

CHAPTER 2

A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION Is BORN



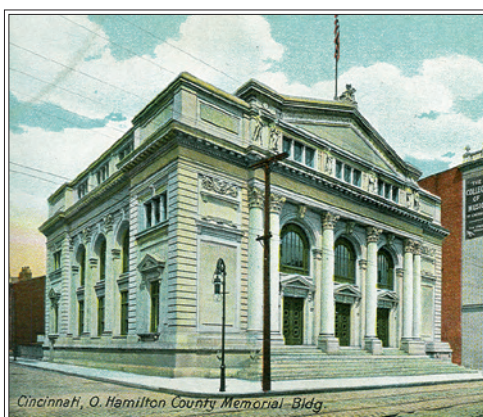
*A man who is good enough to shed his blood
for his country is good enough to be given
a square deal afterwards.*

~ Theodore Roosevelt ~

THOUGH THE DAVWW HAD EXISTED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 25, 1920, THE DAY IS CONSIDERED THE BIRTH DATE OF THE ORGANIZATION. THE CINCINNATI GROUP, HEADED BY JUDGE MARX, CALLED A NATIONAL CAUCUS ON THAT DATE. IT WAS ATTENDED BY SOME 250 DISABLED VETERANS FROM VARIOUS SELF-HELP GROUPS FROM ACROSS THE UNITED STATES.



MEMORIAL HALL, INTERIOR



HAMILTON COUNTY MEMORIAL HALL,
CINCINNATI, OHIO

In the beautiful and stately auditorium of Hamilton County Memorial Hall in Cincinnati, Ohio, they federated into a national body. The caucus divided into a National Organization, state-level Departments, and local Chapters—a structure the DAV still maintains today. The caucus also decided to hold the new organization's first National Convention the following June in Detroit.

At about this same time, Ohio Governor James M. Cox asked Judge Marx to join him and Franklin Delano Roosevelt for a whistle-stop political trip to the west. Governor Cox was the Democratic Presidential nominee and Franklin Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, was his running mate.

Though publicly confident, Governor Cox was privately pessimistic. The Democrats needed a war hero's help, and Judge Marx was just the man.

Governor Cox never became President, but the campaign trip aboard trains proved a windfall for the DAVWW as it struggled to build a network of local Chapters. During that 32-State trip, Judge Marx was able to bring together many of the various clubs of disabled veterans nationwide.

Before boarding that train, Judge Marx wrote to acquaintances and other disabled veterans nationwide. They helped arrange meetings as the train visited cities and towns. After the political speeches, Judge Marx quietly slipped away to meet with disabled veterans. He'd tell them about the DAVWW, urging them to come to Detroit for the organization's first National Convention.

As a combat-injured veteran, Judge Marx struck a chord of unity with the veterans he addressed. He was one of their own.

As a gifted public speaker, he was inspirational when he cited the common thread that bound all of America's disabled veterans together.

MEMORIAL HALL, INTERIOR



Judge Marx convincingly pointed out that as an organized national group, the voices of disabled veterans would be stronger in the halls of Congress and the White House.

His tireless drive to unite groups of disabled veterans from the far-flung corners of America truly earned Judge Marx the honored title, “Father of the DAV.”

Bringing these widely scattered groups together would have taken years without Judge Marx’s travels and his skills in organizing people. His efforts brought hundreds into the DAVWW—hundreds who soon grew into thousands and tens of thousands.

Triumphant First Convention

On June 27, 1921, the new, fast-growing organization opened its first National Convention at Detroit’s Tuller Hotel. More than one thousand disabled veterans had traveled from every State and territory of the United States, and they were primed to take part in the action.

Friends who had shared the same muddy, death-filled trenches arrived early to see each other for the first time since the war. After catching up on old times, the delegates were ready to begin their new battles to achieve justice as the Convention opened for business on Monday morning.

The call to order, the National Anthem, and an invocation by Rabbi Aaronsohn were followed by Judge Marx’s request that the delegates “remain standing in memory of our comrades who have passed from their earthly reward. Let us stand for a period of simple silence, a silence as deep as death, for in that period will be thoughts and feelings that are too deep for words.”

Rabbi Aaronsohn remembered that silence: “We stood there for a moment, and for me, all the memories of France passed before me. I missed some friends and was glad to be among the men present at the Convention. I had the feeling that we had come through a great challenge and that tomorrow would be a better day. When the silence ended, after we had paid our respects, it was all business.”

The delegates elected Judge Marx as their first National Commander. They adopted a permanent organization, a National Constitution, and a national ritual. They fixed the national dues and established a permanent headquarters. They agreed on a national program of legislation and set dates for the next Convention.



JUDGE MARX (SECOND FROM RIGHT) WITH FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT





RAYMOND LASANCE AND JUDGE MARX

Press coverage of the Convention was a tremendous boost. Letters and telegrams came in from everywhere. They included greetings from President Warren Harding and Vice President Calvin Coolidge, as well as General John J. Pershing, who had commanded American forces in Europe during the war.

On Tuesday, the delegates formed up for a parade and marched triumphantly through the rainy streets of Detroit. Though it was a typical parade in some respects, featuring floats and escorted by the police and cavalry, this was truly a DAVWW event. Most of the veterans were in uniform. Some coughed violently

from tuberculosis. Others hobbled unsteadily on artificial limbs. Sighted comrades led Rabbi Aaronsohn and others who were blind.

They marched proudly through Detroit. War had been cruel to each of these veterans, but they were not victims. They were victors, triumphant heroes in the cause of freedom. As they passed, they removed their hats in respect for their flag. Tears mixed with the rain as all remembered those who had not returned from the war, those whose remains were at rest in Europe.

Judge Marx marched his organization into the hearts of America.

Also in the parade was Raymond Lasance, the first to serve as the DAVWW's National Adjutant. Over the years, this position would evolve into the status of chief executive officer.

By the end of the Convention, it was clear: hundreds of small clubs and social units had welded themselves together into a unified national force dedicated to changing the

WORLD WAR I AMPUTEES PARTICIPATE IN AN AMERICAN RED CROSS EVENT, NEW YORK CITY, 1919



lives of disabled veterans. And, as National Commander Marx noted, “In war, all are eligible to be wounded, so all the sick and wounded would be eligible to join the DAVWW.”

The delegates headed home to begin work on the goals they had outlined for themselves in Detroit. Disabled veterans themselves, they had become the champions of *all* disabled veterans. The membership following that first convention was 17,486. From that point on, the new organization would be there for America’s wounded warriors, helping them face and solve their own problems.

The purpose those veterans set for themselves in 1921 remains the same today: building better lives for all of our Nation’s disabled veterans and their families.

From High Principles to Hard Work

Putting this high principle into practice, however, left the new DAVWW asking just where to start. There were so many problems. Ineffective government programs cried out for reform. For example, three years after the war, the government still had no definite plan for dealing with medical treatment and hospitalization of veterans.

First, the DAVWW wanted Congress to establish one federal agency that would have authority to handle all programs for veterans. They wanted to end the bureaucratic nightmare they faced, dealing with a variety of agencies with responsibilities that too often collided, conflicted, and overlapped.

The DAVWW called upon Congress to consolidate veterans’ programs that fell within the jurisdiction of three agencies: the Bureau of War Risk Insurance, the Public Health Service, and the Federal Board of Vocational Training. Working with other veterans’ groups, the DAVWW’s legislative team eventually secured legislation establishing the Veterans Bureau, later renamed the Veterans Administration, which was forerunner of today’s Department of Veterans Affairs.

As the 1920’s roared on, the going got tough. Powerful leaders in Washington called for cuts in vocational training, and the American public wanted to forget about the war. Disabled veterans needed the DAVWW more than ever before, but the organization found it even more difficult to raise funds necessary to maintain operations.

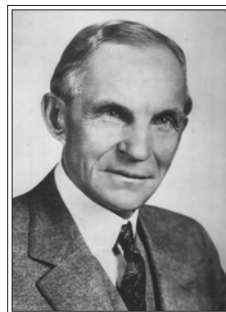
In 1922, the DAVWW modeled a new fundraising campaign on a program that had proven successful for the Red Cross. Judge Marx chose a flower, the forget-me-not, as a reminder of those who fought and became disabled in the Great War. The symbolism was obvious: Our Nation must never forget those who sacrificed their blood and their health for our country’s cause.

JUDGE MARX AND COMMISSIONER OF BASEBALL
ALBERT B. CHANDLER



FORGET-ME-NOT





HENRY FORD



HENRY FORD'S ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION TO DAV, POSTCARD

A nationwide Forget-Me-Not Day was held on Armistice Day, November 11. The program was based in local DAV Chapters, but some of the proceeds went to National Headquarters. Eventually, National Headquarters took over the administration of this effort, which has remained a staple of DAV Chapter fundraising.

San Francisco was the site of the DAVWW's second National Convention.

With the means of travel available in 1922, the west coast was a great distance for many, particularly those with severe disabilities, but many made the trip.

Some caught a ride from Henry Ford, who organized a cross-country caravan of 50 Model T Fords to take DAVWW members to the Convention. No one knew it at that time, but this was to be the beginning of a strong, dedicated partnership between the DAV and the Ford Motor Company.

To help pay for the Convention, organizers brought in Rudolph Valentino for a concert at a dollar a head. After the bills were paid, \$11,000 was left over—a lot of money in that day.

Convention business focused on the need for a meaningful certificate or diploma for veterans who completed their vocational training, one that would actually help them get jobs—a requirement in 1922.



HENRY FORD BREAKING GROUND FOR A NEW DAV FACILITY, DEARBORN, MICHIGAN



RUDOLPH VALENTINO



DAV Auxiliary Founded

A far more lasting contribution of the 1922 Convention—and clearly its crowning achievement—was formation of the DAVWW Auxiliary. Mrs. John Paul Jones from Minnesota was elected the first National Commander of this organization, which focuses its services on the families of veterans disabled during wartime service to our country. Genevieve Brown, also from Minnesota, became its first National Adjutant.

Originally, those eligible for the organization were the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of veterans disabled in military service. Included as well were the women relatives of those who had given their lives in the defense of the Nation, those known as the Gold Star Mothers or Gold Star Relatives.

One highlight of the first National Convention had been a speech by Colonel Charles R. Forbes, the man who was to become the first head of the Veterans Bureau. The delegates' enthusiasm ran high in 1921 as Colonel Forbes concentrated on rehabilitation. He promised to resolve the bed shortage in veterans' hospitals and address a number of other pressing concerns.

By the second Convention in 1922, however, DAVWW members had some pointed questions to pose to Colonel Forbes. As a result of their previous treatment, disillusioned disabled veterans had reason to be skeptical.

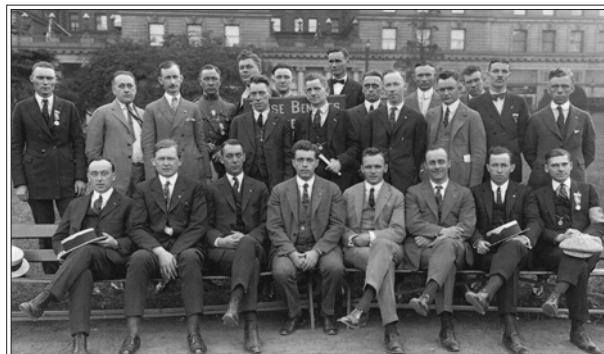
In his leadership of the Veterans Bureau, Colonel Forbes aggressively set out to build new hospitals, but he padded their costs and pocketed some \$50,000 from each one. He bought large quantities of supplies at inflated prices, taking kickbacks. His deception was eventually discovered, and he was sentenced to two years in prison.

Unfortunately, before he was stopped, he bilked the government of some \$200 million, money that should have gone into construction of veterans' health care facilities.

At the second National Convention, Judge Marx made an eloquent speech, refusing nomination for a second term on the grounds that the DAVWW's National Constitution barred National Commanders from succeeding themselves in office.

During Commander Marx's term, the National Adjutant's duties began to take shape. Due to Judge Marx's position as a judge and lawyer, together with his travels to Europe, Lasance had to take over management of the DAVWW's everyday business.

National Adjutant Lasance did an excellent job, both as an administrator and as a leader of the struggle for justice. In Judge Marx's absence, he singlehandedly fought cuts in vocational training for veterans. When the organization's financial situation grew critical, he sought and received help from the Knights of Columbus, and he probably kept the DAVWW from going under.



SAN FRANCISCO HOSTED THE DAVWW'S SECOND NATIONAL CONVENTION. JUDGE ROBERT S. MARX IS FOURTH FROM LEFT.

In 1924, Brigadier General Frank T. Hines took over the helm at the Veterans Bureau, quickly becoming a trusted friend of the DAVWW. General Hines, whose name has become immortal in veterans' affairs, immediately set out to make changes in the Veterans Bureau.



MILLARD RICE AND FRANK HINES

The Bureau rapidly became more efficient. In 1924, a total of 644,000 disabled veterans applied for training. Of those, 328,000 were found eligible. By June, 71,500 had completed training and were considered rehabilitated, and that was only one measure of General Hines's competence.

About the same time, Vivian D. "Crab" Corbly became Department Commander in Montana. Using member-at-large lists provided by Lasance, Corbly put up John W. Mahan's name for nomination for National Commander at the 1924 Convention. Although Mahan was defeated, he was elected the following year.

Upon taking office, he hired Corbly as editor of the DAVWW newspaper. Realizing that differences between Corbly and himself were too great, Lasance left the DAVWW, and the National Adjutant post opened up. Mahan appointed another Montanan to the post, Colonel Oliver S. Perry, who had been working for the Veterans Bureau in Minneapolis.

Not a healthy man, Perry resigned after only a few months. During Perry's brief tenure, Corbly found himself assuming more and more executive duties, in addition to putting out the DAVWW newspaper. When the Adjutant's job again opened up, Mahan chose Corbly to run the show, and that's what he did for the next 33 years.

Fundraising Progress

The lack of adequate funding continued to be a major issue for the DAVWW. The generosity of individuals was as important as the support of such groups as the Knights of Columbus. That's when Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink, a Czech opera singer who had adopted America as her home, came into the picture.

Her two sons had died in battle during World War I, and Madame Schumann-Heink wanted to help. So she toured the United States and gave the DAVWW a generous portion of her earnings. More important, the good word about the DAVWW's work was spread through the publicity she generated.

As the years after the First World War wore on, support for disabled veterans wavered. By 1926, membership fell to 29,000 in a decline that coincided with the DAVWW's most expensive year to date.

By that point, the DAVWW had fielded a nationwide claim-filing assistance effort that would eventually evolve into today's DAV National Service Program. In 1926, the

number of DAVWW Liaison Officers presenting disabled veterans' claims before the Veterans Bureau was increased from 14 to 53. To pay for that corps of veterans' benefits experts, the delegates to the sixth National Convention raised annual dues to \$2.

At the Convention, John V. Clinnin, a founder of the American Legion, was elected Commander. Seeing the DAVWW's financial problems continuing to mount, Clinnin offered to sell the DAVWW to the American Legion. The Legion declined, but the majority of the DAVWW's members didn't even become aware of Clinnin's attempt to sell their organization until the 1928 Convention. They were furious.

In 1927, with funds and membership declining to 23,000, cutbacks reduced the number of DAVWW Liaison Officers to only five. At the National Convention in El Paso that June, newly elected National Commander William E. Tate had to borrow \$10,000 so the DAVWW would have enough money to send its employees back home.

On a more positive note, the 1927 National Convention set up a Service Fund Committee of the DAVWW to look into the possibility of creating a new trust fund. The DAVWW's National Organization could then use principal and interest from this fund from time to time, as needed, to maintain its nationwide service and legislative programs.

One of the greatest difficulties the Service Fund Committee faced during the first couple of years of its operation was continuity of policy and personnel. Therefore, the National Executive Committee provided the authority to form "an incorporated board of trustees and to have the DAV enter into a trust agreement with such incorporated board of trustees."

Thus, in 1931, the Disabled American Veterans Service Foundation was born, the forerunner of the organization we know today as the DAV National Service Foundation. Its first board of directors included Herman H. Weimer, Millard W. Rice, Crab Corbly, William Tate, and Paul M. Millikin.

At the time, the Foundation was the fundraising arm of the National Organization and its Chapters, a little known fact today. It no longer fulfills such a comprehensive role, but its official mission remains "to develop financial resources in support of the goals and purpose of the DAV, including providing support to DAV's National Service Program and other service initiatives."

Contributions to the DAV National Service Foundation strengthened DAV service programs in many ways while helping to ensure the future of those programs.

The 1928 National Convention saw Millard Rice, a Liaison Officer from Minnesota, elected National Commander. The \$10,000 loan had been repaid, and the financial situation was improving. Following his term in office, Rice would continue working for the DAVWW, eventually heading both the service and legislative programs.

Tate's successor, William J. Murphy, joined Corbly in an agreement with a book publisher to print and sell *Progress of Nations*. This book was so successful it was followed by the historic DAV publication, *Forward March*.