



# ALLIES

Newsletter for Members and Friends of the Military Historical Society of Minnesota

Allies

Fall, 2012

Vol. XX, No. 4

## Monday Morning Updates: From Bosnia to the Moon

*Excerpts from weekly letters home, Part II*

By Hal Gorder

Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 151st Field Artillery, Minnesota Army National Guard, were deployed to Kuwait in 2009 on a mission to provide convoy security operations into and out of Iraq. The author, who was First Sergeant for the battalion's Headquarters and Headquarters Battery (HHB), wrote weekly letters home during his deployment (it was his second deployment; his first was in Bosnia). Three more of his letters are presented here, providing a glimpse into the daily routines of those working in the battery's base of operation, Camp Buehring, Kuwait, which to the author resembled a moonscape.



**LIVING ON THE MOON** -- First sergeants on the moon are, left to right: 1SG Lee Stock, A Battery; 1SG Lynne Nelson, 175th Forward Support Company; and 1SG Hal Gorder, HQ Battery.

**This is the second of a two-part series.**

*27 July 2009, Camp Buehring, Kuwait:*

Good Morning to All...*MarHaba...*

We have been unusually busy this week. The battalion's OPTEMPO (Operational Tempo) has been very high as we push out our CETs (Convoy Escort Team). We have many teams throughout the battalion and only so many missions in which to get these teams validated and qualified before our friends, the 299th from Hawaii, say "good bye." We are pushing teams north into Iraq, and achieving the standards.

When those CETs return, my maintenance section gets busy scouring over the vehicles to ensure that they

Story continues on next page



### Points of Interest

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are prepared to roll out again within a 48-hour window. In the meantime, when we have a minute or two to catch our breath, we have a meeting—followed by another meeting to talk over what we were informed of at the first meeting. Then we'll set a time for the next meeting so that every single possible available minute is accounted for and engaged.

There was a Town Hall meeting on Wednesday that my unit clerk and I attended so we could explain projects in and around the FOB (Forward Operating Base). Topics included the Internet and how the local vendor is not living up to the government contract to provide a free service for our soldiers... and television availability... and water problems, such as no water at all in a tented area for transition soldiers (kinda hard to take a shower or get shaved and prepared for the day ahead).

We will be conducting our Combat Patch ceremony on 8 August right after we conduct the TOA (Transfer of Authority) with the 299th and the 115th Brigade. It is a rigidly performed ceremony, full of pomp and circumstance and rich with tradition—so it should be pretty cool. Lots of younger soldiers casually compare this ceremony to a Dog and Pony Show, and truthfully it does resemble that, but it is a revered Army custom. So, those who are on their first deployment will be awarded the 115th Fires Brigade patch from Wyoming. It is a cowboy on a bucking bronco, and referred to as the Combat Patch because we are in a combat zone under the command of the 115th.

Although this is my second deployment, my first mission to Bosnia was considered a “Peace Keeping” effort and we were not awarded a Combat Patch. So now I will be a recipient of the 115th patch.

*Ma'a as salama*

Hal

*05 October 2009, Camp Buehring, Kuwait:*

*SabaaH il Kyayr (Good Morning). Shlonek (How are you?)*

It is flu season, even here on the Dark side of the Moon, so we received our shots like good soldiers. In fact, as we stood in line they ran out of serum. Now if the influenza bug ever reaches this far into the stratosphere, those of us who got the shot are prepared. We have seen the enemy, and he is microscopic. We fear him not at all, for we have raised our shields with the aid of a small shot in the arm.

We just recently were awarded a luxury: authorization to wear civilian clothing when off-duty. This is a real morale booster. There are certain limits, of course: you cannot depict yourself as your favorite grunge/garage/garbage rocker by wearing tattered and torn blue jeans; you cannot dress in a t-shirt emblazoned with hate slogans or references to drug use; and your clothes must be “appropriate” and non-offensive to the local population. Nevertheless, it is nice to finally be able to chill out in civvies. We are still required, by Camp Buehring policy, to wear the reflective Beauty Pageant Belt across our chests when walking around kicking up lunar dust from the hours of 1800 - 0600.

You know, I am thinking that we have established quite a unique life here on the Moon, and it makes



Headquarters Battery stands in formation for its Combat Patch ceremony.

me feel better about the trials and turmoil that we all seem to suffer while deployed. I'm trying to get my head around the fact that we are in an environment of our own design...to a point; and it gives me a strange sense of comfort. We can make life as enjoyable as possible when we are not out on mission, or we can sit around and brood over the hard fact that (1) We are at war and currently residing 45 minutes from the border of that Heart of Darkness; (2) We are at the mercy of active duty orders; and (3) We will not leave here until our mission is completed.

So, as I amble to the gym to work off a bit of stress, and perhaps a muffin or two, I watch the days roll by like an old Mississippi paddle boat—deliberate and steady as it heads for its final destination. My shoes create clouds of minute astral dust as I walk towards the gym, passing by soldiers from many different branches and many parts of the US. We all have different roles to play, but are all here for the same reason and with the same intent: work hard, make the best of the current situation, and get back home to our families intact.

You walk by soldiers who have the combat patch on their right shoulder sleeve, and you estimate that they are at least on their second tour here on the Moon, if not more. And then you walk by those who have not yet earned the coveted patch. They have an air of uncertainty in their eyes but they try to disguise their inexperience by speaking tough like a veteran. Many appear to be mere teenagers who have only just begun to shave. They still giggle like nervous adolescents, but time and experience will soon darken their voices with both understanding and confidence—giving them the edge they are now trying so hard to emulate with swagger and artificially salty speech.

Speaking of speech, I watched a local Kuwaiti man for a few minutes on Friday afternoon as he labored on an older Army generator. The generator was mounted on a trailer frame, the temperature was in the early one hundreds, and he was sitting on the hard, metal fender of that trailer. As he worked on that archaic piece of equipment, I noticed by his mannerisms (and the timbre of his voice) how frustrated he was becoming. It occurred to me, quite suddenly, that aggravation levels are not ethnically oriented. I didn't understand a word he was saying, but his communication was loud and clear. Our soldiers slam their wrenches and swear the same way when the greasy head of impatience rears up. Apparently, irritation and anger affects everyone, no matter what nationality you are, in the exact same way when things just don't go right. Some things are universal.

*Ma'a as salama*

Hal

*19 October 2009, Camp Buehring, Kuwait:*

*SabaaH il Kyayr* from Camp Buehring, Kuwait (aka, 'The Cosmological Café'). *Shlonek*.

"Well...a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down," (you can join in) "the medicine go doooowwn, the medicine..." Ahh, the hell with it! There simply is not enough sugar in the world (or even here on the Moon) to help with Anthrax shots. This was our first Anthrax shot received here on the Moon; the other two were done at Ft. Hood and there are two or three yet to come. There really is no sugar, or anything else for that matter, that will deaden the sting and that wonderful burning sensation that follows when they inject you with Anthrax serum. As one of my soldiers said to me, "it's like having peanut butter injected into your arm—warm peanut butter." The lump-filled soreness hangs on for days afterwards.

Some of the soldiers here have received so many Anthrax inoculations that they could be fed a bowl of the stuff, and eat it with a smile. "I'm good...just hand me a spoon," would be heard throughout Buehring.

And now...NOW, I've been told that I also need a Tetanus booster as well. It seems to me that every time we turn around we have members of the medical staff running after us with syringes and evil smiles. Could they all be relatives of the Marquis de Sade?

It has been a busy week with Awards and Enlisted Promotion Systems paperwork to be completed. The Enlisted Promotion Systems (EPS) is an annual event where we gather and verify information on the enlisted soldiers by rank/grade, secure signatures, and compile it all in a packet to send to the state to see if they qualify to be promoted. It's a lot of work, but it's important for the soldier. Promotions mean more responsibility and more money. Soldiers are usually pretty concerned about the 'more money' part. Go figure.

We had another session of "Area Beautification" last Saturday. This time it was in the Motor Pool

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area. It truly needed it. The rotations before us were the biggest pack rats I have ever seen—and I should know because I am a huge pack rat myself. Most soldiers blamed the Hawaiians that we replaced, but there had been many rotations before them. There were piles of steel scraps, hanks of disintegrating weathered rope, and lots of old lumber, pallets and shipping containers. It reminded me of the cartoon my friend Mark has in his office where a couple of rats, who are presumably married, were talking inside their rat hole. Mr. Rat, seated in his recliner amid piles of trash, was saying to Mrs. Rat (who was glaring at him), “Rat’s nest? Rat’s Nest? It’s supposed to look like a Rat’s nest.”

We have been cleaning up the area in preparation for important visitors, such as the U of M wrestling coach, J Robinson, Don Shelby from WCCO, and various General officers including the Adjutant General from Minnesota. We may even see some celebrities, but we won’t know who they are until a couple of weeks before they come. Some reporters will be assigned to us for a little while in order to get a better feel for what we are currently doing over here on the Moon.

I have received quite a few care packages over the past couple of weeks—for the past three months for that matter—and for this I say Thank You to everyone who has graciously sent me boxes of goodies, football games on DVD and letters. If I were to tell you Thank You forty thousand times, it would not be enough for your generosity and your thoughtfulness. You have absolutely no idea what a morale builder it is to receive mail of any kind. We go get the mail everyday at 1400 hrs (2:00 pm) for the entire battalion, and when you see your name amongst the many packages and envelopes, you just cannot suppress the smile that inevitably breaks out across your face.

That’s about all there is for the week.

Until I transmit once more, remember my quote: “The only thing harder than being a soldier, is being married to one.”

*Ma’ a as salama.*

Hal

**Postscript:** The unit was deployed for another five months, returning to the arms of family and friends in early April 2010. Mission accomplished, without casualties. A book containing all of Hal’s letters is in the works. Watch for it in spring 2013.

## In Memoriam

A long-time friend of the museum passed away earlier this summer, age 100. Maxine Russell of Brainerd was a poet and writer who loved books, theatre, and the arts. Among her own books was *Jungle Angel: Bataan Remembered*, which tells the life story of Hortense McKay of Brainerd. McKay was an Army nurse stationed in the Philippines when the Japanese invaded in December 1941. She became one of the “jungle angels” who ministered to the soldiers desperately holding out against the Japanese in Bataan and Corregidor. The book also recounts the story of Russell Swearingen, Walter Straka, and Henry Peck, three survivors from Brainerd’s Co. A, 194th Tank Battalion, who fought courageously on Bataan before enduring the “Death March” and a subsequent 3-1/2 year imprisonment.

The first edition of the 1988 book sold out, but with Maxine’s enthusiastic permission and a generous gift from the Mills family, a second edition was published in 1991 by the Military Historical Society of Minnesota, with all proceeds going to the museum’s endowment fund. The book is still available for sale in the museum gift shop and at the Crow Wing County Historical Society.

Maxine was preceded in death by her husband, Robert, and a brother. She is survived by her sister, two children, three grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.



Maxine Russell, 1912-2012

## Curator's Notes By Doug Bekke



I recently spent two weeks in France, visiting and walking WWI battlefields. So much was packed into the trip that looking back it seemed like I was gone for two months. While I was there, the time went by so quickly that it seemed like I was only there for two days. Three and a half days were spent on the Somme walking the British and German front line trenches from July 1st 1916. An English historian friend tour-guided me through the battlefield starting on the northern flank and we were only able to cover the northern half of the front. A tour of the southern half is now being planned.

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme (a battle the politicians not the generals chose), the British suffered 10,000 casualties in the first hour and nearly 60,000 casualties by the end of the day. When the battle ended in November the combined German and British casualties were about 900,000 men. This on top of another 900,000 German and French casualties at Verdun earlier in 1916. The British Somme monument at Thiepval has engraved the names of 73,000 soldiers of the empire with no known grave.

Today the battlefield is beautiful rolling farmland dotted with small villages, patches of forests and British war cemeteries. After the war, the dead that could be found were collected into the cemeteries, the villages were rebuilt, the pastures were returned to pastures, the woodlands were restored to woodlands, and the fields had the trenches and dugouts filled in and were restored to farm fields.

Walking the battlefield brings home the reality of what happened there in 1916. The pastures are still filled with bomb craters and the faint traces of trench lines. Where the forests have re-grown, the shell holes and trenches clearly cover all the ground. Nearly every fence post in the region is a steel barbed wire stake salvaged from some death trap of the battle. When you walk through a freshly plowed field, the ground is littered with battle debris, artillery shells of every caliber, hand grenades, shell fragments, shrapnel, bullets, equipment, and, occasionally, bones. It is estimated that unexploded artillery shells will continue to be plowed up by Somme farmers for another 200 years.

The United States only actively participated in the last five and one half months of the war losing by WWI standards “only” about 50,000 battle dead. The American battlefields were generally battles of greater movement leaving fewer battle scars, but, in the post war years, many massive monuments.

WWI shaped our world in way that few understand.

As the 100th anniversary approaches, and the museum plans a major exhibit, I have to wonder how many Americans know when it happened, where, who was involved, why it happened and what were the after effects. Indeed, I wonder how many Americans are unaware that the “war to end all wars” even happened.

### Masons Come Through Again

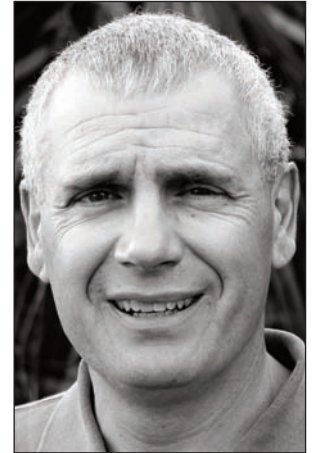
For the second year in a row, Minnesota Masonic Charities and the Grand Lodge have each donated \$5,000 to the museum. This \$10,000 is a significant gift—earmarked to help us continue to process and manage our growing artifact collection up to the professional standards it deserves. Thank you, Masons, for your fantastic support.

### Fallen Heroes Calendar Now Available

The “Minnesota Fallen Heroes Calendar” for 2013 features 12 Minnesotans killed on active duty in the post-9/11 era. They can be purchased in the museum gift shop or ordered online at [www.militaryheroes-foundation.org](http://www.militaryheroes-foundation.org) for \$10. The calendar funds projects that support Minnesota servicemen and women who are adjusting to life with the physical and psychological wounds of war.

## Director's Update

By Jeff Thielen



Being at the museum allows me to connect with a large number of interesting people.

I have day-to-day contact with the great military and civilian staff that run Camp Ripley and support us in more ways than I can mention. I have contact with our volunteers who continually amaze me with the hours they put in and what they accomplish. I work with talented museum staff members who are passionate and interested in the work they do.

But I am especially fortunate to be able to meet some of our visitors and to hear the amazing stories of their lives and of their service to our country.

Joe is a Marine who served on Okinawa in WWII as a forward observer. He came into the museum in a wheel chair, on oxygen, and pushed by one of his care givers. In his lap he carried a beautiful wooden shadow box containing all of his awards and ribbons. Joe was enthralled with our displays and exhibits and had tears in his eyes when he came out of the museum. I asked him about his shadow box and noted the Purple Heart. He told me he was awarded the Purple Heart on Guam and said, "The bullet that killed my buddy also got me." He told me he wanted to donate the Japanese flag he had liberated from Okinawa, but thought it should go to the National Marine Corps Museum at Quantico, Virginia. I located a contact for him at the Marine Corps Museum and thanked him for his service as he left.

A few weeks later I had call from Joe. He said he was so touched by our museum he wanted to give us his Japanese flag, along with a battle map of Okinawa that showed where he found the flag and some pictures he had from the island.

I don't think I will ever forget Joe or the countless other Joes I have been able to visit with since I have been here.

When you leave a job, it is always the people that you remember. The same is true at the Minnesota Military Museum. I feel very fortunate to be able to work with and meet some remarkable people, and I encourage all of you to also stop in and meet some of the wonderful folks who work, volunteer, and visit here.

**give** DAY NOV. 15  
TO THE MAX

**giveMN.org**

### **Give to the Max Day is Thursday, November 15, 2012**

Give to the Max Day was created in 2009 to increase giving to nonprofit organizations across the state and move more giving online. It is a day for Minnesotans to come together to raise as much money as possible for nonprofits and schools in 24 hours, starting at midnight on November 15, 2012. By engaging donors to give to their favorite Minnesota charities in one day, Give to the Max Day showcases Minnesota's unparalleled generosity to the world! During last year's Day, a record 47,534 donors raised \$13.4 million to benefit Minnesota nonprofit organizations.

On November 15, log on to GiveMN.org and include the Military Historical Society of Minnesota among your gifts. You can also log on via our website at [mnmilitarymuseum.org](http://mnmilitarymuseum.org). New memberships and increased giving from individuals will be matched for us by a gift from the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of the Saint Paul Foundation.

Help us raise the money we need to continue telling the story of Minnesota's military history.

## Memorials, (July 1 through Sept. 30)

### *Given by:*

Charles & Norma Extrand  
 Family of Lester Pearson  
 Doug Bekke  
 Linda Cameron  
 Art Ludwig  
 194th Tank Regt. Assn.  
 Charles & Norma Extrand  
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 Richard and Betty Hayes  
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 Richard and Betty Hayes  
 Ray & Shirley Lunde  
 Richard and Betty Hayes  
 Wayne Hayes  
 Richard and Betty Hayes  
 Lyle Doerr  
 Richard and Betty Hayes  
 Paul V. Meyer

### *In Memory of:*

LTC (Ret.) Lester Pearson  
 LTC (Ret.) Lester Pearson  
 SGT Albert Larson  
 SGT Albert Larson  
 MG (Ret.) Robert Blevins  
 MG (Ret.) Robert Blevins  
 MG (Ret.) Robert Blevins  
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 Maxine Russell  
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 COL (Ret.) Marvin Fellman  
 COL (Ret.) Marvin Fellman  
 Gerald J. Gibeau  
 Clarence Harting  
 Clarence Harting  
 Charles Wagner  
 Basil LeBlanc  
 MG (Ret.) Robert Walker

## Wheelchair Donated

We sent out a call in our last newsletter—and it was answered. A brand new wheelchair is now available for use by museum visitors, courtesy of Earl Jensen of Minnetonka. Many thanks, Earl.

## Contributions Honor Roll (July 1 through September 30, 2012)

**Renewing Members:** Win Anderson ▪ Roger Avery ▪ John Bathke ▪ Russell Beddow ▪ Adrian Beltrand ▪ William Casey ▪ Chris Christopherson ▪ Dennis Fjeld ▪ Jon & Diane Grosso ▪ Rodney Hannula ▪ Jack Heidman ▪ Kurt Hoehne ▪ James D. M. Holmes ▪ Charles Kapsner ▪ Eugene Leifeld ▪ Jean McDonald ▪ Larry Mongan ▪ Harry Moore ▪ Robert Nemitz ▪ Richard Noreen ▪ Dennis Ottem ▪ Donald Pettitt ▪ Richard Plaisance ▪ Konald Prem ▪ Robert Purcell ▪ Susan Rasmussen ▪ Derald Steinbrecher ▪ Robert Strom ▪ Robert Swetz, Sr. ▪ Jo Teare ▪ Paul Verret ▪ David West

**New Members:** Mae Dobbs

**American Legion:** Post 550, Minneapolis ▪ Post 328 Auxiliary, St. Joseph

**VFW:** Post 2735, Isanti

**Donations:** Richard Ammend ▪ Mark Anderson ▪ Elizabeth Archerd ▪ P. Beyer ▪ Rick Bornhofer ▪ L. A. Cain ▪ Mark Campbell ▪ The Dahl Family ▪ Otto Demarino ▪ Julie Domino ▪ Eagles Aerie #287, Brainerd ▪ Gregg Ellswout ▪ Holly Erickson ▪ Janese Evans ▪ Isabella Eveland ▪ Bill Fosdick ▪ Allen & Kim Garber ▪ Teresa Goodman ▪ Jim Gordiepy ▪ Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. ▪ Annie Gubrud ▪ Dan Haley ▪ Steve Harder ▪ Craig Hattan ▪ Paul & Kelly Henderson ▪ Greg Highberg ▪ Randy Hildreth ▪ Hopkins Area Jaycees ▪ John Howard ▪ Hunt Technologies, LLC ▪ IBM ▪ Earl Jensen ▪ Ray Johnson ▪ Mason Kite ▪ Richard Klein ▪ Edward Komac ▪ Wayne Lunsford ▪ Tim Meininger ▪ Frank Messina ▪ Michael and Jan Messina ▪ Minnesota Law Enforcement Memorial Association ▪ Minnesota Masonic Charities ▪ Minnesota National Guard Enlisted Association ▪ Mississippi Valley Cattlemen's Association ▪ Paul Monteen ▪ Nick Nagel ▪ Richard Nash ▪ Ryan & Bobbi Jo Nash ▪ Nisswa Lions ▪ Dan & Nicole Nygard ▪ Stephen Osman ▪ Nicholas Ostapenko ▪ Tom & Ginny Pearson ▪ Cecilia Poitras ▪ Oliver Roberg ▪ Brynhald Rowberg ▪ Larry Schul ▪ Leland Smith ▪ Stacy Lions Club ▪ Gabe St. Andrew ▪ Odessa Standke ▪ Carol Stein ▪ Brenda Steinberg ▪ Kurt Stelten ▪ Donna Strickland ▪ Peg Thomas ▪ Lynne VanHouse ▪ Elam Verry ▪ Mike & Oats Vettle ▪ Doug Wabner ▪ Ev Weber

**ALLIES**

**Allies** is published for the members and friends of the Minnesota Military Museum.

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Jeff Thielen, **Executive Director**  
Doug Bekke, **Curator**  
Leland P. Smith, **Archivist**  
Sandy Erickson, **Administrator**  
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**Little Falls MN 56345-4173**

**TO:**

**Artifact Donations (July 1 through September 30, 2012)**

**Uniforms:** Beret ▪ Belt, officer's dress ▪ Blouse ▪ Blouse, USMC (2) ▪ Boonie hat ▪ Boots ▪ Cap, garrison ▪ Coat, Korean officer ▪ Coat, MN Militia officers ▪ Cords ▪ Cravat (2) ▪ Flying suit, WWII USAAF ▪ Gloves (2 pr) ▪ Hat, USA female (4) ▪ Hood, parka ▪ Jacket, USA female summer (2); Jacket, USA Class A (2) ▪ Jacket, USA dress blue ▪ Overcoat, USMC wool ▪ Pakol (cap), Afghanistan ▪ Scarf ▪ Shirt (7) ▪ Shorts ▪ Skirt (8) ▪ Slacks (3) ▪ Socks ▪ Sweater (3) ▪ Tie (3) ▪ Trousers (5)

**Equipment:** Belt, cartridge ▪ Belt, riggers ▪ Cable, radio ▪ Cover, helmet ▪ Ear plugs ▪ Hangar, sword ▪ Headset, radio ▪ Helmet, State Guard ▪ Helmet, German ▪ Liner, helmet ▪ Pouch, ammunition (4) ▪ Radio transmitter ▪ Sea bag ▪ Speaker, radio

**Miscellaneous:** Armband ▪ Books ▪ Buckles ▪ Documents ▪ Insignia ▪ Lapel pins ▪ Newspapers ▪ Pamphlets ▪ Patches ▪ Photos ▪ Postcards ▪ Poster ▪ Scrapbooks ▪ Sheet music

**Weapons and related items:** Ammunition (inert) ▪ Casings, shell ▪ Clip, stripper

**Artifact Donation Honor Roll**  
**(July 1 through September 30, 2012)**

*The museum gratefully acknowledges donations of artifacts from the following:*

Beverly Abbott ▪ Robert Andree, Jr. ▪ John Buck ▪ William Casey ▪ DeLoris Ebert ▪ Lily Beth Frentz ▪ Marvin Garbe ▪ Dario Gherbaz ▪ Lydia Goodwater ▪ Brandon Grabau ▪ Robert Gubash ▪ Tom and Barb James ▪ Jack and Dian Jarvis ▪ Ted Larson ▪ Arthur Lee ▪ Joseph Ludwig ▪ Dirk Lueders ▪ Massachusetts *National Guard* Museum ▪ Lee Miller ▪ Phyllis Mitchell ▪ Shawn Murphy ▪ Jay and Joan Peterson ▪ Michael Rooney ▪ Carol Stein ▪ Robert Swetz ▪ David Young ▪ Nancy Zawacki