VA head visits facilities in state

By Al Zdon

VA Secretary Bob McDonald visited Minnesota at the end of March, dealing with issues at both the Minneapolis and St. Cloud health care systems, and generally promoting the VA to both employees and the public.

His visit to the St. Paul Regional Office at the Whipple Federal Building, he said, was geared “to support Kim Graves.”

Graves, the director of the regional office, was one of two high level Veterans Affairs employees who were reprimanded by the agency for accumulating over $130,000 in relocation benefits, and for transferring into a job with less responsibility while keeping her $174,000 salary.

Graves was at first transferred to another VA system, but then won an appeal. Continued on Page 2

Convention will consider dues hike

By Al Zdon

A dues increase for the members of The American Legion in Minnesota is on the horizon, slated to take effect with the 2018 membership year – the 100th year of the organization.

The Department Executive Committee voted to approve a $3 increase during its March meeting and send it along to the Department Convention for consideration. The convention will meet in Rochester July 21-23.

The dues increase had been recommended at the September 2015 meeting of the Finance Committee meeting on the Department in 2018, should the measure pass the convention, will be $13.75.

That amount includes allocations to the American Legion’s basic programs.

Legion Day at Twins May 20th

The 16th annual American Legion Family Day at the Twins will be held Friday, May 20, at 7:10 p.m. in a game with the Toronto Blue Jays.

Department Commander Jim Kellogg will throw out the first pitch. Tickets are $23, and there will be scoreboard recognition for all posts attending.

To order tickets, call 1-800-33-TWINS and hit O to speak to an attendant. Reference the special Legion discount. Or call 612-659-4083.

North Mankato lad is Scout of Year

Eric Westberg of North Mankato has been chosen as the Eagle Scout of the Year by the Minnesota American Legion.

Westberg, 18, is a senior at Mankato West High School. He is the son of Andrew and Lisa Westberg.

Westberg now qualifies for the national Eagle Scout of the Year award.
VA DIRECTOR VISITS -- On the request of Minnesota’s congressional delegation, Veterans Affairs Secretary Bob McDonald visited facilities in Minneapolis and St. Cloud. From left: John Knapp, director of the Fort Snelling Cemetery; McDonald; Minneapolis VA Medical Center Director Pat Kelly and VISN 23 Director Kim Graves at the Federal Building at Fort Snelling.

"We have the most important mission in government, to serve those who served the country.”

McDonald said he has proposed a 12 part plan for Congress. “I can guarantee the outcomes if they just give me the budget to do it.” He also said that he had been told that this year’s request had already been cut by $1 billion.

He was asked if the increased criticism of the VA in recent years has affected the ability of the agency to hire professionals or if it has affected the morale of employees. “Some of the criticism has been fair, but a lot of it is unfair.” He said that when he was being confirmed for his position by the U.S. Senate, several senators asked him if there should even be a VA.

"Should we just give vouchers to veterans and let them find their own care? No, I don’t think so. Not only do veterans need the VA, America needs the VA.”

He pointed to the huge amount of research the VA does that has resulted in breakthroughs not only for veterans but for everybody. “The first liver transplant was done at the VA. The first kidney transplant was done at the VA. The discovery that aspirin can stop heart attacks was discovered at the VA. Putting barcodes on medicines was developed at the VA.”

McDonald, in a press conference in St. Cloud, said he had instructed St. Cloud VA Director Barry Ball to make progress on the “employee experience” by December.

At the Minneapolis press conference, McDonald said the St. Paul regional office was one of the top VA performers in the nation, and he expected it to stay that way.

He noted that the VA is working hard at reducing wait lists, but he said the organization handled 57 million cases last year, an increase of 1.2 million over the year before.

“Our capacity is increasing. We’ve hire more doctors, more nurses and we’ve gone to evening hours. We also have more space in our facilities.”

He said 90 percent of claims are handled within 30 days. He said the average wait time in Minneapolis for general care is two days, for specialty care five days, and for mental health care, one day.
continued from Page 1

approved to hire a fundraising firm

from last year’s major storm.

compositions for the Legion for activities at The American Legion National Convention to be held in Minneapolis in 2018. It is expected that the investment in the company will be recovered through fundraising.

Past National Commander Dan Ludwig said the fundraising would be targeted to large companies and foundations, and that the money could be used for a wide variety of activities that will enhance the national convention, which is part of the 100th Anniversary Observation.

It will be the 100th annual convention of The American Legion, which was founded in 1919 and held its first convention in Minneapolis.

Also was told by Ludwig that Minnesota will enter into an agreement with the National organization to do our own fundraising. National has guaranteed $160,000 in the Department. If less is raised, the Department will still get the $160,000. If more is raised, the Department and National will split the additional funds. “We’ve created a win-win situation for our company and the Legion,” Ludwig said.

The motion passed unanimously. However, National Vice Commander Al Davis rose and noted that a provision in the Department’s Executive Committee’s standing rules said there was a $200 limit on funding unless it had been submitted to the Department Adjutant 14 days before the meeting. Kellogg at that point ruled the allocation motion out of order.

Heard a request from Commander Kellogg for posts and state departments to create resolutions for the Department Convention. He suggested two: One would call for the National organization to not raise dues in the middle of a membership year, as they did this year. The other would be on the state level and allow the commander, if we were to appoint an ad hoc committee, to have the whole field of Legionnaires available for that service and not be restricted by the state bylaws that says a person can only serve on one appointed committee at a time.

Heard from Adjutant Randy Tesdahl that Minnesota had made its national pledge of 91.75 percent membership by the deadline and could be in line for a $2,000 bonus from National to be used on computer equipment.

Heard from both Kellogg and Tesdahl about increasing the kindness and civility in the Department. Kellogg cited one department chairman who had received numerous phone calls questioning his work. “We have no room for that in this Department,” Kellogg said. “We’re all volunteers. Keep that in mind.” Tesdahl noted that the membership in the Department is down.

“Let’s be positive. We’ve got to stop the nit-picking and be nice to each other. Squelch those stories before they spread. We need to give each other a big hug.”

Was informed by Tesdahl that Heather Larson, who is active in the Minnesota National Guard, was hired by the Rehabilitation Committee to be the new administrative assistant for the Department. She will work two days a week in the Department Headquarters helping out on SAL member programs and three days a week in the Federal Building at Ft. Snelling acting as secretary to the Department Service Officer.

Was informed by Kellogg that both the National Deer Hunter’s Association and the Wild Turkey Federation have donated a dozen framed wildlife prints each for the new membership and programs and three days a week in the Year is chosen

Eagle Scout of the Year

As stated by Kellogg and was exploring ways to remove stumps and other debris

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Let’s be careful where we give our money for veterans

By Randy Tesdahl

Everyday veterans...through their state legislative representatives want to do good by them back in their home communities. All the while they are doing this in the name of “services to veterans” and in most cases they are not checking the validity of the veteran’s “veteran status” as defined by State or Federal law.

State dollars from Health and Human Services are being used to pay for our meals and accommodations. The Veterans Home, which is a state-run mental health care facility, where every day the road is a state-owned and run mental health facility that is in the news trying to find state money to improve the security systems.

I know of a lot of VFWs and American Legions and other Veteran Service Organization that could also use a little time in lobbying your cause. Voila, soon companies, dues are what keeps our children off the streets and engaged in productive activities. Without a job, they will have nowhere to go. Without your help, Boys State and Girls State will close their doors. The 400 plus youth who learn how a Democracy is supposed to work will no longer have teachers to help them understand what we fought for and continue to fight for every day.

Without your help, Boy Scouts will not have our support. They will have to look elsewhere for places to hold their meetings and find financial support. How many boys will never know what it feels like to become an Eagle Scout? Scout leaders will look at us and wonder what has happened. Don’t we care any more?

Without your support our voice in our State Legislature will not be heard. Our Minnesota-born and raised veterans will continue to leave due to increased taxes. Laws will be passed by those who have never served and don’t understand what we all fought for. Our veterans will no longer have a claims appeal process which is second to none in this nation manned by and supported through your dues. Those Comrades you send next to the battle will have to suffer without the help of your American Legion and its outstanding officers.

The guest Post Local Service Officers won’t be there to help families in need of help.

Without your support, our communities will lose many of the programs they rely on. Our homeless veterans will no longer have help. Our fellow veterans in need of food and shelter will grow in number. Our children will be forced closer in our post homes. Meetings will place no longer exist for community activities.

Without your support our nation’s leaders will forget what we veterans have done and continue to do every day for our nation’s security. Those who continue to look for our MIA’s and POW’s will forget our support to continue their efforts. They will be forgotten.

Without your support, Legionville will no longer be able to teach our grandchildren history. There will be no place for a Disabled Veterans deer hunt.

Without your support there will be no American Legion Flag Day in your city. They are included in the ride fee.

Veterans will get the care they deserve. Our children and grandchildren will know what it is to live in the land of the free because of the brave.

Together we can make it happen. Today you can make a difference. By signing up to participate in the 2016 Eagle Scout ride, you must be a 501(c)(3) status then invest in a meeting and support your dues. Those Comrades you send next to the battle will have to suffer without the help of your American Legion and its outstanding officers.

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If you would like to contact me, our East Grand Forks ALR e-mail address is 157ALR@gmail.com.
What’s Happening

Scott Fredrickson Benefit
There will be a benefit for Scott Fredrickson, son of Auxiliary President Sandy Fredrickson, at the Moose Lodge in Albert Lea on Saturday, May 7. There will be raffles, a silent and live auction, and bake sale. Activities will start at 3 p.m. and burger baskets will be served from 4-7 p.m. Fredrickson suffered a spinal cord injury, and funds from the benefit will pay for medical transportation and home renovations.

Military Ball
The 12th annual Military Ball will be held Saturday, April 23, at the Fest Building in Spring Grove hosted by the Legion Family. Tickets are $27 and RSVPs are due by April 9. For more information, call 507-498-3461 or email gnl-bux@springgrove.coop.

Standdowns and Clinics
Events sponsored by the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans include:
-- Standdown for veterans on Thursday, April 28, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Fergus Falls Armory. It will also feature a legal clinic. Services include meals, VA benefits, housing, legal assistance, haircuts, employment assistance and a legal clinic. For more information, call 218-722-8763.
-- Drop-In Legal Clinic at the Dakota County Administration Building in Hastings from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Wednesday, April 20. For more information, call 651-200-4750.
-- Drop-In Legal Clinic at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center in the Flag Atrium Balcony Room from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Tuesday, April 12.
-- Drop-In Legal Clinic on Wednesday, April 27, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Brainerd American Legion post home.

St. Cloud StandDown
A StandDown will be held in St. Cloud on Friday, April 29, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the St. Cloud National Guard Armory. Employment assistance, legal consultation, tax help, benefits help, and dental and eyewear vouchers will be available. Contact 800-543-7709.

Omelet Breakfast
Richfield Post 435 will sponsor an omelet breakfast, craft fair, bake sale and book sale from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on April 17. The breakfast will be served from 8 a.m. until the food is gone. For more information, call 612-481-2148.

Smelt and Fish Fry
The 40th annual Smelt and Fish Fry will be held Sunday, April 10, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Monday, April 11, from 4-8 p.m. at the Willmar Post home. Adults are $10. For more information email rvinar@charter.net.

Gambling Seminar
There will be a gambling seminar at the Department Convention sponsored by the Minnesota Gambling Control Board. It will be held July 21 at 2 p.m. at the Mayo Civic Center, Presentation Hall, in Rochester. The topic will be common problems, compliance reviews and site inspections.

Legion College
Nominations are being accepted for The American Legion National College, a week-long program held Oct. 23-28. Candidates must be from Lebanon/Grenada or newer war eras. Other war era candidates may also be considered, if Minnesota has a new veteran nominated. The college instructs on how to be an effective leader in the American Legion, how to do a local college, the resolution process, and parliamentary procedure. For more information, contact Jennifer at 651-291-1800.

Health Care Day
The St. Cloud VA will participate in the National Health Care Decisions Day. Information and tools for veterans to talk about their wishes with family, friends and health care providers will be available. The information will be available at several sites on the VA campus, and there will be two sessions on advance care planning. Call 320-255-6353.

SAL Disabled Deer Hunt
The SAL Disabled Deer Hunt at Legionville will add two more hunters this year. Dual members of the Legion/SAL are encouraged to help the hunt with donations from Legion posts. The hunt is also accepting a 243 rifle to use on the hunt. There will also be a clean-up and other work at Legionville. For more information, contact Dave Vulcan at 507-380-5095.

Hunting, fishing on-line
Application forms for the Trolling for Troops fishing outing for veterans, the Veterans with Disabilities Fishing Trip and the Disabled Vets Turkey Shoot are available at the Minnesota American Legion website: mnlegion.org.

State NALPA group planned
A Minnesota chapter of the National American Legion Press Association is being organized. A meeting will be held at the Department Convention in July. The organizer is Ralph Schneekloth, a member of the Department Public Relations Committee. He will be sending out correspondence once he gets all the addresses. If you are interested, please contact schneekloth@gmail.com.

Bingo Boards available
The Minnesota Veterans Home at Minneapolis has two electronic bingo boards and a control system they would be willing to donate to a veterans service organization. Contact Sandy at 612-548-5993.

Veterans Job Fair
A Veterans Job Fair and Benefit Expo will be held Saturday, April 23, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at North St. Paul Post 39. The event is free and open to veterans, military personnel, and their families. Major Minnesota corporations are expected to attend. County Veteran Service Officers will also be on hand. For more information contact Ken Giannini at keng5822@hotmail.com.

Round Tables
The World War II History Round Table at Fort Snelling will feature the Invasion of Southern France with author Scott Wheeler and a veterans panel. The meeting will be at the history center on April 14 at 7 p.m.

Vets Outing
The St. Croix Valley Civil War History Roundtable will have “Charlesston and the Civil War” with Dave Page. Contact Steve Anderson, 715-386-1268, for details about the dinner meeting at Lowell Inn in Stillwater on April 25.

The Veterans Roundtable at Rochester at Autumn Ridge Church will feature Combat Search and Rescue in Vietnam, Joe Connell. The meeting is at 7 p.m. on April 11.

Veterans Day on the Hill
Probably the largest attendance ever at the annual veterans’ event to focus attention on legislation was held at the Minnesota National Guard Armory at the Capitol in March. About 400 gathered to hear speakers from both the House and the Senate and to gain information on veterans legislation.

There was also a large contingent from Montevideo carrying signs promoting the establishment of a veterans home in that city. Rep. Kurt Daudt, R-Crown, the House Speaker, said that less than one percent of military retirees reside in Minnesota, mainly because of the tax structure. Most states allow tax relief for retired veterans.

Sen. Tom Saxhaug, DFL-Grand Rapids, said he was surprised by the large turnout. He said the Senate will be working on bills that would allow the establishment of two new veterans homes in Minnesota.

Rep. John Persell, DFL-Forest Lake, said that it was important that veterans speak with one voice. “We need more veterans to show up at our meetings.”

Rep. Dave Aune, DFL-Crookston, also said a veterans home in Montevideo is approaching legislative approval.

“The time is upon us.” He said that tax relief for military retirees should also pass this year.

Rep. Sarah Anderson, R-Plymouth, also said the retirement tax bill should have support.

The event was staged at the armory because of the renovations to the Capitol.

Sen. Tom Saxhaug

REP. BOB DETTMER

REP. KURT DAUDT

REP. JOHN PERSELL

VETERANS DOFFED THEIR CAPS FOR THE PRAYER AT THE ANNUAL VETERANS ON THE HILL EVENT IN ST. PAUL.
VA Ancillary Benefits

If you are a veteran of the United States military, you are most likely familiar with acronyms. Sgt. (sergeant), PT (physical training), FOR (forward operating base), MAG (marine aircraft group), AIC (airman first class), FNG -- we won't go into there but you have the idea. Like the military the VA also uses acronyms for instance like the programs I'll be discussing today, SAH (special adaptive housing), SHA (special housing adaptation), and HISA (housing improvements and structural alterations).

All three grant programs through the VA are in place to assist disabled veterans who need structural modifications done to their house to accommodate their activities of daily living. The VA's Special Adaptive Housing grant and Special Housing Adaptation grant are both administered by the Veterans Benefits Administration. These I'll discuss first.

SAH grants help veterans with certain service-connected disabilities live independently in a barrier free environment. Some qualifications are but not limited to, loss of or loss of use of both legs, loss of or loss of use of both arms, blindness in both eyes plus loss of or loss of use of one leg. SAH grants can be used up to three times with a max amount of $70,465 overall. One way the grant can be used is to construct a specially adapted home on land to be acquired or remodel an existing home.

Moving on to the SHA grant: “the smaller of the two programs” assists with certain service-connected disabilities to adapt or purchase a home to accommodate the disability. Here is a list of some qualifications: loss of or loss of use of both hands, certain severe burn injuries, certain respiratory conditions. The veteran or his or her family must own the home. This grant can be used up to a max amount of $14,093. Some ways to use this grant are: adapt an existing home, adapt a home the veteran intends to purchase or purchase a home that is already adapted.

Refurbishing and building new homes are possible with this grant. Grant programs can be used for a temporary grant for veterans and service-members that are or will be temporarily residing in a home owned by a family member, or will be temporarily residing in a home owned by the veteran himself. This grant can be used up to a max amount of $9,000. Again, some ways to use this grant are: create a new entrance, construct a specially adapted home on land to be acquired or remodel an existing home.

Remember just because you are unaware of a benefit, it doesn’t mean the VA doesn’t offer it. Reach out to your local County Veterans Service Officer or Veterans Service Organization and we will go over certain benefits and procedures.

Legion fights effort to privatize VA health care

Members of a congressionally appointed Commission on Care, many of whom are medical industry executives, are reportedly pushing lawmakers in Washington to support long-term plans to accelerate privatization of VA health care. American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett says such a proposal seriously undermines the committee’s purpose – develop a 20-year strategy to provide timely, high-quality care for veterans who use Department of Veterans Affairs services – and raises conflict-of-interest concerns when those promoting privatization stand to gain financially if that becomes VA’s future.

The 15-member commission, which began meeting last September, currently has no representation from any veterans service organization. A portion of that commission has developed what Barnett describes as a “straw man” proposal condemning the current Veterans Health Administration and promoting privatization instead. The commission, according to a provision that created it as part of the 2014 Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, reports to the president through the VA secretary.

Larson hired by Department

Heather Larson has been hired by the Department of Minnesota and Rehabilitation Committee to fill a new position as a rehabilitation specialist at the Federal Building at Fort Snelling and a program specialist at Department Headquarters in St. Paul.

Larson grew up in Bloomington and graduated from Kennedy High School in 2005. She joined the Minnesota National Guard in 2004 with the 14th Division. She had deployments to both Iraq and to Kuwait.

She started Normadale Community College in 2008 and became an employee of Veterans Resources Center there the following year.

She has a BA in criminal justice from Metropolitan State University and worked for the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Legion to Congress: VA must develop patient-centered care

Lou Cilli, director of the Legion’s Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division, presented the Legion’s views regarding Sen. Richard Burr’s Veterans Choice Improvement Act of 2016 and Sen. John Tester’s Improving Veterans Access to Care in the Community Act while testifying at the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs.

The Legion’s written testimony also focused on recommended improvements to both bills, placing emphasis on eligibility, non-VA care coordination, prompt payment requirements, and emergency and urgent care reimbursement.

The American Legion commends Sens. Burr and Tester for their vision to fix the Choice program and Cody the new VCP. Both bills address deficiencies in current laws, as well as provide a comprehensive framework and foundation for consolidating the purchase of care in the community in those circumstances where it is not readily available from VA through contracts or existing sharing agreements.

There is a great degree of overlap and a lot to like in these bills, and the Legion looks forward to a final compromise bill which incorporates the best of both.

“The bills presented today underscore the commitment and dedication that this committee has shown to ensuring that veterans receive the care and attention they’ve earned,” Cilli said. “The American Legion is proud to be working closely with Congress, as well as the Department of Veterans Affairs, to streamline many of the services that haven’t been updated in close to 50 years.”

During the past two weeks, the Legion has furthered efforts to make improvements and advancements for veterans as they seek access to high quality health care, identifying the necessary improvements that need to be made in regards to veterans disability claims and appeals.
The final rally of the year saw a full house at the Legionville Camp north of Brainerd.

National Vice Commander Al Davis, who is spending much of this year traveling the Midwest region and dispensing membership advice, had some for Minnesota.

He noted that the Department is at 92 percent of goal. “It’s like driving down a football field and going 92 yards. We need to go that final eight yards and get that touchdown.”

Davis said Legionnaires need to knock on doors or call potential members or returning members. He advocated using the National magazine or the Minnesota Legionnaire newspaper as incentives for membership. He also said the National Emergency Fund was a good selling point.

Davis noted that his Midwest region was first in the nation in membership at this point. Because of that he will represent the Legion at a special event in Annapolis, and also at Arlington Cemetery on Memorial Day. He has already stood in for the National Commander at the dedication of the World War I Memorial in Washington.

When the membership results were announced, three different districts shared the honors for highest percentage of goal.

The Second District is leading the Sons of the American Legion membership drive with 97.48 percent. Overall, the SAL is at 85.22 percent.

The Sixth District is ahead in the Auxiliary race with 77.34 percent. Overall, the Auxiliary is at 74.29 percent.

For the Legion, the 10th District is ahead of the pack with 95.23 percent. Statewide, the total is 92.30 percent.
One day Bud Rice was working for the Department of Defense in Washington D.C. as a civilian.

The next day, he was a second class yeoman working down the block for the U.S. Navy.

Of course it wasn’t always that easy for Rice. There were those grueling two weeks of basic training…

Perhaps the Navy at this time thought it might be a good idea if these men had some naval training. So, as an E-6 with a year-and-one-half service under his belt, Rice was sent to boot camp.

“We went to Bainbridge training center. The other guys going through training were eyeing us up pretty good. Especially in the chow line, they couldn’t figure out those recruits with first class insignia were doing there. It was pretty strange.”

The “grueling” schedule didn’t last for long. After two weeks, all 21 of the group were pulled out of the training center and sent west. “I guess Admiral Halsey had some pull with the Navy and he wanted his staff there now.”

Rice traveled to San Francisco and boarded the USAT Poelau Laut, a troop transport, for a ride to New Caledonia, Halsey’s headquarters in the South Pacific.

“I think there were 200 Navy guys on board, and about 2,000 Army guys. The bunks down below were five deep, but they gave the Navy guys hammocks, and we could go up topside and string them up if it was too damn hot below. It took us 23 days to get there. We thought we were being followed by a Japanese submarine, but nothing happened.”

Rice remained assigned to Naval Intelligence. “I was replacing a poor young man who got involved with some guys. The Navy didn’t like guys, so he was being discharged.”

His job was to oversee a library of geographical information about the Pacific including maps and other informa-
tion to be used by the admiral’s staff as they planned the conquest of Japan.

“But I think what I had in my library was pretty outdat-
ed because I never had much to do.”

Halsey’s offices were on the first floor of the building and the intelligence guys were on the second floor. Although Rice worked in the same building as the famous “Bull” Halsey for a year-and-a-half, he never had a close encounter of any kind with his boss.

“I could hear them pipe him aboard every day when he came to work. There was also a full band – every day.

“I would have loved to meet him. His flag secretary at that time was Harold Stassen who had been governor of Minnesota. If I’d been smart, I should have cozied up to Gov. Stassen, and he could have got me in to meet Halsey.”

Rice said Halsey was regarded well by the troops.

“Everybody was pretty high on him. They thought he was a ‘do-it’ guy. He had a good reputation.”

With few people interested in his old maps, Rice and several other first class petty officers began preparing themselves to take the chief’s exam. “But to be a chief yeoman, you had to be expert in shorthand. We didn’t have anybody to teach us, so we taught each other. We worked at it pretty hard.”

In February of 1945, he passed the test and was promoted to Chief Yeoman. He was 26 years old. “If you were out in the fleet, you might have to wait, but when you were on the admiral’s staff, you got it right away.”

In July of 1945, he was rotated home. He was still on his 30 days’ leave, when Japan surrendered. “That was something to celebrate. Everybody was overjoyed. It had been very worrisome up to that point because we were sure we’d have to invade Japan. We would have lost thousands of soldiers.”

With the war over, Rice wanted just to get out, but that was not his fate. “I reported to the recruiting station in Minneapolis for duty, and they had me escort 20 men out to San Francisco.

When he got there, he was ordered to the USS Tangier (AV-8), a sea plane tender. After shore duty for his entire enlistment, and with the war over, he was given sea duty.

“I was assigned as the captain’s writer, sort of his secretary you might say. But Captain Quackenbush took one look at me and asked how good my shorthand was. I told him exactly how I had learned, that we had taught each other. I told him I’d never had much chance to learn how to use it. He wasn’t satisfied with that answer. I found later he tried to replace me, but he couldn’t find a faster shorthand writer.”

One of his first jobs was to sit and take evidence against sailors who had gotten in trouble while the ship was in port.

“The executive officer was quizzing these people, and I had to take it down. You couldn’t make one mistake, not one. When I was done, I put all the transcripts on the captain’s desk. He didn’t say one damn word to me.”

The ship left for Japan soon after. “One great thing was that the chiefs had their own mess. Wow, was that good food!”

En route, the ship went through a typhoon. “The whole rear end of the ship came up out of the sea. I thought the ship was going to break in two.”

Tangier was sent to Ominato in northern Japan and spent some time there. Over the next few months, the ship traveled to Tokyo, Saipan, the Philippines, and Hong Kong.

Rice had plenty of points to get out, but the Navy thought otherwise. “They needed the yeomen to process all the men who were getting out, so the yeomen were the last to go.”

In January, 1946, Rice completed his four-year enlistment, and the Navy now had little choice but to send him home. He arrived in San Francisco on the 24th of January, and was discharged 10 days later after four years, one month and seven days active duty.

He went back to school, this time at the University of Minnesota, where he earned a business degree. He married Charlotte and they had seven children, 13 grandchildren, and 22 great grandchildren. Charlotte died in 2011.

In 1949, he had gone to work for the Ford Motor Company, and he retired 30 years later as an administrative manager in the Lincoln-Mercury Twin Cities sales office. He still drives a Lincoln.

After his wife’s death, he made contact with his high school girlfriend, Arlene, who lives in Oregon, and they talk to each other every day. Both are 96.

Rice makes him home in a condominium that overlooks a beautiful woods in Crystal.
Minnesota honors a fallen comrade

Air Force personnel folded the flag and presented it to the family.

Taps followed the rifle salute.

Two AT-6 World War II trainers did a flyover at the funeral ceremony at Hazelwood, near Northfield.

Veterans from the service organizations presented the colors at the funeral in Hazelwood.

Department Commander Jim Kellogg represented the Minnesota Legion at the services in Faribault. (National Guard photograph.)

A solitary bag piper honored Strohfus.

An Air Force rifle squad delivered a salute among the tombstones.

The development of the atomic bomb during the war began when President Roosevelt personally signed the paperwork to begin the Manhattan Project – one day before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Scientist Enrico Fermi had actually created a controlled nuclear reaction under the football stadium at Chicago University as early as 1934. The Germans had split the atom by 1938. "They realized the wide release of energy from that."

The problem was to separate enough U-235, from which you could build a bomb, from U-239, which was not fissile. A huge plant was developed at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, to do that, and another plant was built in Hanford, Washington, to separate out plutonium, which was also fissile.

The Manhattan Project was located at Los Alamos, New Mexico, in the northern part of the state. In the end, two bombs were created, "Little Boy" which used U-235, and the "Fat Man" which used plutonium.

Eckles said the Little Boy was of such a simple design that the scientists didn't feel it needed to be tested. It was the first atomic bomb used in the war at Hiroshima, Japan. The Fat Man was different. At the core was a softball-sized sphere of plutonium. Around it were tons of high explosives that all had to be detonated at the exact same time, causing the nuclear reaction. The scientists were not sure about Fat Man.

So a 100-foot high tower was built on the White Sands grounds to hold the bomb. "They wanted to replicate an air burst similar to the air burst they planned to use over a target in Japan."

The experiment would be filmed by high speed cameras. "Turned later that the training was likely to have been the delivery of the atomic bombs to the targets."

The explosion of the first atomic bomb at Trinity Site in New Mexico was captured on film 0.03 seconds after detonation. The height of the explosion had already reached over 200 meters. The test was made on July 16, 2016.

But all that meant nothing because Michelsen became a prisoner of war. "Because we were attacking cities, we were considered war criminals, and that made us targets."

The first interview with the Japanese interrogators started fairly routinely. "They asked the name of my mother and of my father, where I was born, and what schools I went to. They asked about my phone number, and when I told them, they said, 'You're right.' They knew all that, and they were just testing to find out if the truth."

The interview went fine until the Japanese started asking military questions, and Michelsen refused to answer. "It all went fine to a certain point, but then all hell broke loose. I don't remember much after that. I woke up in a hallway. I think it was a hallway. I was still tied, and I had a blindfold on."

In the coming days the Japanese tried to beat information out of Michelsen on such subjects as B-29s that had been modified to have only one bomb bay door (as was used to drop the atomic bombs). They wanted to know about any other modifications to B-29s, and they asked about a "big bomb."

Of course, Michelsen knew nothing about any of this. "The reason the Japanese were asking these questions was because they were suspicious of the atomic bomb. How did they get that information? I don't know." He and other prisoners survived on one rice ball and a cup of water a day. His weight went from 160 lbs. to 90 lbs. in three months.

They had an over-crowding problem with the prisoners, but they solved that problem in the usual way."

At the time the war ended in mid-August, 1945, Michelsen and the other prisoners were taken to Tokyo Bay and lined up on the beach. "We had on blindfolds, but you could see a little bit. I saw they had machine guns set up. I figured this was my last day."

Michelsen could be hearing a shouting argument between three Japanese officers. It was clear that one of the officers wanted to kill the prisoners, and the other two were against it. "In the end, they took the machine guns away and we were left standing there."

Michelsen and his comrades were liberated by former Minnesota governor Harold Stassen who was on Admiral Halsey's staff and was charged with freeing the prisoners.

"There was only one Japanese officer left, and he told Stassen he had no authority to free the prisoners. Stassen replied, 'You have no authority at all.'"

Michelsen had two more things he wanted to tell the audience at the history center. One was that the atomic bomb saved millions of lives, both Japanese and American. It saved money."

The second was that before the United States bombed Japanese cities during the war, planes were sent ahead of time to drop leaflets telling the civilians to flee the cities because they would be bombed. "They advised them to get off the city, it gives me a little peace of mind to know that they were warned."

PATTON HONORED – Don Patton, right, accepted the American Legion Sterling Award from the Minnesota National Guard. Patton was honored for his work in directing the World War II History Round Table at the Fort Snelling History Center for over 30 years. The award was presented by Maj. Gen. Richard Nash, the Adjutant General of the Minnesota National Guard.

JIM ECKLES  BOB MICHELSEN
Hello Comrades. I hope everyone celebrated the Legion’s birthday. I went to a great birthday party at Blooming Prairie. There was good food and good music. The Commanders Past President Fish Fry was held in Albert Lea. Sadly I only had to pay for three dinners.

The 16th was Veterans on the Hill in St. Paul. It was one of the largest turnouts I’ve seen. The representations seem very concerned about helping our veterans.

I gave greetings to the Junior Auxiliary Conference at St. Paul. They were tying quilts for the Veterans Homes.

Remember our Department Commanders Testimonial on April 28th. Don Skow. He is doing a great job for the veterans this year. Remember to thank a veteran.

Hello, Department of Minnesota from the 2nd District

We are seven months into this Legion Family year and I’ve had an interesting time doing this job. The 2nd District Veterans have done a wonderful job working with Post Commanders and Membership Directors on membership. The report given at the Department Appreciation Rally was for 2nd District in 2nd place at 93:79. Great job, everyone.

2nd District Revitalization was held March 1-3. Thanks to everyone involved. Those veterans in the district get to them to get a post home. The results of our hard work should show up as soon as the paperwork catches up. One exciting piece of news is that fundraising for the Commander & President’s Project for the Luverne Veterans Home is very near its goal. Thank you for your donations and if you have not yet donated, please consider doing so. It will be deeply appreciated by President Darlene and myself and by the veterans who call the Luverne Veterans Home home.

Second District’s Joint Legion, Auxiliary and SAL testimonial will be held April 16 at Briceyln Post 165 with social hour starting at 4 p.m., dinner at 5 and a program to follow. Tickets are available by contacting President Darlene, Squadron Commander Scott, the Briceyln Post or me. The food will be excellent and a good time will be had by all.

Until next time good-fishing and don’t forget our veterans, the military and their families.

Greetings Thundering Third.

Our Membership Team has done a great job keeping us in the lead so far but we are still a little over 500 members short so we have a little more to do. We need to talk to those few who haven’t renewed yet and bring them back.

We will be having a lunch at the Hastings Vet Home on Saturday April 16th. This will give us a chance to talk with the Veterans who live there. The cost for lunch will be $5. If you are interested in attending please call me at 651-257-3343 for more info.

It’s time to start working on the Consolidated Post Reports. Be sure to due by Department by June 1st. We really need every Post to send one in; this is how we show everyone what we do.

The 7th District Convention will be held in Forest Lake this year on May 20th-22nd. Get your reservations and registrations in, the crew from Post 225 promise a good time will be had by all.

My testimonial will be held at Post 225 in Forest Lake on May 7th starting at 5 p.m. Anyone who wishes to attend please call Dean at 651-464-2600 or me at 651-257-3343 for reservations.

The Commanders Project is moving right along. It is getting close to finishing the fishing dock and beach area when it’s completed. To contribute please make checks payable to “Commanders Project Big Marine Vet’s Camp.” Thank you for your support.

There are several applications, reports and registrations due in the next few months. If you are missing any forms please contact me at 651-517-3177 or danw@alliantenergy.com. Thank you all for what you do for the American Legion and remember “Attitude is Everything.”

The Fabulous Fourth is a great district. This month I’d like to take time to recognize our fabulous team. We have President Connie Anderson, SAL Commander Larry Ryan / Lumberjack. Past Post Commander Carl Reinart, Finance Officer Robin Priezy, Judge Advocate Roger Ball, Historian Teresa Ash, Sergeant At Arms Chuck McCormick, Assistant S.O. John Martin, Past District Commander Carroll “Bud” Partridge and Special Assistant John Weiss. These men and women along with Jim Anderson, Post 577 Commander Luke Stunkel, Bob Bowen, Steve Campos and many more are a great group of people who truly care about the Veterans of the American Legion. There is a passage that instructs us to look upon the things of others as well as our own. The women and men of our District do this faithfully day in and out day. Take time to take those with whom you serve.

Calendar: April 9th Posts 487, 572 and 634 Special Meeting at North Post 99. April 9th Department Commander’s Testimonial, April 13th RCCC District Meeting Rosetown Memorial Post 542; April 22nd Joint District Testimonial Dinner Rosetown Memorial Post 542.

As I begin to write this article, we are now in fourth place for the Department of Minnesota in membership. We have a little way to go to make the 100% goal. We need to keep plugging away at this, slow but sure. Thank you for the great work that has been done this year.

I attended the 6th district Junior Auxiliary meeting in Bemidji in March. I was amazed by how well these young women are doing. Someone running a post is only nine years old. What an outstanding job she did.

We have a revitalization planned for May 19-21st in the St. Cloud area. Those veterans in the district get to them to get a post home. The report given at the Department Appreciation Rally was for 2nd District in 2nd place at 93:79. Great job, everyone. There are three testimonial dinners in April. April 9 Department Commander Kellogg’s in Adams; April 16 District President Lynn Spillman, Park Rapids; April 23 District Commander Dewanye Collins, Brainerd. Please try to attend one or all of these. Hope to see you there.

It is that time of the year for the election of officers for posts. If you have not nominated or if you have not yet donated, please consider doing so. It will be deeply appreciated by President Darlene and myself and by the veterans who call the Luverne Veterans Home home.

This includes the Legion family of the 9th district. 9th District President’s testimonial/fundraiser for the local Honor Flight at the Moorhead post on April 17.
Stein, William John, 71, veteran of the Vietnam War, died March 26, 2016. He served as 10th District Commander from 2000-01, and as Department Vice Commander from 2009-10. He was a member of Wayzata Post 118. At the present time, he was chairman of the Glencoe Area Veterans Memorial.

Mueller, James Henry, 88, Navy veteran of World War II, died March 24, 2016. He was a seaman on the USS Grayback that was stationed at New Caledonia. He was a member of Clearwater Post 323. He was a member of the Purple Heart, and of the Honor Guard of the U.S. Navy. He was a member of the Korean War Veterans Association.

Bolluyt, Arnold F., 85, Navy veteran of World War II, died March 6, 2016. He was a member of the Navy Women’s Air Force Service Pilots. He was a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary. He was a member of the American Legion.

Peters, Dale Elmer, 76, Navy veteran of the Vietnam War, died Feb. 4, 2016. He served on the honor guard of the U.S. Navy. He was a member of the Seabees, and then transferred to the Army where he completed his 20 years of service. He was a member of Wayzata Post 118. At the present time, he was chairman of the Glencoe Area Veterans Memorial.

Bauer, Arnold J., 82, Army veteran of the Korean War, died March 4, 2016. He served in the Korean War. He was a member of the 10th District membership director.

Qirim, Elmer R., 79, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Feb. 26, 2016. He was a cook in the 10th Edition of the Minnesota Legionnaire. He was a member of the Minnesota Legionnaire. He was a member of the Minnesota Legionnaire. He was a member of the Minnesota Legionnaire.
100 percent participation wanted for 2016 Poppy Days

Poppy Days will soon be with us. If your Unit has not ordered its 2016 Poppies we would appreciate hearing from you soon. We have 79 Units that have not yet ordered Let's have 100% participation in our Poppy Program. If you cannot locate an order form just write your order on a plain piece of paper and send it along with your check to the Department office.

We do have poppies available for any Unit that wishes to order more. The Department does not carry the Poppy cans many Units use on Poppy Days. They must be ordered from National Emblem Sales. Also, we do not carry the Poppy Cards. Emblem Sales also has a card that is available directly from them.

Governor Dayton has been asked to proclaim May as Poppy month. A suggestion to all Units is to present a poppy to your government officials and ask them to wear the poppy on Memorial Day.

Please remember to promote and display our Poppies all year round.

JUNIOR CONFERENCE

The Department Junior Conference will be called to order by Bryce Soltis, the Department Honorary Junior President on Saturday, April 9th, at the Grace Lutheran Church in Farmington and hosted by our Second District. We are hoping many Juniors will attend their very own Conference.

On Friday, April 8 starting at 6 p.m. the First District is hosting a fun “girls night out” for the Church for all Juniors. Please come and enjoy the weekend.

GIRLS STATE

Registration fees for the 2016 session of American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State were due on March 31st. We do still have openings so don't feel that because March 31 has gone by that you still can’t register. Units may send as many girls as they choose to from the same high school. Your American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State CIT will add a public, charter, parochial, private or home school in Minnesota or be a resident of Minnesota. Reservations are taken on a first come, first serve basis. We are still taking reservations and would like each Unit to participate. The 2016 session will be held June 12 - 18 at Bethel University in St. Paul.

The enrollment card, information sheet, pledge and order form for a Capitol Day polo shirt are due into the Department office no later than May 1st. Your American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State citizen is completely registered will receive a mailing from the Department office around May 15th which will give her all of the necessary information she needs concerning items to bring, the health certificate form, etc. that are required to be brought in June. Please remember that there are no refunds being given this year.

We look forward to the 70th annual American Legion Auxiliary Minnesota Girls State week and another educational and successful session.

2016 DEPARTMENT CONVENTION

Our 96th annual Department Convention will be held July 21 - 23 at the Kahler Grand Hotel in Rochester hosted by our Rochester American Legion Family #92. A word of thanks to the Auxiliary Chairman and committee members for all they are doing to ensure a successful convention.

Our Department Convention will be held at the Kahler Grand Hotel in Rochester. Hotel reservations are to be made directly with the hotel this year. The registration fee is $15.00 for pre-registrations and $18.00 at the door. Please use the registration form which is in this copy of the Legionnaire. President Sandy Fredrickson has made this such a rewarding “new” Auxiliary Convention – let all her honor her by attending her Convention.

Don’t forget the Poppy contests that will be held at the Department Convention. This year there will be two categories: Wearable Poppy Art and Dress a Doll or Teddy Bear using our Department President’s theme and should include the programs of the American Legion Family. More than one entry is welcomed; there will be three places awarded and a People Choice Award. Entries must be at the Department Convention on Thursday, July 21st by 9:00 a.m. Please read your Trophy and Awards packet for details.

DIRECT BILLING INFORMATION

All Units received a request for information on your Unit’s 2017 dues. A second notice went out in the April Unit Mailing to those Units that haven’t responded to the first request. This information was due in the Department office by March 15th. It is critical that this information gets forwarded on to National. If your Unit has not yet responded - please send in the information as soon as possible. If we do not receive this information before mid-April, National will be printing the information they have from last year on the dues notices. We still are waiting on 229 Units to return the forms.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MONTH

April is Children and Youth month. Plan a special program and invite your community to attend. Let them know of your involvement and concern for the youth of our nation. There are a number of programs you can present to your community. Keep in mind that our children are our future. We need to get them involved in our programs and let them know how. This month, you can do this.

ANNUAL REPORTS DUE APRIL 15

Annual report time is fast approaching. All Units should be preparing their reports covering the time period April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016. The white copy is all that needs to be returned to the Department Office by April 15. It is important that your Unit report your activities each year and send it in. The information received on the reports is then compiled into a Department report that is sent onto our National organization. These reports become part of the American Legion Auxiliary record for the 2015-2016 year. Our National organization and the American Legion and they use the information when they report to Congress each year. Every activity your Unit has participated in is important. Be proud of your accomplishments and activities and share them. Reports are due in April 15th. We realize that many of you are unhappy with the computer system this year and your comments will be passed forward. Thank you all for letting me know how your Units like this new format.

TROPHIES AND AWARDS

Trophy and Award entries are also due by April 15th unless otherwise stated in the rules. Be certain to label each entry with the name of the award you are applying for. Follow this year’s rules. A separate entry is needed for each award unless the Department winner is forwarded for National consideration. Any Unit may apply for a award whether your Unit has reached its membership goal or not unless that is a requirement stated in the rules.

2016 NATIONAL CONVENTION

The National Convention this year will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio! This year the Parade will be on Sunday, August 28, 2016 in Cincinnati. When we Minnesotans go to the National Convention we bring with us our national colors from our Posts, Units, Squadrions and AL Riders to march in the National Parade. When we do this, we typically take up an entire city block or more of just Minnesota’s attendees all carrying their US colors. We often are on the front page of the newspaper the day before our morning issue the following day. Let’s make the headline in Cincinnati big time this year and show the friendly state of Ohio how we support our veterans. Picture the image of hundreds of United States flags marched 4 abreast stretching for several blocks? What a sight to see.

More information will be forthcoming regarding the National Convention.
SECRETARY SANDIE’S NOTES

Sometimes I feel that I write the same thing over and over but some things are worth “trying again.” Please, make those calls and get your current membership renewals paid. We again are behind where we were at last year. I realize many of you are doing all you can but that one little phone call will make a difference. It seems just yesterday was the day after Fall Conference and I told Jan and Julie that now we would have time to “clean up” all of the office areas, scan documents, remodel our work area, etc. Well now it is April and that stuff is all still waiting. I just can’t figure out where time goes. Bunny Bingo at my Post came and went, without casualties again this year - a great time was had by all and Vrzey - where were you? Our son and daughter-in-law bought a new house so that will mean a weekend trip to Texas to help them move in the near future and a long, long motorcycle trip is planned. Again, I said yes and after thinking more and more I wonder why. I hope you all had a blessed and happy Easter and none of those little April Foolsters got you.

CALLING ALL MEMBERS

DEDICATION AT VETERANS HOME – There was a good representation from American Legion Auxiliary members to see the ribbon cutting for the new Building 21 at the Minnesota Veterans Home in Minneapolis. The Auxiliary was represented by our NEC Chris Ronning, 5th District President Julie Martin, Executive Secretary Sandie Deutsch, Auxiliary Hospital Home Representative Sandy Gibson and many others.

MEMBERSHIP AWARD -- Membership Chairman Jean Walker presented the Scallen Carlson Plaque to Ninth District President Linda Gibson and Ninth District Membership Chairman Joanie Krantz at the Appreciation Rally at Legionville in March.

JUNIOR LEADER SPEAKS -- Honorary Junior President Bryce Soltis spoke at the Appreciation Rally at Legionville. In the back is Legion Membership Director Jim Lucas.

RALLY – Department President Sandy Frederickson is introduced at the Appreciation Rally at Legionville.
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