



Legionnaire

Volume 96, Number 12

For God and Country

December 2014

Minnesotans named to national Legion committees, panels

Minnesota Legionnaires were named to four chairmanships and two vice chairmanships for this coming year by National Commander Mike Helm of Nebraska.

Serving as chairmen at the national level:

-- Mike Bredeck of Madison will chair the Committee on Youth Education.

-- Chuck Kruger of Byron will be the chair of the Conventional Armed Forces Committee.

-- William Goede of Plainview will chair the National Guard and Reserve Forces Committee.

-- Thomas Mullon of Eagan will chair the Health Administration Committee.

The two vice chairmanships announced included:

-- Peggy Moon of St. Joseph will be a vice chairman of

Continued on Page 7

VA, Congress roll out new Veterans Choice program

By Al Zdon

Are you eligible for VA care, and did you get your Veteran's Choice card yet? You will.

All those who are eligible for VA health care — all nine million nationwide — will receive the Veterans Choice card by sometime in January. Nearly 700,000 eligible veterans have already received their card.

What can you do with the card? The Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 was signed into law in August, and the program began in November.

Essentially the Veterans Choice program, which is temporary, tries to answer the issues that were raised by

the Legion and other veterans groups about long appointment times and long distances from VA facilities.

Two groups of veterans will mainly benefit. One will be those who have appointments longer than 30 days out. The second group are those who live more than 40 miles from a VA hospital or clinic.

Those veterans can use their card to get care from non-VA facilities.

The program will last for three years, or until the money runs out.

The American Legion warned in a recent press release, however, that "the care is not a free pass for unlimited health care from any provider you may choose in the private sector."

Before you can use the card, the VA must verify your eligibility and provide advance authorization. You can't simply use the card to get treatment at your local clinic. It must be pre-approved by the national VA.

In Minnesota, VA operators at the Minneapolis VA Health

Continued on Page 3



But hang on, it's not quite like winning the publisher's lottery

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation

By Tom Newman



Is it possible that Santa, working in cahoots with the United States Federal Government, decided to deliver the holiday season a bit early to Veterans this year?

That's what I asked myself after clumsily unwrapping the official looking envelope marked to my attention from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Contained in the envelope were my new Veterans Choice Cards.

In addition to the card was a letter outlining the Veterans Choice Program and who to call in order to access non-VA healthcare under the eligibility standards and rules of the program.

Although it wasn't the

most comprehensive letter I've ever received outlining a new program of such magnitude, I'll concede it provided all the necessary information to understand the very basics of the program and what it may mean for our Minnesota Joe and Jane Veteran.

It certainly was a better read than the federal regulation itself - which by the way made me feel very sleepy.

But not so fast, Batman. Unfortunately, I happen to be a nervous-nellie and my one bad eye has a frequent tendency to begin twitching uncontrollably when I receive information I believe either too good to be true or is information I judge to be BS. It's a super-

power I guess I've developed somewhere, somehow, over time.

I've learned over the years that in such inevitable instances of learning news "too good to be true" that in most cases it's important to do your homework.

Some years back I had once before received an official looking piece of postal communication. On that particular occasion it was an envelope stamped "URGENT." Contained was my notification from Publishers Clearinghouse declaring me their official winner of over a million dollars in cash and prize.

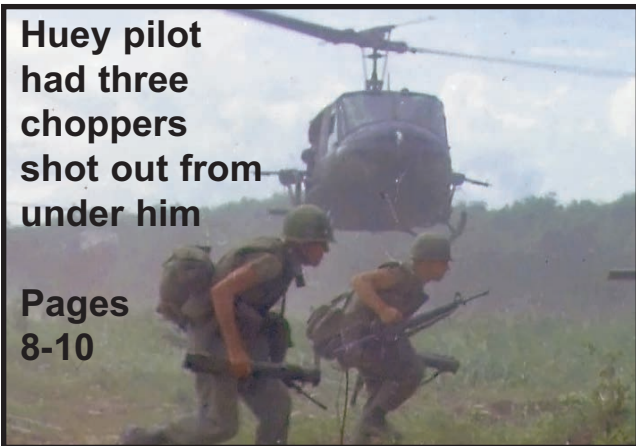
I remember dancing my version of the Irish jig believing my ship had finally arrived - I had hit the big time.

Now I generally don't prefer to revisit disappointing chapters from my early adult life, but let's just say that with the exception of receiving a

Continued on Page 3

Huey pilot had three choppers shot out from under him

Pages 8-10



Past Commander Bob Flaherty, 86

Past Department Commander Bob Flaherty of Forest Lake died Nov. 6, 2014.

Flaherty served as commander in 1988-89, part of a long Legion career spanning over 40 years.

He served as Third District Commander, 1979-80, Department Membership Director, 1982-83, and Department Vice Commander, 1985-86.

He was also commander of his home post, Forest Lake Post 225.



ROBERT FLAHERTY

Continued on Page 5

A Christmas story A SIGN AT BASTOGNE

By Al Zdon

Sgt. Joe Powell hunkered down further in his fox hole.

Above his head, the world was exploding as another barrage of German artillery rocked the ground, tore huge craters in the snowy landscape and shattered the tall pines above.

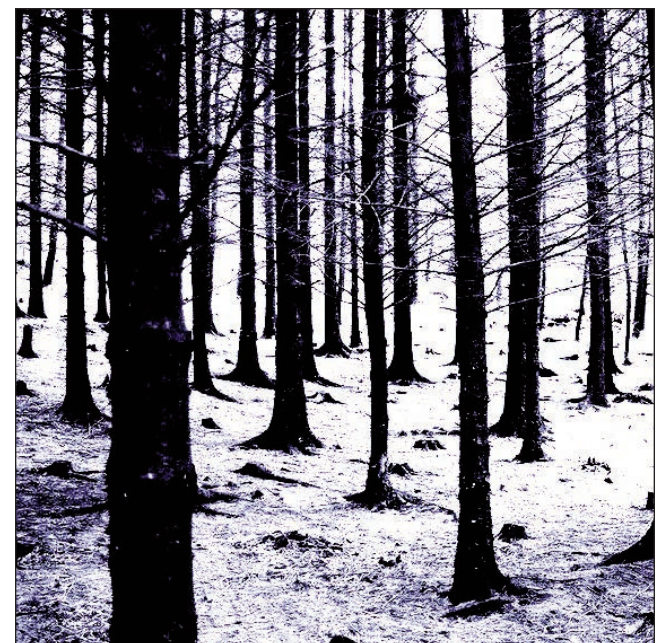
Two days earlier, an 88 shell had exploded among the pines and sent wicked splinters of a tree hurtling down on the troops in their fox holes. One piece, about the size of a baseball bat and sharp as a

razor, had hit his best friend, who was in the same fox hole, in the back. Stan Kaminski was dead before Joe Powell could even extend his hand to him.

He and Kaminski had been best friends for over two years, starting with Airborne training at Camp Taccoa in Georgia. They had trained together, jumped out of airplanes together, and planned what they might do together after the war. Now, Powell couldn't get the memory of those lifeless eyes staring back at him out of his mind.

□□□□

Continued on Page 6



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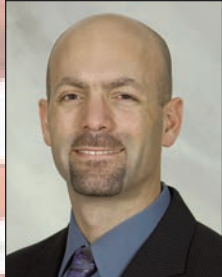
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Help for veterans and families

National Commander's Tour slate revealed

The National Commander's Tour schedule has been announced for 2015. The tour will take place across the state from Feb. 2-5.

National Commander Mike Helm of Nebraska will be visiting 12 posts in four days in a tour that crosses both northern and southern Minnesota.

Helm was elected at the national convention held this year in Charlotte.

The meetings at the posts will include breakfast, lunch or dinner. The dinner meetings will be preceded by a 5 p.m. social hour.

Traveling with the national commander will be Department Commander Peggy Moon, Department Membership Director Pat Logan, and Department Adjutant Randy Tesdahl.

All posts that are at goal by the time of the visit will receive a certificate and have their picture taken with the national commander. Those pictures will appear in the Minnesota Legionnaire.

Those who plan to attend should make reservations with the hosting post. All details about the meal and its cost are being handled by the local post.


The place, time and contact information are listed below.

- The schedule includes:
- Monday, Feb. 2**
 -- Moorhead Post 21, 8 a.m.; Delye Ishaug, 701-361-3652.
 -- Detroit Lakes Post 15, noon; 218-234-7315, Eric Wilkens.
 - Tuesday, Feb. 3**
 -- Walker Post 134, 6 p.m., 218-547-1011, Tony.
 -- Grand Rapids Post 60, 8 a.m., 218-326-9141.
 -- Brainerd Post 255, noon, 218-829-2249.

- North Branch Post 85, 6 p.m., 651-674-6100.
- Wednesday, Feb. 4**
 -- Rosetown Post 542, 8 a.m., 651-483-3535, Tasha.
 -- Le Center Post 108,

- noon, 507-357-4787.
- New Ulm Post 132, 6 p.m., 507-354-4016.
- Thursday, Feb. 5**
 -- Redwood Falls Post 38; 8 a.m., 507-641-5406, Jerry Ludwig.

- St. Peter Post 37, noon, TBA.
- Apple Valley Post 1776, 6 p.m., 952-431-1776, Joan.

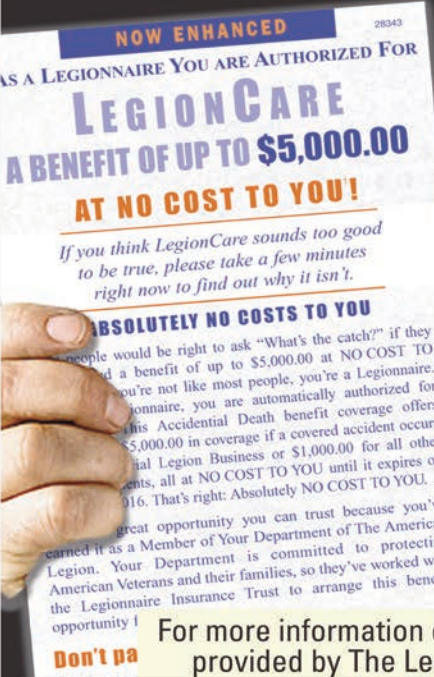


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Tom Newman: Let's look at the fine print of Veterans Choice

Continued from Page 1

very handsome set of emblazoned steel Szechwan stake knives with authentic high polish bamboo grips, and which were in fact very nice, the really big cash prize I had expected didn't come to fruition like expected.

When I had attempted to complain it was eventually demonstrated to me that I had in fact been negligent of having not read the fine print next to my signature block.

So, concerning Veterans Choice - What if anything is included in some of the fine print that you should be aware? In essence, all Veterans currently enrolled in the VA Healthcare System (VHA) prior to 1 August 2014 as well as any new enrollees in the VA Healthcare System, provided this particular group are Combat Veterans, will be receiving the new Veteran Choice Card.

As it's a possibility that all currently enrolled Veterans as described above could at some point be eligible for Veterans Choice, as a result all Veterans will receive the cards.

The cards are part of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act (VACAA) of 2014. VACAA is intended to accomplish several things, which include affording Veterans with the opportunity to access non VA Healthcare services closer to a Veterans home during instances when accessibility or other timeliness access to care standards can't be met using traditional VA Healthcare services.

Two categories of Veterans will be eligible for Veterans Choice. First, I'll explain the category of Veteran I'll refer to as group A. Group A Veteran will be determined eligible for Choice based simply on residing greater than 40 miles from a VA Healthcare System hospital or clinic, as calculated by straight line distances.

Under Veteran Choice, Group A Veterans will simply need to call the 1-800 phone number listed on the Choice card in order to schedule their medical care by a non VA provider closer to home. The 1-800 number is managed by a VA Contracted Third Party Administrator (TPA). In addition to the third party administrator (TPA) authorizing care for group A Veterans they will also be responsible for making a determination of the medical necessity for any episode of care appointments requested by the Veteran.

Veterans will only be eligible to receive the health care services offered all other Veterans as described within the VA Healthcare Benefits Package - which shouldn't be stressed about as it's fairly comprehensive.

The second category of Veterans I'll refer to as group B Veterans. Group B Veterans are those who can't get care from within the VA Healthcare System within 30 days of either the clinically indicated date (CID) assigned them by their VA doctor or in some other instances can't receive timely access to VA Healthcare within 30 days of a Veterans desired appointment date.

Theoretically you could live directly across the street from a VA Medical Center and at some point be found eligible for Veteran Choice as a group B Veteran. As an example, if Veteran B sees their urologist and the doc concludes that the Veteran is to return to be seen in four months for follow up care - the Veteran would be assigned a clinically indicated date (CID) which is approximately 120 days out.

If that Veteran can't be seen until 130 days out, then that Veteran would be notified by the VA and placed on the official Veteran Choice List (VCL). The VCL is uploaded daily to the TPA. After Veteran B is notified by the VA as being approved for Veterans Choice it's at that time the Veteran would be responsible for making a "Choice".

Veteran B would contact the TPA (TPA determines that the Veteran has been placed on VCL and is therefore authorized

care by the VA). Veteran B can either schedule their appointment by contacting the TPA for scheduling care close to home and in the community or will "choose" to wait to receive care from within the VA despite the delay in doing so.

In some cases a Veteran may find that despite the delay accessing VA Healthcare and thereby prompting a Veterans eligibility for Veterans Choice - the VA is still capable of seeing you at a much earlier date than can be found in the community.

VACAA requires by law that Veterans disclose other healthcare insurance held. Not doing so will disqualify you from using the program as the TPA will also be the responsible party for processing insurance claims.

It's been stated that qualifying insurance held by the Veteran, with the exception of Tricare & Medicare, will be billed for healthcare costs associated to any condition being treated which is not service connected.

It's important for Veterans to realize that a Veteran may have medical billing liability depending on the nature of their health insurance. Here are a few examples provided in the VA training I attended. *Veteran is seen for a specialty appointment.

The visit is \$250 and the Medicare Rate is \$250 for the care provided. If the Veteran has no other health insurance the total cost assumed by the VA is \$250. The total charges to the Veteran would be \$50 (Includes VA copayment and insurance cost share). In another example, Veteran receives the same care mentioned above, but the Veterans health insurance denies the claim.

In this case the total cost to the VA is \$250 and the total charges to the Veteran is \$50 (VA Copayment Rate). In another example, Veteran receives the same care mentioned above, Veterans insurance pays the medical bill in full, VA has \$0 cost, and the Veteran has \$0 cost as the Veterans VA copayment is offset by insurance.

In the last example, Veterans health insurance requires \$250 of outpatient deductible applied to the claim and therefore insurance pays nothing. Total cost to the VA is \$250 and the Veteran's liability is \$50 for the VA copayment.

I'll disclose that what I've written in this article concerning the Veteran Choice program is in no way intended to be a complete or comprehensive assessment for how this program will/will not impact those Veterans who "choose" to utilize Veteran Choice.

I believe this program has some potential to positively impact certain Veterans, perhaps none more so than our Veterans impacted by hefty traveling distances which make accessing VA Healthcare impractical.

Its simply unfortunate it may likely remain the case that for many of our Veterans who live in our more rural areas of Minnesota, they may still find difficulty accessing quality care close to home.

It's simply a fact that medical hospitals and clinics, especially those with high skilled medical specialist, tend most often to locate themselves within larger metro and suburban population centers. Although Veterans having a "choice" is an awfully good thing - It should be promoted that a Veteran making a choice should include a strong encouragement for our Veterans to continue "choosing" the VA Healthcare System designed specifically for what we need it to be.

I encourage you to read more about this program -- you may do so at: www.va.gov/opa/choiceact

tnewman@mnlegion.org

Did you get your card yet?

Continued from Page 1

Care System have been trained to refer veterans to the national Choice Act number to verify eligibility. That number is 1-866-606-8198.

In addition, there will be eligibility staff located in the Minneapolis VA Medical Center on the first floor atrium from 7:30 to 4:30 p.m. to answer veterans questions. And, each Community Based Outpatient Clinic in the state will have a "champion" who is prepared to answer questions.

In St. Cloud, staff has been trained to answer veterans' questions about Veterans Choice, but Public Affairs Officer Barry Shelton pointed out that this is a national program and the administration of the program is being handled by third-party health care companies.

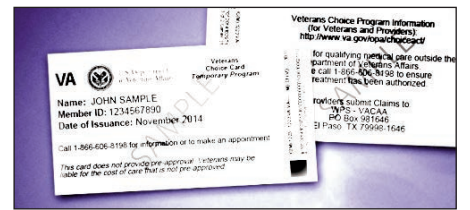
Shelton also noted that as veterans make their health care choices, "the local VA medical center is a choice as well."

Shelton said the St. Cloud system held a meeting with county veterans service officers and others recently to help ramp up for Veterans Choice.

The American Legion also pointed out that Medicare, Medicaid and TRICARE are not approved plans under the Veterans Choice program, and if a veteran uses these plan instead of the Veterans Choice card, he or she will be liable for any out-of-pocket expenses.

Veterans are also cautioned not to throw away their regular VA identification card. The Veterans Choice card does not replace it.

While the primary users of Veterans Choice immediately will be those who live outside the 40 mile limit or who have appointments of more than 30



days out, the card is being sent to all VA enrollees because there may come a time in the future when they might qualify for Veterans Choice.

Even before the roll out of the Veterans Choice program, the VA had options to purchase non-VA care for some veterans. That program is still in place, and was enhanced by the Veterans Choice Act.

The 40-mile limit will be determined by a straight line measurement from the veteran's residence to the nearest VA facility. It does not matter whether or not that facility provides the exact care the veteran needs.

When veterans call to verify their eligibility, they will be asked to provide information what other health insurance they have. If a veteran does not receive approval before he or she uses the card, they may be responsible for all or some of the expense incurred.

The act provides \$10 billion for this increased access to non-VA care. About \$500 million would be spent on hiring more nurses and doctors to work for the VA.

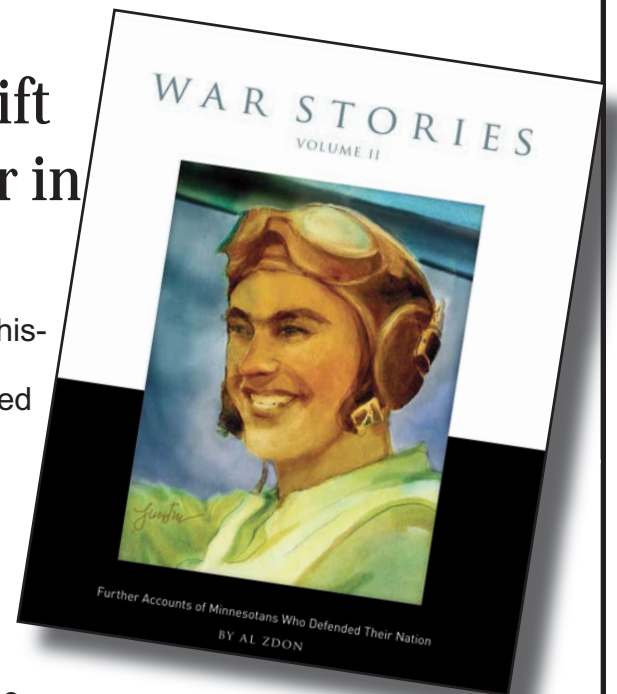
Other provisions of the bill include authorization for the Secretary of the VA to fire top executives, money to build 26 new facilities, and a requirement that colleges and universities offer veterans the in-state tuition rate.

Each card that is sent out will come with a letter explaining the new benefits.

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COMMANDER'S COLUMN

By Peggy Moon



Happy December.

It seems like winter arrived with a loud bang, and with very little notice. We are all learning how to drive again in this messy slush. As I drive around this state, the main roads seem to be in good shape, however, the side roads are miserable. It reminds me of the great Halloween storm where your hubcaps would travel down the road faster than the car.

Last month we celebrated Veterans Day, and I hope you all had the opportunity to share a meal and friendship with the other veterans in your community. Carl and I attended the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Ceremony, and it was wonderful. We listened to addresses by Commissioner Larry Shelito, Senator Amy Klobuchar, Senator Al Franken, and Representative Betty McCullum. We also heard a fantastic performance by the Red Bull band, and witnessed approximately 15 new enlistees take their oath of office. We also attended the Walker Post that evening, who, once again, did a fantastic job. Thank you. It was a memorable day.

While we were there, we stopped in at Northern Lights Casino outside of Walker and signed the contract for my testimonial. It is scheduled for Saturday, March 21, 2015. A block of rooms will be available under The American Legion. We have some special entertainment planned, and it should be a fun evening. I know there are other events planned that day, but it was the only slot available. I hope most of you can make it.

We received the news this month that yet again, another 700 members of the Minnesota National Guard will be

deployed this spring to West Africa to assist with the Ebola outbreak. That means it is up to us to spring into action, again, to reassure them we are here to help their families in whatever way we can during their absence. Stop by your local Armory, and make it known that The American Legion is here to help in any way possible.

Since we are entering the last month of 2014, how is your Post doing on membership? Anyone who has not paid their 2015 dues will no longer be an active member. Have you personally contacted them? Not only do we need their voice and support, but our troops need their assistance as well. District membership teams should be ready to support any Post that is below goal. Visit them, and help them make those calls. The 10th District will be doing a revitalization the first week in December. They could also use some help, and it will give your own teams the opportunity to learn some new tools to help with your own district membership programs. Let's work together to keep Minnesota on top!

Due to the death of my father, Elmer Kriesel, I missed the membership dinner at Royalton, and also the 95th Anniversary Dinner of The Hellenic Post. Thank you for your understanding. On a personal note, thank you to everyone for the outpouring of cards and condolences. It was heartwarming to see so many of you at his memorial service. He was a wonderful man, and I miss him. During the last month, he was unable to travel, but I know he is with me now as I navigate my way around the state. I can actually feel his strong, guiding presence. Thanks, Dad. By the way, if you're keeping track, I just passed 14,000 miles on the odometer. Mid-Winters start in January.

In closing, Carl and I wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and a safe, joyous New Year. As we pause to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, it is with that same excitement and anticipation that we await new life in our own family. Our daughter, Angie, is scheduled to give birth December 1, if the little bundle of joy doesn't arrive earlier, and, after this month, I am looking forward to holding a new baby. Since we know this one is a girl, it is doubtful they will name her Elmer -- but there is a chance for an Ellie -- so we'll just have to wait and see.

Don't forget to say a prayer for all those serving in various locations around the world. They're missing this wonderful holiday at home so that we are free to celebrate with our own families. God bless them.

Until next month.....

Chaplain's Corner

By Steve Klinkner



It's hard to believe we are already into the month of December and the Holidays are here to be with family and friends.

I received a call from my brother on Sunday informing us that his son, who is a member of Madelia Legion Post 19, is among the 698 soldiers with the 34th Red Bull Infantry Division to be deployed to Monrovia, Liberia, to assist with the Ebola mission. Holidays are always tough on families when they receive such news. If you know of a family that has a loved one that will be deployed and in need of help, contact the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon group for assistance.

I would like to congratulate Alberta Marth Wohlfeil of New Ulm Post 132, 2nd District, who will be inducted into the MN American Legion Hall of Fame. The award was announced at the Department Fall Conference. Congratulations, Bert, on this great achievement.

And here we are, the Season of Advent when Joseph and Mary were packing their donkey, sneaking out of town and traveling through the desert on their way to Egypt. They probably didn't feel exceptionally heroic. They didn't make any headlines at midnight by their simple acts of faith and love on Christmas Day. Today God is reminding us that he wants us to do the same thing in our lives. When you get stuck in traffic on the way to work, when you are having trouble paying the bills and keeping food on the table, when an unforeseen crisis wakes you up at midnight and demands immediate action, and when suffering takes up residence in your homes, these are not just life's accidents to be endured and ignored. God is present in them; God is acting through them. And when we struggle to stay faithful to Him in the middle of it, to live thru all of our tasks, responsibilities, and challenges as Christ would want us to live, we can be sure that through God's grace working in our souls, we are doing our part to save the world. God is saving the world through all of us as long as Christ is at the Center of our Hearts, our Families, our Dreams and our Country.

I often hear people saying, especially as we get closer to Christmas, "Well it is just one thing after another." In reality that is a pretty good description of life, isn't it? We never do stay in one place. We never stay the same, we just get through one thing and no sooner do we say "Whew, I'm glad that is over," and then something else happens.

I read in an old magazine a story about two elderly ladies both over 80 years old. They were living on a farm. It was a dumpy farm. In fact, it was the dumpiest farm you had ever seen. The chicken coop was falling down. The barn was falling down, the rusted machinery was falling apart and the elderly ladies were falling apart. But they were tough as nails. They had weathered every storm for the past sixty years. Well, it so happened that a nephew came to visit them one day from the big city and he took out his new ipad and took a picture of his weathered aunts, with the barn and the chicken coop and the rusted machinery in the background. The aunts stood there, straight and stiff for the picture. The nephew later sent them a copy of the picture and the old aunts loved it. They decided to use it for their Christmas card and at the top of their picture they put the words "MERRY CHRISTMAS" in bold letters. At the bottom of the picture in bold black letters were the words: "God is with us in this mess."

Merry Christmas to all.

Editorial

Veteran's Choice Act

In response to the VA's problems with scheduling and dealing with claims, the Congress in August came up with a comprehensive bill to deal with some of the problems.

Part of the bill is the Veteran's Choice Card which every veteran who's enrolled in the VA will receive by January.

It's not a get out of jail free card, but it will help two groups of veterans who's ability to get VA care has been a problem.

The first group are those veterans who live in the hinterlands. Sometimes the price for living in God's Country is that you are far away from services. Many veterans in Minnesota live a considerable distance from a VA facility. Those veterans, who live more than 40 miles from a VA

hospital or clinic, will now be able to use the card to get care at a local clinic or hospital of their choice.

The second group will be those who cannot get an appointment within 30 days of what their doctor thinks is proper. For instance, if a doctor wants to see you in 90 days, and no appointment is available for more than 120 days, you're eligible.

Both these circumstances must be pre-approved, though. You cannot act on your own. And it should be remembered that this is a temporary program, lasting for three years or until the money runs out.

For a few, this will be a great program allowing them to get care closer to home or to get medical treatment on a more timely basis. It's not a cure-all, but there are veterans who will greatly benefit.

Mail Call

Destroyer action

To the Editor:

It was with great interest that I read the story about Lee Nordgren in the October issue of the Minnesota Legionnaire. You see, that was our first "action" in the Pacific.

Prior to this, we, the Destroyer USS Benson, DD 421, had been deployed in the Atlantic Theater. After the invasion of Africa at Casablanca, we entered the Mediterranean and took part in the invasion of Sicily at Gela, and later in Itala at Salerno and in southern France at St. Tropez.

Toward early summer, German air and submarine power were just about nil, so we were ordered to the Pacific.

When we were off the coast of the Carolinas, Germany surrendered. We sailed through the Panama Canal to Pearl Harbor where we were assigned to a carrier group, including the Cowpens on which Nordgren was assigned.

It was "booked" as a 500-plane raid on Wake Island as we passed by and headed on to the Philippines.

The USS Benson went on to convoy the occupation troops into Yokohama Harbor, and on Sept. 2, we were anchored astern of the USS Missouri as the Japanese signed the surrender.

Former chief gunner's mate
Kenneth R. Felt Shevlin

SAL Deer Hunt

To the Editor:

The 2014 John Zgoda Memorial Disabled Deer Hunt on Oct. 3-5, solely sponsored by the Sons of The American

Legion, Detachment of Minnesota, was another success story.

The four hunters enjoyed the opportunity to hunt deer this year at Legionville with all the hunters seeing deer. We harvested three deer with the four hunters. The four were from different Legion districts and represented the 3rd, 4th, 6th and the 10th districts. They were all happy that they were chosen for the hunt. They all commented on the special treatment, camaraderie and fun memories they will have the rest of their lives.

Our hunt would not have been a great success without Commanders Peggy Moon and Dennis Henkemeyer adding to the deer camp camaraderie for both commanders taking the time to be at our hunt. Thank you also to Randy Tesdahl, Department Adjutant and SAL North Advisor, Walt Folendorf, for helping to make it a success.

The success of the hunt always relies on our volunteers. Starting the weekend of the American Legion Riders Romp we thank Tom Kunkel, Greg Teigland, Steve Sullivan and Daryl Rossberg. Also helping with the hunt were Cal Van Horn, Joe Lembeke, Doug Handley, Justin Borden, Lee Borden, Steve Bilderback, Dave Vulcan and Bill Stein. Thanks to all of you that made the 2014 hunt a great success.

The Sons of The American Legion would also like to thank the Legionville Board of Directors for their continued support of this event. Also thank you to Roy Kruger for all his work at the camp to make this event possible.

Bill Stein
Co-chair John Zgoda Memorial Disabled Deer Hunt
Co-Chairs - **Dave Vulcan and Steve Bilderback**

Legionnaire

The Minnesota Official Publication of and Owned Exclusively by The American Legion, Department of Minnesota

Al Zdon, Editor

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What's Happening

Calendars are out

The 2015 Minnesota American Legion official calendar has been mailed to the membership. The company that produces and mails the calendar does not send them to every member, but instead sends them to members who have made contributions in the past plus a sampling of the entire membership. In all, 35,000 calendars are sent.

If you have not received a calendar and would like to, please contact Jennifer Kelley at Department Headquarters, 866-259-9163.

The calendar contains the photo winners from veterans in this year's calendar contest. The photos were taken while veterans were serving.

Rally is moved

The Dec. 6 Pearl Harbor Rally has been moved from Apple Valley to Montgomery Post 79.

The membership turn-in will be from 3-4:30 p.m. and dinner will be at 5.

Bowling Tournament

The 2015 Minnesota American Legion Bowling Tournament will take place from February through April at the Brunswick Zone XL in Brooklyn Park. The 68th tourney is being sponsored by Osseo/Maple Grove Post 172.

There is a \$22 entry fee per event. There is also an all events category available for \$2 per person.

Entries and fees for reserved shifts must be post-marked by the end of the year. For information or to register, contact John Torma, 7724 82nd Ave. N., Brooklyn Park, MN 55445. Cell: 612-749-3704. E-mail: johntorma@aol.com.

Division I is for Legion competition with at least one Legion member per team. Division II is for Auxiliary with four Auxiliary members per team. The tourney is open to all Legion members and all SAL member who are over 18.

There will be handicap and scratch brackets, kangaroo bracket and a 30 Clean Jackpot.

Legion Day at Gophers

The annual American Legion Family Day at the Gophers Mens Basketball will be held Friday, Dec. 19, in a game vs.

the University of Seattle.

Discount tickets are available by contacting the Gopher Ticket office by phone, Steve Walter, 612-626-1592. Or you can purchase the tickets online by going to the Minnesota American Legion website, mnlegion.org, and clicking on "Discount Gopher Basketball Tickets."

The official Minnesota Color Guard from the Third District will do the colors before the game.

Operation Homefront

The Operation Homefront holiday toy distribution will be held Sunday, Dec. 7, at Fort Snelling, 506 Roeder Circle, St. Paul, 55111. Eligible recipients include deployed military, wounded, active duty personnel, active and inactive Guard and Reserves, all ranks. Priority is given to E-1 through E-6.

Registration is required and may be done at the website: www.events.OperationHomefront.net.

Upcoming Department events

The Department Convention Corporation has announced the schedule of events for upcoming conventions and fall conferences.

Conventions will be held at: Redwood Falls, 2015; Rochester, 2016; open, 2017; Rochester, 2018.

Fall Conferences will be held at: Pequot Lakes, 2015; Marshall, 2016; Willmar, 2017; open, 2018.

The convention this coming year will be held from July 16-18, and the Fall Conference will be held Oct. 23-24.

Snowmobile Ride

The 7th annual snowmobile ride, sponsored by MSEAF and MnUSA will be held Saturday, Jan. 10, at Silver Bay. All veterans are welcome to join, and those who do not have sleds, snowmobiles and gear will be furnished.

Pre-registration is required. Contact the Minnesota Snowmobilers Association at 866-811-7669 or email: veteransride@mnsnowmobiler.org or go to the website: www.mnvetsnowmobileride.org.

Legal Clinics

There will be drop in legal clinics in several locations, sponsored by the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans. The clinics offer help on housing, employment, benefits, wills, debt collection, and family law.

Clinics include:

-- Dec. 9, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the VA Medical Center in Minneapolis, co-sponsored by Fredrikson Law.

-- Dec. 16, 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center, co-sponsored by LSC.

-- A legal consultation session will be held at Montevideo CBOC from noon-2 p.m. on the third Friday of each month. Call 320-403-1051 for an appointment.

For more information, contact Sara Sommarstrom at 651-224-0292.

Round Tables

The Scott Hosier Roundtable in Rochester will meet Dec. 8, at 7 p.m. and the program will be "Liverpool, England in WWII." There will be theater and singing. Admission is \$5 and the location is the Autumn Ridge Church.

The World War II History Round Table at Fort Snelling History Center will meet Thursday, Dec. 11, with the program "Christmas at Bastogne." Leo Barron and Don Cygan, authors of "No Silent Night" and veterans will explore a turning-point battle in the Battle of the Bulge. Admission is \$5.

Town Hall Meetings

A town hall meeting will be held for veterans in Rochester on Thursday, Dec. 11, at the National Guard Armory in Rochester. Another will be held Wednesday, Dec. 10, at the Monticello American Legion Post 260 on Elm Street in Monticello. Both meetings are at 5 p.m.

The town halls will provide veterans with a chance to express their concerns and hear from VA staff. The Monticello meeting will be staffed by St. Cloud VA staff, and the Rochester meeting will be staffed by the Minneapolis VA officials.

In the future, Town Hall meeting are being slated for Alexandria, Montevideo and Brainerd.

Taps

Breth, Reinhard, 87, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 26, 2014. He was a member of Upsala Post 350.

Jensen, Wayne D., 70, Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 15, 2014. He was a member of Hopkins Post 320.

Nash, Eric, 57, Navy veteran of the Persian Gulf War, died Oct. 27, 2014. He retired after 22 years as a chief petty officer on nuclear submarines. He was a member of Park Rapids Post 212.

Poeppel, Joseph, 85, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 25, 2014. He was a member of Little Falls Post 46.

Hamersly, Winston C., 89, Navy veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 17, 2014. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 56.

Wright, Ethmer E., 88, Army veteran of World War II, died Oct. 5, 2014. He was a past commander of Albert Lea Post 56.

Lovin, Eugene, 84, Navy veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 1, 2014. He was a radio operator on the USS Hunt. He was a member of Park Rapids Post 212.

Norby, Loren C., 87, Navy veteran of World War II, died Oct. 28, 2014. He was a member of Mora Post 201.

Kroll, George J., 83, Navy veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 3, 2014. He was a member of Little Falls Post 46.

Hockert, Alfred, 94, Army Air Corps veteran of World War II, died Nov. 3, 2014. He was a member of Cold Spring Post 455.

McNulty, Leo B., 90, Army veteran of World War II, died Nov. 5, 2014. He was wounded in the war. He was a 72-year member of Park Rapids Post 212.

Reiss, Darrell Eugene, 72, Navy veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 15, 2014. He served on the USS Northampton, CC1, President Kennedy's flagship. He was a member of Rochester Post 92.

Gylfee, Robert, 83, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 8, 2014. He was a member of Cold Spring Post 455.

Kriesel, Elmer W., 88, Army veteran of World War II, died Oct. 29, 2014. He was a member of Zimmerman Post 560. He was the father of Department Commander Peggy Moon.

Girard, Kenneth, 89, Army veteran of World War II, died Oct. 14, 2014. He was a member of the Rainbow Division. He was a member of Tri-City Post 513.

Tobias, Norman, 90, Army Air Corps veteran of World War II, died Nov. 9, 2014. He was a member of Park Rapids

Post 212.

Vokes, Wallace, 90, Army Air Corps veteran of World War II, died Nov. 11, 2014. He was a ball turret gunner on a B-17. He was a member of Park Rapids Post 212.

Erdmann, Elroy H., 78, Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 16, 2014. He served 25 years in the Air Force. He helped found the Legion Children's Fishing Contest. He was a member of Hackensack Post 202.

Hanna, Lewis Edward, 86, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Nov. 16, 2014. He had a 21-year Army career and served in Germany, Vietnam and Japan. He was a member of Lanesboro Post 40.

Welsh, Walter, 72, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 31, 2014. He was a member of Eyota Post 551.

Burmeister, Albert D. "Abbie," 81, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 13, 2014. He served in Alaska. He was a member of Lakefield Post 4.

Keller, Jack D., 88, Army veteran of World War II, died Oct. 7, 2014. He served in Europe. He was a member of Alexandria Post 87.

Gross, Lloyd, 95, Army veteran of World War II, died Oct. 26, 2014. He was wounded during the war. He was a member of Pierz Post 341.

Torborg, Alfred, 85, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 5, 2014. He was a member of St. Joseph Post 328.

Reischl, Richard J., 70, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 31, 2014. He was a member of St. Joseph Post 328.

Phinney, Norma, 92, Navy veteran of World War II, died Oct. 6, 2014. She was a pharmacist mate second class. She was a member of Cloquet Post 262.

Klaphake, James L., 69, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 15, 2014. He was a member of St. Joseph Post 328.

Helgemoe, Leonard Alan "Skip," 86, Navy veteran of World War II, died Oct. 7, 2014. He served in the Pacific. He was a member of Rochester Post 92.

Hanneman, Donn C., 88, Navy veteran of World War II, died Oct. 2, 2014. He served in the Pacific. He was a member of Rochester Post 92.

Holland, Joseph, 88, Navy veteran of World War II, died Oct. 6, 2014. He was a ship's cook aboard LST 1029. He was a member of Rochester Post 92.

Matson, James T., 76, Army National Guard veteran of the Vietnam War, died Oct. 16, 2014. He was a member of Thief River Falls Post 117.

Skluzacek, Norbert John, 84, Army veteran of the

Korean War, died Oct. 19, 2014. He was a past commander of Lonsdale Post 586.

Bies, Richard E., 86, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 12, 2014. He was a member of Pequot Lakes Post 49.

Gasow, Alexander O., 88, Army veteran of World War II, died Oct. 18, 2014. He was a chauffeur for a general and a mechanic. He was a member of Gaylord Post 433.

Sward, Ray, 86, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Oct. 2, 2014. He served in Korea. He was a member of Mora Post 201.

Anderson, Herbert, 85, Marine Corps veteran of the Korean War, died Nov. 18, 2014. He was a member of the Little Falls Post 46.

Skogquist, Robert, 91, Marine veteran of World War II, died Oct. 24, 2014. He served in the Pacific. He was a past commander of Falldin Post 555. He also served as Fifth District Adjutant.

Bob Flaherty

Continued from Page 1

Flaherty was a veteran of the Korean War.

He was survived by his wife, Joan, four children, 22 grand children and five great grandchildren.

"He was passionate about the Legion and a great teacher," Past National Commander Dan Ludwig said.

Ludwig noted that several times in the 80s and 90s, he and Flaherty held district or department level positions at the same time.

"Before Bob Flaherty, the Third District was kind of a ho-hum district. He brought the district from obscurity into a position of respectability and leadership."

"If you approached him

about anything, he would enthusiastically give you the time you needed."

Ludwig said Flaherty was commander when the Brain Science campaign topped the \$1 million goal.

Past Department Commander Lloyd Ricker said, "He followed me as commander, and he was a very good commander."

"Not a lot of people realize that Bob started the Minnesota American Legion Foundation. He also had a hand in the old Minnesota Legion College," Ricker said.

"And except for maybe Don Miller, Bob Flaherty was the best at parliamentary procedure. He know the Legion and he knew parliamentary procedure."

A Christmas Story: A Sign at Bastogne

The paratroopers had been in this group of trees for seven days, holding the line against the German soldiers who were encamped in the woods nearby. A wide clearing separated the enemies.

The Battle of the Bulge had begun on Dec. 16, 1944, when the German tanks and soldiers had ripped through the American lines in a long line, mainly in Belgium. Powell's airborne division had been resting in France, following a tough time in the Netherlands for Operation Market Garden, when the offensive began.

The men had been loaded into open air trucks without enough winter clothing and without enough ammunition. The paratroopers were considered America's best fighters, and it was their job to protect the encircled Bastogne. If the Belgian town fell, the German advance would have control of a vital transportation junction.

Now, it was Christmas Eve. Powell felt the ground around him shake. He made himself as small in the hole as he could.

A tree-burst not more than 30 feet away sent a shower of splinters, large and small, down upon him.

Powell vaulted out of the hole. As the shells continued to rain down on the American position, Powell stood on the edge of the fox hole, waved his fist at the sky and yelled, "Come and get me! You killed Ski, you might as well kill me. Come on, you bastards, drop one right here!"

Troopers in adjacent foxholes yelled at Powell to get back in his hole, but he continued to rant at the sky.

And then the shelling stopped. The silence was deafening.

Powell stood there, shaking. He was soon joined by several of his comrades. "Hey, buddy, what's going on? What happened, Joe? You've got to hang in there. Don't let those Krauts get to you. That's not what Ski would have wanted."

The little knot of men around Powell soon parted to allow Lt. Ben Greaves to approach.

"What's going on soldier?" Greaves asked, putting his arm on Powell's shoulder. "You trying to kill yourself?"

"No, sir," said Powell. "Well, I'm not sure. Maybe I was. They killed Ski, they might as well blow me up too."

The lieutenant looked at Powell for a few moments. "Come with me, sergeant. There's somebody I want you to talk to." Greaves grabbed Powell by the arm and led him toward the rear. "You know what you just did could get you a ticket to the hospital. They call it battle fatigue. You could sit in a ward with the rest of the wackos."

"But you're one of my best guys, Powell. You're a real leader in this company, both you and Kaminski. The new guys need your help. So I'm going to give you a chance to redeem yourself, but you've got to see my friend."

The lieutenant put Powell in a Jeep and told the driver. Take this man to headquarters. He wants to see Captain Peters.

"Wait a minute, sir," protested Powell. "I don't want to see no damn chaplain."

"Okay, fine," said Greaves, turning to the driver. "Then just take this man to the field hospital and tell them that he was last seen standing on the edge of his foxhole during an artillery barrage, yelling and shaking his fist at the sky."

"Okay, wait," said Powell. "I'll do whatever you say, sir."

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The chaplain's office was in an abandoned farmhouse. Powell was told to wait outside until the chaplain was ready. He stamped his feet on the snowy ground to stay warm as he waited. Finally, an aide showed him in.

Captain Peters was a man in his early 40s, with a touch of gray in his hair. He rose from his desk and greeted Powell with a warm handshake. "Have a seat. I just read a note from your company commander. He thinks we should have a heart to heart. Apparently he doesn't approve of his sergeants leaving their foxholes at inappropriate times."

The chaplain smiled. "I understand you were close to Sgt. Kaminski," the chaplain inquired.

"Yes, sir. He was my best friend."

"Well, I knew Kaminski pretty well too. In fact, I was just writing a letter to his parents. It's the worst part of my job. Kaminski was a great guy, and he rarely missed mass if he could make it."

"Yes, sir, I know that."

The chaplain stared at Powell for a long second. "Tell me son, are you a Christian?"

"Yes, sir. Well at least I was raised that way. I'm not so sure anymore. How could God allow this war? How could he let the best guys get killed? We lost three guys in our platoon in the last three days. I've known those guys forever, and then they're blown up. The shelling never stops. I don't know what I am anymore."

"You know what they say, Powell. There are no atheists in fox holes."

"Well I don't know, sir. I don't see God making things any better."

"Yes, I understand that, son. Well, let me ask a dumb question, and I think you know the answer. Do you think

Stan Kaminski would want you to do something foolish that could get you killed?"

Powell paused. "No, sir, I don't suppose so."

Chaplain Peters looked at Powell. "I've got a problem here, sergeant. What if I send you back to the front and you do some other looney tunes stuff? What if I tell Lt. Greaves that we had our little chat and you're okay and then you do something stupid and get killed? What if I have to write your parents a letter? That would make me both very sad and very angry."

Powell shuffled in his chair. "I don't know what to tell you sir. Maybe I can't take it anymore. Maybe I have that battle fatigue or whatever the lieutenant called it. Maybe the next time the shelling starts I'll climb up in one of those trees. Maybe I don't think God is in charge around here. Why should I?"

Powell was visibly agitated. "What are you going to tell me, padre? That everything's going to be all right? That God will provide? My buddy just died in my arms. Where was God? Where was his mercy and goodness? Why should I trust in God?"

The chaplain stood up and walked around his desk. He sat down on a corner of it, and took a few breaths.

"Son, if I was you, I'd probably feel the same way. I can't explain why your friend got killed. I can't explain why the shelling never stops. I can't guarantee that you won't lose another buddy tomorrow."

"But you know what? Tomorrow is Christmas. I know that doesn't mean a great deal in the midst of this hell on earth, but you know what happened on Christmas? God sent his son down to save us. God became one of us so that we could fix this world and find a little heaven on earth. Well, we haven't done it yet."

"But we've all got to keep the faith, sergeant. We keep the faith not just to honor God, but to honor our friends. I'm telling you without a doubt, it's what Kaminski would have wanted."

Powell didn't look convinced. "I know what you're saying, padre. I know we've got to carry on. But it's just been so unrelenting. It never gets better, it only gets worse. Sometimes I think if I could just see one little sign of God's grace, I could get my hope back again. But that doesn't seem very likely."

The chaplain smiled again. "You know you can go through life looking for that big sign from God and never get it. And then, maybe, you look back and see that God often gives us hundreds of smaller signs rather than one big one."

The chaplain looked directly into Powell's eyes. "But you know what. I think you're going to get that big sign. I can feel it."

"Whatever you say, chaplain."

"Powell, I'm going to send you back. I think you're going to be okay. Don't let me down. Your buddies are depending on you. Kaminski is up in heaven, and he's depending on you."

"And you know what, I hear they might even get some hot grub up to your position tomorrow. Maybe that's the sign you're looking for."

"Yes, sir," said Powell. "Maybe that's it. Thanks for talking to me, padre. I'll be okay. I'll stay in my fox hole. I promise. I'll survive."

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The next day the sun came out for the first time in a week. Powell eyed the woods across the fields. Somewhere over there the Germans were also cold, hungry and maybe scared too. They were also trying to make the best of a Christmas far from home.

One of the first sergeants came by. "Get your tummies ready for a treat," he shouted. "Word is that there will be some hot chow here in about an hour."

The happy announcement was like a signal for more bad things to happen. All heads turned as the faint whine of the 88s could be heard coming their way. The men dove for their fox holes.

No replacement had come for Kaminski, and so Powell still had the two-man hole to himself. Again the ground shook, and again the air-bursts shattered the trees and sent lethal shards toward the ground. Again the sound was loud beyond belief.

Powell had lost his urge to get killed, and he stayed as low as he could while the forest blew up around him.

There seemed to be a silence for just a moment, and then one last shell came screaming in. Powell could tell it was going to be close, very close.

Suddenly the shell landed right in Powell's fox hole with a tremendous thump. Dirt flew up and covered Powell as he instinctively put his arms over his head and closed his eyes. Then it was quiet again.

Just as he had the day before, Powell sprung out of the hole like he'd been launched. He stared at the hole the shell had made and could still see the backside of it just sticking out. It had to explode. But it didn't.

For a minute, Powell stood alone by the side of the hole. As they realized the barrage was over, other paratroopers



slowly emerged from their holes. They saw Powell staring in his fox hole and they gathered around. It didn't take long to see what had happened, and the men began to clap Powell on the back. "Why you lucky son of a gun," one shouted. "It was a dud."

First a few men, then dozens came up to the hole to see the miracle. Powell could only stare as his comrades oohed and aahed, offering congratulations to the sergeant.

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An hour later, Powell and the others had their mess kits out and were enjoying some hot turkey and dressing. It was like heaven. They washed it down with hot coffee. There was general contentment all around.

Powell, with some tremors still running through his hands, ate with relish. He was bent over his task, when he saw some boots just in front of him. He looked up, and there was Lt. Greaves.

"Powell, I think you'd better come with me. There's something I think you should see."

Powell, with mess kit still in hand, followed his officer a short ways away where a small group was gathered around a shiny object.

"The bomb disposal guys got that shell out of your fox hole," Greaves said, "and they found something very interesting."

Powell walked up to where the group was examining the shell. One of the bomb disposal experts looked up. "Oh this must be the luckiest guy on earth. You're the guy that was in that fox hole when this came down?"

"That was me," admitted Powell.

"Well, look here," the man said. "We took this thing apart because we always like to know why a shell doesn't explode. You see that gap here in the workings of the shell?"

Powell leaned over and peered at the guts of the shell in the dim light. "Yeah I see it."

"Well, that's where the detonator should be. This shell was a non-starter from the time it left the ordinance factory. I've never seen anything like it."

Powell said, "Well, I'll be darned."

"Oh that isn't the best part," said the bomb expert. "Look at this." He turned the shell over, and there in the shiny casing were etched two words. Powell leaned closer and could just make them out.

"Frohe Weihnachten."

Powell looked up. He was puzzled. "What does that mean?"

"Well, I just know enough German to translate. It means, 'Merry Christmas.' I mean somebody not only left the detonator out, but they wrote you a message. Damndest thing I ever saw."

"That's incredible," said Powell, looking at the other men.

"I'll tell you what it is," said the bomb expert. "It's like a sign from above. I'll tell you, it's just like a sign from above."

Hospital Association claims declining

The American Legion Family Hospital Association had a drop in the number of claims made during the 2014 fiscal year.

The Association, which helps Legion, Auxiliary and Sons of the American Legion members with hospital bills, received 34 claims in 2014.

Claims Representative Roger Myren said that number compared to 45, 47, and 42 claims over the prior three years. Myren made his report at the annual meeting of the Association at the Fall Conference.

Total medical assistance, totaling \$31,000 in 2014, was about the same as last year. The prior three years show assistance expense at \$44,000 for 2011, \$52,000 for 2012 and \$31,000 for last year.

Incoming money was also down a bit. Dues from the three groups served totaled \$34,000 last year compared to \$35,000 in 2011, \$36,000 in 2012 and \$38,000 in 2013. Donations in the last four years have been \$11,800 (2011), \$15,000 (2012), \$15,000 (2013) and \$7,900 this year.

Total income for the fund dropped from a high \$52,000 in 2012 to \$48,000 this year.

Because the medical assistance paid out by the Association has been declining, the net assets of the Association are growing, Myren said. This past year, \$19,000 in medical assistance was paid to Legion members, \$12,000 to Auxiliary members and nothing to the SAL.

The Hospital Association currently has \$242,000 in net assets, compared to \$231,000 in 2011.

The Association elected two incumbents to their positions. Nick Kakos, representing The American Legion, and Dennis Blue, representing the SAL, were re-elected without opposition.

Orv Otterness asked President Blue why he hasn't seen Hospital Association board members at district or other meetings talking up the Association. Blue said it is the policy of the board to only go to meetings if they are invited.

Later, at the board meeting of the Association, Marie Goede was elected president of the Association, Marland Ronning was elected vice president, and Jan Walker was elected secretary.

Other members of the board are Jim Kellogg, Peggy Moon, Chris Ronning, and Dennis Henkemeyer.

National appointments

Continued from Page 1

the Committee on Children and Youth. Moon was also reappointed a member of the committee.

Thomas Schottenbauer of St. Louis Park will be vice chair of the Conventional Armed Forces Committee.

(The following list reflects only those who were appointed or re-appointed to national positions and not those who will continue to serve from previous appointments.)

Marie Goede, and Auxiliary member from Plainview, was named to the Committee on Youth Education, American Legion Auxiliary Representatives.

Phil Bellefeuille of Callaway, John Bey of Baudette, James Copher of Mound, Wayne Gilbertson of Zimmerman, Carl Hendrickson of Cloquet, and Richard Wog of Willmar were named to the Americanism Council.

Ray DeZurik of Breezy Point was named to the Convention Committee Liaison Committee.

Don Hayden of LeCenter was appointed to the Internal Affairs Commission. Richard Janssen of Richmond was named as the National Commander's Representative to the Constitution and By-Laws Committee.

Don Pankake of Hutchinson was named to the Membership and Post Activities Committee. Curt Norenberg of Roseville was named as a Consultant to the Aerospace Committee.

Michael Ash of St. Paul, Wayne Hammon Jr. of Le Roy, and Robin Picray of St. Paul were named to the Media and Communications Council.

Don Amundson of Blue Earth, Richard Gosse of Wabasha, Robert Haugen of Moorhead, Steven Johnson of Olivia, Jim Kellogg of Taopi, Lloyd Ricker of Dawson, Mike Schaffer of Fulda, Don Schroedl of Minneapolis, E. Jerry St. Michel of Grand Rapids, Wes Thompson of Sartell, and Cal Van Horn of Morris were all named to the National Security Council.

Jeffrey Olson of Green Valley, Arizona, will be the National Commander's Representative on the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission. William Barbknecht of Underwood will be a member of the commission.

Floyd Kumerow of Lambertton will serve on the National Cemetery Committee.

Clinton Burt of Slayton, James Blakesley of Aitkin, Tom Conway of Argyle, Denise Milton of Bagley, and Orville Otterness of North Branch were named to the Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Council.

Marland Ronning of Maple Grove and John Torma of Brooklyn Park were named to the Veterans Employment and Education Council.



SHOP, SHIP AND SHARE -- Commander Peggy Moon, center, helped pack boxes at the Fourth District's annual Shop, Ship and Share at the Maplewood Mall. The event, in cooperation with the U.S. Postal Service brings gifts to those men and women serving overseas.



VETERANS DAY -- State Commander Peggy Moon handled the emcee duties at the official Minnesota Veteran's Day celebration at Inver Grove Heights. Sen. Al Franken and Sen. Amy Klobuchar were also part of the program.



MOON ON RADIO -- Department Commander Peggy Moon recorded her Veterans Day message at the KFAN studios in St. Louis Park. The ad was run on Veterans Day on a statewide network.

Thank you

I am overwhelmed with emotion as I write a heartfelt Thank You to all in the Minnesota American Legion Family for their recognition of my induction into the National Sons of The American Legion Hall of Fame in Pasadena, California this past month.

Special thanks to Detachment Commander Dennis Henkemeyer for his introduction of me at the ceremony and to Steve and Diane Sullivan for accompanying the Minnesota Delegation to the event. It is certainly an unexpected honor in my Sons of The American Legion career.

**Joe Mayne, PNC
Squadron 85
North Branch**

Sons of The American Legion

By
Dennis Henkemeyer



I just returned from Pasadena, California, where I had the true honor of introducing PNC Joe Mayne of the Sons of The American Legion. Commander Mayne was inducted into the SAL Hall of Fame along with four other individuals at a gala event at the Pasadena American Legion Post 13. What an exciting time for me, and I am sure for Commander Mayne and his children as well. It is an award that is truly deserving of Commander Mayne. As I stated in my introduction of him, when Joe Mayne talks about the Sons of The American Legion, it is all about passion. His ability to communicate is something more than a skill; it's even more than a talent. His love for the organization comes in loud and clear, with quick wit and eloquence, that comes straight from the heart. That's why whenever Joe Mayne talks about the Sons, those who listen are inspired to take this organization to new levels of effectiveness and advocacy in timeless respect of those who fought for our freedoms. Congratulations PNC Mayne on an honor that you are so deserving of.

As for our annual fall conference, I want to label it as a huge success. In addition to all of the fine reports, we had a class on parliamentary procedure and a proposal on some possible changes to the detachment that would mirror those of The American Legion. We had many guests address our members including Dale Barnett, leading candidate for National Commander of The American Legion. I want to personally thank Detachment Adjutant for keeping me on track for the entire conference. I also had the opportunity to receive a good number of donations for my commander's project, the Fisher House in Minneapolis.

Under the direction of our Detachment Membership Director Paul Spyhalski, the Detachment of Minnesota is well ahead of pace for the year. As of this writing, Minnesota continues to be in the top ten nationally and is the only detachment with a membership of over 10,000 that is in the top ten. We are presently in third position in the Central Region. Thanks to everyone for their hard work.

Since this will be my last article before the holiday season begins, I want to wish everyone a belated Thanksgiving, a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year from my beautiful wife Denise and myself. May 2015 be a year of peace and may all of our troops return home safely. Please keep all of our troops in your daily prayers not only during the holiday season, but year around.



MAYNE INDUCTED -- SAL Past National Commander Joe Mayne from Minnesota was inducted into the SAL Hall of Fame in Pasadena. From left: Detachment Commander Dennis Henkemeyer; Connor Mayne, Amanda Mayne, Joe Mayne, Spencer Mayne.

Membership Chart

As of Nov. 19, 2014

District	2015 Goal	Total 2014	Total 2015	Percent of Goal	Same Date '13
1	9,976	9,918	7,883	79.02	8,241
2	8,110	8,026	6,315	78.00	6,525
3	12,486	12,421	9,847	78.86	10,219
4	2,554	2,530	2,008	78.62	2,129
5	2,959	2,936	2,271	76.75	2,354
6	12,698	12,627	10,100	79.54	10,403
7	7,245	7,167	5,599	77.28	5,949
8	4,768	4,727	3,586	75.21	3,963
9	7,443	7,378	5,836	78.41	6,139
10	11,243	11,189	8,846	78.68	9,340
At-large	2,340	2,338	2,079	65.83	1,934
Totals	81,822	81,257	64,370	77.91	67,196

THREE CHOPPERS DOWN

By Al Zdon

Gen. Colin Powell fixed his gaze on the 21-year-old warrant officer.

It was 1971 in Vietnam. Powell wanted to learn firsthand about the Huey helicopter that had been shot down a few days before.

"The report says you were shot down in Laos," Powell said.

"Yes, sir," replied Warrant Officer Les Rasset.

"We're not fighting a war in Laos," said the general who would one day be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then Secretary of State.

"Oh, yes, sir," replied Rasset and began to tell him about the covert missions, the involvement of the CIA, and other details of the Laos missions.

"Stop," interrupted Powell. "I don't want to hear another word." He sent the young Minnesotan back to his unit. After all, the United States was not fighting in Laos, therefore it could not lose an attack helicopter there.

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Les Rasset grew up in Maple Lake on a dairy farm. "From the time I was six years old, I was with my dad all the time. I was his right-hand man. I thought it was wonderful. I had good parents, a loving family and I grew up in a great community."

He graduated from Maple Lake High School in 1968, and went to the University of Minnesota. He made it into his second year before he dropped out and volunteered for the draft. It probably wouldn't have taken very long for Uncle Sam to grab him anyway, since his draft lottery number was 61 out of 366.

"I thought I'd get in, do my two years, and get out."

In January, 1970, he was sent to basic training at Fort Bragg. "But then we had an orientation on helicopters, and I decided I wanted to be a helicopter pilot." He filled out the appropriate paperwork and took a physical.

He had already been assigned to Fort Sill to become a forward artillery spotter when he got his orders to helicopter flight school. He was told to report to Fort Walters in Texas.

Rasset's prior experience in flying was limited to a neighbor taking him for flights in a little plane. He had never been in a helicopter.

"That's the great thing about the Army," Rasset said. "Who else can spend a half million dollars to train somebody to fly a helicopter? I thought it was great."

The training was intense and challenging and included six to eight hours of classroom study each day combined with time on the flight line and the other duties of a soldier.

Rasset said he was fortunate enough to have the fundamental skills of a pilot including a good math background, and good hand-eye coordination and depth perception. Others were not so blessed. "I think we had about a 60 percent attrition rate."

Training was in the small Hughes T-55 Osage helicopter, a flying machine that consisted of an engine, a rotor, a bubble where the pilot and trainee sat, a tail and a tail rotor.

"When it crashed, you could pick everything up and put it in the back of a pick-up truck."

His first journey into the air was with a pilot who had just completed two tours in Vietnam. "He lifted the helicopter about five feet off the ground and just held it there. It looked like he wasn't even moving his hands. I thought, 'This is so easy.'"

During an orientation flight, though, the trainer told Rasset, "Okay, you have the aircraft now."

The next few minutes were not pretty. "You read about

this stuff, the power and the pedals and everything, but I got the helicopter into a pendulum, swinging side to side. I was over-reacting to everything. It was a humbling experience. But you get better at it. I thought it was fun."

After about 10 or 12 hours with the instructor, the trainees get to solo. "You've got to take off and land and do all this other stuff. I was sweating bullets. And then you have to listen to the instructor's critiques. I remember he told me I should be watching my airspeed, and I told him I was so busy flying, I wasn't watching anything. He said, 'Well, you should be.'"

Rasset recalled one exercise where the new pilots were sent off in their Hughes 55s to find a series of check points, re-fuel after two hours, and find their way home. He and another trainee were cruising over the West Texas countryside and they saw a group of other Army training helicopters in front of them.

"We laughed. All we had to do was follow the other aircraft. It was so easy. But then we heard over the radio that the lead helicopter had reached the check point. The people on the ground radioed back wondering why they thought they were at the check point. They said they could see the water tower. The ground people replied there was no water tower at that check point. You should have seen all the little helicopters heading off in every direction. They finally had to look at their maps. Just when you think you've got it mastered, you find out how pathetic you are."

After four months at Fort Walters, it was on to Fort Rucker in Alabama for training in the Army's primary workhorse helicopter, the Bell UH-1 Iroquois, usually called the Huey.

One foggy morning, he was to go up with a veteran trainer. "It was rainy and cloudy and foggy. I was sure they would cancel, but the pilot said, 'Let's go up for a little weather check.' He told me, 'When you get to Vietnam, it won't be up to you. You gotta go.'"

Rasset was still surprised they were going up. "I couldn't even see across the parking lot. We got up about 30 feet above the deck and we went right down the road. He told me that in monsoon season in Nam, you just had to find landmarks, like a road or a river. He asked me what I thought, and I said, 'I hope there's no tall telephone poles around here.'"

The training, he said, stressed safety, taking precautions, and doing a good pre-flight of the aircraft. He earned his wings and his warrant in early 1971.

Rasset estimates that ninety or ninety-five percent of his class got orders to Vietnam. By March of 1971, thirteen

Les Rasset signed up for helicopter school in the U.S. Army in 1970. His career in Vietnam included having three Hueys shot out from under him. But he, his crew, and his soldier/passengers walked away unscathed all three times.



months after he was drafted, he was in the war zone as a helicopter pilot.

"We went from Oakland to Anchorage to Japan to Ton Son Nhut airbase near Saigon. It finally hit home where we were going when they turned off all the plane's directional lights and cabin lights before we landed. I thought, 'This is serious.'"

The next day he was off to Da Nang in the northern region - at that time the busiest airport in the world handling nearly 2,600 flights a day. And from there it was up to Camp Eagle, near Hue, even further north. It was the home base for the famed 101st Airborne Division.

"I thought Vietnam was hot, dirty and dusty. It was just so different."

He was shown into the office of the executive officer. "He said, 'Well, Mr. Rasset, we've been looking for you. We're glad you could make it. Welcome to the party.'"

He was shown to his quarters. "There were all these guys hanging around with cut-off fatigues, t-shirts and slippers. Then I realized, these are the pilots. I thought, 'Well, I'm over-dressed.'"

The pilots in his unit were called the Kingsmen, and



LES RASSET
At home in Maple Lake



LES RASSET
As a warrant officer in the Army