THE AMERICAN LEGION
Dispatch
Special Convention Issue
Thursday, September 7, 2000 | 82nd National Convention, Milwaukee

Inside

■ **Pausing to remember the Korean War**
PAGE 3

■ **VA Secretary delivers message of change**
PAGE 3

■ **Miss America rallies the troops**
PAGE 4

Event Highlights

TODAY:

9:25 a.m. – The American Legion Fourth Estate Award Presentation: Midwest Express Center, Halls A&B

10:20 a.m. – Presentation to the Outgoing National Commander: Midwest Express Center, Halls A&B

Noon – Election of National Officers: Midwest Express Center, Halls A&B

2 p.m. – Eight and Forty Nurses Scholarship: Hyatt Regency, Executive Ballroom C

FRIDAY, SEPT. 8:

8:30 a.m. – Eight and Forty Presentation of National Officers: Hyatt Regency, Ballrooms C&D

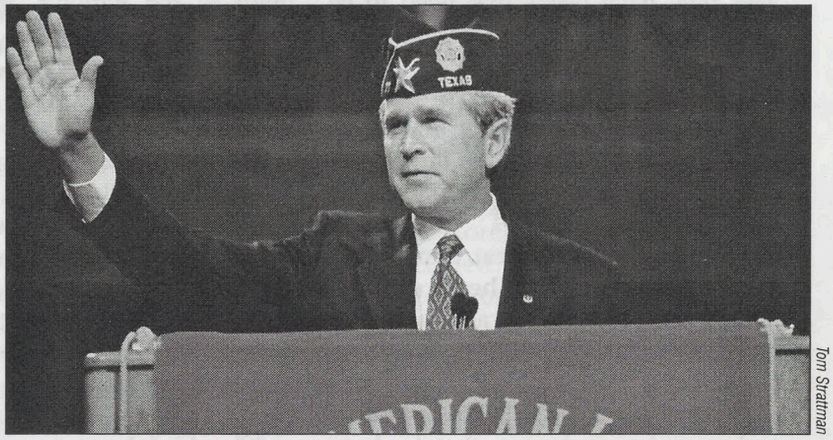
SATURDAY, SEPT. 9:

7 p.m. – Eight and Forty Installation Dinner: Hyatt Regency, Regency Ballroom

Bush pledges support of military, American Legion key issues

By Tim Shearer

Governor George W. Bush pledged to rebuild the military power of America, address veteran's rights and protect the American flag from desecration as he spoke to the 82nd National Convention of The American Legion.



Tom Stratman

Texas Gov. George W. Bush, the Republican nominee for president, speaks at the Legion convention on Wednesday. Bush is a member of Post 77 in Houston.

The GOP presidential candidate made a high-energy entrance to the Midwest Express Center yesterday, shaking hands and giving a lighthearted warning for Texans to behave themselves. "It's an honor to be here in the presence of veterans," he said. "When duty called in the country's hour of need, it was you who answered the call and I respect what you did."

Education concerns top Bush's agenda, and

SEE **BUSH**, PAGE 2

Gore ignores Legion Family, misses 82nd National Convention

By John Raughter

Vice President Al Gore became the first non-incumbent presidential candidate to decline an invitation to speak at a National Convention of The American Legion.

Disappointing thousands of Legionnaires in Milwaukee and the nearly 4 million members of The American Legion family, the Democratic candidate offered to send a surrogate in his place.

"It is Albert Gore who is running for president of the United States, not a substitute, no matter how well qualified – so I refused the offer," National Commander Al Lance said on the Convention podium, as the crowd roared with approval.

"I believe The American Legion, the world's largest wartime veterans' organization, deserves to hear directly from the man himself. The man who would be commander in chief – and no other."

Lance pointed out that in 1992 then-Gov. Clinton spoke before the Legion to explain the circumstances surrounding his failure to serve in the military during Vietnam. "That was a genuine ordeal by fire before this audience, yet he was warmly received. Even President Bush was applauded – and forgiven – when he

SEE **GORE**, PAGE 3

BUSH FROM PAGE 1

he praised The Legion for its efforts to improve the lives of children across the nation. "You care for the young through child welfare foundations and through the Children's Miracle Network," he said. "The American Legion is helping build knowledge and character in our young people. You introduce students to the best traditions of this country."

Bush voiced a commitment to those who served. As the veteran population ages they have needs that need to be addressed, especially in the area of health care.

"No discussion of health care is complete without addressing concerns of veterans," said Bush. "When I'm elected you will have an advocate working daily in the White House."

He explained that great things have come out of the veteran's health care system including CAT scans and a cure for tuberculosis, but it is still a "complicated, bureaucratic process."

"Veterans are faced with long lines and a confusing process that leads to denial of claims that no one can explain," he said. "And, it takes an average of 745 days to get an answer on an appeal.

"The present administration claims to have reinvented government," he added. "But that doesn't seem fair and friendly to me."

To that end Bush promised to return VA to its prior role as an organization existing to help veterans, and make it easier for them to get the help they deserve. A task force on veterans health care will be established and manned with competent people who understand the needs of veterans.

Also on the forefront of his agenda is the World War II Memorial in Washington, D. C. "We need to preserve the memory of your service," he told the Legionnaires. "We need to get the memorial where it belongs, right in the heart of the nation's capital."

He also noted that there are empty spaces for names on the Vietnam Memorial, reserved for those who are still missing from that war, and that nothing less than full accounting of all of them is acceptable. "All who serve this country must know that they will never be abandoned by America," he said.

Bush also affirmed his commitment to Old Glory. "You and I share a commitment to veterans who wrote America's proud record of defending freedom. You and I also share a commitment to the nation's symbol," he said. "We must not allow for desecration of our American Flag."

Tom Stratman

Texas Gov. George W. Bush greets Legionnaires as he exits the convention hall.

He then spoke of a commitment to the veterans of the future. "The present administration inherited a military that was ready for the challenges and dangers that face our nation," he said. "The next president will inherit a military in decline, and Legionnaires understand this problem and many Legionnaires have spoken out.

"Should I become president I will rebuild the military power of the United States," he promised. "There is no question that our military is the strongest in the world; it is competent and proud and ready to carry out the missions we give them."

He said the military's intentions and morale are undermined by back-to-back deployments, poor pay and shortages of equipment. "Let's get this straight," he added. "These aren't criticisms of the military, they are criticisms of the current commander in chief and vice president for not providing the proper leadership."

Leadership is what he promises to give America's military force and he said he plans to provide this through speaking up and demanding nothing but the best.

"I'll ask Congress to increase the pay of those in uniform by a billion dollars," he said. "Those steps will go a long to improving morale."

As commander in chief he pledges to give the military a clear sense of mission. "America will be involved in the world, but that doesn't mean our military will be the answer to every single difficult foreign relations policy question," he said. "I'll order an immediate review of our overseas commitments in dozens of countries."

Bush said he plans to make it clear that America will not put troops on the ground to keep warring parties apart all around the world. "We'll let our friends be 'peacekeepers', the great country of America will be 'pacemakers,'" he said.

The military needs to be fully prepared to fight and win wars, and Bush feels there are too many distractions taking away from this. He added that a strong military is one of the primary keys to preventing war in the first place.

"I will use this window of opportunity to create a military for the future," he said. "Our military is organized to face threats we used to have in the Cold War. We need a military that is ready to face the challenges of this new century."

He envisions a force that is fast to deploy, easy to sustain and packs a potent punch that can win overwhelming victories.

"When we commit our troops to war, the cause must be just, the goal must be clear and the victory must be overwhelming," he said.

"America is great because of our people," Bush said in conclusion. "And, the veterans of America are the best people America has ever produced."

The governor left to a standing ovation of Legionnaires, many of whom were disappointed that Vice President Gore declined an invitation to speak.

Pausing to reflect on the Korean War

By Tim Shearer

A stirring presentation commemorating the Korean War was given yesterday as conventioneers were shown newsreels that took them back to 1950.

"History continually proves that 20-20 hindsight is wonderful and useful, and right now I want each of us to travel back about 50 years," said National Commander Al Lance introducing some war footage. "This is the reality of the Korean War and how it was reported to America."

A videotape took Legionnaires on a tour of the past. From the opening days of the war when the march to the Yalu River was on, through the Marines' fighting withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir, Lance helped everyone remember the war against communism.

After the film, Lance punctuated the words of an Air Force crew who dropped supplies to U.S. soldiers who were cut off and left alone. The aircrew felt they had helped let the soldiers know they were not forgotten. "Those were ironic and prophetic words and the American Legion has not forgotten," said Lance, introducing retired MajGen. Nels Running, Director of the Korean War 50th Anniversary Committee.

"The Korean War was the first battle of the Cold War," said Running. "It was right after World War II and, and it was a signal to Joe Stalin that communism was not going to take over the world. It was the beginning of the democratic surge we are seeing today."

Running has the responsibility of spreading the message of what Korean War vets accomplished for America.

"The DoD commemoration committee is made up of 25 individuals," said the Air Force veteran. "The 25 of us have a nationwide mission to fulfill and we need your help."

Through Commemorative Committees, the DoD remembrance commission is starting a grassroots effort to educate America. The Legion has thus far had 280 groups sign-up for the program that involves going to schools or where ever Americans gather to teach them about the Korean War.

"Something like going to a school and talking to a history class is perfect for this," said Running. It is hard for the average American to find information on the Korean War, and veterans are the most logical source of expertise.

After running addressed the audience, the National Commander introduced Korean Gen. Lee, Sang-Hoon, President of the Korean Veterans Association. Lee fought as a South Korean, alongside American servicemen.

"We worked together and contributed to world peace," said Lee. "We're still working toward ensuring safety for South Korea."

The ceremony concluded with Lance lighting candles representing Americans from each branch of the service who died in the war, and one for the Americans who are still unaccounted for.

GORE FROM PAGE 1

declared that September 7th was the 50th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. I think the record shows that we are clearly non-partisan."

Lance said that Gore's staff had more than three months to put The American Legion National Convention on the vice president's schedule.

Lance recalled presidential candidates who have spoken before the Legion in the past.

"I vividly recall Jimmy Carter proposing to an American Legion National Convention that amnesty be granted to those young men who dodged the draft in Vietnam. We did not agree with him, but we could not fault his integrity; he told us face to face what it was he intended to do if elected."

Lance said that the Legion's Straw Poll, which measures Legionnaire support for where the candidates stand on important issues, would continue. Legion staff members researched Gore's public statements regarding the issues in question. These statements were reproduced and posted on www.MyLegion.com. Excerpts from Gov. Bush's speech before the Legion Convention were also to be included on the web site.

"I now ask you to listen to Governor Bush," Lance said. "Consider the statements of Vice President Gore. And cast your ballot in our Veterans Straw Poll for whomever you believe best qualified to lead the United States as our next president –our commander in chief."

FODPAL installs new officers

New officers of the Foreign and Outlying Departments and Posts of The American Legion (FODPAL) were installed during a meeting at the Milwaukee Hilton Monday. Past National Commander Clarence Bacon conducted the installation. The officers are:

President Fred G. Platt (China Post 1)
First Vice President Orland H. Taylor (Hawaii)
Second Vice President E. D. (Joe) Skinner (Hawaii)
Third Vice President Carlos Orria (Puerto Rico)
Judge Advocate Mike Beavers (France)
Historian Ignacio Palad (Philippines)
Chaplain Sally Bennett (Mexico)
Sergeant at Arms Richard I. Snyder (Alaska)
Secretary Douglas Haggan (France)
Treasurer Arnie Matanky (France)

Miss America 2000 rallies the Legion troops

By Tim Shearer

After singing an emotionally powerful version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" during the opening ceremonies of "The American Legion's 82nd National Convention, Miss America 2000 Heather Renee French summed up her year of promoting veteran's causes.

"I think of many things when I sing the Anthem, with my hand over my heart," she said. "I often think about my father and brother. But this time I also thought about how this is the last time I will be singing this song as Miss America. I'm proud to be doing this for The Legion."

"During her reign, she has been more than just a vocal advocate for veteran's issues. She got down in the trenches and didn't just talk to homeless vets, she put her arm around them" said National Commander Al Lance. "She stood by us in The Legion and people listened to her.

"Remember her name, because this isn't the last we are going to see of this young lady," he added.

"This has been a tremendous year for me," she said. "I was so proud to walk with the National Commander on Capitol Hill as we fought to protect the flag. I have also dedicated this year to those who gave their lives for the country and the families who never got to see them again."

French, brandishing her Miss America crown, compared the shiny headpiece to the plight of homeless veterans, a cause she has championed throughout her reign. "This crown is not just a decoration for pretentious purposes," she said. "Every jewel and every sparkle represents who you are and a better way of life for those 275,000 homeless veterans who sleep on the street every night.

"You are the ones who deserve the spotlight," she said. "Each of you deserves the best our country has to offer."

French has traveled 20,000 miles per month raising public awareness of veterans' issues. "I've talked to local, state and national governments," she said. "That has been the mission of Miss America this year, educating the American people about the sacrifices you've made to make this country great."

Tom Stratman

Heather Renee French, Miss America for 2000, sings the National Anthem at the opening of Tuesday's convention.

French concluded her speech by sharing a present she received from Kentucky veteran. His Purple Heart Medal with two stars. "This man was not just wounded once. Not twice. But three times," she said. "This box contains the price of freedom. If we can remember that, it makes the fight purposeful."

VA Secretary delivers message of change

By Tim Shearer

Acting VA Secretary Hershel W. Gober spoke of change in the bureaucratic systems with the VA, and praised The American Legion, calling them a catalyst of positive forward motion.

Speaking in the Midwest Express Center yesterday, Gober focused on health care. "In 1944 The Legion helped create the G. I. Bill helping veterans go to school, start business' and buy homes. Today you are still there fighting for veterans," he said.

Gober stated that 3.6 million veterans were treated by VA last year. "Our goal is to ensure that every veteran has access to the health care system, and we need to guarantee long term health care as the veteran population ages."

Claims are still one of the biggest headaches for veterans, but according to Gober that is changing.

"We now have the Smart Card system," he said. "That will provide seamless health care and veterans will only have to register for benefits once. It will let you travel across the nation and receive treatment at any facility."

Gober also talked about Gulf War veterans, saying that in many cases we haven't determined what's making them sick, but they still need to be treated. "We've made great strides in helping Gulf War vets," he said. "But, they still have undiagnosed illnesses and we (the federal government) have an obligation to ensure their quality of life."

Treating unusual war related illness' and injuries is not new. "One of the first groups I met with was survivors of the 'Frozen Chosin,'" said Gober. "They were having circulatory problems to the point that they were losing fingers and limbs. This was a result of extreme cold weather injuries in Korea."

Because of those problems new ways of diagnosing and treating long-term cold weather injuries have been developed.

When it comes to providing medical care for veterans, Gober said he is adamant them receiving the best.

"If it's a coin toss," said Gober. "The coin should always have two heads favoring the vet."

Tom Stratman

Acting VA Secretary Hershel W. Gober promises improvements in veterans' healthcare during his speech at the National Convention.