

## **DAV's Paul W. Kephart: A Forgotten Hero**

Recently, DAV State Headquarters received a phone call from Grinnell Hall Senior Center in Beloit seeking information on a Paul W. Kephart. The Senior Center had discovered in their files an old DAV Award presented to Kephart. They were hoping to present the Award to any surviving family members and wanted to know if we could help.

Our intrepid Officer Manager Deirdre Flynn searched our historical records and the internet in hopes of finding helpful information. Here is what she discovered:

At the 38<sup>th</sup> DAV State Convention held in Fond du Lac, Paul W. Kephart of Beloit was presented the Disabled Veteran of the Year Award. The Award Ceremony took place at the Saturday Night Banquet on June 18, 1966.

The Fond du Lac (Wisconsin) Commonwealth Reporter stated, "The Wisconsin Disabled American Veterans 'Man of the Year' trophy was awarded to Paul Kephart, Beloit, a double amputee since 1945. His nomination had been submitted by members of the Beloit Dickop-Honrke Chapter 14."<sup>1</sup> He had lost both feet and parts of his lower limbs in World War II.<sup>2</sup>

Kephart was born on January 14, 1913 in LaSalle, Illinois. He enlisted in the Army on November 10, 1943 in Chicago, Illinois and served as an Infantryman in the European theater. Kephart was discharged in July 1944 due to severe wounds to his feet by an artillery shell. Following the war and rehabilitation, he worked as salesman for a food concern and resided in Beloit with his wife Florence.

On August 5, 1948, Rep. Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts read his WWII exploits into the Congressional Record. She described how "Kephart lost both his feet in the early days of action in France. Since then he has made a successful readjustment to civilian life and holds a responsible position with a food concern."

"Mr. Kephart has been commander of his local DAV [chapter] and has served with the Wisconsin State Department of Veterans. The prosthetic firms have asked him to work for them and he has given his time to help other veterans who have had the misfortune to lose a leg or an arm. He plays he states a better game of golf today than he did before the injury occurred. He bowls and plays basketball and people still stare when he goes to dance."<sup>3</sup>

Rep. Nourse Rogers was a powerful voice for veterans in Congress. She served 35 years (1925-1960) in the House of Representative and sponsored many important pieces of veteran legislation.

- In 1942, she introduced legislation which created the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) with the intent of freeing up men for combat.
- Later in 1943, she introduced the bill that created the Women's Army Corps (WAC), making women officially part of the Army.
- She was instrumental in the passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, more commonly known as the G.I. Bill.

Her legislative career was mainly devotion to veterans and their complex needs upon returning to civilian life. Through her efforts in 1947, the medical services at the VA Medical Center in Bedford, Massachusetts were opened up for women veterans.

She died on September 10, 1960. During the President Carter administration, the Bedford VA medical facility was renamed the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital. For her to speak on his behalf was major accomplishment.

Rep. Nourse Rogers finished her remarks by reading into the record a radio broadcast transcript from WLS in Chicago saying how Kephart saved the lives of two people in a boating accident.

“Survivors of a crash in Wisconsin between two motor launches on Lake Delavan last night have told how a legless Army veteran helped several of them remain afloat until help arrived.

The crash – in which two Chicagoans drowned – involved an excursion boat named the *Rocket* and a motor boat...The *Rocket* carried 12 passengers and the motor boat 11. Survivors say the *Rocket* split the motor launch in half, sinking it almost immediately. One of the motor boat passengers was Paul Kephart, an amputee. Thrown into the waters with others, he managed to grab a horn on the *Rocket* and pull himself on deck. There he kept several others who were in the water from danger by holding them up until rescuers came. “<sup>3</sup>

Records show Paul Waters Kephart passed away on November 13, 1983 in Beloit. If anyone has any knowledge of surviving family members, please contact DAV State Headquarters at 920-338-820.



<sup>1</sup> Fond du Lac (Wisconsin) Commonwealth Reporter, June 20, 1966, page 10

<sup>2</sup> Fond du Lac (Wisconsin) Commonwealth Reporter, June 20, 1966, page 3 (Picture)

<sup>3</sup> [Congressional Record, Proceeding and Debates of the 80th Congress, Appendix Volume 94—Part 12, Page A4910](#)