

THE BIRTH OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

After signing the Armistice on November 11, 1918, there was a necessary delay of many long months in returning to America the 1,500,000 soldiers who became restless and disgruntled. Gen. John J. Pershing sent twenty outstanding officers of the AEF to Paris on Feb. 15, 1919, as a Morale Commission to adopt ways and means of bettering the conditions of the AEF.

Their recommendations were entertainment to be provided, leaves of absences to be granted, and travel to places of interest permitted in great numbers, and assignments made easy to get into foreign universities. Divisional vaudeville troupes were formed to travel around the various divisions of the AEF. Divisional football teams were organized and other sports were encouraged. When these recommendations were placed in operation quite a change took place, and the general morale of the troops improved.

One of the leading officers of the twenty who were on this Morale Commission was Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., of the 1st Division. He used to get together with the members of the committee regularly planning the future welfare activities, and on the evening of Feb. 16, 1919, he invited the nineteen other officers to dine with him at the Allied Officers Club, Rue de Fambrough, St. Honore. During the course of the evening, Col. Roosevelt suggested that it would be a wonderful idea to form some kind of an organization of veterans that would appeal to the ordinary soldiers as well as to those of higher rank. He expressed his belief that such an organization would cement the feeling of comradeship and patriotism of the men of the rank and file upon their return to civil life, and could be the means of protecting America from the disrupting influences that would surely follow a war of this kind.

These twenty men agreed on the formation of such an organization and resolved themselves into a temporary committee with Col. Roosevelt as chairman and Major Eric Fisher Wood as secretary. Col. Roosevelt was to be sent back to the United States at once to sell the idea to those servicemen who did not get across. They agreed among themselves that there should be another meeting held in Paris to be attended by men of all ranks and from all units in the AEF and March 15 - 17, 1919 were set as the dates. It was difficult to obtain permission of GHQ for the Paris Caucus, but Lt. Col. George A. White, of GHQ, assisted by Lt. Col. Ralph D. Cole, of the 37th Division, and Maj. Eric F. Wood, of the 88th Division, finally secured it. It was understood that this caucus was to be strictly unofficial and the enlisted men and officers who attended were to make their own arrangements for passes and must pay their own transportation. The AEF being scattered all over Europe created a hardship and many interesting and amusing stories are told of the ingenuity of the American soldiers trying to get to this Paris Caucus. Col. White was designated to notify all the divisions of the AEF of the coming caucus, and it was through his efforts that 600 delegates were present at the American Club in the Avenue du Gabriel on the first day of the caucus. The premises were too small and they were compelled to hold their sessions at the old Circus de Paris. There were 500 officers and 100 enlisted men attending. The Navy was represented by the 2nd Division Marines.

Many names were suggested for the new organization, among them being "Legion of the Great War," and "Veterans of the Great War." During a prolonged discussion of names, a Texan, Maurice K. Gordon, suggested the name, "The American Legion," and that name has stuck with the organization.

The temporary chairman was Bennett C. Clark, of Missouri, (Given title of Past National Commander at Philadelphia Convention in 1926); Temporary Secretary, Eric Fisher Wood, of Pennsylvania. An Executive Committee was elected to complete arrangements and Milton J. Foreman, from Illinois, was made chairman, (Given title of Past National Commander at Kansas City Convention in 1921), and George A. White, of Oregon, was made Secretary. Gen. John J. Pershing and Marshal Ferdinand Foch have since been made Honorary National Commanders.

The Paris Caucus disposed forever of the proposal for two separate organizations, one for officers and another for enlisted men, which was one of great achievement for the future success of the group. Another thing to its credit was the killing of a proposal for two groups, one for the AEF and another for those who failed to get across.

Coincident with the organization in France, a movement originated in Washington where, on Feb. 5, 1919, an informal gathering of men, who had served in the war, was held at the Cosmos Club, presided over by E. Lester Jones, to consider the advisability of forming a national veterans organization. It was decided to hold a caucus on March 7th and to get in touch with whatever movement might be successful in France. At this caucus, also held in the Cosmos Club, an organization was effected. Three hundred and seventy enlisted men and officers attended this meeting and formed an organization, known as Gen. Pershing Post No. 1, World War Veterans, but it was determined to proceed no further until they got in touch with the overseas movement. Immediately upon the arrival of Eric Fisher Wood in the United States, he communicated with Col. Jones and the Washington unit later became George Washington Post No. 1, Department of the District of Columbia. Other local ex-service organizations joined in the movement for one great Legion.

The second Caucus convened in St. Louis, Mo., May 8 - 10, 1919. A tentative constitution was adopted which was set up for effecting a permanent organization. New York City was selected as temporary Headquarters.

Henry D. Lindsley, of Texas, was elected Chairman, (Given title of Past National Commander at Minneapolis Convention in 1919). Eric Fisher Wood, of Pennsylvania, was elected Secretary (title of Adjutant was not used until after the Minneapolis Convention in 1919). Gasper G. Bacon, Mass., was elected Treasurer and Thomas H. Miles, Colo., was elected Chaplain.

This Caucus ratified the acts of the Paris Caucus in declaring for a strictly non-political, non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-military organization. At this meeting was written and adopted the Preamble to the Constitution which has remained unchanged since that day, with the exception of the letter "s" after the words "World War," and is one of the most famous documents in the world.

ORGANIZATION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION
DEPARTMENT OF NEW JERSEY

In March 1919, Col. Hobart B. Brown, Commanding Officer of the 114th Infantry Regiment, 29th Division AEF, who had returned from France arriving in the USA on February 24, 1919, received the following telegram:

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COL. HOBART B. BROWN, NEWK, N.J.

A CONFERENCE WILL BE HELD AT SAINT LOUIS ABOUT MAY FIRST FOR THE PURPOSE OF ORGANIZING AN ASSOCIATION COMPOSED OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN IN THE LAND AND NAVAL FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES IN THIS WAR STOP A CONVENTION HELD IN FRANCE HAS ALREADY ORGANIZED FORCES THERE IN AN ASSOCIATION CALLED THE AMERICAN LEGION AND WILL HAVE ITS REPRESENTATIVES AT THIS CONVENTION STOP THE CONVENTION WILL BE REPRESENTATIVE STOP ORGANIZATIONS ALREADY IN EXISTENCE WILL BE INVITED TO SEND DELEGATES STOP WILL YOU ALLOW YOUR NAME TO BE USED WITH THOSE OF OTHER REPRESENTATIVE MEN FROM ALL SECTIONS OF THE COUNTRY AS ISSUING THE CALL TO THIS CONVENTION STOP WILL YOU ALSO WIRE COLLECT NINETEEN EAST FORTY FOURTH STREET THE NAMES AND ADDRESSES AND RANK OF OTHERS FROM YOUR STATE WHOM YOU FEEL ARE REPRESENTATIVE STOP IT IS ASSURED OF COURSE THAT YOUR RECOMMENDATION WILL INCLUDE ENLISTED MEN STOP

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

Upon receipt of this telegram and several conferences with Col. Roosevelt and officials of the Paris Caucus and under the authority of the Paris Caucus, eleven men in the City of Newark organized the first unit of The American Legion. This unit later became known as The American Legion, Department of New Jersey. The temporary officers were as follows: Hobart B. Brown, Chairman; Newell P. Reed, Treasurer; Thomas Goldingay, Organizer; F. McCarter, Secretary.

The temporary Charter was granted to Hobart B. Brown and George H. McCarter for the State Organization on May 24, 1919, and signed by Henry D. Lindsley, Chairman and Eric Fisher Wood, Secretary.

The War Camp Community had donated \$3,000.00 for organization purposes. The officers decided to rent the entire top floor of the Ripple Building located at the Southeast corner of Clinton and Broad Sts., Newark, N. J., where it remained during the years of 1919 to 1921. The Officers, together with an Executive Committee of 9 members, working without any Constitution or By-laws, devoted all of their energies toward organizing Posts and enrolling members, and giving such help as was possible to men being discharged from the Army and Navy. Six months of strenuous work was devoted to this activity.

The First Annual Convention was held in Newark, N. J. Many remember the troubles the committee had in securing a proper place to hold this convention. Through the courtesy of the Prudential Life Insurance Co., we were granted the privilege of holding our convention in their large auditorium. The Convention was called to order at 9:00 A. M., Oct. 11, 1919, by the Chairman, Hobart B. Brown. One hundred and seventy-six posts had been organized throughout the State with an approximate membership of 27,000 Legionnaires. There were 551 delegates present at this convention. It was a very

business-like convention and at 6:00 P. M. it was concluded. In their eight hour session the State Constitution and By-laws were adopted, plans laid for hospitalization work; methods were adopted to help and assist disabled and injured ex-servicemen through the red tape and entanglements which confronted them in the unorganized Bureaus of War Risk Insurance, Public Health and Pension Departments. Resolutions were adopted demanding the National Convention to insist upon our Government giving immediate and proper relief to all men injured in the service. Twenty-one Delegates were elected to attend the National Convention. The following Officers were elected for the year 1919 - 1920: Hobart B. Brown, Commander; Leonidas Coyle, Vice Commander; Thomas Goldingay, Adjutant; Lewis B. Leduc, Historian; Rev. Madison Hare, Chaplain; Samuel Y. Cathcart, War Risk Insurance Officer; George Vickers, Employment Officer; Philip J. Erhardt, National Executive Committeeman; and W. W. West, National Alternate.

Following the State Convention, the Department Officers devoted most of their energies toward the building up of the Legion and meeting post-war problems. County Committees were organized in 14 counties and they proved most helpful in meeting local problems and straightening out the work of the local posts. Instructions and plans were submitted to the County and Post War Risk Officers to aid them in handling claims for Disability, Compensation, Insurance and Civil Rights; Employment Bureaus were also established. Hospitals and Homes where the sick and wounded were convalescing were visited and entertainment, help and encouragement were extended.

The Department of New Jersey received its permanent Charter on Aug. 1, 1920. This was issued by National Headquarters, signed by Franklin D'Olier, then National Commander, and countersigned by Lemuel Bolles, National Adjutant.

In order that the Department be more centrally located, by a mandate of the 1921 convention, the Department Headquarters moved from Newark to Trenton, and on Jan. 1, 1922, the Department established its headquarters in the Wilkinson Building on E. State St., remaining there until Oct. 30, 1924.

From Nov. 1, 1924, to June 30, 1928, it was located in the Vroom Building, State House, more space was needed and it was moved to 103 W. State St., Corner Willow St., where it remained until Feb. 21, 1932. Application was made for space in the War Memorial Building and it was officially moved to the War Memorial Building, Stacy Park, on Feb. 22, 1932.

First Caucus of American Legion, held in Paris, France, 1919

