

"For God and Country" DECEMBER 2023 POST 3 NEWSLETTER



Meetings For December 2023

Organization	Location	Time	Date
Legion Post 3	Elks Lodge, 5910 S 58 th St	7:00 PM	12/12/2023
Auxiliary Unit 3	Elks Lodge, 5910 S 58th St	7:00 PM	12/12/2023
SAL Squadron 3	Post 3 Office, 123 S 84 th St	7:00 PM	12/14/2023
ALR Chapter 3	Denton Legion Club	6:00 PM	12/21/2023
40 & 8 Voiture 103	Elks Lodge, 5910 S 58 th St	6:30 PM	12/19/2023
8 & 40 Salon 832	Elks Lodge, 5910 s 58 th St	6:30 PM	12/19/2023
8 & 40 Salon 92	VFW 3606, 3340 West A St	1:00 PM	None
Buddy Check	Mill, 2021 Transformation Dr	6:00 PM	12/22/2023
CoffeeHaus	Auld Pavilion, Antelope Park	10:00 AM	12/15/2023

Commander's Call



Wow! We have come to the end of another year! As a representative of our post, I am very proud to represent a Post and organization whose focus is on Veterans, their families, and our youth. I am also so proud and thankful of everyone who has contributed to the success of our Post.

As we enter this holiday season, I would ask each of you to reflect on the many blessings this year has brought us and to

look forward to the many opportunities that lie ahead in 2024. Planning is already underway for activities for next year at our post. Although it seems like I just took the reins as Commander, it will not be long before we begin the process of electing new officers. I ask each of you to consider what you may be able to contribute to Post 3 and step forward to fill some of the available vacancies. We have several committees that need filling – Membership, Athletic, Finance, Youth Activities, and Americanism to name a few. While they do not meet often, their contribution, and impact, on the vitality of our Post is significant. If you find that you have a desire to serve your post, please make your interest known to Ron Hindmand, Rich Lemmerman or myself.

I would also ask each member to participate in our monthly meetings. For my year as Commander, it is my intent to have a short program at each meeting. We had a wonderfully gratifying turnout for our October meeting, where we made special recognition to our Vietnam-era Veterans. At the November meeting, one of our own Post 3 members, Bob Ruyle, gave a great presentation about the nuclear testing conducted by the United States and its impact on those veterans who participated in ways big and small during those tests. Our guest speaker for December will be a representative from the Vet Center, who will let us know about some of the programs they provide for veterans in the Lincoln area. Oh, by the way, our December meeting will also include some fun activities with the Auxiliary Unit, more on that below.

There are other ways to participate in the activities of our Post. For example, if you have an hour or two available on Tuesday or Thursday mornings, you can help at the office. If you are available during the week (and occasionally on a Saturday), you could volunteer for our Honor Guard as we provide military honors to deceased Veterans. Or you could join the 40 & 8 (if you don't know what that is, ask me). Or you could recruit an Individual who is eligible to join the American Legion.

(Commander's Call – Continued)

By the way, no one has yet to take me up on an offer for a free meal for a potential new member. I'll up the ante a little... I'll even buy dinner for the member who invites a potential new member to a meeting.

Although we are in pretty good shape so far for membership renewals, we still have a ways to go... If you look at your membership card and it says 2023, you have not paid your 2024 dues yet. We have a goal of 100% membership renewal by December 31st.

If you have not paid your 2024 membership dues, I encourage you to do so now. I thank all of you for your loyal support.

Wreaths Across America – The wreath-laying program at Wyuka Cemetery is scheduled to be held on Saturday, December 16th at 8am. Activities take place at the New Soldiers Circle inside the north entrance off Vine Street. More information to follow.

As I previously mentioned, please join us after the December 12th meeting as we socialize with the Auxiliary. We plan to play card bingo, so feel free to bring some snacks to share as we socialize after the meeting. Also remember if you plan to play card bingo, please consider bringing a small gift to be given to the bingo winners. We will have bingo winners until all the gifts have been given away.

As we approach this holiday season, I want to wish every Post 3 member and their family a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. This is a time when families and friends will come together, eat, exchange gifts, and enjoy fun, family, and fellowship. From my family to yours, we wish all of you the Merriest Christmas ever and may the New Year bring Health, Prosperity, and Peace to all.

As always, I want to ask everyone to remember our service men and women, and their families, wherever they may be dispersed, during this Holiday Season. Please lift them in prayer.

For God and Country,

Bruce Gubser Post 3 Commander

Notes from the Adjutant's Desk



Holidays office hours: The Post 3 business office will be closed beginning on Wednesday, December 20 and continuing through Wednesday, January 3.

2024 Renewals. Currently, we have 898 members paid for 2023 and stand at just over 81% of goal for the year of 1107 members. During November, we had 35 renewals come in by mail, 26 online, and 3 transfers for a total of 64. Let's keep those renewals coming in during December.

Nebraska Life members account for 53 members, and PUFL (Paid-upfor-Life) members account for 121. PUFL members --- if you have not received your 2024 card, let me know. They were mailed out by the National Headquarters during July of this year.

Thanks to those 157 of you who have made use of the MyLegion website to renew their membership online. It is quick and easy, saves you postage, and you can even print your own 2024 membership card. We can check daily to identify those who have renewed online the day before and get their 2024 membership cards in the mail the next day or so.

Once you get your 2024 card, please check the years of service to be sure it is correct. We've had some that were incorrect for 2023. If they are incorrect, please let the office know so we can get it corrected for you. This includes misspelled names, change of address, etc.

One reason your number of years might be off is that you may have renewed for 2023 after national had printed the 2024 membership card. Another reason is that you might have forgotten to renew for 2023. I try to catch those who did not renew last year and drop them a note letting them know they lost their contentious years by not renewing. For those who might be interested, you can set up auto renewal by using the MyLegion website. Just a thought to those who want an easy way to remember to pay their yearly dues. (Adjutant's Report – Continued)

The American Legion national leadership is currently working on implementing \$5.00 dues increase adopted at the national convention. It will take effect with the 2025 membership year and be included on the first dues notices that go out from Indianapolis next summer.

We would like to make a request. We have many members who do not have a phone number or an email address on file. For some, we also are missing their branch of service. National has been printing on the back of the renewal slips the data that is in the Legion database. Please check and correct or provide missing information when mailing in your renewals. Thanks

Memorial Services: The Honor Guard has been busy this fall with memorial services and flag details. This would be a great time to review your memorial plans with the family. Locate your DD214 or other discharge papers. You have earned the right to burial in a VA cemetery or request a VA headstone for a private cemetery. You can do all this now by going to the VA website and filling out the forms. If you need assistance, see your local service officer, or give me a call.

Again, Thanks for your Service and Thanks for being a member of Post 3. Remember to thank your fellow veterans for their service and thank you for your service.

The Officers of Post 3 wish you all a Merry Christmas!

Ed Schnabel Post 3 Adjutant



Lincoln CBOC/VA News

Most VA clinics and hospitals will have limited appointments or walk in traffic beginning Monday, December 18, and continuing through Wednesday, January 3, due to staffing.

The Lincoln Clinic has a Gifting Tree, where you may come and take a tag to go shopping for a fellow veteran. If you wish to go shopping for a veteran, please pick up a tag and return the

unwrapped package to Volunteer Services by Monday, December 18 so the gifts can be processed and given to the veterans. Thanks for all who wish to provide a gift for a veteran.

Flu shots are currently given at most VA clinics or hospitals. Covid shots are currently being given by appointment only. You need to call your local clinic to schedule an appointment.

VA clinics and hospitals no longer require the wearing of masks to enter clinics. Masks are available for those who still wish to wear them.

Express Care, a walk-in service, is available for those who wish to have a nurse check out minor items. Express Care hours run from 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM at the Lincoln clinic. Times might be different at your local clinic, so give them a call to see if they offer Express Care (walk in) service. This care is available to those who might wish to see a VA nurse without an appointment during normal hours.

The PACT ACT. Have you checked it out? You need to make the effort; the VA is not going to call you.

On August 10, 2022, President Biden signed the <u>PACT Act</u> into law, extending VA health eligibility to many veterans --- and expanding benefits to eligible veterans. The PACT Act expanded benefits for exposures to toxic substances. This PACT Act now PRESUMES that exposure to toxic substances caused many health problems for those who served in these theaters. If you have filed a claim for Agent Orange, etc., or other toxins and it was denied, you need to file a claim update and get a new review. One of the major benefits for Vietnam veterans is that it now covers services for those who served in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. It allows you to file new claims for many of your health problems without needing to prove your service there caused them. This is a major change. The VA now PRESUMES that service there is a direct cause for many health problems.

(Adjutant's Report – Continued)

One of the forms that the VA would like to have on file for all veterans who use its hospitals and clinics is an Advance Directive Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care and Living Will. Form VA 10-0137 can be picked up at your local clinic or hospital. This form allows you to inform the VA who you wish to make health care decisions if you become disabled and thus unable to do so. It is not required, but it might be something that you may want to think about.

Want to serve your fellow Veterans?

The VA can use more volunteers at your local clinic or hospital. You volunteer to help veterans in the clinic or hospital or at a veteran's home. Or you can donate to your local clinic, hospital, or veteran's home. They can always use a monetary donation, or you can donate activity bags for younger kids to have when they come to the clinic / hospital with a parent for their appointments. There is always a need. Younger kids come with parents, grandparents, etc. when they are too young to be left at home alone.

Clinics / hospitals can always use books, magazines, etc. for patients. You would need to check with your local hospital / clinic / veteran's home volunteer office to see what items they need or allow. This would be a great project for your church, school, or youth group.

During Christmas, they all could use donations for gifts for those veterans who have no family to visit them.

Many clinics have an outreach program to reach homeless veterans. They always need extra donations for these veterans. Many of these veterans do not ask for items for themselves but for their kids / families.

Another way to serve your fellow Veterans! Donate to a local VSO (Veteran Service Organization). They also receive many requests for services during the holidays. From cash for purchasing food for a special meal, car repairs, etc. Most local VSOs would welcome a donation so they could give more to those who have given so much. The holidays are upon us.

Thanks for your service to your fellow veterans and thanks for your service to this great country. God Bless, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year!

Ed Schnabel American Legion Rep. to Lincoln CBOC

ALR Riders Chapter 3 Director's Remarks





We have selected a rifle for our poker run raffle, which will be held in September 2024.

We have our annual elections and our annual holiday party at our December 21st meeting.

Some of us participated in a veteran's funeral in Lincoln on October 25.

We also participated in Lincoln's Veterans Day parade on November 12th.

Neil Larson ALR Director







The Chaplain's Remarks





THE COMING AGE—It's actually occurred several times in human history. It's called...the Judgment. No, not the one that guarantees you a spot in Heaven or Hell as with the End Times (Revelations 20:11-15), but the one that serves like a parent's discipline to get you back on the path to obedience (Exodus 24:3).

And why shouldn't God be like a parent to all of us? Who created us (Genesis 2:7)? Who sustained us (Genesis 1:30)? Who gave us the right to think and feel about our environment in His own image (Genesis 1:26-28), plus have stewardship over Earth?

So, if God is our Creator, very much a parent, and has given us rule over this planet in His stead, what's wrong with Him periodically setting the record straight about what we SHOULD be doing with some of His corrective measures (Malachi 3:5)?

But just what is this Judgment of God that so...scares people...around this big globe of ours? If God IS God, then should it not be prudent for Him to...once in a while...get our attention when we err in our lifestyles?

What about His emphasis on continuous training about His Decalogue (i.e., Ten Commandments) for improved living (Proverbs 22:6)?

Some of these Judgments you've probably already observed, far beyond today's imagined "global warming" scare. "Global warming": Have you not studied Holy Scripture with respect to God's imperiousness over air, land, and sea since His Creation? Our biosphere—living planet—near constantly goes through upheavals, with NARRY a one destroying us.

A last ploy for God's Judgment: carbon dioxide is necessary for photosynthesis, i.e., the exchange for the CO2 we exhaust for the oxygen from vegetation we breath in. God's Carbon-Hydrogen-Oxygen-Nitrogen (CHON) chemicals offers life as we know it. That is: warming and cooling is STILL God's domain, not humans. Don't allow our leaders' fear-mongering to alter your faith in God...period.

Rev. Dr. William Jackson Lincoln ALP 3 Chaplain

Post 3 Honor Guard



In November, the Honor Guard assisted the Military Honors Teams at 12 funerals and made appearances at 9 civic functions. In the days leading up to Veterans Day, we were present at 7 retirement facilities and visited a school. We also made an appearance at the Lincoln Veterans parade on November 12th.

In calendar year 2023, the Honor Guard was asked to assist the Military Honors Teams at 101 funerals and was present at 51 civic functions. The effort the Honor Guard makes to honor our deceased veterans and for appearances at local civic functions is greatly appreciated. I want to thank everyone involved for their continued support.

Post 3 TAPS – November 2023



LEGIONNAIRE	WAR ERA	BRANCH	YEARS
Robert M. Burton	Vietnam	Navy	71
Terry L. Durham	Vietnam	Army	47
Leland G. Foote	Korea	Army	39
Jack Kirkland, Sr.	Korea	Army	46
Robert L. Kloch	Vietnam	USMC	37
Stanley E. Lehn	Vietnam	Navy	9

Regular Meeting of American Legion Post 3 Lincoln Elks Lodge #80 November 14, 2023

Commander Bruce Gubser opened the November 14, 2023 meeting of American Legion Post 3 as a joint session with Auxiliary Unit 3 at 7:00 PM at the Lincoln Elks Lodge 80 with 35-40 Legionnaires and Auxiliary members present.

Prior to conducting normal Post 3 business, Commander Gubser introduced Post 3 Legionnaire Bob Ruyle, a member of the National Association of Atomic Veterans. Bob gave a very interesting presentation on the development and deployment of nuclear weapons at the end of World War II and the testing of such weapons --- and the impact that testing had on the veterans assigned to work with the testing --- that followed.

The Auxiliary ladies were excused to conduct their own meeting,

Veterans of the various war eras were asked to stand and be recognized.

Upon a proper motion, it was agreed to dispense with the reading of the minutes.

Finance Officer Schnabel made abbreviated comments about the financial report.

In the way of Americanism, Dr. Jackson made comments about American Legion involvement in youth activities.

Vice Commander Ron Hindmand reported on Salvation Army Bellringers. Post 3 will cover the Williamsburg Hy-Vee on December 6th and 7th. The American Legion Riders will cover Hobby Lobby on December 8th. Auxiliary Unit 3 is going to ring bells on November 30th. Some time slots remain to be filled.

It was announced that Post 3/District 15 held its Oratorical Contest earlier this month. Last year's winner, Jack Watermolen, participated and will again advance to the Area C Contest in December.

Gerry Wolf reported for the Memorial Squad and outlined the many activities recently concluded around Veterans Day.

During the past year, Post 3 requested and received the replacement of its ceremonial rifles. The refurbished M1 rifles were issued with new pine stocks that had only received a light coat of spray paint. As he had done once before, Rick McLaughlin has been working with the new rifles to provide them with a more proper and protective finish.

In recognition of the work Rick has been doing, he was presented a plaque to recognize him for his distinguished service to Post 3.

Squadron 3 Commander Brendan Moore reported for Squadron 3 and outlined their recent activities.

Brendan, as Area C Vice Commander, commented briefly about the upcoming Area C Oratorical Contest to be held in Seward.

It was announced that the Legion Riders will meet this week and the Voiture 103 of the 40/8 will meet next Tuesday.

Commander Gubser indicated that the birthday card project is ongoing and that he has enough cards for another month.

Ed Muggy gave a pitch for the 40/8 Nurses Training Raffle and the Elks Lodge 80 Raffle.

The Chaplain read TAPS, and the meeting was closed in proper form at about 8:30.

Steve Bartos, Recorder

Recap of November 14th Post 3 Meeting



Post 3 Legionnaire, Bob Ruyle, gave the members in attendance a very informative presentation on the development and use of nuclear weapons at the end of WWII. Bob served in the U.S. Navy on a ship near the area where the experiments were conducted. As such, Bob is a member of the National Association of Atomic Veterans.

Bob explained the impact that the testing had on the people of the area being

tested, the veterans involved in the testing, their families, and offspring. A very sobering outcome of the testing.

Last summer, the Honor Guard requested and received replacement ceremonial M-1 Garand rifles for honor ceremonies at veteran's funerals. The rifles they were using have been in service for over 25 years. They do 125-150 funerals each year firing 3 volleys at each funeral. You do the math. They were tired and needed to be replaced.

The refurbished rifles arrived with new pine stocks and only a light coat of spray-on stain. We knew we needed to do something better than that.

As Post 3 Legionnaire Rick Mclaughlin had done before, he volunteered to apply a more proper and protective finish. At the meeting, unfinished and finished rifles were on display to show the work that Rick had done. He was presented with a plaque and gift card for his exceptional work for Rick to take his wife out for dinner.

Thanks, Rick, for a job well done.



(L to R) Commander Bruce Gubser, Rick McLaughlin, Gerry Wolf



Rick McLaughlin, his plaque, finished rifle (top), and unfinished rifle, (bottom)

SALVATION ARMY BELL RINGING



There is still time to volunteer as a bell ringer for a good Christmas cause supporting the Salvation Army. They provide help to folks in the Lincoln area in need during the Holiday season.

Post 3 is registered for ringing bells in support of our Lincoln Salvation Army at the Hy-Vee store at Williamsburg Mall at 40th & Old Cheney on both Wednesday 6 December and Thursday 7 December from 11am to 7pm on each day. We have 15 volunteers for these days.

However, we still have two hours from 5pm to 7 pm on Thursday 7 December that we need volunteers for.

Our Legion Riders have volunteered for and will be ringing on 8 December at Hobby Lobby at 66th & O Street from 1pm to 7pm. Additionally, the Post 3 Ladies Axillary has volunteered for a two-hour slot on 30 November at the Williamsburg Hy-Vee.

Last year we raised a total of \$2,366.25 during four days/30 hours of bell ringing to support good causes managed by the Salvation Army in our area. It is ideal if we can get two volunteers for each 2-hour block of ringing.

Please contact Ron Hindmand, <u>rhindmand@hotmail.com</u> if you would like to volunteer for the remaining time slot on 7 December.

Ron Hindmand Bell Ringing Chairman

District 15 oratorical Contest



(L to R) Commander Gubser, Jack Watermolen

Our District 15 Oratorical Contest was held on 1 November.

The purpose of the American Legion High School Oratorical Scholarship program is to develop a deeper knowledge and appreciation for the United States Constitution. Contestants must present, without notes, an 8 to 10 minute oration on some aspect of the Constitution and then give a 3 to 5 minute speech on an assigned topic with only a five minute preparation time.

Our Post 3/District 15 winner was Jack Watermolen. Jack is a senior at Lincoln Southwest High School, where he is the Debate Team Captain. He aspires to study International Relations in college after graduation from high school. The title of his oration was "A More Perfect Union."

As our District 15 contest winner, Jack will compete in the Area C Contest which will be held on December 3, 2023, in the Seward Civic Center.

The winner of the Area C contest will compete in the Nebraska Department contest which will be held in January 2024 in Kearney as part of the Midyear Convention. The winner of the Department contest will compete in the 2024 National Finals on May 17-19 in Hillsdale, Mich., at Hillsdale College. Quarterfinal and semifinal contests are scheduled for Saturday, May 18 with the finals scheduled for Sunday, May 19.

Veterans Parade, November 12, 2023





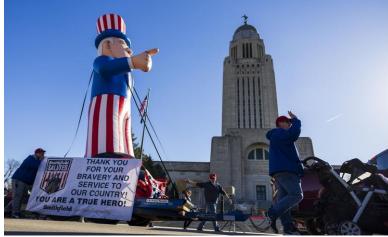












Veterans Day Activities

In the days leading up to Veterans Day, members of the Honor Guard visited seven senior retirement facilities and a school. We even had time to eat breakfast together in between appearances on Friday, November 10th. At some of the facilities, veterans were honored and given certificates and/or pins recognizing their service to their country. Those in attendance were very appreciative of our visit. Here are a few pictures of the visits.

Havelock Senior Citizens Center – 11/07/23





The Legacy - 11/08/23





Aviva/Woodlands - 11/09/23





(Veterans Day Activities – Continued)

Legacy Estates - 11/09/23





Bailey Pointe - 11/10/23





Faith Lutheran School – 11/10/23





Pemberly Place - 11/10/23





Flagpoles For Department Office

The Department is still looking for donations from Posts and/or individuals for flagpoles to be placed in front of our newly acquired headquarters building in Lincoln. The idea is straight-forward... one tall flagpole for the US flag (35') and six smaller poles (30') for the six service flags.

In order to do this, we need \$13,100.00 for the flagpoles alone. That does not include the material and labor cost of having the flagpoles erected (although I believe I have one or two volunteers that would help in that endeavor).

To date, the Department HQ's fund has received \$3,250.00 in donations (one individual donated \$3,000 of that).

The American Legion organization is the country's leader in defending our great flag and we exhibit that every time we go back to Washington DC when we have polite conversations with our elected officials about the Flag Amendment (if you didn't know, the proposed amendment is a single sentence; "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.")

Just think about it, if every current member of the Nebraska American Legion donated just one dollar, we would have nearly twice the amount needed. I know we have Posts and Legionnaires out there that would gladly send in a larger donation if they were aware of this cause. And if this takes off and we have more donations than poles you can rest assured that the extra monies will go towards replacing the flags when they become worn and tattered.

R, Dave David W. Salak Department Adjutant Nebraska American Legion 402-464-6338

The Attack On Pearl Harbor





On Sunday, December 7, 1941, a Japanese attack force of 408 aircraft launched from 6 aircraft carriers and initiated a surprise attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet, stationed at Pearl Harbor on the island of Oahu in the Territory of Hawaii.

The first wave of 183 aircraft launched north of Oahu shortly before 8:00 am. Within minutes, 140 Japanese bombers armed with armor-piercing bombs and torpedoes, escorted by 43 fighter aircraft, concurrently targeted the eight battleships berthed in "Battleship Row" along the coast of Ford Island. Japanese aircraft also targeted the nearby airfields to prevent American planes from launching a defense.

During this wave of attacks, each ship at Battleship Row was struck by enemy aircraft. The damage sustained by the U.S. battleships was compounded by the fact that each ship, other than the USS Nevada (BB-36), was moored to another vessel or in drydock, leaving the crewmembers unable to get their ships underway.

After a brief lull, Japanese forces launched a second wave of airstrikes, which inflicted additional damage, but was not as deadly as the first, since U.S personnel were prepared for a second attack. The attack was over within approximately 90 minutes.

That day, across the island of Oahu, close to 2,400 Americans were killed, including both military personnel and civilians, with more than 1,100 wounded. Additionally, the Japanese attack sunk or significantly damaged 21 ships and, of the 402 U.S. aircraft at Pearl Harbor, destroyed 188 and damaged 159.

On that same day, concurrent Japanese attacks against Wake Island and Midway Island led to additional U.S. casualties, and a Japanese submarine sunk the merchant marine vessel SS Cynthia Olson on its way to Honolulu from Tacoma, Washington. All of the Cynthia Olson's 33 merchant marine crew and 2 U.S. Army passengers were lost.

Present-day efforts to resolve the identities of the hundreds of unidentified remains – or Unknowns – recovered in association with the attack on Pearl Harbor began in 2001. In these early efforts, a tremendous amount of gratitude is extended to the late Mr. Ray Emory, a Pearl Harbor survivor whose efforts to reunite these Unknowns with their names and their families has had a significant impact.

MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENT - JACKSON PHARRIS





For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while attached to the U.S.S. California during the surprise enemy Japanese aerial attack on Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, 7 December 1941.

In charge of the ordnance repair party on the third deck when the first Japanese torpedo struck almost directly under his station, Lt. (then Gunner) Pharris was stunned and severely injured by the concussion which hurled him to the overhead and back to the deck. Quickly recovering, he acted on his own initiative to set up a hand-supply ammunition train for the antiaircraft guns.

With water and oil rushing in where the port bulkhead had been torn up from the deck, with many of the remaining crewmembers overcome by oil fumes, and the ship without power and listing heavily to port as a result of a second torpedo hit, Lt. Pharris ordered the shipfitters to counterflood.

Twice rendered unconscious by the nauseous fumes and handicapped by his painful injuries, he persisted in his desperate efforts to speed up the supply of ammunition and at the same time repeatedly risked his life to enter the flooding compartments and drag to safety unconscious shipmates who were gradually being submerged in oil.

By his inspiring leadership, his valiant efforts, and extreme loyalty to his ship and her crew, he saved many of his shipmates from death and was largely responsible for keeping the California in action during the attack. His heroic conduct throughout this first eventful engagement of World War II reflects the highest credit upon Lt. Pharris and enhances the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Christmas Eve 1944: a brief moment of peace on the battlefield

While the "Christmas Truce" of 1914 has achieved legendary status in the history of World War I, there has been little coverage of similar events involving American troops. When America entered World War I, years of massive casualties discouraged any brotherly feeling between the opposing armies, and senior officers actively discouraged any repeat of the events of 1914. In World War II, there were few chances for such events, as American troops were in close contact with German forces only in relatively small numbers in North Africa and Italy prior to the 1944 D-Day landings. Any large scale truce for Christmas 1944 was impossible as just nine days prior to Christmas, the Germans launched their largest counteroffensive of the war in the west, resulting in the Battle of the Bulge and heavy fighting throughout the holiday.

Yet while there is no mention of any "Christmas truce" in the official records, we do have a personal account of a much smaller truce during the height of the fighting in the Battle of the Bulge. This is the story of Fritz Vincken, a young German boy at the time of the battle. Fritz, then 12-years-old, had moved with his mother to a small cottage in the Huertgen forest after their hometown of Aachen was partially destroyed in an earlier American offensive. The area had stayed quiet until nine days before Christmas, when the German Ardennes Offensive had crashed through the area. According to Fritz, "we heard the incessant booming of field guns; planes soared continuously overhead; at night searchlights stabbed through the darkness."

On Christmas Eve, 1944, Fritz and his mother answered a knock at the door -- three American soldiers, one badly wounded, were standing there. While the Vinckens did not speak English nor the Americans German, they were able to communicate to a limited extent in French. Fritz's mother invited the Americans inside and attempted to make them comfortable. Fritz remembered:

"We learned that the stocky, dark-haired fellow was Jim; his friend, tall and slender, was Robin. Harry, the wounded one, was now sleeping on my bed, his face as white as the snow outside. They'd lost their battalion and had wandered in the forest for three days, looking for the Americans, and hiding from the Germans. They hadn't shaved, but still, without their heavy coats, they looked merely like big boys. And that was the way Mother began to treat them."

Fritz's mother made a meal of potatoes and a rooster, previously being saved for a reunion with Fritz's father. As they cooked, there was a second knock on the door:

"Expecting to find more lost Americans, I opened the door without hesitation. There stood four soldiers, wearing uniforms quite familiar to me after five years of war. They were Wehrmacht – Germans! I was paralyzed with fear. Although still a child, I knew the harsh law: sheltering enemy soldiers constituted high treason. We could all be shot!"

(Christmas - Continued)

The corporal leading the German patrol told Fritz's mother, "we have lost our regiment and would like to wait for daylight...can we rest here?"

"Of course," she replied, "you can also have a fine, warm meal and eat 'til the pot is empty. But, we have three other guests, whom you may not consider friends. This is Christmas Eve, and there will be no shooting here."

The corporal demanded, "Who is inside? Amerikaner?"

Fritz's mother replied, "Listen. You could be my sons, and so could they in there. A boy with a gunshot wound, fighting for his life, and his two friends, lost like you and just as hungry and exhausted as you are. This one night, this Christmas night, let us forget about killing."

The Germans stacked their arms by the door, and after a quick conversation in French the startled Americans also turned over their weapons to Fritz's mother. The entire mixed group, somewhat tensely, sat down and shared dinner. According to Fritz:

"Relaxation was now beginning to replace suspicion. Even to me, all the soldiers looked very young as we sat there together. Heinz and Willi, both from Cologne, were 16. There German corporal, at 23, was the oldest of them all. From his food bag he drew out a bottle of red wine, and Heinz managed to find a loaf of rye bread. Mother cut that in small pieces to be served with the dinner; half the wine, however, she put away, 'for the wounded boy.' Then Mother said grace. I noticed that there were tears in her eyes as she said the old, familiar words, 'Komm, Herr Jesus. Be our guest.' And as I looked around the table, I saw tears, too, in the eyes of the battle-weary soldiers, boys again, some from America, some from Germany, all far from home. Just before midnight, Mother went to the doorstep and asked us to join her to look up at the Star of Bethlehem. We all stood beside her except Harry, who was sleeping. For all of us during the moment of silence, looking at the brightest star in the heavens, the war was a distant, almost-forgotten thing."

The truce held through the morning, Christmas Day, when the two sets of soldiers shook hands and departed, each headed back to their own army.

It is likely that there were other such small-scale truces, or at least tacit agreements between local American and German units to refrain from attacks and firing on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, perhaps in Italy in 1943 or in quieter parts of the line in 1944, but this is the only documented case currently known.

Vincken, Fritz, "Truce in the Forest," Readers Digest, January 1973.

MONTHLY ON THE 22ND At 'The Mill' Coffee and Bistro 2021 Transformation Drive (on the Nebraska Innovation Campus) 6:00 PM TO 8:00 PM

INCOLN



A social gathering of Veterans dedicated to reducing and eliminating Veteran suicide. We continue our service by gathering with fellow Veterans. We call and reach out to those who served at our side. We stood together then, and we stand together now.

OPEN TO ALL VETERANS At Ease

Sons Of The American Legion Application



To be eligible for membership in the Sons of the American Legion, you must be a male descendant (son, grandson, stepson, or adopted son) of:

- A member of The American Legion, or
- A veteran who died in service during World War I or since December 7, 1941, or
- A veteran who died after their honorable discharge from such service, and
- Return the application below along with \$35.00 to:

Sons of The American Legion ATTN: Brendan Moore 123 South 84th Street, Suite L Lincoln, Ne. 68510

Sons of The American Legion Membe	ership Application		5
Detachment of Squadron No Birth Date	Date		
NameRecruited by	(Initial) (Last)		s for 20 ment of
Address(Street) (City)	(State) (Zip)		CEIPT Date
E-mail Address Teleph	hone		
Veteran through whom eligibility is established			Syme ayme
(a) Above is a member in good standing of Post No	, Dept. of		RECEIPT Date Receiv
OR (b) Above is a deceased veteran who served honorably from_	to		<u>۳</u>
(c) Relationship of Applicant to Veteran			4
I hereby subscribe to the Constitution of the Sons of The America transmit \$ as annual membership dues.			nd Cour
Signed	(By Applicant or Parent)	1	Sod au
Eligibility certified by (Post Adjutant)	00-001 (2014)		For Gou

Become a Member of The American Legion

Do you want to help your community and fellow Veterans by becoming a member of the American Legion? Would you want to help recruit a new member? If you can certify that you served at least one day of active military duty since December 7, 1941, and were honorably discharged or are currently serving honorably, you are eligible. Complete the application below and send it with a check in the amount of \$46.00 to:

American Legion Post 3 123 South 84th Street, Suite L Lincoln, Ne 68510

	(Name)		(Date of Birth)
	(Mailing Address)		(Phone Number)
(City)	(State)	(Zip)	(Post #)
		Male EFema	le
(E-mail)	(Gender)	(Dues)
nonorably discharged or am st Please check appropriat Global War on Terror Gulf War	e service era and branch U.S. Army U.S. Navy		
nonorably discharged or am st Please check appropriat	ill serving honorably. e service era and branch U.S. Army	of service bel	

To renew or transfer to Post 3, you only need to sign below and mail this and a check for \$46 made out to "American Legion Post 3" to the address listed above. If you have already renewed for 2024, and want to transfer to Post 3, only sign below and return the bottom portion to us.

YES! Please transfer my membership to Lincoln American Legion Post 3

 Signature
 Membership Number
 Email address



American Legion Post 3 123 South 84th St. Suite L Lincoln, NE 68510 (402) 466-3958

Email: Post3legionlincoln@gmail.com <u>Web Site: lincolnpost3.org</u>

2023 - 2024 Post 3 Officers

Commander – Bruce Gubser – Cell: 402-470-1700

First Vice Commander – Ron Hindmand – Cell: 254-291-1514

Second Vice Commander – Rich Lemmerman – Cell: 402-694-9834

Adjutant & Post Service Officer – Ed Schnabel – Cell: 402-480-8542

Chaplain – William Jackson – Cell: 402-613-9774

Please submit any announcements or items for the monthly newsletter to the Editor for approval. All requests must be received one week before the 1st of the month.