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The Mobilization of the National Bar for War

BY FRAZER ARNOLD*

When it became clear in 1940 that we were soon to be in the war, lawyers throughout the nation began to consider how the bar could aid materially in the task of raising our tremendous Army and Navy. This could only be done under a country-wide plan whereby legal help would be at hand for any young man about to leave home and join the armed forces.

At the start the inspiration and enthusiasm were supplied chiefly by Edmund Ruffin Beckwith, an Alabaman who had taken root practicing law in New York.

The then president of the national association named a National Defense Committee of which Mr. Beckwith was chairman, with one member for each of the ten judicial circuits in the federal system. The plan was—and it has been successfully carried out everywhere—to organize with forty-eight state chairmen. Soon the name was changed to the War Work Committee.

Although each state association was left free to adopt the system it thought best, the plan universally used was to have a local committee in each county or principal city in order to bring the availability of local lawyers down to grass roots. When it is realized that this great project has been effected in such widely differing states as New York and Pennsylvania, Wyoming and Nevada, it will be seen that the organized lawyers have done very well at supporting our country in the war.

Members for the ten circuits are liaison men to solve or forward to the national chairman problems, complaints and suggestions arising in actual experience. By now, practically all hitches and "gremlins" appear to have been eliminated, for no complaints or perplexing questions of policy, either from lawyers or laity, have come in for a year.

*Regional Chairman, War Work Committee, A.B.A.

Just what the local committees are doing is familiar to Denver lawyers from the activity of our own local membership.

Some wonderful pioneer work was performed by John Zanoni of Denver, who is now in the Navy. He was appointed by Mr. Hutton and worked like a beaver at establishing a set-up throughout the state, and he contributed a number of fundamental ideas that were adopted by the national association. Chief among these was his idea, first applied here in Colorado, of "legal clinics" in our different Army and Navy posts and installations. This led to the coordination of a regular system within the armed services and general hospitals, and Lt. Col. Milton J. Blake of the Denver bar happens to be the Army officer who was placed in charge of this activity for the whole country. His title is Chief of the Legal Assistance Branch of the office of The Judge Advocate General of the Army.

Superior service and cooperation have been rendered locally by Paul Irey of the legal aid society. Fundamentally the whole service is a form of legal aid. In establishing it, care was exercised not to drift into too much "socialization" of legal advice whereby local lawyers would be deprived of legitimate legal work from persons well able to pay.

A volume could be and no doubt will be written recounting the many detailed activities of the national and local committees. For about a year Mr. Beckwith maintained an office and staff in Washington, working out regulations with the War and Navy Departments. He overworked himself and had to retire from this service a year and a half ago. His place was taken by a remarkable and indefatigable successor in Tappan Gregory of Chicago. Mr. Gregory's diplomacy, judgment and energy have carried on in Mr. Beckwith's stead. Both of them have made tremendous personal sacrifices.

Locally, honorable mention might go to a great many of our attorneys including Robert E. More and Ben E. Sweet for their work as Denver and Colorado chairmen. I hope no one will feel slighted that his name is not mentioned because space will not permit, for there is a long list of Colorado lawyers who deserve the thanks of the community for their public spirited activities in carrying out this national policy.

The organized lawyers of the nation have achieved their objective, whereby no cynic or other sour critic can say that the bar has not done its part in the civilian effort required by the war.

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