
Fraternals: Military Order of the Cootie

Just as members of the United Spanish American War Veterans had much to do with the foundation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, they also had a prime part in the start of the Military Order of the Cootie. In late 1919 several Spanish American War Veterans conceived the idea of an honor degree order for the VFW.

The name Cootie originated during World War I when the different armies were massed together on the battlefields of France. Each country represented in WW I contributed to what is known as the Cootie, by amalgamation of lice. The common American Greyback, the Black Algerian Schinnels, the great Blue Louse from India, the British Blue Bloods, the Belgian Gold-Striped Heneckers, the French Grey and the Gold Parisian Cooties were all thrown together in the trenches and at once began to increase and multiply so that by the end of the war we had the most intelligent Cooties that could be produced. They were known to bite the soldiers at just the right time to save the soldier's lives; for often when a shell left the German trenches the Cooties would bite the soldiers, causing them to stoop and scratch at just the exact time that the shell would pass over the place where the soldier's head had been. Many soldiers, lying in their shell holes, were saved from death when the highly intelligent Cooties, knowing that a shell was coming in their direction, would bite the soldiers, causing such agony that they were forced to retreat to the trenches or other places of safety for "shirt reading" and "seam running" while the shell burst harmlessly in the places they had just vacated.

The rolls were opened for membership at the Oxford Hotel in Washington, D.C., September 17, 1920, and nearly 300 VFW members signed up. In 1923, at Norfolk, Virginia, the Military Order of the Cootie proposed the idea of a National Home. In Atlantic City, in 1924, the VFW Organization decided to approve the National Home, although it was a "Brain Child" of the Military Order of the Cootie. In 1924, the official Cootie uniform was announced. With the outbreak of World War II, the MOC visualized the need for Hospital visitations and presentation of entertainment for hospitalized veterans. A program of "Keep 'Em Smiling in Beds of White" was inaugurated and soon Cooties were regularly visiting the patients in the VA Hospitals, and other Hospitals, through out the United States. The Hospital visitation program is one of the outstanding programs of the MOC.

In 1959, a National Home Scholarship Fund was taken over. It is now self-perpetuating from its investments. From the start of \$500.00 annually for one boy and one girl, it has grown to an annual amount of \$2,500.00 each until graduated, plus lesser amounts for students attending vocational schools. The Cootie Organization of today works for its parent organization, "the VFW", continuing to do good for all whom they come in contact with. They are always ready to help their Comrades, the Comrades' widows and orphans, and contribute generously to the maintenance of the Orphanage at Eaton Rapids, Michigan. At this orphanage, a swimming pool and playground known as Cootie Field, and a complete and modern fire department have been built and financed by the Cooties.

Certainly not a large category, I only have a few Cootie covers currently.

