



AMVETS Tallahassee Post 1776 Cyber Newsletter

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In this issue.....

Commander's Message Page 1-2

Chaplain's Corner Page 2

Turkey Shoot Help Request

Page 2

POW-MIA Monument Page 3

My Cousin Raffale Minichiello
Page 4-5

USS Tang Page 5

Melinda Topicz: A Trailblazer Journey Page 6-7

Wreaths Across America Page 8

Guantanamo Bay Page 9

Legislative Update Page 10-11

AMVETS Monthly Calendar
Page 12



Commander's Corner

November 1st was a pretty a cold morning, but Butch Topicz and I braved the elements to try to recruit some members in Crawfordville, an event sponsored by Tractor Supply, honoring Veterans Month. It went well, we sold a couple of hundred dollars' worth of raffle tickets for our upcoming Turkey Shoot on November 15th, but it did not generate any new members that we know of. But it did generate a lot of comradery talking to veterans visiting the store.

I belong to several veteran service organizations in Tallahassee, and we all find recruitment to be a difficult task. A lot of us older veterans understand, most of us weren't active in veterans' affairs through our local veteran service organizations when we were younger. It seemed like work, and raising families were the priority back then. But it is interesting, when you do join, perhaps a VFW, an American Legion or a Marine Corps League and most important to me our AMVETS Tallahassee Post 1776, you find you do enjoy spending time with veterans from all branches of service sharing stories and experiences only a veteran can share. And as I see in all the meetings I attend, veterans do trickle in and find out our town of Tallahassee is one of the most friendly veteran communities in Florida. We all work together helping other veterans in need, be it our homeless coalition or our Tallahassee Veteran Legal Collaborative conducting clinics weekly for veterans in need. So, if you are reading this, contact a veteran and **(Continued on page 2)**

AMVETS National was chartered in 1947 and the Tallahassee AMVETS Post 1776 was chartered in July 2009. AMVETS Post 1776 meets the first Thursday of the month at American Legion Post 13, 229 Lake Ella Drive, Tallahassee, Florida 32303. We invite honorably discharge veterans, including Guards and Reserve, from all branches to Join us. We are a small post doing big things

www.amvets1776.org

Vol. 5, No. 4, AMVETS Tallahassee Newsletter Page 1, November 2025

(Commander's Corner Continued from page 1)

invite them into one of our many veteran service organizations. There are many in town and all have unique programs serving our common purpose to help other veterans, some in need, others just needing a hand-up with information on where to go for health services (we have an outstanding VA Clinic here) or where to go to file for VA benefits they think they have earned. Reach out, there is plenty of work to do for our veterans that gave so much.

Now, just a couple of reminders: We have a Marine Corps Ball on November 7th; a Veterans Day Parade on November 11th and our Turkey Shoot on November 15th and a Wreaths Across America event at our Tallahassee National Cemetery on December 13th. These are just a few of the many things happening in November and December.

Blessings and a Happy Holidays to you all. As always, thank you all for all you do for veterans and your continuing service to our Country, our County and our Post.

Semper Fi, Gordon

Chaplain's Corner

For the Sick Members and Family

Lord Jesus, who went about doing good and healing all, we ask You to bless Your servants of Amvets 1776 who are sick. Give them strength in body, courage in spirit, and patience in pain. Let them recover their health, so that, restored to the Christian community, they may joyfully praise Your Name, for You live and reign forever and ever. Amen.



Chaplain Earnest Reed

AMVETS Turkey Shoot Volunteer Requirements List

Registration & Check-In **Greet and sign in contestants:** Collect registration fees and extra shot payments, Sell pistol raffle tickets, Sell 50/50 tickets, Ensure TRPC waivers are completed for non-members

Range Setup & Operations **2-4 volunteers to:** Set up shooting stations, Set up and remove targets throughout the event, Monitor safety protocols and assist with equipment

Judging & Oversight **2-3 volunteers to:** Serve as judges for the turkey shoot, Record scores and determine winners, Ensure fair play and adherence to rules

Floater Roles & Miscellaneous Support **2+ volunteers to:** Fill in gaps as needed, Assist with crowd flow, questions, and general support, Help with cleanup and breakdown after the event

Estimated Total Volunteers Needed 8-12: This allows for coverage, rotation, and flexibility. If fewer return from last year, consider recruiting from TRPC, AMVETS members, or local supporters.



POW-MIA Monument Dedication at Tallahassee National Cemetery (Article by Gordon Lightfoot)

If you haven't visited our Tallahassee National Cemetery in a while you need to visit the Memorial Walkway that was designed into it. The very first monument dedicated was a Purple Heart granite monument inspired by Major John Haynes. Then we have a Marine Corps League granite monument and an Air Force Association monument that is uniquely designed and built out of airplane grade aluminum designed and built by FSU's Master Craftsman Studio design team. And most recently a new VFW District 2 granite monument, and you will find what looks like a flower garden that is a contribution dedicated to American Veterans from a local Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.



AFA Commander Tom Carney Speaks at POW-MIA Monument dedication

These are the current monuments except for one that was just dedicated on September 18, 2025. Tom Carney the AFA Commander and David Wilson, both members of our AMVETS Tallahassee Post 1776, have been working on a POW-MIA monument this past year, another monument designed and built by FSU Master Craftsman Studio. We had a great dedication ceremony with several dignitaries attending including the design team from FSU that has now helped create two beautiful monuments adding more military historical significance to our National Cemetery.

Stop by on a weekend and view these new additions and you might even get a treat of hearing our Bell Tower sing a song or two while you are there. Melissa at the Cemetery has our Bell Tower programmed to play a couple of songs on the hour during the weekend. On weekdays the Tower only plays the National Anthem at 8 am and TAPS at 4:30 pm. Enjoy below photos of Tom and his dignitaries dedicating the POW monument.



Dignitaries Attend POW-MIA Monument Dedication



Dedicated POW-MIA Monument

Raffaele Minichiello
From Melito Irpino to the Headlines
Article Provided by Anthony Minichiello



My Cousin Raffaele Minichiello...

Melito Irpino is a small village located in southern Italy. My cousin was born there in 1950. It is a peaceful area (except for the earth quakes.) In 1963 when Ralph was 13 his family left Italy and moved to a farm outside of Seattle, Washington. The transition was traumatic for the youngster. He went to school and learned to speak English. On May 3, 1967, he left school and enlisted in the United States Marine Corps.

After Boot Camp, Ralph was shipped to Vietnam at just seventeen years old. Once in Country Ralph quickly adjusted to his fellow Marines and their mission. He was wounded and earned the Purple Hart. When he returned to Camp Pendleton, California his problems began.

First he believed the Marines had cheated him out of \$200 in a savings account. In retaliation he broke into a supply store and took what he considered equal to \$200. The day he was to appear at a court martial he purchased a \$15.50 ticket and boarded a TWA that was to fly from Los Angeles to San Francisco. He boarded that plane with a concealed M-1 Carbine. He also carried ammunition, dynamite caps and a knife. At a refueling stop in Denver he allowed all 39 passengers and two flight attendants to leave. One flight attendant remained on board with the plane. Ralph told the pilots to refuel and take off for Rome. When they landed in Rome, he instructed the pilots to stop at the end of the runway, he exited the plane and started running. **(Continued on Next Page 5)**

(Continued from Page 4) Raffaele Minichiello

The Polizia stopped him and he was tried and sentenced to 7 years in prison. The U.S. wanted him returned but Italy would not agree. He was set free when President Carter pardoned him. He traveled back to America on occasion and at one of his reunions his Sargent apologized saying he felt Ralph was wronged.

I contacted Ralph via e-mail and have found him to be proud of his service as a Marine and a devout Christian. I also found that the name "Minichiello" is common in that area of Italy and we are ,sadly, not cousins.

USS TANG
By: John Folsom
chaplainjp3308@gmail.com

In 1966 I was serving aboard the USS Galveston, a light guided missile cruiser. Our ship was undergoing training exercises. This did involve deploying a Polaris Missile. I was below deck when it was fired but heard over the PA system was " DUCK ." Later the crew found out that after the missile had been launched, it turned around and started making a return trip to the ship. In our case it passed us on but gave the personnel on the bridge quite a scare. It did give pause to wonder has this ever happened before.

To find out we have to travel back in time to 1944:

*"On October 24, 1944, the **Navy submarine USS Tang** engaged a Japanese convoy bound for Leyte Gulf. Going after transport, two torpedoes fired. The first went straight for the target, but the second somehow circled back toward the Tang, hitting and sinking it. The episode of the sub that sank itself might have been lifted from a comedy movie, but the reality was more tragic—78 men died, and only nine survive "*

The survivors were picked up by a Japanese ship, on board were survivors of other ships that the USS Tang had sunk. Those survivors were allowed to beat and kick the officers and men of the USS Tang. CMD R.H. O'Kane, survivor, was the commanding officer of the USS TANG. His statement:

"When we realized that our clubbing and kicking were being administered by the burned, mutilated survivors of our own handiwork, we found we could take it with less prejudice."

Melinda Topicz: A Trailblazer in Uniform and Beyond

Born and raised in Loves Park, Illinois, Melinda Topicz graduated from Harlem High School in 1970 with a sense of purpose and a heart ready to serve. Just months later, on August 20, she entered the United States Navy, beginning a journey that would span decades and leave a lasting mark on military history.



Beginning Career Journey

Leadership and initiative earned her a promotion to Petty Officer.

In 1973, Melinda's active duty came to an end—not by choice, but by policy. The Navy declined to transfer her to her husband's next duty station, and so she received an Honorable Discharge. Though her time in uniform was brief, her impact was enduring.

Melinda continued her service to the nation through federal employment, ultimately retiring with 36 years of combined military and federal service. Her commitment to veterans never waned. She became an active member of numerous organizations, including the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association (CVMA), Fleet Reserve Association, American Legion, American Legion Riders, Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary, and AMVETS. Today, she serves as the Public Relations Officer for the CVMA, amplifying the voices and stories of those who served.

In June, Melinda was honored as one of 30 female riders featured in *She Served* magazine—a tribute to women veterans who continue to lead and inspire.

(Continued next Page 7)

(Continued from Page 6) Melinda Topicz: A Trailblazer in Uniform and Beyond

And in November, she will serve as Grand Marshal of the Tallahassee Veterans Day Parade, a recognition of her lifelong dedication to service and advocacy.

Melinda Topicz stands firm in her belief: "Women Veterans Served. Period." She challenges the outdated notion that women in uniform were merely support staff. They were—and are—veterans, equal in sacrifice and honor. Her favorite saying, borrowed from Thomas Paine and General Patton, reflects her no-nonsense approach to leadership: "Lead, follow, or get out of the way."

Her story is not just one of service — it's one of transformation, resilience, and unwavering pride. Melinda Topicz reminds us that history is shaped not only by battles fought, but by barriers broken.



Retired Melinda Continues Service to the Nation

Wreaths Across America

by 1st Vice Tom Carney



**Wreaths Across America Event at the Tallahassee National Cemetery
December 2020**

Wreaths Across America (WAA) began in 1992 after the Worcester Wreath Company in Harrington, Maine had a surplus of roughly 5,000 wreaths at the end of that year's Christmas season. The founder of the company (Morrill Worcester) decided to donate the surplus of wreaths to Arlington National Cemetery after he recalled taking a trip to the cemetery as a youth – and thus wanted to honor the cemetery's dead. With the help of several local volunteers and a local trucking company, the Worcester Wreath Company began to deliver excess wreaths each year to Arlington National Cemetery over the next 13 years. When several photos of a snow-covered Arlington National Cemetery filled with wreaths were displayed on the internet in 2005, many people across the country contacted the Worcester Wreath Company to find out how similar efforts could be made to honor veterans who were buried in multiple cemeteries throughout the country. By the next year (2006), wreaths were delivered to more than 230 state national cemeteries, as well as veterans' monuments. Soon thereafter, an annual parade began that featured members of the Patriot Guard escorting the wreaths between Maine and Arlington National Cemetery – with numerous stops at other national cemeteries and monuments along the way.

When the Tallahassee National Cemetery (TNC) was established in 2015, many of the excess wreaths were also donated to TNC. As TNC began to grow, orders were placed each year for an ever-growing number of gravesites – both at TNC as well as other local cemeteries in the Tallahassee area, such as the city's Oakland Cemetery.

Today (10 years later after TNC opened) – TNC is finding itself struggling with meeting the quotas for more veterans (and their spouses) who are buried each year. For 2025, TNC has reported that only 60% of their quota has been met by the end of October 2025. Some 1,400 or so wreaths are still needed at TNC – with roughly another one hundred or so wreaths needed at Oakland, VFW, and several other local cemeteries. Local veterans service organizations – as well as other civic organizations – are strongly urged to sponsor the remaining deficit of wreaths. The cost of wreaths is now \$17 per wreath and the deadline to order them is December 1. Please consider placing an order for these wreaths to close the deficit – and remember to specify the location of where these wreaths should be delivered (particularly if the wreaths are to be placed at locations other than TNC). The placing of the wreaths at TNC is scheduled to take place on Saturday, December 13, 2025.

GUANTANAMO BAY

BY: John Folsom
chaplainjp3308@gmail.com

When we speak of Guantanamo Bay, we seem to speak of it so glibly. Yet what do you know of Guantanamo Bay other than it's a detention center? What is it really? Under the "Did you know" column it would be listed as the oldest overseas US Naval Base that we have. The 45 acres of water and land that it covers was negotiated for back in 1909. The cost you might ask. Would you believe \$ 4,085.00; however, since 1959 the Cuban Government has refused to cash the checks and now claim we are there illegally. The detention center itself was only established in 2002.

Military personnel are not allowed to take leave or R&R off the base to Cuba. Plus, the Cuban government does not allow the military to come into Cuba. Knowing all of this, try wrapping your brain around the following: Some Cuban Nationals are allowed to work on the base. The lease agreement created a legal framework that is unique, whereas it is not considered a US territory or subject to US or Cuban work laws. Oh! Where is Guantanamo Bay? Look for the arrow on the map.



Legislative Update

From the Legislative Chair, Department of Florida, The American Legion

As we move through the fall legislative season, our advocacy mission remains steadfast: to protect and advance the interests of our veterans at every level of government. Both Washington, D.C. and Tallahassee are active with policy discussions that directly impact our Legion family. Here's a concise update on current federal issues and developments from the first two interim committee weeks in the Florida Legislature.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION: KEY ISSUES IN CONGRESS

Congress continues to deliberate several critical pieces of legislation affecting veterans' health care, benefits, and quality of life. Among the top priorities:

- **VA Health Care Modernization:** Lawmakers are discussing enhancements to streamline scheduling, reduce wait times, and improve mental health services, particularly for rural veterans. Oversight of PACT Act implementation continues, ensuring toxic exposure benefits remain fully funded and accessible.
- **Veterans Disability Claims Backlog:** The claims backlog remains a serious concern. Congress is weighing additional funding and staffing initiatives for the VA to expedite pending claims and appeals, especially for Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan-era veterans.
- **Housing & Homelessness Initiatives:** Bipartisan efforts are underway to bolster the HUD-VASH program and expand transitional housing. Legislative proposals aim to ensure no veteran is left without shelter due to bureaucratic delays or limited community resources.
- **Caregiver Program Review:** Congressional committees are conducting oversight on the VA Caregiver Program after reports of inconsistent eligibility determinations. The Legion continues to advocate for consistency, transparency, and expanded support for veteran caregivers.

As always, your voice matters. Continued outreach to Florida's congressional delegation strengthens our efforts to secure lasting legislative gains.

(Continued from Page 8) Legislative Update (Continued)

State Update: Florida Legislative Interim Committee Weeks (Continued)

- **Gaming and Regulatory Issues:** Committees revisited charitable gaming regulations, including the use of electronic gaming machines by veteran organizations. The Department of Florida American Legion continues working with stakeholders to clarify statutory language and protect legal fundraising activities essential for post operations.
- **Mental Health & Suicide Prevention:** Discussions centered on statewide behavioral health strategies. Several members of the Legislature voiced support for enhanced partnerships with veteran groups to address suicide prevention and expand access to peer support programs.
- **Budget Forecasts:** Early budget projections suggest a cautious approach for FY 2025. While the state remains fiscally strong, legislators have indicated the need to prioritize critical services, which may open opportunities for increased funding in veteran outreach, employment, and transition services.

OUR MISSION IN ACTION

As your Legislative Chair, I will continue to monitor, engage, and advocate on your behalf. Whether at the U.S. Capitol or the Florida Capitol, our message is the same: **“Care for those who have borne the battle.”**

I urge all Legionnaires to remain informed, participate in district and post legislative activities, and support advocacy efforts through direct engagement with lawmakers. When veterans speak with one voice, we are heard.

Strong advocacy today ensures a stronger future for our veterans and their families.

Note: This information provided by the American Legion and is for all veterans.



AMVETS Tallahassee Post 1776

NOVEMBER 2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	American Legion Commander's Coalition	6	AMVETS Post 1776 Monthly Meeting TBD
9	10	11	12	13	14	15 2ND AMVETS Annual Turkey shoot
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						