



Devine Brandon Kelly Atherton McCurdy Waldrip Kraabel Sisson

## Some GI Bill Authors Today

**T**HE EIGHT MEN in the photo above are seen as they met in Washington, D.C., on March 14, this year, during the Legion's 50th Anniversary Washington Conference.

All eight were on the original Legion team that drafted the first of the GI Bills, 25 years ago, to create a progressive revolution in the history of the readjustment of war veterans to civilian life.

This year they met to fill in, from their recall, missing details of the passage of the first GI Bill for the Legion's national archives.

From left to right, they are:

*Maurice Devine*, New Hampshire, chairman of the Legion's Legislative Commission in 1943-44.

*Lyon Brandon*, Mississippi, a member of the Legion's special GI Bill Committee of 1943-44.

*Pat Kelly*, Georgia, also a member of the special GI Bill Committee.

*Warren Atherton*, California, who appointed the special GI Bill Committee and, as National Commander of the Legion in 1943-44, led the Legion in its efforts that year.

*Robert McCurdy*, California, also a member of the special GI Bill Committee.

*W. Bea Waldrip*, Michigan, also a member of the special GI Bill Committee.

*T. O. Kraabel*, North Dakota, Director of the Legion's Rehabilitation Commission in 1943-44.

*Robert Sisson*, Texas (then of Arkansas), the Legion's Rehabilitation Commission chairman in 1943-44 and ex officio secretary of the special GI Bill Committee.

Missing from the photo is *Harry W.*

*Colmery*, who was delayed en route from Kansas and arrived at this year's March meetings later. Past National Commander Colmery was a member of the special GI Bill Committee in 1943-44 and was responsible for drafting the actual words of the WW2 GI Bill.

Some other members of that team still survive, but in poor health.

Here is a sample of some of the GI Bill history that those shown filled in this year, none of which appears as clearly on the written record.

**Q.** *By what authority was a special Legion GI Bill Committee named, and a decision to seek all of the GI Bill provisions in a single bill arrived at?*

**A.** As Nat'l Commander, Atherton did it on his own authority. "I was fearful of delay if I sought to subject it to debate. Consultation with our staff and friends in Congress affirmed that a single bill, with all its dangers, was the only way to get the job done fast and thoroughly. Thousands of WW2 veterans were already discharged, disabled. The Normandy landings were a few months off. I resolved in the fall of 1943 to seek a single bill, and on November 30 appointed the special committee with the late John Stelle, dynamic former Governor of Illinois, as chairman. I simply used my authority as National Commander to carry out our mandates."

**Q.** *What was the basis of the content of the first GI Bill?*

**A.** The direct basis was the content of various resolutions adopted by the Legion in its 1943 National Convention at Omaha, Nebr. But these, in turn, had antecedents in the experience of all of us in the miserable years for war veterans after WW1 and in the Legion's

struggles since 1919 to arrive at a better system.

**Q.** *Was the WW2 GI Bill then simply a consolidation of Omaha Convention mandates?*

**A.** Far from it. The mandates were broad and general. The Bill needed them in detail. No such program had ever been worked out in detail before.

Between December 15 and mid-January, 1943-44, the special committee, Legion staff members, many other Legionnaires who were called in, and not a few enthusiastic supporters from the outside thrashed out the details in the Legion's Washington office.

Chairman Stelle acted as "teacher" at a big blackboard. Everything anyone had to suggest (chiefly our staff experts) went on the blackboard, where it was kept, revised or erased after prolonged discussion and debate.

We went through a similar process with members of Congress, VA Administrator Gen. Frank Hines and many others, even after the first draft of the bill had been introduced in Congress.

The Bill was continually revised for several months. Our good friend in the Senate, Sen. Bennett Clark, held hearings promptly and the House veterans committee moved as fast, at first. Members of other Senate and House committees who operated in the various fields touched by the Bill also contributed to the constant reshaping of it.

**Q.** *What help did you get from the outside in specialized areas of the bill, such as loans and education?*

**A.** Many bankers and educators were skeptical of the bill. Organized educators supported it strongly, while some indi-

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**SOME GI BILL AUTHORS TODAY**  
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vidual educators opposed it. We ended up with the strong support of a large array of educational associations. Sen. Bob Wagner helped us enormously on veterans' employment rights and services.

Organized bankers were scared of the GI loan idea, while it was individual bankers who gave us the help we needed. The banks had just been through long years of depression in which many had gone broke. They were shy of any new adventure in mortgages or business loans. The American Bankers Association neither opposed nor favored the bill, but it steered clear of our invitation to sit with us to give advice on the loan provisions. It remained for bankers in the Legion and some of their friends to give the Bill its professional touch. [W. Bea Waldrip, in the photo on p. 33, is a Michigan banker, so the Legion's committee had its own expert in that field.]

After the Bill was passed there was banking resistance to making GI loans in some areas of the country. Thus, in California, little GI Bill mortgage money could be found until L.M. Giannini, head of The Bank of America, announced that all its branches would start putting money into GI loans. The others soon fell in line. It's interesting to note that the banks put out money for 20 to 30 years at 4% back then. A great deal of this 4% money is still out now, at a time when the prime rate has gone to 7½%, and banks themselves cannot get 4% money.

**Q.** In what way is recorded GI Bill history, as previously published, the weakest?

**A.** (Unanimous.) In the credit given the members of the Legion staff of those days. It is impossible to give them too much credit. They worked night and day, on weekends and holidays. They had the special knowledge and gave of themselves unstintingly. We wanted to raise their pay but couldn't under the wartime wage freezes. T. O. Kraabel (the only staff man in the photo, p. 33) and the late Frank Sullivan (then acting as legislative director) were magnificent. Frank's assistant, Kay Burch (now retired), was almost a whole staff in herself. But the same could be said for every Legion employee involved. Such loyalty, devotion and enthusiasm must be seen to be appreciated.

Then, too, the members of The American Legion Auxiliary deserve a much bigger place in the recorded history. When it is said that the Legion secured literally millions of petitions from the general public in support of the GI Bill, it is safe to say that the women of the Auxiliary probably got the majority of them.

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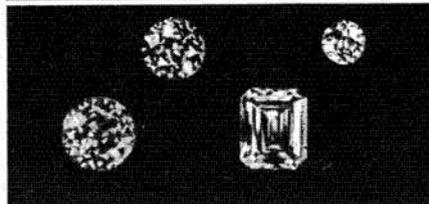
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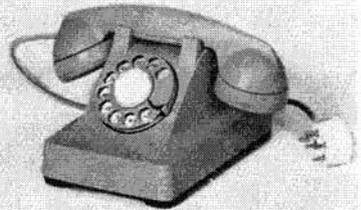
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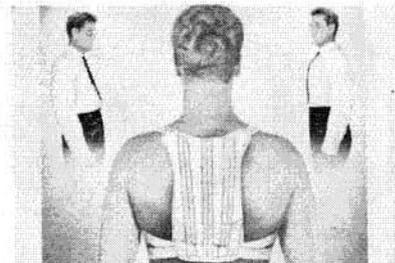


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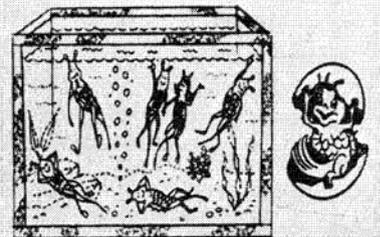
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