

# **THE HISTORY OF THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS AUXILIARY**

The first concrete step toward the formation of an organization to help the wounded and disabled veteran came on Christmas Day, 1919, at a gathering of disabled veterans hosted by Judge Robert Marx, himself a seriously disabled and much decorated veteran of World War I. A few months later, Judge Marx called a meeting of more than 200 vocational trainees at the Ohio Mechanics Institute in Cincinnati. This actually was the beginning of the DAV.

The first national convention of the DAV was held in Detroit in July 1921. In 1922 the necessity for an auxiliary to be composed of the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of war's disabled and the gold star relatives of those who had given their lives in defense of their country, was recognized by the DAV leaders. These leaders fully realized that only those women closely associated with, and vitally interested in, the disabled's problems would be in a position to help them and continue to devote their time and efforts to this service as long as the need demanded.

At the San Francisco National Convention in 1922, plans were perfected for the formation of the Women's Auxiliary, Disabled American Veterans of the World War, now known officially as the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary and Mrs. John Paul Jones was chosen as the first national commander of the auxiliary.

This organization, founded on a single impulse of an unselfish desire to render service to the disabled veterans and their dependents, to make every effort possible to rehabilitate them, to alleviate the sufferings of those who would never be able to take their place in the normal walks of life again and to provide for their families, spread rapidly throughout the country.

The first regular national convention of the auxiliary was held in Minneapolis, in June 1923. A permanent organization was then established. A national constitution and bylaws was adopted, and Mrs. Robert Renton of Walla Walla, Washington, was elected as the National Commander. By 1924 there were 20 active units, now there are more than 1,000.

Saturday, February 24, 1926, the first Forget-Me-Not day was held. At the Detroit Convention, July 31, 1929, Argonne Day, which is September 26, and Armistice Day, November 11, were designated as the official Forget-Me-Not days with the understanding that units may conduct a drive on dates other than those, because of weather or other local conditions. Argonne Day is the commemoration of the last big decisive "push" of World War I in the Meuse-Argonne forest. There, the allies fought and won the great battle on September 26, 1918.

In 1930, the Education Loan Fund was started to assist children of the members of the DAV and Auxiliary in their goals for a higher education. To date we have assisted hundreds of students.

In 1932, the National Department of the DAV called upon the auxiliary units throughout the United States to make voluntary contributions to the DAV Service Officer Program beginning with \$415.00 in 1932 and through the auxiliary membership the fund grew to \$9,652.00 in one year. In 1953 the parent organization agreed that this rehabilitation fund program be discontinued and be replaced by an expansion program for auxiliary growth.

The DAVA became interested in patients with Hansen Disease at Carville (Gillis W. Long Hansen's Disease Ctr.) located in Louisiana. Donations were sent for various

projects. The first DAVA sponsored project was a Washington birthday party on February 22, 1957. WE HAVE SINCE DISCONTINUED THIS PROGRAM SINCE MOST OF THE GROUNDS NOW HOUSE A PRISON FACILITY.

Other programs of the Auxiliary have been added and have grown due to the need and the times. Annually, more than a million hours of Non-VA and VAVS hospital work are reported by the units throughout the country.

More projects that have grown from small beginnings are in the areas of Americanism, Community Service, Freedoms Foundation, Junior Activities and of course our VAVS program with the various sub-programs under its umbrella.

The reason for the existence of the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary is service. This is clearly stated within our Constitution under "Purpose."

### **OFFICIAL EMBLEM OF THE DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS**



Columbia signifies the United States.

She is knighting a soldier who represents the armed forces.

This emblem appeared on certificates of appreciation that were issued to those serving in World War I, and these were signed by President Woodrow Wilson.

It is copyrighted as the official emblem of the Disabled American Veterans.

Probably you have seen the DAV emblem in most of the forms existing today. It appears on lapel pins, flags, and shoulder patches. It is a familiar part of all DAV caps. It is used on stationery, official documents, awards, plaques, business cards, and many other forms of official DAV material. Ever wonder how or why the DAV adopted its official emblem?

Our emblem was selected as the official symbol of the Disabled American Veterans when our organization was founded, way back in 1921. At that time, the organization was known as the Disabled American Veterans of the World War.

The emblem is a replica of an original etching drawn and designed by a well known artist of that day – E. M. Blatchfield – at the special request of Woodrow Wilson. It was used as the central design on a certificate which was presented to every soldier, sailor, and marine who had been wounded in action during honorable service in World War I.

The impressive certificate was headed by the words, "Columbia Gives to Her Son the Accolade of the New Chivalry of Humanity." The emblem was displayed under those colorful words. Below it, the name of the man and the outfit with which he served was printed, and under that the following words: "Served With Honor in the World War and Was Wounded in Action."

The certificate was signed by President Woodrow Wilson.

Several characters of importance are in the design. Our flag, of course, is seen in the right-hand background.

The woman in the long flowing white gown is Columbia. Who is Columbia? Several years before the Revolutionary War many of the people living in the thirteen colonies felt

that our country should have been named Columbia after its discoverer, Christopher Columbus. Throughout the war, poets used the name "Columbia" to describe their new nation which was to become the United States. The name continued to become popularized after the war, and a symbolic figure of a woman dressed in flowing garments and holding an American flag emerged from the pens of artists. It became a familiar figure for statues and pageants to depict America. Some people think the statue of the Capitol dome in Washington, D.C., is Columbia. But it isn't. That is a statue called the Statue of Freedom.

Columbia, in the DAV emblem, is knighting a World War I soldier. She is honoring him for his bravery in protecting humanity, and a group of soldiers stands at attention in the background.

President Wilson and the artist authorized our organization to use the design for the official emblem of the Disabled American Veterans of the World War. The emblem was adopted.

One of the original founders of the DAV, Judge Robert S. Marx, applied for and was granted a patent on the emblem in 1921. It has been used since that time.



The following is an excerpt from a news story published by the DAV many years ago pertaining to the origin of Forget-Me-Not drives. Since that time, the name of the organization has been changed to DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS, and its ranks now include veterans from subsequent wars and conflicts.

### **ORIGIN OF FORGET-ME-NOT DRIVES**

In the Meuse-Argonne Forest the last big decisive "push" of the World War was fought and won by the allies on Argonne Day, which was September 26<sup>th</sup>. The Disabled

American Veterans of the World War enlisted the aid of the general public in waging the battle for justice still being fought by thousands of unfortunate disabled veterans whose claims for government treatment and compensation had been denied because of the deficiencies of the law or of the evidence submitted by them. On that date Forget-Me-Nots were first offered for sale in every large town and city throughout the nation, to a grateful people who had not forgotten their wartime promises that nothing would be too good for the returned soldier. The wearing of a Forget-Me-Not on Argonne Day, therefore, meant much more than the expression of a sentiment; it carried with it as well, the fact that the wearer was performing an unselfish service in assisting unfortunate and needy Disabled American Veterans. By remembering the living, we can best honor the dead. Through the sale of the little blue flowers of remembrance, the DAV hoped to realize sufficient funds to carry on its important work for the coming years. The first Forget-Me-Not Day was February 24, 1926.

At the Detroit Convention, July 31, 1929, Argonne Day, September 26, and Armistice Day, November 11, were designated as Forget-Me-Not Days with the understanding that units may conduct a drive on dates other than the above because of weather conditions or other local circumstances.

In accordance with the custom established at the White House at the time of the Disabled Veterans of the World War's first annual appeal to the public through the medium of the Forget-Me-Not sale, President Calvin Coolidge, while at the summer White House, issued a proclamation calling upon the people of the U.S. to support the organization's call for assistance in which he commended the DAV as one of the agencies which has given the government needed assistance by assisting in every possible way in alleviating the sufferings of those veterans of the recent conflict for whom the war still endures.

## **WHERE DID THE FORGET-ME-NOT GET ITS NAME**

There are many legends and stories concerning the Forget-Me-Not, of course none have been verified; however, here are two such tales.

God was looking at the world that He had created and felt that He needed to place beautiful colors as a finishing touch to make the world a joy for the eye and the soul. He then told the little cherubs that they would be sent to earth to give pleasure to man by blooming as bright and glorious flowers. "These will remind man that whenever there is desperation and the feeling that all is lost they have only to look around and see one of you in all your majesty." After He had almost completed His work the tiniest, chubbiest and youngest cherub came to Him for the third time and jumped on His lap. "Father what am I supposed to be?" God looked down at him and with a smile and a pat on the cherub's head He said, "Forget-Me-Not."

According to history, during the reign of King Edward, a young man and his lady were strolling on the margin of a lake. They discovered some flowers some distance from the lake's inner bank. In the true spirit of chivalry, the lad swam to the off shore island and plucked the flowers for the lady. As he was returning, feeling that he could not reach the shore, he cast a last affectionate look toward the lady, threw the flowers and said, "Forget-Me-Not." It is our "Forget-Me-Not" sale that says to everyone throughout the year "Remember Me." When we pass the flowers to eager hands upon the street we are saying, "Remember and Forget me not, I am a Disabled American Veteran."

## **HISTORY OF FORGET-ME-NOT LUNCHEONS**

In 1921 a luncheon was held in the home of Adelaide Irwin's apartment to plan the first National Convention, which had been

deemed necessary by the parent organization. Adelaide was a "war time necessitated transplant from New York City" whose family resided in the elite type, in those days, a three-story brownstone flat. By the time the convention was held in El Paso in 1927 members had learned that some officers and a "select" group of members had lunch together during each convention for comradeship and politics. This terminology derived from the DAV calling one another "Comrade."

The current officers were not the least bit receptive to a change in this format, since it permitted the little "click" getting together. The delegates voted to adopt the official flower, Forget-Me-Not, after which, a delegate was successful with a motion to have a luncheon for those who wished to attend. The motion carried. Following this decision, it was to be known as the Forget-Me-Not Luncheon, regardless of the size of the attendance.

As recalled by:  
Catherine Early, PNC  
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## **HISTORY OF THE FALL CONFERENCE**

The first National Conference of the DAVA was held in February 1948 at Colorado Springs, Colorado. Colorado Springs at that time was considered the National Headquarters, and was located in the private home of the National Adjutant Ann Fouts Weber. Since then, we have had a conference every year.

At the first conference, the members of the group recommended that future meetings be held in the fall; so two conferences were in calendar 1948, one in February and one in October. On several occasions, it has been necessary to schedule the meetings in early November.

In February 1948, at least twenty-six women gathered together at the home of the National Adjutant. According to some of the

people who were there, the house was crowded with members who were interested in learning more about the DAV Auxiliary. The ladies were happy to have the opportunity to get acquainted with one another and, although they were busy, they still found time to take sightseeing tours in the surrounding area. For many of the members, this was their first visit to Colorado.

Some of the officers spent the nights in the home of the National Adjutant, but of course she couldn't accommodate all 26 of them, so the majority of the ladies had rooms at the local hotels. The members of the Headquarters Staff served lunch following the morning sessions and they took pictures, some of which were published in the Forget-Me-Not papers. This conference, like those that followed, concluded with a banquet at the Acacia Hotel or at the Alta Vista Hotel. At the second conference in October 1948 the attendance totaled 41 and it has grown larger every year since that time.

Originally known as the Commander and Adjutants Conference, the meetings were later designed for the benefit of all members, and since 1953, this meeting has been referred to as the Fall Conference.

It was soon obvious that the Fall Conference provided an opportunity for meetings of the National Finance Committee and the NEC's. In 1964, the National Chairmen, for the first time held a meeting to discuss plans for their programs and try to simplify the questionnaires. It was also hoped that they could eliminate any overlapping of the various programs. During the previous year, the National Judge Advocate began holding a school of instruction on the Constitution and Bylaws.

Eighteen Fall Conferences were held in Colorado Springs, Colorado, through the fall of 1964. One year later, the headquarters of the auxiliary moved temporarily to Cincinnati, Ohio. After the auxiliary moved to Ohio a fire broke out in the building, but

fortunately, no current DAVA records were lost.

Following the dedication of the new DAV building in November 1966 in Cold Spring, KY, the Auxiliary National Headquarters office became firmly established in the headquarters building of our parent organization and is located there at this time.

Since 1965 the majority of the conferences have been held in the Cincinnati area; however there have been times when it has been held in surrounding areas such as Kentucky and other sites.

The Fall Conference is a well-planned part of the functions of the organization and it plays an important role in the preparation for each coming year. Here, the members are given an opportunity to ask questions, make suggestions, and hopefully, to get help in solving problems. Certainly it plays an extremely important role in helping our members understand and carry out the work of the Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary.

Excerpts above

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