

THE PHOENIX

For the American Legion Family of Post 712



Elected Officers

Commander—**Lloyd Ray**

1st Vice Commander
John Dillon

2nd Vice Commander
Don Smoley

Finance
Thad Weidmann

Appointed Officers

Adjutant
Ann Guttendorf

Judge Advocate
Nick Krawec

Svc Ofcr
Don Rottman

Chaplain
Susan Coville-Cook

Executives-at-Large

1. **Nick Krawec**
2. **Don Rottman**
3. **John Caligiure**
4. **Susan Coville-Cook**

Webpage
Thad Weidmann

Newsletter Editor—
John Dillon
412-606-8812
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American Legion Post 712

VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA

> MEETING NOTES <

MEETINGS: American Legion Post 712 holds Monthly Meetings on the third Tuesday of the Month at 7 PM, at the Brentwood VFW, 3801 Saw Mill Run Blvd (PA-51), Pittsburgh, PA 15227.

Like & Follow on Facebook at *American Legion Post 712*
<https://www.facebook.com/AmericanLegionPost712PA>

Post 712 held our regularly scheduled Meeting on Tuesday, January 21st at 7 PM. This was a very cold and wintry night but enough hearty souls braved the weather to come out and a good meeting was conducted. The Meeting was Chaired by **Commander Lloyd Ray**. *The meeting was followed by our new tradition of **712 Social Hour** during which after the meeting we socialize with one another in the Main Hall of the VFW about the "good ol' days" and the not so good ol days in uniform, and anything we want to yammer on about. It is a time for members of the Legion Family to be with one-another and ultimately, that is among the greatest purposes of the American Legion—Camaraderie.*

Motions, Discussion & Events of Note during the meeting

- ♦ A donation \$170 to the **Thomas Jefferson High School Baseball** team in support of youth sports.
- ♦ A donation of \$170 to the **South Park High School Baseball** team in support of youth sports.
- ♦ Noted that Post 712 has already renewed it's pledge to donate \$1,200 to **Operation Troop Appreciation (OTA)** during 2025 thru a donation schedule of \$100/month.

> MEETING NOTES <

Motions, Discussion & Events of note during the meeting - continued

- ♦ Noted that Post 712 has already renewed it's pledge to donate \$1,200 to the **Veterans Place of Washington Boulevard** during 2025, thru a donation schedule of \$100/month.
- ♦ Two (2) Ammunition Cans previously for sale as leftover supplies of the former Post 712 Honor Guard were sold to a member of the **Post 712 Sons of the American Legion** (SAL).
- ♦ **Commander Ray** stated he is trying to contact the leader of the local **Scouting America** organization to form a supportive partnership with Scouting America, though he is having some difficulty in accomplishing this. If anyone has a POC for the local Scouting America organization please contact the Commander or any Post Officer.
 - * The Boy Scouts of America are changing their name to Scouting America effective February 8, 2025, to reflect a more inclusive commitment to welcoming all youth and families.
- ♦ Special thanks to **Commander Ray** for donating a box of newly purchased shirts to the Veterans of the **Southwestern Veterans Center** in East Liberty, a state facility that houses Veterans in need and their spouses or surviving widows. Special thanks to **1st Vice Commander John Dillon, Board Member John Caligiure and ALA Member Susan Dillon** for volunteering to work at Operation Troop Appreciation.
- ♦ **Discussion:** The meeting entered into an open floor discussion as to which schools, youth programs and communities Post 712 should focus on supporting and sponsoring. By consensus of those present a decision was made to focus on those youth groups and schools in grades K thru 12 that are within the geographic area of Post 712. As school districts such as **West Jefferson Hills and South Park** are organically located within the geographic area of Post 712, the membership is open to actively supporting these entities. If a request is received from an external school, such as Baldwin (Nix Vogel Post 935), Clairton (Post 75), or Bethel Park (Post 760) for example, those requestors should be initially directed to American Legion Posts supporting those communities.

Post 712 will prioritize support to local communities using the same geographic guidelines. Therefore **Pleasant Hills, Jefferson Hills, West Elizabeth, and South Park** are organic to Post 712. It was further noted requests inconsistent with these guidelines will be reviewed by the membership on an as-needed basis.

The membership agreed in principle to maintain active support for **American Legion Post 490 Castle Shannon and VFW Post 1810 Brentwood as our partners** for hosting meetings, for welcoming Post 712 members to social events, for supporting the Post 712 Riders and for our ongoing mutually beneficial relationship with each entity.

Support and sponsorship for Veterans in need, Veterans Support Organizations, and Military Members will be reviewed as received for presentation to the membership.

- ♦ Following the meeting the attendees participated in **712 Social Hour** with pizza and pop provided by the Post and beer and mixed drinks available from the VFW Main Hall Bar. All had a good time and loaded up on pizza before heading out into the cold.

> MEETING NOTES <

THANK YOU FOR GIVING BACK

Thanks to our Members who have recently renewed their membership:

**Edward Albrecht, Fred Bonno, Vince Campbell
Daniel Capp, Michael Clarke, Loren Contreras
Lawrence Corr, Daniel Derence Jr, Joshua Dillon (SAL)
Ryker Dillon (SAL), Nick Edinger, Charles Ezerosky
Elmer Falcione, Thomas Fircak, Charles Giovannitti
Richard Greer, Richard Guriel, Michael Horgan
Richard Kauffman, Nick Krawec, John Kuhla
Barry Lux, Michael Mac Jr., Ronald Macosko
Robert McGann (SAL), Bill McVicker Sr., Donald Powell
James Quinlan, Baptist Recaldini Jr., Jesse Riddle
Catherine Ritz, James Rusinko, Richard Sauter
Wayne Shacklock, John Stine, Ken Wise
and Peter Yanief Jr**

- ◆ **Post 712 is one of the strongest Posts in District 36 of the Pennsylvania American Legion with number of members and membership renewals.** We currently have about 325. This has come as a surprise to some Leaders in the Department of Pennsylvania as they expected our membership numbers to dwindle away after we sold our building. So, how does Post 712 have strong membership numbers while so many other Veterans Organizations are struggling?

A. First, remember who we are. Focus on the role of the American Legion which is to aid Veterans in need, enhance Youth Programs and support the Community. Do you remember meetings in the old days when we spent hours arguing about how much to charge for a bottle of beer, or if we should open the kitchen, or when we should clean the beer taps? Well, we no longer have these concerns so we now spend our Meetings talking about which local organizations to donate money and other ways to support Veterans, Youth and the community. It is very rewarding to be a 712 Legionnaire and to be part of giving back to the community in a substantial way.

B. Keep the membership informed. We do this thru five primary venues: Post meetings, our webpage, our Facebook page, occasional e-mails, and, The Phoenix newsletter.

C. Conduct organized events such as 712 Social Hour, 712 Day at Gianna Via's, Veterans Day activities and volunteer days at locations such as the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies and Operation Troop Appreciation.

D. Partnerships: Post 712 is an partner of Brentwood VFW Post 1810 not only to hold Post meetings at this location but also as a location where we can meet informally to socialize.

> **COMMANDERS CORNER** <

From the Desk of the Post Commander—Lloyd Ray

Greetings fellow Legionnaires:

I hope this New Year finds you in good health and high spirits. Over the past year, we've made significant strides in redefining our Post and achieving many remarkable milestones. The challenges of the past are behind us, and our meetings and activities are now filled with positivity and a renewed sense of purpose.

I look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming meetings in 2025—come learn about the new direction the Post is taking, share your ideas, and enjoy some great camaraderie. And rest assured, there's no pressure to buy or sell anything. I like to say that we now host *funraisers*, not fundraisers. The raffles and shirt sales we hold are all about raising awareness, with no expectations or obligations on your part.

Your Post 712 Commander

Lloyd Ray

Join Us for Our Monthly Legion Meetings: A Call to Serve and Celebrate Our Community!

As proud members of the American Legion, we embody the spirit of patriotism, service, and community. Each month, we gather not only to honor our veterans but also to strengthen the bonds that unite us as a community. We invite all members and their families to join us for our upcoming monthly Legion meeting, where we will discuss our ongoing initiatives, share updates, and plan future events that continue to make a positive impact in our community.

A Legacy of Giving Back

The American Legion has a long-standing tradition of supporting our local community through various donations and initiatives. Over the past year, we have proudly contributed to numerous causes, including:

- **Activities for Local Students:** We believe in investing in the future. This year, we made donations to various organizations in the school district, helping them to thrive.
- **Support for Veterans in Need:** Our Legion has provided financial assistance to veterans facing hardships, ensuring they receive the support they deserve. From emergency funds to housing assistance, we are committed to helping our fellow veterans.
- **Community Events and Activities:** We have sponsored local events fostering a sense of community and camaraderie among residents. These events not only celebrate our heritage but also bring us together as neighbors and friends.
- **Donations to Local Charities:** Our Legion has partnered with various local charities, donating funds and resources to support those in need. Whether it's community donations or getting out in person, we strive to uplift our community.

Why Attend Our Monthly Meetings?

Attending our monthly Legion meetings is more than just a chance to catch up; it's an opportunity to engage with fellow members, share ideas, and contribute to our mission of service.

Your voice matters, and together, we can brainstorm new initiatives and strengthen our community outreach.

> **COMMANDERS CORNER** < continued on next page.

> COMMANDERS CORNER Continued <



During our meetings, we discuss upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and ways to further our positive impact within the community. Whether you're a long-time member or new to the Legion, your participation is vital. We value your input and encourage you to bring your ideas and enthusiasm to the table.

Join Us!

Mark your calendars for our next meeting Tuesday Feb 18th at Brentwood VFW. Let's come together to honor our veterans, celebrate our achievements, and plan for a brighter future for our Post and community. Together, we can continue to make a difference and uphold the values that define the American Legion.

In the spirit of patriotism and service, we look forward to seeing you there! Your involvement is what makes our Legion strong, and together, we can continue to support our community and those who have served.

Let's stand united, serve our community, and honor our heroes!

> G-2 <

MONTHLY 712 SOCIAL HOUR

- ◆ Post 712 will sponsor **712 Social Hour after every Post Meeting, during which the Post will pay for food and soft drinks.** This will give all members of the Legion Family the opportunity to fill up on some good chow and to interact with one-another to discuss our days in uniform, politics, the weather, or whatever is on your mind. Social Hour is conducted in the Main Hall, though it is not a structured meeting. The bar will be open in the Main Hall and as noted, food and soft drinks will be provided compliments of Post 712. It is a time to relax with your fellow Vets. Post Meetings typically last from 7—8 PM and 712 Social Hour is expected to last about 8—9 PM.
- ◆ Do you have some photo's of your days in Service? Or perhaps you have photos of a family member of whom you would like to share their Service. Do you have a story you would like to share with your fellow Legionnaires? If so, you can do so right here in the pages of the newsletter. Don't worry, we'll help with the write-up, all you have to do is tell us your story and the newsletter staff will handle the rest.

> 712 Donations During <

12-Month Revolving timeframe

During 2024, **Post 712 donated in excess of \$12,000** to local organizations in support of Veterans and Youth and we have **volunteered over 519** hours of work to local non-profit organizations and community projects.

We are American Legion Post 712

Thomas Jefferson Junior Football League, \$300 (2024)

Thomas Jefferson High School Baseball, \$170 (2025)

Thomas Jefferson High School 5K For a Cure Race, \$200 (2024)

Thomas Jefferson High School Theater, \$100 (2024)

Thomas Jefferson High School Band, \$500 (2024)

American Legion Post 490 Castle Shannon, \$400 (2024)

American Legion Post 940 West Brownsville, \$100 (2024)

American Legion Post 380 Dravosburg, Honor Guard equipment (2025)

American Legion Post 701 White Oak, Honor Guard equipment (2025)

South Park High School Football, \$100 (2024)

South Park High School Soccer, \$95 (2024)

South Park High School Basketball, \$95 (2024)

South Park High School Baseball, \$170 (2025)

Brentwood VFW Post 1810, \$4,400 (2024)

Operation Troop Appreciation, \$1,200 (2025)

Veterans Place of Washington Blvd, \$1,200 (2025)

Pleasant Hills Volunteer Fire Company, \$100 (2024)

Pennsylvania American Legion Hurricane Relief Fund, \$500 (2024)

Volunteer as Veteran of the Game (5) with the Pittsburgh, Pirates (2024)

Volunteer at Operation Troop Appreciation (2025)

Volunteer at National Cemetery of the Alleghenies (2024)

Volunteer at cemeteries to prep graves for Memorial Day (2024)

Volunteer at Pleasant Hills Community Day (2024)

Volunteer at the Vietnam Memorial Traveling Wall (2024)

What's going on in your neighborhood? How can we help?

SOMEONE YOU SHOULD KNOW—

John Dillon — “Top”



Many of us know **John Dillon, or “Top”**, as the First Vice Commander of Post 712 and the Director of the Legion Riders. However, there is more to the story for this **25-year Army Veteran**. John enlisted in the Army Reserves as a junior at *Keystone Oaks HS* and began drilling as a **Combat Engineer** with the *420th Combat Engineer Company* in East Liberty while attending high school and college. After 5 years in the Army Reserve, he transferred to the Regular Army and began his active-duty career where he served an additional 20 years as an **Infantryman and a CID Special Agent** (CID = U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command). As an Infantryman, Top served as a Squad Leader and a Sniper among other duties. As a CID Special Agent, he held an array of positions including Special Agent-in-Charge, Violent Crimes Team Chief and Battalion First Sergeant.

During his career Top was assigned to numerous locations across the globe including *Korea, Germany, Fort Campbell, KY, Fort Moore (Benning), GA, Fort Knox, KY, and Fort Riley, KS*. He deployed or was assigned temporary duty to many far-flung locations including the Middle East, The United Kingdom, Portugal, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Israel, and Russia.

When asked his favorite assignment Top will answer that it is a toss-up between the 3 years he served as a **Special Agent-in-Charge of the Augsburg (Germany) CID Resident Agency** where he led a wide array of investigations working with an international community of law enforcement professionals or the **3 years he served as the CID Battalion First Sergeant at Fort Riley, KS**, Home of the Big Red One, where he led all matters involving Non-Commissioned Officers and Enlisted Service Members within the Battalion.

This last assignment, as a Battalion First Sergeant, is where John garnered his nickname, **“Top”**; **as the traditional Army nickname for the Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of the Company or Battalion.**

Top attended many training courses during his career such as the *Sniper Course* and the *Edged Weapons Course*, though especially courses in law enforcement. He is *certified* as a *Hostage Negotiator* and an *Advanced Fraud Investigator*, along with having trained and worked in Drug Suppression, Gang and Extremist Group Suppression, and Protective Services Activity (bodyguard to the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff).



Though one of his toughest courses wasn't even a Military course. He was selected as one of two U.S. Special Agents to attend the, ***Sherlock Holmes Course***, or as it is more formally known, the Advanced Crime Scene Management and Investigations Course of New Scotland Yard. The course was conducted at the Metropolitan Police Academy in *London, England* and was a challenge though provided Top with investigative techniques and observation skills he used throughout his career in furtherance of investigative excellence.

Top is very proud of the Army and its Soldiers and believes in the Army moniker **Soldier for Life**. In 1990, he was selected as the **CID Special Agent of the Year** and of his decorations he is especially proud of the Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal for which he was recognized for volunteer service helping youth in the Military Community. His other awards include the Bronze Star, The Meritorious Service Medal (4) and the Army Commendation Medal (3).

Upon retiring from the Army, the Dillon family returned to the South Hills where Top worked as the Director of Public Safety for **Kennywood Entertainment**. While amusement and water parks are fun to visit, they are not nearly as much fun to work at so after 3 years Top accepted the position of Director of Security with **Comcast/NBC Universal**, where he worked until retiring a couple years ago. Top is a **Licensed Private Investigator within the Commonwealth of PA**, but admits to only working once in a blue moon when something interesting comes along.

Top's life partner is our very own **Susan Dillon**, ALA member & Secretary of the Legion Riders. Both Top and Susan attended Robert Morris University. They have a son, Josh, who is a members of the Post 712 SAL, who lives in the area with his wife and son; Heather and Ryker. *Over the years Josh and Heather have been volunteers in supporting the annual Legion Riders ride and in supporting Post 712. On numerous occasions Heather has donated funds from her custom jewelry business to support the Legion and the Riders.*

Top and Susan spend their leisure time riding motorcycles among other activities. Susan is an avid motorcyclist herself and rides her own Honda CTX while Top rides an Indian Chieftain.



Above: Top & Ryker, the youngest American Legion Rider.

Left: Top & Susan with Metal Artist Nicholas Yust, whose work they collect.



They also are both frequent volunteers at **Operation Troop Appreciation (OTA)** a non-profit headquartered in West Mifflin, PA. OTA supports active Military forces and local area Veterans in need. Top is also occasionally a volunteer bartender at Brentwood VFW Post 1810 to support Post 1810 where is he also a member. When Top volunteers all tips go to Post 1810 to support the VFW. Top also enjoys marksmanship and is a member of a local *Precision Shooting Team* and a recipient for the German Schutzenshnr Award for weapons proficiency.

The Officers are moving **Post 712 to become a Community Partner that supports Veterans, Military, Youth, and the Community**. Top believes the Legion should be a brotherhood & sisterhood of Veterans who believe in the moniker, ***My Oath of Enlistment Has no Expiration Date***, where together, Legionnaires must support one another & the community. If you take pride in being a Veteran. If you want the commitment, dedication, camaraderie and purpose you had as a Service Member. *If you believe in helping others and want to make our corner of the world a better place to live, then attend a meeting & get involved.*



1986: Korean Peninsula, Joint Security Area (The JSA), United Nations Command, Sniper Teams with M-21 Rifles. **Can you find Top? Answer on the bottom of the last page.**

New Secretary of Defense—The Honorable Pet Hegseth

The Honorable Pete Hegseth is the 29th Secretary of Defense, sworn in on Jan. 25, 2025.

Hon. Hegseth was commissioned as an Infantry Officer in the U.S. Army National Guard after graduating from Princeton University in 2003. He participated in a number of active-duty deployments during his time in service, including operations in Guantanamo Bay, Iraq and Afghanistan. Hegseth also served in multiple staff positions in the National Guard.

New Secretary of Defense—The Honorable Pet Hegseth continued

Hegseth's military awards include two Bronze Star Medals, the Joint Commendation Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, the Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB) and the Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB). He has authored five books, including the *New York Times* best-seller *The War on Warriors* (2024).

"When President Trump chose me for this position, the primary charge he gave me was to bring the warrior culture back to the DoD," Hegseth said during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee."

He, like me, wants a Pentagon laser-focused on lethality, meritocracy, warfighting, accountability and readiness."



Hegseth listed restoring the warrior ethos, rebuilding the military and reestablishing deterrence as the ingredients needed to bring back warfighting.

Calling himself a change agent, Hegseth outlined a vision of a culture of accountability, high standards, performance, readiness, rapid innovation and merit across the Defense Department.

"We share the same goals," he told the committee. "A ready, lethal military; the health and well-being of our troops; and a strong and secure America."

He also said he would trim the bureaucracy and reallocate resources to the warfighter. "We won World War II with seven four-star generals," he said. "Today we have 44. ... There is an inverse relationship between the size of staffs and victory on the battlefield. We do not need more bureaucracy at the top. We need more warfighters empowered at the bottom. So, it is going to be my job ... to identify those places where fat can be cut, so it can go toward lethality."

A former Army National Guard officer, Hegseth, 44, served as an infantryman leading troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and guarding detainees at Guantanamo Bay. His military awards include two Bronze Star Medals, the Joint Commendation Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, the Combat Infantryman Badge and the Expert Infantryman Badge.

Hegseth said his role as the 29th secretary of defense is "the most important deployment of my life."

Hailing from Minnesota, Hegseth graduated from Princeton University in 2003 and earned a master's degree from Harvard University in 2013. He has led organizations advocating for veterans, served as a Fox News host and published several books. Hegseth and his wife, Jennifer, have seven children.

(From www.defense.gov and U.S. Department of Defense webpage)

> American Legion Post 712 <

Contact the Legion

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412-901-0327

Mail—American Legion Post
712, 610 Old Clairton Rd,
Pgh, PA 15236

Facebook page:

American Legion Post 712

Website: *ALPost712PA.org*

712 MEETINGS

The 3rd Tuesday of the
month at 7 PM, at 3801 Saw
Mill Run Blvd, Pgh, PA
15227 (VFW bldg).

*Build your legacy and join
us for a meeting*

We Are The Legion

We are the *New Post 712* building a legacy of camaraderie, service and honor. Supporting Veterans and Youth through donations, sponsorships & volunteering, improving our community and aiding non-profit organizations. Join us—Attend a meeting.

American Legion

Membership Requirements

- ◆ Having served at least one day on active duty during World War I or since December 7, 1941
- ◆ Having served honorably
- ◆ Copy of DD214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty
- ◆ Call or email for more information
- ◆ Annual Dues = \$37

Sons of the American Legion Program Membership Requirements

- ◆ Male of any age
- ◆ Parent or Grandparent served in the U.S. Military and were eligible for American Legion Membership (Served at least one (1) day on active duty during World War I or any time from December 7, 1941 to date (Includes adopted sons and stepsons)
- ◆ Provide DD214 of Veteran
- ◆ Yes, Post 712 does have a SAL Squadron. Annual dues are \$9. Give us a call

American Legion Riders Membership Requirements

- ◆ Be a member in good standing with the American Legion, the SAL or the ALA
- ◆ Be the legally registered owner or spouse of a motorcycle
- ◆ Be properly licensed and insured as required by law
- ◆ Riders Chapter 712 meet the 1st Wednesday of the month at 7 PM.
- ◆ Yes, Post 712 does have a Riders Chapter. Annual dues are \$5. Give us a call

(Question from page 9—Top is the Sniper in the Top Row, Far Right)