



# The Hezzie Gazette

Official Newsletter of Hezzie Griffis American Legion Post 30  
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February 2026



## Commander's Comments

*Post-level Oratorical Contest:  
How this year's event came together*

This year's post-level Oratorical Contest was the result of months of outreach, planning, and community cooperation that began last fall.

Starting in September, I met with students and educators in several settings to explain the program and how to participate. Those visits included a homeschool class in North Augusta, a national homeschool speech and debate club in Augusta, and students from Strom Thurmond High School's NJROTC program and mock trial team.



Post 30 contestant Brianna O'Shea. Photo by Diane Peterson.

On Saturday, January 24, 2026, Post 30 and Post 154 partnered to conduct the post-level Oratorical Contest. The two contestants were **Brianna O'Shea** of SC Top Homeschool, sponsored by Post 30, and **Amelia Morris** of the South Carolina Governor's School for Agriculture. Both demonstrated strong public speaking skills and advanced to the semi-final round, scheduled for February 7 at the Greenwood County Veterans Center.

*(continued Comments, p. 5)*

## No Maracas in Caracas This New Year's

*Behind the Recent Venezuela Special Ops*

When it comes to after-New Year's revelry, the U.S. Army's formidable 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment called the "Night Stalkers," and the Army's elite Delta Force special operations troops know how to throw a real shindig.



The USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN-78) along with amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD-7), not pictured, provided platforms for fighters and helicopters supporting operation Absolute Resolve. Source: U.S. Navy photo, public domain (via DVIDS)

Called upon by the U.S. president to liberate the alleged narco-terrorist Venezuelan state, and depose its dictator leader Nicolas Maduro by capture, they left the world in awe with a demonstrated flawless operation in early January code-named *Absolute Resolve*. The entire undertaking, from initial order to launch to extraction of Maduro and wife Cilia Flores, reportedly only took two-hours and twenty minutes, with just 30 minutes for the assault team inside Maduro's highly defended fortress.

It was a large scale meticulously orchestrated mission by multiple U.S. military branches and intelligence agencies. A CIA unit watched Maduro's every move for months, pinpointing what he was up to most any time.

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A constructed replica of Maduro's safe house provided assault forces with practice on how they might enter the well-protected hideout. U.S. military presence was already beefed up in the Caribbean by an aircraft carrier, 11 warships, fighter aircraft, aerial refueling tankers, drones, and electronics jamming airplanes. About 15,000 ground troops were also on standby. All the pieces were in place for an invasion by Christmas Day, but wind and cloud cover delayed the attack.

By late evening January 2, the weather broke. The moon was full and sky mostly clear, acceptable flying conditions. *Absolute Resolve* was a "Go." Around 150 jet fighters, bombers, and supporting aircraft launched from about 20 differing locations. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Dan "Razin" Caine transmitted a "Good luck and Godspeed" message from the president to the troops.

Venezuelan military bases and air defense systems were hit hard. The ground strike force moved into Caracas under cover of night. A cyber operation had cut power to the city. "Everything was plunged into absolute darkness illuminated only by flashes of nearby detonations," said one BBC witness. The earth trembled and the smell of gunpowder and smoke filled the air amid raging fires. There were aircraft flying everywhere. Special Ops helicopters flying barely 100 feet over water carrying special forces and law enforcement officials penetrated Maduro's fortress on a military base near Caracas while being fired upon. One was hit severely, yet flyable. No U.S. service members were killed, though seven were injured but reported stable, with five now back to duty.

The extraction force was heavily armed, even equipped with blowtorches for cutting through steel doors. When Maduro's hideout was breached, he and his wife, routinely guarded by Cubans, were taken "completely by surprise," said General Caine. They surrendered, unable to reach a steel-doored "safe room." Thirty-two Cuban bodyguards were reportedly killed. Maduro and wife were quickly transported by federal agents to the warship USS Iwo Jima waiting in the Caribbean, and later to face drug-trafficking charges in New York City.

--J. W. "Pete" Peterson, correspondent-at-large

## February Birthdays at Post 30

Let's wish a very Happy Birthday to our members:  
**Francis Feltham, Burdette Gage, Jerome Spurlock,  
Bill Jenison, and Lin Montgomery.**

## From the Adjutant's Desk

**National Commander Visit:** The American Legion Department of South Carolina will host a statewide gathering during the visit of National Commander **Dan K. Wiley** February 22–26, 2026. Post 30 members have a great opportunity to see Commander Wiley at a meeting held especially for all American Legion members, Auxiliary members, Sons of The American Legion, and guests on Wednesday, February 25, at 9:00 a.m. at Columbia Post 6, located at 200 Pickens Street in Columbia. Commander Wiley is visiting South Carolina as part of his nationwide tour to engage with members and discuss issues affecting veterans and local posts. It's a rare opportunity to hear directly from national leadership and connect with fellow members from across the state.



*Dan K. Wiley, National Commander of The American Legion. Photo courtesy The American Legion*

**New Sergeant-at-Arms:** Welcome to **Keith Kennedy** as our new Sergeant-at-Arms, appointed by the Post 30 executive committee in January 2026 following the transfer of **Bruce Everitt** to another post. Kennedy agreed to serve for the remainder of the year, and we appreciate his willingness to serve in this important role.

**Veteran Housing Assistance:** The Alston Wilkes Society offers housing stability assistance to homeless veterans and veteran families across South Carolina, including those working to remain in their current homes. Help is provided through the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program and begins with an eligibility review and meeting with a case manager. Veterans who may need assistance can learn more by calling 803-995-8464 or visiting [alstonwilkessociety.org](http://alstonwilkessociety.org).

--Jane Doolittle, Post 30 Adjutant

## Chaplain's Corner

### *The Four Chaplains Live On*

Four Chaplains Day in 2026 falls on Tuesday, February 3, a solemn yearly observance honoring four U.S. Army chaplains who gave their lives during World War II. In 1943, when the troopship *Dorchester* was torpedoed and began to sink, these men displayed extraordinary courage. As panic spread and life jackets ran out, each chaplain gave his own to another soldier, ensuring others survived while they did not.



*The Four Chaplains, 1943. Source: USPS, public domain.*

The Four Chaplains were Rabbi Alexander Goode, representing the Jewish faith; Lieutenant Clark Poling of the Dutch Reformed Church; Lieutenant George Fox, a Methodist minister; and Lieutenant John Washington, a Catholic priest. Survivors later recalled seeing the four men standing together in prayer as the ship went down—an enduring image of unity beyond doctrine.

In recognition of their heroism, Congress designated February 3rd as Four Chaplains Day. Their sacrifice symbolizes selflessness, interfaith cooperation, and service above self, even in the face of death. Today, the day is observed through memorial services and ceremonies organized by veterans' groups, religious organizations, and military bases, reminding us of the power of faith, unity, and compassion.

In times when intolerance toward those of different religious views can be discouraging, the lesson of the Four Chaplains stands as a powerful reminder. Duty to God and Country means not merely tolerating others but working together with mutual respect. This spirit of cooperation is something I cherish at Post 30, where differing views do not divide us. It reflects the vision our nation's founders set in motion 250 years ago. Come be part of Post 30, where you are always welcome.

-- William Beaver, Post 30 Chaplain

## An Update from Unit 30 Auxiliary

We're pleased to announce that new members **Bethany Brahmer**, **Pam Hensley**, and **Diane Boddie** have joined the Unit.



*Unit 30 Auxiliary meeting. Photo by Diane Peterson.*

Officer roles were also updated, with **Fay Bradley** transitioning from Vice President to Treasurer and **Bethany Brahmer** assuming the role of Secretary. Preparations are underway to identify local students for the 2026 Palmetto Girls State program in June. The Auxiliary meets on the third Thursday of each month alongside Post 30, gathering in a separate room after dinner. Family members of veterans interested in learning more are always welcome to visit.

## Transferred to Post Everlasting



**Thomas "Tom" Yoder** passed away on January 10, 2026. A longtime and active member of Post 30, he previously served as a trustee, was a cherished member of the Supper Committee, and was an all-around good friend. Born in 1938 in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, Yoder joined the U.S. Navy in 1958 and served aboard the USS *Wasp* and USS *Saratoga* with the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean and North Atlantic. He later completed his enlistment at Naval Air Station Key West in 1964 as an Aviation Hydraulic Mechanic. After his military service, he spent 35 years as an aircraft mechanic with TWA and remained a dedicated member of The American Legion for more than four decades.

## District 17: Strategizing for Growth

The district's quarterly meeting was held on January 17 at Post 24 in Newberry, with **Winston Boddie** and **Rick Berry** attending on behalf of Post 30.



Post 24 Commander Henry Brooks opening the meeting. Photo by Diane Peterson.

The presentation centered on membership growth through building a welcoming community and lessons learned from Post 30. We employed social media and physical marketing, a clear community purpose and expanding community partnerships to help Post 30 add seven new members since July 2025. After the discussion, posts provided updates on their activities. Post 24 (Newberry) is collecting toiletries, nonperishable snacks, and word game books (now to 21 Feb) for care packages to deployed National Guard members in partnership with the City of Newberry. Post 61 (Leesville-Batesburg) is co-sponsoring events with youth focused organizations, offering post facilities at no cost. Post 219 (Newberry) reported on an upcoming veteran fishing day in Newberry (date TBD). Additional updates from other posts underscored planning and collaboration across the district.

### Post 30 **NEEDS** You!

**Veterans and community: Help Post 30 Sell Tickets**

**2026 Rifle Raffle**  
American Legion Post 30



**\$25 per ticket**

- 52 chances to win
- **Two tickets** drawn daily for **26 days**

Claim your gun/rifle or exchange it for a Sportsman's Warehouse gift card equal to the value of the prize associated with that day's drawing

**Get tickets:**



- (1) In person: Contact a Post 30 officer
- (2) Text message: Text "RAFFLE" to 864-413-7121 with your name and number of tickets.  
Example: "RAFFLE - John Smith - 2 tickets"
- (3) Email: To [alpost30sc@gmail.com](mailto:alpost30sc@gmail.com) stating the number of raffle tickets

## South Carolina on the Road to Independence

To mark America's 250th anniversary, this is part two of a seven-part series tracing South Carolina's move from British colony to a state. Each article highlights events from this month in 1776, showing how local decisions laid the groundwork for independence.

### February 1776: Governing Without Permission:

Revolutions don't always begin with gunfire. Sometimes they begin with paperwork. In February 1776, South Carolina's leaders did something that would have seemed improbable just months earlier: they began arguing, line by line, over how to govern themselves. Not with a declaration of independence, but with drafts of a working constitution. Courts had to function. Laws had to be enforced. Militias had to be organized.



AI-generated image

That responsibility fell to the Provincial Congress, a collection of planters, lawyers, merchants, and local officials: men experienced in managing farms, businesses, and towns, but never a government of their own. Royal authority had fled and they were left to debate offices and powers, responsibilities and limits. They put ideas to paper, erased them, argued again, and tried to shape order out of uncertainty. The drafts were cautious. They avoided open declarations of independence and even maintained formal loyalty to the Crown. But the act of writing it meant decisions were now being made locally.

What makes February remarkable is that these were not revolutionaries chasing glory. They were neighbors trying to keep courts open, communities stable, and chaos at bay. They didn't know where events would lead or whether independence would succeed. Putting self-government in writing forced a realization that if the colony was going to act like a state, it would soon have to defend itself like one. And by March, that question could no longer be avoided.

## Comments (continued from p.1)

Community and Legion member support played an important role in the success of the event. Post 30's **Dave Coates** and Post 154 leaders **Glenn Herlong** and **Chris Clancy** assisted with staging the contest. Post 30 member **Jon Notestein** also turned out to support the event, a presence that was both helpful and appreciated.



((l to r) Jon Notestein, Winston Boddie, Brianna O'Shea, and Dave Coates. Photo by Diane Peterson.

Toastmasters **Jackie Brooks**, **Ronald Baker**, and **Ricky Rhodes** generously volunteered their time as judges, offering expert feedback and professional insight to the contestants. We also thank Edgefield Methodist Church for the use of its fellowship hall.



Lots of action in the room before the contest begins. Photo by Diane Peterson.

The contest was a success that we plan to build on. Efforts like this reflect how Post 30 works with schools, partner posts, and community organizations to support programs that benefit students and strengthen our connection to the community. Highlights from the contest are available in a short video on Post 30's Facebook and Instagram pages. If you'd like to be involved in future Oratorical Contests, as a volunteer, sponsor, or partner, we'd be glad to have you join us.

-- Winston Boddie, Post 30 Commander

## Post 30 Landscaping Project Sprouts

We're getting ready to replace the landscaping in front of the building. We plan to remove the existing hedges and install a low-maintenance landscape design. This project is being done in partnership with the Strom Thurmond High School agriculture class. We need to raise **\$2,500 by March 7, 2026**. Shrub removal will take place in February and new plantings in late-March. A few simple ways to support the effort are outlined below. Contact details are included for anyone who wants more information or would like to help.

American Legion Post 30  
Edgefield, SC  
www.alpost30sc.org

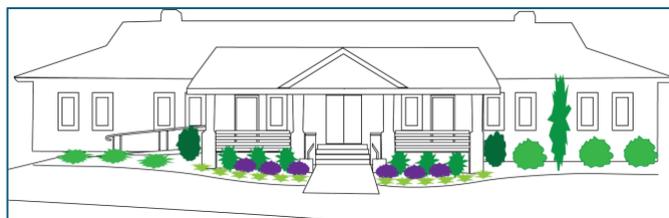
*Landscaping*  
**FUNDRAISER**

We need to raise **\$2,500** by March 7, 2026:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>How you can help:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Make a cash donation*</li><li>- Donate items from our list</li></ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Adopt-a-Plant</b> <small>Includes root stimulator and fertilizer.</small></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- \$20 for an accent plant</li><li>- \$40 to sponsor a shrub</li></ul>
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For questions and to learn details about our project, email Winston Boddie at [alpost30sc@gmail.com](mailto:alpost30sc@gmail.com) or text **LANDSCAPE** to **864-413-7121**.

\*Checks payable to **American Legion Post 30**; P.O. Box 30, Edgefield, SC 29824



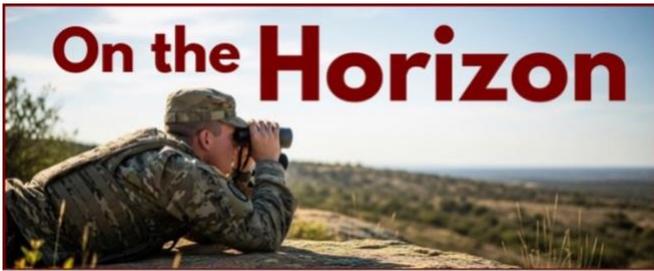
Concept drawing. Not to scale.

## Membership Update

95% of our membership has paid their 2026 Dues. We are four members short of reaching our 100% membership goal. If you haven't paid your dues we encourage you to pay them as soon as possible.

Our annual dues are just \$60 and can be paid in several convenient ways:

- In Person: Cash or check at our monthly meeting.
- Mail: Check made payable to American Legion Post 30 to: American Legion Post 30, P.O. Box 30 Edgefield, SC 29824
- Online: Mylegion.org to pay your dues. **\*Note:** Multi-year membership option locks in our current dues rate for the next three years and avoids dues increases.



**Community Cadence Fitness Walk:** If the cold has you moving a little slower, this is a good way to warm up. Join veterans and community members on Saturday, February 7 at 8:00 a.m. at the Piedmont Tech parking lot for a relaxed walk where everyone moves at their own pace, but no one walks alone. Everyone is welcome. Bring a friend. Need a reminder? Text the word **CADENCE** to 864-413-7121 to receive a text message the day before the walk.

**Veterans Experience Action Center:** The Midlands VEAC is scheduled for March 19-21 at the SCNG Armory, 1328 Old Dairy Dr, Columbia. Hours are 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. March 19-20 and 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. March 21. The event is open to all veterans and family members, offering direct, in-person help with VA claims, healthcare enrollment, widow benefits, and connections to veteran service organizations.

We highly recommend that anyone with an open claim, submitting a new claim, or those who have been denied in the past attend this event. Bring your DD-214 and all documentation, such as medical records, past claim forms, VA decision letters, or denial forms. Arrive early, lines form at 7:00 a.m. and get long fast. If you're not seen that same day, you'll receive a number and automatically move to the front of the line the next morning.

**Honoring a Fallen Soldier:** VFW District 2 will host a lunch and seminar honoring 1LT **Ryan Rawl** on Saturday, February 21 from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at VFW Post 8738, 424 Cedarcrest Dr., Lexington. Guest speakers include Ryan's mother, **Diane Rawl**, and Lt. Col. (Ret.) **Les Carroll**, whom you may recall was a guest speaker at the Post 30 October 2024 meeting. Lunch is \$10. Tickets are available by contacting District 2 Commander Graham at [gingerheart@aol.com](mailto:gingerheart@aol.com).

**Fun Run for a Cause:** The Ridge Healthcare Foundation will host its 3rd annual Fun Run 5K Run/Walk on Saturday, March 21, beginning and ending on the Edgefield Town Square. The 5K Run/Walk will start at 10:00 a.m. You can register in advance at <https://runsignup.com/Race/SC/Edgefield/RidgeHealthcareFoundation5kFunRun> or sign up the morning of the

event as early as 8:30 a.m. This is a great opportunity for the Post 30 family to support one of our community partners while getting out and moving together. Our monthly Community Cadence walkers will feel right at home. It's a great way to spend a Saturday morning together with your community.

## Calendar of Events

### PLANNING TO ATTEND THE MONTHLY MEETING?

We need an accurate supper headcount. Sign up with Jane Doolittle, reply to the Post text message, or email [alpost30sc@gmail.com](mailto:alpost30sc@gmail.com) no later than the Monday prior to the meeting.

**February 7, 2026:** Community Cadence Walk, Piedmont Tech parking lot at 8:00 a.m.

**February 7, 2026:** Oratorical contest semi-final, Greenwood County Veterans Center, 106 Main St N, Greenwood at 10:00 a.m.

**February 12, 2026:** Executive Committee Meeting at 4:00 p.m.

**February 19, 2026:** Monthly meeting, dinner at 6:00 p.m., meeting at 6:30 p.m. Menu is Chris and Allen's "catch of the meeting" boneless fish fillets, tater tots, and coleslaw, followed by Bethany's "almost heaven" lemon poppy seed cake with lemon curd and whipped topping.

**February 25, 2026:** National Commander's meeting at 9:00 a.m., Columbia Post 6, 200 Pickens St, Columbia.

**March 7, 2026:** Department oratorical contest at 10:00 a.m., St Paul's Lutheran Church, 1715 Bull St, Columbia.

**March 7, 2026:** Community Cadence Walk, Piedmont Tech parking lot at 8:00 a.m.

**March 12, 2026:** Executive Committee Meeting at 4:00 p.m.

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On February 23, 1945, U.S. Marines raised the American flag atop Mount Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima. The moment became one of the most iconic images of World War II.