



MECMOAA

CHAPTER NEWS



Our Chapter President

Don Thompson, Col, USAF (Ret.)



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of you as we reach the end of 2025 and celebrate two important holidays with family and friends. I hope that each of you have spent quality time with family, reflected on the past, and look forward to the new year!

Our Mountain Empire Chapter of MOAA has had an eventful year. We were able to present five scholarships and awards to ROTC and JROTC cadets. We have planned to present more in 2026. We received a Five Star Level of Excellence award earlier this year, and Five Star Harris Communications Awards for both our newsletter and website. The Tennessee Council of Chapters received a President's Award from MOAA for 2025, no doubt partially due to the hard work we did in revitalizing the East Tennessee Chapter in Knoxville. By the way, the East Tennessee Chapter has renamed themselves the Smoky Mountains Chapter, so don't be confused if you see that name.

We are in the final stretch of getting liability insurance for MECMOAA. This will allow us to receive grant funds from MOAA and from local businesses to provide direct financial assistance to needy veterans in our region and to fund

projects that will benefit these veterans. We owe Steve Pecinovsky our gratitude for his diligent work in analyzing and sourcing the right policy at the right price for our needs.

Our JROTC outreach led to snagging Kevin Selhorst, the JROTC guy at David Crockett High School (Thanks, Ed Champion!) as a MECMOAA member and new Board member. Kevin will work with Ed to improve our outreach to all of the JROTC programs in our region, and to work with the JROTC programs and guidance counselors at many high schools to improve the information provided to high school students early in their four years and increase their readiness and competitiveness for ROTC and Service Academy appointment. Dan Bishop, Brett Monette, Jim Paffenroth, and Mark Tipton represented our Chapter by comprising the entire Academy nomination board for U.S. Senator Blackburn in Johnson City this November, and they joined statewide representatives in Nashville earlier this month to pick Senator Blackburn's final nominees across the state. In 2026, we'll take the initiative to help local high school students best prepare for nomination and appointment selections as early as possible, increasing their chances of securing these amazing opportunities to serve.

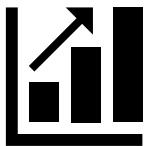
We are also looking at how we coordinate better with the myriad veteran organizations in the Tri-Cities. Many seem to have their own niche, which is a good thing, but there may be some areas where we can be more effective if we work together on various projects. Stay tuned for updates.

We have had several new members in the past six months. Look for their bios later in this newsletter. Please note the 'encouragement' in the legislative update to sign up for the MOAA Legislative Action Center. We will soon be

graded on how many of our members have signed up, so this matters in more ways than one!

Please continue to invite your friends and contacts to our bimonthly meetings at the Ridges. You are the best advocate for new members, so please keep it up!

Thanks for wrapping up 2025 for us, Don!



Speaking of continued membership growth...

We added five members in 2025, marking our third straight year of solid membership growth! As before, this is because of YOU, as you invited prospective members to our gatherings, and when they came, YOU were there to make them feel welcome. Let's keep doing this! We'll bring you another round of member introductions in our June 2026 newsletter.

Membership dues remain \$20 per year, and Surviving Spouses never pay dues. A lifetime membership is available at \$250. You can pay one of three ways: through our website via PayPal, by mail to our PO box, or in person at one of our membership brunches. If paying via the website, you must be logged in under your individual profile.

Also, remember you and your spouse receive Chapter nametags upon joining, so if you haven't received yours, just send us an email.

Now, let's talk about **MOAA membership**. (Just turn the page.)

As the Mountain Empire Chapter is an affiliate of MOAA, our Chapter bylaws state that you do not have to be a MOAA member to join the Mountain Empire Chapter. However, we think you should certainly be members of both! *Why?* Because there truly is strength in numbers, whether we're talking about local, state or national issues. Veterans in Tennessee have a powerful voice on local and statewide issues, just as MOAA has the most powerful voice in D.C., advocating for all veterans, military members, and their families in all states. They go places and get things done that we cannot, often supported by representatives from our very own Tennessee Council of Chapters. Let's make sure our collective voice remains powerful by giving them our individual membership!

Please **click the following link** to see MOAA membership options, from Basic (free) to Lifetime:

Join MOAA

Did you know?

MOAA's ongoing work to hold the line on service-earned benefits has resulted in a 19th-straight appearance on the annual Top Lobbyist list published December 11th by *The Hill*, a leading Washington, D.C., news outlet. Click here for the article:

MOAA named Top Lobbyist for 19th straight time!

Veterans Day 2025

We know that many of you participated in local and national Veterans Day celebrations this year, and two of our members shared remarkable photos.



John and Janet Rice participated in Veterans Day celebrations in New York City. Above are two of their photos of "America's Parade," the largest in our Nation.



Charlie Thomas took this photo of our young comrades honoring Veterans at West Ridge High School. They had a POW table and an Angel Flight display. We're in good hands with youth like this coming up to take our places one day.

Record Donation for Wreaths Across America

Each year, we typically gather at Mountain Home National Cemetery for Wreaths Across America. We weren't able to do so this year; nevertheless, you



collectively almost doubled last year's number of wreaths sponsored via the Tri-Cities Military Affairs Committee. In total, MECMOAA members provided

90 wreaths!

Bravo Zulu, and thank you!

Another great tradition occurred the same day, the Army-Navy game. Navy beat Army by one point. We don't have eyewitness testimony of that game, but this editor was present when Air Force nearly sunk Navy in October at Annapolis! Here are a few of his photos, including our Secretary of War.



**AF
31**



**Navy
34**



2026 Membership Brunch & Meetings



Mark Tipton, Maj, USAF (Ret.)

We meet at Blackthorn Club in The Ridges on a bi-monthly schedule.

Cost is \$35 per person at the door.

- You'll receive an email requesting RSVP approximately two weeks prior
- Begin gathering at 1230, opening remarks at 1300, followed by brunch

Mark your calendars now for all of 2026 meetings!

January 18

March 15

July 19

September 20

November 15

(Annual Business Meeting)



***Do you know of someone who would be a good guest speaker,
maybe even yourself?***

Just let us know by emailing mecmoaa@gmail.com!

We'll see you at brunch on January 18th!

There's more to the Board than meets the eye...

Every two years, we nominate and elect officers to our Chapter's board. That time is upon us again in 2026. We currently have the most board members in recent memory, as we added **5 new members** from late 2024 to Fall 2025: Steve Pecinovsky as our "JAG," Dan Bishop as Secretary, John Lyle as Legislative Liaison, Kevin Selhorst as Chaplain/JROTC coordinator, and Henry Reyes as Treasurer. However, we need to identify and train our next **Webmaster**—if you have any interest, please let us know, as we are currently able to transition you into this role with great continuity. Additionally, our membership chair and newsletter editor is entering his 10th consecutive year and is certainly willing to train someone else to assume one or both of his roles. Per our bylaws, our President can serve another two-year term if no one steps up and he agrees to continue serving in the position. In summary, our board is healthy, but it won't necessarily stay that way unless we keep new blood flowing. Are you ready to come aboard? Let's start talking.



Treasurer's Corner

Brett Monette, MAJ, USA (Ret.)



I am very excited again to report on the state of the treasury for this year!

Our total accounts available have an astounding total of \$37,740.37.

Eastman Credit Union

Business Checking: \$3,223.41

*Herb Ladley Fund: \$24,516.16

MECMOAA Scholarship Fund: \$2,524.89

Interest: \$29.66

EDWARD JONES: \$7,446.25

*Please remember that the Herb Ladley funds were earmarked for specific scholarships when donated by Herb and his estate.

At our January brunch, let's talk about potential MOAA merchandise, incentive gifts, and benchmark (e.g. Life Membership) awards that could be purchased with the appropriate funds. We need to appropriately recognize our guest speakers, community advocates, and YOU; we need everyone's input to do that right.

Again, we thank each one of you who have donated for the Scholarship awards in the past. It is important to note that the MECMOAA Awards we present every year are donations from our members and are matched by the Herb Ladley Scholarship Fund. We will always accept donations throughout the year from our members. If you still wish to contribute to the Scholarship/Award program for our chapter, **try out our website for digital donation.** This is the same as our new website, but anyone can donate without logging in.



Legislative Update

John Lyle, Col, USAF (Ret.)



Final update on topics presented at 2025 Chapter Meetings:

1. CAUTION: Budget risk to DOW & VA persist, and the past shutdown and CR that expires on Jan 30, 2026 elevates the risks.

URGENT ACTION: MECMOAA members should register under the Legislative Action Center (LAC) and actively engage congressional reps. As of October 2025, engagement resulted in 20K messages to 500 congressional members.

The FY26 NDAA was signed by the President on 18 December; final 2026 COLA for retiree/VA disability pay is 2.8%, while active-duty, Guard, and Reserve basic pay increases 3.8%.

2. MOAA's 119th Congress Legislative Priorities

Currently Serving: urge lawmakers to 1) improve housing oversight to address health, safety, accountability, detailed financial reporting, improved tenant protections, medical care for illnesses caused by poor housing conditions; 2) restore 100% BAH; 3) resume consumer financial protection bureau in examinations for military lending act issues

Retirees/veterans: end wait period for toxic-exposed veterans; more perfect PACT ACT, support the Richard Star Act to authorize combat-injured vets to receive full DoD retirement pay and their full VA disability compensation

Family/Survivors: urge lawmakers to support: Love Lives On to protect the right to remarry and retain benefits, parity for surviving spouses by aligning dependency and indemnity compensation with other federal survivor benefits, support the Fairness for Servicemembers and their families Act to require VA to review and update life insurance coverage, support the Improved and Enhance the work opportunity tax credit act

DoD Health Care: urge legislators to improve prenatal care under TRICARE, expand TRICARE eligibility for Guard & Reserve, improve OB-GYN access for military families, fix the TRICARE young adult coverage gap, protect GLP-1 weight-loss meds for retirees covered by TFL.

VA Health Care: improve veterans home care-giving and long-term care: S.879, *The Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement Act, (3R Act) reintroduced on 6 Mar;* support 14.3M mil & vet caregivers, 74% caring for vets > 60 years old; May hearing supported the 3R Act. Legacy caregivers safe until 2028 based on new rule published Sep 29.

Persistent Efforts: Fair COLA, Arlington National Cemetery access, pay increases, TRICARE or pharmacy fee increases that exceed military/retiree pay, stop unequal decrements to compensation and benefits based on rank, age, family composition, retirement status, or disability benefits.

3. U.S. Senator Blackburn has agreed to speak at a future MECMOAA mtg, but not scheduled yet; hoping for a spring 2026 visit

As the status of current legislation can change quickly, we must individually be “tuned in” to what’s happening real-time regarding programs and initiatives that we care about. We must also act in a timely manner to engage our elected representatives so we don’t miss our best opportunities. You can do that easily through **MOAA’s Legislative Action Center**.

Just click [**HERE**](#) to stay informed and take action, and be sure to subscribe to the legislative updates so you are informed as needed.

(Note: This link is also on our new MECMOAA website.)

Remember that the Tennessee Council of Chapters is “plugged in” to **TNVETS**, our state’s largest nonprofit, nonpartisan veterans service organization. Veterans Day on the Hill is on 28 January 2026, in Nashville.

You can learn more by clicking this [**LINK**](#) to their website.

As organizations exempt from federal taxation under Sec. 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code, MOAA and its affiliates must take care to avoid engaging in partisan political activities. Under IRS rules, we are prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any to) any candidate for public office.

We hope you enjoyed this newsletter.

Please send any comments or suggestions to mecmoaa@gmail.com.

Never Stop Serving.

Mountain Empire Chapter (MECMOAA) is an affiliate of the
Military Officers Association of America

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(Webmaster - Stan Gedelman)