From the desk of **John Fellows**

September 22, 1994

Dear Friend of POW/MIA's;

For the past year, I have been trying without success to force an investigation of Dale Hanley of Minnesota Won't Forget POW/MIA, Inc., for reasons that should become evident in the enclosed letter to the Attorney General of Minnesota. I am sending this material to you because I have exhausted all other discreet avenues to resolve this controversy, and seek, before I end this formal effort, to lay the facts before you.

You may have been told things about fighting that went on in that organization last year. Much has been said, but little of it has come from the people who criticized Hanley. They are working people, and are not active in the Veterans community, and while they sought to deal with this controversy quietly through the Board of Directors, and later through the police and Government agencies, they took a terrible beating from people who have nothing better to do than talk on the telephone spreading their version of the facts. As a result, people who devoted years of their lives to this issue are now shunned within this community, for things they did not say or do, and for other things they did do out of concern for this cause, and the organization they had devoted so much time too.

For the past year, in addition to pleading with the Attorney General's office for help, I have been trying to get the veterans organizations to provide some kind of oversight over POW/MIA organizations. All, including the police, have declined to help, not because there has been no wrong-doing, but because nobody wants to take responsibility for enforcing it. As a result, Hanley now knows he is free to operate without fear of public interference, never having been audited (except for a few-month period when he was trying to blame the Treasurer for stolen money) and never having been investigated.

I am sure I will be denounced for this mailing to you. I have become used to it. Had I not been a family member of a missing man, I would have walked away and never looked back at this issue, but I cannot, nor can I ignore the abuse that has been encouraged toward me, and others, in the name of damage control.

You may rightly ask me why I don't simply let this matter drop. I will give you five reasons.

Reasons one and two are Dave Decker and Sandy Decker. Their commitment to this cause was total. They were at the organization office every evening and every weekend for years. As Board members of Minnesota Won't Forget POW/MIA, they formed and managed the POW marching unit and marched in every parade almost every weekend during the Summer. They staffed a merchandise booth at dozens of veterans events, and were the primary volunteers at dozens of organization events and fund-raisers. They were considered to be, and considered themselves to be, the Hanley's closest friends. But they were smeared and trashed, for asking the wrong questions. Statements were attributed to them that they did not make, and their real concerns and intentions were misrepresented to the membership solely for the purpose of making people hate them. Guided by hurt feelings more than reason, they resigned from the Board of Directors when it became painfully obvious.

Reasons three and four are Pat and Becky Hannigan. Though they had only been with the organization for little more than a year, Becky was the organization Secretary, and Pat the Treasurer. Both were at the office every day. Both received the same treatment as the Deckers. Becky and the Deckers resigned, but her mother Pat, would not, and stuck to her guns, though hopelessly outnumbered, and scorned by people who had been misled about her and would not listen to her. Pat was the first Treasurer the organization had seen other than Karen Hanley (another person had been temporarily named a figurehead Treasurer when the Board decided it was inappropriate for Karen to be Treasurer). When Pat refused to resign, Hanley knowingly and falsely blamed her for missing funds he said had been stolen from the office, seized the checking account, and proceeded to harass her until she finally did resign.

I received similar treatment. I had already resigned quietly, without giving my true reasons, before the fighting ever erupted, because, having served for two years as Chairman of the Minnesota League of POW/MIA Families, I believed that Hanley was obstructing our efforts, because we had become increasingly independent of his organization, and were getting too much attention. I came back to the Board of Minnesota Won't Forget POW/MIA at the urging of another Director who wanted my support — Dan Forby. He had raised these concerns to the other Board members, and they had been confronting Hanley with them. After convincing us to press our concerns and after provoking a confrontation, he was talked into changing sides, and worked against us behind the scenes.

Reason five is the POW/MIA family members. I resigned my position on the families' Board because Hanley had urged two women family members on the Board who are fiercely loyal to him, to attack me in order to protect him. Knowing his feelings toward the families' organization and its 10-member Board of active family members, I became concerned that the circus atmosphere that marked all of our subsequent Board meetings, would prompt these family members to stop participating. I resigned to end this controversy, by removing myself from it. Still, half the Board members later walked away, leaving a partial Board under the effective control of Hanley, who has proposed merging the organization with his own.

We may cross paths in the future because I cannot walk away from this cause, and I will continue to help others with their efforts in this behalf, if I believe they have the best interests of this cause and the families at heart. I appreciate your concern with this cause, and if you choose to continue to support the Hanleys in that effort, having read this material, you have my understanding and support. You probably believe that there should be no fighting among POW/MIA activists, that we all should work together, and you are right. If the only thing at issue here was money, I would look the other way; but I will not look the other way and allow the manipulation and abuse of dedicated volunteers and family members.

While I understand why you may feel it's right to support Hanley for the good of the cause, I hope you will understand why I will pursue him wherever he operates.

Sincerely,

John Fellows

John Fellows

From the desk of **John Fellows**

August 17, 1994

TO:
Hubert Humphrey III:
Attorney General
State of Minnesota
102 State Capitol
St Paul Mn 55155

SUBJECT: Request for Action

RE: Minnesota Won't Forget POW/MIA, Inc.

Dear Attorney General Humphrey,

The subject of men missing in the War in Vietnam has not been a popular one with the Press or public officials over the years, but when it is addressed, it invariably focuses on the families of the missing men. I suppose it is because the question of the men themselves is controversial, but the frustration and suffering of the families is apparent to everyone.

Our own government has admitted lying to the families about their loved ones during the war, and withholding information about them after the war — something that continues today. Certainly Vietnam lies to the American public, playing the families as a negotiating card, as they did during the war.

No less cruel are the individuals who exploit this issue, and manipulate the families either for money, or attention, or both. Con artists — both Asian and American, tease the widows of the men with false information, knowing they cannot chance letting their loved one down. They are pulled and twisted by people whose concern is not the family, or the missing man, but the protection and preservation of their own piece of the action — the spotlight, or the money, or both.

For the past year, I have been seeking to bring one individual to account, who I believe has abused his trust, and the family members he claims to be devoted too. I am one such family member. For nine years I have been involved with the community of family members and activists devoted to resolving this issue. For two years I served as chairman of the Minnesota League of POW/MIA Families. I have a brother missing in Laos.

On several occasions last year, I brought evidence of fiscal abuse and criminal wrongdoing to your staff, concerning the Executive Director of Minnesota Won't Forget POW/MIA, Inc, and his wife. I was one of seven Board members of that organization who saw that something was seriously wrong, and sought to do something about it. I served on that Board for six years. I was told by your staff they did not have the time to devote to such a small organization. As a result, those of us who sought your assistance were smeared and abused for questioning these two individuals, and the fiscal abuse we cited has not been investigated.

My allegations are based on the behavior of these individuals during late 1992, and 1993. In November, 1992, a month-long series of five fund-raising events — termed Month-of-Sundays — were held for Minnesota Won't Forget POW/MIA, Inc. A talent promoter provided five prominent local bands and five popular night spots and veterans posts. Minnesota Won't Forget POW/MIA, Inc., managed the events. Money was taken in from a cover charge, food sales, donations, and merchandise raffles. After each event, money was counted, and turned over to the volunteer managing the series. A member, noting that the money was not being deposited into the checking account, was told the volunteer was going to hold the money until the series was over, then present it to the organization at a meeting.

Apparently, it never happened. The promoter had estimated that $75,000.00 would be grossed. According to a subsequent Treasurer, there is no record that any money was deposited in the checking account. Fiscal affairs up to that time had been being handled by the Executive Director's wife. No accounting was given the Board of Directors, and the impression was given the Board that the fundraiser "broke even". These details were not known until many months later. All that was recognized at the time is that what was supposed to have been a lucrative fund-raiser, had been badly managed.

One month later, the Executive Director and his wife began stating there was no interest in the POW issue any more, and it would probably be necessary to close the organization's office — though the U.S. Senate investigation of the POW/MIA issue had not yet concluded, and interest in the issue was at a peak.

In late January, your office sent the organization a stop order, prohibiting any fundraising, for failing to provide financial information for 1991. Your office had sent repeated warnings for over six months. The Executive Director ignored the order, continued fundraising, and did not inform Board members or the Treasurer.

In February, Board members who worked closely with the Executive Director became concerned that he was indeed planning to close the office. He and his wife began to label office equipment as personal property — including a computer donated to the organization. A return call to him from a moving company was intercepted by a Board member. Their concern increased when they learned that the Executive Director expected to be laid off from his job in a series of layoffs beginning in March. His wife indicated they might have to leave the state to find defense work. Action by the Board members was put off because two Board members were on an extended vacation.

In April, the Executive Director, suspicious of an MIA family member on his Board, approached two women on the families' Board of Directors, and told them the family member on his board was going to accuse him of stealing, and demanded they do something about him — and they did their best to accomodate him.

Six Board members of the Minnesota Won't Forget Board signed a letter to the Executive Director expressing their concern that he appeared to be preparing to shut down the organization without consulting them. His response failed to satisfy them. Three chose to resign. Another was persuaded to change sides.

The resignations placed the remaining dissenting Board members in a minority, and no action could be taken against the Executive Director, as the remaining members had been alienated from them by the Executive Director, and refused to listen to the complaints. He had circulated a story that the dissenting Board members were accusing him of stealing, and said the accusation had caused his wife serious emotional problems. She was not seen at the office or meetings after that. The question of theft had not been raised nor suspected.

At the end of April, your office sent a letter to the Treasurer at her home, asking why they had received no response to two stop orders issued to the organization in January and April, due to the fact you had been requesting financial information for 1991, and now, 1992. The executive Director told no one of the orders, and had allowed the organization to continue fund-raising, in violation of the orders.

The Executive Director survived his company's layoffs, which ended in June.

In July, having received what we believed to be false and misleading explanations from the Executive Director, the Treasurer and I brought the subject of the stop orders before the Board of Directors, at which time we were shouted down for questioning him.

In August, the Treasurer began to make a detailed examination of organization finanancial records.

In late August, the Executive Director took approximately $4,200.00 from an organization State Fair booth, said it had been "stolen" from the organization office, and took elaborate measures to cast the blame for the "stolen" money on the Treasurer. The Treasurer was able to account for all but approximately $2,000.00, by documenting that the money had been in the possession of the Executive Director, who had used it to make large cash purchases of POW merchandise, and other associated business. In September it was disclosed that just prior to the fund-raiser, the Executive Director had made a secret trip to Bangkok, Thailand, to conduct a POW "rescue". His travel and lodging expenses were estimated at about $2,000.00, by the family member who made the arrangements.

The Executive Director seized the organization checking account, by lying to a bank officer. He installed his wife as a signer. He justified this by making false accusations of incompetence toward the treasurer, though she does similar work for a school district, for her living. He also accused her of stealing equipment from the office — equipment he knew was not missing — and intimidated her into resigning.

At this point it became apparent to us why the Executive Director had assumed he would be accused of stealing, why he had not not been concerned that the AG's office might shut the organization down, why he had been willing to smear and trash even his close friends in order to save himself, and why he was so desperate to get rid of the Treasurer.

The Executive Director may be suggesting there was a connection between his actions and his trip to Bangkok in August, 1993, but the facts suggest otherwise. Prior to his anticipated layoff, he kept two close friends informed about the details of this particular tip, and they indicate there was no information to warrant or justify such a trip; however, after he survived his layoff, he brought a circle of people into his rescue plan who had no need to know, were notoriously loose-lipped, and whose common trait appears to be their ability to provide him with political survival. More likely, the person he went to Thailand to rescue, was himself. The most revealing fact in this regard is that he ignored your stop orders in January and April, suggesting that he had no future plans for the organization, certainly no plans for a POW rescue operation.

The Board members who raised these questions reported these matters to you, and to the Burnsville Police, but neither agency would become involved. The Police agreed that the Executive Director was the primary suspect in the "Stolen" fund-raiser money, but said that since it was in his possession, it was not stolen, and the City Attorney declined to press charges. Your staff said they did not have the staff to devote to such a small organization, and said it was up to the organization's Board of Directors to police the organization.

The Board members who raised these questions about the Executive Director's actions were not the people who come to meetings once a month. They were the people who came to the office after their jobs, and worked every night and weekend, some for many years, to make this organization successful. Their reward is that their statements, concerns, and their motives have been misrepresented to the membership, to the extent that they are now shunned by the people they served for so long. The Treasurer was accused of stealing money — all to ensure that their complaints were not considered seriously.

I am asking that this organization and the individuals referred too, be investigated properly, to determine if this organization has indeed violated laws, and if it has operated in violation of its charter as a non-profit organization, as the above events seem to suggest. We know and can document that money was illegally diverted from the organization, what we do not know is how long this may have been taking place, and to what degree. Only an audit can answer this question, and even then, only to a limited degree.

Your staff has stated that it is up to the organization's Board of Directors to take such action. My response is that this Board is not sophisticated enough to understand the accounting process, or their responsibility to the organization under the law. They understand only that they have attained a sudden prominence within the organization, and are not capable, nor inclined, to seriously question its operation. I believe that the typical objective observer, informed of the facts of this matter, using common sense, will agree with me, and view your staff's response as a cop-out.

I ask specifically that you take the following actions against Minnesota Won't Forget POW/MIA, Inc.:

1. That a stop order be issued prohibiting further fundraising.

2. That a receiver be appointed to oversee the operation of the organization office and the orders of the Attorney General.

3. That an audit be conducted for the years 1992, and 1993 — the years in which the events referred to above took place. These audits should include surveys of organization suppliers during these periods, to confirm the amount of gross purchases, as the accounting has been inadequate to disclose the alleged abuse, in spite of complaints about the accounting over several years.

4. That an investigator be assigned to review our evidence, to determine if laws have indeed been broken, and that any such violations be referred to the proper authorities.

This may be a small organization, but it is a very important one to the families and to the veterans community. Long a source of controversy, it has gained increasing attention in recent years — in large part due to the extraordinary efforts of its volunteers.

You are our only hope that these individuals will be made to answer for what they have done, and seek to do. It is characteristic of white-collar crimes that few authorities want to get involved, and fewer still are qualified to understand or investigate them. You are responsible for policing this organization. On behalf of many family members and veterans, I ask that you do so.

Sincerely,

John Fellows