



Official Newsletter of the Michigan Company of Military Historians & Collectors

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2009

Open Mess

In lieu of an invitation form in this issue here is the information about our Open Mess Speaker:

Mr. Karl Gelbke, MG-42 gunner, 7th Fallschirmjaeger Div. 1945.

By now you should have received your invitation in the mail. If you need more “Reservation Forms” request them at the next meeting or by email to Jay Stone at: jaybogobblue@hotmail.com. We have tried to scan the form we have received in the mail to no avail. It becomes a blurry “photograph” and not a document.

The Open Mess cover is \$50.00 with payment by Monday, November 9, 2009. Thereafter is \$60.00. Any questions: Don Hill (616) 361-1628; Jay Stone (616) 866-9047; Mike Krushinsky (616) 677-1785

OCTOBER SPEAKER

MSGT (ret) Matt A. Zandee, son of member Paul Zandee, will be our next speaker. A 20 year USAF veteran, April, 1976 to June, 1996, Matt will relate his experiences of 20 years of service. His record should reflect what a typical enlistment entails—*Kingman Davis, XO*

MEETINGS take place the second Monday of every month at the *Radisson Hotel Grand Rapids Riverfront 270 Ann St NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 (616) 363-9001. Socializing begins at 6:00 (1800), dinner at 7:00 (1900), business meeting 7:15 (1915), and program at 8:00 (2000).*

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SEPTEMBER SPEAKER

Don Morell, WWII submariner, USS Chub (SS329), will be our September speaker. He was a motor machinist mate. Don is also on the Board of Directors of the Silversides Museum in Muskegon and will speak a few minutes about their organization.

Ho Chi Minh and the OSS



OSS Deer Team members pose with Viet Minh leaders Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap during training at Tan Trao in August 1945. Deer Team members standing, l to r, are Rene Defourneaux, (Ho), Allison Thomas, (Giap), Henry Prunier and Paul Hoagland, far right. Kneeling, left, are Lawrence Vogt and Aaron Squires. (Rene Defourneaux)

By Claude G. Berube, United States Naval Academy

OSS Deer Team members pose with Viet Minh leaders Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap during training at Tan Trao in August 1945. Deer Team members standing, l to r, are Rene Defourneaux, (Ho), Allison Thomas, (Giap), Henry Prunier and Paul Hoagland, far right. Kneeling, left, are Lawrence Vogt and Aaron Squires. (Rene Defourneaux)

In the mid-1940s, the Viet Minh, under Ho Chi Minh, looked to the West for help in its independence movement and got it.

As U.S. Army Major Allison Thomas sat down to dinner with Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap on September 15, 1945, he had one vexing question on his mind. Ho had secured power a few weeks earlier, and Thomas was preparing to leave Hanoi the next day and return stateside, his mission complete. He and a small team of Americans had been in French Indochina with Ho and Giap for two months, as part of an Office of Strategic Services (OSS) mission to train Viet Minh guerrillas and gather intelligence to use against the Japanese in the waning days of World War II. But now, after Ho's declaration of independence and Japan's surrender the previous month, the war in the Pacific was over. So was the OSS mission in Indochina. At this last dinner with his gracious hosts, Thomas decided to get right to the heart of it. So many of the reports he had filed with the OSS touched on Ho's ambiguous allegiances and intents, and Thomas had had enough. He asked Ho point-blank: Was he a Communist? Ho replied: "Yes. But we can still be friends, can't we?"

It was a startling admission. In the mid-1940s, the Viet Minh leadership, under Ho Chi Minh, looked to the West for help in its independence movement and got it. As World War II ended, the United States and its allies, most of them former colonial powers, now confronted a new problem. Independence movements were emerging all over the East. But former colonial powers had lost

their military muscle, and the Americans simply wanted to “bring the boys home.” During the war, the United States had sought any and all allies to combat the fascist powers, only to find, years later, it may have inadvertently given birth to new world leaders either through misconceptions or missed opportunities. Vietnam’s independence leader, Ho Chi Minh, had been only a relatively minor figure just a few years earlier. In 1945, Ho became the leader of a movement that would result in revolutionary tumult for decades to come.

Deer Team Meets a "Mr. Hoo"

Two months before Thomas’ farewell dinner with Ho and Giap, he and six others from Special Operations Team Number 13, code-named “Deer,” had parachuted into a jungle camp called Tan Trao, near Hanoi, with directions to proceed to the headquarters of Ho Chi Minh, whom they naively knew only as a “Mr. Hoo.” Their mission, as they understood it, was to set up a guerrilla team of 50 to 100 men to attack and interdict the railroad from Hanoi to Lang Son to prevent the Japanese from going into China. They were also to find Japanese targets such as military bases and depots, and send back to OSS agents in China whatever intelligence they could. And they were to provide weather reports for air drops and U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) operations on an as-needed basis.

Thomas had parachuted in on July 16, 1945, part of a three-man advance team that also included radio operator 1st Sgt. William Zielski and Pfc Henry Prunier, their interpreter. Not knowing who or what to expect when they reached the drop zone, Thomas and his team soon found themselves surrounded by 200 guerrilla fighters who greeted them warmly and showed them to their huts. They then met with Ho Chi Minh, who called himself “C.M. Hoo,” at his headquarters to coordinate operations with him. Thomas had no idea that Ho was a Communist, spoke Russian or had visited the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, Ho openly discussed politics with Thomas, stressing not only the abuses by the French, but also his desire to work with the French toward a solution.

In his first official report to OSS Director Archimedes L.A. Patti in Kunming, China, the following day, Thomas noted, referring to Ho: “He personally likes many French but most of his soldiers don’t.” This may have been one of Ho’s ongoing ruses to ingratiate himself with potential but temporary allies. In his mid-50s, Ho apparently thoroughly convinced the Deer Team commander of his sincerity. In an effort to further dispel OSS or U.S. government concerns about Ho, Thomas emphatically wrote in the report: “Forget the Communist Bogy. VML [Viet Minh League] is *not* Communist. Stands for freedom and reforms from French harshness.”

On July 30, the remainder of the Deer Team parachuted in, consisting of the assistant team leader, Lieutenant René Defourneaux, Staff Sgt. Lawrence R. Vogt, a weapons instructor, photographer Sergeant Aaron Squires and a medic, Pfc Paul Hoagland. Defourneaux, a French expatriate who had become a U.S. citizen, had parachuted into France earlier in the war to help the Resistance before joining the OSS.

The first person that Defourneaux met when he reached the drop zone was a “Mr. Van,” General Giap, who seemed to be in charge. Ho was not around much, but when Defourneaux saw him, his first impression was of a sick old man clearly suffering from some disease. In one of the ironies of history, the Vietnam War, at least with the Communists under Ho Chi Minh, might never have happened if the Americans hadn’t arrived when they did.

“Ho was so ill he could not move from the corner of a smoky hut,” Defourneaux said. Ho didn’t seem to have much time to live; Defourneaux heard it would not be weeks but days. “Our medic

thought it might have been dysentery, dengue fever, hepatitis,” he recalled. “While being treated by Pfc Hoagland, Ho directed his people into the jungle to search for herbs. Ho shortly recovered, attributing it to his knowledge of the jungle.”

In other reports to the OSS, Thomas had raised a number of political concerns, from Ho’s allegiances, to Indochina’s struggle with the French, Vichy, Japanese, Chinese and the British. In a July 27 report, Thomas had stated that Ho’s league was an amalgamation of all political parties that stood for liberty with “no political ideas beyond that.” Thomas added, “Ho definitely tabooed the idea that the party was communistic” since “the peasants didn’t know what the word communism or socialism meant—but they did understand liberty and independence.” He noted that it was impossible for the French to stay, nor were they welcome since the Vietnamese “hated them worse than the Japs....Ho said he would welcome a million American soldiers to come in but not any French.”

Control of French Indochina During WWII

French Indochina during World War II was a simmering cauldron of colonial powers on the decline, of colonial powers divided and other powers on the rise. Comprised largely of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, French Indochina had become in the late 19th century the “jewel in France’s crown” in Southeast Asia.

Among the several competing global, regional and internal interests in French Indochina during World War II were: Vichy France, which controlled its colony only with permission of its Japanese ally and German dominator; followed then by the French Republic, which sought to reclaim its colonial territories; the United States, which was fighting against Japan; and Japan, which sought to maintain its regional hegemony. Also involved were the warring Communists and Nationalists in China, which sought to influence the region to their south; and a variety of independence-seeking indigenous factions that all wanted to remove the yoke of any colonial or imperial power.

Vietnam itself was divided into three main regions with their own factions fighting for control: the northern Tonkin, central Annam and southern Cochinchina. French control over Indochina was challenged only when France fell to the Germans in 1940 and was divided into two governments—occupied France, and to the south the nominally neutral, German-dominated Vichy government under World War I hero Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain. Vichy retained control of most of the French overseas territories during the war, including Indochina. However, the French remaining in Indochina were less loyal to the German puppet Vichy government than they were to Pétain.

As Japan expanded into the Pacific and Asia early in World War II, it ironically found itself hamstrung by its own alliance with Nazi Germany. For, so long as both the Vichy government and Imperial Japan were tied to Germany, the French retained de facto control of Indochina, although Japan was permitted to establish military bases. As the war in the Pacific wound down, however, the Allied invasion of Normandy and liberation of Paris resulted in the fall of Vichy France in August 1944 and, with it, any claims on colonial territories.

Throughout most of World War II, the United States was finding and supporting allies in China and other Southeast Asian regions, including French Indochina, to pose a threat to the Japanese military wherever possible. With the liberation of France in 1944, the U.S. government turned to

its primary coordinator of intelligence during the war: the OSS, created in 1942 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

OSS to Ho: Work With Us Against the Japanese

At the time, the OSS was operating a base in China's wartime capital, Chungking. With the growing military complications in Indochina, Brig. Gen. William Donovan, the director of the OSS, instructed his staff to use "anyone who will work with us against the Japanese, but do not become involved in French-Indochinese politics." The Viet Minh, a liberation movement that had emerged under Ho Chi Minh in the early 1940s, was seeking not only Vietnam's independence from France, but also freedom from the Japanese occupation. In mid-1944 the OSS approached Ho to help organize an intelligence network in Indochina to help fight the Japanese and to help rescue downed American pilots. By then, "Ho had been cooperating with the Americans in propaganda activities," wrote Captain Archimedes Patti, head of the OSS base in Kunming, China, and later Hanoi.

The American association with Ho had actually begun in December 1942 when representatives of the Viet Minh approached the U.S. Embassy in China for help in securing the release of "an Annamite named Ho Chih-chi (?) [*sic*]" from a Nationalist Chinese prison, where he was being held for having invalid documents. In September 1943, when Ho was finally released, he returned to Vietnam to organize Vietnamese seeking independence. An October 1943 OSS memo proposed that the United States "use the Annamites...to immobilize large numbers of Japanese troops by conducting systematic guerrilla warfare in the difficult jungle country." The missive went on to suggest the OSS's most effective propaganda line was to "convince the Annamites that this war, if won by the Allies, will gain their independence."

As the Axis retreated in Europe, and what remained of the Vichy French government fell, Japan was no longer restrained in Indochina by its ties to Germany. The Japanese quickly made inroads into Vietnam, staging a coup d'état in March 1945 that dissolved the French government and established a puppet government. On March 11, Emperor Bao Dai proclaimed Vietnam's independence and his intent to cooperate with the Japanese. Ho Chi Minh was surprised by this development, and regarded another independence movement as a threat to the Viet Minh's. At the same time, with the Japanese coup against the French, the OSS realized it was cut off from the flow of intelligence from French Indochina to its base in Kunming, and it urged Ho to work with the United States.

"The coup has produced many new and perhaps delicate problems which will demand considerable attention," the OSS officers in China reported to headquarters. "The French are no longer in power. There are 24 million [Vietnamese] in Indochina [offering] support for the new nationalistic regime. Militarily, it calls for an alteration of military plans; we can't count on French and native troops." The Japanese did not have the military strength to defend all of Vietnam, however, and the Viet Minh began to organize themselves as the provisional government in all but the largest towns, where the Japanese had strongholds.

Also in March 1945, Viet Minh guerrillas rescued a U.S. pilot who had been shot down in Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh himself escorted the pilot back to the American forces in Kunming, where the Fourteenth Air Force was based. Rejecting an offer of a monetary reward, Ho asked only for the honor of meeting Maj. Gen. Claire Chennault, founder of China's legendary American Volunteer Group, the "Flying Tigers," and now commander of the Fourteenth Air Force. During the meeting on March 29, Chennault thanked Ho, who, after promising to help any other downed

American pilots, requested only an autographed photo of the general. Ho would later cannily show the picture to other nationalist Vietnamese factions as proof of his warm relations with—and implied support from—the Americans. At this time, few knew that Ho (whose real name was Nguyen Ai Quoc) was a long-time Communist who had been trained in the Soviet Union. Even the Office of War Information reportedly was impressed by Ho and his “English, intelligence and obvious interest in the Allied war effort.”

On April 27, Captain Patti met with Ho Chi Minh to ask him for permission to send an OSS team to work with him and the Annamites to gather intelligence on the Japanese. “Welcome, my good friend,” said Ho in greeting Patti. He agreed to work with an OSS team and asked Patti for modern weapons. Ho then set up a training camp in the jungle, at place he called Tan Trao—the former hamlet of Kimlung and the new location of Viet Minh headquarters—about 200 kilometers from Hanoi. There he prepared for the Americans’ arrival.

Deer Team Begins Training the Viet Minh

Captain Patti’s OSS group, the Deer Team, was established on May 16 and made its way from the United States to the OSS station in Kunming, where it waited two months for permission to enter French Indochina. Finally the decision was made for Major Thomas and the team’s six other members to parachute to the Tan Trao training camp in July.

Captain Patti had served with Thomas in North Africa and thought he “was a fine young officer but understandably unsophisticated in the way of international power struggles.” Thomas became quick friends with Ho and Giap at Tan Trao, often ignoring the rest of the team. Part of the team’s mission was to indicate targets for the USAAF, but Thomas spent most of his time with Ho and Giap, and even redirected USAAF targets against the Japanese based on Ho’s recommendations, in direct conflict with orders he had received from the OSS.

Defourneaux, who had assumed the alias of Raymond Douglas, the son of a Franco-American mother, to protect him from the locals, had a different experience with Ho. The leader continually probed Defourneaux and challenged his cover story, wary of him. Ho told Defourneaux he hoped the United States would handle Vietnam the way it had the Philippines. “We deserved the same treatment,” said Ho. “You should help us reach the point of independence. We are self-sufficient.” Defourneaux did not believe that Giap and Ho were “on the same wavelength,” and that Giap was doing things independently. At the time, he did not know that Giap, or “Mr. Van,” another of the OSS’s “friends of the forest,” was running an indoctrination school on communism.

As Thomas’ friendship with Giap and Ho grew, his relationship with his own men deteriorated, and Defourneaux became wary of them. Ho, and especially Giap, had “full control over our leader,” said Defourneaux. In his diary, Defourneaux wrote of Thomas: “I stay with the boys and cannot help hear their conversations. They hate him, personally I hate him more and more every day.” He said that Thomas thought Ho and Giap were simply agrarian reformers, “but Ho didn’t know how to use a shovel and Giap didn’t know how to milk a cow.”



The members of the Deer Team had to wait a couple of weeks for supply drops in early August before they could start small-arms and weapons training for the guerrilla forces. Once the arms arrived, the Americans showed the Viet Minh (most were recently civilians) how to fire the American M-1 rifle and M-1 carbine, and how to use mortars, grenades, bazookas and machine guns. For training, they used U.S. Army field manuals, and focused on guerrilla warfare.

*Deer Team members supervise small-arms training at Ho's Tan Trao jungle camp in August 1945.
(National Archives)*

Japan Surrenders and Ho Declares Vietnamese Independence...(to be continued December)

Claude G. Berube teaches at the United States Naval Academy and is the co-author with John Rodgaard of A Call to the Sea: Captain Charles Stewart of the USS Constitution.
<http://www.historynet.com/ho-chi-minh-and-the-oss.htm/print/>

Afghanistan's Tumultuous History at a glance

Despite its inhospitable terrain of mountains and deserts, Afghanistan's strategic location in the heart of central Asia has guaranteed a steady stream of invaders. During the 19th century, the British and the Russians vied for control of Himalayan mountain passes leading to India. It was during this period that Britain learned - at considerable cost -- the Afghans' reputation as fierce and hardy warriors. One hundred years later, the Soviet Union would learn the same bloody lesson before retreating in defeat.

Geography

Afghanistan is an impoverished landlocked Asian country about the size of Texas. Mountains called the Hindu Kush - up to 24,000 feet high -- and vast deserts make for sharp physical contrasts and extremes in climate. Many roads are barely passable and rivers are mostly unnavigable. Two decades of warfare, first with the Soviets and then among opposing forces within Afghanistan, have left much of the country an uninhabitable wasteland. Although the geography varies widely, much of the land is dry. Afghanistan borders six countries: China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to the north, Pakistan to the south and east, and Iran to the west.



The People

The population of Afghanistan is believed to be around 26 million. About 6 million people are believed to have fled the country because of famine and civil war. According to the most recent data available, grinding poverty has slashed life expectancy to around 45 years for both men and women.

The three main ethnic groups are the Pashtuns, also called Pathans, Tajiks and Hazaras. Pashtuns make up 38 percent of the population, Tajiks 25 percent and Hazaras 19 percent. The Pashtuns are mainly in the central, southern and eastern part of the country, and the Tajiks are in the northeast and around Kabul and Herat. The Hazara tribe traces its origin to Mongolia and dominates the central mountain regions. Pashto, Afghan Persian and

various Turkic languages -- mainly Uzbek and Turkmen -- are the country's principal languages. More than 80 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim, while the remainder is Shiite Muslim.

Early years

The geographical area of present-day Afghanistan appears in Western accounts in 328 B.C. following the conquests of Alexander the Great, who seized the land from the Persian Empire. During succeeding centuries the area was occupied by the Scythians, White Huns and Turks. Arab invaders introduced Islam to the area in 642 A.D. Eventually it settled into a collection of independent communities.

The Great Game

Towards the middle of the 19th Century, Imperial Britain and Czarist Russia maneuvered for power among the kingdoms and caliphates of Central Asia. Their actions -- a combination of exploration, alliances, and military moves and feints -- became known to British players as "The Great Game."

Hoping to thwart Russian incursions into Central Asia -- and protect the "jewel of the crown" - India -- Britain moved into Kabul in 1839. Two years later a British envoy was killed by a mob and the British garrison retreated toward what is now Pakistan after it was assured of its safety. But ambushes and massacres by Afghan warlords obliterated the garrison of 4,500 soldiers and 12,000 civilians, leaving only one survivor. Britain retaliated and warfare raged until 1842. After a second Anglo-Afghan war, from 1878 to 1880, London put its own candidate, Amir Abdur Rahman, on the Afghan throne. During this time, the British and Russians officially established the boundaries of what would become modern Afghanistan.



Early 20th Century

King Abdur Rahman remained neutral during World War I, angering many of his subjects who wanted him to join the Axis coalition. After the assassination in 1919 of Habibullah, Rahman's son and successor, a third son, Amanullah, launched the Third Anglo-Afghan war. Britain, exhausted from World War I, relinquished its control over Afghan foreign affairs by signing the Treaty of Rawalpindi in August 1919.



Reform and response

King Amanullah (1919-29) introduced several reforms such as the abolition of the traditional Muslim veil for women and the opening of a number of coeducational schools. The move alienated many tribal and religious leaders. Amanullah was abducted in January 1929 after Kabul was captured by a rival political group of ethnic Tajiks. The throne passed through several hands before Zahir Shah assumed power in 1933. He served as the king of Kabul for four decades.

Daud Khan

King Zahir Shah and his prime minister, Shah Mahmud, promoted elections and a free press, and increased Afghanistan's involvement in foreign relations. However, Lt. Gen. Mohammad Daud Khan seized power in 1953. Daud Khan turned to the Soviet Union for economic and military assistance, while somehow maintaining a position of neutrality during the Cold War. During his 1953-63 tenure, Daud Khan also introduced several far-reaching educational and social reforms, such as the practice of secluding women in private places. Disagreements over the Afghani-Pakistan border in 1961 led to Daud's resignation in 1963.



Reform and revolt

The National Assembly approved a new constitution in 1964 providing for a two-chamber legislature to which the people, King Zahir Shah and provincial assemblies each appointed one-third of the deputies. The elections of 1965 and 1969 yielded strong showings from both Islamic fundamentalists and the communist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. But Zahir Shah refused to enforce the constitution, and political instability grew.

On July 17, 1973, former Prime Minister Daud Khan seized power with the help of leftist military officers. Daud Khan introduced socio-economic reforms, but poverty compounded by widespread government repression provided seeds for a growing leftist coalition. A coup in April 1978 led to the death of Daud Khan and the rise of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Nur Muhammad Taraki, secretary general of the party, became prime minister.

Enter the Soviets

After signing a bilateral treaty with Moscow in December 1978, Soviet money and military assistance poured into Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the People's Democratic Party introduced decrees on land reform, the abolition of usury and changes in marriage customs. The new laws alienated the Kabul-based government from the Islamic traditions of the countryside. To combat insurgency, the People's Democratic Party imprisoned members of the religious establishment as well as the Kabul intelligentsia. The crisis triggered armed revolt in the countryside, where ethnic leaders and conservative Islamic mullahs led protests. As dissatisfaction with the government grew, the People's Democratic Party found itself increasingly reliant on Soviet aid.



Coup and invasion

After a palace shootout, Hafizullah Amin, a former prime minister and representative of a competing leftist faction, seized power from Taraki in September 1979. Meanwhile, revolts in the countryside continued unabated. A month after the coup, Amin refused to accept Soviet advice on consolidating his power in rural areas.

On Dec. 24, 1979, Soviet airborne troops landed in Kabul under the pretext of conducting field exercises. Two days later, the invading forces killed Amin and recognized Babrak Karmal as the prime minister. A massive Soviet ground invasion from the north followed on Dec. 27.



The Mujahedeen

Although backed by 120,000 Soviet troops, the Karmal regime failed to establish authority outside Kabul. The presence of non-Islamic troops in Afghanistan galvanized resistance as men from throughout the Muslim world flocked to battle Moscow's forces. The resistance fighters, known as the Mujahedeen, received substantial support in the form of weapons and training from the United States, along with Britain, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Exit the Soviets, enter chaos

Unceasing Afghan resistance brought the Soviet Union to the bargaining table. The Geneva Accords, signed in 1988, created a timetable guaranteeing full Soviet withdrawal by Feb. 15, 1989. About 14,500 Soviets and an estimated 1 million Afghans lost their lives between 1979 and the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Because the mujahedeen were not involved in negotiations, the pullout left a power vacuum in Afghanistan.



The rise and fall of the Taliban

After the Soviets pulled out, the united front against Moscow collapsed. Various mujahedeen factions fought among themselves to take over Kabul, which led to the rise of the fundamentalist Islamic Taliban movement. The Taliban finally gained control over Kabul in 1996 and

controlled as much as 90 percent of Afghanistan until the United States unleashed a military assault on Oct. 7, 2001, targeting alleged terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden, whom the Taliban had protected.

After the fall of the Taliban, the U.S.-led coalition forces and the Northern Alliance defeated Taliban fighters and Hamid Karzai became interim president.

After the Taliban

Under a U.N.-backed agreement, an interim administration under the leadership of Hamid Karzai took over Afghanistan in December 2001. Three years later, after two 'loya jirga' or grand council meetings of Afghan elders and an election on Oct. 9, 2004, Karzai was sworn in as the country's first popularly elected president for a five-year term.

The editorial opinions and articles in The Cannon Report do not represent any official position of the Michigan Company of Military Historians and Collectors (MCMH&C) only the various neuroses of the editor. The MCMH&C is a non-partisan, non-ideological association. All members are welcome to submit material, letters, "for the good of the company items", etc. **MEETINGS** take place the second Monday of every month at (Socializing begins at 6:00p.m. followed by business meeting and dinner 7:00p.m., and program at 8:00 at **Radisson Hotel Grand Rapids Riverfront** 270 Ann St NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 (616) 363-9001