

Founders Day 2024 - 125 Years of Service

By Past State Commander Robert J. Welch
VFW National Historian

Annually, in late September, the Department of Ohio conducts a ceremony at the grave of James Romanis to commemorate the founding of the American Veterans of Foreign Service (AVFS). This organization would later merge with the Society Army of the Philippines to become the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

This year, I received an invitation from Chris Haynes, National Council Member from Ohio, to attend the Founder's Day ceremony and luncheon. It was an offer I could not refuse.

The morning started off at Greenlawn Cemetery, the final resting place for three of the 14 (yes, it is 14 not 13, as recalled by James Romanis himself) founding members of the American Veterans of Foreign Service.

Here the Department of Ohio lines up by District (colors and all) and parades a short distance to the gravesite

of James Romanis and conducts a fitting ceremony honoring our Birthday on Sept. 29, 1899.

A highlight of the ceremony is when the Commander-in-Chief and the Department Commander place a wreath on Romanis's grave. The Department also unveiled a new historical marker adjacent to his gravesite commemorating the founding of the AVFS.

After the ceremony, everyone proceeded to the National Veterans Memorial and Museum for the Founders Day Luncheon. Taking advantage of the down time between the Ceremony and Luncheon, Cathy and I located the grave sites for the other two founders buried at Greenlawn Cemetery and paid our respects to John Clark and Francis Dubiel.

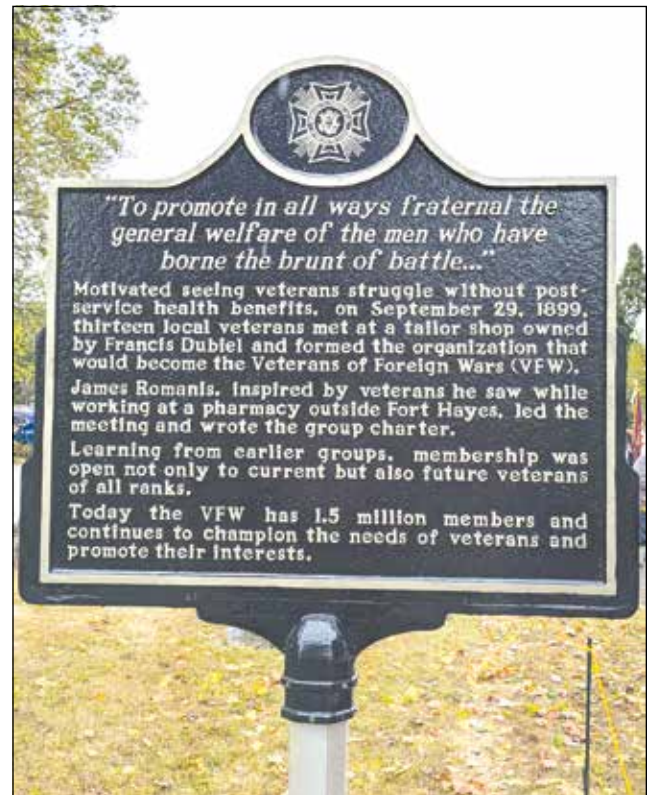
It was nice to see the event was well attended and that Comrades from outside Ohio made the trip as well, Department Commanders from Colorado and New Mexico, the National Council Member from Indiana and Cathy and myself from Illinois.



VFW National Historian and Past State Commander Bobby Welch with Department Historian Cathy Sullivan at the gravesite of James Romanis during the Founder's Day ceremony.



The gravesite of James Romanis at Greenlawn Cemetery in Ohio. Romanis is one of 14 founding members of the American Veterans of Foreign Service, which would merge with the Society Army of the Philippines to become the Veterans of Foreign Wars.



The other side of the VFW Founder's Day marker.



Veterans from the Department of Ohio march into the cemetery to honor the founders of the American Veterans of Foreign Service during Founders Day.



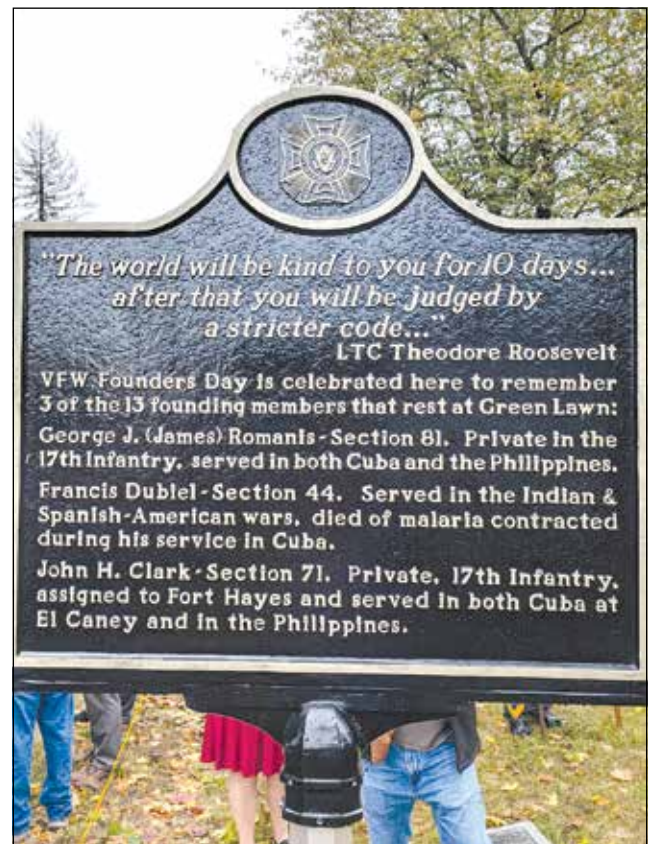
Ohio State Commander Kari Pfeifer is joined by Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt during the Founder's Day program.



The gravesite of Francis Dubiel at Greenlawn Cemetery in Ohio.



The gravesite of John H. Clark at Greenlawn Cemetery in Ohio.



One side of the VFW Founder's Day marker.