first 18 months of operation, Stiggy's Dogs have reportedly trained and placed 15 dogs with veterans around the country. Many of the veterans have reported that, after getting a dog, they were able to reduce their dependency upon anti-anxiety and sleep medications. Like Frye, they all have been enabled to lead more normal lives. If any Post 46 member knows of a veteran who might benefit from the companionship of such a trained service dog or wishes to make a contribution to the program, please visit <http://www.stiggysdogs.org> or call (248) 667-8364.

THE MT. SOLEDAD CROSS AND THE THOMAS MORE LAW CENTER

Most veterans know about and might have been fortunate enough to have visited the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial cross, a monument that has stood in San Diego honoring American servicemen and women for more than 56 years. Many veterans are further perplexed as to how the very existence of this patriotic monument has become the focus of an intense legal battleground which is currently on its way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

By way of background, the concrete cross was initially erected in 1954 by the Mount Soledad Memorial Association. It is 29 feet tall and sits on a 14 foot base. The six concentric walls surrounding it display more than two thousand plaques and commemorate individuals and veterans groups. The existence of the Cross was first challenged by the ACLU in court in 1989. To resolve the legal challenge, the Thomas More Law Center of Ann Arbor, among others, was able to persuade Congress to take over the memorial and declare the Mt. Soledad Cross to be a National Veteran's Memorial honoring the veterans of all wars, including the war on terrorism.

The ACLU promptly filed a new lawsuit against the federal government to tear down the Cross because it was now on federal property. The Federal District Court initially held that there was not an establishment of religion clause violation because Congress acted in a clear cut secular purpose to preserve the site simply as a patriotic Memorial. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, however, reversed this decision holding that the Memorial as configured primarily conveys a message of governmental endorsement of religion. This litigation is headed to the U.S. Supreme Court for final resolution.

Joining the American Legion and other veterans' organizations in defending the Cross by participating in this litigation, the Thomas Law Center has also filed a brief with the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of Admiral Jeremiah Denton (USN Retired), Sybil and Robert Martino, parents of then Captain Michael Martino (USMC) and Julie Bloomfield, the wife of major Gerald Bloomfield (USMC). Both Captain Martino and Major Bloomfield were killed in action in Iraq in November 2005 and Admiral Denton was subjected to severe torture during his nearly eight years of imprisonment in North Vietnam. All three service members have plaques commemorating their service to our nation at the foot of the Cross.

If the U.S. Supreme Court were to deny the appeal, the Cross would have to be torn down. Such a decision will likely be made sometime this spring. The case is currently cited or known as U.S. vs Trunk and many members of Post 46 members will have sufficient interest to follow its outcome.

REGULAR POST MEETINGS

Our regular post meetings continue to be held each month at Weber's on Jackson Road, Ann Arbor. All members are invited to attend and become active in Post 46 activities. These meetings are always conducted in an informal manner and members are urged to participate to express their views, voice their opinions, and vote on any business matters on the agenda.

ADDITIONAL NEWS ITEMS

A curious item which was reported throughout the news media last week involved a recent visit by our Defense Secretary, Leon Panetta, to visit the troops in Afghanistan at "Camp Leatherneck." Shortly before his address to some 200 troops who had gathered in a tent at Camp Leatherneck, all those assembled were told "something had come to light" and, without further explanation, were abruptly instructed to file outside and to disarm themselves of all their weapons. According to the sergeant who was ordered to carry out this command: "Somebody got itchy - we adjust. That's all I've got to say." Major General Mark Gurganus later said he gave the order because Afghan troops who were also attending the talk were unarmed and he wanted the policy to be consistent for all; however, US troops often remain armed even when their Afghan colleagues have been asked to disarm so that General Gurganus' tortured explanation makes no sense and is not credible. As far as anyone is able to determine, this is the first time that US troops have been stripped of their weapons during an address by their own Secretary of Defense. Only in Afghanistan!!!

In almost every issue of your newsletter, Post 46 members are invited to forward any announcements, news items, opinions or other information which he or she would like to see published in our next news letter. The newsletter mailbag (email bag?) has not recently been very full of any of your responses to our invitation. Please stop sitting on your hands and provide us with articles, suggestions, etc. or you will just have to continue to read only those items and opinions selected by your editor. Enjoy!

BEWARE OF SEQUESTRATION AND THE FEDERAL BUDGETARY PROCESS

When the apparent need for a strong and prepared military begins to fade from the public perception, the budget cuts to veterans pay and benefits promptly follow. This newsletter has warned veterans on many prior occasions about this process and the necessity to support The American Legion and other veterans groups as they combine their political muscle to protect the welfare of our nation's veterans. The "sequestration process" is one where across-the-board spending cuts are applied to government programs in order to meet the budgetary goal of reducing the nation's deficit if the politicians involved in the budget process cannot mutually agree as to what programs should be reduced and how these reductions should apply. Some programs are exempt from this process such as Social Security, Medicare and SSI. Otherwise, the "sequestration" cuts are designed to be applied one-half to defense spending and one-half to non-defense spending. As one would expect, the process has become a political football. One reporter describes the current debate on budget cuts as follows:

"The Obama administration proposed defense budget calls for military families and retirees to pay sharply more for their healthcare, while leaving unionized civilian defense workers' benefits alone. Several congressional aides suggested the move is designed to increase the enrollment in Obamacare's state-run insurance exchanges"

As a part of the "sequestration" process, the Office of Management and Budget has already indicated that it might cut a considerable percentage from the VA Healthcare budget. All veterans have a united interest in working to prevent such an "across-the-board-cut." Post 46 members should also exercise their political muscle; so get busy and contact your political representatives regarding this issue!!

POST OFFICERS

Steve Duncan, Commander & Finance Officer
Greta Krapohl, Sr. Vice Commander
Michael Malley, Jr. Vice Commander & Judge Advocate
Elmer White, Adjutant
John "Laurie" Howley, Sgt. at Arms
Graydon Krapohl, Service Officer
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