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Lawyers' War Emergency Committee

BY BENJAMIN E. SWEET*

I wish to briefly summarize what this committee has been doing and what it plans to do in the furtherance of the war effort. In previous issues of DICTA articles have appeared which have been designed to keep the lawyers of Colorado informed of the work of this committee and of the bar association. This will supplement those articles and I hope encourage further suggestions from the members of the bar and particularly from those now in the service as to how we may improve our efforts and make them more effective.

One of the serious dislocations caused by this war has been to the family and affairs of the man entering the service. The speed with which we were compelled to prepare, first for defensive and later for offensive war, has been the cause as well as the justification for this condition. Men who enlisted or who were inducted during the early stages of the war had little time and scant advice as to the arrangement of their personal affairs. As a result, thousands of them found themselves isolated and distant from home and family before they awoke to the fact that much could and should have been done in arranging their affairs before they left. The situation became more aggravated and alarming and the harmful effects on morale which began to appear soon aroused the attention of those charged with the conduct of the war.

Many of the matters left undone were of a legal nature—a power of attorney or a will should have been drawn, insurance should have been changed, a business should have had proper legal safeguards erected. The situation presented a challenge to the lawyers of the nation. The prompt and successful manner in which lawyers, through national, state and local bar associations have met this challenge and solved the problem is a tribute not only to lawyers, but to these associations, without which their desires could not have been translated into action.

One of the first steps to alleviate this condition of the man in service and his family was the establishment by the War Department, in cooperation with bar associations, of legal assistance offices at every military establishment in the country (War Department Circular No. 74, March 16, 1943). The Navy soon followed with a similar directive. As a result, a national system has been established whereby the legal matters of the man in service are being cared for at the post where

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he is stationed. The system is working smoothly and has received universal commendation from those familiar with its operation. Mr. Irey, in his article in this issue, tells of how the idea was conceived by members of the Denver and Colorado Bar Associations and was first established at Lowry Field. At these legal assistance offices all legal matters directly connected with the service and many personal matters are handled. Litigation and other personal or private matters such as divorces, contracts, etc., are handled by civilian lawyers to whom they are referred through this committee or through the Legal Aid Society. In every county in Colorado a lawyer has been appointed as a member of this committee. Much of the legal service rendered by civilian lawyers is gratuitous. In some cases such as divorces, contracts, etc., a charge is made, but in all these cases the fact that the client is in the service is taken into consideration in fixing a reasonable fee.

The legal assistance office plan has solved the problem of the man in service. Experience, however, has demonstrated that much could and should be done in arranging personal affairs before entry into service. The execution of a will, power of attorney or contract, the arrangement or adjustment of personal and private legal matters can always best be handled by a lawyer who resides in and is familiar with the laws of the jurisdiction where the client resides. For this reason, bar associations have encouraged the attention to these matters before enlistment or induction. As a part of this effort, this committee composed and caused to be published and distributed to every man entering the service in Colorado, and in the western states comprising the Seventh Service Command, a "Property Guide" which furnishes a convenient means for him to record and preserve the important details regarding his personal affairs. The guide also contains a check list of matters he should attend to and some suggestions as to his legal rights and obligations. As we go to press, we are informed that the War Department has officially adopted the features of this guide and incorporated them in a new pamphlet which it is expected will soon be distributed through the Selective Service System to every man entering the service throughout the country.

Among other activities of this committee are the following:

- Assisting in the establishment and equipping of legal assistance offices (the Supreme Court has loaned copies of statutes to these offices);
- Assisting in the preparation of a compendium of the laws of Colorado relating to the legal problems of the men in service. This is a joint effort with the American Bar Association and the Junior Bar Conference;
- Rendering opinions to war agencies, American Red Cross, etc.;
- Assisting the dependents of men in service;
- Cooperating in other ways with war agencies.

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