



Elks Remember Veterans

In 1917, the world was at war. The Order of Elks was only 49 years old. In April of that year, Grand Exalted Ruler Edward Rightor appointed a committee to study what the Order of Elks should do in this crisis. The Committee was ordered to present its findings to the Grand Lodge Session in Boston that July. During the session, this committee, headed by Past Grand Exalted Ruler John K. Tener, recommended to the membership that “the Elks give first consideration to the sick and wounded on the battlefields of France and equip base hospitals for their care,” and that “the Order create a fund for war relief work.”

The membership enthusiastically and unanimously approved a resolution appropriating \$1 million dollars for the War Relief Fund. This money was raised by Elks at the subordinate Lodge level. GER Fred Harper, who was elected Grand Exalted Ruler at the Boston convention, appointed an Elks War Relief Commission, with PGER Tener serving as chairman. This commission evolved into the organization we have today: The Elks National Veterans Service Commission.

During World War I, the Elks, under the auspices of the War Relief Commission, helped the nation to victory. Through the patriotism and generosity of our members, the commission organized and equipped the first two base hospitals to reach France - Unit 41 staffed by faculty and alumni from the University of Virginia, and Unit 46 with University of Oregon faculty and alumni.

In 1918, to accommodate the maimed and wounded, the Elks built a 700-bed Reconstruction Hospital in Boston and gave it to the War Department. That was the only veterans hospital after World War I that was donated by a private entity. It was transferred to the US Public Health Service that same year, and then to the Veterans Bureau in 1922. Also in 1918, the Order built a 72-room Community House to take care of families visiting the 40,000 soldiers stationed at Camp Sherman, Ohio.

In 1940, it was becoming quite apparent to many people that war was quickly approaching our shores. Right after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, GER John S. McClelland sent a telegram to President Roosevelt placing the Order of Elks at the nation’s disposal. With an initial war chest of \$35,000, the War Commission set about its work. They also appealed to the subordinate Lodges for financial aid and manpower. The support of Elks throughout America was overwhelming.

The United States Army asked the Elks War Commission to recruit 45,000 young men for the ground crews of the Army Air Corps. The commission, with the help of the Lodges, recruited 97,000.

Elks have supported our military men and women throughout history, ... and will continue to do so.

"So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them!"

