

THE HISTORY OF VFW POST 7234

It was 1945, as the War ended a group of World War I and World War II Veterans saw a need for a Veterans of Foreign Wars Post in Sussex County. They shared a common bond of serving in combat; although each came home and pursued different jobs, they still wanted to continue the comradeship they shared in war. They wanted to belong to a larger organization promoting Patriotic ideals for which they fought. James E Wilgus Sr of Selbyville a World War I Veteran was asked to be chairman to establish a charter VFW Post in Sussex County. Mr. Wilgus served in the United States Army in the Delaware 59th Pioneer Infantry in World War I as a Sgt 1st Class from 1916 – 1919. He participated in battle campaigns at Meuse-Argonne, Chateau-Thierry, and Verdun, where he received decorations for his service. Mr. Wilgus worked in general merchandise, feed grinding, and started the Selbyville Cleaners. Mr. Wilgus and his wife Jennie devoted much of their time to the local and State VFW, where he served as a Past Post Commander and Delaware State Commander. The charter was signed by VFW National and the Post installed May 12, 1946 with 88 charter veteran members and William R. Ringler was elected the first Commander. Mr. Ringler also served as the Mayor of Selbyville and Deputy Director of the Delaware DMV. Both these individuals were active in the Selbyville Volunteer Fire Department; many of our members have been volunteers at other Fire Departments throughout our history.



MASON-DIXON POST

NO. 724

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS
OF THE UNITED STATES



PUBLIC INSTALLATION SERVICE

Sunday, May 12th, 1946

SELYVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

SELYVILLE, DELAWARE

OFFICERS



COMMANDER	William B. Ringler, Jr.
SENIOR VICE-COMMANDER	Richard E. Rayne
JUNIOR VICE-COMMANDER	Donald W. Long
QUARTERMASTER	Herman J. Baker
POST ADJUTANT	Alvin A. Campbell
JUDGE ADVOCATE	Franklin T. Baker
CHAPLAIN	Hugh A. Stephens
SURGEON	Charles C. Richards
OFFICER OF THE DAY	James E. Wilgus
PATRIOTIC INSTRUCTOR	Howard E. Coffin
HISTORIAN	Edward M. Tingle
LEGISLATIVE OFFICER	Alwood F. Lynch, Jr.
PUBLIC RELATIONS	George E. West
POST EMPLOYMENT	Rufus Smith
SERVICE OFFICER	Jean A. Lowenthal
GUARD	Elton C. Savage
TRUSTEE—3 YEARS	Richard C. Scott
TRUSTEE—2 YEARS	Elisia E. Long
TRUSTEE—1 YEAR	Charles L. Lynch
COLOR BEARER	Horace A. Lynch, Jr.
COLOR BEARER	Irving B. Hudson, Jr.
SOT. MAJOR	Roland Cobb
QUARTERMASTER SGT.	Lynn A. Pomeroy, Jr.
SENTINEL	Lemuel Long, Jr.
BUGLER	Harold Hastings
INVESTIGATING COMMITTEE	Paul J. Matter James E. Rayne John F. Howard

A year later on April 27, 1947 several ladies mostly wives of the charter members established a charter Veterans of Foreign Wars Ladies Auxiliary. Some of the original charter members were Helen Cullen, Glenda Long, Rita Taylor, Gloria Gum, Volta Murphy, Mary Rickards, Jennie Wilgus, and Olive Ringler. No charter members of

the Auxiliary are alive today; Gloria Gum was the last when she died in 2016. The Auxiliary has always been a true partner in the volunteer activities of the Post. In fact, in the old days there was a joint meeting once a month and there are pictures of Auxiliary members working side by side with Post members at the Chicken Shack, helping to erect flag poles and marching in parades.



The Post, though established, lacked a “home”; they met in Selbyville Town Hall, the Fireman’s Hall, and Red Men’s Hall. Eventually they wanted their own “home” where Veterans and Family Members could meet for a drink and socialize and with Blue Laws and the cost of drinking at a local bar or restaurant, a “home” for members only seemed ideal. In 1948 10 members came together to build a permanent home. They purchased a piece of property on Rt 113 in Selbyville for \$1000 and constructed a cinderblock building on the site. The name of our Post “Mason Dixon” came from the fact the original Post was near the Mason Dixon line in Selbyville. After a few years the members felt it did not look good (drinking on Sundays at a private club) with their cars parked near a major road for everyone to see especially since they held important positions. Finally in 1953 Wilgus talked to Walter G. Newton who had bought several acres from Crowley on Quillen’s Point overlooking the Indian River Bay. On this property was a wooden hunting lodge which he rented to hunters. Wilgus convinced Newton, a World War II

Veteran, to sell the Hunting Lodge and several acres to the Mason Dixon VFW for \$14000. To finance the purchase, they sold the cinderblock building and land to a poultry company for \$14000. The hunting Lodge was a two-story wood building which caught fire on December 20, 1959. The Post had just installed a new heating system and that night they had a party; of course, with the number of people present the heat did not turn on until several hours after everyone had left. The heating system malfunctioned and started a fire.



HUNTING LODGE AFTER THE FIRE

In 1960 a loan of \$38,000 was secured to build the present home of the Post; at least the current dining room and downstairs. The kitchen, upstairs Bar, deck and Atrium were added later. On April 16, 1961 the new Post “home” was dedicated. At this ceremony they placed a time capsule behind the 1960 cornerstone. No one knew it was there until 2026 when Irv Hudson the last survivor present at the dedication mentioned that it was there. Past Commander Gossart and Past Auxiliary President Weese removed the stone and unsealed the metal box. So, now we can share the details of what was in the box and the details of the 1961 Dedication Ceremony. The box was

made by Mumford Sheet Metal Works. Contents in the box were: The 1961 program presided over by Commander Walter G Newton, the roster of VFW (114) (only 2 were life members) and Auxiliary Members (22), a list of sponsoring Companies, the text of Newton's speech, the melted coins from the Jute box, and a small frying pan (Danny Steele and John Mitchell remember that Mumford Brothers, members of the Post, made the "world's largest frying pan" 10-foot-diameter skillet for the annual Delmarva Chicken Festival 1950).



BURNT COINS



FRYING PAN

THE POST AND ITS MEMBERS



On October 20, 1967 a Mortgage Burning Ceremony was celebrated with dinner and Music by the Uniques. While Commander Robert Wilkins and Auxiliary President Mae Fellerski held the loan papers Danny's Father, Elmer Steele provided the flame.



Initially with no liquor license it was BYOB; certain members had lockers where they stored their liquor. Eventually they obtained a liquor license which required them to have a Board of Directors. They were already incorporated in the State of Delaware since 1948. The first bar tenders were volunteers like Irv Hudson who worked for \$5 a night and eventually put away \$100 to obtain his Life Membership. With a small number of members, they were able to afford new additions to the building and upkeep of the Post. Most members were quite handy and they had sources of cheap materials or they applied for grants. Their needs were minimal and with cost conscious Quartermasters (like the Steeles Father and Son) they were wise with their funds. For many years the Post remained local and small with very few people realizing they existed in a beautiful spot on the bay, With the discovery of coastal towns as a summer vacation spot from the Washington and Pennsylvania areas and the purchase of second homes the potential for new non local members grew. Along comes officers like George Richie (Who rode around in a red truck with wooden sides with a sign that ask combat veterans to join the VFW) who saw the potential to grow the Post. The membership suddenly grew from 100 to 200 locals mostly WW2 to over two thousand and then over four thousand; surging with the retirement of Vietnam Vets and then when the Ladies Auxiliary changed to an Auxiliary for both men and women. Almost half the members lived somewhere else as people from other places like PA, NY and NJ discovered Delaware and cheap taxes. With more members the demands for more services and activities increased. More full-time staff needed to be hired and the budget accelerated. Suddenly our Post was number 1 in the State (almost 40% of Combat veterans) and 15th in the Nation.

Another milestone was November 11, 1976 when the Post reached 25 life members and was able to apply for a permanent charter. Three of those members are still active members of the Post and all were Past Commanders, (Irv Hudson - World War II Veteran and Danny Steele and John Mitchell – Vietnam War Veterans).

Interestingly the founding members of the Post and Auxiliary were descendants of the founders of Selbyville in 1778 and later the founders of the Coastal towns (Bethany Beach, Ocean View, Millville, etc.). The Veterans (mostly World War II) and their spouses were young and busy building careers and businesses and raising families. They wanted their own place to get a drink, socialize and share time together. And although there were other fraternal organizations, they wanted a veteran focus. They chose the Veterans of Foreign Wars whose values were fraternal, patriotic, historical, charitable and educational. As other wars followed, the sons and daughters of the founding members joined to continue this tradition. Most notably two Commanders from the Vietnam War (Danny Steele and Paul Brennan) had a father as Commander and a mother as President. Danny remembers as a lad of 11 cutting the grass at the Post and all he got was an honor guard helmet.



In the 50s the Post added several Korean War Veterans and in the 60s the Post added its first Vietnam War Veterans. Danny Steele and John Mitchell were the first two from Vietnam and went on to be Post/District/State Commanders (Danny being the youngest Post commander in

the history of the Post (22 years old) and youngest District Commander) (John being the youngest State Commander and only two-time State Commander). John Mitchell went on to serve on VFW National Council of Administration (Board of Directors) for two four-year terms from 2021 – 2029; he was the first to hold this position from District 4 and our Post. Danny Steele and John Mitchell served in Vietnam the same year 68/69 and John Mitchell's classmate Harry Dukes III was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. It was because of the dedication and leadership of Danny and John and other Vietnam Veterans to follow that the Post has continued to thrive in its mission and fulfill its charter. In the Last several years the Post has added Veterans from recent wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Desert Storm/Desert Shield, and War on Terrorism. Hopefully they will assume Leadership positions and continue the legacy to serve and honor all Veterans. The Auxiliary members initially were related to descendants of World War II Veterans. In 2012/2013 members related to Veterans who served in other Wars began to join and in 2015 men related to Veterans from all Wars were allowed to join. This created an expanded base for the Auxiliary to continue their strong and steady support of the Post and Community. With the expansion to over 3000 members in recent years fueled by members from other states who bought second homes and those taking up residency in Delaware we hope that our membership will not lose sight of our mission and charter.



25 Anniversary



75 Anniversary Commanders

The major tradition of the Post and Auxiliary has always been the Patriotic Ceremonies; most notably Memorial Day and Veterans Day; in addition, the Post paused to remember Loyalty Day, VE Day, D-day, Pearl Harbor Day, Flag Day and POW/MIA Day with ceremonies. We have recently performed a Vietnam War Veterans Day and a 9/11 Ceremony. In early days all Ceremonies were performed outdoors and usually in other locations like John West Park in Ocean View and the Boardwalk in Bethany Beach. Of special note was Veterans Day in Bethany Beach where the Post and Auxiliary Officers and Honor Guard marched from the Church to the Boardwalk and performed a solemn ceremony to honor all Veterans. The Post Officers performed several Special Events and Ceremonies for the veterans in local Assisted Living Facilities.





Commander Myers 9/11 Ceremony

Another major tradition of the Post and Auxiliary was respect and honor for the Flag. Over 20 flag poles were donated and installed by the Post at local cemeteries, churches, libraries, and municipal buildings. The Post still maintains these poles and flags. In addition, both Post and Auxiliary members were photographed in articles donating flags to various organizations in Sussex County. Perhaps the most patriotic mission was to place flags and VFW emblems at the graves of over 600 veterans across the local community for Memorial Day.



New Flagpole and Flag for Selbyville Library

Midway-VFW Post 7234 recently donated a flag pole and donated a flag with a flag to the Selbyville Public Library and the citizens of Selbyville. Midway-VFW Post 7234, Selbyville, Delaware, is the VFW and VFWA Post 7234. The flag pole and flag were donated to the Selbyville Library and the citizens of Selbyville. The flag pole and flag were donated to the Selbyville Library and the citizens of Selbyville.

Community



VFW POST 7234 recently donated an American flag to the Town of Bethany Beach. From left are Post Commander George Ritchie, Rob Rosenberg, Police Administrative Officer Glen Hudson and Mayor Charles Bartlett.



1991-1994 DAY... The American for this annual Veterans Day ceremony... The American for this annual Veterans Day ceremony... The American for this annual Veterans Day ceremony...

Ocean View VFW to host Veterans Day services



Veterans from Ocean View VFW post #1234... The American for this annual Veterans Day ceremony... The American for this annual Veterans Day ceremony...

The Post also partnered with Garden Clubs and Local Towns to install 3 Blue Star Memorials in Bethany Beach, Ocean View, and Millville.



The Honor Guard deserves prominent recognition in the history of our Post as the center of each Ceremony performing Volley and Taps and as the center of each Veterans Funeral performing Volley and Taps. In their younger days they marched in parades across Sussex County and Salisbury and Ocean City; 4th of July, Christmas Parades, Veterans Day Parades, Halloween Parades, Loyalty Day Parades, etc. The Honor Guard performed at Sports Stadiums; like Philadelphia and Washington and Baltimore. They were a proud group who honored this post and this Country with their precision, dedication, and outstanding performance at every occasion. We should also recognize the Captains of the Honor Guard throughout its history; some of them are Danny Steele, Wes Sauble (John Mitchell said "he was a former drill sergeant and made them practice a lot"), Jim Leahy, Howard Schofield, Paul Burbank, and John Gossart. Let us not forget our premier bugler Dick Hires who played Taps at many a function and funeral with dignity and respect. Never a dry eye as he flawlessly performed.





Honor Guard Leading Bethany 4th July parade 2004



Veterans helping Veterans” That’s a key part in the success of the Veterans Treatment Court in Sussex County and elsewhere.



The mission of the court is to successfully rehabilitate veterans charged with non-violent crimes by diverting them away from the traditional criminal prosecution system into a voluntary treatment-focused court process. Bill Gay a VFW Post 7234 member is the coordinator of this program working with the Judge to recruit Mentors and assign them to Mentees. Over 20 members of VFW Post 7234 have served as mentors for this program. This requires attending court once a month and communicating via phone several times a week to coach and encourage the Mentee to stay on track with the program. Mentors generously donating hours of volunteer time has resulted in an 85% success rate for the Mentees becoming productive members of society. Several Mentees return as Mentors and join our Post for fellowship and support.

The new Memorial Park was envisioned by Commander Loppatto during the 70th Anniversary of the Post; unfortunately, funds were scarce and we chose to do a minor facelift. For the 75th Anniversary we decided to build a new Memorial Garden paying for it with funds from the sale of bricks. Commander Dietrich started the project with support from Past Commanders Mitchell and Loppatto and Senior Vice Gossart. When Dietrich suddenly died, Gossart became commander and finished the project. The Dedication of our Memorial Park was May 30, 2023. Today this Memorial Park honors all those who served this country in the Armed Forces and those who have generously served Mason Dixon VFW Post 7234. This is a sacred Park of honor and respect and a beautiful, quiet, contemplative place to sit and reflect on the names etched here. The team Led by Commander Gossart (Dale Weese, Chuck Hardy, Fulton Loppatto, John Mitchell, James Jensen) designed and built this Park to be a first-class tribute to this Post and a lasting memory for the future.





Each brick holds the emotion of those who purchased the brick and wrote a tribute to remember their love one. This is truly a special place to visit and feel the radiation of Love, Honor, and Respect for those who served this Country and this Post. The flags fly proudly honoring the Military services of our members on flag poles donated anonymously. As you visit the Park and sit on the benches to reflect. Thank you to our Auxiliary for their generous contribution.

In fulfilling their Charter, the Post held numerous activities.

The Post and Auxiliary Education volunteers reach out to the schools in the community especially with Patriots Pin and Voice of Democracy Awards and scholarships to local high school students. This program has instilled and fostered patriotism among the younger generation as they research the traditions and individuals that have kept this country free. The Auxiliary promoting Americanism continually sought ways to be a valuable volunteer in the community in helping others. During an election year the Auxiliary made sandwiches for the Poll workers. They offered safety courses in Boating, Guns, Bicycle, and Home. The Cancer Benefit was a major fund raiser for this charity since the 80s. The Auxiliary for many years participated in the Stokely Center Carnival. Organizing the Local "Wreathes Across America" was an opportunity to involve the community in honoring those who served this country by placing wreathes at the Veteran's Cemetery. The Post and Auxiliary have been active in supporting our local needy Veterans and others in the community.

Feeding the hungry and needy in our community has been a big mission for our Post. Mark Daughaday a 10-year Canteen Manager started a Thanksgiving dinner, He said no one should go hungry or be lonely on Thanksgiving. Turkeys were donated; volunteers donated their time and an event which started with 80 guests grew to over 300 in time with home deliveries to Veterans who could not come out. The Post and Auxiliary have supported a Food Bank "Helping Hands" since 2014. Our members generously donate food which we collect in our lobby. Usually, it overflows one car and we have to make several trips a week.



**Commander Myers & Sr Vice Artemchuk
delivering food to the needy**

We received a nice letter one Christmas from the director which read “My greatest appreciation for such a giving spirit for the less fortunate of our community. We were able to bless 138 families this thanksgiving with a turkey and all the trimmings. Especially thanks for blessing the children at Christmas; you may not see the thank you tears of joy on the parent’s faces but I do, God Bless”, Barbara. Our high successful casserole program where members bake casseroles which we deliver to three local churches to feed the hungry. So far, we have cooked and delivered over 2000 casseroles. We have a Christmas Gift Giving Program for needy families in the Community.

The Auxiliary has collected and shipped cookies for “Operation Cookie Drop”.

The Post and Auxiliary continue to be a big supporter of the Home of The Brave for male and female Veterans in Milford Delaware. The Post and Auxiliary hosted the opening event for Operations Seas the Day for Wounded Warriors for 8 years. The Auxiliary Children Parties

(Easter, Christmas, Halloween) have brought joy to many generations over 60 years.



There is a small house with VFW over the door by the Country Store on Rt26 in Ocean View where Santa sat and greeted the children in the old days. The Post and Auxiliary regularly visit a Local Assisted Living Facility to talk to Veterans and their family members. The VA Home in Milford is frequently visited by Auxiliary Members who provide various activities for the Veterans.

The Post and Auxiliary sponsored several activities to bring members and community together to share a meal and friendship. The ever-popular Sunday Breakfast cooked and served by volunteers feeding 300 to 500 people on a Sunday morning. In the beginning Breakfast was made to order but went to buffet as crowds grew.



Chez G'ssart our "French" Toast Chef with Seceret Recipe

Maybe more popular was the delicious Ladies Auxiliary Friday night Home cooked dinner; seating was always hard to find. Some activities sought to bring members together for some fun competition. The ever-popular Turkey Shoot – not sure what the shot but the prize was a dressed turkey. There was a Motorcycle poker run, an automobile rally, a chili contest, shuffle board contest, bean bag toss contest, Dart contest, golf tournaments, and many other fun times. The Golf League who played every Tuesday with lunch to follow was more about comradship than score (well there were a few "Pros"???). The best story was at a funeral for Vince McCarron when the honor guard lifted the flag off the coffin there was a sign "I'll take my mulligan now".

To fund all these activities and events and to maintain its buildings and grounds, several creative and legendary fund raisers were pursued. Most memorable were The VFW Booths at the Georgetown Speedway selling homemade French Fries and hot dogs; The Chicken Shack Barbequing for at least 60 years starting in the center of Bethany Beach and then moving to the

National Guard site. The legendary taste is still a deep guarded secret (Let's honor Flora Hudson's recipe and the "Sauce Ladies" for their service all these years).



Most old timers say the original chicken was the best because it was soaked in the sauce for hours before cooking; however, the health department shut down the soaking method – now just a small squirt. The slot machines and rip offs brought in BIG money in their heyday allowing us to pay off all the additions to the Post Home (seems like Newton brought in the first two slot machines – which were confiscated – however The Post must have had some pull since he went to court and got them back) (some may remember when they

shut down all the machines in all fraternal organizations – what were they thinking we immediately organized a protest on Legislature Hall with hundreds of veterans carrying signs motorcycles circling the Hall – they caved quickly and invited the leaders in and negotiated a settlement and the machines were back); The ever popular Flip Five (Bar Bingo) which was started by Irv Hudson and developed by Bill Hensley as model for other Posts with big prizes and lots of fun; Finally the Hall rentals, the raffles, member donations, bands on Saturday nights initially \$5 cover – remember the band QysterB (think they played the night the Post burned down), and other charitable fund raisers. There were always long lines for Cheese Steak night (best in Delmarva) and Connie Weber's Ice Cream sellers.

There were some major events of Interest in the Post's History.

The Old Fashioned Fourth of July picnic to honor Vietnam Veterans in 1982 was an outstanding success with over 600 attendees. Complete with fireworks.



The 4th of July Parade was always a popular function for the Post and Auxiliary. In the early days the VFW led the parade carrying flags in 90-degree heat. The Post and Auxiliary decorated floats; a 64 Ford Galaxy and the Post

Van decorated by Don Golis was a crowd favorite; however, it was the float decorated by the Hickmans and Loppattos that took home First Place. In the last few years, we joined with the National Guard decorating a float and passing out flags to the crowds.



The 70th Anniversary of D-day was our last tribute to the World War II generation bringing to the Post a jeep that was on Normandy Beach on D-day for the Veterans to sign before it went to the museum. The 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Vietnam War was a chance to “Welcome Home” our Vietnam Veterans.



**50th Vietnam “Welcome Home” Ceremony
Kuhblank, Mitchell, Steele, Corsa, Gay, Reeping,
Loppatto, Bennar, Busby**



Since 2013, the Post has Partnered with Operations Seas the Day to sponsor 20 Combat Veterans and their Families for a week. Post members provided most of the volunteers and act as hosts for the families.

Finally, the largest function in the history of the Post was hosting “The Wall That Heals”, a ¾ replica of the Vietnam Wall in DC on October 2019. Well over 1000 individuals donated their time and energy to make the event a success and well over 8000 guests visited the site and attended the functions. The wall sections were carried solemnly and installed along the water by 70 year-old Vietnam Veterans. Each Vietnam Veteran in addition to carrying other panels was asked which panel they wanted to carry that contained the names of their comrades. Frank Bolen because of his experience was asked to organize the east side of the wall; his friends were on a panel on the west side. God was there that day; as the panel with Frank’s comrades was taken by mistake to where Frank was; he immediately looked at the panel and with tears in his eyes carried his comrades to their place on the west side. Names of the Delaware and Maryland soldiers etched in the wall were read in a candlelight ceremony. It was a weekend of tears, hugs, and emotions that united the local community especially Vietnam Veterans and families.





In researching the history of this Post, you get a sense of extreme pride in belonging to an organization that has contributed so much to Veterans and the local community. The credit goes not only to the leaders of the Post and Auxiliary but to all the members who actively participated with their time, energy, and talents. Their Patriotism and Volunteerism have touched the lives of so many over the years. The Future - the Post has faced many daunting challenges in the past but individuals have always stepped up, although the challenges looking forward seem overwhelming, we hope that those here today will step up to continue the legacy of this proud and successful Post. May God Bless the Veterans of Foreign Wars Mason Dixon Post 7234 and its Auxiliary, May God Bless all those who have called this home, and May God Bless America.