

available. The cross-country runners were again treated to a dinner on November 15. Six M1 rifles were purchased for the color guard; they, together with countless other items were destroyed in the fire. Dues were increased to \$21; 310 books and 55 decks of cards were delivered to VA Hospitals.

The Sum of \$3,000 was donated to Laurel Hospital, five bicycles were donated to the Laurel Police Department, the Post hosted a pizza party for our undefeated 12 year old girls basketball team and letters were sent to both Senators and President Reagan expressing the deep opposition of Post members to the Panama Canal giveaway.

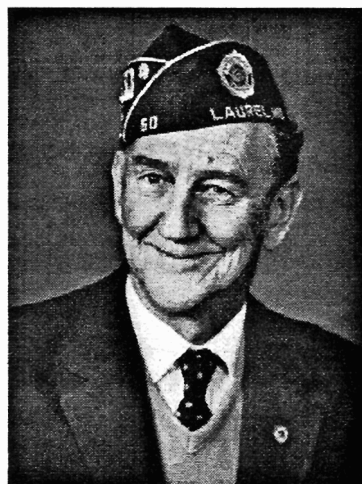
The Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery was dedicated by Project Manager Bob Maring, a number of members worked at the USO gala held at Laurel RaceTrack. We hosted the

Department Junior Auxiliary Fall Conference. Department President Marie Wolbert thanked the Post for an excellent affair. Finally, the Post hosted a dinner for WW I and Gold Star Mothers, where we were honored by the presence of Mayor Leo Wilson, Comptroller Louis Goldstein and Representative Gladys Noon Spellman.

Lou Ruppert again assumed the reins for 1978-1979; the Post supported the Wes O'Brien fund with a gala held at the Kilby Center on October 21. A Christmas party was held at Great Oaks Center, needy families in the area received food baskets. A dart tournament was chaired by Phil Hardy and over 130 runners attended the banquet hosted by the Post. The University of Maryland track coach was the featured speaker; he brought two of his outstanding runners with him.



*CDR Robert Mainhall  
1977-1978*



*CDR Harold Duvall  
1979-1980*



*CDR Edgar Strainge  
1980-1981, 1985-1986*



*CDR Clyde Harmon  
1983-1984*



*CDR James Tanabe  
1984-1985*



*CDR David Kennedy  
1986-1987*



*CDR Sheldon Barber  
1987-1988*



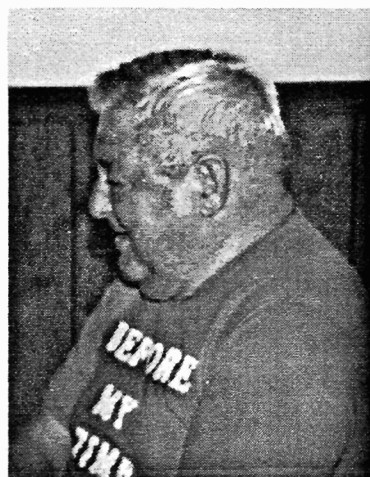
*CDR Charles Lavin  
1994-1995*



*CDR George Schaab  
1988-1990, 1993-1994  
1995-1998*



*Tom Marr, 1916-1994*



*"Mr. Post 60"*

# THE FIRE

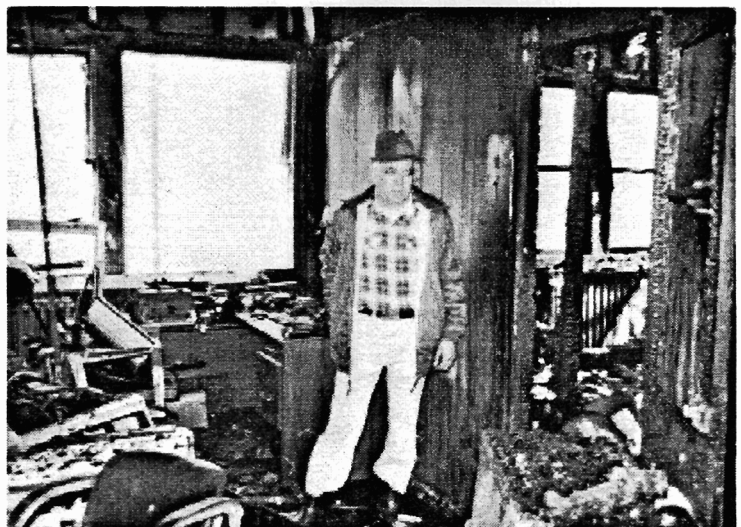
It was 4:18 a.m., March 9, 1979 when the telephone awakened Adjutant Ray Jacquez. It was Auxiliary Member Isabell "Izzy" Thomas telling me: "The Legion is burning", having heard it on the scanner. When I ran out the door it was obvious, the sky was an ominous shade of red. Although all local fire companies responded it was apparent that the Post was beyond saving. The building was constructed of wood and was a tinderbox. Fire was flying everywhere, when it reached the auditorium area there was a loud explosion (ammunition and paint cans). Twelve fire companies responded, over 100 firefighters, six lines and 5,000 gallons of water a minute was futile as the building was totally engulfed. Nearly all Post records were destroyed except membership records. Adjutant Ray directed the fireman to continuously spray water over the office which kept Post records from being totally consumed.

The Post was scheduled to be the Host Post for the National Commanders visit to Maryland; this, together with a planned WW I/Gold Star Mothers dinner had to be cancelled as well as a wedding reception planned for the next day! Fortunately, the American Legion came through with offers of assistance. We received some 60K from insurance proceeds; however, we suffered a 125K loss plus countless memorabilia, furniture and supplies. The fire was reputed to have started in the area of the Managers office and

was determined to be arson.

Our first office of assistance was from Department Commander Jim Thomas who volunteered his assistance in replacing all official documents. Within 72 hours assistance began to pour in by Posts 108, 217, 40, 136, 28, 66, 248, 131, 199, 196, 259, 110 and the Past Commanders Club of The Southern Maryland District. Within 48 hours we were visited by National Commander Jack Carey who offered the services of National Headquarters to replace lost charters and incorporation papers.

After the initial shock, despair, dejection, resignation, indignation and anger had been replaced by optimism, we formed a Building Committee which had its initial meeting just one week after the fire. Under the determined leadership of Bud Wilson we began plans to raze the debris and plan for a new Post Home. We met at Gunpowder Golf club (Joe Cobb), Citizens National Bank (Neil Taylor), Laurel Elks Lodge (John Crane), where, thanks to his



*Adjutant Office after the fire*

efforts we held monthly meetings at the Lodge, they even extended guest privileges to our members, a fine gesture of cooperation! Executive Committee/Building Committee meetings were held at Laurel Building & Loan (Francis Beverina/Maring) while Manager Ed Albiker had an office in the Citizens bank to conduct day-to-day business.

Legion activities slowly resumed; Bingo was held on Friday evening at the Laurel Boys & Girls Club (Squadron 60 also met there), Glen Burnie Post 40 held a gigantic dinner dance which, together with a 3K raffle realized over 4K for our finances. The old building was razed thanks to Johnny James, Paul Brown (the remains are now buried under the parking lot!) and George Lang. A new slate of Officers was elected with Harold Duvall (charter member of the original Squadron 60) as Commander. He was given the unenviable task of functioning without a Post home. He and Adjutant Ray have fond memories of drying out every piece of correspondence salvaged, disposing of flag remnants, returning rifles to the US Army (the wooden stocks were completely burned), ordering new rifles (donated by a member), and the other myriad tasks of rebuilding. The Building Committee met, met, met and continued to meet (Adjutants fingers became hardened with typing). After much discussion, Furman Company was selected as builder, and loans were secured from two local firms who provided financial assistance. The Appendix contains a list of some 467 firms and people (many repeat donors) who contributed; the list continues to this date. (1998)



### *Cleaning up after the fire*

The contract for rebuilding was approved on September 9, 1979 and the loan was signed on November 10, 1979. The building cost was firmed at \$42 per square foot.

Under Commander Duvall, routine Legion activities continued: Bingo equipment donated by Laurel Moose enhanced our fund raisers which included Night at the Races (Elks), Monte Carlo (Elks), and Post functions held at the Post grounds which included a Labor Day picnic and softball games. Clothes valued at \$300 were donated to Great Oaks Center, Unit 60 held a gigantic rummage sale at the Post grounds , three students were sent to Boys State, 85 decks of cards to the VA Hospital and we still managed to become a 4-Star post with 841 members. Bob Solan refurbished the four chairs in the lounge (replicas of WW II), gratis and, a request for reimbursement of lost equipment by a local Fleet Reserve Unit was turned down after it was learned that Unit 60 had suffered a far greater loss but refused compensation.



# 1981 - 1990

Ed Strange was elected Commander for the next Legion year. This period was highlighted by the grand opening of the new home in September, 1990. Our list of dignitaries was so large we had to have our grand opening on two consecutive days; one for our Legion family and one for other dignitaries! Although we had set aside a modest fund (3K) for emergencies, Bingo continued as a primary source of income. The Post had a moral obligation to donate \$1,500 to the Southern Maryland Youth camp (made by Commander Ruppert prior to the fire), the decision was made to make this available in modest payments as our finances dictated.

We continued to make our annual donation to Perry Point VA Hospital from the Joe Leschinsky fund. This fund was established on May 10, 1975 by him as a 2.5K donation from his estate; the interest to be withdrawn annually and presented to the Hospital. This has continued to this date.

Next in line was Polly (Ritter) Pitzer for the years 1981-1982 and 1982-1983, our first (and



*CDR Pitzer,  
Ocean City  
Parade, 1982*



*CDR Pitzer, 1981-1983, with  
National CDR Kogutek, ADJ*

only) female Commander. The first year was highlighted by a \$365 donation to Reyes Syndrome appeal. Ride-a-bike won by the Post (Ed Welsch) who also chaired two "beauty pageants" which netted over 2.9K for Project Oasis. School awards, Law & Order and Policeman of the Year were made.

The coveted 4-Way award was given to Life Member Tom Marr by the Laurel Rotary Club, a new Chapel at Crownsville Veterans Cemetery was dedicated, May Day picnic held at Great Oaks Center, a 50<sup>th</sup> party was held at the Post and a multi-organizational sign posted on Route 1 with the Legion logo included (George Schaab). A Department Executive Committee was held at the Post who also hosted a Monte Carlo night where \$1,405 was raised for Clarence Bacon's quest for National Commander. A typewriter was donated to Post 275 for their Post Home.

During the second year of Polly's tenure a most successful Job Fair was held at the Post on November 17 and January 12. Chaired by