

The Minnesota American Legion and Auxiliary

Legionnaire



Volume 98, Number 12

For God and Country

December 2016

Christmas Fiction

The sergeant and the lieutenant share a Christmas Eve

By Al Zdon

The shell landed maybe a quarter mile away, but the shock wave caused the huge tent to shake violently.

The nurse glanced up from the instruments she was cleaning and looked at a fellow nurse a few feet away. Her friend's eyes were huge with fear.

"Don't worry, Agnes. They won't shell a hospital."

Agnes did not look convinced. "Kate, you're always so brave, but just one of those shells could take out the whole hospital. And besides, those guns are miles away, how do they know there's a hospital here?"

The station hospital was set up in Belgium. When the three massive tents with large red crosses on the roof had been erected in early December, 1944, they were 80 miles from the front lines, far from harm's way.

But on December 16, the German forces had crashed through the American lines. Now, the day before Christmas, the enemy was perhaps 15 miles away, and advancing.

All day long, the ambulances and trucks had been coming and going, evacuating

patients and medical staff far to the rear. Only a handful were left.

Boom! The ground shook this time as the shell landed much closer. Agnes put her hands to her face. "Oh, my God!" she screamed.

Just then, Col. Richardson came through the flap. He was the doctor in charge and he was flustered. "Nurses," he shouted, "pack up what you can. We're getting out of here now. They're zeroing in on us and we've got to get everybody out now. The vehicles are waiting."

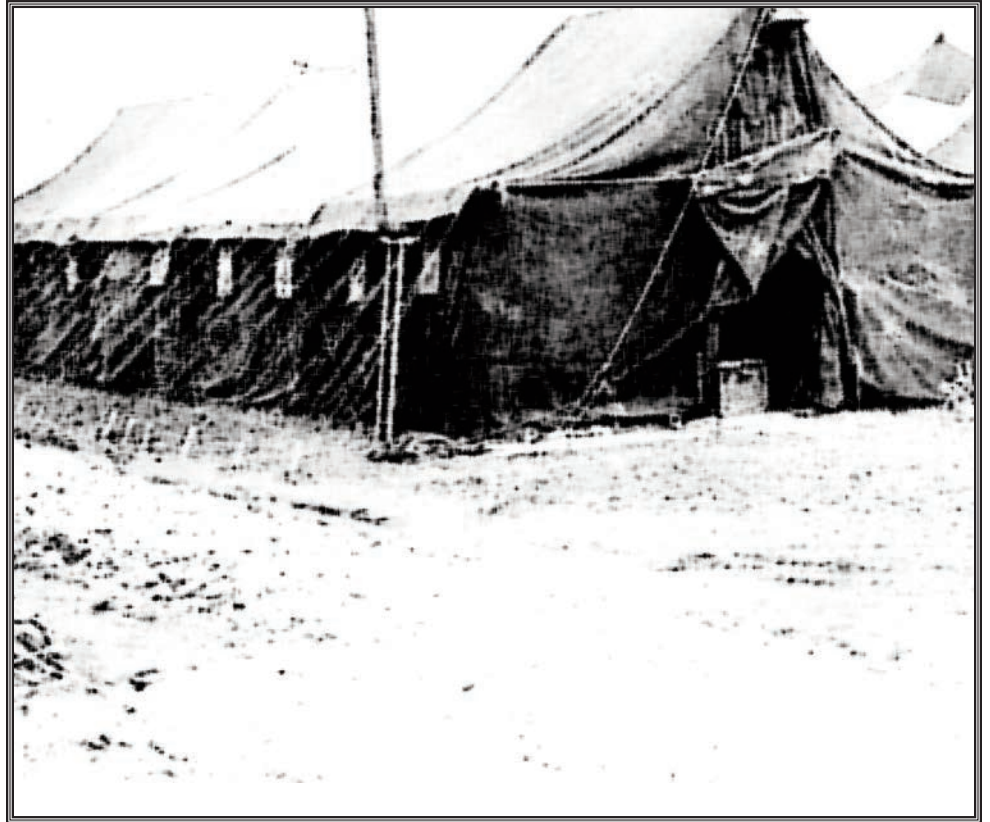
The next 20 minutes were a busy chaos as nurses and doctors and orderlies helped or carried the remaining patients to the ambulances. Now and then a shell exploded close enough to make the evacuation even more frenzied.

Nurse Catherine O'Leary approached the commanding officer and had to grab his arm to get his attention. "Doctor, we've got a problem."

"We've got a lot of problems, O'Leary, but in five minutes we're going to be gone, every last one of us."

"That's the problem," she said. "There's one patient who can't be moved."

Continued on Page 6



Dates, places set for Schmidt tour

A schedule has been established for the 2017 National Commander's Tour in Minnesota.

National Commander Charles Schmidt of Oregon will do a sweep of northern Minnesota posts, ending up in the Twin Cities.

The tour begins Monday, Feb. 6, with breakfast at East Grand Forks Post 157. Lunch will be at Thief River Falls Post 117 and dinner will be at Bagley Post 16, the home of state Commander Denise Milton.

On Tuesday, Feb. 7, the tour will have breakfast at Bena Post 2001, lunch at Hibbing Post 222, and dinner at West Duluth Post 71.

On Wednesday, Feb. 8, the tour will head south with breakfast at McGregor Post 23, lunch at Pine City Post 51, and dinner at Elk River Post 112.

The final day, Thursday, Feb. 9, will feature breakfast at Buffalo Post 270, the home unit of Department President Carol Kottom, lunch at Richfield Post 435, and dinner at Mound Post 398.

A complete schedule will be in the January issue.

Legion baseball creates no-tolerance rule for Anthem

At its annual fall meeting in November at North St. Paul Post 39, the Minnesota American Legion Baseball Committee adopted a no-tolerance policy for student-athletes regarding respect for the National Anthem.

The players will either pay proper respect to the flag during the National Anthem, or they will not play Legion baseball.

The policy is expected to be locally enforced during the regular season, but at the start of sub-state and district play-offs, it will be enforced by Department baseball officials.

The policy will be in compliance with the national American Legion Resolution 16, passed by the National Executive Committee at the Fall Meetings.

"Those who cannot or will not meet the organization's expectations for proper flag respect will be removed from the program and not be allowed any further participation."

A primary tenant of Legion baseball and other Legion youth programs is teaching younger people about American values.

Legion Night at Gophers Dec. 23

The annual American Legion Family Christmas Night at the Golden Gopher Basketball at Williams Arena will be held Friday, Dec. 23.

The Gopher basketball team will be playing Arkansas state in a non-conference game at 6 p.m.

Prior to the game, the official Minnesota honor guard, Waite Park Post 428, will present the colors at center court.

Specially reduced tickets at \$10 and \$15 will be available for the game.



To get tickets, call Steven Walter at the Gopher ticket office at 612-626-1592 and ask for the Legion Family Night promotion.

The Legion wants to know about your local memorial

The American Legion is calling on all posts, districts, counties, areas, zones, departments and affiliates to help build a database of memorials and monuments that honor U.S. military service and sacrifice.

"As The American Legion nears its centennial year, one aspect of our organization's rich legacy is universal -- 'To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the great wars,'" National Commander Charles Schmidt said.

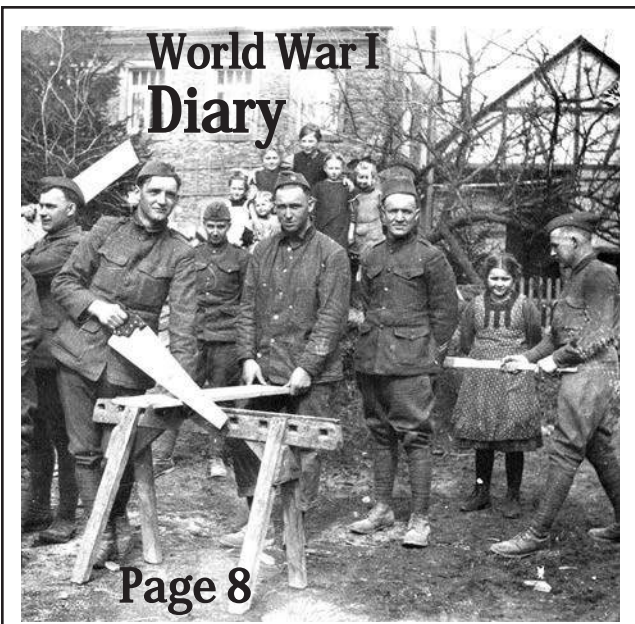
"We know that in virtually every corner of the country, and beyond our shores, American Legion Family members have paid tribute to military serv-

ice, honor and remembrance by carving out sacred spaces in their communities to ensure that the price paid for freedom is not lost on future generations."

The American Legion Memorial Inventory Project uses a web platform for those who want to submit local memorials to the date base.

Go to legion.org/memorials to find instructions on uploading information.

The web platform will ask for the location of the memorial, a description of it, date of installation if known, and a rating of its condition. Photos are highly encouraged when listing your memorial.



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Americanism Committee trying to resurrect trophies and awards

By Art Tobkin

Sixty years ago, The American Legion, Department of Minnesota, established, by Convention Mandate, a Trophy and Awards Committee and initiated the following Awards:

Father L. J. Fortin Trophy

The Father L. J. Fortin trophy is to be awarded to the post that has participated, or has an active program emphasizing the Legion's dedication to God.

Lindell Community Service Bell

The Lindell Community Service Bell is awarded to a post for initiating or completing a living war memorial; or that has been solely, or primarily responsible, for civic fundraisers.

Frank J. Ring Boy Scouts Trophy

The Frank J. Ring Boy Scouts Trophy is awarded to the post with the most outstanding Boy Scout program during the past year.

Hanson Education Trophy

The Hanson Education Trophy is awarded to the post contributing the most to the field of education.

Levi M. Hall School Patrol Trophy

The Levi M. Hall School Patrol Trophy is awarded to the post with the most outstanding and exceptional School Patrol Activity.

Joseph W. Finley Trophy

The Joseph W. Finley Trophy is awarded to the post with the best all-around program of post activities, such as: American Legion Baseball, School Patrol, Children and Youth, Americanism, Rehabilitation, National/Civil Defense, or any other of the many Legion programs.

Stafford King Conservationist of the Year Trophy

The Stafford King Conservationist of the Year Trophy is awarded to the post that promotes or sponsors a conservation program, such as a tree-planting or an anti-pollution program.

Americanism Trophy

The Americanism Trophy is awarded to the post with the best Americanism program; that fosters, teaches or encourages love of country.

Lloyd Grossnickle Memorial Award

The Lloyd Grossnickle Memorial Award is awarded to the post with the most outstanding single Children and Youth project.

In 2015, The American Legion Department of Minnesota, by Convention Mandate, dis-established the Trophies and Awards Committee, and assigned the judging and award of the various trophies to the following committees or individuals:

Father L. J. Fortin Trophy assigned to the Department Chaplain.

Lindell Community Service Bell assigned to the Department Community Service Committee Chairperson.

Frank J. Ring Boy Scouts Trophy assigned to the Department Boy Scouts Committee Chairperson.

Hanson Education Trophy assigned to the Department Education Committee Chairperson.

Levi M. Hall School Patrol Trophy assigned to the Department School Patrol Committee Chairperson.

Joseph W. Finley Trophy assigned to the Department Americanism Committee.

Stafford King Conservationist of the Year Trophy assigned to the Department Energy and Conservation Committee Chairperson.

Americanism Trophy assigned to the Department Americanism Committee.

Lloyd Grossnickle Memorial Award assigned to the Department Children and Youth Committee.

The application form for these various trophies and awards is sent to each Post, usually during February, and received by the Department office prior to the annual Department Convention. After judging of each application by the assigned individuals, a plaque is awarded to the winning Post at the Department Convention. Needless to say, the response to this competition was less than enthusiastic in 2016. In most cases, only one application was received, and some categories had no applications submitted.

Posts should consider applying for these various trophies and awards. Contact your Post Commander or Adjutant for the application forms.

If you have a good program, let the world know about it. Let your community know about it. Let the young veterans that are considering joining The American Legion know about it.

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COMFORT WARRIORS GRANT -- The Minnesota American Legion was able to secure an Operation Comfort Warriors grant to the St. Cloud StandDown to assist veterans with clothing, boots and women veterans care packages. The grant was for \$6,500. The photo includes StandDown volunteers, Department Service Officer Jeremy Wolfsteller, Commander Denise Milton and Assistant Department Service Officer Heather Larson.

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MP2772 1/12

Membership Chart					
As of Nov. 23, 2016					
District	2017 Goal	Total 2016	Total 2017	Percent of Goal	Same Date '15
1	9,380	9,322	7,236	77.14	7,713
2	7,572	7,488	6,015	79.44	6,100
3	11,977	11,912	9,422	78.67	9,769
4	2,592	2,572	1,896	73.15	2,037
5	2,679	2,657	2,043	76.26	2,180
6	12,109	12,038	9,574	79.07	9,865
7	6,695	6,619	5,251	78.43	5,567
8	4,417	4,377	3,386	76.66	3,505
9	7,015	6,950	5,352	76.29	5,690
10	10,611	10,557	7,998	75.37	8,520
At-large	1,953	2,710	1,807	95.52	2,074
Totals	77,000	77,202	59,980	77.90	63,020

WWII History Roundtable plans tour

The World War II History Roundtable will conduct a tour of European sites beginning May 20. Stops will include Market Garden, Fort Eban-Emael, Henri Chapelle American Cemetery (Memorial Day), Waterloo, Huertgen Forest, and then six days on the Battle of the Bulge including Elsenborn Ridge, Malmedy, Schnee Eifel, Bastogne and Patton's grave.

For more information, call Don Patton, 612-867-5144.

Capitol commission votes to keep paintings

The Minnesota Capitol Preservation Commission voted, as this issue went to press, to not move the Civil War paintings in the Governor's Reception Room and Anteroom.

The final decision on the paintings will now go to the Minnesota Historical Society which, by law, has the final say on artwork at the Capitol.

The paintings had become a hot topic around the capital when various politicians and committees had indicated that they didn't want various paintings in the Reception Room.

A leader of the proposal to remove the paintings was Gov. Mark Dayton, but if you wanted to hear his stand on the issue, you couldn't have obtained it at the commission meeting.

The governor walked out of the meeting after making some short opening remarks.

The governor was unhappy with a memo that went around from Rep. Matt Dean, R-Dellwood, a member of the commission, advocating the retention of the Civil War paintings in their traditional space.

Dayton said, "It's a

deeply disturbing issue for me that this commission is being hijacked for political purposes."

He accused Dean of taking his stand to further political aspirations. He then stood up and walked out of the room.

Most of the commission members weighed in on their views on the paintings, which depict Minnesota soldiers in the Civil War.

Historical Society Director Steve Elliot said in a prior meeting the society had decided to remove two paintings depicting Native American subjects from the Reception Room, and displaying them elsewhere in the Capitol where they could "be more robustly interpreted."

He said the Society had heard motions on keeping the Civil War paintings, but had not acted -- wanting to hear what the Capitol Preservation Commission had to say.

The commission is made up of citizens, legislators and state elected officials including Dayton.

Rep. Dean Urdahl, R-Grove City, said the governor should not have the power to remove the paint-

ings. "A temporary tenant should not use temporary filters" to make this decision.

Urdahl said, "The blood stains of history cannot be removed by removing these paintings."

Rep. Alice Hausman, DFL-St. Paul, argued that the paintings themselves have historical significance.

"Do you think they take things down at the Parthenon?"

Others argued that the paintings should be removed from the Reception Room and placed in another room where there would be a better atmosphere to explain the paintings.

Public member Peter Hilger said, "Those Minnesota regiments were at the forefront of preserving liberty for all. They deserve to be displayed in the best room in the people's house."

Rep. Kurt Daudt, R-Crown, the Speaker of the House, said it would be an "absolute tragedy if the paintings were moved."

Last to speak was Rep. Dean, who said, "I appreciated the governor's passion on this issue, like he is on so



WILL IT REMAIN? -- The Battle of Nashville by Howard Pyle is one of the Civil War paintings which has hung in the Governor's Reception Room for over a century. The Minnesota Historical Society will decide its fate in December.

many issues." Dean asked for a unanimous vote.

The voice vote was not unanimous, but it appeared only a handful of commission members voted against a "strong preference" for keeping the Civil War paintings.

The motion was made by public member Dana Badgerow, a former Commissioner of Administration for Minnesota.

The Minnesota Historical Society's Executive Council was slated to have two meetings in December where the Civil

War paintings will probably be addressed.

The council is composed of 28 members from across the state. Dayton serves as

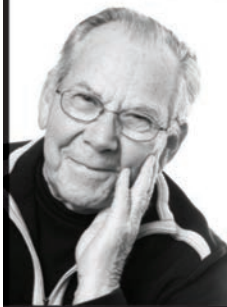
an ex-officio member. The council by Minnesota Statute has the final say on the matter.

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AWARD FOR DETTMER -- Legislave Chair Peggy Moon presented an appreciation plaque from the Minnesota American Legion to Rep. Bob Dettmer, R-Forest Lake, for his work on veterans issues and legislation. The award was presented at the Commanders' Task Force meeting.

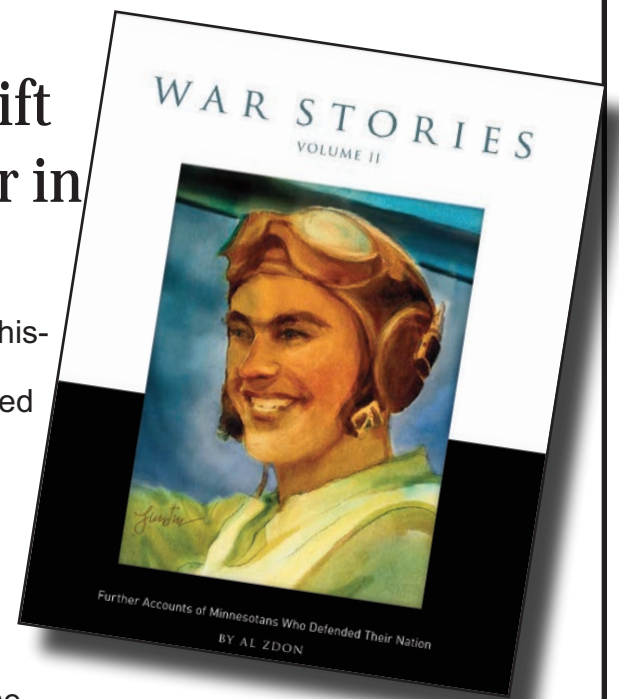


VETERANS DAY -- Department Commander Denise Milton prepared herself for her part in the state's Veterans Day program at Inver Grove Heights.

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**COMMANDER'S
COLUMN**

By Denise Milton



Greetings Minnesota Legion family.

It's hard to believe that the year is coming to an end. We had our first snowstorm of the year which encompassed most of the state. I know that several Legion functions had to be cancelled -- better to be safe and avoid a possible accident. I was in the metro area for a 5th District revitalization and no snow.

Last month we celebrated Veterans Day and I hope that you all had an opportunity to share a meal and friendship with other veterans in your communities. I attended the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Ceremony and it was pretty awesome. We listened to addresses by Commissioner Larry Shellito, Governor Dayton, Senators Klobuchar and Franken and Representative Emmer. We also had a fantastic performance by the 34th Division Red Bull band and to our great joy and pleasure, a 4th grade class lead us in the Flag pledge and sang each military service song.

We attended the program at Minneapolis Veteran's Home, then off to the Gophers basketball game where

Mail Call



From left: Henry and Josephine Bernard, Josie Whitaker, Frank Bernard, Richard, Henry and Esther Bernard.

Uncle died on Arizona

To the Editor:

About June 22, 1941, we met my Uncle Frank Bernard at Long Beach, California. The USS Arizona had made an unexpected stop at San Pedro, just down the coast, and all of us, my parents, my Aunt Josie, and Grandma and Grandpa Bernard had a reunion.

As Grandma's poignant writing on the back of the photograph says: "The first time we had our family together for seven years and also the last."

Uncle Frank, a ship fitter on the Arizona since 11 Jan 1936, went down with the ship, December 7, 1941.

Frank's death five months after we met was a terrible shock, of course, but there was nothing anyone could do.

I was a year old when we met Frank that day in Long Beach, so I don't have personal memories. But I do have the photograph.

Grandma and Grandpa, from Grafton ND, had asked Mom and Dad, also North Dakotans, to drive them to California where their daughter, Josie, had lived since 1934, and where they had become part of the sizable North Dakota part-year community.

Dad was a high school teacher, and one of his students at the time recalled, years later, that to his knowledge Dad didn't even mention his brother's death in school.

Indeed, at first, they thought it was Frank's buddy, John Grabinske, of Warsaw ND, who had been killed.

Since none of the family members were in the hometown of Grafton; to my knowledge, there was not even a memorial service. It had to have been terrible.

In February, 1942, the Polish consul in Los Angeles, at a North Dakota picnic, asked the crowd for a moment of silence for Navy man Grabinske, but Grandpa rose in the audience and



Frank Bernard in Hawaii

Goldie introduced me to all the spectators. What a surprise. The day will certainly be one of my most memorable.

November was an incredibly busy and productive month. Election Day culminated in an unexpected outcome. We as veterans and Legionnaires will need to remind our politicians that the battle for veterans benefits never ends and we will always be leading the way to make sure they aren't forgotten.

I attended several post/community Veteran's Day programs, membership and pheasant dinners and the food was too good to resist. Thanks to all. It gave me an opportunity to visit all the veteran's homes. What great communities that are provided for our veterans-which in great part is due to the dedication and perseverance of you that our comrades receive the care that they so rightly deserve. Thank you all for what you do.

My project, MACV homeless veterans, is doing well due to your generosity. A big thank you to the 9th District Auxiliary for collecting so many items for the coming winter. Also, the Princeton Auxiliary for their many years of contributions to the St. Cloud StandDown which is organized by the Veteran Service Organizations of the St. Cloud community. We stopped by their warehouse to check on the shipment of winter boots and warm clothing that was procured by a grant from Operation Comfort Warriors that our Department Service Officer, Jeremy Wolfsteller had written. Thanks so much Jeremy and Heather. I've received several monetary contributions from the Legion posts that I have visited in the past three months. Thanks so much. All contributions are welcome. MACV is a 501(C)3 organization and contributions are allowed from gambling if you have it in your post.

As we celebrate the coming holiday, Christmas, each in our own special way, let's remember to say a prayer for those serving worldwide allowing us the freedom to do so. God bless us all.

asked to speak: "The boy killed was our son".

Grandma stood by his side, the Grand Forks Herald later reported "The entire audience arose and stood in silence for a moment in honor of the dead hero and the parents who made the sacrifice."

We know from a Nov. 7, 1941, letter from Frank to his brother (nicknamed "Boy" from birth), that Frank thought he'd "get hitched to that little girl up in Washington she is a honey...." We've never learned who she was, but probably from Bremerton, a regular port of call for the battleships in the Pacific fleet.

I've followed Frank's life and death for many years now, most recently visiting the Arizona in December 2015.

World War II, which for the U.S. began the day after Pearl Harbor, was deadly.

I wonder, what have we learned?

**Dick Bernard
Woodbury**

Highly paid athletes

To the Editor:

Once again you have produced a great issue. The two articles about Col. Thorsness were very interesting. His story about POWs making flags and his comment, "So when I see people not respecting the flag..." should be forwarded to all those highly paid athletes who choose to kneel during the anthem.

Keep up the fine work you are doing.

**Jim Partridge
Owatonna**

Seeking veteran

To the Editor:

Hi, I'm Philippe Clerbout and I live in northern France.

A friend found the dog tag of Frank Steffels, an American soldier who fought in World War I. He was born April 9, 1887, and died August 13, 1979. His wife was Agnes Steffels, born July 4, 1890, and died on June 26 1969. They are both buried in Fort Snelling National Cemetery.

Mr. Steffels is on the Honor Roll of Ramsey County.

I look for the family of this soldier to return the dogtag to them. This is not a joke, you can check on my internet research on the American soldier Willy Wilkins.

Thank you for your attention to this search.

Respond to: morillonsouchet@aol.com.

**Philippe Clerbout
France**



Chaplain's Corner

By
Bill Brockberg

A Date Which Will Live In Infamy

This month of December we remember and pay a solemn tribute to those 2,395 American service members and civilians who perished during the attack at Pearl Harbor, 75 years ago on December 7th. During his speech to a Joint session of Congress on December 8th, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was to ask Congress to declare War on Japan. At the last minute, he changed his words from "...a day which will be remembered in American History..." to the now unforgettable phrase, "Yesterday, Dec. 7, 1941 - a date which will live in infamy." In the president's one-page brief to Congress, he addressed the havoc and destruction perpetrated and conducted against Americans by the Japanese. In these most dire of circumstances, the President invoked the almighty. "No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory." In another quote from his address, "With confidence in our armed forces - with the unbounding determination of our people - we will gain the inevitable triumph - so help us God."

So it was in one of the most trying times of American history, President Roosevelt united Congress and the American People to a cause of War for worldwide freedom and liberty. In no uncertain terms, it was made clear too to invoke the power and justice of the Almighty in this most prominent and righteous cause.

The month of December is remembered too from World War II for the buildup to and eventual victory of the allies during the battle of the bulge in 1944. Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr. and his Third Army were being stalled on their eastward march to Germany in the Lorraine at Nancy, France.

Cold rainy weather was hampering efforts to get supplies, winter weather gear and allied air support. In his frustration, Patton called on then Msgr. (Col.) James H. O'Neill to write a "weather prayer" so the Third Army may have good weather for battle. The legend of Patton's weather prayer was erroneously portrayed in the movie, "Patton" as having taken place just before the battle of the Bulge to relieve the 101st Airborne at Bastogne, Belgium. Regardless, that prayer was printed up on 250,000 wallet-sized cards with a Christmas Greeting also written by Col. O'Neill on the opposite side. When the weather let up, Patton exclaimed, "Hot Dog. Get him up here; I want to pin a medal on him." Chaplain O'Neill became the only US Army chaplain ever decorated with the Bronze Star for writing a prayer. "Chaplain, you're the most popular man in this headquarters. You sure stand in good with the Lord and Soldiers," Patton said. Patton's rationale for the prayer was reported by O'Neill in a Patton biography. Patton said, "there are three ways that men get what they want; by planning, by working, and by praying. Any great military operation takes careful planning or thinking. Then you must have well-trained troops to carry it out: that's working. But between the plan and the operation there is always an unknown. That unknown spells defeat or victory, success or failure. It is the reaction of the actors to the ordeal when it actually comes. Some people call that getting the breaks; I call it God."

The Minnesota Legionnaire

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Al Zdon, Editor

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What's Happening

YMCA waives fee

The YMCA has waived its joiner's fee for veterans and their families. An agreement has been made that will allow the VA in Minnesota to use YMCA facilities for outreach events, while at the same time dropping the enrollment fee for 28 months. Monthly fees still apply.

The offer is good for all veterans. To have the fee waived a veteran must bring a VA ID card, a copy of their DD214 or a military ID.

Petition for Korean vet

A petition has been started to get enough signatures to convince the government that E. Royce Williams should get the Medal of Honor. William's hometown is Clinton, Minnesota, and he now lives in California. He is 91. He was a Navy pilot who shot down 4 Soviet MiGs during the Korean War in one sortie. His war record was kept classified for 50 years.

To read his story and sign the petition, go to Homlandmagazine.com and click on the box on the right hand side of the page that starts, "CAPT Williams..."

Round Tables

The World War II History Round Table will feature the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Bataan and Corregidor. Author John Adams will give a historical background, and veterans will tell their stories.

The meeting will be Thursday, Dec. 8, at the Fort Snelling History Center at 7 p.m. Admission is \$5.

The Civil War Roundtable will not meet in December.

Taps

Fraze, Harry E. "Punch," 75, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 15, 2016. He was a member of Park Rapids Post 212.

Wright, C.L. "Lorraine," 97, Navy veteran of World War II, died Nov. 19, 2016. She was a member of Park Rapids Post 212.

Cleland, Gerald, 83, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 8, 2016. He served in England. He was a member of Lonsdale Post 586.

Orlando, Timothy, 66, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 26, 2016. He was a member of North St. Paul Post 39.

Peterson, Donald A., 89, Army veteran of World War II, died Nov. 6, 2016. He was a member of Brainerd Post 255.

Huls, James Clarence, 72, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 12, 2016. He was a military policeman. He was a member of Holdingford Post 211.

Thurson, Ralph, 90, Navy veteran of World War II, died Oct. 24, 2016. He served on the troop carrier Rockbridge. He was a member of Bigelow Post 496.

Verel, Charles Moore, 83, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 1, 2016. He served in the Army Security Agency and was stationed in Japan. He was a member of Millerville Post 527.

Ljung, Allen L., 98, Army veteran of World War II, died Oct. 10, 2016. He was a sergeant. He was a member of Alexandria Post 87.

Graham, Thomas A., 86, Minnesota National Guard veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 16, 2016. He was a member of Benson Post 62.

Flahave, Michael J., 63, Army and National Guard veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 14, 2016. He served in Korea. He was a member of Little Falls Post 46.

Van Horn, Willard, 76, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 16, 2016. He was a medic in a prisoner of war camp. He was a member of East Grand Forks Post 157.

Resisenauer, Lawrence, 81, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 13, 2016. He was a member of Park Rapids Post 212.

Kozloski, James, 84, Navy veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 31, 2016. He was a Seabee. He was a member of Cloquet Post 262.

Teigland, John R.L., 88, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 25, 2016. He was a member of Willmar Post 167.

Lehman, Thomas G., 84, Navy veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 26, 2016. He was a member of Willmar Post 167.

Chapin, Frank E., 92, Navy veteran of World War II, died Nov. 4, 2016. He was a member of Willmar Post 167.

Ivers, Paul H., 92, Army veteran of World War II, died Nov. 12, 2016. He was a member of Willmar Post 167.

Robeck, Guy I., 67, Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 12, 2016. He was a member of Gaylord Post 433.

Ellis, Dr. Stewart C., 91, Army veteran of World War II,

Tree Planting Program

The Department Energy and Conservation Committee will once again be selling trees. Available are Norway Spruce, Blue Spruce, White Spruce, Red Pine, Scotch Pine, Black Hills Spruce, Glossy Black Chokeberry, Tamarack and White Pine. They will come in bundles of 20 each and cost \$18 including shipping.

Also available are Red and Silver Maple and Red Splendor Crab, in bundles of 10 for \$14.

To order, go to the Department website: mnlegion.org for an ordering form.

Trees can also be ordered for Legionville.

Legal Clinics

The Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans will have a series of drop-in legal clinics in Minnesota. The clinics help veterans with housing, employment, benefits, debt collection, expungement, and family law. Each clinic brings in volunteer lawyers, MACV staff, CVSOs and child support officers.

The clinics include:

-- St. Cloud VA, Tuesday, Dec. 20, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Auditorium, Building 8.

-- Minneapolis VA, Tuesday, Dec. 13, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the VA Medical Center, Flag Atrium Balcony Room.

-- Anoka County, Thursday, Dec. 8, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Anoka County Government Center, Room 237.

Merlin Players

The Merlin Players in Faribault will present the musical play "Wrapped in Love and Glory, a story about Faribault women working in the woolen mill during World War II.

died Nov. 12, 2016. He was a member of Cold Spring Post 455.

Gerding, Raymond J., 88, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 11, 2016. He was a member of Cold Spring Post 455.

Walsh, Thomas E., 90, Navy veteran of World War II and Marine veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 7, 2016. He was a member of Deerwood Post 557.

Kvasager, Thelmer A., 86, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 13, 2016. He was a member of East Grand Forks Post 157.

Sirek, Robert, 70, Army and National Guard veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 10, 2016. He was a member of East Grand Forks Post 157.

Storto, Sherman L., 70, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 11, 2016. He was a member of East Grand Forks Post 157.

Ritten, Clarence, 90, Marine veteran of World War II, died Nov. 9, 2016. He was a member of Clear Lake Post 354.

Vosler, William H., 91, National Guard veteran of World War II, died Oct. 19, 2016. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Bolinger, Richard, 68, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 4, 2016. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Lair, Francis L., 97, Army veteran of World War II, died Oct. 23, 2016. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Lee, Harold, 93, Army veteran of World War II, died Oct. 22, 2016. He served in Europe. He was a member of New London Post 537.

Magnuson, Archie, 85, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 31, 2016. He was a member of New London Post 537.

Taylor, James, 94, Army veteran of World War II, died Nov. 6, 2016. He was the the 32nd Division and fought in the Pacific, one of the Ghost Mountain Boys. He earned two Bronze Stars and a Purple Heart. He was a member of New London Post 537.

Westburg, Jerry, 72, Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 29, 2016. He was a member of Marshall Post 113.

Buller, Lyle, 96, Army Air Corps veteran of World War II, died Oct. 27, 2016. He was a navigator on a B-17 and on a B-25. He was a member of Marshall Post 113.

Brewers, Louis, 88, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 6, 2016. He was a member of Marshall Post 113.

Schnyders, Daniel C., 86, Air Force veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 7, 2016. He was a member of Edgerton Post 42.

Erickson, Frederick Abel, 78, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 6, 2016. He was a member of Chisholm Post 247.

Moeller, James H., 73, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 19, 2016. He was a member of Chaska Post 57.

It will be presented at the Paradise Center for Arts with performances on Dec. 9, 10, 15, 16, 17 at 7:30 p.m. and Dec. 11 and 18 at 2 p.m.

Tickets are now on sale. Call 507-332-7372 for more information.

Pearl Harbor events

A series of events have been planned to help Minnesotans mark the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

On December 7 at the Minnesota Historical Society, there will be a program in the morning in the 3M Auditorium. The program, co-sponsored by the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, the Fort Snelling Memorial Rifle Guard, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and others, will feature music, a video tribute and remarks by retired Brig. Gen. Joseph Kelly.

At 1 p.m., also at 3M Auditorium, there will be presentations of events regarding Pearl Harbor. At 3:30 p.m. Mark Wortman, author of *1941* will discuss events leading up to the Japanese attack.

And at 7 p.m., Dave Kenny, author of *Minnesota Goes to War*, will talk about the home front.

Admission to the Minnesota Historical Society is free for active duty military and veterans.

On December 8, the World War II History Round Table at the Fort Snelling History Center will hear a talk from Col. John A. Adams, author of *The Fighting Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor*. Veterans of the Philippines will discuss the attack of the Japanese at Bataan.

Admission is \$5.

The one-hour ceremony, from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the History Center on Dec. 7 will be live streamed on the MNHS website: mnhs.org/pearlharbor event.

Rittenhouse, Francis E., 91, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 3, 2016. He was a member of Chaska Post 57.

Phelon, Phil, 83, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 19, 2016. He was a member of Eagan Post 594.

Kight, George F., 89, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 27, 2016. He was a past finance officer for Hackensack Post 202.

Bosch, William G., 79, Navy veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 22, 2016. He served on the USS Valley Forge. He was a member of Lakefield Post 4.

Beyer, Robert G., 74, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 26, 2016. He was a member of Wheaton Post 80.

Esch, Myles L., 91, Air Force veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 26, 2016. He was a member of Caledonia Post 191.

DesMarais, Chester Eugene, 76, Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 16, 2016. He was a member of Monticello Post 260.

Syverson, Warren, 70, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 16, 2016. He trained with the Green Berets. He was a member of Thief River Falls Post 117.

Walechka, Louis J., 78, National Guard veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 13, 2016. He was a member of Cleveland Post 207.

Obituary policy

Updated: February 2006

Obituaries of members of the Legion Family will be published in the Minnesota Legionnaire in a monthly column under the heading "Taps."

Obituaries must be recent, within the last two months prior to the publication of the new edition of the Legionnaire. For example, the February edition would only contain obituaries from January and December.

While the obituaries are brief, the Legionnaire does seek certain information for our readers:

1. Complete name of deceased.
2. Age at death.
3. Branch of service and war or wars the veteran served in.
4. Exact date of death.
5. Additional information about the veteran's service background including unit, type of service, place of service, valor medals, etc.
6. The post, unit or squadron the deceased belonged to.
7. Additional information about Legion service including officer posts held.

The Legionnaire reserves the right to edit all obituaries for style and brevity.

A Christmas story: The sergeant and the lieutenant share Christmas Eve

Continued from Page 1

A piece of shrapnel is lodged up against his heart. Any movement and he'll die. They were just getting him ready for an operation when the evacuation was ordered.

"Well, he'll just have to stay," Richardson said. "Fix him up the best you can. We've still got troops in the area, and I'll ask them to keep an eye on him. It's the best we can do for right now."

"Sir, I'd like to stay with him," O'Leary said. "He's losing a lot of blood, and his plasma IV is the only thing keeping him alive."

"Not a chance, O'Leary. Everybody leaves." As a punctuation to his command, a shell knocked down two large pine trees not more than 200 yards away. The sound was deafening.

"Fix him up the best you can. The last Jeep is leaving in two minutes. If you're not there, I'll come looking for you. I mean it."

O'Leary returned to the operating theater and looked at her patient. He had been unconscious when he was brought in, and he was still out. It was a miracle, she thought, that he had survived even being transported here. The surgeon said the fragment would rip open his heart if it was jostled at all.

Another shell came down, even closer, as O'Leary quickly put another bag of plasma on his IV line. She put pillows around him, but then shook her head. What good would that do?

"Come on, O'Leary, we're going now and I mean now," Richardson yelled from the tent door. Another shell burst nearby.

Taking one last look back, she ran out of the tent and saw Richardson and the Jeep driver waiting maybe 50 feet away. Her eyes were dazzled with the white snow covering the ground. She ran as fast as she could, but had only covered a little ground when the Jeep simply blew up before her eyes, taking a direct hit from an .88 shell.

The shock knocked her down. After a moment, she slowly sat up, the world spinning around her and her ears ringing. What was left of the Jeep was burning furiously, a red ball of fire in the white snow. The colonel and the driver were just gone.

"Oh no, oh no, oh no, oh no," she said again and again. "This can't be happening."

She struggled to her feet, just as another shell blew up nearby. Grabbing her bag, she ran back into the hospital tent. "Yeah, this will do a lot of good. I don't think canvas can stop an .88 shell," she said aloud.

O'Leary made her way back to the surgery area. Her patient was exactly as she had left him, eyes closed and a grimace of pain on his unconscious face. She pulled up a chair next to his cot. Another shell came down, and the canvas shook. And then it was quiet.

O'Leary sat a long time. It began to get dark outside, and she lit a lantern. Again, she changed the plasma bag and checked the soldier's vital signs. He was surviving.

She settled back in her chair and put her head in her hands. She had never been so alone or so scared or so tired. She wondered when the shelling would start again.

Except for the distant sound of war, it was eerily silent in the hospital tent. It was so strange not to have dozens of people bustling around. Since the battle had begun eight days ago, it had been non-stop action in the tent. She had been working 16 hours a day, and some days more.

O'Leary leaned back and closed her eyes. She was exhausted. It was almost peaceful in the tent.

"Hey, nurse," came a voice from nowhere. O'Leary

jumped, nearly as terrified as when the shells were dropping.

"Hey, nurse, how about some water?"

Miraculously, the soldier on the cot, a tube attached to his arm and his chest a mass of red bandages, was looking at her intently. His eyes, which had been tightly shut as if in pain, were now wide open, sparkling blue.

O'Leary recovered her composure the best she could. "Of course," she mumbled. She held the water to his lips and he drank.

"What's the matter, nurse, you look like you saw a ghost."

"I just didn't expect. I mean I thought you were..."

"Dead?"

"No just unconscious, you know, asleep."

"I must be in pretty rough shape, huh? All I remember is flying through the air."

"You're going to be all right," she said, putting on her best nurse voice.

"Yeah, I'm sure you tell that to all the fellows. Where the hell is everybody? It's like a morgue in here." He laughed a little then quickly stopped. "That's a good one," he said, grimacing.

"You mustn't move at all," O'Leary said with authority. "That's why you're here. We couldn't evacuate you."

"Oh, I probably didn't want to hear that. Am I going to croak?"

"No, you're going to be all right."

"Yeah, I heard that the first time."

There were a few minutes of silence.

"What's your name?" he suddenly asked.

She looked at him. "You can call me Lieutenant O'Leary or Nurse O'Leary, whatever you choose."

"Come on," he said. "It's just me and you, lighten up. What's your name?"

"You can call me Lieutenant O'Leary," she said, resolutely.

"You can call me Butch," he said. "Or you can call me Sergeant Bernelli. But I'd prefer Butch. Where you from?"

Without thinking she replied, "Bemidji, Minnesota. Way up in northern Minnesota." She paused. "You know we're not supposed to be fraternizing."

"Well, I'm from Philadelphia. Is this what you call this, fraternizing? I thought we were pitching woo. Listen, I'll probably be dead in a little while. I won't tell anybody that you talked in a friendly way with a dogface."

Just then a shell landed nearby, shaking the canvas. O'Leary started to her feet, looking at the ceiling of the tent, waiting for another shell to come ripping through the fabric. She settled back in her chair. After a minute, she relaxed.

"You can call me Kate," she said, and smiled.

"That's more like it," said Bernelli. "Now we're getting somewhere. Have you got a boyfriend, Kate?"

"Don't push your luck, Sergeant," she said sternly. "That's none of your business."

"Oh, relax, Kate. I just wanted to know if I was wasting my time or not. I don't want to give you my best stuff and then find out you're hooked up with someone else. I've got better things to do," and he croaked out another laugh, and again the pain swept over his face.

"Oh, please don't do anything to move..." she said, and stopped. She gently wiped his face with a clean towel.

"Move what?" he said. "Why don't you tell me exactly what my little problem is? I can take it."

"You're going to be okay," she said, but then looked at



the frown on his face. "Well, there's a very large piece of shrapnel in your chest. It's right up against, well, it's not in a good place."

He thought for a moment. "So if I move, my heart is going to turn into the Trevi Fountain?"

"I don't know that," she said. "You're going to be all right, I mean if we can get you to surgery..."

"Okay, I get the picture. Thanks."

More minutes passed.

"So?" he asked.

"What?"

"So, do you have a boyfriend? I don't see a wedding ring."

"Well, not at the present time. We've been a little busy. There's a war on."

"That's what I hear."

More silence.

"I'll tell you what," he said. "You tell me everything about yourself, and I'll tell you everything about myself, and we'll get to know each other, and maybe we'll fall in love."

"No," she said. "I think you should keep quiet and go back to sleep. If you're in pain I can give you some morphine."

"Nurse O'Leary, that's exactly the wrong prescription. You should be encouraging me to talk. Don't you watch the movies? They're always saying, 'No, no, Butch, just keep talking, stay with us' as the poor dogface breathes his last. And I don't want any morphine. I want to stay in your radiant presence. You're the prettiest girl I've seen all day. All week in fact."

"Well, if you promise not to move anything but your lips, we can talk."

A twinkle came into his eye. "If I can move my lips, Kate, I don't see any reason we can't have a little smooch?"

"At ease, soldier. Talking is all you get."

The two talked into the night. They talked about growing up, their families. They traded stories about going to parochial school. Often she laughed at his jokes. He tried not to laugh.

Sometime in the wee hours, she could see he was fading. In the middle of a story about nursing school, she watched his eyes close. Again she checked his vitals. His pulse was surprisingly strong. She changed his plasma. She redid the dressing on his chest. The wound was large and ugly, seeping blood.

He slept soundly, and for a while so did she, slumped over in her chair. The peace was broken suddenly by another shell exploding in the near distance. Bernelli's eyes popped open. Another shell sounded nearer. And the next shell nearer yet.

"They're walking it up the road," he said calmly.

"What do you mean?"

"Each shell is closer, and about four shells from now, they'll fall right on top of us."

"What can we do?" A note of panic came into her voice.

"Well, I'd get up and run if I were you. For me, I think I'll just lie here and pray."

Another shell came closer. The next shell must have hit just outside the tent.

"Seriously, I think you should get the hell out of here."

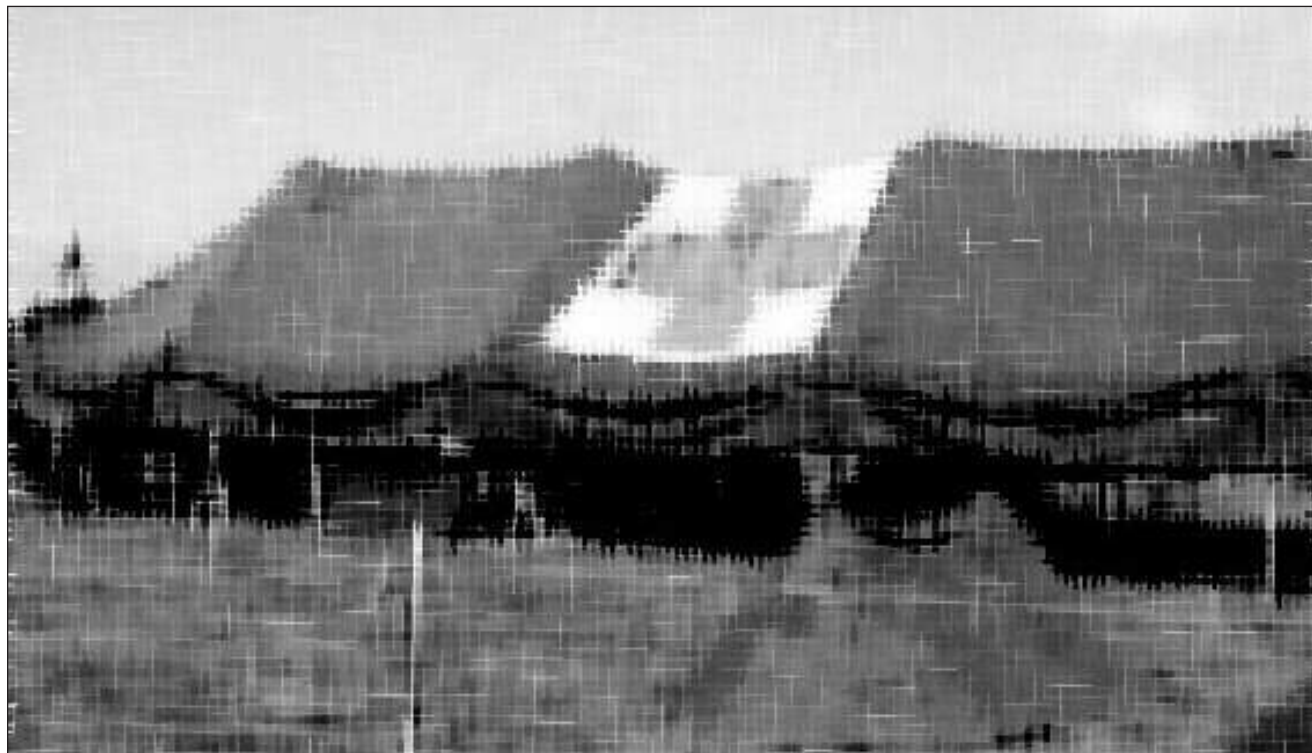
"I'm not leaving you."

"Well, it's been good to know you," he said, and smiled. He looked into her eyes.

KABOOM, a shell tore open the far side of the tent, dirt and debris flying through the air.

O'Leary, without thinking, ever so gently, put her body over his, carefully providing a shield, holding herself up with her arms, not touching him.

The final shell was maybe 25 feet away. The blast was deafening, the middle of the tent was ripped to shreds,



A Christmas Story

shrapnel flew through the air. O'Leary desperately held onto the cot, keeping it steady as the world blew up around her.

And then it was silent again.

Bernelli spoke first. "I think we're still alive. Good thing they ran out of shells. The next one would have got us."

O'Leary fell back into her chair, her face covered with blood. "Oh, Kate, are you all right?" For the first time, there was panic in his voice. He tried to lift an arm, but O'Leary quickly reached out and held it down. "Be still, be still. I'm okay. It's all right."

She put the lantern back on the table and rummaged around for a mirror. Finding one, she took stock of her face. She finally said, "Wow, am I a mess." She wiped the blood from her eyes and then began to carefully examine Bernelli. She reattached the IV tube, which had come loose.

"I think you're okay," she said.

"Yeah, I feel like a million bucks," he said, the twinkle returning to his eye. "What happened to you?"

"I think it's just a piece of shrapnel that grazed my head. It doesn't even hurt, but it's bleeding like crazy."

She tended to herself, finally getting the blood streaming from the laceration on her forehead down to a slow ooze. She put a bandage on herself and sat back in the chair.

Bernelli finally spoke. "You know what, Kate?"

"No, what?"

"I think you tried to save my life there. I think you're in love with me."

"At ease, soldier. I was just doing my duty."

"You know what, Kate?"

"What?"

"It's Christmas Day."

The two thought this over for a while.

"You know what, this might be kind of inappropriate," she said. "But it's been one of those nights." She took a

breath, and started softly singing. "Silent night, holy night..." After a moment, Bernelli joined in.

In the darkness, with shreds of tent flapping over their heads, they held hands and sang every Christmas song they could think of.

Bernelli finally said. "Don't take this the wrong way, but you're the best Christmas present I've ever had."

She looked into his eyes a long time and finally said, "At ease, soldier."

His eyes closed and he was asleep again.

The sun was high in the sky when the Jeep rolled up. A captain got out, looked at the shredded tent and whistled. "What the hell happened here?" And then he looked under a small area of the tent still standing and saw the cot.

On it lay a wounded soldier, a plasma bag hanging from a rack still dripping life into his body, and a nurse, sound asleep, her head on the soldier's leg.

"Excuse me," the captain said. "Excuse me, nurse. Are you okay?" He saw the blood dried into her hair and uniform.

O'Leary rose up, startled. "Oh, yes sir. I'm all right. What time is it?"

"It's nearly 10 a.m. and it's Christmas Day. What happened here?"

"We got shelled and the last one was pretty close."

"We'll you won't have to worry about that anymore," he said. "We were finally able to get our planes in the air, and they took out that artillery battery first thing this morning. And Patton's army came up and liberated Bastogne. I think we're going to win this war yet."

O'Leary was listening, and also checking Bernelli's pulse and dressing.

"Oh, and even better news for you," the captain said.

"The hospital staff is about a half hour away. I just passed them up. They're going to re-open this hospital. The surgeons are in the first Jeeps."

O'Leary looked up. "Merry Christmas to you, Captain. And thank you for the good news. But now you'll need to excuse me."

"Why, what's up lieutenant?"

"Don't you know? I've got to get this soldier ready for surgery." She smiled down at her patient and looked back at the captain. "His name is Butch and he's from Philadelphia and he's the toughest man I've ever met."

□□□□□□□□

Two months later a letter arrived in the mail for "Nurse Lieutenant O'Leary."

Curiously, she tore it open. It was written on Army stationery.

"Dear Kate.

"I want you to know that your surgeons did a fine job. I can get up and walk around a little bit now, but they say it's going to take a while to get back to normal. I just wanted to say that someday this war will be over. And when it is, I'm going to find out where Bemidji, Minnesota, is. I'm coming to see you. I hope you'll wait for me.

"Butch."

And you know what? She did.

And every year on Christmas Eve, they and their four children sit around the Christmas tree and sing "Silent Night." And Butch and Kate just smile at each other and share a Christmas kiss.

Sons of The American Legion

By Gene Olsword



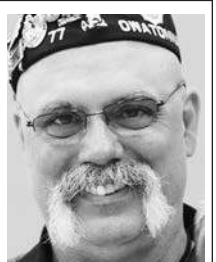
Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

By Jeremy Wolfsteller



American Legion Riders

By Chuck Stone



Membership outstanding

We are now in our 12th month of 2016. Where has this year gone? It seems like only yesterday I was sitting on the deck having my morning coffee, listening to the birds sing and watching the leaves bursting on the trees. I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving and didn't overeat too badly.

November was quite a busy month for me traveling the roads of Minnesota attending pheasant dinners with the Vets at Veterans Homes and Veterans Hospitals.

Along with membership dinners, rallies and Veteran Day Events, I am sorry I could not attend them all but in most cases, I tried to have a representative there from the Detachment. I want to thank everyone for their invitations and I am very glad to say, with all the good food I enjoyed very much, I did not gain any weight.

We have many darn good cooks out there and it is just hard to say NO to trying all the selections in front of you. I guess we just need to have bigger plates to get it all on.

Membership this past month has been outstanding. We had to play a little catch-up from the previous months and we did it and surpassed National's Goal. The Detachment is in Second Place in the Central Region and we are creeping up to get into First Place. For those who have renewed their memberships this year and those who have become new members - thank you.

Remember, membership is not just the Membership Director's responsibility but is everyone's. Help your membership director out and get your squadron to 100%. If your post does not have a SAL squadron and would like to learn more on how your post could benefit from having one, please contact me at manofgrs@hotmail.com or Membership Director Cliff at cteigs@yahoo.com or any other Detachment officer and we will be more than happy to visit and explain the advantages of having a squadron in your post.

It only takes 10 new members to start a squadron which includes any legion member who may qualify. Ask for more details.

I am planning my testimonial for April 22, 2017 at Post 38 in Redwood Falls. Lodging will be available at Jackpot Junction (507)697-8000 or (800) WIN-CASH or Redwood Valley Lodge (507) 644-5700. As I am hearing already, this is going to be a "Fun Night" so you won't want to miss it. More details on this later.

December is a busy month with Christmas just around the corner. The ladies are all baking their Christmas goodies in preparation for this day with family and friends gathered around the table or the many parties that may be going on.

PTSD

If you have ever watched a military movie, you'd be familiar with the term, "shell shock." Have you really thought what that means or what someone with shell shock goes through? Well now you can gain a better understanding, since 1980 when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) added PTSD to the third edition of its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III). The PTSD diagnosis has finally filled a vital gap in psychiatric theory and practice not only for veterans but for everyone.

War is a normal part of civilization; and since 1980 PTSD is confirmed to be a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. It is common for our brave men and women who served this Nation especially in a time of war to have symptoms of PTSD which negatively affects their continued service.

Over the years research has shown that service members that suffer from PTSD are eventually kicked out of the service due to minor offenses. These offences could be unreported absence, self-medicating or reckless behavior; all which are minor administrative problems. Service members should be medically evaluated to see if there could have been a mental health condition like PTSD, anxiety, depression that caused the negative behavior. At that point if there is a mental health diagnosis, then there needs to be a medical board and an honorable separation. Unfortunately the Department of Defense is not practicing this behavior; instead they are just separating these service members who served their country honorably with a less than honorable discharge.

The American Legion works hard both at its National office and here at the Department of Minnesota to identify these service members to advocate a service discharge upgrade and get them their entitlements they deserve.

If you believe yours or someone's OTH discharge was due to PTSD, please contact The American Legion Department Service Officer for access to VA benefits.

jwolfsteller@mnlegion.org

Keep in mind the reason we celebrate this day with the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and make Him a part of your Celebration. Please drive safe if you are going to be on the road.

As your Detachment Commander and Vickie, we want to wish each and every one of you a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Ride Planning

Greetings, American Legion Family,

I hope everyone had an enjoyable Thanksgiving with family and friends, next stop Christmas and New Years. I have received a few requests for the Riders to stop and visit during our 2017 ride. July and August seem a long way off, but the Legacy Ride is entering the planning stage. Our first meeting will be announced next month once a location is decided upon. There is a rumor floating around that the Department of Minnesota Riders are looking to raise over \$200,000.00 in 2017.

There are a few Christmas dinners and celebrations coming up. Please do not feel left out in the cold if I don't make it to the one at your post. There are a couple of dates with two or three events at the same time.

With the onset of winter, many Chapters are turning to inside activities to raise funds. If your Chapter is holding such an event, please get it in your District newsletters, posted on web pages and Facebook. Sounds like some are itching for the white stuff so they can get their snowmobiles out, or colder temperatures to go ice fishing. Whatever it is that you are going to do, please do it safely so that as spring rolls around you will be ready to hop on the motorcycle once again.

Fargo VA to host Veterans Town Hall on December 8

The Fargo VA Health Care System will host a Veterans Town Hall and Claims Clinic at the Fargo VA Medical Center in the third floor auditorium on Dec. 8.

The town hall will be held from 5:30-6:30 p.m. and will be hosted by the VA Director Lavonne Liversage.

All veterans and family members are invited. VA health care professionals and benefits experts will be on hand to answer any questions.

The Clinic will be held one hour prior to the town hall at 4:30 p.m.

Veterans can submit claims for benefits at the clinic.

For more information, call the Fargo VA Public Affairs Office at 701-239-3724.

World War I Diary

By Al Zdon

It can be like a detective story, looking at a diary that was created nearly 100 years ago by a Wisconsin man in World War I.

It's a little black book, about 3 and 3/8th inches by 5 and 3/4ths inches. There are no markings on the cover, and the interior pages are not set up for a diary, but are simply blank pages divided up by tiny blue squares.

But it immediately gets interesting. The first two pages and the last two pages have a printed calendar of sorts listing all the saint's days for the year. The calendar, the only printing from the maker of the booklet, is in German.

He may have purchased it in Texas, but it also may have been a gift from back home.

Now how did a young American soldier who wanted to keep a diary end up with one probably made in Germany? After all, we were at war with the Kaiser.

The creator the diary put his name three times on the inside cover and the first page of the diary. The first one reads:

Axel H. Gilbertson
Co. D, 107th Engrs.
American Expeditionary Force
France, 1918.

Below that he wrote:

Axel H. Gilbertson
Galesville, Wis.

Axel's son, Knute Gilbertson of Minnetonka, inherited the diary.

"My father was a quiet man. He was a good father, a good family man. He was reticent, and not a joiner, but he did belong to The American Legion. I don't think he went to a lot of meetings," Knute said.

Axel Gilbertson was born to Mr. and Mrs. John Gilbertson in Holmen, Wisconsin, on Jan. 7, 1889. His father had emigrated from Norway and was a cobbler, house mover and farmer.

Axel was one of 11 children, and he became a carpenter. He was already 28 years old when he joined the Army. His son said it was probable he was in a National Guard unit and might have been called up.

With his carpentry skills, he was assigned to an engineering unit and spent his time overseas building barracks, latrines, bridges, dams, and whatever else the Army needed. It does not appear he ever used a weapon except on guard duty.

He moved to Galesville at some point, and, after the war in 1921, he married his sweetheart Ella, and they had three children.

"When were kids," Knute recalled, "he would let us play with his steel helmet and his leggings. We would wear them around the neighborhood. It was great for kid to wear that stuff. There was a red arrow on the helmet."

Axel was self-employed as a carpenter, struggling to survive during the 1930s Depression. Around 1950 he went to work for an electric company, maintaining their building.

"He was a church member, but he only went about twice a year. He was a great gardener."

Axel Gilbertson died in 1964 at that age of 75.

Back to the diary:

The first entry he made was a complete listing of the

"General Orders of Guard." Probably every sentry had to learn these orders which began with, "1. To take charge of this post and all government property in view."

The diary itself begins after that with the first entry in January, 1918, and continuing through the 46 pages of the book until January of 1919. All the entries are on the right hand pages.

He then starts working through the book again with entries on the left hand pages that go through June, and about halfway through the book, when he finally came home.

The Diary

Gilbertson was in the 32nd Division, and part of the family's collection of his memorabilia is a history book on the Division published in 1920 by the Wisconsin War History Commission.

With use of the book, it becomes easier to track Gilbertson's travels, though he is quite clear about where he was at all times though his entries.

The first entry was:

Sunday, Jan. 14. Left camp MacArthur, 8:30 a.m. Out of Texas, 12 p.m.

The 32nd "Red Arrow" Division was formed from National Guard units in Wisconsin and Michigan. Its roots were in the famous "Iron Brigade" from Wisconsin that fought in the Civil War.

It was activated in July, 1917, at Camp MacArthur near Waco, Texas. It was deemed ready for deployment by the end of the year, and troops began heading for the East Coast on Jan. 2.

The diary shows the division arriving at Camp Merritt in New Jersey, and then going aboard a transport ship.

Feb. 1, cold and windy. Started sailing.

Feb. 4, At 11 a.m., seen big shark. In a bunch storm at night.

Feb. 5. Waves wash over deck.

Feb. 13, Life preservers on all the time. Meet first of convoy at 5 a.m. Seven more followed shortly after.

Feb. 15, First sight of land at 5 a.m. Pulled into harbor of Brest at 11:30. Colder weather.

Feb. 17, Laying in port unloading transport. Off the ship for a little hike. First step in France.

Feb. 21, Traveled in Train, small car. 8 of us packed in together.

The 32nd Division was the sixth American division to join the AEF under General Pershing. Morale took a temporary plunge when the men learned that they would not be heading into combat, but would be a replacement division instead. Their job would be to train and supply troops to other divisions actually in combat. The engineers were taken out of the division and sent to various construction projects throughout the countryside.

Feb. 27, First barracks built by Co. D, 107 Engrs in France at Gaboro near Contay.

March 9, Started work on second barracks at Malverrears.

March 28, Gass drill and instruction.

The engineers built or finished off several more barracks, and as the American army moved on, began tearing down barracks no longer needed.

Axel Gilbertson was a carpenter and a member of the Wisconsin National Guard when the U.S. entered World War I. His diary, though sparse, offers a unique insight into the life of a doughboy overseas.

April 29, Made table and benches in officers barracks at Beauchman. Took bath in afternoon.

May 1, Tore down bath house and moved it to barnyard for infirmary.

May 8, Worked on barn at St. Loup.

May 19, Fine in forenoon, rain in afternoon. Had letters from mother, Elsie, Otto, Ella.

June 10, Started to build a YMCA at the training barracks at Langres.

The engineers were moved by truck and train from here to there. Because of a huge German offensive and a need for troops, the 32nd Division was once again designated a combat division and began to train for trench warfare. The trouble was, the division had already sent 7,000 men and officers to the First Division as replacements. In May, the division occupied the lines in Alsace, which had been part of the German empire, and the division claimed to be the first on German soil.

By June 15, the 107th Engineers finally rejoined the division, which was now up to fighting strength.

June 16, Baseball game between Hdqrs and E Company of 107th Eng. HQ won 17-1.

July 17, Worked on YMCA at training barracks. Stepped on nail. Went to infirmary and had shot in arm.

Aug. 5, Finished YMCA.



Gilbertson was 28 years old when he joined the American Expeditionary Force in France.