



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

The Veterans of Future Wars

by E. Christian Kopff

It was 1936 and the Depression still held America in its grip. Few doubted that a new European war was coming, and Japan and China had been fighting in the East for years. Most Americans were opposed to participating in another futile European war. The President had begun his successful campaign for the White House in 1932 with a blistering attack on interventionism and had not budged publicly. He had, however, been James Cox's running mate in 1920 and Woodrow Wilson's assistant secretary of the navy, and many felt that his conversion to isolationism was a cynical maneuver designed to win the support of William Randolph Hearst. Just before taking the oath of office he had met with Henry L. Stimson, dean of American interventionists, in a secret meeting to which none of his closest advisers had been invited. In 1933 Charles Austin Beard, America's most prestigious historian, had predicted that America would fight

another world war unless it changed its aggressive foreign policy moralism. In October 1937, having won reelection, Roosevelt then delivered his famous Quarantine Speech, which signaled his return to interventionism.

Into this somber atmosphere burst Lewis J. Gorin Jr. and his classmates of Princeton's class of 1936 to announce the formation of a new patriotic organization, the Veterans of Future Wars. Their platform was simple, but after nearly two generations we may need some reminding of the background. Few doubted that our political class would succeed in frustrating the will of the majority of Americans and involve the United States in a bloody and destructive war. The previous war had made the world safe for democracy by laying the foundations for fascism, National Socialism, and communism. Who could predict what fruits the next war would bear? One thing, however, was certain. After the fighting was over, veterans would demand pensions and bonuses from the United States government.

Gorin described the situation memorably. "Back in the 1920's it was a sore point with our veterans of the World War that this government had only given a discharge fee of sixty dollars to its soldiers whereas Canada, England, and other countries had given perhaps twice as much. It was quickly developing into a point of national honor when Congress finally decided to give our soldiers compensation of one dollar a day for service, plus twenty-five cents for foreign service. Only about half of our four million veterans rated this foreign service, although the war was fought in France. This put foreign countries to shame for we were now paying our soldiers about four times as much as they paid theirs, and of course the English and French and Canadians had all been fighting about four times as long. . . . It was the misfortune of most of those French and British troops that

they actually saw fighting."

Even so, the expense was more than anticipated. New York accountant Herbert Hess had told Congress in 1924 to expect to pay four billion dollars for bonuses. "But Mr. Hess," noted Gorin, "though his figures from a mathematical standpoint were accurate, erred when it came to diagnosing the political future. For one thing Mr. Hess underestimated the number of veterans involved by almost a hundred thousand. This hundred thousand were perhaps members of the 'Lost Generation' but they turned up in time to lay claim to a bonus." In addition, the bonus was paid for with borrowed money, on which interest had to be paid. How differently we do things nowadays!

The proposal of the future veterans was simplicity itself. We were going to get into a war, and after the war Congress was going to pay a handsome bonus to the survivors, both those who fought and those who typed and telephoned. Why not pay the future veterans the bonus now, when they were still alive to enjoy it? The money would be raised by bonds to be paid off in 1965. Young men of fighting age would receive one thousand dollars. They would probably spend the money as young men are wont to spend windfalls. When the war came those who fought and died or were maimed would have tasted their country's gratitude in a more personal form than a marble monument. Those who had survived typing pools or standing guard over Italian POWs on Staten Island or in Pueblo, Colorado, could look forward to spending the years of peace working to pay off the bonds. Such a fate might even encourage some to volunteer to fight.

No sexist organization, the Veterans of Future Wars made provision for a Ladies Auxiliary (initially called the Gold Star Mothers of Veterans of Future Wars). Part of the bond would be used to send nubile American women

to Europe to visit the future battlefields and cemeteries of their putative husbands. In addition, women of childbearing age would receive a pension of fifty dollars a month until the war came. The pension would continue for those who lost their husbands, with a double pension for those whose spouses were disabled. A woman who did not lose her husband would spend the years after the war working to pay off the debt incurred by the pre- and postwar pensions. No great debt would accrue. "The war will probably be upon us in a year or so and then we shall be in a position to start retiring the debt created by paying the pensions now," said Gorin.

There were many details to work out. "Although our uniforms have not yet been chosen, we do have a hand salute which developed out of the obsolete fascist salute devised by Mussolini. The only change we make is that one's arm must be held parallel to the ground and that the palm be turned upward receptively." The future veterans' highest award was the Croix de Guerre with Palm (outstretched). They had a short way with dissenters. "We suggest that all veterans of future wars who are conscientious objectors to a bonus be incarcerated in concentration camps for the duration of the peace. There is really no other way to dispose of them."

The idea caught on like wildfire. Before March was over there were nearly five hundred chapters on various campuses with almost six thousand paid members. The numbers continued to grow. "In this connection," Gorin commented, "Mr. Hanford MacNider, at that time National Commander of the American Legion, remarked: 'It is an interesting fact, and one that I think you [a House committee on bonuses] will be glad to hear, that 10 years after the Civil War the Grand Army of the Republic had only 20,000 members. Three years after the [Great] war we have over 1,000,000.' According to this reasoning think what a stir it will create in Congress when we go before a committee and announce that *some years before the war* we already count a membership of about five million."

Gorin's best-selling manifesto, *Patriotism Prepaid*, attracted favorable reviews from the *New York Times* and *Herald Tribune*, the *Saturday Review* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Stories about the future veterans take

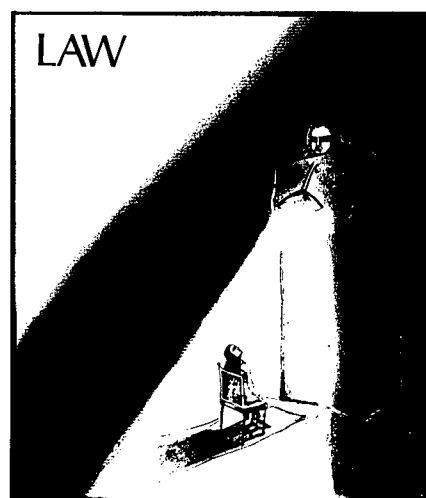
up nearly a full column in the *New York Times* index for 1936. National Commander Van Zandt of the other VFW, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, denounced his rivals for congressional largess and was challenged to a radio debate by Gorin. Van Zandt at first accepted and then, no doubt wisely, backed down. Congressman Fuller of Alabama announced that the future veterans "were unworthy of public notice and should be attacked by every true American." In distant 1936, Congressmen guilty of perpetrating non sequiturs were mocked. The FBI investigated to see if the future veterans were a subversive organization. One G-man asked my father, Frederick Louis Kopff Jr., Princeton '36, whether he saw a contradiction in his belonging to the Princeton ROTC and the Veterans of Future Wars. "No" was the answer. "My membership in both organizations is linked by an Aristotelian logic." Gorin indignantly denied that the future veterans were lackeys of either Moscow or Wall Street. "Fortunately we are neither, merely members of a Great Patriotic Organization whose primary purpose, as with all Great Patriotic Organizations, is to collect a bonus from the government."

By this time you are thinking to yourself, hold on a minute here. If the Veterans of Future Wars even existed, let alone was a major news story in 1936, how come I never heard of it? History is written by victors. The battle to keep America a republic and from becoming an empire was lost. These victors are no Homers, to glorify the Hectors who fought on the other side. They even deny there was a battle. You do not know who John Hay and Henry Stimson were. You think William Jennings Bryan spent his life fighting evolution and Charles Austin Beard wrote one obsolete book on the Constitution. You do not know that they fought their bravest battles against imperialism and for our republic, for the same reason you cannot read the lost history of Cremutius Cordus, whom Tiberius drove to suicide for calling Brutus and Cassius "the last of the Romans."

Imagine, then, not as history, but as fiction, the day in March 1936 when the *New York Times* printed a report of a new national organization formed by Princeton University students to deride

"the fallacies of Democracy," which is what the *Times* article reported. No, you cannot even imagine it, because you have never experienced such a country, where men and women, young and old, could talk in jest and in earnest, but freely. Our fathers, however, knew of such a country. What is more, they lived in it. They were the last of the Romans. Like Tacitus and Juvenal, looking back at their republic from an empire, we often feel anger, *saeva indignatio*. If we can sometime smile when we look back at our fathers' battles, then we owe something to Lewis Gorin, the Princeton class of '36, and the Veterans of Future Wars.

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The Link Line

by John B. Thompson

The Art of Indoctrination

The University of Wisconsin's main campus in Madison has relished, at least since the anti-war movement of the 1960's, its image as one of the most radical and leftist colleges in America. In order to cement that status well into the next century, the university is now selling and nationally distributing a package of "Health-Line" audio cassettes "addressing concerns of the body, emotions and intellect." Warning: these