the Daily Dispatch

1994 MINNEAPOLIS NATIONAL CONVENTION — SUNDAY, SEPT. 4, 1994

CRITICAL CONDITION?

Veterans cannot be ignored in health-care Thiesen says

Veterans deserve better than to be denied a seat at the roundtable debates in Washington surrounding national health-care reform.

"Too many quick-fix health-care reform plans don't even mention the word, 'veteran.' That's not right," National Commander Bruce Thiesen said at a news conference Friday.

"The medical needs of 27 million veterans shouldn't be an after-thought to reformers in Congress," said Thiesen, addressing reporters at a news conference held near the site of where the first national convention was held.

The original convention hall is gone, but two plaques mark the site at Orchestra Hall where Legionnaires gathered on Armistice Day 1919. Thiesen called on Legionnaires gathering for The American Legion's 76th National Convention to contact their legislators expressing concern about VA and how it fits in the health-care debate.

Thiesen is enlisting their help in a campaign to put "the voice of the veteran" back into the health-care reform debate.

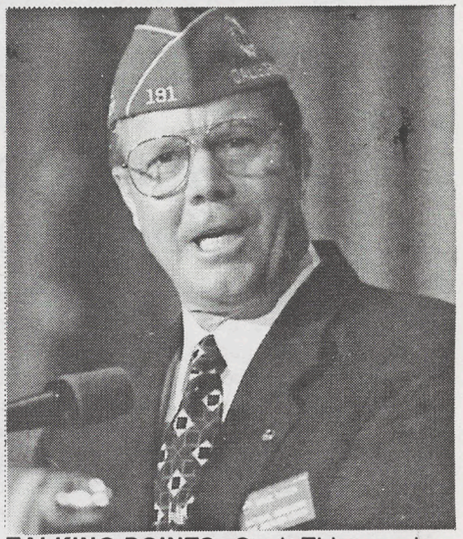
"If health care reform is handled properly, it can improve the care offered to veterans and expand services to their families," said Thiesen.

American Legion health-care experts were included in the administration's reform working group, said Thiesen, and veterans' voices were heard in the administration's original plan. Now, those voices may be silenced in the clamor of competing health-care reform plans on Capitol Hill.

He pledged The American Legion's full resources and best people will assist in supporting the newly-formed Partnership for Veterans' Health-Care Reform. The 10-member group favors reforming eligibility criteria for VA care, providing veterans a comprehensive benefits package, providing stable funding for VA, and retaining its special programs.

The National Commander also wants to enlist the Legion family's help in the campaign to win approval for a narrowly drawn constitutional amendment protecting the American flag. Earlier this year, like-minded groups formed the non-profit Citizens Flag Alliance. The alliance has grown to include 65 organizations in its ranks, with the groups totaling 25 million members.

"We don't want to change the First Amendment, but simply create another, a special place in the Constitution which protects the flag," he said.



TALKING POINTS--Cmdr.Thiesen also spoke about the Legion's ongoing efforts to protect the U.S. flag.

Flag forum set for Tuesday

A special update about ongoing efforts to protect the flag from physical desecration will follow next Tuesday's business session of The American Legion.

The forum will begin about 2:15 p.m. in Exhibit Hall 1 on the first floor of the Minneapolis Convention Center. National Commander Bruce Thiesen and Auxiliary National President Helen Holcomb will be on hand along with Citizens Flag Alliance officials.

A variety of flag-related publications and materials will be available to those interested in promoting flag-protection.

Legion donates to slain officers' fund

When Legionnaires gathered in Minneapolis for the first National Convention in 1919, one of the founding principles that brought them together was respect for law and order.

The Legion continued with that same dedication on the eve of the 1994 National Convention by donating $2,500 in memory of two St. Paul police officers who were shot to death late last week.

"These two officers gave their lives in service to their community," said National Commander Bruce Thiesen, in announcing the donation Friday at a news conference.

"We join the people of St. Paul in their grief and share their sense of loss."
The fund will assist the officers' families.

Officers Ron Ryan Jr., 27, and Timothy Jones, 36, were gunned down while investigating the suspicious activities of a man from Iowa, who has since been charged with their murders.

The shooting deaths of Legionnaires marching in an Armistice Day parade in Centralia, Wash. in 1919 provided the basis for the organization's law and order program.

Thawing of Cold War requires U.S. to warm in aiding spread of democracy throughout Europe

By ANTHONY MILLER
Assistant Edtior

For the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, preventing World War III will be a tough act to follow, a top NATO official told Legionnaires attending a joint sessions of the National Security/Foreign Relations commissions Saturday.

"We have accomplished our goal: the dissolution of the Berlin Wall. But now we face a whole new set of challenges," said Robin Beard, a Vietnam-era Marine Corps veteran and former Tennessee congressman who now serves as NATO's assistant secretary general.

"We've prevented World War III because of our military presence and diplomacy, and our strength," he said.

Beard says the headlines of any recent newspaper explain the United States' key presence in the NATO alliance, and its indispensible role in maintaining American security interests in a post Cold War world. NATO was created under American leadership following World War II to counter the Soviet threat to western Europe.

The disintegration of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact forces presents new challenges for NATO forces, including training the former communist states how to follow western practices of procurement and logistics.

"It would be ridiculous and unfair to walk away from this alliance. You don't tell these countries, 'become democracies,' and walk away without helping them to learn how to do it."

He said NATO's existence prevents the United States from shouldering the burden of taking on missions solo, and he called the 16-member coalition the most' successful political and military partnership in history. He added U.S. leadership is essential in keeping the organization it created together.

He noted Europe was embroiled in continuous warfare for centuries before NATO's formation, and its existence has made it possible for the continent's western democracies to enjoy unprecedented peace and prosperity for nearly a half century.

Beard touched on several problem areas NATO faces now that it has accomplished its original mission. The Warsaw Pact's disintegration has accelerated arms sales by former members strapped for hard currency, fueling regional conflicts among factions in former Yugoslavia.

He said NATO's role will remain one of providing structure and stability to the doctrine of collective defense, and may allow for opening its ranks to former foes like Poland and Hungary.

Beard traveled to the convention center site from his headquarters in Brussels, Belgium in response to National Commander Bruce Thiesen's invitation. Thiesen visited NATO Headquarters in Brussels last spring.

Having eye in sky means better protection against missile attacks

Advances in satellite technology are revolutionizing how soldiers, sailors and airman communicate on the battlefield, where success will be measured by how well combatants match force levels to resources.

"It's so important that we get the right force in the right place at the right time. It's a tremendous force multiplier," said Vice Admiral David E. Frost, deputy commander-in-chief and chief of staff, U.S. Space Command.

Frost, 53, said space command is not about Buck Rogers and space travel, but using emerging satellite technology to coordinate field forces.

The former Navy combat aviator and Top Gun instructor is a native Minnesotan who rose to command of the *U.S.S. Saratoga* and, later, the *U.S.S. Theodore Roosevelt.* He said satellites enable the military to accomplish missions such as:

• **Space Navigation** — the Navstar GPS system will, says Frost, "revolutionize tactics in warfare" concerning directing fire on enemy positions, and locating friend and foe on the battlefield.

He said the Navstar receivers allow troops to rendezvous with support forces under any weather conditions.

In a few years, advances will allow soldier in the future to carry their own pocket-sized receivers so commanders can identify and track every movement. Information from weather satellites, merging military and civilian systems, will assist battlefield strategists in making the weather a weapon instead of an enemy.

• **Missile Warning** — the Soviet Union may have fractured to pieces, but its composite republics, now independent, still have 2,500 nuclear missiles targeted on U.S. cities and installations, says Frost.

> ***"Those missiles are still there and they can reach the United States in 45 minutes. That threat has diminished, but we still need to watch them and we watch them from space."***
> **--VICE ADM. DAVID FROST--**

"Those missiles are still there, and they can reach the United States in 45 minutes. That threat has diminished, but we still need to watch them and we watch them from space," he said.

He said the communications revolution satellites make possible also enhances command unity between active duty and National Guard and reserve forces. Frost says their support in logistics, civil affairs, port handling and communications duties are indispensible.

"The days when active duty forces kind of thumbed their noses at the Guard and Reserve are gone.

They are fully integrated into the force," said Frost, who appeared before a joint session of the National Security-Foreign Relations Divisions Saturday morning.

Legion lauded for help against USPS plan to reduce ranks

The American Legion loves a good fight for a good cause and a good people.

"The Legion fought for America's veterans 50 years ago when it wrote and supported the GI Bill and veterans preference in hiring," said Preston Taylor, assistant secretary for the Department of Labor, speaking before the National Economic Commission meeting Saturday. "And your organization helped join the fight against the U.S. Postal Service plan that would've demoted veterans in their employment and forced many into early retirement.

The Merit System Protection Board sided with those opposed to the plan. Runyon was subsquently told by President Clinton to abandon the reorganization proposal that would have ignored veterans preference regulations in promoting postal workers.

Taylor, a retired brigadier generanl in the New Jersey National Guard, is responsible for adivising Labor Secretary Robert Reich on issues ranging from jobs and training, to ensuring the re-employment rights of veterans.

A Legion member of the Department of New Jersey, Taylor also touted the Labor Department's involvement in the Transitional Assistance Program, designed to help newly discharged veterans adapt to the civilian workforce.

"The most important work we do in my office is fundamental," he said. "The reality is that we're not doing our jobs if we're not helping America's veterans find the employment they need."

VA seeks disbarment of former BVA attorney

By JOE STUTEVILLE
Editor

The Board of Veterans Appeals attorney who has pleaded guilty to charges of destroying veterans' files will never practice law again if the VA gets its way.

"He has violated a most sacred trust. Our mission (at the VA) is to put veterans first. He put veterans last." So said BVA Chaiman Charles Cragin during his remarks before the VA&R Commisssion meeting Saturday morning.

Cragin said his office is urging that Lawrence Gottfried be disbarred from practicing law. Gottfried, a 21-year employee of he VA, last month pleaded guilty in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., to charges that he removed and destroyed essential documents from appeal files.

He is scheduled for sentencing Nov. 1, and faces a three-year prison term and could be fined up to $250,000 on the charges.

After noticing an unusually high rate of remand cases by Gottfried, Cragin's office and the VA Inspector General set up a "sting" operation that revealed the attorney tampered with the files of 32 veterans cases.

"In one case, we found that Gottfried removed 70 pages of medical records," Cragin said. "That man was a WWII veteran and an ex-prisoner of war."

When asked by one commission member what excuse Gottfried offered for altering documents, Cragin said the attorney complained that he was "under a lot of stress to do his job."

The records-tampering controversy has been detailed in recent editions of the *Dispatch* available at the National Headquarters office and other locations throughout the Minneapolis Convention Center.

Single-member hearing boards will boost productivity and place more responsibility on officers, says BVA Chairman Charles Cragin.

Another BVA attorney implicated in an unrelated case is under investigation by the U.S. Attorney's office. According to the BVA, her remand rate is 92.5 percent; the average remand rate among BVA attorneys is 52 percent.

Cragin told the *Dispatch* recently in an interview that as many as 1,000 veterans' files were exposed to the potential of tampering by the two attorneys.

Remand cases are those sent back to the VA regional office of origin for reconsideration or further development. Veterans have the right to appeal to the BVA claims that have been denied by regional offices.

The BVA chairman said veterans should't be concerned that the files-tampering is epidemic within the VA system.

Cragin also reported to the VA&R Commission that his office is making progress in helping reduce the staggering backlog of appeals cases, thanks to recent legislation.

He said single-member boards, rather than the three-person panels, ultimately will help improve productivity.

"It puts the sole and total responsibility of considering an appeal in the hands of one person," Cragin said. "And that means a hearing officer can't run, can't hide after they put their signature on the written decision."

Cragin also said that VA Secretary continues to seek pay raises for BVA attorneys to held curb an exodus of those attorneys to other federal agencies such as the Social Security Administration.

"We've lost nine highly-trained board members since July 1993 and most have taken jobs at Social Security as administrative law judges," Cragin said, adding that such a moves means higher pay and lighter caseloads.

Miami shakes, rattles, rolls on way to Legion Baseball crown

By T. Douglas Donaldson
Special to the Dispatch

With each rally, after each good defensive play of Post 346 Miami, Fla., their fans chanted and shook aluminum cans filled with rocks.

Responding to the fans' support, Fernando Rodriguez pitched and hit the Miami team to victory in the 1994 American Legion World Series Aug. 30 in Boyertown, Pa.

The 19-year-old Rodriguez pitched 32 1/3 shutout innings throughout regional and World Series play and hit his first home run — ever — in the third inning of the championship game on the fifth and final day of competition. The Miami defense committed no errors to shut down the high-powered offense of Post 299 Chino, Calif., 9-0, to win the 69th American Legion World Series.

Earlier in the double-elimination tournament, the Chino team pounded Miami 19-9. Throughout the tournament Chino's offense was in high gear — outscoring opponents 36-14 in their first three games. But hits were few and far between for Chino in the championship game. The Chino team didn't have more than one base runner in any one inning, and the team's only chances to score were cut down at the plate.

"I asked Rodriguez 'If we score one run can you win it?'" said Miami manager Carlos Hernandez Sr. "He said he could and sure enough, he did. I put the pressure on him, and he came through, just like all season. He just pitched great."

Miami fans chanted and shook aluminum cans filled with rocks to root on their own team's route. Including Rodriguez's solo home run, the team pounded out 14 hits.

But Miami didn't need such heavy offensive power.

Rodriguez's pitching overmatched Chino's batters. Rodriguez allowed only one walk and struck out six in the championship game.

Rodriguez credited his battery mate, catcher Marc Suarez, with calling a good game. "I just threw what he called for, and I was catching the corners," said an exuberant Rodriguez after the game.

Because of his performance, which included a 4-0 tournament record, Rodriguez was named the George W. Rulon American Legion Player of the Year.

World Series teams and records

Post 346 Miami, Fla. (5-1)
Post 299 Chino, Calif. (3-2)
Post 136 Salem, Ore. (3-2)
Post 325 Blissfield, Mich. (2-2)
Post 1 Omaha, Neb. (1-2)
Post 72 Brooklawn, N.J. (1-2)
Post 20 Russellville, Ark. (0-2)
Post 54 Bedford, Va. (0-2)

Awards

- *George W. Rulon Player of the Year* — Fernando Rodriguez, Miami, Fla.
- *James F. Daniel Sportsmanship Award* — Erick Gomez, Chino, Calif.
- *Irvin L. "Click" Cower RBI Award* (most RBI) — Frank Hinojosa, Chino, Calif. (24)
- *Rawlings Big Stick Award* (most total bases) — Esteban Barrios, Miami, Fla. (35)
- *James Williams Leadership Award* — Carlos Hernandez Sr. and Carlos Hernandez Jr.
- *Louisville Slugger Batting Award* (best batting average) — Bob Barth Jr., Brooklawn, N.J. (.438)
- *Bob Feller Pitching Award* (most strikeouts) — Lance Franks, Russellville, Ark. (30)

Officials admit mistakes in planning Enola Gay display

The planned exhibit of the Enola Gay bomber will be changed to recognize the service of American veterans and will even-handedly chronicle events leading up to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

In January 1994, the Smithsonian released a script that described the museum's planned presentation of the Enola Gay, the plane that dropped the first atomic bomb. Veterans' organizations, including the Legion, claimed this original script was lopsided and portrayed the Japanese as victims of U.S. aggression.

"I'm not going to tell you we didn't make some mistakes," said Constance Berry Newman, the Smithsonian Institution's under secretary, told members of the National Internal Affairs Commission Saturday.

Newman credited the Legion with helping get the script changed and said on-going script revision is not an unusual process for the Smithsonian, which has 30 million visitors each year. As part of the revision, the Smithsonian added a new section about U.S. views of the war and the main script was dramatically revised, too, said Newman.

"Even when exhibits are opened they are subject to change," Newman said.

Dr. Martin Harwit, director of the National Air and Space Museum, also thanked the Legion for contributing to how the exhibit will be presented. The exhibit will include the forward 60 feet of the fuselage, many photographs with captions, and video interviews of the Enola Gay crew reflecting on their mission.

> *"We want to come up with a version worthy of veterans, worthy of Americans worthy of all of us."*
> -- MARTIN HARWIT --
> *Director of the National Air and Space Museum*

Legion officials just this week received the latest version of the exhibit and are in the process of reviewing it.

Missing from the exhibit though is imput from Enola Gay's pilot, Paul W. Tibbets, who blasted the original version of the museum's script. Harwit said he wants to involve Tibbets in the exhibit and asked any Legionnaires who know Tibbets to urge him to participate.

Another part of the exhibit will show the difference between conventional bombs and nuclear bombs and examine the effect of nuclear weapons post-war order.

"We want to emphasize that the Enola Gay had a pivotal point in the United States and started a new era in which we are trying to live with nuclear power," Harwit said.

Internal Affairs Commission members questioned Harwit and Newman about including other aspects of the exhibit, and suggested including information about the *USS Indianapolis* and Japanese atrocities, and U.S. veterans' exposure to radiation.

Newman and Harwit said for future projects, the Smithsonian wanted to involve the Legion early.

"We want to come up with a version worthy of veterans, worthy of Americans worthy of all of us," Harwit said.

WWII group offers prizes to visitors

Eighteen lucky visitors at the World War II commemorative booth at the 1994 National Convention will go home with a free commemorative item, thanks to a special series of drawings announced by committee chairman Herman G. Harrington of New York.

"Everyone who visits the booth or purchases a commemorative item can place his or her name in a fishbowl, and one winner will be selected every hour between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Tuesday and Wednesday," said Harrington, who also chairs the National Internal Affairs Commission.

Winners may chose an item from among the items available for sale at the booth. Watches and desk sets are not included among the selections.

Winners' names will be posted at the booth in Exhibit Hall2 at the end of each day. A full list of the names will be published in the final convention edition of the Dispatch on Thursday, Sept. 8.

Prizes can be claimed at the booth through 5 p.m. Wednesday, or at the Internal Affairs staff offices until 10 a.m. Thursday. In addition to the special drawings, the WWII Commemorative Committee is offering all items at special reduced prices, including Minnesota sales tax, in effect only during the convention.

Illegal aliens put choke hold on U.S. war against drugs, former INS agent says

The barrage of illegal drugs and illegal immigrants are a powerful one-two punch threatening to knock out American law enforcement's ability to fight the war on drugs.

That was the message delivered Saturday by a former agent with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Justice.

"It's ethnic organized crime that is killing America today, but this question has not been seriously considered or targeted," said Joseph Occhipinti, a highly decorated former federal agents who headed the INS's anti-smuggling unit. "Most police officers are afraid to do their job," he said.

He said the current climate dictated by "political correctness" paralyzes lawmakers and enforcement agencies who have become sensitive to charges of racism.

Occhipinti, a member of the Clara Barton Post 324 in Edison, N.J., alleges he was targeted by a Dominican drug cartel that "set him up" and so remove a threat to their operation. He served seven months in prison of a three-year sentence for alleged illegal search and seizures that prosecutors said violated the subjects' civil rights. The former agent, however, said the charges stemmed from a conspiracy to short-circuit his agency's probe.

"What happened to me has intimidated law enforcement agencies throughout the country," Occhipinti said. "The morale in the law enforcement community is the lowest it has been in decades," he said. He charges the cartels are successfully skirting U.S. immigration laws through their systematic network of counterfeit "green cards," which grant the bearer temporary residence status.

The former INS agent says an increasing supply of illegal drugs overburdens a law enforcement community already hobbled by limited resources and contending against the drug cartel's powerful, well-financed operations.

He applauded Americanism Commission members for passing resolutions favoring stronger restrictions against illegal aliens, and recognizing the current system is failing.

"We've lost control of our borders," said Occhipinti, urging Legionnaires to let lawmakers know its members support more stringent enforcement efforts.

Get the news of the National Convention in the *DISPATCH*. A daily edition is available throughout the Minneapolis Convention Center beginning today through next Thursday.