

Veterans remember losses

By **TERRY BURT**
Of the Tribune staff

TOMAH, Wis. — Three fewer memorial candles were needed this year to honor Wisconsin soldiers missing in action, but there also were fewer ex-prisoners of war to reverently light the flames and give a final salute to those who never returned from battle.

The remains of three Wisconsin servicemen missing in Southeast Asia were found and returned home in the past year, but 34 others from the state are still missing from the Vietnam War, which ended in 1975.

Howard Jones of Nekoosa, a former La Crosse resident and prisoner of war in Europe in 1944-45, was the featured speaker Friday at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Tomah. He recounted the events leading to his capture by the Germans in December 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge.

Jones was one of several La Crosse area men, mainly from the 106th Infantry Division, who were captured in the early days of the battle when Germany launched its last major offensive of the war.

"We were so hungry we would



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During a program Friday at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Tomah, former La Crosse resident Howard Jones recounts his experience as a prisoner of war.

eat anything in sight," Jones said of his experience.

"And that was only after three months in captivity. Think of those who were prisoners for three years or more in Japan and those who were imprisoned for seven years or more in Vietnam," he reminded an audience that consisted mostly of VA patients and staff.

With a clarity of detail that

belied the nearly 54 years that has passed since the event, Jones told of the German attack, a brave but futile resistance and then the capture of his unit near the Belgian village of St. Vith.

Of the 10 men he was with at time, two were killed and the others captured, he said.

The American prisoners were walked several miles behind the German lines before eventually

being loaded in box cars and taken to a prisoner-of-war camp.

Jerald Molnar, associate director of the medical center and master of ceremonies for the event, reminded the audience of the tremendous stress suffered by prisoners such as Jones.

"We hate the unknown,"

Molnar said. "Prisoners of war didn't know whether they would live or die in the next five minutes."

Stan Johnson, director of the medical center, said to date the remains of 502 U.S. soldiers missing in action from Southeast Asia have been found and returned to this country for burial.

However, there are still 2,600 servicemen listed as missing from that war and thousands of others from World War II and the Korean War whose remains have not been found.

"This is a day to remember that loss," Johnson said. "America owes a special debt to those who gave up their freedom to preserve ours."

About 30 former prisoners of war, all from World War II, took part in the ceremony.

With the passage of time, their numbers, too, are dwindling.

Among the local ex-POW's who died this year was Alfred "Babe" Harnish of La Crosse. Like Jones, Harnish was with the 106th Division when his unit was overrun during the Battle of the Bulge.

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