

American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary in Livingston

In 1923 men from Livingston and Olive Township worked diligently to obtain a charter from the American Legion Headquarters to honor the men who gave their lives for our freedom and to liberate Belgium-France in World War I. In June of 1924 the charter was granted. Later the Ladies Auxiliary was formed. The men participated in military funerals with honor guards and playing taps at veteran's funerals.

On June 17, 1924, the American Legion elected the following officers; Commander Walter Koch, Vice Commander Francis Thomure, and Finance Officer Henry Joshu. When the application for a charter was submitted, approximately 30 men pledged themselves to join the new post. The name would be The John Wajcuila Post # 377, so named for the first Livingston resident to die on the battlefield during World War I.

Jonas Wajcuila, know in Livingston as John was a coalminer when he left to serve his country on April 30, 1918. He trained at Camp Dix, New Jersey and was sent to France. His father, Joseph Wajcuila who lived in Livingston, was notified of his son's death that had occurred on October 26, 1918. He was a member of the United States Army, Company 4, 148th Regiment, 37th Infantry Division. He was buried in the United States Military Cemetery "Flanders Field" in Waregem, Belgium.

On May 28, 1925, the following officers were elected at the regular meeting: Commander Dr. H.C. Ti-

etz, Vice Commander Fred Miller, Adjutant Francis Thomure, Sgt. at Arms Leslie Lovejoy and Treasurer John Carson. Services for Decoration Day would be held starting at 10:00 a.m. with Livingston Miner's Band providing the music. Flowers could be brought to the village hall by 8:30 a.m.

On Decoration Day, May 30, 1925, the American Legion Post held a celebration. Judge Trares was the speaker. Father Gribbins gave a speech as well. After the address the post members and citizens marched to Spangle Cemetery and decorated the graves of the departed soldiers. The Livingston Miner's Band



Livingston's Miner's Band that performed at local Decoration Day Ceremonies.

played appropriate music.

After the war, and as time went by, interest waned and the charter had to be renewed April 13, 1942, during World War II. There was an Auxiliary Unit formed and the following ladies names are on the charter:

Frieda Augustine	Martha Augustine	Mary Augustine	Mary Bellovich
Viola Bohenen	Sara Bondy	Marie Bononi	Elymira Buehling
Edith Buffington	Jenny Dumont	Lena Evans	Irene France
Loretta Fech	Olive Gasper	Mary Healy	Roberta Kamosky
Neva Mitchelar	Helen Ocepek	Flossie Prosser	Fern Sandrin
Mary Scanzoni	Bess Thomure	Mary Tsupros	Edna Vallow

Gold Star Members were:

Marie Bononi	Lena Evans	Dima Libbra	Flossie Prosser
Dorothy Kabot			

(A Gold Star Member is one who had lost a family member in a war)

The ladies of Unit 377 accomplished many good things and had an enjoyable time working together. They served lunches to the soldiers when a train would stop in Livingston at the railroad crossing. They met them with sandwiches, refreshments and gave them the feeling of being appreciated for their service to their country.

Poppy Days were always held in May and those funds were always spent directly on the veterans. Other money was spent on programs and some sent to Department of Illinois to help with a 6-point program, USO, Hospitals, Veteran's Homes and a multitude of things to the benefit of the veterans and their families. The Auxiliary also helped with expenses when Red Cross blood drives were held locally.

After the war the interest waned. The charter was lost again in 1963 and some members joined the New Douglas Post and Unit. According to Historian Frieda Augustine the ladies continued to meet and participated in events such as serving at funerals, sending sympathy and get well cards and made cookies to send to the Veteran's Home in Quincy, Illinois.

May 27, 1968, Mayor Charles Oliphant made a proclamation that all businesses in the Village would be closed, so far as practicable, during the funeral service of John J. Slifka, Army Specialist 5, son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry (Evelyn) Slifka Sr. and the American Flag would be displayed prominently during the hour of service at Lesicko Funeral home in Livingston.

In 1975, the village park was renamed, Veteran's Memorial Park, by letter of the Mayor of Livingston. A request was made to put the names of all Livingston veterans on a plaque in the park. That is yet to be accomplished.

In 1980, Dima Libbra was honored as our Gold Star Sister at the May meeting. Each year in May we observe "Gold Star Members Month" and do something special for our Gold Star Members. A flower, plant or small gift is given to Gold Star members as a remembrance of their loss and to honor them. Local boys in service at that time were Roger Roberts, Robert Royer, Jerry Wesbrook, Douglas Glisson and Dwayne Glisson. The auxiliary sent cards and a few dollars to them for incidentals.

In January of 1982 more interest was shown and the local charter was renewed and the organization renamed the post John J. Slifka American Legion Post 1984 and Auxiliary Unit 1984. John Slifka was killed in action in Viet Nam on May 15, 1968.

On April 2, 1982 the John J. Slifka Post 1984 was dedicated. The new officers were: Post Commander Steve Boston, Senior Vice Commander Pete Matesa, Junior Vice Commander Jerry Ollerton, Adjutant Raymond Moggio, Finance Officer Joseph Dal Pozzo, Chaplain Donald Mihelcic, Sergeant-At-Arms Alfred Langer, Service Officer Robert Urban Jr. Charter Members were: George M. Balen, Charles Miller, Armando Rami, Gary L. Ocepek, Donald E. Mihelcic, Walter M. Heinz, Peter J. Matesa, Louis Moggio, Joseph J. Warzala, John P. Grega, William Slifka, Alfred O. Langer, Robert Urban Jr., Joseph M. Dal Pozzo, Steve Boston, Jerry Ollerton and Raymond Moggio.

In 1982 and 1983, more ladies joined the Auxiliary. In 1983, we lost a member to death. When a member dies, the framed charter is draped with a black cloth and a ritual of prayer and remembrance are held. In honor, auxiliary members file past the casket at the funeral home and lay a poppy on the right shoulder of the departed member; American Legion Post members follow in the procession after the auxiliary. When a Legion Post member dies, the post members file past the casket of their departed member followed by auxiliary members.

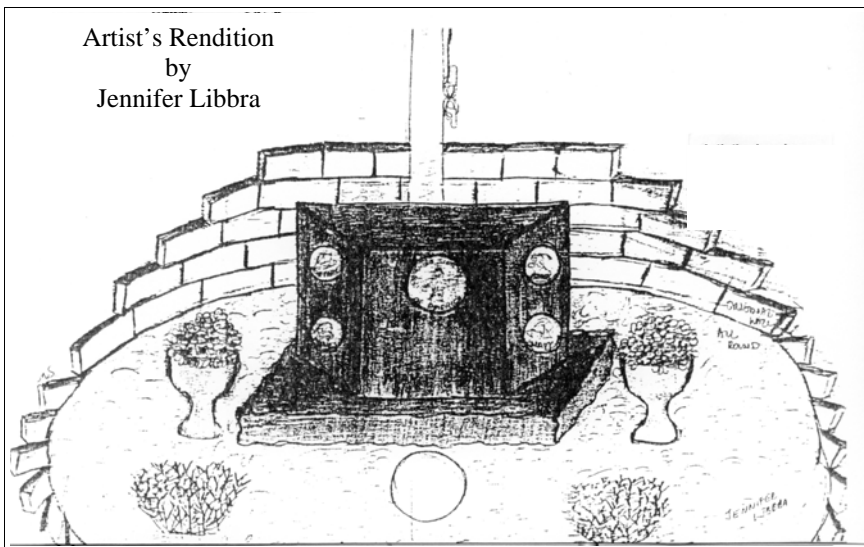
Evelyn Slifka became a Gold Star Mother while Mary Ann Slifka-Bandy and Sheila Slifka Felchner became Gold Star Sisters. They are the mother and sisters, respectively, of John J. Slifka.

In 1986-1989, the organization was busy selling funnel cakes at the homecomings as fund raisers. Looking through the files the names that appear on the workers schedules include, Virginia Balen, Fern Lesicko, Roberta Karnosky, Frances Perne, Beulah Urban, Edna Genczo, Frances Augustine, Sharon Hydron, Aileen Kirk, Lillian Lesicko, Bridget Kopuster, Laura Warzala, Mary Burkhardt, Mary Wentler, Molly Rami, Janice Libbra and Carol Shearlock. Other members served on different committees at various times.

During the years, students could enter the Americanism Essay Contest, sponsored by the auxiliary. Girls could go to Girls' State for a week to see how the government functions and have a week to get acquainted

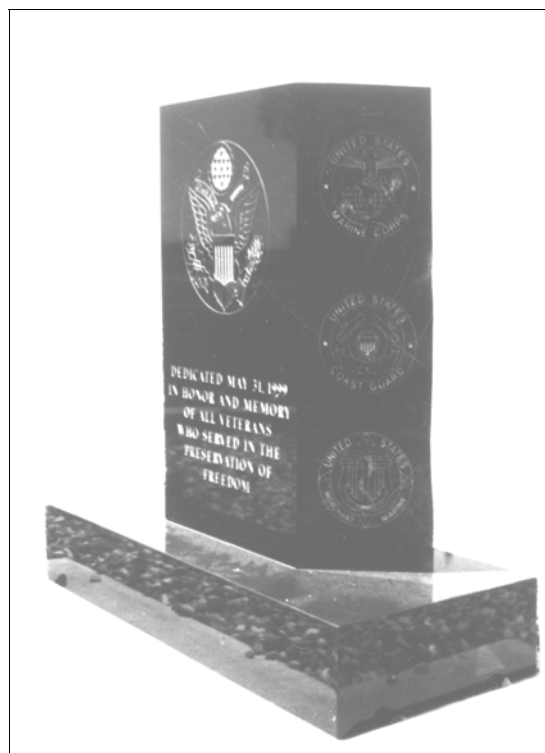
with girls from other parts of the state and make new friends. It was not all work as events were planned that allowed the girls to have fun as well. It was a winning endeavor for the girls and the organization.

The auxiliary invested money with the intention of erecting a Legion/Auxiliary Post building. As time went on and this plan did not materialize the auxiliary was advised that the money set aside for this purpose would need to be expended. Auxiliary treasurers over the years were Viola Bohenen, Fern Lesicko and Liz Ruhmann. The treasurers were very diligent in the duty to see that Auxiliary funds were invested as members felt appropriate. After much discussion, Fern Lesicko and Liz Ruhmann researched the prospect of building a monument to honor all veterans. All information gathered by Fern and Liz was brought back to the membership for their approval. Burn's Nursery of Edwardsville was the only company interested in our endeavor. Tom Burns drew up a plan based on a drawing by Jennifer Libbra. The auxiliary proposed that they could use a design drawn by a student from Livingston School District. Jennifer was the only student that submitted a drawing, and she was a junior member



before becoming a senior member when she turned 18 years old. Tom Burns took the drawing and developed a design for the monument with the bricks, plants, berm and flag pole. As things progressed, the Legion added \$7,000.00 to the \$12,000.00 the Auxiliary had allocated for the project. Mayor Dave Gasper, a veteran, joined the effort and the village donated manpower, materials and support. Olive Township Road Commissioner Bobby Chulka helped as well. Local citizens donated money in honor and memory of veterans in their family and community to truly make it a monument for 'All Veteran's' who served for our freedom. There were times of sadness and hardship as well. We lost our Chairman Fern Lesicko, who worked so hard with Liz Ruhmann. Eventually, Opal Seganfredo offered to serve with Liz as co-chairman until the project was completed. We also lost our Legion Commander, Steve 'Daft' Boston and our electrician, Robert Urban Jr. Jerome Lesicko was our on-site manager and kept watch for just the right piece of marble with the best quality, for such a large piece to be cut, that would show the military seals and the state seal along with the words we wanted engraved. It arrived just prior to the dedication. So with everything in place, we had a beautiful dedication on May 31, 1999 with over 200 people attending. The Veteran's Memorial in Veteran's Memorial Park became a reality and it shows you that a beautiful work can be successful when a community pulls together. Time does not allow me to continue or to mention the many more people involved. This report is done with the utmost respect and appreciation of the material brought forward at this time and is inadequate at best to show everything that has been done in this village for the common good of the veterans and their families and relatives. Enjoy what we do have for now.

Each year a "Memorial Service" is held on Memorial Day and each year it continues to grow.



Veteran's Memorial Dedication

May 31, 1999



Breaking ground for Veteran's Memorial Project
On Site Manager Jerome Lesicko, American Legion
Auxiliary President Diane Swandner, American
Legion Bruno Larcker and Mayor David Gasper



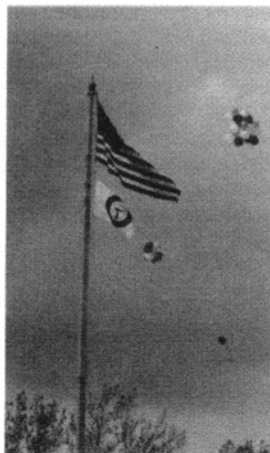
Senator Evelyn Bowles
Former Livingston Resident and Veteran



Co-Chairman Opal Seganfredo-Diane Schwandner-Loretta Fech-
Aileen Kirk-Helen Ocepek-Chairman Liz Ruhmann

in Illinois...

In the January 2000 issue of *Ex-POW* Magazine, the article (pictured right) appeared. The ex-POW flag was donated by Robert and Shirley Lingner in honor of Shirley's brother ex-POW Mike Koehler and first flown for the dedication ceremony.



Don't ever say "can't" in Livingston, IL. This town, with a population of just 926, spent 4 1/2 years building a beautiful tribute to its veterans. Even the mayor joined in -- donating his time and materials. The AXPOW Flag was donated by Rob't and Shirley Lingner, sister of ex-POW "Mike" Koehler.

The memorial can be seen from I-55 at exit 37, and is located between Springfield, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri. The memorial faces the highway so all can see. Later, lights will be added to help at night.



Memorial Day

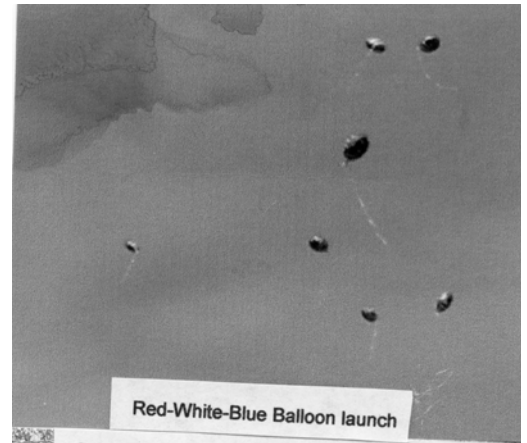
May 30, 2005



Driscoll
Augustine
Iraq
National Guard



From left: Lisa Engelke and
Chaplain Dottie Heeren



Red-White-Blue Balloon launch



Pete Matesa, Chad Matesa, Dennis Scarsdale,
Tom Crosley, John Chalovich, Robert Pollett
Driscoll Augustine



Pete Matesa
Commander
American Legion



At left: Honored Guest Roger
Pitts, U.S. Navy

Spec. 5 John J. Slifka Killed by Mine in Vietnam

Spec. 5 John J. Slifka twenty-one year old son of Harry and Evelyn Clark Slifka was killed in action on May 15, 1968 when the crane he was operating struck a mine in the demilitarized zone in the Republic of Vietnam. John served with the 1st Infantry Division. On June 25th, 1968 the United States Army posthumously awarded John a Purple Heart. He was awarded a Bronze Star Medal, on May 26th, 1968 for meritorious achievement in ground operations against hostile forces. Spec 5 Slifka graduated from Livingston High School. He was drafted in October of 1966, sent to Vietnam July 15, 1967 and stationed at Lai-Khe Base Camp. Prior to being drafted he was employed by McDonnell Aircraft at St. Louis, Mo. According to word received by his parents, the body will be returned to Livingston in about a week. Beside his parents, he is survived by a brother Harry Jr. at home and two sisters, Mrs. Billy Ray (Mary Ann Slifka) Bandy of Williamson and Sheila Slifka at home.



Gold Star Members

If Mothers are the glue that holds a family together, then Gold Star Mothers are the glue that holds the Auxiliary together. The memory of a Gold Star member's sacrifice most surely reinforces our dedication to peace and national security. We honor these women for it is they who have paid the highest price for peace. Through the eyes of these women, we better understand the sacrifice made by their sons and daughters. They were fine young people who believed in duty and honor. They are like members of our own families. We understand the threats and dangers they faced. Those of us who were fortunate enough to welcome home our loved ones are most grateful for their safe return. Think of the bravery and courage these Members have displayed through the years! Their spirit of patriotism and duty is an inspiration to us all and they have our deepest respect. They could have been bitter. They could have turned away from other returning veterans when their sons and daughters were lost but they didn't. They shared our joy with the return of each veteran and have worked for those veterans who came home-just as they would have for their own children. Gold Star Members strengthen our resolve that no American shall ever die in vain. Heroines all, they have turned their loss into gain, for us, for our veterans and for our nation.



Evelyn Slifka



Dima Libbra

Our Gold Star Mothers and Sisters

Marie Bononi, Mother
Lena Evans, Mother
Dorothy Kabot, Sister
Mary Kuttin, Mother
Louise Lanza, Mother
Dima Libbra, Sister
Mrs. Pyle, Mother
Evelyn Slifka, Mother
Mary Ann Slifka-Bandy, Sister
Sheila Slifka-Felchner, Sister



Mary Ann Slifka-Bandy



Sheila Slifka-Felchner

