

Navy League of the United  
States



September-October 2025 Issue

# The Ship's Bell

## Placer County Council, Navy League of the United States Auburn, CA

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# President's Letter

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY NAVY!!!**

**OCTOBER 13, 1775 – 2025!!!**



What a wonderful birthday to be celebrating during the month of October! I hope that all of you were able to see some of the celebrations that Navy had throughout the world and know that our Navy is always there for us!

On November 11, 2025, the annual Auburn Veterans Day parade will kick off at 10:50 AM. The parade will pause at the Central Square at 11:00am where there will be a brief patriotic ritual with the release of doves, followed by a three volley rifle salute and the playing of *Taps*. The parade will resume onto High Street and end at the Gold Country Fairgrounds. Our very own Luther Burbank NJROTC will provide the honor guard for the parade. In addition, the Sacramento Division Sea Cadets will be looking sharp marching in the parade and providing the honors at the ceremony at the Gold Country Fairgrounds. This year special recognition will be for the Vietnam veterans.

The month of December has several important events for Navy. The first is the anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. It is hard to believe that it will have been 84 years since it happened. Although America was dealt a catastrophic blow, the Navy came back and we were eventually victorious. Please keep LCDR Lou Conter and of his shipmates in your thoughts on this day. The next event will be on Saturday, December 13 when the Wreaths Across America will be held to honor our veterans through the laying of Remembrance Wreaths in the Auburn Public Cemetery District in order to remember and honor our veterans. The events start at the New Auburn Cemetery at 9:00am on Saturday, December 13. If you have not had a chance to purchase a wreath and would like to, you can still do so – please see the article further on in the newsletter.

Also on December 13, we are hoping the United States Naval Academy's football team is victorious against Army! The Midshipmen are currently undefeated! As always, we will have a big screen available for the big game at the Veterans Hall where you can buy some pizza and a beverage and help cheer on the Midshipman! Keep your eye on #82 – Navy's wide receiver, Nathan Kent! He is a senior this year and went through the Sacramento Division Sea Cadet Program! GO NAVY! BEAT ARMY!

I hope that as the holiday season approaches all of you are able to take the time to slow down and appreciate your friends and family! Please take care!

—Rebecca Dunavent

# August Picnic Review

By Janelle Kershaw

Our August picnic was a huge success this year. We had a wonderful turnout to celebrate the Coast Guard birthday. Our guest speaker was Congressman Kevin Kiley. August and Greg barbecued hamburgers and hot dogs. Members filled the tables with side dishes and desserts. This was the largest crowd we've had since before Covid.

Thanks to all for making the evening a huge event!

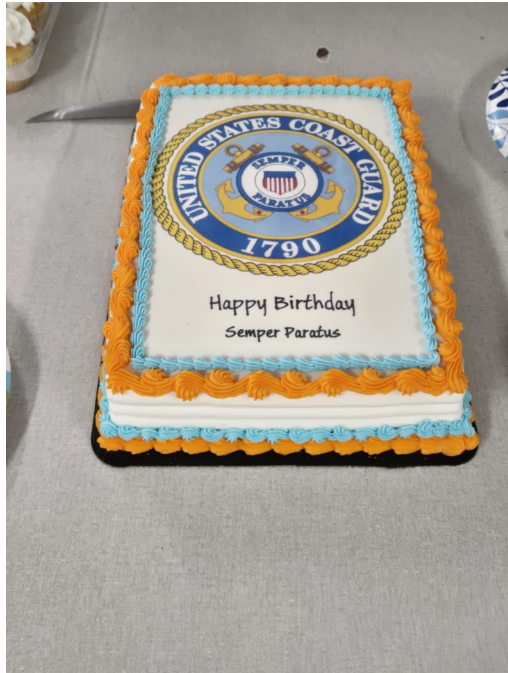


*Above: The crowd-filled tables during the August Picnic.*

*Left: Congressman Keven Kiley speaking to the crowd.*

*(All photographs courtesy of Janelle Kershaw).*





*Above Left: The Coast Guard birthday cake.*



*Above Right: The side dishes at the picnic.*

*Bottom Right: The dessert table.*

*(All photographs courtesy of Janelle Kershaw).*



# Auburn Veterans Day Parade and Ceremony

**By Bonnie Potter**

The Auburn Veterans Day Parade on Tuesday, November 11, 2025, will honor Vietnam veterans. The American Legion Post 84 Veterans Day Planning Committee has been meeting monthly to plan the Auburn Veterans Day Community Breakfast, Parade and Ceremony.

The Pancake Breakfast, put on by the Auburn Jeep Club, will take place from 8:00 – 10:30 AM at 649 Lincoln Way (First Foundation Bank parking lot). Breakfast is free for veterans. The Auburn Winds will play music in Central Square prior to the parade. The parade will begin at 10:50 am at the corner of Lincoln Way and Cleveland Avenue and will proceed down Lincoln Way. The Luther Burbank Junior ROTC Unit that our Council supports, will lead the parade as the **official** Color Guard for the parade, and Placer County Council will be in the parade with our Sacramento Sea Cadets marching with us. **The parade will pause at the Central Square at 11:00 am where there will be a brief ceremony with the National Anthem played by the Auburn Winds, followed by a three-volley rifle salute by the Auburn Area Honor Guard, TAPS, Amazing Grace played on the bagpipes, and the release of white doves. The parade will resume on High Street and end at the Placer Building in the Gold Country Fairgrounds.**

**The first 500 veterans at the parade will be awarded a beautiful commemorative medal. American flags and programs listing the units in the parade will be distributed to spectators along the parade route. There will be free pizza, chips, cookies and drinks following the parade at the Placer Building, with a Ceremony starting at Noon, which will include the Service songs played by the Placer High School Golden Hillmen Wind Ensemble.**

**We hope you will join us in Auburn this Veterans Day!**

## Wreaths Across America 2025

**By Bonnie Potter**

One of our long-standing fund raisers is the annual purchase of wreaths to be placed on the graves of our veterans in the Auburn cemeteries. If you have not yet purchased one or more wreaths for 2025, please go to [www.wreathsassamerica.org](http://www.wreathsassamerica.org). Do not click on the red Sponsor Wreaths button at the top. Instead, click on the magnifying glass Search button at the top right. Then click on Search Sponsorship Groups. Type CA0221P in the box for search groups and Placer County Council of the Navy League should show up; click sponsor. Select the number of wreaths to sponsor. Click Next; click on Next again. Auburn Cemetery should show up as location to support. Click Next. Click Customization if interested; Click add to cart to be taken to the shopping cart for checkout.

If you prefer to mail a check, please use the form that will be sent by separate email and send your check directly to Wreaths Across America. The form has our sponsor ID and location ID so that the Council will get the credit for the purchase, and the wreaths will be delivered to Auburn.

Remember, we get \$5 for the Council for every wreath that is purchased using our ID number CA0221P. The ceremony this year will be Saturday, December 13 th at 9:00 am at the New Auburn Ceremony. As always, we invite you to join us for the ceremony and to assist in placing wreaths on the graves of our veterans.

# Navy League of the United States Scroll of Honor Award

**By Rebecca Dunavent**

At our September 2025 dinner meeting it was a great honor to be able to present Don Anderson with the Navy League of the United States Scroll of Honor award. This is a prestigious award presented to individuals, companies, and government employees who have made outstanding contributions to the Navy League's mission to inform the public about the importance of sea services. It is the highest award on the local and regional levels and the second highest at the national level. Award recipients are recognized for their exceptional support of the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine through programs, advocacy, and support for related youth programs. Don has served the Placer County Navy League for more than 20 years particularly in youth development and STEM education. We are so lucky to have him in our council and for his years of service!

*Below: Don Anderson receiving the Scroll of Honor award. Left to right: past national president Bill Stevenson, Don Anderson, & Bonnie Potter (Photograph by Natalie Brennan).*



# The Polish Thermopylae

By Natalie Brennan

We all know the significance of the first two days in September during World War II: the beginning of the European war on 9/1/1939 with the German invasion of Poland, and the end of the war overall with the surrender of Japan on the American battleship *Missouri* on 9/2/1945. However, we are going to look at a story that took place from September 7-10 1939, days after the war began. This is the story of the Polish Thermopylae: the Battle of Wizna. First, let's look at why it's considered the Thermopylae of Poland. For any readers unfamiliar with Thermopylae—translated to the Hot Gates—it was the scene of a last stand during the second Greco-Persian War, where 300 Spartans and several other Greeks were able to hold off the Persian army for three days. The Spartans were eventually killed, but the Persians lost the war at the Battle of Salamis a few days later. The significance of the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae has ingrained itself in popular culture about a spirited defense despite overwhelming odds and holding off an even more powerful enemy.

Now, we can talk about the Battle of Wizna. The location was a fortified line defending the village of Wizna, meant to shield the Pole's positions that were further south of the village as well as protect the units crossing the Biebrza and Narew rivers. The entirety of the Polish defensive line extended 22 miles from the border with East Prussia, with Wizna being in the center of the line stretching 5.6 miles between the villages of Grądy-Woniecko and Kolodzieje. The fortifications included concrete bunkers that were built specifically on hills overlooking the swamps of the Narew River valley. Before the German invasion on 9/1/1939, only about 12 to 16 out of the planned 60 bunkers were constructed. According to Time Note, "six bunkers were made of heavy concrete with reinforced steel cupolas weighing 8 tons each, armed with machine guns and anti-tank artillery. Two were light concrete bunkers, armed with machine guns only. The remaining eight were ad-hoc machine gun pillboxes, protected mostly by sandbags and earthworks. Four additional heavy bunkers were under construction when World War II started." While not all of the bunkers were ready by the time the war began, the Polish defensive lines were well prepared for what was coming. Time Note states that "the walls of an average bunker, 1.5 meters [4.9 feet] thick and reinforced with 20 centimeter [7.8 inches] thick steel plates, could withstand a direct hit" from the Wehrmacht's heaviest guns at the time.

The Polish line was originally manned by one battalion from the 71<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment, commanded by Major Jakub Fober, but was reinforced shortly before the war began with a machine gun company commanded by Captain Wladislaw Raginis and numerous detachments from other units. On 9/2/1939, Fober passed the command of Wizna to Raginis and his troops. While the numbers are disputed, some saying that the Polish unit numbered no more than 360 men, Time Note also states that altogether, the Polish defense at Wizna numbered 720 men, consisting of 20 officers and 700 non-commissioned troops and privates. The German numbers: over 40,000 men.

On September 7, the German 19<sup>th</sup> Army Corps of Heeresgruppe Nord (Master Group North), as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army commanded by Heinz Guderian pushed to cross the River Biebrza where it converges at the Narew River and take the town of Wizna, encircling the Polish Narew Corps, then close in on Warsaw from the northeast sectors. If the Germans were to succeed in this endeavor, they needed to destroy the bunkers along the rivers.

When Raginis assumed command of the Wizna area, he chose the GG-126 bunker as his command post at the center of the line. Because the bunkers were not exactly battle ready, certainly not ready to stand up against an enemy force with 350 tanks, the major flaw of having only 12 to 16 of the planned 60 bunkers was now a massive problem. So to make up for this, Raginis threw up some anti-personnel and anti-tank obstacles, land mines, and barbed wire lines for good measure. However, even with this rapidly set up defense, with only six 7.6cm guns, a few dozen machine guns, and two anti-tank rifles, there was no chance of the Poles holding out



forever. As German planes dropped propaganda leaflets urging the Polish troops to surrender, however, Captain Raginis vowed that he would die trying to hold out.

The first skirmish was fought at Wizna by the German and Polish recon groups, but the Poles gave up the undefendable village without too much resistance. However, contrary to the thought that the Poles had been routed, the Polish defenders did not give up, and they did not actually flee, rather, retreated back over the river into the bunkers. When the Germans attempted to pursue them, Polish engineers blew up the bridges to stop them. The Battle of Wizna had begun.

The Germans brought in their heavy artillery, pounding the Polish positions throughout the rest of the day. Since the Polish artillery was no match for the German guns, they were forced to withdraw, but the bunkers still held on. Junkers-87 Stuka dive bombers dropped their payloads from the air, but still the bunkers held on. Over the next two days, German assault troops tried to attack, but once they crossed the river, they were struck by machine gun fire from the Polish pillboxes, suffering heavy casualties and having to retreat every single time. On September 8, the German tanks began to cross the river. Since the Polish defenders had no ideal way to deal with the panzers, coupled with the fact that their ammunition was limited, the Polish infantry were forced to withdraw from their forward lines near the river, back to the bunkers. The panzers rolled through the now abandoned lines and stormed towards the bunkers. Still, however, the bunkers would not break, and neither could the panzers provide any covering fire for their infantry. It was a peculiar stalemate with neither side being able to adequately deal with each other. However, since there was no incoming help from reinforcements or any adequate anti-tank equipment in their arsenal, the Polish troops were now officially ensnared.

Now, another major flaw in the bunker system was becoming obvious. Some of the heaviest bunkers were too far away from each other to provide good support, and could not cover each other's blind spots. Since the Germans excelled at exploiting their enemy's weak points, they were able to isolate these bunkers one after another. The first bunkers to finally crumble were those just across the Narew River, which succumbed to heavy artillery bombardment and advancing tanks, causing the defenders to flee or be encircled. The other bunkers held on until September 10<sup>th</sup> when they, too, fell.

Early on September 10, after three tough days of fighting against 40:1 odds, the Polish defenders knew they were defeated. This realization was emphasized by the fact that small platoons of German engineers were able to blow up the fallen bunkers, and were protected by the panzers. One by one, the bunkers were blown up, getting ever closer to Captain Raginis' command center. Most of Raginis' company was either dead or wounded, with the added fact that the ammunition was nearly spent. Raginis ordered his men to surrender their weapons because the battle that they could not win was essentially over. True to his vow at the beginning of the battle, Captain Raginis committed suicide by clutching a grenade to his chest inside of his command bunker. He had kept his word: he died trying to defend the bunkers.

The Polish soldiers had fought a tough battle, holding out for three days against some of the German Army's strongest forces. Like the Battle of Thermopylae of Ancient Greece and the last stand of the 300 Spartans, so too had the estimated 720 Poles fought their last stand at Wizna.

Alas, because German records mention very little of this particular battle, and the fact that the very few Polish sources differ on the numbers of the defense, the casualties, and what happened to the survivors who became prisoners of war, we will most likely never truly know the full extent of this battle. It is because of those facts that the story about the Battle of Wizna has entered into the realm of what might best be referred to as myth. However, the Battle of Wizna was a true story, and just one of many shining examples of a frankly excellent and determined Polish defense against overwhelming odds during the invasion. The Battle of

Wizna is able to stand alongside other events during the early war years such as the Battle of the Bzura, the defense of Hel Peninsula, and even the evacuation of the Polish national airline of its planes, equipment, and factory tools to Bucharest once the Soviet Union also invaded the country. All of these events attest to the willpower and grit of the Polish defenders. The reasons that many are not very familiar with such battles and defenders is, according to historian Indie Nidel, “because already during the war, the Allies crafted a narrative of a heavily inferior Poland easily overrun by the mighty Germans in order to reinforce how aggressive and dangerous Nazi Germany was. So the idea of Polish horsemen fighting hopelessly against tanks, dive bombers, and heavy artillery was reinforced in films and articles, and has stuck as the popular version of the beginning of World War II, but it wasn’t so.”

If you guessed that there is a *Sabatón* song that correlates to this article, then you win a cookie. Their history channel on YouTube also tells the interesting story of their song *40:1* about the Battle of Wizna and how it has resonated with the Polish people. Definitely go and check it out; the link is in the sources.

#### Sources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qpb8gTSMUbo>

<https://timenote.info/en/events/Battle-of-Wizna>



Above: Map of the Battle of Wizna, 1939  
(Image found on [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Wizna](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Wizna)).



*Above Left: Polish Captain Wladislaw Raginis.*

*Above Right: German General Heinz Guderian.*

(Images found on <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/instant-articles/battle-of-wizna.html>).

*Bottom: One of the remains of the Wizna bunkers, now a memorial to the Polish lives lost in the battle (Image found on <https://www.wearethemighty.com/articles/why-the-battle-of-wizna-is-called-the-polish-thermopylae/>).*



# Special Thanks to Our Community Affiliates

Special thanks goes to one of our Community Affiliates, Lassila Funeral Chapel, Chapel of the Hills, and TGH Aviation. Your partnership with the Placer County Council Navy League is most appreciated.



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**Thank You For Reading!**

