



American Legion, Department of Texas, 2nd Division, 7th District

The Woodlands Post 305

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INTRODUCTION

LOOKING BACK

June 28, 1914 was a great holiday for the people of Great Britain. It was "Empire Day," the anniversary of the coronation of Queen Victoria, 77 years past and 13 years since her death. Every village was decked with flags; every church had a special service; every school its ceremony. Although the Continent had been through upheaval, involving no less than Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Serbia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it was viewed from the British Isles as "trouble in the Balkans," which seemed to flare up so regularly that the news was minor headlines of serious newspapers. But, most historians, searching for a pivotal date, cited June 28, 1914, as the start of what much later became "The Great War" and still later, "World War I," involving Great Britain among others in the exploding "trouble in the Balkans."

Sarajevo was the capital of the annexed province of Bosnia and was considered a hotbed of Slav nationalism. There were signs of it erupting into open insurrection. The city had been chosen as the site of annual maneuvers of the 15th and 16th Corps of the Austrian army. The show of force of war games should help dampen the fiery Slavs. Further, the Austrian Inspector-General was to visit the demonstration of military might. The Inspector-General was also heir to the Austrian crown. Archduke Franz Ferdinand, who arrived in Sarajevo by train this 28th day of June, was accompanied by his wife, Sophie, the Duchess. It was their fourteenth wedding anniversary. The plan was to move by open motorcar from the train station to Town Hall with the mayor, who headed a welcoming committee. As the entourage proceeded along the selected route, a bomb was thrown at the car. It bounced off of the target car and exploded beneath the following vehicle, wounding two officers by flying fragments. The Archduke and Duchess were unharmed, but irate, as the mayor tried to restore order. The bomb thrower was caught and arrested, as the dignitaries continued on their journey. Following the stopover at Town Hall, the Archduke was persuaded to take a different, safer route out of town. However, the driver of the lead vehicle was not informed of the change of route and made a wrong turn into Appel Quay, and the Archduke's driver followed. When the mistake was realized, the lead car stopped to turn around or back up. The street was narrow, and the cars did not have a reverse gear, so they had to be pushed back to the main road, passing slowly by bystander Gavrilo Princip.

Gavrilo Princip, 19 years of age, was a Bosnian Serb anarchist and had been given

an underpowered .32 caliber pistol. He had been sent out with two companions to try to assassinate the Archduke. With unbelievable luck, the slow-moving motorcar with his target stood right before Princip, and with two shots he killed the Archduke and Duchess. That single event gave excuse to the cascade of the events which followed, beginning with condolences, but triggering various actions among the same powers who had been recently engaged in "small" wars. Paper commitments like mutual defense pacts and treaties and prepared war plans, directly led to a much larger war, as other powers -- Germany, Belgium, France, and Great Britain -- eagerly or reluctantly joined the fray.

As the far-off United States watched, Europe and the Middle East became fully engaged. Under President Woodrow Wilson's policy and leadership, the US made known its neutrality, and that position helped re-elect Wilson in 1916. Great Britain, who depended on keeping its sea lanes open, continued to trade with the US. Germany, however, refused to honor the US neutrality. Following the sinking of the French passenger ship "Essex" with some loss of American lives, President Wilson protested the act. The German U-boat captains changed to a "stop and search" policy; were required to rescue survivors of sinkings; and were required to warn merchant and passenger ships before attacking. However, in February 1917, Germany announced it was resuming attacks on civilian ships who were suspected of aiding the Great Powers. There was suspicion that British passenger ships were carrying munitions and other war materiel as cargo, so those liners became fair game for German U-boats and raiders. Earlier, in 1915, the RMS Lusitania had been torpedoed crossing the Atlantic with a loss of many lives, including 128 of them Americans. That began to change the public's attitude about neutrality, but President Wilson still hoped for a diplomatic resolution. Virtually all sentiment to stay out of the war dissolved when British intelligence intercepted a telegram from German Undersecretary Arthur Zimmerman to his ambassador to Mexico. The order directed the ambassador to propose to Mexico an alliance between Germany and Mexico in exchange for ultimate return of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico to Mexican sovereignty. Informed of this bold act, President Wilson addressed Congress on April 2, 1917, asking for a declaration of war against Imperial Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Four days later, war was declared.

The National Defense Act of 1916 authorized the Army up to a strength of 175,000 men, but it was based on relations with Mexico. The US was ill prepared for war with only 130,000 regulars and about 70,000 National Guardsmen. The projected need was for a million men, where the Allied Powers and the Central Powers had been at war with millions of men each. The US, in order to mobilize more quickly, passed the Selective Service Act and federalized State Guard units where they existed. It drew in Marines from ships, legations, and "banana republics" all over the world and assembled them in Philadelphia into two regiments of ground troops. French generals visited Washington to present their views on how they wanted to utilize the American troops. When the selected leader of the American Expeditionary Force, Major General Frederick Funston, died suddenly of a heart attack, the choice of a replacement was quickly made. When the Army's night duty officer, who carried the news to the White House, was asked offhand by President Wilson who he would recommend as the replacement, Major Douglas MacArthur's quick response was "General Pershing." Pershing was designated as Commander of the AEF and soon refused to allow American troops to serve under French field officers, demanding American divisions to take the field as American-led units. The earliest AEF contingent and General Pershing arrived in France via England

in June 1917. Just 17 months later, on November 11, 1918, Germany accepted the terms of an armistice, laid down its arms, and went home. The Great War was ended!

FOUNDING THE AMERICAN LEGION

The March 2015 issue of Post 305's newsletter recognized the formation of the American Legion by running the following article, in recognition of the Legion's birthday:

"THE BIRTH OF THE LEGION"

"On September 16, 1919, the United States Code was amended to create "The American Legion" and on that same date the 66th Congress passed Public Law No. 47, which was the original Act to incorporate The American Legion. The American Legion was actually born at an assembly of veterans of the American Expeditionary Force at the call of Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. This gathering (or "caucus") took place in Paris, France. All present represented various AEF divisions and other service units. The dates of the caucus were March 15-17, 1919. Roosevelt is credited as being the "Father of The American Legion". The proposed organization's name was adopted after much controversy about its selection. When Major Maurice K. Gordon of the 36th Division offered "The American Legion", the matter was resolved. It was decided to follow the Paris meeting with one back home to advance the organizational planning and be more representative of the AEF.

"By the close of the Paris assembly, an executive committee of 100 members was named, including a subcommittee of 17, which was charged with promoting interest and support in the Legion and setting up the second meeting. Advance committees of two members from each state met on May 6, 1919, in St. Louis to prepare for the general caucus, which took place on May 8-10, 1919. There about 1,100 delegates met, many still in uniform, and produced a tentative Constitution and finalized the Preamble. Organizational work proceeded after St. Louis, and on September 16, 1919, the Legion was chartered by Congress. The Department of Texas met in San Antonio to organize the state structure and then held its first convention in Dallas on Armistice Day 1919.

"The first National Convention was held in Minneapolis on November 10-12, 1919, and, among other actions, created the American Legion Auxiliary. Armistice Day was selected as the date of the National Convention parade. On that date, in Centralia, Washington, four Post members in its parade were shot and killed by members of the "Industrial Workers of America", a radical group incited by propaganda based on class hatred. That event encouraged the new Legion to confront un-American activities. Five cities made pitches to be the home of the permanent National Headquarters: Detroit, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Minneapolis and Washington, DC. The Indiana capital won out."

It seems remarkable that those Americans who became "veterans" through their period of service in the AEF would be so moved to keep that short interruption of life so strong and vivid in memory. It showed in the 1920s and 1930s prior to Pearl Harbor at the well-attended Post meetings with most members in Legion uniform. It showed on the four or five annual patriotic observances in cities and towns across America, when ranks of marching men trooped the colors and looked sharp. It showed at National Conventions when these comrades "let off steam" with scaled-down 40/8 trains, with water-filled paper bags and cattle prods. It was like victory day all over again, but serious work was done also. If you survived France for just those several months and did not leave a part of your body or mind on Hill 272 or in Belleau Wood, you were glad

to be among your buddies again. What was it about that short segment of so many lives that made it so important, so memorable, so moving, among all those other years of the survivors? What drove Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt and a few other AEF veterans to conceive of and organize what was originally a one-war association, not unlike its predecessor, the Grand Army of the Republic?

OLD MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Montgomery County was the third county formed by the Republic of Texas. That was in 1837. It has been recognized as the birthplace of the Lone Star Flag. The first Texan to die in the Battle of San Jacinto was from Montgomery County. The Texas Congress approved annexation to the United States on June 18, 1845. The County was extensive and became the "mother" of four other counties, which were:

- ❖ Grimes County in 1846 *
- ❖ Walker County in 1846
- ❖ Madison County in 1853, and
- ❖ San Jacinto County in 1870.

*(In 1878, Waller County was formed from Grimes County.)

With civil war starting in the eastern states and Texas electing to secede, able-bodied men of Montgomery County enlisted in the Confederate Army. Most were allocated to Company "H" of the 4th Texas Regiment, Colonel John Hood, Commanding. When Hood was promoted to general, the regiment became part of "Hood's Texas Brigade", attached to Longstreet's First Corps, Army of Northern Virginia. The Brigade was involved in 24 battles, including Second Manassas, Antietam, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, Wilderness and Cold Harbor. At Gettysburg alone, Company "H" lost half of its men. When General Lee surrendered at Appomattox, of the 145 original members of Company "H", only nine men were left to find their way back to Texas.

Obviously, the County responded to many subsequent calls-to-arms – Spanish-American War, Punitive Expedition, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam and those War Eras since. During World War II, the US Government purchased land in Conroe and built an airfield for the Army Air Corps, where training of flying personnel was conducted. In 1945, the field was decommissioned and converted to predominantly civilian use. It became Montgomery County Airport; then later, Lone Star Executive Airport (CXO). Of about 80,000 air operations annually, about five per cent are military. Based at Lone Star is the 1st Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, an Army Recon unit of the 11th Aviation Command. It is a reserve unit with 470 soldiers in six companies, including three line companies, each with eight AH-64D "Longbow" Apache helicopters.

POST 305 AND ITS SETTING

Post 305 is not necessarily unique among Legion Posts; there must be others which experience and accept similar locational circumstances. The Post lies in the Seventh District (one of 23) and the Second Division of the Department of Texas. It is called "The Woodlands Post" because that township is its location. The "locational circumstances" referred to are a Post in the middle of what has become an urbanized/suburban community in the southernmost reaches of Montgomery County and the northernmost communities of Harris County. To the north, most of Montgomery County is exurban and rural, populated by people and commerce to match. Further,

about 76% of Post members reside beyond the boundaries of the strictly-controlled Woodlands Township; 34% in other Montgomery County communities; 31% in Harris County to the south; and 11% out of the region or state. By "strictly-controlled" is meant under strong architectural control and city planning limitations. The Post and Auxiliary are a sort of blend of economic and cultural diversity, lacking pretty much in ethnic diversity, and reflecting the community.

New development to the south, in Harris County, has added significantly to the professional and office support population, thanks in particular to the 385-acre ExxonMobil Campus, which is operating but not yet fully built out and occupied. These white-collar workers either moved north from the City of Houston, were transferred in from other states, or are trying to commute on Interstate 45, following their jobs. Land for the ExxonMobil Campus was acquired from the 2,000-acre Springwoods Village development, which is creating a residential and mixed-use community fronting on the Grand Parkway, a state toll road which eventually will become the northern arc of Houston's third loop highway, extending initially from US 59 on the east to SR 290 on the west. A major interchange with Interstate 45 is under construction now and is nearing completion.

Now, all of this new development did not just spring up overnight, but today The Woodlands is far different from what it was in 1989, when Post 305 was chartered. That's a generation ago, and, a generation hence, The Woodlands may rival the City of Houston in size and economy, lacking only its port and inner city ills. The 2014 population of Montgomery County was 500,000 (189,000 households), including The Woodlands Township with 185,000 people (70,000 households). Employment in the county was about 234,000 jobs, and that of the Woodlands was 139,000. These figures exclude the nearby Harris County, and the ExxonMobil Campus with its 10,000 jobs.

THE WOODLANDS

The Woodlands began as a development concept of George P. Mitchell, who grew up in Galveston; attended Texas A&M University, earning a degree in petroleum engineering; served in the Corps of Engineers throughout WWII, enlisting in 1940; founded the oil-patch company which bore his name; and became the "Father of Fracking," after spending 17 years developing the extraction process by trial and error, working in Texas' Barnett Shale deposits. As a side ambition, Mitchell was driven to "save" his hometown of Galveston and to preserve its rich architectural heritage. With the support of his wife, Cynthia, Mitchell was able to preserve and restore many historic public structures of old Galveston, using profits from the oil development business. But, Mitchell had a different goal -- to create a wholly new residential community "from scratch" somewhere in the Greater Houston area.

After considering and evaluating many sites, in 1966, he selected a 25,000-acre site 28 miles north of Houston which was mostly timber and swamp. It was in the southern part of adjacent Montgomery County and just west of the main road between Houston and Dallas. Once he had evaluated the site, he had development sketches drawn up meeting his objective of a new town. He founded a separate development company and began construction in 1972 of eight "villages," each with its own economic and cultural style. Residential property was supported by utilities, schools, protective services, commercial development and public works, all hidden from public view behind forests and lakes.

Mitchell and his company drew upon the Federal government for available financial help in the form of loans and grants, taking advantage of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and its "Urban Growth and New Community Act of 1968." DHUD's assistance varied greatly as each new administration took different views of "new towns." Between 1968 and 1973, it had accepted to help fund 15 new communities, but most of those expired at some stage. The Woodlands survived, and its Grand Opening was in October 1974. But, there were many issues to resolve after that event -- the mix of residences in the villages and the intrusion of commercial/retail development, drainage problems, county acceptance of this non-city township entity, and application of DHUD's social goals, to name a few.

George Mitchell lived to see his dream come to life. On July 26, 2013, he died in his Galveston home at age 94. He certainly left his mark on southeast Texas and on all nations seeking alternatives to Middle East oil.

THE EARLY YEARS OF POST 305

On December 15, 1988, Articles of Incorporation were duly signed by the original officers of Post 305. Those "charter members" or "plank owners" were:

David L. English; Commander
Michael B. Hoge; First Vice Commander
Wayne L. Pense; Second Vice Commander
Sydney E. Ulmer; Adjutant
Robert Brown; Finance Officer
Frank Mayer; Judge Advocate
Kenneth C. Gore; Service Officer
Robert E. Kaszniak; Historian
Frank J. Fuell; Sergeant-at-Arms
Steve Norris; Chaplain

The Post Charter is dated January 30, 1989.

A neat and complete history of Post 305 does not exist or, if it does, it has avoided discovery. The Post and its History Books have fragments of memories from some of the oldest members who recall or were told of those years following award of its charter in 1989, not so long ago for many Posts who once held only one war-era group of veterans. Despite the Articles of Incorporation, memories or memoirs indicate that the first Commander was Richard Brown, a former Marine Corps sergeant and a division boxer, hence the nickname "Pug." He was the editor of the new Woodlands *Villager* newspaper. His adjutant was David English, in whose home the early meetings took place. Later, the Post met in a small backroom of the Woodlands Athletic Club -- a swim club, then in a small club room of the Woodlands Inn and Country Club. Not long into the Post's operation, both Brown and English were ready to be relieved, and Post member John Fryer, an attorney, was elected Commander. Post meetings drew eight to ten Legionnaires and found a temporary home at the Woodlands Community Center (the same facility where the Post meets today). Attendance at meetings grew to 12 to 14, but there were no committees or reports, not even on finances and membership.

Early in the 1990's, the Post literally fell apart when Commander Fryer relocated to Ohio following a divorce. The District Commander stepped in and by a coin toss declared Frank Gray as Commander and Chuck Suhr as Adjutant. The Post began meeting in Gray's warehouse and membership and attendance grew, with an active

Auxiliary who provided coffee and sandwiches or better. Morale went up and Frank Canfield volunteered as public information officer, issuing at least one press release per month. Harlen Thornhill's wife designed and sewed 40 gold and blue vests adorned with "Post 305." The Post still had no officers beyond Gray and Suhr, no newsletter, no reports, but an Auxiliary of six ladies. The meeting place was changed to the Chateau Woods MUD building east of I-45. George Bannon became Commander and organization followed. The officer corps was fleshed out; a newsletter was started; fundraising began (yard sale); and the Post appeared in its first July Fourth parade. Under Bannon and his wife Sue Ellen, the Post and Auxiliary became viable.

THE COMMANDER

At the December 2011, Membership Meeting, three guests were introduced, Robert Bagley, Terry Green, and Peter Koch. Each was interested in joining Post 305 and all three did. Peter Koch was a Legionnaire and a member of Post 345, seeking transfer to a local Post. He had been a Post 345 member for four years. Koch saw military service starting with the Vietnam War, and spent 22 years in the Navy, retiring as a Master Chief Petty Officer. Subsequently, he was employed for 22 years by several major design-construct companies in quality control/quality assurance positions. After his second retirement, he founded a not-for-profit educational consultancy, oriented to the study and promotion of the Constitution of the United States. That enterprise, led by Koch, exists today.

Koch was readily accepted by Post 305 as a Legionnaire with no Post operational experience, typical of most Post 345 transfers. Koch was eager to "learn the ropes" so collected and studied every American Legion "how-to" publication he could find. He became a "regular" by attending meetings and gained recognition over the next five months under Commander Kim Biggerstaff. The Nominating Committee, formed in March 2012, came up with the slate for election of 2012-2013 officers, and there at the top was Pete Koch for Commander. Koch was elected Commander for the first time with no past experience as a Post officer and short exposure to the running of the Post. Once elected, he turned to a few old Post hands for advice: George Bannon, Emery Heuermann, Everett Ison, Jim Bolin, and Win Salter. Koch also depended on his experience in industry. He developed a close working relationship with District 7 Commander Edward Jarvis and became the District Adjutant concurrent with his second term as Commander, 2013-2014. It became evident he was a "by-the-book" leader, depending not on past Post experience, which he lacked, but on what the Legion guides and manuals said were the proper procedures and protocols.

Koch was nominated for a second term with no opposition, with but minor changes to the officer corps, despite recognition the Post needed to benefit from "new blood." During that period, Post 305 hosted the Spring District Convention. Beyond all of the Post preparations for that event, Koch took on related duties as District Adjutant, both before the Convention and during it. On two or three meeting occasions during the Convention, where Commander Jarvis was presiding, Koch mislaid or forgot needed reports and information Jarvis needed, to Koch's embarrassment. That caused Koch to declare to all Post members, he would not stand for nomination as Commander a third time. The next Nominating Committee would have to find a different candidate as Commander.

As the April 2013 meetings approached, Koch was told of what the Nominating

Committee, led by Emery Heuermann, was proposing as a slate for 2014-2015. Koch was so concerned about the plan, he conferred with the District Commander, who likewise could not support the proposed scheme. It was a plan where three officers were, in effect, serving jointly as the Commander, with Heuermann as the figurehead Commander. Koch, with Jarvis' support, injected himself into nominations, reversing his position about re-election and causing scrapping of the slate about to be adopted. A new slate was assembled with Koch the candidate for Commander and with no candidates for First Vice Commander, Sergeant-at-Arms and both Committeeman positions. At election, Heuermann was nominated from the floor as a Committeeman, but the other open positions remained open. Thus, Koch's third term as Commander began lacking three officers, including First Vice Commander. A month later, Second Vice Commander Fussell resigned for unclear reasons and stopped coming to meetings. That seemed unrelated to the Commander, unless it was fear he would be required to stand in as First Vice and take on membership responsibility, let alone the threat of acting as Commander when Koch was unavailable.

Commander Peter Koch has the bearing, appearance, and attitude of a Commander, and has been an adequate leader, given the need to learn on the job. He has served well, if differently than his closest predecessors - Kim Biggerstaff, Everett Ison, and Jim Bolin. Based on the 2015-2016 elections, he will have the job of First Vice Commander under Commander Bolin, a position not filled in the current year. There, it is assumed, he will take on "membership" as a first responsibility, as well as "communications officer", making all mass e-mail distributions to the membership.

THE PLACE THE POST CALLS HOME

Since May 2010, Post 305 and its Unit have had the good fortune of being provided with more-than-acceptable meeting rooms for the two evenings per month when they meet, the third Thursday of each month (Membership Meetings) and the preceding Monday (Post Executive Committee Meeting). The location is at Montgomery County's South County Community Center, next to the main library, at 2235 Lake Robbins Drive, near the commercial center of The Woodlands. The County does not levy a fee nor charge rent for those regular nights. If the Post needs to meet at another time for an event (e.g. Open House), there is a standard charge.

Within the past year, the County replaced the folding tables and chairs with better quality furnishings and repaired or replaced inoperable kitchen appliances. As a non-paying tenant, the Post is subject to losing its large meeting room -- a banquet hall and the kitchen -- when a paying group wants it, or it has been pre-empted by the County as a polling place or for another public use.

The Post's long-standing desire for a Post Home, where it has 24/7 control, still exists, together with a \$20,500 allocated "Building Fund", but there is no business plan or master plan of what it wants in a Post Home or what it takes to reach that goal and no current effort to prepare such, even on a hypothetical plot of land.