



ALLIES

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

ALLIES

SUMMER, 2008

Special Points of Interest:

- *Vintage Motorcycle Found Buried at Camp Ripley*
- *"Camp Ripley: 1930-1960" book now available*
- *Feature Article, "The Memorial Rifle Squad at Fort Snelling"*

Fort Snelling Rifle Squad

The Memorial Rifle Squad at Fort Snelling

By Anita Buck

The idea for a Memorial Rifle Squad at Fort Snelling first surfaced in 1977. That was the year a friend of George J. Weiss Jr. of Marine-on-St. Croix passed away. The man had served in the U.S. Air Force and the Mendota VFW Post asked Weiss to organize a rifle squad for the veteran's funeral. Weiss was able to get six men to perform the ceremony.

"We did an amateur presentation," Weiss said afterward, but the idea got him thinking. He was getting ready to retire and wanted something worthwhile to do with his time. He decided to organize a memorial rifle squad to serve at military funerals held at the Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis.

The cemetery director and the cemetery committee supported the idea, so Weiss, a former Marine who had served in China in 1945-46, called a meeting to be held at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Minneapolis. Two hundred men showed up for the first meeting, but the number dropped to just eight by the third meeting. Finally, in 1979, six dedicated men formed the first Memorial Rifle Squad for the Fort Snelling National Cemetery. They were veterans of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force. They voted to start with a squad that would be available on Tuesdays. It was a joint effort so Weiss calls himself the "co-founder" of the rifle team.

At first the squad had to borrow weapons to meet military burial standards. Then a member from American Legion Post 435 in Richfield was able to obtain seven M1903 bolt-action Springfields. These were standard infantry rifles from World War I and were ideal for the squad's service.



Inside this issue:

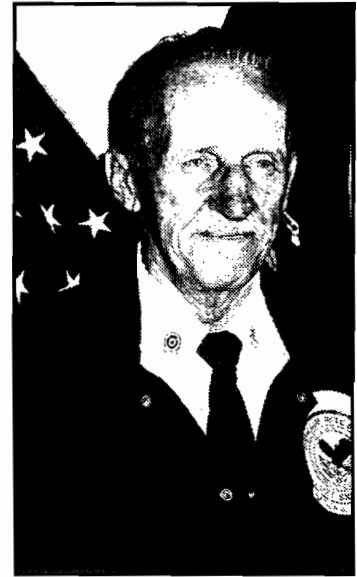
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Hearing of the organization of the rifle squad, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, Chapter 5, donated \$3,000 to purchase winter equipment for the men. Chapter 5 continued to outfit every new member who joined the squad. Each uniform included two pair of black trousers, two shirts, belt, gloves, black tie, and summer and winter jackets. The squad owns black raincoats and black parkas in a variety of sizes to meet changing weather conditions. Each squad member wears the cap of the Veterans' organization to which he belongs.

The Tuesday squad appeared at three funerals on June 19, 1979, and interest in the rifle squad began to spread. Soon a second squad was formed for services on Fridays, and then one for Thursdays. Eventually there was a rifle squad for every day of the week.

Each squad has 17 or 18 members, with 19 on the Friday squad at present. These volunteers represent all five branches of service. Veterans' organizations paid for a \$45,000 bus so squads could be quickly transported around the sprawling cemetery grounds to the various burial sites. Individual teams may attend as many as 16 funerals a day, with services scheduled every 15 minutes. A staff member at Fort Snelling prepares a daily printout containing the name of the veteran and the time and location of each funeral that day. The squad goes to the burial site before the family arrives. The team presents arms as the casket is removed from the hearse and then performs the military ritual. The color guard of five men carries two chrome rifles, the American flag, the Department of Veterans Affairs flag, and the service banner of the deceased veteran. A 21-gun salute is created by seven riflemen firing three volleys. A bugler blows taps. The American flag is folded in the traditional manner and presented to a family member. The squad then silently departs for the site of the next funeral. To date, the Fort Snelling Memorial Rifle Squad has served at more than 51,100 funerals.



George Weiss Jr.

The man who originated the idea, George Weiss, is still actively involved. He served as the first commander of the squad, and has led the Friday squad for many years. The commitment requires more than just time. Weiss's weekly drive from his home in Marine-on-St. Croix to Fort Snelling National Cemetery creates a 95-mile round trip. It adds up. In fact, the annual mileage donated by every squad member is substantial. When a member of a squad dies, his name is engraved on a memorial plaque at Fort Snelling Cemetery. The plaque now carries well over 100 names of deceased squad members. In a recent interview, Weiss said that the teams always need "good men to volunteer" to serve with the rifle squad. Interested veterans may contact Weiss at his home at 651-433-2986, or leave a message for him at the Fort Snelling National Cemetery at 612-726-1127.

On Memorial Day, 2001, WCCO-TV carried a four-minute program featuring the rifle squad. The program received national attention because, at that time, the Fort Snelling team was the only such volunteer organization in the country. Both photojournalist Tom Avlies and the program itself were awarded Emmys for it, but the impact went far beyond the awards. After the show aired, many veterans' organizations across the country contacted the Fort Snelling Rifle Squad, requesting information on military burial honors.

Commander Weiss and Chaplain Gene Schultz visited the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in

Joliet, IL, at the invitation of the American Legion and VFW. The men spent two days describing the Fort Snelling program. A rifle squad which served on Tuesdays was established at Joliet cemetery, and in May, Weiss returned to Joliet for the graduation of a newly-trained Friday squad. When the Minnesota team got new parkas, they sent their old ones to the squad in Illinois.

In recent years, rifles squads have been formed at several national cemeteries around the country. All were inspired by the Minnesota-based organization. A plaque at the Fort Snelling cemetery succinctly expresses the squad's promise to give ". . . the professionalism, dedication, commitment and honor in providing the final salute to thousands of our nation's heroes."

The Curator's Corner

By Doug Bekke

Last week I attended my 40th high school reunion. For the first time since graduation I saw and had a chance to visit with my classmates, only a few of whom had served in the military or—more specifically—in Vietnam.

In early May of 1970 I was briefly on leave from Ft. Bragg where I served in the 82nd Airborne Division. This was the week of the Kent State shootings and resulting protests. Many of my friends from high school were then in college and I was invited to spend a day walking around the campus of the University of Minnesota with a friend. The campus was in turmoil. Protest leaders stood on the steps of Northrop Auditorium damning the war and nearly everything else about the United States. Around the campus protests I encountered several high school classmates who, unlike me with my short Army haircut, no longer looked like the person in their high school yearbook picture. It was a disturbing day and an example of the home front situation that many Vietnam veterans encountered. Many chose to remain quiet about their military experiences when they came home.

Much of my work at the museum has been with "The Greatest Generation" who served in WWII and Korea. Tom Brokaw, who wrote "The Greatest Generation", has recently written another less publicized book, "1968." The Minnesota Historical Society is currently preparing for the 2009 opening of its Greatest Generation exhibit. That exhibit is to be followed by an exhibit entitled, "1968."

About 25 years ago, facing empty nests and retirement, the WWII generation started reflecting on their lives and sharing their stories. Vietnam veterans are now in that situation, and it's time for them to start sharing their stories of service and homecoming. The museum currently has very few stories or artifacts from Vietnam. Much of what we have resulted from the museum's Airborne exhibit. Vietnam changed the nation just as WWII did. The museum is very interested in documenting the experiences of Minnesotans during this era. If it's a part of your story, help us document it and preserve a record of the Vietnam generation's service.

ALLIES**Contributions Honor Roll (April 1 – June 15, 2008)**

Renewing Members: David Adamson ▪ Merl Fletcher ▪ Earl Jensen ▪ Harris W. Olson ▪ Robert C. Purcell ▪ John Salchert ▪ Daniel J. Vandenberg ▪

New Members: Gary A. Davis ▪ Lyle Fuller ▪ Guy Konietzko ▪ Rosanne Mischke ▪ John Sisterman

Donations: Dennis Keller ▪ Kenneth J. Streiff

Memorials**April 1 – June 15, 2008****Given by:**

194th Tank Regiment Assn.
Dale W. Smith

In Memory of:

William Thompson
Duane Garber

**In Memoriam**

In Memory of: _____

Given by: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Please indicate here name and address of member of family to whom we can send notice of your gift:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Make checks payable to:
Minnesota Military Museum
15000 Hwy. 115, Camp Ripley
Little Falls MN 56345

Gifts are deductible for income tax purposes

Artifact Donations (April 1-June 15, 2008)

Uniforms: Cap, garrison (5); Cap, overseas; Cap, patrol, US Army ACU (2); Cap, visor WWII; Cap, visor USN; Flight suit, AAF WWII; Hat, Russian Army; Hat, Russian Navy; Hat, USN foul weather; Hat, USN service; Hat, Pearl Harbor survivors; Jacket, Eisenhower WWII; Jacket, US Army ACU; Kepi, Civil War veteran, G.A.R.; Pants, US Army ACU; Pants, USN Deck; Shirt, EM WWII; Tie; Trousers, WWII (2); Undershirt, WWII (2);

Equipment: Bag, duffle; Goggles; Helmet liner, WWII; Helmet liner, white MP; Helmet, sun, WWII; Sunglasses;

Miscellaneous: Books; Board, plotting; Buttons; Camp Ripley stationery; Coins, commemorative (2); Collar brass; Unit crests; Currency, Iraq; Documents; Dog tags; Dirigible skin fabric; Flag, Russian; Flag, US window; Food production containers from Iraq; Medals; Newspapers; Photographs; Plaques; Ribbons; Ribbon bars; Shot glass; Slide rule (3);

Weapons and Related Items: Bi-pod, MG 08-15; Mortar, WWII;

Artifact Donation Honor Roll (April 1-June 15, 2008)

The museum gratefully acknowledges donations of artifacts from the following:

Michael Baumann, Tom Chial, Susan DeNuccio, Jim Erickson, Jim Gerber, Dick Kloss, Richard and Alice Ingle, Travis Jacobsen, Francis A. Krenik, Jean Laumeayer, John H. Linner, Evelyn Mellot, Bart O'Shea, Roger D. Olek, Patrick Roberts, John Salisbury, Ken Streiff, Betty Strohfus, Phil Sutherland, David Underland, Al Zdon

Corporate Support Campaign

The museum has initiated a new corporate support campaign which will involve soliciting Minnesota corporations for museum support contributions. The first phase of the campaign involves identifying Minnesota corporations and their addresses and developing a corporate solicitation database. The final phase will involve sending out a solicitation package to each corporation asking for their support.

We need the support of newsletter recipients in identifying corporations and their addresses. If you previously worked for a corporation or know of corporations within your locality please provide the name and address to the museum using the following form:

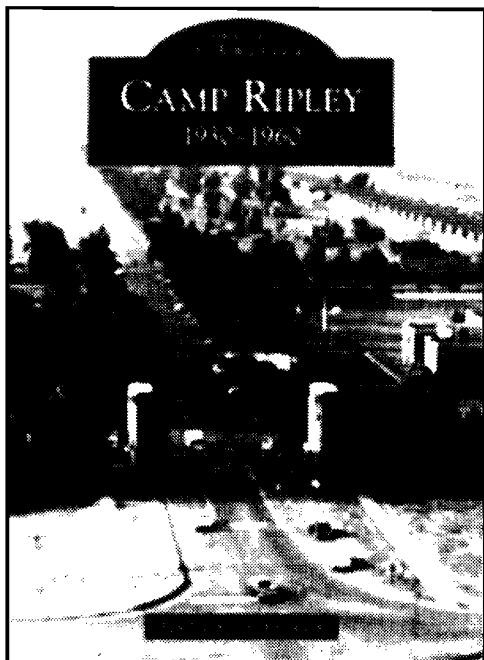
Corporate Support Solicitation Data

Corporation _____ Corporation _____
Address _____ Address _____

Corporation _____ Corporation _____
Address _____ Address _____

Please mail to: MN Military Museum, 15000 Hwy 115, Camp Ripley, Little Falls, MN 56345

Thank you for your support.



The first book on the history of Camp Ripley is now available through the MN Military Museum gift shop. "Camp Ripley: 1930-1960" is a 127-page pictorial history book covering the first 30 years of Camp Ripley's history.

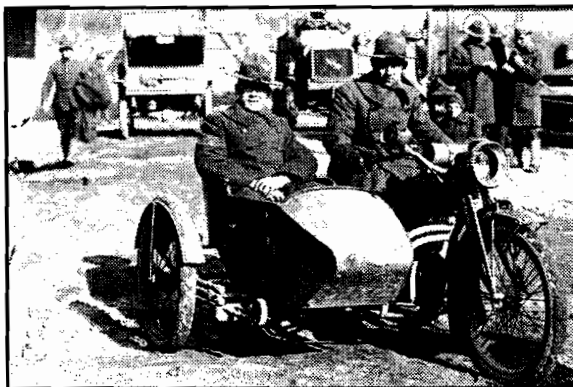
The book is available at the museum for \$19.95 plus tax. To order by mail, please send a check for \$23.25 (which includes tax and shipping) to the museum. Credit card orders can also be processed by calling the museum at 320-632-7374. Museum members receive a 10% discount.

ALLIES**Vintage Motorcycle Found Buried at Camp Ripley**

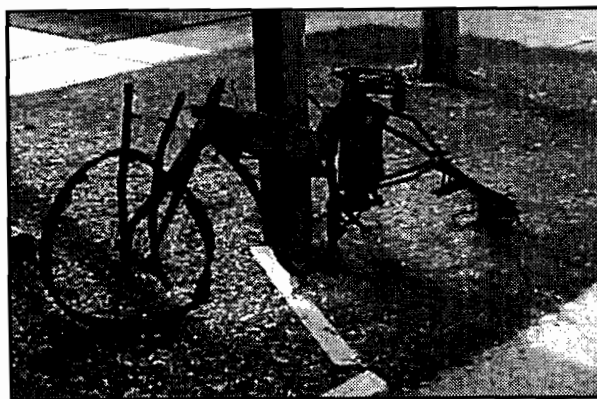
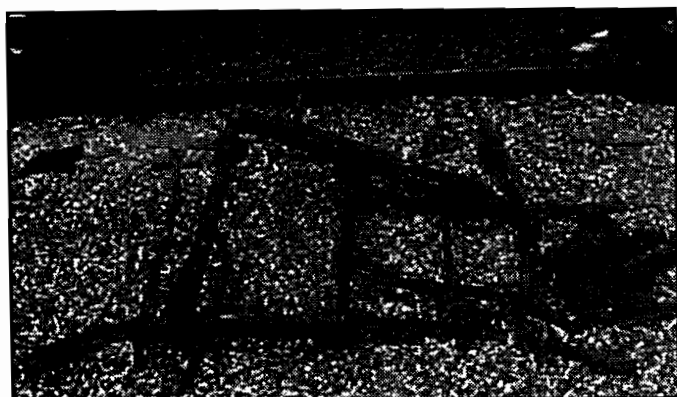
On May 7, 2008, contractors trenching for a new sewer line between warehouse buildings 2-202 and 2-203 unearthed the rusted remains of a WWI vintage motorcycle and sidecar. The contractors contacted the Camp Ripley plumbers who contacted the museum to recover these artifacts.

For many years two different rumors circulated around Camp Ripley pertaining to buried motorcycles in the warehouse area. One rumor was that WPA workers buried several unused motorcycles prior to WWII. The other rumor was that regular Army personnel stationed at Camp Ripley buried several motorcycles during WWII.

The fact that the discovered remains appear to be WWI vintage would tend to support the first rumor. In either case, the discovery is exciting since it pertains to an event that happened 65 to 70 years ago at Camp Ripley. These artifacts will be exhibited at the Minnesota Military Museum.



Motorcycle and sidecar of type found at Camp Ripley



Membership Open House
Saturday, August 2, 2008

To: Current members of Minnesota Military Museum & guests

Purpose: Update current and prospective new members about the museum, Camp Ripley and Minnesota military deployment activities

Agenda:

- 10:00 -10:30** Arrive at Camp Ripley (Post Hq's/Training & Community Center Theater)
- 10:30 -10:40** Welcome by Post Cmdr. & Museum President (Theater)
- 10:40 -11:00** Camp Ripley activity briefing (Theater)
- 11:00 -11:20** Minnesota military deployment activity briefing (Theater)
- 11:20 -11:40** Military museum update briefing (Theater)
- 11:40 -12:30** Lunch (provided, \$8.00 per attendee) (Cafeteria)
- 12:30 -1:00** Tour Environmental Center (TACC Environmental room)
- 1:00 - 3:00** * Rifle, grenade launcher & machine gun simulator demonstration (Rec Center, transport by bus)
 * M1A3 tank simulator demonstration (Rec Center)
 * Combined Arms Collective Training Facility (Field, transport by bus)
- 3:00 - 4:30** Military museum tour (Museum, transport by bus)
 (transport by bus back to car lot for departure)

RSVP For planning purposes please register no later than July 24th if you plan to attend this event. We encourage members to invite friends and prospective members to also attend.

Membership Open House
 Saturday, August 2, 2008

Name _____	\$8.00 for meal enclosed
Guest _____	\$8.00 for meal enclosed
Guest _____	\$8.00 for meal enclosed
	_____ total for meals

Checks should be payable to MN Military Museum and mailed to MN Military Museum 15000 Hwy 115, Camp Ripley, Little Falls, MN 56345. Phone 320-632-7374 for additional information. Mnmuseum@brainerd.net

Note to Newsletter Recipient:

If you are currently a member, we hope you'll attend our first Membership Open House on August 2 and bring a friend or two. Please use the enclosed form to RSVP by July 24 if you plan to attend.

If you are not a member, please consider becoming one by filling out the Membership Application form on page 8. Non members are also invited to attend the August 2 open house. Please use the enclosed form to RSVP by July 24 if you plan to attend.

Minnesota Military Museum's Mission Statement

The Minnesota Military Museum exists to serve the general public as well as military personnel. It provides education and training, enhances public understanding of how armed conflicts and military institutions have shaped our state and national experience, and functions as a major repository in Minnesota for historical military artifacts and records. In particular, the Museum seeks to document, preserve and depict the stories and contributions of Minnesotans who served in all branches of service or on the homefront--in time of peace and war--from Minnesota's early frontier years to the present.

Membership Application for the Military Historical Society of Minnesota

Yes, I want to preserve Minnesota's military history for future generations!

Name: _____ Phone: _____
 Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
 Date: _____ Branch of Service (if applicable): _____ Rank: _____ Active or Retired (circle one)
 E-mail address: _____

Membership Categories:

Individual:

____ Regular (\$25/yr.)
 ____ Sustaining (\$50/yr.)
 ____ Life (\$350+) (or 4 X \$90)

Organization:

____ Regular (\$500)
 ____ Sustaining (\$1,000)

Corporate:

____ Regular (\$1,000)
 ____ Sustaining (\$3,000)

All memberships are annual except Life, Organization and Corporate Memberships. Contributors of \$350 or more will be recognized on a plaque in the museum lobby.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible check for \$ _____ made payable to the Minnesota Military Museum.

Please mail to: Military Historical Society of Minnesota, c/o Minnesota Military Museum,
 Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy. 115, Little Falls MN 56345-4173.
 Phone: 320-632-7374 E-mail: mnmuseum@brainerd.net

Allies is published for the friends of the Military Historical Society of Minnesota.

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 Sandy Erickson, **Administrator**

The **Military Historical Society of Minnesota** is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization, registered with the Federal and State Governments. Donations are Tax Deductible.

Museum Contact Information:

Fax: 320-632-7374
E-mail: mnmuseum@brainerd.net
Telephone: 320-632-7374
DSN: 871-7374

TO:

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c/o Minnesota Military Museum
Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy. 115
Little Falls MN 56345-4173

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