

Ryan Anthony Higginbotham was born on September 29, 1982, in Effingham, Illinois. After graduating from Newton Community High School in May of 2001, he entered the United States Army at Fort Benning, Georgia. Upon completion of basic training, infantry school, and airborne school he was stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina with the 2nd of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. He earned his Veterans of Foreign Wars eligibility first serving as an M-249 saw gunner in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2003 in response to Operation Enduring Freedom earning his Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal and Combat Infantryman Badge. After returning to Fort Bragg to regroup and retrain he was then deployed to Iraq in 2004 during Operation Iraqi Freedom where he served again as an M-249 saw gunner and then as a fire team leader. His other achievements include the expert infantryman badge, parachutist badge, 3 Army achievement medals and 2 Army commendation medals one with a "V" device for valor.

After returning home to Newton in August of 2004, Ryan took full advantage of the Montgomery GI Bill and Illinois Veterans Grant receiving his associate degree in criminal justice and also receiving his certificate in welding both from Olney Central College. After 13 years as a pipeline welder, Ryan currently works for the City of Olney in the street department. He resides in Olney with his wife, Sarah, and two children Jereme, and Rylee. In his spare time, he enjoys spending time with his family, traveling, running, woodworking, and continuing his obligation to our organization. He is also a member of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War Camp 39 in Tinley Park, Sons of the American Revolution "Ewington" Chapter in Effingham, and a life member of the VFW National Home.

Ryan joined Harvey A. Pulliam Post 7537 in Newton in 2004 later transferring to Olney Memorial Post 4226 where he maintains his Gold Legacy Life Membership. He served as Post Commander for three years earning All-State honors twice and an All-American during the 2019-2020 year. At District 13, Ryan has served many positions including District Commander for the 2020-2021 year. After being appointed State Membership Chairman in 2021-2022, Ryan later served as Department Chief of Staff and then two years as your State Surgeon. He has had the distinct honor of holding many National appointments including Assistant Inspector General, Deputy Chief of Staff, and a member of 3 National Convention Committees.