

CHAPTER 9

THE GULF WAR LEGACY



My confidence in you is total, our cause is just. Now you must be the thunder and lightning of Desert Storm.

~ General Norman Schwarzkopf ~

AS 1991 BEGAN, AMERICAN TROOPS WERE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, DEMANDING THAT IRAQ END ITS OCCUPATION OF KUWAIT. ON JANUARY 16, OPERATION DESERT SHIELD VERY QUICKLY BECAME OPERATION DESERT STORM, AS AIRCRAFT ATTACKED ENEMY FORCES. THE GULF WAR WAS UNDER WAY. WHEN GROUND OPERATIONS BEGAN, IT TOOK 100 HOURS FOR COALITION FORCES TO CHASE IRAQI TROOPS FROM KUWAIT. ON FEBRUARY 27, PRESIDENT GEORGE H. W. BUSH ANNOUNCED A CEASEFIRE. KUWAIT HAD BEEN LIBERATED.

Back home, the Nation welcomed its returning Desert Storm veterans with a grand parade in Washington, D.C., led by General Norman Schwarzkopf. At the same time, the DAV was already working with the casualties from the Gulf War.

Jesse Brown, then Executive Director of the DAV's Washington Headquarters, discussed the consequences of war in the *DAV Magazine*. He noted that Operation Desert Storm had "been an international show of force unmatched in the history of the world." He was moved by the "moral tone" and the "deeply felt votes of conscience so many legislators cast."

However, Brown wondered if this sense of moral duty would extend to those who were injured. As he stated:

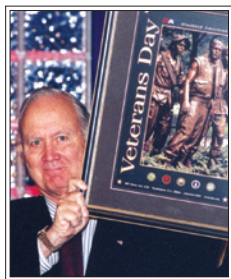
"It was easy spending \$4,000 for each 750-pound bomb that's been dropped on Baghdad. A similar sum could provide a state-of-the-art prosthetic limb for a disabled veteran. But most veteran amputees don't wear state-of-the-art prostheses because the funds to purchase them are not there. It was not so easy for Congress to find the same sense of moral purpose in appropriating those funds."

With reference to the disabled veterans, Brown went on to explain, "They may be the consequences of war, but they are also now the pride of America. And the DAV will not let them down."

No longer facing shortages of funding or membership, the energy of the DAV during the 1990s focused on expanded service programs for veterans. The organization continued its vigorous program to ensure that our grateful Nation remembered its promise to veterans.

As the summer of 1992 rolled on, the DAV planned its National Convention in Reno, Nev. The victory of Desert Storm was still fresh in the minds of all Americans, and the list of speakers was impressive.

President Bush, a World War II aviator shot down by the Japanese in the Pacific and a life member of the DAV, set a precedent by being the first Commander in Chief to address a DAV National Convention. Also on hand was General Colin Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who addressed the delegates on the disabled veterans' "spirit of honor."



GENERAL
NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF



PRESIDENT
GEORGE H. W. BUSH

The election of Bill Clinton to the presidency in November 1992 brought Jesse Brown's days as Executive Director with the DAV to an end. President Clinton called on Brown to be his Secretary of Veterans Affairs in 1993, and "one of our own" was the joyous cry heard throughout the DAV.

Wounded in Vietnam in 1965, Brown joined the DAV shortly after discharge from the Marine Corps and came on board with the organization's professional team as a DAV National Service Officer in Chicago in 1967. He rose rapidly through the DAV's ranks, building a reputation as the Nation's foremost expert in all areas of veterans' programs and services.

Arthur Wilson, who was the DAV's National Service Director in 1993, remarked, "No one has ever been placed at the helm of the VA who knew more about the programs he was asked to manage than Jesse Brown. And no one has ever brought to the job a greater sense of compassion for the men and women who have served in our armed forces. I view Jesse Brown's appointment as a watershed moment in the history of veterans' affairs."

NATIONAL ADJUTANT ARTHUR H. WILSON, SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS JESSE BROWN, AND NATIONAL COMMANDER THOMAS A. McMASTERS, III



PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, DAV NATIONAL CONVENTION, NEW ORLEANS, 1996



Responsibility for preparing Secretary-designate Brown for his new role in the administration fell to Gabby Hartnett. Armed with knowledge of the flaws and strengths of the VA, Brown easily won confirmation of the United States Senate. Then Hartnett followed Brown to the VA as the Secretary's Chief of Staff.

It was at this supreme moment that difficulty and division began to shake the foundation of the DAV. It was a very difficult time. Many experienced National Service Officers were disenchanted and leaving. It appeared that service was not a top priority of DAV leadership and did not have the emphasis that it always had throughout the DAV's history. A ground swell for change arose. And it happened at the National Convention in 1993.

Defining Moment

On June 14, 1993, Joeckel resigned as National Adjutant, following a revolt by DAV members who demanded his removal and five months of intense internal debate over management issues within the DAV. It set the stage for the most critical National Convention and a defining moment in the history of the DAV.

Fred Bristol, a vital part of the DAV for more than a half century, was part of the leadership at that convention. A practicing attorney, Bristol joined the DAV's professional staff as General Counsel in 1952 and was appointed Assistant National Adjutant in 1961. In 1972, he retired from the DAV to launch a highly successful second career in the investment industry, but he continued to serve as one of the organization's most trusted advisers. Bristol said the 1993 National Convention fireworks were rare for the annual gathering of members. There had been only three critically contested elections for National Commander in his career.

In 1962, the DAV had a vigorously contested election in Atlantic City, in which Peter L. Dye was elected National Commander. This occurred again in 1967, when Francis J. Beaton was elected National Commander. But those were cases in which the internal battle was between those gentlemen and other candidates.

The dramatic 1993 National Convention took place in San Francisco. "I call it a 'watershed' event because it was the only election in my tenure that resulted in a complete turnover of the administration," said Bristol.

After Bristol retired in 1972, he noticed a declining DAV net worth beginning in 1987. In the period from 1987 to 1992, there was a 27 percent reduction in the net worth of the DAV—more than a quarter of total value lost. "When Dale Adams explained to me why, he said something had to be done about it," said Bristol. "He asked me to cooperate with him in organizing a campaign to jump then 1st Junior Vice Commander Richard E. Marbes over the then Senior Vice Commander, who would under normal circumstances, be elected National Commander."

PETER L. DYE,
PAST NATIONAL COMMANDER



Marbes proposed a change in administration to increase the DAV's net worth and enhance its financial prospects. Marbes and Adams had the support of many members as they recognized that the diminution in value of the organization would eventually impair the lives and welfare of disabled veterans and their families. With the backing of the corps of National Service Officers, the willingness of Richard Marbes to run for National Commander, and the participation of Dale Adams in the election supporting Marbes, the DAV entered the 1993 National Convention in San Francisco with the hope of securing sufficient votes to win. The election was such a hard-fought battle that the front page of *The San Francisco Chronicle Examiner* compared it to the Republican or Democratic national conventions. "The battle was fought very much as those national conventions were fought, with vote counting and support rallies on behalf of each candidate," said Bristol.

When the votes were counted, Richard Marbes was elected National Commander. In his presentation to the convention, he said it was the dawn of a new era for the DAV, and that he hoped to be able to soon report progress in turning the organization's finances around. While San Francisco was a "watershed" event, the acceptance of routine thinking and status quo dated back to the late 1970's, so innovations rapidly came about after 1993.

At the request of National Commander Marbes, Adams agreed to serve as National Adjutant for one year. Adams appointed Bristol as Executive Director of the DAV National Headquarters in Cold Spring, Ky., and he appointed Arthur H. Wilson the Executive Director of the National Service and Legislative Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Bristol also agreed to serve only one year.

"We weren't sure how things would improve, but it didn't take long with Dale Adams as the Adjutant, Fred Bristol as the Executive Director of National Headquarters, and Art Wilson as the Executive Director of Washington Headquarters," said Ken Wolfe. "They immediately began to improve DAV services. There wasn't a disabled veteran in this country that suffered. They were taken care of, and the DAV continued to be the most effective organization in providing representation."

Shortly after being assigned to the national staff as Deputy National Service Director, then Executive Director Art Wilson called Ken Wolfe into his office and told him to "completely revamp the National Service Program." Wolfe was ecstatic, because that's what everybody wanted. The next question was how to do that.

DAV leadership began discussing how to make the Service Department better. They began looking at what was done in private industry, beginning with the interview process. They asked, "What does private industry do that maybe we could adopt?" So instead of sending a candidate from one office to another, the DAV put together a panel interview process where candidates came in to talk with DAV Assistant Service Directors and asked questions. The DAV also revamped the testing for National Service Officer candidates.

Candidates were sent to a newly created academy at the University of Colorado at Denver. "We were making every decision, and we weren't afraid to take a risk in

*THE CHANGES WERE WILDLY
SUCCESSFUL. FROM 1993 TO 2003,
THE NET WORTH OF THE DAV
INCREASED BY 478 PERCENT.*

the decisionmaking process,” said Wolfe. “There is a difference between reckless risk and calculated risk and the risks we were taking were calculated. We knew that we were going to be progressive. We were being innovative and, for me, it was absolutely a wonderful time.”

The DAV prepared young men and women being released from active duty to virtually take the place of DAV leaders. It was the same as throughout the history of the DAV.

The DAV turned around in a very short period of time. Over the next ten years, the progress and the strength of the DAV were relentlessly growing. It started immediately and continues to this day. Art Wilson put in place a management leadership training program to assess employees and learn their strengths and weaknesses. The program was designed to provide the help that was necessary.

The changes were wildly successful. From 1993 to 2003, the net worth of the DAV increased by 478 percent. Each year was progressively better than the previous year.

“During the year that Adams and I served, we made many financial changes and personnel changes,” said Bristol. “We changed the approach on fundraising, we hired a new comptroller, and when our tenure in office ended, we had increased the bottom-line net worth of the DAV by about 75 percent. That kind of increase was minimal in terms of dollars, but since that time it has grown immensely.”

New Beginnings, New Successes

Asking someone to forego a comfortable retirement and climb back in the saddle of the workaday world is a big request. Adams agreed to again serve, but “not for a full year.”

True to his word, Adams stepped down to an Assistant National Inspector General’s role shortly before the 1994 National Convention. “Only a fool doesn’t know his limitations and I knew I had extended myself physically and mentally as far as I could go,” he said. “I just wasn’t capable of doing the job any more. I wanted to plant the seeds for the future DAV and I think I accomplished that through Art Wilson and his people. The evidence speaks for itself. The growth that we’ve had financially. In public relations, they really brought class to this organization, which we didn’t have at one time.”

The organization had regained its footing. And, in accepting Adams’ decision, Commander Marbes praised the World War II veteran’s role in starting to turn the DAV around financially and restoring its commitment to its primary mission of service to disabled veterans and their families. Fred Bristol also took his leave. In wishing them well, the Commander offered his gratitude for the immense contributions made by them both. One of Adams’ principal legacies was the establishment in 1994 of a Department fundraising project operated by the National Organization. The National Organization



ARTHUR H. WILSON, NATIONAL ADJUTANT

contracted with Departments, which voluntarily wished to participate, to exclusively solicit donations from the DAV membership within that Department. At first the Departments, which had fundraising projects of their own, were skeptical that the project would raise more than their individual projects.

The National Organization required that the Departments not conduct any major fund raising on its own in return for the payment to Departments of \$3 per member annually in two installments. Only a few Departments participated at the start due to their doubt that the National Organization could raise more on a net basis than they could. The National Organization agreed to conduct the project, deducting only its actual cost and expenses with

no charge for overhead. At the time, the DAV National Headquarters was conducting a big nationwide project for return address labels, so it had the facilities available to conduct the projects for the Departments without undue burden on the national projects.

The few Departments that signed up found that the funds returned to them on a \$3 per member basis gave them the ability to balance their budgets without employing their own fundraising personnel or without going to an outside fundraising promoter. Most Departments had employed project promoters who would take the bulk of the funds raised as their fee for conducting the project. Fees ranged from 50 percent to 90 percent, with Departments receiving as little as 50 percent to 10 percent. The project was so successful that all 52 DAV Departments now participate in the program.

The national project has become so successful that in addition to the \$3 per member annually, it has been possible in most years to augment the return to the Departments by as much as \$1 per member.

It's been the experience of the National Organization that the public tends to support the DAV through good times and bad times at the national level. Historically there has been little or no diminution in returns from fundraising during periods of recession, periods of wartime, and extended peacetime periods when sometimes the emphasis is not so much on the veterans. Under ordinary circumstances, DAV returns over the years show a very steady line of support, and that support has increased with the population of the United States, and grown with the professional abilities of the direct mail staff.

WORLD WAR II VETERAN

