

# BONGVHC

## #1

**WE'RE BACK!  
ONCE A MONTH  
NEWSLETTERS**

### ROCK THE BONG

We are proud to host  
Roots in Blue, USAF  
Midwest Rock band  
free concert  
September 13th

### VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: GLEN ERICSON

Devoted to educating  
and creating a better  
space for everyone.

### ANNUAL GALA: SALUTE TO HEROES

Join us, November  
14th for an evening  
you won't forget.

RICHARD I.  
BONG  
VETERANS  
HISTORICAL  
CENTER

**OUR GOAL** is to honor the memory and legacy of Major Richard I. Bong, America's "Ace of Aces"  
To preserve and share the history of sacrifices from veterans of all branches of service.  
To educate about the contributions and sacrifices made by veterans which ensure the freedoms enjoyed today.



# BONG CENTER VETERANS TO THE BWCA 2024

Journal by Duane Lasley

**Monday July 22, 2024,** the participants, three men, two women, group leader Duane Lasley and assistant group leader Randy Freeman met at the Richard I Bong Veterans Historical Center and departed for Ely, Minnesota around 11:30 a.m. In Ely we met with the outfitter where we obtained personal packs, sleeping pads, sleeping bags and were fitted for paddles and life jackets. After the outfitter, we checked in to Veterans on the Lake Resort and then ate dinner at The Boathouse Restaurant in Ely. After dinner,

journals, maps and map cases were distributed and everyone was briefed on the location we were heading to, what the lake where we were going was like and ground rules for the trip.

**Tuesday July 23,** after a hearty breakfast, the outfitter picked us up at 7:30 and transported us and our gear to the entry point for the BWCA. We portaged all of our gear and canoes down to the lake, paired up, loaded the canoes and paddled out onto the lake. Our first choice of camp-sites was availa-

ble so we quickly occupied it and got to work setting up camp. Lunch was tortillas, hard salami, cheese and drink mix. The afternoon was occupied doing camp chores, fishing, relaxing and getting to know each other better. Dinner the first night in camp was fried fish, fresh steaks cooked over an open fire, potatoes and green beans.

**Wednesday July 24,** morning it was fresh bacon and eggs for breakfast. After camp chores were done, it was a day for fishing and relaxing around

camp. Everyone that went fishing caught fish and it was fresh fried fish for lunch and again for dinner. The decision was made to cut the trip short by two days and pull out Thursday afternoon because of a forecast of high headwinds starting early Friday morning and lasting continuously through at least Monday.

**Thursday July 25,** morning was for those that wanted to fish to go early and return for a brunch of peanut butter and jelly or hard salami in wraps or sandwiches. We then broke camp,

loaded the canoes, paddled across the lake and portaged all of our gear back up to the entry point. The outfitter picked us up at 3:00 and returned us to the resort where we cleaned up. Dinner Thursday night was at the Frisky Otter in Ely

**Friday July 26** · morning was fresh eggs/omelets to order for breakfast, packing up, straightening up the cabin then a return to the Bong Center.

**VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS!!**

**RICHARD I. BONG VETERANS HISTORICAL CENTER**

**THANK YOU TO OUR GREAT SPONSORS!**

**VETERANS TO THE THE BWCA**

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JOHN GIDLEY

I am thrilled with the relaunch of our monthly newsletter! We are excited to connect with you in many new ways. There have been several positive changes recently, and some exciting projects are on the horizon that we can't wait to share with you.

This spring has been fantastic with the Grand Opening of our latest permanent exhibit, "The Life of Marge Bong-Drucker." This exhibit chronicles the life of Major Bong's widow and celebrates the success of our "Mission Marge" project. Early this summer, an expedition by the Pacific Wrecks company, which we helped fund, discovered the wreckage of the original "Marge" P-38 Lightning. This iconic aircraft, made famous by Major Bong during WWII, was found deep in the jungles of Papua New Guinea. The crash site contained several identifiable pieces and the "bones" of the old bird. Our mission is to aid in the preservation of the crash site and, soon, develop a physical exhibit to be displayed here at the Bong Center.

Perhaps most importantly, we intend to develop an ongoing relationship with the people of New Guinea through a sister city program and other cultural exchanges that will secure the bond from "Poplar to Papua New Guinea!"

With these newsletters, we aim to keep you informed about the events and happenings here at the Richard I. Bong Veterans Historical Center and strengthen the connection between you and our great museum. We are always eager to hear from you with any requests or suggestions you may have. Feel free to drop me a line via email at [gidley@bongcenter.org](mailto:gidley@bongcenter.org).

Thank you for all your support and interest in the Bong Center!

Sincerely,

John Gidley  
Executive Director

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# MEET OUR VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR: GLEN ERICSON



Glen Ericson, center in white long sleeved shirt waves from the 1940 Jeep driven by First Name Last Name in the city of Superior 4th of July parade 2024. Left of the vehicle are volunteers First Name Last name in 1940 fatigues and Abby Last Name in 1940 nurses uniform. Next to Glen in Civil War uniform is First Name Last name.

Photo credit: Superior Telegram

Our Volunteer of the Year, Glen Ericson, has a heart for service. Inspired by his father's involvement in the Legion and his own military experience, for Glen joining the museum volunteer crew felt like a natural extension of his desire to help and share knowledge with others.

Glen heads many events and efforts for the Bong Veterans Historical Center, he is our "go to" for anything requiring ongoing vigilance and determination. He excels at helping others perform above what they believed possible.

"I have had the pleasure of working with Glen for many years now." Executive Director, John Gidley says, "Like all our volunteers, his contributions are invaluable to the Bong Center. He is amazingly reliable and extremely generous with his time and energy. Glen is an exceptional communicator and can relate the stories of the museum and captivate visitors of any age. The Bong Center is truly blessed to have amazing volunteers like Glen!"

This inspirational volunteer also has a wicked sense of humor, be sure you're watching for the slight crinkle of a smile when he's getting into a story.

We pinned him down to get a few words about his experience at the Bong Veterans Historical Center.

**A Veteran's Perspective:** Glen's background as a veteran and special/adaptive physical education teacher gives him a unique outlook on life. "Working with exceptional over-achievers has made everyday complaints seem trivial. Volunteering here is an extension of helping people and sharing new information."

**Memorable Moments:** One memorable moment stands out when he helped a skeptical parent understand that the mu-

seum doesn't glorify war but honors the courage and efforts of local heroes. His ability to communicate the true intent of the museum left a lasting impact.

**Community Connection:** He loves interacting with visitors from all over the world, from Europe to local folks. "Meeting people from diverse backgrounds gives me a different perspective on life."

**Advice for Aspiring Volunteers:** "Be honest about your availability and limitations. You're part of a team here," he advises, emphasizing the importance of being true to oneself.

**Favorite Exhibits:** While the plane and tank are impressive, he appreciates the personal narratives and trench art from WWII. "It's the human aspect of these experiences that really connects with visitors."

**Proudest Achievement:** Being named Volunteer of the Year was a surprise, but his true joy comes from seeing the school kids gain in knowledge, understand and appreciate history.

**Family Support:** Despite the time volunteering takes away from his family, their support is unwavering. He doesn't get the time he would like with his brother and woodworking, or fishing with his brother-in-law. There is a tug "They need my time, but I love being here."

**Message to Younger Generations:** He urges adults to bring kids in and highlights the Junior Curator program's impact. "It's crucial for the community to know we exist and to get involved."

**Personal Enrichment:** Volunteering is part of who he is, both at the museum and his church. His positive attitude about veterans enriches the museum experience for visitors.

Join us in celebrating Glen's dedication and the invaluable perspective he brings to our museum community!



## ROCK THE BONG WITH ROOTS IN BLUE

Bong Veterans Historical Center is proud to host Roots in Blue, September 13th 2024 at 6:30 PM. This free concert is open to all and has limited space available. (No ability to save seats.)

Roots in Blue is the newest performing group of the USAF Band of Mid-America.

This seven piece popular music group features guitar, bass, drums, piano and vocalists, and is sure to impress audiences of all ages.

Located at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, this ensemble is committed to honoring our veterans and active-duty members, communicating esprit de corps, motivation and inspiration, and rendering honor to our Airmen and country across a 10-state

**FREE!**  
*Rock & Roll  
Concert at Bong  
Center 6:30PM  
September 13th*

*Roots in Blue  
USAF Band  
of Mid-America*

region in the Midwest and Southern United States. Roots in Blue celebrates America's love for rock, country and popular music. Roots in Blue will bring us an unforgettable show!

## BONG CENTER BOOK CLUB IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS

Bong Center Book Club is open to all people interested in reading and discussing books primarily based in real life military excursions and Wars.

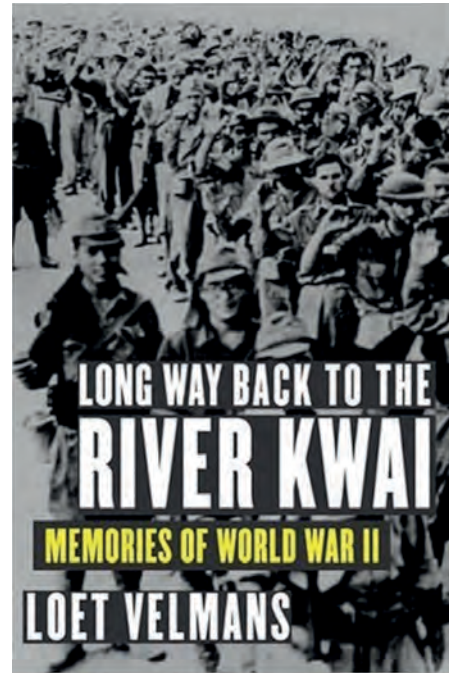
We select books through out the year based on member interest and book availability.

### UPCOMING BOOK CLUB EVENTS

Tuesday, August 13th · Annual Book Club Picnic, High Noon at Dan & Missy Mascarenas' home.

Tuesday, September 10th · Field Trip  
Camp Ripley Military Museum

Tuesday, October 8th · 11:30 AM Book Club Meeting, at V.I.P. Restaurant.  
Discuss our book



“Long Way Back to the River Kwai: A Harrowing True Story of Survival in World War II”

by Loet Velmans

For more details about any of our events, please contact Book Club President Scott Markle.

[semarkle@charter.net](mailto:semarkle@charter.net)



## SHOP ONLINE WITH US!

Take advantage of Bong Veterans Historical Center online shopping!

If you are lucky enough to live close to the center, make your shopping choices, pay and pick up in person, at your convenience!

The selections are fantastic and changing all the time!

Deep discounts on the items above!



# THE DEFENSE OF TOKTONG PASS, KOREA

*The Ordeal of  
254 Marines  
of Fox/2/7*

*- Dave  
Schmidt*

The Korean War, commonly described as the "forgotten war," was a remarkably brutal conflict, a proxy war fought by two superpowers (and China) in an undeveloped land inhabited by a poor and largely agricultural population. "Was" is perhaps inaccurate, for the war has never been concluded. The 1953 truce that ended combat operations still holds, but no peace treaty has ever been signed. For close to 70 years the two sides have been at a precarious stalemate.

The Battle at the Chosin Reservoir, which was referred to as a 'tactical retreat' by American and U.N. forces, in December of 1950, was by many accounts one of the most horrific, grueling battles fought in American history. North Korea is a mountainous country where summers are unbearably hot and the winters are unforgivingly cold. The winter of 1950 was the coldest in living memory.

The North Korean army invaded the South in June 1950 and pushed the South Korean army and the U.S. forces south to a small perimeter around Pusan in the south. Late in the summer, though, U.S. and U.N. forces led by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, landed at Inchon, and pushed the North Korean forces back across the 38th parallel. MacArthur's plan was to push the North Korean forces to the border with China with his most experienced U.S. Army and Marine forces; the Army to engage the North Korean Army (NKA) in the west and the Marines in the east. The First Marine Division commanded by the very tactically accomplished MG Oliver Smith was shipped from Inchon to the east coast of Korea. The two commands fought separately as they were physically separated by the Taebaek Mountains.

General MacArthur had a staff of 'yes men' who told the general what he wanted to hear. As a result, MacArthur made a number of ill-advised decisions.. Pushing the NKA to the Chinese border (and beyond) was one of several poor tactical decisions. MacArthur gambled that the Chinese would not cross the Yalu River to reinforce the North Koreans. The forces that the Marines faced were not the North Korean army, which had offered little resistance, but the massive Chinese army which poured across the Yalu River.

In the west the U.N. forces were over extended and were surprised when they were confronted with 180,000 Chinese that surged across the Yalu River. At the same time, approximately 110,000 Chinese crossed into North Korea to meet X Corps composed of Marines and an Army Regimental Combat Team in the east. The U.N. forces, to put it bluntly, were hammered.

In the east, Marine General O.P. Smith followed the orders he was given as best as he could but was concerned that his three regiments were in danger of becoming overextended and his flanks becoming vulnerable to attack. Unfortunately, U.S. Army General Almond, the overall commanding officer of X Corps, voiced his dismay that the Marines were moving too slowly.

Facing relatively light resistance, the Marines to the east pushed forward on a winding mountain road, the main supply road towards the Chosin Reservoir; contending with the brutal Korean winter. They bivouacked in foxholes around Yudam-ni, scratched out from the minus 20 to 30-degree frozen ground near the Chosin Reservoir and tried desperately to keep warm, battling

frostbite. Soon, the Marine's First Division, often referred to as the "Chosen few," found themselves surrounded by and battling 100,000 Chinese. With the distinct probability of being annihilated, the Marines had to retreat through Nangnim Mountains, all the while holding off the numerically superior Chinese forces. During the battle the Chinese isolated Fox Company which clung to a hill overlooking the Toktong Pass which was just barely wide enough to permit the passage of a single vehicle through which the retreating X Corps had to transit. In the face of the Chinese offensive, Gen. MacArthur and Gen. Almond ordered all U.S. forces to withdraw to the port of Hungnam, a successful but daring operation. In true Marine fashion, Maj. Gen. Smith denied that the retreat from the Chosin Reservoir was the intent: "Retreat, hell! We're not retreating, we're just advancing in a different direction." MacArthur's gamble failed.

Fortunately, the Chinese broke contact with these Marines to attack Hagaru-ri, the headquarters of X Corps, to the south. The outnumbered Marines around Yudam-ni were now enabled to retreat south down the Main Supply Route through the Toktong Pass which was defended by Fox Company. It was imperative that this pass, this choke point, be held open for the retreating Marines. Fox Company was the security force that was to hold this crucial gorge under the command of Captain William Barber and his isolated 254 Marines unaware that they would be facing and deterring over 10,000 Chinese who desperately wanted that pass to trap and annihilate the Marines retreating south to Hagaru-ri.

The Marines of Fox Company dug into the frozen ground, in what would become known as Fox Hill. Captain Barber placed his men on 50% alert. The Marines underwent a deluge of mortar shells rained down upon them. At 2AM, the Chinese came: sounds, shadows rising, a snapping twig, low voices, the sound of a Chinese grenade bouncing off rocks or the frozen ground. They didn't come in waves as is often depicted, but in lines of a dozen or so, with whistles and bugles blowing and cymbals clanging. The Chinese climbed the ice- and snow-covered slopes to get at the outnumbered and isolated Marines. They'd be repulsed to charge back again and again to be third and fourth time. The three platoons of Fox Company held back the repeated assaults of a Chinese regiment of over 3,000 over several never-ending nights; nights which were 16 hours long. The Chinese finally withdrew at dawn to hide in ravines and beneath trees as they feared U.N. close air support.

Many of the Chinese were captured soldiers of the Nationalist Chinese Army of Chaing Kai-shek who were defeated by Mao's communist forces during the Chinese civil war. They were sent into battle unarmed and instructed to collect weapons from their fallen comrades as they advanced.

The Arctic conditions both hampered and benefited the Marines. Toes froze. Lubricants for rifles, especially the light M1 carbine, thickened, turning to glue, making them unreliable. M1s fired fairly dependably but not as dependably as their machine guns, BARs, i.e., Browning Automatic Rifles, and hand grenades. The Chinese used whale oil as a lubricant and had no issues with frozen guns. On the positive side, the freezing temperatures also slowed or stopped the bleeding of wounds. Marines that retreated to their sleeping bags to escape the cold were bayoneted by the Chinese when they periodically broke through the dwindling Marine perimeter. Because of the failure of rifles to reliably fire,

grenades were used extensively. Because of the extreme cold the Marines were given special instructions in arming hand grenades to ensure their detonation after being thrown. There were a great many instances of hand-to-hand combat using entrenching tools and wielding rifles as clubs. Often times the two forces fought each other under a rain of hand grenades. Because the frozen ground offered little protection for the Marines, they stacked the Chinese dead to act as sandbags in front of their shallow fighting hole to improve their defenses.

For five short days and hellishly long nights, from 27 November through 02 December 1950, Fox Company endured and persevered before they were finally relieved by Lt. Col. Raymond Davis with a force of 500 Marines saving the beleaguered Fox Company from annihilation.

At the end of Fox Company's ordeal, three-quarters of Fox Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines were killed, wounded, or captured. Eighty-five of Captain Barber's original 254 Marines walked off of Fox Hill.

Captain William Earl Barber, and Pvt. Hector Albert Cafferata Jr were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for their courage, leadership, and tenacity in the face of overwhelming enemy forces.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR: DAVE SCHMIDT

**From Director of Collections & Exhibits Briana Fiantz One of the most interesting things about working in the Bong Center Archives is the opportunity to do in-depth research into specific areas of military history. We hope to share some of the research being done by staff and volunteers in each newsletter.**

Dave Schmidt is a dedicated and long-time volunteer with the museum. Growing up outside Madison and then Superior he enjoyed his childhood, chasing salamanders and living a "perfect for little boys" rural life. He served in the U.S.A.F. Security Service, now the Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Agency, from 1968 to 1972.

After his discharge, he received his degree from the University of Kansas in Geology, he was thinking of a career in the oil industry until a representative spoke at UK and changed his mind. Dave didn't want to be a stereotypical fat oil man smoking a cigar.

He was recruited by the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution where he enjoyed 35 years out in the field chasing down specimens as well as in house. The proper description of his work is collections management as a collection specialist, but his recall is much more exciting than this title.

He retired in 2011 (and we keep him busy as much as he will allow!)

**OUR ANNUAL FUNDRAISER IS COMING UP!**

RICHARD I. BONG VETERANS HISTORICAL CENTER  
**SAVE THE DATE**

# SALUTE TO HEROES

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2024**  
THE GARDEN CANAL PARK

HONORING BRIGADIER GENERAL RAY KLOSOWSKI, USAF ANG (RET)

Presented by

**National Bank**  
of Commerce



**To become a sponsor of our Gala 2024**

**email: [gidley@bongcenter.org](mailto:gidley@bongcenter.org)**





## LEMONADE FOR THE AMERICAN LEGION

This one hit us right in the heart.

Dakota came in Saturday with her Grandparents.

Dakota had been at an event and saw our American Legion Post 435 present colors.

Grandpa took the time to explain what the American Legion does for soldiers and their families.

Dakota decided she wanted to help the Legion.

Dakota had a lemonade stand and raised money.

Dakota donated over \$100 to American Legion Post 435 on Saturday.

Thank you, Dakota, Grandma, and Grandpa, and special thanks to our amazing American Legion Post 435.

Thank you to all the parents and grandparents, explaining for your littles these complex concepts.

Those littles have a knack of taking your information and drilling down to the essential.

This one hit us right in the heart.



## AMERICAN LEGION POST 435

Meetings for both Legion and Auxiliary are second Tuesdays of every month at 7:00PM at Richard I. Bong Veterans Historical Center

New folks always welcome!

**NEXT MEETING:** AUGUST 13, 2024 7:00PM

**FLAG of REMEMBRANCE** August 23rd

Doug Pearson, US Army, Vietnam

If you are interested in having a flag flown in remembrance of your veteran please email:

JohnVaski@yahoo.com

**COMING UP:** SIP & SUPPORT Legion Auxiliary

Saturday October 12th from 1- 3:00 PM

Fundraiser for Douglas County Veterans Fund.



## VOLUNTEER WITH US

**4PM Friday September 20, 2024** Is our next Volunteer meeting,

A little nosh & a movie in our theatre.

Email: Jodi@bongcenter.org if you want to be a volunteer,

We can't wait for you to join our team!



## Last thoughts from Bong Center Boundary Waters Trip for Veterans

by Duane Lasley

The Bong Veterans Historical Center took 5 veterans into the BWCA from July 22th through 26th 2024.

They came together never having met, but they weren't strangers. They shared a commonality of each having been part of something larger than themselves, of dedication, pride and the satisfaction of having served their country. Some by their own choice, some by the choice of their country.

They came along on this journey because they were provided an opportunity to venture into the wilderness, to bond once again with others who had shared a common experience, though not in the same times or places, but in the long continuum of the legacy of protecting freedom and democracy, a lifestyle began of freedom and independence.

Why each of them decided to participate is unknown. Having the opportunity was important enough to take the time away from work, family and daily life to go along.

Their ages ranged from forty something to the late seventies. Service periods ranged from several years to over several decades, from Vietnam to the present. Over the five days there was time to go off alone for

solitude to contemplate and many opportunities to share experiences and knowledge.

Weather ranged from a light rain shower to calm and sunny. Generally, the weather was calm and provided ample time for fishing or canoeing and everyone was able to have some opportunity to try their luck at fishing. A forecast of high headwinds cut the trip short by two days, but better safe than in trouble.

Meals, campfires, sunsets, stars and stories were shared. There was a general feeling of calm and happiness with lots of joviality. At some point each had a very good laugh, with many shared good times. All got along well together and no one worked alone doing camp chores.

In the end, they each went their separate ways, back to their lives with the memory of a shared experience, perhaps never to meet again, but with the possibility of sharing common interests in the future.

They will always be together in the memory of a week spent thinking, bonding, sharing, laughing and surviving in the wilderness.

Thank you for being part of it.