

Military Research - 100 Years after the United States entered the Great War



It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful people into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the [balance](#). But the right is more precious than peace, and **we shall fight for the things which we have always carried nearest our hearts — for democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free peoples as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world itself at last free.** – President Woodrow Wilson [Address asking for a declaration of war \(2 April 1917\)](#)

100 years have elapsed since the United States entered the Great War. It was the war to end all wars according to President Wilson. The U.S. would mobilize over 4 million military personnel and suffer over one hundred and ten thousand casualties including forty-three thousand from the influenza pandemic. Unknown to the victors, it also set the stage for the Second World War when the Great War came to a conclusion in 1918.

The United States entered the war April 6th, 1917 when Congress declared war on Germany. Congress would later declare war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire December 17th, 1917 but never declared war on the other Central Powers of the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria, and other various Co-belligerents. Consequently, the US fighting was restricted to the Western Front in Europe and did not participate in campaigns in the central, eastern and southern Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

No one incident led to the U.S. getting involved. Germany tried to entice Mexico to join Germany as an ally and declare war on the United States. Germany's offer would include sending money and help in returning those territories of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona taken in the Mexican-American war 70 years prior. British Intelligence would intercept Germany's telegram to Mexico and turn it over to Washington where Wilson would release the contents to the public. Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare on surface ships also helped sway US public opinion. U.S. Merchant seamen were under attack and dying from the sinking of U.S. Merchant vessels on the Atlantic ocean. "American public opinion was strongly divided, with most Americans until early 1917 strongly of the opinion that the United States should stay out of the war. Opinion changed gradually, partly in response to German actions in Belgium and the

Lusitania, partly as [German Americans](#) lost influence, and partly in response to Wilson's position that America had to play a role to make the world safe for democracy.” ^[Wikipedia]

On the battlefields of France in spring 1918, the war-weary [Allied](#) armies enthusiastically welcomed the fresh American troops. They arrived at the rate of 10,000 a day, at a time when the Germans were unable to replace their losses. The Americans won a victory at Cantigny, then again in defensive stands at Chateau-Thierry and Belleau Wood. The Americans helped the British Empire, [French](#) and [Portuguese](#) forces defeat and turned back the powerful final German offensive ([Spring Offensive](#) of March to July, 1918), and most importantly, the Americans played a role in the Allied final offensive ([Hundred Days Offensive](#) of August to November). However, many American commanders used the same flawed tactics which the British, French, Germans and others had abandoned early in the war, and so many American offensives were not particularly effective. Pershing continued to commit troops to these full- frontal attacks, resulting in high casualties against experienced veteran German and Austrian-Hungarian units. Nevertheless, the infusion of new and fresh US troops greatly strengthened the Allies' *strategic position* and boosted morale. The Allies achieved victory over Germany on [November 11, 1918](#) after German morale had collapsed both at home and on the battlefield. ^[Wikipedia]

After the War

Although the United States entered WW1 very late, what was to become of the veterans returning after spending months in the trenches of France and Belgium? Veterans, especially those with debilitating wounds, would find little solace trying to find work.

The following British article about the British soldier's sentiments for their future would be the same for our United States' counterparts. For meager pay and the suffering on the front lines, the prospects for a job and compensation would be in doubt.

The Daily Mail: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1084616/A-bitter-victory-Returning-WWI-soldiers-hatred-leaders-sent-die.html>

Rehabilitating Soldiers

Soldiers returning to the United State with disabilities were similar to those wounded during the Civil War. These men had left to go fight “Whole” as some have written and returned with missing limbs. The disable vets were treated differently than others with disabilities.

NPR WW1 Rehabilitation:

http://www.npr.org/programs/disability/ba_shows.dir/work.dir/highlights/ww1.html

University of Pennsylvania Article Rehabilitating Soldiers: <https://penncurrent.upenn.edu/2011-12-15/research/rehabilitating-soldiers-after-war>

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is still being studied and little was understood in and after WW1. <https://historyofptsd.wordpress.com/world-war-i/>

The Bonus Army

In 1932, WW1 Veterans gathered in Washington seeking promised compensation. They came to be known as the "Bonus Expeditionary Force" as they lobbied Congress. The Great Depression had thrown millions out of work including Veterans and with the passage of the World War Adjusted Compensation Act (43 Stat. 121) in 1924, WW1 Veterans still were 13 years away from claiming any money. The end result would be eviction from the White House lawn and mall by the U.S. Army, a disastrous election defeat for President Hoover and a rousing victory for Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932. It would also force Congress to pass legislation to authorize early payments in 1936 to Veterans (over a presidential veto by President Roosevelt). Eventually, what would come out of this is the G.I. Bill after WW2.

<http://www.upworthy.com/wwi-vets-got-the-short-end-of-the-stick-in-the-great-depression-this-was-their-answer>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_Adjusted_Compensation_Act

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/bonus-bill-1924>

WW1 Draft Registration

Historical Background

On May 18, 1917, the Selective Service Act was passed authorizing the President to increase temporarily the military establishment of the United States. The Selective Service System, under the office of the Provost Marshal General, was responsible for the process of selecting men for induction into the military service, from the initial registration to the actual delivery of men to military training camps.

The Selective Service System was one of "supervised decentralization." The office of the Provost Marshal General in Washington was responsible for formulating policy and transmitting it to the governors of the 48 states, the District of Columbia and the territories of Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. Under the administration of the PMGO it was the states, territories and the District of Columbia which managed the operation of drafting men for military service in World War I.

Under the office of the Provost Marshal General the Selective Service System was made up of 52 states (or territories) and 4,648 local boards. These organizations were responsible for registering men, classifying them, taking into consideration needs for manpower in certain industries and in agriculture, as well as certain special family situations of the registrants; handling any appeals of these classifications; determining the medical fitness of individual registrants; determining the order in which registrants would be called; calling registrants; and placing them on trains to training centers.

District boards were established by the President (one or more for each Federal Judicial District). The average district board had jurisdiction over approximately 30 local boards, each with an average registration of 5,000 men. The district boards had appellate jurisdiction over the decision of local boards in some claims and original jurisdiction in others.

Local boards were established for each county or similar subdivision in each state and for each 30,000 persons (approximately) in each city or county with a population over 30,000. The local boards were charged with the registration, determination of order and serial numbers, classification, call and entrainment of draftees.

During World War I there were three registrations. The first, on June 5, 1917, was for all men between the ages of 21 and 31. The second, on June 5, 1918, registered those who attained age 21 after June 5, 1917. (A supplemental registration was held on August 24, 1918, for those becoming 21 years old after June 5, 1918. This was included in the second registration.) The third registration was held on September 12, 1918, for men age 18 through 45. ^[National Archives]

Three Draft Card Registration forms were issued during WW1 corresponding to the three registrations. Blank Registration Draft Cards can be found at this web site in the center column: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~miwatgs/BlankForms.htm>

Card A issued June 5, 1917:

Card B issued July 5, 1918:

Card C issued September 12, 1918:

Selective Service Act of 1917: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selective_Service_Act_of_1917

This link provides questions and answers about World War 1 draft.

<http://www.gjenvick.com/Military/WorldWarOne/TheDraft/SelectiveServiceSystem/1918-TheSelectiveDraft-QuestionsAndAnswers.html>

World War 1 Memorials

The National WW1 Museum and Memorial: <https://www.theworldwar.org/>

The United States World War One Centennial and Commission:

<http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/educate/places/monuments-and-memorials.html>

The Great War 1914-1918 (UK site): <http://www.greatwar.co.uk/index.htm>

New French Memorial to WW1 casualties: <http://www.france24.com/en/20141110-hollande-opens-vast-new-memorial-wwi-dead>

3 Tips for finding WW1 ancestors and their stories (Lisa Louise Cooke's blog):

<http://lisalouisecooke.com/2016/04/find-wwi-ancestors-stories/>

Canadian Veteran Affairs website:

<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/overseas/first-world-war/france>



This is George B. Orr, my great uncle, who served in the US Army during WW1. These first two pictures are in his uniform probably after boot camp. Pictured below left is George in Germany, 1919. Group photo bottom right, George is on the right, sitting, taken in San Francisco, California, 1917. The note under George's pictures is from my Uncle Wycoff Orr's letter to my cousin. Wycoff's three brothers served during WW1. All the pictures are from my cousin Keith Orr's family collection.

Dave, Geo, and Oliver were all in WW1. Oliver slightly wounded & passed. Geo. spent 27 Mo. in Europe. He was a trucker after the war, in, Calif.



Geo. B Orr in Germany W. Army of Occupation 1919

