VOLUME 25, ISSUE 115

Coshocton County Veterans Service Office Newsletter

318 Main St., Coshocton, OH 43812 740-622-2313 coshoctoncounty.net/veterans

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Once again, we were able to have a full Memorial Day service and parade, and everything went smoothly. We had forty-nine parade participants from a variety of different groups and organizations. Director/County Veterans Service Officer, Doug Schaefer, emceed the services following the completion of the parade route. Pastor Joel Mason, with Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, provided the invocation to open the service. Next, our featured speaker, Sheriff Chris Walters, Sheriff of Coshocton County Sheriff's Department, spoke on what Memorial Day means to him. Ronda Hobbs, a retired USMC 1LT Range Officer, read the forty-nine names of our fallen veterans from the previous twelve months while Fred Hobbs, a retired US Army Special Forces Veteran, rang the bell for each veteran as their names were read. As the bell rang, Scout Troop 403 and Scout Troop 1447 placed flags along the front of the Court Square. Once the final bell had rung, the Memorial Wreath was placed by: Larry Mizer-Vietnam War Veteran, and Larry Pew-Vietnam War Veteran, both from Warsaw. The Coshocton County Honor Guard then fired a three-volley salute to honor our fallen comrades. When the final volley fell silent, Coshocton High School Marching Band Members, Gavin Griffiths and Jordynn Frye, directed by Barry Hardesty, played TAPS to signal that our services were coming to a close. Pastor Joel Mason then closed out our services with the benediction.







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TAPS

The Coshocton County Honor Guard members conducted 17 Military Funerals during April, May, and June.

Veterans honored for their service are listed below.

April

Jon M. Els Korea U.S. Air Force

George D. Myers Vietnam U.S. Army

Gerald H. Fox
Peace Time
U.S. Navy

Jerry R. Walters Vietnam U.S. Army

John Matis, Jr. Korea U.S. Army

John R. Unger Vietnam U.S. Army

May

Fred Metz Peace Time U.S. Navy Reserve

Richard W. Barthel
Peace Time
U.S. Army

Carl L. Emmert Vietnam

U.S. Army Reserve

Harold R. Aronhalt
Peace Time
Army National Guard

June

Elden R. Hudson WWII U.S. Navy

> Jerry Dotson Vietnam U.S. Army

James N. Ayers Korea U.S. Air Force

Donald B. Nixon

Korea

U.S. Navy

Debra J. Bucklew Vietnam U.S. Army

Max R. Thornsley
Vietnam
U.S. Army

John L. Hill
Peace Time
U.S. Marine Corps

Veterans Service Commission

President
Jack Patterson-VFW
Vice-President
Zac Miller-American Legion
Secretary
Herb Tidrick-KWVA
Member
Dave Dilly-AMVETS
Member
Jared Lillo-DAV

<u>Director/Service Officer</u> Doug Schaefer

<u>Service Officer</u> Aaron M. Shearer <u>Administrative Assistant</u> Christina Corbett

The Coshocton County Veterans Service Commission meetings are at 4 p.m. on the first and third Thursday of each month.

Important Numbers for Veterans

Crisis Hotline Dial 988 then 1 Zanesville CBOC 888-615-9448 **Newark CBOC** 740-788-8329 New Phila, CBOC 330-602-5339 Columbus VA 888-615-9448 Wade Park VA 216-791-3800 VA Regional Office 800-827-1000 **Veterans Office** 740-622-2313 740-622-7139 Transportation Mission Act 844-698-2311 877-881-7618 Community Care

To request transfer from a private hospital to a VA medical facility call:

Columbus 614-388-7248 (If no answer, leave a message) Cleveland 216-791-3800 (Ext. 5596)

VA makes it easier for Veterans to use community care

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 19, 2025 11:00 am

Access to non-VA care no longer requires secondary approval

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs announced changes that will make it easier for VA-enrolled Veterans to access health care from non-VA providers at the department's expense.

Since 2019, the MISSION Act has enabled VA-enrolled Veterans to access health care from non-VA providers at the department's expense when it is in their best medical interest. These decisions have been made jointly by Veterans and their referring clinicians but were not considered final until they were reviewed by a second VA doctor.

Effective immediately, VA will implement language in the <u>Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act</u> that removes this extra review step. The change will give eligible Veterans faster access to community care.

"Under President Trump, VA is providing Veterans with more health care choices than ever before," aid **VA Secretary Doug Collins**. "Now, we're making it even easier for Veterans to get their health care when and where its most convenient for them. We are putting Veterans first at the department, and that means placing a premium on customer service and convenience. This important change will help us do just that."

Background

Since 2019, the MISSION Act has given eligible Veterans the option of seeking community care outside VA when they meet any one of six conditions:

- When it is in the best medical interest of the Veteran.
- The care required is not available at a VA medical facility.
- The Veteran lives in a state or territory that does not have a full-service VA facility
- VA cannot meet wait time or distance standards:
- 1. VA cannot offer an appointment within 20 days for primary care, mental health or non-institutional extended care, or within 28 days for specialty care.
- 2. It takes more than a 30-minute drive to reach primary or mental health care, or a 60-minute drive for specialty care.
- VA service does not meet certain quality standards.
- The Veteran meets the grandfathered distance and location provisions of the former Veterans Choice Program.

The new, streamlined process for determining best medical interest will be backed by training for Veterans Health Administration employees to ensure compliance with the Elizabeth Dole Act.

VA announces major survivor benefits reforms

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 5, 2025 10:12 am

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs announced a three-pronged approach to eliminate barriers and streamline the process for how eligible survivors and dependents of deceased Veterans and servicemembers apply for and receive VA benefits and services.

Specific improvements include:

- Starting this month, VA's Office of Survivors Assistance will be moved from the Veterans Benefits Administration to the Office of the VA Secretary, reversing a Biden-era decision that buried OSA under layers of bureaucracy.
- Starting this month, VA will create a "white-glove" survivor outreach team to guide and assist eligible survivors throughout their Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) claims process.
- Starting immediately, VA will begin work to identify areas where automation can be used to make the DIC claims process easier to navigate for survivors.

"The last thing survivors need in their time of grief is frustrating red tape and bureaucracy. That's why we are creating a better system to more quickly and effectively provide survivors the services, support and compassion they've earned," said VA Secretary Doug Collins.

Relocating OSA

In 2021, the Biden administration moved OSA from the Office of the VA Secretary to the Veterans Benefits Administration, creating a siloed system at odds with the intent of the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008. Starting this month, VA will reverse this decision and move OSA to the Office of the VA Secretary, where a staff of five full-time employees will advise the Secretary on all matters related to the policies, programs and legislative issues affecting survivors and dependents.

"White-Glove" Survivor Outreach Team

Under previous administrations, there were gaps in the survivor claims system and no defined outreach process for VA employees to gather information from survivors navigating the benefit process. VA's "White-Glove" Survivor Outreach Team will begin operations in May 2025 and consist of experts based out of the Philadelphia VA Regional Benefit Office. These experts will receive specialized training and guide and assist eligible survivors throughout every step of the DIC claims process with the goal of getting to "yes" on DIC claims decisions for eligible survivors.

Automation Improvements

VA now automates more than 1,000 DIC claims payments or adjustments per day and is in the process of ongoing enhancements to increase automation that will expedite survivors' claims and improve their experience. VA will also be identifying additional areas where automation can be used to make all benefits delivery processes easier to navigate for eligible surviving dependents.



Philadelphia to Host 250th Anniversary Celebrations for the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps

This fall, Philadelphia–birthplace of both the U.S. Navy and Marine Corpswill serve as the official site for a weeklong national celebration marking the 250th anniversaries of both military branches. Dubbed Homecoming 250, the event will feature a series of ceremonies, parades, performances, and tributes from October 9 - 16, with an additional Marine Corps birthday commemoration on November 10th.

A Return to Where it All Began

The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps were both founded in Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War. Independence Hall and nearby landmarks will serve as key backdrops for the commemoration, honoring the legacy of those who served then—and those who serve now.

Highlights of the October events include:

- Parade of Ships on the Delaware River (Oct. 9): Active Navy vessels, historic ships, and Coast Guard Cutters will sail into port, kicking
 off the week's activities.
- Public Ship Tours (Oct. 9–15): Visitors will have the opportunity to tour a range of military vessels, including the historic battleship New Jersey and submarine Becuna.
- Live military performances and ceremonies (Oct. 9–16): Enjoy exhibitions by the Marine Corps Silent Drill Platoon and music by Navy and Marine Corps bands across Independence National Historic Park.
- All Veterans Reunion Picnic (Oct. 12): An inclusive event for veterans of all branches and eras, featuring camaraderie, resources, and service organization booths on Independence Mall.
- Victory at Sea Concert (Oct. 12): A patriotic musical performance by the U.S. Navy Band and Marine Drum & Bugle Corps.
- Memorial service at Christ Church (Oct. 13): A solemn remembrance for Navy and Marine Corps service members who gave their lives.

Inspiring the Next Generation

As part of the outreach to youth, the 250th Salute to Youth Parade (Oct. 13) will honor ROTC, NROTC, JROTC cadets, and Naval Academy midshipmen—highlighting young people on the path to military service. The aim is to raise awareness about service opportunities at a time when the armed forces are facing nationwide recruitment challenges.

Marine Corps 250th Commemoration (Nov. 10)

The Marine Corps will mark its 250th birthday in a series of events centered on its historic roots:

- Independence Hall Ceremony (Nov. 10): With remarks from senior leaders in the Navy and Marine Corps.
- Tun Tavern Site Tribute (Nov. 10): A celebration of the Marine Corps' birthplace, including a look at reconstruction efforts of the original tavern location.
- 100th Marine Corps Birthday Ball (Nov. 10): Held in the same hotel ballroom where the very first official Marine Corps Ball took place in 1925.

Why it matters for Veterans and Families- These commemorations aren't just about honoring the past—they're also a reminder of the strength, resilience, and values that continue to define the U.S. military. For Veterans, this is an opportunity to reconnect with their service branch, meet fellow veterans, and share the significance of their stories with younger generations.

Plan Your Visit- Events ate open to the public, and many are free. Some larger activities, including sporting events and formal galas, may require tickets. For the latest schedule and details, visit homecoming250.org.

Top Summer 2025 Travel Discounts for Veterans

Planning a summer getaway? Veterans and their families can take advantage of exclusive travel discounts to make their vacations more affordable and enjoyable.

1. American Forces travel (AFT)

Operated by the Department of Defense in partnership with Priceline, AFT offers up to 50% off on hotels, flights rental cars, vacation packages, and cruises.

This summer, AFT features special deals in popular destinations like Cancun, Puerto Rico, and Punta Cana, with hotel discounts up to 55%. Additionally, veterans can save up to 20% on Avis or Budget car rentals and up to 15% on U-SAVE rentals.

Exclusive cruise discounts are also available with major lines such as Carnival and Royal Caribbean.

2. Armed Forces vacation Club (AFVC)

AFVC provides access to resort accommodations worldwide at discounted rates.

Veterans can book 7-night stays in top destinations for as low as \$379. Special promotions are available for travel through September 28, 2025.

3. Carnival Cruise Line

Carnival honors veterans with special military rates on cruises. Every sailing includes a Military Appreciation Day, featuring events and gatherings to recognize service members.

Veterans can also participate in a monthly sweepstakes to win a free cruise.

4. Dollywood Park & Resorts

Located in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, Dollywood offers discounted tickets and season passes to veterans and their families. Discounts apply to both the theme park and Splash Country water park, with verification through ID.me.

5. Greyhound Bus Lines

Veterans can receive a 10% discount on Greyhound fares year-round through the WeSalute+ program. Additional savings are available by booking in advance or traveling during off-peak times.

6. GOV X

GOVX offers exclusive travel discounts for military personnel, including veterans. Members can access deals on hotels, rental cars, cruises, and tours. New York

7. Military Discount Center

This platform aggregates various discounts available to military-members and veterans, including travel-related deals. It's a valuable resource for finding the latest offers on accommodations, transportation, and more.

8. Military OneSource

Through the Information, Tickets, and Travel (ITT) office, Military OneSource provides veterans with access to discounted tickets for special events, area attractions, and travel services.

Before booking, always verify eligibility requirements and availability, as some discounts may have specific conditions or limited timeframes. Taking advantage of these offers can lead to significant savings and a more enjoyable travel experience.

The Founder of Senior Veterans Administration Services (SVAS), SVAS, and Four SVAS Employees Indicted for Scamming the Department of Veterans Affairs of Approximately \$20 Million in Fraudulent Benefits

CLEVELAND – Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley announced that a Cuyahoga County grand jury has returned an indictment charging Senior Veterans Administration Services (SVAS), SVAS founder, Richard Rompala, 64, and four SVAS employees, Carolina Riemer, 72, Karen Kral, 47, Gina Ayala, 61, and Mary Lou Griffin, 68, for exploiting elderly veterans and scamming the Department of Veterans Affairs out of approximately \$20 million in fraudulent benefits.

Richard Rompala founded the Senior Veterans Administration Services (SVAS) to act as a charitable organization assisting veterans. SVAS would contact veterans, inform them of their free service, and let them know they are eligible for benefits—which they were not. SVAS would falsify documentation to make the veterans eligible and send falsified documents to the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Department of Veterans Affairs would provide SVAS with financial benefits. SVAS, through a separate entity, would either demand direct payment or a large percentage of the benefits before releasing the remainder to the veterans. The investigation was conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, the Ohio Attorney General's Office, and the Ohio Department of Commerce.

On June 13, 2025, Richard Rompala was arrested by the Collier County Sheriff's Office in Naples, Florida. This case is part of Operation No VA SCAMS (No VA "Service-Connected Account Manipulation"), a nationwide initiative led by the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General in collaboration with federal and state prosecutors, including the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office, to combat fraud and other unlawful conduct committed by predatory claims companies or individuals against veterans and VA. Entities involved in these schemes often are unaccredited and make false or fraudulent promises to obtain or increase a veteran's VA benefits while demanding direct payment or a portion of the veteran's benefits in exchange.

On June 10, 2025, Richard Rompala was indicted on the following charges: two counts of engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity, one count of conspiracy, one count of aggravated theft, one count of telecommunications fraud, three counts of prohibited acts and practices for charities, two counts of tampering with records, one count of money laundering, seven counts of filing incomplete/false/fraudulent returns, and one count of grand theft.

On June 10, 2025, SVAS was indicted on the following charges: two counts of engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity, one count of conspiracy, one count of aggravated theft, one count of telecommunications fraud, three counts of prohibited acts and practices for charities, and two counts of tampering with records.

On June 10, 2025, Carolina Riemer was indicted on the following charges: one count of attempted receiving stolen property.

On June 10, 2025, Karen Kral was indicted on the following charges: one count of aggravated theft, one count of telecommunications fraud, and two counts of tampering with records.

On June 10, 2025, Gina Ayala was indicted on the following charges: one count of tampering with records, and once count of receiving stolen property.

On June 10, 2025, Mary Lou griffin was indicted on the following charges: one count of tampering with records.

They will be arraigned at the Cuyahoga County Justice Center at a later date.

ccprosecutor.us/svas-indictment-scam-dept-veterans-affairs/

Going to an accredited VSO is imperative for you and any benefits YOU'VE EARNED. A good VSO will assist in your claim work and help you obtain credible evidence from medical providers outside of the VA. Claim sharks, will take your money, file anything, and make everything more difficult in the long run. Fraud in the one finding that the VA will sever any rating/benefit for, no matter how long ago the decision was made. Before filing a claim, make sure you have good/solid evidence. VA Fraud is very real and people who will take advantage of you are out there.

If you are on Ohio Veteran, we are fortunate enough to have accredited Veteran Service Offices in every county and they can assist you with any of your state and federal benefits, FOR FREE! Contact any of your local service offices today to see if we can help you!

Coshocton County Veterans- please contact your local, accredited, VSO's at: 318 Main St./Courthouse, Coshocton, OH 43812



We define a "Claim Shark" as anyone who:

- Charges hefty fees to "guide, assist, advise or consult" veterans with filing or appealing their VA benefit claims — this practice is illegal!
- Asserts they are an "expert" or "guardian" but evades the professional and ethical standards of VA accreditation — their advice can be misleading or even fraudulent!
- Hooks you once you're in, you can't get out and may be subject to new and hidden fees whenever you get a new rating — no matter who does the work!

Some of their predatory practices include:

- Claiming they are an "insider" or have inside information to fast track or maximize your VA disability rating.
- Touting better outcomes because you are paying for services.
- Advertising faster VA claims decisions.
- Requesting login credentials to access sensitive personal information through government websites like VA.gov.
- Using confusing tactics or ambiguous language to mislead claimants or coerce them into signing a contract.
- Telling veterans to forego VA exams and offering health consultations within their own network of doctors.

Here is how veterans can help protect themselves:

- Always ask "Are you accredited with VA?"
- Insist on signing a VA Power of Attorney before agreeing to any other terms and conditions.
- Refuse to sign legal waivers of your right to accredited representation.
- Never agree to contingent payments based on your future benefits.
- Avoid medical exams or opinions from doctors affiliated with consultation companies.
- Always attend exams ordered by VA.
- Never provide access to private and secure systems or personal information.
- Always ask "If I have to appeal VA's decision, will you still help me?"

Who is NOT a Claim Shark?

- VA accredited veterans service organization representatives, like VFW's Accredited Service Officers.
- Private VA accredited agents.
- · VA accredited attorneys, to include pro bono law clinics.
- All those who turn up here when searched: www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation.







Who are the Claim Sharks?

We used to list the usual Claim Sharks, but it began reading like a phone book. By this point you know the type – all charm up front, hidden fees in the back.

For free, accredited help from VFW's Accredited Service Officers visit

www.DontFeedTheSharks.org

Go to the following website: www.usa.gov/contact-servicemember-retiree



Home > Military and veterans > Locate military members > Contact an active duty service member or retiree

ı	Military and veterans
	Selective Service
	Requirements to enlist
	Military and veterans pay and
	benefits
	Military and veterans ID
	Veterans jobs and training
	Get copies of military records
	Locate military members
	Contact an active duty service
ı	member or retiree
	Locate a military installation
	About the U.S. military

Contact an active duty service member or retiree

There is no database that you can search to find an active-duty U.S. military member or retiree. But you may be able to contact them through their branch of service.

Confirm that someone is on active duty

If you need to verify that someone is on active duty, <u>use the Department of Defense's website</u> to create a service record request.

Locate someone on active duty or a retiree

Each branch of the military has policies for contacting service members and retirees. The U.S. Coast Guard does not offer a way to locate service members.

To find someone in the other branches, write a letter to that branch. Your request should include the person's:

- Full name
- Social Security number
- Grade or rank
- Last known duty station
- Member or serial number (for Air Force)
- Date of birth (for Air Force)

To receive a reply, include your name and contact information.

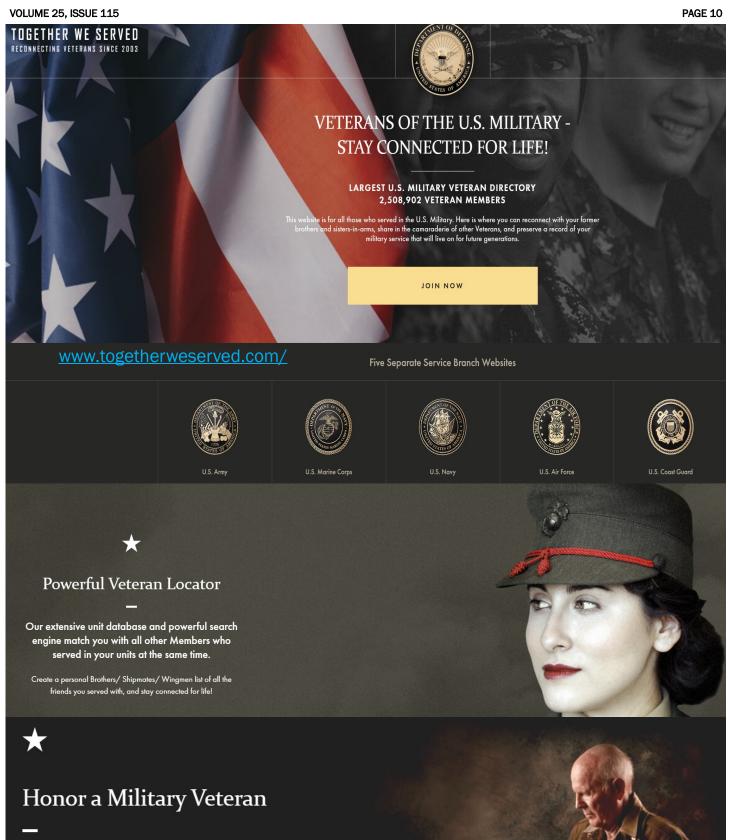
Send your letter to an address in the links below.

Find Someone in the	Instructions
Air Force	Follow the <u>instructions to use the Air Force's Worldwide</u> <u>Locator</u> , or call 1-210-565-2660.
Army	Follow the instructions to use the Army's worldwide locator, or call 1-866-771-6357.
Marines	See the Marines FAQ to help you locate an active duty Marine or retiree. Go to the "Miscellaneous" section of the page. Then select "Personal Locator." Or call 1-703-784-3941.
Navy	The Navy has an FAQ to help you locate an active duty member or retiree. Go to the section titled "How do I find a friend or family member in the Navy?" Or call 1-901-874-3388.

The U.S. Coast Guard does not offer a way to locate service members.

Contact a service member in an emergency

The Red Cross can help you contact a service member during an emergency. <u>Submit your request online</u> or by phone at 1-877-272-7337.



Create a Military Service Tribute Page and Plaque on behalf of a Living Military Veteran.

Help preserve their military service history, photos, and memories in a unique format that can be shared, or printed out and framed.



B.L.U.F.

We are not the VA. We are YOUR County Veterans Service Officers assisting veterans to navigate the VA. We are affiliated with the VA through our accreditations with National Service Organizations: VFW, DAV, American Legion, & Ohio Department of Veterans Services.

Who we are and what we do: The Veterans Service Commission, formerly called the Soldier's & Sailors Relief Commission, was established by the Ohio General Assembly in 1886. Title 59, Chapter 5901 of the Ohio Revised Code, establishes and regulates the operation of the Commission, and accordingly, the Coshocton County Veterans Service Commission is empowered to provide temporary assistance to veterans, their spouses, their dependents, and their widows and orphans.

It is the goal of the Coshocton County Veterans Service Office to inform our veterans of their benefits, transport them to VA medical care facilities, provide short-term financial assistance, and act as an agent in obtaining assistance from federal, state, or local agencies.

VA EMERGENCY CARE

FOR VETERANS USING THE VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM AS THEIR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER. IF YOU NEED TO RECEIVE EMERGENCY CARE WHILE TRAVELING OR AWAY FROM A VA CLINIC YOU SHOULD NOW CALL THE CENTRALIZED SYSTEM AT 1-844-724-7842 WITHIN 72 HOURS OF GOING TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM. THIS POLICY IS DIFFERENT FROM THE PREVIOUS 72 HOUR NOTICE POLICY IN THAT THIS IS A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM REGARDLESS OF WHERE THE VETERAN IS AT OR THE CLINIC THEY NORMALLY SEE. THE CALL CAN BE MADE BY THE VETERAN, EMERGENCY ROOM PROVIDER, THE VETERAN'S REPRESENTATIVE, OR THEIR FAMILY MEMBER.

Office Closures

Monday, September 1st — Labor Day

Monday, October 13th — Columbus Day

Coshocton County Veterans Organizations

VFW Post #1330

Commander: Wayne Hilliard Meetings are the second Saturday of each month at the AMVETS Career Center at 10:00 a.m.



Commander: Ed Skerness P.O. Box 116 Coshocton, Ohio 43812 Meetings are the first Tuesday of each month at the AMVETS Career Center at 6:00 p.m.

AMVETS Post #36

Commander: Rick Cullison 986 Otsego Ave. Coshocton, Ohio 43812 740-623-0538 Meetings are the third Monday of each month at 6:00 p.m.

Army/Navy Garrison #628

Commander: Kevin Freshwater Meetings are the second Monday of each month at 6:00 p.m.

> American Legion Post #466 Commander: Jack Patterson 405 E. Union Ave. West Lafayette, Ohio 43845 740-545-9773

Meetings are held on an as-needed basis

Coshocton County Veterans Council

Commander: Jack Patterson Meetings are the second Thursday of each month at the AMVETS Career Center at 3:00 p.m.



















American Legion Post #634 Commander: Gary Kilpatrick 298 Plum St. Warsaw, OH 43844 Meetings are the third Wednesday of each month at the Fire House in Warsaw at 7:00 p.m.

American Legion Post #65

Commander: Jason Babcock 652 Main St. Coshocton, Ohio 43812 740-622-6106 Meetings are the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

Korean War **Veterans** Association President: Bob Jones Meetings are on an as-needed basis

Coshocton County Vietnam Veterans Commander: David Hindel Meetings are the second Saturday of each month at the AMVETS Career Center at 9 a.m.

Blue Star Mothers OH59 **President: Sharon Burns** P.O. Box 1655 Coshocton, OH 43812 740-502-0169 Meetings are held at 6:00 p.m. on the second Monday of each month at the AMC Nazarene Church, 1030 Orange St.,

Operation Veterans Helping Veterans **Executive Director: Brian Hawkins** West Lafavette, OH 43845 740-610-8109 Meetings are held on an as-needed basis

Coshocton, OH 43812