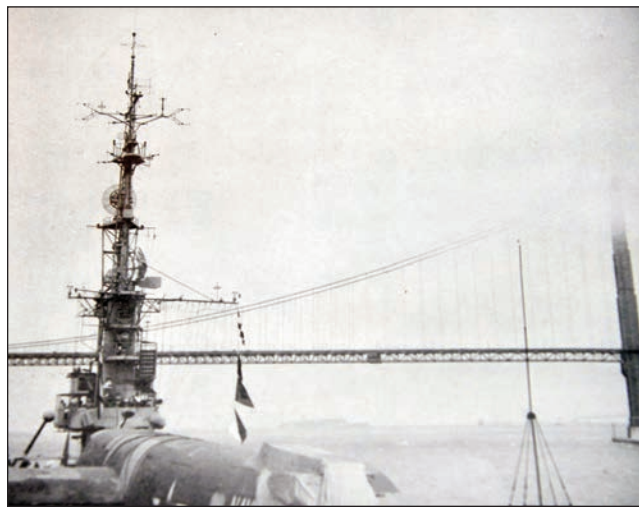


USS Rendova (CVE-114) (U.S. Navy photo)
 Builder: Todd-Pacific Shipyards
 Keel Laid: June 15, 1944
 Launched: December 29, 1945
 Commissioned: October 22, 1945
 Decommissioned: January 27, 1950
 Recommissioned: January 3, 1951
 Decommissioned: June 30, 1955
 Reclassified: Cargo Ship and aircraft ferry
 1959
 Struck: April 1, 1971

Displacement: 11,000 tons
 Full load: 24,100 tons
 Length: 557 feet
 Beam: 75 feet
 Draft: 32 feet
 Propulsion: Alliss Chalmers twin turbines, 16,000 horse power
 Speed: 19 knots
 Armament: Two five-inch guns, 36 x 40 mm anti-aircraft guns
 Aircraft carried: 34



Corsairs of Marine Fighter Squadron 212 lined the flight deck of the USS Rendova. The squadron was on board the ship when it did its tour of duty in 1951-52 off the coast of Korea. (U.S. Navy photo)



As the ship approached the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, the crew on the flight deck was convinced that the ship's mast, left, would never get under the bridge. They were wrong.



Medics posed for a cruisebook picture on the USS Rendova. Ouellette is in the bottom row, second from right.

Living conditions aboard the ship were good, Ouellette said, especially for corpsmen and especially for himself. "I had an office with a pull-down bed. It had a mattress that was a hell of a lot better than what the crew had."

Plus the corpsmen got first place in the chow line every day. "Sometimes we'd go down to the meat locker and the cook would say, 'What kind of steak do you guys want tonight?'"

Ouellette also remembers an ice cream bar on the ship where sailors and Marines could order ice cream bars or malted milkshakes.

The Rendova could only stay on line for a couple of weeks before it would need fuel and other supplies, and those would be provided by an underway replenishment. Two or more ships would travel side by side with cables connecting them as fuel or food or other supplies were passed between ships.

"Sometimes the unrep was done during some pretty heavy seas. One time the cable snapped, and then the fuel line broke. It sprayed this black crap all over the bridge of the other ship. They radioed back, 'Thanks for the paint job, but we really didn't need it.'"

In 1952, Rendova returned to Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands for refitting. "We didn't know where we were going."

One thing they did know was that the corpsmen were required to finger print every one of the 940-man crew. "We had them line up on the hangar deck. At that point we realized this was going to be a top secret mission. We were told not to talk about it, but we didn't know what we were doing anyway."

The mission was called Operation Ivy, and it was one of a series of atomic weapons tests being done in the Marshall Islands. In September, 1952, Rendova sailed for the western Pacific just in time to witness the largest atomic weapon ever detonated up to that time.

The United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a massive arms race at this point, each one taking turns making bigger and bigger bombs. President Truman gave the go-ahead to creating a hydrogen or fusion bomb back in 1949, and this test was the culmination of that research.

Rendova picked up some scientists or dignitaries at Kwajalein Island in the Marshalls and then took up its position around Eniwetok Atoll. Instead of the Corsair fighters, it was carrying Grumman AF Guardians which specialized in anti-submarine warfare.

"We were instructed that if any sub broke the perimeter, ours or theirs, we were to sink it. Thank God that never came to pass."

The ship would pull in at Eniwetok, which had been a Japanese base and then an American base during World War II. The atoll had been a center for supplies and recreation for the troops. "I remember it was a beautiful island, and the girls were very beautiful. They weren't fat and homely like the girls in other parts of the Pacific. But they would chew on these black things, and when they smiled, their mouth and teeth would all be black. Talk about a turn off."

The key island, about 25 miles from the Eniwetok Atoll, had various names. The official name was Elugelab or Flora, but Ouellette said it was also called "Jean" by the military. The Japanese, which had used the island for rest and recreation during the war, called it Japtan, he said.

Built atop Elugelab was a 30-foot tower, and atop the tower was the bomb, codenamed "Mike." Mike was enormous, weighing 82 tons. "It was gray and it was huge." It was never intended as a weapon, but merely a device to test how a fusion bomb, or hydrogen bomb, would work.

The Rendova crew, while the ship did its submarine search (making sure the Russkies were not spying), practiced their part in the test. The men had to sit Indian-style on the deck wearing large goggles and with their heads tucked into their arms.

"The conditions for detonating the bomb had to be perfect. The wind couldn't be more than three miles an hour and it had to be crystal clear." On Nov. 1, 1952, those conditions were reached. The Rendova was parked 30 miles from Elugelab Island.

"We knew it was going to be something big. They confiscated our cameras, and the artist on board, who was one of our corpsmen, was ordered not to make any drawings."

For the crew, it was scary. In a test you never know what's going to happen. "Nobody knew how the hydrogen atoms in the air or the water were going to react."

Ouellette and the other 400 "non-essential" crew members took their position on the deck, facing Elugelab, which was over the horizon. "We had rehearsed it many times. Everybody knew what to do. I closed my eyes as tight as I could. The countdown began, 5-4-3-2-1. Then there was the detonation."

It was 7:15 a.m. on November 1, 1952.

"Even with my head down and my eyes shut tight, I could see the light flash in the distance and go across my eyes. After a while, they told us we could stand up, but we had to keep our goggles on."

"The horizon was about 15 miles away, and so we could only see about half of the detonation. There was lightning in reverse, going from the bottom up to the top of this round fire ball. It was like a biscuit. There were reds and yellows, oranges and blacks. It lasted a few seconds.

"Then there was this heat wave. It was like opening an



The first hydrogen bomb, codenamed Ivy-Mike, was exploded at Enewetak Atoll on November 1, 1952. It was 500 times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Nagasaki, and the largest nuclear device exploded up to that time. The Soviet Union later tested a nuclear bomb that was five times larger than Ivy Mike. (Department of Defense photo)

oven. You were just hit with a blast of hot air. That lasted for a few seconds. It didn't burn you, but it was pretty hot.

"We knew the sound would take a while to get to us, but we were all expecting this big roaring noise. Instead it was kind of muffled. It was like a guy in the next cornfield shooting off his shotgun."

Rising out of the "biscuit" now was a huge tower. "It was like the color of wet concrete with a little bit of color in it. And at the top was a perfectly round mushroom. All white. Pretty soon there was no more color, just all white."

Suddenly from the ship's loudspeakers came the order that everybody on the flight deck was to immediately make their way to the hangar deck. "And they told us to grab something solid."

Coming at them was a round, mound of water, a man-made tsunami, about 30 feet high, rolling across the ocean at great speed. Ouellette said the original plan was to take the wave sideways with all four hangar bay doors open to let the water go through the ship. Instead, the captain made a wiser choice of taking the wave head-on at full speed.

"We could hear over the speakers the captain asking the engineer to give him everything he's got, and that we were going for a ride.

"The wave came, and the ship went up one side and down the other, just as smooth as can be. It was a miracle."

The explosion the crew of the Rendova had just watched was the largest ever created by man to that point. It was the equivalent of 10.5 million tons of TNT, or about 500 times the yield of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki during World War II. It created a crater on Elugelab that was 6,200 feet wide and 164 feet deep. The island was blown to smithereens.

The device tested that day became a prototype for most nuclear bombs created since that time.

But the Rendova's crew was not done yet. Sixteen days later at a nearby location, they took their positions on the flight deck and witnessed another test – this time from only 17 miles away. This test was a more conventional atomic bomb, called a super oralloy bomb, that "only" yielded 500 kilotons of explosion, or about 25 times as powerful as the Nagasaki bomb.

"We were up on the flight deck with our goggles and we were joking around. We looked up and to our left was a beautiful, silver B-29. We were used to the planes always being in camouflage, so this was different."

The bomb was released from the aircraft. "This huge, damn thing came out of the bomber. It was round on one side and concave on the other. Unlike a regular bomb, it tumbled through the air."

The sailors took their positions and heard the countdown again. The atomic weapon was detonated at about 300 feet.



Crewmembers aboard the USS Rendova first got an inkling that their next mission would be top secret when they all had their fingerprints taken on the hangar deck by the corpsmen aboard the the ship, including Don Ouellette.

"It was a perfectly round ball, but with not as much activity going on as the last one. There was a skinnier pillar, and a beautiful mushroom."

Unlike the first bomb test, where no radioactivity had been detected on the ship, this time the Geiger counters started clacking away on the deck.

The Rendova headed back to the States, and the ship mainly did anti-submarine warfare activities after the bomb tests.

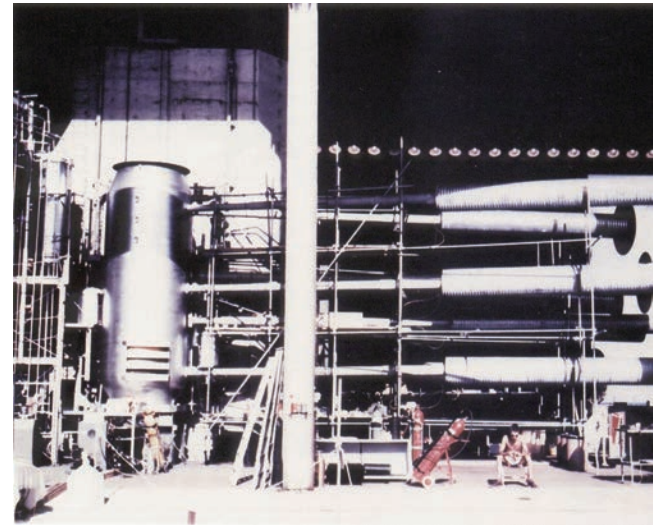
Ouellette recalls one more funny story from this part of his naval career. The corpsmen were expected to provide what was known as a "pro kit" to any sailor going ashore where venereal disease was known to be prevalent.

The kit, he said, contained two penicillin tablets, a small washcloth, a bar of soap and two prophylactics. "But we knew these guys would get drunk and leave them on the table when they went upstairs with the girls."

One of those guys was a lieutenant commander on the ship. "Sure enough, he contracted the clap, and we were treating him. The problem was that he got a letter from his wife saying that she would meet him at Pearl Harbor. The trouble was that the captain had a standing order that no man could leave the ship if they had a disease."

The officer begged Ouellette to fudge the records, and tell the captain that it was just a false alarm. "I told him, 'I can't do that. I'll be court martialed.'"

In the end, the officer worked a deal with the captain to allow his wife to come on board the ship. They would be



While the Ivy-Mike bomb was being constructed, a view of its inner workings was photographed. The completed bomb weighed 82 tons. (Department of Defense photo)

allowed to use the captain's quarters.

"All we knew was that they were in there together. We assume he didn't want to give the clap to his wife, but we'll never know what he said to her to keep her from performing her wifely duties."

Ouellette transferred to another escort carrier, the USS Badoeng Strait, not long after that, and got out of the Navy in mid-1953.

He went to the University of Minnesota, got his degree in chemistry, and then worked at the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis and at the University of Minnesota for 35 years as a chemist. He had the honor at one point of working with Dr. Walton Lillehei, who did the first open heart surgery in history.

He has two sons, Tom and Jim.

He has stayed active as a veteran volunteer, and belongs to St. Louis Park Post 282 where he was chaplain, and to Golden Valley VFW Post 7051 where he is historian. He has created several historical display cases at the post.

He also belongs to the Atomic Veterans, those service men and women who were exposed to nuclear testing in the 1950s. "We had a ship's reunion, and out of our crew of 940, 340 had died of radiation-related causes."

Our Generation

A poem by Don Ouellette

"This Date Shall Live In Infamy"

Men and Boys rushed to answer the call.

Education put on hold.

Families disrupted, weddings postponed.

By the thousands, boarded trains

To training camps that taught how to kill.

Shipped overseas to places unknown.

Stormed beaches, more than a few,

Sand would steal their blood.

Many soared up with fame, then down in flames.

Others sloshing through snow and mud.

Letters from home, news of a birth

Of a son or daughter to grow up

In a home without a father.

We shall not and we dare not forget

Pearl Harbor, Bataan, Anzio, Tarawa,

Midway, Normandy, Iwo Jima,

Battle of the Bulge, to name a few.

Too many gave their supreme sacrifice

Upon the altars of freedom.

They saved the world for us to enjoy.

Truly they are our "Greatest Generation."

District Commanders

FIRST DISTRICT

**Myron Ehrich
Commander**



I did go to the Montgomery Post 79. They put on a good Pearl Harbor Membership Rally. Very nicely done.

On December 1st, here in West Concord, we had a community meeting on possibly building a new community center/ American Legion Hall. This is in the very earliest stages, so I don't have a lot of info at this time. Our current building is desperate need of work. We will have another meeting on the 19th of December.

I hope that everyone had a great Christmas and that they all got what they wanted from Santa Claus. If not, they will have to try harder next year.

Let's pray for a safe year for our servicepersons and their families.

It is a new year under way. I wonder how many of you have made a New Year's resolution? And how long it will be before they get broken? I saved myself the problem, and decided not to make any this year.

So, let's get 2015 going with a real big bang, so that Minnesota gets to the top and stays there.

SECOND DISTRICT

**Jennifer Kafka
Commander**



Resolve to make at least one person happy every day, and then in ten years you will have made three thousand, six hundred and fifty persons happy, or brightened a small town by your contribution to the fund of general enjoyment.

Another challenge for the New Year is increasing not just our membership but our volunteer base. The largest group of veterans in our organization now is the Vietnam era vet. Many have approached retirement age and will have time on their hands. This is the year for those veterans to step forward one more time and volunteer to become the mentors and supporters of this next generation of veterans. As a Vietnam era veteran you now have the knowledge and skills to help guide these new veterans through life. You have made mistakes in life; you can relate those life experiences that have not gone well for you to these "youngsters" so they don't make the same mistakes. An arm around their shoulder telling them you care can go a long way to their recovery. So if you are a Vietnam era veteran and you know another veteran who is not a member make this the year of the Bull. Get bullish on The American Legion, get bullish on service to our veterans and get bullish with our politicians. Don't let anyone stand in your way when it comes to keeping American strong. To my Vietnam area veterans and friends, you are now in charge, so take charge.

PS, don't tell the Chinese I made this the Year of the Bull. Year of the Sheep just doesn't seem to fit into this message.

THIRD DISTRICT

**Duane Anderson
Commander**



The Christmas and New Year's Holidays have swiftly passed us by for another year. It is my sincere wish that with all the rushing and preparing to have a memorable holiday season that we were able to take time to pause and think and pray for those that were unable to be with their spouses, children, parents and other loved ones at this time of the year. This would of course include all our deployed military personnel who are working to keep our nation safe and secure every day from all corners of the world. We have had some very depressing news and happenings during this holiday season so let us not forget our police officers, other law enforcement personnel and fire department workers that many times also are not able to be with family during this time that many of us take for granted.

As this new year begins let us reassess all the great things our American Legion Family is doing to help veterans, families, children and communities to be strong and successful in this great country. Let us also individually vow to do a little bit more this coming year to help our American Legion maintain its many missions.

FOURTH DISTRICT

**Dan Williams
Commander**



Calendar reminders: Our Mid-Winter will be Saturday, Jan. 3 with 8 a.m. registration at the meeting at 9 at Arcade Phalen Post, 577 - 1129 Arcade Street, St. Paul. We will present Shop, Ship and Share certificates and awards at

Mid-Winter. The 4th District Oratorical Contest will be held at North St. Paul Post 39 at 1 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 10. Please stop by to watch or participate in this outstanding program of your American Legion. Minneapolis VA Hospital Visitation Sunday will be January 18th. On Saturday, Jan. 24, Winter Carnival and joint 4th/5th Districts Membership Rally meet at Arcade Phalen for the bus to the parade at 11:30 a.m. The rally will start at 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 31 is the date for the ALR and Minnesota Veterans Homes Ice Fishing Tournament at Disabled Veterans Rest Camp on Big Marine Lake. Don't miss this "cool" event. It has promise of being very "holeeee" and a good time will be had by all.

Correction: The 4th District, Ramsey County Central Committee (RCCC) meets the second Wednesday in the month starting at 7 p.m. Dinner is served after the meeting. There will be no January 2015 District RCCC meeting. Our February District RCCC meeting will be held at Rosetown Memorial Post 542 Wednesday, Feb. 11. It will also be hosted by Rosetown. Our guest speaker will be Past Department Commander, Mike Ash.

FIFTH DISTRICT

**Wayne Glanton
Commander**



The commander's project for this year is to furnish two of the EVA Electric Support Walkers. Our target is to raise enough money to help pay for this project. Each walker costs \$3,600. The EVA Electric Support walker comes with a 110 volt charger. It's an elite support walker designed to provide post-operation patients with a rehabilitation device to get back on their feet. Pendant controls up and down motion. Physical therapists can utilize this walker with their patients to minimize having to lift or lower the patient themselves. The pendant control works independently of the hand grips. The hand grips have up and down push button controls built in.

This is what the veteran home wants, so let's make it happen.

SIXTH DISTRICT

**Carl Moon
Commander**



Oh what a year. Peggy and I have been blessed with our fourth granddaughter, Stella Marie Meyer, and yes she has been signed up as a Junior Auxiliary member. I have also been blessed as being the Commander of greatest District, which begins the new year remaining in first place in membership.

Just a quick update about the Pearl Harbor Rally. The 6th District took first place, we were awarded another \$150 which goes to my project, Legionville. Our Membership Director Jim Lucas received an autographed "Tony Oliva" baseball bat for hitting membership out-of-the park. Congratulations Jim and to all of our Posts for stepping up to the plate. I especially want to thank our past district commanders and our Department Vice Commander Mel for all of their hard work in being our designated hitters and picking up the membership.

I am getting ready for our Mid-Winter Conference on Saturday, Jan. 24 in Aitkin. I am hoping to arrange a speaker from the Red Bull ANG to give us a presentation about their up and coming deployment to West Africa. I am hoping that we will also find out what we can do for those troops and their families while they are deployed.

I was inspired at the last Strategic Planning Committee meeting by the interaction of the District Commanders. What a great venue. I want to challenge all of the District Commanders to get out there and help their Membership Directors keep up the pace.

SEVENTH DISTRICT

**Victor Gades
Commander**



We proudly proclaim that we are "Still serving America." Let's not forget this, You may think you are insignificant and what you do is insignificant. This is not true. Even the smallest gesture, word or deed has an impact on someone. Without you knowing it may have a larger impact than you would have thought. We have over 2 million members. The American Legion Consolidated Post reporting form that is sent in by your Post goes in with 14,000 others around the nation. The statistics are truly amazing. These numbers are used by our American Legion national officers when they talk to the U.S. Congressmen and women. These numbers give The American Legion enormous credibility and go a long way to ensure the rights

of veterans. So this year, let's resolve to submit your Posts Consolidated Report in a timely manner. You may only have a small Post, but what you do, does make a difference.

I would like to thank the membership officers and adjutants along with my Vice-Commanders. We are meeting goal as the membership year is proceeding.

Mid-Winter is approaching fast. It is at Olivia Post 186. Registration begins at 8 am and morning session starts at 9 am. We will be having a membership rally (poker run style) in the morning before noon break.

Coming in February: National Commanders Tour, Sweetheart Rally at Chanhassen Post 580, membership turn in 3-4:30 p.m., dinner at 5.

EIGHTH DISTRICT

**Wilson Spence
Commander**



Please have as one of your New Year's resolutions, to contact your congressman/woman and/or your senators about veteran's issues in 2015. The contact may be by email, phone call, postal mail, or in person. In an email I received from Congressman Rick Nolan, he stated, "So next time you meet a local official from your area-at church, or on the street, or in the store—take a minute to say thanks, and to tell them what's on your mind. By doing so, you'll help them make differences for the benefit of all." Very sound advise from one of our elected officials. Let us just do that. Thank them for voting for veteran issues in the past, and ask for their support on others. Remember you are the American Legion and all of us matter. We vote and have elected each one of our elected officials. They represent us.

The Veterans Health Administration recently established VADIP--Veterans Dental Insurance Program through Delta Dental and Met Life. This is a low cost dental insurance for veterans who do not have dental eligibility through the VA Medical Center. The web site is the following:

<http://www.va.gov/healthBenefits/vadip/>. If you are in need of dental insurance please look at this website.

The American Legion has helped to pass in the last national budget an amendment for two-year funding for Veterans Administration Benefits to have a two-year cushion. This will help keep our elected officials from playing politics and attempting to hold veteran benefits hostage in national budget debates.

NINTH DISTRICT

**Thomas Norgaard Sr.
Commander**



After a longer than expected period of making Christmas Wreaths, I am free from my duties there and can get back to my Commanders' duties. January does not seem to be a real busy month with only the 9th District Mid-Winter Conference on Jan. 9-10 in Thief River Falls and the 6th District Mid-Winter on the 24th in Aitkin.

My Commander's Project, a Handicapped Accessible Pool Table for the Fergus Falls Veterans Home is slowly gaining momentum. Please consider making a donation from your Post or even a personal donation. I realize that times are tough for many Posts but even \$25.00 or even \$10.00 will be fine. Let us try to get all 64 Posts in the District involved in this project.

Until next month, God Bless all our Veterans and God Bless America.

TENTH DISTRICT

**Tom Sanders
Commander**



The month of December was very busy and a little chaotic. I want to thank all the posts that I was invited to and I want to apologize to the posts that I could not make it to your dinners. As your District Commander, I realized that sometimes you just can't be in two places at the same time, but wished you could.

As we float along like a snowflake, the Mighty Tenth District will have completed its Mid-Winter Conference, Jan 3, at Anoka Post 102. I hope the information that you received, will give you some insight on The American Legion Family and all its' great programs and our combined project "Helping Paws."

I am looking forward to the Tenth District's 44th Annual Snowmobile Rally the 23rd and 24th of January. Go get 'em teams- Brrrrrrrrr Cold, Frosty Cold, Shivery Cold, Ice Cold and Freezing Cold. The Rally covers the entire Tenth District and will end up at Hopkins Post 320, at 6 p.m. Saturday evening. This will be our chance to talk with all the Posts of the District and get those membership dues that are due before they go delinquent.

Listening Post

News from around the State



EAGLE FAMILY -- Korean War vet Kenneth Anderson and his wife, Joyce, have five grandsons, four of whom are Eagle Scouts while the fifth is an Army veteran of the Afghanistan war. From left, front: Joyce, Michael Ochs, Eagle, 2014, Ken. Back row: Patrick Williams, Eagle, 2002, Dan Ochs, Army 2nd Lieutenant, Jeff Ochs, Eagle, 1998, Nate Beckrich, Eagle, 1996. Anderson is a member of Richfield Post 435.



WOODBURY ROTC PROGRAM -- The Woodbury Junior ROTC cadets annually invite the Woodbury American Legion and the Woodbury VFW to their Veterans Day program at Woodbury High School.

Bagley fifth graders thank veterans for their service

In October, Bagley Elementary School Fifth Grade Teacher Teresa Dunn, along with other fifth grade teachers and teacher's aides, brought approximately 55 fifth graders to the American Legion Auditorium in Bagley to learn about the United States Flag and listen to the experiences of the veterans that were present.

The program was hosted by members of The American Legion Auxiliary, and by members of The American Legion Irvin Blix Post 16 Honor Guard.

Irvin Blix Post 16 received numerous letters after the program was presented to the Bagley Fifth Graders. Some of these letters were randomly selected and are presented as follows:

Dear Veterans,

Thank you for your service and showing us how to fold the flag. We appreciate what you did saving lots of Americans. I think your presentations were very interesting, like being on the air force and being soldiers. Those little flags were cool. I like to play with them a lot with my brother. Now that I think of it, I might serve in the military too. Hope you have a nice and wonderful life knowing you're a hero to our nation. Thank you.

Rodney

Dear Veterans,

Thank you for showing me how to properly fold the American flag. It was a cool experience and it was fun. Thank you for giving those little American flags. Thank you for service for our country.

Skylar

Dear Veterans,

Thank you so much for teaching me how to fold the flag. I also liked the speech and the story. Thank you for service for our country. I hope we can come again.

Moriah

Dear Veterans,

Thank you for serving our country and for protecting the U. S. and keeping us safe and keeping this country free. I liked your stories and it was fun folding the flag. I am hoping to see you again,

Jakob

Dear Veterans,

Thank you for your service. Thanks for teaching me how to fold the American flag. I appreciate you for serving our country. I hope you saw a lot of things on your journey.

Jonna

Dear Veterans,

Thank you for coming and showing us how to fold a flag. I never knew that was how you fold a flag, and teaching us how to do it. Thank you for your service and risking your lives for us to be safe.

Kaiden

Dear Veterans,

Thank you for letting us fold the flag, and unfold the flag. I also think you guys had awesome speeches. And it was nice to meet you guys, and you guys are nice, funny and have a good sense of humor.

Chaz

Dear Veterans,

Thank you for serving in our country. Thanks for teaching us how to fold the American flag. My grandpa went to the Viet Nam war; his name is Mick. Thank you for the small flags.

Jayce Ray

Dear Veterans,

I had a great time learning and folding the flag. I was very surprised by what the folds of the flag means. Thank you for your service, even if you were stuck in the office.

Sloan



BACKUS CHRISTMAS PARTY -- Mike Elsner, left, and Marty Whalen, in reversed gender roles, sang the "Baby It's Cold Outside" at the Backus Post and Unit 368 Christmas Party. More than 140 attended.



WALKER VETS DINNER -- Led by the National Guard, the Walker Post 134 Vets Dinner sang the National Anthem. Department Commander Peggy Moon, second from left, was the featured speaker.



FERTILE LONG TIMERS-- Fertile Post Commander Ray Cheeseman presented Bruce Erickson (50 years) and Ellsworth Sulerud (60 years) with certificates and jackets recently.

World War II History Round Table

Paratroopers recall the Christmas 1944 fighting at Bastogne

By Al Zdon

Two veterans of the 101st Airborne Division recalled their experiences around Christmastime of 1944 near the Belgian town of Bastogne.

It wasn't very merry.

Jim Carroll and Herb Suerth recounted the first days of the Battle of the Bulge for the full house at World War II History Round Table at Fort Snelling History Center.

They joined two authors who had collaborated on writing a book about a battle that took place on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day at Bastogne.

Jim Carroll, who grew up in Missouri but later settled in Minneapolis, joined the Army in 1942. "I went to a movie with three buddies and it was about the airborne. We decided we'd meet the next morning and all enlist together. I went to the street corner at 6 a.m. and waited and waited and waited. I was the only one who showed up."

Carroll went to Camp Toccoa for airborne training, and then on to Fort Benning in Georgia. "We had to pack our own parachute for the first three jumps, and evidently we did a good job because I didn't see anybody turning it in for a new one."

Carroll's first taste of the danger of parachute jumping came on his first jump. "I noticed there was fluid by the wheel of the plane, and I got a whiff of it. It smelled like brake fluid. I didn't say anything to anyone, but I should have. When we were getting ready to take off, the pilot was trying to make a left turn. One wheel locked and we did a 180 and smashed into another plane. I thought, 'Boy, I hope this isn't an omen of what's going to happen.'"

Carroll jumped at Normandy during D-Day and then into Holland during Operation Market Garden. He was recuperating with his comrades at Mourmelon, France, in December, 1944.

"When we left Holland, morale was not very good because we didn't do the job we set out to do," Carroll recalled. Market Garden was planned to be a daring end run into Germany, but it bogged down and failed.

Carroll's Company C of the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment took some trucks into town and was partying there one day in Mid-December. "All of a sudden we could hear Jeeps going up and down the streets with sound systems saying that all troops should get back to the camp immediately." The Germans had invaded through the Ardennes Forest and the Battle of the Bulge had begun. The Allies desperately wanted to hang on to Bastogne, a major transportation center, and the 101st was ordered north.

Back at the camp, "We were told to get our gear together, put on all the warm clothes you can find because we're going on a trip."

He recalls the troops had plenty of ammunition but no winter clothes. "We put on as much as we could get on. We really bundled up in summer clothes. I put some dry socks under my shirt. Nobody had an overcoat."

Which was too bad because temperatures were below freezing.

"I think we were in a cattle truck, and we were packed like sardines. Most of us stood up the whole way, and it seemed like eternity.

"We got it all. First it was snowing, then sleeting, then raining. The highway was frozen. I saw tanks cartwheeling down the hills. The engineers alongside us were blowing up the trees so they would block the Germans if they tried to come this way."

Carroll said his company deployed at a crossroads southwest of Bastogne. "We needed to do anything we could to slow the attack down. We covered as many crossroads and roads as we could."

He was in a foxhole that was big enough for two, but he was the only one in it. "You just hunkered down to stay warm. You thought of a hot stove, or hot food, or a hot drink. I was thinking about a Dear John letter I had just received. I was kind of resentful about that. I was true to my girl, but she wasn't very true to me."

The men were subsisting on C-rations they had stuffed into their uniforms. "They had sardines or some garbage. We were pretty hungry. We knew things would change, but we didn't know when."

On Christmas day, a Jeep came up the road. "It had big pots along one side. They told us to get our mess gear out. They had dressing and turkey and potatoes and sweet potatoes. Anything that was hot would have tasted good."

By the day after Christmas, Patton's Third Army had entered Bastogne, and the siege was over. Carroll's brother, who was in the 4th Armored Division, part of Patton's Army, searched for his sibling. "I was sleeping in my foxhole, when there was a rifle jammed in my ribs. I looked up and saw my brother. He told me that he had come to save me. I told him we had everything under control."

Herb Suerth, of Easy Company of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, the famous "Band of Brothers" unit, took a different route to Belgium. He came overseas to England as a replacement in the Corps of Engineers. "I was having a hot beer in a hot pub, and I thought, 'I've got to get out of this outfit.'"

He went down and signed up for airborne, and did his training, including his five practice jumps, in England. He joined the 101st at Mourmelon. "I was a green recruit, but there was no hazing. They treated me well. I think they were damn glad to get replacements because they had been shot up pretty bad in Holland."

One of Suerth's bunkmates was Staff Sergeant Earl "One Lung" McClung, a veteran and a top marksman.

Since it looked like the 101st was going to be in Mourmelon for a while, Suerth hoped to make a dream come true. He wanted to go to Christmas mass at the famous Reims Cathedral, and he had been able to get a pass and even borrow money from his sergeant. "I hadn't been paid in seven months."

That dream never came true. "At about 8 o'clock on a Sunday, a runner came and said, 'Sgt. Taylor, we're going up.' I asked McClung what that meant. He said it meant we were going back into combat."

Suerth said he was amazed at the sudden change in attitude. "My God, these were paratroopers. Their whole attitude changed instantly. They were ready to go.

"I had been re-supplied in England, so I had some winter gear. They had no galoshes, no rubbers, nothing. All they had were their jump boots, and they weren't very warm."

Suerth and Easy Company also took the open trucks north. "As we got to Bastogne, I remember asking McClung what a burp gun sounded like, and he said, 'Don't worry you'll know soon enough.' He was right."

As the troopers disembarked from their trucks, they were greeted by a mad rout of U.S. soldiers retreating. "They didn't have guns, they didn't have helmets. I never thought I'd see American troops like this. Lt. Shames stopped them. We had guns pointed at them, and he managed to turn them around and give them some weapons."

The unit was about 1,000 yards from the town of Foy which was occupied by the German attackers. "The most vivid thing I remember is getting off the truck and being in combat immediately."

Suerth was assigned as an ammo carrier for two machine guns. "That didn't last very long. They sent me on an errand, and when I came back the two machine gunners were dead."

Staying warm was difficult. "We tried to move our legs and arms as much as possible, but there was no way to stay warm. We tried to do it in layers in our hole. We'd have two guys on top, and two in the bottom huddled together to stay warm. You'd like to make yourself some coffee, but smoke brought mortar fire. I really felt sorry for the southern guys who had never seen ice or snow. I thought they would shake themselves to death they were so cold."

Suerth didn't have a warm Christmas dinner. "My sergeant pointed out that there was dead Kraut in front of our position. So I went out and stole his food."

After Christmas, Suerth was assigned as a stretcher bearer for a while, and he was at an aid station one night. "There were tanks running at the top of the hill. It was a pitch black, moonless night. One of the guys on the tanks lit up a cigarette. That's all the Germans needed."

An 88 shell exploded on the hill just below the tanks. "Four guys were killed instantly, and a shell fragment went through both femurs in my legs."

They first put him on a snow pile to try and stop the bleeding, and then took him to a two-stretcher hospital. "They were just going to give me the ether and put me under, and I asked the doctor if he was going to take my legs. He said no. I said, 'Tell me the truth. Are you shitting me? Are you going to take my legs?'"

Suerth woke up in an evacuation hospital the next morning. "I asked the nurse to raise the sheet so I could see my legs. I wiggled my toes and then went back to sleep for 24 hours."

Suerth spent 18 months recuperating from his wounds.

The two authors at the Round Table, Leo Barron and Don Cygan, had written a book titled "Silent Night: The Christmas Battle for Bastogne."

Barron outlined the backdrop for the German invasion. The goal was to push through the skimpy American lines in the Ardennes and drive to the coast and take the critical port of Antwerp. "As we know now, it was probably unrealistic, but at the time they thought it was strategically possible."

Bastogne had seven roads leading into it. "Roads were needed for everything. This was severely restricted terrain, and those two towns, St. Vith and Bastogne, were critical."

Some American leaders thought the attack on Dec. 16th was a false alarm, but Gen. Eisenhower sensed it was not and immediately ordered the 101st Airborne to positions around Bastogne. After the 101st dug in, the town was com-



101st Airborne troops watch as supplies are dropped at Bastogne the day after Christmas. (US Army photo)

plete encircled by the German divisions.

The Germans decided on Christmas Eve to attack Bastogne from the northwest side, on the opposite side of what you might expect.

"There was wide open terrain on that side. Tankers like to move around in big open areas." The sides closest to Germany were heavily wooded.

The Germans first bombed the area and then at 3 a.m. brought in a huge artillery barrage. It was followed by a group of tanks and six infantry companies. That attack ran into the Able Company of the 502nd PIR and was halted.

Later in the morning, another group of tanks attacked further south. "Able Company of the 401st stayed in their foxholes and let the tanks rumble over them. It was still dark at the time. The Germans drove right by the main line of resistance and they had no idea."

When the infantry tried to follow the tanks, though, they were stopped by the paratroopers in their holes.

"The tankers were waiting for their infantry, and they stopped and had coffee and breakfast." Finally realizing that the infantry wasn't coming, the German panzers headed both north and south to take out the American artillery. The north group was wiped out by American anti-tank weapons.

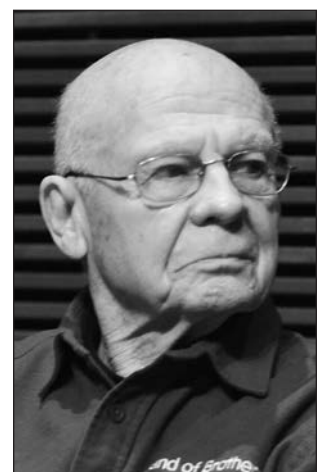
That was basically the end of the Christmas day attack.

Don Cygan, the other author, called the attack, "the high point of trying to break into the Bastogne nutshell." Cygan then gave a methodology of how the two wrote the book.

The moderator for the evening was Doug Bekke, curator at the Minnesota Military Museum at Camp Ripley.



JIM CARROLL



HERB SUERTH



LEO BARRON



DON CYGAN



The Auxiliary Bulletin

No. 15-6

President Chris Ronning

January 2015

Secretary Sandie Deutsch

Department Headquarters, Veterans Service Building, St. Paul, MN 55155 651-224-7634

The President's Column

By
Chris Ronning



As I am sitting here getting ready to write my first article for 2015, I can't help but look back and reminisce a little of what all happened in 2014. Some good, some not so good. A new generation was born, graduations, marriages, birthdays, reuniting with old friends and making new friends but also lost loved ones as the circle of life embraces us. We were sending young men and women off to foreign countries to fight a war that many of us don't understand. We all make New Year's Resolutions, what we could change or what we could do make better.

Today I turned another year older and looking out the window a few snowflakes are dancing around and as I sit in the warmth of my house. I think about our homeless, so many of them are veterans, men and women that have fought for our freedom. We just can't sit down any longer and watch this happen. I wonder what goes through their minds, and there are also children with empty stomachs, no toys for Christmas. This should not happen in this country and we as Auxiliary members need to help them make 2015 a better year for them.

As our legislators begins their sessions we again need to stand side by side with The American Legion and let them hear our voices. Our service men and women deserve a lot better than they are being offered. Contact your legislators, congressmen and women - we voted them in to office, shouldn't we have a voice in their decisions?

As we honor our veterans, past, present and future, we need to recruit new members to help us with our tasks.

As always the Gift Shops were a huge success. We had some beautiful items and it gives you such a warm feeling to see a smile on a veteran's face, when they pick out a gift for themselves and a loved one. Our gift cards are also a big hit with our veterans.

December was a very busy month with Christmas parties at different units. There is always good food and company and I can't forget my trustful chauffeur Marland who has driven me all over the state. He says "where to?" and I say just follow the road. It has been fun so far and I am looking forward to the second half of my year. The members of the Auxiliary are such a great group of ladies and you couldn't ask for anything more.

Our District Midwinters are in full swing and I hope to make many of them and listen as each Chairman gives their report. With this, I wish everyone a prosperous year filled with love, joy, health and happiness.

January is Legislative and National Security Month

Do you know who represents you in Congress? How about what Legislative District you live in? Take this time to learn what Legislative District you live in and get to know those who represent you.

Keep informed on veteran's issues and the bills that will affect them and their benefits. Read the "Legionnaire and The Dispatch". Keep informed of what is happening on the various veterans issues The American Legion is working on.

Support those families in your community who have loved ones serving in the military. Keep abreast of what is happening.

GIRLS STATE RESERVATIONS

In the January Unit mailing, every Unit received the necessary information and reservation form to reserve a place for their candidate(s) to the 2015 session of the American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State. Please ask your Unit President for the necessary information.

After your Unit sends in the reservation fee (\$300.00 per girl) and it has been processed, your Unit will receive a packet of information including a complete registration packet for each girl you are sponsoring. This will be sent to the person who signed the reservation form.

Information has been mailed to each high school in December. The schools will be waiting to be contacted by you. Let them know now if you will be sponsoring a girl.

A Unit may sponsor as many girls from the same high school as it would like to. There is no limit. The candidate(s) must attend a Minnesota public, charter, parochial, private, home-school, or be a resident of Minnesota. All reservation fees will be accepted on a first-come first-served basis. Any person, business or organization may provide the fee to sponsor a girl but this must be run through a Unit.

This year the American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State will again be held at the University of St. Thomas. The session will be held June 7 - 12, 2015.

JUNIOR PATCH PROGRAM

Does your Unit have Juniors? What are you doing with them? Are they active in your Unit? Involve your Juniors in all the programs. They are members of your Unit, not a separate entity.

The 2014-15 Junior Patch program along with the Junior Awards and Trophies has been included in the January Unit Mailing. It is a set of activity sheets for three age groups. Make certain your Junior Activities Chairman receives this information and the forms so your Junior members can become involved and earn their patches under the various programs. As your Juniors complete these activities, please send the form(s) into the department for processing. Do not wait until the end of the year to send them in. Recognize your Junior members for their accomplishments and involvement by presenting them with these National patches as they are earned.

You do not need to have an organized Junior group in order for your Junior members to participate.

JUNIOR CONFERENCE

Saturday, April 11th is the date for the annual Department Junior Conference. It will be held at the Stewartville American Legion Post 164 with the First District serving as our hosts. A fun evening has been planned for Friday, April 10th. Complete information and the Call to the Junior Conference will be included in the January Unit mailing. Be sure you share this information with your Junior Activities Chairman. Arrange now for your Juniors to attend. There will be a mailing sent out to parents of all Junior Members sometime in January. This is something new this year in order to encourage more of our Juniors to attend and learn more about what the Auxiliary is and what Juniors can learn about the organization.

2015 POPPY ORDERS

Poppy orders are still being accepted in the department office. As of this writing, we have not yet received orders from many of our Units. Please get your order into the Department Office. We need to know how many 2015

Poppies are needed so we can plan accordingly. If you have already ordered and need to place a second order, please do so.

Shipment of Poppy orders has been ongoing. Upon receipt of your order, please check it carefully and report any discrepancies to the department office immediately. Please do not wait until Poppy Day.

ANNUAL REPORTS

Annual reports will be sent to the Unit Presidents around mid to late January. We realize this is a little later than normal but every report needed to be reformatted to the way you the members wanted them done. Please look over the reports carefully.

MEMBERSHIP RALLY

December 6th found over 200 Legionnaires, Auxiliary and SAL members at the Montgomery Post 79. It was an afternoon of fun, fellowship and membership. Our many thanks to the Montgomery Post and Unit for their warm hospitality. The meal was simply wonderful. I would encourage each of you to attend these Department Membership Rallies - it is a great way to meet fellow members and make many new friends.

Thanks to everyone's effort for all of the membership that was turned in at the rally. We are holding our own at National in 4th place.

With January comes crunch time. This is when we historically see membership turn ins stop coming in. Let's make President Chris real proud - make those calls and keep the membership coming in at a steady pace.

SECOND DUES NOTICES

The National organization will be sending out a second dues notice around January 15, 2015 to all Senior members whose 2015 dues were not received and recorded by the National organization by December 10. That means some of you will receive this second notice though you recently paid your dues.

If you have already paid your dues and receive another notice, please disregard it. We know that some of the dues and the dues notices cross in the mail.

Reminder: Any member who has not paid her 2014 dues by January 31 is considered delinquent and loses her rights, privileges and benefits of membership. Payment of her 2014 dues reinstates her as a member in good standing.

2015 DIRECT BILLING

My how the time flies - though the calendar just turned to 2015, it is already that time of the year when the National organization requires the necessary information for printing the 2016 dues notices. Every Unit will receive a notice asking for the amount of your Unit's year 2016 Senior and Junior dues, and the name and address of the person whose name should appear on the year 2016 dues' notices. The information and form will be in the February Unit mailing. The information is due into the department office no later than March 31, 2015. We would appreciate your cooperation and getting this form back to us in a prompt manner. This form will also be on our website.

THANK YOU

The American Legion Auxiliary undertakes a number of programs each year for our veterans, their families and the youth of our nation. But none of these would be possible without the generous financial support from our Units. Thank you to all who have contributed to our department programs.

Thank you too, to those Posts that have been supportive of several of our Auxiliary programs, namely the Gift Shop, our American Legion Auxiliary Hospital Program, Girls State and the \$5.00 Bill Shower. We appreciate your help in making these programs possible.

SUPPORT NEEDED

In reviewing the contributions to the various approved Department programs, we find there seems to be some questions as to what are our own Auxiliary programs; what

Auxiliary

Membership as of Dec. 16, 2014

District	12-16 Tot.	Percent	Goal
First	3,910	66.87	5,847
Second	4,099	72.00	5,693
Third	3,559	70.91	5,019
Fourth	589	67.70	840
Fifth	670	65.75	1,019
Sixth	5,017	70.94	7,072
Seventh	3,334	72.81	4,565
Eighth	1,286	66.46	1,935
Ninth	3,706	73.24	5,060
Tenth	4,211	69.93	6,022
Depart.	105	60.34	174
Total	30,476	61.88	43,276

Auxiliary Bulletin

Continued from Preceding Page

are not.

Each year the Department Chairmen receive approval from the Department Executive Committee for those Auxiliary programs that need our financial support. These programs are listed on pages 13-14 of the Unit Guide. Those marked with an * are our own Department Auxiliary programs, namely: Junior Activities, Department Scholarships, Girls State, Past Presidents Health Care Scholarship, American Legion Auxiliary Hospital Program, \$5.00 Bill Shower, Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation and the Christmas Gift Shop. These programs cannot be carried on without the financial support of our Units and those Posts that have so kindly supported our programs.

Many Units are having difficulties financially. Every Unit should look carefully at what they are donating to. Many, many letters of solicitation come to the Unit from other organizations. Some Units feel that they "must" support these other organization in order to be carrying out the programs of the ALA. That is not the case. Too, some Units are supporting programs we are no longer involved with financially or that have been completed.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Question. What has your Unit done with the copies of the scholarship applications sent to you last fall? Are they sitting in your Unit's files, or have you taken them to your local schools and shared them with the students who are searching for ways to finance their education? If you are in need of additional copies for distribution, you may duplicate those you received or contact the department office for additional copies.

All scholarship applications are due into the department office by March 15, 2015. Let your schools and community know about these scholarships. There are seven (8) Department scholarship awarded each year at \$1,000.00 each. The Past Presidents Parley Health Care Scholarships are also \$1,000.00 each. All applications can also be found on our website.

THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS

There is a very special group of people who serve our hospitalized veterans every day of the year. These are our Hospital/Home Representatives and the volunteers who work with them. Each month is busy for them as they make the stay of our hospitalized veterans a bit more pleasant and comfortable. During the month of December they are exceptionally busy with the Christmas Gift Shop and \$5.00 Bill Shower programs. Our appreciation and many thanks to all our representatives and the volunteers who serve with them.



Front Row: Gloria Lindquist, Sioux Falls, Mary Ann Davis, Minneapolis, Jan Benson, St. Cloud. **Back Row:** Judy Kumerow, Luverne, Phyllis Mealey, Silver Bay, Sandra Gibson, Minneapolis, Carolyn Albertson, Fargo, Doris LaFayette, Fergus Falls, Darlene Wondra, Hastings

MINNEAPOLIS GIFT SHOP



The Minneapolis VA Medical Center had a very special guest attend their annual Gift Shop in December. The picture shows the 4th District Volunteers along with Minnesota Commissioner of Veteran Affairs Larry Shellito. This was the first Gift Shop that Commissioner Shellito attended and he was very impressed at what the American Legion Auxiliary provides for our Veterans.

Program of the Month: National Security

With winter upon us it is time to think our safety while driving these Minnesota roads. So please try to prepare a winter survival kit for your car. Here is the list of items to place in your kit with a few helper hints to go along with it.

How to Make a Winter Survival Kit

Everyone should carry a Winter Survival Kit in their car. In an emergency, it could save your life and the lives of your passengers. Here is what you need:

- a shovel
- windshield scraper and small broom
- flashlight with extra batteries
- battery powered radio
- water
- snack food including energy bars
- raisins and mini candy bars
- matches and small candles
- extra hats, socks and mittens
- First aid kit with pocket knife
- Necessary medications
- blankets or sleeping bag
- tow chain or rope
- road salt, sand, or cat litter for traction
- booster cables
- emergency flares and reflectors
- fluorescent distress flag and whistle to attract attention
- Cell phone adapter to plug into lighter

Kit tips:

- Reverse batteries in flashlight to avoid accidental switching and burnout.
- Store items in the passenger compartment in case the trunk is jammed or frozen shut.
- Choose small packages of food that you can eat hot or cold.

911 tips:

- If possible, call 911 on your cell phone. Provide your location, condition of everyone in the vehicle and the problem you're experiencing.
- Follow instructions: you may be told to stay where you are until help arrives.
- Do not hang up until you know who you have spoken with and what will happen next.
- If you must leave the vehicle, write down your name, address, phone number and destination. Place the piece of paper inside the front windshield for someone to see.

Survival tips:

- Prepare your vehicle: Make sure you keep your gas tank at least half full.
- Be easy to find: Tell someone where you are going and the route you will take.
- If stuck: Tie a florescent flag (from your kit) on your antenna or hang it out the window. At night, keep your dome light on. Rescue crews can see a small glow at a distance. To reduce battery drain, use emergency flashers only if you hear approaching vehicles. If you're with someone else, make sure at least one person is awake and keeping watch for help at all times.
- Stay in your vehicle: Walking in a storm can be very dangerous. You might become lost or exhausted. Your vehicle is a good shelter.
- Avoid Overexertion: Shoveling snow or pushing your

car takes a lot of effort in storm conditions. Don't risk a heart attack or injury. That work can also make you hot and sweaty. Wet clothing loses insulation value, making you susceptible to hypothermia.

• **Fresh Air:** It's better to be cold and awake than comfortably warm and sleepy. Snow can plug your vehicle's exhaust system and cause deadly carbon monoxide gas to enter your car. Only run the engine for 10 minutes an hour and make sure the exhaust pipe is free of snow. Keeping a window open a crack while running the engine is also a good idea.

• **Don't expect to be comfortable:** You want to survive until you're found.



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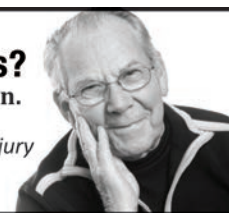
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NATIONAL EMBLEM SALES

The National Emblem Sales catalog for the year 2015 has been sent to all Unit Presidents and Post Commanders. If you have not received your copy by the end of January, please request a copy of same directly from National Emblem Sales. 2015 prices are now in effect.

WASHINGTON CONFERENCE


The 2014 Washington Conference will be held in Washington DC, February 22-25, 2015. If any member is interested in attending, please contact the department office for details.

SANDIE'S NOTES

Please take note that the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Guide for Volunteers has been updated and is now available through Emblem Sales. They are at a cost of \$1.95 each. The Department Office will only have a small supply on hand. You can order them directly through Emblem Sales if you would like a copy.

On a note of reflection, I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of the Minnesota American Legion Auxiliary members. No matter where I go, everyone is so pleasant and wonderful to talk to. It has been just a rewarding year working with both Shirley Frederick and Chris Ronning. You truly have wonderful ladies in charge of the Department.

The office staff of myself and Jan Lauby both wish you a very Happy New Year. Always remember that this is your organization and if you need any help, we are here at your beck and call.




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Tour Includes:


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- Royal Canadian Mounted Police Museum
- Cruise on Waterton Lake to Goat Haunt



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Monuments of Washington D.C.

April 17-21, 2015



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- 4-Seasons Tour Director, Jenny Gilbertson
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National Parks

Utah and Arizona

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Tour Includes:

- 4-Seasons Tour Director, Joyce Langerud
- Deluxe motor coach transportation
- 10 nights accommodations
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Alaska Tour and Cruise

August 7-19, 2015

Tour Includes:

- 4-Seasons Tour Director, Jenny Gilbertson
- Roundtrip Delta flights from Minneapolis to Fairbanks and return from Vancouver to Minneapolis
- Accommodations at superior and deluxe hotels
- All sightseeing/entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary
- A 7-night southbound cruise on the Coral Princess
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