

September 13, 2010

OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL HISTORIAN

MEMORANDUM TO: Department Historian

My personal greetings and congratulations and that of National Librarian Howard Trace (liaison to the National Historian) and his staff, upon your selection as the Historian of your Department.

The work of collecting, preserving and recording the activities of The American Legion is a very important phase of American Legion activity. While it entails much detail work, I am sure you will find it most rewarding and inspiring. This work is cumulative and the continuity is important, so it is well to leave it in the hands of one person as long as he/she is doing it well. By the same token, a Department Historian who continues to show lack of interest in his/her work should not be kept in office indefinitely. The Department budget should also include a sum for the historian's annual operating expenses and travel.

An annual report of the activities of the Department should be made each year to the Department Convention. In addition, a duplicate copy should be forwarded to the National Historian at National Headquarters in Indianapolis for record.

In cooperation with the Department Adjutant, the Department Historian should assist in the assembly and preservation of the Department records of historical value. This would include Convention proceedings, Department reports, biographies, etc. Binding the reports by category is the best way to preserve them. Volumes of Department publications should always be bound. Files should be checked for historical material before discarding. You might want to ask the advice of the National Librarian as a last resort.

It is of special value for the Department Historian to compile a Department history covering the entire period from beginning to date. If a history has already been published, it could well begin where the previous one ended. There are many examples of older American Legion Department and Post histories on file, and available for viewing, in the library at National Headquarters of The American Legion in Indianapolis.

For your information, there are four (4) annual contests conducted on the National level. The contests involve the Post "First Place" winner in your Department contest for a one-year narrative history and yearbook as well as entries for a one-year Department narrative history and yearbook. These entries will be judged at National Headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana during the NEC meeting week in October of each year. The "Certification" forms for the year 2010-2011 which must accompany the book(s) submitted are now attached.

*The American Legion Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies* contains much information

about the history contest. Also in that section of the *Guide* are “Capsule History of The American Legion” and “Helpful Hints for District (Also County) Historians”. There is also an “Annual Report of Post Historians” which might be of help to Post Historians. I suggest that you notify the Posts in your Department of this readily available material by Department bulletin or other means of communications. Remind them that their entries in either category (narrative history or scrapbook/yearbook) MUST be a “*First Place Winner*” in your Department contest. And, it MUST be “certified” as such by you, as Department Historian, before being forwarded to the National Historian for entry in the announced contest for that category. Your Department may be one of several that may have to forward additional information to your Posts for your particular Department contests. The National Historian appreciates the fact that some Departments of The American Legion have developed their own rules and policies in running and judging histories. But keep in mind the requirements that have to be met for the National Contest and refer to the most current edition of the *Officer’s Guide* (January 2010) as the official rules of the mid-2010-mid-2011 Legion year, or at the Legion’s web site [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org).

Wherever possible, oral histories should be recorded by use of a cassette or other recorder to tape interviews of American Legion leaders in order to capture “first hand” information about the historical events of the Department. You may be an important link to some first-hand historical information. There is also an important initiative from the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. The Veteran’s History Project is based on Public Law 106-380 that calls for the American Folklife Center to collect and preserve audio and video recorded oral histories of America’s war veterans as well as other selected documentary materials including letters and diaries. The spirit of the enacting legislation encourages all American veterans to participate and calls upon the Center to create partnerships with a wide range of organizations.

**The National Association of Department Historians of The American Legion (NADHAL)** was organized in Philadelphia during the 1949 National Convention. The Association meets twice a year, at the site of the National Convention and in Indianapolis during the week of the Fall Meetings of the National Executive Committee. The National Historian hosts each of these meetings. You are encouraged to join NADHAL and, if possible, attend the meetings.

I understand that an *informational background seminar will be held on Monday, October 11th from 8:30 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. for newly appointed Department Historians so that they can have a general overview of the contest activities and understand the duties of a judge.* And the judging will follow at the National Headquarters building at 700 N. Pennsylvania St.

**Resolution No. 27 (copy attached) of the October 1989 NEC allows for a two day per diem if you, the official Department Historian, attend the workshop and/or judging sessions. Per Diem will be \$85.00 per day for a total of \$170.00.** Membership to NADHAL is \$5.00 per calendar year. It is important to be a paid-up member since correspondence and the newsletter will only be sent to those current. Contact the Treasurer Virgil Arling, 284 Stallo Rd, Minster, OH 45865-1326, tel. 419-628-2675, [va284@roadrunner.com](mailto:va284@roadrunner.com) or join when you attend your first meeting. With this letter are details of hotel accommodations. *You or your Department are responsible for making your own reservations.*

If there isn’t one already, the Department Historian is urged to establish a Department

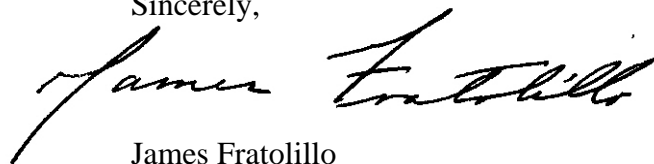
Association of Post Historians along the lines of NADHAL. An annual meeting could be held at the time of Department Convention with an assessment of dues of a modest nature to off-set any anticipated expenditures that will incur.

The serious Department Historian will find informative and interesting any one of the following published histories about The American Legion:

- *American Legion Extension Institute*. Indianapolis: The American Legion, 1996. (Available from Emblem Sales)
- Rumer, Thomas. *The American Legion: An Official History 1919-1989*. New York: M. Evans, 1990. (Out of Print)
- The American Legion National Headquarters. *This is The American Legion*, 2nd ed. Indianapolis: American Legion, 1990. (Out of Print)
- Moley, Raymond. *The American Legion Story*. New York: Duel, Sloan, & Pearce, 1966. (Out of Print)
- Jones, Richard Seelye. *A History of The American Legion*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1946. (Out of Print)
- James, Marquis. *A History of The American Legion*. New York: William Green, 1923. (Out of Print)
- *The American Legion Magazine, 1919 to the current issue*. Subjects covered in this publication can be found in the index which is available via the staff of The American Legion Library at National Headquarters in Indianapolis.

The work of collecting, preserving and recording the activities of The American Legion is very important. If the National Historian's office can be of assistance to you in any way, please don't hesitate to let us know. Best wishes for a successful and most rewarding year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Fratolillo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

James Fratolillo  
National Historian

cc: Department Adjutant