



**VETERAN'S AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**  
**Benovalent and Protective Order of Elks ~ Lodge 2679**  
**937 Carter Drive, Calabash, NC 28467**

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## **A HISTORY OF THE ELKS VETERANS PROGRAMS**

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 July.

During the July Grand Lodge Session held in Boston, this Committee, headed by Past Grand Exalted Ruler John K. Tener, reported to the membership and recommended, "That the Elks give first consideration to the sick and wounded on the battlefields of France and equip base hospitals for their care; that the Order create a fund for war relief work".

The membership enthusiastically and unanimously approved a resolution appropriating one million dollars for the "War Relief Fund". This money was raised by our Brothers at the local Lodge level.

Grand Exalted Ruler Fred Harper, who was elected at the Boston convention, appointed an Elks War Relief Commission. With Past Grand Exalted Ruler John K. Tener serving as Chairman, the Commission began evolving toward the organization we have today: the Elks National Veterans Service Commission.

During World War I, under the auspices of the War Relief Commission, the Elks 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 the 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 federal government. This hospital was the forerunner of the VA Medical Centers we have today. Another facility was scheduled for construction in New Orleans when the government decided it was not needed. That same year, the Order built a 72 room Community House to take care of families visiting the forty thousand soldiers stationed at Camp Sherman, Ohio.

During the war, the Salvation Army was severely handicapped in its great work for the servicemen by a lack of funds. To make sure this work continued, the Elks War Relief Commission and local Lodges of the Order undertook campaigns to raise funds for the Salvation Army. In addition, the Commission, at Christmas time, in 1918, gave the Army \$60,000 to continue its work.

The Commission made forty- thousand rehabilitation, vocational and educational loans to disabled veterans who were ineligible for government help or were waiting for approval of their applications for assistance. This service was so effective that the federal government followed the Order's example; they set up a revolving fund and took over this activity. The GI Bill, which makes funds available to veterans for education, had its genesis from this Elk program.

More than seventy thousand Elks served in the Armed Forces during World War I. The supreme sacrifice was paid by over one thousand Brothers.

That Elks hold veterans in high esteem is evident by their actions. During the Grand Lodge Convention held in Los Angeles in 1921, a proposal was made to establish the Elks National Headquarters in Chicago. The Committee also recommended that the Order erect a memorial building honoring those who served their country and gave their lives during the Great War. Three and one-half million dollars were raised by the Elks Lodges to pay for the new building.

The cornerstone was laid on June 7, 1924. Upon completion two years later on June 14, 1926, the edifice was formally dedicated to those who served in World War I.



The Elks rededicated the memorial in 1946 and 1976 to honor veterans of World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. On July 3, 1994, the building was rededicated to peace and to those who served in Grenada, Panama, Operation Desert Storm, and future conflicts. On October 1, 2003, the City of Chicago granted the memorial landmark status. Besides its status as a memorial, the building serves as the national headquarters of the Elks.

In 1990, at their annual meeting in Las Vegas, the Elks voted to restore their National Headquarters and Memorial to America's Veterans. They raised over \$5,000,000 for this purpose.

In 1940, it was becoming quite apparent to many people that war was quickly approaching our shores. That year at the Grand Lodge Session, held in Houston, Texas, the Elks unanimously voted to establish the Elks National Defense and Public Relations Commission.

The primary focus of this Commission was to establish a patriotic program, which placed the power of the Order behind the United States National Defense Program. All Elks were called upon to help preserve and defend our democratic way of life.

Right after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Grand Exalted Ruler John S. McClelland sent a telegram to President Roosevelt placing the Order of Elks at the nation's disposal. McClelland then called a special session of the Elks National Defense and Public Relations Commission to be held in New York City. From this meeting on January 4, 1942 was born the Elks War Commission.

With the 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. Once again, our Brothers, with their ladies, responded as they always have in times of crisis. Their support was overwhelming.

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

During its first session, the War Commission decided to set up a program in cooperation with Lodges that were close to large military camps. They wanted to provide Brother Elks with the benefits of their membership in the spare time available to them. The Commission also wanted to provide members of the Armed Forces who were not Elks, some of the comforts of home while far away from their families.

Throughout the United States, 155 Elks Fraternal Centers were established. They were supported by the Elks National War Commission, and in many instances, by individual Lodges.

Because of their record of accomplishment, the Elks were asked to help recruit men skilled in construction for the Army Corps of Engineers and the Navy Construction Battalions. With the enthusiasm and efficiency of our Lodges, the requested numbers of Army Engineers and Navy Seabees were met three months ahead of schedule.

The President of the American Merchant Marine Library Association reported to the Commission that 600,000 books were needed to provide reading material for the seamen of the Merchant Marine Service. The Order responded by providing 650,000 books, one for (at that time) for every member in our great fraternity.

Aid was provided for members of Manila Lodge No. 761 and Agana, Guam Lodge No. 1281 and their families after they had been captured and devastated by the Japanese.

Thousands of gift boxes containing smoker's supplies, candy and personal hygiene items were sent to our fighting military personnel, while thousands of slippers were distributed to hospitalized members of the Armed Forces.

When thousands of wounded and disabled members of the Armed Forces were returned to the States for recuperation at government hospitals, the Elks again stepped forward offering their services helping entertain these veterans. In addition to radios, phonographs, playing cards, books, magazines, games, musical instruments and craft items, they also provided comfort care items for bedridden patients.

Our Elk volunteers also spent hours listening to these heroes. They heard their tales of horror and heroism during battle. They listened to the hopes and dreams of these young veterans who were far from home, family, spouses and sweethearts. Most of all, the Elks were there to lend support whenever possible.

It was through the work with hospitalized veterans during World War II, that we continued our evolution of "SERVING OUR NATION'S VETERANS".

In July 1946, at the Grand Lodge Session in New York, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission was created to replace the Elks War Commission. The main goals of the new Commission were "to carry on the Hospital Program, the Peace Army Enlistment Campaign, and all uncompleted activities supervised by the Elks War Relief Commission". The Elks even provided funds and materials to build a recreational unit at the Navy Hospital in Guam. During this Grand Lodge Session, the Elks pledged, "So Long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them". Our commitment continues to this day, providing comfort and care to Veterans in over 300 VA and State Hospitals, long term care facilities, clinics, and USO centers.

At the Philadelphia convention in 1948, a delegate from each Lodge in California deposited a bundle of hides at the rostrum. These hides, valued at \$26,000 were distributed to 21 veterans hospitals who had requested these items. This was the beginning of our Leather Program. We still actively promote and support occupational and recreational therapy programs with leather provided from hides donated

by Elks, as well as thousands of pairs of high quality fingerless gloves for veterans confined to wheelchairs. Tens of thousands of leather craft kits embossed with the Elks logo are produced and distributed every year, each one including information about the Elks.

The Elks National Veterans Service Commission became the Elks National Service Commission in 1949 at the Grand Lodge session in Cleveland. This new Commission was named the patriotic agency of the Order, in addition to continuing our work with veterans.

When a shooting war broke out in Korea in 1950, the Elks responded by sending gift packs as they had in World War II. The same was done during the conflicts in Vietnam, Desert Storm, and continues in our most recent confrontations in the Middle and Far East.

In 1951 during the Korean War, the Secretary of Defense appealed to the Order for help in procuring blood for our wounded. Within a few months, the Elks Lodges obtained over a half million pints.

During the Vietnam War, the Defense Department was concerned with the morale of our 400,000 troops fighting communist aggression because of the anti-American sentiments being reported on the home front. After much discussion, it was decided that a "Letters from Home" campaign would help counteract all the negative acts emanating from this country.

The Elks again answered the call and flooded these fine young defenders of freedom with letters expressing our gratitude for the sacrifices they were making for our country.

When the Commission learned that wounded veterans from Vietnam were sweltering in Tripler Army Medical Center that lacked air conditioning, they provided 24 air conditioning units so that these military personnel might recover in relative comfort.

The Elks were among the first fraternal organizations to formally welcome home the returning veterans from Operation Desert Storm. Local Lodges held appropriate functions recognizing the veteran's sacrifices and thanking them for their commitment to duty. Care packages and letter writing campaigns were renewed for the troops in Desert Storm, and continue to this day supporting our troops in the war against terrorism.

***“So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them.”***

At the National Convention held In New Orleans in 1995, the delegates voted on July 13th to change the name of the Elks National Service Commission to the Elks National Veterans Service Commission, just as it was from 1946 to 1949. Then, at the National Convention in Philadelphia in 2001, the delegates voted to amend our pledge, which now reads "So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them". By removing the words "in our hospitals", we have expanded our outreach to all veterans. While our name has changed, our mission is the same-to provide aid and comfort to any veteran in need.

In 1997, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission began to provide financial support for National Cultural and Athletic Competitions hosted by the Department of Veterans Affairs. These events provide a venue for disabled or senior veterans to compete athletically on a national level. We support the National Veterans Winter and Summer Sports Clinics, Wheelchair Games, Golden Age Games, and the National TEE Tournament (for visually impaired Veterans) as well as the Creative Arts Festival for Veterans.

Since 1986, the Commission has worked closely with Re-Creation, USA, a group of young men and women volunteers who travel the country bringing a Broadway style show to our hospitalized veterans. This program helps brighten the days of those confined to VA Medical Centers and Veterans long term care facilities.

In 2002, the Elks and Bugles Across America joined together. The mission of this dedicated group is to make sure that all veterans will make their final journey home in dignity by playing live Taps for over 3,000 Veterans' funerals every month. We are proud to be associated with this outstanding patriotic organization. For more information about Bugles Across America, contact [www.buglesacrossamerica.org](http://www.buglesacrossamerica.org)

In February of 2003, then Grand Exalted Ruler Roger True proposed a new national program, to be called the 'Army of Hope', with special emphasis given to the families of those members of the Military Reserve and National Guard units that had been deployed overseas. The absence of a key family member from the home can cause not only financial distress, it may mean that the service person deployed was not available for maintenance of the home, family vehicle, or any number of family oriented tasks. Lodges participating in the Army of Hope provide temporary financial relief, routine maintenance for homes and vehicles, caregiving, food, necessities, and even Christmas gifts for the children of families in need while their loved ones defend our country.

In 2011, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission began offering 'Freedom Grants' of \$2,000 each to Lodges which submitted proposals designed to help veterans in their communities. Freedom Grants have been used to provide comfort and care to Veterans in hospitals, long term care facilities, and at home. They have helped homeless veterans re-establish themselves by providing housing, clothing and necessities. Freedom Grants have purchased therapeutic and recreational equipment for veterans' hospitals and for veterans at home. Many Freedom Grants are used to aid the families of those on active service as well as the service men and women themselves.

We are proud to say that the Elks National Veterans Service Commission, our Local Lodge Veterans Committees, and our State Associations. Our story is long; our work is humble; our history is proud. The Elks National Veterans Service Commission will continue, "Serving Our Nation's Veterans".

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Note: The text above was extracted from the national Elks web site at <http://www.elks.org/programs/history.cfm> for the purpose(s) of educating the members of our lodge, prospective members, and current members of our lodge's Veteran's Affairs Committee, Calabash Elks Lodge ~ 2679.

Visit the Grand Lodge web site to learn additional ways in which the Elks serve our Veterans at <http://www.elks.org/Programs/>

For specific information on the many ways the Calabash Elks Lodge supports our Veterans, visit the [Veteran's Affairs] TAB, and the Press Releases about our recent activity in our community, on our web site at [www.CalabashElks.Org](http://www.CalabashElks.Org) , or contact us at the address below.

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