

# NATIONAL ORGANIZATION



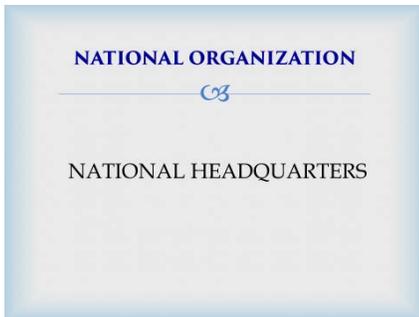
## NATIONAL ORGANIZATION



The top legislative body of The American Legion is the national convention. The National Executive Committee is vested with administrative authority between national conventions.

Through the offices of National Headquarters in Indianapolis and Washington, D.C., the policies of the Legion are clarified and its activities are centered and directed. Thus, the influence of nearly 14,000 posts is coordinated and directed along the lines of Legion policy.

### National Headquarters



Nearly all your contacts with National Headquarters rightfully come through department headquarters. There is, however, one publication that should be faithfully read and kept, issue by issue: The American Legion Dispatch, which provides you the latest Legion news and information on which to base your programs. Post officers should also subscribe to The American Legion Online Update, and weekly email newsletter.

## BACKGROUND

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION



BACKGROUND

The aftermath of two American wars in the second half of the 19th Century had seen the formation of several ex-soldiers' organizations. Following the American Civil War of 1861-65 former Union soldiers had established an organization called the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), while their Southern brethren had joined together as the United Confederate Veterans (UCV) in the aftermath of hostilities. Both of these organizations had emerged as powerful political entities, with the GAR serving as a mainstay of the Republican Party, which controlled the Presidency from the Civil War through the Theodore Roosevelt administration for all but the two terms of office of Grover Cleveland. In Southern politics the UCV maintained an even more dominant position as a bulwark of the conservative Democratic Party which ruled there.

With the termination of hostilities in World War I in November 1918, certain American officers who had been participants in the conflict began to think about the creation of a similar organization for the nearly two million men who had shipped out for European duty.

The need for an organization for former members of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (AEF) was pressing and immediate. With the war at an end, hundreds of thousands of impatient draftees found themselves trapped in France and pining for home, certain only that untold weeks or months lay ahead of them before their return would be logistically possible. Morale plummeted. Cautionary voices were raised about an apparent correlation between disaffected and discharged troops and the Bolshevik uprisings taking place in Russia, Finland, Germany, and Hungary.

This situation was a particular matter of concern to Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., eldest son of the 26th President. One day in January 1919, Roosevelt had a discussion at General Headquarters with a mobilized National Guard officer named George A. White, a former newspaper editor with the Portland Oregonian. After long discussion, Roosevelt suggested the establishment at once of a new servicemen's organization including all members of the AEF, as well as those soldiers who remained stateside as members of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps during the war without having been shipped abroad.

Roosevelt and White advocated ceaselessly for this proposal until ultimately they found sufficient support at headquarters to move forward with the plan. Orders were issued by Gen. John J. Pershing to a group of 20 non-career officers to report to YMCA headquarters in Paris on February 15, 1919. The selection of these individuals was handled by Roosevelt. Joining them were a number of regular Army officers selected by Pershing himself.

The session of reserve and regular officers was given the task of providing a set of recommendations aimed at curbing the problem of declining morale. A series of proposals resulted from the three days of sessions, including elimination of restrictive regulations, organization of additional athletic events and recreational opportunities, and the expansion of leave time and entertainment programs. At the end of the first day, the group retired to the Inter-Allied Officers Club, a converted home located across the street from the YMCA building, where Lt. Col. Roosevelt unveiled his proposal for a new veterans' society for the first time.

Most of those present were rapidly won to Roosevelt's plan. The group decided to declare all of their actions provisional until a duly elected convention of delegates could be convened and made no effort to predetermine a program for the still-unnamed veterans organization. Instead they sought to expand their

number through the convocation of a large preliminary meeting in Paris, to consist of an equal number of elected delegates from the ranks of enlisted men and the officer corps.

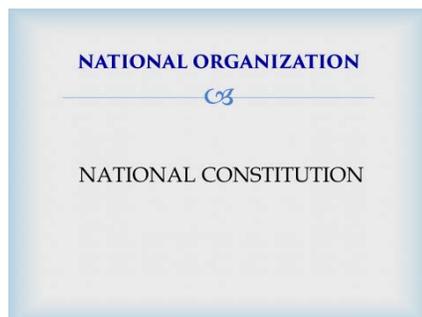
A provisional executive committee of four people emerged from the February 15 "Roosevelt dinner": Roosevelt in the first place, who was to return to the United States and obtain his military discharge when able, and then to gather assistants and promote the idea of the new veterans' organization among demobilized troops there; George White, who was to travel France touring the camps of the AEF explaining the idea in person; Secretary of the group was veteran wartime administrator Eric Fisher Wood, together with former Ohio Congressman Ralph D. Cole, Wood was to establish a central office and to maintain contact by mail and telegram with the various combat divisions and headquarters staffs, as well as to publicize activities to the press.

Preparations for a convention in Paris began apace. A convention call was prepared by Wood and "invitations" distributed to about 2,000 officers and enlisted men and publicized in the March 14, 1919 issue of Stars and Stripes. The convention call expressed the desire to form "one permanent nation-wide organization composed of all parties, all creeds, and all ranks who wish to perpetuate the relationships formed while in military service." In addition to the personal invitations distributed, the published announcement indicated that "any officer or enlisted man not invited who is in Paris at the time of the meeting is invited to be present and to have a voice in the meeting." The conclave was slated to begin on March 15.

## CONSTITUTION OF THE AMERICAN LEGION

You cannot cover all of the articles of the Constitution and Bylaws in this lesson but you should highlight the following:

### PREAMBLE



For God and Country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes: To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to maintain law and order; to foster and perpetuate a one hundred percent Americanism; to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in the Great Wars; to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; to make right the master of might; to promote peace and good will on earth; to safeguard and transmit to Posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.

### ARTICLE I NAME

Section 1. The name of this organization shall be THE AMERICAN LEGION.

Section 2. The National Headquarters of THE AMERICAN LEGION shall be located at the site of the Indiana World War Memorial in the city of Indianapolis, Indiana.

## ARTICLE II NATURE

Section 1. THE AMERICAN LEGION is a civilian organization; membership therein does not affect nor increase liability for military or police service. Rank does not exist in the Legion; no member shall be addressed by his military or naval title in any convention or meeting of the Legion.

Section 2. THE AMERICAN LEGION shall be absolutely nonpolitical and shall not be used for the dissemination of partisan principles nor for the promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public office or preferment.

## ARTICLE III ORGANIZATION

Section 1. THE AMERICAN LEGION shall be organized in Departments and these in turn in Posts. There shall be one Department in each state, in the District of Columbia, and there may be one Department in each territory and insular possessions of the United States. The National Executive Committee may establish Posts in the territorial and insular possessions of the United States and foreign countries, and shall designate the Department under whose jurisdiction they shall function, but this shall in no way affect the status of Departments already established.

## ARTICLE V NATIONAL CONVENTION

Section 1. The legislative body of THE AMERICAN LEGION shall be the National Convention, except as otherwise provided in the Constitution and Bylaws.

Section 2. The time and place of the National Conventions shall be determined by the National Executive Committee, which shall have authority to change such time and place for sufficient reasons to it appearing.

Section 3. In the National Convention each Department shall be entitled to five delegates and one additional delegate for each one thousand members, or major fraction thereof, whose current dues have been received by the National Treasurer 30 days prior to the meeting of said convention, and whose registration fees, as fixed by the National Executive Committee, for its total authorized delegate strength, have been paid; and to one alternate for each delegate. The delegates shall be chosen not less than two weeks before the National Convention at Department Conventions or in any other manner specified by any Department Constitution.

Section 4. Each duly registered delegate shall be entitled to one vote. The vote of any registered delegate absent and not represented by an alternate shall be cast by the majority of the registered delegates present from his Department. Alternates for registered delegates shall have all the privileges of registered delegates, except that of voting. A registered delegate is one who has received his credentials after his registration fee has been paid.

Section 5. A quorum shall exist at a National Convention when sixty percent of the Departments are represented as provided above.

Section 6. The National Executive Committee shall provide a Uniform Code of Procedure for the orderly organization and operation of National Conventions with continuing power of revision, and said Code shall be applicable at all National Conventions unless it is amended, suspended, or repealed by a majority vote of the total authorized representation at a National Convention.

## ARTICLE IX POST ORGANIZATION

Section 1. Those who desire to form a Post shall make application for a temporary charter to the Commander of the Department in which they reside. The temporary charter shall be issued by the National Commander and National Adjutant upon receipt of the application properly executed by the charter members of the projected Post, but only when such application is approved by the Commander of the Department or by the Department Executive Committee.

Section 2. The minimum membership of a Post shall be determined by the Executive Committee of the Department in whose area it lies.

Section 3. No Post shall be named after any living person.

Section 4. A temporary charter shall be granted and shall state that it is granted on the recommendation of the Department and on the following terms and conditions:

1. All acts heretofore duly and properly taken for the formation of the above named Post are recognized and confirmed by the National Executive Committee.
2. The above named Post shall uphold the declared principles of The American Legion and shall conform to and abide by the regulations and decisions of the Department and of the National Executive Committee, or other duly constituted national governing body of The American Legion.
3. This charter is subject to revocation by the National Executive Committee on the recommendation of the Department, or by such authority that may hereafter be established by the National Convention.

Section 5. After a temporary charter has been in effect for a probationary period of at least ninety days, application for a permanent charter may be made. Such probationary period shall not exceed one year upon the termination of which the Department shall determine whether or not a permanent charter shall be issued or denied and the action of the Department shall be final.

Section 6. All charters shall be countersigned by the Commander and the Adjutant of the Department.

Section 7. Each Department may prescribe the Constitution of its Posts. Permanent charters may be suspended, cancelled or revoked by the Department Executive Committee as provided in the ByLaws.

## ARTICLE X FINANCE

Section 1. The revenue of THE AMERICAN LEGION shall be derived from annual membership dues and from such other sources as may be approved by the National Executive Committee.

Section 2. The amount of such annual dues shall be determined by each National Convention for the ensuing year.

Section 3. The annual dues shall be collected by each Post and transmitted promptly through the Department to the National Treasurer. Departments are designated agents for collection for THE AMERICAN LEGION with respect to such annual dues and upon the receipt thereof shall remit them promptly to THE AMERICAN LEGION. In no event shall the period transpiring between the receipt of such annual dues by a Department and the remittance thereof to THE AMERICAN LEGION exceed thirty (30) days.

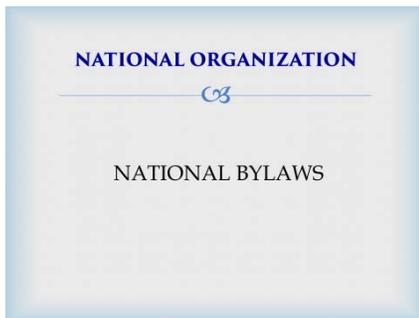
Section 3.2. The annual dues shall be collected in such alternate method(s) as determined by the National

Executive Committee from time to time and thereafter communicated to the Departments for communications to the Posts provided that (a) in no instance shall the National Organization or the Departments be empowered to retain, or withhold, more than each ones published amount of per capita dues; (b) in no event shall the period transpiring between the receipt of such annual dues by the National Organization and the remittance thereof to the Departments exceed thirty (30) days; and (c) any such alternative method shall be in addition to and not in substitution for method 3.1 above.

Section 4. Annual dues shall be payable October 20 of each year, for the succeeding calendar year.

## BYLAWS OF THE AMERICAN LEGION ARTICLE III

### CHARTERS



Section 1. The Department Executive Committee may suspend, cancel or revoke a Post Charter. The action taken by the Department Executive Committee shall be final and conclusive unless an appeal is taken to the National Executive Committee within thirty days from the date of said suspension, cancellation or revocation. The action taken by the National Executive Committee upon appeal shall be final.

Section 2. Any Post failing to meet the obligations imposed upon it by the Constitution and By---Laws, or ceasing to function for six months as an American Legion Post, or voluntarily ceasing to function as a Post, or merging with one or more other Posts, or refusing to pay the Department and National per capita dues, or under such other conditions as might make such action necessary shall, upon order of the Department Executive Committee, surrender its charter for cancellation. Upon failure to surrender such charter, immediate steps may be taken for its revocation, suspension or cancellation.

Section 3. Upon revocation, cancellation or suspension of the charter of a Post in any Department of THE AMERICAN LEGION, said Post shall immediately cease operations and upon revocation or cancellation shall turn over its charter to its Department Commander or Department Executive Committee, and the Department Executive Committee is authorized, empowered and directed by and through its duly authorized agent to take possession, custody and control of all the records, property and assets of said Post; provided, however, that nothing herein shall be construed as requiring any Department to take over or assume any financial responsibility as to such property. Said Department Executive Committee may provide for the transfer of the members in said Post to other Posts of their choice, subject to the approval of such other Post.

Section 4. The National Executive Committee shall provide a uniform code defining the procedure to be followed in the revocation, cancellation or suspension of Post charters and providing for a method of appeal and further providing a code of procedure for the revocation, cancellation or suspension of Department charters with continuing power to revise said code, provided, however, that the procedure now in effect shall continue until such code is so adopted.

ARTICLE IV  
DISCIPLINE OF POST AND POST MEMBERS

Section 1. Each Post of The American Legion shall be the judge of its own membership, subject to the restrictions of the Constitution and Bylaws, except that no person who is a member of an organization which has for its aim the overthrow of the United States Government by force or violence, or who subscribes to the principles of any group opposed to our form of government, shall be eligible to become or remain a member of The American Legion.

Section 2. Members may be suspended or expelled from the Legion only upon a proper showing of cause. Charges shall be based upon disloyalty, neglect of duty, dishonesty and conduct unbecoming a member of The American Legion. All charges must be made under oath in writing by the accusers, and no member in good standing shall lose his membership until given a fair trial by the Post or Department in such manner and form as the Department Bylaws and Department Executive Committee shall prescribe.

Section 3. Any member who has been suspended or expelled has the right of appeal to his Department Executive Committee, or to the Department Convention, according to the provisions in the Bylaws of such Department. The decision of the Department shall be final.

Section 4. A member whose dues for the current year have not been paid by January first shall be classed as delinquent. If his dues are paid on or before February first, he shall be automatically reinstated. If he is still delinquent after February first, he shall be suspended from all privileges. If he is still under such suspension on June thirtieth of such year, his membership in The American Legion shall be forfeited. A member so suspended or whose membership has been so forfeited may be reinstated to active membership in good standing by vote of the Post and payment of current dues for the year in which the reinstatement occurs. Provided, however, that the Posts, Departments and the National Organization may waive the provisions hereof, upon payment of dues for the year in which reinstatement occurs, with reference to former members who have been prevented from the payment of dues by reason of active military service.

