

RHODE ISLAND COMMANDERY MILITARY ORDER OF FOREIGN WARS NEWSLETTER - WINTER 2021



COMMANDER'S MESSAGE

Dear Companions,

As holidays end and we look towards 2021, I wanted to provide you with a brief update on the Commandery. The generosity and support of our organization to our Veterans, those currently serving and military families is extremely important. If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything it is that there are so many reasons to be thankful. Even though 2020 has been a difficult year, we have countless blessings to guide us through 2021.

As we look to 2021, there are agenda items your Executive Committee is coordinating:

- Dining-In. Annual meeting will occur at the start of the event, followed by the Dining-in. Tentative date: TBD.
- Citizen-Soldier Hall of Fame. Tentative date: TBD.
- Fund Raising Committee. Plenary for a September launch plan to cover Dec/Jan timeframe.
- Bi-Annual Convention & Plenary – update to follow
- MOFW Website Modernization. The Executive Committee is pursuing options to update the Commandery's website to better serve the organization – update to follow.
- MOFW website/Paypal integration. The Treasury Team is looking to a Paypal

option to assist with keeping your membership current by providing other ways to submit your dues.

- Change of Command (CoC). Tentative timeframe: May/June 2021.

On behalf of our Executive Committee, we want to say thank you from the bottom of our hearts for being a part of this community. We hope you find time to rest, reset, and enjoy time with your loved ones (as safely as you can). Please take care and we will talk soon.

Kasim J. Yarn

RI MOFW Commander



MILITARY ORDER OF FOREIGN WARS: THE BEGINNING

By Companion LTC Dennis Morgan

The Order was founded on December 13, 1894 in the office of Frank M. Avery in the Tribune Building in New York City. The first signer of the Order's "Institution" (founding document) was Major General Fitz John Porter who was a

veteran of both the Mexican War and the Civil War. Eighteen others signed the Institution of which five were Mexican War veterans, nine were descendants of American Revolutionary War officers and four who were descendants of officers who served in the War of 1812.

The resultant Order was initially known as the Military and Naval Order of the United States and was organized and later incorporated under that name. Its hereditary line of descent spans the period of American history since national independence during the Revolutionary War. Initially membership in the Order was limited to officer veterans (and their hereditary descendants) of the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Mexican War. (In addition, there is a requirement that ancestors who were militia officers must have had active service during wartime.)

Although there were many individuals who served as officers in the American Civil War and the Indian Wars who were living at the time of the Order's founding, that service did not qualify them for membership as those wars were considered to be domestic rather than foreign wars.

In April 1895, the name of the Order was officially changed to its present name – The Military Order of Foreign Wars of the United States (MOFW). By the end of 1896, commanderies had been formed in seven states.

The MOFW was patterned after the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States (MOLLUS) which is a military society for officers, and their descendants, who had served the Union during the American Civil War. As MOLLUS had restricted its membership to officers who had served in one particular war, the need was felt to have an organization for the descendants of officers who had served in the American Revolution, War of 1812 and the Mexican War – as well as the few surviving Mexican War veterans who were officers.

The influence of the Order spread rapidly and soon commanderies (state level organizations) were formed in other states. It was deemed

advisable to form a National Commandery to centralize and coordinate the activities of the various state commanderies, and which would have general supervision and control over the policies and activities of the Order. The National Commandery was founded at a joint meeting of the individual state commanderies in March 1896 and General Alexander S. Webb was elected as the first Commander General.

The motto of the Military Order of Foreign Wars is the Latin phrase *Deus et Libertas* meaning *God and Liberty*.

The War and Navy Departments, and later the Department of Defense, under various resolutions of Congress, gave recognition to the Order and permitted the wearing of its insignia on uniforms.

Coming in next issue - the formation of the Rhode Island Commandery.



DISTINGUISHED COMPANIONS OF THE MILITARY ORDER OF FOREIGN WARS

By Companion John Duchesneau

Since its founding in 1893, a number of distinguished military leaders have been companions of the MOFW.

Originally, there was a limited pool of potential applicants for the Order. Only veteran officers and descendants of veteran officers of the Mexican War and earlier wars (i.e. the War of

1812 and the Revolution) were eligible for membership. Although there were numerous distinguished veterans of the Civil War, they were not eligible as the MOFW was intended for the veteran officers and descendants of foreign rather domestic wars such as the Civil War and the Indian Wars.

The original membership rules did allow for sitting and former presidents of the United States to be inducted as honorary members, as well as officers in the rank of major general and rear admiral and above.

President Benjamin Harrison was admitted as an honorary member in 1895 followed by presidents Grover Cleveland and William McKinley in 1897.

A great boon to the MOFW's membership occurred after the Spanish-American War in 1898. The war provided a large number of veteran officers from which to draw members. A study of the MOFW's register from 1900 shows that the Pennsylvania Commandery seemingly sought applications from every officer who served in the War with Spain as its membership had grown to fully two thirds of the Order as a whole.

The new companions included future president Theodore Roosevelt, Major General William Shafter who commanded the Fifth Corps in Cuba, Major General Joseph Wheeler who commanded the Cavalry Division of the V Corps (as well as being a former lieutenant general in the Confederate States Army), Commanding General of the U.S. Army Lieutenant General Nelson Miles and millionaire Jacob Astor IV who served as a lieutenant colonel during the war and would die on the RMS *Titanic* in 1912.

The US Navy was well represented by the founder of the Naval War College, Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce; hero of the Battle of Santiago, Rear Admiral Winfield Scott Schley and the illustrious Admiral George Dewey who commanded the Asiatic Squadron at the decisive Battle of Manila Bay.

Other new companions included several who would distinguish themselves in the First World War. These included the future commander of the American Expeditionary Forces General John J. Pershing, future Army chief of staff General Tasker H. Bliss and two time Medal of Honor recipient Major General Smedley D. Butler.

Unfortunately, MOFW membership listings for much of the 20th Century are missing. We do know that several eminent leaders of the Second World War were companions of the Order including Generals of the Army Dwight Eisenhower and Douglas Mac Arthur as well as Fleet Admiral William "Bull" Halsey.

Our own home state of Rhode Island has had several distinguished companions of its own.

These include three of the Order's Commanders-General – Colonel Charles Bechtold, Major General John Salesses, and Colonel David Russell.

Other Rhode Islanders of note include the founding commander of the Rhode Island Commandery, Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce, former Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court Frank J. Williams, former Adjutant General of Rhode Island Lieutenant General Reginald Centracchio, the late Governor Bruce Sundlun, and former Lieutenant Governor Bernard Jackvony.

Last, but far from least, Medal of Honor recipient Captain Paul W. Bucha is an honorary companion of the Rhode Island Commandery.



SOME THOUGHTS ON MEMBERSHIP

By Companion John Duchesneau

In common with most similar organizations, the RIMOFW is struggling to maintain its membership. It is no secret that our membership is aging and slowing declining.

The obvious solution is to recruit new members, but this is easier said than done.

The first thing to do is not to think of reasons why people may not wish to join. Yes, “young” people are busy and don’t see the value in fraternal and patriotic organizations which previous generations have. On the other hand, they are not as interdependent as past generations were and may need more social connection. (Despite having hundreds of “friends” on social media.)

People are social by nature and seek and enjoy the companionship of others with similar values and interests. With the temporary social isolation imposed by the pandemic, it would seem that once the “all clear” is given – hopefully in a few months – people will be eager to socialize more and enjoy the many activities which they have been denied over the past year.

In considering methods of recruiting new members, companions of RIMOFW should start with some introspection. Questions we should ask ourselves should include – “Why did I join the MOWF?”, “Why do I maintain my membership?”, “What do I enjoy about being a companion?” and “What do I like and dislike about the various organizations I belong to?”

The answers will, of course, vary from person to person but they will lead us all in finding ways of making the RIMOFW an organization which we, and others like us, will want to join and be active in.

We all probably know at least 20 people who would be excellent companions of the Order. We need to tell what the Order is, what it does and, most importantly, why we ourselves are members of it.

In almost all cases, we joined the Order because someone asked us to and we have stayed with the Order because we like the people we associate with in the Order and what the Order does for the benefit of its members and our community.

The chances are slim that someone will ask us if they can join the Order. We must ask them and give them good reasons to join.

Once new members have joined, we need to get them as active as possible. I once read that a new member’s enthusiasm is highest when they first join an organization. They need to be given enough responsibility to make them feel welcome and important but not so much that they feel burdened.

Well, those are just a few thoughts off the top of my head. In closing, I will return to my central theme – we need to realize that others will join the MOWF for the same reasons we did and invite them to join as someone did to us.

Deus et Libertas