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DOUGHBOYS ON THE GREAT WAR
On 27 February 2011, the last US World War I veteran, Corporal Frank W. Buckles, passed away at the age of 110. With his passing, the Great War moved from memory to history in the United States. Lost too was any opportunity to ask these veterans the question that drives this monograph: What motivated World War I doughboys, whether volunteer or conscript, to answer their country’s call?1

Even if we could ask Buckles or other veterans this question, would their answers be the same ones given in their youth? Perhaps with confabulation, decades of reflection, tempered passions, and shifting sociocultural and political views, their opinions would have been different from their 1918 assessments. Would the true reasons they fought now elude them?

I mulled these questions as I traveled to Kansas City, Missouri, to the National World War I Museum at Liberty Memorial. And there, quite unexpectedly, I discovered an important clue. After my second day of research, I noticed an exhibit displaying artifacts recovered from the RMS Titanic. In the lower levels of historic Union Station, through which many Great War veterans had passed, were several large rooms of Titanic relics and displays. Before the last room was a large, darkened area, lit only by a faux starry sky and a few lights to illuminate the showcases containing small artifacts. Amidst the stars were printed quotations from contemporaries commenting on the Titanic disaster. I froze when I saw the name of Benjamin Guggenheim. What serendipity, I thought. My research was being supported by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and there had been a famous Guggenheim aboard the Titanic—a fact that, I humbly admit, I had forgotten. Guggenheim’s words, however, were what truly struck me: “We’ve dressed up in our best . . . and are prepared to go down like gentlemen.”2 Those words answered the question I had devoted more than
a decade to understanding: Why did doughboys fight? Duty. For Guggenheim and most men of his generation, including the American soldiers of World War I, that reason was paramount.

Guggenheim’s story encapsulates an age when honor mattered a great deal to a man. On board the doomed ship, as Guggenheim and his valet, Victor Giglio, dressed in their evening clothes and without their life belts, Guggenheim told Titanic steward James Etches, “If anything should happen to me, tell my wife in New York that I’ve done my best in doing my duty.”3 That night, the men in second class volunteered to remain on the ship, as did the eight-man orchestra. Only 8 percent of the men in second class survived, and the entire orchestra was lost. Belowdecks, in the engine and boiler rooms, the Titanic’s engineers and crew fought against the inevitable and delayed the ship’s sinking, thus saving hundreds of lives while sacrificing their own. Some have tried to debunk the male heroism displayed on the Titanic, but the fact remains that only 20 percent of the male passengers survived, compared with 74 percent of the women and 50 percent of the children.4 Male heroism was not universal—self-interest and cowardice existed then, as now—but the concepts of honor and duty played greater roles in 1912 society and occupied men’s thoughts more often.

This book examines the psyche of the doughboys—men of Guggenheim’s time. It focuses not on battles or military strategy but on American combatants’ conceptions of battle—before, during, and after the conflict.5 My writing follows the lead of Denis Winter, whose fascinating study of the war as seen through British soldiers’ eyes begins with this observation by Ardant Du Picq: “The man is the first weapon of battle. Let us study the soldier for it is he who brings reality to it.”6 Toward this end, I concentrate on enlisted men’s assessments of the actualities of war (although some officers’ voices are heard), which, in his study of German soldiers in World War II, Stephen G. Fritz dubs “The View from Below.”7 Doughboys on the Great War is a sociocultural examination of how war transforms an individual, an approach Peter Englund aptly describes in his own work: “It is not . . . a book about what it was . . . but a book about what it was like.”8

Digging for Answers

Few World War I scholars have delved deeply enough into doughboys’ motivations, combat experiences, and Western Front reactions. In particular, historians have overlooked the importance of duty and the influence of the Civil War, which spurred most doughboys toward the trenches.9 But how do we fully answer such a complex question as why men fought in World War I without interviewing any veterans? Although memoirs, diaries, letters, and after-action reports all have value, surveys or interviews that ask hundreds of soldiers the
same questions produce unique data that can establish broader patterns of understanding and ascertain why men fought.

The majority of soldiers from the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) returned home from Europe in 1919. Whereas only 67 percent of the AEF saw combat, all the returning veterans received the admiration of hundreds of thousands of citizens, who honored them with parades and festivals. Many veterans received something else: a simple card or sheet of paper from their home states asking for basic data concerning their backgrounds and units. Four states—Utah, Minnesota, Connecticut, and Virginia—asked for more than basic information from their veterans. Veterans from Utah and Minnesota received a four-page questionnaire asking for additional information about their families, their time in the service, and the types of wounds or citations they received. Utah also provided a “Remarks” section at the end of the form. Connecticut and Virginia veterans received the most complex survey: a four-page questionnaire entitled the Military Service Record (MSR). Though similar to the questionnaires distributed in Utah and Minnesota, the MSR also contained a number of subjective questions on the last page, asking soldiers to describe their experiences and the war’s impact on their characters. Of the 12,947 Connecticut, 3,000 Utah, and 14,900 Virginia MSRs, 1,264 of the questionnaires were fully completed, the veterans answering every question in detail. For the last fourteen years, I have studied this information supplied by these AEF veterans as they returned home.

The last pages of the questionnaires filled out by Samuel B. Yaffo, a Russian Jewish soldier living in Hartford, Connecticut, and James P. Spencer, an African American Baptist from Charlotte, Virginia, are reproduced here. Their responses illustrate the value of this source. Both men participated in major engagements with the AEF; Yaffo lost his brother Max and several close friends in combat, and Spencer was wounded in the hand during a firefight. The questionnaire also asked each veteran to send in two photographs—one as a civilian and one taken while in service.

Unlike Yaffo and Spencer, many veterans refused to answer these questionnaires. Some found the form too tedious to fill out and the questions too intrusive, or they thought the government might be asking them to reenlist. However, the 27,847 respondents from Connecticut and Virginia who did fill out their questionnaires left a unique and previously unused source of primary evidence about the doughboy and his participation in the Great War.

The importance of collecting information, especially subjective information, as close to an event as possible is illustrated by the case of author Maurice Genevoix, a French veteran of the Great War. He entered the conflict in 1914 at age twenty-four and served until he was wounded in 1915. On 10 September 1914, during the Battle of the Marne, Genevoix encountered some German soldiers, and he later described the event: "I came across three isolated Ger-
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

What was your attitude toward military service in general and toward your call in particular? I have always favored and advocated military service for young men, and would have been willing to serve had I not been exempt from the draft.

What were the effects of camp experiences in the United States upon yourself—mental and physical?

Best of effects.

What were the effects upon yourself of your overseas experience, either in the army or navy or in camp in France or in England?

Upon arrival in England we were greeted by a representative of King George's Fine Country. I had not seen a good residence in France.

If you took part in the fighting, what impressions were made upon you by this experience?

At first I could not get angry enough at the issue to want to kill them after our brave men had given up their lives from the shelling of our front line. What has been the effect of all these experiences as contrasted with your state of mind before the war?

The effect of all has been a profound change in my mind. I cannot get over it. I don't even know where he is to.

Photographs—If possible enclose one taken before entering the service and one taken afterwards in uniform, both signed and dated.

Additional data. I have in my possession some German revolutionary propaganda, and would be glad to have them forwarded.

Signed at: Hartford, Conn. on Nov 5, 1919

(Signature)

The information contained in this record, unless otherwise indicated, was obtained from the following persons or sources:

Page four of Samuel B. Yaffo's MSR, 8 November 1919. (Box 15, Military Service Questionnaires, 1920–1930, War Records Department, Record Group 12, State Archives, Connecticut State Library)
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

What was your attitude toward military service in general and toward your call in particular?... I felt that it was my patriotic duty to accept my training at the most critical hour in our Nation's history. Though my race had not been given its proper weight.

What were the effects of camp experiences in the United States upon yourself—mental and physical?

Made me socially more alert to political, social factors of the day; made me physically stronger & fitter... The great task of making the infantry face the face.

What were the effects upon yourself of your overseas experience?

Brought down some body strong qualities like hardness.

What effect, if any, did your experiences have on your religious belief?

That God intended the Great War to change our world. Christianity might be devoured. We had to show it the world, etc.

If you took part in the fighting; what impressions were made upon you by this experience?

The experience at the front impressed me with the idea that God seems to be the only element in man's power, the power of all time, anywhere.

What has been the effect of all these experiences as contrasted with your state of mind before the war?

That most wars are fought from a selfish viewpoint; fought from an economic viewpoint; that the Great War was fought for the Germans desire to spread a brotherhood among nations. Photographs—If possible, enclose ones taken before enlisting and one taken afterwards in uniform, both signed and dated.

Additional data

Name: James P. Spencer

Address: T.W. Kennedy and Associates, Institute

Signed at: Berkeley, Calif., on April 20, 1921.

James P. Spencer

The information contained in this record, unless otherwise indicated, was obtained from the following persons or sources:

James P. Spencer
man soldiers, each running behind the other at the same pace. I fired a bullet from my revolver into the head or back of each of them. Each one collapsed, with the same strangled cry.” Over the next six decades, Genevoix recalled this experience several times, and in each recollection, he changed the details. When Genevoix reflected on the incident in 1950, he called it a choice of “kill or be killed” and said it had “made an ineffaceable imprint on my memory.” In 1961, Genevoix retold the experience as an epic struggle, filled with romanticism and meticulous detail; he described the weather conditions, the German soldiers’ uniforms, and their cries. This time, two Germans were set to engage him, rather than three running away single file. Genevoix recalled, “He was going to turn around, turn around. . . . Understanding this, I raised the weapon in my

Russian Samuel B. Yaffo of Hartford, Connecticut, in France, 1918. (Box 15, Connecticut State Library)
right hand and fired.” Near the end of his life, in 1977, his recollection was filled with self-doubt, and he lamented, “I very much hope I did not kill them.”

It is clear that human memory is altered by and fades with the passage of time. Thus, memoirs written years after the Great War present a distorted view compared with the recorded memories and feelings of veterans in 1919, when their experiences were untainted by age or cultural norms. In the midst of war, soldiers were expected to shoot fleeing enemies, but as the years passed, enemies were no longer enemies. Genevoix’s story changed perhaps because of shifting societal viewpoints or because he forgot the facts. Either way, all versions of his story could not be fully true. As William L. Langer wrote in 1965
regarding his own 1919 memoir, “I find its immediacy rather appealing. It has nothing of the sophisticated rationalization that invariably creeps into reminiscences recorded long after the event.”

Genevoix’s opaque memories parallel those of the doughboys Richard Rubin interviewed for his book *The Last of the Doughboys*. Rubin tracked down around two dozen American veterans before they passed away, and he admits that “many of the veterans I interviewed—though not Mr. Moffitt—didn’t recognize me the second time I visited . . . they had completely forgotten our first meeting.” But even Laurence Moffitt’s story changed from one interview to the next: during the first, Moffitt stated he had never seen anyone killed, but during the second, he said he had seen a great deal of killing. Immediacy is critical to obtaining the most accurate assessment of events.

The majority of men filled out their questionnaires in 1919, when their memories of the Western Front were still vivid. Most of the rest did so in 1920 or 1921, and the remainder did so in 1923, the year the last AEF soldiers returned from Germany. This makes the MSRs distinct from the World War I questionnaires distributed by the US Army Military History Institute (MHI) beginning in 1975. Based on previous models for earlier wars, the survey was created by Don Rickey Jr. and was sent to every known veteran still living. Each of these former soldiers and sailors, ranging in age from late seventies to early nineties, completed an eleven-page survey covering topics such as training camps, duty overseas, and combat experience. Most of the questionnaires were completed during the 1980s.

The MHI at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, holds approximately 5,800 responses from these veterans (fewer than 200 veterans fully completed their questionnaires), and in recent years, several historians have made excellent use of them, most notably in two well-researched studies: Gary Mead’s *The Doughboys* (2000) and Jennifer D. Keene’s *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America* (2001). In spite of the value of the MHI questionnaire, a weakness exists: the lapse of time. As Robert J. Clark acknowledged when asked to recall his combat service, “Time loose & impossible to tell you now at the age of 85 in November 1982.” How long do memories stay fresh and accurate? There is no specific age at which memory begins to fade, but a memory decrement over time is normal. And because the MHI conducted the survey more than sixty years after the fact, only the youngest veterans could participate.

To compensate for the limitations of the MHI questionnaires, various historians have used diaries, memoirs, letters, interviews, and official armed services reports, but until now, only three have used the Connecticut and Virginia MSRs collected in 1919: Christopher M. Sterba, Chad L. Williams, and Jonathan H. Ebel. In his book *Good Americans*, Sterba uses only twenty-three Connecticut questionnaires—specifically, those filled out by New Haven Italians. Williams’s *Torchbearers of Democracy* is about African American soldiers and in-
cludes only forty-four Virginia questionnaires. Like Williams, Ebel’s *Faith in the Fight* uses only Virginia MSRs completed by African Americans and cites twenty-two of them. Sterba, Williams, and Ebel make no connection to other states’ questionnaires. Why have scholars not used these records? Perhaps the answer lies in the strange origin of the MSRs and in the war history commissions that distributed them to veterans.

Following the armistice, historians and veterans of the war began to write about the AEF’s role in the conflict. The great majority of publications in 1919 and the 1920s consisted of unit histories and personal memoirs (e.g., Frank P. Sibley, *With the Yankee Division in France* [1919], and Hervey Allen, *Toward the Flame* [1925]). Not until Edward M. Coffman’s *The War to End All Wars* (1968) did a historian study all aspects of America’s role in the war, including the infantryman’s experience. He relies on several interviews to detail the life of the common soldier, making it one of the first scholarly texts in decades to discuss the experiences of the AEF. Coffman also employs a variety of sources from the National Archives and state collections; his use of personal accounts enriches the narrative. The strength of his work stems from its wide scope and its discussion of individuals and divisions. This, however, also limits the book’s intimacy: it touches on infantrymen’s experiences but does not explore the intensity of the Western Front or the war’s effect on them.

Recent studies such as Byron Farwell’s *Over There* (1999), John S. D. Eisenhower’s *Yanks* (2001), and Mark Ethan Grotelueschen’s *The AEF Way of War* (2007) update Coffman’s work with new research. Although Farwell uses memoirs, diaries, and letters to give the AEF infantrymen voices, his book, like those of Eisenhower and Grotelueschen, is a top-down study of American battlefield performance, generals, and the AEF’s contribution to the Allied victory. Similar to Coffman’s book in scope, Mead’s *The Doughboys* covers the Western Front and the home front; it also makes great use of the MHI archives, as does Keene’s *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America*. Mead’s work touches on only who the soldiers were and how the war changed them mentally and physically. Keene focuses on the importance of the Bonus Bill and the veterans’ struggle to obtain the money promised to them by the government. Stephen R. Ortiz also explores the Bonus Bill in *Beyond the Bonus March and GI Bill* (2010). These authors portray the experiences of the soldiers, but only to a certain degree.

The MSRs from 1919 asked the veterans difficult questions and pushed them to reflect on experiences that were still fresh in their minds. By examining the 1919 MSRs of Connecticut, Utah, and Virginia, this book focuses on these contemporary memories. Comparing veterans’ responses from 1919 to those provided in 1975 would furnish further insight into the sociological and sociocultural aspects of military history: Did decades of reflection alter the opinions of veterans? If so, how? What patterns, if any, are seen? An in-depth
examination of these questions is beyond the scope of this book, but they are important ones.

**Faded Memories and Shaky Pens**

Six decades later, the feelings of duty and pride of service remained, but two strong differences are evident when comparing the 1919 MSRs and the 1975 MHI questionnaires. The 5,800 MHI questionnaires contain bitter responses aimed at a different enemy. As the veterans’ passions toward the Germans waned, their wrath found a new target. In 1975, many veterans expressed anger toward the US government; they felt cheated out of a future, which the GI Bill had provided for World War II veterans. This is especially apparent in part IV, questions 41 and 42, of the 1975 questionnaire: “If the Army sent you to school, please recount your experience there” and “What were your expectations of civilian life upon leaving service (post-war America, G-I benefits, educational and career opportunities).” Typical responses were, “G.I. benefits were in WWII!” and “WWI veterans did not have any benefits!” As Sergeant Aaron Coplin emphasized, “None—things were so different then—60–61 years ago—No modern convenience—we got ‘nothing’ then—or now.”

The second difference is the level of respect rather than disdain for the Germans. In 1919, the MSRs were filled with celebratory remarks about how the “Huns” could not contend with the military might of the United States. Decades later, the doughboys expressed deference for the superiority of the German soldier. Part III, question 34, of the 1975 questionnaire read: “Did you and your comrades consider the enemy good fighters? Better trained? Better equipped?” Sergeant Paul J. McMahon answered, “Yes Germans were best, even better than us.”

The old doughboys felt the Germans were “like Americans” and “human beings.” These two sentiments represent the bulk of veterans’ replies.

As mentioned earlier, not all the veterans filled out the MSRs completely. Many left the fourth page blank or only partially answered some of the questions. Yet for the Connecticut and Virginia questionnaires, the fourth page, entitled “Additional Information,” is the most interesting and produces the richest material—the soldier’s personal thoughts about the war. In rare cases, some Minnesota veterans provided valuable additional data, such as letters, and included the photographs requested by the MSRs; unfortunately, they did not share their impressions of the war (notably, their combat experiences) in the blank space provided, but seventy-two Utah veterans did. These pages reveal feelings, attitudes, and insights. Many men did not want to share their memories, especially of combat; numerous soldiers did not answer questions about the actions they had participated in. Almost 400 men gave a taut three-word an-
swear: “Sherman was right” or “War is hell.” They were referring to Civil War general William Tecumseh Sherman’s famous words from a speech he delivered at a veterans’ reunion in Columbus, Ohio, on 11 August 1880: “There is many a boy here to-day who looks on war as all glory, but, boys, it is all hell. You can bear this warning voice to generations yet to come. I look upon war with horror, but if it has to come I am here.” In response to questions about their combat experiences, other veterans wrote, “Are you kidding,” “Impossible to answer,” or “Cannot explain.”

The majority of men who gave such short answers had participated in a great deal of combat and usually suffered serious injuries from machine gun or small-arms fire, grenade fragmentation, artillery shrapnel, or poison gas. Others who engaged in heavy combat wrote more expansively, such as Private First Class Finlan D. Cuddy of New Haven, Connecticut: “I took part in the fighting in the Argonne forests its an experience I never will forget. I’ll say war is worse the Hell.” “I did not realize what war really was. No one can know who hasn’t been there. It is worse than hell and may this be the end of war,” stressed Corporal Egbert B. Inman of Hartford. Marine Corps private first class William W. Ward, a Chicago native, concluded, “Learned that Sherman told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Private Bernard C. Paggett of Alexandria, Virginia, who worked as a brick mason both before and after the war, declared, “Sherman was right but mild in expression.” “Sherman knew what he was talking about” stated another Virginian, Captain Charles Johnston, who was wounded in the right leg during combat.

Second Lieutenant Roy D. Hitchcock, who served with Machine Gun Company, 111th Infantry, and came from East Hampton, Connecticut, commented, “That war was much worse than the famous remark of General Sherman.” Private John B. Vaninetti of New Britain, Connecticut, admitted, “The impression was terrible to realize that what I was thinking theoretically it was in facts as General Sherman described.” Marine Corps private Jerry M. Davis of Hartford remarked, “When I first went into action at Chateau Thierry sector I did not seem to relize what war was untill 600 fell in action in my Bn it made me feel as Sherman expressed it, WAR IS HELL.” New Haven resident Private Jack F. Molloy, who served in the Medical Corps, concluded that combat “verified to me Gen Shermans opinion of war. It sure was Hell.” “Little change except to know now that war is H-ll instead of having to believe what Sherman said,” stressed First Lieutenant Edgar H. Dowson of New Haven.

These veterans’ responses show that memories of the Civil War dwelled in the minds of the doughboys. The passing decades, however, had diminished the horrors of the 1860s, and the Western Front spawned a level of brutality that none of America’s regular or enlisted soldiers anticipated. How did ordinary men cope with relentless artillery bombardment and lethal hand-to-hand combat, and how did the war alter their psyches? Their experience remains relevant.
today, since the cornerstone of America’s strategy against terrorism is the infantryman. It is unlikely that this policy will change. In particular, we need to understand why individuals volunteer to go to war, and, if reality fails to match expectations (as it did for almost every doughboy), we need to ascertain the causes of these erroneous presumptions.

This work surveys men’s reactions to every facet of the war: prewar emotion, life in the trenches, and reflective return. It examines the knowledge of the American soldier—not only of his time on the front but also his identity throughout the war. Coffman writes, “It is impossible to reproduce the state of mind of the men who waged war in 1917 and 1918.” This volume seeks to change that statement. Toward this end, the Connecticut, Minnesota, Utah, and Virginia questionnaires are unique. A search of America’s archives and the secondary literature has found nothing comparable.

Nonetheless, this book cannot definitively address all aspects of the doughboys’ mentality and motivation. All 1,390,000 of them who fought in France are now gone, and unlike Yaffo and Spencer, many of them failed to answer their questionnaires in their entirety. Many others died serving their country, and we will never know what they thought. As Primo Levi attests, the true voices of Auschwitz-Birkenau belonged to those who perished at the death camp. Those who survived and spoke, like Levi, were, by definition, atypical. Yet theirs are the only voices we can hear, and they deserve to be heard. Levi asserts, “Even if they had paper and pen, the drowned would not have testified because their death had begun before that of their body. Weeks and months before being snuffed out, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, to compare and express themselves. We speak in their stead, by proxy.”

Doughboys on the Great War attempts to do the same for the AEF.

The Doughboys

Although this book includes some naval and aerial matters, as well as some of the women of the AEF (nurses and stenographers), it focuses on infantrymen on the Western Front. However, Americans also served in Italy and Russia. The American Military Mission to Italy, consisting of the 332nd Regiment (part of the 83rd Division), was sent to aid the Italians during the last year of the war. The AEF also served in northern Russia and Siberia from 15 August 1918 to 1 April 1920. Pressured by the Allies, President Woodrow Wilson agreed to send American troops there, provided they did not become involved in Russia’s internal revolution. The American Expeditionary Force North Russia (AEFNR), often called the Polar Bear Expedition, was a force of 4,487 men, half of whom were conscripts from Michigan and Wisconsin. Despite US intentions, the AEFNR skirmished with units of the Bolshevik Sixth Red Army. Wilson also dispatched 5,100 soldiers to Siberia (AEF Siberia) to protect the Trans-Siberian
Railroad and important supplies. These two Russian expeditions claimed more than 500 Americans captured, wounded, or killed in action.40

Soldiers from Connecticut, Utah, and Virginia came from the 26th, 29th, 40th (originally 19th), and 91st Divisions. The first three were created from existing National Guard units; the 26th and 29th saw heavy combat, which included front-line sectors in Aisne, Champagne, Marne, Meuse-Argonne, Lorraine, and Saint-Mihiel. The 40th Division included Utahans and became the 6th Depot Division in France, which acted as a replacement unit for other divisions. The 76th and 80th Divisions included draftees from Connecticut and Virginia. The 76th also became a replacement unit—the 3rd Depot Division—and the 80th saw some action on several fronts: Meuse-Argonne, Picardy, and Saint-Mihiel. In total, these six divisions (excluding the 40th) sustained 6,033 men killed in action or died of wounds and 25,364 wounded.41 In addition, each of these divisions spent eighty-five days in active sectors.42

Because the military was segregated, African Americans from Connecticut and Virginia who filled out MSRs, along with blacks from around the country, served only in the 92nd and 93rd Divisions. The latter served under the French and comprised just four infantry regiments, including the famous 369th. Men from the US Marine Corps also filled out MSRs. Marines who fought on the Western Front were from the 4th Marine Brigade, which represented part of the army’s 2nd Division.43

This book follows the doughboy from his ethnic, religious, and cultural origins through his training in the States and abroad, his life on the front, and his readjustment to civilian life. Chapter 1, “The Great Adventure,” discusses the similarity between the doughboys and their European brethren in 1914. American men longed to “do their bit” when the United States declared war on 6 April 1917, just as their European counterparts did three years earlier. Unaware of the power of modern industrialized warfare, these future soldiers—inexperienced, but with steady constitutions—wanted to repay the French for their help and sacrifice during the American Revolution. Enhanced by the Victorian milieu of boxing and football and by the legacy of the Civil War, the trenches of the Western Front offered American men a perfect chance to display their manhood.

Chapter 2, “Gimme da Gun,” answers social and cultural questions. Who were these men? What factors shaped the AEF soldier? Each man’s experience logically depended on his ethnic, religious, and educational background. Some men felt they had something to prove, and others hoped the war would facilitate their transformation from boys into men. Whether conscript or enlistee, they all felt it was their duty to fight.

Chapter 3, “Wooden Weapons,” examines the men’s military education in America. Whether this occurred at Camp Devens, Kearny, Lewis, Lee, or Upton or one of the other training camps around the country, the men had strong feel-
ings—either respect or hatred—about their military training. Most men did not participate in live-fire exercises, and some trained with wooden replicas instead of real rifles and artillery pieces. Despite its inadequacy, this training gave the men a false sense of combat prowess (which many of them believed they possessed innately), and it proved fatal on the Western Front.

Chapter 4, “Across the Pond,” discusses the veterans’ experiences as they crossed the Atlantic and dealt with the threat of German U-boats and influenza. After that two-week journey, most received additional training in England or in quiet sectors of France. The majority of men benefited from this additional military training and enjoyed the opportunity to explore foreign cities. But this illusion of merriment would not last long.

Chapter 5, “The Supreme Test,” analyzes the doughboys in combat. Finally, they faced their true trial—after all, they thought, the war was all about defeating the enemy by going over the top on the glorious Western Front. The trenches, mud, rats, constant shelling, and death shocked the doughboys. Where was the adventure? Once they experienced the true nature of war, most were disheartened; they disliked the front and deplored the killing. It was not what they expected.

Chapter 6, “Would Not Take Anything for It,” discusses the war’s effect on these men after the armistice. Knowing what they now knew, would the doughboys enlist with the same enthusiasm or be as patriotic in the future? Most veterans said they would think twice about signing up again or would wait for the government to draft them; a minority said they were ready to go a second round. Most doughboys returned to their old jobs in factories or on farms, but some could not due to physical injury or mental unrest. Though most of them now condemned war, the veterans were proud they had done their duty.

The conclusion, “If It Has to Come I Am Here,” summarizes the American experience in the Great War. Doughboys did not enjoy combat, yet they valued their war experience. They voiced a “war is hell, but I’m glad I served” outlook. This may seem paradoxical, but it is not. If Civil War veterans had been given questionnaires in 1866, their responses likely would have paralleled those of the doughboys in 1919. Both fought for honor, manhood, comrades, and adventure, but especially for duty.

Although sociocultural conceptions of war changed after the First World War, the majority of veterans of later conflicts remained proud of their service as the years passed. The combat endured by marine corporal E. B. Sledge in the Pacific during World War II haunted him for years. Nonetheless, according to Sledge, “Until the millennium arrives and countries cease trying to enslave others, it will be necessary to accept one’s responsibilities and to be willing to make sacrifices for one’s country—as my comrades did. As the troops used to say, ‘If the country is good enough to live in, it’s good enough to fight for.’ With privilege goes responsibility.”44 Vietnam War veteran Lieutenant Frederick Downs
was glad he served, despite losing his left arm. Downs concluded, “I’m now sixty-one and have had a rich, full life with family, friends, job, church, travel, and much else. I often think back to that day in Vietnam when I stepped on the Bouncing Betty and my life changed forever. It has been a good life.”

During his four tours in the Iraq War (2003–2011), Chief Petty Officer Chris Kyle, a navy SEAL, killed more than 150 Iraqi insurgents. A devout Christian, Kyle believed God would judge him and probably punish him for the men he had killed. Nonetheless, Kyle acknowledged, “I’m not the same guy I was when I first went to war. No one is. Before you’re in combat, you have this innocence about you. Then, all of the sudden, you see this whole other side of life. I don’t regret any of it. I’d do it again.”

War affected each of these men in different ways: psychologically, physically, and spiritually. But what they all have in common is that they are glad they served—just like the doughboys.

Throughout history, men have marched into war despite the warnings of prior generations. Some sought honor. Others searched for adventure, glory, or manhood. But many served because of a sense of duty. Soldiers brushed off their fear and entered the fray. The doughboys were no different. The popular image of the doughboy is one of the Lost Generation—a misnomer coined by Gertrude Stein and then aggrandized by Ernest Hemingway and his literary contemporaries. It continues to misguide our understanding of the conflict. The war shocked them, but it did not shatter them. Duty- and honor-bound, the doughboys were young and eager to fight on the Western Front. Only when they returned home did they have a full understanding of the brutality of war. Even though the doughboys experienced the horrors of modern warfare, it ennobled them. They were honored to make the sacrifice.
The war had been raging in Europe for almost three and a half years before the doughboys arrived in France—brave, eager, and naïve. Similar to most of their European brethren, American men had become intoxicated with excitement at their country’s declaration of war.¹ The horrors of Verdun and the Somme did not deter these raw young recruits from what they thought would be a great adventure—a semester abroad, for some. The heroic legacy of warfare was already present in America and fostered a sense of exhilaration; the Civil War literature of the time, the short and victorious Spanish-American War, and the propaganda machine of the British and US governments augmented the Victorian image of romantic warfare.

The Common Bond

During the years between the Civil War and the Great War, newspapers, churches, and schools emphasized nationalism and the importance of war. Americans lauded their generals and soldiers—to die in battle was glorious. The country viewed the Spanish-American War as an opportunity for patriotism and honor. Civil War veterans, especially those from the South, urged young men to demonstrate their bravery and display their heroism by joining the military. Veterans from both the North and the South told tales to the younger generation that extolled the rewards of serving one’s country. While not declaring their love of war or killing, these men were proud to be Civil War veterans. James Marten notes, “Their service defined them, made them different, provided unique rewards and self-esteem beyond anything most Gilded Age Americans could muster.”²

During the 1880s, tributes to and the memorialization of the Civil War and its veterans increased. Memorial Day events (the first was held
1 May 1865 in Charleston, South Carolina, to honor dead Union prisoners of war), gatherings of veterans, monument construction, and the publication of books and magazines all commemorated the conflict. One of the most popular Gilded Age books was Ulysses S. Grant’s *Personal Memoirs*. Americans had purchased 300,000 sets of these books four months before the first volume’s delivery date. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, periodicals and novels helped revive interest in the war. *Century Magazine* printed the “Battles and Leaders of the Civil War” series between 1884 and 1887, which later influenced novelist Stephen Crane.

On 30 May 1888, during a Memorial Day address at Seven Pines National Cemetery in Sandston, Virginia, orator Theodore W. Bean stated, “The great fatherhood of our country . . . left a progeny North and South, whose loyalty to leaders, whose bravery in battle, whose industry and indurance, demonstrates the glory of our inheritance, and in the grand battles fought between ourselves, however unfortunate in some respects, reveals a manhood of the Republic, as now reunited, capable and willing to protect and defend the Union against the political powers of the earth.” In an 1890 address to veterans of the Army of Tennessee, General William Tecumseh Sherman compared Civil War soldiers to the knights of old: “There is nothing in life more beautiful than the soldier,” he declared, and “a knight errant with steel casque, lance in hand, has always commanded the admiration of men and women.” Two years later, at a Memorial Day ceremony in Dubuque, Iowa, a speaker noted that Civil War veterans “remind us that with all the greed there is in this world, the holy leaven of manliness, true manliness may yet be found.” The admiration for Civil War (and Spanish-American War) veterans inspired young men to serve as doughboys. The romantic vision, in the words of James McPherson, stirred “the quest for adventure, for excitement, for the glory to be won by ‘whipping’ the enemy and returning home as heroes to an adoring populace.” These ideals impelled countless young men to follow their sense of duty and serve in the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and the First World War.

As a captain in the 12th Connecticut Volunteers during the Civil War, John William De Forest participated in the capture of New Orleans, the Port Hudson campaign, and the Battle of Cedar Creek in Virginia. When asked whether he “liked the business” of war, De Forest stated, “I did not like it, except in some expansive moments when this or that stirring success filled me with excitement.” Fighting, he continued, “is just tolerable; you can put up with it; but you can’t honestly praise it . . . it is much like being in a rich cholera district in the height of the season.” De Forest called on his own experience as a veteran to answer the question: why do men fight in war? He declared, “‘Self-preservation is the first law of nature.’ The man who does not dread to die or to be mutilated is a lunatic. The man who, dreading these things, still faces them for the sake of duty and honor is a hero.” Men who fought in the Great War were in-
spired by the courage of their Civil War ancestors. But under the stress of modern warfare, the doughboys' courage was tested. They discovered that courage meant overcoming fear and completing the task of a soldier.

On 4 July 1913 President Woodrow Wilson spoke at an event in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, commemorating the semicentennial anniversary of the Civil War. In his oration, Wilson memorialized “the splendid valour, the manly devotion of the men” who had fought on the fields of Gettysburg and praised “the high recklessness of exalted devotion which does not count the cost . . . the blood and sacrifice of multitudes of unknown men lifted to a great stature in the view of all generations by knowing no limit to their manly willingness to serve.”

How many future doughboys heard or read Wilson’s words and took them to heart when, a year later, the war in Europe began? The “splendid valour” and “manly willingness to serve” of the Civil War soldiers inspired thousands of young men to prove their own heroism on the battlefields of France. These words could pertain to the doughboys of 1917 as well as to their Civil War counterparts. Bell Irvin Wiley observes, “Yanks and Rebs were far more alike than not. For the common soldiers of both sides the qualities that stand out were: pride in themselves and their families; a strong sense of duty; courage; a capacity for suffering; a will and strength to endure; and, for most, a devotion to country and cause which exceeded that of the folk at home.”

The correspondence of Civil War soldiers from both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line attests to the characteristics Wiley defined. In August 1861 seventeen-year-old Day Elmore enlisted in the 36th Illinois Infantry. In spite of being wounded and taken prisoner, he reenlisted. In a letter to his father, Elmore explained his motivation: “I can not Express my self so I will only say that my whole soul is wrapt up in this our countrys caus I ought to be at school but I feel that I am only doeing my Duty to my self and you, Pa.” Elmore died from wounds he received at Franklin, Tennessee, in 1864, three months before his twenty-first birthday. When J. T. Terrell’s mother suggested he acquire a substitute to replace him in the Confederate army, the soldier from Aberdeen, Mississippi, declared, “I can say I do not want any as I think it is the duty of every man to bear an equal part in this struggle.” After serving for three years and spending time in a Union prison camp, Terrell reenlisted in 1864. He was killed by a sharpshooter while on watch outside Atlanta on 22 August 1864. The deaths of Elmore, Terrell, and 752,000 other Civil War soldiers left an immeasurable imprint on Victorian America. As a result, the doughboy had a strong connection with Billy Yank and Johnny Reb. The American soldiers of 1861–1865 and 1917–1918 fought for the same reasons—above all, duty.
“He Was a Man”

The literary works of Stephen Crane, Oliver Optic (pseudonym of William Taylor Adams), and others made a deep impression of the warrior ethos on the future doughboys. Alice Fahs concludes that the books left “an underlying consensus that the war had been—and should remain in memory—a white, masculinist experience in American life.”13 Crane’s Civil War novel The Red Badge of Courage sparked young men’s quest for combat the moment it first appeared in a serialized version in newspapers in 1894; it was published as a book a year later. The novel chronicles the war experiences of young soldier Henry Fleming and his path to manhood. Crane places readers in the midst of violence—connecting manhood and war. When Fleming engages in a skirmish with Confederate troops and fights with a fierceness he did not realize he possessed, his lieutenant, who “seemed drunk with fighting,” called out to him, “By heavens, if I had ten thousand wild cats like you I could tear th’ stomach outa this war in less’n a week.” Fleming’s fellow soldiers “now looked upon him as a war devil.”14 War transforms Fleming, as described at the novel’s conclusion: “He felt a quiet manhood, non-assertive but of sturdy and strong blood. He knew that he would no more quail before his guides wherever they should point. He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.”15

Some critics argue that The Red Badge of Courage is an antiwar novel, a story saturated with irony and full of deception. This ironic interpretation became stylish in the 1960s and continues today.16 To these critics, Henry Fleming is no more than a deluded, misguided young man lost in his own fantasies, simply a pawn in a symbolic battle.17 As Michael C. C. Adams suggests, “The fact is that The Red Badge is about how boys achieve manhood by facing violence.”18

Henry Fleming is a boy who, like Crane himself, dreamed of war. Crane grew up in the post–Civil War era; he met many veterans and listened to their stories, absorbing the details they imparted. As a young man, he read a series on the Civil War published by Century Magazine between 1884 and 1887, but he found that the articles lacked color and human feelings. He complained to his friend, Corwin Linson, “I wonder that some of these fellows don’t tell how they felt in those scraps! They spout eternally of what they did but they are emotionless as rocks!”19 His childhood dreams, his fascination with history, and the Century Magazine articles sparked Crane’s interest in writing his own Civil War story, in which he chooses a specific field of combat and describes the scenes with stark realism. When D. Appleton & Company published The Red Badge of Courage in its complete form, it was well received. In a letter to John N. Hilliard in January 1896, Crane wrote about his “meager success” as an author and noted, “My chiepest desire was to write plainly and unmistakably, so that all men (and some women) might read and understand. That to my mind is
good writing." In another letter to Hilliard the following year, Crane expressed his pleasure at the positive reviews his novel had received in England (where he lived at the time): "The big reviews here praise it for just what I intended it to be, a psychological portrayal of fear... I have never been in a battle, but I believe that I got my sense of the rage of conflict on the football field, or else fighting is a hereditary instinct, and I wrote intuitively; for the Cranes were a family of fighters in the old days, and in the Revolution every member did his duty."

Although Crane never experienced combat, he did pursue adventure, serving as a war correspondent during the Greco-Turkish War in 1897 and the Spanish-American War in 1898. At Velestino, where the Turks assaulted the Greeks, fellow war correspondent John Bass asked, "Crane, what impresses you most in this affair?" The author answered, "Between the two great armies battling against each other the interesting thing is the mental attitude of the men." In Cuba, while covering the Spanish-American War, Crane witnessed Colonel Theodore Roosevelt's victory at Kettle Hill and saw the Rough Riders, the Regulars, and the 1st and 10th Cavalleries push the Spanish from San Juan Hill. As a group of journalists watched the action unfold, someone yelled, "By God, there go our boys up the hill!" Crane wrote of the scene, "There is many a good American who would give an arm to get the thrill of patriotic insanity that coursed through us when we heard that yell."

In The Red Badge of Courage, as well as his other war stories, Crane explores the "mental attitude" of his characters. In Crane's short story "The Veteran," published in 1896, an older, gray Henry Fleming enters a burning barn numerous times to rescue the trapped horses and cows. In contrast, the other men, fumbling with water buckets, are as terror-stricken as the animals. Crane describes one such man: "The Swede had been running to and fro babbling," carrying an empty pail. Fleming saves the Swede by dragging him out of the barn. When the Swede remembers that two young colts are still trapped inside, Fleming braves the inferno and rushes back in to rescue the "poor little things." The roof collapses on Fleming, killing him, and as the smoke and flames rise to the sky, Crane concludes, "Perhaps the unutterable midnights of the universe will have no power to daunt the color of his soul." As Marten states, "'The Veteran' showed that once a man came to grips with mortal peril in battle, the strength he drew from that special brand of terror and accomplishment would last the rest of his life."

Biographer Linda H. Davis writes, "Stephen Crane was a product of his time; duty and honor were inseparable from his notion of masculinity." To the future doughboys reading Crane's stories, duty and honor were paramount. They, like Fleming, sought manhood on the battlefield. The doughboys witnessed the realities of war, but like Fleming, they were gratified by their service. In the end, American veterans would feel that their wartime experiences made them better men.
For God and Country

Literary characters like Henry Fleming, along with the legacy of the Civil War, created a sense of duty and a vision of heroic warfare. Another hallmark of Victorian America was a keen interest in sports, especially boxing, football, and baseball. “Amateur games were especially important to those coming of age after the Civil War, for violent contests on athletic ‘fields of battle’ allowed young men to replicate the heroism of fathers who had sacrificed so much in their selfless commitment to saving the Union. Here the martial values of hardiness, courage, and endurance took their place beside the older Victorian ideals of piety and earnest hard work,” explains Elliott J. Gorn. This competitive drive also led men to form clubs and secret societies where they could express their manhood and brotherhood.

Bolstered by the legacy of the Civil War and the Spanish-American War and by a growing interest in sports and private clubs, American men felt they had much to gain when the United States declared war, especially after listening to the lectures of the Four Minute Men (and women). These four-minute speakers, all volunteers, promoted the reasons for joining the war. George Creel led them into action as director of the Commission on Public Information, which President Wilson had established to encourage fervent patriotism and support for the war. In addition, the president passed the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918. The latter stated that any antiwar actions, writings, or sentiments “shall be punished by a fine of not more than 10,000 dollars or imprisonment for not more than twenty years, or both.” Meanwhile, at movie theaters, churches, synagogues, and meeting halls of all types, the Four Minute Men injected their audiences with enthusiasm, nationalism, and an inescapable sense of duty. Many of the women who spoke read the following poem, “It’s Duty Boy,” to crowds across the country:

My boy must never bring disgrace to his immortal sires
At Valley Forge and Lexington they kindled freedom’s fires,
John’s father died at Gettysburg, mine fell at Chancellorsville;
While John himself was with the boys who charged up San Juan Hill.
And John, if he was living now, would surely say with me,
“No son of ours shall e’er disgrace our grand old family tree
By turning out a slacker when his country needs his aid.”
It is not of such timber that America was made.
I’d rather you had died at birth or not been born at all,
Than know that I had raised a son who cannot hear the call
That freedom has sent round the world, its previous rights to save
This call is meant for you, my boy, and I would have you brave;
And though my heart is breaking, boy, I bid you do your part,
And show the world no son of mine is cursed with craven heart;
And if, per chance, you ne’er return, my later days to cheer,
And I have only memories of my brave boy, so dear,
I’d rather have it so, my boy, and know you bravely died
Than have a living coward sit supinely by my side.
To save the world from sin, my boy, God gave His only son
He’s asking for My boy, today, and may His will be done.30

It was as if Creel had resurrected the mothers of ancient Sparta, who gave their sons the following instructions before departing for battle: “Come back with your shield—or on it.”31 Even before young men heard speeches like these, former president Theodore Roosevelt had exclaimed, “A mother who is not willing to raise her boy to be a soldier, is not fit for citizenship.”32 Many families urged their sons to enlist, but most young men did not need to be pushed too hard.

During the war, the enemy became an object of hatred among the citizenry. Crowd psychology took control of individuals’ thinking, affecting even members of the clergy, whose sermons preaching hatred and violence seemed inconsistent with their religious calling. The clergy joined in depicting Kaiser Wilhelm II as Satan and in vilifying Germany. To the majority of American clergy, the Great War represented a holy war. Protestant preacher Billy Sunday declared, “If you turn hell upside down, you will find ‘Made in Germany’ stamped on the bottom.” In April 1918 Sunday went even further, calling Germans a “bunch of pretzel-chewing, sauerkraut spawn of blood-thirsty Huns.”33 At the First Baptist Church of New London, the pastor, who became a chaplain during the war, preached to his congregation in uniform as he stood beside a machine gun and an American flag.

Inflamed by church and state, the doughboys were filled with patriotism. Regardless of color or creed, and despite varying reasons for becoming soldiers, men expressed enthusiasm for and pride in military service. Every doughboy, whether drafted or enlisted, felt it was his duty to fight.

Nineteen-year-old Garnett D. Claman was curious about the world outside his farm in Bristol, Virginia. When he entered the service on 28 July 1917, he hoped “to go to France that I might have the knowledge of travel, of association with different nationalities, and I wanted to know what war meant.”34 Henry A. Isleib of Marlborough, Connecticut, a farmer and lumberman, joined the infantry on 29 March 1918, “spurred on by my country’s needs and my own patriotic thoughts.”35 Joseph J. O’Connell of Manchester, Connecticut, enlisted due to a sense of “patriotism and a desire for adventure.”36 James P. Spencer, an African American student at Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, was thirty years old when he entered the infantry on 26 October 1917. Spencer had no misgivings about his military service and remarked, “I felt that it was my pa-
triotic duty to serve my country at the most critical hour in the Nation’s history, though my race had not been given the proper rights.”

Niels A. W. Johnson, a Manchester, Connecticut, resident who served with the 102nd Infantry, expressed the sentiments of many when he said that he had enlisted “to fight for the United States and Democracy.” Another Manchester man, Harold J. Dougan, served as a sergeant in the infantry and explained, “A man knowing that his country’s honor was at stake, that he, a very small factor, was needed to do his little part, I went willingly.” Infantryman James O. McKarney, a farmer from Washington County, Virginia, commented, “I thought it was our duty to go and help win the war before I was drafted. I am glad to know that I was able to help win the war.”

“When I received my call, I thought it over, and considered it an honor as well as a great privilege to go and fight or die for my country,” reflected Thomas M. Clary, an African American blacksmith and farmer from White Plains, Virginia. “At the time I was called I was employed in the US Navy yard and was urged to claim exemption on same grounds, but my thoughts were that someone else would have to go if I did not. I was young and was willing to do my share,” commented Paul T. Wysocki of Norfolk, Virginia. Wysocki, the son of Polish immigrants, entered the Machine Gun Company of the 318th Infantry, 80th Division, on 22 September 1917, three months before his twenty-second birthday.

“Well I did not know anything about the military, I had as much patriotism as anybody. And I made sure that I got the first uniform on of boys that night,” stated twenty-six-year-old Arthur F. Lundin, a sheet metal worker and farmer from Oxford, Connecticut. William W. Parker, employed as a welder and sheriff in Norfolk, Virginia, enlisted in the infantry on 9 June 1917 at the age of twenty-four. Said Parker, “My attitude towards military service is of the highest that any man can have, and I felt it was necessary that I do my duty for I am an American and fight for her principles.”

“When men first began to be drafted I thought to myself that if others were to go, I might as well go along too, and when my call came I was ready for it,” observed African American John S. Fields, a twenty-two-year-old teamster from Church Roads, Virginia. Arthur A. Grove, a merchant from Luray, Virginia, and a member of the National Guard, reflected, “I believed then and I believe now that it is the duty of every man to serve his country in time of need. I was over the age for the first Draft but would not have felt right if I had not gone into the Army, especially as I had a good many year’s service in the Virginia National Guard.”

The soldiers of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) shared President Wilson’s conviction that “the world must be made safe for democracy.” “The man who was unwilling to fight for this country at such a critical period has no right to protection under its flag. I was ready and willing to go when called,”
remarked Emory P. Barrow of Alberta, Virginia. Barrow, inducted on 10 May 1918, five days after his twenty-seventh birthday, had been a student before the war. “I think that if a country is good enough to live in its good enough to fight for,” stated Theodore Elmore of Richmond, Virginia. At age sixteen, Elmore joined the Marine Corps on 30 June 1916 as a drummer and trumpeter in the infantry. Edgar C. Outten, a twenty-six-year-old clerk and private secretary from Hampton, Virginia, remarked, “Military Service beneficial to all who serve. A very essential part of our Gov’t. A means by which we may learn the obligation and privilege of citizenship.” Outten continued, “Belonged to National Guard when war was declared. Glad to be of service to my country.”

Young doughboys like these entered the military with preconceived notions of what war would be like; the heroic legacy of warfare made them impetuous, and they believed war was the path to manhood. The average AEF soldier did not know and did not care to know what the war was about or how it had started. The June 1914 assassination of Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, enveloped all of Europe in a massive conflict that would cause 10 million military deaths. After the Battle of the Marne in September 1914, which halted the German army’s plan to crush France, both the Allied and German forces dug in, and a series of trenches formed from the North Sea down to the border of neutral Switzerland. While England, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and their allies engaged in brutal modern warfare, across the Atlantic, young men watched and waited to see whether the United States would enter the fray. To Americans, the events in Europe were a world away.

**The Fall of Isolationism**

The four years of World War I spawned some of the bloodiest combat the world has ever seen, resulting in an unequaled loss of human life. The conflicts at Verdun and the Somme in 1916 would become infamous; 19,240 British troops lost their lives on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Americans read about these disasters in newspapers, but most citizens still clung to isolationism—a long-standing tradition dating from President George Washington’s warning in his Farewell Address (19 September 1796) to beware of foreign authority and perpetual alliances. Washington admonished Americans “against the insidious wiles of foreign influence.” He cautioned, “‘Tis our true policy to steer clear of permanent Alliances, with any portion of the foreign world,” and he counseled “against the mischiefs of foreign Intrigue.” President James Monroe strengthened Washington’s original message when he issued the Monroe Doctrine on 2 December 1823, stating that the countries of Europe, especially Great Britain, should mind their business within the Western Hemisphere and vowing that the United States would refrain from involvement in European
affairs. Monroe declared, “The American continents, by the free and inde-
pendent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not
to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.
. . . We should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any
portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety.”

Throughout the nineteenth century, while the countries of Europe vied for
global domination, the United States remained preoccupied with its own ex-
pansion. The venture into Cuba, Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico be-

Beginning in 1898 marked the first major US attempt to expand its rule overseas.
Up to this point, westward expansion in the continental United States had been
the focus, but once the Indian Wars were over, the country sought a new en-
terprise. After the short four-month war against Spain, America began its own
style of imperialism against former Spanish colonies, but it still distanced itself
from European international affairs.

The United States held true to Washington’s recommendation when Pres-
ident Woodrow Wilson was elected for a second term in 1916. During the cam-
paign, Americans had praised Wilson’s promise to keep the United States out
of the war in Europe; this neutral stance helped him defeat Republican candi-
date Charles E. Hughes. Despite Americans’ isolationist sentiments, Wilson had
a sense of foreboding. Even though most Americans wanted no part of the con-

flict, many people had already taken sides, some for the Allies and some for
the Central Powers. Many Americans, especially in the Northeast, were foreign-
born and had strong family ties to Germany, Italy, France, or Britain. Table 1.1
shows Connecticut’s diverse population during the war years.

As 1915 and 1916 passed, the United States crept closer to war: British prop-
ganda, the sinking of the RMS Lusitania, the Zimmermann telegram, and
Germany’s resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare all drew America
into the conflict. Gary Mead stresses that France and especially Britain waged
a “propaganda campaign” in the United States well before 6 April 1917 to con-
vince Americans to join them in war against Germany. The Allies made the
most of stories of German atrocities to persuade Americans to enter the war.

Although American journalists were in France to cover the war and report ob-
jectively on events, the French did not permit them to travel near the front lines.
Most of the information they received was from the British; in fact, most ac-
counts of the war originated in Britain and were cabled to American newspa-
pers. Moreover, the British could execute as a spy any journalist who attempted
to cover the war from the German point of view. “The Great War,” writes Jay
M. Winter, “spawned the most spectacular advertising campaign to date. Its
product was justification of war.”

The Allies and the Central Powers both employed propaganda to gain sup-
port from the civilian population and military personnel. Britain, France, and
the United States all exploited allegations of enemy atrocities, but Britain had
Table 1.1. Distribution of Foreign-Born in Connecticut’s Five Largest Cities, 1920

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<th>New Haven</th>
<th>Waterbury</th>
<th>New Britain</th>
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<td>5,395</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>8,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2,315</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1,783</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total foreign-born</td>
<td>40,667</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>46,414</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>45,686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>138,036</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>143,555</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>162,537</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the most effective and refined propaganda campaign. Yellow journalism infiltrated American homes and altered the perception of Germany. Stories of the German soldiers’ barbarity, especially toward women and children in occupied Belgium; the inoculation of prisoners with the tuberculosis bacterium; and other reports from Britain were permeated with distortions, exaggerations, and outright falsehoods. These accounts, accompanied by British pleas to join the war in support of the Allies, helped convince the American people and the US government to enter the war.

Germany’s sinking of the British liner Lusitania on 7 May 1915 killed 1,198 people—128 of whom were Americans. From the Germans’ point of view, the Lusitania was fair game, since it was a military reserve and carried some munitions. Furthermore, Germany had warned that traveling on such a vessel could be dangerous. Nevertheless, Germany risked incurring the anger of the United States, and when it protested, Germany halted the strategy the following month.

The Zimmermann telegram, sent on 12 November 1916 by German Foreign Minister Alfred Zimmermann to Heinrich von Eckhardt, German ambassador to Mexico, alluded to a Mexican-German alliance designed to embroil the United States in a conflict with Mexico. Zimmermann proposed that if the United States declared war on Germany, Mexico should declare war on America. In exchange, Mexico would receive German financial aid and the return of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Zimmermann also planned to encourage Japan to join the proposed German-Mexican alliance. British intelligence intercepted the telegram, and the US ambassador to Britain, Walter H. Page, forwarded it to President Wilson on 23 February 1917. Wilson authorized publication of the telegram on 1 March 1917, and its contents outraged Americans. The Zimmermann telegram aggravated tensions between the United States and Mexico, which had already been strained when Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa and 500 men attacked Columbus, New Mexico, killing seventeen Americans, on 8 March 1916.

The final and decisive political factor was Germany’s resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare on 1 February 1917 in an attempt to strangle supply lines to Britain. President Wilson, who had won reelection just months earlier based on his firm commitment to American neutrality, went to Congress on the night of 2 April 1917 and asked for a declaration of war. In a voice that grew more passionate with each paragraph of his address, Wilson declared that there was no other course of action; the United States must enter the conflict and fight for democracy. He concluded, “To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no
other.”60 His words were met with thunderous applause. Later that evening, Wilson said to his secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, “Think what it was they were applauding. My message today was a message of death for our young men. How strange it seems to applaud that.”61 Four days later, on 6 April 1917, America went to war.

An Ill-Equipped Ally

America was unprepared for war. A US Army expeditionary force, led by General John J. Pershing, had spent the past year engaged in the Punitive Expedition (March 1916–February 1917)—a humiliatingly unsuccessful attempt to hunt down the elusive Pancho Villa in northern Mexico. The Punitive Expedition devoured supplies, leaving insufficient materiel for the AEF. Pershing’s troops had been trained in some modern tactics, such as trench warfare, but they soon forgot those lessons as they played cat and mouse with Villa across the vast terrain of Chihuahua, Mexico. More important, the army’s attention was focused on Mexico rather than on preparations for possible intervention in Europe; homeland defense and open field battle remained the hallmarks of army doctrine.62 The US Army’s total strength was fewer than 200,000 men. The US Navy, though the third largest in the world behind Britain and Germany, consisted of many outdated battleships; it was ill prepared to face the German U-boat menace or, more important, to transport soldiers across the Atlantic. In the air, America was also far behind; the US Air Service (USAS) possessed only fifty-five trainer planes, almost all of which were outdated and not combat ready.63 Although the Wright brothers had introduced the airplane to the world in 1903, as late as 1911, the US Signal Corps had only one plane and one pilot.64 In addition, the military did not officially distinguish pilots until 1912, and from 1908 to 1913 the United States spent only $430,000 on aviation, compared with the $22 million spent by France and Germany.65

The National Defense Act of 1916 had cut the general staff of the army to the bare minimum; as a result, it appeared that the United States was incapable of coming to the aid of the Allies. Although Congress had established the Council of National Defense to prepare American industries for war, it actually worked against preparedness. The council, comprising engineers, academics, and industrialists, created advisory networks that operated in each state, but this type of state and national organization proved unwieldy. In addition, the Council of National Defense limited itself to compiling data and taking inventory of the resources necessary for wartime. The US Army was thus an inefficient operation with limited funds in 1916; Congress was not willing to provide the resources needed to ensure its growth, and in general, the populace did not support militarism.
Secretary of War Newton D. Baker favored the decentralization of government, as did the rest of Wilson’s administration, and Baker disregarded the army officials who warned that the military lacked staff and supplies. This situation continued even after the United States declared war. Troops had no uniforms; weapons and supplies of every sort were scarce. Only when Congress questioned Baker in January 1918 did the Wilson administration react to the lack of military supplies. North Carolina senator Lee S. Overman sponsored the Overman Act, passed by Congress on 20 May 1918, which enabled Wilson to consolidate six agencies into one and gave him greater power to spend money for wartime purposes.

The Regular Army was small, the National Guard was limited in size, and both forces were sorely underequipped: they had no tanks, no gas masks, only 742 field pieces, a mere 43 heavy guns, and 2,000 antiquated machine guns. Ammunition was also in short supply. As discussed later, during their training on Governor’s Island and at other camps, some new soldiers drilled with wooden replicas instead of guns. General Johnson Hagood, chief of staff of the Services of Supply, lamented the War Department’s lack of preparation: “The fourteen years, 1903 to 1917, during which the General staff had been in existence had not been spent in making plans for war, the purpose for which it was created, but in squabbling over the control of the routine peace-time administration and supply of the Regular Army and in attempts to place the blame for unpreparedness upon Congress.” Hagood also charged that, from 1914 to 1917, the War Department had not anticipated the country’s entry into the war and had failed to plan. “Hindsight is better than foresight,” he commented, “and I, like all the rest, did not have the brains—or the genius—to see preparedness in its true light.”

After the war, many returning veterans also lamented the lack of preparation. A captain in the infantry, George W. Cheney of Manchester, Connecticut, stated, “My experience was that the American Army never did reach the point of being completely equipped and organized as had been contemplated in War Department plans. This goes to show that we were woefully unprepared in spite of repeated warnings, and the fact that we entered the war three years after it started. We should have a standing army of 500,000 and compulsory military training for one year for each boy reaching age 18.”

“I am a strong advocate of preparedness. If the U.S. Army had had the proper equipment and some trained officers our losses would have been less and the Army better managed,” said infantry sergeant Marcel W. Rice of New Haven. “We should keep a large well-trained National Guard and fair-sized regular Army. The volunteer is the better soldier. We should develop a strong air service so that in future wars our infantry will not suffer for lack of eyes.” When Second Lieutenant John M. Ross returned home to New Haven after the...
war, he expressed “a hope that our United States will never again be caught unprepared and that our military program will be adequate for its full protection, both on land and on the sea.”

Yet in spite of its many deficiencies, the United States mobilized and prepared a large fighting force in a remarkably short time. The nation’s strong industrial foundation, along with its vast population, enabled the rapid creation of a formidable military force. The Fighting 69th Infantry Regiment of New York City had no lack of volunteers, in spite of its recruiting slogan: “If you don’t want to be amongst the first to go to France, don’t join the 69th.”

Francis P. Duffy, a Roman Catholic chaplain for the 69th’s 42nd (Rainbow) Division, described the enthusiasm of the mostly Irish troops mustered at the regiment’s armory to welcome volunteers on 18 August 1917: “Our 2,000 lined the walls and many perched themselves on the iron beams overhead. They cheered and cheered and cheered till the blare of the bands was unheard in the joyous din—till hearts beat so full and fast that they seemed too big for the ribs that confined them, till tears of emotion came, and something mystical was born in every breast—the soul of a Regiment. Heaven be good to the enemy when these cheering lads go forward together in battle.”

The marines were ready for war. “When the United States declared war on Germany, a thrill went through the Marine Corps,” remarked Brigadier General Albertus W. Catlin, “for we were fighting men all and we learned that Marines were to be rushed over to France to take their stand on the Frontier of Liberty beside the battle-scarred veterans of France and Great Britain.” For the most part, Americans rallied and galvanized into action when their country declared war. As Corporal J. E. Rendinell and newspaper correspondent George Pattullo wrote, “The young American men with a brashness born of the ignorance of war’s brutality rushed to enlist in the armed forces. . . . They exuded invincibility and exhibited their intense belief in their own immortality.”

By the end of 1918, the government believed that the 4 million men in the services were combat ready; America sent 2 million of these soldiers overseas to the front. The majority of men went willingly as volunteers or conscripts; only a few went unwillingly as disgruntled draftees. One of the latter was Wilbur T. Brownley of Norfolk, Virginia, whose thoughts on military service were succinct: “What can’t be cured, must be endured.”

In a 16 January 1988 interview with Kerry W. Bate, David E. Davies of Kanarraville, Utah, recalled his reaction on receiving his draft notice in July 1917: “I don’t believe in wars. I don’t think they settle anything. . . . I didn’t want to fight anybody, but I did want to stick up for our rights. . . . I figger you got to stick up fer your rights, an’ I think that was the attitude, mostly.” Brownley and Davies, however, represented the minority.
For the Glory

At the time of the war, Americans embraced romantic notions of combat. Many men were eager to go because they had not tasted battle; thoughts of honor, heroism, and patriotism filled their heads. Common were dreams of courageous acts that would make the doughboys heroes—and indeed, many of these dreams were fulfilled, although not necessarily in the way the soldiers imagined. The men who enlisted or responded to conscription had visions of righteous glory in battle, based on the Civil War stories their fathers, uncles, and grandfathers had regaled them with as young boys. Tales of bravery at Antietam, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and elsewhere spurred their desire to experience the thrill, the adventure. In addition, the exploits of Theodore Roosevelt and his Rough Riders were still vivid memories, making combat seem delectably dangerous and appealing to many young men. Thirty-one-year-old Herman R. Furr of Norfolk, Virginia, enlisted in the National Army on 15 May 1917 and “believed in preparedness, not a big standing army but a trained reserve.” He added, “My father was a Confederate soldier, and have always believed it was my duty to get into military service at once in case of war.”

Czechoslovakian Edward G. Pobuda, a resident of Willington, Connecticut, enlisted in the National Guard on 23 August 1917, his twenty-third birthday. He said, “As soon as war was declared I resigned my position and joined the ranks for a just cause against a common enemy.”

“I was not called, being a volunteer three days after declaration of war. Was glad to go and will go again if necessity arises,” commented Joseph Ryan, a student from Putnam, Connecticut, who enlisted on 9 April 1917 at age nineteen.

Private Stephen J. Weston of Waterbury, Connecticut, enlisted five months before his eighteenth birthday, on 6 June 1917. Weston’s zeal for military service was echoed by other young men as well: “Military service builds strong bodies, and sound minds. With military service one acquires confidence and poise. Being young and adventurous, I chose the Infantry. After all, when positions must be taken it is the Infantryman that takes them. When ground must be held, it is the Infantryman’s job to hold it.”

Douglas C. France, a lawyer from Charlottesville, Virginia, said he “always found military life to be attractive and considered it my duty to volunteer when war was declared.” Twenty-three-year-old France entered the Army Ambulance Service on 28 May 1917. Millard C. Life, a twenty-seven-year-old college-educated shipping clerk from McGaheysville, Virginia, entered the service on 18 September 1917 and affirmed that he “was ready to go at any time that I might be called.” Life added, “Made no effort to be exempted.”

“My enlistment was brought about by the realization that manpower only could stop a tremendous slaughter. My country’s need and the ‘Great Adventure’ were also...
compelling items,” said Theodore E. Whitney, a machine gun corporal and Hartford native.83

Thomas B. McDermott felt so strongly about helping his country that he left his wife and two children at home in Hartford, Connecticut, when he began his military training in Plattsburgh, New York. The twenty-seven-year-old McDermott, who enlisted in the infantry on 28 April 1917, “had no definite attitude except the firm conviction that his country would take impudence from NO ONE.”84 Alvin C. York of Pall Mall, Tennessee, reported to his local draft board on 14 November 1917. According to York, “Uncle Sam said he wanted me and he wanted me most awful bad. And I had also been brought up to believe in my country. I knowed that even in the Civil War, when Tennessee was a doubtful state, my two grandfathers had both fought straight out for the Union. I knowed that my great-great-grandfather, old Coonrod Pile, had been one of the pioneers who done helped to build up this-here country, and he hain’t never hesitated to use a gun, and I kinder felt that my ancestors would want me to do whatever my country demanded of me.”85 At age seventeen,
Martin J. Hogan of New York enlisted in the Fighting 69th Regiment. Recalling his enthusiasm for answering the recruitment call, Hogan stated, “I felt that I looked old enough to pass a recruiting sergeant and that the call for men was urgent enough to justify my camouflaging my age by one year. Anyhow, I thought I can go to France and grow up with the war.”

Pro-war propaganda and literature also encouraged these earnest Americans to rise to the challenge of serving in the military. English poets Rudyard Kipling and Rupert Brooke, whose works were widely read in the United States, contributed to the romantic images of war held by these young men. Kipling’s “For All We Have and Are” (1914) is a prime example:

For all we have and are  
For all our children’s fate,  
Stand up and take the war.  
The Hun is at the gate!

Equally important to the doughboys’ mind-set was the influence of veterans—soldiers of past American wars who helped shape their aggressive, sometimes idealistic mentality. The charismatic Theodore Roosevelt, famous for his charge up Kettle Hill during the Spanish-American War, made fighting the enemy seem no more than a hazardous sport. Others characterized war as a glorious adventure and a way of escaping a dull or unchallenging life.

Younger educated men, especially in the northeastern United States, pushed for military training and US participation in the war. Editors and publishers of newspapers and magazines supported America’s entrance into the Great War. Through the written and spoken word, men with influential positions not only perpetuated the heroism of war but also pressed for it. As early as 1914, John G. Hibben, Woodrow Wilson’s successor as president of Princeton University, had begun advocating US involvement in the European conflict. As David M. Kennedy notes, Hibben spoke of “the chastening and purifying effect of armed conflict.” Colleges and preparatory schools contributed hundreds of volunteers for military service. Ivy League universities such as Princeton and Yale, steeped in the teachings of war as a noble cause, sent their young students off to fight the Germans. In 1925 Yale president Arthur Twining Hadley said that, during the war, “the students as a body were carried outside of themselves by visions of a larger world than that in which they had hitherto moved. . . . Thank God, the vision of 1917 and 1918 led us in the right direction. The lives of those who fell in that great struggle were not wasted.” Hadley added, “It was the good fortune to die while the inspiration under which they fought was at its highest.”
those who had fought and died, Hadley seemed to surmise that the war and the sacrifices made by American soldiers would slip from the nation’s collective memory in future years.

General Catlin noted, “Unquestionably, the intelligent, educated man makes, in the long run, the best soldier. There is no place for the mere brute in modern warfare. It is a contest of brains as well as of brawn, and the best brains win. The American colleges doubtless supposed that they were turning men into scholars; when the test came they found they had been training soldiers.”

Catlin remarked that in the 6th Regiment, 60 percent of the soldiers were college men; two-thirds of one entire company came from the University of Minnesota. Twenty-four-year-old Washington and Lee University student William B. Yancey of Harrisonburg, Virginia, recalled, “I was not called, and as to my attitude it was not mine to question, and being a firm believer in that old but apt saying, ‘May America in all her diplomatic relations be right but America right or wrong,’ I went with full confidence of victory and we came home with the bacon.”

Joseph B. Bowen of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was a forestry student at Yale when the United States declared war. In a letter home, Bowen wrote, “I shall enlist at the first opportunity. It is true that the aviator’s job is dangerous, but death has never held any dread for me; in fact, I think I have a philosopher’s point of view, and I can look on it as an interesting experience that will come sooner or later. I shall hope and pray that I may be killed outright rather than come back maimed, but God’s will be done.”

Influential men and women of the era echoed similar sentiments when advocating US entry into the war. In addition to Hibben at Princeton, writers such as Robert Herrick and Edith Wharton spoke and wrote about the cleansing aspects of military conflict. The words of the Roman poet Horace, “Dulce et Decorum est Pro patria mori” (it is sweet and glorious to die for one’s country), influenced recruiting posters, one of which showed the image of Dame Columbia or a goddess figure guarding soldiers as they marched to the front.

Even Lost Generation novelist John Dos Passos himself joined the American Volunteer Motor Ambulance Corps (Norton-Harjes Ambulance Corps) to experience adventure: “We had spent our boyhood in the afterglow of the peaceful nineteenth century. There was a war on. What was war like? We wanted to see with our own eyes. We flocked into the volunteer services. I respected the conscientious objectors, and occasionally felt I should take that course myself, but hell, I wanted to see the show.”

Films, novels, stories, and poems recounted glory, virility, and destiny, bringing young men to Europe even before the United States declared war. Students from prestigious colleges and sons from influential families joined French, British, and Italian forces. One such young man was poet Alan Seeger, best remembered for his poem “I Have a Rendezvous with Death.” He graduated from
Harvard in 1910, traveled to Paris two years later, and joined the French Foreign Legion in 1914. Seeger recorded his war experiences in France in his poetry, letters, and diary. In a letter to his mother dated 3 July 1915, he wrote, "Had I the choice I would be nowhere else in the world than where I am. Even had I the chance to be liberated, I would not take it. Do not be sorrowful then. It is the shirkers and slackers alone in this war who are to be lamented." Two months later, on 1 September, he admitted that his "sentimental and romantic nature" yearned for combat; "it is for glory alone that I engaged." When Seeger died in action on 23 July 1916, he became an American hero, propelling more young men toward the European conflict.

Poet and historian Joyce Kilmer served with the Fighting 69th of New York. When Chaplain Duffy met Kilmer at training camp on 5 August 1917, he remarked that Kilmer "sees what he considers a plain duty, and he is going ahead to perform it, calm and clear eyed and without the slightest regard to what the consequences may be." New Jersey–born writer Arthur G. Empey joined British forces after the sinking of the Lusitania. Empey’s autobiographical books Over the Top (1917) and First Call (1918) describe his experiences in the trenches with the English troops. Over the Top became an instant success and sold 350,000 copies. A year later, Hollywood made the book into a motion picture starring the author. Empey, who was wounded three times in combat, became a popular speaker who described his personal war adventures as one long heroic undertaking filled with camaraderie and thrills. Although he wrote of the horrors of war and the death of a close trench mate, Empey’s overall message was one of adventure, manhood, and ultimate triumph. He helped convince many young American men that war was a grand adventure they should not miss: “In a worthwhile cause like ours, mud, rats, cooties, shells, wounds, or death itself, are far outweighed by the deep sense of satisfaction felt by the man who does his bit.”

In First Call, Empey recounts the following story—an impassioned plea for young men to enlist:

A friend the other day made a remark that was very helpful to me and may be helpful to you. He is a shade under forty, healthy and vigorous, but he has a large family and many responsibilities and cannot go—and oh! how he wants to! As he watched a few of the men in the office saying “Good-bye” the day before they were to leave for the training camps, he said: “No matter what we men who are left behind may do—those fellows will have it all over us.”

Wasn’t he right? . . . Men may become rich or famous in other walks of life—but no matter what their achievements, they can be no greater than yours. You will have it “all over them.” To have taken part in this great war, on the side of Right, to have been one of the struggling
soldiers who have helped to bring back to the earth Freedom and all that makes life precious, is well worth while. The sacrifice may be great, but it will not have been in vain.99

Jack Morris Wright, a young American who joined the French Air Service in July 1917, trained in France and obtained his pilot’s license. He wrote to his mother on 20 November, expressing his enthusiasm for his role in the war: “Never has a third of a year rushed past my bewildered eyes so rapidly. It passed like a comet furious and glowing. It has been a wonderful period of youth, of adventure, of romance, that which is now the ideal I strive to attain. Thank God I am living up to my dreams. Thank God my dreams are not fancies, are not dreamt in vain, and perhaps are the forgings of a real mind and the real prospect of a man.”100 Wright became a first lieutenant at age nineteen in January 1918 and was killed that same month.

Young women, too—some born of privilege, others not—were dedicated to the war’s causes. One such young woman was an American nurse—the daughter of a former medical director of the US Navy—who served as a lieutenant in a French army hospital near the trenches along the Marne. Her patients called her “Mademoiselle Miss,” and a collection of her letters sent from the front was published anonymously. Working fourteen-hour days caring for the thirty-four patients in her ward, Mademoiselle Miss maintained a cheerful attitude to inspire the recovery of the wounded. In a letter home dated 19 January 1916, she described the type of woman needed for wartime nursing: “I tell you that here on the front it isn’t just a mere nurse that is required; send the finest, most versatile woman that America . . . can produce, and her fineness and her gifts will not be wasted. . . . She should combine a glacial calm with un-failing, gayety . . . and a sense of humor . . . a touch as light as a watchmaker’s, and strength to carry a man alone on occasion.”101

Other women volunteered to serve as ambulance drivers, nurses, Red Cross workers, secretaries, and canteen girls before or shortly after the United States declared war. Elizabeth McCune of Salt Lake City, Utah, daughter of mining millionaire Alfred W. McCune, was determined to drive ambulances or supply vehicles at the front. She studied auto mechanics, purchased her own vehicle (a requirement for female drivers), and sailed for France aboard the Rocheambeau on 5 November 1917.

Another Utahan from a wealthy mining family, Maud Fitch of Eureka, was an active Red Cross volunteer at home, but she wanted to serve in Europe. In February 1918 Maud went to New York, where she passed the driving and engine knowledge exams and bought her own truck and a six-month supply of fuel. She sailed for France on 7 March 1918 aboard the Chicago—the only female in the group. In a letter to her father, Walter, dated 9 April 1918 and sent from Paris, she expressed how excited she was about her new assignment to serve
as a Red Cross driver with the French Third Army near Compiegne, an area experi-
ing heavy shelling: “We will get into action AT ONCE—the magic of these two words! And to think at last I shall get into the very vortex of the greatest conflict in the history of the world. . . . If only I shall have the right stuff in me to benefit by it—to go into it and come out with one’s soul and heart all fire tried!”

Indeed, Fitch possessed the right stuff. She often worked twenty-four-hour shifts, weaving through heavy traffic to transport the wounded to hospitals behind the lines, sometimes bribing the traffic directors with cigarettes to allow her vehicle through. For her 9 June 1918 rescue of wounded soldiers during heavy fire, Fitch received the French Croix de Guerre with a Gold Star.

Once the United States entered the war, thousands of young women enrolled in nursing courses to help the wounded troops. In 1917 there were 7,000 graduate nurses available as reserves, and more were being trained, but there was still a shortage. Recruitment of nurses began across the country, and Lettie B. Welsh, supervisor of nurses for the Mountain Division of the Red Cross, traveled to Salt Lake City in April 1918 in the hopes of adding to their ranks; it was estimated that 5,000 more nurses would be needed. In her appeals at the YWCA and nursing schools at Holy Cross, St. Mark’s, and Latter Day Saints Hospitals, Welsh stated, “War demands something from everyone,” and “those parents who give their boys gladly and willingly for their country need to give their daughters, that their sons may be rightly cared for.” Utah answered the call, sending one-quarter of all its nurses to serve in the war.

As young men enlisted and left for training, their minds were filled with thoughts of doing their part for freedom and serving their country; many of them never considered the realities of war or faced their own fear of dying. Their sense of duty trumped the personal sacrifices they would soon make. Miletus B. Jarman, a twenty-six-year-old high school principal from Elkton, Virginia, remarked that he “had no definite attitude toward military service in general—until U.S. entered the war. Was then eager to serve in any capacity in which Gov’t. could use me. I felt that I wanted to do my own fighting—asked for assignment to infantry when called upon to express a preference.”

Twenty-six-year-old Culpeper, Virginia, native John W. Covington believed it was “my duty or any American to obey the call of the country regardless for what purpose. A man who cannot serve a country where he was born and raised or nationalized is not a good specimen of citizen and if he cannot fight for it he does not deserve the right to live under the protection of that flag.” Empey expressed the same sentiments: “The flag flying from the front of your home is your flag, our flag; our fathers shed their blood to put it there; now it is up to every man and woman of us to shed our blood, if need be, to keep it there. If you will not do this, you are not an American and America does not want you. Go over where you belong, under the German flag of murder, rape, dishonor and treachery.”
Curry P. Hutchison, a twenty-three-year-old farmer from Newport, Virginia, recalled, “While in my school life I had often felt a longing for to wear my country’s uniform as a soldier never dreaming that my call was to come so suddenly. I answered my call with no feeling of remorse or regret and felt thankful that God gave me power and strength to serve my country and my people in a cause as just.”

The vast majority of the 30,847 Connecticut, Utah, and Virginia veterans who expressed their opinions after the armistice, even those who saw heavy combat in the closing months of the war, supported the military both before they went to war and after they came home (although perhaps a little less vigorously after the fact). “I did, and do believe that every man from 18 to 40 years of age should have at least one solid year of military service, not only to prepare him for emergencies but for the personal benefits derived therefrom,” recommended William P. Nye of Radford, Virginia.

Proud to Volunteer

Aspirations of heroism and manhood encouraged tens of thousands of young Americans to enlist, with the applause following President Wilson’s speech still echoing in their ears. Many men proudly stated that they did not wait to be drafted; they volunteered. There were draft dodgers, however, especially in larger cities like New York. These men, referred to as “slackers,” either refused to register with the Selective Service System or simply did not report for duty when drafted. Also included in the slacker group were conscientious objectors who sought exemption from combat on religious grounds; many of these men accepted noncombat roles in service of their country, thus avoiding prosecution. Society regarded slackers not only as unpatriotic and unfit citizens but also as cowards. Approximately 338,000 men eluded duty in the AEF, but by mid-1919, half had been taken into custody. For the most part, though, even those who were conscripted answered the call with pride. But the doughboys were not prepared for the horrors of the Western Front; despite reading about the war for three years, most of them were oblivious to the realities of the conflict.

Raleigh A. Bagley, a twenty-six-year-old unmarried physician from Norfolk, Virginia, enlisted on 6 June 1917. “I enlisted as soon as possible after the declaration of war,” he noted, “and thought every man without disqualifying diseases or dependents should do likewise.” Twenty-year-old Fairfield H. Hodges, an assistant rate clerk from Portsmouth, Virginia, enlisted in the 1st Virginia Ambulance Company of the National Guard on 1 June 1917 and served as a sergeant with the 104th Sanitary Train, 29th Division. Hodges recalled his desire to enter military service: “When we first went in the war I tried to enlist the second day after the declaration but owing to the fact that my eyesight...
was poor could not get in the artillery my favorite branch of the service, but managed after much trying to enlist in the ambulance service by June 1st, 1917.”

Channing W. Daniel, a twenty-seven-year-old teacher and salesman with a bachelor’s degree from the University of Virginia, enlisted on 28 August 1917. Daniel stated that he was “satisfied to go as volunteer, glad of opportunity for a great experience, and not inclined to consider probability of death.”

Hugh E. Brown, a bank clerk from Norfolk, Virginia, volunteered for military service on 24 April 1917 and described his attitude: “In general, I volunteered believing every patriotic, able-bodied man should enthusiastically answer the call of his country if necessary. 1st, unmarried men under 25 years old; 2nd, unmarried men under 35 years old; 3rd, married men under 35 years old, without children; etc. I have always been opposed to a large standing army, but should have one, between 4 and 5 hundred thousand men.”

Twenty-five-year-old contractor James F. Bonham of Sugar Grove, Virginia, enlisted in military service on 4 August 1917 and served as a private first class with the 108th Aero Squadron. Bonham remarked, “I was never called and I felt it my duty to enlist in the army and do my bit, so I did.”

Chaplain Duffy recalled an incident at camp in September 1917 that illustrated the enthusiasm of the men of the Fighting 69th:

A soldier of Company K came to my tent one afternoon last week and stood at the entrance fumbling his hat in his hand like an Irish tenant of the old days that had not the rent to pay the landlord. “What’s the matter, Tom?” “I took a drop too much, and Captain Hurley got very mad about it and brought me up before Major Moynahan. I wouldn’t mind if they’d fine me and be through with it for I know I deserve it. But the Major and the Captain say that they’re not going to stand anything like this, and that they won’t leave me go to the war. And sure, Father Duffy, if I couldn’t go to the war it’d kill me.” The smile that came to my lips at this very Irish way of putting it was suppressed when I thought of the number of men born in the country who were worried sick lest the Draft should catch them and send them to the war.

The reality of war escaped these eager and duty-bound soldiers. Their conceptions were dramatically different from the actual experience; in addition, warfare had changed from the days of the Civil War and the Spanish-American War. The first American troops arrived on the Western Front in November 1917, eight months after the United States declared war. This seemed like an eternity to the impatient Allies. European armies had mobilized much quicker than the AEF had: one month after the assassination of Francis Ferdinand on 28 June 1914, Austria-Hungary had mobilized; Germany invaded Belgium on
4 August, and France clashed with Germany three days later. Although American troops did not engage in heavy combat until March 1918, the anticipation of an overwhelming US force prompted Germany to launch major offensives in the spring of 1918.

General Pershing believed the AEF could end the stalemate on the front. The infantryman, Pershing assumed, was still the backbone of an army, and the US armed forces could show their European counterparts how war was supposed to be waged. Pershing and the AEF soon learned the hard truth: America was unprepared. The trenches, modern technology, and artillery were the champions, and infantrymen alone could not win the war—a lesson the Europeans had learned after three years of brutal combat. The Allies believed it would take more than American bravado to achieve victory in Europe. Much to Europe’s surprise, however, with the aid of Allied (especially French) technology, the United States rescued the Allies. Although the cost was high, the doughboys’ élan saved the Allies from defeat against the Germans’ spring offensives.

Americans who craved battle did not realize the power of industrialized warfare. But even with hindsight, the majority of American soldiers still supported their initial patriotic enthusiasm for the war, the draft, and enlistment after the armistice. What these men did not know was that their country had been poorly prepared to train, equip, or transport them to the front. Throughout the war, in fact, American forces depended on the Allies for almost all their artillery, machine guns, tanks, airplanes, and other supplies. American soldiers nevertheless went headlong into the trenches of Europe, their idealism buoying their spirits and inspiring them to overcome the actuality of modern war. Many doughboys acknowledged that their Judeo-Christian beliefs helped get them through their ordeal, along with a belief in their country and the support of family at home and their fellow soldiers. These vital factors enabled the men to endure with their convictions intact.