Minnesota veterans needing transportation now have a new way to figure out local options to get around.

The Minnesota Ride Link, a program with several government partners including the County Veterans Service Officers, can provide fast and easy information about transportation services in an area.

Ride Link can help veterans, military families and others to a single source of information for trips in their local area for such reasons as employment, medical, recreational and shopping.

The link is made through the MinnesotalHelp Network, the state’s existing one-call/one click virtual information center.

**Wisconsin makes sure every veteran has a proper burial**

Serving in the U.S. Army, Terrence Sund drowned while searching a tunnel in Vietnam 1967. His body was sent home and cremated. Then, his cremated remains were interred in a room at a cemetery in Wisconsin for decades.

Thanks to Department of Wisconsin American Legion efforts, Sund received a full military burial last summer. And the department has helped draft a bill that will ensure the remains of veterans not claimed by family members will be released so that the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) can arrange a military burial at one of the state’s veteran cemeteries.

According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Legionnaire Steve Conto was able to raise funds so that Sund could get the funeral he deserved. Since then, the Department of Wisconsin has set up a fund to assist with burial costs for similar deceased veterans.

Department Adjutant Dave Kurtz said the effort has been a partnership between the Legion, Gov. Scott Walker and the WDVA. Waukesha County Veterans Service Officer Randy Tesdahl reinforced this in another article.

**Commander’s Task Force sets 2016 goals**

The Commander’s Task Force, representing the veterans community in Minnesota, has agreed on a list of seven priorities for this coming session of the Minnesota Legislature.

The state legislature will go back into session March 8.

The list includes:
- A request for bonding and funding to support the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Funding is needed to maintain the five Minnesota Veterans Homes in the state system.
- Bonding is needed to fix the bridge between the Minnesota Veterans Home in Minneapolis and Minnehaha Parkway. The bridge has been closed since 2014 due to safety concerns and failed bridge inspections.
- A bill that would expand the permitted uses of the Minnesota GI Bill. The proposed legislation would allow veterans to use their GI Bill funds for such things as school applications, exams, licensing and other certifications. At present, money can only be used for tuition at higher education institutions.
- A bill that would allow veterans with 100 percent service-connected disabilities to have free tuition at Minnesota state colleges and universities.
- A law that would allow veterans with 50 percent service-connected disability to get free hunting and small game licenses and lifetime fishing licenses. At the present time, the threshold is 100 percent disability.
- A bill that would extend the eight-year homestead property tax exemption to a permanent exemption for widows of veterans, if the veteran was eligible at the time of his or her death.

**Continued on Page 2**

**EIGHT STARS ON THE BANNER**

The Stanek Family of Austin sent eight children and the family dog to war in World War II.

Story on pages 8-10

**Wolfsteller chosen as new state DSO**

Jeremy Wolfsteller, who had been serving as the acting Department Service Officer, was hired as the permanent DSO in January.

He will replace Tom Newman, who resigned last year to take a position with the federal Department of Veterans Affairs at the regional office in St. Paul.

Wolfsteller, 37, who had served as assistant DSO for six years under Newman, was hired by the Minnesota’s American Legion’s Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Committee and endorsed by Department Adjutant Randy Tesdahl.

He is an OEF/OIF veteran serving in the Army with two tours in Iraq. On his second tour, he was wounded in combat and is medically retired from the Army.

A native of Hopkins, he came back to Minnesota and took a position with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development helping veterans seek employment after their time in service.

“His love to serve veterans was amplified to a broader level when he was recruited to work for The American Legion,” Tesdahl said. “During that time he has been recognized at all levels for his work with veterans at the VA Medical Center as well as the outstate work he has accomplished.”

Wolfsteller will continue to office primarily at the medical center in order to have more contact with the veterans he serves.

“Jeremy has experience in the role and has created long-lasting professional relationships through the Minnesota veterans service network and also in the national VA&R arena,” Tesdahl said.

At this time the Department VA&R Committee and the adjutant are recruiting for an administrative person to take over Wolfsteller’s old position.

The new job will be different, however, with three-fourths of the time

Continued on Page 2

**Continued on Page 2**
Task Force sets legislative goals

Continued from Page 1

the legislation will encourage more military retirees to make their permanent home in Minnesota.

— A change in the law that would remove the Guardianship language from the state MDVA commissioner’s duties. The program is no longer in effect.

— A law that would create a disclosure statement and waiver language for veterans who are seeking benefits through private, for-profit providers. The statement would include acknowledgement by the veteran that these services and advocacy are offered at no-cost by Veterans Service Organizations and County Veterans Service Officers.

Members of the task force include the Minnesota American Legion, The American Ex-PW’s, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, Marine Corps League, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Vietnam Veterans of America. The members of the task force must agree on a legislative proposal unanimously in order for the task force to support it.

The chairman of the Commander’s Task Force is Gregory Remus of the DAV. The vice chair is Jim Kellogg of The American Legion.

Wolfsteller will be new Minnesota DSO

Continued from Page 1

continued from page 1

Wisconsin law will provide burials

Continued from Page 1

Tom Ludka was instrumental in helping with the legislation, and Department Vice Commander Cooper “has really picked up the torch on this effort,” Kurtz said.

Cooper, a member of Post 80 in New Richmond, said he couldn’t get the Sund story out of his head. He formed a committee tasked with seeing if there were any other veterans’ remains in similar situations in Wisconsin’s District 10.

Finding three, Cooper then expanded his search to the rest of the state, reaching out to more than 650 funeral homes. More than 40 such remains have been found. “I know there are more,” Cooper said. “There are a couple funeral home directors who have just started going through their records, or their records are in really bad shape.”

Of the remains that have been located, their situation usually falls into three categories, Cooper said: 25 percent have no known next of kin, 25 percent’s families have been unresponsive, and 50 percent have families who are happy to have the Legion help.

“To me, these guys are as important as POWs or MIAs,” Cooper said of the veterans’ remains. “Just happen to be on American soil. Everyone deserves a final resting place. These happen to be veterans who deserve full military honors. I’m going to make damn sure they get it.”

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Endorsements
Skillestad endorsed for V-Cdr.

Richard Skillestad has been endorsed by the Eyota Legion Post 551 for Department Vice Commander for the 1st and 3rd Districts for the Legion year 2016-17.

Richard Skillestad has served the Eyota Post 551 as Commander, 1st Vice Commander, 2nd Vice, Chaplain, Service Officer, Legion baseball coach. He is currently the Service Officer, Color Guard member and serves on the Executive Board. In addition, he has held the office of Olmsted County Commander and Chaplain.

At the district level, he has been Commander, 1st Vice Commander, Chaplain, Historian, and Law & Order Chairman. He is currently the Historian.

At the Department level he has been Ideer/Chairman and served on the Executive Board.

He is a member of the 40 & 8, 1st Degree, 1st Vice Commander, and serves on the Executive Board.

As we implement the Veterans Choice Program, we are learning from our stakeholders what works and what needs to be refined," said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. "It is our goal to do all that we can to remove barriers that separate Veterans from the care they deserve."

To date, more than 400,000 medical appointments have been scheduled since the Veterans Choice Program went into effect on November 5, 2014.

Under the old policy, a Veteran was eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she met the following criteria:

• Enrolled in VA health care by 8/1/14 or able to enroll as a combat Veteran to be eligible for the Veterans Choice Program.

A Veteran with unusual or excessive burden eligibility determined by geographical challenges, environmental factors or a medical condition impacting the Veteran’s ability to travel.

A Veteran deemed eligible based on the Veteran’s current residence being more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility.

Under the updated eligibility requirements, a Veteran is eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets at least one of the following criteria:

• Told by his or her local VA medical facility that they will not be able to schedule an appointment for care within 30 days of the date the Veteran’s physician determines he/she needs to be seen or within 30 days of the date the Veteran wishes to be seen if there is no specific date from his or her physician.

• Lives more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician.

• Needs to travel by air, boat or ferry to the VA medical facility closest to his/her home.

• Faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to the closest VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature or simplicity or frequency of the care needed and whether an attendant is needed. Staff at the Veteran’s local VA medical facility will work with him or her to determine if the Veteran is eligible for any of these reasons;

• Veterans seeking to use the Veterans Choice Program or wanting to know more about it, can call 866-606-8198 to confirm their eligibility and to schedule an appointment. For more details about the Veterans Choice Program and VA’s progress, visit: www.va.gov/opa/choiceact.

VA makes several changes to Veterans Choice Program

WASHINGTON – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced a number of changes to make participation in the Veterans Choice Program easier and more convenient for Veterans who need to use it. The move, which streamlines eligibility requirements, follows feedback from Veterans along with organizations working on their behalf.

"As we implement the Veterans Choice Program, we are learning from our stakeholders what works and what needs to be refined," said VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald. "It is our goal to do all that we can to remove barriers that separate Veterans from the care they deserve."

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A Veteran deemed eligible based on the Veteran’s current residence being more than 40 miles driving distance from the closest VA medical facility.

Under the updated eligibility requirements, a Veteran is eligible for the Veterans Choice Program if he or she is enrolled in the VA health care system and meets at least one of the following conditions:

• Determined eligible based on the VA’s review of current medical science and ATSDR’s findings, Circuit Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit of the United States decided in July 2014 that ATSDR’s findings are legally sufficient to prove causation. Based on VA’s review of current medical science and ATSDR’s findings, Secretary McDonald intends to propose creation of a presumption of service connection for the following conditions: Kidney Cancer Liver Cancer Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma Leukemia Multiple Myeloma Amyloidosis Parkinson’s Disease Aplastic Anemia / Myelodysplastic Syndromes

More information can be found at: https://www.va.gov/medcenter/services/svcpolic...
Greeting fellow Legionnaires.

Congratulations, you have done it. You have made history. For the first time in recent memory our Department is ahead of the previous year in membership. Your hard work has paid off. Now we have the last 10 percent to renew or recruit. As we farmers say, “Don’t take the plow out of the ground yet we need to finish the field.” We can do this working together. One way to get it done is the old divide and conquer theory. If we each look at our non-renewal list at our post and divide up the list the task becomes much easier. Don’t let the membership program be one person’s job. Together we can make it happen.

We have reached the half way point in our Legion year. It proves that our goals and objectives are not always at the beginning of the year. How are we doing? What can we do to achieve the goals we set? I have attended some of your Mid-Winter Districts. It seems that you and your members have organized and the new ideas I have seen you implement. Change can create new interest and bring out new ideas. As an old 44 member, I am reminded of one of your sayings: Strive to Make the Better.

This is the time of year to look for new leadership for the coming year. Encourage new leadership in your post at all offices. Become mentors and share the knowledge you have. I believe that you can feel you have done a good job with an office when you have helped your successor to do a better job than you did. We all learn from our past, we need to continue to do this. Together we can make us better.

The age of technology is upon us. Some of us have adapted well and some need coaching. As we move forward in this new and fast changing age, communication has changed and taken on new forms. One that I have seen most successful is our newsletters. Our postal system has become consolidated and that has caused more delays in delivery. Electronic news letters are being used more and found to be successful. The news we send out is more current and can reach more people.

Here’s my history. I was first turned away in 1972, and since have been transferred from the Brainerd clinic to the Minneapolis VA Medical Center where I have been transferred from the Brainerd clinic to the Minneapolis VA Medical Center since have been transferred from the Brainerd clinic to the Minneapolis VA Medical Center where I received at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center.
What’s Happening

Flea Market
There will be an antique sale/flea market at the North St Paul Scout Hall, 992 56th St. S. on Sunday, Feb. 20, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Bake sale and food will be available. For more info, call Betty 775-5552. All proceeds go to support the work of the Auxiliary.

Valentine’s Day Breakfast
Apple Valley Unit 1775 will have a Valentine’s Day Omelet Breakfast and Bake Sale on Sunday, Feb. 14, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tickets are $10 for adults and $5 for children under 12. Omelet tickets will be made to order and will be served with hash browns, toast, fruit cups, milk and coffee. Bring your sweetheart.

Tree Seedlings
Orders for tree seedlings are now being accepted through the Conservation Committee. Order forms have been mailed to all posts and are available for downloading from the state Legion website: mnlegion.org. Click on “post resources” then “Energy and Conservation Tree Order Form.”

There is a new seedling supplier this year and a larger variety of seedlings is available in March 31. For more information, contact Carl Hendrickson at 218-393-0079.

Richfield Casino Trip
Richfield Post 435 is sponsoring a bus trip to Prairie’s Edge Casino in Granite Falls on March 6-7. The cost is $89 for the bus fare and includes transportation, a hotel stay, and tickets for the casino each night. For more information, contact Deanna Gershner at 612-867-5144.

Taps

Wiener, Lawrence D., 59, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Jan. 13, 2016. He was retired from the National Guard, 34th Division. He was a member of the color guard and a member of St. Joseph Post 328.

Ziemer, Brian M., 70, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Dec. 9, 2016. He served in Vietnam. He was a past commander of Elysian Post 311.

Robson, William, 90, Army veteran of World War II, died Dec. 24, 2015. He served in the Philippines. He was a past member of Ely Post 311.

Schnettler, Jerome L., 66, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Dec. 9, 2016. He served in Germany. He was a member of Albert Lea Post 45.

Tschann, Robert L., 76, Army veteran of the Vietnam War, died Jan. 7, 2016. He was a member of Payneville Post 271.

Lohse, Donald G., 91, Navy veteran of World War II, died Dec. 24, 2015. He was a member of Waseca Post 228.

Petre, Myren, 81, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Dec. 20, 2015. He was a baker in the Army. He was a member of Long Prairie Post 12.

Hoffman, Glen D., 91, Army veteran of World War II, died Dec. 26, 2015. He served in Germany and France. He was a member of Redwood Falls Post 38.

Hagert, Bernard M., 86, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Dec. 10, 2015. He was a member of Redwood Falls Post 38.

Castner, Stephen, 71, Air Force veteran of the Vietnam War, died Jan. 16, 2016. He was a past club accountant at Red Wing Post 54.

Carlson, Leonard “Boomer,” 90, Army veteran of World War II, died Jan. 7, 2016. He was a member of Red Wing Post 54.

Jansen, John, 88, Army veteran of World War II, died Jan. 10, 2016. He was a member of Red Wing Post 54.

Neiheiser, Robert William, 85, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Dec. 31, 2015. He was a member of Waseca Post 228.

Hill, Reino Michael, 87, Navy veteran of the Korean War, died Jan. 6, 2016. He was a member of Chisholm Post 216.

Klingler, Edward, 68, Marine Corps veteran of the Korean War, died Dec. 23, 2015. He was a member of Princeton Post 216.

Donald, O. J., 92, Navy veteran of World War II, died Jan. 5, 2016. He was a fireman and second class. He was a member of the color guard and past commander of Princeton Post 216.

Kiester, Calvin, 91, Army Air Corps veteran of World War II, died Jan. 4, 2016. He later served in the Air Force Reserve, retiring in 1985. He was a member of Waseca Post 228.

Lynch, Robert James, 86, Navy veteran of the Korean War, died Jan. 5, 2016. He was an honor guard member of Waseca Post 228.


Prax, Robert E., 87, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Jan. 7, 2016. He was a member of Fairfax Post 205.

Priboda, Roy L., 82, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Dec. 23, 2015. He was a member of Pine City Post 51.

Johnson, Walter, 84, National Guard veteran of the Korean War, died Jan. 11, 2016. He was a member of Pine City Post 51.

Wesenberg, Michael F., 65, Navy veteran of the Vietnam War, died Jan. 14, 2016. He was a member of Sauk Rapids Post 254.

Fuchs, Deane Arden, 78, Army veteran of the Korean War, died Jan. 7, 2016. He served with the 175th armored Infantry. He was a member of Pine Island Post 184.

Editor’s Note: When submitting obituaries, please include the full name, age, what military branch the veteran served in, dates of service, and a brief sentence or two about the veteran’s service, valor medals and his or her service to their post.
Legion posts encouraged to promote voting

As 2016 ushered in presidential and congressional elections, American Legion posts are encouraged to promote “Get Out the Vote” (GOTV) efforts while remaining non-partisan in the process.

The Legion’s “Get Out the Vote” brochure provides ideas on how posts can participate in and promote the electoral process in an effort to motivate U.S. citizens of legal age to exercise their right to vote.

Legionnaires can serve as poll volunteers, host or participate in nonpartisan candidate forums, place public service announcements in local media that promote registration and voting, distribute GOTV promotional materials and more.

During GOTV promotional efforts, it is imperative to remember that The American Legion is nonpartisan and will not be used for the dissemination of organizational policy or for the promotion of any candidate or party.

For example, when a Legion post hosts or sponsors a candidate forum or debate, it must be open to the public and all candidates must be invited.

Any impression of endorsement or support must be avoided. Individual Legion members may support candidates of their choosing. However, Legionnaires engaged in nonpartisan activities such as attending a candidate’s rally should do so without wearing the Legion cap or other Legion attire.

“It’s an exciting time for our nation as we prepare to elect our 45th president,” said Richard Anderson, chairman of the Legion’s National Americanism Commission. “And as Legionnaires, it is our duty to demonstrate 100 percent Americanism and commitment for continued service to this country by being politically active as individuals.

But politics and elections can easily stir the emotions and passions of even the most passive people among us. For this reason, as posts begin their Get Out the Vote efforts, they must be ever-vigilant in following the rules of nonpartisanship.”

Start planning GOTV efforts now by downloading the Legion’s “Get Out the Vote” and “Vote, America” brochures. For sample GOTV public service announcements and news releases, visit www.legion.org/vote.

“As you head to the polls, and encourage others to do the same, remember that our government is ‘of the people, by the people and for the people’ and our democratic republic can only function when we the people participate,” Anderson said.

“With a successful GOTV campaign, Legionnaires can make a different in voter turnout.”

Legion membership doing well this year

American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett was happy to announce to members of the Legion’s National Membership & Post Activities Committee on Jan. 8 that 36 Legion departments are at or above the 80 percent membership target date for January. For the past two years, less than 10 departments had met the January membership goal.

“I’m smiling right now, and hope I continue to smile – there’s more green (membership) numbers than red numbers,” Barnett said. “Now we need to focus on finishing the game. We have to be close to that 100 percent (by May) if we are going to grow the organization.”

The dues increase and revitalization efforts are two reasons Barnett believes membership is in the green. A dues increase “doesn’t always represent growth,” he said, “but with it being implemented in the middle of the membership year it created a focus for the membership team that there was a reason to get out there early and work membership.”

With revitalization, I’ve seen the fruits of those efforts. Not every department has implemented a revitalization effort while others have implemented it extremely well. We did revitalization efforts is where we are seeing membership growth.”

The committee members gathered in Indianapolis to review the progress toward the Legion’s revitalization strategic plan, and to discuss ways to grow membership. Young Army Iraq/Afghanistan veteran Edgar Morales of Bryan, Ohio, said he joined the committee to get involved, and encouraged to participate in Legion programs at the local level.

“We need to promote our programs,” said Morales, a member of Post 159. “If we do our programs and serve our community, we are going to see that growth and those veterans are going to find out who we are and what we stand for. And that’s going to bring in our membership.”
What we call World War II, the Russians call the Great Patriotic War.

And flat-out patriotism was a major factor in why the Soviet Union was able to put 34 million men and women in army uniforms and eventually push the Nazi army back into Germany.

Author Roger Reese, a professor of history at Texas A&M and an expert on the Soviet Union, said that when he first started talking about the Red Army at history round tables years ago, people assumed that the Soviet soldiers did not fight for their country in war, but Hitler’s generals were inconclusive.

Many onlookers thought Stalin, for a variety of reasons, would have trouble creating and maintaining a strong army.

Part of the reason is the history of the Soviet Union in the years just preceding World War II. Stalin was continuing to try and collectivize agriculture during the 1930s, and it was not a smooth process.

It was very, very tough. The collectivization of agriculture was brutal and the victims were millions of people who died of famine, Reese said as many as five million people “died of starvation” by the end of the year.

In addition, just before the war and even after Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Stalin purged the officer ranks of the Red Army. And prior to this, political purges killed over 800,000 in the country.

“The survivors of those episodes were now the ones being called on to fight,” Reese said.

So why did they fight, and in such huge numbers?

Because Hitler was the lesser of two evils? Or because they were motivated by fear?

“It was very, very tough. The collectivization of agriculture was brutal and the victims were millions of people who died of famine,” Reese said.

For the most part, Reese said, they were Russian (as the nation was Russia, and Russians were patriotic). But the commanding officers were not that well trained at the time.

“The soldiers were good, and for the most part were well trained,” Reese said, but the commanding officers were not that well trained at the time. Very few had any experience thanks to the purges.

The troops generally defended their front, but Germany’s lightning warfare quickly pushed them back to Leningrad where they were surrounded. “We prevented them from entering the city,” Rabinovich said.

Jacob Rabinovich was born in 1921 in a Byelorussian town to a poor Jewish family. He went to military school in 1939 and by 1941 when Germany invaded the Soviet Union, he was about to graduate as a lieutenant.

He was assigned command of a machine gun unit. “The soldiers were good, and for the most part were well trained,” Reese said, but the commanding officers were not that well trained at the time. Very few had any experience thanks to the purges.

The troops generally defended their front, but Germany’s lightning warfare quickly pushed them back to Leningrad where they were surrounded. “We prevented them from entering the city,” Rabinovich said.

He lost seven of his 22 machine gunners in the early action.

The 900-day siege of Leningrad was very tough, especially the first year, and especially the civilians trapped in the city. Rabinovich said, however, that the troops on the line had adequate food, clothing and ammunition.

He thanked the United States for much of the supplies that did reach Leningrad through the siege years.

During the siege, he became a chief of reconnaissance, and three times he went on missions behind German lines, but the commanding officers were not that well trained at the time. Very few had any experience thanks to the purges.

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Eight Stars on the Banner

During World War II, blue star banners were common across America. Families that had a son or daughter serving in the military displayed the red-bordered banner, often home-sewn, in a front window as a symbol of sacrifice, honor and pride.

The Albert and Caroline Stanek Family of Austin, Minnesota, had a blue star banner in their front window during the war. Only their banner was a little different. It had eight stars sewn into it.

Bud Stanek grew up in that family of 10 children. By the end of World War II, he and seven of his siblings had served in the military. Of the other two, one sister worked in Washington D.C. in the war effort, and the youngest later served in the Korean War.

Even the family dog, “King Wags” served during the war.

Stanek recalled a happy childhood. “My brothers and I often went hunting to put food on the table.

A family history recounts trips to the Cedar River to fish for bullheads using worms and cane poles, fishing from shore.

Friday night was card games with the family and others trying their hand at 500 or Hearts. Albert had his reserved chair, closest to the refrigerator and the beer. Sundays, after church when Caroline fixed a chicken dinner, card games also were the main occupation.

The Staneks raised cherries, grapes, corn for popping, potatoes and other food in their yard. There were 12 apple trees. Each fall, the family could can between 30 and 40 gallons of sauerkraut.

It’s also been said that the family engaged in a little bootlegging during Prohibition.

Bud remembers that after a rainstorm, his sisters would wash their hair in the rain barrel alongside the house, a tradition that became more difficult one day when the brothers filled the barrel with snapping turtles.

His main love was baseball, and he played for the Austin High School team and also for the Legion team. Later, when he worked for Scheid Plumbing, he was the boss of Moose Skowron, who played for the Austin Packers minor league team and was later an all-star for the New York Yankees. At one point, Stanek was recruited to play professionally for the Duluth Dukes in the St. Louis Cardinal farm system, but chose not to.

Baseball was a strong tradition in the family. It was claimed that Bernie was the best ballplayer, but all the boys played. Donald, the youngest, played for an Air Force team.

Stanek graduated from Austin High School in 1941, just before America’s entry into the war. He hung around town for a year, worked a while at the Hormel plant, and then enlisted in the Marine Corps at the end of 1942. “It was either that or get drafted.”

He went to boot camp in San Diego. “I was sick when they were spending their time on the rifle range. I had what they called cat fever, and I missed quite a bit. When it came time to take the test, I shot very poorly. It was probably a good thing because if I’d shot well I’d have been stuck in some line company.”

Instead, Stanek was chosen to go into the Marine air program. “I was what I wanted, and by gosh I got it. I did go back after a year and take the test again to get my sharpshooter badge.”

Training was at Norman, Oklahoma, where Stanek learned his trade as an airplane armorer. It was his job to put bombs, rockets, 20 millimeter shells, .50 caliber bullets and other armament on Marine Corps planes.

He was next sent to Marine Corps Air Station Santa Barbara at Goleta, California, where his training continued. “They were training new Marine Corps pilots there, and we were training as the new ground crews.”

Stanek anticipated he might be sent aboard a Navy carrier as part of his squadron, VMF-221, but no one knew for sure. “They don’t tell you nothing.”

Finally, in December of 1944, his squadron joined the crew of the USS Bunker Hill, an Essex-class carrier that was beginning its second tour of the Pacific. The first action was at Iwo Jima, aiding in the capture of the island.

“My younger brother, Arnie, was fighting at Iwo Jima. He got shot, but he survived. I didn’t even know he was there.”

Stanek said during the war he generally had no clue where his siblings were. There was very little letter writing between the brothers and sisters, and when a letter did come home to the parents, any information about where they were was censored out.

Aboard ship, life settled into a routine based on when the air operations were scheduled. “We were always busy with a lot of stuff to do. When we weren’t working on the planes, we would be loading the ammunition belts with different kinds of shells.”

During air ops, Stanek was often on the flight deck.

The Stanek Family of Austin, Minnesota, sent eight children off to war during World War II — and also the family dog. All returned safely. Only one now remains to tell his story. Stanley ‘Bud’ Stanek joined the Marine Corps and served in a fighter squadron stationed on board the USS Bunker Hill. He was on board the ship in 1945 when it was hit by two kamikaze planes that set the ship on fire and killed nearly 400 Marines and Sailors.
The Stanek Family

Leonard, born 1912, joined the Merchant Marine and served in the North Atlantic.

Richard, born 1914, served in the Army in Italy fighting in the Apennines and the Po Valley. He earned a citation for meritorious service while fighting with the 86th Mountain Infantry.

Robert, born 1914 (Richard's twin), joined the Army. He served in Florida for a time as the skipper of a 48-foot Chris-Craft boat used by the Army. He was later stationed in the Aleutians.

Marjorie, born 1916, WAVE. Served in Alameda and San Diego, California.

Bernard, born 1918. Tried to join the Marines at the onset of the war, but was rejected because of foot problems. He joined the Army instead. Served overseas for 38 months at New Guinea and the Philippines. He was in a mobile refrigeration unit and earned two battle stars serving with the Americal Division.

Helen, born 1921. Women's Army Corps. Worked as a secretary/assistant on the staff of Gen. Dwight Eisenhower at Supreme Headquarters in Europe. She was one of nine secretaries to Eisenhower, and worked directly under Gen. Robert Crawford, Eisenhower's assistant chief of staff. Whichever Eisenhower traveled, Helen Stanek also went and her experiences included Scotland, Goering's house in Berlin, and she was present at the "little red schoolhouse" in Reims, France, where the German surrender was signed.

Stanley "Bud," born 1923, enlisted in the Marines and became a member of the ground crew for a Marine squadron, VMF 221, the Fighting Falcons. Served on board the USS Bunker Hill.

Arnold, born 1925, enlisted in the Marine Corps by lying about his age, served on Saipan, Tinian, Roi-Namur and Iwo Jima. He was wounded at Saipan and Iwo Jima. On Saipan, he took a Japanese pillbox. Fighting with the Fourth Marine Regiment, he was awarded two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star during the war.

Dorothy, born 1926, worked for the U.S. government in Washington D.C. in the State Department.

Donna, born 1930, too young to serve in World War II. Joined the Air Force and served in Korea and Japan. As an airplane mechanic, he fixed Gen. Curtis LeMay's aircraft and also his Cadillac.

Donald, born 1926, enlisted in the Marine Corps by lying about his age, served on Saipan, Tinian, Roi-Namur and Iwo Jima. He was wounded at Saipan and Iwo Jima. On Saipan, he took a Japanese pillbox. Fighting with the Fourth Marine Regiment, he was awarded two Purple Hearts and a Bronze Star during the war.

King Wags, black Labrador cross, served in the K-9 Corps in Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. He was a sentry dog and after the war guarded the parents' house. He served almost two years, and was given an honorable discharge. When the Staneks were notified King was done with his service, Albert and Caroline chose not to have the dog come home because they thought he might be too mean, but son and daughter, Donald and Dorothy, forged the parents' name on the papers requesting King be sent home. Albert and Caroline were surprised when they got a call that King was at the railway station. They drove down, and Donald yelled, "Here, King." The dog jumped off the train, jumped through the back window of the car, and sat down between Donald and Dorothy. King was home.

George "Dee" Faas, Helen's husband, served as a medic and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism at Bougainville. On one day he was sent out six times, and saved six soldiers' lives.

Father Albert Stanek served during the Spanish American War.

Mother Caroline Stanek. At the end of the war, from nephew Lennie: "I don't think Grandma drank, but we did not see her the rest of the night, so maybe she had a glass or two of wine to celebrate her sons and daughters would be coming home safe."
"When the planes came in, we knew what was going to happen. We would have to re-arm the planes right off the bat on the flight deck so they could go back out again. We worked behind barriers.

It was a dangerous place to be. "The planes would come in so fast. We were always afraid that the rockets on their wings would come off and come flying down the deck."

I went back to the Bunker Hill. The ship was attacked. Stanek said his assignment during battle stations, "was something under the flight deck. I never got to it, of course."

Stanek chose not to talk about what happened next, only saying that he made his way out of the compartment and worked his way to the rear of the ship. A newspaper clipping from that time gives a hint of what Stanek was facing.

"Stanek was below deck in a compartment when a bomb struck. Within the compartment, about 35 men died of fire and suffocation. Heavy smoke poured from the badly damaged ship."

Many men dove off the ship to escape the raging fires. In all, 389 men aboard Bunker Hill were killed or were missing. Another 264 were wounded. Homicide men kept the ship’s boilers and engines running and the ship survived. Slowly the fires burned out or were extinguished. The men trapped at the back of the ship were unable to move forward because of the fires, and at the same time trying to breathe while surrounded by the asphyxiating smoke. In other parts of the ship men were dying by the scores as the Bunker Hill’s ventilation system sucked the black smoke below and it filled the compartments.

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Hello, Department of Minnesota from the 2nd District. We are six months into this Legion Family year and I’ve had an interesting time doing this job. The 2nd District Vice Commanders have done a wonderful job working with Post Commanders and the Department. We are doing a good job of keeping our districts involved. The mailed surveys that are sent out in January are not returned. The membership team for our District, along with all of our Posts has done a great job of keeping us on top. Thank you all for your efforts but we are not done yet. One more big push should do it. Congratulations to the 15 posts that are at goal or all time high.

National Commander Dale Barnett will be in Forest Lake on February 12th at 2 p.m. on Monday, February 1st. He will also be in Hutchinson on Wednesday, February 3rd at 8 for a breakfast meeting. We need all Post Commanders from the District who are at goal or all time high to be at one of these events to have your picture taken with the National Commander. The 1st and 3rd District Fishing contest will be held in Ely asian on February 7th at 1 p.m. The Auxiliary, SAL and Legionnaires are all welcome, see you on Lake Francis for a good day of fishing. The 6th District Oratorical was held at the Brainerd Post 255 from 8-12 February. If you have not paid your dues yet, please do so now. The new rates take effect as of January 21 when National will increase their rate. Membership training will take place during the 2nd District meeting on February 4th at 2 p.m.

The 2nd District Oratorical was held at the Brainerd Post 255 on 23 January. I was impressed with the contestants’ skills and discipline.

The Fabulous Fourth is enjoying this wonderful time of the year with the snow, cold and ice. These are the essential elements for us to take part in the St. Paul Winter Carnival. Thank you; 4th and 5th District Legionnaires, Auxiliary Members, Sons of the American Legion and Legionnaires. The time to walk with dedication in the Grand Day Parade. You represented us very well.

As of January 13 we were 26 members behind last year. I am asking each Fifth District Commander to contact their assigned Post Commanders and Membership Directors encouraging them to make that personal contact to all remaining unpaid members. Let’s get ahead of the numbers in February. Congratulations to The Hellenic, Bambriotte, Joe Smith and The Minneapolis Veterans Home Posts on attaining 100% or exceeding their membership goal.

“Outstanding Enlisted Man/Woman of the Year” instructors have been sent to each Post. For applications contact the Fifth District Officer. The Second Term Relations Chairmen Curt Norenbere at 651-631-2706 and cdbi@sttc.umn.edu or Department Headquarters at 651-291-1800.

As Always, “Keep Looking Forward and Keep It Positive”

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MOORHEAD AND DILWORTH -- Moorhead Post 21 and the Dilworth VFW honor guard are shown firing a 21-gun salute at the North Dakota State University dedication of the Fallen Bison Memorial. It honors former students who have given their lives in service to their country.

BLOOMINGTON GIFT BAGS -- Bloomington Unit 550 prepared 150 gift bags for veterans containing socks, candy and miscellaneous items that were delivered to five care centers in Bloomington. Front row: Gabriele Servin, President Beth Clausen. Back row: Bonnie Proctor, Rose Kilt, Nancy Stolarczyk, Joan Boerner and Janice Rau. The bags would not have been possible without a donation from the Bloomington Post.

EAGAN POINTE -- A flag dedication was held recently at Eagan Pointe Senior Living Center. There are 36 veterans and 16 widows of veterans living at the center. Third District Vice Commander Bob Racette and the Rosemount Post helped plan the flag raising ceremony.

BACKUS DONATION -- Backus Post 368 donated $2,000 to the local foodshelf. From left: Eugene Gagnon, William Taylor, commander, Cheri Westphal, representing the food shelf, Don Van Horst.

OKLEE MEMBER HONORED -- Frank Hanson, right, accepts his 60 years of service certificate from Oklee Post 159 Commander Dean Walstad.

CONCORD SINGERS -- With the help of six veterans organizations, the Concord Singers traveled to the Minnesota Veterans Home at Minneapolis to perform a concert. Included in the supporters were New Ulm Post 132 and the Auxiliary.

SPRING GROVE GIFTS TO SOLDIERS -- A Spring Grove Boy Scout Troop packed holiday gift bags for troops stationed overseas. Spring Grove Post 249 paid for the postage. From left: Sam Folstad, Zach Folstad, Brody Christiansen, Ben Gray and Lance Hegge.

WILLMAR GIFTS -- Willmar Post 167 delivered over 50 gifts to veterans in nursing homes in the Willmar area.
BAYPORT HOSTS DINNER -- Bayport Post 491 hosted a dinner for the Stillwater Area High School exchange students. From left, front: Marlena Sych, Fredrika Von Essen, Bia Nunin, Kun Sahaisuk, Veronica Deyerl. In back: Jonn Von Puttkamer, Stephanie Storp, Jonas Ankiar, Sandra Isakson, Erik Boe. The students were presented with American flags. The students told about their experiences in the U.S.

BIG LAKE MEMBER HONORED -- Dick Boecker, right, was honored at the St. Cloud VA annual Volunteer Recognition Ceremony for his 8,750 volunteer hours put in at the St. Cloud VA Medical Center. Minnesota National Executive Committeeman Marland Ronning offered his congratulations.

NURSE TRAINING SCHOLARSHIPS -- Recipients of this past year’s Nurse Training Scholarships were honored. From left: Danielle Sims, Minneapolis VA; Katie Inveen, Minneapolis VA; Jeremy Wolfsteller, Assistant Department DSO; Kurt Thienen, Associate Medical Center Director; Mary McMahon, Minneapolis VA; Helen Pearman, Nurse Executive; Mary McDonough, Minneapolis VA.

NURSE SCHOLARSHIP -- Finance Committee Chairman Tom Burau presents an American Legion Nursing Scholarship to Velvet Link, Fergus Falls Veterans Home.

NURSE SCHOLARSHIP -- Rehabilitation Chairman Wilson Spence presents an American Legion Nursing Scholarship to Jane Matejcek, Fargo VA.

NURSE SCHOLARSHIP -- Finance Committee Chairman Tom Burau presents an American Legion Nursing Scholarship to Olena Colvin, Fergus Falls Veterans Home.
Greetings all and happy Valentines Day

As membership is what keeps our organization running and making it capable of assisting each and every Unit in the effort to serve our veterans and their families, we continue to struggle to meet our membership goals.

As Department leaders, we are writing this directly to you, as you are the members who make this organization possible. Sometimes, as we have been made aware, important information isn’t shared with all members of our organization and we want to make sure the right people read this.

We are asking that each Unit come up with some sort of plan to make that personal contact to those members who haven’t renewed their 2016 dues and also come up with ways to recruit new members. The American Legion Auxiliary is a wonderful organization that only does good for our Veterans, along with Community Service, Children and Youth and many more areas. Without membership, we will no longer be able to exist.

A couple of hard facts are as follows: as of the end of our 2014/2015 Auxiliary year membership was behind our goal by 1,535 members. As of today we are behind 1,190 for the 2015/2016 Auxiliary year. Adding just those two figures together brings us losing 2,725 members in just one and one half years. Prior to that membership has also been on the constant decline.

Please meet with your Unit leaders and set a strategic plan for your Unit. You can follow the Department Strategic Plan which is on our website as a guideline, and your Unit can develop a strategic plan for your Unit. You can follow the Department Strategic Plan which is on our website as a guideline, and your Unit can develop a strategic plan for your Unit. You can follow the Department Strategic Plan which is on our website as a guideline, and your Unit can develop a strategic plan for your Unit.

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Dakota, Carver, Scott and Anoka counties).

POPPY ORDERS
Shipping of 2016 Poppy orders began last fall as orders were received and Poppies were available. All orders are shipped according to the “need by” date indicated when the order was placed. Orders are shipped by first class mail. Upon receipt of your Poppies please check it carefully. Contact the department office with any discrepancies. If your Unit has already ordered Poppies, but needs more, please order again. Units may place as many Poppy orders as they want to.

If you haven’t placed your Poppy order yet, please do so. We need to finalize the number of Poppies needed for this year’s Army distribution so we can plan accordingly. Let’s have 100% Unit participation in the Auxiliary Poppy program. Right now out of 440 Units 329 have placed orders. Remember our Poppies are made by our veterans and they receive a small compensation for their work. Let’s support their efforts. It will help the Department Office tremendously if you get your orders in now and not wait until the last minute. That will ensure that we have the inventory to handle all orders.

Don’t save your Poppies just for Poppy Day. Use them throughout the year. Let’s make this a Poppy year in recog-nition of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice to keep America free.

2017 MEMBERSHIP DUES
Gosh, it seems that these months go by so fast — in the February Unit mailing, every Unit received a notice asking for the amount of your Unit’s 2017 Senior and Junior dues, and the name and address of the person whose name should appear on your Unit’s 2017 dues’ notices. Please make sure this information is correct so you can send it back to Sandy at the Department Office by March 15. There are no increases in dues at either the National or Department level this year.

SCHOLARSHIPS
Just a reminder all applications for any Department and National scholarships must be received in the department office by March 15. Let your schools know they are available and provide them with the application forms. They are also posted on our website for your convenience. If additional copies are needed, you may duplicate those you have received or contact the Department office.

PRESIDENT’S MEMORY BOOK
If our Department President Sandy has attended an American Legion Auxiliary function in your community, be certain to share with her through her Memory Book Chairman any pictures, newspaper articles, etc. that pertain to her visit.

You may send these directly to: Diane Hayes, 30595 Pleasant View Road, Frazee, MN 56544. Email them to dianehayes@msn.com. You can also send them to the department office and we will forward them for you. President Sandy has been such a treat to work with this year and her passion for the organization comes through at every visit she makes. I am sure many of you have some real interesting “moments”.

UNIT ANNUAL REPORTS
Unit Annual Reports have been mailed to each Unit in January. The school year sheets and history paper will be in one envelope. If you don’t receive this envelope, contact the department office immediately. Please note: The Unit reports cover the period from April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016.

This year the reports have again been reformatted because of the feedback we received from the Units. We have made the Unit reports like those in the past. When our Units ask for better ways of doing things we do everything in our power to come through.

All Unit reports are due on or before April 15. Reports are important. Let’s hear from every Unit.

February 2016
Minnesota Legionnaire

Dakota, Carver, Scott and Anoka counties)

POPPY ORDERS
Shipping of 2016 Poppy orders began last fall as orders were received and Poppies were available. All orders are shipped according to the “need by” date indicated when the order was placed. Orders are shipped by first class mail. Upon receipt of your Poppies please check it carefully. Contact the department office with any discrepancies. If your Unit has already ordered Poppies, but needs more, please order again. Units may place as many Poppy orders as they want to.

If you haven’t placed your Poppy order yet, please do so. We need to finalize the number of Poppies needed for this year’s Army distribution so we can plan accordingly. Let’s have 100% Unit participation in the Auxiliary Poppy program. Right now out of 440 Units 329 have placed orders. Remember our Poppies are made by our veterans and they receive a small compensation for their work. Let’s support their efforts. It will help the Department Office tremendously if you get your orders in now and not wait until the last minute. That will ensure that we have the inventory to handle all orders.

Don’t save your Poppies just for Poppy Day. Use them throughout the year. Let’s make this a Poppy year in recog-nition of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice to keep America free.

2017 MEMBERSHIP DUES
Gosh, it seems that these months go by so fast — in the February Unit mailing, every Unit received a notice asking for the amount of your Unit’s 2017 Senior and Junior dues, and the name and address of the person whose name should appear on your Unit’s 2017 dues’ notices. Please make sure this information is correct so you can send it back to Sandy at the Department Office by March 15. There are no increases in dues at either the National or Department level this year.

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GIRLS STATE
There is a correction to be noted from last month’s Legionnaire. The actual week of the Girls State session is June 12 - 18, 2016 at Bethel University in St. Paul. This year will be very exciting with many new changes in store.

PAST PRESIDENT’S PARLEY
Just a reminder that any candidates that your Unit may have for Auxiliary Unit Member of the Year need to be sub-mitted with your other Trophy and Award forms. All of the forms are on the Auxiliary website, www.mnala.org. Also, the Past President Parley Health Care Scholarship forms were sent to all Units in earlier Unit Mailing. Make sure and get your applications in to the Department Office by March 15.

SECRETARY SANDIE’S NOTES
Another month has come and gone - spring is getting closer every day. Valentine’s Day is right around the corner and I know every one of you has that special someone around somewhere. Make sure and take a minute to show them you care and then make an effort to wish someone, a Veteran perhaps, that you don’t know to have a very special day. As I get older I find that the little things that are done for a person are so heartwarming - just yesterday my daugh-ter did that just to me. She made my heart just fill with love, just by a few words. Enough of that as I will cry again. The Department Office couldn’t be running any smoother - for the first time in my 4-plus years things are smoother - for the first time in my 4-plus years things are smoother - for the first time in my 4-plus years things are smoother - for the first time in my 4-plus years things are smoother - for the first time in my 4-plus years things are smoother. It will help the Department Office tremen-dously. That will ensure that we have the inventory to handle all orders.

VA DISABILITY APPEALS
Tom Hagen
ATTORNEY & VETERAN

OWATONNA NEW MEMBERS
-- From left, front: Barb Nielsen, Lynn Holgness, Vicki Antl, and Mary Schwanke. Officers of the American Legion Auxiliary back row: Vickie Radtke, Unit Chaplain/Sergeant of Arms, Pam Aul; Unit Treasurer, Cheryl Bulver; Unit President, and Grace Steele; Unit Secretary.

OWATONNA PRESENTS GIFT -- Owatonna President Pam Aul presents a gift to Harvey Ronglien on Veterans Day.

OWATONNA Auxilary Unit 77 visits the nursing/assisted living homes on Veteran’s Day in Owatonna and presents each veteran a card and gift of food. One of those veteran's was Harvey Ronglien who was raised at the Minnesota State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children in Owatonna. Ronglien is the person, along with his wife, Maxine, who spearheaded the project of State School Restoration so that all those neglected children would be remembered. The project is known as the Minnesota State Public School for Dependent and Neglected School Museum and Cottage 11 in Owatonna. Visitors can check it out and take a tour, or go to orphanagemuseum.com. He is just one of the veterans in Owatonna who did some great things by serving his country and continued to do great things in his hometown.

State Public School for Dependent and Neglected Children in Owatonna. Ronglien is the person, along with his wife, Maxine, who spearheaded the project of State School Restoration so that all those neglected children would be remembered. The project is known as the Minnesota State Public School for Dependent and Neglected School Museum and Cottage 11 in Owatonna. Visitors can check it out and take a tour, or go to orphanagemuseum.com. He is just one of the veterans in Owatonna who did some great things by serving his country and continued to do great things in his hometown.

Memorial Day and Veteran’s Day Commemoration's
March 13, 2016.

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Reverse Mortgages

Call for a free consumer guide and personal quote.
-- Must be 62 or older.
-- Never make a monthly mortgage payment again.
-- Receive a lump sum of cash, credit line or monthly payments.
-- See how much you could qualify for today.
Let a retired active duty veteran you can trust show you how you may benefit from a Reverse Mortgage.

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