

# CONnecticut Men <br> of the 85th-Custer-Division 

Demobilization, Fort Devens, Massachusetts
August 1945

## 85th DIVISION BATTLE LOG

Italy - Cracking of the Gustav Line, a part in the liberation of Rome, breaching of the vaunted Gothic Line and the final drive which broke the backbone of German resistance in Italy are highlights of the combat action of the 85th Infantry Division. The division was sent to Italy in March 1944 and took over the sector near Minturno. On May 11, 1944, it joined the great offensive against the Gustav Line.

Anzio - After four days of bitter fighting the 85th broke through the enemy's defenses and began to drive the Germans north across the mountains and along the coast, opening the road to the Anzio Beachhead before the end of May. In that first push the division fought what is considered to be one of the most bitter and costly battles of the Italian campaign in capturing Hills 66 and 69. Solaccianno Ridge, Castellonorato, Terracina and Sonnino were a few of the objectives captured.

Rome - During the first days of June the division took up the drive on Rome from near Lariano and, after routing the famed Herman Goering Panzer Grenadier Division, leading elements entered Rome on June 4. After a short rest period in the summer, during which it defended a 26 mile front on the Arno River west of Florence, the division prepared for the assault on the Gothic Line. The 85th attacked Sept. 13 and hammered at the fortified towering mountains - Altuzzo, Verruca and Pratone. By Sept. 17 the line had been breached.

Po Valley - The division went on into the Saterno River Valley and by capturing Monte Mezzano almost at year's end was at the threshold of the Po Valley. In
the first months of 1945 the division held the important Monte Grande sector of the winter defense line, facing one of the best German divisions in Italy - the 1st German Parachute Division. On Apr. 18, 1945, the division entered the attack that was destined to shatter the German forces in Italy. Originally committed west of the Reno River and north of Vergato, the division swept through Gesso, Tignano, Casalecchio, advanced into the Po Plain with a series of lightning-like thrusts and continued northward. Driven from his Apennine stronghold, the enemy fell apart, his retreat changing into a chaotic rout. The impetus of the drive carried the 85th across the Po River despite the fact that no bridges spanned the stream within the division zone. Rafts, DUKWs, anything that could float was used to span the river and it was quickly reduced as a potential barrier.

The Alps - On Apr. 26 the division swept north through Verona into the Alps and breached the Adige Line, last organized German defense in Northern Italy. The 85 th then swung to the east and claims for itself the honor of being the first sizeable force to seal off the ItaloAustrian border at the Brenner Pass. The maneuver succeeded in completely trapping the German Tenth Army and forced a number of German divisions to surrender intact to the 85th. Shortly after the termination of hostilities in Italy on May 2, 1945, the division liberated a group of international celebrities who were held as hostages by the Germans. This group included such men as Leon Blum of France, Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg of Austria, Paster Martin Niemoeller and many others.

## HERE ARE THEIR STORIES

War correspondents of World War II frequently embellished and often overwrote the action stories of modest soldiers. The aggregate result pleased editors, made headlines, and, on occasion, embarrassed the soldiers. In retaliation, the correspondents and their victims were labelled, in characteristic G. I. language, "Joe Blow". Actually, the "Joe Blows" were few and far between in this Army. The purpose of these stories is to record without embellishment, the mood, the impressions, the exciting events, of the worst and best of the great days, before time blurs memories with resulting confusion as to events, dates and places. These are soldiers' stories, here recorded as near verbatim as possible in soldiers' words. - The Editor.

Barnes, Kenneth G., Pvt., 310th Engr. Bn., New Haven.
"My greatest thrill was when the Pope touched my rosary beads in the Sistine chapel. I went there during a five day pass from Turin, Italy, where the fighting was going on. He held an audience for us. There were quite a few people there. He came in, blessed all the rosaries and said a prayer in all the Allied languages. He talked to a few people in their own tongues. He touched the rosary I wanted blessed. I can't explain the thrill I got when his hand touched it."
Cota, Leon A., Pfc., Co. I., 168th Inf. (34th Div.), Hartford.
"After 25 months of combat, the thing I will remember longest in this life is the USS West Point. We climb out of the truck and look down at the water in Naples, and there she is at the foot of the wide street on the docks, straight ahead. She looks so good and so big. Prettiest thing I ever saw. The band plays and everybody yells as we march down the wide street to the ship, past the 48 American flags for the 48 states. When I step on board, I know they can't get me off."

Digliani, Armand, Pfc., Anti-tank Co., 339th Inf., Waterbury.
"While in Italy I found the Italians very friendly. We GIs knew we had a job to do and we did our part enthusiastically. Now we're glad it's all over. I'm glad to be back after having been over two years with the First Battalion of the 34th

Division's 135th Infantry in North Africa and Italy."

Dorman, Arthur, Pfc., Sv. Co., 135th Inf., (34th Div.), Hartford.
"It was a long, tough war I want to forget. The 34th had more than its share. In the hill fighting they told us there was just one more mountain and that's all. But when we reached it, there was another beyond. In the mountains it was always the Krauts on top and us on the bottom."

Gaudiosi, Charles, Pfc., Div. Hq., Waterbury.
"Getting home was what I thought about most while overseas. Italy sure is battered up. What you saw made you feel sorry for the people. I was 14 months with the Fifth Army Headquarters and felt at home best when I met a couple of home-town buddies."

Jacobs, Anthony J., 1st/Lt., Co. F., 168th Inf., (34th Div.), New Britain.
"The second time I got wounded is something I'll always remember. It was one of those 'Million Dollar Wounds,' not fatal, but enough to need hospitalization. We were pinned down by a counterattack below Rome, at Lanuvio. I got it in the shoulder. We had a lot of casualties and no aid could come up. I crept out of a draw, sneaked through grapevines and worked back to the aid station and sent up some litter teams. They had a hard time getting in until the Germans withdrew. I recovered in Naples and got back later with my outfit."

Johnston, George M., 1st/Lt., Co. A., 135th Inf. (34th Div.), Hartford.
"I remember the little children standing along the road, everywhere you went, crying 'chocolate and caramelli!' "

Kowalczik, Francis, Cpl., Btry B., 125th F.A. Bn., (34th Div.), New Britain.
"On the Anzio beachhead at Ferriera I had a nice foxhole but just before daylight every morning a Kraut tankman would send over just two shells, one landing on either side of the hole. One morning he blew up the reserve ammo dump. I figured it was time to move and built a better foxhole with two other men. It was pretty nice and we even had electric lights. About 2 a.m. one morning they dropped personnel bombs. They were pretty close so I got up and looked out. The command car was on fire and it threatened to spread to the ammo; so I got out, found the extinguisher and doused that fire. It was all over in a few minutes. Later I get a Bronze Star for that. I didn't want the thing burning because it made a target."

Laraia, Dominick J., T/4, 785th Ord. Co., Hartford.
"The 85th was a great outfit for teamwork. At Minturno the only place I could leave the truck was by the road next to this old monastery. It was a hot day. An officer gets out of a jeep - I can't see his uniform for dust - and asks what I'm doing there. I tell him things are bad, and I ask him, 'How do you expect men to keep the war going without guns and ammunition?' Next day a three-quarter-ton truck comes up full of small arms. Two days later the officer gets out of his jeep, there's no dust on him now and I see his stars, and I salute General Clark. He asks how things are now, and I say equipment is coming much better, and he says he's glad to hear it. 'And if you need anything more, send for it.'"

Macri, Pasquale A., 1st/Sgt., Co. C., 310th Med. Bn., New Haven.
"The toughest part of the campaign in Italy was when we started the offensive on the Gothic Line in September of 1944. Just take East Rock and multiply it by six, imagine troops attacking it with very little cover and you'll have a fair idea of what it was like. The Germans had a clear view of our troops. There were very heavy casualties. That was the first time that I actually ran into a case of German snipers firing at medics. Two of the men from our collecting company were hit both of them in the leg - by snipers when they went out to pick up wounded. Another man had the chin strap of his helmet almost cut in half by a sniper. Only a few strands held the strap together. The man had it wrapped around the back of the helmet."

Maran, Jacob M., Cpl., Co. I., 339th Inf., Waterbury.
"There's no place like good old America. Some parts of Italy are nice to look at but the living conditions are pretty lousy."

Mazur, Lucian J., Cpl., Co. C., 135th Inf. (34th Div.), New Britain.
"It was from the headlights on trucks there in Biella up at the top of Italy that I got my first real information that the war was over. For a few days before that the bells used to be rung in the town at reports the war was over, but they were wrong. Then one day we got an order not to fire any more. That night I saw the trucks passing through with the lights on and then I believed the war had ended. That was right after we had the coincidence of our 34th Division capturing the German 34th Division. I was happy that we wouldn't have to climb those Alps we could see in front of us."

Petrecca, Michael A., T/5, QM Co., (34th Div.), Hartford.
"I was 32 months over there, and some
times I got so disgusted I wished I'd get hit. At first I was with the 52d DUKW Battalion attached to the Fifth Army, driving a duck ashore in four invasions. My closest came when the Anzio Express dropped a shell five feet from our dugout. It was a good dugout located under the knoll where the shell burst. The ground shook like an earthquake, but I wasn't scratched. Later I saw the Express, a railroad gun on two flatcars, and so big I could crawl inside. Every guy had so many troubles of his own he just lived from day to day. I wouldn't ask to go through it again; but now when you look back it seems different. I wouldn't have missed it for a million dollars."

Robbins, Max, T/5, Co. F., 16th Med. Regt., 142d Inf., (36th Div.), Hartford.
"The worst was Salerno. The first three
days on the beach were the longest three days I ever lived - no food or sleep. Every time the cooks set up some coffee, there was a raid and we threw it away. We were all scared. No one said so, but you saw in a man's eyes that he was wondering if we'd lose the beach. I thought - not once but many times - that I'd never see my home again. Later I was with the 232 d A.G.F. Band. I never expected to play before the King. We had many visitors at headquarters. Churchill looked fatter than in his pictures. We played for King George at a buffet lunch. While he was eating, one of the aides came to the bandmaster with a message that there was one tune the King would like to hear. We played it. It was 'Lily Marlene.' "

Roy, Arthur J., T/5, 310th Engr. Bn., Waterbury.
"We were a swell bunch of boys -

that's the best I can say about my experiences with the Fifth Army's 185th Combat Engineers Battalion in Italy."

Simeone, Ralph P., Pvt., 310th Med. Bn., New Haven.
"We had a 'Cops grab' during a crap game at the time of the Po Valley push in Italy, but there weren't any cops around - they were Jerry planes strafing. We were shooting dice next to a main highway - about six or eight of us, all cooks. I was shooting the dice and kept yelling there was five dollars open. Just about that time the Jerry plane came over shooting up the place. Some of the bullets ripped through the dice tables thereby covering my bet. We grabbed our dough and 'faded.'"

Subataitis, Joseph J., Pvt., 310th Engr. Bn., Waterbury.
"I didn't care for snow, mud and sleet in Italy. While with the Fifth Army's 185th Engineers, we had to fix bridges bombed out by the Germans and keep
traffic moving. I helped build the famous Road 65 to Bologna where I saw pretty girls and many historic spots. I didn't care for the Italian farmer; you couldn't trust them, but I got along all right."

Wilson, Arthur K., 1st/Lt., Hq. Co., 339th Inf., West Haven.
"It was heartbreaking to see the Italian people when we went in to liberate a town. They kissed us, threw their arms around us and gave us wine and flowers. They seemed to be very friendly. The Partisans rounded up the Fascists. They went around in bands to chase them out of their houses. It was more of a parade going through towns than anything else, but sometimes we got a little sniper fire. The happiest feeling for me over there was when we liberated a town because I felt that we were really doing something. We liberated a lot of Italian towns, but nothing like when we went into Rome. Rome was the most interesting place I have ever seen."


Yushkas, Alfred J., Pvt., Co. B., 133d Inf., (34th Div.), Hartford.
"Italy was tougher than France or Germany because of the terrain, and the toughest spot was the Gothic Line. We had to take mountains thousands of feet high - go on top and chase Jerry off. We had to attack up the side of Mount Belmonte through mortar and artillery. The rest of the fellows made it - that's where I got shrapnel in the arm and was evacuated for four months. Up to Belmonte I'd been with my platoon six
months. Only 12 of the original 40 men were still with us. If you want to give credit to someone, the front line medics deserve it."

Zaretsky, Harold S., 1st/Lt., 151st F. A. Bn. (34th Div.), Hartford.
"The great thing in the Army in combat was that we were not conscious of rank, religion, color or race. Each man was pretty well assured that the man next to him was on the job. And yet, in spite of all the cooperation, it is still the foot soldier who does the work and the fighting."

## THE 85th COMES HOME

The 85th Division, which fought from Minturno to the Brenner Pass, was officially inactivated at Hampton Roads, Virginia, on August 25, 1945. Actually the division was torn apart when high and low point men were separated in Italy some weeks after V-E Day. The 85th's high-pointers, along with other high-pointers from the 34th, 36th and 10th Mountain Divisions, and from the 5th Army came home on the Navy transport U.S.S. West Point, formerly the crack liner S.S. America, embarking at Naples and debarking at Hampton Roads.

There were 5,113 high-pointers on the West Point of which only 86 were Connecticut men. They were staged through Camp Patrick Henry, Virginia, and arrived at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, for separation from the service on August 27. Pictures of two groups of men taken on August 28, at Devens, appear on Page 5. The cover illustration of the West Point, and the reproduction of the 85 th's banner (on the center spread of this booklet), are from Army Signal Corps photographs, supplied by the Hampton Roads

Port of Embarkation Public Relations Offices. They were taken on the arrival of the West Point in August.

Shoulder Patch - A circular patch containing the initials " C " and " D " in red on khaki background. The initials stand for Custer Division, in honor of Maj. Gen. George A. Custer, famous officer in the Civil War, who was later killed during the Sioux War. Camp where division was activated during the World War was named for Gen. Custer.


## 85th DIVISION FACTS

## Nickname - Custer Division.

History - The division was activated Aug. 25, 1917, at Camp Custer, Mich. After training for a year, the 85th moved overseas during July and Aug. 1918. Landing in France, it began functioning almost at once as a depot division, a unit from which replacements for other units were furnished. Later the division became part of the Regional Replacement Depot of the Second Army in France. During 1918 the 339th Infantry Regiment was dispatched to Archangel, Russia, and served for a time under British command there during the North Russian Campaign. The 85th was returned to the United States during March and April, 1919, and was demobilized at Camp Custer.

Training - The 85th was reactivated in this war, May 15, 1942, at Camp Shelby, Miss., and was assigned to the IV Corps and XV Corps successively while at that station. Between April and June, 1943, it participated in Third Army maneuvers in Louisiana. Following these maneuvers the division was transferred to Camp Young, Calif., where it maneuvered at the Desert Training Center. In Oct. 1943, the 85th was sent to Fort Dix, N. J., and assigned to the XIII Corps.

Left this Country - December 1943 for European Theater of Operations.

Overseas Training - Division received amphibious training at Arzew, North Africa; and three or four months' intensive preparation on Italian soil.

Awards - Company C of the 337th Infantry Regiment received the Distinguished Unit Citation for action on May 12 to 16, 1944, near Tremensuoli, Italy: Company F of the 337th Infantry Regiment received the Distinguished Unit Citation for action near Roco, Italy, on

Sept. 23 to 29, 1944: Company B of the 338th Infantry Regiment received the Distinguished Unit Citation for action on Mount Altuzzo, Italy, Sept. 23 and 24, 1944: Company G of the 339th Infantry Regiment received the Distinguished Unit Citation for action near Tremensuoli, Italy, from May 11 to 14, 1944.

Successive Commanding General Maj. Gen. John B. Coulter from Feb. 1943 to present.

Component Units - 337th, 338th, 339th Infantry Regiments; 328th, 329th, 910th (L) and 403d (M) Field Artillery Battalions.

## CONNECTICUT VETERANS COMMEMORATIVE BOOKLET

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No. 19
Carleton B. Clyma, Editor
This booklet on the return of the men of the 85th (Custer) Division from the European war was prepared by the Office of the Governor, as an addition to their souvenirs and memorabilia of participation in the defeat of the once great Axis Armies.

The courtesies and assistance of public relations officers, at the Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation and at the Fort Devens Reception Station, greatly facilitated the gathering of the material for this booklet. The group and ship pictures are from Signal Corps photographs. The Battle Log and Facts herein were prepared by the Office of Technical Information, Army Ground Forces.

A limited number of copies are available for distribution to Connecticut men of the Division. They can be secured by written request to the Veterans' Booklet Division, Office of the Governor, State Capitol, Hartford.

Reproduction of original material is permissible only with written authorization.

The names of the officers and men who came home with the 85 th Division were taken from the official ship's personnel roster of the U.S.S. West Point.

ADLER, Edgar T., Capt. 10 Ashville Ave., Rocky Hill
ARGO, James, S/Sgt.
36 Belmont Ave., Bridgeport
ASAY, Joseph, T/5
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Battaglia, Thomas V., Pfc. 27 Baldwin St., Devon
BROWN, Benjamin K., T/Sgt. RFD 2, Thomaston
BROWNING, Ray W., Pfc. 328 Howe Ave., Shelton
BURNETT, Joseph J., Cpl. 14 West Ave., Bridgeport
CLARKE, Francis E., Pfe. 171 Barker St., Hartford
COTA, Leon A., Pfc. 78 Chestnut St., Hartford
DAVIS, Leslie, Pfc. RFD 1, Box 192, Danbury
DELANEY, William L., T/5 24 Sheridan St., Bridgeport
DIGLIANI, Armand, Pfc. 1383 No. Main St., Waterbury
DOBSON, Edward L., Cpl. 330 Delevan Ave., East Port Chester
DORMAN, Arthur, Pfe. 495 Fern St., Hartford
DUMSCHAT, Richard W., T/5 RFD 3, Porter Ave., Middlebury
DUNN, Leroy F., 2d/Lt. 25 Senford Pl., Bridgeport
FARKEN, Paul F., T/5 New Germany Rd., Collinsville
FIELDS, Bernard L., T/5 93 Elm St., Winsted
GAUDIOSI, Charles, Pfe. 79 Savings St., Waterbury
HALVERSON, John E., T/5 244 Whiting St., New Britain.
HANSEN, George O., Pfc. Turner Ave., Oakville
INNACELL, Anthony R., Sgt. 533 Garfield Ave., Bridgeport
JACOBS, Anthony J., 1st/Lt. 21 Olive St., New Britain
JOHNSTON, George M., 1st/Lt. 62 Sisson Ave., Hartford
JUDSON, George M., T/4 2020 Fairview Ave., Norwalk
KAMINSKY, Alexander J., Pfc. 607 Williams St., Bridgeport
KASSABIAN, Levon H., T/5 295 Curtis St., Meriden
KELLER, Edward A., T/5 32 Orchard St., Rockville
KENDY, Stephen F., T/5 26 Paradise St., So. Norwalk
KIRBY, Albert L., Pfc. 669 Iranistan Ave., Bridgeport
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KOLODZIFJ, Michael L., Pfc. 420 Webster St., Naugatuck

KOWALCZIK, Francis, Cpl.
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LEMEN, Robert N., Capt.
206 Farmington Ave., Hartford
MACRI, Pasquale A., 1st/Sgt.
208 Greene St., New Haven
MARAN, Jacob M., Cpl.
24 Bishop St., Waterbury
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211 Broad St., New Britain
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230 Dewey St., Stratford
REALE, Joseph G., Pfc. 198 Broad St., Plainville
ROBBINS, Max, T/5
10 Essex St., Hartford
ROY, Arthur J., T/5
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SIMEONE, Ralph P., Pvt. 24 Lyons St., New Haven
SIRY, Peter H., T/4 49 No. Pond St., Bristol
SOKOLSKI, Stanley A., 1st/Sgt. 522 Fairfield Ave., Bridgeport
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STEFURACK, Frank, Pvt. 99 Castle Ave., Fairfield
STOKESBURY, James E., Sgt. 71 Chestnut St., Seymour
SUBATAITIS, Joseph J., Pvt. 3 James Pl., Waterbury
SWEENEY, Richard A., Capt. Brookside Rd., Westport
TANGARONE, Robert C., T/Sgt. 125 Brown St., Hartford
TANGREDI, Frank, Sgt. 6 Henry St., Danbury
TAYLOR, Leonard F., Pfc. 194 Main St., Glastonbury
UNAS, Peter P., T/4 Shaker Rd., Somersville
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WILSON, Arthur K., 1st/Lt. 349 Savin Ave., West Haven
YUSHKAS, Alfred J., Pvt. 15 Charter Oak Ave., Hartford
ZARETSKY, Harold S., 1st/Lt. 452 Wethersfield Ave., Hartford

## STATE AIDS AND BENEFITS

The laws of the State of Connecticut provide for many forms of aid, benefits and preferences for veterans, and for their next of kin in varying degrees. The following digest is designed to inform of the aids, benefits and preferences, and to designate the local or state agency charged with providing full information to veterans. There are thirty-four full-time and eight part-time Veterans Centers operating which serve 86 of the 169 cities and towns in the State. In some smaller towns the Town Clerks act as a "Veterans Center".

Tax Exemptions - File discharge with your Town Clerk; notify local assessors and collector.

Local Taxes - Any veteran is exempt from taxes on real or personal property up to $\$ 1,000$ in valuation. Disabled veterans are exempt up to $\$ 3,000$, according to disability ratings. This exemption is in part valid for veterans' wives, and next of kin, as specified by the Statutes. See Local Tax Collector.

Local Business Taxes - (Personal property) on stock, fixtures and equipment of new businesses established by veterans, for three years. See Local Tax Collector.

Old Age Assistance Taxes - Servicemen are exempt, during active service in armed forces, and veterans may secure refund if they paid while in active service. See Local Tax Collector.

State Unincorporated Business Taxes - On new businesses established by any veteran, good for three years. See Tax Commissioner, State Office Building, Hartford.

Free Business Licenses - Most licenses are free; renewals usually unnecessary for varying periods. See your Town Clerk.

Professional Licenses - Qualified veterans can be admitted to the practice of law or chiropractic without examination in most cases. Contact your county Bar Association, or the Board of Chiropractic Examiners, State Office Building, Hartford.

State Employment Preference - Veteran passing state civil service examination has five points added to score; ten, if he has a disability rating. Names placed on list of eligibles in the order of such augmented score.

The State's general policy on veteran's job preference, which has not the effect of law, was established by the 1945 General Assembly, with passage of the following:

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:
"1. That it shall be the policy of the State, acting through the Connecticut Veterans Reemployment and Advisory Commission, to encourage Connecticut employers to voluntarily set aside a minimum of 25 per cent of post-war jobs for veterans of World War II.
"2. That it shall be the policy of the State until July 1, 1950, to give preference to veterans of World War II in all State positions outside the classified service of the merit system act and in all positions involving contractual services and part time services and in all cases where compensation is paid by the State whether on a fee basis or otherwise.
"3. That until July 1, 1950, it shall also be the policy of the State that appointing officers of the State, as defined by Sec. 2049 of the General Statutes, shall, other conditions being equal, give preference to veterans of World War II in filling State positions from registers of eligible candidates furnished by the State Personnel Department."

Educational Aids - With satisfactory credentials, a veteran can secure free a grammar school or high school diploma from the State Board of Education, State Office Building, Hartford.

Free instruction in secondary subjects (high school courses) will be furnished by the State Board of Education if your town can't do it. See your local school officials.

Financial aid for college educations for children, 16 to 23 , of servicemen killed in service. Consult the State Board of Education.

Aid for Needy Veterans - If you are being cared for under legal direction of the Veterans Home Commission, your children under 16, husband, wife or widowed mother can receive weekly financial assistance up to $\$ 10$. for an adult and $\$ 6$. for a child. Apply to the Commission, through the Veterans Home, Rocky Hill.

If you need temporary financial assistance because of a service disability, contact the Veterans Home Commission, Rocky Hill.

Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund - Many of the veterans' aid benefits set out above are payable from the income produced by this fund which is to be augmented by a portion of the Connecticut tax on cigarettes until the principal of the fund reaches $\$ 15,000,000$. Disbursements of these funds to carry out aid provisions to veterans, and certain relatives and next of kin of veterans pursuant to statute, are through the State Treasurer of the American Legion, State Office Building, Hartford.

