 The Beginning - 1898 - 1899



When Johnny came marching home after the Spanish American War, he did not receive quite the hero's welcome he expected.

Many Spanish American War veterans were mustered out of the service far from home and left to find their own transportation back. Most arrived home virtually penniless only to discover that their hero status was no help in finding employment. Often the jobs they had given up when they answered the president's call for volunteers had been taken by men who had stayed safely at home.

Treatment of veterans who were sick or wounded was especially shoddy. Even the most severely disabled veterans were denied hospital care or medications. Nor were there any government programs to help returnees rehabilitate themselves so that they could resume their places in society. They were given two months' pay (\$31.20 for a private), discharged, and sent home to their families.

Many veterans were embittered by the treatment they received. They had won property in two oceans, and, in the process, new-found status as a world power for the United States. The federal government now had an annual surplus of \$46 million in revenue over expenditures and surely could have spared the funds to aid its needy war veterans. And yet, all the country offered veterans in return for their services was pain, sorrow, and an early grave. The war had caused no visible damage to property inside our borders, so it was difficult for officials and citizens to see the need to spend more money on a war that was officially over.

Politicians were not the only ones to turn their backs on the Spanish American War veterans. The two major organizations for Civil War

veterans also rebuffed the nation's newest veterans. Both the North's Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) and the South's United Confederate Veterans (UCV) refused them a place in their ranks. This refusal to admit new blood was the same shortsightedness that brought about the demise of every previous veteran's organization.

With no organization to plead their cause, the veterans were left to protest their treatment on their own. For more than a year the cries of the lone veteran went unheeded. Then, within the space of several months, the seeds of a solution were planted in two locations - one to the east of the Mississippi River and one to the west. In both Columbus, Ohio, and Denver, Colorado, veterans began to band together to jointly attack their problems. Like the war with Spain, the veterans fight for better treatment from their government would now be conducted on two fronts.

The East

American troops in the Eastern theater - in Cuba - were the first to cease fighting the Spanish and return home. The 17th Infantry Regiment was one of the first troops to come home. Following its return from Cuba, the 17th spent the next few months replacing both men and equipment. Once the regiment was back up to strength, it was shipped to the Philippines to replace a unit of volunteers. First, though, men who were sick or wounded were given two months' pay and discharged. No allowances were made for medication, hospital care, food, or transportation home. Since they were of no further use to the Army or the government, the men became the problem of Columbus, Ohio, their own hometowns or their families.

Among the first to grapple with the problems of these disabled soldiers was a small group of their former comrades. Unlike most members of the 17th Infantry Regiment, these compassionate men were not career soldiers, but had been discharged upon their return to Columbus because their terms of enlistment had expired. It was their hope that they could help their less fortunate comrades by founding a veteran's organization.

Thirteen former members of the 17th Infantry Regiment combined their efforts to make this dream a reality. Of these thirteen, two men stood out as the leaders: James C. Putnam and James Romanis. Both men had been discharged as privates. They also shared a recent and firsthand knowledge of the horrors of war, a deep compassion for their fellow man, and the willingness to work to rectify what they saw as unfair treatment of veterans of the Spanish American War. Perhaps it was because Romanis and Putnam each worked toward their common goal

from different perspectives that they ultimately succeeded. No veteran's organization before theirs had ever survived its generation. The rules and practices that gave their organization its longevity did not even exist at its inception. Instead, they grew out of the beliefs and determination of its founders - and out of the founders' feeling there was no equal to the bonds of loyalty forged between men in the crucible of war. Romanis and Putnam succeeded not by strengthening or changing these bonds, but by utilizing them for the common good.

On September 29, 1899, James Romanis called the first meeting. His intention was to form an association for mutual benefit in getting pensions, claims, etc., the help the men of the 17th Infantry. During the meeting, someone suggested that the association's membership should be drawn only from this regiment. But Putnam reminded them that this limiting idea has sounded the death knell for other organizations. He suggested that they find a way to make their association endure forever, so that it would be "evergreen." A motion was made to allow men who had served honorable in any overseas outfit during the Spanish American War to join. It passed without a dissenting vote. Further discussion eventually broadened the right to membership to everyone who had been awarded a Campaign Medal by our government for service in any war or conflict. The scope of this motion would allow survivors of the 1846 war with Mexico to join if they so desired. More important, its passage ensured the association's longevity by granting the right to membership to those who qualified in any future war. The association would be "evergreen."

A second meeting was scheduled for October 7, 1899. Several other decisions reached that night would greatly influence the future of the organization.

The first was that all members of the American Veterans of Foreign Service (AVFS) would be considered equals. After all, they were an organization of previous military men, with the key word being "previous." No allowance was made for special treatment of those who had held superior rank during their previous service. This decision was understandable, considering that of the original thirteen who met, only one had been an officer. Until the founding of the Vietnam Veterans of America some seventy years later, it would be the only major veteran's organization founded by enlisted men.

The second decision was to prepare for anticipated future expansion. To properly channel this hoped-for growth, a provision was made for the formation of additional units. They would be administered locally and be called "camps." The unit they had just founded in Columbus would be known as "Headquarters Camp Number One." All of the

Columbus officers would hold dual positions, serving in national as well as local capacities.

The final noteworthy decision reached that night was to acquire a logo or emblem so that their deeds would not be forgotten with the passage of time. After some discussion, they settled on the Cross of Malta, the emblem which had decorated the banners of the Order of the Knights of St. John during the Crusades. The order had been famous for caring for its wounded comrades, a fact which was not lost on the American Veterans of Foreign Service.

Once the organization's foundation had been laid, its members moved rapidly to obtain national stature for their group. On the incorporation application, the principal business location of the corporation was listed as Columbus, Franklin County, Ohio. The purpose for which the corporation had been formed was given as, "For social enjoyment of the membership of said association and their families and friends. The promotion of the mutual interests of all such and more especially to preserve the reminiscences of the camps and field beyond the borders of our native land" The charter was granted on October 10, 1899, just days after the organization's second meeting. Within a few weeks, new camps were formed in Cincinnati, Hamilton, Marysville, Delaware, and Marion, Ohio; and in Sparta, Illinois, and Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

The West

The First Colorado Voluntary Infantry Regiment returned to San Francisco, where the regiment was mustered out September 8, 1899. So proud of their soldiers were the people of Denver that they ignored the usual policy of leaving men who had "mustered out" to find their own way home from the mustering-out point. By public subscription of funds, they hired a special train to transport the men home to Denver. On September 14th, the soldiers were greeted by 75,000 citizens of their capital city. After a joyous parade and stirring speeches of appreciation for the job the First had done in the Philippines, General Irving Hale ordered his men to fall out for the last time.

Problems began almost immediately for the former members of the First. Like their eastern counterparts, many discovered that the jobs they had held before the war had been taken by others. And those who were unable to work because of disease or crippling wounds belatedly found they had no prospects of rehabilitation or financial assistance from the federal government. Veterans' employment woes were further increased by the depression that gripped the nation. Not only had their old jobs been taken by others, but new ones were almost nonexistent.

A born leader, Irving Hale was a man of tremendous energy and vision. His enthusiasm and loyalty toward his home state and the men who had served under his command made him a natural selection to lead many civic and organizational projects. After the First was disbanded, Hale kept in contact with his men. He talked to those he met on the streets and visited some of them in their homes. What he encountered touched him deeply. It seemed especially unjust to him that men who had suffered during wartime service were now destined by an uncaring government for further suffering and starvation. Hale helped many veterans from his personal funds. He soon became convinced, however, that the only way to right all the wrongs being imposed upon his returning veterans was to form an association.

On November 18th and 23rd, 1899, Hale and other former officers from the First discussed the possibility of forming a veteran's association. General Hale, acting as temporary chairman, appointed a committee to draft a constitution. Another meeting was held on December 12th. Twenty-eight men attended this meeting. The committee which was appointed to draft a constitution, Henry Lippincott, Charles H. Anderson, and Charles B. Lewis presented their report. They all reported in favor on an "immediate formation of a permanent organization of officers and enlisted men, comprising the land forces of the United States who served honorable in the distant Philippines, to sustain the honor and supremacy of our beloved flag, and having for its objects: The perpetuation of the memory of the achievements of the participants in this striking and unique epoch of our country's history; the perpetuation of the memories of our departed companions in arms, many of whom are now sleeping their last sleep under the palms of the tropics, or in the sand of the deep seas; to cement and strengthen the bonds of friendship formed in camp and bivouac, on long lonely voyages to the Orient, in the trenches and on lonely outposts, in skirmish and battle among rice ridges and swamps of the Philippine Islands; to collect and preserve the relics, records, books and other historical data relating to the Spanish-American War and maintain and foster true patriotism and love of our country and its institutions." This report was unanimously adopted and parts of were later used in other statements of the organization's philosophy.

The adoption of the committee's report was followed by the election of Hale as President and Frank Noble as Secretary. They were charged with contacting all former commanding officers or regiments that had comprised the Eighth Army to suggest they form local units. If all went according to plan, the units would be merged into a single association at the reunion in Denver the next year. The name the former men of the First chose for their new association was the "Colorado Society of the Army of the Philippines."

Former Lt. Colonel Henry Lippincott, who had served as Deputy Surgeon General of the United States Army and Chief Surgeon of the Pacific and Eighth Army Corps, maintained that the government should furnish medical care for those who needed it and provide pensions for veterans unable to support themselves and their families due to service-connected disabilities. Since their jobs had been taken by men who did not fight in America's war with Spain, they felt that those who did fight should be considered first for federal jobs. General Hale told the assembled group that he favored forming a separate association from the one they had just founded to help them press the government for assistance.

A roster of membership for the Colorado Society of the Army of the Pacific was started at this meeting. Each man signed only his name with no reference to past rank. The paper on which each man signed his name also carried the principles of the association. "We, the undersigned, agree to form an organization to be of mutual aid to our comrades and to perpetuate the memory of those who died in the service of their country and to keep alive the glorious deeds of bravery and courage performed in field of war. This organization will be non-political." (By "non-political," they meant that the organization would not favor one political party, not that it would stay out of politics entirely. They certainly did not want to rule out the possibility that their group could and would replace the Grand Army of the Republic as a political power).

While many of the initial goals of the Colorado Society of the Army of the Philippines were similar to those of the American Veterans of Foreign Service, there were two important differences between the groups. First as the name of the Army of the Philippines suggests, membership in the society was open only to veterans from one branch of service, the Army. This automatically excluded personnel of the Navy and Marine Corps. Second, it restricted eligibility to those who had served in the Philippine Theater of War and only in the Spanish American War. If these rules were left standing, the Society, like all previous veteran's organizations, would die out with its generation.

In time, the Colorado Society of the Army of the Philippines would not only adopt innovative membership rules that would assure its longevity, but it would also merge with the organization that first formulated those new rules - the American Veterans of Foreign Service. Together, these two organizations would form the nucleus of the present-day Veterans of Foreign Wars.



The Early Years - 1900 - 1913



As could be expected, the new century started off with much activity. In the United States, the Spanish American War veterans worked on building harmony, not discord. In the space of thirteen years, the American Veterans of Foreign Service, the Colorado Society Army of the Philippines, and three newer veteran's organizations would all resolve their differences and merge into one association. United under the name of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United

States, these veterans would go on to jointly pursue their dream of better treatment of all American veterans.

The watchword in the creation of the VFW was one sorely lacking in European politics of the day - compromise. Before the major reorganization of five veteran's organizations into one could take place, several minor mergers and changes in organizational structure had to occur. Thousands of members of the existing organizations also had to concede that one large national organization could serve their interests better than the more specialized, but smaller ones to which they already belonged.

The East

From the first meeting of the American Veterans of Foreign Service, it was evident that its founders had far more than a local society in mind. But although their enthusiasm and aspirations were great, their planning often did not keep pace with their ideas. It took the pragmatism of Jim Romanis to turn the ideas into reality.

Several weeks before the encampment of 1904, Romanis persuaded a group of Spanish American War veterans based in Pennsylvania to send a representative to the AVFS's encampment. This veterans group,

which was coincidentally also known as the American Veterans of Foreign Service, had responded by sending their National Junior Vice Commander, Dr. George Metzger. When he appeared before the assembled delegates in Columbus, Metzger made an unexpected proposal. He suggested that the Columbus officers attend his group's National Encampment the following week in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, for the purpose of discussing a possible merger of the two veteran's groups. Without hesitation, the delegates voted to send their President, James Romanis, and empowered him to take any action he felt necessary to expedite the merger. The merger eventually happened in 1905.

After the 1905 merger, it was quite some time before the AVFS once again made headlines. From 1905 to 1908, the organization worked mainly on structuring and consolidating this newly merged, larger group. The group grew both in political power membership. In 1910 an AVFS membership report showed thirty-four posts in good standing with approximately 1,200 members.

The West

General Irving Hale, president of the infant Colorado Society Army of the Philippines, dreamed of building a national veteran's organization that would rival the FAR in size and power. This was a dream he shared with Jim Romanis, cofounder of the American Veterans of Foreign Service. But unlike his Eastern Counterpart, whose dream was clouded only by minor procedural problems in getting his organization up and running, Hale needed to overcome two major obstacles - one natural, one man-made - that stood in the way of his goal.

Geographical factors presented the first stumbling block to growth of the Army of the Philippines. The East had many more towns large enough to support a camp, and veterans who lived outside of town had less distance to travel to camp meetings. To complicate matters, cowboys, sheep herders, and men who worked in the mining camps out west were continually moving about.

The second hindrance to recruitment of new members was one that the Army of the Philippines had imposed on itself: its restriction of membership to men who had served in one theater of one war.

Thanks to Hale's outreach efforts, almost one thousand Philippine veterans, representing nineteen military units of the Eighth Army, attended the reunion in Denver on August 13, 1900. They came from Colorado, Utah, Oregon, Iowa, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and all of the western states. In the business session, a constitution and bylaws were

swiftly adopted for the national body. So too was a name for the organization: "The National Association of the Army of the Philippines." Although General Hale was the most popular and logical candidate to head the national association, he was not elected as president. Instead the honor went to General Francis V. Greene of New York City. Historians believe he was elected to help attract more veterans from the East as members. Even with an Easterner at its helm, the Society found its recruiting efforts hampered by the requirement that members must have served in the Philippines.

Many attempts were made to merge with other veterans organizations, but up till now, all were voted down. At the 1912 reunion in Lincoln, Nebraska, several representatives from the AVFS who were in attendance suggested a merger of the two organizations. The Army of the Philippines promptly invited these members to attend the next year's reunion in Denver to discuss the possibility further.

In fact, the entire AVFS National Encampment would end up meeting with the Army of the Philippines in Denver, thanks to the scheming of one man. That man, Gus Hartung, was the commander of the Denver-based John S. Stewart Camp of the Army of the Philippines. During the 1912 reunion, he proposed that the next reunion of the Army of the Philippines be held in Denver, and the delegates agreed. After the possibility of a merger was raised, Hartung contacted Robert Woodside, Commander-in-Chief of the AVFS and suggested that the AVFS, too, hold its next convention in Denver. When Woodside accepted, the way was paved for the joint meeting of 1913.

The convention opened with both groups meeting separately. Each group had a certain amount of old business to handle, and undoubtedly wanted to discuss in private what they would and would not concede in a merger. While rivalry between the groups arose in part from local pride in their unit's "feats of arms," the main dissension came over choosing a name for the new group. Because of the heated discussions and lingering resentment over issues that had passed despite objections from substantial minorities, the delegates postponed most organizational changes to a later meeting or left them to the newly elected officers to make. One major change, however, was silently approved when the Army of the Philippines agreed to merge. It was also decided that the new association would go by the name of "Army of the Philippines, Cuba and Puerto Rico" until a referendum could be held and a name be chosen by a vote of all members and all posts. Henceforth, membership in both groups would be open not just to veterans of the Philippine Campaign, but to veterans who served honorably in any war on foreign soil.

There were many who were not satisfied with the merger. In many camps, the legality of the merger topped the list of the most discussed items. In an attempt to take charge of the situation, on September 12, 1913, Commander-in-Chief Rice Means issued General Order Number One. In it, Means appealed to the members' loyalty and patriotism in asking them to set aside their dissatisfaction with the merger. He also announced that local units would henceforth be known as "posts" rather than "camps." Several camps on both sides of the Mississippi continued to protest the merger.

In February 1914, Commander-in-Chief Rice Means sent all posts a message suggesting that they agree on a name that was so comprehensive that every veteran would realize that this new organization was not like any other previous veteran's organizations. This one would not die out with the founding generation, but would be available to veterans as long as the United States was forced to fight wars. Official approval of the selected name was later given at the 1914 Convention in Pittsburgh. This approval, coupled with the adoption of the constitution, made that convention the first annual convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.



The Learning Years - 1914 - 1929



For an organization to remain progressive, it must continually change with the times. It must constantly assess the needs and problems of its members and adjust its goals to address those problems. In the first fifteen years after the VFW's founding, its members did not lack for goals. But as yet, its members did not have the experience or knowledge that would enable them to successfully achieve all their goals.

During this period, the VFW's goals focused primarily on the needs of two important groups - present-day veterans and their families, and servicemen who would be the nation's future veterans. For the benefit of the first group, the VFW advocated for veterans' entitlements such as job preference, vocational rehabilitation and training, pensions for disabled veterans and families of deceased veterans, and medical care for veterans with service-connected disabilities. For the benefit of the second group, the VFW worked for reforms in military preparedness to ensure that our armed forces would never again be sent into combat as poorly trained and equipped as were the troops of the Spanish American War. No organization had ever before dared to challenge the government's stance on recruiting, training, and equipping its servicemen. And although the VFW's early cries on the subject of preparedness were largely ignored, the VFW never relinquished its goal. Eventually the VFW would make up for what it lacked in experience with stamina and determination. During these learning years, many of the victories the VFW won were small. Many of its attempts to secure what it deemed fair treatment for the nation's veterans failed. Yet in each attempt, there was a victory. The victory was learning that the VFW could influence legislation on behalf of its veterans.

Thomas Crago, United States Congressman from Pennsylvania, was elected VFW Commander-in-Chief in 1914, and was responsible for what is recognized as the greatest VFW victory of that time; the pension bill which provided for the widows of Spanish War Veterans, which he authored and defended on the floor of the House. Through

Crago and others like him, the organization learned how and when to apply its influence to gain the legislation necessary to accomplish its goals. In the near future, these hard-learned lessons would serve well both the VFW and a much larger group of veterans.

In 1915, the nation's need to prepare for war was palpable to the VFW. True, President Woodrow Wilson had vowed to keep the United States out of war, but all over the world, events appeared to be drawing the United States inexorable closer to war. As if the members of the VFW needed any further evidence that a war was on the horizon, President Wilson issued a call for men to serve on the Mexican border. Because many VFW members responded, quite a few familiar faces were missing from the National Encampment in 1915. From the moment the National Encampment was gavelled to order in Detroit on August 16, much of the talk centered on the need for preparedness. According to the Detroit News Tribune, one of the first practical suggestions was offered by W.S. Voorsanger, a member from Pittsburgh. Voorsanger proposed a plan to create an "adequate veteran reserve" by "securing the enlistment in such reserve of several hundred thousand veterans of the campaigns of the last two decades." Although this suggestion was never adopted on a national level, many departments supplied their states with men who performed some of the duties a reserve corps might have provided. These men patrolled sea coasts and national boundaries and investigated and reported suspected subversive groups and saboteurs.

On April 6, 1917, at President Wilson's urging, Congress declared war on Germany. Over the next eighteen months, the VFW would prove many times over that it had meant what it said when it promised President Wilson "the united support of the members of this organization, in any crisis that may arise." America's declaration of war galvanized the VFW into action. More than 60 percent of its members decided to make the supreme contribution to their country's war efforts by going back into uniform. Those still at home channeled their efforts into four main areas: helping to win the war, fighting for entitlements for the veterans-to-be, advocating for the needs of servicemen's families, and recruiting new members. Perhaps the VFW's most valuable assistance toward winning the war was in recruiting.

Besides helping to register men for the draft, VFW posts helped with recruitment in other ways. Putting into action an idea first proposed at the 1915 National Encampment, the posts in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, organized a Veteran Reserve Corps to take over when the National Guard of that state was ordered overseas. To keep up the morale of the servicemen they had helped to recruit, many posts inaugurated a special "Vets to Vets" letter program. Through this

program, posts tried to target men from their hometown who didn't receive mail from home. One last "direct support" service the VFW offered the armed forces during the war was to help the military overcome its shortcomings in equipment. Despite the VFW's continuous pleading with the federal government in past years for the maintenance of an up-to-date and well-equipped military organization, its advice had mostly fallen on deaf ears. As a result, the armed forces were thrust into another war almost as ill equipped as they had been during the Spanish American War. In 1917, the entire VFW National Encampment got into the act of raising money for much-needed equipment. The delegates and others attending the meetings sold pencils on the streets of New York City - the host city - in one of the nation's earliest street-sales fund-raisers. With the proceeds, the VFW purchased two ambulances for donation to the U.S. Army.

At the same time the members of the VFW were throwing themselves into the war effort, they were also looking ahead to the day when the troops now fighting the "War to End War" would be veterans. The veterans of 1898 knew from personal experience of the "war's over" apathy of the public; they knew they could not wait until the boys came home to secure for them the entitlements they had earned. Armed with this knowledge, they constantly reminded the government and politicians of their promises. On a national level, the VFW worked to secure some form of insurance against disability or loss of life for service members. On September 2, 1915, Congress had approved an act which covered losses or damage suffered by our Merchant Marine or commercial companies due to actions of warring European nations. This War Risk Insurance Act, however, did not extend to members of the armed forces or to naval ships and their cargo. Finally, after years of prodding from the VFW, the government expanded the act's coverage. Shortly after war was declared, Congress approved the new War Insurance Act, and in October 1917, an addition to it in the form of medical insurance for servicemen. This new system was pronounced by its originators to be "modern, scientific, complete and free from all deficits of the old Pension System." Unfortunately, the act's provisions were not handled expediently or efficiently. As a result, the act was amended eight times, then finally repealed in 1924.

If the War Insurance Act was ultimately disappointing, another entitlement the VFW succeeded in winning was not. The enactment of Public Law 178 in 1918 marked the achievement of a major VFW objective. With this act, the federal government finally conceded the need for vocational training for disabled veterans who required special training for complete rehabilitation. Before this time, the returning disabled veteran had been discharged and made to fend for himself. Even if his previous employment had been as a stevedore or

steeplejack, as far as the government was concerned, the loss of one or both legs was not a problem. Under Public Law 178, he would be trained at special centers to qualify for employment where his loss would present less of an obstacle. He would be reeducated to cope in a different environment and receive financial assistance for himself and his dependents.

In June 1920, the VFW was finally awarded the Widows and Orphans Pension Bill which gave widows of veterans of the Spanish American War and the Philippine Insurrection \$12 a month plus an additional \$2 for each child.

While the VFW was working on behalf of veterans' families, many of these families were themselves taking an active role in veterans' affairs. At the organizational meeting in 1914, the VFW had approved the formation of a national Ladies Auxiliary.

From the start of World War I, the VFW left no doubt that it seriously intended to become an organization for veterans of all wars, not just veterans of the Spanish American War. It worked to secure entitlements for all veterans, to obtain pensions for all veterans' families, and - most important to its future survival - to recruit veterans from all wars as members.

One of the committees established to handle claims against the War Risk Insurance Act and Vocational Training Bureau evolved into a permanent Washington office known as the National Service Bureau. With the establishment of this bureau, the VFW became the first veteran's organization to maintain a permanent office in the nation's capital.

As another result of its tremendous growth in membership, the VFW found it necessary to establish a level of leadership and authority midway between the national and local levels. At the 1920 Encampment in Washington, D.D., the delegates adopted a new set of bylaws that provided that all posts within each state be organized into a department. This department would be headed by a state commander elected by a delegate from those posts. The new arrangement would improve communication between the posts in each state and enable posts within a state to use their clout jointly when necessary.

From its inception, the VFW had taken it for granted that veterans should, by law, be entitled to certain benefits. But the federal government did not officially acknowledge this self-evident truth until the 1920's. In that decade, the government took several actions that signaled it was finally ready to take veterans' entitlements seriously.

First on August 9, 1921, the government transferred administration of veterans' entitlements from the Treasury Department to a separate Veterans Bureau. This move, made after several years of pleading from the VFW, meant that for the first time there were government officials whose job was to focus full time on veterans' problems.

The second way the federal government officially recognized the needs of veterans was by forming Veterans Affairs Committees in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.



The Retrenchment Years - 1930 - 1940



Unlike many countries, the United States has no "military class". Its armed forces are made up of civilians who choose - or are chosen- to join one of the services, and who can elect to serve for a short period of time or a lifetime career. Once a serviceman's membership in the armed forces ends, he automatically returns to his former status as a civilian. Unless he

is rich, his life will be affected by the same economic winds that affect the lives of other citizens. Hard times will be equally hard for him, and may even be harder if he sustained injuries or health problems while in the military.

Toward the end of 1929, the economic winds that had previously swept veterans and non-veterans alike into an era of unparalleled prosperity shifted their direction cruelly. Beginning in late October 1929, almost every citizen in the country had felt the deadly effects of the depression precipitated ;by the crash of the stock market.

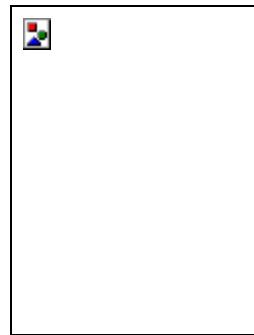
In the early years of the depression, the VFW's overriding concern was to obtain some quick financial relief for the nation's veterans. The VFW fixed on payment of a cash bonus for wartime service as the surest means to this end. In 1924, the government had granted World War I veterans "bonus" certificates that would be redeemable for cash in twenty years. At the time, the VFW had argued that it was senseless to promise a starving man that he would get money for food two decades later. Now the VFW stepped up its efforts to persuade the government to redeem the certificates early.

In 1932, the VFW's bonus campaign suddenly took on a new urgency. Early that summer, Congress passed Public Law 212, a measure that would slash veterans' entitlements to the bone. It now appeared that unless payment of the cash bonus was authorized, most veterans would receive no government assistance whatsoever for the duration of the

depression.

One factor that complicated and prolonged the campaign for the cash bonus was the lack of cohesion among the three major veteran's organizations: the VFW, the American Legion, and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV). Whether because of disagreements as to which organization should lead the campaign or differences in opinion about what veterans were entitled to, the three groups found it nearly impossible to agree on a course of action. Finally, in 1935, the DAV and the American legion both joined the VFW in an all-out effort to push for the passage of Congressman Wright Patman's version of the bonus bill. That year, the Patman Bill passed both houses of Congress, but was vetoed by President Roosevelt. Subsequently, the Senate failed by nine votes to override the veto.

The following session, Congress was presented with a slightly different version of the bonus bill: the Patman-Vinson-McCormack Bill. On January 27, 1936, the Senate passed the Patman-Vinson-McCormack Bill over a presidential veto. Under the new law, nearly three and a half million veterans were eligible for almost two billion dollars worth of Adjusted Service Bonds. These bonds, which were immediately redeemable, were available to World War I veterans who qualified by August 1936. On January 28th and 29th, thousands of veterans were lined up outside VFW posts to obtain and fill out the applications.



Delivery of most of the bonds was completed by August 1st that year.

Although the cash bonus and the nullification of the Economy Act are remembered as two of the VFW's greatest victories, it fought other legislative battles during that same period.

For example, the VFW successfully sponsored the Disability Allowance of 1930. In 1940, their efforts were rewarded when Congress passed Public Law 868, which granted \$20 million for the construction of veterans' hospitals.

Although the VFW's main priority during this period was, as always, to assist veterans and their families, the organization also threw itself into community service. Throughout the depression, posts all over the United States initiated programs to help the needy. VFW members collected and distributed food and served free meals at Post Homes..

As part of its community service, the VFW also started several youth programs. In 1937, borrowing a concept developed by the Department of Minnesota, it introduced a nationwide program to teach bicycle

safety. This program was operated with the cooperation of local and state police. About the same time, the organization also received the exclusive right, from the Amateur Softball Association of America, to sponsor Junior Softball Tournaments throughout the country. In addition, the VFW established two programs for the children of its members - the Sons of the VFW, authorized by the 1934 National Encampment, and the Daughters of the VFW, authorized the following year.

In 1935, the VFW again went on record as backing peace for the United States. This time it proposed a four-point program that asked the government to: adopt a permanent neutrality, take federal control of the manufacture and sale of arms and ammunition, conscript wealth and industry as well as manpower in the time of war, and maintain an adequate defense force.

To enlist public support for staying out of war, in 1937 the VFW unveiled its "Peace for America" program. Through posters, windshield decals, newspaper publicity, public forums, and radio speeches, all posts helped popularize the VFW's position. As part of the program, in late November the VFW launched a campaign to "Keep America Out of War".

Even as the VFW deliberated as to how to preserve peace in America, events that would make neutrality untenable were rapidly unfolding in Europe. On September 1, 1939, Adolf Hitler unleashed his armies and air forces on Poland. Two days later, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. Shortly afterwards, Russia entered the fray on Hitler's side, helping to crush Poland from the east. By mid-summer 1940, most of Scandinavia, Holland, Belgium, and France had succumbed to Hitler's "blitzkrieg" (combined air/tank/infantry) tactics.

With Great Britain standing alone against the rampaging Germans, the U.S. quickly softened its stand on neutrality. Congress voted vast sums for rearmament, and nearly a million men were drafted into military service. Both candidates for president - two term incumbent F.D.R. and Republican challenger Wendell Wilkie - forcefully advocated helping the British in any possible. And when the VFW's National Council of Administration met in Chicago in September 1940, they too strongly endorsed an "Aid to Britain" policy.



War & Conflict



In 1941, Americans could look either east or west and find a shooting war in progress. Civilians in countries involved in these struggles were dying without even seeing the flash of an enemy saber or hearing the roar of his cannon. In many corners of the world, home front and battle front were becoming indistinguishable.

In the United States, the average citizen was still content to root for Great Britain, France, and the other allies from the sidelines. Although isolationists were now a distinct minority, few Americans were as yet advocating military aid to Europe or China. Congress, too, concentrated on economic rather than military assistance by approving the lend-lease bill - an act that authorized the U.S. to lend or lease weapons, raw materials, facilities, food, or other goods to the nations whose defense was deemed vital to that of the U.S.

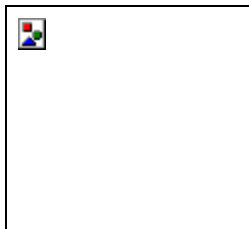
Then on December 7, 1941, a day that President Franklin Roosevelt predicted would "live in infamy," planes from a Japanese task force struck the U.S. military installations in Hawaii. Caught unaware, the naval base at Pearl Harbor received the brunt of the assault. While sacrificing twenty-eight aircraft and three midget submarines of their own, the Japanese inflicted losses on American forces of nineteen ships, 3000 lives, and uncounted airplanes and vehicles. The following day, the U.S. Congress swiftly declared that a state of war existed between the United States and the Empire of Japan. Two days later, when Japan's allies, Germany and Italy, declared war upon the United States, Congress adopted a resolution declaring that a state of war also existed with these two nations.

Although many members of the VFW would see action on the various battle fronts, the VFW's major contributions to the war effort took place on the home front. The VFW was by now a highly adaptable and versatile organization, and its War Service Commission made sure the

organization funneled its efforts wherever they were needed most. As a result, during the early years of World War II, the VFW's programs were mainly directed toward winning the war. Priority was given to recruiting and training manpower, boosting morale, defending the U.S. against enemy attack or sabotage, and other direct support activities. From 1943 on, however, programs became increasingly concerned with obtaining benefits for returning veterans. During the war and afterwards, the VFW continued to prove that it was truly an all-wars, all-services organization.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the VFW's first official act was to dispatch Legislative Representative Omar B. Ketchum with a request that Congress provide immediate life insurance coverage to all men in the service. Because the War Risk Insurance Act of World War I had long since expired, many men, both inside the country and overseas, were not covered. Together with fellow VFW member Casey Jones, Ketchum wrote a bill that would award a \$5000 life insurance policy to every serviceman and cover his dependents as well. Congressman John McCormick of Massachusetts introduced the bill into Congress, and on the day after Pearl Harbor, Congress approved it. This bill remained in effect until April 19, 1942, when the National Service Life Insurance Act went into force.

Even as Ketchum was persuading Congress to enact the insurance



legislation, the VFW national organization was offering its services to the U.S. Government. They took on the job of enrolling auxiliary police and firemen. These auxiliary units replaced men who had answered their country's call to the colors, and performed normal police, fire and emergency duties. In some areas, units also provided border

patrols whose primary mission was to prevent an invasion by enemy saboteurs. Members from all over the country carried on a recruiting drive and many Post Homes were turned into training centers for auxiliary volunteers.

In 1942, the Army needed fliers badly. It needed a multitude of technicians of all kinds to fill its rapidly expanding air arm. Unfortunately, thousands of recruits were being turned away because they could not pass the required exams. To salvage these would-be airmen, Lieutenant General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, commanding general of the Army Air Corps, asked for the VFW's assistance.

The VFW had already shown its support for the Air Corps by collecting \$150,000 for the purchase of fifteen training planes. Now they established the Aviation Cadet program - a training program to test and

drill young men eighteen to twenty-six years of age so they could qualify for the Air Corps. They prepared pamphlets, and supplied tests, aptitude screening material, application blanks, and study materials to more than 1400 Aviation Cadet Committees in forty-six states. Posts then supplied, free of charge, special classes in mathematics, physics, English, geography history, or any other subject in which a recruit was weak. All tests were continually updated to stay abreast of Air Corps requirements. During its seven months of operation, the Aviation Cadet program was extremely effective. In one subject area alone, 83 percent of those who had failed the examination on their first try passed after being tutored by VFW members. In all, the VFW successfully recruited 75,000 men for the Air Corps and 45,000 for other branches of the service. The VFW received hundreds of letters from young fliers thanking the organization for enabling them to "make the grade."

Although the Aviation Cadet program, the Americanism Department programs, and other VFW programs conducted at the national level received the most publicity, many worthwhile projects also went on in the trenches (on the local level). Throughout the war, for example, local posts selflessly pitched in to alleviate shortages of materials essential to wartime industry. They could do little about the rationing of consumer goods such as meat, sugar, coffee, canned goods, and cheese which made feeding their members' families difficult, but posts organized and led thousands of scrap drives to feed the demands of industry. Together with other groups and individuals, they helped collect 43,919 tons of fat, 255,513 tons of tin cans, 6 millions tons of waste paper, and 26 million tons of scrap iron and steel.

Local Ladies Auxiliaries also devoted themselves to the war effort. Besides assisting posts with local and national programs, Auxiliary members tried to ensure that each serviceman, no matter where he was stationed, received mail from home. Auxiliaries sent Christmas boxes filled with home-baked treats, canned goods, and knitted items. They also mailed hundreds of letters via the Post Office's newly introduced V-Mail - a weight-saving measure that transferred letters to microfilm, then reprinted them on paper upon arrival overseas. In addition, Auxiliaries visited servicemen in veterans' hospitals and sent them homemade baked goods, books, and cigarettes.

Thanks to their first-hand knowledge about the way the war was progressing, the VFW's leaders easily recognized when the time was ripe to change from a wartime program to one aimed at handling the postwar problems its veterans would encounter. That turning point came in 1943, when Allied forces went on the offensive in both the European Theater of Operations (ETO) and the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO) and reclaimed areas such as Stalingrad, Rostov, and

Kharkov in Russia; Tunis and Bizerte in North Africa; the Aleutian Islands; and Guadalcanal in the Pacific. Confident that the war would reach a speedy conclusion, the VFW began shifting its emphasis away from winning the war and toward securing benefits for new veterans now, before "the war's over" apathy make their attainment more difficult.

Aware that many millions now in their country's military service would have an increased need for rehabilitation, the VFW gave high priority to expanding and overhauling its Rehabilitation Service. In 1931, this Service had taken over several duties from the National Service Bureau, including the responsibilities for handling claims submitted to the government's War Risk Insurance Bureau, Bureau of Pensions, and Bureau of Vocational Training and Rehabilitation. The VFW now went about improving these programs. In 1945, the VFW Rehabilitation Service grew into what many veterans and government employees considered the "best in the world." At times, in fact, the VFW handled as many veterans' claims as all other agencies combined.

Revamping the Rehabilitation Service was not the VFW's only accomplishment during this time. In June 1944, Congress passed Public Law 346, the Service Man's Readjustment Act. The Service Man's Readjustment Act, more commonly called the G.I. Bill of Rights, provided veterans of World War II with funds to continue education that was interrupted by the war, or to obtain training or formal education that would improve their ability to secure gainful employment.

With the VFW's support, several other important veterans' bills were passed in 1944. Among these was the Mustering Out Pay Act, passed February 3, 1944. This act was intended to reduce some of the economic hardships veterans of other wars had experienced immediately upon returning home. Provisions included payment for unused leave time and transportation to the returnee's home of record, as well as a VFW-backed provision of differential payment for men with foreign service.

The final act beneficial to servicemen was the Veteran Preference Law of 1944. Thanks to this law, job preference for veterans no longer had to be granted on a war-by-war basis by regulation, directive, or presidential proclamation; it was now a matter of statute law. In addition, the new federal law allowed returnees - as a step to ease the transition back into civilian life - fifty-two weeks of unemployment compensation at \$20 a week. For veterans who wanted to go into business, the government guaranteed half of a \$2000 loan bearing a maximum interest charge of 4 percent. In addition, the government

helped job-seeking veterans find employment.

The VFW's many efforts on behalf of veterans - on the home front, in the legislative arena, in union circles - did not go unremarked. During the war, overseas veterans joined the VFW by the thousands. Between 1940 and 1945, membership increased by more than 350 percent, growing from 201,170 to 741,310. By 1946, a year after Allied victory had been declared first in Germany, then in Japan, membership had climbed to 1,544,444 - the highest level it would reach until 1970. And by 1949, the VFW's 10,000 posts stretched from coast to coast and from Tokyo and Yokohama to Paris and Bremen. For the VFW, looking after the needs of all these new members in peacetime posed a challenge equal to any it had faced in wartime.

In the fall of 1945, the VFW Council of Administration met and endorsed a long-range housing program. They sent a telegram to President Truman urging him to make veterans' housing a priority. In May 1946, Congress obliged by passing the Veteran Emergency Housing Act of 1946 (Public Law 388). After wrestling with housing issues in the early postwar period, the VFW turned its attention to a different entitlement problem; adequate medical care for veterans. The VFW's major battle in this area occurred in 1949, following a Presidential Order curtailing VA hospital construction. As vital as the VFW's campaigns for veterans' entitlements such as pensions, medical care, and housing were, they were not the only issues that concerned the organization during this period. The organization also lent its support to broader causes - most important, to world peace. From April 25 to June 26, 1945, representatives of about fifty nations gathered in San Francisco to draw up a charter for the proposed peace organization. The VFW sent a consulting delegation to this United Nations World Conference on International Organization. At about the same time the United Nations charter was being ratified, the VFW held its own version of the United Nations by hosting a United Nations Veterans Victory Conference. At the VFW's invitation, veterans' representatives of twenty-two nations convened to present plans for outlawing future wars.

Although its support of the United Nations and its aims were unwavering, the VFW did not relax its stance on military preparedness. As it had since its founding, the organization continued to insist that the best guarantee of peace was a defense force strong enough to enforce that stand. Because of this conviction, in 1946 the VFW established the National Security Committee. The group met regularly with Army and Navy officials on matters of defense and security.

In 1950, the "Russian aggression" that the VFW and much of the free

world had been condemning, abruptly escalated. At issue was the way in which the tiny Far Eastern nation of Korea had been divided at the end of World War II. The United States had been granted control of the populous, agricultural region south of the 38th parallel, while the Soviet Union had received the sparsely settled, industrial region to the north. With the help of the United Nations, the South Koreans had held elections and drawn up a democratic constitution, but the Northern Koreans remained under the Communists' heel. The Soviets adamantly resisted all attempts by the United States and the United Nations to reunite the sundered nation.

Then on June 25, 1950, the North Korean Army made its move. Backed by Russian tanks and planes, the Communists surged across the 38th parallel and invaded the newly formed democracy to the south. American reaction was swift. Within twenty-four hours, President Truman announced he would send the Army and Navy to the aid of South Korea.

As the war progressed, the VFW began to find some fault with the Truman administration's handling of the Korean situation. The 13,000 delegates of the August 27 through September 1, 1950 encampment were especially critical of White House policies. They called upon the President to seek out new leadership of the "Highest Integrity and Non-Political Favor" and to develop policies concerning foreign policy and national defense. The delegates passed resolutions asking Congress for: the mobilization of the National Guard; expansion of the Selective Service draft for all males between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five who had no previous military service; establishment of an adequate radar network, supported by an effective Air Force; conversion and expansion on a global scale of America's intelligence operations.

Despite the VFW's occasional differences of opinion with the Truman administration, the organization's contributions to the war effort were as unstinting as usual. Some of the VFW's earliest work was aimed at building public support of the fight against Communism by heightening appreciation of the American way of life.

While the VFW was supporting the war effort, it was, of course, also looking out for the rights of the servicemen fighting in Korea. In fact, several times during the Korean conflict, the organization had to mobilize to prevent cuts in existing benefits.

In 1951 the government attempted to weaken the Veterans Administration by slashing its budget and reassigning the oversight for certain veterans' entitlements to other federal agencies. The VFW's pressure did its job. The control of veterans' affairs remained in the

province of the Administrator of Veterans Affairs. Also during this period, Truman administration leaders tried again to make large cuts in the VA budget in the area of veterans' medical care. For three weeks in April, VFW personnel testified to the need for more hospital beds. Thanks to their testimony the cuts were not made. Still, the battle was not won overnight. Both Commander-in-Chief Frank C. Hilton and his successor, James W. Cothran, found much of their time occupied with long and difficult struggles to prevent these cuts.

On June 27, 1953, a truce between North and South Korea was finally signed. The fighting had lasted three years to the day. During that period, 5,720,000 Americans had served in Korea, and the United States had sustained 157,530 casualties. Many who survived had crippling injuries and were in need of serious rehabilitation and other assistance. Others - some 500,000 by 1954 - enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities under the GI Bill. They, too, had special employment, housing, and financial needs. Fortunately, many of the programs and much of the machinery required to meet these needs was still in place from the "popular" war, World War II.

While the VFW worked to help the new veterans readjust to civilian life, it also continued its war on Communism. Its major objection to the Communist party, then as now, was that Communists advocate the overthrow, violent or otherwise, of other governments. This Communist philosophy is incompatible with the purpose of the VFW as stated in Article I of its constitution: "To maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States of America, and fidelity to its constitution and laws; to foster true patriotism; to maintain and extend the institution of American freedom; and to preserve and defend the United States from all her enemies, whomsoever." As it had for over a quarter of a century, the VFW pressed Congress to outlaw the communist party. Finally, in 1954, Congress passed a law making the Communist party illegal in the U.S.



 Recycling the Battle - 1955 - 1973



Not negating the sacrifices of the men and women who died in Korea, it would be fair to say that one of the most severe casualties of all was the attitude of the American public. This was, after all, the first war in which the United States did not come away with a clear-cut

victory. Although the war was not lost on the field of battle, but at home, it was the returnees who suffered the backlash of public opinion. As a consequence, the VFW and other veteran's organizations met considerable resistance in securing new entitlements for veterans - as well as in holding on to those already won. Resistance became even harder to overcome as the United States was gradually drawn into the most unpopular war ever; the Vietnam War. As in the First World War battle of Isonzo, the VFW would have to fight for the same territory again, and again, and again...

Given the nation's anti-veteran climate, it was vital that the VFW have leaders who were willing to fight for what they believed in. Fortunately the VFW had never lacked for fighters. From the end of the Korean War to our withdrawal from the Vietnam War, a succession of leaders with an unshakable commitment to the veteran's well-being stepped forward.

A major threat came from the Hoover Commission. This commission, headed by former President Herbert Hoover, had been established to look into possible reforms within the executive branch of the federal government. Among the reforms recommended in the commission's report, was that the government cancel all plans to construct additional VA hospitals. It also proposed selling or otherwise disposing of any VA hospital that could no longer be operated economically or effectively. Worse, the report recommended denying treatment for veterans with non-service connected disabilities who had not demonstrated the need for treatment within three years after discharge. In no cases were veterans with non-service-connected disabilities to be given treatment unless they could prove that they could not afford to pay for it. This report was to be given further weight next year when

the American Medical Association (AMA) attacked the VA hospital system on the grounds that 85 percent of veterans receiving care had non-service-connected disabilities, and that most of them could not afford to pay for their own treatment.

While fighting bitterly against the report's proposal to close and sell VA hospitals that were not being run economically, the VFW went along with the suggestion of canceling any contracts for new hospitals that were not already completed or under construction. By paying frequent visits to the White House and working through Veterans Affairs Committee of the House, the VFW leadership eventually managed to soften most of the proposed changes. Finally, in 1958, the VFW's investigations prompted Congress to direct a twelve-year plan to update VA hospital facilities.

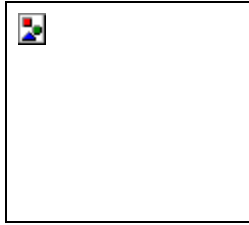
Another threat to veterans' entitlements that reared its head during Murphy's year was the appointment of the Bradley Commission, which was charged with scrutinizing other veteran's programs and pensions.

Accompanied by every Department Commander, Commander-in-Chief Holt delivered a no-nonsense message to Congress on February 5th, 1957. The VFW insisted on a stronger military, expanded care and services in VA Hospitals, and a militant opposition toward Communism. They also demanded that all U.S. prisoners of war in Communist North Korea and China be freed.

At the 1957 Encampment in Miami Beach, Florida, Commander-in-Chief Holt again took a shot at Communism. In one of his last official acts, he charged that the Russian Embassy was directing espionage and propaganda activities inside the U.S. Holt called upon the convention delegates to ask President Eisenhower to sever relations with the Soviet Union. Also at this convention, the official term "encampment" was dropped. With the approval of a national bylaw, all references were changed from "National Encampment" to "National Convention."

Into the summer of 1958, Congress continued to be more receptive to veterans' needs than usual. In July, Congress passed a precedent-shattering bill increasing pension payments to Indian Wars, Mexican War, Civil War, and Spanish American War veterans and their widows. Then in August, an eight-year-old campaign of the VFW bore fruit when President Eisenhower signed Public Law 529, making May 1st Loyalty Day. Also during this time, the so-called "new" pension law was amended, liberalizing benefits to veterans and their widows. This law raised benefits to veterans and their widows by 25 percent if the disability was due to combat action.

In 1958, the VFW became a cosponsor of the Voice of Democracy program - an annual high school speech competition of patriotic themes.



Also during this time, the VFW stepped up its Americanism program. To alert the American public to the dangers of world Communism, posts made radio spots and pre-written speeches available and distributed pamphlets to schools and other organizations. The Community Activities Program, too, was active, upgrading the Sons of the VFW organization to full program status and adding several new youth programs. In addition, the VFW Insurance Department was established to run the first insurance programs sponsored by the VFW. These included the post insurance and accidental death programs.

With VFW support, several important bills made it to the floor of Congress during 1964-65. First, after a ten-year fight to provide all "Cold War" veterans with educational and loan privileges, a permanent G.I. Bill was passed. No longer would these benefits be established on a conflict-by-conflict bases. Instead, this bill assured each returnee that he would receive entitlements of equal or greater worth than had the veterans of previous area. The second important bill was introduced into Congress by Representative Richard L. Roudebush, past Commander-in-Chief. The bill prohibited desecration of the U.S. flag and had the wholehearted support of the VFW and other veteran's organizations. The bill stipulated that anyone who knowingly cast contempt upon any flag of the United States by publicly mutilating, defacing, defiling, or trampling upon it could be subjected to a fine of up to \$1000 or up to one year on jail. This federal law against flag desecration was eventually passed in 1968. It would remain on the books until June 11, 1990, when a five-to-four vote by the Supreme Court declared that it violated the First Amendment principle of free speech and was therefore unconstitutional.

The VFW also paid particular attention to the needs of all Vietnam veterans: both those who had already returned and those who would never return. The members pressed Congress for more grave sites in National Cemeteries and advocated for Veterans Assistance Centers to help veterans readjust to civilian live. Later, the VA would establish a series of "storefront" counseling centers for Vietnam veterans. The VFW also fought long and hard with the Office of Management and Budget, which was determined to cut staffing in VA hospitals.


When Commander-in-Chief Herbert R. Rainwater took office in August 1970, he took up the campaign for the release of POW/MIAs.

With Ladies Auxiliary President Mary Cottone, Rainwater traveled to Paris. There they attempted to deliver a petition bearing more than two million signatures which demanded humane treatment and the release of American prisoners held by the Communist North Vietnamese forces. Rainwater and Cottone were not able to meet with Vietnam's Chief Delegate Mai Van Bo, but were instead ordered to leave. "My crusade has just begun," Rainwater announced following the refusal of the petition. He promptly ordered the VFW to begin a letter-writing campaign. The letters would be delivered to the Vietnamese Embassy in Paris. In the meantime, "Chief" Rainwater traveled to India, where he delivered the petition and discussed the POW/MIA cause with a different high-ranking North Vietnamese official. Later, returned POWs would tell Rainwater that pressure from the VFW contributed toward their better treatment.

With more public sympathy lavished on the plight of the exiled draft dodgers than on returning Vietnam veterans, the VFW faced some difficult challenges during the term of Patrick E. Carr (1972 - 1973). First, there were the usual tussles with the VA over its facilities. After continual warnings from the VFW brought no changes from the VA, the VFW joined with Congressional veterans' committees in working out these stipulations. Congress would order the VA to maintain an average daily patient load of no less than 85,000 and to maintain not less than 97,500 beds in its 165 VA hospitals. President Nixon immediately signed the bill and Congress made it clear that there was to be no cut in VA Hospital care.

Commander Carr's year wound down on a positive note as the VFW successfully negotiated a 25 percent increase in the Vietnam G.I. Education Bill, and a federal court agreed with the VFW's contention that veteran's preference should be upheld in state as well as federal jobs. These and other advances gained since the Korean War would be increasingly important in the months and years ahead. There were, after all, six million veterans of the Vietnam War - many of them seriously scarred, both physically and emotionally. As they swelled the ranks of the nation's veterans, they would undoubtedly tax the services already in place and arouse a need for more and better services and benefits. More than ever before, America's veterans would need a strong and experienced veteran's advocate like the Veterans of Foreign Wars to plead their cause.



 Evergreen - 1973 - 1990



By mid-1973, there were approximately 29 million veterans in the United States. Together with their families, these one-time members of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard accounted for about one hundred million citizens, or one-half the population of the United States. These veterans, of course, were not all members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, or even veterans of foreign wars themselves. But that made little difference to the 1.7 million veterans who did belong to the VFW. As charged by its Congressional Charter, for nearly three-quarters of a century the VFW had fought for the rights of all veterans, whether they were members or not. It had no intention of changing its policy now.

As in years past, the VFW would conduct its battles on two fronts. Following the mandate of its farsighted founders, it would continue to fight first of all for our nation's veterans. The struggle for increases in pensions, job rights, educational benefits, and improved medical care for veterans would continue unabated. The VFW would also wage war in service to our nation. Once again, it would turn its attention to community projects, Americanism, and youth programs, as well as to Communism and other threats to the country's defense.

In September of 1974, President Ford issued a Presidential Clemency Order allowing all Vietnam-era draft dodgers who had gone to Canada to freely return to the United States. They would initially be given an undesirable discharge. But upon completion of a period of alternative service in VA hospitals, this discharge could be upgraded to a clemency discharge. They would not be eligible for the G.I. Bill or other veterans' entitlements. Still, the VFW was adamantly opposed to both the Clemency Order and the alternate service in VA hospitals. Commander-in-Chief Stang wrote to VA Administrator Roudebush



complaining that it was ridiculous to give these draft dodgers and deserters jobs in VA facilities when thousands of Vietnam veterans were unemployed. In the end, few, if any, draft dodgers performed alternate service in VA hospitals.

As a backdrop to all the other activities of Stang's term were the projects sponsored by posts, districts and departments across the country in honor of the nation's upcoming 200th birthday. These projects varied widely from post to post - and there were more than 10,000 posts - but each had an underlying patriotic theme. Many posts made costumes for children to wear in parades or distributed posters and coloring books to help them learn about America's heritage. Adults, too, entered costumed marching units and patriotic floats in parades. Other popular projects included writing articles or sponsoring radio and TV spots with a patriotic theme.

Amidst all the Bicentennial festivities, the VFW paused to give serious concern to world events that could threaten America's two centuries of freedom. The spread of communism in South America, in particular, became an important issue. To get a firsthand look at the situation to the south, Commander-in-Chief Walker embarked on a tour. In Chile, he discussed his concerns about Communism with General Augusto Pinochet, Chile's ruler. Pinochet assured him of his strong opposition to Communism.

A Senate committee was formed to pare down the number of standing committees in the Senate by 50 percent. This committee, chaired by Illinois Senator Adlai Stevenson, had targeted the Veterans Affairs Committee for dismantling. This was a committee that the VFW had labored for years to get and was not about to relinquish without a fight. Fortunately, some senators were opposed to dismantling the Veterans Affairs Committee. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, for instance, stated that the committee was authorized as a separate committee, and advised a hands-off policy. The VFW moved quickly to consolidate and build upon this support. While other veteran's organizations paid little if any attention to the proposed dissolution, VFW Past Commanders-in-Chief, Council Members, and just plain members traveled to Washington to urge senators to retain the committee. In addition, VFW and Ladies Auxiliary members made thousands of phone calls to senators' offices, and Commander Smith brought the Commander or Quartermaster from each state to lobby their senators personally. (This was the first time the VFW had ever brought its members to Washington, D.C. to lobby.) Thanks to these efforts, the number of senators in favor of keeping the committee doubled.

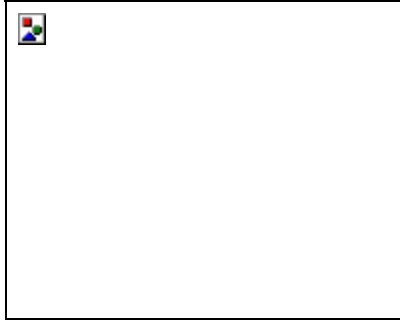
Other gains recorded in Smith's year included a 6 percent increase in veterans' pensions and compensation and an increase in the VA budget. A new veteran's employment program was also begun. Called "HIRE" (Help through Industry Retraining and Employment), this program trained or secured employment for more than 100,000 veterans. In addition, the Director of the Veteran's Employment Service received a new title and loftier position: Special Assistant to the Secretary of Labor. (This position is now called Assistant Secretary of Labor for Veterans Employment and Training Services).

Despite the VFW's many victories during Smith's year, it failed completely to block an unprecedented move by new elected President Carter. On the first day of his administration, President Carter issued a "blanket" pardon to everyone who had refused to serve in the Vietnam War. In March 1976, "Bulldog" expressed his - and the VFW's - outrage at Carter's pardon. "It is an insult to every man who has ever fought and died for his country and to all the men who have served honorably in our nation's Armed Forces." He went on to explain that the reason the VFW opposed any hasty, mass upgrading of less-than-honorable discharges was because "the speeding up of this process prevents close scrutiny and study of each case with the final result being the upgrading of all less-than-honorable discharges" The VFW's objections fell on deaf ears.

In 1983, following a resolution passed by the 83rd National Convention, the VFW concluded a new agreement of cooperation with the American Red Cross. This statement of understanding replaced a Cooperative Disaster Plan adopted by the 1950 National Convention in Chicago. The statement allows the Red Cross to use VFW facilities for feeding and shelter during times of disaster and offers the voluntary assistance of VFW and Ladies Auxiliary members.

The year 1983 also saw the end of a year-long challenge to the VFW's tax-exempt status. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) had questioned whether an organization that engaged in lobbying could maintain its tax-exempt status. On May 23, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that an organization may lobby Congress without losing its tax-exempt status.

While the VFW's concerns about Communism in Central America were growing, the organization was able to relax its vigilance somewhat in Europe. One November 1, 1987, the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. was signed. At the urging of Commander Stock and others, the Senate approved the treaty. The VFW supported this treaty because it contained provisions for verifying compliance as called for by VFW resolutions.



In summing up the accomplishments of his year at the 89th National Convention in Chicago, Commander Stock singled out one perpetual problem area still unresolved: the plight of the POW/MIAs in Southeast Asia. He pointed out that much work still needed to be done, "even though in dribs and drabs the Vietnamese are returning

home sets of remains of American servicemen killed there during the war. You may be certain that every influential personage in Washington has been thoroughly advised on our position on the POW/MIA issue, and of course, I am certain that my successor also will continue the campaign for a resolution of this most heart-rending problem."

The man preordained to succeed Stock was a Vietnam veteran named Larry Rivers. Upon his election, Rivers told the 1988 convention, "Our theme for this, our 90th year, is a simple one: 'We Remember.' So beautiful in its simplicity, yet so powerful in the message it conveys. As we celebrate ninety years of faithful service to America and her veterans, we do indeed remember. We remember the many challenges we have faced, the many obstacles we have overcome, and the impressive list of accomplishments that we, together, have compiled" And it went without saying that the VFW remembered the POW/MIAs.

To keep the POW/MIA issue in the forefront of everyone's consciousness, the VFW worked to carry out a number of resolutions previously passed by the organization. Resolution 401 of this 89th National Convention demanded that the issue remain one of the government's highest priorities; No. 402, that the government vigorously pursue negotiations with Laos to allow us to investigate aircraft crash sites for remains and to follow up on reported sightings of live POWs; No. 421, that Congressional appropriations to international lending agencies be contingent on those countries' cooperation in the search for U.S. POW/MIAs of past wars; No. 438, that Congress pass a law requiring the POW/MIA flag to be flown on every government installation in the world; No's. 444 and 445, that the president appoint a permanent POW/MIA affairs advisor on the embassy staff in Vientiane, and that maximum economic and diplomatic pressures be brought on the North Korean government to account for the 8,000 U.S. servicemen still missing from that war.

On December 15, 1989, Panama's notorious drug-dealing dictator, Manuel Noriega, declared that a state of war existed between Panama and the United States. On December 20, 1989, the U.S. military

launched Operation Just Cause. From the land, sea, and air, 27,000 U.S. soldiers, marines, and air crewman struck Panama. Shortly after Operation Just Cause ended, it was announced that all armed forces personnel who had participated in the invasion would be awarded the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal. This medal would, of course, entitle these service men and women to join the VFW. And once again, the wisdom of the founders' "evergreen" policy was proven.

As the organization entered its 91st year, it could claim more active posts (10,399) than ever before in his history. This included fifty-five posts located in a dozen countries: Germany, France, Great Britain, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Guam, Kwajalein (a U.S. territory), Panama, and Japan, including Okinawa. There were also posts in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, as well as four posts in Mexico under the jurisdiction of the Department of Texas. And for the thirty-fifth consecutive year, total membership of the Veterans of Foreign Wars grew. This was as it should be, according to Commander-in-Chief Hogan: "Influence, for better or worse, it tied directly to membership figures."