

The History of Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46, Ann Arbor, Michigan



Cpl. Erwin (Hap) Prieskorn
Died of War Wounds in France, Autumn 1918

May 2005



TO THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

*You lie in your cold grave --
triumphant in death because you
defeated tyranny, peaceful in death
because you died a free man.*

*And I wonder what tribute I can pay to
you -- a patriot who loved freedom and
country enough to forfeit life and name
on a foreign battlefield?*

*I would thank you -- but words of thanks
cannot penetrate the grave.*

*I would weep for you -- but tears can
neither stir your silent body nor warm
your still heart.*

*I would laugh for you but laughter would
disintegrate against the walls of your
joyless tomb.*

*I would comfort you as a brother -- but
brotherhood cannot surmount the
obstacle of eternity.*

*I would show you the free land you helped to save --
but your vision is blocked by the
curtain of death.*

*So I will offer you the one tribute which makes
your death meaningful and my life
worthwhile. I will honor your memory
by pledging myself to the perpetuation of
those ideals for which you fought and died --
the defense of freedom, the love of liberty,
and a peaceful future.*

*Thus will your death enrich my life, thus
will my actions honor your unknown name.*
--James R. Howard

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Commander's Greetings

American Legion Post 46 was named in memory of Erwin Prieskorn of Ann Arbor, who died of wounds suffered in France in 1918. The Post was issued a charter in 1919 and has been serving veterans and their dependents continuously for the past 86 years.

Over those years membership has fluctuated as new members from the conflicts that followed World War I swelled our ranks. Today our roster includes men and women who have served this nation in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, the Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to many still on active duty around the world at this very moment.

Over the years Post 46 had had a great tradition of service and fellowship. Those same attributes continue and I hope they always will.

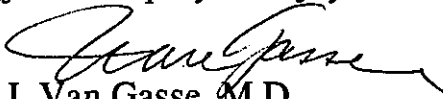
I have been commander of this Post since 2000, joining a long line of past commanders who have helped guide the direction and programs approved by our members. It has been a rare privilege to be associated with and to work with our officers and executive committee.

Our accomplishments over the past 86 years have been many, and some of them, notably the Past Commanders' Dinner two years ago; the World War II Memorial Prayer Breakfast; the contribution of funds to the VA Medical Center to refurbish the auditorium; and our substantial contribution to the national 9/11 relief fund occurred on my watch.

But many other significant activities took place long ago and form a distinguished part of our history. Your officers and executive committee accordingly asked Historian Bob Wischmeyer to compile, as best as one can from scattered records and documents, an updated Post history.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

The book you are reading is the result of his and several other members' work. But remember, none of us can know all the details, all the history of any organization active on so many fronts as ours. So if you have additional information, recall events from years gone by, or have a personal recollection, contact your Historian by mail at 1114 Mixtwood, Ann Arbor 48103, and help him fill in the gaps for a future edition. On behalf of the officers and executive committee of the Post, I thank Bob and all the others who contributed to this commendable effort. I hope you enjoy it.


J.J. Van Gasse, M.D.

Commander, Erwin Prieskorn Post 46
American Legion

Historian's Greetings

It has been a pleasure to write this history of Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46. Its flaws are mine; what's good about it are the result of early research by William Hagel, the detailed record keeping of longtime Post Adjutant Bob Oxenger, and the careful preservation of records, particularly by Sgt-at-Arms John "Laurie" Howley and Cmdr. J. J. Van Gasse. Though incomplete in many ways, this history tells of a proud past and points to what could be a bright future.

I would like to pay tribute to all those veterans who have gone before us with a poem that Laurie Howley passed on to me. The poem is well known and was part of a remembrance card distributed at the memorial service for Charlotte Oxenger, faithful wife for 56 years of our Post Adjutant until her death in 2001. It captures, I think, what we veterans feel about those who have gone before us.

-- Bob Wischmeyer, Post 46 Historian

"Do not stand at my grave and weep. I am not there, I do not sleep.

*I am a thousand winds that blow, I am the diamond's gift of snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain, I am the autumn's gentle rain.*

*When you awake in the morning's hush, I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight. I am the soft stars that shine at night.*

Do not stand at my grave and cry. I am not there, I did not die."

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	Page 1
A Young Ann Arbor Soldier Dies in France.....	Page 2
An Outstanding Commander.....	Pages 3-4
Past Post 46 Commanders.....	Pages 5-6
Post 46 "In the News".....	Pages 6-15
Poem "In Flanders Fields".....	Page 15
Some of Today's Members (Brief Military Biographies).....	Pages 16-29
Membership Roster (As of 2005).....	Pages 29-33
Highlights from 1959-1988.....	Pages 33-38
1991-2005: A Struggling Post Continues to Serve Veterans.....	Pages 38-67
--The Auxiliary Disbands.....	Page 45
--1995 -- The Year the Post Gave Up Its Home.....	Page 48
--1999-2005 --Membership Lags, But Is It the Beginning of the Future?.....	Pages 57-67
Poppy Days Succeed.....	Page 65
An Auxiliary President Remembers.....	Page 68
The Origins of Veterans Day.....	Page 69
Photos.....	Following Pages
Back Cover.....	Memorial Post Home on Main Street in 1950

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

26

27

Introduction

They were a small but determined group of veterans -- led by Pat Walsh, Adolph Wiese and Cornelius Tuomy -- who met in late November 1919 in the Washtenaw County Court House to organize American Legion Post 46, and they unanimously decided to name their post in honor of a brave young man who had died from battle wounds in the defeat of enemy forces in World War I.

Within 40 years of its founding, Post 46 had grown to 1,023 members, with a Post Memorial Home on Main Street that throbbed with activity.

The local veterans' action followed the founding of The American Legion March 15-17 in Paris by officers from the American Expeditionary Forces and the first annual convention of the national American Legion in Minneapolis Nov. 10-12, 1919. National headquarters awarded Post 46 its charter Aug. 15, 1923.

Now nearly three million veterans are Legionnaires in 15,000 posts worldwide, making the Legion the largest veterans organization in the world. Post 46, while its membership has fallen to just over 200 and its home was sold several years ago, remains committed to helping and honoring both veterans and active military personnel and their families.

Through these written and photographic highlights of the Post's existence, gathered from as many sources as are available today, the officers and executive committee of Post 46 hope to inspire today's younger veterans to join the Post and continue its outstanding history of service to the men and women hospitalized at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Ann Arbor, and all veterans and their families.

A Young Ann Arbor Soldier Dies in France

Far from Ann Arbor near the small French community of Soissons some 70 miles northeast of Paris, 21-year-old Army Corporal Erwin (Hap) Prieskorn was on patrol on August 31, 1918.

His unit, Company E of the 126th Infantry Regiment, 63rd Brigade, 32nd Division, had arrived in France seven months before and soon found itself fighting in three major offensives of World War I -- the Aisne-Marne, Oisne-Aisne, and Meuse-Argonne.

During the Oisne-Aisne offensive east of Soissons, in an area where wheat and oats were grown, the young Ann Arbor soldier suffered severe shrapnel wounds.

He lived for 26 days before dying in a military hospital, and was buried in a national cemetery in France. Only a month and a half later, on Nov. 11, Germany signed the Armistice agreement to end the war.

Corporal Prieskorn, the youngest of five sons of Gustave and Mary (Schultz) Prieskorn, was just one of approximately 14,000 casualties in the 32nd Division, which is known today as the Red Arrow Division.

So he was not among the troops from the 32nd Division who marched in front of cheering crowds down Woodward Avenue in Detroit on May 12, 1919. But by naming the new Post 46 in his honor, Ann Arbor veterans have perpetuated the name of that brave young corporal. And his nephew, Robert Prieskorn, is today one of the Post's members.

An Outstanding Commander

Since the first commander, Pat Walsh in 1919, 68 men have served with honor in that position. Two, Carl Hetchler (1972-1977) and Brian Dunn (1994-2000), held the position for more years than any other besides the current (2005) commander, Dr. Jerome J. Van Gasse, who has been the Post's leader since 2000.

Among Post 46 records kept at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan's North Campus are papers donated by one particularly forceful and outspoken commander in 1966-68 -- George W. Harms.

Harms's association with the American Legion began as a teenager who helped the 1936-39 Post 46 American Legion baseball team win the state of Michigan championship.

As a catcher (he once caught a game pitched by famous Detroit Tigers hurler Hal Newhouser), he played for the U. of M. varsity in 1940, 1941, and 1942. He earned his bachelor of arts degree in 1943 and signed with the New York Yankees, but never got to play for the Yankees because his 1943-46 World War II service as a Marine resulted in diminished vision.

Harms won the Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts. The citation for the Bronze Star told how he led his men 150 yards across an open field in face of heavy machine gun and other small-arms fire to seize a ridge. The Purple Hearts resulted from being wounded in Okinawa April 17, 1945, suffering a concussion,

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

and on May 18 when he was badly burned during action in which his platoon leader and platoon sergeant were wounded and had to be evacuated. Harms served 22 months in the South Pacific campaigns during his Marine duty and participated in the assault and capture of Guam.

His commitment to veterans continued after his service as Post 46 commander. In 1972, he was commander of the Department of Michigan's Second District, which includes Posts from all over southeast Michigan.

And he spoke out against radical opponents of the Vietnam War. In May 1972, angered by a Vietcong flag that someone, or some group, had clandestinely erected over the former Post 46 home on Main Street, he took the flag (which the Fire Department had removed) to the office of Mayor Bob Harris, and vehemently told the Ann Arbor News, "We want peace more than anyone because we've been in combat."

Earlier, in 1969, as past commander he had appeared before the Ann Arbor City Council to read a Post 46 letter calling for the city to counter White Panther street demonstrations that involved law-breaking.

Still fighting for veterans' benefits in 1978, he led a public movement to get a life insurance payment that had been denied to the parents of Robert B. Huff, a fellow Marine who had been killed Sept. 14, 1942, during a Japanese attack on Guadalcanal.

At Post 46's annual Christmas lunch and party, living past commanders are honored and deceased commanders are remembered. Their names follow:

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Past Post 46 Commanders

1919	Pat Walsh	1953-54	Harold C. Brooks
1919-20	Carl Lehman	1954-55	Rudy Schmerberg
1920-21	James J. O'Kane	1955-56	Kenneth E. Immel
1921-22	F. M. Menefee	1956-57	Donald G. Bachman
1922-23	Conrad Church	1957-58	Freeman J. Flynn
1923-24	George Hammon	1958-59	Clark D. Lewis, Jr.
1924-25	Roscoe Bonisteel	1959-60	Robert E. Hinderer
1925-26	Cornelius W. Tuomy	1960-61	Lawrence A. Wren
1926-27	A. C. Stimson	1961-62	Carl E. Delaney
1927-28	Reuel I. Blake	1962-63	James L. Amerman
1928-29	Charles Rash	1963-64	Henry A. DeSautel
1929-30	Lawrence Leever	1964-65	Herbert J. Schaff
1930-31	Leo Burns	1965-66	Melvin Kessler
1931-32	Leonard Tappe	1966-68	George Harms
1932-34	Jack Dunn	1968-69	William Collins
1934-35	Arthur Marsh	1969-70	Clarence Nutt
1935-36	Albert Larmee	1970-71	Myron Crosswait
1936-37	R. Roy O. Bartell	1971-72	Stanley Schlect
1937-38	Harold Golds	1972-77	Carl Hetchler
1938-39	Luther F. Hagen	1977-79	Dick Schindler
1939-40	Thomas A. Fitzgerald	1979-80	David "Ron" Karr
1940-41	R. Day Bird	1980-81	Jack Tschirhart

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

1941-42	Chester L. Nowland	1981-83	Tim Budoff
1942-43	A. Benjamin Alber	1983-85	John Tanner
1943-44	William Sodt	1985-86	Robert Kuehn
1944-45	George T. O'Neal	1986-88	Kermit Sharp
1945-46	Dugald Duncanson	1988-89	Clyde Gow
1946-47	Melvin C. Pierce	1989-90	Joseph Hoffman
1947-48	Olin G. Tenny	1990-91	Fred Reeves
1948-49	Roy C. Bird	1991-92	Robert Oxenger
1949-50	Lloyd Alber	1992-93	W. Weindorf/F. Reeves
1950-51	Floyd Bargy	1993-94	Joseph Hoffman
1951-52	Walter Orth	1994-00	Brian Dunn
1952-53	Howard Seefield	2000-05	J.J. Van Gasse

Post 46 "In the News"

Erwin Prieskorn Post 46 has often been "in the news" -- that is, the Ann Arbor News, its hometown newspaper. Unfortunately, much of the news during the 1940s, when the first articles saved by Post members appeared, were related to military deaths in World War II.

Among the Ann Arbor News clippings in a scarred and taped-up album that Post 46 sergeant-at-arms Laurie Howley preserved when the Post's memorial Home was sold in 1995, are 13 that tell of the return for burial of Americans killed in the battles to liberate Europe and the Pacific islands.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

These are their names:

Lt. George H. Cannon, Marine killed at Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Pfc. Robert C. Mukensturm, killed in France in 1944.

Cpl. Hollis J. Engel, killed in Sicily in November, 1943.

Pfc. Roy G. Fischer, killed in Normandy on D-Day, 1944.

Lt. Robert I. Bates, pilot killed in action over China, 1944.

Pfc. Robert B. Huff, Marine killed at Guadalcanal in 1942.

Lt. Robert H. Huhn, B-25 pilot killed over New Guinea in 1944.

Lt. John Weese, 9th Air Force, killed over Normandy in 1944.

Pfc. Myrl Heusel, killed in Germany in 1944.

Pvt. Roy Hirth, killed in the Philippines in 1945.

Lt. Clare Schosser, B-24 navigator killed over the South Pacific in 1944,
and his brother, Pfc. William Schlosser, killed in France in 1944.

Sgt. Bernard L. McCudden, B-17 gunner and bombardier, killed over
England in 1945.

Cpl. John Wares, date and country of death unreported.

Pfc. Joseph Klohs (of Saline), date and country of death unreported.

Sgt. Kenneth M. Fox, killed in Italy in 1945 and awarded a Silver Star.

Post 46 and VFW posts participated in services for these men. In the case of Sgt. Fox, VFW Post 7433 was named after him -- the first all-African American post in the city.

Many of the those clippings about Post 46 activities were undated, but seem to have been in the mid- to late 1940s, reporting, for example, the elections of William H. Sodt (1943-44), Olin G. Tenny (1947-48) and Roy C. Bird (1948-49)

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

as commanders; the selling of War Bonds; the addition of a clubhouse, kitchen, grill room and game room to the Post Home on Main Street; and the dedication of the addition during the celebration of the Post's founding.

Then there is a gap in clippings about the Post, until June and July of 1958 brought seven articles, showing how active the Post was that year. A June 1958 article headlined "Ceremony Planned for Flag Disposal" told of the Post's preparation for citizens to dispose of unserviceable American flags.

Public Law 829 of the 77th Congress prescribed methods for honorably disposing of flags by burning them. Post 46 held a public ceremony at the Post's former home at 1035 S. Main St. "The color guard of Co. K of the 125th Infantry of the National Guard and various units of other Legion posts will participate in the ceremony," the Ann Arbor News reported.

Also in June 1958, the News reported that Clark D. Lewis, Jr., of 1018 Pine Tree Drive, had been elected commander of Post 46, and on July 12 the News ran a picture of Commander Lewis following his installation.

A large photo and six-paragraph article appeared June 5 in the News telling that 11 local high school youths would be attending the American Legion Wolverine Boys State week-long educational meeting in Lansing as guests of Post 46 and several other community organizations. Hugh P. Gaston, Boys State chairman for Post 46, noted in the article that "this year marks the first time that students have been named for all three of the senior high schools in the city." (The schools were University High School, St. Thomas, and Ann Arbor High.)

July 1958 brought a long article and photo announcing that Philip M. Ambrose, senior vice-commander of Post 46, had been appointed Department of

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Michigan judge advocate at the Legion's state convention in Detroit. The News pointed out that Ambrose was the second Ann Arbor Legionnaire to have become judge advocate. The first was Roscoe O. Bonisteel, Sr., judge advocate in 1934-1935.

In an undated editor's column, probably in 1958 and titled "Ye Old Editor Has His Say," the editor wrote about an Aug. 12, 1918, letter received by a Mrs. Homer French from her nephew, Erwin Prieskorn, who was in France. Post 46's namesake wrote: *"We have just returned to rest camp after spending 15 days in the front line trenches and five days in reserve. Our dugouts on the front line are as big as city blocks, with room for 400 men and stoves and tables. I have crossed No man's Land with night patrols four times, up to the Germans' barbed wire, and returned safely."* (About six weeks later, he died from wounds.)

In September of 1958, the News reported that Post 46 member Harry Hogan, who headed his own detective agency, had been appointed chairman of the Ann Arbor chapter of the Washtenaw County Junior Deputy League, an organization that taught teenage youths police work and how to assist law enforcement officers in various civic events. Post 46 sponsored the chapter.

Nine new junior deputies received their uniforms in January 1959, according to the News, in a ceremony at Post 46's home on South Main Street. They had completed an eight-week training course, and joined 31 other boys. It was 30 years before another article in the News was saved by a member, and that article reported a major development for the Erwin Prieskorn Post:

The Post Moves Again

A large, all-capital-letters headline in the Ann Arbor News on Saturday,

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Jan. 30, 1988, told the story in a couple of words familiar to veterans: "MOVING CAMP." The secondary headline said, "Local American Legion going to Dexter Road facility."

Here are the first several paragraphs of that article:

"The Ann Arbor post of the American Legion is moving its operations to a new facility -- lock, stock and cannon.

"Erwin Prieskorn Post No. 46, a fixture in the Ann Arbor community for 70 years, will close its home at 1035 S. Main St. today, according to Patrick Schindler, post adjutant. Its new facility at 3460 Dexter Road will open Feb. 7, he said.

"The South Main Street location is in the former Allmendinger home, a building well over 100 years old. The high cost of maintaining the structure forced the post to move to a smaller and more affordable facility.

"The M5 3-inch rifle which sat on the front lawn of the Main Street property was moved Thursday -- by the man who installed it there nearly 40 years ago.

"The cannon was a replacement weapon given to the post by the Army. The post's original piece, a French 75 cannon, was used for scrap metal by the government at the start of World War II.

"Laurie Howley, a Legion member who helped to install the M5 cannon in July 1948, after its arrival to the Ann Arbor train station aboard a flat bed car, spoke of the message the M5 delivers to the community.

"'When you're driving by, you just don't notice the house,' Howley said. "You notice the cannon. It attracts the attention of the people. It helps them to

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

recognize the place where veterans go, veterans who helped make life easier for all of us today.'

"Oliver Johnson, also a Legion member, spoke of the M5's symbolic qualities.

"'I think the cannon stands for peace,' Johnson said. 'Maybe that isn't the way to look at it, but that's the way I look at it.'"

The News article covered the top of four columns of the paper that day and included a photo of the cannon being loaded on a trailer. It went on to report how Post 46's membership had dropped to 351 from a high of 1,421 after the close of World War II, then one of the largest in Michigan. Regrettably, as reported elsewhere in this history, the Post a few years later was forced for financial reasons to sell the Dexter Road home, and the cannon was moved again, first to Saline Post 322 and in 2000 to the Graf-O'Hara VFW Post 423 on Wagner Road.

The Post's first home on Main Street just north of Michigan Stadium was later demolished and the Dexter Road home is now a child-care center.

Coverage Resumes in 2003

Between that article in 1988 and 2003, no record of any Post 46 activity was found during research for this history. But since 2003, under the more public-awareness leadership of Dr. J.J. (Jerry) Van Gasse, the Ann Arbor News began to report Post activities again.

Van Gasse and other officers of the Post, recognizing that military action in the Mideast was resulting in many Ann Arbor area men and women serving

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

abroad, decided to revive the Blue Star Banner practice that had been so full of meaning in World War II.

He turned to former Ann Arbor News columnist-reporter Don Faber, who wrote on Jan. 21, 2003: "During World War II, American families displayed banners proudly proclaiming that a child was serving in the military. A Blue Star stood for active duty, a Silver Star denoted wounded in action and a Gold Star signified that a family had lost a child in battle."

The News carried a photo of Van Gasse in his Post 46 Legion cap displaying one of the Blue Star Banners the Post had purchased from the Legion's national headquarters. Within a few months of the article, 65 families had requested the banners and the Post sent them out free of charge. Some families sent contributions to the Post anyhow. Eventually, some 200 banners were sent.

The article also noted that Post 46 had donated \$5,000 to the Pentagon relief fund after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks by terrorists that destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City, severely damaged the Pentagon and killed many people there, and caused a jetliner to crash in Pennsylvania.

It also quoted Van Gasse regarding the Post's members hosting bingo events for Veteran Administration Hospital veterans twice yearly and selling poppies in conjunction with Memorial Day each year to raise money for support of veterans.

The next article about Post 46 came on Nov. 26, 2004, in a prominent location on the front page of the "Local News" section of the Ann Arbor News, headlined "American Legion will host party for military members."

Staff reporter Art Aisner started his article this way: "The Erwin

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 in Ann Arbor has a long history of hosting annual Christmas parties for veterans and their loved ones.

“But this year, for the first time, the post’s 220 members are opening the celebration to all area residents with a military affiliation.” Post senior vice commander Doug Woolley was quoted: “We’re trying to reach out and show the veterans and their active personnel how much we appreciate them. Some folks won’t be home for Thanksgiving and we wanted to open up our celebration to all of them and make sure they had a place to go.”

In a letter to the editor that had appeared six weeks earlier, on Oct. 10, 2004, Commander Van Gasse had noted that Post 46’s current membership “includes veterans from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Panama, Grenada, Lebanon and the first Gulf War as well as the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan -- and many of those are still engaged in active duty and combat.

“Anyone who has worn the uniform of this nation and served it faithfully is welcome to assist us in this ongoing mission. We share a lasting common bond.”

Remembering World War II Veterans

At the writing of this history in early 2005, the most significant Ann Arbor News articles reporting Post 46 activities preceded and followed the dedication in Washington, D.C., of the National World War II Memorial, an event which drew veterans from all over the United States.

To coincide with that televised dedication and in keeping with a suggestion from national American Legion headquarters, Post 46 hosted a memorial prayer breakfast Saturday, May 29, 2004, in the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Ann Arbor.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Some 250 veterans of WWII and other wars and in some cases their families from Ann Arbor and surrounding communities attended. They were honored in a moving ceremony that included brief speeches, a ceremony honoring those still prisoners or missing in action, the posting of the colors by the University of Michigan ROTC Color Guard, vocal and instrumental music, introduction of WWII veterans by branch of service, playing of Taps, the poem "To the Unknown Soldier," and the singing of "God Bless America."

In a long Page 1 article May 28 announcing the event, the News quoted Post 46 adjutant Robert Oxenger, 84, who had manned communication controls on a U.S. Coast Guard troop transport island hopping in the Pacific Ocean six decades before. "I still wake up at night thinking about the burning gunpowder and a lot of other stuff," Oxenger told the News. "There's a lot of memories you'd just as soon forget, and this memorial will bring some of them back. But it's not all a bad thing."

The News also carried two photos of Post 46 member John Clark, whose service as a B-17 bomber co-pilot is included in profiles of some members later in this history, including one of his wife, Marie, also a pilot in WWII and also a Post 46 member. Some of their WWII experiences were reported.

The followup article on May 30, also on Page 1 with two photos, had a secondary headline on an inside page that said "World War II veterans say that even 60 years later, they still share a bond," picking up on a statement from Post 46 commander J.J. Van Gasse to the attendees, "We don't walk alone. We walked together all these years and we are still walking together."

The article, by Tom Gantert, News staff reporter, covered the event and

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

focused on the experiences of three WWI veterans -- Leonard Schmitt, an 81-year-old Pittsfield Twp. vet who lost an infantry buddy in Holland (the new WWII Memorial, he told the News, is "a monument not to have wars"); Ann Arbor veteran Al Stone 76, a Navy veteran who served in the South Pacific; and Richard Johnson, 80, of Ypsilanti, who fought as a Marine in the South Pacific. Johnson told the reporter, "We value and cherish our way of life. And when it is jeopardized, we all come together to do what has to be done."

As Post 46 proceeds in the years ahead, more coverage of its activities will show how it continues its mission of serving all veterans and their families.

* * * * *

In Flanders Fields

*In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

* * * * *

Some of Today's Members

The history of any organization is more than a chronology of events. It is a record of the lives of its members -- in this chapter, their military years. The following pages will record the active service of those members of Post 46 who provided such information (all members were asked to). Some could provide much information, others very little, but all are included, in alphabetical order.

(We regret that so many of our members have passed on to their reward, their service to their country unacknowledged except by their comrades, their families and their friends and whatever accounts were published during their time of service.)

Now, on to members' service records...

Charles M. Allmand -- It was no picnic for crews of B-24 bombers flying the skies of the South Pacific in 1943 to 1946, but Chuck Allman was there as a teenage (he was born June 22, 1925) radio operator and gunner, with the rank of Army Air Force Sergeant.

He was on board as his B-24 flew in the Okinawa and Philippines campaigns, winning the American Theater and Asiatic-Pacific Theater ribbons and Good Conduct and Victory medals.

Fred Bentz -- Born a farm boy in the Upper Peninsula, Fred Bentz joined the Army in 1942 as a 27-year-old and soon found himself in the Coast Artillery in New Jersey, later on going to South Carolina and North Carolina for more training.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Finally he was shipped to the Philippines, where he helped American service personnel and civilians deal with the after-effects of fighting there, until the Japanese surrendered. He once treated a Filipino boy who had a gash on his head all the way to the bone, and has continued hospital work in Ann Arbor as a twice-weekly volunteer at the Veterans Administration Hospital, even as he turns 90 in 2005.

Dale E. Burgess -- Born in 1922, Mt. Pleasant native Dale Burgess completed the Army Air Forces Advanced Flying School training at Williams Field, Chandler, AZ, in the autumn of 1943. The 21-year-old 2nd Lt. (later promoted to 1st Lt.) soon found himself in the 475th Fighter Group in New Guinea, flying the famed P-38 twin-engine fighter plane, with its distinctive center-mounted cockpit and twin tails.

He flew 131 combat missions, clocking 452 combat hours, before returning to the States in May 1945. He achieved the rank of Lt. Col. in the reserves and retired in 1968.

Burgess earned an Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, an American Theater Ribbon, Philippines Liberation Ribbon with one Battle Star, an Asiatic-Pacific Theater Ribbon with four Battle Stars, Distinguished Unit Citation, World War II Victory Medal, and the Armed Forces Reserve Medal.

Ross W. Campbell -- While Dale Burgess was serving in the Pacific Theater, Ross Campbell was spending his World War II years in Germany and Italy as part of a nine-year tour of duty, 1942 to 1951.

Ultimately reaching the rank of Captain in the Army (Coast Artillery), Campbell, born in 1923, served with the 467th and 644th Anti-Aircraft Artillery battalions before being assigned to command a Special Services detachment in the

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Mediterranean Theater of Operations headquarters.

During that assignment, he ran 13 tours of Rome and historic places in Italy, directing bus drivers and the mechanics who kept the buses running and leading the other half of his command who were soldiers with degrees in Fine Arts, European History, and other areas. Those men served as docents. He himself had an audience with Pope Pius XII.

Campbell also served in Fort Custer, Fort Jay, Fort Bliss and Fort Sill, and earned World War II Victory, Army of the Occupation (Germany), American Campaign, American Defense, and European Theater Campaign medals.

Frank A. Ciaravino -- Before he was captured in World War II by the Germans, young Army medic Frank Ciaravino's service career resembled a tour of the world. He served on a ship, the USS West Point, that made port in North Africa (Egypt and French Morocco), India, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, Palestine, Italy, Malta, Sicily, England, and France, and he also treated military personnel in Germany, Belgium, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Luxembourg, and Bavaria.

Enlisting in August 1942 at age 21, he was inducted at Fort Custer near Battle Creek and was sent to Camp Barkley, TX, for basic training and to attend sanitation technician school, where he learned how to prevent and treat patients afflicted with lice and tick-borne diseases. In September he was assigned to the 16th Field Hospital at Camp Bowie, MD. Thus began his journey.

It ended on April 1, 1945, while his field hospital was following tanks of the 4th Armored Division through the Ardennes Forest and was captured by German troops. Rather than killing the American medical personnel, the

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Germans allowed them to treat their troops. When the Germans surrendered on May 7, his captors left and Ciaravino was free.

His service over four years resulted in several awards and commendations, including, among others, the Good Conduct, Bronze Star, Ex Prisoner of War, Army of Occupation with German Clasp, World War II Victory, and European-African-Middle Eastern medals; Presidential Citation Badge (Blue); Meritorious Unit Badge (Red); Meritorious Service Award; commendation from Gen. George Patton for performance of duties during the relief of Bastogne; commendation for service in Egypt; and a unit citation "For Distinguished Service in Combat" from Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Europe, while attached to the 4th Armored Division.

John A. Clark -- Thirty-two combat missions over Germany as a B-17G co-pilot with the 100th Bomb Group of the 8th Air Force stand out in the World War II career of John Clark. Born in 1923, he was just 19 when he joined the Air Force and served until the war ended in 1945.

He met his wife, also a pilot who trained women pilots while they both served at the Las Vegas Army Air Base in New Mexico. On one mission, Clark's B-17 was forced to crash land in a swamp in Belgium, shot up and out of fuel. The accounts of that landing and his other missions are told in an illustrated book he wrote and published in 2001, "An Eighth Air Force Combat Diary."

First Lt. Clark earned six Air Medals, the European Theater Medal with three Battle Stars, the Croix DeGuerre with Palm Leaf; the Presidential Unit Citation with Oak Leaf; and various other WWII service medals.

Marie M. Clark -- Flying P-39 and P-63 fighters, AT-6 and the twin-

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

engine AT-11 trainers, and B-26 and B-17 "Flying Fortress" bombers as a Civil Service WASP (Women's Air Service Pilot) pilot, Marie Clark was treated as an officer while teaching others to fly those various planes.

She taught instrument flying and herself flew mock fighter attacks on B-17s while also flying engineering test flights on the P-39s and P-63s. She was forced to parachute from her plane over Texas during one training flight.

She met John Clark (see above) and they later married. Marie earned an American Theater Ribbon and a Victory Ribbon for her 1943-44 service.

Culan Crocker -- Born in 1933, Culan Crocker served in the U.S. Army from 1953 through 1955, attaining the rank of corporal. After basic training, he sailed to Japan in 1954 on the USS President Jackson and then on to Korea on an LST (Landing Ship Tank) with equipment and materiel needed to build air strips and bridges.

He served with a combat engineers battalion, bunking in 20-man tents heated by oil stoves against the bitter cold of Korea's mountains. Once, just after the men had formed up outside in formation, his entire tent went up in flames from a stove explosion.

Crocker earned National Defense Service, Korean Service, United Nations Service, and Army Good Conduct medals; the Korean Presidential Unit Citation; and the Army Overseas Service Ribbon.

James R. Dempsey -- From his first duty as a private first class in the Army in 1974 until his retirement from active duty as an Air Force lieutenant colonel in 2002, Dempsey had varied experiences in progressively more important roles in Texas, New York, Washington, D.C., and Michigan. He

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

continues today as an employee of the Ann Arbor Veterans Administration Hospital. In April 2005 he completed 31 years of continuous military service as an admissions liaison officer (retired) with the Air Force Academy.

His primary duties during active service involved working with other military personnel in social work, psychological evaluation, medical support, aeromedical evacuation, nursing, medical education and training, seminars, facility construction, and curriculum development related to medical readiness.

Along the way, he became a registered professional nurse. While holding the rank of Air Force captain and then major, he directed the training of medical personnel and served in related military and National Guard positions. The last 12 years of active duty were spent in the Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, MI. He is now senior vice commander and service officer for Post 46 and a Red Cross volunteer. Jim is married to a Vietnam era veteran who is a retired Army major, Jane, now a professional registered nurse with the Ann Arbor VA.

Harvey Doss -- On his seventh mission as a B-25 pilot Feb. 2, 1943, 23-year-old U.S. Army Air Force 2d Lt. Harvey Doss was shot down over North Africa and became a German prisoner of war. Thereafter he spent 32 months in two POW camps, Stalag Luft III and Stalag Luft VII-A, not seeing freedom until October 1945. He was promoted to 1st Lt. Oct. 13 of that year.

He had been commissioned Aug. 5, 1942, and shipped to England aboard the Queen Mary two months later. Assigned to the 379th Bomb Squadron, 310th Bomb Group, 57th Bomb Wing, he flew six missions out of French Morocco before the one in which his plane was downed. He had flown for 30 combat

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

hours during his 330 hours total flying time.

Harvey continued his career aloft as a commercial pilot in the Ann Arbor area from June 1949 until 1984, when he retired. He holds the Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster; North African Theater of Operations Medal; and European African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with Bronze Star.

Harvey joined Post 46 in 1965 and was honored with other World War II veterans like John Clark and Garnett French at Post 46's Memorial Day prayer breakfast in 2004.

Garnett French -- Among the U.S. Army men who stormed ashore on June 6, 1944, on Omaha Beach on the Normandy coast of France was 23-year-old Garnett French. Garnett had been inducted Aug. 4, 1941, and took basic training at Camp Grant, IL, later being transferred to Vancouver Barracks for about a year and then to Camp Young in Indio, CA, for about nine months.

As the invasion of Europe by the Allies loomed, he was sent east to Camp Sherman, VA, and on Oct. 8, 1943, left the port of New York on a two-week Atlantic crossing to England. On June 5, 1944, he joined other young men on the cross-English Channel trip towards Normandy, landing on Omaha Beach, where 1,000 GIs were to die that day on that beach alone.

His unit worked its way across France and into Belgium. Garnett returned to New York City Nov. 20, 1945, as a staff sergeant. He has belonged to Post 46 since 1990. He earned service medals for the Normandy Invasion, European Theater, and American Defense.

William C. Hagel -- Born in 1927, Bill Hagel was still a teenager when he joined the U.S. Navy in 1945. He trained at the Great Lakes Naval Base near

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Chicago, became a Seaman 1st Class, and ultimately volunteered for UDT (underwater demolition team) training in Fort Pierce, FL. UDT members later became known as SEALs under Pres. John F. Kennedy.

Hagel joined the crew of the submarine USS Barb with a specialty in power plant demolitions. Exploits of that sub are recounted in a book "The Thunder Below." On its last of 12 missions, the USS Barb landed eight men on Japan; they blew up a 16-car train. Hagel was not on that mission, however.

Before his own discharge in 1946, he served as a discharge interviewer at Lido Beach, L.I. The mild-mannered Hagel remembers that he "learned to study hard, exercise vigorously, and never to volunteer for special assignments" during his two-year term of service. Nevertheless, he rose to the rank of Specialist Third Class and was awarded the World War II Victory Medal, American and Pacific Theaters.

Donald T. Haller -- U.S. Navy service occupied Donald Haller in 1950-54 as an organist on the USS Missouri (BB63). He remembers playing "The Navy Hymn" for church services with a pump organ and in the chow hall on a donated Hammond electric organ. Haller, born in 1928, received the National Defense Service Medal and Good Conduct Medal.

William Hinton -- A young U.S. Marine in 1966-69, Hinton went into his 20s while at Camp LeJeune, Guantanamo in Cuba for one year, and then in the Mediterranean, achieving the rank of E-5 (Sergeant).

During one of his three years, he used his athletic skills to make Marine Corps football and baseball teams and earned the Good Conduct Medal. Friends of his, he reported, said that he was the only Marine they knew to make it

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

through the Corps on a football "scholarship."

John Laurie Howley -- Born in 1927, Howley was only 18 when he entered the Army for a two-year hitch that included time in Japan in the Army of Occupation.

Known to veteran friends by his middle name of Laurie, he took his basic training at Fort Sill, OK, then went by train and troop ship to Japan, where he repaired office machinery in the Adjutant General's Office. That office was part of Gen. Douglas MacArthur's General Headquarters. Howley earned a Victory Medal for his service and has been extremely active in Post 46 and other veterans' activities. His father, Jack, was also an active Post 46 member.

Michael P. Malley -- As an officer in Fort Riley 1961-63, 1st Lt. Malley served with the First Infantry Division during a period of international tension. Although he was never sent overseas, he recalls the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion, followed by the Cuban Missile Crisis, the construction of the Berlin Wall and the buildup of American forces in Vietnam, as well as the bombing of South Vietnam president Diem's own palace by his own air force in 1962.

William J. Mundus -- Born in 1925, Mundus enlisted as an Army Air Force cadet for pilot training in 1944, but that training was stopped as World War II wound down. His service as a Private First Class continued into 1945 before he was discharged. He said he was "one of the lucky ones" in WWII.

Robert Oxenger -- Commander of Post 46 in 1991-92 and adjutant for all the years since then (except one year off because of illness), Bob Oxenger achieved the rank of captain in the U.S. Coast Guard during his 1942-46 active service and 1946-1980 active reserve duty.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

He joined the Coast Guard in Detroit as a 22-year-old, trained at the Coast Guard Academy and was commissioned an ensign in November 1942. His first assignment was in Seattle for 18 months in communications engineering, personnel training, and operations. Next he went to the Navy Recognition School at Ohio State University for two months before shipping out in August 1944 on the AP-123, the Admiral E. W. Eberle, a Navy troop transport manned by the Coast Guard, to serve in the Southwest Pacific theater of operations.

In July 1945, he was reassigned to Radar/Loran School at the Coast Guard Academy and two months later took over as Commanding Officer of Coast Guard Unit 40, a Loran station on Unnak Island in the Aleutians. He was released from active duty in Seattle at the end of July and remained on active reserve status in Detroit, finally retiring as a captain March 27, 1980.

Donald W. Peterson -- Just after World War II ended, 18-year-old Don Peterson joined the Army and was placed in Infantry Special Services, rising to the rank of Technician 4 while serving in General Headquarters in Japan and as chief Non-Commissioned Officer for Athletics in Tokyo. He served for two years.

Robert I. Prieskorn -- Nephew of Erwin Prieskorn, who was killed in battle in World War I and for whom Post 46 is named, Bob Prieskorn carried the family name into the fierce battles at New Caledonia, Guadalcanal, Bougainville, and Guam.

Like his uncle, he became a corporal, but his branch of service was the Marines, not the Army. He was in sixth wave of Marines landing on beaches at Bougainville and Guam. For his service, he received the Pacific Theater,

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Presidential Unit, and Navy Unit Citations.

One of his proudest possessions is a 2004 Certificate of Appreciation signed by Governor Felix P. Camacho and Lt. Gov. Kaleo S. Moylan of Guam. It reads: "To Robert Prieskorn, who fought bravely in the liberation of Guam from occupation forces in 1944 and to whom the people of Guam will always be grateful. We commend and salute you for your valor, service and bravery given so generously 60 years ago without which our island's freedom and progress today would not have been realized. On behalf of the people of Guam, we present this Certificate of Appreciation and our heartfelt thanks."

James R. Robbins -- Service in Korea from 1953 to 1956 was what occupied Jim Robbins, who was born in October 1933 -- making him a 20-year-old Army private who rose to the rank of corporal while there.

Donald E. Schleede -- Identical twin brothers Donald and Douglas Schleede (a 49-year member of the American Legion who died in 2000) served together in the Air Force in 1948-52 at Randolph Field in San Antonio, TX. Don was a flight line crew chief and flight engineer. Doug was a supply sergeant and both rose to the rank of Staff Sergeant.

They enlisted as 17-year-olds in 1948 after outstanding athletic careers at the old Ann Arbor High School. Doug's baseball skills as a hard-throwing lefthander (and on Post 46's American Legion baseball squad for four years) earned him a spot as an ace of the Randolph Field baseball team for three years. Don had run track and played basketball at AA High. Doug pitched and Don caught for the Post's 1948 state championship team.

They were written up by the Ann Arbor News when they first enlisted and

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

later when home on leave, the article noting that a captain in charge of paying the airmen asked Doug, "Just a minute, sergeant, didn't I pay you a minute ago?" Doug replied, "No sir, that was my twin brother, Don." Don reports they often alternated KP (Kitchen Police) duty, too.

In providing photos of himself and Doug, Don said his biggest regret is that Doug did not live to see them celebrate 50 years together in the American Legion in 2001 and receipt of their 1949 high school diplomas in June 2004 (they had left school after their junior year to enlist in the Air Force). His affection and respect for his brother were obvious during an interview.

Reuben V. Swisher -- Another Post 46 veteran born in 1933, Reuben Swisher had more years of service than veteran Robbins (see above) -- nine years, two months and 18 days on active duty, to be exact, followed by five years in the reserves.

Wounded twice in Korea, he earned the Purple Heart and a Bronze Star for Valor while a combat infantryman. Swisher was 17 years old when he served in Korea, assigned to Fox Company of the 2nd Battalion, 7th Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was wounded on Hill 578 on Feb. 15, 1951, at Chip-Yongni, near Yongp-Yong, as part of a force defending the Wonju Line close to the twin tunnels of Koksuni, named the "Killer Operation." Besides being wounded twice, he suffered frostbitten feet.

After this Army service in 1950-52, rising to corporal, he joined the Air Force in 1957 and served until 1964 in the States, achieving the rank of Technical Sergeant. Besides his Purple Heart and Bronze Star, he earned the Combat Infantryman Badge, the Korean Service Medal with three Bronze Stars, and the

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

United Nations Service Medal.

Swisher then served the Department of Veterans Affairs and earned several honors while employed there, followed by 400 hours of volunteer work at the VA Medical Center in Ann Arbor after his retirement in 1991. He also served as Commander of the Washtenaw County Chapter of Disabled American Veterans for seven consecutive terms.

J.J. Van Gasse -- A veteran of two wars, Dr. Van Gasse was elected commander of Post 46 in 2000 and at the time of publication of this history is still serving in that leadership position.

Drafted in 1945 after his freshman year in college, he was assigned to and graduated from the Judge Advocate General's School in Fort Oglethorpe, GA, and was assigned to Fifth Army headquarters, then located in Fort Sheridan, IL, as a classification-investigator.

Remaining in the reserves after discharge, he was recalled at the start of the Korean conflict and assigned to Fort Sam Houston, TX, as part of the Korean Military Advisory Group to implement plans for the development of an effective medical care operation for South Korean Army. After release from that duty, he returned to the University of Michigan to obtain his M.D.

Robert Wischmeyer -- After being commissioned a 2nd lieutenant following four years of ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) studies at John Carroll University in Cleveland, OH, Wischmeyer went on active duty in 1955, first at the Basic Infantry Officers School in Fort Benning, GA.

After four months there, he was assigned to Korea and became a rifle platoon leader in K Company, 3rd Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Division, 8th Army at Camp Kaiser north of the 38th parallel near the

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

demilitarized zone. In 1956 he became a motor pool officer at Division headquarters in Camp Casey.

Wischmeyer finished his two years of active duty as executive officer and 1st lieutenant in a basic training company in Fort Knox, KY. He remained in the inactive reserve for six more years. He was adjutant of Post 46 for one year.

Douglas Woolley -- Outgoing senior vice commander of Post 46 and commander of the Washtenaw County Council of Veterans, Doug Woolley was born in 1929 in Alberta, Canada, and came to the U.S. at age 16. He enlisted in the Air Force in 1954. Two older brothers had served in WWII as Canadians.

He served at Lackland AFB in Texas, Keesler AFB in Mississippi and at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. before being discharged. He later earned a degree at Michigan State University.

His service drew commendations from two presidents -- Dwight D. Eisenhower and Richard M. Nixon.

Membership Roster (as of 2005)

American Legion adjutants annually update their posts' membership ledgers. The ledgers show which war era each member served in..

Membership eligibility dates for WWI are April 16, 1917 to Nov. 11, 1918; for WWII, Dec. 7, 1941 to Dec. 31, 1946; for Korea, June 25, 1950 to Jan. 31, 1955; for Vietnam, Feb. 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975; for Lebanon/Grenada, Aug. 24, 1982 to July 31, 1984; for Panama, Dec. 20, 1989 to Jan. 31, 1990; and for Persian Gulf (Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq) and beyond, Aug. 2, 1990, to a date yet to be determined.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Although several World War II veterans in Post 46 went to their final resting place in 2004 and 2005, almost half of the Post's 200-plus roster served in WWII. (No World War I veterans in the Post survive.) World War II veterans number 96; Korean War, 50; Vietnam War, 56; Lebanon/Grenada era, 6; Panama era, 2; and Persian Gulf (Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq) and beyond, 11. Post 46 records for five "paid up for life" veterans do not note their war era. Based on their service years, Post 46 members as of the publication of this history include:

World War II

William W. Adamchak, William F. Ager, Jr., Charles M. Almand, Douglas B. Angell, Harry W. Baker, John R. Baker, Laurel A. Bauer, John P. Bentley, Fred Bentz, Robert J. Blakemore, John D. Blanchard, Louis E. Boone, Julian D. Boyd, Dale E. Burgess, Ross W. Campbell, Theodore G. Chapekis, Frank A. Ciaravino, John A. Clark, Marie M. Clark.

Kenneth R. Cobb, Robert A. Cooch, Donald F. Crump, Ronald A. DeCicco, Henry A. Desautel, Harvey A. Doss, John G. Dryden, Marshall W. Edman, S. J. Elden, Ben C. Fairman, Reginald H. Fischer, Chuck H. Franklin, Garnett C. French, William A. Gracie, Charles Gray, William C. Hagel, Ralph E. Hamilton, Jr., David E. Hellner, Clarence H. Hennigan, John R. Hildinger.

John L. Howley, George G. Hulstrom, Ralph M. Huntley, William E. Jelneck, Richard L. Juetten, Richard E. King, John F. Ladd, Wayne M. Lamerson, Richard L. Levenick, Gordon E. Levenson, Edward Linck, Norman B. Lovelace, Lauren E. Lutz, Tom F. Mahs, Robert O. Maki, Claude J. Marshall, Joseph R. Mastie, George N. May, James R. McCleery, Robert W. McIntyre, Jasper E. McClaurin, Victor L. Meyers, Joseph A. Moore.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Clifford J. Morris, Leonard F. Motsinger, W. J. Mundus, Robert G. Nolan, Reinhart A. Olsen, Clifford J. Orielly, Walter F. Orth, Robert G. Oxenger, Donald W. Peterson, Robert D. Plichta, Farrell D. Plotner, Robert I. Prieskorn, Ben A. Putman.

Paul N. Racicot, Donald L. Robbins, George W. Schultz, Jack G. Scott, Samuel Singer, James C. Smith, Robert A. Steinke, John E. Stephens, James D. Strong, Jerome F. Szynewski, M. Tomita, Jerome J. Van Gasse, Jennie P. Viery, John E. Viery, Herbert J. Ward, Loyd J. Wicks, Edward R. Wiedman, Howard L. Wikel, George A. Wild, Russell K. Woinowsk, Darwin F. Woods, William K. Yahr.

Korean War

Marion J. Alberts, Roger R. Allen, Robert G. Ballingall, Peter Barhydt, Willie M. Bleakley, James K. Bradburn, Jess W. Brown, Donald J. Cain, James E. Christman, Arthur E. Clark, Norman B. Coats, James D. Conway, Culan J. Crocker, Donald Eschelbach, Colin J. Fingerle, Francis L. Harris, Douglas J. Harvey, Donald T. Haller, Thomas W. Hill, Robert F. Hoeft, Frank M. Holdreith.

Richard L. Juetten, James F. Karpus, David B. Kennedy, Leland L. Kitchen, Richard M. Larson, Roger S. Losey, Robert M. Mason, Boyd J. Maynard, Jack E. Meisenhelder, David E. Meissner, Robert W. Mueller, Garth C. Othoudt, James L. Peters, Donald C. Peterson, John W. Ransom.

Frank N. Ritter, James H. Robbins, Donald E. Schleede, Robert Shaneyfelt, Edward W. Skipper, Gilbert W. Smith, Reuben V. Swisher, Alex Szuch, Roy K. Tanabe, Ray A. Tarnaski, Earl W. Taylor, James O. Wanzeck, Duane F. Westphal, Robert A. Wischmeyer, Douglas R. Woolley.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Vietnam War

John E. Barber, Stanley Berent, James C. Crosby, Arnold Darr, James R. Dempsey, Marc F. Derenthal, Steve A. Duncan, Ralph J. Easter, James P. Gartin, David M. Gilbertson, David D. Gray, Donald L. Hackbarth, Mark A. Hallauer, Charles L. Harper, James P. Harper, Patrick M. Hayes, Ricky Hendershot, George W. Hill, William A. Hinton.

James R. Kemppainen, James Y. Kennedy, Paul A. Kirton, Phil B. Madouse, David P. Magee, Michael P. Malley, James Mattke, Robert P. McFarland, Oleg Michajlenko, Harold L. Moon, Richard W. Moore Sr., William L. Nuber, R. S. Olsen, Alan S. Owens, Halket M. Pattullo, Clinton J. Pennisi, William C. Prout, Stuart Richards.

Waldomar M. Roeser, Thomas G. Rombyer, Peter G. Roopas, Michael J. Ruedisale, Charles E. Russell, Douglas H. Sager, Dennis S. Salamin, David O. Schankin, Patrick J. Schindler, John M. Schnur Jr., Eugene E. Smith Jr., Larry E. Swisher, Miguel E. Thorton, Donald Townsend, Willem M. Vandenbroek, Lawrence Waggoner, Elmer E. White, James H. Winter, Paul W. Wright.

Lebanon/Grenada

Michael G. Dorow, Roger S. Manor, Donald P. Proctor, William Tehoy, Robert Warner, Craig A. Whitt.

Panama

Brian J. Dunn and Jeffrey E. Jacobsen.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Persian Gulf (Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq) and Beyond

Cynthia J. Blevins, Laurel Burkel, Adam E. Dempsey, Carolyn G. Dempsey, Brent T. Gallagher, Michael B. Morgan, Jeffrey J. Nicholls, Samuela J. Pollack, Dean M. Prestegaard, Timothy Raquet, Steven A. Tufte.

Paid Up for Life

Thomas W. Butler Jr., Michael R. Schurkamp, Thomas L. Scott, Richard Tejan.

* * * * *

Highlights from the 1959-1988 Era

There is no chronological history of Post 46, only notes, commanders' reports, newsletters and adjutants' minutes, with most of those only from the 1990s. But we can still glean some sense of Post 46's activities from the earlier records.

The oldest of them were copies of the Post's *Ann Arbor American Legion News* at the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library. Highlights from that publication and subsequent newsletters follow:

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

March 1959

Robert Hinderer was commander and the Post home was located on the east side of Main Street south of the Pauline intersection on what is now a lot used for parking, near the University of Michigan Stadium. Formerly, the Post had met in the basement of City Hall.

The home had belonged to the Allmendinger family and had been purchased in 1933 under commander Jack Dunn. Volunteers had remodeled it for Post purposes.

Membership was 1,023, making Post 46 the largest Post in Michigan. But membership began to slip and by January 1965, the Post's goal for the year was set at 800.

February 1968

The Post news has a printing of 800, with some being mailed to service personnel on duty in Vietnam. Thirty-four Vietnam veterans belong to the Post.

November 1968

Post 46 and its Auxiliary host a three-day fall conference of 1,985 Legionnaires. The Post home ballroom was the scene of a Saturday evening banquet, with U.S. Rep. Gerald Ford as keynote speaker and 350 people attending. As a World War II veteran, Rep. Ford -- later to become President Ford -- belongs to a Grand Rapids American Legion Post. Post 46 presented Rep. Ford an "M" blanket. Commmander George Harms chairs the conference.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

March 1969

Post 46 provides a warm sendoff at 6 a.m. for 11 men heading for service in Vietnam, providing coffee, donuts and best wishes from veterans. Two months later, the Post does the same for 10 more Vietnam-bound personnel.

December 1974

Now only four pages (occasionally eight), and typed rather than printed, Post 46's newsletter circulation will fall to only 500 members by 1979. As a sign of declining participation in the Post, Commander Carl Hetchler reports his great disappointment that only 56 Legionnaires and their wives had attended a Veterans Day party, despite there being a band and free refreshments.

The Post color guard did participate in the Veterans Day parade in Chelsea and members will be manning kettles and ringing bells to support the Salvation Army's Christmas charity drive.

May 1975

Post 46 is no longer the largest post in Michigan, having been bypassed in 1974 by a Post in Ida. The Erwin Prieskorn Post 46 membership had slipped to 544 members in 1974.

May 1976

Sponsored by Post 46, a young man named Edward L. Compere wins second place in the District 2 (Southeast Michigan) Oratorical Contest. He has received an appointment to the U.S. Naval Academy.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

In other news, the Post says it is raising its annual membership to \$16 because the National headquarters increased its dues by \$2.

The news also carried the text of the moving poem titled "America's Answer," by R. W. Lillard, reminiscent of the "In Flanders Fields" poem made famous after World War I, and promising that the dead who lie in Flanders Fields will not be forgotten. It reads:

*Rest in peace, ye Flanders dead,
The fight that ye so bravely led
We've taken up. And we will keep
True faith with you who lie asleep,
With Each a cross to mark his bed,
Where once his own life-blood ran red.
So let your rest be sweet and deep
In Flanders fields.*

*Fear not that ye have died for naught,
The torch you threw to us we caught,
Ten million hands will hold it high,
And Freedom's light shall never die!
We've learned the lesson that ye taught
In Flanders fields.*

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

July 1979

Under commander Ron Karr, Post 46 returned to a professionally printed newsletter, sometimes four pages, sometimes only two. The Post had 509 members, including 41 new ones, 17 of those having served in the Vietnam War, nine in the Korean War, and 15 in World War II. President of the Auxilary was Theresa Cubberly.

February 1981

This issue of the news was significant in that it traced the history of the Post's former social club, the **"American Legion Post 46 Hunt and Fish Club."** The first meeting of the club had been in August 1951, with the attendance of Bill Buettner Jr., Lou Jeffreys, Adolph Wiese, Don Carter, Luther Hagen, Chet Nowland and Will Staebler.

That organizational meeting led to the first official meeting on Sept. 4 at 10:30 p.m., Bill Buettner Jr. chairing. Also attending were Luther Hagen, Roundy Janousky, Chet Nowland, Elgie Gould and Don Carter. Three days later, Will Staebler was appointed vice president and dues of \$1 per year were set. By-laws were approved, with meetings to be on the second Thursday of each month. Sixteen members attended.

In April 1958, the Hunt and Fish Club signed a lease for 600 acres at Silver Lake near Dexter, the land being part of what was described as "the Clerk estate." The club was incorporated Dec. 11, 1958, and soon began making improvements to the land it had leased. No further information on the club was provided, but a page of photos of one picnic there appears later in this history.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

May-June 1982

The newspaper now went to every other month publication because of printing and mailing costs, and in the February-March 1984 issue it was scaled back to two pages, typewritten.

January 1988

On Jan. 30, the Post closed its home at 1035 South Main, which it had operated since 1933 (see pages 10 and 11) and moved to 3460 Dexter Road. It was a sad, but financially necessary, ending to the location that had seen so much activity benefiting veterans and their families, the Auxiliary, and indeed the general public.

1991-2005: A Struggling Post Continues to Serve Veterans

Fortunately for this history, Post officers in late 1991 had begun to keep consecutive copies of their newsletters and minutes. Much of the Post's recent history can be gleaned from those records.

We are indebted to those officers, especially to Bob

Oxenger, who as commander and later adjutant, kept meticulous notes.

The last 15 years of Post 46 have been marked by:

- * Annual, successful Poppy "Sales" that raise funds from public contributions to assist veterans, especially those in the VA Hospital;**
- * Participation in bingo evenings at the hospital, where members assist hospitalized veterans and provide snacks;**
- * Social events like Christmas parties;**
- * Participation in Memorial Day and Veterans Day events;**
- * Sending local youths to Boys State, where they learn good government;**
- * Support of county, district, state and national veterans organizations; and**
- * Support of many other individual, non-recurring events, when asked and when needed.**

The following are brief accounts of such activities year by year.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

1991

The Post again hosted a picnic for patients from the VA Hospital at the Dexter-Huron Park, with Bill Weindorf and his wife, Joni, in charge, Tom Hill and Art "Fizz" Symicek assisting.

Later in the summer, the second annual Dick Schindler Golf Tournament was held at Brookside Golf Course in Saline, 32 members teeing off and the team of Walt Crocker, Clyde Gow, Mary Isaacson and Bud Clymer posting the lowest score. Two other summer activities were a steak fry and a chicken barbeque.

The Post voted to pay the first year's dues for any eligible veteran involved in the Grenada, Panama or Desert Storm campaigns who wish to join the unit. The Auxiliary held a yard sale at the "new" home on Dexter Road in September, led by president Mary Isaacson.

Fred Reeves, Bill Weindorf, Laurie Howley and Paul Gilson served as the Color Guard at the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in November, and the Post held an open house on Dec. 7 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, with the Auxiliary serving refreshments. Slides of the attack were shown and a memorial service was held.

As Thanksgiving and Christmas approached, the Auxiliary began collecting non-perishable foods, new or clean used clothing, and blankets for needy veterans or their families.

Twenty members attended a special meeting Dec. 17 of the Home Association Board (responsible for operation of the Post's Memorial Home, then located on Dexter Road) to discuss the Home's financial problems caused by continued loss of revenue.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

1992

The post decided to send two boys to Boys State at a cost of \$185 each. Fred Reeves agreed to handle arrangements. The Post sponsored a bingo party Jan. 17 at the VA Hospital, donating \$75 for prizes, and Norm Coats arranged for refreshment.

Members learned that Life member Melvin C. Pierce had passed away Nov. 6, 1991 in Lake Worth, FL. John "Laurie" Howley was awarded Life membership, given to members who under the by-laws must have belonged to the American Legion at least 15 consecutive years, five of which must be with Post 46, and have served at least one year on the executive board.

An Easter egg hunt at the Post Home was open to the public via an ad placed in the Ann Arbor News. It delighted children (and adults), with members Art and Ursula Symicek reported to be "a smashing success" in their Easter Bunny costumes. On the "negative news" side, Auxiliary president Mary Isaacson suffered a severe stroke. She later recovered, but the lack of interest among Auxiliary members in serving as officers was about to lead to the Auxiliary's demise later in 1993, despite Joni Weindorf stepping in as president.

A new, modest fund-raising effort -- the selling of caps and license plates -- was only moderately successful. Larry Wren reported that more than \$2,081 had been collected from Poppy Day sales, including \$829 collected by Cmdr. Bob Oxenger, the most ever raised by one individual. After expenses and the share going to the Auxiliary, \$961 was the Post's share, deposited in the Welfare Fund.

Post 46 provided the only complete Color Guard at Arborcrest Cemetery's Memorial Day ceremonies May 24, and the Color Guard also presented the colors

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

May 25 at the Post's own ceremony, led by Fred Reeves. Fred Bentz "did a fine rendition of 'Taps'," Post minutes showed.

In June, Bill Weindorf was elected commander, replacing Bob Oxenger, who became adjutant. The final membership total for 1992 was 284.

The Auxiliary "adopted" a city park at Main and Depot streets and planted 10 flats of flowers there, then continued to maintain the plot by weeding it and other means.

Although the Post Home was struggling financially, it still provided a gathering place for members to socialize on football Saturdays. Members also played in the third annual Dick Schindler Memorial Golf Scramble at the Brookside Golf Course in Saline, later enjoying a steak dinner.

Fall activities as 1992 drew to a close included the Post Color Guard marching in the Veterans Day parade in Manchester, a \$150 contribution to aid three needy veterans' families at Thanksgiving, and a Christmas party.

Another highlight of the Manchester parade was the fact that Auxiliary president Joni Weindorf and member Sherri Whipple were accompanied to Manchester by Lenore Garry, whose deceased husband served in World War I. The auxiliary also staffed the VA Hospital gift shop Nov. 30-Dec. 2 and members put in more than 500 hours during 1992, but the number of members participating in Auxiliary activities continued to diminish.

At the last meeting of 1992, Adjutant Bob Oxenger was presented with a Life Membership "in appreciation of his activities for the Post."

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

1993

The year started with the resignation of Cmdr. Bill Weindorf on advice of his physician because of heart problems. Senior Vice Commander Fred Reeves moved up to commander.

Continuing its support of hospitalized veterans, the Post hosted a bingo party in January. Five members assisted 67 veterans in "playing" their cards and receiving snacks. Many of these veterans are wheelchair-bound.

The Post decided to close the Post Home on Sundays and Mondays following the Super Bowl party there Jan. 31. Tuesday through Saturday hours would continue.

The Post wrote to the mayor of Ann Arbor and the City Council supporting the relocation of the Oak Way road east of the VA Hospital so that construction of the new hospital could begin. A copy of the letter was also sent to the Ann Arbor News. Legion State Cmdr. Al Ford of Ypsilanti and other veterans groups joined Post 46 in supporting the road relocation by attending a council meeting Feb. 1

Seven members -- Melvin Kessler, Laurie Howley, Paul Gilson, Larry Wren, Don Eschelbach, Jim Morrison and Charles Gray -- joined a national battle against blindness by volunteering to serve as store captains at local grocery stores where coupons would be passed out to raise money for the National Retinitis Pigmentosa Foundation, Inc., and Kellogg, USA. The national American Legion Child Welfare Foundation was helping support this project.

Willard J. Stabler reached the milestone of 50 years as a Legionnaire, and he was presented a certificate honoring him.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

As usual in April, Post members hosted another bingo party at the VA Hospital. Two Pioneer High students were to be sponsored to Boys State, at a cost to the Post of \$195 per boy.

Membership rose to 310 this year, an increase of 26, partly as result of some members transferring from Michigan Post 225 in Lansing. Yet the Post Home on Dexter Road was in danger of having to be closed, according to Junior Vice Commander Norm Coats. It continued to operate in the red, he reported in the June/July newsletter, and would soon run out of funds. He asked for ideas on reviving it.

Again the Post's distribution of memorial poppies to the public succeeded in raising money for hospitalized veterans and other veterans' aid. Contributions into canisters from the public amounted to \$1,489.37 and mail-in donations hit \$381.50, for a total of 1,870.87. After expenses of \$285, the net profit was split between Post 46's Welfare Fund and the Auxiliary. Mary Isaacson, having recovered from her stroke, and Margaret Swisher of the Auxiliary joined Bob Mueller, Charlie Gray, Larry Wren and Bob Oxenger as collectors. Oxenger led the way with \$908.89, another new "most ever" mark for one Post member.

Members praised Charlie Gray for another reason: his devoted work in keeping the Post Home grounds in good shape. Helping Charlie were John and Sheila Schnur and Jeff Whipple.

In a sad note, it was reported that former Cmdr. George Harms -- whose leadership in 1966-68 is recounted on pages 3 and 4 -- was in poor health. He died June 30. The Post presented a Bible to his widow.

The seven members who volunteered in the Fight Against Blindness, plus

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

one Sons of American Legion member, Larry Wren Jr., reported they handed out 1,850 fund-raising coupons at two local supermarkets, Meijer's and Busch's.

About 45 patients and 10 staff members from the VA Hospital attended a Post 46-hosted picnic in August at Dexter Huron Park.

The Auxiliary Disbands

Only six women out of a membership of 70 had been doing all the work as the Auxiliary struggled to remain active, so on Nov. 2 of 1993 the chapter turned in its charter and disbanded. Its remaining funds were presented to Post 46 to be used for patients at the VA Hospital or for needy veterans at Thanksgiving and/or Christmas. The Post expressed its "sincere appreciation" and said the Auxiliary members "will be sorely missed."

In a letter of regret to an Auxiliary member who had sent in a donation, Evelyn Kesler of the Auxiliary wrote:

"I think back on World War II. If we had not had your husbands, brothers, fathers and grandfathers to carry the guns and ammunition, to fly the planes, drive the trucks and to carry the wounded loved ones to safe ground, where would we be today?

"Where would this country stand in the world today? Our men took years out of their lives to keep us and our country going, and we can't even take one night out of our lives to keep their memory alive and to keep our programs working, to help the veterans and their families, the patients in the VA Hospitals, and to keep patriotism alive in our communities."

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

As 1993 drew to a close, it was decided to raise Annual Post dues to \$30 per year because of an increase by National Headquarters of \$3.50 and by State of \$1.50. The Post did not meet in December but held a Christmas party that drew a good crowd.

1994

Continuing its support of veterans, the Post voted in January to donate \$200 to the VA Hospital's Wheelchair Team of basketball players and to commend them for their activity.

Members observed a moment of silence for John C. Tanner, commander in 1983-85. Several members attended a memorial service for him, and a Bible was presented to his son, Tom. Five members, along with three Legionnaires from other posts, helped 55 VA Hospital patients play bingo in January.

Boosted by the addition of 35 members transferring from the state holding Post 225 in Lansing, membership rose to 329 in 1994. Forty VA Hospital patients attended Post 46's bingo party in April.

Fate of Post Home Discussed

In the May meeting of officers and the executive committee, the future of the Post Home on Dexter Road was discussed. "Many feel it is time to close the doors," the Post newsletter reported. Yet in August the newsletter reported "the Memorial Home club facilities would not be closed...in the immediate future." In the next year, however, that decision would be made, despite an anonymous contribution to keep the Home functioning for several more months.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Thanks to another donor who wanted to remain anonymous, the Post was able to sponsor a young lady, Latasha Franklin, to the Student Trooper program, and the Post also sponsored two boys to Boys State, Bret Seltzer and Shawn Phillips. Poppy Days revenue reached \$1,947.50.

Led by Cmdr. Brian Dunn, five members attend a meeting of local veterans organizations at the VFW Post 423 building on Wagner Road to hear a proposal that all groups without their own home could use the VFW building as a meeting place.

The Post supported a decorated Vietnam veteran who needed help while traveling from Ann Arbor to his home in Orlando, FL, with a \$300 contribution; Adjutant Bob Oxenger had provided the assistance upon the vet's request after ascertaining the validity of his service. The man had been wounded in Vietnam.

The annual Dick Schindler Memorial Golf Outing/Streak Fry continued to be a success as 64 members participated.

Clinical psychologist Richard L. Amdur and Dr. Israel Liberzow of the VA Medical Center spoke at the September meeting about a stress disorder study of Vietnam veterans they are conducting, and said they are seeking veterans who may want to participate.

Finance Officer Jim Stein was thanked for his "outstanding job for over two years in that position," and he was acknowledged for being "the driving force" behind the Boys State program. Stein's resignation for personal reasons was regretfully accepted.

As 1994 ended, leaves were raked at the Post Home by Norm Coats, Bobby Jones, Leon Whitlock, Jim Morrison and Charlie Fehrenbaker for the last time.

1995 -- The Year the Post Gave Up Its Home

Financial constraints prompted members to vote in January not to support Boys State or Student Trooper programs in 1995. Officers also voted to insert a notice in the March/April Newsletter that at the regular monthly meeting on April 4, "a decision must be made as to the future of the bar and club facilities at the Post Memorial Home on Dexter Road." Those votes set the tone for what was to come.

Yet the Post's support of veterans continued as five members helped 45 hospitalized comrades play bingo in January and members supported the expenditure of approximately \$185 for 12 dozen 12-inch by 18-inch "Spearhead" American flags to decorate graves at Arborcrest cemetery on Memorial Day.

As VFW Post 423 continued its monthly meetings about use of its facility for meetings, Cmdr. Dunn, Larry Wren and Fred Reeves planned to represent Post 46 at the March meeting, and the Post again got ready to sponsor the April bingo party at the VA Hospital.

But April brought the beginning of the end for the Post Home at 3460 Dexter Road, which had opened Feb. 7, 1988. At the April 4 meeting of officers and the executive committee, to which all members were invited, Cmdr. Dunn presented six options. But first, in a typed statement, he explained the situation:

"The Memorial Home does not provide enough income to support the expense of keeping the bar open six days per week. The Home Board must make a choice among various options this April so that we will be able to keep a reserve of money in order to take care of any repairs or unexpected expenses.

"We must make a decision so that we will not need to use Post funds to pay

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

for Memorial Home expenses. In the years ahead we want to continue to help veterans at the VA Hospital, help needy veterans and their families at the holidays, and sponsor young people to events such as Boys State and Trooper School. By stopping our losses, we can continue to do these things and more. If we do not stop the losses we will drain all of our Post and Memorial Home funds and be unable to assist anybody.”

Summaries of the options he proposed follow:

Option A -- Continue to operate the Home six days a week; would require a significant new source of income.

Option B -- Keep the Home open on meeting nights and Friday and Saturday nights, plus special events; would require continuing the liquor license and insurance costs.

Option C -- Do not renew the liquor license but open the Home on meeting nights, weekend, and special events on some type of honor system with beer and wine, or provide a refrigerator for members to use; some complications with liquor licensing commission and inventory, but insurance costs would be less.

Option D -- Do not renew liquor license and open the Home only for meetings and special events.

Option E -- Close the Home and meet at the new VFW facility until the Home could be reopened under better financial circumstances; would require joining an Ann Arbor Area Veterans Association and paying rent; would require paying for upkeep of the Home.

Option F -- Close the Home, meet at the VFW, and sell the Home; would

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

eliminate the expense of maintaining the Home and provide cash to place in a building fund.

Cmdr. Dunn explained that it would cost \$100 to join the Ann Arbor Veterans Association at its inception, or \$300 later. The groups joining the association would share the cost of operating the VFW facility. He said he will have a legal representative of Post 46 look at a formal proposal for such an association.

After Cmdr. Dunn presented the options (to the largest meeting attendance in years), members voted to close the bar facilities on April 30, to open the Home only for regular meetings and on special occasions that would be announced, and that Home Board officers determine further action, with members to be notified at least 30 days before any major steps such as sale of the property were taken.

Later in April, Cmdr. Dunn wrote to all members explaining the need to close the Home and sell it, and told them the Post would continue negotiations on using the VFW facility on Wagner Road. "Our present course," he wrote, will allow us to reorganize and continue with our Post's missions of helping veterans and their families and of providing opportunities for area children to attend programs such as Boys State and the Student Trooper program." He concluded, "Please rest assured that our Post can continue to do much good regardless of where it meets," and he also addressed members in the July/August newsletter.

In May, after the Executive Committee members recommended such action, Post officers voted to hire an appraiser to set a value on the Home for a fee of between \$250 and \$300, and that a second appraiser be hired for a second evaluation at a cost of \$225.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

At the May 16 meeting, the first appraiser reported the property to be worth \$138,000 "as is." In June, the second appraiser gave the Home a value of \$180,000.

On the assumption that an area veterans association would be formed, the Post in June authorized payment of an initial \$100 fee. Expenses for the association were estimated at \$350 per month, to be shared by all veterans groups that join.

A Life Member of Post 46, Mervin F. "Pogie" Wadhams, Jr. died June 14 at the VA Hospital, and on June 22, the Post held a memorial service for him at the Post, attended by nearly 100 of his friends and fellow Legionnaires.

Farewell, Post 46 Memorial Home

Sixty-two years after Erwin Prieskorn Post 46 purchased its first permanent home at 1035 S. Main Street (see page 34), it moved out of its second home at 3460 Dexter Road and into an uncertain future.

By action of the Home Board (officers from the Post) at a special meeting Monday, June 19, 1995, presided over by Home Board President Norm Coats and attended by Larry Wren, Brian Dunn, Fred Reeves, Don Nutt, John Rayburn, Charles Gray, Tom Hill, Bill Nuber and Bob Oxenger, an offer was accepted for purchase of the property.

Jean Navarre, 4300 Scio Church Rd., Ann Arbor, offered \$166,000, with a down payment of \$16,000, \$6,000 of which would go to the broker, and the balance of \$150,000 would be paid off under a 10-year land contract in monthly

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

installments of \$1093.36, including interest at 8 percent. Ms. Navarre will operate the building and grounds as a pre-school day care facility.

Earnest money of \$1,000 had been made and the balance of the down payment would be paid on a closing date of Oct. 30. Coats was directed to contact a local attorney to draw up a sales contract. Adjutant Oxenger was to obtain a Post Office box number for future mailings.

Then came complications. Ms. Navarre was unable to finance the deal, so it was cancelled, but another buyer, Jane E. Barber, 608 Tecumseh St., Clinton, paid \$1,000 earnest money on a purchase price of \$160,000 for use of the property in the same manner as Ms. Navarre had planned, a day-care center. Under her offer, \$16,000 would be a down payment, there would be 120 months of payments on land contract at 9 1/2 percent, with purchaser to pay the balance within 30 days of the 120th payment, closing also to be on Oct. 30. The buyer also, for tax purposes, wanted to rent the Home at \$1,000 per month plus utilities in November and December and start monthly amortization payments under the land contract in January 1996.

The Home Board and the Post agreed to her offer in July. That was immediately followed by a decision to offer for sale the moveable items from the Home to members on Aug. 26.

A "Blazing" Beer Party Signals a New Era

By the end of August, Post 46 no longer could say it owned a home, but since the closing date was Oct. 30, why not hold one more party? That's just what members did on Friday, Oct. 20 -- it was called the last "blazing" party and featured free beer and snacks for all members. Attendance, of course, was good.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

The VFW 423 proposal and formation of an Ann Arbor Veterans Association both fell apart (only two other veterans groups besides Post 46 wanted to join the association and only one other group wanted to meet at the VFW; the Post's \$100 initial fee was returned). So Post 46 moved its meetings to the Elks Club for a few years and finally to the Grotto Club on West Stadium Boulevard until the present.

September rolled around and Post 46 had a new address for membership mailings: P.O. Box 2192, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-2192. That mailing address also remains to the printing of this history.

The Post continued to support VA Hospital service to veterans by approving a contribution of \$200 to the hospital for 10 bedside phones that Communication Workers of America volunteers would install.

Members voted to meet at the Elks Club on Eisenhower Parkway starting in November. Members also learned that Purple Heart, a non-profit organization to help veterans, would pick up the Post's organ and a couch, and that the Eagles were buying all the Post Home chairs, but tables were to go to the new owner. Pictures, plaques and other small items were to be stored by Laurie Howley and wheelchairs, crutches, canes, and Bibles were to be stored by Brian Dunn. (The Post cannon was loaned to Saline American Legion Post 322 until being moved to the VFW on Wagner Road a few years later.)

Now without a home, but still with a heart, Post 46 donated \$150 at Thanksgiving and \$150 at Christmas to needy families of veterans, and \$449 to the VA Hospital for an oxygen analyzer for the respiratory therapy department. Members ended 1995 with a pot-luck Christmas party at the Elks Club, the Post furnishing ham and coffee.

1996 -- A Transition Year

"Please remember, we only sold the Memorial Home. Post 46 remains and will continue to help our community the best we can," wrote Cmdr. Dunn as 1996 began with a meeting at the Elks Club ("our gracious hosts," he wrote).

To prove his point, the Post treated 40 VA Hospital patients to bingo, snacks and refreshment in January and about the same number in April; raised \$2,186.81 in Poppy sales in May; and in September contributed \$300 to the VA Medical Center's Radiation Oncology Travel fund to help defray travel expenses of patients living 50 to 100 miles from the hospital and ineligible for travel pay, and \$100 to the Medical Center's social work service program.

A well-known man in the community and a Post 46 member, Robert E. Muehlig, died Jan. 18. He owned the Muehlig Funeral Chapel and was a WWII veteran.

Membership dipped to 251 in 1996. An expanded newsletter was introduced with the September-October letter. It included short articles from American Forces Press Service that could be of general interest to veterans.

As the year ended, the support of veterans from Post 46 helped pass Proposal C on Nov. 5. Proposal C protects the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund and prevents the fund from being used for other purposes. Six Post 46 members hung information on door knobs and passed out leaflets.

1997

Larry Wren, commander in 1960-61, began his recovery from a Dec. 30

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

stroke and was taking physical therapy, aiming for a return to meetings in March, but the Post received news that a 41-year member, Bill Carmen, Jr., a WWII vet who continued to support the Post even while living in Florida, had passed away -- ironically, on Dec. 7, the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor that drew America into WWII.

The Post hosted bingo in January for 30 VA Hospital patients and donated a total of \$500 to the hospital for three different funds. In April, as promised, Larry Wren was back and reported on receipt of 4,000 poppies for the Memorial Day weekend sale.

As generous as ever, the Post donated \$100 to the American Legion's National Emergency Fund for flood relief in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana, meanwhile receiving a letter of thanks from the VA Hospital for earlier support. Again some Post members hosted a bingo party in April at the hospital.

Poppy sales rose to \$2,419, including \$740 from mail-in donations by members who cannot assist in collections outside three Kroger stores and the Kmart on Maple Road. National Cmdr. Joseph J. Frank wrote to thank the Post for its flood relief fund contribution (Michigan posts contributed \$20,000).

A small but enthusiastic crowd enjoyed a picnic in August at the Pittsfield Township Park on Ellsworth Road, thanks to Doug Woolley's efforts. A Christmas party in December at the Elks Club ended the year for a Post that reported only 226 members for the year.

1998

Former State Cmdr. Al Ford and other District 2 officers were guests at

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

the March meeting to discuss ways to increase membership. He reported there are now 437 posts in Michigan.

Besides its bingo parties at the VA Hospital in January and April and its Poppy Days sale in May, the Post supported national American Legion efforts to encourage Congress to pass an amendment to the Constitution to prevent desecration of the American flag. It also adopted a resolution to support the efforts of the University of Michigan officers training program to persuade the College of Literature, Science and Arts to grant credits for military science courses. Copies were sent to the college, the regents and the commanding officers of the university's officer education programs.

Cmdr. Dunn sent letters to 20 elementary schools in the Ann Arbor School District offering American flags for their classrooms.

Despite two ads placed in the Ann Arbor News, only three new members were enrolled at a May 30th "new members" meeting at the Elks Club. Because the Elks Club was abandoning its Eisenhower Parkway building and constructing a new one, Post 46 moved its meeting place to the Moose Club on South Maple Road starting in November.

However, the Post's annual Christmas party moved to the Grotto Club on West Stadium -- which ultimately led to the Post moving its meeting place to the Grotto Club in April 2001.

Prior to that decision, officers had evaluated an offer from VFW Post 423 to use their space and had decided not to, but to keep that option open. In their last meeting of 1998, on Dec. 7, officers observed a moment of silence in memory of the military and civilian personnel who died at Pearl Harbor in 1941.

1999-2005-- Membership Lags, but Is It The Beginning of the Future?

Membership that hovered just over 200; failure to attract new members in any significant number; changing meeting places twice; key officers often being unable to attend meetings; the continuing deaths of World War II veterans (and even one 104-year-old World War I member, William G. Dow, who had joined Post 46 in 1947) made it obvious that the Erwin Prieskorn Post 46's 80-year history faced an uncertain future.

Minutes and newsletters for 1999 and the first half of 2000 presented a somewhat dreary review of regular activities that continued to be of value but depended on a small number of officers and members.

In a reading of those minutes and newsletters, several names stand out as the core of Post 46's existence: Laurie Howley, Bob Oxenger, Brian Dunn, Doug Woolley, Charles Gray, Norm Coats, Bill Nuber, Larry Wren, Jerry Van Gasse, Tom Hill, and Fred Bentz. As 1999 faded and 2000 rolled in, Dunn and Coats were increasingly unable to attend meetings, and members like Cliff Morris, Bill Hagel, Steve Duncan, Garnett French, Hank DeSautel, Frank Ciaravino, J.J. Van Gasse and Bob Wischmeyer began to serve as active members and officers.

Dues from veterans who continued their membership, Poppy Days sales, interest on financial instruments related to the previous sale of the Post Home, and occasional pro bono contributions from generous members enabled the Post to continue its support of the VA Hospital and patients there, Boys State, and other events. But the writing was on the wall: New leadership and the continued

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

persistence of key officers was needed in 2000-2001 to bridge a period of malaise that had sprung up between the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st.

No one in the nation -- certainly not the veterans in Post 46 who had seen war first hand and were glad no new national emergency was on hand -- could have anticipated the tragic events of Sept. 11, 2001, that would dramatically change the military equation in the world.

The terrorists' suicidal and murderous attacks of 9-11 altered the meaning of the word war. No longer, it seemed, was the United States to be involved in multi-nationed armed conflicts like World War I or World War II, or more localized battles like Korea or Vietnam or Panama or Grenada or the Persian Gulf or Bosnia-Kosovo. United States armed forces were now facing a non-territorial enemy driven by ideology, organized into cells and dispersed around the world in a struggle that had religious and cultural overtones as well as economic ones. Even Iraq and Afghanistan combat would have a new dimension.

For veterans' organizations like the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Vietnam Veterans of America, this transformation in how military power would need to be used meant just one thing: support of active duty troops and returning veterans gained more relevance in the public eye.

An Important Election

As 2000 moved into the summer months, Post 46 was struggling to stay viable and valuable to veterans. It would depend on a new commander and a loyal band of officers and members, some of whom who had persisted through the difficult years of the last quarter century.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

So perhaps the election of officers on June 5, 2000, will turn out to have been a very important one, given the fact that 9-11 was still 15 months away. Just 212 veterans belonged to the Post on that June date.

Dr. J. J. (Jerry) Van Gasse, a physician and a businessman, was elected commander. Doug Woolley became senior vice commander; Charles Gray, junior vice commander; Larry Wren, judge advocate; Bob Oxenger, adjutant; Laurie Howley, sergeant-at-arms; Tom Hill, chaplain. Brian Dunn, commander in 1994-2000, remained as finance officer (but would be unable even to continue in that position for very long, because of business and personal obligations). Tom Hill remained as chaplain and service officer.

Cmdr. Van Gasse wasted no time in getting up to speed for his duties: he attended the State American Legion leadership conference at Higgins Lake June 23-24. Adjutant Bob Oxenger persuaded seven more members to renew their memberships, raising the Post total to 219.

At the July meeting, Oxenger reported he was obtaining a copy of the video "America's Veterans" for showing to grades 5-8 in local schools. The officers approved a donation of \$100 to the Concordia College Military Leadership Award endowment.

In August, Cmdr. Van Gasse instructed the adjutant to obtain four more copies of the "America's Veterans" video so that each of Ann Arbor's middle schools could be given copies.

Not pleased with meeting arrangements at the Moose Club, the Post through the efforts of Cliff Morris worked out an agreement with The Grotto Club on W. Stadium Boulevard to meet there starting in April 2001. The Grotto

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Club had already shown its support of the Post by providing its auditorium for the annual Christmas party, which in December 2000 had attracted some 35 members plus their spouses or other family members.

Along with the regular activities like those reported for previous years, Post 46 officers and executive committee members in 2001 under Cmdr. Van Gasse and new finance officer Steve Duncan began to improve its financial situation with a more formal budget, and (following a pay-off of the land contract on the Memorial Home in August 2003) investments in certificates of deposit with various monthly terms. The goal was to be able to continue supporting all veterans and their families in Ann Arbor and at the VA Hospital for the foreseeable future.

"We owe this to the members who have supported Post 46 since it was founded in 1919 -- to be good stewards of the dues they paid over the years -- and to the service personnel who will become veterans," Cmdr. Van Gasse emphasized. "And we hope some of those future veterans will join our Post."

On Sept. 11 of 2001, it became obvious that more young Americans would become veterans of that new kind of war described above, and that Post 46's support of them would be needed.

9-11 Survivors Fund Established

Twenty days after the terrorists' attacks, concerned Post 46 officers voted to seek donations from all Post members for a fund for survivors of the attack at the Pentagon, reasoning that survivors of the World Trade Center attack and families of those killed in the Pennsylvania crash would receive much support

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

from other sources and that many of the Pentagon victims were military personnel. The Post would match each donation up to \$100. By the time the Post met again Nov. 5, \$1,175 had been received from members. Officers decided to make its total contribution \$5,000, with dependents of veterans killed at the Pentagon to be recipients, but the method of distribution was still uncertain.

As 2001 came to an end, Adjutant Bob Oxenger was able to report 210 members had already paid their dues for 2002. (That number would rise to 240 by April 2002 and Oxenger would proudly announced that only two other posts in the entire Second District had a greater percentage of paid-up memberships.)

2002

Discussion early this year centered around how best to direct the Post's \$5,000 assistance to military families of service personnel killed in the 9-11 attack on the Pentagon. Cmdr. Van Gasse and Sr. Vice Cmdr. Doug Wooley both investigated possible avenues through contacts in Washington. In May, officers voted to make the Navy/Marine Corps Relief Society in Washington the recipient, with instructions to split the amount into three equal portions for the other services and civilian employees and their dependents needing help.

In a more personal, local action, the Post honored one of its 50-year members, Don Schleede (see pages 26-27) and his wife, who attended the meeting. Harold Jahnke and Masato "Joe" Tomito also reached their 50-year marks; 20 members had now achieved the 50-year mark, and the Post pays their annual dues.

Officers voted to contribute \$25 to one of the VA Hospital funds in the

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

name of a deceased member upon that member's death.

Post 46 hosted the June 17 meeting of the Washtenaw County Council of Veterans at the Grotto Club and honored all past commanders and 50-year members at a dinner in August.

Among the 85 persons attending that dinner were past commanders Walter Orth (1951-52), Larry Wren (1960-61), Henry DeSautel (1963-64), Stanley Schlect (1971-72), Bob Oxenger (1991-92), and Brian Dunn (1994-2000). Each received a Post 46 cotton weave polo shirt properly inscribed with the American Legion and Post logos. Bob Oxenger was also given a winter jacket recognizing his long service as post adjutant, and 50-year members were honored.

Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus and his daughter, Heather; Ann Arbor Police Chief Daniel Oates; Chief Washtenaw County Judge Archie C. Brown; and uniformed personnel from the local Air Force Recruiting Station also attended. The band "Betty and Her Boys," which plays for the Post's Christmas parties and includes Post 46 chaplain Fred Bentz on the bass fiddle, provided music.

Besides regular activities in 2002, such as two bingo parties for VA Hospital patients and another successful Poppy Days sale, Post 46's support of veterans extended to a generous offer to the VA Hospital to help add a wheelchair lift to a van that had been donated to the hospital by the Disabled American Veterans.

2003 -- the Year of the Blue Star Banners

As a World War II vet, Adjutant Bob Oxenger recalls how homes displayed Blue Star Banners in their windows to show that a family member was

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

on active duty during those years. Hundreds of thousand of homes displayed such banners. Sadly, tens of thousands at some point also displayed a banner with a silver or gold star on it, indicating the member had been wounded or killed in action. Spurred by Oxenger's suggestion, the Post approved purchase of Blue Star Banners from American Legion headquarters and obtained Ann Arbor News coverage of its plan to donate a banner to any Ann Arbor area family that wanted one. (See page 12 for an Ann Arbor News article about this.)

The article and accompanying photo on Jan. 21 promptly resulted in 60 requests, some callers offering assistance and sending in contributions. As word spread, more than 20 more requests came in, including two two-star banners, and as the weeks went on, the total rose to nearly 200.

Continuing its efforts to attract more veterans and to publicize the Post, it participated in the "Bigger 'N Texas" flea market at the Washtenaw Council Farm Grounds in Saline May 3, renting an 8-foot by 15-foot booth to display Legion materials. The booth also brought in \$105 to the Post through the sale of books written by three members, a painting by Fred Bentz, and other items members contributed.

The 2003 Poppy Sale, thanks to 11 volunteers led by Bob Oxenger, brought in more revenue -- \$3,203.83 -- than any previous collection. One-third of that amount was from mail-in contributions by Post members not able to help the outdoor collections.

The Post also approved switching its contribution from helping to pay for the VA Hospital van conversion to paying the full cost of new drapes in the hospital's auditorium, since other veterans groups had helped the van conversion.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

In a thoughtful move to show its support of one active-duty member, Air Force Major Laurel Burkel, stationed in Korea, officers voted to mail her a package of incidental supplies.

As 2003 ended, nine officers and/or members spoke to Pioneer High students and to residents at Hillside Terrace about their experiences while in service and at the Post. The Post also provided financial aid to a National Guard unit in Ypsilanti for the mailing costs of Christmas boxes going to troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

2004

In an effort to make communications with members more timely, the Post approved mailing the newsletter first class rather than by the current bulk mailing. This would also allow quicker delivery and more information.

A Huron high student, Peter Friedewald, spoke at the February meeting of his interest in Boys State, and the Post approved sponsoring him for the \$225 fee, Friedewald said he plans on a military career, perhaps starting at the U.S. Naval Academy.

A major activity -- hosting a May 29 Memorial Prayer Breakfast at the Crowne Plaza Hotel to honor World War II veterans -- took careful planning and budgeting by the Post. Senior Vice Cmdr. Doug Woolley obtained generous sponsorships from Pfizer Corp., General Dynamics, Finn's JM&J Insurance and IMS Corp. The breakfast, attended by 250, coincided with the opening of the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. (See pages 13-15 for Ann Arbor News coverage of this event.)

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

Poppy Days collections reached a new high -- \$4,015.63, passing the previous top mark of \$3,203 only a year earlier.

Poppy Days Succeed

Much of the financial support Post 46 provides for patients of the VA Hospital and for other needs of veterans and their families both locally and, in the case of special needs, elsewhere in Michigan or the nation, comes from donations by the public and by members during the annual Poppy Days. Many Post members stand in front of cooperating stores to solicit contributions from the public and give each donor a bright red poppy purchased by the Post from National Headquarters; other members unable to volunteer mail in checks. According to yearly records kept since 1992, the Post collected \$30,382 through 2004, led by the late Larry Wren and Bob Oxenger. The lowest annual total was \$1,736 in 2001, just three months before the terrorist attacks of 9-11. Each collection since then has risen. What will Poppy Days 2005 bring?

Senior Vice Cmdr. Doug Woolley was elected commander of the Washtenaw County Council of Veterans in 2004, giving Post 46 an important recognition in the county. Woolley has been active in the WCCV for many years.

In a move to foster camaraderie among members, especially those who

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

cannot attend the regular monthly Monday evening meetings, the Post decided to have luncheon get-togethers each fourth Wednesday of the month at the Americana Restaurant on the southwest corner of the intersection of US-23 and US-12. The luncheons started in September 2004 and were continuing in 2005.

Because the well-known and popular Yankee Air Force Museum at Willow Run Airport had been destroyed by fire earlier in the year, the Post voted to contribute \$500 to a fund-raising drive trustees of the museum had begun.

As 2004 closed, the annual Christmas Party at the Grotto Club added a magic show for children; magician Murl Eastman, himself a veteran, was paid \$50 but returned it with instructions to use it to help mail gifts to service personnel overseas.

Financial support for the party came from members Thomas L. Scott, \$100, and James D. Conway, \$50; sale of three paintings by Fred Bentz brought in another \$125, and Charles Hashley of O&W Distribution Inc. donated several beer steins, T-shirts, sports bags, and other items that swelled the number of door prizes given out.

In another Christmas-related activity, new Post Service Officer James Dempsey arranged for Christmas cards to be taken to 69 veterans in local nursing homes and assisted living residences. He personally visited the locations and included a letter to each veteran. The Post agreed to spend up to \$40 for cards.

2005

Battling back from health complications, Cmdr. Jerry Van Gasse started

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

2005 with the goal of strengthening the Post with new members and seeking new ways to help veterans while continuing traditional practices.

By February, one such new way emerged -- the possibility of helping a new young member just back from active duty in the Mideast and his film production organization put together a film about the past, present and future of nuclear weapons.

The young man's grandfather, Hugh Ferguson, piloted one of the planes that accompanied the bomber that dropped a nuclear bomb on Nagasaki, helping to bring World War II to a close. The film company had already interviewed members of the Air Force unit that conducted the raids over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

As this history was being prepared, Post 46 officers and executive board were awaiting further information about the project before lending financial support. Information from the video project team was sent to all members.

With the approach of mid-2005, Service Officer Dempsey was soliciting candidates from six area high schools for candidates for Boys State, and Post officers for 2005-2006 were set to be:

Jerry Van Gasse, returning as commander; Bob Oxenger, returning as adjutant, backed up by Dale Burgess; Jim Dempsey, new senior vice commander and returning service officer; William Hagel, junior vice commander; Steve Duncan, returning finance officer; Laurie Howley, returning sergeant-at-arms; Fred Bentz, chaplain, with Garnett French as backup; Bob Wischmeyer, returning historian; Culan Crocker, returning judge advocate; executive committee: Doug Woolley (3 yrs.), Dale Burgess (2 yrs.), and Bill Hagel (1 yr.).

An Auxiliary President Remembers

One final note remains before ending this history. It comes from Mary Isaacson, who led the Post 46 Auxiliary for many years. As all good men and every good organization know, behind each of them stand very many good women. And this is how Mary remembered the former Memorial Post Home on Main Street and some of its prominent members, in a letter:

"To you members who live outside of Ann Arbor (or possibly even in Ann Arbor, but out of touch), you probably are not aware that the old Legion home at 1035 S. Main St. is now only a memory. It has been demolished, torn down, hauled away -- nothing is left but the parking lot.

"The once proud showplace of South Main Street with the colored lights dancing on the fountain and then the flower garden are all gone. Gone too are the football games, wedding receptions, bowling banquets, birthday, retirement and Christmas parties, the floor shows with live music, stag nights, Past-Commanders' and Past-Presidents' parties, euchre nights, sending the boys off to WW II via bus to the train station and on to their camps or ports of call, the family picnics, the bus trips to ball games and some events I don't remember.

"Do you remember Bill Gagalis, Adolph Wiess, Hinny Weir, Kenny Milspaugh, Minnie and Harold Brooks, George Harms, Carl Hetchler, Bob Kuehn, Ben Alber, Lucille and Walter Stollsteimer, Floyd and Rita Bargy, Bill and Joe Buettner, and many, many more gone but not forgotten?

"Of course some names of the past are still with us. We just don't see them very often. For example: Tiny Towler, Sam Sekaras, Edna Alber, Vi Wilson, Ruth Leach, Virginia Busch, Bill Weindorf. Some names I don't remember and some I didn't know. You could compile your own list. This is just my way of saying, 'Thanks for the Memories.'"

The Origins of Veterans Day

In 1921, an unknown World War I American soldier was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. This site, on a hillside overlooking the Potomac River and the city of Washington, became the focal point of reverence for America's veterans.

Similar ceremonies occurred earlier in England and France, where an unknown soldier was buried in each nation's place of honor (in England, Westminster Abbey; in France, the Arc de Triomphe). These memorial gestures all took place on November 11, giving universal recognition to the celebrated ending of World War I fighting at 11 a.m, November 11, 1918 (the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month). The day became known as "Armistice Day."

Armistice Day officially received its name in America in 1926 through a Congressional resolution. It became a national holiday 12 years later by similar Congressional action. If the idealistic hope had been realized that World War I was "the War to end all wars," November 11th might still be called Armistice Day. But only a few years after the holiday was proclaimed, war broke out in Europe. Sixteen and one-half millions Americans took part. Four hundred seven thousand of them died in service, more than 292,000 in battle.

An answer to the question of how to pay tribute to those who had served in this latest, great war came in a proposal made by Representative Edwin K. Rees of Kansas: Change Armistice Day to Veterans Day, and make it an occasion to honor those who have served America in all wars. In 1954 President Eisenhower signed a bill proclaiming November 11 as Veterans Day.

On Memorial Day 1958, two more unidentified American war dead were brought from overseas and interred in the plaza beside the unknown soldier of World War I. One was killed in World War II, the other in the Korean War. In 1973, a law passed providing internment of an unknown American from the Vietnam War, but none was found for several years. In 1984, an unknown serviceman from that conflict was placed alongside the others. To honor these men, symbolic of all Americans who gave their lives in all wars, an Army honor guard, the 3d U.S. Infantry (The Old Guard) keeps day and night vigil.

The focal point for official, national ceremonies for Veterans Day continues to be the memorial amphitheater built around the Tomb of the Unknowns. At 11 a.m. on November 11, a combined color guard representing all military services executes "Present Arms" at the tomb. The nation's tribute to its war dead is symbolized by the laying of a presidential wreath. The bugler plays "Taps." The rest of the ceremony takes place in the amphitheater.

Veterans Day ceremonies at Arlington and elsewhere are coordinated by the President's Veterans Day National Committee. Chaired by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the committee represents national veterans organizations. (*Source: Department of Veterans Affairs*)

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



FIFTEENTH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, OCTOBER, 2 - 5, 1933

BANG THE DRUMS SLOWLY, HEAR THE BUGLES CALL

The Post 46 Drum and Bugle Corps shows how to keep in perfect step 72 years ago in front of thousands; Tom Fitzgerald and Jack Howley, front row, right.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



MAY 31-1932

PROUD: The Drum and Bugle Corps poses in front of the U-M Engineering Bldg.



LEADERSHIP OVER 32 YEARS: Past commanders gather at the old Post Home.
From left: Lloyd Alber, 1949-50; Cornelius W. Tuomy, 1925-26; George T. O'Neal, 1944-45; Donald G. Bachman, 1956-57; Kenneth E. Immel, 1955-56; Harold C. Brooks, 1953-54; A. C. Stimson, 1926-27; Melvin C. Pierce, 1946-47

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

**BISCUITS
AND BEER?**

In this undated photo at the former Post Home, Jack Howley, Harry Brown and Doug Duncanson (left to right) look like they have already enjoyed a beer or two before Louella Smith serves their biscuits.



In its heyday, the Post 46 bar took on a merry, merry holiday look.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



BELLY UP TO THE BAR, BOYS! -- And you would have been served back in the mid-20th century by this intrepid crew of bartenders at the Post Home on Main St. L-R: (Unidentified), Charlie Pleske, Jerry (Last Name Unknown), Julius Hinderar, Bob (Last Name Unknown), Unidentified.



**MONTE CARLO NIGHT AT THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL:
A patient chats with (from left) Freeman Flynn, Melvin Pierce and Benjamin Alber at one of the Monte Carlo parties Post 46 held for patients decades ago.**

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



PICNIC TIME!

Post 46 members and their children enjoy a picnic in August 1958 at the grounds of the Post's social organization, the Hunt & Fish Club. There were no IDs on these photos, but maybe some current Post members will recognize themselves as kids having a good time then.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

AMERICAN
EXPEDITIONARY FORCES
Corps Expéditionnaire Américain

OFFICER'S IDENTITY CARD
Carte d'Identité d'Officier

Name *Cordon R. Avery.*
Rank *2nd Lieutenant.*

HEADQUARTERS
OFFICIAL
DIVISION

Signature *Cordon R. Avery.*
Holder

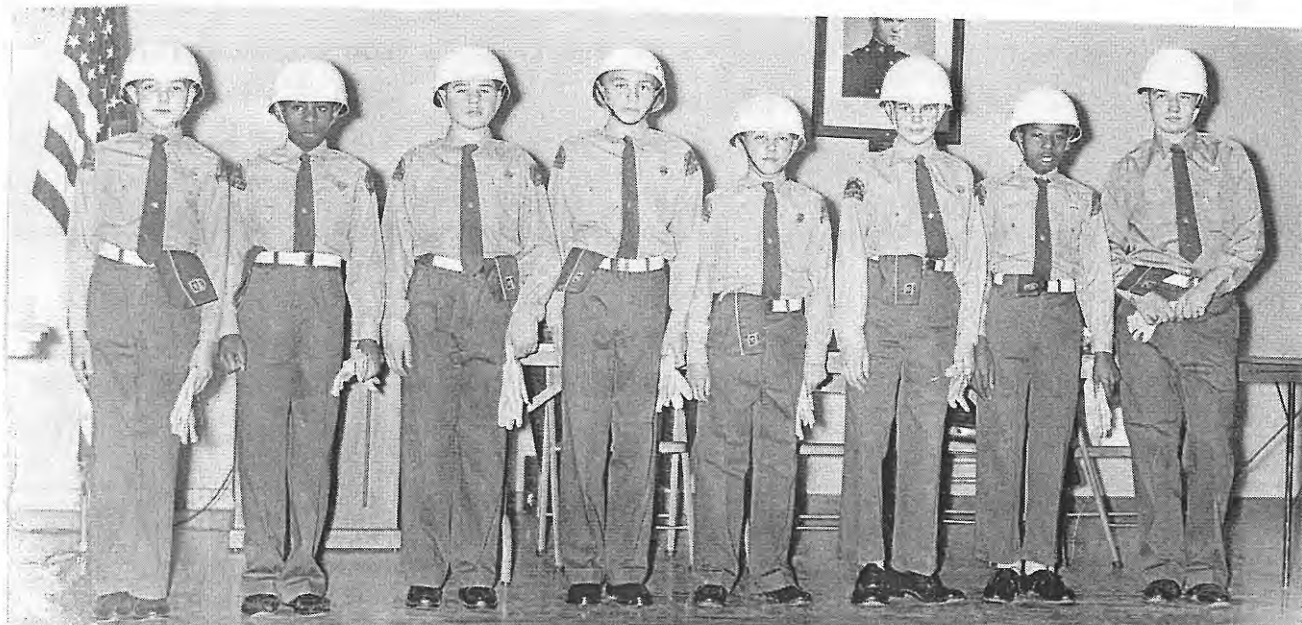


Who knows anything about this soldier -- 2nd Lt. Cordon R. Avery? This American Expeditionary Forces (WWI) officer's identity card was found behind a photo in a Post 46 album.

Below: Post 46 conducts an official flag-burning ceremony in front of the Post Home on Main St. in accord with flag protocol. Members Ambrose, Shaw, Isaacson and Hechler participated.



Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



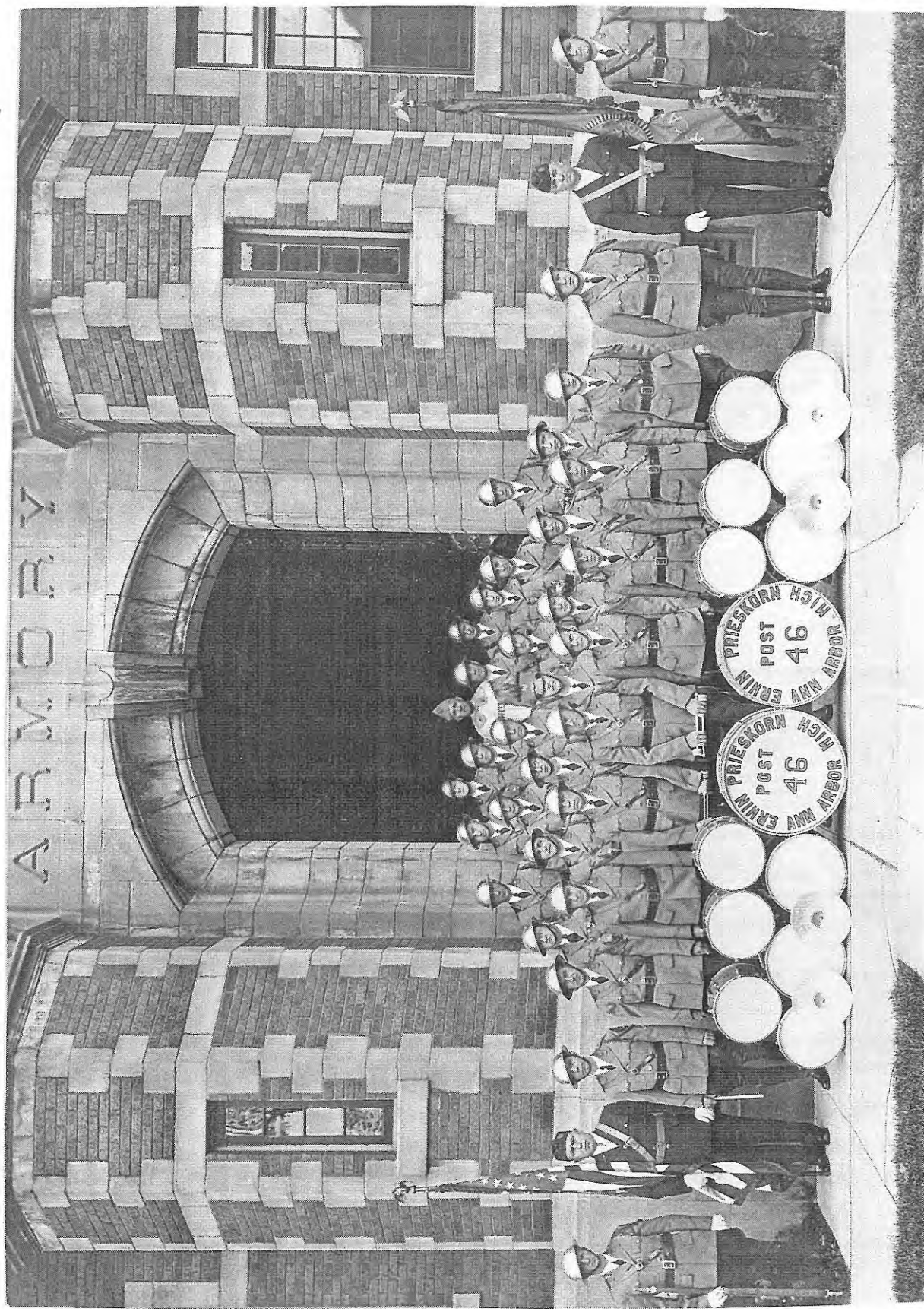
SONS OF THE LEGION: In the 1950s, many sons of Post 46 members served in the SAL, and some belonged to an Honor Guard.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



Top: "Ruptured Duck" banquet at the Post Home on Main Street. Only names known are Mrs. White, fifth from left, and Harold Brooks, eighth from left.
Bottom: Santa makes an appearance at a Christmas party in the Post Home.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

That They Shall Not Be Forgotten...



The front lawn on Main St. in 1964 memorialized those who died for freedom.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



THE CANNON ARRIVES

Post 46's M-5, 3-inch cannon is installed in July 1948 in front of the former Memorial Home on Main Street by (from left) Laurie Howley, Ford Hilbert, Jack Howley (Laurie's father), and George MacMillen. On the next page are photos of a subsequent move.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



AND AWAY SHE GOES!

On Feb. 16, 2000, the 75 MM cannon owned by Post 46 was moved from American Legion Post 322 in Saline to the VFW Post 423 on S. Wagner Rd. near Ann Arbor. The Saline Post had provided space for the cannon since 1995, when Post 46 sold its Memorial Home on Dexter Rd. Post 46 donated the cannon to the VFW Post for its Military Museum.



Moving the cannon were L. Howley, R. West, R. London, D. Meabon and L. Swisher, shown here (top) loading up the cannon at the Saline Post and unloading it at the VFW Post. There it stands before the American flag. (See pgs. 10-11 for more about the cannon.)



Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



**World War II
Memorial Prayer
Breakfast, 5-29-04**

* * *

Doug Woolley (left)
and Laurie Howley
prepare the POW-MIA
table in front of the
podium, as Cmdr. J.J.
Van Gasse presides.

Post 46 Chaplain
Fred Bentz recalls
the lives of Legion
members who have
gone before. Far
right: Taps are
played in their
memory by
Charles Burney.

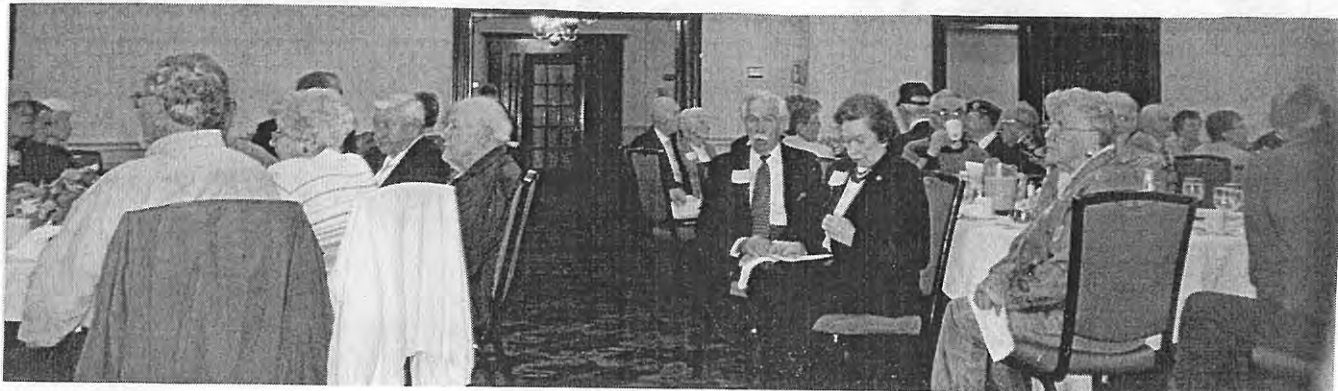


The University of
Michigan Reserve
Officers Training
Corps Color
Guard posted the
colors for the
opening ceremony.

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

**Prayer Breakfast
Touched Hearts**

The registration table was busy as 250 came to honor WWII veterans, and smiles were plentiful as all enjoyed a medley of WWII songs by Betty Flanders, bringing tears to some eyes and some sang along. Part of the crowd is shown below.



Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

On this and the next two pages are photos of eight of the current Post 46 members whose military careers are profiled on pages 16-29. We start here with Harvey Doss at the World War II Memorial Prayer Breakfast May 29, 2004, with a portrait of him during his B-25 pilot days before being shot down (pgs. 21-22).



Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



Seaman First Class Bill Hagel
(See pgs. 22-23)



Coast Guard Cmdr. Robert Oxenger
(See pgs. 24-25)



Pvt. John "Laurie" Howley
(See pg. 24)



Marine Cpl. Robert Prieskorn
(See pgs. 25-26)

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

**THAT'S A HEAD-
SCRATCHER!**

Twins Doug (center) and Don Schleede were sometimes mistaken by Air Force officers in Texas. Doug was a star pitcher and Don caught for the Post 46 state baseball championship squad. Doug died in 2000. Don is in his 54th year in Post 46. (See pages 26-27.)



Twice wounded in Korea as a combat infantryman, Reuben Swisher later served in the Air Force for eight years, rising to a Tech Sgt. rank.



1st Lt. Dale Burgess flew the famous P-38 fighter plane in WWII combat in the South Pacific. He's shown here in a P-38 cockpit (see pgs. 27-28)

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History



Post 46 Officers in 2004-2005

Top left: Finance Officer Steve Duncan (l) and Commander J.J. "Jerry" Van Gasse, M.D.; top right: Adjutant Bob Oxenger (l), Sgt.-At-Arms John "Laurie" Howley (c), and Judge Advocate Culan Crocker; middle left: Garnett French, Executive Committee member; center right: Dale Burgess (l) and William Hagel (r), Executive Committee members, and Frank Ciaravino, Junior Vice Commander; Chaplain Fred Bentz (l) and Senior Vice Commander Doug Woolley. Missing: Service Officer James Dempsey, Historian Bob Wischmeyer

Erwin Prieskorn American Legion Post 46 of Ann Arbor -- A History

The next four pages show officers in 1950, a 1950 Post team, two current officers and one past commander. Back cover shows the Post Home in 1950.

Post Officers



Carl Hahn
Senior Vice-Commander



Lloyd Alber
Commander



William Pendorf
Junior Vice-Commander



Walter Orth
Finance Officer



Jack Howley
Adjutant



Thomas Phibbs
Chaplain



Stuart Thayer
Sgt.-at-Arms



George Williams
Historian



Willard Curtis
Vice-President



Roy Court
President



Junior Past Commander
Roy Bird

Memorial Home Association



Henry Pendorf
Treasurer



Ralph Keyes



Melvin Pierce
Secretary



William Buettner

Auxiliary Officers



Bernice Frisinger - President

Ruth Garland - Junior Past President
Viola Wilson - Corresponding Secretary
Edna Pilbeam - Chaplain
Margaret Hahn - Sgt.-At-Arms



Betty de Guise - 2nd Vice-President
Mary Kopka - Secretary
Ruth Leach - Treasurer
Majel Navarre - Historian

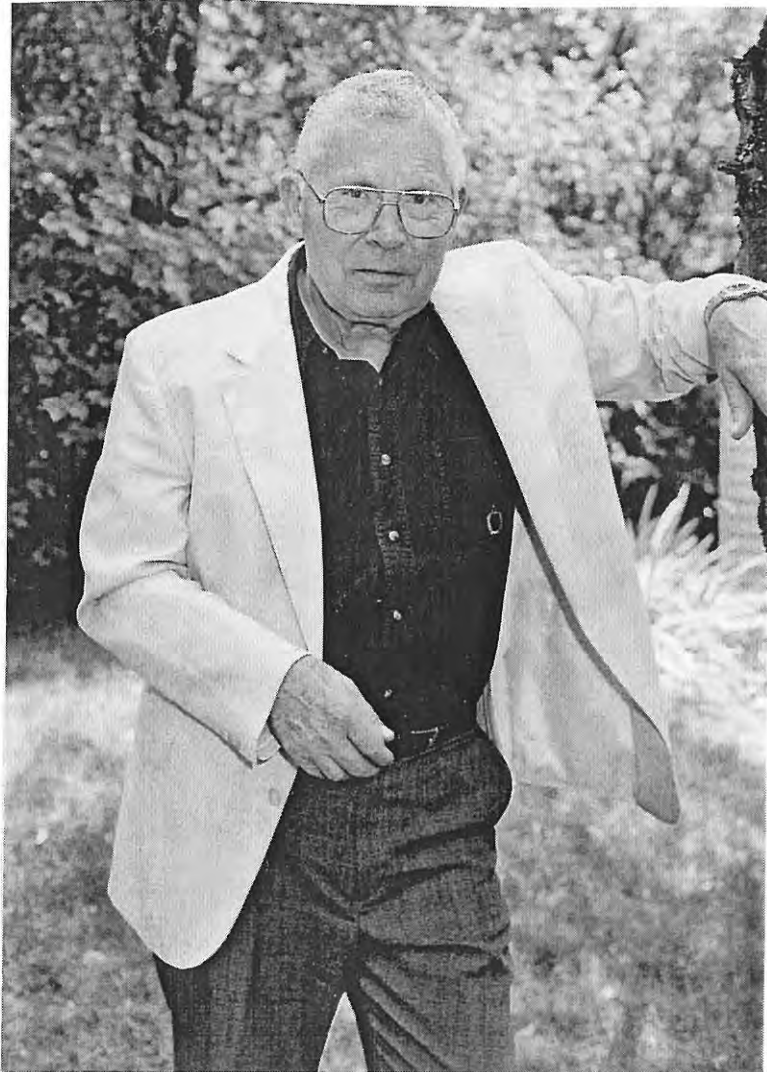


Mildred Alber - 1st Vice-President





Baseball Team



2005-6 Cmdr. J.J. Van Gasse, M.D.



**1994-2000 Cmdr. Brian Dunn
2005 Historian Bob Wischmeyer**



**Preamble to the Constitution
of the American Legion**

**For God and Country
WE ASSOCIATE OURSELVES
TOGETHER FOR THE
FOLLOWING PURPOSES:**

To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; To maintain law and order; To foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism; To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the great wars; To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; To make right the master of might; To promote peace and good-will on earth; To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

ERWIN PRIESKORN POST NO. 46

