

## Amvets | Nutley Yesterday · Today - 1961

### *AMVETS*

CARMEN A. ORECHIO

NOT long after the first atomic bomb convinced the Japanese that theirs was a losing cause, as had been their ally Germany's, Nutley's many veterans were being released from military service and returning to the pleasant scenes of their pre-war days in Nutley.

Casual conversations among the returning veterans led them to the desire to unite as a group to cement the relations gained in World War II and render service to their fellow returnees from the great conflict.

After several street corner conferences, the ex-soldiers, sailors and Marines, some of whom had joined either the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars during their military service, decided that the fledgling national veterans' organization, the American Veterans of World War II (Amvets) was the unit to which they owed their affiliation and allegiance.

Amvets had been founded on a national scale through the merger of some 30 organizations formed under different names and in many parts of the country during World War II.

Nutley was the 30th in the country to receive an Amvets charter, which was granted on March 25, 1946.

Those appearing as charter members were: Dr. Albert L. Gaydos, John J. Pinajian, Frank J. Horan, John T. Sherman, Jack C. Young, George E. Karras, Albert I. Piro, William J. Lee, George Birmingham, Charles L. Shaw, John E. Drake, Eric J. Belmont, Patrick Piro, Rudolph W. Hanson, Joseph K. Driscoll, Ferdinand Baruth, Harry M. Nassis and William R. Simmons.

During the organization year of 1946, other enlistees who are still on the membership roll were Mayor Harry W. Chenoweth, Anthony W. Andriola, Thomas D'Ambola, Michael F. Catania, Edgar Fendrich, Clarence Kincaid, Frank LoCurcio, Leonard Peduto, Dr. Sidney Rogoff, Gino Giua, Amuel Lardier, Thomas Ciccarelli, Walter H. Schmittzeh, Wallace T. Small, George H. Siegel, Rocco Liuzzi, Joseph Viola, Michael Viteritto and Irving Zucker.

William J. Lee, a finance company junior executive at the time and son of one of Nutley's early families, a combat veteran of the U.S. Navy, was elected as the first commander of the Amvets, which held its initial formal meeting at the Commission Chambers in the Town Hall in November, 1946.

Lee was a sparkplug and leading light in the Amvets until moving to upper New York State six years ago. He still retains his membership.

Looking for quarters in which they could also hold social functions, the Amvets made arrangements with Monsignor Anthony DiLuca, pastor of Holy Family Church, to meet at the former Catholic Youth Center on Franklin Avenue.

George Birmingham, now credit manager for Hahne & Co., was the second commander, and W. Howard Young, the third. An odd coincidence is that the first three commanders have long since moved from Nutley.

The first project to gain the attention of the Amvets was the World War II Memorial proposal. A committee worked with other veterans' organizations and civic groups which finally settled on the imposing memorial erected on the Town Hall Green.

Albert L. Manchee, R. H. Macy & Co. president, was later honored by Post 30 for his unselfish services in heading the World War memorial project, receiving a "Distinguished Citizen" award.

The Amvets were up with the leaders in the movement to provide temporary housing accommodations for returning veterans, who found themselves facing a critical housing shortage on their return to town, many of them having been forced to move their families in crowded quarters with their parents.

Commander Lee headed the screening committee for the housing program, which position he resigned after being appointed project manager by Commissioner John H. Lucy.

The other housing project managers for both state and federal veterans temporary housing all came from Post 30 - Jack Schwarzenbek, John T. Sherman and Rocco Liuzzi.

In December of 1946 the World War II veterans staged a boxing show before a capacity crowd at Park School, and repeated the event in April, 1947.

After several years of meeting at the Catholic Youth Center, which allowed the Amvets to mingle only twice a month, the ambitious vets began to consider securing a home of their own.

Plans were set in motion under Anthony W. Andriola, fourth commander, who had been a top organizer in the now defunct Catholic War Veterans Post of Holy Family Church.

The Amvets began negotiations first with Holy Family Church to acquire the property where they were holding their twicemonthly meetings, but when this project collapsed, the veterans decided to build their own clubhouse. Attempts were made to secure town-owned property on Chestnut Street but Commissioner Robert B. Anderson felt the neighbors would not welcome a veterans' clubhouse and offered a town plot at Park Avenue and Walnut Street, which was finally purchased at a cost of \$1,500.

In the search of the property, which was done by Attorney Benjamin Appel, a

prominent Legionnaire, to whom Post 30 is in debt, it was ascertained that one of the former owners of the plot was the slain dictator, Benito Mussolini, who many of the local lads had helped to bring to his untimely and inglorious end. This fact was publicized in papers the country over.

The Amvets were aided from their inception by Mayor Chenoweth, who has been their judge advocate since the group's inception. The town's first citizen was a delegate in September, 1947, to the National Department's third annual convention at Columbus, Ohio.

This was a history-making session for the Amvets, who voted in the negative by an overwhelming margin to merge with the American Veterans' Committee, known - justly or not - as a pink-tinted group.

Mayor Chenoweth was honored by the Amvets in October, 1956, at a banquet held at the Robin Hood Inn, for 12 years of continuous service as judge advocate. He also framed the Post's constitution and by-laws.

The Amvets have set a precedent in honoring outstanding members for achievements with testimonial dinners, and they have staged many highly successful affairs of that nature, in addition to the one held for Mayor Chenoweth.

Francis T. Buel and Salvatore Dimichino were honored when promoted to sergeants in the police department and at another function Amfren Gerald Ferraro and Trustee August E. Negra were feted for appointments as captain and sergeant respectively.

The fourth sell-out affair held last Spring honored Buel for his promotion to a captaincy; William Knust and Dom Casciano on achieving sergeant and Harry Jacques and Dominick Daddio on promotions to Fire Department captains.

Another testimonial dinner held a year ago March at the San Carlo in Lyndhurst honored George H. Siegel, who has held an elective or appointive position every year since Post 30's start and has also been editor of the monthly Fox Hole News, recently renamed Amvetically Yours.

On October 16, 1948, the World War II alumni staged their first "Miss Nutley" contest at the then Park School with Miss Catherine Hild winning the honor and later going on to fame as a model.

This competition was originally scheduled for the I.T.T. clubhouse on Washington Avenue, but the violent hurricane made that place inaccessible to transportation and the site was changed.

This Spring the Amvets will stage a competition to select a "Miss Amvet" to represent the Post at the state finals in Lakewood in June, the winner to represent New Jersey at the 1960 national convention in Miami Beach.

On April 24, 1953, under the chairmanship of Negra, the Amvets staged an Eastern Paraplegic Wheel Chair basketball game, introducing this therapeutic

sports activity to Nutley sports fans.

The event was staged the following two years and Post 30 was awarded a plaque by the national association for paraplegic welfare.

After their purchase of the Park Avenue site from the town, the Amvets proceeded with their building plans under the leadership of Liuzzi, a real estate broker, who later became Post 30's seventh commander.

The building was formally opened for the installation of the sixth commander, Edwin Von Hoene, in April, 1951. The building was financed by the issue of bonds, sold to members and civic-minded Nutley citizens.

The veterans were not without their financial difficulties and on one occasion over \$1,500 was raised in direct gifts from the membership to pay off a long patient mortgagee, a local builder, Louis Rossi, Jr.

When the final mortgage payment was made in 1956, a mortgage-burning ceremony, conducted by Mayor Chenoweth and Board of Education President Edward J. Lenihan, long time finance officer, was held at post headquarters.

Honored guests were the proprietors of Brookdale Beverages, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Pieretti, of Bloomfield, who refinanced the building. The bonds remaining in circulation are scheduled for retirement soon.

The Amvets celebrated in August, 1947, the granting of a national charter from Congress, the only World War II organization to be so recognized.

When the United States entered the Korean Conflict in 1950, the Amvets National Department ruled in favor of making Korean War veterans eligible for membership, and the name of the organization was officially changed to American Veterans of World War II and Korea. The eligible period for the Korean veterans extends from June 25, 1950, to July 27, 1953.

In 1955, the World War II veterans conceived the idea of forming an associate group of non-veterans to aid them with their objectives and projects, and so AMFRENS (friends of Amvets) was formed.

This group now numbers more than 50 members, comprising mainly Nutley business men and civic-minded citizens. The unit has been of unmeasurable assistance to the Nutley veterans.

For his part in forming Amfrens, Siegel, a former commander and currently public relations and service officer, was cited by the Amvets national department and the Nutley model for Amfrens has been copied by posts throughout the country.

Siegel and former commander Anthony J. Capriglione recently aided in the formation of an Amfrens post in West New York, home post of former national commander Dom Strada, head of the parks department in that city.

Several years after the formation of Amvets, an auxiliary post was organized,

the president for the first two years being Mrs. John T. Sherman, wife of a charter member and long-time adjutant.

Other auxiliary presidents have been Mrs. Marie D'Ambola, Mrs. Edna Walsh, Mrs. Margaret Rummel, Mrs. Eleanor Kincaid, Mrs. Muriel Narish, Mrs. Geraldine Amoscato, Mrs. Jean Tangorra and the current leader, Mrs. Josephine Viteritto.

The Amvets have never forgotten their more unfortunate comrades who are confined to Veterans' Administration facilities at Lyons and East Orange, holding many ward parties throughout the years, as has the Auxiliary.

The veterans have also provided Christmas and Thanksgiving baskets for needy veterans' families and among other projects spearheaded the drive to secure funds for schooling of the blind daughter of a Nutley veteran.

In 1959, the Post lost its first members through death, former third vice commander Archibald Stone and Samuel Strafacci. Amvets' rites were conducted at the services for both men and graveside urns were contributed to the families.

As the Amvets met in 1959 to elect their 14th commander, members recalled their leaders of the past, who saw them through the lean years, in this succession: William J. Lee, 1946-47; George Birmingham, 1947-48; William Howard Young, 1948-49; Anthony W. Andriola, 1949-50; John T. Sherman, 1950-51; Edwin A. Von Hoene, 1951-52; Rocco Liuzzi, 1952-53; Frederick J. McBride, 1953-54; George H. Siegel, 1954-55; Walter H. Wilhelm, 1955-56; Anthony J. Capriglione, 1956-57; Martin G. Bross, Jr., 1957-58; and Carmen A. Orechio, current commander.

Only one commander has succeeded himself, Capriglione achieving that distinction in being elected in April, 1956, and again in October of that year.

A change in the national constitution required all posts to hold their elections in September, instead of in April, and so Post 30 re-elected Capriglione after his first short term.

Three Amvets have been awarded life memberships, Capriglione, Siegel and Liuzzi.

The Amvets began the construction of a modern building, which more than doubled their facilities, needed for an evergrowing membership.

The target date for the formal opening was Veterans' Day, November 11, 1959. Construction was under the direction of former commander Andriola, a building contractor, and was financed by \$150 loans from members and Amfrens and with a mortgage granted by a Clifton friend of the Post.

The estimated cost of the structure is \$25,000. The new building will be used mainly as a meeting place and for social functions, while the older structure will be used for recreation exclusively.

Amvets take particular pride in their sponsorship of the state championship baton twirling tournament.

The veterans feel this is a strong weapon in combating juvenile delinquency and have received a national citation for their efforts in this direction.

The event has been held in Nutley for five consecutive years, through the efforts of Capriglione, whose daughter, Debbie, has been an outstanding twirler, having given several hundred exhibitions of her skill throughout the Mid-Atlantic States and New England.

The World War II veterans started a vigorous membership campaign in 1959, their objectives being 250 members and 100 on the roll of Amfrens.

They have been overcoming formidable obstacles since their inception 14 years ago when a good-sized telephone booth could have held all their members. The Amvets feel that their new building will be a credit to the town and enable them to better serve veterans and their families and their members in embodiment of their motto, "We Fought Together-Let's Serve Together."