

History of American Legion Post TH-02

Sergeant Thomas Oliver Ahlberg Memorial Post No. TH02

Pattaya City, Chon Buri, Kingdom of Thailand
Calendar Year 2021



Introduction

Following its formative foundation in 2020, the Sergeant Thomas Oliver Ahlberg Memorial Post No. TH02 entered 2021 focused on institutional stabilization, regional alignment, and adapting its operations to unprecedented global challenges. Operating under the overseas jurisdiction of the Department of France, the Post expanded its mission to bridge service gaps for American veterans residing across Thailand's Eastern Seaboard while preserving the memory of its namesake.

1. Post Identity & Regional Alignment

Throughout 2021, Post TH02 strictly operated under its defining motto, "**Veterans are our business.**" To better serve the local expatriate veteran community, the Post actively strengthened its diplomatic and inter-organizational frameworks.

- **Cross-Organizational Collaboration:** Key leadership figures, including Ken Stine, Lou Holub, and Shawn Watson, maintained close collaboration with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of the Pacific (District 5).
- **Embassy Liaison:** The Post established tight coordination with Bobby Brooks, the U.S. Embassy Representative and Citizen Liaison.
- **Joint Humanitarian Initiatives:** Post TH02 partnered with local VFW Posts 9876 and 12146 to execute massive localized food drives. On September 6 & 21, 2021, veterans volunteered to distribute over 1,000 meals to neighborhood residents experiencing severe economic and physical hardships in the Bali Hai Pier area.
- **International Ties:** By late 2021, the Post forged structural ties with the Royal British Legion, represented locally by Martin Orchard and Tim Wooten.

2. Executive Leadership & Officer Rotations

The year was marked by several critical leadership transitions as the officer framework adapted to changing member circumstances:

- **February:** Howard Gundy was elected as the 2nd Vice Commander.
- **June:** 1st Vice Commander Joseph Thomas resigned. Howard Gundy subsequently stepped into a dual role, serving as both the 1st Vice Commander and Judge Advocate, leaving the 2nd Vice position temporarily vacant.
- **August:** Long-serving Chaplain Gary Steuer resigned due to ongoing medical struggles, prompting the appointment of charter member Shane Curtis to fulfill the Chaplaincy duties.
- **November/December:** New member Scott "Thomas" Smith initially accepted the role of Post Photographer in November and was subsequently appointed and installed as the new 2nd Vice Commander in December.

2021 Officer Roster (As updated throughout the year)

Position	Jan – May 2021	June 2021	July – Oct 2021	Nov – Dec 2021
Post Commander	William M. Ahlberg	William M. Ahlberg	William M. Ahlberg	William M. Ahlberg
1st Vice Commander	Joseph Thomas	Joseph Thomas (Resigned)	Howard Gundy	Howard Gundy
2nd Vice Commander	Shane Curtis / Vacant	Howard Gundy	Vacant	Scott Thomas Smith
Adjutant / Finance Off.	Michael Chitwood	Michael Chitwood	Michael Chitwood	Michael Chitwood
Judge Advocate	Howard Gundy	Howard Gundy	Howard Gundy	Howard Gundy
Sergeant-at-Arms	Skip Storno	Skip Storno	Skip Storno	Skip Storno
Chaplain	Gary Steuer	Gary Steuer	Shane Curtis	Shane Curtis
Historian	Richard Garcia	Richard Garcia	Richard Garcia	Richard Garcia

3. Financial Milestones & Post Home Preservation

In early 2021, the Post Home lease faced an extreme structural crisis. Total annual operating costs were estimated at 120,000 Baht (~10,000 Baht per month). Operating on razor-thin margins, Commander Ahlberg declined to sign a new lease without guaranteed funding. He catalyzed a targeted donation campaign by personally pledging 50% of his \$600 U.S. government stimulus check.

- **Crisis Resolution (February 15, 2021):** Following a successful post fundraising drive and structural lease negotiations by the Post Commander, a lower monthly lease price was secured. The membership rallied, raising 65,430 Baht in donations. Combined with temporary property landlord discounts, a 60,000 Baht payment successfully secured the physical Post Home lease, and a new 1-year lease agreement was signed.
- **Asset Growth:** By mid-year, bank assets were diversified across Bangkok Bank (87,815.49 Baht) and U.S. credit unions (including Navy Federal and PenFed).
- **Merchandise Fundraising:** Historian Richard Garcia launched a custom Post T-shirt fundraiser, generating 5,500 Baht in net proceeds.
- **Raffle Donations:** In October, Richard Garcia won a 5,500 Baht 50/50 raffle drawing and immediately donated the entire sum back to the general fund. In December, new member Glen Zastrow won a 7,000 Baht 50/50 draw and similarly returned it to the Post.
- **The Long-Term Lease Settlement (December):** Post Home Committee leaders Shane Curtis and Skip Storno analyzed regional relocation vectors and recommended remaining at the existing site. The Post successfully renegotiated the lease down to a fixed monthly rent of 6,500 Baht (78,000 Baht total for the year), securing a critical lock-in option for an additional year under matching terms.

4. COVID-19 Operational Adjustments & Logistics

Public safety lockdowns and health regulations within Chonburi Province profoundly reshaped standard veteran activities, forcing the Post to innovate logistically

- **Digital Meeting Evolution:** On January 11, 2021, strict provincial emergency orders banned physical gatherings, halting in-person meetings. Traditional physical customs—such as color details, physical POW/MIA table settings, formal hand salutes, and 50/50 drawings—were temporarily omitted to optimize digital workflows.
- **Resuming Operations:** On February 15, 2021, with the temporary lifting of local health restrictions in Pattaya, the post officially resumed its in-person operational footprint. However, due to a renewed surge of COVID-19 cases in April, the Commander canceled the April general membership meeting, advising members to stay safe and conduct virtual "Buddy Checks".
- **Hybrid & Streaming Technology:** On May 17, 2021, the post transitionally opened its May General Membership Meeting into a fully Virtual Meeting format. By June 24, 2021, the post began utilizing and testing its physical infrastructure to stream meetings directly from the Post Home using two donated Logitech 920 Pro webcams mounted on central pillars and two eMeet Luna speakerphones. On July 25, 2021, the post hosted a successful virtual general membership meeting and presented several post awards to members virtually.
- **Medical Intervention Drives:** Navigating vaccine registration proved difficult for many expatriates. On May 26, 2021, the post coordinated with the American Citizens Services unit of the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok to disseminate official Department of State health directives regarding vaccine availability. Following a highly problematic rollout of the Thai government's "expatvac" website, Post TH-02 leadership mobilized alongside local VFW posts from August 4–6, 2021, to build direct communication channels with medical facilities like Bangkok-Pattaya Hospital, helping local veterans safely receive their Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccinations. By September, organizers confirmed that every local U.S. citizen in the immediate Pattaya vicinity who desired inoculation had been successfully vaccinated.
- **Community Goodwill:** On August 26, 2021, Post Commander Bill Ahlberg and his wife Karn marked his birthday by personally donating food supplies to local neighbors in need.
- **The IRS Check Cashing Crisis:** In November, the Executive Committee handled a complex case involving a destitute, bedridden veteran in a long-term assisted living center who had accumulated a 10-month visa overstay. Because Thai banks refuse financial services to foreigners out of status, the veteran was blocked from cashing a physical U.S. Government IRS stimulus check. The Post resolved this emergency by routing the funds through its Navy Federal Credit Union accounts, which legally accepted third-party U.S. Government instruments.

5. Major Events & Institutional Initiatives

- **The Permanent Charter:** On January 15, 2021, American Legion National formally issued and activated the official Permanent Charter for Post TH02 under the Department of France, cementing its permanent legal standing. On January 25, 2021, the post officially progressed out of its initial organizing phase and into permanent charter status.
- **The David Landis Expat Precedent:** Following the passing of VFW Life Member David Landis, a combined Honor Guard from VFW Post 12146 and American Legion Post TH02 executed formal military protocols at a local Thai Wat. This mission served as an institutional blueprint detailing the exact administrative and legal requirements needed when an American expat passes away inside Thailand.
- **U.S. Embassy Liaison Coordination:** Community Liaison Volunteers (CLVs) and Embassy Representative Bobby Brooks coordinated directly with the Post to manage shifting documentation tracking, emergency services, and updates on returning to the United States on expired passports.
- **Consular Lottery Systems:** In November, the Post circulated a formal defense directive from the Joint US Military Advisory Group Thailand (JUSMAGTHAI) outlining a temporary trial lottery system to distribute 170 restricted retiree APO mailboxes to eligible American retirees and surviving family members.
- **Tri-Care National Escalation Policy:** In October, the Post tackled a systemic problem: the inability of overseas veterans to obtain formal coverage verification letters from Tri-Care. The Adjutant initiated procedures to escalate this issue directly to the American Legion National Headquarters to secure federal-level administrative intervention.

Holiday Ceremonies & Postponements

- **Patriots Day:** Successfully observed and commemorated for the first time on September 12, 2021 (observing the September 11 anniversary) with a formal gathering at the Post home.
- **Veterans Day & USMC Birthday:** Conducted as an integrated public celebration on November 10 at Keaw's Coffee Break on Soi Nern Plabwan, featuring catering under strict adherence to provincial health gathering limits.
- **Pearl Harbor Day:** Commemorated on December 7 with a formal, localized bell ceremony at the Post home following a formal invitation issued on December 3.
- **Christmas Party Restructuring:** A planned "Christmas Family Day" scheduled for December 18 at the Chok Chai Village Pool was officially canceled and replaced with a standard General Membership meeting. This defensive measure was passed due to fluid COVID-19 regulations, zero advance ticket sales, and provincial bans on alcohol marketing.

6. Financial Condition and Membership Growth

Despite mid-year lockdowns and the lack of physical engagement, membership metrics demonstrated explosive growth. Total official enrollment rose steadily across the calendar blocks, closing out the year well ahead of regional targets:

- **January 2021:** 50 members
- **March 2021:** 53 members
- **May 2021:** 58 members
- **September 2021:** 65 members
- **November 2021:** 69 members
- **December 2021:** 72 total members (with 68 in good standing), representing 111.28% of the Post's designated membership renewal goal.

2021 New Member Roll

The Post formally welcomed a diverse cohort of new and transferring veterans throughout the year:

- **March:** Bobby Brooks, Dustin Williams, Shawn Watson (Transfer)
- **April:** Keo Noochan, William Raksakun, Carl Perrino (bringing membership to 56)
- **May:** Jerry (Max) Mankins, L David Walker (bringing membership to 58)
- **July:** Dave Bell (Transfer)
- **August:** Dan Rust (US Army retiree residing in the Philippines), Timothy McLean (US Navy veteran residing in Pattaya), Tom Friend (Retired US Army residing in Bangkok)
- **September:** Robert Keener (CMSGT, USAF Ret.), Robert Heiser (USAF Veteran)
- **October:** Angelo Trifiro (25-year US Navy veteran), Donald Smith (Retired USMC veteran)
- **November:** Scott Thomas South (US Army veteran and local business owner in Ban Chang), Lionel Seeram (USN Veteran and retiree)
- **December:** Mark Trudel (US Army Veteran), Ronald Tull (USMC Veteran), Glen Zastrow (USN Veteran)

7. Taps, Memorial Tributes, and Members in Distress

The solemn discharge of memorial duties remained a core priority as the Post honored fallen comrades and monitored those enduring severe medical hardships.

Honor Roll of Departed Veterans (Post Everlasting / Taps)

- **Mike "Big Mike" Rasmussen (Honor Guard):** Passed away in early January; a combined American Legion and VFW honor guard provided a final military salute and send-off at a funeral service on January 5, 2021.
- **Barton Ahlberg:** Recorded on the 2021 Roll of Departed Veterans.
- **David Landis:** Honored via joint Legion/VFW inter-post formations.
-

Commanded Safety Directives: Lone Veteran Protection

Prompted by the influx of isolated members suffering debilitating falls at home without a mechanism to summon help, Commander Ahlberg issued an official advisory in December. Citing the clear operational hazards of aging veterans living completely alone in Thailand, the Commander formally recommended that all unattached personnel purchase a dedicated **Smart Watch**. This wearable technology was adopted as a baseline safety protocol, ensuring that an injured or immobilized veteran could immediately trigger emergency communications to contact Post officers or emergency medical services.

Conclusion

Calendar Year 2021 represents a pivotal era of resilience for American Legion Post TH02. Navigating severe economic pressures, strict provincial lockdown orders, and a sweeping regional health crisis, the Post successfully defended its physical home, achieved its official permanent charter, and expanded its roster to 72 members. Through hybrid technology, active hospital alignments, and deep community welfare initiatives, Post TH02 solidified its standing as an indispensable sanctuary of comradeship and practical service for veterans on Thailand’s Eastern Seaboard.

Contents

History of American Legion Post TH-02	1
Sergeant Thomas Oliver Ahlberg Memorial Post No. TH02.....	1
Pattaya City, Chon Buri, Kingdom of Thailand — Calendar Year 2021.....	1
Introduction	1
1. Post Identity & Regional Alignment.....	2
2. Executive Leadership & Officer Rotations.....	3
3. Financial Milestones & Post Home Preservation	4
4. COVID-19 Operational Adjustments & Logistics	5
5. Major Events & Institutional Initiatives	6
6. Financial Condition and Membership Growth	7
7. Taps, Memorial Tributes, and Members in Distress	8
Conclusion.....	9

Permanent Charter

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
THE AMERICAN LEGION

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

The required number of persons duly qualified for membership having applied therefore and such application having been approved in due form.

Now therefore, pursuant to the powers conferred by the Constitution of The American Legion, this Charter is granted and those applying together with such others as may unite with them are hereby authorized to establish and maintain a Post of

THE AMERICAN LEGION

at Pattaya, Thailand to be known as Sgt Thomas Oliver Ahlberg Memorial Post No. TH02 Department of France, and this instrument, unless revoked or suspended, shall be conclusive evidence of the lawful existence thereof.

By the acceptance of this Charter, the said Post acknowledges irrevocable jurisdiction and declares itself to be in all things subject to the Constitution of The American Legion and of the Department of France, and the rules, regulations, orders and laws promulgated in pursuance thereof; and further the said Post pledges itself, through its members, to uphold, protect and defend the Constitution of The United States and the principles of true Americanism, for the common welfare of the living and in solemn commemoration of those who died that liberty might not perish from the Earth.

In Witness Whereof, this Charter is given under the hand and seal of the National Commander, duly attested by the National Adjutant, at National Headquarters in Indianapolis, Indiana, this 15th day of January, 2021 and countersigned by the Commander and the Adjutant for the Department of France at Germany, the 25th day of January, 2021.

Countersigned:

Santa Muro
Department Commander

John D. Fleming
Department Adjutant

James W. "Bill" Buford
National Commander

James A. Hulse
National Adjutant

