

Editor's Note: Following the Tacoma National Convention, 1994, Major Keith Wilson, MOWW Judge Advocate General, was researching the provision of our Bylaws which mandates the use of Robert's Rules of Order in all MOWW meetings and conventions (Sec. 1, Art. XI) when he ran across some rare biographical information on General Henry Martyn Robert, the author of Robert's Rules.

ROBERT'S RULES

How a West Pointer and a career engineer officer became known as "the great peacemaker", late in his life—Brigadier General Henry Martyn Robert, U.S.A

by
Keith Wilson, Jr.
Judge Advocate General

The French Huguenots, that sturdy band of Protestants that endured a century of persecution for their unwavering resistance to the pressure of the Catholic Kings of France, were finally forced to leave the nation of their birth when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685. This was the Edict which Henry IV had issued in 1598 guaranteeing to the Huguenots full freedom of conscience and the preservation of their civil rights and religious liberties.

Fleeing for their lives, many of the Huguenots sought refuge in Switzerland, the adopted home of the Frenchman John Calvin, who was the spiritual founder of their sect. Even though they bought property in Switzerland and felt secure in the practice of their religion, many of the group felt that only in the New World could they obtain a full release from the oppression of the Roman Catholic monarchies in Europe.

In 1686 a group of Huguenot families established a colony in America in what is now South Carolina. Pierre Robert from St. Imier, Switzerland, became the first pastor and the spiritual leader of this small flock of French immigrants.

One of Pierre's great, great, great, grandsons was Joseph Thomas Robert, born in 1807. He lived in Beaufort, South Carolina and was provided with an excellent education by his family. Joseph Robert graduated from Brown University in

1828, then spent two years at Yale and later graduated from the South Carolina Medical College, before entering the ministry. In 1834 he was ordained as the Pastor of the Baptist Church of Robertsville, South Carolina.

In 1832, Pastor Robert had married Adeline Lawton of Savannah, Georgia. She was the sister of Brigadier General Alexander R. Lawton, CSA, who gained fame as an Infantry Officer fighting under General Stonewall Jackson and Lt. General Richard Ewell, during the Civil War.

On May 2, 1837, Mrs. Robert gave birth to her second son, Henry Martyn Robert, at one of the family plantations near Robertsville. Young Henry Martyn came into a family that placed high emphasis upon honor, duty, and education. He applied, and was accepted at West Point in the summer of 1853 at the age of 16.

Cadet Robert was an exceptional student and easily excelled in his work. When only 19, he was called to act as an assistant to the Professor of Mathematics. He graduated fourth in the West Point Class of 1857. Because of his stellar record as a cadet, he was appointed as an assistant Professor of Practical Military Engineering immediately following graduation.

After a year of teaching, Second Lieutenant Robert was ordered to the Washington Territory, a comparatively unknown and unexplored region in the Pacific Northwest. He

was assigned to duty with a detachment of troops to take charge of engineering operations in a campaign against the Indians. For two years, young Robert worked in the Territory, surveying a military route from Vancouver to Puget Sound and constructing a wagon road from Fort Dalles, Oregon to Salt Lake City.

In 1860, the dispute with Great Britain over the Northwest Boundary with Canada, erupted in the cry, "Fifty-four forty, or fight!" Robert was ordered to the Island of San Juan de Fuca to prepare defensive works to repel an expected British attack. Fortunately, no clash occurred and General Winfield Scott ordered the troops withdrawn. Robert was re-assigned to Washington, DC.

Although a Carolinian by birth and family heritage, Lieutenant Robert was among the many Southern West Point graduates who remained true to his oath and to the Republic whose uniform he wore. As the swirl of secessionist debate reached flood-tide, Henry Robert was steadfastly loyal to the union.

With the attack on Fort Sumter, the Civil War began. Robert was one of the engineers charged with constructing the defensive works surrounding Washington. In 1862, he was transferred to New Bedford, Massachusetts and placed in charge of fortifications in the Northeast. Following the war, he was assigned to the Presidio of San Francisco, then to Portland, Oregon; and finally to Milwaukee, where newly-promoted Major Robert was placed in charge of constructing lighthouses on the Great Lakes and harbor improvements along the Mississippi River.

In 1882, Robert was advanced to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and became the Superintending Engineer of Fortifications and River and Harbor Improvements on the Canadian Border and Delaware Bay. In 1889 he was appointed by President Benjamin Harrison to a Board of Engineers to locate a major harbor on the western side of the Gulf of Mexico. With his methodical mind and keen engineering skills, Col. Robert chose the City of Galveston over such competing venues as Aransas Pass, Sabine Pass, and Port Arthur. Congress approved the plan, Galveston was chosen, and Robert became

regarded as the single individual who put Galveston on the map. A granite monument was later erected by the City of Galveston honoring Robert and his team for the design of the Galveston Seawall and boulevard which has endured through hurricane and storm up to the present day.

Henry M. Robert was promoted to Brigadier General and named Chief of Engineers of the U. S. Army in 1901. Thereafter, having reached retirement age, he left active duty. He was immediately employed by the City of Galveston to continue to provide engineering oversight for the development of the Galveston Harbor. This was General Robert's Engineering Magnum Opus.

The fascinating thing about this Renaissance Man lies in the fact that he found time during all of his arduous engineering and mathematical tasks to devote his tremendous energies to becoming the principal world expert in the field of Parliamentary Law. Starting in 1876, and continuing with additions and updates in 1893, 1904, 1915, and 1921; General Robert wrote and published one of the most popular books ever printed in the English Language, "Robert's Rules of Order".

Article XI of the Bylaws of The Military Order of the World Wars, reads as follows:

"Section 1. Robert's Rules of Order shall govern parliamentary procedure in all meetings, assemblies and conventions of the Order."

I think that it is fair comment to say that no Lion's, Rotary, Kiwanis, Sertoma, or Chamber of Commerce group in America ever meets without General Robert's little brown book at hand. The same can be said of all women's clubs, civic groups, professional associations and every single debate class in high school, college, or university. In short, Robert's ubiquitous handbook is everywhere that English-speaking people congregate in formal assemblage.

Robert was twenty-six when he first took a personal interest in parliamentary procedure. As the Chief Engineer in New Bedford, and later Milwaukee, he had to attend numerous public meetings where diverse opinions upon civil engineering problems were voiced and thrashed

out in committee. The sometimes raucous and uncontrolled public debate offended the orderly mind of Henry Robert. He took up the study of parliamentary law with intensity.

The casual student of parliamentary procedure becomes confused when he tries to understand why a motion to lay on the table takes precedence over a motion to postpone, or why it requires a two-thirds vote to carry one kind of a motion



Brigadier General Henry M. Robert, Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army, at the time of his retirement in 1901.

while another prevails by a simple majority. Robert undertook to untangle the parliamentary conundrum with the mind of an engineer, a mathematician, a logician, an idealist, and with the patience of a plodding pilgrim.

After a long period of study, Robert was able to distill the fundamental purpose of parliamentary law. "The will of the assembly", he stated was to be his guiding star. "There is only one valid reason for holding a meeting...and that is to get at the will of the assembly."

"The object of rules of order is to assist the assembly to accomplish the work for which it was destined, in the best possible manner. To do this

it is necessary to restrain the individual somewhat, as the right of the individual in any community to do what he pleases is incompatible with the interest of the whole." And so Robert developed his guidelines that the majority must rule, but the minority must be heard, the rights of individuals must be guarded, and justice and courtesy must prevail. He was firmly opposed to any "Steam-Roller" tactics in a gathering.

After many late-night, and weekend hours devoted to honing his thoughts on parliamentary procedure, Henry Robert decided that he should publish the fruits of his intellect. The year was 1874, Robert was thirty-seven and still a Major when he sent off his initial manuscript to, D. Appleton and Company, a New York publisher. Appleton's handwritten response exists today in the Henry Martyn Robert Archives: "We return your Ms, as requested; our engagements are such that we cannot undertake its publication."

D. Appleton and Company is out of business today. They had just turned down what would become the most published book in the English language...next to the translation of the Holy Bible. If Appleton had not sent that rejection slip, they might be on the New York Stock Exchange now.


At the beginning of his research, Henry Robert had decided in his own mind on the kind of book that he wished to present to the public. He planned to make it convenient to carry in one's pocket...easy to read, divided into concise sections, and copiously indexed for quick reference.

Undaunted by the rejection slip, then-Major Robert decided to pay for the publication out of his own pocket. He chose the firm of Burdick and Armitage of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Robert stated that he ordered a first printing of 4,000 copies in 1876 so that he would have a supply that would last a long time. Needless to say, "Robert's Rules of Order" was an instant publishing hit. With a long succession of printings and updates, by the time of the General's death on May 11, 1923, the little brown book had exceeded well over the two million mark in sales.

General Robert's enduring philosophy of proper parliamentary proce-

ture was perhaps best expressed by one of his comments in 1915:

"Where there is radical difference of opinion in an organization, one side must yield. The great lesson for democracies to learn is for the majority to give the minority a full, free opportunity to present their side of the case, and then for the minority, having failed to win a majority to their views, gracefully to submit and to recognize the action as that of the entire organization, and cheerfully to assist in carrying it out, until they can secure its repeal."

Brigadier General Henry Martyn Robert was exceedingly well known and admired as a military engineer, ending his career as chief of the branch. However, his international fame lies entirely as the creator of the little brown book that resides in the briefcase of every organizational secretary in the English-speaking world. It is too bad that he was not born about thirty years later...he most assuredly would have been a member of The Military Order of the World Wars. 

The art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike at him as hard as you can and as often as you can, and keep moving on.

—General of the Army Ulysses S. Grant
(1822-1885)

National War College Conference

A conference on national security issues, one of a continuing series sponsored by the National War College Alumni Assn., has been set for the Tampa area for Thursday, 17 November 1994, at the MacDill AFB Officers' Club. The theme of the conference will be "National Security Policy: Crises Ahead", and will focus on the topics of Operations Other Than War, Operations with International Organizations, the Caribbean and Central America, and the Middle East. For information and forms, contact Executive Director, NWC Alumni Assn., Ft. L.J. McNair, Washington, DC 20319. Tel: (202) 863-2306. FAX: (202) 475-0531.

THE INNOVATIVE COMBAT DENTIST

by
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SPLAT!

The sound of a bullet hitting a tree? The noise of a bomb squashing a building? The clamor of a shell falling into a pond? No, the sound of fluid hitting a cuspidor. It was something Captain (Doctor) David Dorfman, combat dentist, heard hour after hour in his small dental suite in the Southwest Pacific more than fifty years ago.

So why "splat"? Because that was the noise of a stream of liquid hitting a metal basin instead of the bottom of the U.S. Army's standard portable "feed-bag" receptacle. Captain Dorfman, ever the dental innovator, had once again shown his knack for refusing to accept the status quo.

In fact, if Dorfman had not been an innovative dentist, he surely could have been a dental inventor. It seems he was never at a loss for new ideas to make his patients more comfortable, less terrified, and more amenable to his ministrations in that place that was only dreaded more than a bullet—the dentist chair. This is how, starting in the jungles of the South Pacific in World War II, he served as a combat dentist.

A practicing dentist in the small downstate New York hamlet of Cornwall-on-Hudson, he joined the local home defense force in 1941. Here he learned the rudiments of saluting, marching, and close order drill which was to put him light years ahead of his contemporaries when he joined the Army Air Corps in 1943. Thus when he arrived at Greensboro, North Carolina in June 1943, he did not have to suffer the embarrassment of say, saluting with his left hand or starting off marching on his right foot.

He finished his rather lengthy training in January 1944 and prepared to ship out to the South Pacific.

Disembarking at the tiny settlement of Lae, in New Guinea, David



Dr. Dorfman named his jeep after his wife.

was dispatched to an active combat zone. The Japanese were still in force at Wewak and the naval base at Rabaul. David's initial war, however, was not with the Japanese, but with an item called Army Dental Chest 60.

In many ways, this dental chest contained items more feared by the American soldier than a Jap bullet. At least a soldier could hide from a bullet. On the other hand, the soldier had no choice but to submit to a dentist drill driven by a foot treadle at the miserably slow rate of 500 revolutions per minute. Ouch!

David was still very much the compassionate civilian dentist at heart. So where a professional soldier may suffer a tooth being filled using a 1898 vintage drill, David could not subscribe to such treatment. So he set out to innovate in the interest of all those he was to come to treat. But first he had to get to his place of work.

For his first assignment, David travelled some 25 miles inland from Lae over a rough road to a place called Nadzab. Along the way he got a taste for what the army engineers were encountering as they carved roads and air strips out of a jungle, "...that frequently was so thick that to venture in [to it] 50 feet without a compass could mean getting lost for hours if not forever. In more than one instance the infantry would be