

Honoring VFW's Forefathers

The annual Founder's Day event in Columbus, Ohio, included a ceremony in a cemetery where three of VFW's founders are buried

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On Oct. 4 last year, VFW officials and members gathered at Green Lawn Cemetery in Columbus, Ohio, to commemorate the 126th anniversary of VFW's humble beginnings in the back room of a tailor shop in 1899.

At the cemetery, VFW and Auxiliary members marched in the parade, which ended at the gravesite of James Romanis, one of the founding fathers of VFW.

After returning home from fighting in the Spanish American War, Romanis was working in a pharmacy outside the Columbus Barracks.

From the pharmacy windows, he witnessed veterans' struggle to overcome ailments brought on by war and noticed there was a lack of government hospitalization for them. So on Sept. 29, 1899, Romanis and 13 other veterans gathered inside Francis Dubiel's tailor shop in downtown Columbus to form the American Veterans of Foreign Service, today known as the VFW.

Sadly, Dubiel died in 1904 from malaria contracted during the Spanish American War. Like Romanis, Dubiel and another VFW founder, John Clark, also are buried in Green Lawn Cemetery.

Last year, VFW Commander-in-Chief Carol Whitmore and National VFW Auxiliary President Lois Callahan were honored guests at the Founder's Day event, which included a banquet at the National Veterans Memorial Museum.

Located on Broad Street in Columbus, the museum's mission is to honor veterans, tell their stories and recognize service. Founder's Day attendees were provided the opportunity to stay after for self-guided tours of the museum.

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For Whitmore, VFW Founder’s Day is a poignant occasion — one in which she reflects on the service of the organization’s forefathers.

“When we honor the tradition of Founder’s Day, we honor those who stood for our nation, for freedom and our rights, and the heartbreaking sacrifices made by those who wore the uniform in harm’s way,” Whitmore said.

This article is featured in the 2026 January/February issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.