MILITARY SERVICE, COMBAT, AND AMERICAN IDENTITY IN THE

PROGRESSIVE ERA

by

Sebastian Hubert Lukasik

Department of History
Duke University

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Approved:

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Alex Roland, Supervisor

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Claudia Koonz

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Peter Wood

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Richard H. Kohn

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
History in the Graduate School
of Duke University

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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

During the First World War, approximately two million troops served with the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), the army that functioned as the material and symbolic focal point of America’s commitment to the defeat of the Central Powers. This dissertation examines the impact of training, active service and combat on the social identity of the draftees and volunteers who comprised the AEF. Reigning historiography has generally minimized the importance of those experiences as factors in the formation of distinct socio-cultural allegiances among American participants of the Great War. Instead, it has stressed the historical context of Progressive-Era reforms as the key to understanding the development of corporate identity among American soldiers in the years 1917 – 1919. This body of scholarship maintains that soldiers interpreted the meaning of their war service, and evaluated their relationship with each other and with the mainstream of American civil society, through the prism of the Progressive rhetoric of social engineering, national rejuvenation, and moral “uplift” to which they had been exposed from the moment of their induction. Exposure to the optimistic slogans of Progressive reform, coupled with the brevity of America’s active involvement in the conflict, assured that American soldiers would emerge from the war with a heightened appreciation of American socio-political institutions, culture, and moral norms.

This dissertation offers an alternative interpretation of the impact of the Great War on the collective and individual identities of its American participants. Using letters, diaries, and memoirs penned by enlisted soldiers and junior officers, it asserts the primacy of the war experience in shaping the socio-cultural allegiances of ordinary “Doughboys.” Immersion in the organizational milieu of the military, followed by overseas deployment, active service in
France, and combat on the Western Front, represented a radical break with civilian forms of identity soldiers professed prior to the war. It was the sum of these life-changing experiences, rather than the Progressive indoctrination they received in the training camps, that shaped soldiers’ views of their relationship with each other and to the nation back home. Under the influence of these experiences, soldiers became members of an alternative social order whose values and worldviews frequently clashed with the attitudes and norms they associated with the American home front. Convinced they belonged to a closed community whose unique experiences had set them apart from the American mainstream, Doughboys emerged from the war with a collective mentality that dwelled on the fundamental differences, rather than the similarities, between those who had fought “over there” from those who remained “over here.”
To my parents and sister
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Abstract

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# Abbreviations

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<td>HST</td>
<td>Harry S Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LMM</td>
<td>Liberty Memorial Museum and Archives, Kansas City, Missouri.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LVA</td>
<td>The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NARA</td>
<td>United States National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RG</td>
<td>Record Group (NARA and LVA).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHC</td>
<td>Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAMHI</td>
<td>United States Army Military History Institute, Army Heritage and Education Center, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USMA</td>
<td>Special Collections and Archives Division, United States Military Academy Library, West Point, New York.</td>
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## Published Documentary Collections, Journals, and Reference Works

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<tr>
<td>JMH</td>
<td><em>Journal of Military History</em></td>
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*WiH* *War in History*

**Organizational and Institutional Acronyms**

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>AEF</td>
<td>American Expeditionary Forces</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BEF</td>
<td>British Expeditionary Force</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTCA</td>
<td>Committee for Training Camp Activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHQ</td>
<td>General Headquarters</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>NG</td>
<td>National Guard</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOS</td>
<td>Services of Supply</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States Army (Regular Army)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>USMC</td>
<td>United States Marine Corps</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>YMCA</td>
<td>Young Men’s Christian Association</td>
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The first citation for each of the sources listed above is rendered in full; all subsequent references are abbreviated. Materials in the USAMHI World War I Veterans’ Survey Collection are organized by individual division or branch of service, followed by component units and individual soldiers’ files. Thus, the serviceman’s identifying unit, as cited in the reference, also indicates the location of the source in the USAMHI collections. The military rank indicated in the citation refers to the highest rank the serviceman attained during the war, rather to the rank he held at the time he wrote the source cited. Whenever possible, I have also indicated the rank and unit of the authors of the published war narratives and memoirs used in this study. Quotations from primary sources retain their original spelling and punctuation, except in cases where possible confusion over meaning could be averted only through correction or the provision of “*sic*.”
There is one myth about writers that I have always felt was particularly pernicious and untruthful – the myth of the “lonely writer,” the myth that writing is a lonely occupation, involving much suffering because, supposedly, the writer exists in a state sensitivity which cuts him off, or raises him above, or casts him below the community around him. This is a common cliché, a hangover probably from the romantic period and the idea of the artist as Sufferer and Rebel.

– Flannery O’Connor

Though directed primarily at writers of fiction, Flannery O’Connor’s words have enduring relevance for historians. The process of researching and writing this dissertation testifies to that relevance in particularly stark terms. From its amorphous origins in the author’s mind to the final revisions, this study has always embodied the combined time, effort, and thought of people whose names may not appear on the title page, but whose assistance was instrumental to the completion of the project as a whole.

In the first order, I must thank the five remarkable scholars who comprised my dissertation committee. Above all, I owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Alex Roland, my primary advisor, who directed this study at every stage of its development. Without his encouragement, practical guidance, and kindness this work might never have been brought to completion. Unfailingly generous with his time, magnanimous with praise, circumspect yet firm with constructive criticism and advice, he has been a true Doktorvater in every sense of the term. Professor Claudia Koonz introduced me to the most innovative approaches to the

---

study of the First World War and proved a tireless editor of my written work and critic of
my ideas. Professor Edward Balleisen guided me through the scholarship on the Gilded Age
and Progressive Era, a body of literature representing the basic contextual framework of this
dissertation. Professor Peter Wood oversaw my first forays into the world of early American
history, a field that has produced many outstanding works dealing with the relationship
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My gratitude also extends to a number of other scholars, colleagues, and friends at
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encouragement and helped sustain my spirits. Among them, I owe special thanks to Nilsa

In the course of my research, I have had the privilege of meeting many dedicated archivists and librarians who helped me navigate the voluminous – and at times overwhelming documentary collections – represented in the bibliography. Pride of place must belong to the staff of the U. S. Army Military History Institute in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. In particular, I wish to thank Dr. Richard Sommers and David Keough, whose patience, knowledge, and courtesy make the USAMHI a delight to work in. No less rewarding has been my experience at other archival depositories, including The Library of Virginia, the National Archives and Records Administration, the Special Collections and Archives Division of the United States Military Academy at West Point, and the Southern Historical Collection. The staff of the library system at Duke University provided assistance in obtaining materials from other depositories and libraries and furnished invaluable research advice, with Carson Holloway and Kelly Lawton especially generous with their time and research expertise.

My research benefited from the generous financial support provided by the Graduate School and the Department of History at Duke University, the George C. Marshall/Baruch Family Foundations, and the U. S. Army Military History Institute.

In addition to scholars, professional colleagues, archivists, and friends I met in the course of my research, I also owe thanks to another group of people who encouraged me to persist in my choice of vocation as a historian. Malcolm McCaw and Peter Otten were the first to steer me in that direction. I took my first, tentative steps as a historian at Simon Fraser University, where Professor Hilmar Pabel provided me with the inspiration I needed to commit myself to the discipline. Professors Martin Kitchen and William Cleveland were
equally supportive, as was Professor Denis Smyth at the University of Toronto. Equally important was the encouragement, hospitality, and generosity of good friends, including Kyle Anderson, Isabella and Nicolas Bourillon, Glenn Graham, Anne Laporte, Georgia Mavrodi, Thomas Rost, Erick O'Reilly, and James Rosenzweig. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the debt of gratitude I owe to Christian Nielson and Stefani Marciante, whose friendship, kindness, and consideration saw me through the entire course of my formation as a scholar.

The people who deserve more credit than anyone else for helping me finish this project are my parents, Zbigniew and Donna Lukasik, and my sister, Adriana Lukasik. No words of mine can even begin to describe how much I owe to their support and encouragement. This dissertation is dedicated to them, with love and particular gratitude.
Introduction

In late May 1918, a few weeks after his division landed in France to join the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) on the Western Front, Private Lloyd Staley composed yet another in a sequence of letters he had been faithfully writing to Mary Grey, his fiancée, since enlisting in the Missouri National Guard the previous August. Staley’s latest missive was a radical departure from the prosaic accounts of an ordinary soldier’s everyday life that had dominated the content of the letters he had penned since his induction.¹ For once, descriptions of the French countryside, ruminations on local weather conditions, and pleas for more news from home yielded to a loftier theme. Praising Mary’s brother for his decision to volunteer for active service, Staley ventured a sweeping prediction of the impact the Great War was likely to have on its American participants, and on the relationship between servicemen and the mainstream of American civil society in particular. “[T]here will be two classes of men in America after the war,” he prognosticated. “[T]he ones who went [to war], and the ones who did not. And I believe...the ones who went are going to have the charge of affairs when they get back for, if a man stands this war, and still comes out smiling, he is a man.”²


Staley was among the nearly five million Americans who served in their country’s armed forces between 1917 and 1919. They had either volunteered for or been drafted into the United States Army, Navy, and Marine Corps as part of the great mobilization effort their government undertook to assist the Entente in defeating the Central Powers. At the sharp end of this effort stood the two million troops – soldiers as well as Marines – of the AEF, the army group that functioned as the material and symbolic focus of America’s commitment to victory. As the evidence of their letters, diaries, and memoirs suggests,


many of them shared Staley’s belief that the experience of active duty would fundamentally alter the nature of their relationship with the civilian society they had left behind upon donning uniform.

Certainly not all of Staley’s comrades-in-arms subscribed to his view that the experience of war would transform ex-soldiers into a socio-political elite and perhaps even elevate them above the common run of American citizenry. Some embraced a diametrically opposite viewpoint, one that stressed the degrading and dehumanizing aspects of military service and combat as the essence of the war’s capacity to distance its participants from the civilian social order on whose behalf they were fighting. “[W]e are nothing but animals,” Frank Thompson wrote shortly after the Armistice, “[e]ating what we can get – sleeping on [the] floor and in stables – howling with glee when we see the enemy dead, or thirsting for blood when we don’t see him – drinking brandy to excess when we can get it – cursing and growling among themselves etc., we are nearer being animals than we think.”6 Especially in combat, Arthur Joel noted, “man mentally ceases to be a man and becomes more like a trained animal.”7

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6 Thompson, Frank L., First Lieutenant, 348th Machine Gun Battalion, 91st (“Wild West”) Division, diary entry for 23 November 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Army Heritage and Education Center, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (hereafter USAMHI). Writing in similar vein, Earle Poorbaugh was only half-joking when he claimed that one of the generic nicknames assigned to American troops was simply a reflection of the undignified living conditions and moral norms the war had compelled servicemen to confront. Soldiers “were first known as Doughboys,” he explained, but “[l]ater we became known as dog-faces. Where the doughboys name [came from] was always a mystery to us. Dogface [was] more patently understood. It was said we were so called because we wore dog tags, slept in pup tents, growled at everything we ate and tried to F--- every female we saw.” See Poorbaugh, Earle R., Sergeant, Company I, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, “Random Thoughts,” addendum to an Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

But even if they did not see the war’s transformative power in the same rosy hues as Staley did, many of his fellow “Doughboys” could still agree that their participation in the conflict had clearly set them apart from the rest of American society. The notion that servicemen comprised a unique socio-cultural community distinct from the American “home front” was underscored by the gradual emergence among the AEF’s soldiers and Marines of a common identity rooted in a broad spectrum of shared attitudes, mentalities, values, and modes of behavior inseparable from the experience of war. Among the components of this soldierly identity, many reflected the broader worldviews servicemen inherited from their parent society. In particular, they mirrored the mainstream social, cultural, political, and intellectual trends associated with the Progressive Era of American history. Nevertheless, the contribution such elements made toward the crystallization of a common identity among servicemen paled in contrast to the formative influence the war experience itself exercised over the formation of that identity. For Americans whose service embraced the entire trajectory of the war experience, active duty in the Great War proved the single most important catalyst of their individual and collective metamorphosis from “citizen-soldiers” to “soldier-citizens”: from individuals who expected to emerge from the war with their

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8 Notwithstanding Lawrence Stallings’ assertion that “there can be little dispute as to the derivation” of the name “Doughboy,” the precise etymology of the appellation is far from certain. In its strictest sense, as understood by the American servicemen in the years 1917 – 1919, the term specifically denoted infantrymen. Historians have subsequently adopted the tag to describe all U. S. Army troops of the Great War. This study follows that convention, but it also extends the “Doughboy” label to the Marines of the AEF as well. While such an approach is likely to cause considerable distress to historians and admirers of the United States Marine Corps, it does reflect the central argument of this dissertation. It addition, it represents the only feasible mechanism for avoiding the necessity of constantly referring to “soldiers and Marines.” For the etymology of “Doughboy,” see especially Lawrence Stallings, The Doughboys: The Story of the AEF, 1917 – 1918 (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); Edward Lengel, To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918 (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 31; and Michael E. Hanlon, “The Origins of Doughboy: An Interim Report,” retrieved on 26 June 2008 from http://www.worldwar1.com/dhc/origindb.htm. For the development of a distinct institutional culture within the U. S. Marine Corps in the era of the Great War, see the forthcoming doctoral dissertation by my Duke colleague Heather P. Marshall entitled “Telling It to the Marines: Constructing and Using the Corps’ Early History, 1875 – 1935,” as well as her “Crucible of Colonial Service: The Warrior Brotherhood and the Mythos of the Modern Marine Corps, 1898 – 1934,” M.A. thesis, Department of History, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 2003.
civilian values and attitudes more or less intact, to a community for whom the conflict had become the touchstone of personal and collective identity.\(^9\)

Above all, the conditions and burdens of active service generated among ordinary troops a peculiar relationship with the American “home front,” one whose ambivalence reflected soldiers’ conviction that those who had remained “over here” neither understood nor valued the sacrifices soldiers were shouldering on their behalf “over there.” On the one hand, servicemen professed loyalty to the higher ideals embodied in their country’s political institutions and traditions, routinely acknowledged the superiority of American culture vis-à-vis its European counterparts, and retained strong emotional commitments to the families, communities, and social networks that had delimited their civilian lives. On the other hand, Doughboys spawned a sophisticated and frequently acerbic critique of their homeland. This appraisal of home front/fighting front relations enshrined the allegedly stark contrasts between the self-sacrificing “men of the hob-nailed clan” on the battle-front, and the complacent civilians, busy-body social reformers, corrupt politicians, grasping war profiteers, and idle “slackers” on the home front, as the centerpiece of soldiers’ collective mentalité.\(^10\)

Given the central place the term “identity” occupies within the argument outlined above, its definition requires elaboration. As an analytical category whose study has

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\(^10\) Fred S. Westerbach, untitled, undated poem (possibly 1920s), in file of Burlingame, Giles H., First Lieutenant, Company G, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USMAHI.
generated an enormous body of literature spanning several academic disciplines, “identity” represents an elusive target. Its very nebulousness, however, holds the key to a more precise classification. The development of personal or collective identities is, above all, a dynamic process grounded in the constant revision of answers that individuals and communities offer to a set of basic questions. These include, by are by no means restricted to such queries as: Who am I? Who do I wish to be? Who do others – individuals as well as societal and community institutions alike – believe me to be and want me to be? What social group or groups do I affiliate with on a regular basis? Where, who, or what are my “home” and “community,” the entities in which I, or the group to which I belong, invest primary emotional loyalty or allegiance? The answers given to such questions at any given moment will be the product of a confluence of a variety of factors ranging from individual or community choices to key national or international events. These responses, in turn, are crucial in determining how individuals and the socio-cultural communities to which they belong perceive, and are perceived by, themselves and other people or institutions. Viewed in this, the specific case of Doughboys’ experience represents a case study of the extent to which a traumatic event of transnational significance compelled nearly five million Americans to grapple with just these fundamental questions at a time when a series of far-
reaching demographic, social, economic, and political changes were forcing many more of their compatriots to rethink what it meant to be “American.”

* * *

The contention that active duty on the Western Front distanced servicemen from the mainstream of their parent society represents a challenge to traditional interpretations of the American experience of the Great War. With the notable exception of the literature on the African American experience of the conflict, the canonical historiography depicts the

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Great War as a catalyst of national integration and homogenization in the realm of politics, economy, and culture. Specifically, it highlights the role of the Great War in accelerating or bringing to fruition several long-term trends that had been gestating since at least the middle of the nineteenth century. These included the rise of powerful, centralized state and business institutions;\(^{15}\) the emergence of a class of professional bureaucrats and managers responsible for operating the levers of political and corporate administration;\(^{16}\) the rise of a national economic market and a mass consumer culture;\(^{17}\) and the crystallization of the reformist

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ethos of Progressivism whose adherents stressed rationalization and uniformity as the essence of social, political, and economic order. By necessitating an unprecedented mobilization of America’s human, economic, and financial resources, the Great War created conditions favorable to an expansion of the already considerable coercive and regulatory powers of the federal state. At the same time, the conflict witnessed the redoubling of attempts by government agencies, social reformers, and nativist vigilantes to assert the primacy of an overarching American national identity over alternative foci of allegiance –


whether local, regional, or ethno-cultural. In other words, the American experience of the Great War is said to have been characterized by the entrenchment of institutions, ideologies, and cultural trends pointing the way toward the transformation of the United States into a truly national state: a polity in which parochial identities, markets, socio-cultural conventions, and centers of power would become thoroughly subsidiary to their nation-wide counterparts.

The corpus of studies dealing specifically with the American soldier experience in the years 1917 – 1919 mirrors this general interpretive thrust. The majority of these works identify the broader historical context of Progressive-Era social reform as the essential point of departure for any serious inquiry into the impact of the Great War on the attitudes and mentalities of its American participants. In particular, these studies have focused on the...
war’s role in exposing the vast mass of servicemen to the very institutions, ideologies, and socio-cultural values – many of them inseparable from the Progressive agenda of societal regeneration, moral uplift, and “Americanism” – that helped ensure the final triumph of an American national identity in the first half of the twentieth century.

Among these studies, Fred Baldwin’s pioneering work occupies a pride of place. As the first social history of the American soldier in the First World War, Baldwin’s monograph remains seminal in the field. Its influence on virtually all subsequent studies of the same subject is evident in a number of ways. Above all, Baldwin views the efforts of Progressive reformers to translate war service into a morally and socially elevating experience as the pivot of his analysis. “[T]he social history of [the American war effort],” Baldwin asserts, “may be seen as a continuation of the Progressive movement.”

The corollary of such a firm focus on the Progressive context of the American military experience is the relegation of the war experience itself – especially that of combat and the physical and psychological burdens of active service – to the peripheries of Baldwin’s analysis. Though he expresses a ambivalence about the effectiveness of wartime social reform, Baldwin nonetheless concludes that the war hastened the pace of Progressive reformers’ struggles to rid American society of its cultural parochialism by exposing as many soldiers as possible to the mainstream national and moral values professed by the Anglo-American middle-class.

Recent studies have elaborated the arguments propounded by Baldwin, but they have not succeeded in transcending the limitations of his basic analytical framework. Without exception, this corpus of literature highlights the crucial role the war played in integrating

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23 See ibid., 237 – 241, for a summary of these arguments.
white soldiers closer into the American mainstream – whether political, social, or cultural. Along these lines, Mark Meigs’ *Optimism at Armageddon* identifies the upbeat vocabulary of Progressive reform as the crucial formative influence shaping the efforts of ordinary soldiers to grapple with the significance of their war experience. Their active involvement in the conflict too brief to permit any profound soul-searching about its meaning, Doughboys readily embraced the message of progress and optimism as the principal lens through which to scrutinize the war and their part in it. They proved especially susceptible to assertions of American cultural and political superiority that dominated much of this buoyant rhetoric. In consequence, the war could be said to have acted as a mechanism for firmly integrating servicemen into the American mainstream, rather than distancing them from it as Meigs implies was the case with many European soldiers.²⁴

Along similar lines, Nancy Gentile Ford has produced an illuminating study dealing with the attempts of the War Department to train immigrant soldiers in accordance with Progressive principles of social engineering, moral “uplift,” and scientific management. Highly benevolent in nature, these efforts revolved around an unprecedented degree of cooperation between the Army, civilian social reformers, and ethnic leaders. The three groups worked together toward the ultimate goal of reconciling soldiers’ ethno-cultural pride and religious traditions with American patriotism, and creating “an atmosphere wherein dual pride and dual identity became acceptable.”²⁵ An admirable work of historical scholarship, Ford’s study nonetheless remains thoroughly wedded to the analytical model established by Baldwin, its primary focus rooted in the socially and culturally integrative legacy of the war.


²⁵ Nancy Gentile Ford, *Americans All! Foreign-born Soldiers in World War I* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 139.
The tendency to accentuate the war’s capacity for bringing soldiers closer to the American mainstream is also apparent in what remains the most comprehensive examination of the social experience of Doughboys. Jennifer Keene, author of *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America*, has produced what may well be the most resounding assertion of the crucial function the war played in integrating its American participants into their country’s body politic. Specifically, Keene focuses on the politicization of Doughboys during the conflict. This development, she argues, had profound implications for the post-war relationship between veterans and the state. In the eyes of soldiers the wartime draft “established a social contract between citizen-soldiers and the federal government.” While the war lasted, servicemen articulated this conviction through their unrelenting insistence that the Army acknowledge their rights as citizens, and through their efforts to negotiate – and at times defy – military discipline. After the war, veterans banded together in pressuring the federal government to recognize its moral obligation to help ex-servicemen re-establish the livelihoods and careers military service had interrupted. Convinced that “the decisive exercise of state power” contained “the answer to their financial and personal problems,” veterans of the Great War helped “to establish the principle that total war gave soldiers and the state a mutual obligation to ensure each other a safe and prosperous future.”

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27 Ibid., ch. 3.

28 Ibid., chaps 7 – 8.

29 Ibid., 6 (first citation), 214 (second citation).
Though possessed of formidable explanatory power, these studies exhibit a number of inherent shortcomings that leave their interpretations of the American Great War experience open to debate. First, by stressing the influence Progressive social reformers wielded over the process of identity-formation of American soldiers, these studies present an overly optimistic assessment of the potential of ideologies, socio-cultural norms, and disciplinary regimes imposed “from above” to shape the actual behavior and mentalities of ordinary servicemen. Recent monographs on the social experience of European soldiers of the Great War make it abundantly clear that “top-down” efforts to regulate the lives of troops rarely met immediate acceptance on the part of ordinary soldiers. Instead, disciplinary standards, hierarchical relationships, and command authority were characterized by a process of almost constant negotiation, compromise, and revision as the rank-and-file and their commanders jostled for a middle ground acceptable to all. In spite of what one historian has referred to as the “carceral” nature of military service on the Western Front, soldiers


31 In his study of the French 5th Infantry Division during the Great War, Leonard Smith draws on Michel Foucault’s theories of the coercive and punitive nature of state authority to argue that soldiers’ sense of entrapment in circumstances beyond their control rendered the battlefields of the Western Front an extension of the “carceral archipelago” of the modern state – “that collection of institutions and ways of thinking that generated the power relations of France, from the educational discipline of the Republican schoolhouse, to the work discipline of the fields and factories, to the military discipline of the army barracks and the trenches.” See
remained sufficiently independent as historical actors to manipulate, negotiate, and – in extreme cases – reject formal power relations and disciplinary codes that governed their lives. By contrast, students of the American experience of the Great War have not adequately explored the outer limits of Progressive reformers’ struggles to mold the identities of ordinary servicemen. Their reluctance to probe such limits obscures the possibility that instead of persuading millions of Doughboys to internalize the social and cultural norms of Progressivism, the experience of military service and modern warfare may have had the unintended consequence of distancing soldiers from the mainstream national values that military service was supposed to reinforce.


33 In all fairness, there exist two significant exceptions to this trend. As noted previously, much of Jennifer Keene’s analysis is devoted to examining the attempts of servicemen to negotiate and redefine the U.S. Army’s traditional standards of discipline. In similar vein, Nancy Bristow’s study of the work of the Commission of Training Camp Activities (CTCA) among soldiers in stateside training camps draws attention to the difficulty that civilian moral watchdogs experienced in regulating the social behavior of soldiers and their host communities. See Keene, *Doughboys*; and Nancy K. Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996).

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Historians’ focus on the efforts of civilian reformers, War Department bureaucrats, and military officers to fashion the identity of Doughboys also exposes a second critical shortcoming evident in the dominant historiography. Specifically, this particular analytical focus has led scholars to rely heavily on evidence that sheds light on the aspirations of the elites that supplied the Progressive movement, both before and during the war, with its leadership cadre. Unfortunately, such sources do not necessarily illuminate the reception by ordinary soldiers of the ambitious schemes of social engineering, “Americanization,” and moral education to which Progressive elites sought to subject them. Simply put, students of the American war effort have favored sources that constitute the “public transcript” of the past, the corpus of records reflecting the perspectives of officialdom and the socio-cultural elites that comprise it. They have been much less attentive to materials that comprise the “hidden transcript” of the American war experience, evidence that clarifies the mentalities and behavioral patterns of those at the receiving of policy statements, institutional decrees, and official pronouncements.

34 This, for example, is the case with Nancy Gentile Ford, Americans All!; and Nancy Bristow, Making Men Moral. Both studies provide indications of soldiers’ reception of Progressive initiatives, but the overall emphasis is on tracing the development and implementation of policies formulated at the highest levels of political, military, and administrative decision-making. Jennifer Keene, Doughboys, makes extensive use of personal accounts written by ordinary servicemen, but the evidentiary basis of the book remains grounded in official documents, with soldiers’ letters, diaries, and memoirs serving as a backdrop for Keene’s examination of larger policy issues. Mark Meigs, Optimism at Armageddon, juxtaposes official documents and views with sources illuminating the mentalities of common soldiers, but the range of evidence in the latter category is relatively limited.

35 The dichotomy between the “public transcripts” and “hidden transcripts” is at the core of political scientist James C. Scott’s two studies of rural resistance to centralized government authority in the Malaysian countryside. According to Scott, any attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of official power structures within a society must be based not only on the textual records comprising the “public transcript” and “describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate,” but also on the “hidden transcript” that shows what “takes place ‘offstage,’ beyond direct observation by powerholders.” As Leonard Smith has demonstrated in his study, this conceptual model has much to offer to scholars interested in ordinary soldiers’ experience of the Great War. See James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1985); idem., Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990), 2, 4; and Smith, Between Mutiny and Obedience, 14.
Third, the dominant historiography underestimates the extent to which prolonged physical and psychological separation from America’s civil society, coupled with immersion in military life and exposure to the kind of mass industrialized warfare waged on the Western Front, might have generated tensions between the body of Americans who fought, bled, and died “over there” and their compatriots who remained “over here.” Extant literature has consistently downplayed the potential of even limited exposure to the realities of modern combat to profoundly influence the identity of American servicemen. Rather, the historiography has emphasized factors other than soldiers’ encounters with battle or its effects as central to Doughboys’ experience of the war.  

36 Equally alarmingly, students of the social history of the Doughboys have displayed a marked reluctance to engage in dialogue with the burgeoning literature that deals with the operational and tactical aspects of the American experience of the Great War.  

37 Given the fact that the nature of fighting on the

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36 Mark Meigs’ assertion of the relatively marginal role combat experience played in molding American soldiers’ perception of the war encapsulates this interpretive trend. “For an American soldier, sharing an initial young man’s war enthusiasm with schoolmates, reading the army’s ubiquitous propaganda, going on leave at a French resort town, visiting the cultural sites that he had learned in school represented the distant background of his civilization, or flirting with a French girl might have made as strong an impression as his time fighting, and might have informed his thoughts on fighting...American who had experienced combat certainly privileged [its] memory, but it colored, rather than obliterated, the other aspects of the war.” Meigs, Optimism at Armageddon, 3.


Grotelueschen, The AEF Way of War; Robert H. Ferrell, Collapse at Meuse-Argonne: The Failure of the Missouri-Kansas Division (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2004); idem, Five Days in October: The Last
The Western Front attained the apogee of its intensity, destructiveness, and human and material cost precisely at the moment when American troops began to enter combat in large numbers for the first time, these historiographical patterns stand in evident need of correction.38

The fourth serious limitation discernible in the scholarship on the American experience of the Great War is an almost inevitable product of the third. By underrating the potential of the war experience itself to contribute to the process of identity-formation of American soldiers, scholars inadvertently reinforce the pattern of historiographical exceptionalism that characterizes much of the writing on the United States in the First World War.39 There can be little doubt that, for a variety of reasons, American servicemen experienced the conflict in ways fundamentally different than was the case with their European counterparts. It is possible, however, to overstress the uniqueness of the American experience of the Great War, while obscuring significant aspects of that experience that Doughboys may have shared with British “Tommies,” French poilus, and German Frontschweine. Because historians have treated the American military experience in relative isolation from the broader patterns of the war’s impact on the soldiers of other nations, they have devoted only passing attention to exploring factors that argue in favor of a

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38 Judging by the evidence of reviews, historians of the social experience of the American fighting men in the Great War are generally weakest in regards to their treatment of combat and purely military topics. See for example the review of Meigs, Optimism at Armageddon, by Scott Stephenson, Military Review 78 (May/June 1998), 97; and the review of Keene, Doughboys, by Kerry E. Irish, JMH 67 (July 2003), 963 – 964.

39 In the words of Mark Meigs, “[t]hat the experience of World War I differed for both American and Americans from the experience of the European combatant nations and combatants cannot be stated too strongly.” See Meigs, Optimism at Armageddon, 1. For a trenchant critique of this argument, see review of Meigs, Optimism at Armageddon, by Edward Lengel, Essays in History 40 (1998), retrieved on 16 July 2007 from http://historyofideas.org/journals/EH/EH40/lengel40.html
certain universality of the war experience that transcended national boundaries.\footnote{In all fairness, it must be said that among historians of the Great War, Americans are by no means the only group of scholars reluctant to examine the experience of ordinary soldiers in a broader context. The field as a whole is dominated by highly specialized case studies of the war experience of individual armies, units, and socio-economic, ethnic, and racial groups. Comparative studies of soldiers’ personal experience are few and far between. For a detailed historiographical discussion see Winter and Prost, \textit{The Great War in History}, chap. 4, esp. 99 – 101.}

conventions that governed soldiers’ letter-writing and war reportage regardless of which nation’s uniform they happened to wear.  

The purpose of this study is to rectify these historiographical limitations and advance an alternative interpretation of the impact of military service and combat in the Great War on the socio-cultural identities of American soldiers. This study argues that the cumulative experience of active duty in the years 1917 – 1919 represented a radical break with civilian forms of identity and allegiance soldiers professed prior to the war. It was the sum of these often-traumatic experiences, rather than the Progressive indoctrination they received in the training camps, that shaped soldiers’ views of their relationship with each other and with the American home front. Under the influence of these experiences, soldiers developed a collective identity that depicted servicemen as members of an alternative social order whose values and world views frequently clashed with the attitudes and norms they associated with their parent society. Convinced they belonged to a closed community whose commonly shared experiences had set them apart from America’s social mainstream, Doughboys emerged from the war with a collective mindset that dwelled on the fundamental differences, rather than the similarities, between themselves on the one hand, and the “home front” on the other.

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45 Here it is imperative to note that the sense of solidarity that emerged among servicemen in the crucible of military service and combat did have its limits. In particular, African American soldiers were largely
By stressing the primacy of military service and combat as the core of American soldiers’ identity in the years 1917 – 1919, this dissertation offers an alternative view of the impact of the Great War on the historical development of the United States. Specifically, it challenges the historiographical insistence that the conflict witnessed the solidification, if not the final triumph, of an overarching national identity among the war's American participants. Doughboys were undeniably the collective product of their parent society, and never became completely severed from it. But their identity as Americans existed side-by-side with their identity as soldiers. Such a mode of self-perception bore a close resemblance to the attitudes that soldiers of other belligerent powers professed toward the civil societies on whose behalf they were fighting. In situating the Doughboy identity within the broader framework of the soldierly subculture of the Western Front, this dissertation represents a step toward a re-examination of America’s Great War experience through a wider, transnational lens.46

Finally, in examining active duty and combat against the background of soldiers’ socio-cultural origins, their responses to the environment of war, and their interaction with the

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46 Such an approach is fully in keeping with the calls that a number of scholars have issued in recent years for a transnational approach to the study, not just of the Great War, but of American history as a whole. See especially Micol Siegel, “Beyond Compare,” Radical History Review 91 (Winter 2005); Robert Gross, “The Transnational Turn: Rediscovering American Studies in a Wider World,” Journal of American History 34 (2000), 373 – 393; and especially Michael Neiberg, “Toward a Transnational History of World War I,” paper presented before the 19th Military History Colloquium, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2 May 2008, copy in author’s possession courtesy of the Department of History, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.
society they left behind, this study makes a crucial contribution to the literature on the social history of military service in America in general and of the American soldier in particular.\textsuperscript{47}

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The four sections into which this dissertation is divided correspond to the four stages of the identity-formation process American soldiers underwent during the Great War. Part I surveys the nature of the socio-cultural and geographical parochialism that served as the principal focus of individual and communal allegiance for a large cross-section of American society prior to 1917. Historians generally agree in identifying such culturally, politically, and economically integrative forces as industrialization and urbanization as central feature of the “master narrative” of United States history in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Yet, as Part I demonstrates, emphasis on the seemingly relentless advance of these centripetal influences in the years 1865 – 1920 marginalizes or ignores an array of countercurrents evident in the stubborn persistence of local, regional, and sectional allegiances well into the 1900s. It was these precisely narrowly-defined loyalties that functioned as the anchor of the individual and collective identities professed by would-be Doughboys at the moment of their induction into the military.

The impact on these parochial allegiances of initial encounters with military service in the great training camps and cantonments forms the subject of Part II. Once in uniform, the soldier came face-to-face with a broad variety of institutions and centers of authority that competed for his allegiance and sought to mold his identity. These agents of change included the official corporate culture of the Army, the barrage of moral and ideological instruction to which Progressive social activists and welfare workers subjected the soldiers in camps and

cantonments, and the multiplicity of links soldiers retained with their families and home communities. In spite of the influence that all three of these centers of influence wielded over the soldier’s loyalties, he emerged from the camp experience with a sense of identity that, while a significant departure from the local allegiances one with which he had began his military service, was largely generated by the soldiers themselves in response to their immersion in military life, rather than the product of officially-sanctioned, “top-down” initiatives designed to shape their attitudes and world views. Soldiers certainly retained various degrees of loyalty to their families and communities, absorbed enough of the optimistic rhetoric of Progressivism to parrot many of its more fashionable slogans, and developed various degrees of awareness of belonging to units – companies, regiments, divisions – endowed with distinctive corporate personalities that set them apart from other formal organizations. But none of these three sources of socio-cultural allegiance could compete, in terms of the impact it made on soldiers’ identity, with two other modes of collective identification that emerged in the course of the training camp experience. The first consisted of the embryonic body of soldiers’ folklore, mythology, and vernacular rooted in the shared experience of camp life. The second comprised the growing tendency of servicemen to define themselves, individually and collectively, in contrast to the civilian values, attitudes, and worldviews they had recently left behind, an outlook increasingly fuelled by their cognizance of the glaring disparity between the sacrifices the war effort imposed on civilians and soldiers, respectively.

Deployment to the war zone in Western Europe, the stage of American soldiers’ identity-formation analyzed in Part III, drove American soldiers and civilians, fighting front and home front, even further apart. Physical distance and unreliable communications upon which soldiers depended for information related to the goings-on “back home” created the
impression that select elements of the American polity, far from supporting the war effort to an extent commensurate with the sacrifices of servicemen on the Western Front, were actively seeking to benefit from the conflict to satisfy their own selfish interests – whether partisan, material, or ideological. This conviction received an additional reinforcement from the frictions that arose between soldiers serving in France and the overseas institutional representatives of the home-front – such as the Young Men’s Christian Association – that catered to the physical and spiritual needs of active-duty servicemen. Coupled with the physical and psychological strain of combat, the subject of Part IV, this unflattering perception of the home front became one of the chief distinguishing features of the collective world view that emerged, by the time the war ended, as the cornerstone of their identity.

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The arguments and conclusions presented in this dissertation are the product of extensive research in a variety of archival and published sources. The principal base of evidence is provided by the soldiers themselves in the form of the letters, diaries, memoirs, and auto-biographical fiction they penned during and after the war. Given their highly “literary” character, such sources do not lend themselves easily to quantification. It is also possible to cast doubt on the extent to which these texts, their provenance traceable to a relatively small sample of the two millions soldiers and Marines of the AEF, represent the broader worldviews and attitudes professed by Doughboys in general.48 Finally, scholars

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48 See especially the discussion of these issues in William B. Skelton, An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1781 – 1861 (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992), xv.
who depend on evidence of this kind must be careful to distinguish between sources that reflect the *experience* of the war as opposed to its *memory*.\(^{49}\)

Their limitations notwithstanding, these texts provide invaluable insight into the collective mentality of Doughboys. The sample of sources utilized in this study represents all but two of the twenty-nine divisions that saw extensive combat service with the AEF. It includes all branches of service (with an emphasis on the combat arms), and spans all ranks from private to colonel (with an emphasis on enlisted men, non-commissioned officers, and junior commissioned officers). When used in conjunction with other sources – including soldiers’ newspapers, official and institutional documents, and unit histories – these sources comprise what a historian of American servicemen who fought in a different war refers to as “a coalescence of soldier testimony.”\(^{50}\) Within this body of evidence individual components reinforce and corroborate one another to produce a firm foundation for drawing broader conclusions about the war’s impact on the generation of Americans who fought it.


“That Old Neighborhood Spirit”:
Parochialism, Community, and Socio-Cultural Identity in
America on the Eve of the Great War

“I was real proud to serve my country. We were taught in school to honor the Lone Star
flag first & the Stars and Stripes next.”

-- Private Homer E. Wilson

I. Introduction

Homer Wilson’s apparent ambivalence about whether it was his native state or the
United States as a whole that he defined as his “country” testified to the resilience of
geographical and socio-cultural parochialism as the hallmark of ordinary Americans’
individual and collective identity on the eve of the Great War. The tendency to refract one’s
allegiance to the nation as a whole through the prism of loyalty to one’s region, state, or local
community was by no means confined to soldiers who hailed from areas – Texas being a
prime example – that boasted enduring legacies of erstwhile political independence or
cultural distinctiveness. Instead, similar conceptions of identity pervaded the American
mainstream. As revealed in the testimony of Wilson’s comrades-in-arms, such narrow
definitions of personal and collective allegiance transcended the boundaries of region and
social class, and enjoyed a wide currency among the generation of Americans who would be
swept up in the national mobilization effort that began in the summer of 1917. To them,

1 Wilson, Homer E., Private, Company F, 7th Infantry Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, Army
Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

2 In arguing that the Americans who fought in the Great War constituted a distinct “generation”
whose participation in the conflict endowed them with a unity of experience that transcended many of the fault
identity was a matter of finding their proper place on each level of a hierarchy of allegiances that comprised a number of ever-narrowing circles of communal loyalty. These were arranged in descending order, with one’s immediate locality, community, and familial kinship representing the smallest, but ultimately the most important, of these circles. Allegiances, therefore, tended to gain in meaning the more specific and narrow they became. This trend reinforced the power of the locality to exercise greater influence than any other foci of allegiance over the process of identity formation. Pre-war notion of allegiance, therefore, represent the baseline against which to gauge the extent of the Great War’s power to transform the identities of Doughboys.

II. “City Roughnecks” and “Pumpkin Dusters”: The Urban/Rural Dichotomy in the Military

Irrespective of America’s rapid urban and industrial growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the distinction between town and country, factory and field, urban slum and rural farmstead, remained an important fault line of individual and collective identity. While technological changes in transportation and communications technology were rapidly bringing city-dwellers and country-folk into closer association than ever before, few Americans doubted the existence of a fundamental divide separating the worldviews, social values, and cultural mores professed by those who inhabited the two respective spheres. In the eyes of those who continued to live on the land or in small communities, the large urban

lines that crisscrossed American society of the Progressive Era, I draw upon the historical scholarship dealing with the European “generation of 1914” or “front generation” whose shared experiences of the same war exercised a long-term influence on their collective identity, political leanings, and worldviews. This corpus of literature, in turn, is informed by the various models of generational theory posited by literary scholars and social scientists. See Robert Wohl, The Generation of 1914 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979); and Dan S. White, Lost Comrades: Socialists of the Front Generation, 1918 – 1945 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Leed, No Man’s Land. For a review of the literature of generational theory, see Wohl, The Generation of 1914, 2, n. 3.
center appeared, at one and the same time, an object of desire and fascination as well as the focus of suspicion and dread. The big city enticed with its promise of a bewildering variety of exciting pleasures, diversions, and forms of entertainment and social interaction with which county fairs and barn-raisings could hardly compete. It functioned as a showcase of modern technologies and public conveniences whose proliferation did little to diminish their novelty or dampen the enthusiasm with which rural visitors like James Hoskins described such marvels as the New York public transit system. “Don’t suppose you know what the subway is,” he wrote with palpable excitement in a letter to his family. “[I]t is an underground railway…We went under the Hudson River about 40 miles an hour. The subway is run underground in New York as they are so crowded for space above[,] of course they have an elevated railway too and street cars.”

But the big city, whether a throbbing metropolis like Chicago, or even a mid-sized regional center like Kansas City or Milwaukee, also concealed temptations and dangers that lurked in wait for the unwary, the naïve, or the foolhardy. Expressed in the simplest of terms, cities could prove downright intimidating to anyone whose social horizons had hitherto been delimited by the boundaries of the home county. In the fall of 1910, having spent his childhood and adolescence in an isolated town in rural Wisconsin, John Kress moved to Madison to enroll at the state university. More than half a century later, the memories of the transition from his native community to a mid-sized urban center

continued to be a source of anguish. “[I]t is impossible for most to realize the enormity of breaking from home ties – to be lost in the big city,” he noted in his memoirs.4

Nothing could be more antithetical to “traditional” rural virtues of frugality, hard work, “plain-dealing,” and community than an environment replete with brothels, saloons, and gambling dens; teeming with disease-ridden slums; populated by masses of degenerate (not to mention crime-prone) immigrants; and oppressed by the smoke belching from the factories where they toiled. Completing the picture of the city as the cesspool of vice and corruption was its reputation as the seat of the “Three Ms” – markets, middlemen, and money. The real and alleged depredations that banks, corporations, railroad companies, and commodity exchanges were believed to commit against honest farmers at times drove county folk to various forms of organized agrarian protest that usually assumed the form of short-lived political movements such as the Grange in the 1870s, the Farmers’ Alliance of the 1880s, and the Populist Party of the 1890s.5

Personal experience of sustained contact with urban, or even semi-urban, settings tended to confirm the stereotypes rural folks customarily ascribed to their city-dwelling counterparts. George Dongarra, by his own admission a farm boy “not used to large cities,” must have stuck out like a sore thumb when he alighted in Milwaukee in summer of 1917 on his way to an Army recruiting station; almost immediately after his arrival, he was “flim-flammed” by an enterprising pick-pocket or con-artist.6 Donald Kyler did not even have to

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6 Dongarra, George, Private First Class, Company B, 2nd Ammunition Train, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
travel to a large city to realize the essential difference between the disciplined life-style his
family and their neighbors led in the Indiana countryside and the dissolute individualism of
townsfolk. A trip to a nearby settlement that functioned as the commercial hub of the
surrounding agricultural region was sufficient for the purpose:

The change from the farm environment…was [a] shock to me. I was not prepared for it. On
the farm I had been with grown people; mostly kind people. In the village all was different.
Fights were common among boys and young men. Neighbors were close but not necessarily
friendly. Drunkenness was quite frequent among some of the men.⁷

The impression of profound temperamental differences between the inhabitants of
town and country, respectively, were further reinforced in the initial stages of America’s
involvement in the World War. For the first time since at least the Civil War, Americans
from a myriad of backgrounds found themselves living and working side-by-side on a more
or less permanent basis. Perhaps inevitably, many volunteers and draftees resorted to
evaluating their encounters with the American “Other” through the filter of preconceived
stereotypes concerning the real and alleged differences in the temperament and cultural
habits characteristic of town and country. At the very least, such preconceptions had the
potential to absorb the impact of the shock and disorientation that comprised a natural
response of many recruits to their sudden integration into the military life. But they also
underscored the seriousness of the attitudinal chasm separating town and country in the
minds of their respective representatives. Illinoisan William Helberg’s initial impressions of
his induction into the Army in the company of a group of draftees from upstate may have
been emblematic of the sentiments felt by many a farmer’s son who got caught up in the

⁷ Kyler, Donald D., Sergeant, Company G, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Brigade, 1st Division,
“The Thoughts and Memories of a Common Soldier,” 8, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
draft. The experience, he recalled, was “[r]ough – no good – farm boy entering with boys from Chicago…They were a tough bunch.”

In some instances, frictions between the two groups remained sufficiently pervasive to dictate the social dynamics of entire units for much of the war, burning themselves into the memories of individual soldiers for decades to follow. Such appears to have been the case in the ambulance company of the Kansas National Guard in which Clarence Wood enlisted in the summer of 1917. According to his estimate, “about half or more of outfit was from railway or structural steel work in K[ansas].C[ity], Kans. So they were for [the] most part heavy drinkers.” While this “did not affect their work” in the unit, there was no mistaking Wood’s reluctance to mix with a crowd of this sort. As a farmer who “[w]anted a clean record,” he “did not fit [in with] city roughnecks.”

The perception of the city as a morally corrosive environment and of its inhabitants as degenerate troublemakers bereft of traditional social values overlapped easily with another staple truism shaping rural Americans’ perceptions of their urban-dwelling compatriots. Determined to explain why cities offered such fertile soil for the pressing social problems confronting the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, intellectuals, nativists, and social reformers sought to establish direct connections between urban public disorder, industrial unrest, labor radicalism, crime, and disease on the one hand, and, on the other, the tidal wave of immigrants steadily pouring into the nation’s great cities. By the time the

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9 Wood, Clarence M., 140th Ambulance Company, 110th Sanitary Train, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

10 See for example Keith Gandal, The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jared N. Day, Urban Castles: Tenement Housing and Landlord Activism in New York City, 1890 – 1943 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Jeffrey S.
United States intervened in the Great War, the tendency to view cities as havens for unassimilated immigrants, and to encumber the latter with the responsibility for the problems attendant on urban growth and industrialization, had become a given in public consciousness. “We have with us…a swell little representative bunch from that village of Manhattan,” Eugene Curtin noted in one of a series of letters describing an encounter in France with a New York unit of the 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division:

There are all kinds; Irish, Wops, Poles, Chinks, Jews and every other race and previous condition of servitude that one can think of…Others, from their look, I know toted guns in some of the New York gangs since they were children. A lot I would be willing to bet don’t know any more English than the commands of their officers.

Curtin qualified his observations by adding that “the American army has melted them all into one and they are all Americans and soldiers and we are sure darn proud of those birds.”¹¹ But his charitable caveat, coming at a time when the experience of war had already revealed that first- and second-generation Americans’ capacity for self-sacrifice on behalf of their adoptive country was at least just as great as that of the native-born, could not completely cancel out the accumulation of stereotypes of urban dwellers that Curtin continued to embrace. In another letter, Curtin elaborated on his initial depiction of the New Yorkers in terms evocative of an anthropologist’s inquiry into the customs and cultural practices of a strange tribe:

We have a fine crew of huskies who, I am sure, are enjoying the beauties of country life for the first time and whose only idea before of what a cow is like was gleaned from the Bull Durham sign on the fence of the Polo grounds. These birds who joined us a couple of weeks ago only a few months ago gawed on the green fields of Broadway and drew their rations from the Automat; who earned their money for the movie or to take their ‘skirt’ to Coney Island by working in the sixty-fifth floor of some office building or by sewing on pants buttons in some sweat shop.¹²

The widespread perception of cities as receptacles for racially “inferior” elements that eked out a living as wage-slaves and succumbed easily to the morally questionable allure of new forms of popular entertainment and consumer culture could only underscore the sense of cultural superiority with which rural Americans had already long been accustomed to look down on urban-dwellers. At best, this superiority could assume the form of bemusement. While stationed at Camp Meade, Maryland, a training facility that received large numbers of draftees from the urban centers of the East Coast, Harry Hunter came to the conclusion that “we don’t have to go to another country to learn different languages because you can hear all kind of blabbing down here but I cannot understand it. But they all seem to be good fellows and quiet[,] they have to behave their selves [and] if the don’t they will put them in the guard house and that is not very pleasant I guess.”¹³

On the other end of the spectrum were reactions like those of Ohioan Samuel Clark upon his arrival at Camp Upton, an installation situated on Long Island. “I haven’t any idea how long we will be here,” he informed his mother, “but I hope it will not be long[,] although this is a large camp it is filled with drafted men from N.Y., niggers, wops, chinks,


¹³ Hunter, Harry C., Private, Company C, 311th Machine Gun Battalion, 79th (“Liberty”) Division, letter to Emma Hunter, 3 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
and various other kinds.”

Arriving in New York City for the first time in his life en route to France, a soldier from Missouri characterized the place as a “Kike town” populated by large numbers of people of “Israelitist extraction,” not to mention by “millions” of “wops.”

Yet, far from being the exclusive preserve of semi-educated farmers, the belief in an almost unbridgeable cultural gap separating native-born, country-based Americans from the alien elements populating the great cities seemed beyond dispute even to those who, like Henry Ward of Oklahoma, could boast of broader intellectual horizons. A former college student and some-time teacher in rural schools, Ward had no doubts that the New York draftees who had been transferred to his unit of Texans and Oklahomans as replacements hailed from might have been a completely different world:

These men were nearly all from the slums of the lower East Side. They changed the whole tone of battery life. At Camp Travis, [Texas] in spite of some friction and clashing of personalities, it had been all for one and one for all. We had similar backgrounds and moral codes. No one was afraid that blankets, equipment, or personal belongings would be stolen…We were sitting ducks for the new recruits. Socks, handkerchiefs, razors, shoes, anything: if you laid it down and looked away it was gone. Not only were they unkempt and untrained, they were lazy and rebelled against discipline.

City-bred Americans reciprocated the blend of condescension, contempt, bewilderment, and pity evident in their rural cousins’ perceptions of urban life and its perils.

Since at least the Early National period of American history, when Thomas Jefferson

14 Given his contempt for the “inferior” classes of American society he encountered at Upton, Clark was understandably chagrined when he realized that his transformation into a soldier would result in his resembling the people he detested. Complaining about the quantity and appearance of the equipment he had been issued by the Army before his unit’s embarkation for foreign service, he noted that his new helmet made him “look like a coolie” and that “when I get all my things on my back I will look like a Jew peddler.” See Clark, Samuel S., Private First Class, Battery D, 136th Field Artillery Regiment, 37th (“Buckeye”) Division, letter to mother, 20 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.


16 Ward, Henry C., Sergeant, Battery D, 343rd Field Artillery Regiment, 90th (“Alamo”) Division, untitled typescript memoirs, 16, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
articulated his faith in the innate superiority of agrarian life, the figure of the sturdy, virtuous yeoman farmer occupied a prominent place in the political culture of the Republic. Farmers and rural folk in general, generations of social commentators asserted, embodied the concentrated essence of the all that was praiseworthy in the American national character. As producers of the most basic human needs, they performed a socio-economic function that rendered them superior to such “parasitic” elements as merchants, lawyers, and bankers. Farmers were thought to live in a close relationship with nature, which was said to endow them with qualities – simplicity, moral rectitude, piety, frugality, communal and family loyalty, and a host of others – that were becoming increasingly scarce among the urban masses. Finally, farmers were credited with possessing more genuine public spirit and patriotism than any other social group by virtue of their ownership of the land they tilled. Whoever owned a farm could be safely relied on to remain economically self-sufficient, socially and politically conservative, and perpetually vigilant of republican liberties. Farmers, in short, could claim to constitute the bedrock of American political culture, social stability, and economic prosperity. In a letter written a few years before the war, a young Missouri farmer who would subsequently serve as a junior officer in the AEF, unwittingly summed up the creed of Jeffersonian agrarianism while articulating rural people’s mistrust of

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urbanization and industrialization. So long as the United States remains a nation of farmers, he explained,

people are more independent and make better citizens. When [a country] is made up of factories and large cities it soon becomes depressed and makes classes among people. [But] every farmer thinks he’s as good as the President or perhaps a little better.18

The claims advanced by advocates of agrarianism crumbled in the face of America’s metamorphosis into a society whose economy came increasingly to depend on the products of the factory floor, rather than the field. In the wake of the Civil War, with occupational specialization and professionalization gaining in importance as determinants of social prestige and economic standing, evidence of superior moral qualities no longer commanded the automatic respect it had in preceding decades. In the words of one historian: “It was no longer sufficient just to be a particular type of person or display admirable character traits. Increasingly, society’s idea was the educated professional, possessing a specialized and esoteric body of knowledge.” And in a society that extolled professionalism and formal training, the farmer quickly came to be seen as “a drudge, pursuing an occupation demanding no special skills or training, only hard and thoughtless labor.”19

Urban attitudes toward rural America had always been tinged with a modicum of mockery and ridicule, but in the second half of the nineteenth century, such expressions of scorn began to acquire a discernibly sharp edge that bordered on outright contempt. No longer were rural folk regarded as “salt of the earth.” Under the close scrutiny to which urban intellectuals, journalists, and social reformers were increasingly subjecting it, rural life lost much of the romantic halo that had hitherto surrounded it. Edgar W. Howe’s 1883


19 Danbom, Born in the Country, 149 – 150.
novel *The Story of a Country Town* savagely attacked the notion of the American countryside as a bastion of moral virtue by depicting the inhabitants of rural communities as narrow-minded, puritanical, and sanctimonious.\textsuperscript{20} A few years earlier, sociologist Richard L. Dugdale published “The Jukes,” a sensational study of a rural family from the hill country of northern New York State. Actually a composite of several closely-related families who traced their descent to the same early-eighteenth century ancestor, “The Jukes” chronicled the history of a country clan whose successive generations displayed an appallingly frequent incidence of criminal behavior, chronic poverty, sexual deviance, mental illness, and retardation.\textsuperscript{21} It did not take long for such reassessments of rural life to permeate popular dialogue. Writings produced by the likes of Howe and Dugdale created the impression that country people were, at best, stubborn, ignorant, bigoted bumpkins; at worst, congenital “idiots, perverts, and throwbacks.” In practical terms, the new urban attitudes toward the countryside found their most potent expression in a number of late-nineteenth century additions to the American English lexicon of derogatory terms used with reference to rural folk. “[L]abels such as hick, rube, and yokel became regular parts of public discourse about people who were defined as distinctly – perhaps dangerously – inferior.”\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{21} Richard L. Dugdale, “The Jukes:” *A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1877). In subsequent decades, Dugdale’s opus became a staple among enthusiasts of the eugenics movement, who used his findings as evidence that anti-social and criminal tendencies were hereditary in nature, and could be remedied through the forced sterilization of those deemed particularly susceptible to such behavior. Thanks to Dugdale, members of the “Jukes” clan (a pseudonym) acquired a degree of celebrity-status in eugenics and “social hygiene” circles. They were the subject of continued observation by a number of investigators whose findings were incorporated into a 1916 sequel to Dugdale’s study by Arthur H. Estabrook entitled *The Jukes in 1915* (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1916) that apparently confirmed the conclusions of the original by demonstrating the continued prevalence of criminality, madness, and aberrant social behavior among the progeny of those members of the clan who comprised the subject of the pioneering work.

\textsuperscript{22} Danborn, *Born in the Country*, 150 – 151.
The tepid welcome that rural people extended to well-meaning social reformers who sought to help them sealed the reputation of country-folk as parochial, resistant to change, and suspicious of any attempts to challenge time-hallowed cultural practices and farming methods. The urban intellectuals, bureaucrats, social workers, and businessmen who dominated the Country Life movement in the years immediately before the Great War found dealing with rural folk particularly exasperating. An archetype of a Progressive initiative, Country Life aimed to improve living conditions in the countryside, boost agricultural productivity, and halt the steady stream of young people who chose to quit the family farm for the cities and threaten to depopulate rural America. Farmers resented the patronizing attitudes of the reformers, and proved reluctant to abandon traditional methods of agriculture, social organization, and rural education for the innovations promoted by the Progressives. And rural communities as a whole, suspicious of any initiatives designed to curtail local socio-political autonomy and the intrusion of centralized state power into their daily lives, often refused to play along with the efforts of Progressive reformers to acquaint the countryside with the blessings of “uplift” and “efficiency,” however defined.

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This, then, was the context that informed much of urban America’s perception of the countryside at the time of the Great War and shaped the nature of the first impressions that city-dwellers in the service formed of their rural counterparts. With a large proportion of young Americans familiar with the countryside only through the medium of stereotypes propagated in popular culture, initial contact with country folk, whether in or out of uniform, was bound to be interpreted with reference to a set of typecast images. In the course of his transcontinental train journey from California to New York in 1917, Melvyn Burke was delighted how closely many of the inhabitants of the Great Plains conformed to some of preconceptions concerning the appearance and mannerisms of rural people. “We actually saw some real ‘Farmer Comtassel’ characters when we were in Kansas,” he recalled with delight, “complete with chin whiskers and looking almost like the cartoon character.”  

But first encounters with the essentially alien surroundings of an unfamiliar countryside could also find expression in terms that were downright scathing. Surveying the Middle Western landscape from the window of the train taking him to a training camp in the South, John Blaser, a native of Indianapolis, saw little to admire. In words that seemed to echo, if only distantly, the cutting stereotypes of country folk as indolent and deficient in industry, he informed his brother that “[m]ost of the towns were little old things and the farm buildings some of the worst places I ever did see…I guess the people here are too lazy to work…by the looks of things.”

No evidence exists to suggest that the patronizing attitudes frequently city-dwellers adopted toward their rural brethren created serious disturbances among the soldiers

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25 Burke, Melvyn F., Sergeant Major, Headquarters Troop, 1st Division, “Army Years, 1916 – 1923,” 54, Folder 1, Melvyn Burke Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

26 Blaser, John J., Private, Company B, 47th Infantry Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, letter to brother, 27 November 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
mobilized in 1917 – 1918. In units whose ranks included contingents from rural districts and urban centers alike, whatever suspicions and animosities may have pitted the two elements against one another probably found a frequent outlet in nothing more harmful than mutual ribbing of the kind described by Samuel Kent. A native of Baltimore, Kent served at the beginning of the conflict in a regiment that owed its existence to the wartime consolidation of several units of the Maryland National Guard. The amalgamation threw Baltimoreans together with men from Maryland’s overwhelmingly rural Eastern Shore, and generated a discernible culture clash. “They seem to be pretty nice chaps,” Kent conceded when referring to the sizeable Eastern Shore contingent in the 115th Infantry. But the temptation to score some points at their expense proved too much to resist for Kent and his fellow Baltimore-bred Guardsmen. “[O]ccasionally,” he confessed in his diary, “we call [the Eastern Shore men] pumpkin dusters, corn crackers, and hay seeds. They generally retort, often in plain and forceful ‘Army Language.’”  

The geniality of such confrontations aside, the fact they happened at all indicates that in 1917, a large proportion of Americans from urban backgrounds took for granted the assumption that a vast range of tangible socio-cultural differences separated them from the worldviews, mentalities, and attitudes of their rural cousins. An equally large segment of Americans who hailed from the countryside appeared to agree. In the second decade of the twentieth century, far from becoming subsumed in the centripetal trends of the great transformation American society underwent between the Civil War and the Great War, the

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city-country dichotomy continued to function as a powerful determinant of individual and group identities alike.

III. “We Came from the West Where a Man Has Room to Grow”: Regional Allegiances

If the tensions that characterized the relationship between urban and rural Americans failed to boil over into overt confrontation or hostility, it was because distinctions between city and country tended to take a back seat when measured against another socio-cultural category that made claims on the emotional loyalties of ordinary Americans. Identification with one of their country’s specific regions exercised a seminal influence in molding the socio-cultural allegiances of Americans at the start of the Great War. Regional loyalties transcended the realm of purely geographical definitions of identity. Cognizance of the natural or administrative boundaries that delimited a particular region in the popular imagination certainly played an important role in the development of such forms of allegiance. But regional identities also owed their resilience to other important factors. Their roots could be traced, in their turn, to the persistent sensitivity Americans continued to display toward such manifestations of regional uniqueness as idiosyncrasies of language and dialect; unique cultural practices, traditions, and forms of social organization; distinctive frameworks of economic activity; vagaries of local climate and natural environment; and the ethnic and racial origins of the inhabitants. The generation that went off to war in 1917 consistently credited such considerations with a degree of significance disproportionate to their ostensibly prosaic nature. Simply put, Americans of the Progressive Era regarded these variables as the collective foundation for the construction of broader assumptions about the moral fiber, character traits, intellectual temperament, physical health, and social worth of
the population of a given region. Few would have disputed the notion that such attributes, as exhibited by individuals and communities alike, owed much of their character to the physical environment, ethnic origins, and cultural variations associated specifically with their region of origin.

Regional identity in the military owed its importance to a number of influences. First, it provided a readymade explanation for the quality – or lack thereof – of the human material that filled the ranks of units raised in specific parts of the country. Not even the experience of the Great War itself proved capable of discrediting the belief that the military effectiveness of a regiment depended, above all, on the hereditary ethnic, cultural, and social traits the unit’s personnel were assumed to embody by virtue of their geographic origin. The historian of the 102nd Infantry Regiment, a unit created through the amalgamation of two regiments of the Connecticut National Guard, lamented the early shortage in New England National Guard units of “well-to-do young men of old Yankee stock.” The only saving grace was the presence among the rank-and-file of “young men of the middle class…officered by men of the same sort.” He bemoaned the subsequent dilution of the regiment’s regional identity and social composition through infusions of foreign, and implicitly inferior, elements. “As time went on the [New England] regiments lost this local character and became melting pots for all kinds and types of officers and men, as the selective service draft without regard for family, filled the gaps in the ranks caused by the many casualties.”  

28 In similar fashion, the author of the regimental history of the 140th Infantry, a unit whose ranks were dominated by National Guardsmen from Missouri and a handful from Kansas, stressed “their ancestry and rearing” as the key to understanding the high standards of discipline,

morale, and physical endurance they were said to have exhibited during the war. Reflecting the idyllic vision of the Trans-Mississippi West as the ultimate embodiment of the American Dream, he ascribed the spirit and prowess of his fellow soldiers to their descent from hardy frontiersmen who had tamed the region only a few decades previously. Though his ultimate purpose was to stress their allegiance to America as a nation, he clearly refracted it through the prism of a narrower, regional identity:

Their fathers were strong men; their mothers were brave women. Cities stand today where a generation ago there were open fields. It is but a short while since this was virgin country. The forbears of these men were pioneers. Strong and virile, generous and just, quick to defend their rights, eager to seize what they desired, their faults and virtues alike [were] great. Conquering a new country, they grew apt in meeting emergencies, accustomed to bloodshed, fearless and determined. They were representatives of the Great American Spirit. And they bequeathed to their sons ruddy health, courage, strength, and a loyal love for the Nation.29

Uncritical acceptance of assumptions about regional peculiarities extended the pages of self-congratulatory unit histories. Evidence exists to indicate that, at least in the early stages of the American involvement in the war, sweeping generalizations concerning the socio-economic traits of draftees and volunteers hailing from specific regions of the country

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29 Evan A. Edwards, *From Doniphan to Verdun: The Official History of the 140th Infantry* (Lawrence, Kansas: The World Company, 1920), 9. The historian of a regiment of New Englanders rationalized its wartime performance in analogous terms, describing its soldiers as the product of the environmental and historical peculiarities of their native region. No less in this case than in the one alluded to above, professions of regional allegiance underpin and overshadow the professions of loyalty to America’s national ideals and institutions:

It was a fine regiment from the beginning. In view of its background and traditions, the quality of its man power and the strength of its support in the community, it was bound to be a fine regiment. It epitomized in its organization and record the latent strength of the American democracy. Behind the Regiment and contributing to its spirit in a degree no man can measure lay the priceless heritage of Massachusetts and New England: Indian warfare and the taming of a wilderness; Concord and Lexington, Bunker Hill and Liberty; the Civil War, the war with Spain, the east wind, the sea, the rocky farms and nestling towns, with their white church spires looming against the blue; the rugged faith of rugged forbears; the staunch convictions of generations. Steeped in the early New England traditions strengthened by new blood from across the seas, reared in a fierce and fickle climate, the officers and men of the Regiment were physically and mentally and morally prepared for whatever might come, for the strength of the rocky New England soil and the independent New England spirit were in their character.

influenced military officialdom. The policies that the headquarters of at least one division adopted for the purpose of allocating personnel among its component units exemplified this trend with particular clarity. In the 89th Division, a formation composed of draftees from the Prairie West and the desert states, men from Colorado and New Mexico were likely to find themselves assigned to artillery units on the supposition they were good on horseback; those hailing from the “counties in which the inhabitants are supposed to have certain practical engineering experience such as the lead mining and river districts of Missouri and the mining counties of Colorado and New Mexico” could be certain of being slotted into the division’s engineer regiment, while those from Kansas and Missouri were likely to end up in the ranks of one of its four infantry regiments. There is no doubt that on the surface, the rationale behind this policy made certain sense considering the forms of economic activity prevalent in the states in question. But one may only speculate about the number of Colorado and New Mexico recruits who encountered a horse for the first time in their lives upon being transferred to the artillery brigade of the 89th or, for that matter, the number of Kansans and Missourians who, in spite of having grown up around horses and other hoofed farm animals, spent the war bringing up the rear of an infantry company.30

From the perspective of ordinary soldiers, affirmation of regional differences appeared the most convenient rationale for the baffling variations in behavior, mannerisms, and mentalities they encountered upon entering military service and coming into sustained contact with Americans from other sections of the country for the first time in their lives. What made regionalism especially potent as a focus of identity was its tendency to conform

– sometimes to the point of overlapping – with the stereotypes at the heart of the urban-rural dichotomy discussed earlier. Thus, the proclivity of Westerners to differentiate themselves from Easterners and Southerners rested on the association of the East Coast with the enervating influence that life in the physically constricted environment of the region was thought to have had on the moral and physical attributes of its inhabitants. “If it weren’t for our gang,” Harley Semple reported to his parents from training camp, “the whole company would die of homesickness.” For Semple, the apparent contrast he observed between the psychological responses that sudden separation from families and home communities stimulated among his fellow Westerners on the one hand, and, on the other, among the Easterners and Southerners who made up the balance of his company, was proof enough of the innate superiority of the former. “This is the difference – we are from the North and West and they are from the South and East. They have always been cooped up in the woods and we came from the West where a man has room to grow.” When two of his fellow soldiers committed suicide, Semple interpreted the tragedy as yet another manifestation of the regionally-based differences of character and temperament that made resilient, hardy Westerners like himself stand out from the herd of timorous Easterners in his unit. “They were Eastern men,” Semple sneered matter-of-factly and without the slightest trace of compassion for the two suicides. “[N]o man from the West is that big of a coward,” he concluded with satisfaction.31

In embracing his identity as a Westerner with a belligerent earnestness that bordered, Semple appears to have been in a minority among American soldiers of the Great War. Few of his comrades-in-arms, whether from the West or from other parts of the country,

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31 Semple, Harley D., Private, Company F, 104th Engineer Regiment, 29th (“Blue and Grey”) Division, letter to parents, 28 April 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
expressed their regional loyalties in comparably strident terms. There was no denying, however, that such allegiances gained, rather than diminished, in importance as hundreds of thousands of would-be doughboys left their home communities for the first time in their lives in response to the demands of military service. While en route to his division’s port of embarkation, Nebraska farm boy Arthur Yensen rationalized his negative first impressions of the East Coast and its people with reference to regionally-based assumptions about the temperament and socio-cultural disposition of a part of America he had never seen before.

The same mental process served to confirm in Yensen’s mind what he believed were the dominant character attributes of his fellow Westerners. “Across New York State it was dark and rainy,” he wrote when recalling the train ride from Kansas to New York City. “There were large houses, barns, rock roads, rail fences, stone walls, lakes, woods, and little fields; all of which looked cold and forbidding. The people acted the same way – cool, reserved, and distant, which didn’t appeal to us Westerners.”

Groping for an explanation for the chilly reception he received upon his transfer to another unit, Iowa draftee William Graf readily acknowledged that his modest rural upbringing, low level of education, poor social skills, and deficient training conspired to make assimilation into his new surroundings problematic. At the same time, he implied that as significant as these factors may have seemed, none mattered as much as the fundamental differences of regional origin and temperament that set him apart from the vast majority of the soldiers who made up his new unit:

“This division, the 80th, was made up of men from Virginia, W[est]. Virginia and Pennsylvania. To me they seemed very proud and egotistic. They thought that I was from the west and living in a frontier area. Well, I had been a farm boy from the outward edge of the county, where we were least favored educationally. Then they were a trained infantry

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32 Yensen, Arthur E., Wagoner, 7th Engineer Train, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, “War Log of an Underdog by Pvt. 916369” (typescript memoir), 57, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
outfit, and I had little training in this branch of service. Then, I was of a shy nature, making it more difficult to be happy with this strange group.33

Thousands of other soldiers could be certain of encountering alien landscapes, cultures, and peoples long before they ever set foot aboard a France-bound troops transport. Their responses to various manifestations of the American “Other” revealed just how little Americans knew about the world beyond their immediate localities and regions of origin in spite of those improvements in education, transportation, and communication that, over the preceding decades, had supposedly done so much to fuse the country into an integral economic, cultural, and administrative whole.

At least one of those ostensibly integrative forces – an emergent mass popular culture – may actually have contributed to the distortion, rather than the clarification, of the stock images and associations that dominated the popular conception of regional differences. In the early years of the twentieth century, heavily sanitized representations of the American West exercised an undue influence over the new forms of popular culture and entertainment characteristic of the period. Owing much of their appeal to the romantic nostalgia surrounding the dissolution, in the 1880s and 1890s, of the Western “frontier” in the face of the advancing forces of corporate capitalism, commercial agriculture, and large-scale settlement of the Trans-Mississippi, popular cultural representations of the region dwelled on its idealized past, rather than the prosaic conditions that were its hallmark in the present.34 The pageantry of “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s enormously popular traveling Wild West

33 Graf, William, Private, 357th Field Hospital, 90th (“Alamo”) Division, “My Experience in the Army during World War I” (privately published memoir, 1975), 33, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

show, its mass appeal stoking, as well as benefiting from, the torrent of Western-themed dime novels, pulp magazines, and other forms of popular fiction that flooded the market each year, accentuated the image of the West as a region uncorrupted by the disturbing changes that, many Americans believed, had the potential to unravel the fraying fabric of their society. \(^{35}\) The West, at least as depicted in plots concocted by such authors as Zane Grey and Eugene Rhodes, remained free of the sinister forces of big business, rising class antagonism and labor radicalism, and foreign immigration. \(^{36}\) With popular culture so prominent in molding popular perceptions of the West, the boundary between fantasy and reality could, at times, prove a porous one, as attested by Stanley Lane, a New York teenager at the time of the Great War who viewed his enlistment in the Army as the fulfillment of daydreams fuelled by a partiality for Western fiction. “I enlisted in the cavalry,” Lane recalled,

and I thought that was the greatest thing going because I’d get a horse…And a great deal of my reading books in the library, I read a great many of them by Zane Gray, who was the

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author of a lot of these scouting books. And I thought that was the greatest thing. I could be a scout. I could learn that and be a trooper and something else.  

The sudden influx, beginning in late summer of 1917, of soldiers of Western origin into the states of the American East and South illustrated in stark terms the endurance in the popular imagination of metaphors that continued to depict the West as essentially a frontier zone; a region whose economy, culture, and society had more in common with the stuff of mass-market paperbacks than it did with actual conditions prevailing there in the early twentieth century. To some soldiers, the persistence of such mental images often proved a source of considerable amusement. Rudolph Forderhase thought it humorous that in one Midwestern town where his division of Westerners briefly stopped on its way to the East Coast, the locals thought the visitors exotic. “I heard them say that we were all from out West and were all cowboys!” Many Western soldiers went out of their way to perpetuate their collective reputation as tough, and potentially dangerous, frontiersmen. Assigned to a division that included, among its subordinate units, a regiment of infantry from New York City, Rollyn Leonard and his fellow Iowa National Guardsmen elevated the cultivation of this image to an art form. “These New York fellows…think we are all cowpunchers from way out west in Iowa,” Leonard informed his mother:

They asked some of the fellows if we really did have to carry guns all the time out west, and we told them sure, we never thought of leaving home without a gun. They think we’re a regular hard-boiled bunch of Cowpunchers from way out west in Iowa, so we just let them continue thinking so and have a lot of fun with them.


38 Forderhase, Rudolph A., Company I, 356th Infantry Regiment, 89th (“Middle West”) Division, “We Made the World Safe!!!!!!!?: Camp Funston, Jan. 12, 1918 – Cornieville, Aug. 16.” (typescript memoir), 7 – 8, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

39 Leonard, Rollyn E., Private, Company A, 168th Infantry Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to mother, 17 September 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
The temptation to corroborate preconceived notions of regional peculiarity received a powerful stimulus from a set of highly practical considerations. Soldiers based in one of the Army's training camps or cantonments could assume they would remain at these installations for several months before the completion of their stateside training cycle and their deployment to Europe. The prospect of spending close to a year in the relatively bleak environs delimited by the company barracks, mess-hall, and drill field placed a premium on soldiers' ability to establish and maintain social connections with civilians residing in the immediate vicinity of the camp. An invitation to a weekend dinner with a local family offered many a soldier the opportunity to momentarily escape from the mind-numbing routine of camp life, the vulgarity of the barrack-room, and the monotony of Army rations. Most of all, time passed in the company of a wholesome family allowed soldiers to immerse themselves, if only temporarily, in the atmosphere of domesticity from which they had been severed upon their induction into service. In consequence, soldiers fortunate enough to establish such relationships with local civilians tended to cherish them, doing their best to cultivate their newly-forged friendships during the war, and recalling them with genuine fondness in subsequent years.40

Given the value soldiers attached to social connections of this type, servicemen could hardly be blamed for doing everything in their power to ensure that dinner invitations would continue to arrive on a regular basis. And if the attainment of that goal depended on the willingness of a soldier to humor his hosts’ ignorance about the culture and people of his native region, that was a small price to pay in exchange for the prospect of a home-cooked

meal, a bit of flirtatious banter with the daughter of the house, an after-dinner cigar and a pat on the back from the grandfather, and an evening of piano-playing in the family parlor. In some cases, soldiers had to do little more than satisfy a demand that was already in place. While stationed in Camp Mills on Long Island, Earl Humphrey appears to have made the best of the curiosity the locals demonstrated with regards to the Great Plains. The people who invited him and his buddies to Sunday dinners “were very interested in knowing about Kansas City, and most of them were interested in knowing about the Indians. They thought we were from the Wild Wild West.”

Humphrey left unsaid whether he took great pains to dispel these hazy notions about the realities of life in the West. Considering what was stake at stake, however, one may safely postulate that neither he nor his fellow Kansans felt obliged to go out of their way to dilute the richly colored images of the Trans-Mississippi as envisioned by their hosts.

The tendency of soldiers to identify specific regions as the primary focus of their allegiance could also function as a means of making sense of the ordinary frustrations and personality conflicts that troops from a variety of socio-cultural, occupational, and geographic backgrounds were likely to experience in the course of active service. Some took for granted the assumption that the coming together, within the confines of a training camp or the organizational structure of a unit, of soldiers from different parts of the country had the potential to create an explosive situation. “It is very strange here,” Minnesotan Earl Mitchell wrote from Camp Sevier, North Carolina, where he trained with a division composed of troops from Tennessee and the Carolinas, “as there are Northern men and Southern men and we have to be careful as they don’t always pull together. But we have had

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41 Humphrey, Earl O., Sergeant, Company B, 117th Signal Battalion, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
no fights so far and hope we don’t.” But affirmations of regional identity could also conceal deeper fault-lines of social and class antagonism. Though himself a graduate of the University of Wisconsin, John Kress exhibited what appeared a profound sense of inadequacy in relation to the well-heeled Easterners – many of them products of Ivy League schools – he met upon arrival at the camp where he was to undergo officer training. But in explaining the sources of the ridicule to which his fellow officer-candidates subjected him, he stressed neither his modest rural background, nor the implied inferiority of his alma mater vis-à-vis older educational institutions, as the key to understanding the frictions that arose between him and his antagonists. Instead, he singled out his conformity to the cultural and linguistic peculiarities of his native region as the one factor that rendered him a “marked man” above all other considerations:

To this day I maintain I was the only Indian in that large camp of aspiring candidates, that is, the only one there from west of the Mississippi River, as most of the candidates were from the vicinity of Philadelphia, and of course all college graduates from the elite schools of the east, a degree being necessary for entry into the school. My speech gave me away as someone foreign to the area and when it was known that I was from Wisconsin, I must be a direct descendant of the Indians of that area, and not an associate of Harvard and Yale.43

Real and imagined affronts to their dignity and professional aspirations frequently reinforced the regional consciousness of soldiers. So, too, did the grievances Doughboys professed with respect to their superiors’ failure to recognize or reward individual merit. Unfair treatment at the hands of an officer or NCO could be easily accounted for with reference to his alleged prejudice against men from a particular section, region, or state.

Originally a volunteer in the Wisconsin National Guard, Edward Lauer was transferred,

42 Mitchell, Earl, Private, Company K, 118th Infantry Regiment, 30th (“Old Hickory”) Division, letter to mother, 22 April 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

against his will, to a unit made up of Michiganders. The transition was relatively painless: “I
don’t know why, but it made no difference, as I found friends in the Michigan National
Guard.” But his transfer to a formation dominated by men from another state, Lauer
believed, also ensured that his progress up the hierarchy of military rank would come to a
premature halt simply by virtue of his being an out-of-state interloper. “I have always felt
that my chances for promotion were slim because there were four Michigan sergeants” in
the unit.44 Assignment to a regiment whose ranks and command hierarchy, Albert Thome
claimed, included a large number of Southerners, guaranteed that the few Northerners in the
unit would “get all the dirty jobs” simply because the Southerners “didn’t like us
[N]ortherners.”45

In extreme cases, resentment concerning the prejudice that soldiers from one region
allegedly displayed toward those of another could outlast the war itself, leaving the aggrieved
parties more cognizant of their regional identity than even before the conflict. Gordon
Needham, a volunteer from the state of Washington, served out the war with the 26th
Division, a formation whose original complement of manpower had been drawn exclusively
from National Guard units raised by the states of New England. But the thousands of
replacements the 26th received in compensation for the casualties it suffered in combat came
from all over the country, thus diluting the originally cohesive regional identity of the
formation. In spite, or perhaps because, of this development, Needham maintained, the
Yankees harbored a regional prejudice against the newcomers that manifested itself in an
alleged reluctance to reward the Westerners while the war was in progress, and accord them

44 Lauer, Edward T., Private First Class, Sanitary Detachment, 121st Field Artillery Regiment, 32nd
(“Red Arrow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

45 Thome, Albert M., Private First Class, 315th Engineer Regiment, 90th (“Alamo”) Division, Army
Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
due recognition in unit histories after the conflict had ended. Commenting in the quality of
the historical literature he had read about the Great War, Needham complained that the
books “I have read about my division…gave all credit to the men from New England and
nothing about the men who were transferred…from the West and I might say that not one
of those transferred in ever made a promotion.” As a result, he continued, “there was
resentment” among the Westerners who claimed, as Needham himself did, that “they were
better soldiers under fire.”

IV. “Most of the Men Resented Being Called Yankees”: Sectional
Allegiances

The intensity and nature of the differences that soldiers from the American West
perceived between themselves and their Eastern counterparts paled in contrast to the actual
or imagined dissimilarities of temperament, culture, language, and worldviews that
distinguished the people of the South from the inhabitants of other regions. By the second
decade of the twentieth century, the historical memory of the Civil War – along with the
antagonisms it had generated – had become subsumed within a commemorative tradition
that stressed sectional reconciliation as the principal goal of the symbols, rituals, and
terminology associated with public and private efforts to honor those who had fought and
died in the conflict. Memorial Day speeches, regimental reunions, battlefield memorials, and
popular and scholarly histories of the Civil War propounded the theme of reunion by
depicting the sacrifices of Northern and Southern soldiers as equally honorable, and the

46 Needham, Gordon A., Private First Class, Company I, 104th Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
causes for which the Union and the Confederacy had respectively fought as equally just.\textsuperscript{47} The emphasis on the universal aspects of the war, rather than on the profound ideological differences that had been responsible for its outbreak and its conduct, overlapped with the Southern myth of the “Lost Cause.” Advocates of the latter represented slavery as a benevolent, “civilizing” institution, cast the South in the role of a victim of Northern aggression, and justified the post-war disfranchisement of black Southerners as a measure indispensable for redressing the twin “follies” of Emancipation and Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{48} Though a number of African American leaders and Northern veterans of the Civil War openly dissented from this interpretive trend, their voices increasingly came to represent a minority opinion.\textsuperscript{49}

By the early 1900s, Americans had become accustomed to remembering the Civil War conflict in the framework of sectional reconciliation and national healing, rather than in terms of a struggle that revolved around the issue of the future of race slavery. With African Americans largely written out of the memory of the Civil War except as passive and, for the most part anonymous historical actors, the way was open for the integration of Northern and Southern practices of commemoration. The prominence accorded to the theme of reunion and reconciliation gathered steam in the 1890s and continued well into the twentieth


\textsuperscript{49} Piehler, \textit{Remembering War}, 68 – 69. See also David W. Blight, \textit{Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War} (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), chaps. 5, 6, 8, and 9.
It manifested itself in the increasing frequency of joint “Blue and Gray” reunions that brought Union and Confederate veterans together in annual encampments on the site of former battlefields as well as in such highly symbolic developments as the return of captured Confederate flags to the state of the South in 1905; Theodore Roosevelt’s endorsement of a bill making the federal government responsible for the upkeep of Confederate graves in the North; the extension of Congressional approval to Southern states and veterans’ organizations to build markers and monuments honoring Confederate soldiers on the grounds of national military parks at Gettysburg, Antietam, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, and other former battlefields; and the gradual emergence of Robert E. Lee as not simply a Southern, but a national hero, an embodiment of “a noble aristocratic world doomed by the onslaught of industrial development.”

The theme of sectional reconciliation and national reunion reached its apogee in the summer of 1913, when thousands of spectators flocked to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania to join the commemorating the semi-centennial reunion of the battle’s surviving Union and Confederate veterans. Attended by President Woodrow Wilson and a number of dignitaries from both North and South, the three day-long extravaganza culminated in a reenactment of Pickett’s Charge featuring some of the men who had taken part in the actual attack half a century earlier. In a scene suffused with easily understood – if somewhat heavy-handed – symbolism, the mock battle ended with ancient Johnny Rebs and Billy Yanks exchanging fraternal embraces across the same stone wall lining the crest of

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Cemetery Ridge over which they had traded bayonet thrusts and volleys of lead half a century earlier.\textsuperscript{52}

The entry of the United States into the Great War created a set of circumstances that had the potential to subject the conciliatory spirit of sectional relations to a severe test. As part of America’s military mobilization, the War Department authorized the construction of thirty-two large camps and cantonments in anticipation of the projected wartime expansion of the U.S. Army.\textsuperscript{53} The majority of these installations were to be built in the states of the former Confederacy, a decision based on the assumption that the mild climate prevailing in that region would maximize opportunities for year-round training.\textsuperscript{54} As a result, the years 1917 – 1919 witnessed the largest deployment of Northern troops to the South since the Civil War. For thousands of soldiers from the North and West, the sojourn south of the Mason-Dixon Line represented their first experience of sustained contact with a society that was recognizably different from the environments where they had spent most of their lives thus far. The degree to which servicemen viewed the South as the epitome of the American “Other” demonstrated in stark terms the vibrancy of soldiers’ consciousness of sectional differences. This cognizance, in its turn, underscored the tendency to identify with a specific region as the pivot of individual and communal allegiance.

The exoticism that pervaded soldiers’ reportage of their first acquaintance with the people, landscape, culture, climate, language, and social order prevalent in the South competed with, and in some cases arguably exceeded, the sense of novelty Doughboys would experience upon coming into contact with societies – such as those they would later


\textsuperscript{53} See Part 2 below.

\textsuperscript{54} Coffman, \textit{The War to End All Wars}, 29 – 31.
encounter in Europe – that were undeniably alien to ordinary Americans. Initial impressions of the region, formulated on the basis of glimpses caught from the windows of troop trains conveying draftees and volunteers to camps in the South, left many soldiers in no doubt they were traversing what was a recognizably foreign country. Here was a place as unfamiliar as most had probably seen until that time; a region whose inhabitants, low population density, strange topography, economic backwardness, alien culture, and bucolic charm endowed it with the trappings of a society largely unaffected by the broader currents of industrialization and urbanization. The letter that Kenneth Gow, a National Guardsman from New York, wrote to his mother during a brief pause in his regiment’s journey through Virginia and the Carolinas, depicted the South in terms that many a fellow Northern would be willing to second:

The scenery is very fine, but gets rather monotonous…gently rolling country, heavily wooded, and sparsely settled. Most of the people are very miserable-looking, and seem to be as poor as church mice. They live for the most part in log-cabins chinked with clay, and have a little corn and tobacco planted. There are niggers and niggers, and then more niggers. There are very few towns of any size at all, and no big cities so far. The hills are covered mostly with pine and oak. The air is wonderful.55

Deeper immersion served merely to enhance, rather than dispel, Gow’s perception of the South as an exotic realm whose people, culture, and socio-economic conditions and practices had little in common with what he and his fellow Northerners may have regarded as the mainstream of their country’s historical development. “Spartanburg is a typical Southern city,” Gow noted with reference to the South Carolina locality where his unit was undergoing training. “It seems very old-fashioned to us,” he added with a mixture of admiration and condescension, sentiments that applied equally to the verdict he pronounced

upon the natives. The locals, he acknowledged, “are very obliging, and evidently are making a sincere effort to give the troops a square deal.” On the other hand, they also were “very much inclined to take things easy. If you try to hurry them, you are worse off than ever.”

Archaic integrity in business, it seemed, seemed inseparable from a degree of indolence that the supposedly industrious Northerners could only find quaint.

The need to become accustomed to such mundane matters as the local diet enhanced Gow’s unmistakable belief that he and his fellow New Yorkers were strangers in a strange land. “Nearly everyone’s digestion is upset,” he grumbled. “I suppose we are all undergoing the process of acclimation.” In addition, the capacity of the South to explode some of the stereotypes he had harbored about its people – while seemingly confirming other deeply-rooted prejudices – offered even more evidence of the fundamentally foreign origins of much of Southern culture:

I heard some darkies singing the other night, the first time I have ever heard this far-famed Southern darky singing. It is the weirdest thing I ever heard. Their melodies are very primitive, and seem to revert to what might have been African dirges. We asked them to sing ‘My Old Kentucky Home,’ ‘Suwanee River,’ ‘Old Black Joe,’ or some other darky song, and (will you believe me?), they never heard of any of them. They chant when they work. Foremen, I believe, encourage them in this, as they work better. They are the slowest workers I ever saw.

There is no doubt that the impressions Gow formulated of the South owed a great deal to the specific circumstances of his relatively privileged socio-cultural background. Yet, the views expressed by this scion of an upper middle-class New York family and a member of his native city’s most socially exclusive National Guard regiment were not exceptional. Instead, they closely paralleled the general spirit of the collective response that initial contact

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with the South generated among soldiers from the North and West regardless of their precise geographical origin and socio-economic standing. Chicago office clerks, Pennsylvania farmers, or New England college students interpreted their respective experiences of the South with the aid of a standard set of terms, ideas, and visual images whose remarkable consistency transcended the obvious occupational, educational, and cultural differences that distinguished them in civilian life. Almost invariably, this accumulation of widely shared points of reference cast the South in the role of a foil to the industrialized, urbanized, and ethnically diverse North, a place that provided a fascinating insight into the kind of economic order, cultural value systems, and templates of social organization whose days in the North appeared numbered, if not wholly past.

A foray into the South aboard a troop train, followed by an extended sojourn at a training camp and buttressed by prolonged association with Southerners serving in the same unit could, therefore, function as either a nostalgic reminder of an earlier, pre-industrial era, or as an opportunity to critique the region’s backwardness by way of affirming, even of only implicitly, the cultural superiority of the institutions, economic structures, and social relations characteristic of the North and West. With respect to the former category, many soldiers simply stressed with delight the picturesque anachronisms they perceived at the heart of everyday life in the South. “There is one thing I must praise of the southern people,” a Pennsylvania infantryman gushed in a letter addressed to his parents, “and that is the way girls act toward the soldiers. They refuse to have anything to do with you unless you are properly introduced, which makes the class of girls very select.”

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58 Munder, Howard W., Bugler, Company G, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to parents, 20 September 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. There were, however, limits to Munder’s admiration for the social custom he described in the letter: as he himself confessed with discernible regret, the aloof demeanor of Southern girls meant that “I have been unable to get acquainted with any of them.”
the poverty and economic underdevelopment of the region, soldiers were more likely to emphasize what they perceived as the charmingly archaic appearance of indigence and backwardness rather than dwell on the more troubling implications of what they saw. "The farm-houses are quaint and it is amusing to see the farmers using oxen to pull the plow. Occasionally we see a combination of a horse and ox hitched to the plows," Marylander Samuel Kent jotted down in his diary as he headed South. But the stock image of the South that, more than any other, pervaded the letters and diaries of soldiers from the North was that of a thinly-peopled landscape of vast cotton, tobacco, rice fields sprinkled with small settlements and sharecroppers’ shacks, and occasionally spectacular scenery. It was, in short, the direct antithesis of the tidy, prosperous, and at least in the North and certain parts of the Midwest, densely-populated countryside whose economic life had come to revolve around a number of great urban centers. A few soldiers went beyond written descriptions in their efforts to convey to family and friends the foreign ambiance of the

59 Kent, Samuel M., Corporal, Company K, 128th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, “Diary of Samuel M. Kent,” entry for 18 September 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI. Here it is worth noting that not all Northerners viewed the hard-scrabble ways of Southern dirt farmers with condescension. Traversing the mountains of West Virginia, Paul Doty, a native of the Midwest expressed genuine admiration for the resourcefulness of local farmers and their ability to scratch out a living in a region distinctly unsuited to agriculture:

The mountains here are not so very high, but they are even better at scenery than a good many of the Western mountains…On some of the steep sides, where it looks almost impossible to climb, we could see small cornfields of wheat fields of possibly a half-acre each. If some of the Illinois farmers had to work such land as some we went thru, they would feel badly treated.


South: some resorted to the conventional method of supplementing the written word with pictures, postcards, or books of photographs; others treated their families to samples of such exotic, quintessentially Southern, staples as bits of cotton or cactus.  

Nothing underscored the regional peculiarity of the South and, by implication, the cognizance of their own regional identities among soldiers from the North and West, than the unfamiliar dialects and lexicon of Southerners. In her study of the impact of the Great War on the identity, social composition, and disciplinary regimes of two of the British Army’s Territorial battalions, Helen McCartney demonstrates the crucial role that the endurance in the pages of soldiers’ magazines of the phraseology and pronunciation specific to Lancashire played in augmenting the two units’ close identification with the geographical locale in and around Liverpool that served as their recruitment area. In emulating the tone, content, format, and dialect prose popularized in local magazines, unit publications evoked memories of Lancashire, and provided soldiers with a cultural reference point that “would have been very familiar to all those who lived in the region,” irrespective of the stratum of society to which they belonged. The experience of Northerners who came into sustained contact with the Southern dialect of American English illustrated that this process could also work in reverse. Within just over a decade of the Great War, the displacement of silent films by “talkies,” augmented by the appearance of mass-produced radio sets, would gradually familiarize Americans with the linguistic quirks of their compatriots from other parts of the

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62 McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, 84 – 86.
country, rendering the Southern drawl a relatively commonplace element of popular culture. But in 1917 – 1918, few Northern and Western ears had had much prior familiarity with the cadences, lilts, and inflections that make up the Southern accent in its many variations. The mesmerized fascination that soldiers from north of the Mason-Dixon Line professed with respect to this fundamental determinant of cultural identity arguably did more than anything else to underscore the persistence of elemental sectional and regional distinctions irrespective of the growing influence of such centripetal forces as a universal popular culture, an integrated national economy, and a sophisticated, nation-wide communications and transportation network.

“One of the most amusing things down here is the speech of the natives. I could listen to them nearly all night, sounds so new,” Howard Munder reported. In part, the

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64 To soldiers from the states of the West, the differences between the dialects of their own region and the accents and pronunciation used by the working-class populations of the great cities of the East Coast could at times appear almost as profound as the linguistic divide between North and South. In units that combined large numbers of troops from the East and the Trans-Mississippi, such differences no doubt heightened the awareness of regional differences that transcended the realm of linguistic peculiarities. The experience of William Triplet, a NCO in an infantry regiment composed overwhelmingly of National Guardsmen from Missouri and Kansas, illustrates the degree to which linguistic differences could interact with the inherent contempt National Guardsmen felt for draftees to reinforce a sense of regional identity. Just prior to embarking for France, Triplet’s regiment

received a second draft of conscripts to bring each company up to its war strength of 250 men. These heroes, well trained but unenthusiastic, were mostly from New York. A serious language barrier existed between us until we gradually learned to translate their fast, clipped jargon into American. Funny – they had little trouble understanding our slower, more clearly pronounced language.


65 Munder, Howard W., Bugler, Company G, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to parents, 15 September 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. See also Walker, Lynn M., Private First Class, Company C, 9th Field Signal Battalion, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, letter to sister, 14 August 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
bemused reactions Northern troops registered upon their exposure to the Southern dialect could be traced to what some Yankees regarded as the apparent incongruity inherent in a white person’s usage of the speech patterns and vocabulary Northerners normally associated with African Americans. “It is very funny to hear the people talk, they talk just like colored people,” Frank Messer wrote from Georgia “The little colored kids come through the camp shining shoes and taking [sic] washing. One of the fellows in my tent called one of them in the other day just to hear him talk.”66 But in many other cases, linguistic novelty was its own reward. A Pennsylvania soldier claimed he liked to engage store clerks in conversation simply to get his fill of the “lazy drawling way they have of talking.”67 And among Northerners whom the vagaries of the draft or the Army’s personnel policies had pitch-forked into the ranks of predominantly Southern units, the peculiarities of their fellow soldiers’ vocabulary and modes of speech required a mental adaptation akin to the process of digestive “acclimation” that Kenneth Gow and his unfortunate New Yorkers had to undergo shortly after their arrival in the Appalachian foothills. Assigned to a regiment of combat engineers composed overwhelmingly of National Guardsmen from South Carolina, Connecticut native George Browne reveled in translating for the benefit of his fiancé the lexicon of hitherto strange expressions and words that he had absorbed from his comrades-in-arms. “As soon as it sprinkles here the mud gets up to one’s neck,” he wrote from France, “and it’s four

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66 Messer, Frank J., Machine Gun Company, 60th Infantry Regiment, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 11 June 1918, in file of Smith, John H., Sergeant, Machine Gun Company, 60th Infantry Regiment, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. See also Mitchell, Earl, Private, Company K, 118th Infantry Regiment, 30th (“Old Hickory”) Division, letter to sister, n. d., possibly April 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. In all fairness, Mitchell, a native of Minnesota, while claiming that it was “fun” to hear the Southerners in his unit converse, acknowledged that the “Southern boys” who made up most of his regiment’s manpower “say they like to hear us [Northerners] talking to[o].”

67 Merritt, Charles B., Corporal, Company M, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to mother, 21 December 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
times harder to march when the road is ‘slick.’ That’s an expression of S[outh].C[arolina]. I
think. You won’t know me when I get back to the states…I say ‘Yonder,’ ‘You all,’ and
other words foreign to me ‘before the war.’”

In at least one sphere, the reactions of soldiers from the North and West to
encounters with the South transcended mere amusement, condescension, or simple curiosity. Enough Northerners and Westerners shared the prejudices and bigotry of their white
Southern counterparts to accept without adverse comment the countless manifestations of the institutionalized racism that pervaded social relations in the South in the early decades of the twentieth century. Many, as must already be apparent, enthusiastically embraced the racial stereotypes, attitudes, and rhetoric of their Southern hosts. But in the relatively rare instances where encounters with Jim Crow generated some kind of response among Northerners and Westerners, the reaction was likely to be negative. Having volunteered for the Regular Army at the age of sixteen, Pennsylvanian John Stoffa found it difficult to get along with civilians in the South because “[s]egregation created some problems.” Since he “wasn’t accustomed to treating Negroes that way,” it did not take long for “Southern whites…to point out my ‘misbehavior.’” For Joseph Donnelly, the racist attitudes plainly evident among the Southern officers with whom he served in the early part of the war

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69 Stoffa, John, Private First Class, Company C, 47th Infantry Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. Stoffa did not elaborate on the precise details of the offenses for which white Southerners took him to task. Presumably, however, he may have been guilty of the transgression for which Randolph Hoefs, a North Dakotan serving in an artillery regiment composed chiefly of Texans and Oklahomans, was taken to task by his Southern comrades-in-arms. “The Texas and Oklahoma troops was giving me a rough time [because] they said we [Northerners] treat the colored people the same as white people in the same room with them.” See Hoefs, Randolph H., Musician 3rd Class, Headquarters Company, 345th Artillery Regiment, 90th (“Alamo”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
rendered hollow Southern pretensions to gentility and social refinement that many other Northern soldiers had found so charmingly quaint. While Donnelly was full of admiration for the courage and patriotism of the poor Southern whites under his command, there was no mistaking his disgust with the college-educated officers from Louisiana, Arkansas, and Alabama with whom he came into contact. “I never could stand having one man call a colored man a ‘Nigger’ or ordering one around,” he claimed. “On hearing some of these ‘gentlemen’ brag of their exploits with colored women or killing their ‘nigger’ I was very happy to have had the opportunity to transfer to the 32nd Division.”

The latter, a formation composed of National Guard units from Michigan and Wisconsin, was presumably free of the kind of racial intolerance Donnelly had encountered earlier in his service, simply by virtue of its being a Midwestern division.

The road from disapproval to ridicule and contempt was a short one, as was the tendency to critique Southern attitudes toward race in terms that reinforced the regional stereotype of white Southerners as hot-headed, impulsive bigots. Among the Northerners who served in Frederick Pottle’s company, some took undisguised pleasure in overtly taunting their Southern comrades-in-arms with the prejudices the latter were known to espouse. On a typical evening at the Georgia camp where Pottle was undergoing training,

[The calls blow, call to quarters, tattoo, finally taps. We are all in bed and the lights are out. Absolute silence is supposed to reign until first call in the morning, but it seldom does…. Soon after the lights go out…a plaintive voice, clear and distinct, announces, as in continuation of a long argument, ‘All I say is, a white man is as good as a n— any day if he behaves himself.’ Bang! The belligerent Southerner with the weak sense of humor is out of bed square footed, looking for a fight.]

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70 Donnelly, Joseph M., Captain, Company G, 125th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

71 Frederick A. Pottle, *Stretchers: The Story of a Hospital Unit on the Western Front* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1929), 54. Pottle served as a medical orderly in the AEF’s 8th Evacuation Hospital.
Relating a racially-motivated bar brawl that pitted his fellow Missourians against a group of National Guardsmen from Alabama, William Triplet resorted to verbal imagery that underscored his perception of at least this batch of Southerners as fundamentally alien – and by implication inferior – to anything he had encountered before. “Strange lot,” Triplet mused. “[E]very man of them seemed to be stamped out of the same mold. All were medium height, skinny, yellowish-tan complexion, narrow-set eyed, and talked funny. We could understand them a little better than we could the New Yorkers but not much.”

Here, the obvious allusion to the stock image of the white Southerner as the product of generations of inbreeding was further reinforced by subsequent references to the equally potent stereotype of the white Southerner as a crude ignoramus, one so deficient in faculties of the intellect as to be unable to distinguish between the fine gradations of his own prejudice. The relish inherent in Triplet’s account of the causes of the aforementioned scuffle – a fight that began when some Alabamans objected to the presence in “their” watering hole of two Native Americans who served Triplet’s Missouri regiment – is impossible to miss, as is the delight with which he poked fun at the alleged idiocy of the Southerners:

We got along fine with [the Alabamans] at first. Then one night…about two dozen [Missourians] of D Company including Little and Big Chiefs swarmed into one of Garden City’s lower-class dens of iniquity…Large numbers of Alabama’s finest were already in possession and well on their way to a wonderful evening.

Our pair of Dakotah braves were very quiet, seldom heard and almost invisible. But as they unobtrusively accompanied their Missourian comrades into the scene of revelry the sight of their cordovan-colored countenances brought the Alabamans to a full red alert.

‘Git them black bastuds outa heah,’ yelled a scrawny redneck hanging on the rim of the bar.

‘Ah ain’t gonna drink with no niggus,’ announced another, weaving forward and stupidly taking a roundhouse swing at Big Chief…

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73 Ibid.
The cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic peculiarities that set the South apart from other regions of the United States made plain the fact that while the various areas of the country shared a common history, its main theme was one of divergent courses of regional development that, only a few decades previously, had boiled over into open conflict. Years of emphasis on healing and reconciliation had dulled the edge of whatever antagonism Northern soldiers, many brought up on the tales of their grandfathers’ exploits in the Civil War, may have felt toward their Southern hosts. Yet, again, the profound differences in the historical meaning the country’s individual sections ascribed to the memory of the conflict offered fertile soil for affirmations of regional allegiances, even when such professions were couched in terms that paralleled the rhetoric of national reunion. Observing the arrival of a regiment of Alabama troops who had arrived to relieve his unit of Pennsylvanians from their turn at the front in France, Harold Pierce commented on the scene in language that attested to the enduring capacity of the Civil War to confirm the members of his generation in their particular regional identities, even while expressing satisfaction with the progress that the work of sectional conciliation had made since the end of that conflict:

They come in about dusk, Alabama Boys, a fine looking bunch of men, as they duck swiftly across the road and on into the woods where they will remain for the night. As they leapt-frog us, I cannot help but think of what would have happened if this regiment from Alabama had met this regiment from Pennsylvania in the [eighteen]-sixties. I feel a little emotion as they pass to carry on the work of the Pennsylvania and New England soldiers.74

With soldiers from the North and West so highly attuned to such indicators of regional uniqueness as distinct dialects, cultural customs, levels of economic development, and social relations, the tendency to interpret encounters with the South in the framework of

the historical legacy of the Civil War could only augment the sense of broader regional affiliations that had already been well-congealed in the mind of many troops upon their induction into service. Even in cases where Southern communities accorded a warm welcome to Northern soldiers, the latter sometimes saw such generous treatment as a pleasant surprise precisely because it defied what appear to have been low expectations – expectations that, in turn, were rooted in Northerners’ assumptions about the resilience of disagreeable historical memories among Southerners. Walton Clark, a Pennsylvanian who trained at Camp Hancock, Georgia, could not say enough about the graciousness of the locals. Yet, when reading his testimonial in praise of Southern hospitality, it is difficult not to notice the muted tone of relief discernible in his tribute to the citizens of Augusta. “We were made very welcome there,” he acknowledged. “The people…were most hospitable to us Yankees. The [C]ivil [W]ar was forgotten.”75

In consigning the Civil War to merciful oblivion, Clark was probably in a minority among his fellow soldiers. The memory of the sectional conflict loomed too large in the popular historical consciousness of North and South alike to play only a minor part in influencing Doughboys’ perceptions of regional allegiance. What reinforced its capacity to do so was the plentiful evidence furnished by inter-regional encounters in the years 1917 – 1918, that the Civil War was not, in fact, forgotten. Such spectacles as “a Confederate and American flag flying together,” as witnessed by a Pennsylvania soldier in Georgia, might have generated only mild amusement and presumably be classified in the same category as

75 Clark, Walton., Lieutenant-Colonel, 3rd Battalion, 107th Field Artillery Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, “Three Brothers in World War I” (typescript memoir), 57, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
other examples of quaint Southern charm. But even five decades after Appomattox, it was still possible for Northern soldiers to find annoying at best and infuriating at worst the fervor with which Southern civilians responded a regimental band’s performance of “Dixie,” a reaction whose capacity to irritate the grandsons of Union veterans was exacerbated by a correspondingly lukewarm reception Southerners accorded to the strains of the “Star-Spangled Banner.”

Southern sensitivity to the nuances of historical memory matched, if not exceeded, that of their Northern guests, highlighting the residual power of regional loyalties to function as the pivot of identity more meaningful than the broader, but more abstract, concept of national identity. Because most Southern troops did not have to travel beyond their own region to reach the camps and cantonments where they would undergo training, their contacts with the culture, language, and people of other sections were much more circumscribed. In many cases, such interactions were limited to the impressions Southern troops formulated on the basis of the glimpses they caught from the windows of the troop trains that transported them to a Northern port of embarkation en route to France. Yet, the few relevant items of evidence that do survive attest to the presence in the minds of Southern soldiers of dynamics of regional identity similar to those operating among their

76 Munder, Howard W., Bugler, Company G, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to parents, 15 September 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

77 “You had ought to have heard them when the band played Dixie. As soon as the first note was struck they began clapping and cheering. They took notice of it quicker than the average soldier does of The Star Spangled Banner.” See Merritt, Charles B., Corporal, Company M, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to mother, 22 February 1918. Morris Arner, a soldier who served in the same division of the Pennsylvania National Guard implied this sort of behavior in the part of Southern civilians was nothing short of deliberate tactlessness. Commenting on his unit’s relations with American civilians, he claimed he and his fellow soldiers were treated “[v]ery badly in Georgia” because the locals “raised hell when Dixie was played by the bands” but seemingly “didn’t know what the Star Spangled Banner was.” See Arner, Morris W., Wagoner, Company C, 103rd Ammunition Train, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
Northern counterparts upon their first encounters with an essentially alien sectional culture. When the Army arranged for a Civil War veteran to deliver a patriotic address to an audience of young Southerners undergoing training at the Officer Training Camp (OTC) at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, located on the site of the Civil War battle of Chickamauga, his oratorical fireworks nearly sparked a riot among his listeners. The speaker, an officer who had commanded a Union brigade at the November 1863 engagement, left his audience aghast when he drew parallels between the ruling elites of Imperial Germany and the political and military leaders of the former Confederacy, and shocked the aspiring officers even further with his bloodthirsty exhortations to dispatch their putative German opponents in the same way he and his fellow bluecoats had slaughtered greybacks by the bushel back in '63. Speaking in terms that probably exemplified the mindset of the officer-candidates present, Tennessean Donald Davidson could scarcely contain his outrage at the sacrilegious faux pas committed by the speaker. "How could [Robert E.] Lee, Stonewall Jackson, Jefferson Davis, or even Braxton Bragg be equated, as enemies to be slaughtered, with Kaiser Wilhelm, Hindenburg, and Les Boches?"

Real and alleged differences apparent in the response of individual sections to America’s involvement in the Great War represented yet another variable capable of stimulating a deeper awareness of regional allegiance among soldiers. Historians generally agree that the South generally lagged behind other parts of the country in its support for the conflict. Rural Southerners in particular consistently questioned the wisdom of the federal government’s decision to intervene in the European conflict on a variety of political, moral, 

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and religious grounds. Southern draft boards registered the highest rate of exemption requests in the nation, while Southern states in general accounted for close to thirty percent of the men the Selective Service System classified as deserters: individuals who registered for the draft but who failed to heed their draft board’s induction notice, or who went absent without leave after being inducted. Nothing illustrated the region’s ambivalent attitude toward the American involvement in the World War more vividly than the decision undertaken by the Wilson administration to authorize federal troops to cooperate with state and local law enforcement agencies in suppressing the numerous bands of deserters that, by the summer of 1918, were infesting the mountains, forests, and swamps of the former Confederacy.  

Under such circumstances, Southern soldiers were apt to interpret displays of excessive patriotism they witnessed among their Northern cousins as yet another substantiation of elemental difference between the sections. This applied even to those troops who, unlike many of their fellow Southerners, submitted, however grudgingly or reluctantly, to the machinery of the draft and the requirements of military service. Chris Emmett, an unenthusiastic but ultimately obedient draftee from Texas, may have typified such attitudes. Like most soldiers, he viewed with gratification the warm and generous welcome accorded to troops passing through civilian communities on their way to camp or a port of embarkation. “We received as evidences of appreciation from a grateful people the most palatable of life’s delicacies,” he fondly recalled his division’s stopover in one Southern town. “The inner man was filled to a satiety and soldiers from the Southland wended their ways back to their train surfeited with food and cheered in spirit by the contagious

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79 For a recent examination of wartime dissent and resistance in the agrarian South, see Keith, Rich Man’s War, Poor Man’s Fight.
patriotism of a sincere people.”

By contrast, Emmett recoiled with suspicion bordering on revulsion from the gratuitously frenzied reception the inhabitants of a Pennsylvania town extended to the men of his unit. “[W]hen I looked upon this fierce enthusiasm… I came to know we were not especially in their graces… just soldiers passing by on our way to duty.”

Much more important than his doubts about the sincerity of his hosts, however, was the language of regional distinction Emmett employed in an attempt to grapple with the meaning of the incident. “[M]y mind went back to my Southland,” he continued:

I could see no such fervor there. The fierceness of these people of the East had far outstripped our timorous enthusiasm. We of the conservative South could not comprehend with what seriousness our brothers of the East were taking this war. To these people war meant an accompanying adoration of all soldiers who carried it. Contagious as was their spirit, I could not be imbued with their flaming, flamboyant intensity sufficiently to prevent retrospection.  

Whatever may have been the rationale behind it, therefore, Southern soldiers remained as conscious of their distinct regional identity vis-à-vis other regions of the United States as troops from other sections, a tendency that revealed the limitations of the integrative influence of the Second Great Transformation. The pains Joseph Lawrence and his fellow regiment of South Carolina National Guardsmen took to distinguish themselves from their Northern brethren furnish a fitting epitaph with which to conclude a discussion of the persistence of regional loyalties among the generation of Americans who went off to

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war in 1917. While traversing England en route to their final destination in France, the men in Lawrence’s unit lost no opportunity to educate their hosts about the dynamics of regional allegiance in the United States. “[T]he Englishmen who addressed us as Yankees usually got a good cussing, as most of the men resented being called Yankees,” Lawrence remembered. “Sometimes we had to go into a detailed history of the United States to explain why we did not want to be called Yankees.”

In the final reckoning, neither fifty years of conciliatory rhetoric, symbolism, and cultural production, nor the emergence of a national market, a universal popular culture, and a nation-wide communications and transportation network could erase overnight sectional distinctions that had been decades, and in some cases centuries, in the making.

V. “It’s Best to Go With Those You Know”: Local and Community Allegiances

No matter how strong the emotional attachment many soldiers felt toward their native regions, its resonance in the minds of troops had to compete with yet another potent focus soldiers’ allegiance. Notwithstanding the loyalty they may have professed to a region, members of the generation of 1917 persisted in viewing their immediate localities of origin – whether rural towns, urban neighborhoods, or specific social and ethnic communities – as the single most important anchor of individual identity. Rooted in social networks revolving around membership in local voluntary associations, religious congregations, athletic clubs, and ties with co-workers and school and college classmates; reinforced by participation in

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82 Lawrence, Joseph D., Second Lieutenant, 113th Infantry Regiment, 29th (“Blue and Grey”) Division, “Experiences of Joseph Douglas Lawrence in the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, 1918 – 1919” (typescript memoirs), 18, World War I Veterans’ History Survey Project, USAMHI. Lawrence had initially volunteered to serve with the 118th Infantry Regiment of the 30th (“Old Hickory”) Division, a formation composed of troops from Tennessee and the Carolinas. He was transferred to the 29th Division upon being commissioned while in France.
local civic rituals like county and state fairs; and crowed with the intimate ties of family kinship, identification with the narrow geographic locale was all the more powerful a pivot of allegiance for being firmly fixed in the comfortingly familiar routines of work, leisure, and socio-economic activities associated with everyday life.

At first sight, an argument in favor of the persistence of localism as the central feature of the individual identities of Americans of the Progressive Era appears to defy canonical interpretations of the country’s national development in the first decades of the twentieth century. Viewed through the prism of the received historiography, the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era appear synonymous with the gradual erosion of the political and economic autonomy and socio-cultural diversity of local communities and their submersion in the broader homogenizing and integrative influences of the Second Great Transformation. While valuable as an explanation of the long-term patterns of American history between the Civil War and the First World War, this synthesis does not render justice to the nuances of the urbanization and industrialization of the United States in those decades.

As students of American rural have demonstrated, the sweeping demographic and economic changes with which the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are synonymous may have encouraged, rather than hampered, the coagulations of the kind of local social networks that underpinned vibrant local allegiances. In the American countryside, the migration of families and individuals from the Northwest and Midwest to the Trans-Mississippi West in search of land and economic opportunity enhanced the
cultural and ethnic homogeneity of “those who stayed behind” in the older communities.\textsuperscript{83} The deindustrialization of the countryside, a process that revolved around the centralization in large urban industrial enterprises of production activities formerly conducted in small workshops located in the countryside heightened the distinctions between city and country, and created the illusion among the inhabitants of rural communities of individual communities being exempt from the broader patterns of historical change taking place around them.\textsuperscript{84} Rural out-migration and deindustrialization went hand in hand with the renewed emphasis on active engagement in voluntary organizations and civic rituals – church groups, concerts, and socials, fraternal lodges, athletic competitions, agricultural improvement societies and chambers of commerce, “pioneer day” and Decoration Day celebrations, and family reunions – that aimed to affirm the distinctive character of the community, promote its political and economic interests, and demonstrate its intimate links to the customs and traditions of the past.\textsuperscript{85}

To a considerable extent, the socio-economic structure and cultural practices of communities situated in the more recently settled parts of the country replicated such localist tendencies. Defying Frederic Jackson Turner’s depiction of pioneer-farmers as a rugged individualist who, in the very act of moving West dissolved the bonds that had them to their native communities – whether New England towns or Scandinavian villages – the migrants from the East and the immigrants from Europe who settled in the American West


\textsuperscript{84} Osterud, \textit{Bonds of Community}, 48 – 49.

frequently arrived as part of what some scholars have referred to as “migration chains.” The prospect of settling in a strange environment enhanced, rather than diminished the importance of kinship networks and encouraged the formation of communities based on shared cultural, ethnic, and religious attributes. The American West, in short, “was an environment tailor-made for the formation of isolated ethnic communities.” Within such communities, social institutions like churches, schools, voluntary associations, and systems of social relations embodied in the “farming neighborhood” generated emotional and kinship loyalties that drew clear boundaries between individual communities. The boundaries between individual communities were sufficiently porous to allow for social, cultural, and economic interaction with other communities and with the mainstream of broader American society. Yet, mutuality and co-operation, while the norm within communities, were extended to “outsiders” only on a highly selective basis determined on their compatibility with the ethnic, racial, religious, or social characteristics of the community.


87 Gjerde, *The Minds of the West*, 18. Gjerde refers specifically to the Middle West, but as he himself acknowledges, and as historians of the Trans-Mississippi West confirm, cultural patterns of settlement were carried westward, where the uniqueness of individual communities was reinforced by the geographical isolation of agricultural settlements. See for example Carol K. Coburn, *Life at Four Corners: Religion, Gender, and Education in a German-Lutheran Community, 1868 – 1945* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992); Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880 – 1940* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), esp. chap. 2.


89 For an excellent case study of this process, see the examination of the interactions between the German, Norwegian, and Polish ethnic communities inhabiting a Midwestern county in Jane Marie Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870 – 1970* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Madison Press, 1992).
in question.\textsuperscript{90} In fact, throughout the United States, rural communities developed a variety of sophisticated mechanisms of exclusion designed to ensure the cultural homogeneity of the community and protect it from contamination by undesirable elements.\textsuperscript{91}

The American intervention in the Great War accentuated the enduring importance of local allegiances as the primary focus of soldiers’ identity. The significance of local ties and of emotional attachment to the community manifested itself in a variety of transmutations. These spanned an entire spectrum beginning with the localized nature of recruiting and conscription, progressing through soldiers’ determination to remain in contact with their home communities after induction into the Army, and culminating with efforts not always successful to replicate in the context of military service the local basis of the social relationships soldiers knew in civilian life.

Regardless of whether he had volunteered or been drafted, the putative soldier could usually rely on the local community to mediate and smooth his transition to the military life. In the specific case of draftees, the decision of the War Department to decentralize the operations of the Selective Service System owed much to the federal government’s conviction that this potentially unpopular measure could be made more palatable to draft-

\textsuperscript{90} For the “limits of neighboring,” see Neth, \textit{Preserving the Family Farm}, chap. 3.

\textsuperscript{91} In the Midwest, for instance, the trustees of local school boards often functioned as “community gatekeepers” by restricting enrollment to students whose socio-economic and ethnic background conformed to those of the local community. Religiously and ethnically homogenous communities could also resort to the establishment of committees that regulated the sale of local land in an effort to keep the ownership of neighborhood property in the hands of its original members. See Paul Theobald, \textit{Call School: Rural Education in the Midwest to 1918} (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), chap. 3; and Neth, \textit{Preserving the Family Farm}, 71. In communities lacking such sophisticated, institutionalized mechanisms of exclusion, less formal methods could work equally well in attaining the same ends. Running away from his Arkansas boarding school at the age of fifteen, Berch Ford caught a freight train to make his escape and disembarked at a small town situated a two hour train ride from his place of origin to buy food. There, “people on the main street stared us down” while “several young men threw rocks” at Ford and his traveling companion. Evidently, the locals “didn’t want strangers in their town.” Though lacking in subtlety, this particular “exclusion mechanism” fulfilled its purpose, with Ford promptly skipping town. See Ford, Berch E., Corporal, Machine Gun Company, 16\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 1\textsuperscript{st} Infantry Brigade, 1\textsuperscript{st} Division, untitled manuscript memoirs, n. p., World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
age Americans and their families if administered by local draft boards composed of prominent members of individual communities, as opposed to a distant, impersonal, and anonymous center of authority in Washington. With the county and, in larger towns and cities, the ward designated by the War Department as the basic operating units of the draft, the apparatus of selective service was coupled with the machinery of local government and the local community in general. In the words of Enoch H. Crowder, the Army’s Provost-Marshal General and the officer responsible for design and the implementation of the Selective Service Act, these measures would ensure the process would be administered by the “friends and neighbors” of the men subject to the draft, in keeping with “the democratic doctrine of local self-government,” and with the support of local institutions with which the draftees would already have been familiar.

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92 The decision to delegate the responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the draft to local boards testified to the enduring memory in the institutional psyche of the War Department and the U.S. Army of the unpopularity and ultimate failure of conscription measures to which both the Union and the Confederacy resorted during the Civil War. In the eyes of the architects of the Selective Service System, the turmoil that Civil War draft initiatives unleashed in both sections – culminating with the New York draft riots of July 1863 – could be traced to the determination of Northern and Southern leaders alike to administer their respective conscription mechanisms through powerful, highly centralized bureaucracies. The intrusion of the latter into the affairs of individual communities ran roughshod over traditions of local autonomy and contributed to the unpopularity of conscription in both sections. With local, rather than federal, authorities serving as the “human face” of the draft in the Great War, the War Department could be certain that whatever resentment and opposition the draft would generate among Americans would be channeled toward the former, not the latter. As Enoch Crowder put it, local draft boards would function as “buffers” between ordinary Americans and the federal government, shielding the latter from the most serious criticisms that might be leveled against the Selective Service System by deflecting the blame in the direction of local elites. In short, the “grounding [of the draft] at 5,000 local points dissipated its force, and enabled the central war machine to function smoothly without the disturbance that might have been caused by the concentrated total of dissatisfaction.” See U.S. Provost-Marshal General, *Second Report*, 276, as quoted in Keith, *Rich Man’s War*, 58. For an examination of the Civil War experience of the draft, see Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, chap. 2.

93 See Enoch H. Crowder, *The Spirit of Selective Service* (Garden City, New York, 1920), 12, as quoted in Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 181. See also U.S. Provost Marshal General, *Report of the First Draft under the Selective Service Act, 1917* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1918), 7 – 8. With a local draft board for every administrative subdivision of 30,000 people, there were 4,647 draft boards in total, each composed of three members appointed by the President of the United States on the recommendation of the governors of individual states. Members of local business and professional elites predominated among the board appointees. By law, all boards were required to include one physician responsible for conducting medical examinations. Of the remaining places, twenty percent went to local elected officials, especially sheriffs and county clerks; eighteen percent to lawyers; and twelve percent to businessmen. Farmers, laborers, and other occupational groups representing the socio-economic strata of society from which draftees were disproportionately drawn,
Contrary to expectations, the “localization” of the draft did not eliminate abuses and popular dissatisfaction. In fact, it may have exacerbated the potential for both, as illustrated by the frequency and magnitude of draft evasion in the years 1917 – 1918. Nevertheless, it is plausible to argue that the localized character of the procedures of the draft dulled the edge of intimidation and anxiety that draftees – many of them about to leave their communities for a sustained period for the first time in their lives – may justifiably have felt when faced with the prospect of departing for military service.

The fact that draftees selected for induction tended to depart for training camps in the company of men from the same geographical locality – perhaps even from the same neighborhood or street – was likely to be a source of considerable comfort to those about to embark on a journey into the unknown. So was the presence in one’s training company of men whom a soldier might have known in civilian life. By the same token, arbitrary transfer accounted for only ten percent of draft board members. See Chambers, To Raise an Army, 182; and U.S. Provost-Marshal General, Second Report, 227.

In spite of the popular perception of the Vietnam War as “the height (or nadir, depending on one’s politics) of draft dodging,” more Americans succeeded in illegally evading military service in 1917 – 1918 than in all the years of their nation’s active involvement in Southeast Asia. During the Great War, the Selective Service System registered approximately 24 million men between the ages of eighteen to forty-five. Of this number, 2.8 million were drafted. Some 338,000 men, representing twelve percent of those who had been drafted, did not report for induction or deserted after arriving at a training camp. Another 64,700 registrants applied for Conscientious Objector status. Finally, 2 to 3 million failed to register altogether, their numbers being impossible to estimate with greater precision because their failure to sign up meant they would never appear in federal records in the first place. By contrast, an estimated 571,000 Americans illegally evaded the draft between 1965 and 1975. See John W. Chambers II, “Conscription,” in John W. Chambers II, ed., The Oxford Companion to American Military History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 181; and Keith, Rich Man’s War, 57 – 58.

Among recently inducted draftees, the morale and whereabouts within the organization of the Army of their associates from civilian life represented a staple subject of the correspondence they maintained with family and friends back home. See for example, Beverly, E. R., Private, 18th Company, 5th Battalion, Depot Brigade, Camp Lee, Virginia, letter to Rev. J. W. Stewart, 30 May 1918, Folder 15, Box 52; Colley, Fred H., Private, Company L, 318th Infantry Regiment, 80th (“Blue Ridge”) Division, letters to parents, 23 and 25 October, and 22 December 1917, letter to father 21 April 1918 Folder 16, Box 52; Davis, Joseph S., Private, Company L, 317th Infantry Regiment, 80th (“Blue Ridge”) Division, letter to Ed Sutherland, 20 October 1917, Folder 18, Box 52; Owens, Olney, Private, Company A, 38th Infantry Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to father, 31 December 1917, Folder 26, Box 52; Rasnake, John R. H., Private, Company L, 317th Infantry Regiment, 80th (“Blue Ridge”) Division, letter to father, 12 December 1917, Folder 31, Box 52; Silcox, Jessie L,
to a unit made up of “strangers” who had no links with a draftee’s home community or state could have a potentially negative impact on the morale of the soldier. Plucked out of a training camp and assigned to a Louisiana National Guard regiment to full strength, Nelson White had accepted the transfer with misgivings. In his new unit, he explained, “every man in it was a stranger to me.” Simply being a Virginian in a unit of Louisianans, he implied, condemned him to social ostracism. In consequence, “my outlook for future work in France was not a pleasant one, for being a perfect stranger among men from the rice fields and swamps of Louisiana was anything but a good position for one from Virginia.”

Fully cognizant of the advantages for individual and collective morale of concentrating men from local draft districts in the same units, some regimental and divisional commanders attempted, as far as possible, to make their soldiers’ civilian localities of origin the basis of unit organization and personnel assignment. The personnel management policies initially adopted by the commander of one regiment, a unit whose manpower had been supplied by draft boards operating from Buffalo, New York, deliberately sought to foster the identification of soldiers with their home communities. Thus, “each company was made up of men from the same local board or from several boards. The idea was to keep friends in the same company and to make the different companies the exclusive property of some

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96 White, Nelson E., Private First Class, Company E, 114th Engineer Regiment, 39th (“Delta”) Division, untitled reminiscences, Folder 12, Box 107, Series IX: Virginia War Diaries and Incidents, 1915 – 1922, RG 66, LVA. See also Owens, Teddy, Private, Company D, 358th Infantry Regiment, 90th (“Alamo”) Division, letter to mother, 28 April 1918, Folder 27, Box 52, Dickenson Co. (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA. Owens was a native of Virginia who had been transferred to a unit made up chiefly of Texans and Oklahomans, an assignment that appears to have resulted in a degree of social isolation that is apparent in his letter.
district of the City of Buffalo.” This practice never became official Army policy, being impossible to sustain as the need to provide under-strength units with reinforcements resulted in the transfer of thousands of soldiers from unit to unit without the slightest regard for their geographic origin. Yet, the expectation of undergoing at least the first stages of their military training with friends, neighbors, and perhaps even family members could only underscore the importance of local ties and allegiances in the minds of draftees.

If local allegiances played an important – albeit underutilized – role as a motivational and cohesive force among draftees, they were absolutely central to the individual and collective identity of National Guardsmen. The institutional ethos of the National Guard, as it had evolved by the time of the First World War, rested on two pillars. The first consisted of the Guard’s claim to represent the ultimate embodiment of America’s “amateur military tradition.” Its roots reaching back to the militias of the Colonial and Early National periods of American history, this corpus of rhetoric and ideas extolled voluntary units composed of part-time “citizen-soldiers” as the form of military organization most compatible with American democratic ideals. According to its advocates, a system of military service that depended on civilian volunteers who underwent periodic military service on peacetime in units based in the home communities satisfied the demands of national security and domestic order while ensuring that America’s constitutional fabric would remain safe from subversion by a military dictatorship. Soldiers who were, first and foremost, citizens with a socio-economic stake in their communities, and who trained and served alongside their relatives, friends, and neighbors, could draw upon the unique esprit de corps that cemented their unit to elevate themselves to the same level of military effectiveness as soldiers of the

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Regular Army. However, unlike the professional soldier whose minimal ties to any one locality oriented his allegiance away from community and toward the authoritarian institution in which he served, a National Guardsman would not pose a significant threat to cherished constitutional liberties enjoyed by the nation’s constituent communities. With its superficial resemblance to the civic virtues of classical republicanism, this vision enjoyed a wide currency among small-town middle-class elites increasingly concerned with their communities’ gradual loss of cultural autonomy and economic independence. It also fed feelings of superiority toward, and fundamental distinction from, professional soldiers and draftees alike that many National Guardsmen assiduously cultivated before, during, and even after the Great War.

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99 The historian of an artillery regiment of the Massachusetts National Guard and himself a veteran of the Great War, summarized this attitude in the following passage:

[National Guardsmen] were soldiers neither by compulsion nor by profession; they were not in the Army against their will or for the sake of pay or a career; they were civilians at heart and had no wish to be anything else, having voluntarily given up positions for reasons of patriotism.

The intimate ties connecting National Guard units to individual communities constituted the second pillar of that institution’s unique identity. With the manpower of each National Guard company and regiment drawn from specific geographic areas or from narrowly-defined social or – in some cases – ethnic groups, such units had historically played a central role in the social and political lives of the localities, regions, and social communities in which they were based.100 The 7th Regiment of the New York National Guard, for example, carried on its muster rolls the names of so many scions of New York City’s socially prominent families that it was commonly known as the “Silk Stocking” or “Blue-Blood” Regiment. The unit’s strict peacetime entry requirements endowed it with the character of an exclusive club for New York City’s patrician elite, the regiment’s membership being limited only to recruits able to produce evidence of proper pedigree or social connections.101 The stringent membership criteria were relaxed with the coming of the war, but the unit’s socially exclusive nature remained a central element of its identity.102 Similarly, the 8th Infantry Regiment of the Illinois National Guard served as the focal point of community pride and social aspirations of Chicago’s African-American middle-class. Established in 1890 on the initiative of several successful black professionals and businessmen, the unit quickly became the exclusive preserve of the community’s social and professional elite. Its membership requirements, though perhaps not as stringent as those of the 7th New York, effectively ensured that entry into the 8th Illinois would be restricted to college graduates, professionals,


101 Cooper, The Rise of the National Guard, 72 – 73.

skilled tradesmen, and business owners. In Milwaukee, Company K of the 1st Infantry Regiment of the Wisconsin National Guard played an analogous role in the life of that city’s immigrant Polish community. Organized in 1874 and named in honor of the pre-eminent Polish hero of the American War of Independence, the Kosciusko Guards owed their existence to the initiative of the Roman Catholic clergy who presided over the Milwaukee’s Polish parishes. The company restricted its membership to recruits of Polish descent, and claimed the distinction of being the only National Guard unit in which English was not the language of command in peacetime. Situated at the heart of an ethnic community’s social and cultural life, it bore a close resemblance to the more famous 69th Regiment of the New York National Guard, a unit that enjoyed close ties with the local Irish community, but that also became a magnet for Roman Catholic recruits of other ethnic backgrounds who joined its ranks after the American entry into the Great War. Father Francis P. Duffy, the regiment’s Catholic chaplain, explained how the regiment attempted to tailor its recruitment


methods in such a way as to minimize the potential of wartime mobilization to dilute the unit’s distinctive socio-cultural and religious composition:

The old-timers were told to bring in friends who had the right stuff in them. The Catholic Clergy were asked to send in good men from the Parish athletic clubs….Our 2,000 men were a picked lot. They came mainly from Irish County Societies and from Catholic Athletic Clubs. A number of these latter Irish bore distinctly German, French, Italian, and Polish names….Men of Irish blood were attracted by the traditions of the 69th, and many Catholics wanted to be with a regiment where they could be sure of being able to attend their religious duties. About 5 percent of the 2,000 were Irish neither by race or creed.

As Duffy’s description of the recruiting practices of the 69th makes clear, the regiment’s leadership had a very specific notion of what constituted “the right stuff.” The reliance on “old-timers,” Catholic clergy, and religious and ethnic social organizations as catalysts of recruitment ensured that the regiment’s distinct identity would survive the contingencies of the rapid expansion that the war’s outbreak necessitated. Some degree of dilution would be unavoidable, but even that would be kept to a minimum by the common confessional allegiance that its new, non-Irish elements shared with the unit’s solid Irish core. With luck the identity of the unit would remain firmly grounded in the narrow community with which it was associated in peacetime.

The 7th and 69th New York, the 8th Illinois, and the Kosciusko Guards were exceptional among National Guard units in enforcing the strict criteria of membership to which they resorted in an effort to maintain their social, ethnic, or denominational character. There was nothing unusual, however, about the extent to which association with a specific community – even if one defined in terms other than those of geographical locale – shaped the allegiances of their rank-and-file. The vast majority of National Guard formations, their institutional background and history nowhere near as exotic or distinguished as the four

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units discussed above, stressed their close identification with a locality or region as the core of their members’ allegiances. That many small-town Guard companies served as venues of socialization and community-building as of military training enhanced the resilience of such bonds. The local armory, apart from functioning as the site for the once-weekly drill and parade night, also fulfilled the role of an informal meeting-place and a hub of the social and civic life of the community. It was place of interaction between family members, friends, and neighbors and of their informal socialization into the community.\textsuperscript{106} It offered new members of the local community – provided they conformed to its social and cultural benchmarks – with opportunities to establish the social networks they would need to develop in order to secure employment and gain acceptance as full-fledged members of the community.\textsuperscript{107} Finally, it furnished the location for community dances, banquets, athletic events, and civic celebrations of which the unit itself was often the host and integral participant.\textsuperscript{108} While no

\textsuperscript{106} “We had a company of the [Michigan National Guard] since before the Spanish-American War. As a kid I hung around the armory during their drills on Monday night, knew all the members.” See Bradley, Daniel E., First Sergeant, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{107} Ted Marks, an English immigrant from Liverpool, was persuaded to join a local National Guard unit shortly after his arrival in Kansas City in 1906. As a skilled tailor, Marks does not appear to have had problems finding employment, but his decision to volunteer for the Guard was definitely linked to the desire to broaden his social connections: “Upon arriving in Kansas City, I met a fellow named Trenary and he had a boy in the National Guard, and Trenary was the chief mechanic, and he told me it would be a fine thing for me if I would join the National Guard and get acquainted with some people.” See James R. Fuchs, oral history interview with Marks, Ted, Captain, Battery D, 129th Field Artillery Regiment, 60th Artillery Brigade, 35th Division, Kansas City, Missouri, 19 September 1962, Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter HST), Independence, Missouri, retrieved on 14 June 2006 from http://www.trumanlibrary.gov/oralhist.

\textsuperscript{108} Detroit’s Light Guard Armory, for example, served as the city’s “Convention Hall, Masonic Temple auditorium, Olympia and Orchestra Hall” in addition to its purely military function. That the construction of many an armory had been financed by public subscription cemented the place of these structures at the heart of community life. Constructed in 1898, the Detroit armory had been financed through the issue of public bonds, most of which were purchased by the city’s business community. See Robert M. Fogelson, America’s Armories: Architecture, Society, and Public Order (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), 55 – 62 (community financing or armories), 209 – 212 (social and non-military functions of armories), quotation on 209. Fogelson’s work remains seminal as a study of the socio-political purpose of National Guard armories, although as its subtitle suggests, its emphasis is on the armories’ function as bastions of domestic order in large cities. For the Detroit armory in particular, see Woehl, Harold C., Second Lieutenant, Company H, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, “Corporal Tanglefoot’s
Guard unit was “typical” in this respect, the fond memories that one Guardsman retained of pre-war service in his local regiment illustrate what must have been the norm in many other organizations of this type:

Prior to the war the armory of the old 13th [New York National Guard] Regiment appeared to us more as an immense athletic or social club than an establishment for the actual training of soldiers. Companies vied with each other in obtaining the best men possible. Rosters contained names of athletes who were star performers and champions in their own fields….Our drill floor was the largest and finest in the entire city, plus a spacious swimming pool for the enjoyment of its members…[t]here remained that “old neighborhood” spirit, and on regular drill nights many of us reported an hour or so earlier to get in a game of poker, or at times deftly follow the sparkling little “lumps of sugar,” which when properly matched, always added up to the unusual number of seven…The average age was about twenty age or less, so that most of us were just kids…The blessed happiness of being single seemed to prevail for most of us and we fondly recall escorting our best girl, mother or dad, or other close friends, to the armory on review nights.¹⁰⁹

The historical memory of the military exploits of the local Guard unit in wars past bolstered its connections with the community and represented a source of considerable civic pride. Many Guard companies, batteries, and regiments could trace their institutional lineage to various volunteer and state militia units whose history stretched as far back as the era of the Civil War, if not even further.¹¹⁰ Their battle honors placed the community’s own past

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¹⁰⁹ Arthur Hinderer, The Story of Battery “D”: World War I, 1917 – 1919 (N. p.: Battery “D” 59th Artillery Veterans Association, n.d.), 7 – 8. Michigander Herbert Woehl felt an equally strong emotional attachment to his unit’s armory in Detroit and affirmed its status as the throbbing heart of his city’s life in even firmer terms:

Its old floors had echoes to the tread of marching feet thru the years of drill nites…And its walls had echoed to the music of many fine concerts and the voices of many noted orators…Great parties were staged there which included ever-popular military balls…Boxing matches, basketball games and other athletic events were held at the armory….The Detroit Armory was more than brick and steel and mortar. It was the landmark which witnessed Detroit the beautiful become Detroit the Dynamic.


¹¹⁰ The 116th Infantry Regiment, a unit that came into existence after the consolidation of three regiments of the Virginia National Guard, was typical in this respect, its institutional heritage traceable back to the Colonial era, and its individual components claiming direct descent from Thomas J. Jackson’s “Stonewall
within the heroic master narrative of the country’s history as a whole. They highlighted the contribution of the community to the national development of the United States. At the same time, they allowed the locality to retain a sense of its own historical and cultural uniqueness. Once war came in 1917, the heritage of a unit emerged as an important consideration in influencing volunteers’ choice of which units to join. As a New Yorker, Albert Ettinger could sign up with any of the half dozen or so Guard units based in his native city. As an Irish-American, however, he believed that he could only be happy in one regiment. “I wanted to join the ‘Fighting 69th’, because that regiment had a glorious reputation among my friends.”

James Minogue, who volunteered for the same unit, elaborated on what Ettinger had in mind:

A lot of the kids who went with me [to baseball games before the war] ended up in the 69th. The 69th, you see, was quite a thing to the Irish kids, narrow backs and greenhorns alike. We’d hear about their great record in the Civil War and Thomas Francis Meagher and Michael Corcoran. So I guess it was natural that when war came, I would want to go over with them.

The central position that a National Guard company, battery, or regiment occupied in the history and the socio-cultural life of the community contributed to the aura of social prestige – and in some cases social exclusivity – that surrounded the members of many such

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111 Ettinger’s dream of joining the ‘Fighting 69th’ was dashed by his father, who insisted that his son join the 7th New York instead, because “a good friend of his…was also the first sergeant in Company L of that regiment.” Though plausible as an explanation of the motives that prompted Ettinger senior to steer his son toward the 7th, it is plausible to assume that the socially prestigious reputation of the latter unit might also have played a considerable part in the parental preferences. Ever the dutiful son, the younger Ettinger reported to the 7th, but eventually contrived to obtain a transfer to the 69th later in the war. See Albert M. Ettinger and A. Churchill Ettinger, A Doughboy with the Fighting Sixty-Ninth: A Remembrance of World War I (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: White Mane Press, 1992), 1 – 3.

units. The company of the Missouri National Guard in which Chester Marshall enlisted in the summer of 1916 was, in his eyes, “a sort of small town Country Club. If you belonged to the local military organization, you sort of belonged” to the community as a whole.113 Though plenty of National Guard units suffered from a chronic lack of manpower in peacetime and experienced constant difficulties in recruiting and retaining personnel, many others could afford to be highly selective in their choice of candidates applying to fill the vacancies in their ranks. To become a member of the grandiosely named “Fulton Fusiliers,” a company of a Georgia National Guard regiment, a potential recruit “had to be voted upon” by the unit’s members. This policy, combined with the relatively low authorized peacetime strength of the company, ensured that there would always be “a considerable waiting list” of hopefuls aspiring to membership in this socially exclusive unit.114

As extensions of the community upon which they relied for recruits, Guard units often reflected and perpetuated that community’s dominant socio-economic patterns. Practically as a matter of course, a community’s leaders — be they professionals, the socially and economically prominent, the politically active, or the socially notorious — dominated their Guard unit’s commissioned and senior non-commissioned ranks.115 Theoretically,

113 Marshall, Chester B., Company K/Company M, 139th Infantry Regiment, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.


115 On the whole, the National Guard drew its officers from the propertied classes represented by a mixture of, “on the one hand, the older, entrepreneurial, and independent middle class and, on the other, the ‘new’ middle class of managers, accountants, lawyers, and other educated men serving in the expanding corporations.” Artisans, craftsmen, and skilled workers tended to serve as senior NCOs. The hierarchy of National Guard units thus mirrored to a great degree the systems of social and occupational stratification that characterized America’s industrial and business sector at the turn of the twentieth century, with upper- and middle-managers fulfilling the executive position of officers, and foremen and factory-floor overseers replicating, as sergeants and corporals in the armory or drill hall, their civilian supervisory roles. Finally, the rank-and-file of most National Guard units was made up primarily of those social elements that, in civilian life, occupied the lower rungs of workplace hierarchy: office clerks, bookkeepers, factory and railway workers,
Guard officers were elected by the enlisted men, with any and all members of the unit eligible to enter the contest. In reality, the results of the elections tended to confirm the complex structures of social deference that governed the community’s public life. On the eve of the Great War, the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the Connecticut National Guard was commanded by a Lieutenant-Colonel who in civilian life was one of his state’s Congressional representatives. His battalion commanders included the state commissioner of motor vehicles and a district judge. The regimental rolls of units that made up the New York National Guard featured Vanderbilts, Fisks, and other socially prominent names in positions of regimental, battalion, and company command. Their subordinates, “[f]ar from resenting command by gentlemen obviously prosperous…took a solid pride in being associated…with machinists, tailor, and a few unskilled laborers. See Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard*, 72 – 74; and idem., *Citizens and Soldiers: A History of the North Dakota National Guard* (Lincoln, Nebraska, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 21.

In the wake of the military reforms initiated in the early twentieth century by Secretary of War Elihu Root, the Regular Army undertook sustained efforts to raise the standards of military professionalism within the National Guard. These bore modest fruit by the time of the First World War, but the tradition of electing officers by the rank and file remained a sacrosanct “democratic” custom the Guard refused to abolish irrespective of the disdain with which Regulars regarded it. The latter claimed that the elective tradition undermined discipline by creating the illusion of equality between officers and enlisted men. Guardsmen retorted with the argument that the election of officers and NCOs was inseparable from the National Guard’s status as the defender of the democratic ideals of the United States. Apart from the detrimental effects it had on military efficiency, the practice of electing officers also made Guard units vulnerable to “political opportunism and personality clashes” that had the capacity to erode their military efficiency even further. This problem was all the more serious because commissions in the National Guard were also subject to the recommendation, approval, or both, by governors and legislatures of individual states, and thus functioned as sources of political patronage. The most that some National Guard units were willing to do by 1917 was to require candidates for commissioned and senior non-commissioned vacancies to take oral or written examinations that tested their qualification for the post they aspired to fulfill. But even those who successfully passed the exams had to be confirmed in their position by a vote of the unit’s rank and file. See Cooper, *The Rise of the National Guard*, 65 – 68, 108 – 127.

See Schaffer, Edward A., Corporal, Company C, 102nd Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
men of wealth and family,” viewing such connections as invaluable from the perspective of social and professional aspirations in civilian life.\textsuperscript{118}

The New York National Guard included some of the country’s most socially prestigious regiments, including the fabled 7\textsuperscript{th} New York Infantry. But similar social dynamics governed personnel selection and appointments to positions of responsibility in units located in other parts of the country and endowed with much less luster. The Guard company based in Weston, Missouri, was commanded in 1917 by a “rich druggist” who enjoyed a reputation as “a hail fellow well met.” His two lieutenants were a “popular” jeweler and a tobacco farmer, respectively. The battalion of which the company formed a part was, in its turn, commanded by a real estate agent turned major.\textsuperscript{119} Their ranks in the unit could be said to correspond to the socio-economic status their professions had conferred upon them.\textsuperscript{120} With positions of command responsibility allocated on the basis of

\textsuperscript{118} Arthur Pound, “O’Ryan’s Traveling Circus,” \textit{Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review}, 47 (5 August 1961), 260, copy in papers of O’Ryan, John F., Major-General, Headquarters, 27\textsuperscript{th} (“New York”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. The 116\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, a unit composed of several units of the Virginia National Guard, represents an additional example of a regiment officered by the sprigs of local aristocracy, with the scions of prominent families of Virginia’s Tidewater region conspicuous among the company-grade officers of the unit. See Allen, Herbert O., Corporal, Company L, 116\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 29\textsuperscript{th} (“Blue and Grey”) Division, “Experiences during World War I” (typescript memoir), 1, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{119} Predictably, few of these officers appeared to possess a degree of military competence and leadership ability commensurate with their social standing in the local community. According to one of his subordinates, the company commander in question “had no military training whatever” and “didn’t know right face from right oblique.” The major, who also doubled as the regimental judge advocate, “knew as much about [military] law as I knew about running a battleship.” See Marshall, Chester B., Company K/Company M, 139\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 35\textsuperscript{th} Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{120} The example of another National Guard unit – a company from rural Ohio – illustrates this trend with equal effectiveness. Based in the generically named Pleasantville, the seat of Fairfield County, the local Guard company had been effectively moribund until a few weeks before the American declaration of war against Germany. With the possibility of war approaching, the socio-economic elite of the county eagerly responded to the appeal made by the state governor to bring the ranks of the Ohio Guard to full authorized strength. As could be expected, commissions in the unit went to the most prominent participants of the county’s economic and social life. The captaincy and one of the lieutenancies fell to the owners and proprietors of this predominantly farming community’s largest non-agricultural business concerns: a lumber mill and a hominy mill, respectively. The owner of the latter also happened to be one of the elders of the local Methodist
such criteria, considerations of military competence or fitness to command often fell to the bottom of a candidate’s required qualifications for the desired position. The recollections of William S. Triplet, a high-school student who joined the National Guard company being organized in his small Missouri town in the heady days of April 1917, provide a case study of the process at work:

At long last we…held our election of officers. Votes were cast in order of priorities for political activity, pleasing personality, vigor and saltiness of speeches, warlike enthusiasm, military knowledge, and the ability to command. Scott [a locally prominent businessman] was confirmed as captain by a narrow margin. Mr. Berry, a late enlistee whose qualifications were a friendly disposition, an endless fund of filthy jokes, and an ever-filled pocket flask, was elected as first lieutenant. Salisbury, the most capable of the lot, trailed as second lieutenant. Mr. Dunnica, a bookkeeper, was appointed as first sergeant. We were then accepted in the Guard as D Company of the Sixth Missouri Infantry Regiment…God help the Kaiser now.\[121\]

Though the end result was hardly in keeping with the imperatives of military effectiveness, the custom of electing officers and NCOs grounded the identity of a National Guard unit in the community from which the commissioned and non-commissioned leadership cadre of the unit was drawn. Ostensibly, this arrangement might at first appear patently unfair to those without the economic resources, political connections, or social standing capable of smoothing the path to a sergeant’s stripes or an officer’s shoulder tabs. Closer scrutiny reveals that the system was based on firm contractual foundations that, regardless of their informal and “personalized” character, delineated a set of mutual obligations that commissioned and enlisted Guardsmen alike were expected fulfill toward each other. Guard officers and NCOs who owed their positions to the popularity they enjoyed among the men who elected them could claim that from the perspective of the rank-

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Episcopal congregation. The other lieutenancy was allocated to the minister who headed the same congregation. See Martin, Sumner L. First Lieutenant, 112th Train Headquarters and Military Police, 37th (“Buckeye”) Division, “World War I, 1917 – 1919: Chaplain Sumner L. Martin, 37th Division,” (typescript memoir edited by Louise Martin Mohler, daughter), 1, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\[121\] Triplet, *A Youth in the Meuse-Argonne*, 3.
and-file, service under the command and leadership of men the privates and corporals already knew or were acquainted with in civilian life was implicitly preferable to obeying the orders of complete strangers with no roots in the community. Above all, such an arrangement ensured that the enlisted soldiers would be under the command of individuals most capable of looking after their welfare and interests as soldiers and citizens. With its peacetime leaders occupying the highest positions of command in wartime, officers and enlisted men alike could be assured that their community’s complex fabric of socio-economic patronage would continue to operate even on active service in wartime.

The circumstances surrounding the organization of a unit of the Pennsylvania National Guard represent a case in point. In the first weeks of the war, Walton Clark, Jr., a middle manager at a Philadelphia utility firm and an enthusiastic advocate of the military preparedness movement asked the firm’s president for authorization to recruit a National Guard company from among the firm’s employees. The firm’s management agreed, further promising that if the state’s National Guard were to be called out for federal service – as it eventually was in July 1917 – any employee who had enlisted would continue to receive his regular wages and would be allowed to return to his job upon return from the war. When the company came into being, Clark became its captain. It was, as he implied, the least he deserved for providing his fellow employees and soldiers not only with the opportunity to serve alongside their co-workers, but also with a solid guarantee of post-war job security. “[T]he recruits,” he argued, “would all be fellow employees of the same company, they
would suffer no loss of pay and they would be under the leadership of a fellow employee whom they already knew or about whom they knew.”

Among the most attractive features of service in a National Guard unit was the expectation of disciplinary standards that were much more relaxed and informal than those characteristic of disciplinary regimes prevailing in the Regular Army or the National (Draft) Army. This expectation, too, was the product of the “home-town” character of many National Guard units and their identification with specific locales. Though despised by professional soldiers as the most flagrant manifestation of the National Guard’s amateurism, inefficiency, and indiscipline, the informal nature of social relations between officers and men who had been friends, neighbors, and co-workers in peacetime was widely recognized by the Guardsmen themselves as an essential feature of the institutional ethos of locally-raised companies or regiments. Officers and enlisted men alike accepted without reservation the assumption that the continued command authority of the former was explicitly dependent on their capability to lead the latter without having to resort to stifling disciplinary methods associated with service in Regular Army units. Promises of institutional commitment to relaxed discipline and a light workload could even become a bargaining chip.

122 Clark, Walton, Jr., Lieutenant-Colonel, Battery F, 3rd Battalion, 107th Field Artillery Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, “Three Brothers in World War I” (typescript memoir), 12–15, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

123 William Roper, a former college student and part-time shoe and clothing clerk at Heer’s Department Store in Kansas City served in a company composed of many of his fellow employees, and commanded by a captain who in peacetime had worked as a floor manager in the same store. In consequence, the social atmosphere in the unit was conducive to a level of familiarity between officers and men that would have been unimaginable in the Regular or National Armies. “[S]ometimes when we were alone [the company commander] would call me ‘Leon’ instead of Private Roper.” See Roper, William L., Private First Class, Company B, 130th Machine Gun Battalion, 35th Division, “With Harry Truman in World War I,” National Guard Magazine (July 1982), 30, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
that Guard recruiters, desperate to attract the manpower needed to bring their units to authorized wartime strength, held out as an enticement to potential volunteers.\footnote{The recruiting campaign initiated by a newly-organized logistical support unit of the Kansas National Guard in the early stages of the war serves as a case in point. During a recruiting rally held in front of the drug store in the town of Minneola, the leadership cadre of the unit promised the handful of locals who had turned out to listen that “there would be no drilling, no loading or unloading; we probably would have big White trucks and we even pictured a trip across the United States from the truck factory to the seaboard.” In spite of these blandishments, “[w]e got no recruits but interested several young men from the village.” See Lambert, Calvin H., Sergeant, 3rd Truck Company, 117th Ammunition Train, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, untitled typescript memoir, 3 – 4, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.}

Ensooned at the center of a community’s social life; its officer and NCO cadre corresponding to the community’s social, political, and economic elite; and its rank-and-file often reflecting the peacetime networks of social relations of family, neighborhood, church, and workplace, the National Guard company, battery, or regiment epitomized the localism of early twentieth century America. Collectively, these attributes strengthened the claims of Guard units to represent their parent communities on the national stage and in the wider world, providing the individuals who served in them with the opportunity to perform a vital civic duty that benefited the locality and the nation alike. Volunteering for a Guard unit based in one’s hometown or county allowed Americans to make sense of abstract notions of patriotism on the national level by channeling them toward, and translating them into, the concrete act of serving on behalf of their local communities, alongside and under the command of friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even family members. It was precisely this parochial but tangible allegiance to the immediate community that dictated an individual’s response to the crisis of war. A veteran of service on the Mexican border in 1916, Russell Adams rationalized his decision to re-enlist in his home town’s Guard company the following years with reference to the obligations he believed he owed to his friends and neighbors, rather than to his nation as a whole. Initially, he claimed, he
hadn’t really been interested in what was going on in Europe…Why, hell, when the damn thing broke out in ’14, I was more concerned with the Braves….Well, it was different now. Company B was made up of Rumford boys, and I was one of them. If the 2nd Maine went, I was going.\textsuperscript{125}

As evident from the explanations other Guardsmen provided for their decisions to enlist; their rationale for joining a particular unit; and their descriptions of the social milieu prevalent in their company or regiment, service in a local Guard unit was above all an expression of loyalty to their home town and a demonstration of allegiance to the social networks that defined their civilian lives. Ellsworth Fordham joined up before the war “for exercise, horse back drill, and sociability…along with brother and neighbors.”\textsuperscript{126} Warren Wilkerson, who at fifteen years of age was too young to be drafted, enlisted in the National Guard in order not to become separated from his high school friends who had also volunteered.\textsuperscript{127} “I had a great many friends in Troop B, and all I knew was they were going and I wanted to go,” Philip Hammersmith remembered. “I felt that if I didn’t go, the world would come to an end.”\textsuperscript{128} In short, National Guardsmen volunteered for local units to maximize the possibility of going through the war in the company of siblings, neighbors, and friends;\textsuperscript{129} classmates and fraternity brothers;\textsuperscript{130} co-workers;\textsuperscript{131} fellow church members;\textsuperscript{132} or 

\textsuperscript{125} Adams, Russell, Sergeant, Company B, 103rd Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, in Berry, ed., \textit{Make the Kaiser Dance}, 189.

\textsuperscript{126} Fordham, Ellsworth W., Private, Company D, 105th Machine Gun Battalion, 27th (“New York”) Division, Army Service Experience Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{127} Wilkerson, Warren O., Private, Company M, 111th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{128} Hammersmith, Philip H., Private First Class, 101st Machine Gun Battalion, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, in Berry, ed., \textit{Make the Kaiser Dance}, 176.

\textsuperscript{129} Palmer, Merwin H., Corporal, Company D, 101st Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; Schaffer, Edward A., Corporal, Company A, 101st Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; Cunningham, Joseph M., Private, Battery B, 101st Artillery Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, untitled typescript memoir, 2; Corkery, Raymond F., Battery F, 102nd Field Artillery Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; Kemerer, Duncan M. Private, Company B, 111th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division,
simply individuals whom they knew only as the inhabitants of the same town, county, or state.  

Merritt Cutler doubtless spoke for countless National Guardsmen when he posed

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130 Christensen, Walter, Private, Company C, 101st Field Signal Battalion, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; Engel, Charles M., Private First Class, Battery A, 119th Field Artillery Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; both in World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

131 It was not uncommon for the employees of a business concern to volunteer in a body, thus providing the core of a number of established as well as newly-organized National Guard units. See for example Hagan, Fendell A., First Sergeant, Company F, 140th Infantry Regiment, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; Roper, William F., Private First Class, Company B, 130th Machine Gun Battalion, “With Harry Truman in World War I,” National Guard Magazine (July 1982), 30; Hansen, Harry P. R., Master Gunner, Headquarters Company, 113th Field Artillery Regiment, 55th Field Artillery Brigade, 30th (“Old Hickory”) Division, “From a Diary and Recollection of World War I” (typescript memoir), 1 – 2; and Wood, Clarence M., 140th Ambulance Company, 110th Sanitary Train, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; all in World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

132 Sirmay, Emery J., Private First Class, Headquarters, 33rd (“Prairie”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; War World I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

133 “I enlisted in the National Guards…in order to be associated with home town and other units in Kansas.” See Spivey, William L., Supply Company, 137th Infantry Regiment, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; War World I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. See also Shiflett, Robert A., Corporal, Headquarters Company, 120th Infantry Regiment, 30th (“Old Hickory”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; Johnson, Russell, Sergeant, Battery C, 130th Field Artillery Regiment, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; all in World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
the rhetorical question “what could be nicer than going [to war] with a bunch of men you knew?”

The recruitment methods adopted by individual Guard units exploited the theme of their intimate connections with local communities for all it was worth. In so doing, recruitment tactics testified to the enduring hold that allegiances to the local community maintained on the minds of Americans on the eve of the Great War. Regardless of the type, size, or location of unit, recruiting posters sought to attract volunteers by depicting enlistment in the local Guard company, regiment, battery, troop, or regiment as an opportunity to partake in whatever historical traditions the unit may have acquired in the past; fulfill one’s civic obligation to one’s community; and serve alongside friends and neighbors. The poster issued by the 69th New York touched upon all of these incentives in turn:

ENLIST TO-DAY
IN
THE 69TH INFANTRY
JOIN THE FAMOUS IRISH REGIMENT
THAT FOUGHT IN ALL THE GREAT
BATTLES OF THE CIVIL WAR
FROM BULL RUN TO APPOMATTOX
GO TO THE FRONT
WITH YOUR FRIENDS
DON’T BE DRAFTED INTO SOME REGIMENT
WHERE YOU DON’T KNOW ANYONE

The placard thus invoked the regiment’s connections with New York’s Irish community, drew attention to its glorious history, and held out the prospect of active service in the company of friends from civilian life. It concluded with a none-too-subtle reminder that volunteering for a unit made up of friends and acquaintances was infinitely preferably to

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being drafted and compelled to serve with strangers. Conspicuous by its absence was any reference to patriotic sentiment on the national level, with the main thrust of the recruiting appeal consisting of an appeal to duty on behalf of the local community, in this particular case defined in ethnic rather than geographical terms.  

Units lacking the glamorous history of the 69th could still take advantage of their close identification with the community or state in an effort to entice the recruits they needed. The recruiting drive organized by the officers of a newly authorized artillery battery of the Tennessee National Guard featured newspaper advertisements, banners, and posters that held out to potential recruits the prospect of going to war “WITH THE HOME BOYS…IT’S BEST TO GO WITH THOSE YOU KNOW…JOIN CHATTANOOGA’S OWN VOLUNTEER BATTERY.” Also, the wider recruiting campaigns of which these kinds of printed media formed an integral part demonstrated the resilience of localism as a

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135 The only indication evident in the poster that the 69th was being organized for service on behalf of the government of the United States was a small American flag in the upper left-hand corner of the sheet. For a graphic representation of the poster, see the back cover of Ettinger, *A Doughboy with the Fighting Sixty-Ninth*.

136 West, Ernest P., Corporal, Battery B, 114th Field Artillery Regiment, 30th (“Old Hickory”) Division, “Chattanooga’s Battery B, 1917 – 19: History of Battery B, 114th Field Artillery, 30th Division, with Some Trials and Tribulations of Its Personnel, as Observed by Ernest Patrick West, Corporal” (privately published unit history/memoir, 1967), 9, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. The company being organized by the notables of Ohio’s Fairfield County portrayed their recruiting efforts as “a chance to enlist with the ‘Home Boys.’” The 1st Wisconsin Cavalry conveyed a slightly more sophisticated message, one that raised the specter of the draft and alluded to the unit’s historical record of active service (in this case limited to suppressing labor unrest and a spell of duty on the Mexican border), while touting the advantages of serving with associates from civilian life, but its message was essentially analogous to the plainly-worded pitch mentioned above. “If you wait for the draft, you will not be able to choose for yourself,” the recruiting poster of the 1st Wisconsin proclaimed. “If you act now you can go with your friends in an organization that has already earned a splendid reputation.” The tendency of recruiters to harp on the disadvantages of the getting drafted, as opposed to volunteering for the Guard and ensuring a spot alongside friends and neighbors, grew more shrill in direct proportion to their inability to build their units up to minimum wartime strength before 5 August 1917, the deadline the War Department had designated for the attainment of that goal. In the words of an officer serving in a North Dakota regiment that was still struggling to fill its ranks as late as the middle of July, enlistment in the unit he commanded represented the “last chance to join a company in which they have friends instead of waiting for the draft which will place them in ranks where they are strangers.” See Martin, Sumner L. First Lieutenant, 112th Train Headquarters and Military Police, 37th (“Buckeye”) Division, “World War I, 1917 – 1919: Chaplain Sumner L. Martin, 37th Division,” (typescript memoir edited by Louise Martin Mohler, daughter), 1, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; and Carl Penner, Frederic Sammond, and H. M. Appel, *The 120th Field Artillery Diary: 1880 – 1919* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Hammersmith-Kortmeyer, 1928), 48; Cooper, *Citizens as Soldiers*, 193.
focus of allegiance. Units vying with each other for a limited number of volunteers solicited the aid and endorsement of well-known local worthies and familiar community organizations to drum up recruits and spice up recruiting rallies. The readiness of many Guard units to exploit the tightly-knit social relationships that bound community members at home, in school, and in the workplace reinforces the notion that local allegiances, expressed in the sense of obligation to those one intimately knew in civilian life, remained a pivotal element of the American identity well into the second decade of the twentieth century.

Recruiting drives undertaken by National Guard units illustrated their stature as extensions of the community, and attested to the strength of localism, in other important respects as well. The social cachet that accrued to individuals by virtue of their membership in as prestigious a community institution as a local Guard company, battery, or troop had its counterpart in the role such local units played in the intense competition between individual communities within the same county. Neighboring towns that provided the manpower for units based in their general area of a state viewed engaged in fierce battles related to the

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137 This trend enhanced the appearance of recruiting rallies as events little different from such leisure-oriented, peacetime community rituals as county or state fairs, church picnics, or family reunions. In consequence, recruiting rallies organized by Guard units sought to convey their appeals for volunteers in terms that maximized their value as community entertainment. The advertisement for a recruiting rally organized by the National Guard company based in Ohio’s Fairfield County exemplified this pattern. It held out to prospective attendees the prospect of a concert by “[a] military band of 15 pieces” (actually the band of the local high school), and oratorical fireworks by the superintendent of the local Methodist school district, “a noted speaker and military man…Don’t fail to hear him!” On a grander scale, the recruiting drive launched by the 1st Infantry Regiment of the North Dakota National Guard featured a parade through downtown Fargo, a marching band, and patriotic speeches. See Martin, Sumner L. First Lieutenant, 112th Train Headquarters and Military Police, 37th (“Buckeye”) Division, “World War I, 1917 – 1919: Chaplain Sumner L. Martin, 37th Division,” (typescript memoir edited by Louise Martin Mohler, daughter), 1, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; and Cooper, Citizens as Soldiers, 193.

138 See for example the highly “personalized” nature of the recruiting campaigns undertaken by two New England units of the National Guard. Enlisted members of the 2nd Connecticut Infantry were effectively encouraged to pressure friends and relatives to volunteer. At the same time, “recruiting parties combed the streets, factories, and offices” of New Haven. The Boston-based unit that eventually became the 101st Engineer Regiment utilized equally aggressive recruitment methods that relied on former and current members to drum up recruits “on the Common, at street corners, and in the theatres,” and sought to attract men from colleges and schools. See Strickland, Connecticut Fights, 58; and Carroll J. Swan, My Company (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 3.
apportionment of officers’ commissions in newly-organized or recently enlarged Guard organizations. Such commissions represent important sources of political patronage but, perhaps even more significantly in a political culture the stressed the importance of civic pride in the individual and collective achievements of the local community, they boosted the social clout of the localities whose native sons were among the officers of a local Guard unit. The socio-political leaders of towns and communities whose demands for representation on the roster of a unit’s officers were either ignored or marginalized by those responsible for raising the unit could simply refuse to co-operate with the efforts of recruiters. Given the fact that early recruiting campaigns depended so heavily on exploiting the informal networks of communal life – including ties of family, friendship, or workplace camaraderie in an attempt to induce recruits to come forward, the unwillingness of local civic leaders to endorse or assist the recruiting drive in their town had the potential to seriously undermine even the most vigorous enlistment campaign, and perhaps even cripple it altogether.

The experience of a company of the Ohio National Guard illustrated the dynamics of inter-community rivalries with particular forcefulness. Having taken the initiative in launching a recruiting drive, the socio-economic elite of Pleasantville felt fully justified in apportioning commissions among themselves to the exclusion of their counterparts from other towns in the area. The response of the latter to this attempt to monopolize anticipated glories of military service was immediate and unequivocal. “[W]e discovered after visiting Lancaster, the county seat, and several of the larger communities [in the company’s recruitment area], unless someone of their community was given the First and Second Lieutenancy, they would not cooperate [with the recruiting effort].” The men of Pleasantville managed to appease their neighbors only after one of the unit’s original organizers agreed to
forfeit his claim to a lieutenancy so as to vacate it for someone from one of Pleasantville’s sullen rivals.  

The sense of socio-cultural distinction that the inhabitants of geographical locales felt not just in relation to distant regions of the country or remote parts of the same state, but also with regards to nearby communities, operated in the minds of individuals no less than on the collective consciousness of a town’s notables. Put in simplest terms, many soldiers believed it was not enough to serve in a unit composed of and commanded by men from the same state. Civic pride and personal predilection dictated a preference for service with and under the command of, men who hailed from the same town or county as the majority of the rest of the unit’s members. A native of Emporia, Kansas, Calvin Lambert lived in Dodge City at the start of the war. When friends suggested they should all enlist in a cavalry troop then in the process of organization in Dodge City, Lambert “flatly refused because, I told them, I hated horses.” More to the point, however, he argued he “would rather go to war with a unit from my home town – Emporia.” Not long afterward, “there was talk of organizing an infantry company” with a local physical education teacher as its captain. Again, Lambert “was not enthused as I would rather join the dough-boys in Emporia than go ‘Over the Top’ with men I do not know.”

The potential for friction among men from different parts of the same state could be even greater in the context of the resentment Guardsmen were apt to express toward superiors who, even if they came from the same state, did not enjoy intimate connections

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140 Lambert, Calvin H., Sergeant, 3rd Truck Company, 117th Ammunition Train, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, untitled typescript memoir, 2, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
with the specific community from which the manpower of a unit was drawn. In the 1st Infantry Regiment of the North Dakota National Guard, for example, the transfer of a young second lieutenant from one company to another in April 1917 created a situation that illustrated the resentment Guardsmen were capable of directing against any “outsider” who threatened to dilute the local character of a unit. On the surface, the lukewarm welcome that the officers and men of Company H extended to John Fraine following his transfer from Company C may have had something to do with Fraine’s being the son of the regimental commanding officer, a situation that may have stirred up suspicions the young officer was the beneficiary of preferential treatment rooted in nepotism. Closer scrutiny suggests that the members of Company H, a unit based in Jamestown, North Dakota, could not conceal their antipathy toward an officer whose only significant crime consisted of his being an “outsider” from nearby Grafton, the home base of Company C. No matter that Fraine was a North Dakotan, as was everyone else in the regiment as a whole. The simple fact that he traced his roots to a community other than Jamestown threw into doubt his qualifications to command Jamestown men. The latter, as one of their officers posited, “would do far better with their own officers,” in other words with officers who hailed from Jamestown. Another officer, the commander of the Bismarck-based Company A, also worried about a vacancy in the unit being filled “by some sprout” from another part of the state.\footnote{As quoted in Cooper, \textit{Citizens as Soldiers}, 187 – 188.}

The persistence of local allegiances among the Americans who went off to war in 1917 -- 1918 ensured that many soldiers would continue to view their military service, first and foremost, as a practical expression of their allegiance to the values and traditions that defined the identity of their parent communities. “I can tell you that Mansfield [Massachusetts] has no need of being ashamed of any of the boys she has sent into war,”
Raymond Hodges assured his mother. Soldiers did not always specify with any great precision the precise nature of the community standards they were doing their best to live up to. That was not a matter of great importance, however. What was significant was their willingness to represent and maintain the honor of the community on a stage of action that transcended the intellectual, conceptual, and geographic boundaries of their native locality.

“Our outfit is certainly upholding all the traditions of the boys from Kansas and Missouri,” boasted Lloyd Staley to his fiancée. It was a claim with which thousands of other soldiers, their social horizons and loyalties grounded primarily in relatively small communities, could agree.

On a more concrete level, the predominance of localism as a focus of loyalty offered an opportunity to perpetuate – and perhaps even add luster to – the specifically historical traditions that defined the identity of local communities. This perception firmly situated the units mobilized to fight in the Great War on a spectrum of historical continuity linking the men who volunteered or consented to be drafted for service in that conflict with their illustrious forbears. Writing to his mother about the battlefield accomplishments of his brigade of the Virginia National Guard, George Woodhouse expressed the certainty that the accolades bestowed upon its members by the high command would become a source of pride for the people of his native community. “The people of Norfolk will be glad to hear [about the unit citation awarded to the brigade], because the ‘Old Fourth Virginia’ is a part

142 Hodges, Raymond G., Sergeant, Company I, 302nd Infantry Regiment, 76th (“New England”) Division, letter to mother, 29 December 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

of the brigade.” George O’Brien, went one step further by suggesting that he and his fellow soldiers from Badger, Wisconsin, had not only upheld the honor of their native town, but had actually surpassed the battlefield exploits of their ancestors of Civil War fame.

Requesting his mother to give his compliments to a neighbor, O’Brien instructed her to “tell him the Badger boys are more than living up to old traditions. Even the Iron Brigade has nothing over them. In a subsequent letter, reminded his mother to “[t]ell him the boys of this period are right up to the spirit of ’61.”

The tendency to visualize the war through the prism of local, rather than national, allegiances helped to reduce this vast, confusing conflict down to a manageable size. No matter how complex its origins or how baffling the issues over which it was being fought, the war could not fail to appear relevant to ordinary Americans when depicted in the framework of its capacity to profoundly alter the lives of relatives, friends, and neighbors representing the local community in the war zone. “The Fourth Ohio Regiment…is at the front,” an article in the newspaper edited by that unit’s soldiers announced in the early months of 1918:

Boys from Columbus, and from Circleville, and Lancaster, and Delaware, and Marysville, and the region hereabouts – our very own, from Central Ohio – they are at the front! For months the war has been a thing to read about, something that was far off. When we read where a soldier was killed, and found that he lived at a remote crossroads, in a distant state, it didn’t make much impression on us…But it is different

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144 Woodhouse, George, Sergeant, 116th Infantry Regiment, 58th Infantry Brigade, 29th (“Blue and Grey”) Division, letter to mother, 31 October 1918, Folder 41, Box 67, Norfolk (Va.) materials, Series VII: City Source Material, 1919 – 1927, RG 66, LVA.

145 O’Brien, George H., Corporal, Headquarters Company, 121st Field Artillery Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letters to mother, 26 September and 3 October 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. The allusion to the “Iron Brigade” refers to one of the most celebrated units of the Union Army of the Potomac. Composed of three regiments of volunteers from Wisconsin, one from Michigan, and one from Indiana, the brigade participated in all of the great battles of the Civil War’s Eastern theater of operations, in the process establishing a corporate identity and a reputation for military effectiveness that few other units in either the Union or Confederate armies could match. See Alan T. Nolan, The Iron Brigade: A Military History (New York: Macmillan, 1961).
now….We shall not forget the names we read upon the lists at this time….The Fourth Ohio – boys from the towns about us and from this very place.146

VI. “I Wanted to be as Brave as My Grand Father”: Family Allegiances

Allegiance to a geographic, social, or ethnic community derived much of its power from the varying degrees of loyalty the generation of 1917 felt toward the individuals who comprised that community and who collectively made up the peacetime social world of the would-be soldier. And no form of personal allegiance was more meaningful to volunteers and draftees alike than that owed to their immediate families. As was the case with affirmations of loyalty to the local community, allegiance to family expressed itself most clearly in the context of explanations to which soldiers resorted to rationale their decision to volunteer or comply with the draft.

An apparent minority of soldiers embraced their duty to serve on the grounds of “defensive” family allegiances, that is, forms of familial loyalty that stressed the soldier’s belief in his duty to protect his loved ones from the depredations on an enemy whom

146 “The Ohio Rainbow Reveille: Official Organ of 166th Infantry,” 29 April 1918, 1, MiscellaneousDocuments, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI. In its most extreme form, the conceptualization of the war as yet another chance for the community to display its best attributes to a wider world leaned toward the ridiculous. This, in particular, was the case with communities that saw the conflict as a highly personal squaring of accounts between their town, county, or state and the enemies against whom the United States as a whole was fighting. Writing shortly after the war, the historian of a regiment of the Alabama National Guard stated, with no hint of facetiousness that

All through England, France, and Italy, far down in the island of Sicily – even in Germany – I heard of ‘those Alabamians who put the fear of God into the hosts of the Kaiser.’ The very mention of the name, it seemed, shot terror through the ranks of the Huns…Where any other regiment was named once, the word Alabama was uttered twice.

official propaganda organs had done their best to dehumanize and vilify. William Carpenter exemplified this category. The sinking of the ocean liner *Lusitania* in May 1915 having convinced him “that Germany victorious would be a national neighbor too terrible to conceive” and that Germany “only awaited favorable opportunity to make us pay for the war under penalty of treatment similar to that she had accorded to Belgium,” he enthusiastically embraced the military preparedness movement that flourished in the United States during the period of American neutrality. It was, however, his concern for the safety of his young son that provided Carpenter with the stimulus to enlist as a private in a local National Guard unit:

> Among the stories, real of fictitious, told in the news of the day were ghastly tales of drunken German soldiers marching through the streets of Belgium with little babies impaled on their bayonets. Now Oliver was about a year and a half old at the time, and after reading in the paper about some British or French defeat – and they were quite frequent about that time – I seemed to see some drunken lout in ‘feldgrau’ strolling along Ocean Avenue with my life’s hopes naught but a mass of bloody rags at the end of a savage’s rifle.  

Among soldiers whose personal loyalties motivated them to serve, few specified the object of their allegiance as precisely as did Carpenter. William Roper, for example, claimed to have been spurred to enlist after seeing a propaganda film “portraying Dorothy Gish as a Red Cross nurse, being brutally treated by the ‘Huns.’” Roper failed to specify, however, why the film had “deeply moved” him. Was it because the spectacle of German soldiers abusing a woman stirred up in his mind anxieties about the women who featured in

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147 For the distinction between “defensive” and “social” varieties of personal allegiances as motivators of voluntary enlistment, see David J. Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914 – 1916* (London: Routledge, 2005).

148 Carpenter, William T., Captain, 312th Sanitary Train, 87th (“Acorn”) Division, “A Peace Lover Goes to War: Being the Experiences of William T. Carpenter During His Time in the Army During the Great War” (photocopy of typescript memoirs), 1, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

149 Roper, William L., Private First Class, Company B, 130th Machine Gun Battalion, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
Roper’s personal – and especially family – life? There is no way to tell. In similar fashion, Lloyd Foster noted in a letter addressed to his parents that “I hope the people of America will never have to submit to such treatment as that of Belgium.” The great expenditure of life and money the Allies were investing into the war, he went on, was fully justified in view of what he believed he was fighting for, namely, “better womanhood and manhood and true freedom.”

Again, it may be possible to see in Foster’s desire to spare Americans in general from the indignities to which Germany submitted Belgium an anxiety about the safety and well-being of his loved ones in particular. On the other hand, his statements may be little more than expressions of the messianic language and rhetoric of Wilsonian liberalism to which Foster and his fellow soldiers would have had plenty of exposure throughout their military service.

The proportion of soldiers who articulated their family allegiances with reference to the military heritage of their relatives was much greater. In parallel with the contributions that a soldier’s local community had made to the military history of the United States, the martial traditions of one’s ancestors represented a powerful inducement to enter service. Though the ranks of Civil War veterans were growing thin by the second decade of the twentieth century, the grandfathers, elderly uncles – and at times even fathers – who had fought in the sectional conflict remained among the most important male authority figures and role models for the generation of 1917. Local branches of Civil War veterans’ associations such as the Grand Army of the Republic in the North and the United

150 Foster, Lloyd, Private First Class, Company B, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letter to parents, 30 April 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

151 See for example one of Foster’s earlier letters, a missive in which assured his parents that “I often think of all at home but I must forget home affairs for a little while, until I help finish up Uncle Sam’s big undertaking to free humanity.” Foster, Lloyd, Private First Class, Company B, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letter to parents, 12 March 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
Confederate Veterans in the South continued to command enormous respect in individual communities. As the beneficiaries of this esteem, Civil War veterans played a central role in the social life and civic rituals of hundreds of towns and counties across the country. As such, they exercised an enormous influence over the imaginations of the cohort of Americans who came of age just in time to serve in the Great War. And no aspect of that influence was more important that the capacity of Civil War veterans to play an unduly dominant part in shaping the expectations of the nature of war and combat that the would-be Doughboys would carry with them into battle. 

From the perspective of the young Americans growing up in the early years of the twentieth century, these graying patriarchs, with their memories of participation, no matter how insignificant, in the country’s single most convulsive military conflict, or their interaction, no matter how limited, with the some of that war’s heroic figures, fulfilled within their respective families the same function as the battle honors of the local National Guard unit performed in the local community. They served as a link between family lore on the one hand and, on the other, the broad brush strokes of the nation’s history. “My father and his brother [rode] with [Philip] Sheridan in the Civil War and another uncle was with Sheridan


\[153\] Lawrence Jones, whose grandfather was active in the Grand Army of the Republic and eventually became the state commander of the organization’s Michigan branches, vividly remembered the talks that Civil War veterans would give for the benefit of his classmates in the town where he grew up. He noted however, that among the men who shared their experiences in this fashion “were the younger veterans and had not seen much action to tell us about. They stressed patriotism and not the agony of war.” The testimony of Joseph Cunningham may provide a partial explanation for the tendency of Civil War veterans to highlight the glory rather than the “agony” of war. Like Jones, Cunningham was accustomed to hearing Civil War veterans address his classmates on Memorial Day, but the impression they created in his mind of the nature of war was a distressing one. After hearing one such speaker, Cunningham claimed to have decided that “If war is ever declared in my time I will hide and they will never get me for it sure must be terrible.” See Jones, Lawrence E., Sergeant, Company C, 107th Ammunition Train, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, “Lucky to be Alive” (typescript memoir, 1987), 5 – 6; Cunningham, Joseph M., Private, Battery B, 101st Artillery Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, untitled typescript memoir, 4, both in World War I Veterans’ History Project, USAMHI.
when he took over Yellow Stone Park area,” Walter Eichenlaub noted with pride. Tom Gary admitted, on the basis of his experience in the Great War, that “General Sherman of the Union Army in the Civil War said it all when he said ‘WAR IS HELL.’” For all that, he took great pride in his father’s record of service in the sectional conflict. “My father enlisted in a Virginia Cavalry Rgt. at age 16 a month after the [Civil] War began, and was one of six of his unit at [Robert E.] Lee’s surrender.” The unmistakable fondness and admiration with which William Clark wrote of his grandfather, a veteran of the siege of Fort Donelson and of the Vicksburg Campaign, typified the esteem Civil War veterans enjoyed among their younger relatives:

As a boy I would often sit in my grandfather’s lap and his long white beard would tickle my face as we rocked back and forth in his favorite rocker. At times like this, he would tell me of his experiences as a young soldier in the Civil War. He had four years of army experiences to talk about […] He still wore suits and coats of Union blue in color. His [Grand].[Army].[Republic]. button was proudly displayed on the lapel of his coat…With this tradition behind me, I grew up wondering if the opportunity would ever come when I too could serve my country in war.

In similar fashion, Donald Kyler, growing up in the isolation of an Indiana farm, ranked visits from his paternal grandfather among the most cherished memories of childhood. “[M]y mother’s father visited us often. He was a veteran of the Civil War and enjoyed telling me about his adventures in it. I took a great liking for him and I guess I pestered him whenever the opportunity came. For South Carolinian Johnson Hagood, the

154 Eichenlaub, Walter V., Private First Class, 7th Field Hospital, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

155 Gary, Tom C., Captain, Company A, 6th Engineer Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to director, U.S. Army Military History Institute, 12 May 1975, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.


157 Kyler, Donald D., Sergeant, Company G, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Brigade, 1st Division, “The Thoughts and Memories of a Common Soldier,” 4, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
senior officer who commanded the AEF’s Services of Supply, the memory of his family’s participation in the Civil War transcended the boundaries of lore and represented the essence of familial and individual identity. Hagood’s father, maternal grandfather, and a platoon of uncles from both sides of the family had all served with the Confederate forces. In the latter stages of the conflict,

Sherman had passed through the Hagood and Tobin plantations and destroyed them […]

Thus it happened that my boyhood dreams were about being a soldier, a Confederate soldier, in gray uniform. I never aspired to anything so glorious as Uncle Johnson [a regimental and brigade commander in the Army of Northern Virginia, and a post-war governor of South Carolina] or Uncle Jimmie [who earned a citation of merit from Robert E. Lee], but I did hope that some day there might be another Hagood’s Regiment or, perhaps, Hagood’s Brigade.\textsuperscript{158}

Cognizance of familial military lore, combined with the desire to uphold and contribute to such martial traditions, reduced the Great War to a fundamentally personal dimension, one that allowed the potential soldier to volunteer or acquiesce in the draft without the need for any profound intellectual engagement with the intricate issues that had led the United States into the conflict in the first place. These paled in comparison to the demands that family honor imposed upon the would-be recruit. In consequence, many soldiers viewed the war in personal terms, their decision to enlist or register for the draft based on the desire to live up to the example set by their direct ancestors and, in the process, reaffirm their respective families’ intimate links with the grand narrative of heroism and progress that underpinned their understanding of American history. John Barkley, a future winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor, was only eighteen, and therefore exempt from the draft, when the United States declared war on Imperial Germany. His “war fever” exacerbated by community pressures – one of his neighbors had enlisted early on in the war – Barkley was all the more eager to enter military service because his older, draft-age brother

was suffering from long-term complications related from a botched operation and would likely be rejected by the local draft board on medical grounds. The possibility that a clan whose members, Barkley claimed, had participated in every major war waged by the United States would not be able to contribute anything to this particular war was an affront to family pride. “I’d heard my father say he ‘guessed the Barkleys were petering out.’ From Revolutionary days on, whenever America got into trouble, there’d always been a Barkley in the fight.” With this in mind, Barkley promptly enlisted in the Regular Army.¹⁵⁹

Most soldiers did not have reach that far into the past to find role-models whom the outbreak of the Great War provided them with a chance to emulate. In keeping with the dominant place it occupied in the historical consciousness of Americans who grew up in the Progressive Era, the memory of the Civil War imposed upon the generation of 1917 an obligation of service and sacrifice for a cause greater than their individual lives. Yet, again, that cause expressed most frequently with reference to the duty soldiers felt they owed their families, rather than the nation as a whole. For some soldiers, the memory of Civil War ancestors could serve a point of orientation helped them come to grips with America’s intervention in the European conflict. W. G. McMullen confessed that it had been “quite a

¹⁵⁹ John L. Barkley, No Hard Feelings! (New York: Cosmopolitan, 1930), 1 – 2. Barkley initially served in Company G, 356th Infantry Regiment, 89th (“Middle West”) Division, and was later assigned to Company K, 4th Infantry Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division. He was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions near Cuneé, France, on 7 October 1918 during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. See Barkley’s letter to brother, n. d. (possibly late October/early November 1918), American Letters and Diary Entries, 1917 – 1919, Archives of the Liberty Memorial Museum, Kansas City, Missouri (hereafter LMM), retrieved on 30 March 2006 from http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEnt.doc. The same hierarchy of abstract patriotism on a national level, community pressures, and the determination to uphold family traditions of military service – with the last of the three representing the most powerful inducement to serve – drove Harold Kalloch to volunteer for the National Guard. Asked why he had enlisted, Kalloch alluded to all these incentives in turn, but dwelled in particular on his family’s military history. “My country needed me. Four of my brothers enlisted. Kallochs served in all the wars. My great-great-grandfather served in French and Indian war [for] 3 years.” Kalloch, Harold, Private, 102nd Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. See also Chase, Donald S., Private, Company D, 103rd Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experience Questionnaire, World War Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
shock” to him when he first heard that Woodrow Wilson had asked Congress for a declaration of war against Imperial Germany. But the memory of the affectionate relationship he enjoyed with his grandfather appears to have softened, if only a little, the blow the news had administered to McMullen. “I had been very close to my grandfather, David McMullen, a Civil War veteran [and] I had heard many stories relating back to that awful conflict.” This, combined with the monopolization of the front pages of newspapers by articles concerned with the national mobilization, allowed McMullen to become accustomed to the war.\textsuperscript{160}

It was, however, in the form of a rationale for entering military service that allegiances to family traditions embodied by Civil War veterans manifested themselves in their most conspicuous incarnation. Desperate to obtain the parental consent the Army required as a condition for waiving the minimum age of enlistment, teenage boys eager to volunteer dangled in front of their parents the military records of elderly relatives, with the implication such martial traditions needed to be upheld by a new generation.\textsuperscript{161} But even those young men whose decision to enter service was their own were apt to express their choice in terms that emphasized familial allegiance. Merwin Palmer’s paternal grandfather

\textsuperscript{160} McMullen, W. G., Private, Headquarters Company, 9\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Brigade, 2\textsuperscript{nd} (“Indianhead”) Division, “Memoirs of World War One,” 3 – 4, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{161} Among the arguments seventeen year-old William Triplet advanced to his parents in the hope of obtaining their permission to enlist in the National Guard, he “cited the military career of great-uncle Launer Stith who enlisted with General John Morgan’s cavalry at the age of fifteen and who almost won the War Between the States.” By Triplet’s own admission, however, the role this and other arguments he made ultimately played only a marginal role in convincing his unwilling parents to cave in to his wishes: “I think that my parents finally gave me their blessing because they realized that with or without their consent I was going,” Triplet, \textit{A Youth in the Meuse-Argonne}, 1.
had lost his left arm in the Civil War, while his maternal grandfather had been the first man from New London, Connecticut, to volunteer for service in the same conflict. “Pride,” as Palmer implied, dictated he emulate the examples they had set. In explaining his decision to enlist in the Regular Army, Leroy Bucknell felt no need to provide any rationale beyond stating that three of his uncles – of whom two were killed and one so badly wounded he had to be invalided home – had participated in the Civil War. Even if they did not say so explicitly, many of the Americans who donned uniform could seriously claim, as George Nornhold did, they had military service “[i]n my blood” simply by virtue of being the sons, grandsons, or nephews of Civil War veterans. Their descent from men who had fought in what was, until 1917, America’s greatest war, conflated national allegiances with family loyalties. In so doing, it imbued the former with a tactile meaning whose capacity to motivate young men to enter the armed forces transcended the specific war aims of the particular conflict America entered in April of that year. “My grand father was a Union veteran,” R. E. Banks wrote by way of explaining the reasons that propelled him into the ranks of the Army. “He was in the battle of Shiloh and Antietam…[and]…told me if we lost that war we would not have any United States so I wanted to be as brave as my grand father.” Here, the spectrum of allegiances had come full circle, fusing familial loyalties with a national identity

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162 Palmer, Merwin H., Corporal, Company D, 102nd Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

163 Bucknell, Leroy E., Sergeant, Company D, 38th Infantry Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

164 Nornhold, George E., Private First Class, Battery A, 10th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

165 Banks, Rivers E., Private, Company D, 7th Engineer Regiment, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
that was inseparable from the historical memory of the small, but important intervention of one’s own relatives and ancestors in the grand narrative of the American past.

VII. Conclusion

The generation of Americans who went to war in 1917 came of age at a time when the United States was undergoing its “Second Great Transformation,” a process that completed the country’s metamorphosis from an agricultural, rural society, to an industrial, urban one. This metamorphosis was accompanied by the emergence of a nationwide consumer culture, powerful and highly centralized state and business institutions, and modes of social and cultural self-identification that transcended the boundaries of locale, state, or region. Yet, as this examination of the identities professed by soldiers in the initial phases of their Great War service demonstrates, parochial foci of socio-cultural allegiance continued to exercise a powerful hold over the minds of many Americans. In spite of rapid industrialization and urbanization, the dichotomies of town and country life remained an important determinant of individual and collective identity, one that might actually have grown in significance with the passing of traditional values and attitudes associated with the pre-industrial social order. Regional and sectional identities also flourished, their relevance underscored by the divergent histories, patterns of economic development, and cultural attributes that clearly distinguished them from each other. Finally, if the evidence of soldiers is any indication, Americans remained fiercely loyal to the local communities and families that delimited the contours of everyday life. Irrespective of the integrative and homogenizing

cultural trends that figured among the significant byproducts of the “Second Great Transformation,” it was these parochial entities that determined the attitudes and mentalities of individuals and communities alike. Above all, they served as arbiters of the way in which would-be Doughboys related to each other and to the outside world. Immersion in the world of military service would present a serious challenge to these narrow identities, but the indelible mark they left on the minds of soldiers would prove difficult to eradicate completely.
“A Complete New Life for All of Us”:
The Training Camp Experience and Identity Formation

I. Introduction

Reflecting on their experience of the First World War, many American veterans dismissed their initial encounter with the military as the least memorable aspect of their service. “Life in camp is such an eternal sameness that there is not much to write about,” Walter Ash noted in a letter from Camp Lee, Virginia, one of the thirty-two sprawling military installations in which the majority of American soldiers of the Great War received their introduction to Army life. For William Mertz, “the initial event of interest” related to his unit’s departure from training camp for a port of embarkation en route to France after months of training in the United States. Edward Radcliffe, a Pennsylvania newspaper editor who served in the National Guard, described his seven-month stay at Camp Hancock, Georgia, as an “interval of monotony to most of us and to me in particular.” Laurie C. Green, a farmer from Virginia’s Surry County, concurred. As a draftee who had been inducted into the National Army in September 1917, Green believed that a rite in which so

1 Ash, William R., Private, Headquarters, Camp Lee, letter to Meta Gaskins, 31 July 1918, Folder 22, Box 53, Fauquier County (Va.) Materials, Series VI, RG 66, LVA.


many of his compatriots partook was so prosaic as to merit little elaboration. "Passing through the Draft Law Bill was an experience...which every man between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one went through, so I will not dwell on it." He pronounced the same verdict on the nine months of training he spent at Camp Lee, Virginia. "The training period," Greene opined, "is something with which everyone in this country is more or less familiar. Just monotonous routine." The only noteworthy feature of the tedium, Green noted, was the opportunity it afforded him "[t]o watch backwoodsmen, pale clerks, farmer boys and all the other types of men being made into straight, clean, well-groomed soldiers."

In May 1918, the 80th Division, the formation in which he served, finally received orders to proceed to France to reinforce General John J. Pershing's American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). Greene's vivid recollections of the excitement that accompanied the preparation for overseas service stand in stark contrast to the sparing description of his training experience, and leave no doubt that the departure from Camp Lee must have come as a relief.  

In paying only token attention to the first phase of their military service, Radcliffe's and Green's reminiscences reflect a trait common to many American narratives and memoirs of the First World War. The coverage works in this genre accord to the time their authors

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4 Green was among the batch of approximately 35,000 draftees pre-selected by the Army from among the 687,000 men of the "first" draft (September/October 1917) for early induction into service. Known as the "first five percent" of the draft's initial call-up of manpower, this cohort was to provide the non-commissioned leadership cadre for the great mass of draftees to follow. In theory, the men who comprised this group had been chosen for early call-up by virtue of their possessing skills or qualifications that, the War Department believed, made them suitable cloth from which to pattern the corporals and sergeants the Army urgently needed in order to redress its critical shortage of NCOs. In practice, as the historian of one regiment of draftees tartly remarked, "[i]n some cases, the qualifications were extremely well-concealed." See U.S. Provost Marshal General, Report of the First Draft, 15–21; and Eckstein, Richard, "A History of the 309th Regiment of Infantry, 78th Division" (typescript), 309th Infantry Regiment, 78th ("Lightning") Division, World War I Veterans' Survey Project, USAMHI. For Green's war service record, see Green, Laurie C., Corporal, Military Service Record, Folder 6, Box 11, Surry County (Va.), Series I: Individual Service Records (Questionnaires), 1919–1924, RG 66, LVA.

5 Green, Laurie C., Corporal, Company A, 318th Infantry Regiment, 80th ("Blue Ridge") Division, "My Experiences in the Great War" (typescript reminiscences), 1, 2, Folder 7, Box 106, Series IX: Virginia War Diaries and Incidents, 1915–1922, RG 66, LVA.
spent in training camps prior before joining the AEF pales in comparison to the attention they lavished on conveying their impressions of overseas service. To be sure, the repetitive routine of camp life could hardly compare, from the perspective of its potential as exciting reading material, with descriptions of the spectacle of war. Though many American war memoirs of the World War begin with the soldier’s induction into the military and his subsequent immersion in the subculture of the Army, most make it clear that for their authors, the “real” war story begins either at the moment when he boards a transport ship, disembarks in a French port, or joins battle – anywhere but in the training camp.

Synonymous with the predictable, the orderly, and the humdrum, the camp experience initially appears as the very antithesis of the uncertainty and strangeness that twentieth-century “soldiers’ tales” highlight as the essence of modern warfare. In this respect, it is telling that at least one soldier who did devote significant attention to describing his impression of cantonment life in vivid detail prefaced his work with an apology for having done so. James M. Howard, who served in a field artillery regiment and subsequently wrote his unit’s semi-official history, found it difficult to imagine that his recollections of Camp Upton could be interesting to anyone but himself and his comrades. That part of his book, he modestly declared, “will doubtless be dry reading for an outsider,” having been “recorded primarily for the benefit of the men who lived through [it].” He then encouraged the general reader to “pass on to the later chapters, [where] he will find…the story of actual war.”

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7 Hynes, The Soldiers’ Tale.

American soldiers’ tendency to marginalize or overlook altogether their first few weeks or months in uniform can be deceptive, however. Even while asserting the allegedly minor importance of this stage of their war service, veterans like Green and Howard hedged their generalizations with noteworthy qualifications. These provisos indicated that the process of induction and training, monotonous though it might have been, played a crucial role in preparing the groundwork for the emergence among the soldiers themselves of a collective identity that, in their minds, distinguished them from other Americans. By stating that only those who had encountered it first-hand could find his description of camp life appealing, Howard effectively implied that some aspects of his comrades’ experience of the Great War lay beyond the understanding of civilians. Similarly, Green’s emphasis on the allegedly unexceptional nature of his introduction to army life is offset by his recognition that for all its monotony, the same process imparted to a heterogeneous mob of recruits a new, uniform identity as “straight, clean, well-groomed soldiers” who bore little resemblance to the various “types” that made up American society as a whole.

The notion that some aspects of the military experience could be communicated only to other soldiers, and the belief that service in the Army’s ranks fundamentally set a man apart from his non-uniformed fellows, are mutually reinforcing. Above all, they highlight the fissures dividing soldiers from civilians and, in so doing, capture the essence of how American servicemen of the Great War would come to define themselves in relation to each other and to the society on whose behalf they fought. At the same time, they indicate that the roots of this collective self-image, one based on the real and alleged discrepancies between the world view of the soldier and the civilian, are to be found in the first, great collective experience shared by virtually all American soldiers of that conflict: the initial
period of training and indoctrination that took place in the weeks and months immediately following the soldier’s induction or enlistment.

In stark contrast to the tendency of ordinary soldiers to write off their training camp experience as a prosaic overture to encounters with “actual war,” historians have scrutinized that stage of Doughboys’ military service from a variety of angles. Scholars concerned with the development of military doctrine have produced numerous studies establishing direct linkages between the “questionable training” American soldiers received in camp and the uneven tactical performance of the AEF on the battlefields of France. Another significant historiographical strand has stressed the role of the American military training camp of the Great War as a site of social engineering and experimentation. Historians active in this field have been particularly interested in exploring the numerous intersections between the education and indoctrination soldiers received while in camp and the efforts of civilian social reformers and their allies in the U.S. military to inculcate Doughboys with the values and mores of America’s Anglo-Protestant middle class. In similar vein, historians have also underscored the crucial role that the training camps played in facilitating the absorption of ethnic minorities into the mainstream of American society, and providing all soldiers in

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general with the rudiments of a Progressive civic education that promoted the ideals of moral “uplift,” harmonious class and ethnic relations, and cultural homogeneity as the basis of post-war societal organization. Finally, at least one scholar has identified the camp experience as the foundation of the disciplinary tensions that allegedly alienated citizen-soldiers from the Army’s formal hierarchy of power and laid the groundwork for the subsequent politicization of ordinary servicemen.  

Because they have received ample treatment from historians, these aspects of the training camp experience will be examined below only insofar as they relate to the one element of that experience scholars have yet to analyze in detail, namely, the role the physical and institutional setting of the training camp played in the initial formation of a soldierly identity distinct from recruit’s parochial, pre-war loyalties. Rooted in a growing recognition among Doughboys of the real and alleged differences in attitudes, viewpoints, and values separating servicemen from civilians, this corporate and individual ethos transcended peacetime allegiances while defying – and at times even subverting – the efforts of Progressive social reformers and of the formal power structure of the Army to mould the identities of Doughboys “from above.” But because this identity began to take shape in the broader framework of attempts to mould raw recruits into effective, obedient soldiers and good, Progressively-minded citizens, this section must necessarily begin with a contextual elaboration of the role these institutional imperatives played in determining the parameters  


12 Keene, Doughboys.
and routines of everyday existence in what contemporary social commentators enthusiastically – and significantly – referred to as “America’s New Soldier Cities.”

II. “America’s New Soldier Cities”: Camps, Cantonments, and the Progressive Social Vision

With the exception of soldiers who served in two Regular and three National Guard divisions that had been rushed to France before the end of 1917, the vast majority of Doughboys spent the initial phases of their military experience in a camp or cantonment. These installations resulted from the most ambitious construction program in American history until that time. Its goal was to provide adequate shelter for an army that, by the time of the Armistice, would grow to nearly 4,000,000 troops – a staggering increase from its pre-war strength of approximately 130,000 officers and men. By October 1917, sixteen National Army “cantonments” and sixteen National Guard camps, the majority situated in the South,

13 See below for an examination of the urban metaphor. The image of the camps and cantonments as towns or cities designed, constructed, and administered with a view of exposing as many young Americans as possible to the comforts, amenities, and collective civic-mindedness associated with the lifestyle of the urban middle class formed a staple theme of articles published throughout the war in mass-circulation periodicals that served as mouthpieces of the many wings of the Progressive movement. See for example “The Cantonments of Our National Army,” Scientific American (7 July 1917); “Building Cities for the Big Draft and Volunteer Army,” Current Opinion (September 1917); William J. Showalter, “America’s New Soldier Cities: The Geographical and Historical Environment of the National Army Cantonments and National Guard Camps,” National Geographic Magazine, 32 (November 1917), 439 – 476; “The National Army Cantonments: Building Sixteen Towns of 40,000 Inhabitants,” Scientific American (1 December 1917); William H. Taft, “The Health and Morale of America’s Citizen Army: Personal Observations of Conditions in Our Soldier Cities by a Former Commander-in-Chief of the United States Army and Navy,” National Geographic Magazine 33 (March 1918), 219 – 245; Gustavus Ohlinger, “The National Army,” Atlantic Monthly (April 1918); Bascom Johnson, “Eliminating Vice from Camp Cities,” Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 78 (July 1918), 60 – 64; Francis Lynde, “All the Comforts of Home: What the Army Engineer Corps has Done for the Men in the Training Camps,” The Outlook (18 September 1918).

14 These formations included the 1st and 2nd Divisions of the Regular Army, and the 26th, 41st, and 42nd Divisions of the National Guard. Raised by combining pre-existing units (as was the case with the 1st and 2nd Divisions), or raised in record time during the summer and early fall of 1917 (as was the case with the three National Guard formations), these divisions spent only a limited amount of time in the United States before being shipped to France, where they received advanced training. In consequence, most of their personnel did not have the benefit of a prolonged sojourn in the purpose-built camps or cantonments constructed to accommodate the enlarged wartime Army. See AABE, 515.
were sufficiently ready to receive the first consignment of draftees. The cantonments were made up entirely of permanent, pre-fabricated wooden structures, while the camps used tents for living quarters. Only hospitals, unit headquarters, and administrative and utility structures were wooden. Collectively, these thirty-two facilities operated throughout the war as the primary setting for the processing and training of the manpower that filled the ranks of the AEF.

The camps and cantonments functioned on two interrelated levels. Their primary purpose was to integrate millions of civilians into the Army, and provide them with the general training and specialized skills they would need to play a military useful role as members of the great force the United States mobilized to help the Entente fight and defeat Imperial Germany. At the heart of this process was the standardized training program drafted by the War Plans Division of the Army General Staff, a set of guidelines based on the doctrinal prescriptions promulgated by the General Headquarters of the AEF.

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16 Regular Army units underwent training in pre-existing military installations, though several Regular formations were based in some of the newly-constructed cantonments prior to deploying overseas. The Navy and the Marine Corps operated their own training facilities, but because the two services’ manpower requirements were significantly smaller than those of the Army, their installations were correspondingly fewer in number and more limited in size. The Navy had constructed a “cantonment” around the nucleus of the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, a pre-existing naval facility on the shores of Lake Michigan just north of Chicago. The Marine Corps put its recruits through basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina, and then sent them off to Quantico, a facility constructed during the war, for advanced infantry training; Quantico was also the main facility for training Marine officer-candidates. See H. L. Roosevelt, “History of Quantico Camp” (typescript), Folder 1, Box 45, Subseries D: Quantico, Series IV: Virginia Camps and Cantonments, ca. 1917 – 1919, RG 66, LVA.

Apart from this purely military rationale, the camps fulfilled a second, much more comprehensive purpose. Simply put, camps and cantonments functioned as the collective arena for the practical implementation of myriad Progressive theories of social engineering and moral reform. Among the civilian reformers of various backgrounds who comprised the leadership elite of the Progressive “movement” of the early twentieth century, a large segment viewed their country’s intervention in the Great War as an opportunity to restructure the American body politic with a view of purging the social fabric of the multitude of ills that had been plaguing it for the preceding three or four decades as a consequence of rapid industrialization and urbanization and the drastic changes in its demographic make-up. The wartime growth of the legislative and coercive powers of the federal government held out the prospect of harnessing the apparatus of the state to the cause of social reform to a much greater extent than ever before. Moreover, the rapid expansion of the armed forces in the months following April 1917 subordinated an unprecedented number of young Americans to the dictates of the state. This development enabled civilian reformers to contemplate the possibility of using that sample of the general population as a target group for large-scale experimentation with the latest techniques of social control, personnel management, moral indoctrination, and civic instruction. As sites where thousands of newly-inducted “citizen-soldiers” were gathered together, allocated specific places within the hierarchical and occupational structure of the military, and compelled to live and work within the framework of an impersonal, strictly regulated collective, the stable, easily controlled environment of the camps represented the ideal

2001), ch. 1; and idem, The AEF Way of War. Keene, Doughboys, 36 – 42, offers a succinct summary of the influence of John J. Pershing’s doctrinal pronouncements on select aspects of the training regimen in stateside camps.
setting in which social reformers, moral crusaders, and efficiency experts could put into practice their most cherished recipes for national rejuvenation.\(^{18}\)

With the highest echelons of the Woodrow administration – including the President himself – made up of individuals with solid Progressive credentials, civilian social reformers experienced few difficulties in convincing the Army to allow them to help shape policies and procedures related to soldiers’ education and vocational training, recreation, and moral instruction. While numerous Army officers shared the ethos of Progressive reformers, the Army as institution tolerated the intrusion of civilians into its daily affairs not for its own sake, but because in many cases, the social concerns that had prompted civilian Progressives to look toward the camps in the first place overlapped with narrow considerations of military effectiveness. From a military perspective, the cultivation among soldiers of sobriety, personal hygiene and cleanliness, and high levels of physical fitness and psychological morale were essential for maximizing their functional utility on the battlefield. The Army viewed its efforts to educate soldiers about the dangers of sexually transmitted diseases in the same light. In the “Old Army,” whose officers and NCOs would now train the millions of wartime volunteers and draftees, senior leaders’ concern with the proclivity of soldiers to consort with prostitutes was grounded in purely pragmatic terms. Simply put, a soldier who had contracted a sexually transmitted disease could not take his place on the firing line, where he was needed the most.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{19}\) For the attitudes of the pre-war Army toward drunkenness and venereal disease, see Coffman, *The Regulars*, 78 – 81.
Civilian reformers, by contrast, viewed soldiers’ proclivity toward boozing, gambling, and whoring as issues of pressing moral and social significance. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the notion that military service in general, and army camps in particular, was morally corrosive and degrading, enjoyed a wide currency in the popular imagination. As long as the rank-and-file of the Army was composed of social misfits, moral degenerates, the unemployable, and the economically marginalized – another staple of pre-war public perceptions of the peacetime Regular Army – the moral condition of the depraved dregs that comprised its manpower attracted little public attention. The advent of war in 1917 altered significantly altered such attitudes. With draftees and wartime volunteers – “the flower of America’s manhood” – now accounting for the overwhelming majority of the Army’s manpower, civilian and military authorities alike believed themselves responsible for ensuring that recruits remained untainted by the vices with which they were likely to be confronted on active service. It was precisely this concern that provided the impetus for the broad range of initiatives that, throughout the war, civilian organizations such as the Red Cross, Young Men’s Christian Association, the War Camp Community Service, the

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20 Army camps owed their reputation as cesspools of vice to the tales of moral degradation that allegedly prevailed in the encampments of both Union and Confederate Armies during the Civil War. But America’s recent military adventures – especially the Philippine War and the mobilization of Regular Army and National Guard units on the border with Mexico – also contributed to public fears concerning the possible effects of morally corrosive environment of Army camps on the recruits who entered military service beginning in April 1917. See Bristow, Making Men Moral, ch. 1. For examples of contemporary anxieties regarding this issue, see “Morals of the Militia on the Mexican Border,” Current Opinion (January 1917); “Moral Prophylaxis in the Army,” The Literary Digest (15 September 1917), 33 – 34; and “The Captain of the Men of Death,” The Outlook (5 December 1917), 551 – 552.

21 In the words of Clinton Dattel, a high school dropout who joined the Regular Army just before the American intervention in the Great War, “in those days that was generally the caliber of the people who were in the Army – it was somebody who couldn’t get a job or something like that, they were little misfits.” Dattel, Clinton, 1st Ammunition Train, 1st Division, “My Experience with the First Division” (transcript of oral history interview, 3 November 1986, Southampton, Pennsylvania), 2. Joseph Rizzi, a draftee who served with a National Guard division, agreed. “Before [the war] a soldier was looked upon as an unambitious person.” See Joseph N. Rizzi, Joe’s War: Memoirs of a Doughboy (Huntington, West Virginia: Der Angriff Publications, 1983), 1. Rizzi served in Company A, 110th Engineer Regiment, 35th Division, and attained the rank of Corporal.
American Library Association, and a host of others, undertook to provide soldiers with wholesome entertainment, athletic activities, religious services, educational programs, and moral indoctrination – all in an effort to reduce the possibility that the ennui of Army life might lead servicemen to seek diversion in the form of what Newton D. Baker, Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of War and an accomplished Progressive in his own right termed “cheap picture shows, saloons, dance halls, and houses of prostitution.”

Though driven by the desire to guard soldiers’ moral and spiritual welfare above all, the idealistic aims of social reformers were thus fully compatible with the pragmatism with which military authorities approached the problem of “vice,” generating a congruity of interests that underpinned the Army’s willingness to accord to civilians so significant a role in educating and instructing its personnel.

Few aspects of the design, construction, and daily life of the camps and cantonments could escape incorporation into the social vision of Progressivism. It did not take long for advocates of reform to acclaim the camps as ideal, if not utopian, communities: places that reflected in microcosm the social and moral order the Progressives hoped to ultimately impose on American society in general. “[I]n these cantonments,” one enthusiast of social reform asserted, “a new epoch in our national life began.”

Months before the first cantonments opened its gates to receive draftees, the Progressive press celebrated the symbolism of the nomenclature the Army had selected for the purpose of naming individual camps. The decision to name the new installations in honor of some of the greatest luminaries of American military history attracted praise for its capacity to “remind [soldiers]

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of our past history and inspire them to their best efforts.”24 Progressive publicists made even more capital out of the overrepresentation of Civil War generals – Union as well as Confederate – among the names chosen, touting it as evidence that sectional divisions had been irrevocably forgotten. For example, the significance of naming a Virginia cantonment after Robert E. Lee, one writer claimed, lay in “the fact of the American nation strongly united. The bleeding wounds of the fratricidal conflict of 1861 – 1865 are healed.” Like all other camps, Camp Lee would function as a place where “the South vies with the North in giving its all for its cause,” and where soldiers would be free to express their sectional and state loyalties, but would do so by placing “before the proud State title…their claim to being Americans.”25

The anticipated metamorphosis – physical, intellectual, and moral – the camps and cantonments were expected to effect over the minds, bodies, and attitudes of their inhabitants also captivated the Progressive public imagination. Looking beyond the strictly military utility of the draft, its advocates argued that compulsory military service in wartime would finally put an end to the regional, class, and ethnic distinctions that inhibited the emergence of a homogenous American national identity. That the draft army “has welded the country into a homogenous society, seeking the same national ends and animated by the same national ideals” represented one of its greatest accomplishments, one contemporary observer noted. The National Army, he continued,

fuses the thousand separate elements making up the United States into one steel-hard mass. Men of the North, South, East, and West meet and mingle and on the anvil of war become citizens worthy of the liberties won by the first American armies. Here…the last vestiges of sectional divergence disappear and, in those camps, where the hodge-podge of European


immigration assembles, Pole, Galician, Greek, and Sicilian are woven into the woof the nation.  

In addition to the hope they would function as the ultimate embodiment of the idea of the “Melting Pot,” the camps were expected to facilitate the Progressive quest for social unity on a number of other levels. Reflecting contemporary concerns with class tensions and industrial unrest, supporters of the draft looked forward to the prospect of seeing the representatives of diverse social classes work together toward a common goal within the institutional setting of the Army. “A callow youth from a farm sat next at mess to the habitué of the Tenderloin,” a social worker active in the cantonments wrote when describing the arrival of a fresh batch of draftees in camp to the readers of a middle-class periodical. “[M]other’s darling from the suburb bunked beside the gunman from the underworld, the exclusive fraternity man from the exclusive college stood at attention between two grimy immigrants who could speak no English, the bootblack and the bartender flanked the immaculate baker.”

Viewed from this angle, military service in general, and the camps and cantonments in particular, could be expected to serve as catalysts of social “leveling,” where a soldier’s civilian identity, socio-economic standing, class background, and peacetime occupation and professional expertise would matter little, a setting where a farm-boy enjoyed the same social position, and was subject to the same disciplinary regime as “a young man from Kansas City who last year was drawing a salary of $12,000 a year,” but who “is now a private in the ranks.”

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alike, had to acquire before they could be pronounced fit for combat duty on the Western Front, a soldiers' aptitude for acquiring and retaining these skills would theoretically trump all civilian criteria of gauging socio-economic success as the chief determinant of his social position in the Army. That point was hammered home in a fictional story published during the war in a mass-circulation magazine. Its protagonist, a well-educated, middle class businessman who has volunteered for officer training, chafes at his subordination to a younger man of humble social background. “It was difficult for a man fifteen years out of college, who had by dint of energy and foresight worked his way to the superintendency of one of the largest banking houses in the years, to take orders from a grocery clerk and of slight education.”

As if that inversion of peacetime social status were not enough, the story also reminds its readers that in the camps, a record of competence and success a man brought with him from the civilian world constituted no guarantee that the recruit would make a good soldier or officer. “The fact that he had made good in civil life…meant nothing in his favor of a military way,” the protagonist reminds himself on the day of examination that will determine his fitness for a commission. “For only the previous week Cyrus Long,

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29 William A. Ganoe, “Ruggs – R.O.T.C.,” *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1917), 780. The capacity of the camp experience to subvert – if not invert altogether – pre-war social and professional hierarchies fascinated contemporary observers and post-war commentators alike. Describing what he claimed was a scene he himself had witnessed in an Officer Training Camp, one writer took an obvious delight in reporting what may well have been the inspiration for Ganoe’s fictional account. “Picture a man in his thirties,” Edward Fox wrote, “who has made his way in the business world, being told by a lieutenant ten years his junior that he must sew his hat cord and not leave it free to slip around. Imagine the older man, accustomed in a business office to ordering subordinates around, obeying the lieutenant without hesitation.” Situations of this sort were reportedly not confined to officer training camps alone, but allegedly happened in National Army cantonments as well. “The lieutenant who had flunked out of college found the professor who had graded his paper assigned to his company,” the regimental historian of a unit of draftees wrote. “The clerk who had gone to training camp returned his former boss’s salute with satisfaction. ‘You’re in the army now –’”. See Edward L. Fox, “How Our Reserve Officers Are Made,” *Forum* (October 1917), 464; and Julius O. Adler, *History of the 306th Infantry* (New York: 306th Infantry Association, 1935), 16.
an industrial manager, with a salary of fifteen thousand a year, had been told plainly…that he could not make good. And Cy left with the first failure of a lifetime in his wake.”

To fantasies that pivoted around the alleged capacity of the camps and cantonments to dissolve regional, ethnic, and class barriers, contemporary social commentators added yet another element. “If there is one thing this war has done,” one of them explained, “it has delivered a terrific blow at theology. It has turned men’s thoughts in a common channel, unimpeded in their flow toward God by the obstacles that creeds have barricaded.”

Yet again, the cosmopolitan environment of the camps received full credit for blurring the denominational lines that divided Americans as effectively than socio-economic, ethnic, or regional distinctions. With soldiers of diverse religious backgrounds living and working together for months at a time, the camp experience could not but demonstrate the alleged artificiality of confessional allegiances and, in the process, further the cause of the social unity of the nation. “Protestants and Catholics, Augustinians, Baptists, Jesuits, Methodists, Presbyterians – you couldn’t tell one from another. We lived together, we ate together.”

Simply by virtue of bringing into sustained daily contact Americans from a variety of faiths, the camps would homogenize religious sentiment as effectively as they rendered irrelevant other distinctions. “The lines between the Protestant, the Catholic, and the Hebrew remain, but they are not emphasized, and they are never exaggerated,” claimed a social worker active in Camp Gordon, Georgia. “The fellowship, co-operation among Protestants, Catholics,

30 Ganoe, 780 – 781.


and Jews in religious and welfare work for our soldiers are most delightful and earnest,”
attested one camp chaplain. “Religious divisions find exceedingly barren soil in which to
grow in our camps.”

In praising the camps and cantonments as agents of social harmony and communal
coop-eration, Progressively-minded commentators tended to dwell, above all, on the reified
moral atmosphere they claimed prevailed in the new military posts. In their minds, that
atmosphere was inseparable from the physical environment that nurtured it. With the
standard camp or cantonment intended to house 48,000 inhabitants in 1,500 buildings, the
managerial challenge these installations presented to the War Department had a lot in
common with the everyday problems involved in administering such early twentieth-century
civilian municipalities as Atlantic City, New Jersey; Lincoln, Nebraska; Augusta, Georgia;
Bay City, Michigan; or Sacramento, California. According to the federal census of 1920,
only twenty-five cities west of the Mississippi could claim a population equal to or greater
than an average cantonment. The realization that the size, infrastructure, logistical
requirements, physical layout, and administrative complexity of a typical cantonment
resembled those of a fair-sized city could hardly escape the notice of contemporary
observers.

For Americans eager to assimilate the camps into the Progressive social vision, the
emphasis on parallels between cities and Army cantonments fulfilled a two-fold purpose.

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37 See n. 13 above for specific examples.
First, the speed and efficiency with which such intricate, quasi-urban communities had been constructed reinforced the claims of those who held up the camps as tangible evidence of the American genius for technical and organizational improvisation and communal cooperation, a point discussed previously. Viewed in this light, the rapid construction of the camps could be said to have represented a graphic vindication of Progressive notions of industrial and business efficiency rooted in “scientific” approaches to problems associated with the design and operation of large organizational “systems.” Simply put, the cantonments stood out as showcases of modern approaches to engineering, urban planning, utility management, sanitation, and telecommunications. Each one of the thirty-two “soldier cities,” explained one writer, disposed of “its own water, sewerage, telephone, and lighting systems, with miles of…roads, its own theatres, fire-department, railroad yards, refrigeration plant, bakeries, laundry, post-office, hotels, and hospital.” These embodied “the latest results in scientific investigation and building practice,” collectively rendering the camps “an epic in enterprise.”

Second, the conscious promotion of the image of the wartime camps as cities reflected the prominence that Progressive reformers had accorded to urban settings as the focal points of social reform and moral rejuvenation. Since the late nineteenth century, cities had served as both targets of and templates for Progressive-style reforms in such disparate spheres as municipal government, education, health and sanitation, and social control. The urban focus of reform, in its turn, both reflected and reinforced a fundamental tenet shared by reformers across the diverse spectrum of the Progressive “movement,” namely, the notion that the physical and moral condition of individuals and communities alike could be

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elevated and improved through the active manipulation of the immediate environment they inhabited. It was precisely this rationale that stood behind the welter of Progressive Era initiatives intended to streamline municipal administration; improve the lot of urban workers, immigrants, and the poor; suppress prostitution and drunkenness; and promote the construction of parks, playgrounds, libraries, and community centers – all in an effort to make cities physically and morally safer for their inhabitants.\textsuperscript{39} The conviction that the physical environment and its systematic modification held the key to effecting lasting social change and moral reform found its most potent manifestation in the “City Beautiful” movement, an intellectual trend that flourished in the early 1910s. Influenced by such celebrated exemplars of nineteenth-century city planning as Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s spectacular reconstruction of Paris under the Second Empire of Napoleon III, proponents of this school of urban design drew explicit connections between the scale and the esthetic appearance of a city’s public spaces and buildings on the one hand and the civic loyalty of its inhabitants on the other. In turn, a heightened sense of civic loyalty, they claimed, would facilitate the advent of a harmonious social order and staunch the alleged moral degeneracy of the urban poor. Urban beautification, in short, would be harnessed to the cause of social control that, in time, its supporters hoped, would be just as beneficial to the inhabitants of

America’s inner cities and working-class slums as other, more prosaic Progressive initiatives such as urban missions or sanitary reform.\(^{40}\)

It is unlikely that even the most fervent Progressive would go as far as to compare any of the hastily-constructed camps and cantonments with Richmond’s Monument Avenue, Denver’s central esplanade, or Washington’s National Mall. Collectively, the drab uniformity of the rows of pine-board barracks that made up each camp, combined with the improvised nature of their construction and their strictly utilitarian purpose, meant that the cantonments would never shed the physical and metaphorical resemblance to such “intentional communities” as company towns and Western mining towns with which so many Americans were familiar.\(^{41}\) Their lack of esthetic appeal, however, did not reduce the socially transformative potential that Progressive public opinion recognized in the physical ambiance of the camps. The civilian urban planners, civic engineers, architects, and sanitation experts who designed the camps on behalf of the War Department did not, it was true, aim for an


“aesthetic municipal effect,” one commentator noted. But when coupled with the disciplinary regimen that set the pace of everyday life in the cantonments, the designers’ emphasis on standardization, functional efficiency, and the provision of modern amenities to thousands of recruits would, Progressive commentators hoped, turn the camps into mechanisms for transforming individuals into members of a cohesive community bound by shared social, cultural, and moral values. In the process, the cantonments would thus facilitate one of the most deeply cherished goals of virtually all Progressive reformers.

The orderliness of the basic layout of each camp – a variation of the standard, U-shaped grid-work of streets – bore testimony to the Progressive passion for order and systematization (Figure 2.4) and impress the newly arrived recruit with the importance of these virtues. “The garish, irregular outline of the bonanza camp that symbolized it’s equally loose and careless organization, finds no duplicate where our citizen soldiers train,” one writer boasted. “Everything is regular and in order here, and the first view of one of these camps must impress the selected soldier with the system that created them…combining the fundamental element of military life – order through efficiency.”

The dual emphasis on order and efficiency and the spatial distribution of living quarters in relations to drill and parade grounds stood as a model of efficient planning that would have been the envy of many a scientifically-designed company town. “The new soldiers live within three minutes’ march of their work. They have but to cross the main road” before arriving at the central

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parade ground “suitable for the work of any unit from a squad to a regiment. In a word, officers and soldiers live with their work.”\textsuperscript{45}

Along with its standardized design, the cantonment, it was hoped, would make recruits amenable to the work of social reform and moral regeneration by virtue of its sheer physical size and the unvarying functioning of its day-to-day administrative routine. With over half of Americans in 1917 hailing from population centers with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants, the camps represented the largest social conglomeration that thousands of recruits had ever seen. Referring to the apocryphal figure of a draftee from the mountains of Eastern Tennessee, one writer noted that prior to his arrival at a cantonment, the soldier had “never seen as many as a hundred of his fellow citizens together at one time and in one place.”\textsuperscript{46} His sudden immersion in a community 40,000 or more people, their daily routine governed by the prescriptions of a uniform system of military discipline,\textsuperscript{47} their exertions directed toward a common end, could not but bring about a radical change in the way a typical recruit – whether a Tennessee mountaineer or a slum-dweller from the Lower East Side – related to his community and to the country as a whole. Brought into contact with Americans whom he would never have encountered in any environment other than the community of which he was now a part, the soldier would find his mental horizons and attitudes broaden under the influence of sustained interaction with “the better men” to be found among his fellow recruits. These would exercise “a refining and an uplifting influence upon their less favored fellows.” Such influences, in turn, would further the socially unifying

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 427.

\textsuperscript{46} Lynde, “All the Comforts of Home,” 95.

\textsuperscript{47} “Think of [a hypothetical soldier] as reporting to one of our National Army camps…What happens to him in one, happens to him in another. The [soldiers] are clothed, fed, their health is looked after, likewise their amusements and their finances, by the same system.” See Fox, “Is the Soldier Coddled?” 190.
tendencies with which many Progressives credited the camps. “Old misunderstandings and prejudices are passing away, social distinctions are giving way to a new solidarity; individual goodness, repressed for lack of an encouraging environment, is coming frankly to view.”

Best of all, the soldiers’ cognizance of membership in a community united by a common effort could be expected to ultimately dictate the moral tone of the society at large. One confident prediction asserted that the mentality and worldviews recruits were expected to acquire in the camps in the course of their service will set the current our thought for the next generation…The suggestibility of the camp, the march, the kinship that comes from work commonly pursued is its great opportunity. No man who regrets the exchange of civic influence for military position need regret it, if he will there work exactly as in civil life…Nor will his influence end with the platoon. The groups that meet each other will form the opinion of the regiment and the regiment the opinion of the army[…][For when the fighting has been done, the soldiers will carry their ideals everywhere into civil life. They will carry with them all the effective power that comes from membership of a close-knit organization.

The care the War Department took to provide each camp with amenities associated with modern urban life provided contemporary commentators with yet another reason to believe in the capacity of cantonments to effect a profound transformation of the social and moral values of recruits. “These towns cannot be the old-fashioned camps,” one writer noted when explaining the painstaking attention to detail that went into the planning and construction of the cantonments. “It is not tolerable that they shall not have ample water supply and the best of sewerage.” But the value of such conveniences as pure drinking water, shower baths, or modern toilets transcended their obvious practical utility. Along with the telephone networks, post-offices, libraries, street lighting, camp theatres, waste


management systems, barber-shops, hospitals, laundries, and clean mess-halls that were to be
found in every camp, these amenities were intended to familiarize recruits with the material
culture – and by implication with the socio-cultural values – of the urban middle class, the
stratum of American society at the cutting edge of the Progressive movement. \[51\] “[A]part
from the military discipline the cantonment city is going to exert a tremendous influence – a
remodeling influence – on…backward American regions,” one writer proclaimed. Even if
the war were to end before a typical soldier had a chance to complete his training, “he would
never be content to go back to things as they were” in the backwoods of Tennessee or the
slums of New York. “[I]f he should go back, he would carry with him, together with his
disciplined body and his well-learned lesson of the value of good food, good housing, and
the balanced ration, a spirit of progress and enlightenment…to make [his home community]
a better place for his children to live in.” \[52\]

Here, then, lay the crux of the Progressive insistence on conceptualizing the camps
and cantonments as urban communities. No less than the monumental architecture and
quasi-Parisian boulevards associated with many of America’s “Cities Beautiful,” the physical
and moral environment of the camps was supposed to facilitate the development of a
common “national spirit” that a multi-ethnic, multi-denominational, socially stratified, and
parochial polity like the United States appeared to be sorely lacking. “So negligent have we
been,” one contemporary observer noted, “that we have permitted our foreign population to
segregate itself according to racial groups, each group preserving its native language and only
very remotely affected by American thought and ideals.” To the majority of such individuals,

\[51\] For the contribution of the American middle class to the development of Progressivism, see
especially Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870 – 1920*

\[52\] Lynde, “All the Comforts of Home,” 100.
the writer went on, America was synonymous with “a factory and a boarding-house,” rather than with any great ideal. And how could anyone be expected to fight or work on behalf of “a lodging or a workshop”? Neither could make a “contribution to the public spirit of the country.” The institution of universal military service, and its consort, the camp and cantonment, held out the hope that this might change by offering “these people” something through which to “visualize their duties and obligations to their adopted country.”

Immigrants, of course, would not be the only beneficiaries of the transformative experience of camp life and selective service. The influence of the cantonment, Progressives hoped, would extent, in the long term, to other, marginal or peripheral elements American society. The stress on socio-cultural homogeneity, middle-class morality, and communal effort would subvert and overcome once and for all the forces of localism and parochialism that stood in the way of the country’s transformation into a modern, centrally-administered, industrial polity. Once the war ended, draftees from the “feud counties” of Virginia’s hill districts, no less than unassimilated immigrants from the inner-city neighborhoods of the Northeast, were expected to return to their homes with a highly developed sense of moral rectitude, a newly acquired loyalty to something greater than their immediate neighborhood or ethnic group, and a healthy respect for the blessings of orderly government and the rule of law. The camps would facilitate this wholesale metamorphosis of the American identity on both an individual and a communal level. With regards to the former, the discipline and moral formation he received in camp would transform “Charlie Smith,” formerly “the town’s star corner loafer,” into a “man.”


profound. “When Ikey and Abie go back to the East Side,” one writer believed, “if any greasy anarchist attempts to put anything over on them, Ikey and Abie will stand him up against the wall and say: ‘See here, old sport! Have you ever had any dealings with the United States Government? Well, we have! Uncle Sam’s all right!’”  

As the Progressives imagined them, the disciplined, culturally homogenous, and morally upright atmosphere of the camps and cantonments served as a model for what American society as whole ought to look like. “Imagine two square miles of teeming manhood,” one particularly enthusiastic proponent of the redemptive qualities of the camp experience wrote, “firmly organized, and yet bearing every evidence of care-free liberty.”  

Seemingly capable of reconciling the imperatives of collective endeavor with deeply-cherished ideals of individualism, the social order prevalent in the camps appeared to represent a model of communal organization uniquely suited to the needs of a rapidly urbanizing, industrial society like the United States in the Progressive Era. Irrespective of its grandiose aims and the flamboyant rhetoric in which it was couched, the ambitious social vision that Progressives postulated with respect to the camps and cantonments suffered from at least two inherent flaws. Both defects are instantly recognizable to students of Progressivism as a whole. First, the social reformers who perceived the “Soldier Cities” as sites for the construction of new models of masculinity, citizenship, and national identity frequently tended to express their schemes for societal rejuvenation in terms that tended to be heavily encumbered by wishful thinking, but remained unfettered by concrete proposals for action capable of illustrating the logical connection between the means and ends of a particular reform initiative. In consequence of


this tendency, confident assertions of the camps’ potential for imbuing soldiers with a new, Progressive identity rarely left the realm of faith in the power of such abstract concepts as “public spirit,” “enlightenment,” and of course “progress” to work their transformative magic over communities and individuals alike.

The roots of the second deficiency marring the Progressive social vision as it related to “America’s Soldier Cities” could be traced to the innate sense of socio-cultural superiority that characterized the collective mindset of Progressive reformers. The rarely-questioned assumption that the values, mores, and lifestyles of the Anglo-Protestant middle class should dictate the patterns and direction of social reform frequently led Progressives to underestimate or ignore altogether the amount of opposition their initiatives would encounter from established traditions; private, institutional, and local interests; and alternative models of socio-cultural organization and behavior. In none of its manifold manifestations – whether in the sphere of nation-wide business regulation, anti-hookworm campaigns in the rural South, agricultural and educational reform in the Midwest, or the battle to rid the big cities of drunkenness and prostitution – was Progressive reform ever a matter of the straightforward imposition of new attitudes and strictures on passively constituencies that had been targeted as recipients of Progressive values. Instead, such efforts almost invariably took the form of dialogues – frequently confrontation in nature – between the innovative worldviews and practical novelties championed by the Progressives on the one hand, and, on the other, the suspicion, obstructionism, and at times outward resistance on the part of the individuals, communities, and institutions that stood at the receiving end of Progressive benevolence.57

57 See especially Skowronek, Building a New American State; William J. Reese, Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements during the Progressive Era (Boston and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,
The efforts of Progressive reformers to shape the identity of the mass of recruits who began to arrive in the newly built camps and cantonments in the summer of 1917 replicated this pattern. By virtue of the prominence the War Department accorded to Progressive organizations in overseeing the social and leisure activities of ordinary soldiers in their off-duty hours, few recruits could avoid coming into contact with the Progressive corpus of worldviews and attitudes. These continued to serve as the broad context for the socio-cultural ambiance of the camps and the moral indoctrination to which soldiers were exposed, no matter how haphazardly, during training. At no point in that process, however, did the Progressive social vision succeed in asserting itself as the dominant influence over the process of soldiers’ identity-formation. Rather, it found itself in stiff competition with at least several other influences whose interaction laid the groundwork of a distinct soldierly identity. Particularly prominent among these variables were the institutional policies of the Army; the response of soldiers to the efforts of Progressive social workers and military authorities alike to impose formally-sanctioned notions of identity on recruits; and the growing tendency of servicemen to define themselves, individually and collectively, in contrast to the civilian values, worldviews, and attitudes they believed they left behind when they donned their uniforms for the first time. With all these factors jostling to leave a lasting imprint on the loyalties of recruits, the dynamics of identity-formation among the inhabitants of “America’s Soldier Cities” could best be characterized as a process of constant negotiation between competing sources of allegiance, rather than as the direct imposition of single framework of identity on a submissive mass of recruits.

III. “All Civilian Associations Were to be Severed”: The Demise of Localism

In keeping with the primacy of parochial allegiances in shaping the identities of Americans in the Progressive Era, soldiers departing their homes for training did so as representatives of their communities first, and their nation – however defined – only second. This perception was fully in keeping with historical traditions and patterns of manpower mobilization in virtually all the major conflicts the United States had waged up to and including the Spanish-American War. The War Department to harness the administration of the Selective Service System to the administrative machinery of local government appeared to indicate that things would be little different in 1917. The celebratory send-offs staged by countless localities for the benefit of young men leaving for camp left little doubt of the persistence of such parochial loyalties. While the civic rituals, symbols, and rhetoric that accompanied such events featured references to ideals of national unity and patriotic obligation, these lofty themes did not always dominate the tone of such ceremonies. Particularly in smaller communities, the parades, banquets, and assorted festivities that accompanied the departure of their National Guard unit or quota of draftees served as an outlet for expressions of local civic pride or regional loyalty above all else. Local elites, elected officials, and representatives of voluntary organizations often shared the spotlight with the departing soldiers in many such celebrations. Their presence and prominence in the context of such proceedings underscored the importance of the local loyalties and traditions that recruits were expected to uphold in the course of their service.58

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58 See for example “Twelve Good Men and True,” The Outlook (21 November 1917), 445; “Rockingham Recruits are Guests at Banquet,” Richmond Times-Dispatch (6 September 1917); “Registration is Carried Out; No Trouble Occurs; Parade at Chapel Hill,” The News and Observer (Raleigh, N.C.), 6 June 1917; and Annie S. Cameron, “A Record of the War Activities in Orange County, North Carolina, 1917 – 1919,” 19,
It is difficult to gauge the effects such civic celebrations may have had on the minds of recruits as they readied to leave their home communities. With new soldiers about to undergo the bewildering variety of experiences that delineated their first few days and weeks in uniform, memories of send-off ceremonies, in so far as they were recorded in contemporary letters and post-war reminiscences, made nowhere as deep an impression on servicemen as subsequent rituals of induction into the Army. In general, soldiers commented on the nature of the farewells they received from their home communities only in cases where departing troops deemed their particular send-off to have been a disappointment, insufficiently supportive, or simply a burden for the soldiers themselves.59 Yet, the marginal position send-off rituals occupied in the memory of servicemen did not, by any means, signify indifference on the part of the troops to their home towns or native localities. Nothing illustrated the resilience of local identities among soldiers at this early stage of their military careers than the resentment servicemen felt toward communities that neglected to demonstrate their solidarity with departing troops. Rudolph Forderhase vividly recalled the apathy his home town’s social and political elites displayed toward his fellow draftees as they entrained for Camp Funston, Kansas. A small crowd of friends, relatives, and the curious turned out to bid the men goodbye, but there were “[n]o official well wishers: No County or

59 In Worcester, Massachusetts, the insistence by local worthies on staging a ceremonial farewell for local National Guardsmen before their departure for training camp provoked the soldiers’ resentment rather than gratitude. “Next day was Sunday and Worcester gave her sons that ‘royal send-off,’” recalled the unit’s historian. “There was much oratory, much marching, and much heat...It was a grand sight for the people, but it was hard on the men. Standing at rigid attention for long spells and the long march told on some on some of them. Several fainted because of the heat...This ceremony came to a welcome end for us.” See Ernest LaBranche, *An American Battery in France* (Worcester, Massachusetts: Belisle, 1923), 15. LaBranche served in Battery E, 102nd Field Artillery Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division. See also James Mennell, “African-Americans and the Selective Service Act of 1917,” *Journal of Negro History* 84 (Summer 1999), 275 – 287.
City Officials, not one ordained minister.”\textsuperscript{60} No matter how simple or elaborate, however, the ceremonies that accompanied the departure of recruits from their communities symbolized the high-water mark of the locality’s stature as the focal point of soldierly identity. Among the forces whose interaction facilitated the dilution of traditional allegiances, the organizational policies implemented by the Regular Army to govern the organization and training of the enlarged land forces of the United States emerged as the most immediate challenge to the parochial character of soldiers’ pre-war identities.

Although the Regular Army was the smallest component of the forces the United States fielded in the years 1917 – 1919, its traditional stature as the repository of American military professionalism allowed its officers to exercise undue influence over the process of raising, training, and commanding these forces in wartime. Throughout the conflict, Regular officers dominated the War Department and the nascent General Staff, and exercised a near-monopoly of command at divisional, corps, and field army levels. In addition, Regulars predominated among brigade and regimental commanders, and all but monopolized key staff appointments at the General Headquarters of the AEF (GHQ-AEF) in France.\textsuperscript{61} The determination with which the Regular officer corps sought to assert its control over all the individual components of the Army could be traced to the decades-long battle that that corporate body had waged in an effort to subordinate the heterogeneous elements of the American military establishment to uniform standards of professionalism, organization, and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{60} Forderhase, Rudolph A., Company I, 356\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 89\textsuperscript{th} (“Middle West”) Division, “We Made the World Safe!!!!!!!: Camp Funston 21\textsuperscript{st} of Sept. 1917, to 12\textsuperscript{th} of January, 1918” (typescript memoir), 1, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.}

doctrine – standards dictated by the Regular Army. The goals and methods of this professionalizing impulse, its roots reaching back to the nineteenth century, had emerged by the early twentieth century as a full-fledged military wing of the reformist agenda of the Progressive movement.⁶²

In parallel with their civilian counterparts, many reform-minded officers perceived the decentralized and highly localized character of American state institutions as the chief obstacle impeding the emergence of a socially harmonious and administratively flexible polity capable of adjusting to the challenges of rapid industrialization.⁶³ Above all, Regulars cast a critical eye on what historians have come to refer to as “America’s amateur military tradition,” that is, the set of customs, forms of organization, and institutional relationships

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⁶³ Skowronek, *Building the American State.*
that had allowed volunteer, state militia, and National Guard units to play a crucial role in virtually all American wars since the Revolutionary and Early National periods.  

Regular officers regarded the institutional peculiarities of the National Guard establishments of individual states as a weak foundation upon which to build a military force able to safeguard America’s national interests in an increasingly dangerous world. Military reformers, their arguments grounded in historical precedents elucidated by Emory Upton, a leading American military thinker of the second half of the nineteenth century, contended that the autonomy and intimate ties National Guard units enjoyed with the social, political, and cultural structure of their respective states and localities critically undermined their military effectiveness in wartime. Loose federal oversight rendered the enforcement of professional standards of training difficult if not impossible. The close integration of National Guard unit into the fabric of state politics privileged political connections and social clout, rather than knowledge of things military, as the main criterion for the appointment of officers to positions of command responsibility. Finally, the social- or neighborhood-club atmosphere that pervaded many a National Guard unit was said to have undermined morale and discipline by blurring or erasing altogether the line of deference and respect that, Regulars believed, must necessarily separate officers from enlisted men. The jealously-guarded custom of electing NCOs and company-grade officers sapped discipline even further by forcing

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commissioned and non-commissioned officers alike to pander to their subordinates in order to gain and maintain popularity.\textsuperscript{66}

Whether the officer corps of the Regular Army deliberately set out to use the national mobilization in the years 1917 – 1919 to complete the work of subordinating state military organizations to centralized authority at the federal level is still a matter of some debate among historians.\textsuperscript{67} Accusations of Regulars’ prejudice against National Guardsmen form a standard trope of contemporary as well as post-war writings produced by soldiers who served in Guard units.\textsuperscript{68} Evidence explored by other scholars does, in fact, suggest that the litany of shortcomings that allegedly hamstrung the effectiveness of National Guard units did, in fact, enjoy wide currency among Regular officers throughout the war.\textsuperscript{69} On the other hand, plenty of evidence – some of it examined in Part I – also indicates that the criticisms Regulars leveled against the deficient professionalism of many National Guard units also had a sound basis in fact.\textsuperscript{70} Nonetheless, even if the National Guard was not the victim of a conspiratorial vendetta that Regular officers were said to have relentlessly...

\textsuperscript{66} Cooper, The Rise of the National Guard, 67.

\textsuperscript{67} For an interpretation of the wartime treatment of Guard officers by the Regulars that sympathizes with the former, see J. D. Hill, The Minute Man in Peace and War (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole, 1964), 261 – 286; and John K. Mahon, History of the Militia and National Guard (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 154 – 168.


\textsuperscript{69} See especially Keene, Doughboys, 17; and Ferrell, The Collapse of the Missouri-Kansas Division, ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{70} The problematic nature of the informal standards of discipline that prevailed in some National Guard units was a matter of serious concern for the Guardsmen themselves. As the historian of one Guard division noted after the war, “the men found it difficult to obey some man who was ‘home folks.’” Since “the commissioned and non-commissioned officers were friends and acquaintances, [enforcement of] army discipline was a task requiring both tact and patience.” See Elmer A. Murphy and Robert S. Thomas, The Thirtieth Division in the World War (Lepanto, Arkansas: Old Hickory Publishing Co., 1936; Illinois in the World War: An Illustrated History of the Thirty-Third Division (Chicago: States Publishing Co., 1920), 14.
pursued against state troops, the latter could hardly be blamed for thinking otherwise. The Guard’s mobilization into federal service did, in fact, signal the beginning of a process of dilution of state and local identities, albeit for reasons that had more to do with the immediate organizational requirements of the Army rather than with any deep-seated prejudice Regulars harbored toward citizen-soldiers.

Even before America’s entry into the war reports began to circulate that induction into federal service might involve transfers of personnel or wholesale mergers of Guard units. When they did surface, these items of hearsay were received with hostility. “We hear [a] rumor that we will be called into Federal service and transferred to the 4th Va. Infantry,” a Guardsman of serving in a Virginia coast artillery regiment noted in his diary a few days before the outbreak of hostilities. “There will be a big protest if this is true.” Only a few months later, the rumors were proven correct. In August 1917, the planning staff at GHQ-AEF finalized the tables of organization that would govern the composition of each U.S. Army division. The parameters drafted by Pershing’s staff called for the creation of abnormally large divisions whose size and composition would maximize their ability to withstand the grinding attritional warfare characteristic of the Western Front. With Pershing’s new organizational scheme calling for a corresponding enlargement of every unit down to company level, the War Department implemented the policy of amalgamating two or more National Guard regiments, and re-designating the final product in accordance with the Regular Army’s numerical identifications. By depriving some units of their deeply-

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71 Entry for 3 April 1917, Diary of Lucian H. Cocke, Jr., Aviation, Roanoke, 29 March 1917 to 22 May 1919, Box 105, Folder 9, Series IX: Virginia War Diaries and Incidents, 1915 – 1922, RG 66, LVA.

cherished historical identities, and stripping all National Guard regiments of their coveted state titles, the War Department struck a blow against the most sacred tenets of the National Guard’s institutional ethos. In the process, it inaugurated what would become the first step toward the wartime transformation of American soldiers’ modes of identity. 73

Before that process could get underway, however, the Army had to weather the storm of protest and controversy that illustrated the resilience of the parochial allegiances National Guardsmen had traditionally professed. To begin, the new scheme of numerical identification bestowed upon the combined Guard regiments ran roughshod over their deeply cherished state designations, as well as their own, individual titles. For many regiments, these affiliations constituted so much a part of their identity, and were so closely enmeshed with their history and traditions, that their loss was painfully felt. The merger of the 1st Connecticut, a unit with roots in the northern part of the state, with the 2nd Connecticut, a regiment that drew its manpower from the area around New Haven, proved so traumatic “that company commanders stood gaping for hours afterward.” Their consolidation into the 102nd Infantry was all the more shocking because “[n]o one had dreamed that this old and honorable regiment would be broken up.” 74 The officers of the two units tried to interpret this development in the best possible light. As one of them cheerfully put it, “It’s the new 102nd, the old 1 and 2 with ‘nothing’ in between, no animosities, no jealousies, no rivalry any more, – just the desire to get to France and fight.” But in spite of efforts at making the best of a bad situation, the regimental historian admitted that “until the union of the two regiments was sealed in blood on the battle-field there was


74 *Connecticut Fights*, 60.
to be a severe testing of morale because of the intermingling of these two units, each with such fine old traditions.”

The entire amalgamation scheme, he concluded, had been a big mistake. “The great fault of this plan,” he asserted, “was that it well nigh shattered the spirit of two of the finest National Guard Regiments in the country.”

Ordinary soldiers’ reactions to the transfers and amalgamations intrinsic to the reorganization plan underscore the intensity of the parochial identities espoused by National Guardsmen. Reporting his old regiment’s transformation into the 112th Infantry to his parents and sister, Charles Merritt of the 16th Pennsylvania noted wistfully that “We have entirely lost our identity with the state now.” In some instances, the loss or regimental identity provoked outright resistance. When they learned their regiment would be broken up, two hundred men of the 1st Oklahoma National Guard promptly went absent without leave in protest. The men of a Guard company based in Reading, Pennsylvania, demonstrated an even more impressive instance of organized opposition to the War Department’s challenge to traditional unit and community loyalties. In late September 1917, the Army ordered the transfer of over one hundred of the Reading men to a Philadelphia regiment. They “realized that it was their duty to go where they were sent. Most of them, however, had been recruited with the understanding that they were to serve in a peculiarly Reading

75 Ibid., 63.

76 Ibid., 64.

77 Charles B. Merritt, letter to parents, 5 October 1917; letter to sister, 9 October 1917, Merritt, Charles B. CPL, Company M, 112th Infantry Regiment, 56th Infantry Brigade, 28th Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

78 White, Panthers to Arrowheads, 18 – 19. The men of a Massachusetts National Guard unit slated for dissolution responded in similar fashion, with some going as far as to proceed to “Boston to protest to the [state] authorities.” See Arthur C. Havlin, The History of Company A, 102nd Machine Gun Battalion, Twenty-Sixth Division, A.E.F.: A Record of the Service, in the Great War, of Troop A, 1st Separate Squadron Massachusetts Cavalry, the Bodyguard to His Excellency, the Governor of Massachusetts, as Company A, 102nd Machine Gun Battalion, American Expeditionary Forces (N. p.: Harry C. Rodd, 1928), 3.
Contingent, amongst their friends and neighbors.”79 When news of the contemplated transfer reached Reading, it provoked “a widespread feeling of discontent over this summary breaking up of a detachment that had served as an individual unit since the days of the Revolution.” A committee of three leading citizens was convened in short order to enlist the aid of the local Congressman in lobbying the War Department to rescind the order. In the end, their protestations availed them little, and could not prevent a comprehensive reorganization of the company that included the transfers of large drafts of Reading men out of the unit, and their replacement with men from other parts of the state.80

The experience of Reading’s infantry company embodied the fate of dozens of other Guard units as they struggled to come to terms with the implications of the amalgamation scheme.81 The effects on the morale and discipline of units slated to lose their traditional identities could be profound. In one regiment of the South Carolina Guard, mere rumors that the unit was to be broken up prompted the more resourceful men to seek transfers to other units of their choice. In the words of one of its NCOs, “[t]his destroyed the old spirit” of the unit. Shortly thereafter, the regiment came to an ignoble end when, being merged with several other units to function as a depot brigade, a command that trained incoming recruits before forwarding them as replacements to combat divisions.82 “This was quite a blow to the pride of the Second South Carolina,” one its crestfallen soldiers remembered, “as there was

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80 Ibid., 116 – 117.

81 See for example with the experience of the Richardson Light Guard of Richardson, Massachusetts, as examined in Stentiford, “The Meaning of a Name,” 745.

82 Lawrence, Joseph D., Second Lieutenant, 113th Infantry Regiment, 29th (“Blue and Grey”) Division, “Experiences of Joseph Douglas Lawrence in the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, 1918 – 1919” (typescript memoirs), 5, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
no glory to be gained from a Depot Brigade.” Within a matter of weeks, the original personnel of the regiment ended up scattered among the various units of its parent division, their collective identity as the representatives of agricultural communities in the northeastern part of the state now little more than a memory.83

Quite apart from the loss of a distinct identity, unit mergers also sapped morale by playing havoc with the formal and informal hierarchies of social deference and command that gave National Guard units much of their institutional flavor. With its emphasis on reorganizing state troops by creating a smaller number of larger units, the amalgamation plan carried grave implications for hundreds of commissioned and non-commissioned officers of the Guard whose commands and assignments were likely to be rendered superfluous. As noted in Part I, the rank that an officer or NCO of the Guard held in his company was intricately intertwined with the position he occupied within the socio-economic hierarchy of his home community. The authority he claimed over his fellow citizen-soldiers stemmed from their respect for his civilian attainments and their deference to his social clout as much as it did from their esteem for whatever evidence of military professionalism their company commander or squad leader might display. For men whose claims to leadership roles depended to such a great extent on their prominence in specific communities, relief from command or transfer to units with which they had no emotional or social connections could hardly be a matter of purely professional concerns alone. Demotion was bad enough, but being compelled to yield rank to intruders from outside of one’s immediate community left a bitter taste. The experience of Walter Zukowski’s company of the Wisconsin Guard illustrated this mindset in vivid colors. Originally composed of men from the Polish-

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83 Ibid., 6.
speaking neighborhoods of northern Milwaukee, the unit was merged with several companies from the city’s South Side that included a fair number of soldiers with the experience of service on the Mexican Border. “We…were not happy about it,” Zukowski recalled. “[A]lthough we were numerically greater in numbers the S[outh], S[ide]. men had it all over us in length of service, experience, and rank. As a result our men holding non-com rank lost their chevrons, including me. We felt downgraded in more ways than one, [and] they looked down on us, ‘green-horns, raw, know-nothing recruits,’ etc.” That the newcomers for the most part shared the same ethnic background as the victims of demotion did little to smooth over the tensions the amalgamation produced.84

To soldiers steeped in the traditions and lore of their respective regiments and accustomed to serving alongside and under the command of friends, neighbors, relatives, and other familiars from civilian life, incorporation into a new, makeshift organization composed of troops from other localities and socio-cultural backgrounds was a prospect viewed with apprehension. “[O]ur regiment is going to be broken up to fill other parts of the army,” Edward North, a Guardsman from upstate New York reported. “Most of us will go to the Seventh [New York National Guard] Regiment.” By way of explaining his implicit lack of enthusiasm, he went on to remind his mother that the Seventh “is from New York City. It is made up of college fellows, wealthy men and the like.”85 For their own part, the “college fellows” and “wealthy men” of the Seventh felt just as victimized by the reorganization plan as the plebian units their regiment was forced to absorb. The merger of


85 North, Edward L., Private, Company A, 102nd Field Signal Battalion, 27th (“New York”) Division, letter to mother, 10 October 1917, Folder 1, Edward L. North Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
the Seventh with the much less illustrious First New York to produce the federally-
designated 107th Infantry kindled acrimony on both sides of this awkward union. The
Seventh, having been designated as the composite unit’s “base” regiment, at least retained its
officers and staff. But for the First, the amalgamation amounted to a wholesale
reassignment to a new outfit under new, unfamiliar commanders. Even a historian of the
Seventh acknowledged their predicament. “To be broken up and transferred to a strange
regiment was very discouraging and the men of the 1st came to us with very bitter feelings.”
For their part, the soldiers of the Seventh mourned what they saw as the demise of a proud
historical tradition. The consolidation was formally sealed at a ceremony that inspired one
soldier to compose for his regiment a mournful epitaph encapsulating the reaction
thousands of other National Guardsmen would have felt as they watched the independent
existence and distinct identities of their units evaporate under the contingencies of war. “We
have just returned from a regimental review,” wrote Kenneth Gow in early October 1917:

The regiment made an exceptionally fine showing, for the men realized that it was the last
review that the Seventh New York Infantry would ever give, as we take our new designation
on Monday. It is not a cheerful thought, this one of losing our identity, and it has more or
less made the old men unhappy when they realized that they would not parade again as the
Seventh.

The drastic reorganization of the National Guard overshadowed the Army’s efforts
to manipulate the institutional identity of new units composed of draftees. At first sight, the
War Department’s decision to entrust individual localities at the levels of the county and the
ward with the responsibility for operating the machinery of the draft suggested that units

88 Kenneth Gow, letter to mother, 6 October 1917, in R. M. Gow, ed., Letters of a Soldier, 165.
raised on the basis of this system might reflect, in terms of their composition and collective identity, the communities that furnished them. To be sure, draftees departing their home communities for the cantonments did not evince as solid a corporate spirit as that displayed by their counterparts in the National Guard. Nonetheless, draftees usually proceeded to camp with fellow members of their civilian community, with batches of draftees from the same general locality often allocated to the same company or battalion upon arrival in camp.89 Such an approach to the assignment of personnel, some Army officers recognized, could play a constructive role in stimulating unit cohesion and individual morale among newly-inducted draftees. For example, in one regiment that included large numbers of draftees from Buffalo, New York, “each company was made up of men from the same local board or from several boards. The idea was to keep friends in the same company and to make the different companies the exclusive property of some district of the City of Buffalo.”90

As a method of fostering fighting spirit and cementing esprit de corps, the practice of linking the identities of companies and regiments with their soldiers’ geographical origins echoed a custom routine in many Western armies of the era. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conventional military wisdom suggested that units composed of men hailing from the same community or area enjoyed a qualitative and motivational edge over


90 Eckstein, Richard, 309th Infantry Regiment, 78th (“Lightning”) Division, “A History of the 309th Regiment of Infantry, 78th Division” (typescript), 2, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
bodies of troops cobbled together from elements representing a variety of geographical regions and backgrounds. The localist focus of the principal European armies of the time reflected this conviction in full. At the outset of the Great War, the component regiments of most European land forces drew its personnel and replacements from well-defined recruitment areas associated with a particular locality or region. The famed “regimental system” of the British army was arguably the most conspicuous manifestation of the tendency to ground unit identities in the heritage, cultural peculiarities, and demographic attributes of specific geographical areas.  

But variations of the same theme were also prevalent among the British army’s Continental counterparts. Once the war broke out, soaring casualties and unexpectedly high rates of “personnel turbulence” conspired to dilute the local identity of most regiments. Increasingly, drafts of reinforcements were simply assigned to units that needed them most, without regard for their regional origins. Even so, many units managed to perpetuate their local allegiances by redoubling their efforts to inculcate replacements with pride in local and regimental traditions, or broadening their definition of regional identity to render it more inclusive. Given the enormous strain that the carnage of the Western Front placed on the morale and cohesion of combat units, the cultivation of local loyalties may be said to have increased as the war progressed.  

But the U. S. Army of the Great War never became what some of its European counterparts had been at least in the early stages of the conflict – a force whose individual

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92 For insights into how localized recruiting worked in French and German armies, respectively, see Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience*, ch. 1; and Dennis Showalter, *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires, 1914* (North Haven, Connecticut: Archon, 1991), 105 – 117.

93 For a recent case study of this tendency as it manifested itself in the British Army, see McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers*, ch. 4.
units drew their personnel and replacements for as long as circumstances permitted from specific geographical localities. Though it was consistent with standard military practice, the possibilities inherent in constructing unit identities around local allegiances was anathema to the specifically American intellectual context of Progressivism, a movement whose advocates viewed the war as an opportunity to subvert once and for all the parochialism they identified as a bar to a uniform national identity. The Army as a whole never developed a consistent policy on the matter, leaving the issue of assignments of personnel within individual units to the discretion of regimental commanders and their divisional superiors. Given the intellectual climate in which they operated, such men had little incentive to encourage their soldiers to cultivate local loyalties as the basis of their corporate self-image. Instead, the principal criteria that governed the distribution of draftees between the various companies of an individual regiment at the outset of America’s mobilization reflected the Progressive fixation with occupational efficiency and, above all, with the development of identities that transcended the narrow, pre-war allegiances soldiers had brought with into service from civilian life.

The first of these priorities revolved around the system of work-related classification the Army developed with the assistance of civilian efficiency experts and psychologists in an effort to match the vocational skills of incoming draftees with the variety of specialized positions the military needed filled in order to function effectively. Individual commanders questioned the value of the classification scheme, frequently assigning soldiers to whatever position was vacant regardless of individual draftees’ actual qualifications. In addition, the system allowed soldiers to exaggerate their occupational expertise in the hope of obtaining a more attractive assignment. Even when its recommendations were observed in the breach, however, the scheme of occupational classification emerged as a determinant of soldiers’
identity simply by virtue of its potential to influence the patterns of personnel assignment in the earliest phases of their military service.  

Second, attempts to highlight the local character of National Army units also ran counter to the Progressive emphasis on the creation of a uniform, national identity among recruits, as well as to the Army’s won efforts to inculcate them with a new, officially-sanctioned set of allegiances. The steps that the commander of one newly organized unit took to fulfill both priorities represented a case in point. The colonel of an infantry regiment belong to the 77th Division, a formation composed primarily of draftees from the ethnic neighborhoods of New York City, made a deliberate decision to break up groups sent to him by local draft boards and scatter them throughout the unit. By ensuring that platoons, and even individual squads, would include as diverse a mix of recruits as possible, “[a]ll civilian associations were to be severed and a new comradeship, based on the men’s experiences in the Regiment in peace and war, be fostered, so that there might be borne into civilian life after the war a greater understanding of democracy.”  

As noted by an officer who adopted a similar course of action in another unit, personnel assignment policies that paid no heed to the local origins of draftees could lead to a short-term decline of morale among recruits who had been deprived of the security of serving alongside men they knew from civilian life.  

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96 In the 309th Infantry Regiment, “selected men were transferred from various companies to the Headquarters, Machine Gun, and Supply Companies, bringing these specialty organizations more nearly to their authorized strength. This heralded an epoch in the history of the regiment, an epoch marked by transfers without the division which were destined to reduce all organizations to mere skeletons and which were to remove from the regiment all claims to representing any special city or locality in the country. This period marks, for the time being, the decline of enthusiasm and the birth of a feeling of guided initiative.” See Eckstein, Richard, 309th Infantry Regiment, 78th (“Lightning”) Division, “A History of the 309th Regiment of Infantry, 78th Division” (typescript), 2, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
But this was a risk that commanders appeared more than willing to take as they proceeded with their own efforts to turn civilians into soldiers.

**IV. Constructing Soldierly Identities: The Army’s Institutional Perspective**

For the professional soldiers who supervised the training of the wartime Army, weaning recruits from their civilian socio-cultural allegiances represented only the first step in the process of molding their identities in accordance with the Army’s own objectives. The second stage involved convincing soldiers to embrace a set of loyalties that had been institutionally sanctioned by the military to facilitate the transformation of raw recruits into reliable, obedient, and technically proficient soldiers. With its emphasis on stripping raw recruits of key elements of their civilian identity and its replacement with a new collective ethos, this two-fold process was fully in keeping with the methods and goals that have distinguished the basic regimen of military basic training in the United States, Great Britain, and much of the Western world in the twentieth century. During the First World War, this “tear-down”/”build-up” process was still in its infancy. The techniques that military establishments in America and elsewhere utilized to dissolve the identities of recruits and then reconstruct them in accordance with institutional expectations would only be perfected several decades later. But even the relatively unrefined training regimen the Army adopted in the years 1917 – 1918 to mold civilians into soldiers already included features that rendered it a conceptual model for the more sophisticated variations of the “soldierization process” that reached maturity during and after the Second World War.97

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97 See Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*, 17 – 26, for a comparative analysis of the soldierization process in America in the twentieth century.
In the specific case of America’s Great War generation, the most conspicuous elements of that process – ritual humiliation and hazing by training instructors, curtailment of personal independence, restriction of privacy, and emphasis on collective responsibility, followed by efforts to develop specialized technical and tactical skills and proficiency in the operation of weapons, and imbue soldiers with a cult of aggressiveness – have already received attention from historians. Yet, the Army’s endeavors to construct alternative modes of cohesion and motivation also included another component, one whose importance has largely eluded scholars. Specifically, this involved efforts to foster among soldiers a sense of allegiance to and pride in the units and formations in which they were serving as the pivot of their collective identity. Such efforts, in turn, reflected the Army’s recognition of the need to systematically cultivate soldiers’ morale, a priority whose urgency had been demonstrated in graphic fashion by the toll that warfare on the Western Front was taking on the psychological and mental endurance of European combatants after nearly three years of fighting.

As with many of the Army’s other morale-building projects, the initiative for this particular scheme appears to have originated with the commanders of individual units, especially at the regimental and divisional levels. Aware of the need to foster among soldiers forms of group identity other than the parochial loyalty the Army’s personnel assignment policies aimed to subvert, commanders strove to build alternative modes of collective allegiance that recruits would find attractive enough to embrace. Schemes to cultivate unit

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98 Most notably from Kindsvatter, 17 – 26; and Keene, *Doughboys*, 36 – 42.

pride, a key component of the “building-up” phase of the modern basic training regimen, were an obvious starting point.100

But the emergence of unit loyalties as a bonding force among American soldiers of the Great War was inhibited by the relatively minor role that regimental loyalties and traditions had played in the peacetime Regular Army. Though a number of Regular regiments boasted proud institutional pedigrees reaching back to the Early National period of American history and cultivated unique customs and traditions, these never attained the same level of diversity or importance accorded to them in the armies of Great Britain and a number of other European armies.101 For much of the nineteenth century, the Regular Army was distributed in company-size detachments scattered around the continental United States, especially west of the Mississippi. Such patterns of deployment encouraged soldiers to view the company, rather than the more amorphous regiment, as the principal locus of their collective allegiances.102 The series of military reforms initiated by Secretary of War Elihu Root in the early 1900 reversed this practice by reducing the number of military posts and concentrating manpower in fewer, larger Army installations, thus allowing the individual

100 John H. Faris, “The Impact of Basic Combat Training,” Armed Forces and Society 2 (November 1975), 120.

101 The four Regular Army infantry regiments that provided the core of the 4th (“Ivy”) Division represent a case in point. Two of these units traced their lineage to a regiment (the 4th Infantry) that had been formed in the Early National period of American history, and whose regimental colors were adorned with over a hundred battle- and campaign ribbons. A third had been created from a unit (the 9th Infantry) that had been raised just before the Civil War, and that had distinguished itself in the Indian campaigns, the Spanish-American and Philippine Wars, and the Boxer Rebellion. In spite of such distinguished institutional pedigrees, the traditions of these units’ parent regiment do not appear to have played a significant role in the official attempts to sanction the new regiments’ corporate identity. See Christian A. Bach and Henry N. Hall, The Fourth Division: Its Services and Achievements in the World War (N. p., 1920), 13 – 14.

102 In 1869, for example, the Army’s 37,000 officers and men were scattered among 255 individual military posts. See Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 267.
components of regiments to train together for the first time in decades. Even so, on the eve of the Great War, the company remained the largest unit with which ordinary soldiers could identify in a meaningful way. What is more, the possibility that even these limited regimental traditions could be disseminated among the hundreds of thousands, and ultimately millions, of draftees and volunteers who swelled the ranks of the Army in the years 1917 – 1918 was further diminished by the organizational structure the War Department imposed on the force mobilized during the war.

In contemplating the wartime expansion of the Army, two distinct options were available to American military planners. First, they could conceivably follow the model furnished by the British army, an institution that accommodated rapid wartime growth simply by adding new battalions to regiments already in existence and filling them up with volunteers and – beginning in early 1916 – conscripts. This expedient facilitated the development of esprit de corps among recruits by allowing the new battalions to share in the distinctive customs, traditions, and even dress of their parent regiments. Historians

103 Notwithstanding the reduction in the number of military installations and a concomitant increase in the average size of individual garrisons as well as of the Regular army itself in the wake of the Spanish-American War, the average garrison comprised no more than a battalion (approx. 1,000 troops) as late as 1911. See Weigley, History, 333 – 334.

104 Donald D. Kyler, who volunteered for the Regular Army in 1916, viewed his infantry company as “my home, it’s [sic] members my friends, my family and my mentors for several years.” In peacetime, newly enlisted soldiers received most of their practical training and instruction from the officers and NCOs of the company to which they were attached. Likewise, it was the company’s commissioned and non-commissioned cadre that served as the principal conduit of the soldier’s interaction with the disciplinary regime, higher bureaucracy, and institutional policies of the Army as a whole. In short, “[t]he company was both a tactical and an administrative unit – a prime one…it was one of the most important influences in a soldier’s life. For many men it was the only home they had. As was the case with regulars when I first joined, most of them either had no other home, or had been away from it so long that the company had become their true home. For me that soon became true. Within a short time I felt more attachment to my company than with any other since my father died.” See Kyler, Donald D., Sergeant, Company G, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, “The Thoughts and Memories of a Common Soldier” (typescript memoir), 16 – 17, 26, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

continue to debate the relationship between regimental identity and combat performance.\textsuperscript{106} There is little doubt, however, about the significance of unit traditions as a bonding force among new recruits. As at least one scholar has pointed out, the readiness of erstwhile civilians to quickly embrace the formal as well as informal aspects of regimental tradition attested to its effectiveness as a mechanism for socializing recruits into the institutional world of the military.\textsuperscript{107}

The alternative to this system was the creation of entirely new units that could claim little or no institutional association with the Regular Army’s extant regiments. The War Department’s adoption of this course early on in the war, combined with the decision to sublimate the distinctive identities of National Guard through the amalgamation scheme, ensured that the majority of the wartime Army’s regiments would have no fund of pre-war traditions to draw on. Instead, distinct unit traditions and identities would have to be constructed from scratch on the basis of wartime experiences. The problem inherent in this arrangement was that many regiments would spend months in training before being deployed to the front, a situation that minimized the opportunity for creating regimental identities based on an individual unit’s combat record. Such difficulties were compounded in the case of administrative and combat support units, which might never see the front line in any case. Though tasked with the performance of duties indispensable to the smooth functioning of the Army as a whole, troops serving in logistical, transport, and medical units found themselves at a severe disadvantage vis-à-vis their counterparts in the combat arms in the matter of staking claims to wartime distinction and battlefield glory. With infantrymen

\textsuperscript{106} For a synthesis of these debates, see French, \textit{Military Identities}, ch. 1.

\textsuperscript{107} Winter, \textit{Death’s Men}, ch. 3.
and artillerymen apt to denigrate the value of the services performed by non-combatant troops, the issue of how to maintain the morale of the latter continued to plague the Army for the duration of the war. 108

Collectively, these factors placed a premium on the Army’s ability to carry out its own, institutionally-sanctioned variant of the process cultural historians refer to as “the invention of tradition.” 109 The need to endow soldiers with a collective identity independent of pre-war loyalties encouraged military authorities to sanction efforts that aimed at nurturing the growth of artificial, institutionally approved manifestations of group consciousness among its troops. Nurturing identification with and pride in the company (or battery in the case of artillery units) represented the touchstone of such efforts. There were several reasons for this. The company remained the administrative and tactical unit most intimately engaged in regulating the private soldier’s daily routines of life, work, and leisure. The company commander – normally a captain – was the highest-ranking officer with whom a soldier had daily contact, and who was likely to know individual soldiers by name. The two hundred and fifty men who made up a standard infantry company lived in the same barracks, ate in the same mess hall, trained as a unit, and regularly interacted on a social basis. In the field, a unit of this size was the largest that a single commander could directly see and control in combat. In short, the company functioned as the soldier’s “tribe,” the level of

108 For an analysis of the soldiers’ perceptions of social status and “warrior legitimacy” in the Army during the war, see Keene, Doughboys, 55 – 61.

organization with the greatest everyday significance – practical as well as emotional – for its members.\textsuperscript{110}

For commanders concerned with developing and sustaining morale, stimulating company-level allegiances among soldiers assumed a high level of priority. To nurture these forms of group loyalty, commanders accorded considerable importance to making inter-company athletic competitions an integral element of soldiers’ organized leisure activities. The commanding officer of one battalion arranged a six-week long boxing competition between fighters representing the individual companies that comprised his unit. “I found that this scheme helped to bring the companies together,” he claimed, “because during the contest, the companies which the two contestants represented, wildly cheered their would-be champions. I found that the men who entered the contests, who under ordinary circumstances would have given in after a few punches, were ashamed to do so in the face of their comrades.”\textsuperscript{111} At Camp Greenleaf, Georgia, newly arrived recruits were organized into company baseball teams, and set to play inter-company games, on the first day of training. If the testimony of the camp’s morale officer were to be believed, this expedient worked wonders in weaning soldiers from their parochial pre-war loyalties and channeling them toward allegiances sanctioned by the Army. “[I]t is interesting to note that the men newly

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Students of combat motivation generally agree that later in the twentieth century, as improvements in weapons technology compelled units to increasingly disperse on the battlefield, soldiers’ primary identification shifted to even smaller groups such as the platoon and the squad. Nevertheless, the administrative, tactical, and disciplinary autonomy of the company allowed it to retain its status as the main psychological support group for soldiers, at least in peacetime or when not in combat. See F. R. Hanson, \textit{Psychological Factors of Adaptation to Combat} (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Department of Defense Research and Development Board, 1951); Shelford Bidwell, \textit{Modern Warfare: A Study of Men, Weapons and Theories} (London, Allen Lane, 1973), 99; and Anthony Kellett, \textit{Combat Motivation: The Behavior of Soldiers in Battle} (Boston: Kluwer, 1982), ch. 3. For the tribal metaphor, see Showalter, \textit{Tannenberg}, 120.
\item Charles M. DuPuy, \textit{A Machine Gunner's Notes: France, 1918} (Pittsburgh, Reed & Whitting Co., 1920), 27. DuPuy was a major in the 316\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 79\textsuperscript{th} Division, until November 1917, when he assumed command of the 311\textsuperscript{th} Machine Gun Battalion.
\end{thebibliography}
arrived ‘root’ for their home states, but how, in a few days, their esprit de corps shifts to their provisional companies,” he noted with approbation.\footnote{112 Memorandum, “Handling of Men in Quarantine at Camp Greenleaf,” September 1918, Box 6, Entry 377, Correspondence Relating to Morale at Army Installations, War College Division and War Plans Division, 1900 – 1942, Records of the Army General Staff, Record Group (RG) 165, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NARA). See also Captain H. B. Williamson, Intelligence Officer, Auxiliary Units, Camp Wadsworth, South Carolina, to Chief, Military Intelligence Branch, Morale Section, Washington, D.C., “Questions Regarding Morale,” 19 July 1918, Camp Wadsworth file, Box 16, Entry 377, RG 165.}{112}

If individual commanders’ efforts to cultivate soldiers’ affinity with companies represented the corner-stone of the identity-formation process, attempts to imbue troops with loyalty to their divisions stood at its apex. According to the Tables of Organization finalized by GHQ-AEF in the fall of 1917, each of the forty-two American combat divisions that managed to reach France before the Armistice would include some 28,000 troops distributed among a host of combat and non-combat units that made up each division.\footnote{113 See n. 72 above.}{113}

The smallest formation combining principal combat arms and logistical and support units within a single command, the division was also the smallest formation capable of independent operations in the field. By 1918, the quality and quantity of their divisions had emerged as the principal criterion for gauging the relative strength and combat effectiveness of the armies engaged in the Great War. Moreover, given the complexity and sheer magnitude of the fighting on the Western Front, divisions rapidly displaced regiments as the benchmarks that senior commanders, politicians, and the press used to measure the progress of the war. When newspaper reports, official governmental communiqués, and confidential memoranda sought to convey to their respective target audiences a sense of how the latest offensive was proceeding, they usually did so with reference to the number of divisions involved, and the amount of territory conquered, the quantity of prisoners and guns
captured, and the number of casualties sustained by each division. Viewed in light of the high profile they had come to enjoy both in the public as well as the official eye, divisions represented a promising foundation upon which to construct modes of group allegiance with which ordinary soldiers could identify.

The first attempts to foster regimental and divisional loyalties sought to capitalize on the residual regional and state loyalties that existed among newly inducted soldiers. National Guard formations furnished the most fertile ground for the development of unit identities based on local affiliations. Although the reorganization plan carried out in September and October 1917 broke up many Guard units or merged them with others, the divisions that had been formed from the new, amalgamated regiments initially retained their specific regional character, as reflected in the geographical origins of their personnel and their component sub-units. Lingering ties to specific locales provided senior officers with an opportunity to foster esprit de corps and highlight the unique organizational character of their commands through the use of nomenclature, symbols, and other points of cultural reference associated with the respective divisions’ regional and state roots.

For example, in the early months of 1918, while his 27th Division was still in training in the United States, its commander, Major General John F. O’Ryan, appealed to his soldiers for “suggestions and designs for a Divisional Insignia” that would reflect the formation’s identity as the division of the New York National Guard. In issuing his call for an easily recognizable divisional symbol, O’Ryan was motivated, above all, by practical considerations. Having spent several weeks in late 1917 visiting British units on the Western Front, he could

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not fail to notice the semi-official custom prevalent among the European armies of using distinct divisional insignia to identify divisional property, vehicles, artillery pieces, and troops, the latter advertising their membership in a formation with the aid of divisional shoulder patches or outlines of the insignia stenciled on their helmets. In some British divisions, plaques bearing divisional insignia were even fixed to the grave markers of the divisional dead.\textsuperscript{115} The memory of the prominent role that unit insignia played in promoting unit cohesion in the Union Army of the Civil War era also figured prominently in O’Ryan’s mind.

But these pragmatic considerations told only a part of the story. O’Ryan let it be known that whatever emblem the division might end up adopting, “it should have some relation, sentimental or otherwise, to New York State.” Moreover, O’Ryan desired the insignia to advertise the formation’s links to its home state in terms that would be sufficiently clear to be understood among the European soldiers and civilian with whom the New York Guardsmen were bound to come into contact. “[T]he letters ‘N.Y.’ should in some way appear in the Divisional Emblem. It is also urged that such designations as ‘Empire,’ ‘Goldenrod,’ etc., convey nothing to the minds of the people of Europe, among whom the Division is shortly to serve. Few people in Europe know much of the sentimentalities or history of our States, or even of our country, but there are very few of these who have not heard of New York.”\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{115} For the use of divisional insignia and regional identity in the British army during the First World War, see McCartney, \textit{Citizen Soldiers}, 81 – 87. See also O’Ryan, \textit{The Story of the 27th Division}, 73.

\textsuperscript{116} “Division to Have an Insignia,” \textit{Gas Attack of the New York Division}, 16 March 1918, 3, Cooling, Benjamin F. (donor) file, Miscellaneous Units, 27th (“New York”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
The badge the division eventually adopted may not have been the most imaginative—an arrangement of the letters “NY”—but it fulfilled the mandate specified by its commanding officer and affirmed the formation’s ties with its home state as the officially-sanctioned pillar of its collective identity. In order to encourage soldiers to think of the new insignia as a symbol of unit pride and personal prestige, the 27th Division placed strict limitations on the number of servicemen entitled to wear shoulder badges bearing the divisional symbol. In the New York Division, the privilege of displaying the unit symbol was restricted to those servicemen classified by their company commanders as “first-class soldiers.”

By seeking to construct a divisional identity that harnessed his soldiers’ state and regional origins to the cause of unit pride, O’Ryan was following a path that had already been blazed by several other National Guard divisions in the early stages of their training in the United States. The men of the 28th Division, its tables of organization dominated by units from Pennsylvania that claimed institutional descent from Civil War-era regiments, wasted no time in adopting the sobriquet “Keystone,” a nickname reinforced with the aid of an appropriate insignia that soon began making its appearance on divisional property and vehicles. The 29th Division, a formation comprising Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, and District of Columbia National Guard organizations, claimed the name “The Blue and the


118 On the eve of his unit’s departure for France, one Pennsylvania Guardsman boasted to his parents that “[e]verything is marked with over seas stencil and painted ready for shipment. The division as you may know is to be called Keystone Division]. The keystone in blue and the shell shape in the middle white…Don’t that look and sound great[?]” Munder, Howard W., Bugler, 109th Infantry Regiment, 55th Infantry Brigade, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to parents, 6 April 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. It is worth noting, however, that the “Keystone” appellation received formal sanction from the divisional headquarters only in the final weeks of the war. See Headquarters, 28th Division, American Expeditionary Forces, Memorandum, 27th October 1918, as reproduced in frontspiece of H. G. Proctor, *The Iron Division: National Guard of Pennsylvania in the World War: The Authentic and Comprehensive Narrative of the Gallant Deeds and Glorious Achievements of the 28th Division in the World’s Greatest War* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1919).
Gray” in reflection of its straddling of the sectional divide of the Civil War. Its New England counterpart, the 26th, consciously cultivated its identity as the “Yankee Division” from the very first phases of its existence. The division adopted the predictable, but unmistakable monogram “YD” as the basic design of its insignia, and utilized it to brand horses and mules and marking vehicles. On their own initiative, subordinate units of the division identified their vehicles with symbols that drew their inspiration from the history, maritime connections, patriotic themes, and landmarks associated with New England, including anchors, eagles, and representations of the Bunker Hill Monument. Beyond the Mississippi, the 40th Division, an organization that brought together Guard units from California, the Mountain West, and the desert states, dubbed itself the “Sunshine Division,” and imitated its sister formations in adopting a symbol relevant to its regionally-based nickname. Other examples abounded, with the majority of National Guard divisions officially adopting, before the Armistice, insignia and names that testified to the state or regional affiliations of their component units.


122 History of the Fortieth (Sunshine) Division, 1917 – 1919: Containing a Brief History and Roster of all the Units under the Command of General Major General Frederick S. Strong (Los Angeles: C. S. Hutson & Co., 1920).

123 Examples include the symbols and nomenclature associated with the 30th (“Old Hickory”); 33rd (“Prairie”), 36th (“Lone Star”), 37th (“Buckeye”), 39th (“Delta”), and 41st (“Sunshine”) Divisions, units raised from Guard units based in Tennessee and the Carolinas; Illinois; Texas and Oklahoma; Ohio; Mississippi and Louisiana; and the Trans-Mississippi West, respectively. See Murphy and Thomas, The Thirtieth Division in the World War; Illinois in the World War; and Ben F. Chastaine, Story of the 36th: The Experiences of the 36th Division in the World War (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing, 1920). For a complete listing of divisional nicknames and insignia, see AABE, 502 – 503, 515 – 516.
To a considerable extent, commanding officers of National Army, or draft, divisions shared the faith their Guard counterparts placed in state and regional loyalties as the foundation of meaningful divisional identities. Though not as closely tied to specific geographical areas as National Guard divisions, formations composed of draftees initially drew their manpower from clearly defined regions of the country. As had been the case with Guard formations, it had been expected at the start of the war that individual draft divisions would receive reinforcements from the territories from which they drew their original personnel. With this in mind, a number of divisional commanders attempted to utilize such regional affiliations as building blocks of unit identity and cohesion.124

The 80th Division, a formation that brought together draftees from Virginia, West Virginia, and southwestern Pennsylvania, represented a case in point. Cognizant of the geographic origins of their soldiers, the senior commanders of the division strove to foster the development of a unit identity that showcased the formation’s stature as a symbol of sectional reconciliation while affirming its essentially Southern character. In January 1918, the division formally celebrated the birthday of Robert E. Lee, an occasion one observer claimed had a special significance by virtue of its being initiated by soldiers from Pennsylvania. A few weeks later, their Virginia counterparts reciprocated by taking the lead in organizing observances to honor the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, an occasion that featured the commander of one of the division’s component brigades recite a poem extolling

124 Apart from the particular examples examined below, the most notable showcases of this trend are the 78th (“Lightning”), 86th (“Blackhawk”), 89th (“Middle West”), 90th (“Alamo”), and 91st (“Wild West”) Divisions, units whose original complements of manpower were supplied by draft board from New Jersey; Illinois; the Prairie West; Texas and Oklahoma; and the Mountain West. For individual divisions, see Thomas F. Meehan, History of the Seventy-Eighth Division in the World War, 1917 – 1919 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1921); George H. English, Jr., History of the 89th Division, U.S.A.: From its Organization in 1917, through its Operations in the World War, the Occupation of Germany and Until Demobilization in 1919 (Denver, Colorado: The War Society of the 89th Division, 1920); George Wyrne, A History of the 90th Division (N. p.: The 90th Division Association, 1920); and The Story of the 91st Division (San Francisco: 91st Division Publication Committee, 1919).
the troops of the 80th as the spiritual heirs of both Lee and Ulysses S. Grant, and claiming that the impending sacrifices that “the sons of the North” could expect to share with “the sons of the North” on the battlefield of France would transform them into a collective exemplar of national reconciliation.\textsuperscript{125}

Yet, the theme of sectional healing nearly always took a back seat to symbolic rituals aimed at aligning the division’s \textit{esprit de corps} with the martial traditions of the South. When the Confederate Veterans of Virginia held a reunion in Petersburg, the commander of the 80th invited the participants to visit Camp Lee, with the division’s soldiers parading in review in honor of their guests.\textsuperscript{126} The enthusiasm with which the division’s senior officers sought to make its Southern affiliation the main pillar of its identity reached an apogee in proposals to formally designate the 80th as the “Lee Division,” but this suggestion may have been a little too much for one Pennsylvania-born brigade commander. “When we have gone over there and stood the acid test of battle, then and not until then bestow upon us the name of the Lee Division,” Brigadier-General Lloyd M. Brett argued.\textsuperscript{127} In the end, the nomenclature and symbols the division adopted diplomatically omitted the historical allusions to the “Lost Cause.” Instead, they highlighted its geographical origins as a formation composed of troops from the “Blue Ridge” country.\textsuperscript{128}

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\textsuperscript{125} C. C. Pinckney, “The American Red Cross at Camp Lee,” 4, Folder 11, Box 43, Subseries C: Camp Lee, Series IV: Virginia Camps and Cantonments, 1917 – 1919, RG 66, LVA.
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\textsuperscript{126} On another occasion, the division’s resident American Red Cross representative arranged for visits to the division by various living relics of the Confederate “Lost Cause,” an assortment of guests that included the last surviving daughter of Robert E. Lee; the only surviving veteran of Stonewall Jackson’s staff; one of the four soldiers who carried Jackson off the Chancellorsville battlefield after the latter had been mortally wounded; and another Confederate soldier “who lay down in front of Jackson to protect him from bullets when the [s]tretcher broke.” Ibid., 5.
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\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{128} “Brief History of the 80th Division,” Folder 4, Box 37, Subseries C: 80th Division, Series III, Virginia Military Organizations, ca. 1917 – 1922, 1925, RG 66, LVA.
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As students of organizational sociology point out, the development of institutionally approved modes of collective allegiance represents only the first step in the process of identity formation within a formal organization. In order for such modes to take firm root in the minds of the rank-and-file of an institution, its leaders must find an effective method of transmitting such concepts of group loyalty to the mass of individuals who make up the organization at the lowest levels. The utilization of organizational symbols, ceremonies, rituals, and myths plays a paramount role in the diffusion of official concepts of corporate culture from the upper echelons of an organization's hierarchy to the lower.\textsuperscript{129}

Officers responsible for organizing and commanding higher military formations such as regiments and divisions while in training in the United States resorted to all of these strategies. Rituals and ceremonies such as regularly scheduled, large-scale reviews or parades brought together the various elements of a division in a display that fostered *esprit de corps* and morale by showcasing its concentrated size and power, imbuing soldiers with the sense of membership in a disciplined collective, and promoting friendly competition as individual regiments sought to outdo each other in the deportment of their soldiers. “The sight of from twenty to twenty-five thousand men in formation with their animals and equipment, on one big parade ground, is impressive, whether one be spectator or participant,” wrote an officer who witnessed the weekly reviews held by the 34th Division at Camp Cody, New Mexico. These occasions, he noted, afforded “[a] splendid opportunity…to compare organizations with respect to bearing, equipment, and march discipline, and there was naturally much rivalry among the various regiments participating.”

As noted previously, the use of symbols such as divisional insignia, unit designations, or mottos represented the second important aspect of official efforts to construct unit allegiances. To increase the appeal of these efforts, some senior commanders encouraged ordinary soldiers to take an active part in constructing the corporate identity of the units in which they served. In some divisions, servicemen were permitted to suggest proposals for appropriate unit nicknames and divisional songs. In the 12th Division, a Regular Army formation based at Camp Devens, Massachusetts, the contest for the best divisional

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nickname yielded a list of a hundred and twenty three suggestions.131 The official designation of the 34th Division as the “Sandstorm Division,” a facetious comment on the dominant weather conditions prevailing in New Mexico where the formation underwent training, was selected by the divisional command on the basis of a “popular vote of the officers and men.”132 The choice of a divisional song was also submitted to competition among the soldiers of that organization.133

As newly created organizations with little in the way of continuous institutional tradition, the new division of the U.S. Army could not draw on any significant reservoirs of “institutional sagas” – the body of organizational myths that interpret the history of an organization in the framework of past heroic accomplishments that helped to transform it into a unique collective.134 The emergence of organizational narratives based on tales of heroic effort and the successful negotiation of assorted challenges by the division’s personnel could be generated most effectively through active participation in combat, a condition that could be realized only after a division’s deployment to the Western Front. Few divisional commanders, however, could afford to wait until their units joined the AEF overseas before assuming an active role in constructing a corpus of officially sanctioned organizational “myths” that would cement their soldiers’ unit allegiances. The process of raising and training new divisions in the United States was barely underway when the Army’s administrative nerve-center in Washington began to issue a series of orders related to

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131 Captain Ernest J. Hall, Assistant Division Intelligence Officer, “Names suggested for the 12th Division,” 11 October 1918, Camp Devens file, Box 3, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

132 Acting Division Intelligence Officer, 34th Division, to Chief, Military Intelligence Section, Washington, D.C., “Weekly Report on General Information,” 23 April 1918, Camp Cody file, Box 1, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

133 Stevens, “National Guard Units at Camp Cody,” 283.

personnel assignment policies that would have a profound impact on efforts to cultivate divisional-level unit allegiances among newly inducted soldiers. In the short-term, the new personnel assignment policies would make such efforts more difficult, while in the long-term, would impress divisional commanders with the necessity to focus their energies on building unit identities capable of withstanding the disruptive effects of “personnel turbulence” on unit cohesion and identity.

Beginning in mid-September 1917, the War Department instituted a policy of raiding the manpower of divisions undergoing stateside training for technically skilled personnel required to fill the ranks of engineer, ordnance, signal corps, aviation, field artillery, and other specialist units. Once the AEF entered combat in the spring of 1918 and began to suffer casualties, stateside divisions were forced to give up personnel to help compensate for the losses incurred by the combat divisions or help bring up to full strength the ranks of divisions scheduled for immediate deployment to France. National Army (Draft) divisions were especially hard hit, with over two hundred thousand men originally assigned to such formations being siphoned off to fill out under-strength Regular Army and National Guard units preparing for overseas deployment. In place of the trained, semi-trained, or even completely untrained soldiers involved in these transfers, divisions would frequently be flooded with raw, recently inducted draftees.

The tribulations that one National Army unit – the 82nd and 88th Divisions – experienced in this regard are indicative of the problems other organizations had to confront as a consequence of the War Department’s personnel assignment policies. Activated in late August 1917 at Camp Gordon, Georgia, the 82nd was assigned the states as Tennessee,

Georgia, and Alabama as the territory from which to draw its original manpower and replacements. By the end of September, the divisional muster rolls included the names of over 13,000 officers and men organized around a training cadre of officers and NCOs furnished by two infantry regiments of the Old Army.\textsuperscript{136} The hemorrhaging of manpower began about a month later, when the division lost 267 officers who were transferred to other divisions and specialist training facilities. In early November, virtually all of the division’s draftees – meaning the vast majority of its manpower – were transferred to two Southern National Guard Divisions along with a number of junior officers. This personnel shakeup left the division with little more than a “skeleton crew,” some companies vanishing altogether, and one of its artillery regiments reduced to six men per battery. Its organic field signals battalion and engineer regiment fared even worse, losing almost all of their soldiers at one stroke. At the end of the month, the 82\textsuperscript{nd} once again ballooned in size close to its authorized strength, with nearly 27,000 officers and men present for duty at Camp Gordon. The dramatic turn-around in the division’s fortunes was due to a massive transfer of draftees from some half a dozen other National Army cantonments from the North, South, and Midwest. Many of the newcomers were recently inducted recruits who lacked even rudimentary military skills, a situation that would require the officers and NCOs of the 82\textsuperscript{nd} to begin the training cycle anew. And with so many of the newcomers originating from the urban centers of the industrialized North, a large number proved to be recent immigrants who could not speak English and were not yet American citizens, a circumstance that

\textsuperscript{136} Cooke, \textit{The All-Americans at War}, 3 – 4.
compounded even further the efforts of the division’s training cadre to transform raw recruits into effective soldiers. 137

The constant transfers of men in and out of the division set a pattern that dominated its institutional existence until the 82nd at last left for France in April 1918. None of the manpower problems the division subsequently experienced while at Camp Gordon compared with the large-scale gutting of its enlisted ranks in the fall of 1917. Nevertheless, “manpower turbulence,” along with the deleterious influence it had on the division’s training and morale, remained the greatest problem facing its officers and NCOs. When coupled with shortages of skilled instructors and modern equipment, the perpetual fluctuations of personnel played havoc with the carefully designed training schedules of individual units, with what would ultimately prove to be serious repercussions for the combat effectiveness of the AEF on the battlefields of France. More significantly still, the continuous transfusions of manpower in and out of the organizations had the potential to deal repeated heavy blows to whatever morale, unit cohesion, and sense of corporate identity newly-raised divisions such as the 82nd had managed to cultivate in their brief period of existence. Among the first victims of the War Department’s personnel policies was the local character of the 82nd as an essentially “Southern” National Army division. In less than two months following its activation, the 82nd had become a polyglot entity in which poor whites from the rural South represented a mere drop in an ocean of draftees – many of them first- and second-generation immigrants – from the urban centers of the industrialized Northeast who had come to represent the core of the division’s manpower by the time its stateside training came

to an end in the spring of 1918.\textsuperscript{138} With the local character of the division thus diluted, its officers were presented with the additional challenge of cultivating a sense of corporate identity that did not correspond to the traditional emphasis on common parochial geographic and cultural origins as the cement of unit allegiance.

The experience of the 88\textsuperscript{th} Division, a formation originally made up of draftees from the Midwest and the Northern Plains illustrated the disintegration of the territorial principle of unit identity in equally stark terms. At first, the division’s senior leadership sought to assign incoming recruits to individual regiments in such fashion as to keep together men hailing from the same general localities. The 351\textsuperscript{st} Infantry Regiment functioned as the special preserve of men from St. Paul and the counties of southern Minnesota and northern Iowa, while in the 352\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry the bulk of manpower came from northern Minnesota and eastern North Dakota. Similarly, the majority of the gunners of the 337\textsuperscript{th} Field Artillery Regiments came from just two counties in central Minnesota. Finally, the division’s organic engineer regiment, the 313\textsuperscript{th}, included a disproportionate number of draftees from Minnesota.\textsuperscript{139}

But the territorial basis of the division’s composition, and hence of its corporate identity, proved impossible to sustain in the face of the sweeping transfers of personnel that began only a few weeks after the 88\textsuperscript{th} had been activated and continued until the early summer of 1918. By the middle of December, the division had lost some fifteen thousand men, a depletion of manpower that effectively diluted its character as a predominantly Minnesota-based organization. The trend continued in the following months as the

\textsuperscript{138} Cooke, \textit{The All-Americans at War}, 5 – 11.

\textsuperscript{139} Wayne E. Stevens, “Minnesotans at Camp Dodge,” in Holbrook and Appel, eds., \textit{Minnesota in the War with Germany}, 315.
formation’s original core of enlisted personnel was gradually drained to satisfy the manpower requirements of at least seven other divisions based at some fifteen to twenty different military installations throughout the country.  

Fresh quotas of draftees reporting for service with the division increasingly brought men from states other than Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas, a situation that added another layer complexity to the efforts of the divisional command to maintain the local identities of the division’s component regiments.  

Between its activation in late August 1917 and its departure for France in late July of the following year, close to 40,000 troops had cycled through the ranks of the 88th, a formation with an authorized strength of some 28,000 officers and men.  

One indication of the instability of its manpower is furnished by the fact that the permanent personnel the division took to the Western Front in July 1918 had been principally furnished by the quotas that draft boards called up for service only the previous month.  

The impact on individual and collective morale of the blanket transfers sanctioned by the War Department was significant. Soldiers dreaded reassignment to another unit for at least two reasons. Reports filed by officers responsible for monitoring the morale of soldiers stationed in the camps and cantonments identified one of them. “[T]he spirit of all ranks has been affected by the repeated inroads in the enlisted strength by drafts of men to fill other units,” a characteristic report of the morale of one division claimed. “[T]he men are not as keen as formerly in competition for noncommissioned rank, and this is attributed to the fact that they feel that in all probability they will be transferred to other organizations and lose  

140 See The 88th Division in the World War (New York: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., 1919), 17.  


142 The 88th Division in the World War, 33.  

143 Stevens, “Minnesotans at Camp Dodge,” 319.  

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the rank which they have gained by their efforts.” More significant, from the perspective of soldiers with first-hand experience of inter-divisional transfers, were the implications of reassignments for a serviceman’s sense of collective and individual identity. “There are countless ‘sad sacks’ in uniform,” Edward Johnston explained. “[W]hen a soldier loses that which he prides the most – his outfit – his organization – his brothers-in-arms – and on that awful day becomes what is known as a ‘casual’, then he becomes the very saddest ‘Sad Sack’ under the canopy of Heaven.” Finally, rumors that their particular division would be designated a replacement unit and slated to provide reinforcements to other divisions without ever being sent to France also had a dispiriting effect on soldiers.

The corrosive influence of personnel reassignment policies on soldier morale convinced many senior officers of the necessity to re-evaluate their approach to the problem of fostering unit allegiance in the divisions they commanded. On the one hand, the high rate of personnel turnover in individual divisions seriously hampered any sustained efforts to

144 Intelligence Officer, 86th Division to Chief, Military Morale Section, “Summary of General Information,” 11 March 1918, Camp Grant file, Box 6, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

145 Johnston, Edward, Sergeant, 2nd Machine Gun Battalion, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, untitled reminiscences, 4, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

146 See for example Acting Division Intelligence Officer, 34th Division, to Chief, Intelligence Section, War College, Washington, D.C., “Weekly Report on General Information,” 19 March 1918; Headquarters, 34th Division, “Weekly Bulletin #20,” 30 March 1918; Acting Division Intelligence Officer, 34th Division, to Chief, Military Intelligence Branch, Washington, D.C., “Weekly Report,” 28 May 1918, all in Camp Cody file, Box 1, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA; Captain Robert S. Henry, Intelligence Officer, 31st Division, to Chief, Military Intelligence Branch, Washington, D.C., “General Information,” 6 May 1918; Captain Robert S. Henry, Intelligence Officer, 31st Division, to Chief, Military Intelligence Branch, Washington, D.C., “General Information,” 6 May 1918; First Lieutenant George N. Northrop, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 88th Division, Camp Dodge, Iowa, to Chief, Military Intelligence Section, “Summary of Conditions in this Cantonment,” 23 March 1918; First Lieutenant George N. Northrop, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 88th Division, Camp Dodge, Iowa, to Chief, Military Intelligence Branch, Washington, D.C., “Weekly Summary,” 6 April 1918, both in Camp Dodge file, Box 4, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA; Captain Howard F. K. Cahill, Acting Division Intelligence Officer, 83rd Division, to Chief Military Intelligence Section, “General Information,” 11 March 1918, Camp Sherman file, Box 14, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA; Colonel H. G. Brees, Chief of Staff, [91st Division], Confidential Memorandum, 15 April 1918, Camp Lewis file, Box 9, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA; Captain Thomas R. Gavenlock, Acting Assistant Chief of Staff, 89th Division, to Chief, Military Intelligence Branch, “General Information,” 25 March 1918, Camp Funston file, Box 5, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.
infuse soldiers with a distinct sense of unit allegiance. On the other hand, the same
“personnel turbulence” heightened even further the importance of such efforts as a means
of absorbing new arrivals into the organization as rapidly as possible. Faced with this
dilemma, divisional commanders reacted in three distinct ways.

First, with divisions and regiments quickly losing their original associations with
specific localities and regions, some commanders chose to make a virtue of the increasingly
“cosmopolitan” character of the formations they led, and translate the geographic, cultural,
and even ethnic diversity of their soldiers into the basic building block of divisional identity.
Having repeatedly failed to persuade the War Department to purge his division – the 82nd –
of the several thousand non-English speakers, illiterates, recent immigrants, and suspected
enemy aliens it had received since autumn of 1917, Brigadier-General William P. Burnham
bowed to the inevitable.147 In a General Order issued shortly before his command was
shipped overseas, Burnham announced his decision to designate the division as the “All-
American.” This appellation, he argued, was fitting in view of the fact the formation had
come to include “the best men from every state in the union.”148 Virtually overnight, the
division’s polyglot composition, so vexing from the point of view of the officers and NCOs
responsible for training the successive drafts of incoming soldiers, had metamorphosed into
the cornerstone of its officially-sanctioned identity. This was quite a turn-around for a
division that had begun its institutional existence as a predominantly “Southern”
organization.

147 Cooke, The All-Americans at War, ch. 2.

148 Headquarters, 82nd Division, American Expeditionary Forces, General Orders No. 3, 8 April 1918,
Box 111, 82nd Division Historical File, Record Group (RG) 120, Records of the American Expeditionary
Forces, NARA, as cited in ibid, 27.
The 77th Division represented an even starker example of the same trend. Its rank-and-file hailed almost exclusively from New York and immediate environs, with a large proportion of draftees from the city’s ethnic ghettos. At first, the War Department was so doubtful that a division whose soldiers reportedly spoke forty-three different languages – including Yiddish, Italian, Russian, German, Polish, and even Chinese – could ever become a combat-effective formation that it seriously contemplated designating it a replacement division or breaking it up altogether.\footnote{Pearlman, To Make Democracy Safe for America, 151.} The mixture of Regular and Reserve officers provided the division’s leadership apparently shared this pessimistic outlook.\footnote{Major-General Robert Alexander, who took over the command of the division after its deployment to France, summarized his fellow officers’ outlook when he noted, following the war, that “[o]n account of [the] wide diversity of origin and tradition among the enlisted personnel[,] the general expectation of really valuable service from the Division was not especially optimistic.” See Robert Alexander, Memories of the World War, 1917 – 1919 (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 108.} In what appeared as a foreshadowing of its future status, between November 1917 and March 1918 the division experienced four waves of mass personnel transfers that left some companies at half their original strength, only to be flooded by fresh infusions of draftees, necessitating the commencement of the training cycle from scratch.\footnote{Frank B. Tiebout, A History of the 305th Infantry (New York: 305th Infantry Auxiliary, 1919), 26 – 27; Julius O. Adler, ed., History of the 306th Infantry (New York: 306th Infantry Association, 1935), 19.} These hard realities seemingly bode ill for any efforts at fostering a sense of unit allegiance among the soldiers of the 77th.

Ironically, the public notoriety the division had acquired in the press by virtue of its polyglot composition ultimately turned out to be the unit’s saving grace and the foundation of its formal institutional identity. Contemporary observers, including such luminaries as Theodore Roosevelt, praised the 77th as “a university of American citizenship,” and as an organization that would serve as a practical instrument of the kind of “martial Americanization” that proponents of the pre-war Preparedness Movement had identified as
one of the most desirable side-effects of their calls for compulsory military service in peacetime.\textsuperscript{152} Popularly known as the “Melting-Pot Division,” the 77\textsuperscript{th} sealed its organizational identity as an agent of socio-cultural assimilation only after its exploits in France had enshrined its reputation as one of the most effective units of the AEF.\textsuperscript{153} But the origins of its unique corporate culture – an ethos that emphasized pride in the heterogeneous composition of its rank-and-file while highlighting the socially unifying potential of military service – could be traced to the months the 77\textsuperscript{th} spent in training at Camp Upton, New York.\textsuperscript{154} Few indicators demonstrated with greater clarity the formal sanction of the division’s newly-found sense of corporate identity than the enthusiasm with which officers and NCOs encouraged their soldiers to sing the irreverent but eloquent ditty that became the unofficial song of the 77\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{155}

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\item \textsuperscript{152} Theodore Roosevelt, \textit{Roosevelt in the Kansas City Star} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), 14, as cited in Pearlman, \textit{To Make Democracy Safe}, 150.
\item \textsuperscript{153} For a particularly prominent example of the corpus of post-war mythology that grew around the 77\textsuperscript{th} Division on the basis of its combat record, see Julius O. Adler, ed., \textit{History of the Seventy-Seventh Division, August 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1917 – November 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1918} (New York: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Co., 1919).
\item \textsuperscript{154} Among the most potent attempts at projecting just this image of the division was the collection of semi-fictional short stories published in early 1918 with a view of educating the American public about the capacity of the Selective Service System to integrate immigrants and minorities into the country’s body politic. Populated by stock figures of draftees who, in civilian life, had been effete Italian barbers from Brooklyn, perpetually grinning African Americans from Harlem, clownish Chinese laundry operators from The Bronx, and lazy Orthodox Jews from the Lower East Side, the anthology extolled the wartime draft and the 77\textsuperscript{th} Division as the epitome of the “Melting Pot” idea. “Will it justify American democracy?” the volume’s author asked. “Will it show the world that American youth has not been born for naught? Will it demonstrate that this great country can take to its heart the peoples of the whole world and make them her own sons? I know the answer – and thank God it is of three letters instead of but two.” See Frazier Hunt, \textit{Blown in by the Draft: Camp Yarns Collected at One of the Great National Army Cantonments by an Amateur War Correspondent} (New York, n. p., 1918; reprint: Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 371 – 372.
\item \textsuperscript{155} “Oh, the army, the army, the democratic army!/They clothe you and they feed you/Because the army needs you. Hash for breakfast,/Beans for dinner, stew for supper time,/Thirty dollars a month, deducting twenty-nine./Oh, the army, the army, the democratic army,/The Jews, and the Wops, and the Dutch and Irish cops,/They’re all in the army now!” See L. Wardlaw Miles, \textit{History of the 308\textsuperscript{th} Infantry, 1917 – 1919} (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1927), 20 – 21. Following the Marne-Aisne offensive, the engagement that served as the division’s baptism of fire, Robert Alexander, the new commanding general of the 77\textsuperscript{th}, issued a general order to his subordinate officers that included what may have been the most telling nod to the urban, polyglot composition of his command’s enlisted personnel. In the document, he encouraged platoon commanders and squad leaders to cultivate the “gang” mentality of their soldiers, a reflection of the belief,
Other divisional commanders responded to the gradual dilution of their units’ regional affiliations by adopting a diametrically opposite course. This involved re-emphasizing a division’s regional identity as the basis of its corporate culture, but with one important qualification. While redoubling their efforts to link the organizational ethos of a particular command with specific geographical regions or locales, senior officers now stressed the universal significance of the historical traditions, cultural heritage, and socio-political values allegedly associated with the part of the country with which their division was affiliated, if only marginally. At times, this meant stretching the relevance of a region’s defining socio-cultural characteristics to the point where such attributes became little more than stilted truisms. All the same, the expansion of their meaning and applicability to include virtually every ethnic, regional, or social element represented in the division, officers hoped, would free unit cohesion and identity from its erstwhile dependence on the closely-knit localism of its original complement of manpower.

The 12\textsuperscript{th} Division, a formation of the Regular Army, illustrated this pattern. Organized in July 1918 – too late to ship out to Europe before the Armistice – it spent the war in training at Camp Devens, Massachusetts. In spite of its designation as a “Regular” division, it included a significant proportion of draftees and raw recruits. Like virtually all of its sister formations, it coped with repeated outflows and inflows of manpower that disrupted its training schedule and rendered difficult any serious attempts at imbuing soldiers with a sense of unit identity. Although two-thirds of its successive quotas of draftees came

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prevalent among the division’s officers, that many of their troops must have been urban “gangsters” in civilian life, and that an appeal to the fighting spirit they had developed in the back alleys of New York City might improve their morale and aggressiveness on the Western Front. See Headquarters, 77\textsuperscript{th} Division, American Expeditionary Forces, General Orders No. 20, 28 August 1918, as cited in Alexander, \textit{Memories of the World War}, 112 – 113. See also Adler, ed., \textit{History of the 77\textsuperscript{th} Division}, 13; Arthur McKeough, \textit{The Victorious 77\textsuperscript{th} (New York’s Own) in the Argonne Fight} (New York: John H. Eggers, 1919), 6; Stallings, \textit{The Doughboys}, 198 – 199; and Grotelueschen, \textit{The AEF Way of War}, 282.
from New England, the division’s personnel were said to represent “almost every state in the union.” As was typically the case with units that procured their personnel with the aid of the Selective Service System, the 12th had large numbers of recent immigrants, many of them non-English-speakers, in its ranks. French-Canadians, Italians, Slavs, Greeks, Armenians, and Syrians were especially prominent. Periodic assessments of the division’s morale left little doubt of the fragility of its cohesion as a unit and of the difficulties its officers and NCOs faced in their efforts to motivate and train their subordinates. The language barrier dividing many of the soldiers from their superiors in rank rendered “non-English-speaking soldier…not a troublesome problem, but a perplexing one.” The problem was further exacerbated by the tendency of some officers and NCOs to vent the frustration they felt toward their charges by indulging in ethnic slurs and committing occasional acts of personal violence against soldiers who did not understand the commands they had been ordered to


157 Captain Ernest J. Hall, Intelligence Officer, Auxiliary Units, Camp Devens, Mass., to Chief, Military Morale Section, Military Intelligence Bureau, Washington, D.C., “Questions regarding morale,” 20 July 1918, Camp Devens file, Box 3, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

158 One example of the linguistic and cultural incomprehension that separated many of the immigrant soldiers of the 12th from their superiors was furnished by a patriotically-themed meeting organized under the auspices of the Camp Devens YMCA for the benefit of the division’s French-Canadian soldiers. Reporting his impressions of the meeting to his immediate superior, an operative of the Camp’s intelligence and morale section professed his disappointed that French-Canadian troops “are very apathetic and do not show the same enthusiasm as the other nationalities. When the Canadian National Anthem was being played, they did not seem to realize it was their duty to stand at attention.” Though he failed to specify just which musical composition he was referring to – Canada having had no official national anthem until 1980 – it is possible to speculate that the piece in questions would have been “God Save the King” or “Maple Leaf Forever.” Even if the soldiers present had been familiar with either (and it is perfectly possible many of them would not have been able to recognize either of the two), it is likely they would have reacted with indifference to the former, and would have found the latter deeply offensive to their cultural sensibilities. See N.F.R., “Memorandum for Captain Hall: Report on the French-Canadian Meeting,” 6 September 1918, Camp Devens file, Box 3, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

159 Captain Ernest J. Hall, Intelligence Officer, Auxiliary Units, Camp Devens, Mass., to Chief, Military Morale Section, Military Intelligence Bureau, Washington, D.C., “Questions regarding morale,” 20 July 1918, Camp Devens file, Box 3, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.
Incoming draftees, at least one report suggested, were susceptible to left-wing propaganda, apathetic about the outcome of the war, and sadly ill-informed about the larger issues for which the conflict was being fought. Forging an effective combat unit out of such disparate – not to mention discontented – elements, and convincing them to identify with an organization as large and impersonal as a modern infantry division, would be a formidable challenge.

The divisional command responded to the situation in two ways. First, it co-operated with local welfare and service organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association and the Red Cross in initiating a series of general athletic, educational, and indoctrination programs designed to improve morale. Second, it sought to encourage the development of a divisional allegiance whose foundations would be set firmly in unique symbols and nomenclature, but sufficiently broad and inclusive to appeal to all of the division’s homogenous elements. The renewed emphasis on the practical utility of divisional names, songs, and mottos as the building blocks of morale reflected the efforts to the Army General Staff to institutionalize the hitherto random process by which individual divisions had been adopting such outward expressions of corporate identity and unit pride since the autumn of the preceding year. “It is deemed…of greatest benefit to the morale of units,” the head of

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160 “The average officer [at Camp Devens]…silently resents…any suggestion that our foreign-born selectives should not be called ‘Guineas’, ‘wops’, ‘squareheads’, etc.” See Captain Ernest J. Hall, Camp Intelligence Officer, Camp Devens, Mass., to Chief, Military Morale Section, Military Intelligence Division, Washington, D.C., “Military Morale,” 9 September 1918, Camp Devens file, Box 3, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

161 According to one report, “[n]one of the draftees…are anxious to fight. [They are ] [n]ot pro-Germans, but ignorant and provincial. All they are interested in are pork chops…One hears phrases like this around the tents and camp streets: ‘The big guns wanted this war to kill off labor.’ ‘If it’s only a family quarrel over there, why should we be in it?’ ‘Gee, I hope every morning to wake up and see that the war is over.’” See First Lieutenant T. C. DeFriez, “Memorandum for Captain Perkins,” 24 September 1918, Camp Devens file, Box 3, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

162 Robinson, Forging the Sword, 134 – 138; 145 – 146.
the Military Morale Section of the General Staff wrote in the summer of 1918 in a variant of a confidential memorandum composed for the benefit of divisional commanders, “that they have individual material of [this] kind which stimulates an esprit de corps, and which makes evident to new-comers that the outfit means something very real to its members.” Recognizing the value of endowing divisions with distinct organizational personalities that would resonate with ordinary soldiers, the General Staff touted the benefits of these manifestations of institutional identity while confessing its own erstwhile tendency to marginalize their importance. “Examples of the success of such things are numberless,” the same officer continued,

‘First to Fight’ of our Marines, the ‘Rainbow Division,’ the new ‘Engineers’ Song’, etc. Much greater stress has always been laid on this in the British Army. Who would not prefer to fight with the ‘Black Watch’, or the ‘Coldstream Guards’, than with the 152nd Infantry Regiment? This office, therefore, suggests that official stimulus be given to the natural tendency to develop these songs and names, if indeed they be not made the object of direct official action.163

It was in response to a similar missive that the commander of the 12th Division requested the officers and men of his organization to submit suggestions for an appropriate divisional name that would provide the basis for a distinct unit identity and boost soldier morale.164 On the surface, the name selected by the commanding general and higher staff officers of the division from the numerous suggestions that had been submitted appeared to perpetuate the tendency to associate unit identities with local and regional loyalties. The formation was dubbed “The Plymouth Division” in reflection of the fact it “was training in

163 Captain G. B. Perkins, Chief, Military Morale Section, to Intelligence Officer, 11th Division, Camp Meade, Md., “Divisional Songs, Name and Slogan,” 26 August 1918, Camp Meade file, Box 10, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

164 Captain G. B. Perkins, Chief, Military Morale Section, to Intelligence Officer, 12th Division, “Name for Division,” 17 October 1918, Camp Devens file, Box 3, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA; and Robinson, Forging the Sword, 139. See also n. 139 above.
the Pilgrim country and the name was so typically American.” But the formal order spelling out the rationale behind the selection of this seemingly parochial designation made clear that its value as the bedrock of unit identity transcended its symbolic associations with the history of New England. Instead, the announcement dwelled on the allegedly universal appeal of the social values and political doctrines associated with the memory of New England’s original European colonists, “those splendid forerunners of that great emigration of freedom-loving people from many nations who planted, nurtured, and brought to perfect growth in American the tree of Democracy.” The order acknowledged that the traditions synonymous with the Pilgrims would resonate especially with those members of the division “born and bred in the shadow of Plymouth Rock.” Yet, in emphasizing the allegedly timeless significance of the “historical atmosphere” of that landmark, the order emphatically claimed that all of the division’s members, their diverse origins notwithstanding, could view “[t]he names, achievements, and character of the Pilgrims [as] an important part of the common heritage of our country.” The immutable and all-embracing significance of the principles embodied in the historical memory of the Pilgrims was especially pertinent to the present war, a great national endeavor that united Americans of all backgrounds in a common effort. Thus imbued with the ideals their division’s name represented, all soldiers of the 12th would be “ready and eager to go forth across the seas” in emulation of the Pilgrims, “to battle again for Liberty, in order that Democracy may prevail and the rights of Freedom and Self-preservation be guaranteed to citizens of all nations.”

165 Robinson, *Forging the Sword*, 139.

166 Headquarters, Twelfth Division, General Orders No. 13, 11 October 1918, Camp Devens, Ayers, Massachusetts, Camp Devens file, Box 3, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.
The 31st ("Dixie") Division provides another example of the process by which divisional commanders sought to endow their units’ regional affiliations with a more universal significance that would assist in integrating a cosmopolitan assortment of replacements from all over the country into a formation originally composed of men from a specific region. Initially a formation made up of National Guard units from the South, the 31st underwent the usual hemorrhages of manpower while in training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia. By late spring of 1918, most of its personnel were Northern draftees, with men from Illinois and Michigan particularly numerous among the newcomers. But the profound change in the demographic composition of its manpower only strengthened the resolve of divisional headquarters to cultivate a unit identity based on an officially-sanctioned corporate ethos that professed to reflect the "Southern" spirit of the division. With virtually all of the division’s new draftees arriving from the North, “only the framework of the division will be from Dixie,” an officer of the 31st reported. “But,” he continued, “it is the firm intention of those left behind to perpetuate the spirit and carry on the work of the division under the inspiration of that name which has been its pride since its organization.”

In actual fact, however, this ethos, its essence summarized in the eleven “Soldier’s Commandments” promulgated by the divisional commander for the benefit of his subordinates, extolled virtues that had much more in common with popular late-Victorian

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167 The division had adopted the “Dixie” sobriquet as early as November 1917, likely one of the first divisions to do so. See Headquarters, 31st Division, Memorandum No. 129, 27 March 1918; Camp Wheeler file, Box 17, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

168 Captain Robert S. Henry, Intelligence Officer, 31st Division, to Chief, Military Intelligence Branch, Washington, D.C., “General Information,” 15 July 1918, Camp Wheeler file, Box 17, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

169 Captain Robert S. Henry, Intelligence Officer, 31st Division, to Chief, Military Intelligence Branch, Washington, D.C., “General Information,” 26 May 1918, Camp Wheeler file, Box 17, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.
and Progressive Era platitudes concerning fair play, moral rectitude, hard work, and courage in adversity than with any distinctly “Southern” cultural attributes. “Obey orders first, and, if still alive, kick afterwards if you have been wronged,” urged the second commandment.

“Tell the truth squarely, face the music, and take your punishment like a man; for a good soldier won’t lie, doesn’t sulk, and is no squealer,” advised the fifth. “Be of good cheer, and high courage, shirk neither work nor danger, suffer in silence and cheer the comrade at your side with a smile,” exhorted the ninth.170 The divisional song, its lyrics distributed among all soldiers of the organization, nominally praised “dear old Dixie,” but stressed with much greater emphasis the division’s stature as yet another symbol of sectional reconciliation, national unity, and America’s determination to defeat its archenemy across the Atlantic.171

The third expedient available to commanders of units gutted by repeated out-transfers of manpower was to transform “personnel turbulence,” roller-coaster fluctuations of morale, and ordinary frustrations of camp life into integral components of the organizational mythology and corporate identity of their divisions they led. Increasingly cognizant of the deleterious effects that repeated postponements of its overseas deployment had on the morale and discipline of the 34th Division, the headquarters staff of that formation drew analogies between the division’s protracted training sojourn in the deserts of New Mexico and some of the most celebrated episodes in American military history. “The most heroic actions are not always the most spectacular,” the division’s weekly bulletin

170 Major-General LeRoy S. Lyon, Commanding Officer, 31st Division, “The Soldier’s Commandments’ Adopted by the 31st (Dixie) Division,” n. d. [July 1918?], Camp Wheeler file, Box 17, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

171 “Down in Dixie,/Dear old Dixie,/Where the Blue and Grey are one,/We’ve got to go across the sea,/And put an end to Germany.” For the text of “It Shall Be Done,” the divisional song of the 31st, see enclosure in Captain Robert S. Henry, Intelligence Officer, 31st Division, to Chief, Military Intelligence Branch, Washington, D.C., “General Information,” 23 August 1918, Camp Wheeler file, Box 17, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.
reminded soldiers who were thoroughly fed up with marking time at Camp Cody. “It was harder to be an American soldier at Valley Forge than to dash upon the enemy and defeat him at Monmouth. Lee’s last stand before Richmond had in it more heroism than the brilliant victory at Bull Run. The ability to stand with patience and fortitude,” the bulletin went on, “in the face of the most bitter adversity, is more to be sought after than the élan that carries the soldier through the barrage and into the trenches of the enemy.”

No matter how much the senior officers of the 34th Division tried to mythologize it, the commonly shared experience of boredom, annoyance, and communal discomfort synonymous with living in one of the most unpleasant training camps in the United States probably did not lend itself easily to efforts that aimed at transforming that experience into the basis of unit identity. But given the scarcity of other, more tangible bases of unit pride and corporate identity, commanders of newly raised divisions, their often-demoralized officers and men marking time in training camps and cantonments, frequently had no alternatives beyond grasping at such fragile straws as they sought to imbue their subordinates with an approximation of a distinct corporate ethos.

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172 Headquarters, 34th Division, Camp Cody, New Mexico, Weekly Bulletin #20, 30 March 1918, Camp Cody file, Box 1, Entry 377, RG 120, NARA.

173 For the concept of “communal discomfort” as a touchstone of soldierly identity during the Great War, see Siegfried L. Sassoon, The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 426 – 427.

174 For a similar example, see the comparable experience of the 91st (“Wild West”) Division, whose prolonged stay at Camp Lewis, Washington, mirrored the tribulations and morale problems of the 34th Division. See Headquarters, 91st Division, Camp Lewis, Washington, “Confidential Memorandum,” 15 April 1918, Camp Lewis file, Box 9, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.
V. Constructing Soldierly Identities: Doughboys’ Response

The efforts that Progressive social welfare agencies and the Army’s high command to imposing an institutionally-sanctioned collective identity upon the mass of soldiers under their tutelage ultimately had only one true criterion of success. The sole yardstick with which to gauge the effectiveness of their efforts was the extent to which ordinary soldiers internalized the array of symbols, rituals, values, attitudes and beliefs that underpinned the officially-promulgated corporate culture of the great collective to which they now belonged. Available evidence makes clear that neither Progressive social workers, nor the Army’s bureaucratic and command hierarchy succeeded in persuading the soldier to wholeheartedly embrace the cosmopolitan middle-class ideology of Progressivism, or to make the division – a relatively large, impersonal organization – the principal focus of his emotional loyalties.

Servicemen reacted to their immersion in military life by transferring the parochial allegiances that underpinned their identity in civilian life to the Army’s equivalent of the neighborhood, town, or county – the geographical, social, and cultural entities that dictated the modes of collective and individual identification in America at that time. As had been the case while they were still civilians, soldiers undergoing training identified most strongly with the communities and groups that dictated the patterns of everyday life, and with whose members they interacted on a daily basis. To ordinary soldiers, therefore, the squads, platoons, and companies to which they happened to belong corresponded to what Benedict Anderson refers to as “visible communities” or “experienced communities.” The ever-present role they played in a common soldier’s existence endowed them with significantly more relevance and tangible substance than such abstract, remote concepts of social
organization as regiments, divisions, and much later, army corps, all three levels of command representing the military version of “imagined communities.”

The tendency of soldiers to regard the smallest components of their parent units as the main focus of companionship and identity became apparent in the earliest stages of training. The experience of the 340th Machine Gun Battalion, a National Army unit was formed at Camp Funston, Kansas in September 1917, serves as an example. The battalion was part of the 89th Division, an organization whose initial attempts at fostering a distinct corporate ethos assumed the unusual, quasi-feudal form of linking the identity of the division with the flamboyant personality of its first commanding officer, Major General Leonard Wood. By November, the 340th had made considerable strides in training, but the progress its men made in mastering machine gun tactics (conducted with wooden mock-ups for lack of real weapons) stood in stark contrast to their failure to develop a coherent unit identity. “The two months the men had been together had not the desired effect upon their associations,” the unit’s anonymous historian claimed after the war. “There was still a tendency for them to mingle only with members of their own squads and platoons.” At this relatively early stage of America’s war effort, when the massive personnel transfers had only recently begun to take effect, that the makeup of these small unit may still have corresponded to soldiers’ civilian, peace-time associations, or at the very least may have been made up of quotas of men sent to camp by the draft board of a specific community or


176 Whether anyone other than the commanding general and his staff took seriously the unofficial sobriquet of the 89th as “Wood’s Own” is difficult to determine in light of the paucity of evidence. See *History of the 340th Machine Gun Battalion, 89th Division, A.E.F.* (N. p., n. d.), 36; English, *History of the 89th Division*, 49 – 50; and Stallings, *Doughboys*, 348.

177 Ibid., 27.
county. Though it is impossible to know for certain, careful scrutiny of the battalion’s official history suggests that its soldiers did not begin to exhibit an awareness of belonging to a unit larger than a platoon or a company until their deployment to France and commitment to combat.

Sufficient evidence exists to indicate that the narrow range of collective loyalties professed by soldiers of the 340th Machine Gun Battalion reflected a broader trend. Reporting on the morale of soldiers undergoing training in the camps and cantonments, a civilian official of the War Department observed that the main mode of collective and individual self-identification prevalent among servicemen rested on a “gang spirit” that afforded little scope for any “higher ideals.” Evidence supplied by the soldiers themselves shed light on what this particular observer may have meant. In spite of serving in the 32nd Division, a formation that had compiled an impressive record of combat effectiveness, Hakon Anderson’s primary focus of wartime allegiance remained rooted firmly in the emotional attachment he felt toward the small group of friends and neighbors with whom he had enlisted in the Wisconsin National Guard, and who formed the core of the company in whose ranks he spent most of the war. More common still was the tendency of soldiers to anchor their primary wartime allegiance in their sense of membership in even smaller groups, such as those comprising their fellow platoon- and squad-mates, individuals with whom they messed, shared living accommodations such as tents and barrack-rooms, and upon whom they relied for social interaction in off-duty hours. “[O]ur [squad] tent was always a place for songs, scuffling, drinking (but not getting drunk), and poker,” Joseph Rizzi fondly recalled.


his time of training with the 35th Division.\footnote{Rizzi, \textit{Joe's War}, 19.} Doubtless he would have understood just what Charles Merritt had meant when he wrote his parents that leaving his squad-mates would be tantamount to leaving home.\footnote{Merritt, Charles B., Corporal, Company M, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th ("Keystone") Division, letter to parents, 28 October 1917, World War I Veterans' Survey Project, USAMHI.} The domestic and familial connotations that a soldier's squad could acquire in its capacity as the focus of identity and loyalty could go even further. The squad to which Earl Cronk had been assigned shortly after his enlistment in an engineer regiment was commanded by a corporal who was older than his subordinates, and who exhibited an almost parental solicitude for his charges. "We called him 'Mother' and he referred to us as his children. 'Come children, I must make soldiers of you.'"\footnote{Earl T. Cronk, \textit{The Leatherman-Cronk Story of Two Innocents Abroad in the 21st Engineers, Light Railway, World War One} (Richmond, Virginia: The Beacon Press, 1963), 5.} Certainly not all servicemen professed such a deeply-felt emotional bond to their squad-mates. But even those who did not made it clear that the random group of strangers in whose company they now spent the majority of their time comprised the central social network of their new life as soldiers, and the chief formative influence shaping their general impression of the Army.\footnote{See for example, French, Francis M., letter to father, 13 July 1917, Folder 42, Box 80, Richmond (Va.) materials, Series VII, RG 66, LVA; Reynolds, George V., Cook, Battery B, 307th Field Artillery Regiment, 78th ("Lightning") Division, letter to father, 30 September 1917, World War I Veterans' Survey, USAMHI; Green, Paul E., Company B, 105th Engineer Regiment, 30th ("Old Hickory") Division, letter to Mary Green (sister), Paul Eliot Green Papers, SHC, retrieved on 25 November 2005 from \url{http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/greenletters/menu.html}; Clarke, William F., Private, Company B, 104th Machine Gun Battalion, 27th ("New York") Division, \textit{Over There with O'Ryan's Roughnecks}, 22 – 23; Searcy, Earl B., Private, Company E, 311th Infantry Regiment, 78th ("Lightning") Division, \textit{Looking Back}, 18 – 19; Wilder, Amos N., Corporal, Battery A, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd ("Indianhead") Division, \textit{Armageddon Revisited: A World War I Journal} (New Haven, Connecticut, and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 62 – 63; Browne, George E., Corporal, Company A, 117th Engineer Regiment, 42nd ("Rainbow") Division, letter to Martha Johnson (fiancée), 14 September 1917, in Snead, ed., \textit{An American Soldier in World War I}, 22 – 23; Rogers, Horatio, Corporal, Battery A, 101st Field Artillery Regiment, 26th ("Yankee") Division, \textit{World War I Through My Sights} (San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1976), 5 – 6.} In the long-run, daily contact and shared experiences of training permitted soldiers to broaden their horizons of communal loyalty beyond the level of the Great War equivalent
of the “primary group” of combat organization. Yet even this expansion of the horizon of identity tended to stop at the level of the company or artillery battery in which individual soldiers served. As had been the case in the professional “Old Army,” the company retained its significance as the unit whose commissioned officers and NCOs functioned as mediators between individual soldiers in the ranks and the institutional policies of the Army as a whole. The Company or Battery was also the largest unit with whose members an individual soldier could conceivably hope to become personally acquainted on a meaningful basis. “All the members of a company are potential friends because they are living the same life, cherishing the same hopes, and facing the same difficulties,” Frederick Pottle explained. In a social and spatial milieu whose hallmarks included communal sleeping quarters and dining halls, a minimum of privacy, and the daily performance of routine tasks that required a high degree of co-operative effort, the social distance separating the inhabitants of the same barrack-building or company street shrank to a minimum. The company to which Arthur Yensen was assigned upon his arrival in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was “made up of all kinds of men from all over the Union: preachers, criminals, rich men, tramps, young boys, and old army men,” he observed in his diary. Despite such diversity of social and geographical background, a spirit of group solidarity prevailed. “Almost everyone here calls everyone else a son-of-a-bitch, but no one takes offense,” Yensen continued. “A rough-shod friendship exists among us all.”

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184 The classic (though by now heavily beleaguered) formulation of the squad- and platoon-level “primary group” as the basic unit of combat motivation and soldierly identity in modern warfare is Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 12 (1948), 280 – 315.


Two additional factors increased the importance of the company or battery as the anchor of communal identity. The first was the gradual, but undoubtedly real, growth of the spirit of competition that regimental and company commanders deliberately cultivates among their soldiers in an effort to boost their morale and military efficiency. For reasons analyzed previously, the personal interest servicemen took in the state of their respective companies’ proficiency at drill, field-craft, or deportment was probably strongest in units of the Regular Army. Once the war came and the Army started to expand, a similar impulse took hold in units made up of Guardsmen and draftees. No less than their Regular brethren, these “citizen-soldiers” felt sufficient loyalty to their company to take a keen interest and pride in their respective unit’s efficiency rating or turnout at inspections as ways of distinguishing it from other organizations in the same regiment. Though merely a private first class, and thus unlikely to derive any great benefit from the exemplary showing his company made during an inspection by the commander of its parent regiment and a visiting state governor, John Bolin could not conceal his satisfaction when describing the event to a correspondent back home. “Well, this morning we had a big review in front of our Colonel and Gov. Capper [of Missouri],” he wrote. “I wish you could have been there to see it. We

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187 See pp. 35 – 35, and n. 112 above. Earle Poorbaugh, who enlisted in the Regular Army in late 1916, recalled the “great rivalry between [the] companies” of his regiment, as individual units competed in their proficiency in drill, athletics, and weapons maintenance. See Poorbaugh, Earle R., Sergeant, Company I, 26th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade, 1st Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
came into our company street and Capper came along in front of us; he passed a comment on us and to the Col. as our Co[mpany]…was better equipped, better drilled, in better shape and looked 10 per cent better than any other Co. in the Regiment.”  

Soldiers’ relationship with larger units and formations was more complex. The simple reality of residing in divisional-size camps and cantonments whose average populations dwarfed the small communities in which over half of Americans continued to live in 1917 was a novelty soldiers found sufficiently striking to comment upon in detail and with some enthusiasm. No doubt many had never seen such great numbers of people gathered in one place. “There are about 50,000 men here, all branches of the army,” James Block reported from Camp Greene, North Carolina, in a letter to his parents, “and it is a wonderful sight to see them, although it is impossible to see them all at once.” The sight of Camp Mills, New York, made a similar impression on George Browne, a native of a small Connecticut town. “I’ve never seen anything equal to this camp,” he told his fiancée, “as there must be over twenty thousand men here and they are from all over the country.”

Even routine communal ceremonies – such as the morning stand-to or the evening retreat – could function as catalysts of group loyalty. In uniting the whole camp – from the commanding general to the greenest private – in the observance and enactment of seemingly immutable rites pregnant with quasi-sacramental overtones, such rituals served as the glue that symbolically bound individual soldiers to larger organizational entities. The sublimation

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189 Block, James W., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters Company, 59th Infantry Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, letter to parents, 13 March 1918, James W. Block Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

of one’s identity within a large, impersonal collective was an experience that many a soldier must have found thrilling, particularly if his social world had, until then, been circumscribed by the boundaries of a small community such as Winona, Minnesota, the home town of Regular Army volunteer David Bareuther. “You can never imagine what patriotism is,” he asserted,

until you see an army of thousands of men stand at ‘Parade Rest’…and surrender to the Stars and Stripes at retreat every morning at sundown. And turn out bright and early every morning and stand at attention while the Star Spangled Banner flutters to the top of the staff again at sunrise. A feller can’t express it in words. You get chills in your back every time you think of it.  

The spectacle of the consolidated combat and auxiliary units of an entire infantry division, complete with all of their personnel, weapons, transport animals, vehicles, and assorted equipment displayed in a review or parade also made a lasting impression on soldiers. In the process, it helped establish at least of modicum of identification between individual soldiers and their respective divisions.  

“You should have seen it,” Charles Merritt wrote his sister with reference to the review of his parent division, the 28th, in December 1917 at Camp Hancock, Georgia. “Six lines of men lined along one road shoulder to shoulder for almost a mile. There were 30,000 men lined up all dressed in the olive drab uniform of Uncle Sam’s men. It was worth a year of a person’s life to see them.” Putting the event into the larger context of the war, he noted that “[i]f you could have seen them, it would frighten you to think there are over two hundred times as many on the battle fields of

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191 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 24 November 1917, Folder 2, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

Europe in active service.” Charles Johnston described the review of his organization, the 10th Division, as “beautiful for a fact.” The 40,000 troops that, according to his estimate, participated in the parade “took about two hours to pass [the divisional commander’s reviewing stand] at a very rapid pace.” If Johnston’s reaction to the divisional review in which he participated is any indication of a wider trend, such ceremonial rituals did, at times, live up to their intended purpose of cementing soldiers’ allegiance to their parent formation, impressing them with the organizational complexity and concentrated power of a modern division, and stimulating their confidence in their capacity to achieve victory on the battlefield. “Looks like we ought to whip the Germans if we all get [to France],” Johnston ventured to predict by way of concluding his description of the review.

The extent to which soldiers’ identified with their divisions while still in camp had its limitations, however. Divisional parades and reviews might have brought soldiers together and rendered more real their sense of belonging to an organization as large as a fair-sized town. But the staging of these rituals required an enormous amount of preparation, much of it of the “spit-and-polish” category that was likely to be detested by officers and enlisted men alike – by the former, because it detracted from the precious time that could otherwise be utilized for the purpose of practical training; by the latter, because it tended to intensify the petty harassment the rank-and-file had to put up with from their officers and NCOs on a daily basis. At worst, participation in divisional reviews and parades might generate in the minds of soldiers sentiments that stood in direct opposition to the heightened sense of unit

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193 Merritt, Charles B., Corporal, Company M, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to sister, 4 December 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

194 Johnston, Charles L., Corporal, 239th Ambulance Company, 10th Sanitary Train, 10th Division, letter to Lucille Johnston (wife), 24 August 1918, retrieved on 8 October 2006 from http://members.cox.net/~tjohnston7/ww1hist/10-08-18.html.
pride they were intended to stimulate. In the second half of November 1918, at the outset of
an unusually cold Southern winter, the 80th ("Blue Ridge") Division paraded before Secretary
of War Newton D. Baker at Camp Lee, Virginia. Due to shortages of Army-issue uniforms
(especially those of the cold-weather variety), many of the soldiers of the 80th still wore “their
summer underclothing, blue overalls, and civilian shoes, and no overcoat” as they marched
the reviewing stand. “It was very cold, and many of the men were sick with pneumonia,
from exposure.”\textsuperscript{195} A few weeks later, Assistant Secretary Bernard Crowell inspected the 76th
Division at Camp Devens, Massachusetts. The troops of the division were “lined along the
sides of the roads through the camp…They were cold and uncomfortable, standing for
hours in the slush and snow, waiting until [Crowell] had passed them.”\textsuperscript{196} Events
synonymous with intense physical discomfort or extra-fatigue duty were unlikely to convince
soldiers to feel anything other than resentment toward the divisional level of military
command and organization.

Serious problems also plagued some of the other strategies of identity-formation to
which senior commanders resorted. Individual divisions’ adoption of distinctive insignia was
hampered by the opposition of some elements of America’s military bureaucracy to this
custom. Although the War Department authorized divisions based in the United States to
use their insignia markings for the purpose of identifying divisional vehicles and property, it
did not sanction the practice of soldiers’ wearing the insignia on their uniforms in the form
of shoulder patches. The ostensible rationale behind this injunction rested on the War
Department’s contention that the proliferation of distinctive badges and ornaments would

\textsuperscript{195} Young, Rush S., Private, Company B, 318th Infantry Regiment, 80th ("Blue Ridge") Division, \textit{Over the Top with the 80th}, [3].

\textsuperscript{196} Robinson, \textit{Forging the Sword}, 82.
place a burden on the metal industry, and that the Quartermaster-General’s Department already had its hand full trying to meet the demand for regulation badges. But other motives, possibly connected with the jurisdictional battles the War Department perpetually waged against the general headquarters of the AEF in France, may also have been at work.

Whatever the source of the War Department’s distaste for unique insignia, there is no doubt that its strictures on this issue were frequently observed in the breach. Nevertheless, by limiting the extent to which divisional commanders could exploit the distinctive insignia of their commands as a means of facilitating unit identity and group cohesion, the official policy doubtless curtailed the power of these symbols to foster divisional allegiances among soldiers stationed in stateside training camps. Only after a division’s deployment to France could its insignia and appellation come into full play as catalysts of morale and unit allegiance. What is more, the AEF did not order its divisions to adopt shoulder sleeve insignia until relatively late in the war. John J. Pershing issued instructions to that effect only in October 1918, a mere weeks before the Armistice, after becoming enthused about the distinctive shoulder patches worn by the soldiers of the newly-arrived 81st (“Wildcat”) Division. That formation had adopted the design in the fall of the preceding year, but given the War Department’s reluctance to endorse the practice, the divisional commander instructed his soldiers to desist from wearing the device until they

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197 Captain Robert S. Henry, Intelligence Officer, 31st Division, to Chief, Military Morale Section, Military Intelligence Branch, “Division Badge,” 4 August 1918, Camp Wheeler file, Box 17, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

arrived in France. Ultimately, therefore, it was only as a result of Pershing’s measures that the division became an important focus of collective allegiance and self-identification for some soldiers. But the fact this development took place so late in the war necessarily meant that it resonated the most with those servicemen who had already completed their stateside training and had been deployed to Europe, rather than with those whose units had not yet finished their period of camp or cantonment preparations.

As long as they remained in the camps and cantonments, troops were likely to feel significantly more allegiance and emotional loyalty not to their divisions, but to the individual arms of service to which they belonged. In April 1918, the War Department eliminated all formal differences between Regular, National Guard, and National Army (Draft) components of the country’s land forces and commenced treating them all equally as indistinguishable elements of the United States Army. But the official eradication of such distinctions could do little to purge soldiers’ minds of the pride many took in being Regulars, Guardsmen, or “Selectives,” or do away with the residual condescension, at times bordering on overt hostility and contempt, that servicemen belonging to any of these three categories professed in relation to the other two. Cognizance of belonging to one of these groups served as a resilient bonding force throughout the war, but especially in the training stage of American soldiers’ Great War experience.200


200 The U. S. Marine Corps, an entity under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Navy, cultivated its own institutional identity whose manifestations included self-identification in opposition to the other two services combined. For an example of the extent to which the rank and file of the First World War-era Marine Corps absorbed and internalized this corporate ethos, see Short, Lloyd G., Private, 96th Company, 6th Marine Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 6 April 1918; letter to sister, 12 May 1918; letter to father, 12 May 1918; letter to aunt, 15 May 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
Within the rivalries that pitted the three groups against each other and reinforced their sense of distinction, there existed several discernible sub-currents. First, a profound sense of antagonism existed between volunteers and draftees. In the early stages of the war, at a time when the War Department’s personnel assignment policies had not had the time to dilute the composition of units, volunteers predominated in Regular Army and National Guard organizations. These men had enlisted of their own free will for a variety of reasons. They included, but were by no means limited to, patriotic fervor, the perception of the war as an adventure and a rite of passage that would test its participants’ masculinity, and the conviction that the Army would offer volunteers a greater degree of choice in selecting their assignments than it would allow to draftees.  

Whatever the actual reasons that had brought them into service, volunteers claimed their willingness to join the Army of their own accord, instead of passively waiting to be swept up into it by the dragnet of the Selective Service System, was proof of the moral superiority their enjoyed over draftees. Believing themselves imbued with a purer and more altruistic form of patriotism and motivation than their counterparts in the National Army, volunteers articulated their claims to distinction by disparaging draftees both during and after the war. “No one can say I was drafted,” James Eisenhower boasted over six decades after the war.  

William Hiner, who volunteered because he “wished to do something for

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202 Eisenhower, James S., Corporal, Company A, 107th Machine Gun Battalion, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI. Eisenhower volunteered with the Pennsylvania National Guard in July 1917 at the age of twenty-four; he wrote the statement quote above a few months after his ninetieth birthday. See also Shaw, Walter G., Private, 18th
the cause in active service,” was careful to point out he enlisted in spite of his having been
too young, at seventeen years of age when the Selective Service Act went into effect, to be
taken in by the draft.203 Waiting for the draft, volunteers implied, constituted evidence of
deficient citizenship and patriotism at best, and shirking or “slacking” at worst.204 “I
volunteered before the passage of the draft act,” Horace Hawkins stated emphatically, “as I
consider no man has a right to enjoy the advantages of a government unless he is ready to
support that government in war if necessary.”205 After witnessing the arrival of several
hundred draftees who had been transferred to his division, Will Judy and his fellow Illinois
Guardsmen “curled our lips when they march by for we are volunteers and they are
not….War demands all or nothing; half-heartedness wins neither in peace nor strife.”206

In the opinion of Rollyn Leonard, there was nothing to distinguish draftees (or “conscripts”
as he and other volunteers contemptuously called the drafted men) from deserters.207
Perhaps more damning still was the imputation of effeminacy volunteers leveled at draftees. “I volunteered,” John Hutcheson noted proudly after the war, before adding that “any red-blooded man should have done this without waiting to be drafted.”*208 Farley Wilson believed his willingness to enlist was typical of “any redblooded American. I met the call as a challenge to my manhood and as a privilege to defend the inheritance of my forefathers.”*209 One of the problems with draftees, a former commander of a National Army unit noted after the war, was that prior to the conflict, some “had never been involved in a fistic argument,” an unambiguous assertion of the alleged “softness” of the selectives.210

The implication that those who had waited for the draft lacked the moral and physical attributes of a true American and a real man was even more pronounced and sharply articulated by volunteers while the conflict was still in full swing. Describing his outing to the town of Leavenworth, Kansas, David Bareuther made much of his encounter with “a couple of sisyfied [sic] slackers standing on a corner, gazing through their tortoise shells specks, and waiting to be drafted.”211 Milton Bernet, who had volunteered for officer training and could look forward to the prospect of commanding draftees after obtaining his commission, expressed his scorn for “conscripts” with reference to their alleged propensity for cowardice, a trait that combined accusations of effeminacy and deficient patriotism in one compact category. “[T]he draft is about to take place and a lot of unwilling patriots are

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208 Hutcheson, John C., Captain, Military Service Record, Folder 15, Box 6, Henrico Co. (Va.) Materials, Series I, RG 66, LVA.

209 Wilson, Farley R., Private, 18th Company, 5th Marine Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division Military Service Record, Folder 3, Box 6, Grayson Co. (Va.) Materials, Series I, RG 66, LVA.


211 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 17 November 1917, Folder 2, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
about spring into being,” he wrote in a latter home. Though he believed that “many,” if not “most” draftees would “enjoy the work” once in uniform, he predicted that “the yellow streak is going to widen on many of them to an awful size when they think of the terrors of the trenches.”

The third pillar of volunteers’ tendency to identify themselves in opposition to draftees was grounded in a veritable persecution complex the former had developed in response to what they alleged was the favoritism the Army authorities and the American public displayed toward “conscripts” at the expense of draftees. Neither public opinion nor the Army, volunteers charged, accorded sufficient recognition to those who had left their civilian existence of their own volition. Instead, the military authorities and the public supposedly showered praise and material comforts upon the “slackers” who had contentedly deferred military service for as long as possible. The disparity in the standard of accommodations enjoyed by draftees and volunteers, respectively, provided the most obvious bone of contention. “Sleeping in tents in this weather,” Samuel Kent remarked about the experience of living in a National Guard camp in the South, “was no picnic,” especially in the light of his knowledge that “our ‘brothers in arms’ the drafted men were sleeping in cozy barracks” in their cantonments. “But we are only volunteers,” he sighed. “See how much better the draftees had it,” the men of Philip Shoemaker’s company of the Pennsylvania National Guard moaned when they first arrived at Camp Upton, New York, a

212 Bernet, Milton, First Lieutenant, 314th Sanitary Train, 89th (“Middle West”) Division, letter to family, 12 July 1917, as quoted in Bernet, “The World War as I Saw It” (typescript memoir), vol. 1, 95, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

213 Kent, Samuel M., Corporal, Company K, 127th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, entry for 26 December 1917 to 10 March 1918, “Diary of Samuel M. Kent,” 6, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
National Army cantonment where they would be temporarily quartered prior to their deployment to France. “We had only tents.”

Believing themselves neglected by an ungrateful public whose attention was fixed firmly on the National Army, volunteers developed the self-image of America’s forgotten soldiers. They also cast draftees as a pampered elite whose members monopolized the public acclaim that rightly belonged to volunteers. Writing from Camp Sheridan, Alabama, where his division of the Ohio National Guard was training during the crisp winter of 1917/1918, Samuel Clark groused to his sister about the partiality he and his fellow Guardsmen accused the Ohio press of showing toward draftees. “I suppose you have read in the papers about the feeling that prevails here that the *selectives* are getting the best & most of everything at Chillicothe [the site of Camp Sherman, Ohio’s National Army cantonment],” he wrote to his sister. “Well it seems that way to us here when we read the papers from O[hio]. & see nothing but columns about Chillicothe & not a mention of Camp Sheridan.” There was more at stake than mere pride here, Clark claimed, as the imbalance in the press coverage of Ohio’s volunteers and draftees, respectively, had serious material repercussions for the Guardsmen stationed in Alabama. “[W]e haven’t sufficient clothing to keep warm,” he complained, “but still when the papers do mention us they say we have everything we could want.”

At times, volunteer resentment of the easy life they claimed draftees were leading could descend to the level of self-pity. David Bareuther articulated the essence of the

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215 Clark, Samuel S., Private First Class, Battery D, 136th Field Artillery Regiment, 37th (“Buckeye”) Division, letter to sister, 30 November 1917; see also letter to father 8 December 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
grievances volunteers like him nursed toward draftees. “You know anything that you read in the papers about the boys in khaki never means us fellows. *We* aren’t worth talking about.”

The American public, he went on to argue, had it in for volunteers, especially those of the Regular Army variety, and made its distaste for them apparent by diverting the proceeds of the subscription campaigns meant to provide soldiers with tobacco and other small comforts away from the Regulars and toward the National Army. This situation, Bareuther argued, was the product of lingering socio-cultural stereotypes that had dominated public perceptions of the Regular Army prior to the war. “If you only knew the opinion people have about us it would make you sore,” he fumed. “They think that we are only a bunch of bums without any home and that why we joined the army. Well they are mistaken. Of course I’ll admit that the army used to be that way in times of peace but now the bunch is all together different and have got just as good home if not better than those drafted into the service. But the public doesn’t see it that way. Anyway,” he concluded by way of a parting shot intended to reiterate the moral superiority volunteers enjoyed draftees, “you can be glad that I answered my country’s call and wasn’t yellow.”

The fear that draftees would arrogate to themselves the credit for defeating Germany, and by implication monopolize the attendant glory, constituted the fourth major component of volunteers’ hostility toward the men of the National Army. “I certainly would hate to have these drafted fellows go across and see the real stuff and keep us here to take care of this country,” George Hawley wrote. “From the looks of things…the War Department seems to have it in for the Ohio National Guard,” Samuel Clark vented to his

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216 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 16 December 1917, Folder 2, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

217 Hawley, George D., Battery D, 112th Field Artillery Regiment, 29th (“Blue and Grey”) Division, letter to Thelma Parkinson, n. d. [postmarked 9 April 1918], World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
mother. “[W]e don’t get any equipment or anything to work with, while the drafted men are being sent over every day without half the training we have.”

Given the alleged inclination of the American people and of the War Department to esteem draftees more highly than volunteers, it only stood to reason that once the war ended, the public would lionize “conscripts” and cast volunteers into oblivion. “I sure am glad that I’m a Reg’lar and in the real army,” David Bareuther noted. “Of course I suppose the ‘National Army’ will win this war (that is, in the news papers).” His only consolation was that being a volunteer meant he was in a position to claim “a clean conscience and not a yellow streak.”

Draftees fought back against the charges leveled against them by volunteers by casting doubts on the purity of the motives that animated the latter. Draftee Horace Baker suggested many volunteers enlisted simply to secure for themselves safe assignments that would keep them out of the front line. Having been inducted in the middle of 1918, Baker had requested a transfer to a combat unit in France along with several of his fellow draftees. This decision, he argued, required much more courage and dedication that volunteering for a plum job stateside. The variety of moral courage and patriotic devotion implicit in a draftee’s willingness to serve in whatever capacity his country required of him was of a higher order, draftees argued, than the self-interested pragmatism draftees ascribed to volunteers. An uncomplaining submission to the demands of the Selective Service System,

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218 Clark, Samuel S., Private First Class, Battery D, 136th Field Artillery Regiment, 37th (“Buckeye”) Division, letter to mother, 6 May 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

219 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to father, 12 December 1917, Folder 2, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

220 “[L]est I forget it, every man in my detachment of 65 men had volunteered to go to the Front, which requires more nerve than selecting an easy place to volunteer for in the U.S.A.” Baker, Argonne Days, 4. Originally assigned to Company I, 153rd Infantry Regiment, 39th (“Delta”) Division, he finished the war as a Private in Company M, 128th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division.
especially when such submission went against the grain of one’s views on the morality or value of military service, was more praiseworthy by far, draftees claimed, than the opportunism that many volunteers were said to have displayed. It is plausible to assume that Harvey Clopton spoke for many of his fellow draftees when he claimed he had been determined, if called, to give the best that was in me, whatever the assignment,” irrespective of the fact that “I can’t say that I was very enthusiastic about entering the Army.”221 This was even more the case with men who stoically submitted to the draft in the knowledge that induction into the military would require them to forfeit their civilian economic standing. “I was not crazy about getting into the army, for I had just worked up a business which I had to sacrifice,” John Whalen noted, “but as I knew we were needed, I did not hesitate or try to dodge [the Draft].”222 Viewed from this perspective, waiting for the draft acquired the trappings of a patriotic duty whose value and sincerity towered over the motives of those who had volunteered merely in order to dodge the draft.223

In her study of the politicization of American soldiers during the Great War, Jennifer Keene traces the roots of the mutual hostility between volunteers and draftees to the frustration the former felt toward the Army’s failure to grant special recognition to enlistees as an acknowledgement of their greater sense of motivation and patriotism.224 This view has

221 Clopton, Harvie A., Private, Military Service Record, Folder 15, Box 6, Henrico Co. (Va.) Materials, Series I, RG 66, LVA. See also Clark, Francis A., Private, Company G, 6th Infantry Regiment, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, Military Service Record, Folder 20, Box 16, Richmond (Va.) Materials, Series I, RG 66, LVA.

222 Whalen, John J., Private, 39th Company, 10th Battalion, 155th Depot Brigade, Military Service Record, Folder 1, Box 8, Norfolk Co. (Va.) Materials, Series I, RG 66, LVA.

223 Years after the war, one National Guardsman complained bitterly about his experience of being “called a draft dodger because I enlisted before being drafted.” See McCloskey, Floyd J., Company E, 108th Engineer Regiment, 33rd (“Prairie”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

224 Keene, Doughboys, 14 – 15.
much to recommend it, but it is possible to speculate that the antagonism between the two groups could also be traced to some of the broader class and ethnic tensions characteristic of the Progressive Era as a whole. Historians generally agree that members of the lower economic strata of American society were over-represented among the nearly three million men who were drafted in the years 1917 – 1918.\footnote{Initially articulated by Fred Baldwin, the validity of this argument has been confirmed by a number of subsequent studies of the First World War draft and its socio-political impact. See Baldwin, “The American Enlisted Man,” ch. 2; Chambers, To Raise an Army, chaps. 7 and 8; Keith, Rich Man’s War, Poor Man’s Fight; Shenk, “Work of Fight!”} This situation created conditions favorable to the projection of pre-war notions of class and ethnic consciousness onto the social world of the military. Such continuities, in turn, had the potential to aggravate the relations between draftees and volunteers, and between the various branches of the land forces of the United States. In keeping with the prominent role the Regular Army and the National Guard had played since the 1870s in the suppression of civil unrest and labor disputes, working-class draftees would have had an abundance of reasons for viewing professional soldiers and Guardsmen alike with suspicion, if not outright hostility.\footnote{Jerry M. Cooper, The Army and Civil Disorder, 1877 – 1900 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980); idem, The Rise of the National Guard, ch. 3; Sidney L. Harring, Policing a Class Society, 1865 – 1915 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1983); and Sidney Lens, The Labor Wars: From the Molly Maguires to the Sitdowns (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1973) remain seminal analyses of the role of the American military in quelling industrial unrest. For specific case studies, see especially Roy Turnbaugh, “Ethnicity, Civic Pride, and Commitment: The Evolution of the Chicago Militia,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 72 (May 1979), 120 – 132; Eugene Leach, “The Literature of Riot Duty: Managing Class Conflict in the Streets, 1877 – 1927,” Radical History Review 56 (Spring 1993), 23 – 50; Allan M. Osur, “The Role of the Colorado National Guard in Civil Disturbances,” Military Affairs 46 (February 1982), 19 – 22.} By the time the United States intervened in the Great
War, the volume of such criticisms had become muted. But shrill denunciations of the military as a tool of big business continued to emanate from some of the more radical elements if the labor movement, with the anti-militarist stance of International Workers of the World (IWW) being especially conspicuous. Moreover, the military’s role in quelling such legendary landmarks of labor unrest as the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the Pullman Strike of 1894, or the Idaho Miners’ Strike of 1914 remained in the realm of living memory for many Americans, including those of draft age in 1917.228

The recollections of two National Guardsmen who found themselves at the receiving end of this resentment testify to the resilience of such class-based attitudes, and their power to shaping the relations between volunteers and draftees. During its trans-Atlantic voyage to France, Bob Hoffman’s regiment of the Pennsylvania Guard was sharing ship-board accommodations with a unit of the Regular Army whose personnel included recently-inducted draftees. “There were plenty of fights on this boat,” Hoffman remembered. “We had a year’s training back of us and felt like soldiers. The 59th [Infantry Regiment, Regular Army] was…filled with draftees who had just come into service. Many of them did not know how to handle a gun, yet they ridiculed us for being tin soldiers, national guards, strike breakers, etc.” In consequence, “[T]he fights between our organization and men from the 59th were rather bitter.”229 Walter Zukowski’s memories of his interactions

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with the draftees who, by 1918, predominated in the ranks of newly-formed units of the Regular Army, also reflected the class-based roots of the antagonisms that pitted volunteers and draftees. The latter, Zukowski recalled, “had nothing but contempt” for the National Guard in whose ranks he was serving, and whom draftees referred to as “’home-soldiers, strike-breakers, home-guards,’ etc., etc.” Zukowski and his fellow Guardsmen reciprocated with interest. “[W]e looked down up [the draftees] as a bunch of bums, rowdies, troublesome drunks, incorrigible deadbeats, etc.”

Whatever its cause, the fault-line between draftees and volunteers was significant enough in the early stages of soldiers’ training to fuel tangible resentment that had the potential to erupt into violence, as exemplified by Hoffman’s testimony. To be sure, much of that violence remained in the realm of abstraction, as was the case with the aggressive fantasies to which some volunteers gave reign when thinking about those who were content to wait for the draft. Recalling his encounter with the bespectacled “slackers” he saw on a Leavenworth street, David Bareuther asserted that “If I’d have had a gun along I would have shot them. Those kind of guys make me tired.”

The contempt that Charles Merritt, a Pennsylvania Guardsman, felt for draftees, was so great he confessed his wish to be made an NCO in the National Army just so that he could haze the “yellow” drafted men. “I would drill the legs off some of them.”

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231 See n. 212 above.

232 Merritt, Charles B., Corporal, Company M, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to Ethel (sister), 4 December 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
Even if they did not act on their fantasies, volunteers clearly expected draftees to accept their allegedly inferior status vis-à-vis volunteers without murmur. “They are all good fellows,” Harry Hunter conceded in reference to a group of draftees he saw at Camp Meade, Maryland. “[But] they have to behave their selves [because] if they don’t they will put them in the guard house.” Being “drafted fellows,” he concluded, “they know where their place is.”\(^{233}\) Volunteers did not hesitate to resort to social ostracism to ensure that draftees did indeed “know their place.” Summing up the extent of the interactions between his fellow National Guardsmen on the one hand and draftees on the other, Rollyn Leonard noted, with some pride, that “[we] don’t have anything to do with [draftees].”\(^{234}\) Regarding themselves as a category apart, volunteers heartily endorsed any official measure designed to increase the distance, whether physical or social, between themselves and draftees. The physical segregation of a newly-arrived group of drafted men at his camp met with David Bareuther’s intense approbation. “They [aren’t] allowed to associate with ‘Army Men’ at all and are stuck way back in the last row of buildings up in the hospital corner of the Cantonment.”\(^{235}\) Such isolation, he implied in another letter, may have been in the best interests of the draftees.

Writing from Camp Mills, New York, a cantonment that housed units from all three branches of the Army, Bareuther could only hint at the violent nature of daily life in a

\(^{233}\) Hunter, Harry C., Private, Company C, 311\(^{th}\) Machine Gun Battalion, 79\(^{th}\) Division, letter to Emma Hunter, 3 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\(^{234}\) See n. 208 above.

\(^{235}\) Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5\(^{th}\) Field Signal Battalion, 3\(^{rd}\) (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 10 January 1918, Folder 3, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
training facility in which Regulars, Guardsmen, and draftees mixed freely. Camp Mills, he reported, “isn’t a very peaceful place. Not a good place for the Conscript especially.”

As indicated above, the frictions between volunteers and draftees at times shaded into an equally pronounced antagonism between Regulars – whether volunteers or draftees – and National Guardsmen. This animosity was the grass-roots equivalent of the critical attitudes the Army’s senior leaders had voiced prior to 1917 regarding the military effectiveness, discipline, and war readiness of the Guard. Regulars, even those who had enlisted after the declaration of war in April 1917, considered themselves the Army’s elite. “There are no draft men here, nor no National Guard,” James Block wrote with pride from Camp Greene, North Carolina. “We are in the Regulars, if you know what that means. The Regulars are the pick of the land.” For a group of soldiers who thought of themselves in such exalted terms, the National Guard often functioned as a synonym for slovenliness, incompetence, low levels of professionalism, and equally lax standards of deportment and conduct. These alleged attributes proved remarkably effective in allowing Regulars to base a significant component of their corporate culture on their tendency to identity themselves in opposition to the Guardsmen. Searching for a rationale behind the failure of civilians in El Paso, Texas, to extend their hospitality to the Regulars training at Fort Bliss in 1917 – 1918, Charles Ash ascribed the chilly relations between the townsfolk and the garrison “to the actions and behavior of [N]ational [G]uardsmen who were on the border in 1916 when

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236 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 24 February 1918, Folder 4, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

237 Block, James W., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters Company, 59th Infantry Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, letter to parents, 13 March 1918, James W. Block Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
Mexico was invaded during the Hunt for Pancho Villa.” Floyd Dean offered a similar explanation for the unpleasant episode he and a group of his buddies experienced while on leave in the town of Winona, Minnesota. After arriving at the local railroad station, “the police made us get back on the train, because the National Guards had all the girls pregnant so they didn’t want us in town.”

In the minds of Regulars, the professionalism and deportment of their counterparts in the Guard left at least just as much to be desired as their allegedly unsavory conduct among civilians. Dissatisfied with the sloppy salutes rendered by some of his men, Arthur Yensen’s company commander berated them for “pokin’ around like a bunch of State Militia; youse hev been with the regulars long enough to know better that that!” After reminding them of their duty to set an example for the draftees in their unit, the officer concluded with an exhortation to “quit looking like a bunch of National Guards.” Regulars grudgingly acknowledged that National Guardsmen were not quite as bad as draftees, but that was not much of a compliment. In the opinion of the outspoken David Bareuther, “[t]here is as much difference between a Reg’lar and a conscript as there is between day and night. The National Guards are about half way between” by virtue of the training they acquired on the Mexican border. Nevertheless, he concluded, while that

238 Ash, Charles P., Private First Class, Battery D, 18th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

239 Dean, Floyd R., Private, Battery E, 16th Field Artillery Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

experience may have “made men out of some of them...just the same they would pass for boy scouts.”

As severe as was his opinion of National Guardsmen, Bareuther’s estimate of America’s citizen-soldiers appears generous when contrasted with the views another Regular. After receiving a copy of his hometown newspaper in the mail, Girton fulminated about the amount of coverage the publication had devoted to the activities of the local National Guard company. “I counted four headings on the front page of the NGs (We call them No Goods) and a couple of the other pages were full of them and their blowouts.” Weighing National Guardsmen and draftees in the balance, Robert Girton openly admitted he had more respect for the latter. “Some of the fellows here are begrudging the drafted fellows the farewell events they are having, and calling them slackers,” he wrote. But “[y]ou never heard me call them that. I think there are lots of the finest kind of fellows that waited to be drafted. Its [sic] no disgrace to be drafted. But Oh! the National Guards.”

The critical eye new soldiers, whether volunteers or draftees, cast on what they viewed as the hidebound social conventions and customs of the “Old Army” represented another “negative” bonding force that enjoyed a broad circulation among servicemen. For many soldiers, initial encounters with professional officers and NCOs appeared to confirm the pre-war stereotypes of the Regular Army as a socially conservative institution dominated by an officer class whose members cultivated aristocratic affectations that were wholly incompatible with the democratic ideals for which the United States professed to be fighting.

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242 Girton, Robert L., First Sergeant, Headquarters Detachment, 314th Engineer Regiment, 89th (“Middle West”) Division, letter to mother and brother, 9 September 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
At best, the arcane customs of the “Old Army” appeared as amusing anachronisms to those encountering them for the first time. John Clark, a volunteer commissioned from the ranks early in the war, remembered being taken aback by his Regular Army subordinates’ custom of addressing him in the third person.  

But what was merely humorous for some constituted, for others, evidence of a fatal flaw in the Regular Army’s approach to human relations and personnel management. In the opinion of Samuel Orgel, another officer commissioned during the war, such quasi-feudal holdovers embodied the numerous barriers he had had to overcome in order to gain full social acceptance by the professional officers with whom he served. “I was not gently born, so lacked social graces that I had to learn, slowly and painfully,” he remembered. “Regular Army officers, mainly of a certain caste, did not understand or know the people who came from ‘lower class’ families and were disdainful of them. That is the great weakness of the system…Our Army is a people’s army and must be handled as such.” The aristocratic pretensions of Regular officers could not fail to impact their attitudes toward their subordinates and their views on discipline. Wallace Boyle became so thoroughly disgusted with such high-handedness he argued that “[m]any officers could have held a place in the Prussian Army without changing their methods” of upholding discipline. “[T]here should be some system whereby the enlisted man need not be considered as dirt under an officer’s feet” in order for discipline to be maintained.

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244 Orgel, Samuel Z., First Lieutenant, Company C, 165th Infantry Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, USAMHI.

245 Boyle, Wallace H., Sergeant, Military Service Record, Series I, Folder 8, Box 7, Louisa County (Va.) materials, RG 66, LVA.
Ordinary soldiers were of the same mind. Whatever their differences, volunteers and draftees alike agreed that officers and NCOs of the Regular Army had no right to treat them as they had been accustomed to treating soldiers in peacetime. After receiving a batch of Regular Army NCOs to assist in training new recruits, the officers of a National Army regiment had to engage in a “strenuous sifting process” intended to weed out those who had come “with an utterly wrong notion of the National Army.”\(^{246}\) Just what those “wrong notions” consisted of is clear from evidence provided by other soldiers. The Regular Army NCOs who initially trained Rush Young’s regiment of the National Army “gave us hell and told us how dumb we [were].” So harsh was their behavior toward the draftees that most were quickly transferred to another unit.\(^{247}\) For Frederick Pottle, the treatment he and his fellow soldiers received from a visiting “Old Army” colonel was nothing short of galling:

> As we stood at attention, he walked along the ranks, occasionally kicking our feet or thumping our chests. Men not accustomed to such insults naturally gasped with surprise and anger and looked down to see what was happening. When they did, the old Colonel chucked them sharply under the chin and lectured them on the meaning of the word “Attention.”\(^{248}\)

Soldiers’ response to attempts of Progressive social workers to inculcate servicemen with the values and worldviews of the Anglo-Protestant urban middle-class were as complex as their reactions to the Army’s parallel efforts to shape their identity. The relationship between soldiers and the YMCA, the most prominent of the Progressive welfare organizations active among American troops during the Great War will be examined subsequently in Part IV. For now, it will be sufficient to state that if the corpus of evidence

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\(^{247}\) Young, *Over the Top with the 80th*, [9].

\(^{248}\) Pottle, *Stretchers*, 63.
consulted here is any indication, civilian Progressives fell significantly short of the lofty goals they hoped to realize in the camps and cantonments.

Soldiers recognized the recreational and practical value of the leisure activities, educational programs, vocational training initiatives, and welfare services agencies provided. But participation in such activities did not always imply a readiness to embrace the uplifting messages they were supposed to impart to their target audience, or a readiness to embrace middle-class socio-cultural mores as the pivot of individual and collective identity. This was matter of considerable chagrin to civilian social workers active in the camps and cantonments and to their Progressively-minded allies in the military. Both groups frequently bemoaned their inability to elevate soldiers’ minds above the baser forms of entertainment and conversation that enticed servicemen at every step. Impressed with the enthusiastic applause with which some French-Canadian soldiers rewarded the participants of an impromptu song and story-telling contest held at the Camp Devens, YMCA building, a social worker was aggrieved to be told “that they bordered a little on the ‘suggestive.’” He confessed to have been “greatly disappointed that they appealed to the men as much as they did,” and concluded that “[a] great deal must be done for their uplift...At our future meeting, the speaker should make a special effort to tell the men the importance of high moral character.”

The basic reasons behind the limited effect of Progressive notions of uplift and moral probity on the identities of soldiers are relatively easy to decode. Just as the Regular Army’s archaic social customs and quasi-feudal notions of personnel management proved incomprehensible at best and offensive at worst to newly inducted soldiers, so, too, the

middle-class, Anglo-Protestant worldviews that underpinned the work of Progressive reforms in the camps frequently failed to resonate with servicemen representing a cross-section of diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. In an assessment of the educational value of a rather sordid “uplifting” feature film screened to soldiers at Camp Grant, Illinois, for the purpose of instructing them about the dangers of alcoholic and sexual excess, an Army officer noted that among the movie’s chief weakness, the socio-economic rank of its principal protagonists constituted one of the greatest handicaps. “The Duponts are rich, live in luxurious surroundings, have a butler, [and] very fine clothes, [and] none of them are shown to work.” This, the report went on, made it unlikely that “the men of average means who constitute the army” would be able to relate to such characters, making the protagonists “less than the best choice of a family to be understood and effective” in shaping the moral conduct of servicemen.250

The criticism another officer leveled against the Camp Meade, Maryland, branch of the Committee for Training Camp Activities (CTCA) – the umbrella organization responsible for furnishing soldiers with wholesome, morally elevating forms of entertainment – illuminated with equal clarity the socio-cultural distance separating the well-meaning Progressives from the great mass of soldiers whose identities they sought to shape. The officer, an investigator working for the Military Morale Branch of the Army General Staff, poured scorn on the CTCA’s attempts to imbue soldiers with an appreciation for such

250 In spite of this flaw, the film proved quite a hit with its audience of soldiers, but for reasons that no doubt would have horrified the well-intentioned temperance and “social hygiene” activists who appear to have been the inspiration for this production. According to the report, the “morbidly erotic” scenes at the core of the film were so suggestive that the message they conveyed to the soldiers watching them may have been the exact opposite of their intended purpose. “[W]hen many men make remarks…such as…”That would make a man catch something” – ‘By God, Some Stuff’ – ‘He’s coming now, all right’ – ‘There he goes to it’ – ‘Go to it boy’ – ‘Oh, boy’ – they are not at the same time susceptible to social hygienic instruction.” See First Lieutenant Paul W. Terry, Sanitary Corps, U. S. A., to Major George B. Perkins, Military Morale Branch, “Study Value of ‘Damaged Goods’ as Morale Agent,” 9 December 1918, Camp Grant file, Box 6, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.
staples of “high-brow” culture as the plays of Moliére or classical dance (presumably ballet). After inquiring as to how long a run the camp’s production of Moliére’s “An Imaginary Invalid” had enjoyed, Captain Morse was told “the ‘run’ was confined to one night. After the first half hour…’An Imaginary Invalid’ was being enjoyed by an imaginary audience.” The “fine idea that classic dancing would make a terrific hit with men in training” met with a similar dénouement. The performance, featuring “a very lady-like male pianist,” lasted approximately twenty minutes, with the audience departing en masse, “lingering only to make comments on the personal appearance and bearing of the pianist.” It required no great insight, Morse concluded, to realize that “soldiers representing the walks of life reached by the selective draft will not cooperate with any mistaken attempts to elevate the stage at their expense.”

VI. “We Were Proud of Looking Like Soldiers”: The Emergence of a Soldierly Subculture

Morse’s conclusion was indicative of an even broader set of attitudes that took root in the collective consciousness of soldiers in the training phase of their military service. Focused on serviceman’s relationship with the civilian world he had only recently left, these attitudes functioned as the kernel of what would emerge, by the end of the war, as one of the most important modes of self-identification professed by American soldiers of the Great War. Following their deployment to France and their exposure to the realities of modern warfare, soldiers would construct an elaborate critique of the U. S. home front and its dominant socio-cultural values. Powerful enough to transcend the narrow organizational

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251 Captain F. P. Morse, Memorandum for Captain George B. Perkins, “Visit to Camp Meade,” 13 September 1918, Camp Meade file, Box 10, Entry 377, NARA.
allegiances discussed above, this critical assessment nonetheless sprung from seeds first sown in stateside camps and cantonments.

In its embryonic stage, the inclination of servicemen to draw sharp distinctions between the values and attitudes of civilians and those of soldiers manifested itself in the predictable form of recruits’ attempts to come to terms with the culture shock that accompanies the transition from civilian to military life. Paul Murphy spoke for thousands of putative Doughboys when he summed up the impact induction into the service had on him. “Soldiering meant a complete new life for all of us and it was pretty hard to become adjusted to taking orders and having your whole life regulated by authority other than your own.”

For most recruits, the outward trappings of that “new life” encompassed the renunciation of personal freedom, submission to strict regimentation and discipline, loss of privacy, abdication of individuality, and subordination to a bewildering variety of rituals, rules, and customs whose sole rationale, it seemed to newly-inducted soldiers, was to confuse, harass, or humiliate them. Soldiers’ propensity for highlighting such fundamental novelties

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252 Murphy, Paul, Corporal, Company H, 309th Infantry Regiment, 78th (“Lightning”) Division, “An Account of My Personal Experience in World War I,” (typescript memoir, 1 April 1963), 9, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

frequently amounted to little more than stating the obvious. Even so, it underscored the extent to which servicemen viewed their traumatic immersion in the institutional milieu of the military as synonymous with becoming members of an alternative social order. To some soldiers, the defining attributes of this alternative social order contrasted so sharply with the conventions of their civilian existence as to suggest that the socio-cultural dynamics of Army life amounted to nothing less than an inversion of the essential organizing principles upon which the mainstream of American society was based.

This viewpoint was especially evident in the reactions of soldiers to the challenge that military service offered to conventional notions of gender-based division of labor. The Army’s emphasis on the practical self-sufficiency and versatility of individual soldiers meant that recruits who, in civilian life, had depended on their wives, mothers, or sisters to deal with menial household chores, now found themselves forced to engage in tasks they formerly regarded as “woman’s work.” After reporting for basic training at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis, Missouri, Clarence Mahan went ten days without washing his clothes. “My excuse was that I had never been accustomed to washing my clothes. That was a woman’s job. I finally realized that if I wanted my clothes washed, I would have to wash them [myself].”

In letter home, Milton Bernet assured his family he would never “need

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254 Mahan, Clarence E., Corporal, Headquarters Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Brigade, 1st Division, “Hoosier Doughboy with the First Division: World War One, 1917 – 1919,” 5, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
anybody to make my bed, sweep my room or do anything like that after the experiences I have had in the last few weeks...I am some housewife."

Soldiers’ good-humored allusions to their new status as “housewives” may well have been in earnest. But it is possible to conjecture that such witticism also served to disguise a deep sense of anxiety stemming from the difficulty servicemen experienced in trying to reconcile their membership in an institution that apparently saw no contradictions between its essentially masculine socio-cultural ethos and its promotion among individual soldiers of proficiency in skills they had hitherto regarded as fundamentally feminine. This supposition appears particularly relevant in the case of soldiers whose surviving correspondence indicates the willingness to embrace both of these seemingly incongruous aspects of military life. Charles Johnston, who thrilled at the sight of the concentrated units of his division pass in review before its commanding general and itched to “whip the Germans” boasted to his wife about the “big washing” he had carried out one day. “[Y]ou had ought to see my lily white hands. Say, I do hate to get into that habit, too, for you may think that I can do the washings in the future.” In a similar spirit, David Bareuther, the same soldier who fantasized about shooting “slackers,” professed a hatred of Germans and draftees and, subsequently, claimed to derive great pleasure from participation in combat, was also capable of bragging to his

255 Bernet, Milton, First Lieutenant, 314th Sanitary Train, 89th (“Middle West”) Division, letter to family, 26 May 1917, as quoted in Bernet, “The World War as I Saw It” (typescript memoir), vol. 1, 36, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

256 Johnston, Charles L., Corporal, 239th Ambulance Company, 10th Sanitary Train, 10th Division, letter to Lucille Johnston (wife), 24 August 1918, retrieved on 8 October 2006 from http://members.cox.net/~tjohnston7/ww1hist/13-06-18.html. For a comparison with the impact that fluid gender roles in wartime had on the socio-cultural identities of soldiers in another army of the Great War, see Bourke, Dismembering the Male, 133 – 134.
mother about having dedicated an entire day to sewing and take care of assorted household

tasks. “I am some ‘gal’ when it comes to washing dishes and sewing and sweeping.”

In the minds of newly inducted servicemen, the communal basis of virtually all
aspects of daily life, work, and leisure in the Army reinforced the impression that their
metamorphosis from civilians to soldiers marked a passage from one distinctive social order
to another. Americans of the Progressive Era were products of a culture that celebrated the
individual as the basic building block of civil society, and visualized its past with reference to
a master narrative that singled out the aspirations, achievements, and unique personality
traits of exceptional men (and at times women) as prime catalysts of historical change and
human progress. This conception of societal organization stood in direct opposition to the
collectivism that, since at least the seventeenth century, had been transforming the military
and naval establishments of the Western world into forerunners of the “total institutions”
characteristic of modern “mass society.”

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257 See Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 5th (“Red Diamond”)
Division, letter to George J. Bareuther, 18 October 1917, Folder 1; letter to mother, 17 November 1917, Folder 2;
letter to mother, 24 November 1917, Folder 2; letter to mother, 29 December 1917, Folder 3; letter to father
23 June 1918, Folder 4; and letter to father 28 June 1918, Folder 5; all in David G. Bareuther Papers, World
War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

258 For the intellectual roots American individualism and its development from the Colonial and Early
National periods to the Progressive Era, see especially Barry A. Shain, The Myth of American Individualism: The
Lawrence F. Kohl, The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1991); Christopher Newfield, The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America
(Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); Myra Jehlen, American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, the

259 According to Erving Goffman, the sociologist who coined the term, a “total institution” is an
organizational and physical setting “of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut
off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally-administered
round of life.” Though originally based on Goffman’s study of mental hospitals, this definition has also been
applied to military institutions (particularly basic-training facilities and service academies), general hospitals,
prisons, concentration camps, slave plantations, tuberculosis sanitaria, and monastic houses. See Erving
Goffman, Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates (Garden City, New York:
and David M. White, eds., Identity and Anxiety: Survival of the Person in Mass Society (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press,
that reserved its highest accolades for individual achievement, sudden immersion in a “total institution” such as the Army – combined with the efforts of officers and NCOs to “dissolve” the personalities of new recruits in basic training – offered plenty of scope for the emergence of anxieties capable of undermining even the strongest-held assumptions about one’s identity. 260

The intensity with which servicemen recoiled from their first encounters with the overwhelmingly communal character of a soldier’s life indicates just how alien a concept the collective mode of existence was to the minds of America’s Great War generation. Its strangeness did not reside solely in its novelty. Many things about the Army could be categorized as new experiences. Some, like weapons training, for example, could even be exciting and genuinely interesting. But few were as terrifying as the initial submersion in the great collective mass that was the Army. This process, not a few soldiers seemed to think, did not simply strip a man of his identity and individuality. Instead, it appeared capable of depriving him of his humanity as well. Viewed in this light, it is difficult to dismiss as mere hyperbole the metaphors comparing the lot of new inductees to that of livestock that crop up in soldiers’ recollections of their first days and weeks in camp. Detailed to carry food to the camp guard house, David Bareuther and several other soldiers “carried it in wash boilers


and believe me,” he wrote to his father, “it reminded me of feeding just so many animals instead of men.”

It was, however, in the context of collective rituals accompanying the processing of new recruits that apprehensions about the degrading, if not downright dehumanizing influence of collective existence came into full play. Samuel Fleming was convinced that the “hard-boiled Medicos” who supervised the inoculation of his regiment in the fall of 1917 “looked on us as a lot of animals, similar to a line of cattle going to the chopping block in a Chicago Stock Yard.” At the very least, Fleming was an officer, a status that accorded him enough privileges to cushion the impact of such ordeals. The men in the ranks could not count on any preferential treatment, and their resentment of the rites of collective humiliation to which they had been subjected frequently outlasted the war by years, if not decades. “They ‘herded’ us through the ‘Bull Pen,’” Chris Emmett recalled about his first day at Camp Travis, Texas, “so called by the men because all the incoming soldiers passed under the observation of officers like a drove of cattle – a constant stream of flowing, cursing, protesting, complaining humanity.” The fact such procedures often involved efforts to categorize, quantify, and inventory the mass of recruits could only heighten the visceral revulsion these episodes engendered in the minds of soldiers. The physical examination to

261 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to father, 28 October 1917, Folder 1, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.


263 Emmett, Give ’Way to the Right, 7. The same facility indelibly seared itself into the memory of Christ Stamos, a soldier who served in another regiment of Emmett’s division (the 90th), and who framed his recollection of his rite of passage through the personnel selection process at Camp Travis in similar terms. “We were assigned to fill the ranks of the 90th Division which was rushing its preparations to go overseas. Here the officers of the different outfits came and picked us out like butchers picking out sheep they like best for their slaughter house.” See Stamos, The Road to St. Mihiel, 14.
which soldiers of one National Army units were subjected the day after their arrival in camp was a case in point. “As each man entered the medical barrack a number was stamped on his bared arm – much like the branding of cattle, we thought.” To add insult to injury, “[t]he inspectors concluded the examination by taking our fingerprints. [A]pparently, we were to be treated like criminals.”

Sheep, cattle, criminals – few things attested as powerfully as these metaphors did to soldiers’ belief that induction into the military was tantamount to the wholesale absorption – and subsequent dissolution – of their personalities and civilian identities by a social order based on organizing principles, values, and attitudes that went completely against the grain of those that underpinned civilian society. Yet, notwithstanding the profound anxieties and encounters with the Army generated in the minds of some soldiers, it also furnished servicemen with the opportunity to come to terms with this seemingly alien and hostile environment.

To begin, the discomforts, humiliations, and annoyances inherent in the hierarchical and strictly regimented social structure of the Army were interspersed with a handful of attributes capable of dulling the trauma of induction and furnishing the soldier with a modicum of compensation for his loss of individuality and privacy. The profound sense of camaraderie – at times bordering on genuine emotional intimacy – soldiers derived from their inclusion in small groups such as squads or platoons has already been remarked upon. But the Army also offered other attractions, too. In fact, some soldiers viewed their new surroundings in a highly positive light almost from the beginning of their service. Lewis

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265 See 52 – 56 above.
Neumayer, "a hard working lad" who spent his entire life on his family’s Oklahoma farm, thought of Army life as “something of a vacation, something I never had before.” Others, like Will Judy, savored the sense of liberation from mundane peacetime responsibilities that camp life offered for the great mass of individuals who formed the Army. “I have little of worry,” he reflected in his diary. “[T]he easy duties of the day are done in good grace and the demands of tomorrow do not rise above the horizon. Enough of the world is shut out of the camp so that the eye of the mind is not bloodshot.” Third, the mouth-watering attention soldiers paid in their letters to the contents of mess-hall menus suggests that in terms of their nutritional value and the regularity with which they were served, the meals servicemen ate in camps were a vast improvement over what many of them were used to eating in civilian life. “Speaking about our food,” Emile Grandblaise wrote from Camp Lee, “I heard so much kicking about it before I came down here, but we all get good eats. [T]o day we have chicken, potatoes, corn, peas, ice cream and I don’t know what else.” Finally, sanitary living conditions, coupled with the immutable routine of parade-ground drill, field training, recreational athletics, plentiful (and for the most part nourishing) food, could not but have a positive effect on the health and physical condition of soldiers, especially those who may not have had access to such luxuries in civilian life. Observing his National Guardsmen, many of

266 Neumeyer, Lewis, Private First Class, 344th Machine Gun Battalion, 90th (“Alamo”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

267 Judy, A Soldier’s Diary, 14 – 15.

them former office clerks, turn into soldiers, Clark Walton noticed that they “soon lost their
city pallor. Their shoulders began to straighten and tasks that at first seemed hard became
simpler and easier.” 269 And how could anyone fail to gain in weight, health, and physical
strength, one former Doughboy asked, “with three good meals a day, plenty of exercise for
all the muscles, and regular sleep!” 270

Collectively, such blandishments rendered military life palatable to the great majority
of soldiers who quietly accepted their new status as “component parts of a rapidly
assembling military machine.” 271 More significant still, they implied that in some respects at
least, the military lifestyle was preferable to the civilian existence from which they had been
severed upon their induction into the Army. And only a short distance separated the
willingness of soldiers to acknowledge this implication from their acquiescence in, and
perhaps even an enthusiastic absorption of, the very customs, attitudes, and values that
servicemen had initially found repulsive, and that appeared to confirm the image of the
Army as menacingly alien social order. The eagerness with which many soldiers came to
admire and emulate the mannerisms, language, and deportment of the officers and NCOs of
the “Old Army” was the most discernible manifestation of this trend. After the initial shock
of acculturation to the Army’s routines, John Barkley and his fellow soldiers began to

269 Walton, Clark, Lieutenant-Colonel, 3rd Battalion, 107th Field Artillery Regiment, “Three Brothers in
World War I,” 51 – 52, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.


271 Emmett, Give Way to the Right, 30. For other examples of the mechanical metaphors soldiers used
when describing their immersion in the social and organizational environment of the Army, see Norris, Delmar
L., Supply Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Brigade, 1st Division, letter to Nellie Borders, 10
January 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Green, Paul E., Company B, 105th Engineer
Regiment, 30th (“Old Hickory”) Division, letter to father, 18 September 1917, Paul E. Green Papers, SHC,
retrieved on 25 November 2005 from http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/greenletters/menu.html; Pottle, Stretchers,
6, 20; Searcy, Looking Back, 13; Macarthur, Charles, Battery F, 149th Field Artillery Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, War Bugs (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1929), 79; Carnes, ed., Compensations of
War, 1.
develop a grudging esteem for their NCOs. “[W]e took them for our role models. We began to wear our clothes differently…Our talk was changing, too. It was getting more like the regulars’ talk…[W]e were proud of looking like soldiers.”

Soldiers’ ultimate acceptance of conformity and anonymity, two features of military life that many “rookies” initially regarded with such deep revulsion, served as another example of this pattern. It did not take long for these integral features of Army life to shed their repute as the ultimate negations of the concepts of individuality that civilian society cherished so deeply. In fact, they rapidly emerged, in the minds of soldiers, as the quickest route to social acceptance and accommodation within the hierarchical structure of the Army. The simple act of donning a uniform could assume the overtones of a welcome release from the humiliating self-consciousness to which new recruits were highly susceptible. According to Frederick Pottle, a soldier newly arrived at a camp or cantonment “is keenly conscious that his civilian attire marks him as a ‘rooky,’ an outsider, a being worthy of contempt and ridicule. His clothes had formerly suited him well enough, but now they have suddenly become conspicuous and offensive…[E]veryone sneers and glowers.” In such circumstances, soldiers might actually welcome their loss of individuality and look forward to the dissolution of their personalities in a sea of olive-drab. “What a difference a uniform makes!” Pottle continued:

Man’s greatest desire is not to be conspicuous, but to conform. Is there any misery more acute than that of feeling your clothes are wrong? The man in civilian clothes in a military camp is an outsider, a poor uninitiate, a stupid fool. It is not merely that others think so; he thinks so himself, and shows it in his face. But an hour afterward, when he has assembled and put on an ill-fitting uniform, witness his self-confidence, his air of experience, his

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273 Pottle, Stretchers, 4 – 5.
swagger. It cut him to the heart when the men in uniform sneered at him; now his chief
delight is to hunt up the new men and sneer at them.\textsuperscript{274}

VII. The Birth of the Home Front/Fighting Front Dichotomy

Regardless of the form it assumed, a soldier’s willing acceptance of – or even his
passive resignation to – his new stature as a member of a radically different social order
marked a turning point in his relationship with the civilian world he had left behind. To be
sure, the soldier’s immediate family and native community remained important as a collective
focus of allegiance. The crucial role that mail from home – whether in the form of personal
letters or hometown newspapers – played in sustaining soldier morale in the camps (and
even more so in France) testified to the continuing emotional attachment servicemen
continued to feel toward these basic units of personal and collective identity. “Tell
everybody to write us,” E. R. Beverly urged a home-town pastor. “Tell them they can’t
realize the awful desolation that will come to us if ever…we are forgotten by those we never
can forget.”\textsuperscript{275} Soldiers sought to impress on their “homefolks” the notion that writing
letters to active-service friends and family members was a patriotic duty, an opportunity for

\textsuperscript{274} Ibid., 13. Though Army officialdom took a relatively long time to recognize the effect of an
immediate issue of uniforms on the morale and contentment of newly-arrived recruits, it eventually
acknowledged the vital role this simple but meaningful ritual played in rendering the rite of passage from
civilian to soldier less intimidating to those who had to undergo it. See for example First Lieutenant George N.
Northrop, Assistant Intelligence Officer, 88\textsuperscript{th} Division, Camp Dodge, Iowa, to Chief, Military Intelligence
Section, War College Division, Washington, D.C., “Summary of conditions in this cantonment,” 2 March 1918,
Camp Dodge file, Box 4; and Captain Eugene E. Barton, Intelligence Officer, Auxiliary Units, Camp Pike,
Arkansas, to Chief of Morale Branch, Military Intelligence, Washington, D.C., “Morale Report No. 5,” encl.
“Exhibit A,” 2, 29 October 1918, Camp Pike file, Box 12; both in Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

\textsuperscript{275} Beverly, E. R., Private, 18\textsuperscript{th} Company, 5\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, 155\textsuperscript{th} Depot Brigade, Camp Lee, Virginia, letter
to the Reverend J. W. Stewart, 30 May 1918, Folder 15, Box 52, Dickenson County (Va.) Materials, Series VI,
RG 66, LVA. See also Colley, Fred H., Private, Company L, 318\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 80\textsuperscript{th} (“Blue Ridge”)
Division, letter to “Homefolks,” 22 December 1917, Folder 16, Box 52; Damron, Vernon, Private, letter to S.
H. Sutherland, 30 July 1917, Folder 17, Box 52; Owens, Olney, Private, Company A, 38\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment,
3\textsuperscript{rd} (“Marne”) Division, letters to father 3 October 1917 and 31 December 1917, and letter to mother, 6
February 1918, Folder 27, Box 52; all in Dickenson County (Va.) Materials, Series VI, RG 66, LVA.
civilians to “do their bit.”276 Conscious of the morale value of meaningful contact with home, the Army buttressed the appeals of servicemen with its own official sanctions. Beginning in 1917, newly commissioned officers were presented with copies of a personnel management manual that instructed commanders to urge their subordinates to maintain a steady correspondence with the homefolks.277 In similar vein, the Army appealed directly to civilians with injunctions to contribute to the war effort by writing soldiers as often as possible.278 Finally, the Army paid close attention to the efficiency and security of postal operations in camps and cantonments, although concrete steps toward the standardization of mail-handling practices at individual military installations appear to have been taken only in the last few months of the war.279

But continued allegiance to family and native community did little to impede soldiers’ recognition of the extent to which induction into the Army represented a major sacrifice of their civilian freedoms, identities, and values. That recognition, in turn, provided ample scope for the emergence among servicemen of a distinct sub-culture grounded in the

276 That was the message behind a poem composed by one serviceman based in Camp Lee, Virginia: “Won’t you write me a cheering letter/And send some news from home?/I’ll be on my way most any day,/Sailing through foreign sea foam […] So now is the time to do your bit,/While you have the time and the chance;/Don’t hesitate, as it’s getting late,/And I’m needed now in France.” See Stanley, George G., Private, 18th Company, 5th Training Battalion, 155th Depot Brigade, Camp Lee, Virginia, Folder 47, Box 59, Shenandoah County (Va.) Materials, Series VI, RG 66, LVA.


278 In at least one cantonment, soldiers were required to write and mail a letter home within twenty four hours of their arrival in camp, and to enclose with their missive a message signed by their battalion commander. This form letter made clear to the “homefolks” their crucial role in the country’s war effort, and reminded them that “getting a letter is a big event in a soldier’s life, and getting none is a real disappointment […] Remember that you, too, are a part of the American army – you are the Army of Encouragement and Enthusiasm. Write letter filled with these things to your Soldier, and you will help us help him.” See First Lieutenant Elliott P. Frost, Memorandum for Commandant, Camp Greenleaf, Georgia, “Munson Plan of Morale Work at Camp Greenleaf,” 1 October 1918, Camp Greenleaf file, Box 6, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

279 See for example the results of the investigation of postal operations at Camp Meade, Maryland, First Lieutenant L. G. Niblack, Memorandum for Captain George B. Perkins, Military Morale Section, Military Intelligence Branch, Washington, D.C., “Pernicious System of Mail Handling at Camp Meade,” 23 August 1918, Camp Meade file, Box 10, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.
growing corpus of attitudes, ideas, and rhetoric soldiers used to evaluate their relationship with the mainstream of American civil society. At the heart of this subculture was the uncompromisingly severe scrutiny to which soldiers were increasingly subjecting those elements of American civil society that either did not acknowledge the sacrifices and deprivations synonymous with military service, or attempted to take outright advantage of soldiers. In short, servicemen did not respond to the shock of their absorption into an alien social and institutional setting – and the concomitant loss of their privacy, personal freedom, earning potential, career and educational opportunities, and social status – by rebelling against or resisting the institution that had deprived them of these things in the first place. Rather, their response to immersion in the alternative social order of the Army took the form of a critical re-evaluation of the civilian society they had so recently left.

For some soldiers, the process of questioning the home front’s willingness to acknowledge the sacrifices of servicemen and to shoulder its share of the burdens of war began as early as their journey to camp. In September 1918, a group of nearly seven hundred draftees from the Northeast endured a harrowing train ride from New York City to Camp Jackson, South Carolina. Motivated by an obvious desire to save costs, the railroad company that operated the train failed to provide adequate food and water for the men, and frequently shunted the train off to sidings to allow other trains – especially those carrying paying passengers – right of way, causing interminable delays that only compounded the discomfort and hunger of the draftees. In what appeared to be another cost-cutting measure, no lights were provided to illuminate the interior of the train cars, rendering movement on the train positively hazardous. The employees of the railroad argued that wartime shortages of gas and electricity made it difficult to furnish the troop-trains with proper lighting, an explanation the draftees on board countered by observing ‘that trains carrying civilians dash past them
brilliantly lighted.”

Gerald Gilbert sneered in his diary when describing the ordeal he endured on a train-ride that brought him back from leave in Philadelphia to Camp Meade, Maryland. “There is no reduced rate for soldiers…[I]t seems to me that the boys are getting a mighty rotten deal,” he concluded after complaining about a journey in “filthy and dirty” coaches with “no ventilation and no water and no lights.”

Had they taken place in isolation, such episodes would have amounted to little more than irksome incidents in the minds of soldiers. But as servicemen arrived in camps and cantonments and began the process of acclimatization in the social world of the Army, they confronted what they increasingly interpreted as mounting evidence that these seemingly isolated occurrences were part of a much larger and disturbing pattern. Not only did certain segments of American society appear to have little or no intention of assuming their proper share of the same sacrifice that military service imposed on soldiers. That would have been bad enough, but a conviction also began to take root in the collective mind of soldiers that a fair number of individuals, institutions, and even entire economic and social groups that made up the civilian sector seemed determined to exploit the war for their own profit, even if that determination meant taking advantage of the soldiers themselves.

The camps and cantonments themselves furnished the most glaring “proof” of this allegation. Many of these facilities were still unfinished when they received the first consignments of draftees and volunteers in late summer of 1917. In consequence, soldiers

280 Captain C. W. B. Long, Intelligence Officer, Camp Jackson, South Carolina, to Chief, Military Morale Section, “Investigation of Morale on Troop Trains,” 12 September 1918, Camp Jackson file, Box 7, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

281 Gilbert, Gerald F., 313th Ambulance Company, 303rd Sanitary Train, 79th Division, entry for 2 June 1918, “History of My Experiences in the Army during World War I” (typescript diary), 14, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
frequently came into contact with the civilian employees of the construction firms the
government had contracted to build the cantonments. The significantly higher wages the
construction workers were receiving for their work touched a raw nerve with soldiers who
had exchanged their own civilian careers for an Army private’s thirty dollars a month. At
Camp McClellan, Alabama, where Herbert Allen’s National Guard was stationed, some of
his fellow soldiers “seemed to think they should be earning as much as the civilian
carpenters who were building the mess halls.”²⁸² What strengthened such convictions was
the fact that in many cases, soldiers themselves were pressed to perform construction-related
work. At Camp Humphreys, Virginia, soldiers had to hack down and uproot nearly a
thousand acres of dense-growth timber and tree stumps to make room for the parade
ground alone. The knowledge their efforts would not result in any additional compensation
rankled deeply in the minds of men who found themselves working “against the $3.50 and
$4.00 a day laborer, or $16.00 a day plumber, and doing the same kind of work better or
more efficiently.”²⁸³ The bitterness such remunerative disparities engendered in the minds of
soldiers bore fruit in accusation of laziness and “slacking” that servicemen leveled against the
civilian contractors. “How many times was it heard from officers and $1.00 a day soldiers
that…the honest but benighted Hun was a far better type of man than these [?]…How
much better a plan it would have been to draft these skulkers and make them work for $1.00
a day in a drafted labor army!”²⁸⁴

²⁸² Allen, Herbert O., Corporal, Company L, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th (“Blue and Grey”)
Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

²⁸³ Captain Charles T. De Rell, “An Illustrated History of Camp A. A. Humphries,” 9, Folder 1; and
Colonel Richard Park, “History of Camp A. A. Humphries,” 54, Folder 2; both in Box 42, Subseries A: Camp
A. A. Humphries, Series IV: Virginia Camps and Cantonments, ca. 1917 – 1919, RG 66, LVA.

²⁸⁴ Park, “History of Camp A. A. Humphries,” 127, Folder 3, Box 42, Series IV, RG 66, LVA.
Episodes like these added a significant layer of complexity to the serviceman’s perception of the mainstream of American civil society. Increasingly, the image of the “home front” as a source of moral and material support, embodied in the strong emotional attachments soldiers continued to profess toward their families and native communities, had to vie with a rival representation. This depiction of the home front cast it in the role of a haven for parasites whose readiness to profit from the war underscored the seemingly disproportionate share of the burden soldiers were being asked to shoulder at the behest of their parent society.

The interactions between soldiers and civilians in the immediate vicinity of the camps and cantonments appeared to confirm this dismal assessment. Plenty of soldiers appreciated the welcome that civilian communities extended to the thousands of servicemen in their midst. The city of Waco, Texas, practically adopted the Michigan and Wisconsin National Guardsmen of the 32nd Division, as their own. “The townspeople, the churches, fraternal organizations and clubs all did their best to make us feel completely at home,” one soldier remembered. According to John Baker, the people of Waco were hospitable and generous to a fault. Everyone, “including street walkers, seemed overly anxious to ‘do something for our soldiers.’” But not all communities enjoyed such amicable relationship with the soldiers who resided at a nearby camp or cantonment. Given the economic opportunities that a large military installation offered, many of the communities located in the vicinity of the camps acquired the attributes of bonanza camps whose inhabitants did


286 Baker, John G., Second Lieutenant, Company H/Company D, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, USAMHI.
their best to take advantage of the sudden influx of tens of thousands of men in government
pay into the area. Situated next door to Camp Dix, New Jersey, the community of
Wrightstown “developed into a veritable nest of profiteers. They swarmed into it from the
cities like gamblers to a gold strike…and skinned us with a glad hand.”287 A similar gold-rush
atmosphere prevailed in many other locations, with soldiers’ letters and reminiscences
featuring a steady litany of complaints about the extortionate prices local businesses or mass
transit companies demanded in exchange for goods and services from anyone in uniform.288
Occupying a category of their own were communities that advertised in no uncertain terms
their reluctance to welcome soldiers at all. Too many servicemen reported encountering
signs that proclaimed a variation on the message “No dogs or soldiers allowed” for such
stories to be completely apocryphal.289

To a soldier, however, it mattered little whether a community seemed determined to
gouge him or to keep him out. In the minds of servicemen, both extremes of civilian
behavior epitomized the failure of certain segments of civil society to recognize its

287 Carpenter, William T., Captain, 312th Sanitary Train, “A Peace Lover Goes to War: Being the
Experiences of William T. Carpenter during his Time in the Army during the Great War” (typescript memoirs),
14, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

288 See for example Doty, Paul A., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division,
letter to mother, 10 January 1918; Munder, Howard W., Bugler, Company G, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th
(“Keystone”) Division, letter to parents, 18 September 1917; both in World War I Veterans’ Survey Project,
USAMHI; Gow, Kenneth, Lieutenant, Machine Gun Company, 107th Infantry Regiment, 27th (“New York”)
Division, letter to mother, 6 October 1917, and letter to parents, 20 February 1918, both in R. M. Gow, ed.,
Letters of a Soldier, 166, 234 – 235.

289 See for example Poorbaugh, Earle R., Sergeant, Company L, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division,
Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI; Durbenhaus, Joe, Private
First Class, Company D, 8th Machine Gun Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, Army Service Experiences
Questionnaire; Hagan, Fendell, First Sergeant, Company F, 140th Infantry Regiment, 35th Division, Army
Service Experiences Questionnaire; Livingston, Lawrence E., Corporal, Company E, 168th Infantry Regiment,
42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Army Service Experience Questionnaire; Bory, Benjamin L., Private First Class,
Battery D, 151st Field Artillery Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire;
Hoefs, Rudolph H., Musician 3rd Class, Headquarters Company, 345th Field Artillery Regiment, 90th (“Alamo”)
Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; all in World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
indebtedness to those who had willingly assumed a disproportionate share of the nation’s burden of wartime sacrifice. For the most part, the strategies of retribution soldiers adopted in an effort to obtain a modicum of satisfaction for the grievances they nursed against their civilian tormentors assumed the form of instinctive acts of revenge. The soldiers of a unit of the Connecticut National Guard reportedly settled the score with a businessman accused of profiteering by demolishing his retail establishment the night before they embarked for France.290 A similar fate befell a skating rink in San Antonio, Texas, whose operators dared to put up signs banning “Dogs and Men in Uniform” from the premises. “With over 100,000 soldiers” in the area, this turned out to have been a grave mistake. “Word went out quietly,” Earle Poorbaugh remembered, “and one night every street near the rink was shoulder-to-shoulder soldiers. They completely wrecked the place – floor dug up; wall torn down, etc.”291

Yet, even as some soldiers were taking the law into their own hands, others were laying the groundwork for a more sophisticated response to the accumulating evidence of the inequalities of sacrifice sharply dividing civilians from soldiers. The burgeoning body of soldiers’ newspapers published under the auspices of the military authorities in most major camps took a leading role in exposing merchants notorious for preying on servicemen. The Camp Sheridan *Reveille* conducted a campaign to force local taxi drivers to stop overcharging soldiers. The *Camp Sherman News* urged its readers, in the words one of its headlines, to “Ban the burglars, rid the city of these profiteering pirates.” Still others published blacklists of businesses with profiteering tendencies, while a number of such publications went so far as

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291 Poorbaugh, Earle R., Sergeant, Company L, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
to refuse to carry advertisements for businesses that refused to guarantee their merchandise had not been marked up for soldiers.\textsuperscript{292} The magazine of the 27\textsuperscript{th} Division went one step further, explicitly linking profiteering with treason. “A man who gouges a soldier for rent, for clothes or for food is doing the Kaiser a valuable service,” an article asserted.\textsuperscript{293}

That last statement stood like a signpost pointing indicating the direction in which soldiers’ relationship with the American home front would proceed. As long as soldiers remained in training in the United States, their dissatisfaction with the home front’s apparently lackluster response to the challenge of war would be shaped by grievances related to the unequal distribution of the material rewards and sacrifices of wartime service. Deployment to the theatre of war in Europe and attendant encounters with modern industrialized warfare on the Western Front would sharpen the edge of soldiers’ perception of the home front, shifting its focus toward a critique of American society as a whole, and encouraging soldiers to arrogate to themselves the role of their parent society’s moral conscience.

\textbf{VIII. Conclusion}

The training camp experience represented a crucial stage in the identity-formation process of America’s Great War generation. The camps and cantonments in which the vast majority of volunteers and draftees first encountered the realities of Army life witnessed the beginning of the process by means of which servicemen distanced themselves from the allegiances that had defined their individual and collective identities in peacetime. Yet, the


\textsuperscript{293} “Stop Thief!” \textit{Gas Attack of the New York Division}, 16 March 1918, Benjamin F. Cooling (donor) Materials, Miscellaneous Units, 27\textsuperscript{th} (“New York”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
transformation soldiers underwent in the camps only partially followed the template according to which Progressive social workers and the official hierarchy of the Army sought to mold the corporate and individual identities of the millions of soldiers who passed through these installations in the years 1917 – 1918. Civilian reformers and senior officers attempted to imbue soldiers with modes of self-identification that revolved around the Progressive rhetoric of moral rejuvenation and American nationalism on the one hand, and loyalty to such abstract social and organizational entities as the Army’s new, large divisions on the other. But the allegiances that had come to represent the principal focus of a soldier’s sense of identity by the time he embarked on a transport ship that would convey him to France rested on a set of pillars that made little allowance for the officially-sanctioned parameters of loyalty.

Partly in keeping with the socio-cultural parochialism of his civilian existence, and partly as a defensive reaction to the traumatic experience of immersion in a thoroughly alien socio-organizational environment, the American soldier embraced an identity grounded in his sense of membership in the small group of soldiers with whom he interacted, in work and leisure, on a daily basis. The investment of one’s primary loyalties into one’s squad, platoon, or company – the latter representing the largest military unit with which a soldier could feel an emotional bond – was an almost natural reaction on the part of individuals whose socio-cultural horizons had, until then, been delimited by the family, the neighborhood, or the small community. Complementing that narrowly-based sense of identity was a broader, though at this stage still poorly-defined, cognizance of belonging to a social order radically different from the civilian world the recruit had so recently left. Initially based on the commonly-shared ordeal of immersion in the military life and of the “dissolution” of civilian identity under the stresses inherent in the induction process, this
collective mindset underwent a rapid metamorphosis into recognition of the profoundly different meaning that wartime sacrifice held for soldiers and civilians. That recognition was the first conspicuous manifestation of the rift that would ultimately open between the Americans who worked for victory “over here,” and those who fought “over there.”
“You Are Sacrificing Much, We Are Sacrificing More”:
Home Front, Fighting Front, and the Moral Economy of Wartime Service

“The slacker over the sea got our job and sweetheart;
Early discharge got the man who never played a part.
Our gold and grub went to the profiteer;
Our ‘smokes’ and Red Cross packets to the slacker over here.
So the apple is divided and for us is left the core;
I wonder who gets credit for the ‘Winning of the War?’”

I. Introduction

Private Roy Goode, a soldier in the celebrated 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, wrote these words following the Armistice while serving with the American Army of Occupation in the Rhineland in the winter of 1918/1919. Part of a longer poem entitled “Who Won the War?” the stanza encapsulated a crucial element of his fellow soldiers’ collective mentality. Like Goode, many Doughboys believed that the Great War had witnessed a fundamental breakdown of the moral economy of sacrifice that dictated the relations between the American home and fighting fronts. While the ordinary front-line soldier – “the man in whose shirt the cootie hatches;/The man who wades in mud to his neck/Whose home is a dug-out or village wreck” – fought, bled, starved, and suffered in France, a host of deviant

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1 Goode, Roy L., Private, Company B, 117th Engineer Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, “Who Won the War?” (poem), World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

2 For the provenance of the poem, see Goode, Roy L., Private, Company B, 117th Engineer Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, untitled note, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

3 Goode, Roy L., Private, Company B, 117th Engineer Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, “Remember the Man at the Front” (poem), World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
social elements was brazenly scheming to exploit the war for its own selfish purposes. Profiteers, grafters, draft evaders, shirkers, “slackers,” and crooks did not simply rest content with thumbing their noses at soldiers by feasting on “the nation’s cream and fat”\(^4\) while “the man at the front” had to make do with “hard-tack.”\(^5\) Instead, servicemen believed, these parasites within the American body politic allegedly took advantage of soldiers’ absence from home by stealing their women, taking over their well-paid civilian jobs, swindling them out of money, tobacco, and food, and making a killing by supplying the Army with shoddy equipment and clothing, unpalatable rations, and bad medicine. Worst of all, these unscrupulous social elements appeared determined to wrest from soldiers the most priceless commodity of all – the credit for victory Doughboys believed rightfully belonged to them.

By the time of the Armistice, these anxieties represented one of the central pillars of the Doughboy identity. Physical separation from American society created fertile ground for the emergence among Doughboys of rumors and half-truths concerning the conditions that allegedly prevailed back home. That some of the rumors had solid foundations only compounded the problem. Soldiers who served in combat units proved particularly willing to lend credence to unconfirmed reports of the corruption and moral decay that allegedly prevailed on the home front. This was because access to reliable sources of news and information such as newspapers and mail from home grew more sporadic in direct proportion to a unit’s proximity to the front. Moreover, in contrast to their European counterparts, American troops had no hope whatsoever of obtaining home leave for as long as the war was still in progress. Considerations of logistics and geographical distance made even brief visits home impossible. In such conditions, there existed considerable potential

\(^4\) Goode, “Who Won the War?”

\(^5\) Goode, “Remember the Man at the Front.”
for the appearance of serious frictions between the home and fighting front of the American war effort.⁶

What exacerbated these frictions even further was that the negative image of the home front competed in the Doughboys’ minds with another, more benign picture: that of the home front as the generous supporter of the fighting man, ready at all times to him with the material and moral backing he needed to finish their appointed task. Individual soldiers’ communities and families were integral to this vision of a benevolent home front. No matter how vitriolic Doughboys might grow in denouncing the moral turpitude in which the home front as a whole was apparently becoming mired, the “home folks” in particular were almost always exempt from the reproaches of soldiers. But as the war went on, Doughboys’ critique of the home front began to acquire an increasingly sharper edge, one that could, at times, cut through the barrier of immunity to soldiers’ anger that families and communities had hitherto enjoyed. Few, if any, soldiers ever accused their loved ones of direct complicity with grafters and slackers. Nonetheless, Doughboys made it clear that in their view, the “home folks” did not take the war seriously enough and did not comprehend the enormity of the sacrifice that victory required.

⁶ In identifying letters, mail, and leave as the principal sources of communication between soldiers and civilians, I am conforming to the model of home-front/fighting-front relations that dominates the literature on the experience of European combatants of the Great War. See for example Richard Bessel, Germany after the First World War (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 5, 43 – 48; Fuller, Troop Morale and Popular Culture, 72 – 74; Audoin-Rouzeau, Men at War, chaps. 4 and 5; McCartney, Citizen-Soldiers, ch. 5. To this list of home-front/fighting front channels of communication must also be added film and visual media, topics not covered here, but examined from the British perspective in N. Reeves, Official British Film Propaganda in the First World War (London, 1986); and idem, “Through the Eye of the Camera: Contemporary Cinema Audiences and their Experience of War in the Film ‘Battle of the Somme,’” in Cecil and Liddle, eds., Facing Armageddon, 780 – 798; and from the American perspective in Stephen Vaughn, Holding the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Larry W. Ward, The Motion Picture Goes to War: The U.S. Government Film Effort during World War I (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1985); and Craig W. Campbell, Reel America and World War (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1985).
Doughboys never fully succeeded in reconciling the tensions and contradictions between the two views of the home front. As was the case with the troops of other nations, the home front both fascinated and repelled Doughboys. Servicemen perceived sustained contact with the home front as vital for their morale. At the same time, conscious of what they saw as the misdistribution of the war’s burdens, servicemen responded with indignation to suggestions that home front and fighting front represented identical halves of the equation of wartime sacrifice, and that both were equally valuable to the war effort. Likewise, they challenged the home front’s efforts to regulate their social and moral behavior. The war did not last long enough for Doughboys’ discontent with the home front to boil over into the kind of bitter hostility that some European combatants developed toward their respective societies.\(^7\) Before the conflict ended, however, the stark contrast between the hypocrisy, self-interest, and complacency of the home front on the one hand and, on the other, the ethos of self-sacrifice and altruism of front-line soldiers became firmly enshrined in Doughboys’ collective worldview.

II. “The People at Home Back Us Up”: The Benevolent Home Front

On the surface, soldiers’ perception of the home front appeared unreservedly favorable. The abundant praise soldiers showered on the home folks for their exertions during the war underscored the appearance of a harmonious relationship between home front and fighting front. Servicemen stationed abroad recognized the home front’s crucial role in influencing the outcome of the conflict. In consequence, they remained acutely aware of their own dependence on the moral and material support of those who remained

\(^7\) See for example Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War*, ch. 4.
Stateside. Writing to his wife from France, Hugh Ogden characterized the war as “a deep, profound science of the correlation of the entire energy of a hundred million people behind five million soldiers, each doing his appointed bit to a common end.”

Ogden and Janda were both officers, but their understanding of the bonds linking home front and fighting front was shared by enlisted men also. “I want to make it hot for the Germans if I can and finish this war as soon as possible,” infantryman Paul Ostertage stated. “It seems to be up to us, and the people at home back us up. We can’t do anything without this last.”

Lloyd Foster was equally direct in his attempts to make his parents understand the importance of cooperation. “This is a big game and will require [the] very best efficiency of our men, and the support of the American people.”

This equation of interdependence, soldiers readily conceded, implied that not everyone could be expected to fight on the front lines or serve in France. Instead, soldiers recognized that the quest for victory required that even some able-bodied men would have to stay home to perform essential work. As William Shoemaker assured his younger brother,
those who did so need not necessarily feel ashamed on that account. “You needn’t think
because you stand back that you are neglecting duty,” he wrote his sibling, “because we need
men your age on the farm.”

Charles Merritt, a Pennsylvania farmer, resorted to a similar
rationale when he bemoaned his earlier decision to enlist in the National Guard. “I could do
more for my country at home on the farm than I can here anyway. I can only fight one
German in every attack and if I were there I could be the means of keeping a good many
other men in condition for fighting.”

In the circumstances, no censure, Harvey
Hendrickson asserted, could in all fairness be leveled against those who stayed behind —
provided they “did their bit.” “Those who did not have to go into service were just as true
blue faithful Americans as we soldiers that did go. These provided us with what we needed
to win the war!!”

Deeply aware of the extent of their reliance on the toil and good will of the “home
folks,” servicemen could be liberal with praise, bestowing upon the home front enthusiastic
accolades whose generosity at times bordered on the fawning. “If it were not for you folks at
home and your hearty support – our moral[e] would drop one hundred percent and our
victory would never have been won,” wrote Ernie Hilton. In a series of letters written to

12 Shoemaker, William, Company A, letter to brother, 23 September 1917, 168th Infantry Regiment,
42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, LMM, retrieved on 26 April 2006 from http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/
FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEnt.doc.

13 In a letter written approximately a month later, Merritt developed his argument further. “I have
seen my mistake in not staying at home and farming. I could have done more there towards ending the war… I
thought it was my duty, and it was, to answer my country’s call but I should have answered it in staying on the
farm and raising more food.” See Merritt, Charles B., Corporal, Company M., 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th
(“Keystone”) Division, letters to mother, 26 February 1918 and 28 March 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey,
USAMHI.

14 Hendrickson, Harvey L., Private First Class, Company L, 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th (“Blue and
Gray”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

15 Hilton, Ernie G., Corporal, Headquarters Company, 353rd Infantry Regiment, 177th Infantry
Brigade, 89th (“Middle West”) Division, letter to “Grace,” 20 February 1919, World War I Veterans’ Survey,
USAMHI.
the pupils of their home-town high school, a group of soldiers from Norfolk, Virginia, paid fervent tribute to their community’s – and the nation’s – exertions during the war. “We boys over here feel that the people back home are fighting with us,” one soldier declared to his pen-pals. For servicemen inclined to abstract thought, the bonds linking home front and fighting front, and the influence the former wielded over the latter, amounted to nothing less that a profound metaphysical connection whose dynamics could best be explained in spiritual terms. “It was largely due to the knowledge they had the support, the prayers and the admiration of the women and the boys and the girls of America that caused the men of our Army and Navy to put all their will-power and physical strength in the struggle,” opined another of Maury High School’s correspondents.

In its most effusive form, soldiers’ appreciation for the encouragement and emotional concern they received from their loved ones endowed the home front’s share in the final victory with a value on a par with the contribution of the servicemen themselves. “[M]y dear Mother, Father, brothers and sisters, at home…really made the only true sacrifices which easily enabled us to win the war,” a Doughboy admitted. “We, over here, had something to do most all the time, to occupy our minds, while our dear ones had to stay at home and make many sacrifices and worry as to how soon it will end. I think each one of you deserves as much credit as any of us in France, for you have had to make many sacrifices as well as we.” Writing for the consumption of the reading public in the States,

16 Ansell, Luther, letter to pupils of Maury High School, 14 December 1918, Folder 1, Box 67, Norfolk (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

17 Old, Herbert, Major, Medical Corps, letter to pupils of Maury High School, 11 December 1918, Folder 24, Box 67, Norfolk (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

18 McCourt, John L., Private, 103rd Military Police Battalion, letter to pupils of Maury High School, 19 December 1918, Folder 21, Box 67, Norfolk (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.
an officer who commanded an engineer company on the Western Front testified that “[it] seems to the boys in France as if all the men and women in the home land [are] doing everything in their power to help and protect them. The boys in the trenches feel that if there are any heroes, they are the folks working and sacrificing at home, while they are over there getting all the joy and glory.”19

Much as they appreciated “the support, the prayers and the admiration” of the “home folks,” servicemen felt an even greater esteem for tangible, material evidence of the home front’s solicitude for the welfare of ordinary soldiers. Even the most mundane demonstrations of this kind, servicemen pointed out, had immense value. “The women in America who are making pajamas, bandages, socks, and all those things [for the soldiers], are not working in vain, for they certainly come in handy,” Herndon Brown informed his mother. “Cigarettes, cocoa, and coffee given us on the way were very much appreciated.”20 But the importance of such generosity extended far beyond the material comfort it afforded the men in the training camps and at the front. In the soldiers’ collective mindset, civilian attentiveness to the needs of the fighting man derived its ultimate worth from the broader context of patriotism and civic responsibility in which Doughboys routinely situated it. “I wish all you fellows…knew how happy and comfortable you are making thousands of men who are fighting for ‘Old Glory,’” David Bareuther told his father when thanking him for his contribution to a YMCA soldiers’ fund.21 He spoke with equal approval of his father's

19 Swan, My Company, 97.

20 Brown, Herndon, letter to mother, 5 August 1918, Folder 14, Box 51, Culpeper County (Va.), Series VI: Country Source Material, 1919 – 1927, RG 66, LVA.

21 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, Folder 2, letter to father, 12 December 1917, Folder 2, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

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involvement in the Liberty Bond sale campaign.\textsuperscript{22} As Paul Green pointed out to his sister, the liberality of which soldiers were the immediate beneficiaries had implications far in excess of their potential to ease the serviceman’s lot. “Every little thing you do – making comfort bags, cooking cakes, and sending letters worth reading to your numerous soldier boys brings the war nearer to its end.”\textsuperscript{23} In similar fashion, the efforts of servicemen to educate the home folks about the importance of participating in some of the larger, nationwide patriotic initiatives dwelled on their capacity to abbreviate individual soldiers’ separation from their loved ones. “What wonderful work the people at home did in their Loan Campaign,” Donald Dinsmore beamed with satisfaction in a letter to his mother. “Tell Aunt Emma that every dollar’s worth she sold means just so many days less before Al and I are home again.”\textsuperscript{24}

Soldiers reserved their warmest acclaim for those who, irrespective of their non-combatant status, voluntarily chose to leave the safety of the home front and willingly subjected themselves to personal danger in order to alleviate soldiers’ hardships. Among the overseas representatives of the home front soldiers encountered most frequently, nurses were the most prominent. The improvised newspaper published by the soldiers of an Army camp in France paid tribute to “our brave and gallant women who came to France to share the hardships, and when the vigor or war overtook us, nursed us back to health...These

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Bareuther, David C., Private, 5\textsuperscript{th} Field Signal Battalion, 3\textsuperscript{rd} (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 3 May 1918, Folder 4, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Green, Paul E., Company B, 105\textsuperscript{th} Engineer Regiment, 30\textsuperscript{th} (“Old Hickory”) Division, letter to sister, October 1917, Paul Eliot Green Papers, SHC, retrieved on 25 November 2005 from http://docsouth.unc.edu/wwi/greenletters/menu.html.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Dinsmore, Donald. Second Lieutenant, 103\textsuperscript{rd} Field Artillery Regiment, 26\textsuperscript{th} (“Yankee”) Division, letter to mother, postmarked 29 May 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
\end{itemize}
women...braved everything that they might come here and give the American soldier the comfort and solace that only they could give.”

In the minds of soldiers, no manifestation of the home front’s support for the war effort was as important as regular mail from home. Mail from loved ones fulfilled three essential functions. At the most rudimentary level, it allowed soldiers to maintain links with family and friends, and keep up as much as possible with latest developments in their home community. Doughboys had a voracious appetite for local news from home, a craving well-documented in their requests for home-town newspapers. “Say, why don’t you send me some papers to read?” Cordie Majors wrote to his parents in rural Tennessee. “Bundle up some old *Enterprises* and mail them to me. Am ‘hungry’ for some good old McNairy County news. Have already written for the *Independent* to be sent to me.”

Referring to the newspaper issued by his fraternity at Washington and Lee College in Lexington, Virginia, George Junkin let his mother know that “I would appreciate it if you would send me the *Ring-tum Phi*. Hop gets the *County News*, and we can always get French newspapers, if not the *New York Herald* or the *Chicago Tribune*, European Editions, so...we can get the complete news of the world, and of the most important (to us) place in the world.”

The satisfaction soldiers derived from the home folks’ willingness to comply with such requests was unmistakable. The arrival of a large consignment of home newspapers was a significant event in the life of ordinary soldiers, one many servicemen believed sufficiently important to

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25 *Camp Garrett Camouflager*, 20 February 1919, in file of Franek, Frank J., 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.


be remarked upon in their diaries. “About 2:00 P.M. there was a very large bag of second
class mail and so now all of the fellows have papers from home and they sure do read and
yell about the news,” Elmer Straub noted.28 At times, the appearance of a fresh batch of
newspapers could almost compensate for soldiers’ disappointment in not receiving any
personal letters. Though clearly frustrated with coming away empty-handed from a company
mail-call, North Carolinian Willard Newton found solace in the fact that “a number of the
fellows receive packages of Charlotte papers. By reading them I get lots of news from the
part of the States that especially interests me.”29

The second role that mail from home played in soldiers’ lives was even more crucial.
Specifically, some servicemen credited their home folks’ letters with helping Doughboys to
ward off the many temptations that threatened to ensnare them in camp, at the front, or
behind the lines. “When I come home I really believe I will be better fitted to start civilian
life again, both morally and physically than ever before,” Howard Munder assured his
parents, “because I am putting into daily practice what has been taught me at home, and
which your letters remind me of.”30 George Irwin told his parents that their letters were
instrumental in saving him from succumbing to a mindset that the horrors of war could all
too easily kindle. “These things often make a fellow feel like saying ‘what’s the use,’ and

28 Straub, Elmer F., 150th Field Artillery Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, entry for 26 June 1918,
in A Sergeant’s Diary, 48.

29 Newton, Willard M., Sergeant, Company G, 105th Engineer Regiment, 30th (“Old Hickory”) Division,
entry for 7 July 1918, in “Over There For Uncle Sam: A Daily Diary of World War One” (typescript,
1975); see also entry for 26 July 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. See also Roberts,
George A., Private, Company F, 332nd Infantry Regiment, 83rd (“Ohio”) Division, entry for 10 July 1918,
in “The Story and Experience of the Great War, 1918 – 1919” (typescript diary/memoir); and Walker,
Lynn M., Private, Company C, 9th Field Signal Battalion, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, letter to Esther
Walker, 26 October 1918, both in World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

30 Munder, Howard W., Bugler, Company G, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division,
letter to parents, 18 October 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
throwing all principles to the four winds, and running wild like a hog,” he noted with reference to a particularly gruesome sight he encountered close to the front. “I don’t know why it should have that effect, but it does. Then we get letters from you folks over there, or we think about you, and everything is all right again.”31 In short, letters from home allowed soldiers to stay true to the moral values and modes of behavior associated with the communities that delimited their pre-war, civilian lives.

Most significant of all was the contribution that mail from home – whether in the form of newspapers, letters, or packages – made toward sustaining and boosting soldier morale. Viewed in this light, mail acquired a symbolic value whose impact on servicemen was impossible to quantify. Put in the simplest of terms, mail embodied the contractual nature of the relationship between the home and fighting fronts. An article that appeared in *The Stars and Stripes*, the official newspaper of the AEF, captured the essence of that bond. Using the apocryphal “Private John Jones,” an AEF “everyman,” as an example, the article highlighted the practical and emotional significance for ordinary soldiers of the home front’s thoughtfulness. Jones is delighted to have received a box of goodies from home, and eagerly anticipates feasting on its contents of “California figs and raisins, nuts, American chocolate bars, made with real milk and sugar, ginger snaps, cookies” and many other delicacies. Being a good sport, Jones does not hoard these treasures for himself, but encourages his buddies to “‘Have one – they are from God’s country’…and the cookies and dried fruit go the rounds.” But the delight Jones takes in the package pales in comparison with the psychological impact the box has on his mind. After receiving the package, “Jones is a

different man and a better soldier,” an effect that testified to the quasi-mystical nature of the bond between the home and fighting fronts:

The box from home cheered him up and he goes about his work cheerfully and gaily. The box was a bond of union with the home folks. It restored his personality and he feels that he is doing something “Over Here” and is not a mere colorless nonentity – one among a million men. He goes to his work with his chest out, reawakened to the realization that the home folks expect him to do his bit and are not forgetting him.32

As the writings of actual soldiers demonstrated, this idealized depiction of the importance of home mail to the cultivation of soldier morale transcended the pages of the Army’s official news organs. “The people back there will never be able to imagine what the letters mean to the boys over here,” Rollyn Leonard assured his mother.33 Gilbert Gerard elaborated on this theme when recounting the effects on his company of its first mail-call in France. “The spirits of the members of the company rise like a thermometer on a hot day and everybody was in a happy and contended frame of mind. Toward evening some more mail was distributed. I received several letters from the folks back home and when I read them I felt like a king.”34 For soldiers undergoing the ordeal of battle, letters from home were arguably the most effective means of blocking out, if only for a moment, the psychological and physical stresses of combat. “Mail – letters from home,” Edward Davies noted in his diary while his division was occupying a sector of the front near what used to be the St. Mihiel Salient. “I am going to sneak off [to] a little corner and read them by myself. There are two from Sis, one from Carrie and one Clara and one from Billy Parker. How

32 “A Box from Home,” The Stars and Stripes, 22 February 1918.

33 Leonard, Rollyn E., Private, Company A, 168th Infantry Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to mother, 30 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

34 Gilbert, Gerald F., 313th Ambulance Company, 304th Sanitary Column, 79th Division, entry for 6 August 1918 in “History of My Experiences in the Army during World War I” (typescript diary), World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
good it is to hear from them. Gone is the mud and slime of the trench, gone are the bursting shells and stinking gas. I am home for just a few minutes.”

III. The Limits of Home Front/Fighting Front Solidarity

Soldiers’ recognition of the value of the home front’s wartime exertions had its limits, however. The sentiments of praise and gratitude servicemen voiced in their missives home frequently cloaked deep fissures in the façade of harmony that ostensibly characterized the relationship between America’s home and fighting fronts. Collectively, the qualifications with which servicemen often hedged their apparently positive appraisals of the home front’s role in the war indicated that something more serious than geographical distance separated Doughboys from their parent society.

Some of the discordant notes voiced by soldiers in this respect amounted to little more than irritation with what they saw as the home front’s misdirected solicitude for their welfare. Soldiers appreciated all manifestations of the home folks’ kindness and concern. They drew the line, however, with acts of generosity whose ultimate purpose aimed to satisfy civilians’ own sense of patriotic or moral worth, even at the cost of causing discomfort or inconvenience to the soldiers whom such acts were ostensibly to benefit. Frederick Edwards mocked the misguided zeal that led civilians to inflict needless items upon soldiers.

“Everyone is knitting sweater and socks and God help the poor men who’ve got to wear some I’ve seen. Every incompetent girl seems possessed to show her patriotism by knitting an unwearable sock….It seems to me they could subsidize a good factory or two and do

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35 Davies, Edward A., Sergeant, Company B, 315th Infantry Regiment, 79th Division, entry for 20 September 1918 in “War Diary,” World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHL.
something else.”

While training at Camp Greene, near Charlotte, North Carolina, Carl Noble and his fellow infantrymen of the 5th Division found themselves at the receiving end of an even more extreme example of civilian determination to “pamper” soldiers whether they liked it or not. That soldiers’ participation in the proceedings had to be secured through coercion only intensified Noble’s bitterness. “The good people of Charlotte were to give us a grand entertainment on Christmas Day. The soldiers were marched to a piece of marshy land, and the people from town parked their cars on dry ground between the soldiers and the speakers. The men couldn’t see or hear a thing. We were kept in this marsh by sentries with bayonets until the program was over. Several men were sick from standing there with wet feet, and the papers were full of blah about the great time given our dear boys.”

Even worse than this kind of compulsory entertainment masquerading as civilian generosity were efforts to inflate the value of the home front’s patriotic work to a point where it threatened to eclipse soldiers’ own contribution to the war effort. While fully prepared to recognize the vital role that the home front played in the war, soldiers consistently rebuffed any suggestions that the burdens borne by civilians and non-combatants enjoyed tangible parity with the hardships endured by those serving and fighting overseas. In consequence, the notion that civilians and non-combatants played as great a part in the war as the soldiers occasionally provoked the withering scorn of servicemen, facilitating a tendency to differentiate themselves from the home front.

The likelihood that such a notion might become a bone of contention between soldiers and civilians was all the greater in light of the emphasis that wartime propaganda


placed on perpetuating it. The Wilson Administration’s propaganda organs routinely insisted that those who saved food, hawked Liberty Bonds, knitted socks for the troops, operated YMCA huts, tended crops, or worked in such war-essential industries as ship-building contributed as much to the war effort as those who gave up jobs and businesses to serve in the armed forces.  

The most high-profile medium of wartime propaganda – the posters issued by the various agencies of the federal government as well as a number of non-governmental welfare organizations – graphically underscored this attitude. One of the best-known examples of the genre urged civilian workers to “Make Every Minute Count for Pershing” and depicted them as paragons of heroic masculinity who would not have been out of place on an Army or Marine Corps recruiting poster. A poster exhorting civilians to minimize food waste drew direct connections between home front thrift and battlefield success with an appeal to “Keep it Coming,” and a bleak scene of a convoy of food-laden Army trucks lumbering along a snow-bound French road, presumably on the way to the front. This tableau, in turn, functioned as the backdrop for a quote attributed to John J. Pershing affirming the interdependence of the home and fighting fronts. “We must not only feed our soldiers at the front,” Blackjack Pershing was credited with saying, “but the millions of women and

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38 The interdependence, as well as the allegedly unshakable unity, of home front and fighting front represented a central theme of official propaganda in virtually all belligerent nations during the war. For the development and depictions of these themes in the American context, see Vaughn, *Keeping Fast the Inner Lines*; Maurice Rickards, *Posters of the First World War* (New York, 1968); and Michele Shover, “Roles and Images of Women in World War I Propaganda,” *Politics and Society* 4 (1975), 469 – 486. Schaffer, *America in the Great War*, chap. 1; and Zieger, *America’s Great War*, 57 – 85.

children behind our lines.”  

The message was clear: civilians were as integral to the war effort as soldiers, and even the smallest contribution made by the former was equal in value to the sacrifices borne by the latter.

For those unwilling or unable to don their country’s uniform, this conceptualization of the value of wartime sacrifice comprised an honorable – not to mention convenient – justification of their contribution to victory. As the chronicler of one Virginia community’s part in the war noted, those who performed civilian service “seemed to feel that they were fighting their country’s battles just as much as if they had been selected for military service. They tilled the soil and worked and produced for patriotism.”

But soldiers’ views of the matter were predictably dimmer.

As far as servicemen were concerned, there was simply no comparison between the sacrifices borne by soldiers on the one hand, and even the most patriotic civilians at home on the other. “[D]on’t let anyone joke you into believing that the patriotic jobs at home are winning [the war],” a junior officer lectured his aunt on this particular point. “It’s the ‘dough boy,’ the most down-trodden man in the Army who catches all the gaff and does the work that counts.”

“Cannot the people at home be made to see you win wars with men?” Hugh Ogden asked his wife. “Yes, just men, dirty, swearing, panting, sweating, fighting men, men who will stand up and be shot down, who will go on when the other fellow stops and turns back, men with physical and mental guts to last to the last jab through the other fellow’s

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41 J. R. Horsley, “Appomattox County in War Time – Military Service,” n. d., Folder 1, Box 49, Series VI, RG 66, LVA.

42 Robinson, F. R., First Lieutenant, letter to Mrs. W. F. B. Slaughter, 23 April 1918, Folder 27, Box 67, Norfolk (Va.), Series VII: City Source Material, 1919 – 1927, RG 66, LVA.
William L. Judy asserted the primacy of soldiers’ contribution to the war, and the correspondingly auxiliary role of the home front’s exertions, in similar terms. “There are…cries that ‘ships will win the war,’ and ‘economy will win the war.’ The War Department has sent a gentleman to this camp to teach the soldiers how to sing, because singing will help to win the war.” Such notions, he continued, were fundamentally erroneous. “Too much of this twilight help will lose the war….Twilight soldiers are necessary, but the soldiers of the battlefield who smell the smoke of shell, stick the bayonet into the enemy and themselves fall down with torn body, are the soldiers who will win the war.”

Surveying the sacrifices America’s allies had already made in the war, Archibald Robertson reminded his mother that the outcome of the war ultimately depended on more than Liberty Bond subscriptions and patriotic speeches. “This war will never be won by money and talk,” he cautioned. “America must give and suffer, give men, millions of men, and suffer the loss of many lives as England and France and Canada have done and are doing, before we shall win.”

Even those servicemen who noted with approbation what the “home folks” were doing to help win the war often did so in a manner that left no doubt as to the secondary character of the home front’s contribution to the struggle. Morris Pigman’s reaction to the news of his relatives’ war-work evidenced just that kind of spirit. “I am glad to know that both you and Uncle Harry were workers for the 4th [Liberty] Loan,” Pigman informed his

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43 Ogden, Hugh W., Lieutenant-Colonel, Headquarters, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to wife, 14 April 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

44 Judy, William L., diary entry for 12 February 1918, in A Soldier’s Diary, 58 – 59.

45 Robertson, Archibald G., Second Lieutenant, Company G, 163rd Infantry Regiment, 41st Division, letter to mother, 10 June 1918, Folder 15, Box 88, Staunton (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.
aunt, before adding that “I have a share in it also paid for by my little army pay.”46 The smug qualification endowed Pigman’s tribute to his relatives’ patriotic spirit with the distinct air of damning with faint praise. The soldiers in Carroll Swan’s company found a particularly creative way of comparing the value of their own and the home front’s respective contributions to the war effort. As part of the promotional campaign for the Third Liberty Bond, Swan’s men received a copy of a poster whose caption urged them to “Fight or Buy Bonds.” Swan’s combat engineers promptly added a line at the bottom of the placard that read “We Do Both.”47 In similarly caustic fashion, Orie L. Hesley expressed satisfaction with his home community’s war-related activism. “Pleased to note that the old county is going over the top in Red Cross, Y.M.C.A., and all the war work assigned to her,” he remarked. This was all the more satisfying, Hesley continued, because “I recall that some of the people were very indifferent regarding our participation in and the outcome of the war when I left those parts in August [1917].”48 For those at the receiving end of Hesley’s praise, the broader perspective within which he situated his community’s attitude toward the war could only have a humbling effect.

In extreme cases, soldiers deliberately sought out ways to silence the home front’s claims to parity of sacrifice with servicemen. The rationale behind the efforts of one divisional commander’s efforts to promote the sale of Liberty Bonds among the soldiers under his command serves as a case in point. “Gen. [William G.] Haan’s [32nd] division

46 Pigman, Morris, Sergeant, letter to aunt, 4 November 1918, unit unknown, possibly 28th Division, LMM, (emphasis in the original), retrieved on 26 April 2006 from http://www.libertymemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEnt.doc.

47 Swan, My Company, 132.

48 Hesley, Orie L., Sergeant, Ordnance Department, letter to “Ed,” 20 July 1918, Folder 2, Box 59, Shenandoah County (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA.
wants every man in camp to own a Liberty bond,” Goldie Slater wrote his parents from Camp Macarthur in Texas, where his regiment of the Michigan National Guard was undergoing training in late 1917. “[T]hen after the war [,] when some one says, ‘Well, you did the fighting and we backed you with our money,’ we will be able to say, ‘Yes, we did the fighting and also gave our money.’”

But the most strident expression of soldiers’ conviction that the home front’s sacrifices would never match their own may have come from the pen of David Thornton. Writing to the editor of his home-town newspaper, Thornton praised civilians for their willingness to open their pocketbooks in support of the latest Liberty Loan drive and subscriptions to a soldiers’ welfare fund being organized by the YMCA. This generosity, Thornton explained, would go a long way in allowing servicemen “to win honor for you, for our country and for ourselves.” His approbation for such manifestations of civilian patriotism carried an important qualification, however. Though he acknowledged that civilians “support the Liberty Loans splendidly,” he also reminded his audience that “[t]hose were loaned with the expectation of receiving a financial gain.” See from this angle, Thornton implied, the relative value of the contributions that civilians and soldiers, home front and battle front, were making to victory, was a non-issue. The simple truth was that while “[y]ou are sacrificing much, we are sacrificing more.”

From servicemen’s claims that the fighting front bore a disproportionately large share of the national community’s wartime sacrifice, it was but a short step to assertions that the home front’s own contribution fell far short of its potential. A serviceman engaged in

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49 Slater, Goldie E., Private First Class, Headquarters Company, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letter to parents, October 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

50 Thornton, David M., Corporal, Machine Gun Company, 316th Infantry Regiment, 79th Division, letter to the editor of the Mechanicsburg (Pa.) Daily Journal, 27 October 1917, Folder 1, “War Letters of David Miles Thornton” (typescript), World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
promoting the sale of Liberty Bonds explicitly highlighted the contrast between the alleged apathy of civilians and the dutiful spirit of the armed services. “Well Ethel,” W. Carlisle Sutton complained, “I have been around on street corners giving little speeches on Liberty Bonds and it’s a shame to have to beg the people to buy bonds. No one has to beg the Army and Navy…. [W]e always volunteer.”

Hugh Ogden, who had promoted the sale of Liberty Bonds before he departed for France, openly doubted the sincerity of the home front’s commitment to the pursuit of victory, and deplored its inability to understand the seriousness of the task facing the United States and its allies. “We get a daily wireless news bulletin, from which it looks as if the Liberty Loan was not going as well as it might,” he wrote his wife from a France-bound transport ship. “I think sometimes of the smug physical and mental satisfaction of some of those audiences I talked to this summer, and despair of ever making them see how vital are the issues of this war.”

For servicemen deployed overseas, direct observation of the war’s effects on Entente nations reinforced the conviction that the people back home were not pulling their weight. In commenting on the sufferings that years of war had inflicted on their European allies, American soldiers frequently contrasted what they viewed as the grim fortitude of ordinary French men and women on the one hand, with the American home front’s supposedly half-hearted dedication to victory on the other. Edward M. Barksdale’s description of the conditions he encountered near the front was typical. “As you go along the streets, you can only see old women in black, men either very delicate looking, crippled or too old to fight and the children’s clothes are generally ragged and torn,” he related to his parents. “Many of

51 Sutton, W. Carlisle, letter to Mrs. G. T. W. Kern, 28 April 1918, Folder 15, Box 82, Richmond (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

52 Ogden, Hugh W., Lieutenant Colonel, Headquarters, 42nd (“Rainbow”), letter to wife, October 1917, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
the people also wear wooden shoes. You can look into the fields and see only old men, women and children gathering in the harvests. With all these sorrows and hardships, they seem to take everything very bravely and without a murmur, for it is France they love most after all, and they will give everything for the sake of their country.” Then came the taunt. “You will also see women doing all kinds of hard labor such as men do in the U.S.A. Do you not think it is time American[s] should help[?] Yes, everyone that really knows the conditions does, and I am very glad I am over here to do my bit.”

James E. Henschel punctuated his paean to French resilience with doubts about the capacity of Americans to appreciate or emulate their allies’ willingness to sacrifice all for a greater cause. “The French spirit is wonderful,” he remarked to his parents, before assuring them that “[y]ou people at home cannot appreciate it. The patience and determination, the quiet, uncomplaining, enduring of sacrifices is beautiful, and really as wonderful as it is beautiful.” He concluded with an appeal that combined hope about his native country’s potential to emulate the example set by the French with an affirmation of his skepticism on the same issue. “If only the Americans back home could ‘get’ the spirit that the French have,” mused Henschel. “[W]hy with all of the tremendous resources and abilities that our country has, the war would be a different proposition. The Frenchman has given everything he has for three long years and is still hopeful and smiling. We in America don’t know the meaning of sacrifice.”

53 Barksdale, Edward M., letter to father and mother, 3 August 1918, Folder 5, Box 69, Series VII, Petersburg (Va.), RG 66, LVA.
54 Henschel, James E., U.S. Motor Transport Corps, letter to parents, 8 July 1917, LMM, retrieved on 26 April 2006 from http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEnt.doc. See also Turner, Joe S., 8th Company, 1st Infantry Training Regiment, letter to unidentified recipient, 17 August 1918, LMM, retrieved on 26 April 2006 from http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEnt.doc; Covington, John W., First Lieutenant, 353rd Infantry Regiment, letter to uncle and “Home People,” 14 August 1918, Folder 18, Box 51, Culpeper County (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA; Cocks, Lucian H., 10 January 1918, and letter to father, 26 March 1918, both in Folder 2, Box 88, Roanoke (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA; Clarke, G. Stanley, to unidentified recipient, n. d. (possibly summer 1918), Folder 27, Box 80, Richmond (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA; Hanes, Robert M.,
The view that the home front knew little about the war’s realities and could never equal the sacrifices borne by servicemen for the sake of victory facilitated the emergence among soldiers of the conviction that those back in the States had no right to complain of any real or imagined hardships. “We ask that there be no more a tone of complaint anywhere,” demanded Paul E. Green. “Let those who complain walk once among the ruins of Ypres, what then?”\(^{55}\) “When you write,” Carroll J. Swan advised the friends and relatives of soldiers serving overseas, “talk about pleasant and joyous things…Don’t tell [the soldier] you’re suffering because the lid is on and you can’t get any chicken. He’s probably eating cold ‘canned Bill.’”\(^{56}\)

Those civilians who did dare complain in letters to soldiers could not count on a sympathetic audience. “Certainly knocks one in pit of stomach to hear complaints back home about gasoline restrictions, taxes, etc.,” Howard V. O’Brien grumbled. “Civilians here suffer privations Americans can’t imagine, always cheerful.”\(^{57}\) When Foster Berger’s mother grumbled about the increasingly burdensome demands for donations solicited by charitable organizations and the federal government, he poured cold water on her grievances. “Mother, about the Red Cross, Y.M.C.A., Liberty Loan and War Saving Stamps, which you say require sacrifices. I would say that no one is giving too much at any time, because they are speeding


\(^{56}\) Swan, My Company, 76 – 77.

it in the right way over here and doing wonderful work.” Responding to a friend’s complaint about having to work unusually long hours, Hobart S. Wilson put him squarely in his place while illustrating in stark terms the disparity in the demands the war made on the home front and fighting front, respectively. “You state you work 14 hours a day for 7 days. Good! You will soon be up to me. Two meals in sixty hours with one canteen full of water for the same period.” Even Carroll J. Swan, an officer normally eager to smooth the differences between home front and fighting front, could not restrain himself from recounting an episode illustrative of many a soldier’s attitude toward reports of the “hardships” confronting those at home. In the early months of 1918, with Swan’s company of engineers living in a cave that formed a part of the French defensive positions in the Chemin des Dames sector northeast of Paris, his men received some American newspapers in the mail. “It was interesting to see the boys read the home papers,” Carroll wrote. “One bitterly cold day George Morse was Barrack Sergeant. He was sitting in the cave on a keg, wrapped in sweaters and blankets, reading from the Boston Post. ‘By Gosh!’ he exclaimed, ‘what’s this war coming to! The steam heat gave out at Camp Devens. Those fellows will catch their death of cold!’” Swan hastened to assure his readers that even “with all the joshing about the men not over yet, there was a wholesome feeling of respect and admiration” for those Stateside, but his qualification rang hollow.


59 Wilson, Hobart S., Private, Company D, 103rd Engineer Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 22 August 1918, Richards, ed., Pennsylvaniaian Voices, 146.

60 Swan, My Company, 95 – 96.
That Doughboys’ perception of the home front could alternate so rapidly between gratitude and open scorn reflected an even broader trend evident in the relationship between civilians and soldiers. The attributes soldiers ascribed to the home front had the potential to inspire, motivate, comfort, and console servicemen. But the same attributes could frustrate, irritate, and occasionally outrage the men in uniform. Such was the case with the civilians’ insistence on their role as full-fledged partners in the war effort, and with the home front’s determination to spoil soldiers regardless of whether the latter desired it or not. Viewed in isolation and in the short-term, these sources of tension were little more than small grits of friction incapable of seriously straining soldiers’ relationship with civilians. But when combined with another troublesome aspect of that relationship, a variable whose effects could become apparent only in the long run, they had the potential to spawn a serious rift between the two spheres of the American war effort.

Specifically, that variable consisted of the limitations inherent in the channels of communication linking soldiers with their “home folks.” In contrast to the flow of information that linked the home and fighting fronts of at least one other belligerent power, the exchange of news and information between Doughboys and the American home front did not constitute “a dialogue…in which both parties were equal participants.” 61 To begin, the strict censorship regulations the AEF instituted in the middle of 1917 constrained soldiers’ ability to convey to the “home folks” the realities of war. 62 Arthur Yensen summarized the implications of the censorship regime for his fellow Doughboys. “Letters from home say they wish we would write more; we would but there is so little we can say

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61 McCartney, Citizen-Soldiers, 93.

62 For a detailed discussion of the impact of censorship on soldiers’ correspondence, see Part IV below.
without giving military information that we sure have to stretch our imaginations to fill up a couple of pages.”

At the same time, the practical conditions of active service in the European theater of operations complicated the task of delivering letters to soldiers. “Mail from home was a sometime thing – letters were usually at least 6 weeks old by the time we got them,” Mervyn Burke recalled.

Page Manley, like Burke a soldier in a combat division, agreed. “Mail service was spasmodic, we weren’t in one place long enough for any regularity.”

Soldiers’ access to other sources of accurate news and information that could shed light on the goings-on at home was equally problematic. Units stationed in rest camps or training areas behind the front could count on a steady supply of European editions of newspapers. Closer to the front, however, papers were a luxury, some soldiers going for days, if not weeks, without access to a news source of this kind. “Haven’t seen a paper for about ten days,” George O’Brien remarked in a letter he wrote to his mother while his division was at the front. “There were no newspapers available at any time,” another frontline soldier recalled. “We knew little of what was going on on the outside except from some

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64 Burke, Mervyn F., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters Troop, 1st Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, Mervyn F. Burke Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

65 Manley, Page, Private First Class, 167th Ambulance Company, 117th Sanitary Train, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

66 See for example Moody, John W., Corporal, Company F, 304th Engineer Regiment, 79th Division, letter to parents, [?] July 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Straub, Elmer F., 150th Field Artillery Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, entry for 18 October 1918, in A Sergeant’s Diary, 198; LaBranche, Ernest, Battery F, 102nd Field Artillery Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, An American Battery in France, 57.

67 O’Brien, George H., Corporal, Headquarters Company, 121st Field Artillery Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letter to mother, 4 September 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
friend who was a dispatcher or a courier.” No doubt this was an extreme case, but even so, it testified to the tenuous nature of the links between home front and fighting front. The unreliability of these channels of communication almost guaranteed the emergence of potentially grave misunderstandings and tensions between soldiers and civilians.

Even when letters and newspapers did catch up with soldiers, their impact on Doughboys’ morale and perception of the home front was not always positive. On a prosaic level, letters could depress a soldier’s spirits just as easily as they could bolster it. “Packages and letters from home always had a double effect on me,” Horatio Rogers claimed. “There was the thrill of getting them and of gloating over them, and there was the accompanying pang of homesickness.” For Edward Davies, the elation he initially felt at receiving the first batch of letters from his family soon yielded to a feeling of homesickness bordering on despair. “What a feeling of loneliness comes over me. Am I to see them again?”

Second, soldiers did not always approve of the tone and content of the letters they received from family and friends. “Some letters are more harm than good,” Rollyn Leonard observed. The last thing Doughboys wanted to hear was civilian bellyaching. “A lot of men are getting junk like this: ‘I am worrying to death about you, and I don’t think sister will live,’” Kenneth Gow told his family. “Junk like this is not conducive to good morale in the

68 Alcox, Ward F., Sergeant, 361st Machine Shop Truck Unit, 117th Supply Train, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

69 Rogers, Horatio, Corporal, Battery F, 102nd Field Artillery Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, World War I Through My Sights, 46.

70 Davies, Edward A., Sergeant, Company B, 315th Infantry Regiment, 79th Division, entry for 20 September 1918 in “War Diary,” World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

71 Leonard, Rollyn E., Private, Company A, 168th Infantry Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to mother, 30 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
soldier.”

James Block was even more direct in letting his family know what kind of letters he preferred to receive. “The great complaint about letters from the States is that they are mournful and gloomy and the Govt. wants parents to write cheery letters as they are better for the soldier and keep him from worrying.”

Soldiers had enough first-hand experience of wretchedness and woe, he noted, and could easily do without additional helpings from home. “[T]he kind of letters you write, about the home folks and the doings in town are just what we fellows want – we don’t want letters full of war, war, war – we get enough of that here – what we want is cheerful news aside from the war.”

Most important of all, mail from home was instrumental in stoking in soldiers’ minds the conviction that the home front was gradually succumbing to the domination of social “parasites” that prayed of the American body politic while making a mockery of the sacrifices that front-line soldiers underwent on a daily basis. For many Doughboys, the first intimation of this development may have come from reading a personal letter bearing an all-too-familiar and dreaded item of news. Recalling one of his artillery battery’s mail calls, Charles MacArthur noted that most of the letters “revealed that our girls were getting married to naval ensigns in droves, or were giving lawn parties for second lieutenants.” His flippancy concealed an experience to which many Doughboys could relate. Shortly before start of the Champagne Offensive, Roy Goode received a letter his girlfriend had written “for the sole purpose of notifying me that she hoped I would never return from France

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73 Block, James W., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters Company, 59th Infantry Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, letter to parents, 30 June 1918, James W. Block Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

74 Block, James W., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters Company, 59th Infantry Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, letter to parents, 26 August 1918, James W. Block Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

75 Charles MacArthur, War Bugs, 201. MacArthur served in the 149th Field Artillery Regiment of the 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division.
alive.” But as distressing as a “Dear John” letter may have been to a Doughboy recipient, its broader implications were even more alarming. Behind all such communications, Doughboys believed, lurked a dim figure dedicated to getting ahead in life at soldiers’ expense. Clarence Mahan, who lost his lady-friend to one such antagonist, defined the type in terms that most Doughboys would have understood. His redhead, Mahan explained, had left him for someone who “was not in the service and [who] had a job.” In other words, Mahan’s rival fit the classic profile of what soldiers referred to as a “slacker” – an able-bodied young male who, by fair means or foul, managed to avoid military service and succeeded in spending the war in the United States, where he took full advantage of high wartime wages, and helped himself to the jobs and womenfolk of active-duty servicemen.

IV. The Demonology of the Home Front

What made the slacker a particularly dangerous nemesis was that, in the eyes of Doughboys, he was not alone. As they perused the letters and newspapers they received in France on a more or less regular basis, many servicemen drew the conclusion that the ubiquitous slacker represented merely the vanguard of a much larger cohort of “types” of home-front denizens devoted to the same, or similar, ends as the slacker. By the time the war ended, that conviction had become sufficiently widespread within the ranks of the AEF to crystallize into an integral element of Doughboys’ worldview.


77 Mahan, Clarence E., Corporal, Headquarters Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
At the heart of this conviction was a sophisticated demonology of the home front. Even if grounded in little more than rumor, incomplete or unreliable information, and flawed inferences deduced from sporadic contacts with home, the notion that the home front was being unduly influenced by slackers, profiteers, corrupt or incompetent politicians, and busybody social reformers fulfilled a vital function. It allowed Doughboys to reconcile seemingly two seemingly contradictory imperatives. On the one hand, servicemen needed a clearly defined target upon which to focus the grievances they harbored against the home front. On the other hand, as frustrated as Doughboys might on occasion become with the alleged complacency, ignorance, and presumptuousness of the “home folks,” they could hardly afford to launch direct attacks against the social networks upon which they depended for moral support. Conceptualizing the home front in terms of two self-contained and diametrically opposed spheres – the nurturing, compassionate home folks, and the unscrupulous, grasping parasites bent on subverting the moral economy of wartime sacrifice – permitted Doughboys to indulge in an acerbic critique of the home front without alienating the families and communities toward which they continued to profess various degrees of loyalty.

Among the generic figures in the Doughboys’ demonology of the home front, that of the slacker easily qualified as the most notorious and despised. In its narrowest war-time sense, the term applied exclusively to draft evaders. Their determination to avoid a vital wartime civic duty transformed draft evaders into objects of particular abhorrence in the minds of soldiers. Draft evaders, suggested Howard V. O’Brien, were guilty of more than breaking the law. “[T]he draft evader – he’s not playing fair. Defaulted on the social contract,
and ought to be made to pay up.”78 But it did not take long for this limited definition to outgrow its narrow boundaries. Ultimately, the term came to embrace a wide variety of other social and professional categories whose members, servicemen maintained, were deliberately evading their civic obligations. These included conscientious objectors; draft-age men who had contracted marriages to escape military service; men just over the maximum age limit who had refused to volunteer in spite of their physical and mental suitability for the armed forces; members of local civil defense organizations; as well as those who sought draft exemption by claiming their specialized skills rendered them more useful to the war effort at home than at the front.79

As a social type, the slacker – however defined – drew much of his war-time notoriety from the broader context of early twentieth century debates concerning delinquency in the workplace. In the two decades preceding the outbreak of the war, the detection, punishment, and prevention of malingering and shirking among industrial workers emerged as issues of prime concern for efficiency experts, factory managers, psychologists, sociologists, and jurists on both sides of the Atlantic. Concerns about the social costs of work avoidance had generated a burgeoning body of literature that portrayed industrial malingering not simply as an impediment to productivity, but as an evasion of one’s obligations to society as a whole.80 Inefficiency acquired the connotations of a moral failing on the part of those who deliberately caused it.81 By the time the United States entered the

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78 O’Brien, Howard V., diary entry for 7 March 1918, in *Wine, Women, and War*, 42.


80 Burke, *Dismembering the Male*, 78 – 81.

war, the figure of the malingerer had become sufficiently iconic in the country’s popular consciousness to facilitate an effortless metamorphosis into its war-time equivalent, that of the slacker.

In addition, the unsavory reputation slackers enjoyed in soldiers’ collective mindset owed much to a specifically American context. The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a nationwide effort to criminalize desertion and financial non-support by working-class husbands and fathers. Progressive social reformers and jurists with an interest or intellectual stake in this issue generated a sophisticated vocabulary with which to lambaste this particular group of individuals. With its tendency to portray deadbeat husbands and fathers as a threat not only to their own families but to the social fabric as a whole, this body of rhetoric may have inspired at least some of the language that social commentators and servicemen alike used with reference to slackers during the Great War.  

In the minds of American servicemen, the figure of the slacker was synonymous with a number of complex and overlapping connotations. On one level, soldiers regarded slackers as the domestic equivalent of the enemy Americans faced in France. The heated discussions Amos Wilder overheard among his fellow artillerymen on the Western Front combined “the usual diatribes among pacifists, slackers, and profiteers on the home front” with “imprecations against the enemy as Huns and perpetrators of atrocities” in France and Belgium. Second, the slacker was an economic rival, always on the lookout to derive financial gain at the expense of servicemen. Here, the image of the slacker merged with another noxious type, the war profiteer. Unable to attend properly to his business dealings at

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home because of his obligations with the National Guard, G. Leslie Van Alan had no doubt as to where to assign the blame for his frustrations in this regard. “I am doing my duty and making larger sacrifices than a lot of them there slackers,” he fulminated in a letter to his wife. “[T]hey are so damned patriotic that they would and are willing to take advantage of the fellow who offers to go to the front and squeeze him on a proposition that they know is not fair just so they make the dollars, that is just the way people do and that is the condition of affairs and the way of most in the world do today.”

Howard O’Brien, confiding in his diary the anger he felt over the news that his house had been sold for taxes, could afford to be less restrained, and far more articulate, on the same point. “Taking advantage of [my] absence to do [a] dirty trick like that makes me see red,” he noted, vowing that “I’ll meet that son of a bitch some day!...[I]t’s hell to be four thousand miles away engaged in saving you God damned country and have some greasy slacker steal your house from you. Some day I hope to have a visit with that bird.”

Third, the slacker was also credited with enjoying an unfair advantage in another, much more personal, area of competition, one to which an allusion has already been made. In what was arguably his most formidable incarnation, the slacker was a sexual rival. His potential ability to cuckold servicemen absent on overseas duty posed a direct challenge to their masculinity and sharpened even further the resentment servicemen felt toward anyone in a position to spend the war at home. One of the Marine protagonists of Thomas K. Boyd’s autobiographical novel Through the Wheat summed up servicemen’s outlook on this touchy matter when he quipped sarcastically that the “home guards” back in the States were

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84 Van Alan, G. Leslie, Private First Class, Headquarters Company, 103rd Ammunition Train, 28th Division, letter to wife, 5 February 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

85 O’Brien, Howard V., diary entry for 12 May 1918, in Wine, Women, and War, 85 – 86.
taking good care to “guard our women while we’re over here.”

Plenty of servicemen would no doubt have agreed. Fighter pilot Kenneth MacLeish was one of them. When he learned that his fiancée had been flirting with a “stay-at-home” serviceman, he responded with a letter whose facetious veneer does little to conceal its underlying insecurity and frustration, or disguise the writer’s contempt for those sitting out the war in the States. “This staying-at-home business, instead of fighting, is fine for one’s family, and one’s matrimonial ambitions, but it’s h____ on the men over here who have loved ones at home…I’m not alone in that view.” Already some of his friends “have had their girls stolen by the little boys who stayed home. I feel I shall have to enlist in their ranks soon.”

That servicemen customarily resorted to humor to deal with the threat posed by the slacker in this sphere testifies not only to their powerlessness but also to the pervasiveness of the problem in their collective consciousness. It did not take long for the smooth, stay-at-home slacker, poised to “steal your best girl,” to become an easily-recognizable “type” in the soldiers’ demonology of the home front. Doggerel poems featured in soldiers’ newspapers customarily dwelled on the challenge that slackers presented to the faithfulness of the soldiers’ womenfolk. “My Letter,” a piece submitted by a soldier who identified himself only as “Skinner,” to The Plowshare, the newspaper of the A.E.F. University Agricultural School, represents a case in point. After pleading with his girl “to always think of me/And pray that I may have a chance,” the author resignedly acknowledges that “some girls are not patient/And will not wait so long/They will go and love a slacker/After their soldier boy has

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gone.”\textsuperscript{88} The same newspaper’s humor section included a fictitious letter from “Mable” to her soldier-boy “Bill,” in which the former notifies her hero that she is “going round with a new swell John and he writ this for me. It will make the fellows think that I’m a swell dame when you show it to them.”\textsuperscript{89} Its comical intention notwithstanding, the letter’s grim humor no doubt resonated with many soldiers. For some, the anxieties implicit in the humorous approach to the problem were all too real. In Carroll J. Swan’s company,

the men organized two clubs. Those who still held their sweethearts back in the United States belonged to the ‘Tried and True’ Club…The others, who from their letters found that some one else had supplant them with their loved ones, joined the ‘Loved and Lost’ Fraternity. After each mail the leading members of each club went around seeking new members. They judged each case on its merits, deciding what ‘frat’ would accept the man. It was a lot of fun, but behind all the foolishness there was much real feeling. The leading lights of the ‘T. and T.’ Club fought for members. When they lost one, they tried to cheer him up and often wrote the girl.\textsuperscript{90}

It was in this particular context that the slacker, along with all the depredations soldiers believed he was wreaking back in the United States, became an acute morale problem. Swan’s unabashed appeal to the women of America, aggressively urging them to reassure soldiers in France, attested to the fears that slackers were capable of engendering among servicemen:

Now, if you happen to be the proud young lady in whom [the soldier] is particularly interested, impress upon him constantly that he is the only one, that you admire him and are proud of him. The other boys in the town look so out of place in civilian clothes, and are so uninteresting to you. It seems as if nearly every soldier gets the impression that some chap at home is stealing his sweetheart away. And so many reports get around about our women at home that even married soldiers worry for fear the wife’s affection may be transferred to some one who is ‘Johnny on the spot.’\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{88} “Skinner,” “My Letter,” \textit{The Plowshare}, n. d., Folder 51, Box 59, Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

\textsuperscript{89} “Mable to Bill,” \textit{The Plowshare}, ibid.

\textsuperscript{90} Swan, \textit{My Company}, 94 – 95.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 78.
Next to the slacker, three other figures associated with the home front provoked soldiers’ scorn and highlighted their estrangement from the home front as a unifying point of a common identity. The first was the politician. As was the case with soldiers’ perceptions of the slacker, their view of the politician ranged from benevolent derision to outright hostility. On one level, the politician, along with the public institutions that represented his natural element, was simply an object of good-natured ridicule. When Congress allocated a portion of the Army’s budget for the purpose of buying seeds that would allow soldiers to grow their own vegetables, *The Stars and Stripes* poked fun at the impracticability and absurdity of the idea spawned by “that ancient and venerable and profitable body which votes the money to buy us our grub.”

Yet, genial mirth at the expense of politicians’ often concealed a deep resentment that soldiers harbored against any group, they believed, was ready to upset the delicately-balanced “economy of sacrifice” for its own selfish interests. Howard V. O’Brien’s description of a chance meeting with a visiting Congressman illuminates the hard-edged contempt that lay beneath soldiers’ ostensible opinion of politicians as innocuous bunglers.

While in Paris, O’Brien and several other servicemen were accosted by stranger, American, with slap on back and mealy stuff about ‘you soldier boys.’ Sweating well, coat thrown back, exposing suspenders not so very new, and shirt not so very clean. At intervals, geysers of tobacco juice. U.S. Representative—from Kentucky. One of the delegation ‘studying conditions.’ ‘Yessir, had dinner with King of Italy t’other day. An’ as I was tellin’ McAdoo ‘fore I left,’ etc., etc. Unpleasant to reflect that he represented what ‘we boys’ were fighting to make the world safe for.

At the most elemental level, soldiers who questioned their country’s motives for going to war resented politicians’ apparent readiness to sanction foreign adventures whose

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costs would have to be shouldered by others. “Wars are determined upon by old men but young men fight them,” complained William L. Judy. “Beards vote for war proclamations and the beardless die therefrom. The greatest fighters are they who have passed the conscript age.”

But servicemen also resented what they saw as the dedication of politicians to seemingly petty issues, their susceptibility to corruption, and their equally apparent devotion to narrow, partisan loyalties. Then politician’s narrow horizon, its boundaries circumscribed by small-minded partisanship, appeared as an antithesis of the appeals to national unity that formed the staple of political rhetoric during war. Where servicemen were concerned, the squabbles characteristic of America’s domestic political debates belonged in the category of “Things that Don’t Interest the A.E.F.,” a regular column appearing in The Stars and Stripes that habitually mocked the concerns and worries of the home front. This feature routinely singled out politicians – as well as America’s political institutions and processes in general – as subjects of thinly-veiled ridicule intended to demonstrate the trivial nature of the home front’s everyday anxieties.

This abstract hostility assumed a concrete form whenever soldiers saw evidence of Stateside politicking impeding military effectiveness in France. Hervey Allan, an officer in a regiment of the Pennsylvania National Guard, shook up his company’s organization on the eve of its commitment to battle precisely to weed out what he believed were “political” appointees to non-commissioned rank. He described the process of reorganization in terms

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94 Judy, William L., diary entry for 7 April 1918, A Soldier’s Diary, 69.

95 See for example “Things That Don’t Interest the A.E.F.,” The Stars and Stripes, 5 March 1918. Among the issues singled out by that week’s installment as unimportant to the AEF were “The yawp of the professional military critic who has never been any nearer Europe that Eastport, Maine…The fear of hypersensitive souls…that this horrid war will have a debasing effect on table manners for the next century to come…The reported discovery there is just as much graft under a system of municipal government by commission as there used to be in the good old days of a party-elected mayor and board of aldermen…”
redolent with contempt for the kind of petty political machinations synonymous with small-town America. “It seems impossible that Pennsylvania politics could reach France, even in a guard regiment, but they did. In the old days, a lot of the men had been appointed noncommissioned officers to salve up the folks at home in the fourth ward, or for some such reason and it was necessary to change this now.”

Another soldier, Missourian Frederick Bowman, recalled how advantageous strong political connections proved to one inept officer. After being relieved from the command of the field artillery battery in which Bowman was serving, the officer in question faced being sent back to the United States for inefficiency. No such thing happened, however. “[T]hey found out that Captain Thacher was a Princeton graduate and a good friend of President Wilson, and that somebody in the State Department was his cousin or something like that, a very influential man. So, they found out, well they had better hadn't send Mr. Thacher home, or they would get in trouble.” Instead of going home with his tail between his legs, the “inefficient” but “influential” Captain Thacher was slotted into a cushy staff job: “So they moved him over as battalion adjutant and he remained there until after the war.”

The politician was further detested by soldiers because of his readiness to exploit his political influence to avoid shouldering the burdens of war, or help others do the same. As a field clerk at a divisional headquarters, William L. Judy observed this type of favoritism firsthand. “The difference between our headquarters and the infantry regiments on the west side of the camp is one mile and fathers of influence. Our headquarters are crowded with sons of

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Illinois politicians. In France we will have deeper dugouts than the infantry soldiers.”

Soldiers assumed almost as a matter of course that those capable of mustering political “pull” in their favor could count on better treatment by the military authorities. While marking time at the notorious Pontanezen Barracks embarkation camp near Brest, Lucian H. Cocke, Jr., watched as officers with “friends back home (Congressmen, etc.),” enjoyed a freedom of movement in and out of the camp, and comfortable living conditions, denied to the great mass of soldiers and officers waiting for transportation to the States. “And the rest of us live up here hedged in by sentinels and the fear of being absent when a list is read,” he informed his father. David Bareuther, his patience exhausted after months of waiting for orders that would enable him to return to America and resume his civilian life, was certain his wait would have been far shorter had he been able to invoke political privilege. With a bitterness that went far beyond a mere dislike of politicians, he gave vent to his views on this point in a letter to his mother. “It’s all politics,” he fumed. “[M]aybe if I was a Senator’s son I’d have a discharge on acc’t of that corn on my little toe. Or else I’d be a major-general.

Well, I’m glad I’m not. And although they claim that this war was to make the world safe for democracy, I don’t see any shining examples in our Army or Government.”

Stuck in a similar predicament, James Block bluntly informed his parents that unless they could mobilize some high-level backing to convince the Army to grant him a discharge and relieve him from duty with American occupation forces in Germany, they should not expect him to return home for quite a while. “[I]f you have some pull with a Senator or Congressman you

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98 Judy, William L., diary entry for 28 October 1917, in A Soldier’s Diary, 34.

99 Cocke, Jr., Lucian H., letter to father, 4 May 1919, Folder 2, Box 88, Roanoke (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

100 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 6 March 1919, Folder 6, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
can cable to Pershing and maybe get some action. Have you any influential friends over there? If you have, get busy. Otherwise you won’t see me for a couple of years.”

Personal contact with politicians tended to sharpen the edge of soldiers’ critical views of their country’s lawmakers and public figures. For those with a measure of political savvy, encounters with civilian leaders raised serious doubts about their competence to direct the country’s war effort. Observing the visit of Secretary of War Newton D. Baker to an artillery regiment in France, Howard O’Brien found the distinguished visitor’s ignorance of things military depressing but hardly surprising. “Visit from Sec’y Baker,” O’Brien noted in his diary. “Poked fingers in breech blocks and made usual helpless remarks of layman. Looked about as uncomfortable as he probably was.”

For William Judy, the speech that the governor of his native state delivered to his division on the eve of its departure for France was so generic as to be deflating. “Governor Lowden of Illinois spoke in the open before the troops drawn up in formation…His speech was that of every other public man to a body of troops; a German governor would have spoken it to departing German recruits.”

Amplifying soldiers’ distaste for politicians was the role the latter appeared to have played in schemes Doughboys believed were designed at depriving them of just rewards their loyal service at the front had earned them. The passage, during the war, of a series of local, state, and federal laws designed to legislate morality appeared to many soldiers as evidence that the home front in general was bent on exploiting the legislative process as a tool for depriving ordinary servicemen of some of the simple compensation to

101 Block, James W., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters Company, 59th Infantry Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, letter to parents, 6 April 1919, James W. Block Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

102 O’Brien, Wine, Women, and War, 46.

103 Judy, William L., diary entry for 9 May 1918, A Soldier’s Diary, 76.
which they felt themselves entitled in exchange for their sacrifices. That the home folks should agree to such measures as the Prohibition amendment to the U. S. Constitution, or the ban on smoking that several local jurisdictions passed during the war, appeared to soldiers as unfair at best, and a devious, perhaps even treacherous, act of ingratitude at worst. Americans, asserted soldiers in letter home, had no right to decide on such momentous issues in soldiers’ absence. “The men over here are kicking to go home but at the same time they are pretty mad about the new laws that are being passed while they are away and have no chance to vote on them,” William Van Dolsen wrote from Germany. “When they heard that smoking was going to be forbidden in the States, they set up quite a kick and want to know what the USA is coming to”104 “America had gone dry while we were away, and most of the boys were peeved because they didn’t get to vote on it,” Arthur Yensen recalled.105

Soldiers’ resentment of initiatives like the Prohibition went hand-in-hand with their misgivings about the attempts of Progressive social reformers, “uplifters” of morals, and religious organizations to regulate soldiers’ behavior and nourish their spiritual lives – by any means necessary. In all fairness, servicemen generally did not object to the presence among them of individuals and organizations devoted to cultivating their religious faith. In many units, regimental chaplains were often among the officers ordinary soldiers admired the most. Whatever their denomination or depth of religious sentiment, however, few soldiers were willing to tolerate any hint of condescension or moral superiority on the part of those

104 Van Dolsen, William W., Captain, 166th Field Hospital, 117th Sanitary Train, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to mother, 13 February 1919, Folder 5, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

who engaged in evangelizing efforts. Shortly after he enlisted in an artillery battery of the Massachusetts National Guard, Horatio Rogers and his fellow gunners were “lined up and marched...to hear the chaplain preach not very good sermons. He seemed to be trying to lower himself to what he considered was the soldiers’ level, and he put it quite low.”

When imposed upon servicemen stationed in stateside training cantonments or in rest camps far behind the front line, such proselytizing efforts represented, at worst, a source of irritation or inconvenience. They ceased to be a mere nuisance, however, when their instigators’ evangelizing zeal carried them directly to the war zone. Frank Thompson’s furious reaction to an ill-timed effort to kindle his platoon’s religious fervor was a case in point. In early October 1918, Thompson’s machine-gunners were trudging away from the front toward rest billets in the rear. Having barely survived a spell of nearly two weeks of battle, his troops were temporarily spent as an effective combat unit. “The men in the last stages of exhaustion, and fed up on the sights of the past week or so, nerves shattered etc., were dreaming for the billets we were en route to,” Thompson reported. Suddenly, up came a rattling Ford with two individuals in the back seat. They wore that same asinine, watery-eyed smirk, adopted by the rustics of our glorious republic who make religion their fad, and shout ‘Glory Halleluja,’ then with their eyes rolled Heavenward cheat their neighbor out of a good horse or eject a widow with three children for non-payment of rent. Incidentally they voted for the Prohibition Ticket when their MEN were away making the world unsafe for the Democratic Party. One of these blatant imbeciles introduced himself as ‘Rodeheaver, the right hand man of Billy Sunday,’ and drawing forth a brassy trombone played ‘Right in the corner where you are,’ and ‘Down the Wabash.’ We had to ask them to remain to lunch, and I thought of Irvin S. Cobb’s Article called ‘A Fool Proof War.’ This isn’t one.

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107 Thompson, Frank L., 1st Lieutenant, 348th Machine Gun Battalion, 91st (“Wild West”) Division, diary typescript, entry for 8 October 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI. Thompson’s platoon appears to have been ambushed by Chicago-based entertainer Homer A. Rodenheaver. This singer and publisher of gospel music became Billy Sunday’s choir director in 1909, and toured the Western Front under the auspices of the YMCA in the fall of 1918. He is best known for having made the first documented audio recording of the Bluegrass classic “Gimme that Old Time Religion” in 1923. See David L. Shillinglaw, diary
Thompson’s outburst exemplified the reasons behind the suspicion servicemen directed toward anyone professing a self-appointed duty to fortify soldiers’ souls. In his emphasis on the alleged hypocrisy and provincial prudery of such individuals and organizations, Thompson gave vent to grievances shared by many other servicemen. The moral superiority and condescension palpable in the initiatives designed to guard the moral virtue of servicemen aggravated soldiers to no end. That the practical manifestation of such initiatives often assumed the form of attempts to limit or block altogether soldiers’ access to the few simple comforts that made their lives exacerbated the problem. It was chiefly due to the efforts of such arbiters of morality, Mervyn Burke claimed, that the AEF, alone of the Entente’s armies, did not provide its soldiers with a standard issue ration of alcohol. “[T]he good people of the W[omen’s].C[hristian]. T[emperance]. U[nion]. and others who were advocating Prohibition at home had sufficient clout then & they didn’t want their men ‘demoralized’ by the Demon Rum.”

Howard O’Brian found the frequent “Warnings from home about Demon Rum” laughable. “Earnest old ladies in pants over here ‘investigating’ must be disappointed. Less drunkenness here than N.Y. can show on one Saturday night.”

But to Frank O’Brien, the sway that the temperance lobby wielded over Americans who were fighting and dying in France was nothing short of scandalous, if only because it defied simple military utility and made Americans a laughing stock in the eyes of their Allies.

“There is one thing all soldiers should have in this war, and that is rum or whiskey as an

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allowance,” he argued. “It is necessary to the physical up-keep of troops. I defy and damned fool of a half-female prohibitionist to show where a drink of rum does not help a half-starved, wet, exhausted, shivering human being back to something like normal. We had diarrhea, but the British ‘Tommie’ with his rum ration did not have it. The French also kept well while sleeping on the wet ground and in shell holes. The Prohibitionist is something else that makes us a sorrowful figure in European eyes.”

Servicemen reacted with similar exasperation to signs that many on the home front were openly scheming to deprive them of that other staple palliative long popular with soldiers. “This is a hell of a strain on a man,” David Bareuther confided to his father shortly after emerging safe but severely shaken from the Battle of Chateau-Thierry. “Sometimes one gets so nervous he hardly knows what to do and then the W.C.T.U. talks about cutting out the smokes for soldiers. Why, they’re crazy, that’s all. If we couldn’t have a smoke at times to quiet our nerves I don’t know what we would do. In the hottest shell fire, one can sit in his dugout and peacefully puff ‘that ol’ pipe’ and feel perfectly at home. I suppose when I get back into civilian life I won’t care to smoke but right now it’s all we have to do.”

With civilian guardians of virtue actively conspiring to deprive the Doughboy of his few comforts, the social reformer and moral crusader became a much-reviled figure among servicemen. Howard O’Brian could only marvel at the futility of the craze for “investigating” the AEF’s moral condition that had seized so many humanitarians and moralizers in the United States. “Be-spectacled ‘investigators’ of A.E.F. come to two conclusions. (1) Drifting toward hell fire. (2) Pure as driven snow. Why not appoint commission to ‘investigate’ if the

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110 Thompson, Frank L., 1st Lieutenant, 348th Machine Gun Battalion, 91st (“Wild West”) Division, diary typescript, entry for 21 October 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

111 Bareuther, David G., Private, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to father, 30 July 1918, Folder 5, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
sun is shining?” In a direct jibe against the kind of moralist activism synonymous with Progressive values, an editorial published in the inaugural issue of The Stars and Stripes bluntly castigated the variety of “self-appointed ‘boards of morals’ and people of the hysterical stripe” for disseminating reports of the AEF’s allegedly depraved habits. Several weeks later, it was followed by a piece whose ostensible purpose was to criticize those American civilians desperate to come to France simply because philanthropic work in Europe happened to be in fashion in some circles. The author singled out for special censure those who “speak vaguely of ‘uplift,’ of ‘investigation,’ of ‘co-ordinating branches.’” These were staple catchphrases in the lexicon of any self-respecting Progressive reformer.

The grafter or war profiteer represented the fourth constituent element in Doughboys’ demonology of the home front. Like his other companions and sometime collaborators – the slacker, the politician, and the social reformer – the hostility the grafter generated among servicemen could be traced to the pre-war period. In the four decades preceding the outbreak of the Great War, the challenge of moderating the real and imagined excesses of corporate capitalism emerged to the forefront of political debate and public concern in America. The efforts of social commentators and political reformers to publicize and address corrupt business practices, and reconcile the corporate sector’s quest for profits with public demands for accountability, represented one of the conspicuous strands of the Progressive movement. The political culture of early-twentieth century America was thoroughly suffused with anxieties about the effects of the new corporate order on working conditions, participatory democracy, quality of consumer goods, and public and individual

112 O’Brien, Wine, Women and War, 125.

113 “To the Folks Back Home,” The Stars and Stripes, 8 February 1918.

114 “Coming for the Ride,” The Stars and Stripes, 26 April 1918.
morality. Central to such anxieties were the concerns, articulated by critics of the new economic order, about its tendency to subordinate the public good to the profit motive. By the time the United States declared war against Germany in 1917, the notion that certain elements of civil society were perfectly capable of violating the norms of the country’s moral economy to serve their own selfish interests had taken firm root in America’s political culture.

The insatiable demands that America’s war effort made on its economy and industry lent new force to such concerns. It did not take long for servicemen to embrace the conviction that some Americans viewed the war as an opportunity to reap unfair economic advantage at the expense of the public good. “There are patriotic and profiteer types,” William Spivey explained. “Profiteers welcome war as a time of financial opportunities, but do not do any military service unless absolutely forced to.”

Writing from France, Raymond Hodges urged his mother to keep tabs on his father’s insufficiently discriminating patriotic generosity. “I do not think it advisable for him to dig for everything that is claimed to be of benefit for ‘Our Boys,’” he cautioned, “because a good many times these things go to the benefit of ‘Our Grafters.’”

This notion provided a ready-made explanation for the shortcomings in the quantity and quality of soldiers’ clothing, equipment, and rations. “In New York we were issued a raincoat, or slicker, as it was called,” Howard Woodward recalled. “Upon arriving in France

115 Spivey, William L., Wagoner, Supply Company, 137th Infantry Regiment, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

116 Hodges, Raymond G., Sergeant, Company I, 302nd Infantry Regiment, 76th Division, letter to mother, 1 September 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
it was like wearing a cheesecloth. Some New York manufacturers made plenty of money.”117

When, on Armistice Day, his unit was issued a ration of sugar for the first time in months, Arthur Yensen could only wonder about the reasons behind the delay, while hinting at the dark forces he suspected were responsible. “Our folks say they don’t get much sugar because it is all being sent over here – we’ve sure been wishing some of it would arrive. ‘Something sure is rotten that ain’t in Denmark!’”118

The anti-climactic results of a high-profile production program inaugurated in the early stages of America’s active belligerency fortified soldiers in their belief that grafters and profiteers were attempting to hamstring the country’s war effort for private gain. In May 1917, amidst considerable publicity, the U.S. Congress allocated the unprecedented sum of 640 million dollars – the largest single Congressional appropriation until that time – to finance the development of an air force of fifty thousand planes that would permit the Allies to establish undisputed air superiority on the Western Front. A year later, the promise of a massive air armada remained unfulfilled, and the Entente’s ability to control the skies over northern France and Flanders tenuous at best.119

These realities could not be kept hidden from soldiers in the field. Combat troops, for whom the failure of the aircraft construction program was far more than an academic issue, were acutely aware of the discrepancies between the program’s widely advertised potential and its disappointing outcome. “I have read in different papers that the Allies have the supremacy of the air on the Western Front,” Robert Anderson jotted down in the diary

117 Woodward, Howard M., Company E, 117th Engineer Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.


119 Coffman, The War to End All Wars, ch. 7.
he kept while serving in the trenches in Alsace, “[but] it isn’t so on this section of the Front for I see at least five Boche planes to every one of the Allies.”\textsuperscript{120} After witnessing the spectacle of a German fighter leisurely blow three Allied observation balloons out of the sky in a matter of minutes, Robert Casey could only muse about the contrast between official pronouncements of Entente air superiority and the actual conditions at the front. The German plane, he noted acidly, “had no business in our sky. By all the rules – by all the preponderance of advertising – we were masters of it. He stood to get his nose burned if he thrust it over our line. But the German pilot apparently had not been informed of this.”\textsuperscript{121}

For some soldiers, the temptation to assign the blame for this situation to shadowy Stateside profiteers proved difficult to resist. “We are going to give [the Germans] a run for their money as soon as America begins to send heavy guns and aeros enough to give us supremacy,” Paul Ostertage promised his mother. “I am sorry to know that there is any scandal connected with the production of planes back in ‘the States.’ The longer they delay sending planes the more lives are going to be lost among us. No punishment is too severe for those who have profited by these schemes and I hope they get limit…. If any of these skunks try to cheat us out of planes or delay their production they should be given the Devil’s punishment for it.”\textsuperscript{122} A brief piece published shortly after the war in the newspaper of the troops of one infantry regiment recapitulated the grievances soldiers leveled against profiteers and reiterated the fantasy of retribution servicemen hoped to exact from grafters.

\textsuperscript{120} Anderson, Robert H., Company I, 125\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 32\textsuperscript{nd} (“Red Arrow”) Division, manuscript diary, entry for 30 May 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{121} [Robert J. Casey], \textit{The Cannoneers Have Hairy Ears: A Diary of the Front Lines} (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1927), 46 – 47. Casey served as the executive officer of Battery C, 124\textsuperscript{th} Field Artillery Regiment, a unit originally attached to the 33\textsuperscript{rd} (“Prairie”) Division.

\textsuperscript{122} Ostertage, Paul R., Sergeant, Battery D, 304\textsuperscript{th} Field Artillery Regiment, 77\textsuperscript{th} (“Metropolitan”) Division, Folder 1, letter to mother, 15 August 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
“War wasn’t such a hell for everyone,” the anonymous contributor to *The Ohio Rainbow Reveille* snarled:

We can’t help saying that, when we think of the fat grafter that sold the Govt. the rotten raincoats and the shoddy clothes we have been issued; we can’t help think that when we read about the one billion dollars spent in airplane production and remember that our air force in France used practically nothing but French planes; and when we look at the thirty odd millions of waste and extravagance that is found in the Hog Island Shipyard expenditures – we know it! No, war wasn’t such a hell for everyone, but those armchair fighters and sneaking grafters who made money out of the suffering of our men should be hauled out into the open by the men they have cheated and given a little dose of hell for their soul’s sake.123

V. “Pseudo-Americans” Unmasked: Doughboys, the Young Men’s Christian Association, and the Moral Economy of Sacrifice

The resentment and suspicion Doughboys directed toward the “parasites” who prayed on the sacrifices of patriotic civilians and soldiers alike found their fullest expression in what might initially appear as an unlikely setting. By the end of the war, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) acquired a notorious reputation among the troops of the AEF.124 In letter after letter addressed to their friends and relatives in the United States,

123 “Wait Till We Get Home!” *The Ohio Rainbow Reveille*, 26 February 1919, Miscellaneous Material file, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

soldiers vented their dissatisfaction with various aspects of the welfare work the organization performed for the benefit of servicemen at home and abroad. The institution’s practice of selling, rather than distributing to soldiers for free, the goods it had purchased with money donated by ordinary Americans, came in for particularly heavy condemnation, but did not, by any means, exhaust the list of Doughboys’ grievances. Beginning in the second half of 1918, reports of the real and imagined abuses with which the Association was becoming synonymous in the minds of its khaki-clad detractors had come to represent a serious menace to its hitherto positive public image. In January 1919, the pressure of accumulated condemnations forced John R. Mott, the General Secretary of the American YMCA, to take the drastic step of requesting the U.S. War Department to launch an official inquiry into his organization’s wartime conduct in an effort to clear its name.

Formally concluded only in 1923, the exhaustive investigation exonerated the “Y” and upheld its reputation as a beacon of Progressive social, cultural, and religious values.

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On the whole, students of the American war effort have accepted the inquiry’s final verdict.

That much, at any rate, is clear from the treatment that the historiography of America’s experience of the Great War accords to the issue. Practically alone among the many dimensions of YMCA’s war work in the years 1917 – 1919, the heated controversy that erupted in the last months of the conflict and threatened to tarnish its formidable institutional reputation has failed to attract the attention of historians. But scholars’ reticence on the subject is puzzling in light of the enduring contempt American veterans of the Great War continued to heap upon the YMCA long after the wartime controversy had

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129 Specialized studies have generally inclined to examining the broader historical significance of the YMCA’s close co-operation throughout the conflict with the agencies of the state – especially the War Department – for the purpose of assisting the armed forces in maintaining the morale of the great draft army the United States raised to prosecute the war, an analytical approach pioneered in Baldwin, “The American Enlisted Man. Particularly notable in this regard are studies of the crucial function that the YMCA, in tandem with other, similar organizations, fulfilled in developing and implementing programs of social control designed to safeguard the moral and physical health of soldiers while inculcating them with the socio-cultural and religious values of America’s Progressive, Anglo-Protestant middle-class. These include Bristow, Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War; and Coventry, “‘God, Country, Home and Mother.’” Other monographs have emphasized the YMCA’s vital role in educating foreign-born soldiers and serving as the conduit of communications between the U.S. Army and the ethnic minorities that served in its ranks during the war; as well as its contribution to the social advancement of African-Americans and the encouragement of interracial dialogue during and after the war. For two outstanding examples, see Ford, Americans All; and Mjaklji, Light in the Darkness. No study, however, has devoted more than a passing glance to the controversy that blighted the YMCA’s reputation among a large constituency of Americans. Among secondary sources, the seven and a half pages that C. Howard Hopkins devotes to the controversy in his general history of the North American YMCA remains the most detailed analysis of the issue. See Hopkins, History of the YMCA, 497 – 503. Brief overviews may also be found in Beaver, Newton D. Baker, 223; and Coffman, The War to End All Wars, 78.
run its formal course. The War Department’s investigation may have absolved the “Y” from charges of misconduct leveled against it, but the favorable verdict did little to modify the unflattering connotations that the YMCA frequently conjured in the minds of former Doughboys. If soldiers’ reminiscences are any indication, the “Y” remained firmly enshrined in Doughboys’ folklore and collective memory of the war as the concentrated essence of rapacity, moral duplicity, and socio-cultural elitism. So pervasive was this damning portrayal that it managed to insinuate itself into the world of American letters. John Dos Passos’ *Three Soldiers*, William K. March’s *Company K*, and Thomas Boyd’s *Through the Wheat* – three of the most important works of American auto-biographical fiction inspired by the war – all cast YMCA secretaries as smug hypocrites, insensitive misers, or effete, inanely cheerful fops completely out of touch with the needs of ordinary soldiers.¹³⁰ Clearly, when it came to the wartime controversy that pitted Doughboys against the YMCA, American veterans had long memories.

What accounts for the lasting bitterness and disdain that colored many a former Doughboy’s perception of the YMCA for years, and at times decades after the Armistice? The enduring hostility soldiers harbored toward the Association suggests that the roots of Doughboys’ resentment of the “Y” extended far deeper than their ostensible grievances concerning the YMCA’s functional inefficiency and business practices. A re-examination of the issue from the perspective of the soldiers themselves corroborates this assumption, and indicates that the significance of the debate that pitted Doughboys against the YMCA transcended these relatively narrow considerations. Instead, the controversy reflected in

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microcosm the ambivalence that came to characterize soldiers’ collective view of the home front.

As the most high-profile extension of the American home front overseas and a conspicuous standard-bearer for America’s dominant socio-cultural norms, the YMCA functioned, in the minds of soldiers, as a weathervane of the American home front’s commitment to the war effort and to the troops serving overseas. In consequence, soldiers projected onto the YMCA all the pent-up animosity they felt toward the home front but could not fully express in their letters on account of their residual loyalty to their families and communities. Unlike the distant home front, the YMCA provided soldiers with easily identifiable flesh-and-blood targets of criticism in the form of the numerous civilian employees it sent to France. These individuals interacted with soldiers on a daily basis, allowing Doughboys to scrutinize with unusual thoroughness the doings of these conspicuous representatives of their parent society. What soldiers saw, or believed they saw, reinforced their conviction that, in comparison to the contributions made by civilians and non-combatants, the “man at the front” bore a disproportionate share of the sacrifices the war had imposed on American society. The YMCA’s institutional policies, combined with its employees’ business practices, appeared to confirm the belief of many soldiers that far from

131 Brigadier-General John J. Bradley, the AEF officer who presided over the post-Armistice investigation of the YMCA, estimated that the organization provided “90.55%” of the welfare services furnished to American soldiers during the First World War. Though Bradley did not explain just how he had arrived at this figure, it is clear that of all the welfare societies active among Doughboys during the war, the “Y” contributed the largest amount of human, material, and financial resources. In the first category alone, it sent to France approximately 13,000 workers. In contrast, the Knights of Columbus, the second largest welfare organization, dispatched at most 1,000 workers to look after the Doughboys. Other societies sent even fewer personnel: the Salvation Army, whose activities the soldiers were fond of contrasting favorably with those of the “Y,” had 264 workers overseas; the Jewish Welfare Board sent 189, and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) provided 289. See Report of the Investigation of the Y.M.C.A., vol. 2, 219; Young Men’s Christian Association, Summary of World War Work of the American Y.M.C.A: With the Soldiers and Sailors at Home, on the Sea, and Overseas (1920), 197; Mayo, “That Damn ‘Y’”, 381; Hopkins, 499; Christopher J. Kauffman, Faith and Fraternalism: The History of the Knights of Columbus, 1882 – 1982 (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 190 – 227.
supporting the troops at the front, certain elements of America’s civil society sought to
benefit from the war in general and from the sufferings of servicemen in particular. The
Association’s apparent vulnerability to these social parasites, soldiers believed, illustrated the
gradual disintegration of the moral economy that governed the distribution of the burdens
and rewards of military service and wartime sacrifice among Americans. With its explicit
differentiation of the long-suffering “man at the front” from the allegedly ungrateful and
parasitic denizens of the home front, this perspective furnished soldiers with a powerful
focus of a collective identity that subsumed many – though by no means all – of the glaring
differences apparent in their ranks. In light of the contribution that soldiers’ confrontation
with the YMCA made to the development of this mindset, the wartime controversy merits a
closer examination against the background of Doughboys’ increasing estrangement from the
American home front.

Though its origins pre-dated the Progressive Era, the YMCA was a quintessentially
“Progressive” institution. Its institutional genesis, ideology, practices, and goals made it an
archetype of the chief characteristics historians commonly attribute to the broadly-based
reform movement that lent its name to an entire era of American history. Founded in
England in 1840s, the YMCA established its first branches in the United States a decade
before the Civil War.\textsuperscript{132} Its European beginnings thus typified the “Trans-Atlantic” roots of
many of American Progressivism’s dominant traits.\textsuperscript{133} In the early stages of its operations in
the United States, the YMCA focused its efforts on tackling urban poverty and addressing

\textsuperscript{132} C. Hopkins, \textit{History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America} (New York: Association Press, 1951),
3 – 8.

The social problems the country’s explosive industrialization had bred in the cities. The institutional focus on industrial workers, immigrants, and the poor who populated the burgeoning slums of America’s metropolises was fully in keeping with the urban roots of the Progressive “movement.” In addition, the YMCA’s approach to the problems it sought to tackle mirrored broader trends espoused by Progressive reformers. At the heart of the YMCA’s activities figured a dual commitment to “modern” principles of welfare work and an equally strong dedication to the aggressive propagation of evangelical Protestantism and the cultural values of the Anglo-Saxon middle-class. The “Y” went far beyond traditional notions of philanthropic charity and relief. In keeping with its Progressive credentials, its programs used “scientific” methods of welfare work to manipulate the physical, social, cultural, and religious environment of urban neighborhoods. Administered by professional social workers recruited from Protestant, middle-class backgrounds, such initiatives aimed to create conditions favorable not only to economic betterment but also to moral and spiritual “uplift” of laborers and disadvantaged city-dwellers. While it took a lead in the development of religious, educational, athletic, and social programs aimed at improving the lot of workers and ethnic minorities, the YMCA also embraced the struggle waged by groups like the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League waged against

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135 See n. 39, Part 2 for an overview of the historiography of the urban origins of Progressivism.

prostitution and liquor. In short, the YMCA combined, within one institutional setting, Progressivism’s twofold emphasis on social justice as well as social control.

The methods and goals evident in the YMCA’s work with soldiers during the Great War were a direct extension of the institution’s activities on behalf the urban poor in the decades preceding the conflict. In virtually all of the Army’s training camps, cantonments, and other installations, the YMCA took the lead in organizing recreational programs, athletic competitions, adult education classes, entertainments, and religious services. The focus for these activities was the YMCA “hut.” This structure functioned as the center of the enlisted soldier’s social life, where he and his fellows spent many of their off-duty hours writing letters on stationary provided free of charge, attending Bible study sessions or French language classes, reading books or magazines, enjoying variety shows, listening to lectures and religious sermons, or attending movie screenings. The value of such diversions from the perspective of morale was doubtless considerable. Equally important in the minds of their originators was the compatibility of such activities with one of the central wartime goals of the YMCA and other welfare organizations that cooperated with the federal body known as the Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA): providing soldiers with forms of

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137 See Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 380 – 391, for a survey of the YMCA’s track-record as a contributor to campaigns against liquor, gambling, pornography, and prostitution.

138 For the classic articulation of the tensions between the impulses of “reform” and “coercion” as the principal fault-line within the Progressive movement, see Link and McCormick, *Progressivism*, 67 – 104.

139 During the second half of the nineteenth century, the YMCA’s involvement with the armed forces was relatively limited. That relationship significantly expanded in scope, however, with the Spanish-American War, a conflict that set the institutional foundations for the Association’s work with soldiers in the decades that followed. See Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 453 – 456.

140 As the “aim and apex” of the YMCA’s activities on soldiers’ behalf, the hut played a pivotal role in the Association’s efforts to address the potential problems inherent in the soldier’s abrupt separation from the formal and informal institutions that, in civilian life, enforced his adherence to the moral standards and socio-cultural values of his community. The YMCA hut aimed to ensure the soldier’s faithfulness to these norms by combining the functions of “the American home, school, club, country store, stage and in a sense the American church.” Carter Report, *USAWW*, 443 – 444. See also Coffman, *The War to End All Wars*, 77 – 81.
off-duty entertainment capable of competing with alternative modes of recreation, such as visits to the saloons, brothels, and gambling dens that invariably mushroomed in the vicinity of most cantonments.  

Well might a grateful soldier conclude that “[t]he Y has been the salvation of many boys.”

If the YMCA’s efforts among servicemen reflected the broader patterns of its welfare work, soldiers’ own response to the institution’s labors among them paralleled on a smaller scale their ambivalent relationship with the home front and the mainstream of America’s civil society. To Doughboys, the YMCA was, at one and the same time, the essence of the nurturing solicitude and cooperation they expected from the home front, and the most glaring example of the unequal distribution of sacrifice between fighting men and those who “did their bit” out of uniform. In soldiers’ collective consciousness, the image of the YMCA as the chief link with home and family coexisted with the vision of the “Y” as a sanctuary for many of the parasitic social elements – particularly profiteers and slackers – that, Doughboys believed, exploited the war for their own unethical ends by seeking to benefit from the readiness of others to take up a disproportionate share of the sacrifices the conflict demanded from ordinary Americans.

Soldiers found cause for dissatisfaction with the YMCA long before they ever set foot in France. Troops began their journey to the war zone in one of the sprawling training

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141 Bristow, Making Men Moral, 18 – 53.

142 Merritt, Charles B., Corporal, Company M, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to mother, 17 March 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, United States Army Military History Institute, Army Heritage and Education Center, United States Army War College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania (hereafter USAMHI). Note that materials in the USAMHI World War I Veterans’ Survey Collection are organized by individual division or branch of service, followed by component units and individual soldiers’ files. Thus, the soldier’s identifying unit, as cited in the reference, also indicates the location of the source in the USAMHI collections. The military rank indicated in the citation refers to the highest rank the serviceman attained during the war, rather to the rank he held at the time he wrote the source cited. Whenever possible, I have also indicated the rank and unit of service of the authors of the published war narratives and memoirs used in this study.
camps hastily constructed throughout the United States beginning in the summer of 1917. It was in this setting that many encountered the "Y" for the first time. The ambivalent nature of that encounter set the pattern for soldiers’ relationship with the Association for the remainder of the war.

Torn from their families and communities, servicemen frequently responded with sincere gratitude for the Association’s efforts to tend to their physical and moral welfare. To ordinary servicemen, the atmosphere that prevailed in a “Y” hut was almost as important as the quality of the leisure activities it provided. Committed to the dissemination of middle-class ideals that fused evangelical Christianity, American nationalism, and the Victorian cult of domesticity, the YMCA consciously strove to transform each its recreational facilities into a “home away from home,” a place where soldiers could absorb the values, material trappings, and intellectual preoccupations of America’s respectable Protestant bourgeoisie. As George Irwin put it in a letter he wrote home from France, the YMCA “furnishes the best substitute a fellow could have for home.”

Lonely servicemen, many of them away from home and family for the first time in their lives, readily embraced this attribute of the “Y” huts, viewing them as oases offering temporary refuge from the harshness and vulgarity of military life. Repelled and shocked

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143 As Frederick Pottle, a volunteer in the Regular Army put it, “At the ‘Y’ will be an entertainment, books, magazines, games, writing materials. It is not so much these we seek, perhaps, as the warmth, the brightness, the cheerfulness, which link us with home, and give silent solace for the exasperations of the day.” See Pottle, Stretchers, 33.

144 For the YMCA’s efforts to integrate these themes into its institutional practices and war-related welfare work, see Coventry, “God, Country, Home and Mother,” passim. See also n. 12 above.


146 “I’ve come over to the Y.M.C.A. building, where there are long benches we can write at; seems quite civilized,” Yale graduate Sylvester Butler remarked to his fiancé in a letter describing the “Y” hut in Plattsburg, New York. “Then there is a piano, too; and even though little but popular music is being played, I
by his initial encounters with the realities of the barrack room and the mess hall, Arthur Yensen found his spirits restored by a visit to his camp’s YMCA. There, he “found a warm room, books to read, and writing materials. Some of the boys were singing round a piano; the rest were talking, reading, or writing. In general it reminded me of the social hour at Bellevue College. Life seemed worth living again.”

In places like Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, the Army post to which Yensen was eventually transferred for advanced training, the “Y” represented the only semblance of a wholesome environment available to soldiers. Entertainment aside, soldiers concerned that their time in the army would result in intellectual atrophy saw the YMCA’s libraries and reading rooms as a partial antidote to that trend.

Yet, as was the case with their perceptions of the home front in general, soldiers’ views of the YMCA were subject to sudden fluctuations of attitude, appreciation giving way to criticism and, in the long term, pure scorn. Behind such rapid transitions stood what servicemen interpreted as the “Y’s” morally condescending proclivities along with its apparent determination to turn a profit at soldiers’ expense. The conclusion of Frederick Pottle’s account of his first visit to the “Y” hut at Fort Slocum, New York, demonstrates just can forgive anything, it seems so good to hear the tones of the piano once more.” See Butler, Sylvester B., Captain, Company C, 301st Supply Train, 76th Division, letter to Eva Lutz, 19 May 1917. Retrieved on 2 August 2006 from http://www.cromwellbutlers.com/sbel0517.htm#May191917el.


148 “Amusements here consist of sleeping, gambling, or going to Leavenworth where a soldier and a mangey [sic], yellow dog rank equally, or going to the Y.M.C.A. I usually go to the ‘Y’ because there I can get plenty of writing paper and they ordinarily try to do something to entertain us.” See Yensen, Arthur E., Private, 7th Engineer Train, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, “War Log of an Underdog,” 19, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

149 For example, Amos Wilder, who had interrupted his studies at Yale to volunteer first for the American Field Service in France and the Balkans, and then for the AEF on the Western Front, credited the library of his regiment’s YMCA with helping him compensate for the loss of over two years of education in history and social studies. See Wilder, Armageddon Revisited, 63. Wilder served in Battery A, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, finishing the war in the rank of corporal.
how swiftly soldiers’ positive impressions of their “home away from home” could turn sour. Writing of himself in the third person, Pottle was gratified to realize that the “Y” hut is a place where, in contrast to the rest of the camp, “[m]en are kind to each other.” But the pleasantly familial atmosphere was deceiving, for even here

one has disquieting experiences. At the desk, as he comes in, he sees a stern gray-haired matron with a pile of khaki-bound New Testaments. He thinks, somewhat sentimentally, that it would be a good thing to have a New Testament; perhaps in the army there may be time to read it. He asks for one. It is handed over, with a query ‘Are you a Christian?’ He is fixed by the stern eyes. ‘Are you a Christian?’ He mumbles something about being a church member. ‘That does not prove anything at all. Is your heart right with Jesus?’ The lady is hard and vulgar and unlovely. He carries back to his bench the New Testament, which he is sorry he asked for, and goes futilely over in his mind the smart replies which he might have made.150

The smug denominational particularism Pottle found so repellent exemplified broader institutional traits that, even in the early stages of the mutual encounters between the Association and Doughboys, did much to mar the initially favorable impression the YMCA made on recently-inducted soldiers. The Association’s dual role as a Protestant religious organization and a non-denominational welfare organization inevitably produced situations where its religious mandate eclipsed the YMCA’s function as a provider of entertainment and recreation. Its proclivity for indulging in clumsy attempts to propagate its aggressive brand of evangelical Protestantism often alienated and angered many soldiers, many of whom came to resent what they saw as the YMCA’s efforts to dictate their religious preferences and moral behavior.

Reporting on the results of his investigation of soldiers’ morale in one of the training camps in the United States, an officer of the Army’s General Staff castigated the organization for its “tendency to force religion on the men, cram it down their throats, so to

soldiers resented in particular the ham-fisted nature of such misguided efforts at evangelization. Overzealous YMCA secretaries often capitalized on the popularity of the organization’s recreational facilities by staging unannounced prayer meetings or sermons precisely at times when the “Y” hut or auditorium was packed with off-duty troops trying to write a letter home or watch a movie. Among servicemen, the opportunistic injection of religious content into recreational activities prompted amusement at best, and outrage at worst. “This letter is written in the middle of a sort of Billy Sunday revival meeting which has usurped our writing room here in the Y,” Robert Kean informed his fiancée in a letter written from a stateside training camp. “It is rather funny – about half the people sitting here are writing letters, and the other half are singing hymns.” Troops deployed closer to the front had far less patience for contrived proselytization of this sort. Commenting on the fate of a YMCA representative who tried to entice soldiers to attend a prayer meeting by promising to screen a movie, Howard O’Brien implied the man had been lucky to merely lose his job. “[H]ad it coming – no sense. Got men to picture-show, and slipped prayers over on them. [The soldiers] [w]alked out. Nearly broke up [the] place.” Servicemen did not necessarily object to religious instruction, O’Brien noted, but they did resent its incorporation into purely recreational activities. “Some men want religion, some want show – nobody wants them mixed.”

151 Lieutenant-Colonel Follett Bradley to Chief, Military Morale Section, War College, Washington, D.C., “Report of Visit to Camp Dodge,” 13 May 1919, Col. Bradley file, Box 1, Entry 377, Correspondence Relating to Morale at Army Installations, War College Division and War Plans Division, 1900 – 1942, RG 165, NARA.


153 O’Brien, Wine, Women, and War, 55.
The YMCA’s attempts to dictate soldiers’ religious preferences had a direct counterpart in its efforts to mold the moral behavior of troops. By the time the war ended, a significant proportion of American soldiers came to view the YMCA’s activities in this sphere as a sanctimonious interference in their private lives. Charles MacArthur recalled with undisguised contempt the “lectures on the Perils of Pleasure by Eminent Y.M.C.A. workers” his regiment had to endure shortly after landing in France.\(^\text{154}\)

Having finally obtained permission to go on furlough after spending months on or near the front, Horatio Rogers was disgusted to discover that the YMCA had completely spoiled his plans to blow off some steam in the fleshpots of the French Riviera. Arriving in Aix-les-Bains, he noted with a mixture of loathing and sorrow that the great Casino for which that locality was famous had been “turned into a Y.M.C.A. building where ‘group games,’ milk chocolate, and educational talks had replaced roulette, liquor, and sporting ladies.”\(^\text{155}\)

Harmful though it may have been to soldiers’ perceptions of the YMCA, the Association’s moral pretensions ranked far behind another aspect of its operations as a significant source of Doughboy complaints. It did not take long for soldiers to notice that in sharp contrast to other welfare societies, the YMCA’s readiness to provide servicemen with “all the comforts of home” often came with a price tag. Joe Rizzi discovered this as early as his training days in Camp Funston, Kansas. One day, while Rizzi and his buddies were relaxing in their squad tent, “[a] Y.M.C.A. man happened along…and threw candy, crackers, cigars and cigarettes on our bunks. We expected these articles to be given free of charge, but imagine poor Jimmy’s chagrin. He was broke and his cigarettes and candy would cost him 50

\(^{154}\) MacArthur, Charles, 149th Field Artillery Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, War Bugs, 7.

\(^{155}\) Rogers, Horatio, Corporal, Battery A, 101st Field Artillery Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division. World War I Through My Sights, 244.
cents. After a good lecture from Steve, this Y.M.C.A. man departed never to return to our tent. You can imagine the words used in the lecture.” For Rizzi, the incident sparked an attitude of contemptuous bitterness toward the YMCA that lasted throughout the war and showed few signs of abating by the time he wrote his memoirs in the late 1970s.\(^{156}\)

Much of the resentment Rizzi and other Doughboys aimed at the “Y” in connections with this issue could be traced to another duality evident in the Association’s wartime work, one stemming from its character as a charitable institution that operated in accordance with business principles. In contrast to the stateside training camps, where the cheerful civility of a “Y” hut stood at the heart of most soldiers’ perceptions of the YMCA, troops serving at the front were likely to encounter the institution in a far different guise. While the YMCA operated permanent installations behind the lines, in base and rest areas assigned to American units, its efforts in the vicinity of the front coalesced chiefly around its canteens and post-exchanges. Stocked with such items as cigarettes, sweets, and fruit, these symbols of the “Y’s” solicitude for the troops allowed servicemen to supplement their bland field rations with a few luxuries.\(^{157}\)

Yet, the “Y” workers’ insistence on being paid for this merchandise left a bitter taste in many a Doughboy’s mouth. The authorized rate of pay that a typical U.S. Army private serving overseas was supposed to receive each month was low enough to begin with, while the various deductions – many of them compulsory – to which soldiers’ pay was subject

\(^{156}\) Rizzi, Joseph N., Corporal, Company A, 110\(^{th}\) Engineer Regiment, 35\(^{th}\) Division, \textit{Joe’s War}, 5.

reduced servicemen’s purchasing power even further.\textsuperscript{158} Then, as a general rule, the closer a soldier served to the front, the greater was the likelihood of his not being paid on a regular basis. In extreme cases, some soldiers went for months without being paid. With cash so scarce a commodity the closer one moved to the firing line, soldiers viewed the YMCA’s business operations near the front as an effrontery at best, and a cynical attempt to profit at ordinary Doughboys’ expense at worst.\textsuperscript{159}

\textsuperscript{158} A ditty popular among the soldiers of one infantry regiment presented a remarkably accurate picture of the how drastically an Army private’s $30 per month could become diluted after the various deductions and allotments had been charged against it:

\begin{verbatim}
I took out ten thousand, Insurance
For [Liberty] bonds I gave fifteen bucks more;
To wife and mother
I ‘lotted another
Ten dollars, and then furthermore
I ran up big bills at the Laundry,
And finally pay day was there.
I went up for my dough,
But the answer was NO!
You’ve already drawn more than your share.
\end{verbatim}

See Tiebout, \textit{A History of the 305th Infantry}, 23. For another humorous, but no less apt, assessment of the ephemeral nature of a private soldier’s paycheck, see the commentary of Private Bill Smith, the ubiquitous Everyman created by one of the AEF’s leading soldier-humorists: “First they sell us enough Liberty Bonds to buy a brand new army and let us go home. Then they cram a lot of insurance at you what won’t never do you no good until you get killed. Then I guess they found that someone still had a couple of dollars left so they made us send that back home.” See Edward Streeter, \textit{“Dere Mable”}: Love Letters of a Rookie (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1918), 15.

\textsuperscript{159} Doughboys’ anger on this issue would no doubt have intensified had they been aware of the vast discrepancy between their own paltry pay and the generous remuneration YMCA representatives received for the far less onerous work they performed during the war. By May 1918, single men employed by the YMCA received annual salaries of $1,000, while married men collected $1,200 per annum. In addition, YMCA secretaries were entitled to “living allowances” ranging from $60 per month (twice the total monthly pay of an Army private) for men employed in stateside training camps and up to $120 per month for those based in localities such as Paris where living expenses were high. Men with families could also count on allowances ranging from $50 to $120. Somewhat surprisingly, given the YMCA’s obvious vulnerability to criticism in this quarter, I have not, thus far in my research, come across any specific allusions to this point in soldiers’ wartime writings or post-war reminiscences. See Minutes of the YMCA War Work Council Executive Committee, 17 May 1918, 235, Bound Volume, Box AS-1, Kautz Family YMCA of the USA Archives, Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis-St. Paul, as cited in Michael T. Coventry, \textit{“In Loco Parentis: Welfare, Nationalism and Gender in Great War America,”} 4, n. 13, paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Organization of American Historians, San Francisco, California, 19 April 1997, retrieved on 10 August 2006 from \url{http://www.georgetown.edu/users/coventrm/mtc/pdf/coah.pdf}. See also Taft and Harris, eds., \textit{Service with Fighting Men}, I, 253; and Carter Report, \textit{USAWW}, 442.
In the circumstances, the “Y’s” alleged parsimoniousness became something a byword among soldiers. “[T]he Y.M.C.A. selling cigarettes in the rear did not impress us,” Farley Granger recalled acidly after the war.\footnote{In all fairness, it must be noted that Granger was equally unimpressed with the sight of “[t]he Red Cross in their Cadillacs.” See Granger, Farley E., Captain, 362nd Infantry Regiment, 91st (“Wild West”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.} “I am sending you a card the Y.M.C.A. people are giving to us boys,” Everett Taylor informed his mother, “and it is the only thing that they give away in France! They are charging enormous prices for tobacco and other things and there is no need of doing so.”\footnote{Taylor, Everett E., Private First Class, Company A, 101st Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, letter to mother, 15 December 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.} The YMCA’s ostensible rapacity appeared in an especially unfavorable light when contrasted with what soldiers perceived as the liberality of other smaller, welfare organizations whose resources and talent for self-promotion may not have been as extensive as those of the “Y,” but which managed to provide soldiers with edibles gratis. “The difference between the Red Cross, Salvation Army, [and] Y.M.C.A. was that the Salvation Army and Red Cross gave you food and drink, whether we had money or not, but the Y.M.C.A. charged full price for everything,” Lyle Cole explained. “Our pay was so small, hardly enough to keep some of the boys in cigarettes. The boys in the A.E.F.,” he concluded, “had little use for the ‘Y.’”\footnote{Cole, Lyle S., Sergeant, Company I, 125th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, “A 1918 Diary of World War I and Condensed History of the 32nd Division,” 54, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.} James Isenhower concurred. “The only people who gave anything was the Salvation Army….The YMCA sold candy bars when we were near one.”\footnote{Isenhower, James S., Corporal, 107th Machine Gun Battalion, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI. For an especially vivid account of the YMCA’s alleged gouging of front-line soldiers, see Langille, Leslie, Battery B, 149th Field Artillery Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Men of the Rainbow, 145. Marine Raymond Stenback actually professed surprise that the local “Y” representative was emulating other service organizations in distributing something free of charge. “As soon as we came in here the Knight of Columbus man was right on the job,” Stenback wrote from the German town his unit had recently entered. “This organization is certainly on the job and doing}
Soldiers proved particularly sensitive to even the slightest discrepancies between the YMCA’s publicity claims and the reality of its shortcomings. “The Red Cross [and] Salvation Army are certainly doing wonders for the soldiers,” Paulus Petersen noted in a letter to his parents. On the other hand, he continued, “[y]ou don’t hear me say anything about the Y.M.C.A. Why?...You see so much about the ‘Y’ in the papers, and what they do for the soldiers. But wait till the A.E.F. gets back home, then the Y will have to play another tune. But the Salvation Army, the least heard from, does more for the fellows at the front than the whole ‘Y.’ They make coffee & ‘doughnuts’ and give them to the fellows. Does the ‘Y’ give anything?”

Describing his first post-Armistice Christmas in Europe, H.V. Thomas told his pen-pals in a Norfolk, Virginia, high school that “if it were not for the R[ed].C[ross]. we would be in a bad fix for pastime and candy and cigarettes. Xmas eve the R.C. had a very good show for us as usual….We can’t get along without the R.C. They ARE what the Y.M.C.A. advertises itself to be.”

To the charges of miserliness that some soldiers leveled against the “Y,” others added accusations of callous indifference to the needs of the fighting men. It was bad enough, the YMCA’s front-line detractors argued, that the “Y” was gouging ordinary soldiers. Allegations to the effect that the YMCA often seemed conspicuous by its absence from places where its services were most needed also enjoyed wide currency among

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164 Petersen, Paulus F., Private First Class, Company I, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letter to parents, 10 September 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

165 Thomas, H.V., Private, letter to students of Maury High School, Norfolk, Virginia, 1 January 1919, Folder 31, Box 67, Series VII: City Source Material, 1919 – 1927, RG 66, LVA.
Doughboys. In the minds of some combat troops, a firm conviction took root that the “Y” shunned the combat zone and preferred to cater to the “rear echelon,” that is soldiers in the Service of Supply (SOS; the AEF’s logistical command), an organization whose members were generally despised by men in combat units. “This ain’t the Y.M.C.A., Buddy,” an American infantryman informed Horatio Rogers when the latter instinctively tried to pay for a snack he had been given by a Salvation Army worker close to the firing line. “They’re all in Paris, and this here’s the front.”

Leslie Langille also believed that the YMCA displayed an excessive fondness for the French capital. “[I]t is a well-known fact that the large majority of Y.M.C.A. workers preferred to hang around Paris rather than go out with the fighting divisions, where they could have done some good and reflected credit rather than scorn upon that organization.” In a letter he sent to his parents, James Block scoffed at the laudatory press coverage of the YMCA’s work among the troops. “In all the time I have been in France, I have never been in a real Y hut, or seen their shows or had any of the pie and doughnuts, as you read the boys get, in the papers.” He thought he knew the reason for this state of affairs. “Some outfits behind the lines may get that stuff,” he explained, “but such is not for us.”

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168 Block, James W., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters Company, 59th Infantry Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, letter to parents, 14 September 1918, James W. Block Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI. Returning to the same subject a few months later, Block forwarded to his parents a bit of doggerel composed by a fellow soldier in the 4th Division and entitled “The Other Bird,” in reference to the “other birds” in the SOS whom the YMCA allegedly favored in its ministrations. The poem, Block claimed, was “worth repeating” as a synthesis of Doughboys’ understanding of the YMCA’s priorities:

You read a lot of phoney bunk about Y.M.C.A.s.  
But for all the fun the fighter has,  
You bet your socks he pays.  
Somebody says down in ‘Paree’  
There’s a ‘Y’ there that’s a bear
Convinced the “Y” preferred to hang well back from the front line, and critical of the favorable publicity the organization received in the press, some Doughboys went far beyond denunciations of the YMCA’s alleged miserliness and callous unconcern for combat troops. H. Schiess linked these widely prevalent criticisms with a far more serious insinuation:

I suppose all these news paper and Y.M.C.A. heroes [are] telling the crowds what they done to win the War, and how much chocolate they were eating, which was for the soldiers. You know, there is a lot of these heroes, never seen a front line, the very reason why we never get anything. Not once we received tobacco or candies. I know for a fact, there is lot of money put together in the States for the purpose, but it don’t reach us.\footnote{169}

In short, Schiess drew implicit but unmistakable connections between the “Y” on the one hand and, on the other, one of Doughboys’ worst domestic enemies – the war profiteer or grafter. In their letters home, soldiers suggested that the YMCA functioned as a front for shadowy profiteering rackets that grew rich at the expense of both honest folks

But the front line troops don’t benefit,
For the S.O.S. are there.
Up where the big boys scream and howl,
And there’s gas and hell and all.[J]
They’re a myth, those red triangle men
Up where your comrades fall.

As was customary in many a soldier’s condemnation of the “Y,” the anonymous poetaster contrasted the YMCA’s indifference to the needs of the fighting men with the spirit of kindness, generosity, and courageous self-sacrifice displayed by the front-line representatives of the Red Cross:

Here we’ll have to pause and say
A kind word for a chap
And he’s the good old Red Cross man
He goes up where they scrap
He passes out all that he has,
And does it with a smile
While the other bloke grabs for the francs,
Like a miser o’er his pile.

For the text of the “The Other Bird,” see Block, James W., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters Company, 59\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 4\textsuperscript{th} (“Ivy”) Division, letter to parents, 14 January 1919, James W. Block Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

\footnote{169} Schiess, H., Sergeant, Company H, 315\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 79\textsuperscript{th} (“Liberty”) Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 17 December 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
back home and ordinary soldiers at the front. That, the outspoken David Bareuther suggested, appeared as the best explanation for the “Y” real and alleged shortcomings. At the outset of his service in France, Bareuther sang the YMCA’s praises. Within a matter of weeks, however, he had changed his tune. The manner in which the “Y” disposed of the funds it had raised in the United States for the ostensible purpose of helping soldiers, he informed his mother, bordered on graft. “Just a few months ago [the YMCA] wanted to raise something like sixty million dollars and I guess they did it. That was a heap of dough and now just recently I’ve noticed they wanted a hundred million more. Well the idea is, what are they doing with this[?]” he asked. “Of course it costs some to transport their stuff and all that but the way they charge us for the stuff ought to compensate for that and more too. We pay for everything we get from them….I think that these funds ought to be investigated into as for all the public knows they are pinching and saving to make some grafter rich.” Christ (Christos) Stamas thought he had an answer to the kind of question posed by Bareuther. The “Y” secretaries “would charge American soldiers more for the things they sold then they did the French,” Stamas alleged. “These American gifts, which were intended for the comforts of the soldiers, were used by these pseudo-American patriots to promote dates with the French women.”

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170 See for example Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to father, 26 July 1918, Folder 5, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

171 Bareuther, David G., Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to 30 August 1918, Folder 5, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans' Survey, USAMHI.

172 Stamas believed that the profiteering activities the YMCA allegedly carried out in France were merely an extension of what was happening on the home front. “[W]hat could one expect from those who grew fat at home on the poor people’s sweat? Naturally, they did the same over there [in the U.S.].” See Stamas, Christ K., Private, Company I, 357th Infantry Regiment, 90th (“Alamo”) Division, The Road to St. Mihiel, 77.
Few, if any, soldiers could offer positive evidence to prove their allegations of collusion between the “Y” and the grafters. Nevertheless, tales of the YMCA’s money-grubbing ways entered the AEF’s folklore. Collectively, they reinforced soldiers’ suspicions that the “moral economy” regulating the distribution of wartime sacrifice among their country’s various social groups had broken down, allowing a segment of the body politic to take advantage of the sacrifices of their compatriots. The tales proved resilient enough to remain firmly ensconced in Doughboys’ minds for decades after the war. Some sixty years following the Armistice, while recalling his spell of service with the 1st Division, Robert Allen flared with anger when he remembered a second-hand story that demonstrated the “Y’s” unscrupulous and cynical ways. “[T]here was one fellow told me his sister had donated five dollars to the Y.M.C.A. and gave them a (24) bag of Bull Durham smoking tobacco, and he had just came back from buying a box of the same from the Y.M.C.A. AND HE FOUND A LETTER INSIDE OF THE BULL DURHAM FROM HIS SISTER BACK IN THE STATES telling him in the latter about donating the five spot and the Y.M.C.A. people told her that they would see her brother got the tobacco, he got it OK, but he had to buy it.”

Junius Lynch cautioned his daughter not to send him anything as “somebody would appropriate it. I heard the other day that an enlisted man bought a box of candy in a Y.M.C.A. place and in it he found the card of his sister with a message on it from him. The Y.M.C.A.,” he concluded, “is not popular over here and it will not get any more of my money when I get home.” At least one soldier claimed to have witnessed this form of racket in operation. After purchasing several cartons of cigarettes from the “Y” man

173 Allen, Robert E., Sergeant, Company C, 26th Infantry, 1st Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

174 Lynch, Junius F., Major, Medical Corps, letter to daughter, 26 April 1918, Folder 16, Box 67, Norfolk (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.
attached to their battery, “a cloud of suspicion” crept into the minds of Leslie Langille and his fellow artillerymen. “[U]pon opening the cartons, we find cards showing the names of the donors” inscribed on them. Doubtless such stories were apocryphal for the most part. Yet, their presence within Doughboys’ popular culture attests to the YMCA’s low repute among soldiers.

To charges of profiteering and fondness for the “rear echelon,” enlisted men in particular accused the organization of partiality toward commissioned officers, a charge that tainted the YMCA with the stigma of social elitism. “The majority of the [YMCA] workers are the biggest snobs I ever saw,” Raymond Witchell noted. “The Y.M. caters more to officers than to enlisted men…You never see a Y.M. girl in the enlisted mess but their [sic] all in the officers’ huts. Girls that come over here under the Y.M.C.A. just to get what they can out of the officers. Very seldom one will speak to an enlisted man. I wouldn’t speak to them at home.”

After reiterating his belief that the YMCA “is just a money-making organization” and urging his mother to desist from making any more donations to that institution, David Bareuther proceeded to recount a few examples of its pettiness and elitism. “One time when I was on a certain relay station that was situated among the lines of

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175 Langille, Leslie, Battery B, 149th Field Artillery Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Men of the Rainbow, 47.

176 On occasion, third parties corroborated the stories. Though perhaps not the most disinterested observer, Red Cross worker Carter Harrison substantiated the tales. He recalled how “[b]oys had come to me again and again with cigarettes just bought in Toul’s ‘Y’ canteen that were plainly marked: ‘Gift of the American People through the American Red Cross.’ The ‘Y’ insisted the cases had been bought at the…army commissary. Even if true, they should have been exchanged; selling gift cigarettes that were plainly marked as such, was unpardonable.” See Carter Harrison, With the American Red Cross in France, 1918 – 1919 (n. p., Ralph Fletcher Seymour, 1947), 259.

177 By contrast, Witchell claimed, “[T]he S[alvation]. A[rmy]. girls are fine. Most of them are not regular S.A. girls but volunteered for the occasion and they are absolutely straight doing everything they can for the enlisted man and very little for the officers. Their fine, I can’t say enuf for them.” See Witchell, Raymond C., 104th Ambulance Company, 101st Sanitary Train, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, letter to parents[?], n.d. (possibly early 1918), World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
another division, I went to the YMCA [man] and told him I belonged to the –Div. and on account of being so far from my outfit couldn’t I buy a little smokin’ and he said ‘Oh, I’m sorry but this is only for the –Division.’ Another time I said ‘those are nice cigars you have there, could I buy one?’ and he replied ‘No, those are reserved for the officers.’ Bareuther rounded out his complaint by restating the litany of objections, including those pertaining to the “Y’s” alleged greed and profiteering, that many a Doughboy would find familiar:

I’m not the only man that has had such embarrassing and annoying experiences with them, but more than three fourths of the men of the A.E.F. will agree with me. That organization has certainly ruined itself by doing as it has in this country. And believe me, after the war it is going to be hard up for support.

The man with beaucoup francs is welcome at the Y but the man that is broke is just out of luck. My [ , ] but that is a nice brotherly way to act, and it beats me as to where they are squandering the funds that the loyal and patriotic people of the States have so liberally and unselfishly donated.\footnote{Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5\textsuperscript{th} Field Signal Battalion, 3\textsuperscript{rd} (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 25 October 1918, Folder 5, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.}

As their grievances about the YMCA accumulated, Doughboys channeled their frustration with the institution in the direction of its personnel. The rigid criteria to which the “Y” initially adhered in selecting its male employees left it particularly vulnerable to accusations that it functioned as a haven for another genus of home-front parasite universally despised by soldiers: the slacker. Already prejudiced against the YMCA on account of what they viewed as its moral pretentiousness, its profiteering tendencies, and its elitist leanings, Doughboys also came to believe the YMCA served as a refuge for this type of home front parasite.

In the initial stages of America’s involvement in the war, the YMCA insisted that its male workers be exempted from the draft, a position that could hardly be expected to win accolades from the country’s public opinion in general and from active-duty soldiers in
particular. The “Y’s” personnel hiring policies made sense when viewed through the prism of its institutional emphasis on hiring workers of “Christian character,” an ill-defined term that, in practice, implied the candidate’s commitment to Protestant, middle-class values and to the YMCA’s evangelizing mission. Above all, the association sought to attract what it called “successful men” whose “Christian character” would be evident not only in their professional, social, economic, educational, or religious attainments, but also in their physical appearance. The YMCA’s recruiting and training literature established explicit connections between outward appearance, including “habit, manners, and dress,” and “personality.”

The “Y” recruiters’ conviction that a “reasonably good physique” constituted a “desirable and real asset” for a YMCA field secretary naturally placed a premium on the hiring of young, healthy, able-bodied, military-age men – precisely the kind who, in the minds of many Americans, could best contribute to their country’s war effort by wielding a rifle in the trenches.

The murmurs of public disapproval provoked by this stance prompted John Mott, the YMCA’s General Secretary, to assert that “only men of the strongest physique are able to do what is expected of them in the danger zone.” He added, too, that the YMCA’s field

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179 The civilian author of a letter to the editor of a leading periodical singled out the YMCA as one of the most glaring examples of his assertion that Americans were in danger of becoming “a nation of slackers, if not of cowards! In every cantonment there are men who refuse to fight, to drill, or even to wear the uniform...The Y.M.C.A. workers, including the President’s son-in-law, are nearly all draft age...Anything rather than shoulder a rifle and fight! Why are not retired officers and women substituted for them?” See Charles Smith, “Our Defective War Machine,” North American Review, March 1918, 468.

180 Taft and Harris, Service with Fighting Men, I, 249 – 250.


workers confronted dangers no different from those soldiers faced, often accompanying troops into the trenches and enduring artillery fire.\textsuperscript{183} Some of the nation’s leading periodicals and newspapers rallied to the YMCA’s defense and eagerly corroborated Mott’s claims.\textsuperscript{184} Also, many soldiers gratefully acknowledged the willingness of individual YMCA workers to minister to front-line troops even at the risk of injury or death.\textsuperscript{185} But the


\textsuperscript{184} YMCA secretaries serving in France, one publication claimed, “must do everything in fighting zones but go over the top…If he be assigned to the trenches near the front-line, it is the ‘Y’ man’s job to…go through the communication trench so that the boys on watch may have their comforts from home. And if there be a listening post near by in No Man’s Land, he goes there too. The ‘Y’ goes everywhere with the men except over the top and is not far behind them.” Supporters of the YMCA also tended to point out that the organization’s workers had to “be able to undergo as searching a physical examination as do the men admitted to the combat trenches,” and that “many were breaking under the terrific strain” of front-line service. A number of YMCA secretaries, one of their defenders noted, had been close enough to the front to have suffered from the effects of poison gas, and had been killed or wounded by shrapnel, while several had been cited for bravery. “That,” he fumed indignantly, “is the answer to those who regard the Y.M.C.A. as a paradise for pacifists, a refuge for slackers…At least one in eight or ten of our workers in France is in the shell-zone.” See “Y.M.C.A. Needs 4,000 New Secretaries for Overseas Work,” \textit{Current Opinion}, September 1918, 128 (first quotation); and “Y.M.C.A. Work in France is No ‘Soft Snap’ for Slackers,” \textit{Current Opinion}, August 1918, 196. In a detailed rebuttal of this, and other criticisms of the YMCA, John R. Mott claimed in the last days of the war that nine YMCA workers had been killed, and twenty-nine seriously gassed or wounded while on service with the AEF in addition to the thirty-one who had died of exposure or overwork. See “Statement by John R. Mott, General Secretary, National War Council, Y.M.C.A,” n. d., probably October/November 1918, \textit{Mott Papers}, 812 – 813.

\textsuperscript{185} As one Virginia soldier put it, “The work of the Y.M.C.A. is wonderful. The ‘Y’ men go just as far in danger and risk their lives as the soldiers. They are very much devoted to us and follow us right in the front line trenches with gas masks at times. Without them we could hardly get along.” See Allen, Claude, letter to uncle, 4 September 1918, Folder 31, Box 56, Mecklenburg County (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA. For similar examples, see Munder, Howard W., Bugler, Company G, 109\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 28\textsuperscript{th} ("Keystone") Division, letter to parents, 18 July 1918, World War I Veterans Survey, USAMHI; [Woehl, Harold C., 1\textsuperscript{st} Lieutenant, Company H, 126\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 32\textsuperscript{nd} ("Red Arrow") Division], “Corporal Tanglefoot’s Diary,” vol. 2, entry for 19 October 1918, in Joseph D. McDaniels Papers, 126\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 32\textsuperscript{nd} ("Red Arrow") Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI. In one particularly conspicuous instance, the contingent of YMCA workers assigned to the 82\textsuperscript{nd} ("All-American") Division won considerable praise from soldiers and officers alike for routinely exposing themselves to enemy fire while tending the wounded and bringing refreshments to exhausted troops. Their dedication earned them repeated citations for bravery in the General Orders issued by the division’s commander. In addition, two members of the “Y” contingent of the 82\textsuperscript{nd}, both of them women, received the Croix de Guerre, a French decoration recognizing exceptional courage. See General Orders No. 1, 13 January 1919, Headquarters, 82\textsuperscript{nd} Division, Box 85, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces, Record Group 120, NARA, as cited in Cooke, \textit{The All-Americans At War}, 52, n. 46; 92, n. 59; 100, n. 22; see also Lotti Gavin, \textit{American Women in World War I: They Also Served} (Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1997), 152, 272, 273. Citations and decorations were also bestowed on YMCA workers serving with the 3\textsuperscript{rd} ("Marne"), 28\textsuperscript{th} ("Keystone"), and 35\textsuperscript{th} Divisions. See Carter Report, \textit{US-AIFII}, 469. At least one soldier actually faulted his unit’s YMCA man for being too eager to put himself in harm’s way. Joseph Lawrence, a platoon commander in the 29\textsuperscript{th} ("Blue and Gray") Division during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, benefited
conspicuous courage displayed by a handful of the association’s representatives did little to offset the negative impressions the YMCA’s hiring policies on American troops. In an editorial that claimed to speak on behalf of the members of the AEF, a contributor to *The Stars and Stripes* summed up Doughboys’ perspective in the following manner:

The spectacle of a man of draft age, undeniably husky and fit for active service, cosily situated behind a counter during working hours, and when off duty enjoying all the privileges, and often wearing much of the insignia, of an officer when he had not been through the training and made the sacrifices to entitle him to such treatment, has more than once galled the feelings of the enlisted man, who, far less comfortably quartered, enjoying no privileges, knew that sooner or later he and his officers would have to take the chances ‘up there’ [at the front] while the ‘Y.M.’ man would remain in comparative safety behind. Such a spectacle led to the belief, in the minds of many men, that certain young gentlemen with ‘pull’ were donning the Association uniform simply to escape the perils which all good men and true, wearing the khaki of the A.E.F., will sooner or later be called upon to brave.186

Ordinary servicemen said as much, albeit in fewer words. "Why in hell isn't that able-bodied fellow in uniform, where he could do some real good?" was a question, Harry Smith claimed, his fellow soldiers instinctively asked themselves whenever they encountered a “Y” man.187 Christ Stamos provided the answer. YMCA workers, he stated bluntly “were there to avoid military service – mostly men from well-to-do homes who used the gifts of the people of the United States for their own personal profit and pleasure.” He regretted he had been unable to spend more time in their company on account of his unit’s frequent moves.

“Otherwise, I would have been able to gather up a specific indictment against some of those from the assistance that a “Y” man rendered him in helping his men to find their way through barbed wire prior to a major attack. His gratitude notwithstanding, Lawrence believed the “Y” man had no business being so close to the firing line; “[t]he front,” Lawrence stated firmly, “was no place for non-combatants.” See Lawrence, Joseph D., 2nd Lieutenant, 113th Infantry Regiment, 29th (“Blue and Grey”) Division, “Experiences of Joseph Douglas Lawrence in the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, 1918 – 1919” (typescript memoirs), 85, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI; and Joseph D. Lawrence, *Fighting Soldier: The AEF in 1918* (Robert H. Ferrell, ed., Boulder, Colorado: Colorado Associated University Press, 1985), 79.

186 “Squaring the Circle,” *The Stars and Stripes*, 8 February 1918, 4.

pseudos who wore the uniform of the Y.M.C.A. as a camouflage for that of the A.E.F.”

David Bareuther accepted as a matter of course the claims that the YMCA constituted a refuge for slackers and all those who sought to delay or avoid altogether service in the armed forces. In thanking his mother for the local newspapers she had sent him from his home town of Winona, Minnesota, Bareuther professed to have been especially delighted to read that one of his neighbors, a young man who hitherto had done all in his power to put off his patriotic duty, had finally entered service. “I imagine Steer will make one real, full-of-pep YMCA man,” Bareuther chortled, while implying that the man in question was eminently qualified for the position as “[h]e used to be a lieutenant in an Illinois H[ome].G[uard]. outfit.”

The fondness for self-preservation and privilege soldiers attributed to “Y” men continued to surface even after the YMCA finally released its draft-age secretaries. William Judy claimed to have encountered one such individual in the final weeks of the war. The man, Judy noted, “anxiously inquired, not how he could join the army but how he could secure a commission.”

In a rare instance of a meeting of minds between the army’s rank-and-file and their officers, two of the U.S. Army’s senior officers testified to the validity of their soldiers’ criticisms of the YMCA as a haven for slackers. While dining in Charlotte, North Carolina, where the division he commanded was undergoing training in preparation for deployment to France, General Joseph Dickman noticed “four husky athletes” who “appeared to be below twenty-five years of age, were six-footers in stature, and averaged one hundred and ninety

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188 Stamas, The Road to St. Mihiel, 76 – 77.

189 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 27 June 1918, David G. Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.

190 William L. Judy, diary entry for 14 October 1918, A Soldier’s Diary (Chicago, 1930), 146.
pounds in weight. The fact that they wore a uniform closely resembling that of army officers, and bore on their sleeves the insignia of the Y.M.C.A., did not create a favorable impression.” Dickman’s poor opinion of the YMCA reflected his general disapproval of the proliferation of welfare organizations during the war, a development that promoted inefficiency in the management of the nation’s finances and manpower. Their consolidation into a single, overarching agency, he argued, would have been “a disappointment to slackers, [but] it would have saved our people a lot of money, and also would have obviated sarcastic remarks” that active-duty soldiers were fond of directing at such institutions.\textsuperscript{191}

Another prominent officer who shared Dickman’s less than flattering opinions of the YMCA was Peyton C. March. A colonel commanding an artillery brigade at the start of the conflict, March had become, by the end of the conflict a four-star general and the Army’s Chief of Staff – effectively the highest-ranking officer in the U.S. Army. Though he accorded token praise to the YMCA for its contribution to maintaining the morale of soldiers, he also believed that “no man should be permitted to enter or become a member of any noncombatant organization who was capable of carrying arms” and argued that “the great mass of [the YMCA’s] work should be done by women.” For this reason, he unambiguously criticized the presence of draft-age men among the YMCA’s workforce. The first time he inspected the “Y” workers attached to his artillery brigade in France, he “noticed that several of them were husky young men, fully capable of joining the fighting forces.”\textsuperscript{192} To be sure, Dickman and March were unusually outspoken and opinionated officers who enjoyed an acerbic reputation among their contemporaries and professional


\textsuperscript{192} Peyton C. March, \textit{The Nation at War} (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1932), 212 – 214.
peers; their views, therefore, may not have been representative of the official attitudes of the AEF’s senior generals. Even so, their criticism of the YMCA’s personnel policies demonstrated that negative attitudes were not confined solely to the men in the ranks, but percolated upwards into the highest echelons of the Army’s institutional hierarchy. \(^{193}\)

While the war lasted, the YMCA did little to improve its image among soldiers in relation to this issue. The Association’s Executive Committee waited until September 1918 before adopting the policy of hiring only middle-aged men too old for the draft. \(^{194}\) Within the organization, isolated voices spoke in favor of hiring only men whose age or physical condition disqualified them from military service and who, by implication, might provide a counterweight to rumors that the YMCA harbored slackers. \(^{195}\) But the institution’s commitment to the idea that an individual’s bodily appearance reflected one’s moral character retained a powerful hold on its hiring policies and delayed any meaningful reform in the sphere of personnel selection. The YMCA’s stalwarts argued against hiring draft age men with physical deformities on the grounds that such men would make unattractive canteen workers. \(^{196}\) Others objected to “cripples and deformed men” serving in the YMCA. The sympathy such men would generate among soldiers, an anonymous “Y” man claimed,

\(^{193}\) For biographical information on Dickman and March, respectively, see Robert L. Bullard, *Fighting Generals: Illustrated Biographical Sketches of Seven Major-Generals in World War I* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: J.W. Edwards, 1944), 1 – 10; and Coffman, *The Hilt of the Sword*.

\(^{194}\) Taft and Harris, eds., *Service with Fighting Men*, I, 251 – 252.

\(^{195}\) See for example the letter of YMCA secretary Cranston Brenton to *The Recruiter* (YMCA’s organizational newsletter), 15 July 1918, as cited in Coventry, “*In Loco Parentis*,” 5, n. 21, retrieved on 10 August 2006 from from http://www.georgetown.edu/users/coventrm/mtc/pdf/oah.pdf.

would be “detrimental to favorable service.”” The fact that, as late as September 1918, a YMCA representative in France still believed that his organization could not afford to elicit too much sympathy from Doughboys, indicates just how badly the “Y” misread soldiers’ collective temperament, and just how distant it had become from the very men whose spiritual and material needs it aimed to satisfy.

Miser, grafter, slacker, coward – the “Y” worker cut a sorry figure indeed in the minds of the AEF’s soldiers. In contemporary accounts and post-war reminiscences alike, soldiers skewered the YMCA and its representatives without mercy. “Wherever doughboys congregated,” an American civilian who worked in France during the war colorfully put it, “the ‘Y’ was ‘roasted from hell to breakfast.’” Operators of the “Y’s” war-zone canteens attracted the heaviest fire, acquiring among Doughboys a reputation for surliness and hypocrisy in addition to all the other unflattering traits soldiers ascribed to them. “We stood in line for an hour at the Y.M.C.A. counter to buy our weekly allowance of a package of Camel cigarettes, a box of matches, a cake of chocolate, and a pack of biscuits,” William Judy wrote. “The Y.M.C.A. representative behind the counter spoke sharply, argued with several, carried himself grouchily, and would not sell unless the exact sum were offered.” Charles MacDonald described the “Y” canteen that tended to the needs of his artillery battery as “a secondhand stable operated by a human scantling with a bad temper. This bozo passed out paper and envelopes but never had both at the same time; what’s more, he didn’t

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198 Harrison, With the American Red Cross, 261.

199 William Judy, diary entry for 29 July 1918, A Soldier’s Diary, 114.
Another gunner, Robert Casey, lambasted the YMCA for the hypocrisy of its workers. His men having gone without food for about forty-eight hours during the Meuse-Argonne offensive, Casey went “looking for some relief from the Y.M.C.A.” When the canteen worker refused to sell any of his stock because, as he claimed, it had been earmarked for another battery, Casey exploded. “I reminded him that his dump was within the field of fire of our first piece and that an accidental shot might put him out of business.” More to the point, “I also reminded him that the spirit of Christianity might normally be expected to have something to do with an organization that called itself a CHRISTIAN association. I asked him whether he thought Christ would stand haggling over whether hungry men were stamped with one numeral or another.”

In all fairness, the YMCA did have a few defenders among the AEF’s rank-and-file. Roy Gochenour, a combat engineer, offered what may well have been the most perceptive and dispassionate vindication of the “Y.” He recognized that the YMCA was a victim of the glowing publicity that surrounded its activities in the United States. This “over advertising” generated among soldiers unrealistic expectations that could not possibly be met in France, especially in light of the practical constraints involved in ministering to the needs of millions of soldiers in a country whose transportation infrastructure was stretched to the limit by the logistical requirements of the war. Gochenour conceded that “when we hear of a boy walking ten or fifteen miles to get some cigarettes, and then the Y.M.C.A. secretary turns him down, because he is broke, and hasn’t the money to buy them…we feel that it is wrong.” But, he continued, “if we stop to consider, we must realize that the Y.M.C.A. in

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201 Casey, *The Cannoneers Have Hairy Ears*, 258.
spite of all the donations it has received cannot afford to keep three million men in cigarettes. They sell them to us at cost, and that is about all we can expect. There must be a line drawn somewhere, and when they draw it, they have to stick to it.”

Yet, the number of Doughboys who championed the YMCA appeared relatively small, and whatever defense the “Y’s” soldier-champions could mount on its behalf became drowned in the chorus of complaints voiced by its far more numerous detractors. Too, the pleas to which the YMCA’s rare defenders resorted in an effort to justify the organization’s war-time conduct frequently lacked conviction, and appeared as half-hearted excuses. William Graf professed himself satisfied with what he had seen and experienced of the “Y.” “[M]any times while in the service, I appreciated their services, music and other entertainment they provided,” he stated. As for the other soldiers, their discontent could be traced to the false expectations and a general misapprehension of the “Y’s” organizational purpose, Graf claimed. He acknowledged that “generally the soldiers did not care too much for the Y.M.C.A.” But that was hardly the “Y’s” fault. “It seems that [soldiers] had been given the idea that this organization would give them cigarettes, candy and other things. But I don’t think that they had the resources to provide all this. They tried to provide moral and spiritual benefits, besides some other services for the men in the army. I felt that they were providing a splendid service, but too few took advantage of their services.”

202 Gochenour also thought he could explain the notorious tales concerning the YMCA’s alleged appropriation and subsequent sale of gifts donated by civilians for soldiers’ use: “[W]e hear of many cases where boys buy candy at the Y.M.C.A. canteens, and in getting to the bottom of the box find a card which shows that some Mother has sent that box to her boy in France, [b]ut instead of reaching him [it] has been sold by the Y.M.C.A. to some other boy. That looks bad at first, but it is no convincing evidence against them. There must be many cases where boxes fall into their hands for delivery, with the address entirely eradicated, and they have no way of delivering it, or knowing for whom it was intended.” See Gochenour, Roy S., Corporal, Company E, 319th Engineer Regiment, letter to mother, 20 February 1919, Folder 12, Box 88, Staunton (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

203 Graf, William, Private, 357th Field Hospital, 90th (“Alamo”) Division, “My Experience in the Army in World War I” (privately published memoir, n. p., 1975), 7, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
At times, soldiers’ attempts to intercede on the YMCA’s behalf could be so ambivalent in tone as to amount to the very condemnation they were intended to deflect. Like Graf, Robert Big Thunder had only praise for the “Y’s” religious and entertainment functions. “Their Christian work was of a splendid kind and was worth while listening to and helped in every way, and their entertainments such as movies and vaudevilles were very good,” he conceded. But, he continued, “where they lost their praise was where they overcharged the canteen goods and cheated the boys out of their French changes of money.” Big Thunder retained sufficient objectivity to distinguish between the rapacity of the overseas canteen workers and the creditable work performed by the “Y” in Stateside training camps. For this reason, he deplored the unspecified acts of vengeance exacted by soldiers on the YMCA in the U.S. “It’s a shame for us boys to pull off such stunts on our Home Y.M.C.A.,” he lamented. “It was not the Home [YMCA] men, but men overseas,” he explained. To prove his point, he freely admitted that “I was cheated 2 or 3 times and was so mad that I could eat a bushel of carpet tacks.”\(^\text{204}\) In similar fashion, Hervey Allen tried to sympathize with the lot of YMCA canteen operators. Yet, again, his best efforts notwithstanding, he could not divest himself of the front-line soldier’s contempt for people whom he obviously regarded as no better than itinerant peddlers. Allen agreed the “Y” man’s job was not easy. Whenever his regiment’s YMCA canteen opened for business, “[t]here was always a dense ring formed around [the “Y” man] right away, and things were bought up like mad, the officers snatching off the cigars, and everyone wanting to get more than his share. There was also much discontent at prices, and haggling over change, which

\(^{204}\) Big Thunder, Robert, Private, letter to Mrs. G.T.W. Kern, 17 February 1919, Folder 12, Box 80, Richmond (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.
was very difficult to make, the men’s pay generally being in franc notes of large
denominations.” Allen admitted that “[t]he harassed ‘Y’ men were for the most part very
patient.” Still, his final verdict could hardly have been more damning to the YMCA. The
patience of “Y” men aside, he observed, “the nature of their business, selling gum drops and
cakes when civilization hung in the balance, was so petty that they were bound to be
despised by the very men for whom they labored.” With defenders like Big Thunder and
Allen, the YMCA hardly needed enemies.

VI. Conclusion

Throughout America’s involvement in the First World War, the YMCA went out of
its way to portray itself as the principal mediator between troops on active service and the
home front. As the largest of the organizations engaged in the task of distributing among
soldiers the financial and material largesse donated by ordinary Americans for the benefit of
the troops, the “Y” symbolized the positive image of the home front that many soldiers
cherished. The organization’s own sense of mission, with its emphasis on highlighting the
benefits of the social, moral, and cultural values of the Progressive middle-class, enhanced its
status as a symbolic extension of the mainstream of American society among soldiers.

Its high visibility among troops in camp and in the war zone alike proved a mixed
blessing for its reputation. Soldiers embraced the YMCA’s self-perception as the home front
to such an extent that they frequently viewed the organization’s real and imagined faults as
illustrative of their parent society’s alleged unwillingness to shoulder its fair share of the
sacrifices the war demanded from all Americans. Indeed, the criticisms Doughboys leveled

205 “A religious organization that found its greatest field in purveying stationary, jelly, and ginger snaps
behind the lines of battle,” Allen concluded uncompromisingly, “merited the contempt which it so often
received.” See Allen, Hervey, 111th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, Toward the Flame, 181.
against the YMCA were little different from the grievances they directed at the home front of the American war effort. At the very worst, the “Y” appeared to function as the overseas arm of the deviant social elements – slackers, grafters, and pretentious moralizers – whose supposed influence over the country's war effort made a mockery of the official pronouncements concerning the unity and equality of sacrifice fusing the exertions of those fighting “over there” and those doing their bit “over here.” In addition, the presence of such elements on the home front and within the ranks of its overseas extensions like the YMCA made a mockery of the claims that civil society advanced concerning its right to dictate soldiers’ moral conduct and act as the arbiter of their social and cultural tastes.

In voicing criticisms of the home front and its auxiliaries, then, soldiers were doing far more than expressing dissatisfaction with their conditions of service. Rather, they were articulating a profound discontent with what they perceived as a breach of the ethical standards their parent society professed in the abstract but abused in practice. The seemingly transparent “fact” that the war was being used by many of their compatriots as a chance to get rich; that many Americans perfectly capable of shouldering a rifle were doing all in their power to avoid doing so; and that such activities were often condoned, if not sanctioned, by those claiming special moral authority – all this appeared to Doughboys as evidence attesting to the home front’s unwillingness to take up its share of the war’s burdens, and its concomitant eagerness to transfer as much as of that load as possible onto the already overburdened back of the “man at the front.”

Viewed through the prism of Doughboys' perception of their collective identity, the home front's violation of the moral economy of wartime sacrifice could only broaden the physical and metaphorical distance that opened between a soldier and the mainstream of civil society when he first left his family and community, and grew with each step of his
journey to the front and his immersion in the military life. In extreme cases, soldiers came to view the environment of military service and war as more wholesome and morally elevating than the socio-cultural ambiance of their parent society. Powerful enough to subsume the differences of rank, branch of service, and unit, soldiers’ critical assessment of their relationship to the American home front united them in spirit as only a few other facets of their war experience could.
“Love of Thy Neighbor is Forgotten”:
Combat and Identity in the American Expeditionary Forces

I. Introduction

Toward the end of the first chapter of his seminal *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, distinguished literary historian and combat veteran Samuel Hynes grappled with a noteworthy paradox. Why is it, he asked, that while plenty of Americans wrote narratives of their experiences of the Great War, few such works display the kind of erudition and poignancy so prevalent in British, French, and German exemplars of the same literary genre? “Why should that be the case,” Hynes wanted to know, “when other American wars produced many excellent soldiers’ stories? Perhaps,” he ventured, “Americans fought a different, less terrible war.” For the European belligerents, Hynes asserts, “[t]he essence of the war on the Western Front...was its grim countinuousness – the way the war dug into the French countryside” to become

a trench war, the long purgatory of the static front, the endless cycles of movement into the lines, out to rest, and then back again into the trenches, where the same lives, the same fears, and the same deaths waited. It was these elements that gave to British, French, and German narratives their grim authority.¹

By contrast, “[t]he war the Americans fought wasn’t like that.” Large numbers of American troops reached France only in the summer of 1918, and fought only in the war’s final campaigns. Though the battles in which they participated were hard-fought, but they

were, by the standards of the Western Front, “brief, mobile, and light in casualties.” That brevity ensured that Americans would never lose “their recruiting-office feeling that this war would be an adventure, to be entered into for the goodwill of the thing, because Europe needed help.” As a result, the Great War did not engender among American “Doughboys” sentiments of alienation or disillusionment, and did not produce “any change of national feelings about leaders and values; it was moral at the beginning and moral at the end.”

Hynes’ view that American soldiers who served on the Western Front had “fought a different, less terrible war” than their European counterparts, and that, in consequence, the experience of combat affected Doughboys only marginally, mirrors much of the literature on the topic. The canonical historiography maintains that exposure to mass industrialized warfare in France and Flanders did little to modify the world views and attitudes American servicemen had inherited from their parent society. This literature relegates combat to the margins of Doughboys’ social experience of the conflict, limiting its capacity to alter the individual and collective identity of soldiers in any meaningful way. The first serious scholarly study of American enlisted men in the Great War pointedly omitted any discussion of how combat may have influenced the moral norms and social values of American troops; instead, it identified Progressive social reformers’ efforts to disseminate middle-class mores among soldiers as the pivotal element of the social history of the war. Historians who sanction this banishment justify it on the grounds that battle formed only a small fraction of American soldiers’ experience of war. According to David M. Kennedy, author of what is still the standard one-volume history of the Great War’s impact on American society,

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2 Ibid., 96.

3 Baldwin, “The American Enlisted Man.”

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Doughboys “were, first of all, as much tourists as soldiers.” In contrast to their European allies and enemies, American soldiers’ participation in battle was limited in time and scope. Few Doughboys ever became familiar with “the horror and tedium of trench warfare for years on end.” The AEF fought no grinding, defensive battles of attrition with which their British, French, and German counterparts were only too familiar, while its two principal engagements amounted to “relatively brief, mobile attacks in the closing weeks of the conflict.”

Recent studies both echo and elaborate this interpretive pattern. “That the experience of World War I differed for both America and Americans from the experience of the European combatant nations and combatants cannot be stated too strongly,” Mark Meigs states emphatically. Noting that “Americans arrived late, fought briefly, and quickly found themselves among victors,” Meigs argues that “[a] study of Americans in World War I must…address many different kinds of experiences beyond combat.” In keeping with this contention, his study privileges factors other than battle – soldiers’ sexuality, their encounters with French culture, attitudes toward the commemoration of American war dead, and expectations of life after demobilization – as central to the American experience of the Great War. In similar fashion, Jennifer Keene’s monograph identifies the alleged politicization of American citizen-soldiers during the conflict as the pivotal aspect of their war experience. Like Meigs, Keene treats Doughboys’ encounters with modern warfare in passing, preferring to address such issues as racial tensions in the Army, soldiers’ attempts to

4 Kennedy, Over Here, 205 – 206.

5 “For an American soldier, sharing an initial young man’s war enthusiasm with schoolmates, reading the army ubiquitous propaganda, going leave at a French resort town, visiting the cultural sights that he had learned in school represented the distant background of his civilization, or flirting with a French girl might have made as strong an impression as his time fighting, and might have informed his thoughts on fighting.” See Meigs, Optimism at Armageddon, 1, 2 – 3.
manipulate and “redefine” military discipline, their relations with the French and the Germans, and the impact of their wartime experiences on the political landscape of post-war America.⁶

The reigning interpretation of the American military experience of the First World War possesses considerable explanatory power. In particular, its emphasis on the circumscribed nature of Americans’ participation in the fighting on the Western Front is impossible to deny.⁷ What is open to debate, however, is the dual supposition that their relatively limited involvement in battle left only a faint imprint on the collective mindset of Doughboys and diminished the importance of combat as a crucial formative influence on the modes of identity they came to embrace during the war. Such assumptions are based on a flawed understanding of the nature of combat on the Western Front as it had developed by the time American troops were committed to the struggle in large numbers. These soldiers made their combat debut in France precisely at a moment when “the face of battle” in the West was undergoing its most profound metamorphosis since the onset of the trench stalemate in the final months of 1914. By early 1918, thanks to a series of technological and doctrinal innovations coupled with the growing organizational complexity, tactical

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⁶ Keene, Doughboys. See also idem, The United States in the First World War (Harlow, England: Longman, 2000), 54 – 68. This volume, an introductory survey of the Great War’s impact on American society aimed at undergraduates and non-specialists, examines “the American soldier experience” in the framework of the politics of the draft, the Army’s attitudes toward racial and ethnic minorities in its ranks, the impact of disease on American troops, and the treatment of shell-shocked soldiers. Although the book analyzes the principal engagements of the AEF, its analysis is confined to a general discussion of strategy and operations, with little attempt to illuminate ordinary soldiers’ reactions to combat.

⁷ Though the United States had declared war in April 1917, American troops began to arrive in Europe in large numbers only in late spring of 1918. The AEF mounted its first offensive operation – the set piece-attack at Cantigny involving a single regiment of just one division – in late May of that year. Over the next few months, an increasing number of American divisions entered combat under French and British operational control. But it took the General Headquarters of the AEF until August to activate an independent field army. This formation was finally committed to battle in the middle of September, and managed to participate in two major offensives before the Armistice terminated the fighting on the Western Front some two months later. For recent examinations of AEF operations, see Trask, The AEF and Coalition Warmaking, Bruce, A Fraternity of Arms.
sophistication, and sheer size of armies, warfare on the Western Front had reached unprecedented levels of relentlessness and violence. The gradual disappearance, beginning in March 1918, of stationary trench warfare, and the concomitant reversion to a more fluid, mobile form of operations, rendered combat more costly and horrific than ever before, with the armies of virtually all belligerents suffering more casualties during 1918 than in any previous year of the war. The continuous nature of the fighting, with individual offensives lasting for weeks, and at times for months, on end, imposed upon their participants a degree of physical and psychological stress that had few parallels with the classic trench warfare of 1915 – 1917, whose static nature at least permitted individual units to be rotated in and out of the front line for periodic rest and recuperation.

As this chapter demonstrates, far from having fought in “a different, less terrible war” than European combatants, American soldiers on the Western Front participated in what may well have been the most ferocious and destructive phase of the entire 1914 – 1918 conflict. The fact that their experience of battle was defined by mobile operations rather than trench warfare could only increase, rather than decrease, its potential to leave a lasting mark on the individual and collective modes of self-identification that soldiers professed. No less than was the case for their European counterparts, this form of warfare stood outside of the realm of virtually all of the previous experience and expectations of battle American soldiers carried with them into combat. Collectively, these considerations ensured that encounters with modern warfare would have a considerable impact on the socio-cultural allegiances of Doughboys. Above all, active service at the front convinced American soldiers that they belonged to a unique social order whose experiences set them apart from the mainstream of their parent society. Exposure to the realities of the highly impersonal, materially- and technologically-intensive style of combat that reached its apogee in the 1918
campaigning season represented the climax of the long, gradual process that witnessed the transformation of America’s “citizen-soldiers” into “soldier-citizens” – individuals for whom the war had become the defining feature of their personal and professional identity.⁸ To reiterate: combat served as the crucible of American soldiers’ collective mindset, influencing their relationship with each other and with the American home front as no other aspect of their war experience did.

This chapter begins by outlining the historical context of the American experience of ground combat on the Western Front. Toward this end, it subjects to closer scrutiny the defining characteristics of tactical- and operational-level combat between late spring and late autumn of 1918, the period that delimited large-scale participation of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in that year’s battles. It then turns to the evidence of American soldiers themselves in an effort to gauge their response to the challenge of combat and its impact on their respective mentalities and modes of self-identity, with a special emphasis on their relationship with the American home front and with each other. As their letters, diaries, memoirs, and other personal writings makes clear, American soldiers recognized the violence of battle as the central aspect of their war experience. Students of that experience would do well to do the same.

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II. “Hell Can Hold No Terrors for Me After This”: Tactical and Operational Contexts of Combat on the Western Front, March – November 1918

The Western Front remains one of the most enduring cultural icons of the twentieth century. The notoriety it enjoys in the popular historical imagination derives from the writings of the remarkable generation of British soldier-writers who served on – or were influenced by – the experience of combat in France and Flanders.\(^9\) Much of their output focuses on the ordeal of static trench warfare that dominated the fighting in the West for over three years (Fall 1914 – Spring 1918). Conventional depictions of this phase of the conflict, their emotionally-charged essence enshrined in popular histories, literature, art, film, and television productions, have traditionally stressed its futility and exorbitant human and

\(^9\) The corpus of poetry, novels, and autobiographical fiction that has reinforced the cliché of the Great War as a tragically futile and thoroughly wasteful endeavor is enormous and much too broad to be profitably analyzed here. But its best-known (or most notorious) examples include Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Boston: Brown, Little, 1930); C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1922); Max Plowman, *A Subaltern on the Somme* (New York, E. P. Dutton, London, 1927); Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (Paris: H. Babou, 1929); Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War: Fragments of Autobiography* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1929); Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (New York: J. Cape, 1930); Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1931); Victor M. Yates, *Winged Victory* (London: J. Cape, 1934); Frederick Manning, *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (London: Piazza, 1929); Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900 – 1925* (London: V. Gollancz, 1933); John Dos Passos, *One Man’s Initiative – 1917* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1920); idem, *Three Soldiers* (New York: George H. Doran, 1921); Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929); F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* (New York: Scribner, 1934); and William Faulkner (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926). Not all of these books were intended as anti-war statements, but they were often perceived as such by the public. In consequence, they have done more than any scholarly monograph to shape the popular historical memory of the 1914 – 1918 conflict, and have provided the inspiration for such recent revivals of First World War-related fiction as Pat Barker’s highly acclaimed trilogy (*Regeneration; The Eye in the Door; and The Ghost Road*), all published by Viking Press in 1990, 1993, and 1995, respectively. In addition they have formed the basis of the popular, and in many cases wildly inaccurate, stereotypes of the war that filmmakers and television producers have been eager to disseminate in an effort to “sell” the conflict to broad audiences. Specific cases in point include *Paths of Glory* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, United Artists, 1957); *King and Country* (dir. Joseph Losey, Warner-Pathé, 1964); *Oh! What a Lovely War* (dir. Richard Attenborough, Paramount Pictures, 1969); *All Quiet on the Western Front* (dir. Delbert Mann, ITC Entertainment, 1979); *The Monocled Mutineer* (dir. Jim O’Brien, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1986); *La vie et rien d’autre* (*Life and Nothing But*, dir. Bertrand Tavernier, Orion Classics, 1989); *1914 – 18* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1996); *Regeneration* (dir. Gillies MacKinnon, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1997); *The Trench* (dir. William Boyd, Arts Council of England, 1999); *Un long dimanche de fiançailles* (*A Very Long Engagement*, dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Warner Independent Pictures, 2004); *Joyeux Noel* (dir. Christian Carion, Sony Pictures, 2005); and, perhaps most notorious of all, *Blackadder Goes Forth* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1989).
material costs. The tedium of tactical and strategic deadlock was punctuated only by a series
of great battles that boiled down to unimaginative and costly frontal assaults planned by
callous “donkeys” (criminally incompetent generals and staff officers) and delivered by
gallant “lions” (stoical and long-suffering infantrymen) against strongly-defended enemy
positions. In return for massive expenditures of artillery ammunition and enormous losses
of manpower, these offensives are said to have attained little apart from decimating an entire
generation of Europeans, contributing to the physical devastation of one of Europe’s richest
agricultural and industrial regions, and facilitating its metamorphosis into a surreal “waste
land” that would haunt the collective imagination of Western poets, novelists, and artists for
decades to come.11

Popular fixation with trench warfare robs the Great War of its nuance and
complexity. Two points are especially important here. First, while the Western Front
remained static for much of the conflict’s duration, the war as a whole continued to escalate
and change in character. All belligerent powers sought to mobilize their respective societies,
expand the scope and scale of military operations, innovate in the realms of technology and
document, and apply increasing levels of violence in every theatre of operations in an effort to
break the strategic stalemate.12 Second, the fascination with the trench stalemate that

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10 Among popular historical accounts that have shaped this interpretive pattern, leading exemplars
include Basil H. Liddell-Hart, *The Real War, 1914 – 1918* (Boston and London: Brown, Little, 1930); Leon
Hamish Hamilton, 1963); Alan Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Hutchinson, 1961); and Denis Winter, *Haig’s

11 Seminal analyses of the cultural impact of the Great War include Paul Fussell, *The Great War and
Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the
Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1989); George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the
First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1992); and Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The
Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
characterized the middle years of the war on the Western front detracts attention from the two mobile phases that bracketed it. The first, opening phase lasted until the final weeks of 1914 and featured campaigns of movement conducted in accordance with nineteenth-century precepts of maneuver warfare. The second, concluding phase began in the Spring of 1918 and continued until the November Armistice. It, too, was a war of movement, but with a difference. The strategic designs, organizational structure, and even some of the tactical doctrine of the armies that took the field in 1914 at times appeared to have been inspired by the ghosts of Napoleon or Helmuth von Moltke the Elder. In contrast, the technology, doctrine, and forms of organization utilized by the armies of 1918 looked forward to the campaigns of the Second World War rather than backwards to the battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars or the Wars of German Unification. The final battles of the Great War were waged by forces that relied on the selective use of overwhelming and increasingly accurate firepower, combined-arms, the internal-combustion engine, close air support, armored fighting vehicles, chemical weapons, infantry tactics based on the principles of fire-and-movement, and complex logistical support structures to carry out systematic advances along frontages that extended for dozens, and at times hundreds, of miles in width.


14 I am indebted for this insight to my Duke colleague, MAJ Jason P. Clark of the U. S. Army.

This tactical and operational environment represented the principal context of the American combat experience of the Great War. The AEF began to enter the fray almost at the same time as a series of technological and doctrinal innovations had dissolved the deadlock of the trenches and restored a modicum of mobility to military operations on the Western Front. But contrary to assumptions voiced by historians of the American soldier in the First World War, the restoration of mobility to warfare did not diminish the potential of this new way of fighting to leave a lasting imprint on the ideals, attitudes, and identities of individual combatants. Measured in terms of its capacity to tax the psychological and physical endurance of soldiers, the mobile warfare of 1918 imposed a significantly greater burden on its participants than did the trench stalemate of 1915 – 1917. The efficiency and variety that weapons technology had attained by the time Americans made their combat debut endowed this form of warfare with a degree of relentlessness and lethality that had few parallels with the war’s earlier phases. In other words, this combat environment presented Doughboys with more opportunities than trench warfare ever could for divesting them of their “recruiting-office” view of the war as an adventure or moral crusade. As one of their number commented with reference to his state of mind after three days of unrelenting

combat in the Meuse-Argonne in late September 1918, “[h]ell can hold no terrors for me after this. We are not men anymore, just savage beasts.”  

Here lies one of the greatest paradoxes of the Great War. Irrespective of their unsavory reputation – perpetuated in art, film, and popular fiction – as a lice-, rat-, and mud-infested “trogloyte world” whose inhabitants lived in appalling conditions while dodging lead and high explosive, trenches minimized casualties and saved lives. Front-line soldiers knew this. “Thanks be to God for providing us with this shelter from shells and bullets,” a grateful infantryman scribbled into the wall of a tunnel that made up part of the British line in the vicinity of Arras.17 “To speak of the horror of the trenches,” historian Hew Strachan contends, “is to substitute hyperbole for common sense:

the war would have been far more horrific if there had been no trenches. They protected flesh and blood from the worst effects of the firepower revolution of the late nineteenth century….The dangers rose when men left the embrace of the trenches to go over the top, and when the war was fluid and mobile.18

A glance at the casualty statistics of the principal belligerents confirms this assertion. All armies sustained their heaviest losses in 1914 and 1918, years that coincided with the mobile phases of the war, rather than in the long hiatus of trench stalemate associated with the 1915 – 1917 period. Cumulatively, the armies of the First World War sustained half their total casualties in the first fifteen months of the conflict, “before the fronts became hardened.” In contrast, casualties sustained during the “trench phase” of the conflict

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represented only about a quarter of the total.\textsuperscript{19} According to one estimate, the French army lost approximately 854,000 soldiers (including some 417,000 listed as killed in action) in the mobile campaigns of August – December 1914. This was considerably more than the 442,000 casualties (including 156,000 fatalities) it incurred during the protracted Battle of Verdun (February – June 1916), an engagement traditionally viewed as an epitome of the war’s pointlessness and horrendous human cost. The losses the French suffered in 1918 were even more staggering: approximately total 1,015,000 including 259,000 dead. These numbers amounted to about twenty percent of its total wartime losses (as compared to ten percent for 1917 and twenty percent for 1916).\textsuperscript{20} In 1917, the year of the lackluster Arras offensive, the disastrous Third Battle of Ypres (Passchendaele), and the setback at Cambrai, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) suffered approximately 480,000 casualties (including an estimated 82,000 soldiers killed) on the Western Front.\textsuperscript{21} Along with Verdun, the Somme, and several other battles of the war’s middle period, Passchendaele in particular symbolizes for some the intellectual bankruptcy of the senior military leaders who conducted the war. No such opprobrium, however, is attached to the mobile battles the BEF conducted in 1918. Though waged in accordance with an innovative tactical doctrine and with the aid of several novel weapon systems, these operations still cost over 855,000 British casualties, a number that included some 117,000 dead.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} Robert M. Citino, \textit{Quest for Decisive Victory: From Stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899 – 1940} (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 144.


\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
The Entente powers’ principal antagonist tells a similar story. The Imperial German Army sustained more losses in 1918 than in any other year of the war, with close to 1,500,000 German soldiers listed on the casualty rolls for 1918. Close to half of this number (approximately 688,000) were killed or wounded between March and June 1918, the period of Germany’s last va banque offensives of the war. These operations have attracted praise from military commentators and historians as showcases of innovative tactics that broke the stalemate of the trenches, restored mobility to the Western Front, and established a framework of small-unit tactics that continue to dominate modern military doctrine. Their innovative character notwithstanding, they proved more costly for the Kaiserheer than the notorious Blutmiβle (“blood-mill”) of Verdun (approximately 335,000 casualties), or the defensive battles of attrition the Germans had fought against the British on the Somme in 1916 (approximately 538,000 casualties) and at Passchendaele in 1917 (approximately 404,000 casualties). Of all the campaigns the Germany army conducted on the Western Front, the one that came closest to replicating the human toll of the Ludendorff Offensives of 1918 was the opening campaign of 1914. Encompassing the Battles of the Frontiers, the First Battle of the Marne, the “Race to the Sea,” and the Kindermord at Ypres, this period of the war resulted in some 678,000 German casualties.23

General casualty statistics may give too clinical a picture of the ordeal that Americans arriving on the Western Front in the final stages of the war could expect to undergo. The physical and psychological toll the fighting in 1918 extracted from its participants becomes even more apparent in the light of its impact on the manpower of specific formations and

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subordinate units. In the nineteen months of active American participation in the conflict, close to 120,000 U.S. soldiers were killed in combat, died of wounds or disease, or perished in accidents; a further 200,000 were wounded. While these numbers pale in contrast to the losses sustained by the major European belligerents, they must be placed into a proper perspective before their significance can be fully understood. The vast majority of Americans who died or suffered wounds in the war became casualties within a period of less than six months (June – November 1918), the time frame delimiting the AEF's most sustained bout of active operations. Put another way, twice as many Americans suffered war-related deaths in this five-and-a-half month period than were killed in the eight years of the Vietnam War.

Some idea of the ferocity of the fighting in which American soldiers took part throughout the summer and fall of 1918 may be gleaned from the number of replacements individual AEF divisions received to help maintain them at their authorized aggregate strength of 28,059 soldiers each. Of the twenty-nine U.S. Army divisions that saw front-line service (out of a total of forty-two divisions that, at one time or another, served with the AEF), 24 two (1st and 2nd Divisions) absorbed replacements in excess of their original strength; six (3rd, 4th, 26th, 28th, 32nd, and 42nd Divisions) had over fifty percent of their personnel replaced; while five (5th, 35th, 77th, 89th, and 91st Divisions) received replacements equal to between twenty-five to fifty percent of their original complement of manpower. To be sure, combat losses did not account for all of those replacements: thousands of soldiers left their units due to hospitalization for causes unrelated to combat, were detached for advanced training, reassigned to another unit, or transferred upon promotion. Nevertheless,

24 For the purpose of this study, front-line service encompasses time spent in occupation of a static sector of the front as well as participation in offensive operations. See “Final Report of Assistant Chief of Staff G-1 to Commander-in-Chief, American Expeditionary Forces,” 22 April 1919, as cited in Braim, The Test of Battle, Appendix 2: “Time Spent in Training and Combat,” 176.
there can be no doubt that a relationship exists between intense exposure to combat and the high rate of personnel “turbulence” and turnover in these divisions, a trend that, in turn, reflects the intensity of the toll the campaigns of 1918 took on their American participants.  

The cumulative casualties that American combat divisions sustained by the time of the Armistice suggest that combat on the Western Front was hardly the picnic that some scholars have depicted.  

The casualty rates the campaigns of 1918 imposed on smaller units, such as battalions, companies, and platoons, demonstrate the heightened ferocity of the new ways of warfare in terms that are starker still. Consequently, the practical implications of the doctrinal and technological novelties of 1918 are best reflected in the rates of attrition and personnel turnover specific companies and battalions of infantry suffered in the course of that year. Between 1 March and 11 November 1918, Guy Chapman’s battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (City of London Regiment), lost forty officers and over a thousand enlisted men, a figure in excess of its authorized strength. The battalion of South African infantry that Deneys Reitz commanded during the victorious Allied offensive in the fall of 1918 sustained


26 Peter F. Owen, To the Limit of Endurance: A Battalion of Marines in the Great War (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2006), ix.

twenty percent casualties in the last week of September and the first week of October alone.  

Among American units that participated in sustained combat, the rate of losses was little different from that of their allies and enemies. If anything American casualties were compounded by serious problems the AEF never fully succeeded in addressing. These included a set of deeply flawed operational and tactical precepts to which the American high command clung with an obstinate tenacity; inadequate or irrelevant training; and the inexperience (at times verging on incompetence) of junior officers. In combination with


30 On training, see Rainey, “The Questionable Training of the AEF.” Specific case studies include Cooke, *The All-Americans at War*, chaps. 1 and 2; Ferrell, *Collapse at Meuse-Argonne*, ch. 1; White, *Panthers to Arrowheads*; idem, *The 90th Division in World War I* (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower Press, 1996); and Owen, *To the Limit*, 4 – 10, 17 – 21.

31 Complaints about the quality and competence of platoon and company commanders are a constant refrain in the post-war reminiscences of American veterans of the Great War. Gordon Needham’s claim that “some officers knew little more than the men they were commanding” was typical. See Needham, Gordon A., Private First Class, Company I, 104th Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, USAMHI. See also Ash, Charles P., Private First Class, Battery D, 18th Field Artillery Regiment, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Burke, Mervyn F., Sergeant-Major, Headquarters Troop, 1st Division, “Army Years, 1916 – 1923” (typescript memoir), 74, Folder 1, Mervyn F. Burke Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Cordossi, Humbert, Private First Class, Battery C, 7th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, USAMHI; Dattel, Clinton, 1st Ammunition Train, 1st Division, “‘My Experience with the First Division’” (oral history transcript, 3 November 1986, Southampton, Pennsylvania), 9, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Randle, Edwin H., Captain, Company D, 6th Infantry Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Baker, Jess M., Private First Class, Company F, 47th Infantry Division, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Bush, Walter H., First Lieutenant, Company B, 60th Infantry Regiment, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Lawrence, Joseph D., Second Lieutenant, 11th Infantry Regiment, 29th (“Blue and Gray”) Division, “Experiences of Joseph Douglas Lawrence in the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, 1918 – 1919” (typescript memoirs), 55, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Baker, John G., Second Lieutenant, Company H/Company D, 127th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Barber, Guy A., Sergeant, Company H, 128th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Trock, Elmer L., Private First Class, Headquarters Detachment, 130th Field Artillery Regiment, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences
the transformations that combat on the Western Front had undergone by 1918, these variables ensured that Americans would pay a high price for their relatively limited contact with the realities of modern warfare.

Few American organizations illustrate the intersection of these factors better than the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Marine Regiment, a unit that fought in five major American battles. Trained in accordance with dangerously outdated tactics, 2/6 sustained seventy-six percent casualties in three weeks of combat Brouesches and Belleau Wood (June/July 1918). Thereafter, its officers and men proved highly capable of absorbing the lessons of combat, and displayed a remarkable capacity for tactical adaptation. But each successive engagement decimated its ranks even further, depriving the unit of experienced veterans and flooding it with raw replacements. The newcomers would then have to re-learn the costly battlefield lessons that had been purchased with so much blood. This pattern soon evolved into a vicious circle. At its next major engagement, the Battle of Soissons, 2/6 lost forty percent of its authorized strength in just one day, 19 July 1918. The battalion’s participation in the St.-Mihel Offensive, an operation involving a limited offensive against a relatively poorly-defended and numerically-inferior sector of the German front resulted in 2/6 absorbing a twenty-seven percent casualty rate in three days (12 – 15 September 1918). Just over a month later, the battalion sustained thirty-seven percent casualties during its ten-day struggle for

Blanc Mont (1 – 10 October 1918). The climax of the unit’s service, its eleven-day involvement in the final phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive (1 – 11 November 1918) resulted in a casualty rate of seventy-one percent. Altogether, between early June and early November 1918, 2/6 incurred total battle casualties amounting to about 181 percent of its authorized strength.  

2/6 Marines could boast of having been more heavily engaged in combat than most units of its size in the AEF. But a unit need not have fought nearly half a dozen particularly bloody engagements, or remained in contact with the enemy for very long, in order to incur serious, or even crippling, casualties. Between June and November 1918, the company of the Pennsylvania National Guard in which Bob Hoffman served throughout his sojourn in France lost over two hundred and fifty men killed and received over a thousand replacements, in other words, four times its authorized paper strength. By the time of the Armistice, not one of the company’s original members – that is men who had served in its ranks at the time of its parent division’s deployment to Europe in May 1918 – remained on its muster rolls. Fred Takes served in the 82nd (“All American”) Division, a formation that arrived in France in May and entered the line in late June of 1918. At that point, Takes’ company had approximately two hundred and twenty soldiers. By early November, only sixteen of the original complement remained in the company’s ranks. “Fifty were wounded, thirty were killed, and the rest were sick with dysentery and other ailments. Many times we were replaced with new men,” Takes testified. In some cases, mere days sufficed to

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32 Owen, To the Limit, Appendix A: “Recapitulation of 2/6 Casualties,” 214.


34 Takes, Fred H., Company A, 325th Infantry Regiment, 82nd (“All American”) Division, untitled typescript memoir, 41, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
demolish the cohesion, morale, and combat effectiveness of units composed of troops that had lived, worked, and trained together for months. On the morning of 26 September 1918, the second day of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, William Triplet counted fifty-one soldiers in his platoon of National Guardsmen from Missouri. By 30 September, three days of combat had whittled the platoon down to seven survivors. “Over 86 percent casualties,” Triplet reflected. “I was depressed, sick about it. It had been a fine outfit, completely ruined in five days.”

Mobile, offensive operations of the type that defined the American combat experience on the Western Front also exacted a significant number of psychiatric casualties. According to the official history of the U.S. Army’s Medical Department, mental and neurological diseases were responsible for 97,497 admissions to Army hospitals and 41,976 disability discharges from the AEF in the course of the war.6 Given the AEF’s limited experience of “classic” trench warfare, it is impossible to determine how different the American psychiatric casualty rate would have been had the Doughboys been called upon to endure what Samuel Hynes has called “the long purgatory of the static front.” But available evidence suggests that just as soldiers ran a greater risk of being killed or wounded when out of the trenches, so too, they were more likely to become psychiatric casualties when

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participating in “open warfare.” A number of studies suggest that in modern wars, psychiatric battle casualties rise and fall in direct proportion to the number of killed and wounded, with offensive operations producing considerably greater numbers and rates of physical casualties than defensive ones. The specific case of the Great War corroborates these general conclusions, with the British army, to cite just one example, consistently registering a higher rate of psychiatric casualties during offensives than in defensive operations, or in static trench warfare.

There is no denying that the war Americans fought on the Western Front was different from the static trench stalemate that had dominated combat in France and Flanders between late 1914 and early 1918. And students of the American war effort are quite right in stressing this point. Where they err is in assuming that the war of movement that dominated the AEF’s combat experience was somehow less terrible and, by implication, less likely to make a lasting impact on the attitudes and values of American servicemen, than the indecisive positional warfare of the middle years of the conflict. The restoration of limited mobility to military operations in the early months of 1918 amplified the intensity of battle beyond anything heretofore seen on the Western Front. Their alleged tactical flair

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38 Edgar Jones, “The Psychology of Killing: The Combat Experience of British Soldiers during the First World War,” Journal of Contemporary History 41 (2006), 229 – 246. This is not to downplay the peculiar psychological burden that offensive operations or static trench warfare imposed on soldiers. Service in the trenches, even if not quite as potentially dangerous to mind and body as participation in “open warfare,” still carried its own intrinsic stresses capable of generating their own share of psychiatric casualties. But the erosion of a soldiers’ mental stamina in trench warfare appears to have been a more protracted process than the sudden break-downs experienced by participants of mobile, offensive operations. Describing the psychologically corrosive effects of long service in the trenches on the effectiveness of junior officers, Robert Graves makes clear the gradual nature of the mental decline of a typical subaltern: “At six months he was more or less all right; but by nine or ten months...he usually became a drag on the other company officers. After a year or fifteen months, he was worse than useless.” See Graves, Good-Bye to All That, 143.
notwithstanding, operations such as the German Spring Offensives, or the Allied armies’
counterattacks in the summer and fall, generated losses on a scale that easily matched, and
frequently exceeded, the physical and psychiatric casualties associated with such exemplars
of allegedly inept Great War generalship as the Somme, Verdun, Chemin des Dames, and
Passchendaele, to name just a few. Significantly more intense and ferocious than the trench
stalemate that had preceded it, the war with which some 1.3 million Doughboys became
intimately acquainted could not fail to leave a lasting mark on their collective mindset and
sense of self-identification. Testimony supplied by the servicemen themselves more than
bears out this assertion, and it is to this corpus of evidence that we must now turn.

III. “This War is Not Like Those You Have Read of”:
Representations of Combat and the Home Front/Battle Front
Dichotomy

The experience of combat shaped a soldierly identity among American servicemen in
two fundamental ways. First, it profoundly influenced the relations between the home front
and fighting front. Participation in battle – whether as combatants or mere witnesses to the
destructive power of modern warfare – amplified the attitudinal distance that had been
steadily growing between servicemen and the “home folks” almost from the moment of
induction. Among the combat-related variables that demarcated home front and fighting
front as distinct and mutually exclusive spheres in the minds of servicemen, at least one was
specific neither to the First World War nor to the American experience of that conflict. Yet,
it played a crucial role in underscoring the markedly distinct physical and mental world
servicemen believed themselves to inhabit. Specifically, it pivoted around the difficulties
soldiers experienced in their efforts to articulate the reality and complexity of modern warfare in terms that would be meaningful to the “folks back home.”

The sheer scale of the phenomena they witnessed impeded the efforts of servicemen to describe them for the benefit of family and friends across the Atlantic. Having observed two British divisions successfully assault part of the German line south of Ypres, Kenneth Gow was proud to inform his mother that “I have seen and experienced an attack.” But he was helpless when it came to comprehending, let alone relating, the specifics of what he had seen. “I wish I could describe it to you, but I am afraid it is beyond me, the magnitude of the thing is so great and the individual’s part so small… The thing is so tremendous that one’s mind cannot grasp it. It just can’t be done.”

Ray Austin, who commanded an artillery battery at the Battle of Soissons (15 – 18 July 1918), was equally frank in confessing his inability to paint a complete picture of an event whose scope was too great for one individual to grasp. “[W]hat I did see was, of course, only a minute detail of the battle,” he cautioned in a letter devoted to describing his impressions of the engagement.

Servicemen who tried to convey a sense of the realities of combat by breaking it down into its individual components fared little better. “It is impossible to recall all of one’s thoughts while you are being shelled,” Charles Ash noted when asked, a few decades after the war, to describe the sensations he felt while under fire. This sentiment was likely a reflection of what many of his fellow soldiers felt during the conflict itself. In a missive


40 Austin, Ray B., Major, 6th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 31 July 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

41 Ash, Charles P., Private First Class, Battery D, 18th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
Charles Merritt wrote to his parents to give them an idea of the fighting in which he had participated during the Aisne-Marne Offensive (July-August 1918), the Pennsylvania National Guardsman admitted that “[o]ne cannot describe the sensation of having a machine gun or two popping at you and hearing the bullets whiz around you.” Soldiers who grasped for metaphors in the hope that analogies with the familiar might give the “home folks” an impression of what it was like to endure the rigors of combat were usually the first to recognize the futility of such parallels even as they resorted to them. “[N]ever can I describe what that German barrage sounded like,” William Van Dolsen claimed. “[I]f you put 100 base drums in a line and had a dozen men hitting each drum at the same time and continuously you might get some idea.”

The efforts of American servicemen to help their families and friends understand the realities of the front-line experience were further complicated by two distinct types of censorship. Both exercised a paramount influence over the content and form of soldiers’ correspondence. Shortly after the formation of the AEF in the summer of 1917, its headquarters implemented an official regime of press and postal censorship. As its Commander-in-Chief patiently explained, the goal was “to prevent the publication of military information [and] to keep the enemy from learning our plans and movements.” Soldiers were issued information cards that summarized the censorship rules and implied that failure to follow these guidelines might result in the revocation of letter-writing.

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42 Merritt, Charles B., Corporal, Company M, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to parents, 11 August 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

43 Van Dolsen, William, Captain, 166th Field Hospital, 117th Sanitary Train, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to mother, 17 July 1918, Folder 4, William Van Dolsen Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

privileges. “REMEMBER that writing or receiving of letters in war time is a privilege, not a right,” the document proclaimed. “In many wars of the past soldiers were not allowed to write letters at all.” Troops were forbidden to disclose their locations and prohibited from discussing such subjects as the movements of their units, the effects of hostile fire, casualties, and the condition of the commands to which they belonged. In addition, they were to refrain from expressing their opinion on military matters or “the general situation” of the war, and urged to remain “loyal to your Government and your superiors. Trust them to conduct the war while you attend to your particular part in it.” Finally, soldiers were urged to “[a]void in any way giving the impression of pessimism either in your conversation or your attitude,” and “[i]n all ways be confident in the success of our armies and of our cause.”

All outgoing correspondence was filtered through three distinct layers of postal control. Company and platoon commanders were made directly responsible for reading and signing all letters written by their soldiers. Next, company officers would forward the letters to the regimental headquarters for stamping by the regimental censor. Stamped letters would then be sent to divisional postal agents for mailing to the United States. Servicemen who consistently violated censorship regulations would not only have their letters returned to them, but also ran the risk of disciplinary action.

45 For a copy of the censorship card entitled “To the American Soldier in France,” see file of Smith, John H., Sergeant, Machine Gun Company, 60th Infantry Regiment, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

46 For details of the AEF’s postal control system, see Paragraphs 8 – 17, Headquarters, A.E.F., General Orders No. 3, 28 June 1917, USAWW, Vol. 16, 5 – 6. The running battle that Kenneth MacLeish, a naval aviator who served on the Western Front, waged with the censors, demonstrates just how easily a serviceman could fall afoul of the postal control apparatus. See MacLeish, Kenneth, Lieutenant (N), letters to Priscilla Murdock (fiancée), 2 February 1918, 3 March 1918, 8 March 1918, 27 March 1918, and 5 April 1918, in Geoffrey L. Rossano, ed., The Price of Honor, 91, 109, 110 – 111, 126 – 127, 132 – 133. See also Truman, Harry S., Captain, Battery D, 129th Field Artillery Regiment, 35th Division, letters to Elizabeth (“Bess”) Wallace, 14 July 1918, 6 October 1918, and 5 November 1918, in Ferrell, ed., Dear Bess, 264, 273, 279.
Still, censorship rules in the AEF were frequently observed in the breach. Company officers generally viewed their censorship duties with some degree of aversion, if not outright distaste. “[I]t is some job,” Harry Truman growled with reference to his responsibilities as censor of the letters written by the two hundred men of his artillery battery. Not only did the task of reading letters prove tedious, but the sheer volume of mail to be censored consumed massive amounts of precious time that could have been expended more productively. “Worked last night until ten o’clock…censoring mail….That’s a cheerful job for a machine gun officer to be doing, when he has to prepare himself for the task of meeting an enemy in the near future – this looking over a lot of trashy letters that some ass of a soldier has written to a sentimental shop-girl…that he has only seen for a few minutes and will never see again,” Frank Thompson grumbled. “Ten or twelve pages full of mush and the same man writes to six other girls and they are all worded the same.” Given the repugnance with which overworked platoon and company commanders regarded their responsibilities as censors, it is possible to speculate that many of their soldiers’ letters did not receive the exacting attention that the AEF’s postal control regulations specified. This, in turn, may have allowed some soldiers to bend or break altogether any number of censorship taboos, if only indirectly and unintentionally.

For all that, official censorship in the AEF was more than just a leaky sieve. However imperfect postal control may have been in practice, it appears that American military authorities were for the most part successful in impressing ordinary soldiers with an

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awareness of what they could and could not say in their letters. So adamant were such injunctions that former Doughboys had little trouble remembering them decades after the war. “We couldn’t tell [the people back home] where we were, what we were doing, or anything,” Archie Ingram recalled in the early 1980s. To be sure, the inflexible nature of the censorship regime struck some soldiers as unreasonable. After his unit passed the cliffs of Dover while traversing England en route to the Western Front, Earl Searcy “longed to write my wife in minute detail, and tell her of the beauties of this heavenly spot, but censorship forbade. The Germans, you know, weren’t supposed to know that some of us Yanks were making our way to France via England!” Others expressed displeasure with a system that required soldiers to submit private letters intended for loved ones to the scrutiny of superiors. “It’s no use cursing the luck of having my letters censored, I suppose,” George Browne fumed in a missive addressed to his fiancée. “One of our lieutenants read my first letter to you and returned it because it contained too much information concerning our whereabouts. I was sore in the first place because it’s bad enough to let someone you know read one anyway.”

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Browne’s exasperated critique of the postal control system exemplifies the attitude that most of his fellow soldiers in the AEF professed toward the censorship regime: no matter how stridently they might have grumbled about it, Doughboys for the most part complied with its strictures. That general acquiescence, in turn, minimized even further the possibility that the “home folks” would ever gain the kind of information necessary to construct an accurate picture of the realities of combat or to appreciate in full the ordeal common soldiers faced at the front. The dread of the censor’s heavy black pencil was at times enough to deter servicemen from discussing their battle experience in anything but the vaguest of terms, and to deflect their literary talents toward such harmless banalities as the weather, the quantity and quality of military rations, the cultural quirks of their French hosts, and the natural beauty of the French countryside. “In writing letters our chief worry is the censor,” Willard Newton jotted down in his diary. “We do not know whether anything we say will reach the States without a line through it or not, but anyway we write….We are not allowed to tell the folks about what we think we will do or where we are. We let them know we are in France and well and enjoying the life. We make an effort to describe the French and their customs.” Unwilling to let the effort of letter-writing go to waste, some soldiers preferred to err on the side of caution and elected to limit their reportage of life at the front to the bare minimum. After serving up a few anodyne remarks concerning the unpleasantness of war, Delmar Norris explained that as “[c]ensorship is a little rigid as I explained before, I will discontinue the war dope.” “No, I wasn’t concealing things from you, except involuntarily,” Amos Wilder assured his mother. “We just are not allowed to


53 Norris, Delmar L., Supply Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, letter to Idean (Nellie) Borders, 5 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
write anything. Censorship rules look liberal on paper, but when you get called up to the office in your own battery where the censorship is done, you find there is not much subject-matter.⁵⁴ For similar reasons, Kenneth Gow, though suffering from severe emotional distress in the wake of a particularly costly attack that inflicted heavy losses on his company, chose not to express his emotions on paper. “The price we paid I am not permitted to write about,” he informed his family. “I might violate censorship regulations.”⁵⁵

It is conceivable, of course, that some soldiers used censorship to their own advantage, trotting it out whenever they needed to explain to their loved ones their reluctance to write about traumatic experiences or, more prosaically, to find a ready-made excuse for failing to write the “home folks” as frequently as the latter would have liked. All the same, there can be little doubt about the capacity of the AEF’s censorship regime to exercise a powerful influence on soldiers’ interactions with the home front. By inhibiting servicemen from furnishing the “home folks” with candid impressions of front-line conditions and the experience of combat, the censorship apparatus facilitated a further widening of the gap that separated the American home and battle fronts. In the process, it contributed, even if indirectly, to the crystallization among Doughboys of a collective identity based on their awareness of a fundamental attitudinal dissonance between American soldiers and civilians.

Doubtless official censorship bore a large share of the responsibility for fostering the estrangement of servicemen from the American home front. But the blame for this


development cannot be placed solely on the shoulders of the AEF’s censors. The various types of informal self-censorship practiced by the soldiers themselves played an equally important role in veiling the details of life in the war zone from the eyes and minds of the “home folks.” Self-censorship facilitated the coagulation of a soldierly identity based on soldiers’ self-perception as the keepers of a corpus of impressions, memories, and attitudes related to combat that were either too terrible – or too sacred – to be divulged to those who had not experienced them in person.

Self-censorship operated in a variety of combinations of motive and form. Soldiers were well aware of the emotional anguish their loved ones at home felt for their. Commenting on the bittersweet effects that mail from home had on his mind, Horatio Rogers remembered that “[p]articularly at the front, I had difficulty in answering those brave letters which so painfully tried to hide the worry of the hearts they sprang from.”

Doughboys’ awareness of the concern the “home folks” felt for soldiers placed a premium on the ability of servicemen to withhold the truth about the nature of modern combat in an effort to relieve the anxieties of family and friends. In consequence, many servicemen deliberately adhered to conventions of letter-writing whose content, style, and tone were meant to reassure, comfort, and cheer up rather than inform. “It’s funny to see what the boys write about,” a non-commissioned officer who censored letters as an acting Second Lieutenant noted in his diary:

Their letters to their mothers are in most cases wonderful, they don’t let them know just the life we are leading. They want them to think they are having a wonderful time. What splendid chaps these boys are. I don’t see a word of complaint in any of their letters. They just write about the beautiful country and how they felt in the big drive. And of course they

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had to tell all about shooting the Germans and how they captured a 100 or so single-handed.\textsuperscript{57}

In their simplest form, the assurances servicemen sought to furnish for the benefit of the “home folks” revolved around professions of the allegedly risk-free character of front-line existence. “Now, mother, don’t get worried about my being at the front,” Marine officer Lemuel Shepherd wrote. “It’s not half so bad as the papers make it out to be. It’s a bit disagreeable living in the mud, and the night watches – when everything is quiet. A little excitement now and then helps out a whole lot. A man with any kind of luck at all can generally get by.”\textsuperscript{58} “The life in the trenches is not so bad,” Clair Grover assured his parents in a similar vein. “After you are established…it falls to a regular routine of duty. You follow your work just as one would in the city. Just as in the city you will have a powder mill blow up or something similar to it, so here we may receive shells every once in a while. That only reminds us that the war is still going on.”\textsuperscript{59}

The comforting depiction of front-line service as an experience analogous to – and only marginally more dangerous than – everyday life and work in an industrial, urban setting mirrored broader patterns of self-censorship evident among American servicemen. The same tendency to visualize combat in terms that drew parallels between front-line service on the one hand and the familiar routines of peacetime existence on the other furnished soldiers with a corpus of metaphors and analogies that – when garnished with a pinch of insouciance

\begin{footnotes}
\item[57] Davies, Edward A., Sergeant, Company B, 315\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 79\textsuperscript{th} (“Liberty”) Division, entry for 18 October 1918, “War Diary of Sergeant Edward A. Davies, Company B, 315\textsuperscript{th} Infantry, 79\textsuperscript{th} Division” (typescript), 31, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
\item[58] Shepherd, Lemuel C., First Lieutenant, 5\textsuperscript{th} Marine Regiment, 2\textsuperscript{nd} (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 18 April 1918, Folder 30, Box 67, Norfolk (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.
\item[59] Grover, Clair, First Lieutenant, 313\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 79\textsuperscript{th} (“Liberty”) Division, letter to parents, 5 November 1918, as cited in “Memoirs of My Services on the Mexican Border, 1916 – 1917; in World War I, 1917, 1918, 1919; and in World War II, 1942 – 1946” (typescript memoir, 1979), World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
\end{footnotes}
— could prove valuable in convincing the “home folks” of the relative harmlessness of modern warfare. Describing the din of an artillery bombardment to his brother, Thomas Whalen dwelled of its fundamental familiarity and employed a recognizable metaphor that portrayed the barrage as a harmless racket. “[Y]ou ought to be over here where we are for just one week and hear the wartime jazz band,” he joked about the guns. “They sure make some noise, which we are well used to.”

The injection of generous amounts of levity, flippancy, or nonchalance into missives that purported to describe the realities of combat fulfilled a similar purpose. “This warfare is quite exciting,” Howard Munder assured his parents, before proceeding to make it clear that the tons of steel and high-explosive that filled the air at the front were harmless at best, and an annoying inconvenience at worst. “I have had shells strike only 20 feet away, not touching anybody in our party. Also had an airbomb drop within 25 feet; except for showering us with dirt if did no further harm. Day before yesterday a shell hit only 15 feet away from me, knocking me flat on my back and making me lose a whole plate of honest to goodness American beans.” Raymond Corkery had a similar opinion of gas. The worst thing about it, he told his father, was that “it is pretty tough firing a gun with a gas mask on.” For Lewis M. Krebs, exposure to danger was a point of pride, no matter how perverse. “This life as a machine gunner is great,” he boasted in one of his letters. “[W]e get more Fritz shells on us

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60 Whalen, Thomas, Private, Company A, 1st Engineer Regiment, 1st Division, letter to brother, 5 May 1918, in Richards, ed., *Pennsylvanian Voices*, 26.

61 Munder, Howard W., Bugler, Company G, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to parents, 18 July 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

62 Corkery, Raymond F., Battery F, 102nd Field Artillery Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, letter to father 12 May 1918, Folder 1, Raymond F. Corkery Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
than the [infantrymen] get.”

The bottom line was that no aspect of the war, as G. O. Santee assured a friend in a tone of conspicuously strained cheerfulness, was so unsavory as to inhibit one from becoming accustomed to it. “[T]here is always danger, but it is remarkable how soon you forget about it and find it to be the least of your troubles,” he stated. “You see men shot down, killed, wounded and torn to pieces, but after a while you get so that you feel you can take your medicine the same way if necessary and not think much of it.” The key, he argued, was to accept such things as the norm: “I have had several close calls since I am over here but these are just matters of course.”

Soldiers also resorted to athletic metaphors to paint benign pictures of front-line service. The appeal that parallels between sports and combat would have held for soldiers and their correspondents alike may be easily understood. Sporting allusions played upon conventional, turn-of-the-century century notions of war as an exhilarating competition that tested the physical mettle, moral fiber, and virility of individuals and nations alike in the greatest contest of all. Athletics, with an emphasis on team sports, figured prominently in the recreation programs the Committee for Training Camp Activities (CTCA) organized and supervised in stateside training camps and cantonments for the benefit of recruits. The Army incorporated boxing into some of its training regimes as a way of cultivating soldiers’

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64 Santee, G. O., Major, Medical Reserve Corps, letter to “Bright,” 29 July 1918, in Richards, ed., Pennsylvania Voices, 98.


self-confidence and aggressiveness, and as a complement to bayonet training. Finally, such sports-related values as team-work, duty, and self-sacrifice for a greater cause inculcated raw recruits with respect for the military virtues of discipline, obedience, and deference to authority.

Given the intimate relationship that sports and war enjoyed in the minds of Americans in the Progressive Era, it was perhaps inevitable that servicemen who groped for the right words with which describe the nature of Western Front combat would compare modern fighting to a game – more exciting than dangerous. “It’s a great game that is almost as good as football,” Ladislav Janda exulted when relating what it felt like to dodge German artillery shells. “[W]ith me its like playing a game,” explained Lemuel Shepherd. “[A] man wants to be in it, and doing things a little better and braver, than the other fellow, just to beat the Boche.” “Active service is great sport,” mortarman Robert Ennis chuckled. “[M]y battery has just put some good ones over to Fritz this summer.” And it was not just combat that servicemen compared to a game. Some referred to the war as a whole in terms normally associated with a sporting event. “[A]ren't you just a little pleased with us,” Paul


68 See for example the message issued by the commander of a Kansas National Guard company to his soldiers at the beginning of the war. “[U]nder War conditions there is no place in the game for a quitter…This company will be no better than the individual member as each man has a duty to perform and each man must hit the ball…Play the game like a man. Hit the ball and when we come back the reward that awaits the valiant soldier will be his.” Captain Fred E. Ellis, Company D, 2nd Kansas National Guard Infantry Regiment, “To All Members of Company D,” 15 July 1917, in file of Case, Alexander H., Private First Class, Company D, 137th Infantry Regiment, 35th Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

69 Janda, Ladislav T., First Lieutenant, Company M, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to parents, 11 April 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

70 Shepherd, Lemuel C., First Lieutenant, 5th Marine Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 18 April 1918, Folder 30, Box 67, Norfolk (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

71 Ennis, Robert H., Captain, 4th Trench Mortar Battery, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, letter to “Charles,” 1 October 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
Green queried his father on his own and his brother’s behalf, “that we had grit enough to play the game through; that though we both wanted to go home, we realized that this was an opportunity of learning and experiencing things that would never come again? Really after every A.E.F. man has left France you can say, ‘Well, my boys went into it, and they stayed (of their own free will) and saw the last inning played.”\(^{72}\) The peculiar terminology of America’s favorite pastime lent itself equally well to soldiers’ attempts to assess the war’s overall strategic situation for the benefit of the home folks. “Here’s hoping that we make a home run and make it soon,” wrote one soldier on the eve of the St. Mihiel Offensive. “The game is won but there are a few more innings to play and then the whole world will shout with joy.”\(^{73}\)

The propensity of servicemen for sanitize the war in their letters home reached its apogee in their accounts of direct contact with the enemy in battle. In Charles S. Stevenson’s breathless description of the Battle of St. Mihiel, the engagement appears as an exuberant

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hunt, marred only by the disappointing nature of the spoils of victory. “We have just finished being part of a drive,” Stevenson reported. “The chase was a merry one! The Boche beat it – and beat it fast, too…. We went thru a German camp and at their expense got some good stuff to eat. They have fine jam and tea - their bread is awful, and their coffee is vile. But ‘twas all better than hardtack!”74 Dayton Sackett’s description of his experiences at the Second Battle of the Marne evidenced a similar combination of high-spirited nonchalance and vagueness about what he had really seen and done. “I surely had a glorious time,” he boasted to a friend. “At dawn we rushed ‘em under a ripping old English barrage.”75 The same sense of high-adrenaline excitement pervaded the brief account of William Montalto wrote to his sister in an effort to tell her about his first battle. “[I]t sure was something real new and big for me,” he reported with unmistakable pleasure. At first, “I felt a little shaky,” he admitted. But then, “we started to go over. I was in the first wave…. We kept going until we hit the town when a few machine guns opened on us. We put them out of commission in short order and went on. We never stopped until we reached our objective.”76

The euphemistic insouciance that marked soldiers’ depictions of battle was equally prominent in their efforts to convey to their friends and relatives the implications of combat’s central act. Servicemen willing to admit that they had dealt death to the enemy often described their actions in terms that reduced the process of killing to a matter of impersonal routine. For Robert M. Hanes, who commanded an artillery battery, combat was


75 Sackett, Dayton, Second Lieutenant, Company K, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, letter to “Arch,” 27 July 1918, Folder 16, Box 88, Staunton (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

76 Montalto, William, Private, Company E, 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to sister, 31 July 1918, in Richards, ed., Pennsylvania Voices, 103 – 104.
largely a matter of “pumping lead” into the enemy.  

77 But even infantrymen sometimes spoke of killing with reference to familiar, peacetime tasks. “We just mow them down like mowing hay,” wrote Russell R. Peed by way of explaining what it was like to kill Germans.  

78 In comparably casual fashion, John L. Barkley spoke with a hunter’s satisfaction of how he “got myself some krauts.”  

79 Willard Thompson appeared equally pleased that he and his platoon had “bumped off a few dirty Huns.”  

80 For Mearl Sinton, shooting a German sniper was sufficiently interesting to report in a letter to his parents, but also routine enough not to require any elaboration. “He was up a big tree when I got my eye on him and he came down very fast,” wrote Sinton in words that could well be used to describe the results of an afternoon of fowl-shooting. He then proceeded to enquire about the fortunes of his hometown baseball team.  

81 Joseph Maleski took the hunting simile one step further, drawing analogies between combat on the one hand and, on the other, his memories of his boyhood, when “I roamed the hills and hunted fox and rabbits and squirrels and duck.” The instructions his officers issued on the eve of an attack confirmed his belief in the

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81 Sinton, Mearl, Private First Class, Company K, 112th Infantry Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to parents, 10 August 1918, in Richards, ed., Pennsylvanian Voices, 133 – 134.
parallels between the two activities. “We were told to keep cool and fix the sights on our guns, take careful aim, and then let em have it, so that every shot counted for something.”

Abundant evidence suggests that American servicemen reveled in the danger and excitement that combat service offered and that some may even have taken genuine pleasure in killing. Joseph Sawyer probably spoke for many of his fellow Doughboys when he confessed to having experienced a rush of exhilaration during a trench raid, a kind of operation that experienced soldiers usually dreaded. “While advancing on the German trenches under our gun barrage it gives one a feeling that is hard to describe but one just felt as if the world belonged to us.” Arthur Yensen, by his own admission hardly the most enthusiastic of soldiers, admitted that “there is something fascinating about war. It must appeal to the primitive instinct – the love of adventure, conflict, and excitement.” The opportunity to kill, he intimated, constituted a significant part of the stimulation war could provide. “We don’t really hate the Germans,” he remarked in his diary. “[W]e just think of them as rats that ought to be killed. Shooting Germans is the same as shooting wolves or lions, and looked upon as a sport.”

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82 Maleski, Joseph, Private, 30th Infantry Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 1 August 1918, in Richards, ed., Pennsylvania Voices, 107. See also Haas, Robert K., First Lieutenant, Headquarters Company, 308th Infantry Regiment, 77th (“Metropolitan”) Division, letter to parents, 28 July 1918, Robert K. Haas Papers, USMA.

83 Tony Ashworth, Trench Warfare.

84 Sawyer, Joseph H., Private, Company H, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, letter to parents, 3 April 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.


No doubt, too, the AEF, like most military organizations, included a small minority of servicemen whom students of war have variously dubbed “soldier-adventurers,” “connoisseurs of violence,” “aesthetes of war,” or “natural soldiers.” This human type may best be defined as an individual who excels at and takes delight in war: someone who thrives on the challenge of combat, and derives intense emotional and spiritual fulfillment “from male companionship, from excitement, and from the conquering of physical and psychological obstacles.” Possibly some of the servicemen who wrote enthusiastically about combat were actually stating their true feelings, rather than engaging in a form of dissimulation intended to disguise the horrors of warfare from their loved ones.

At first sight, the palpable pleasure vast numbers of servicemen – even those who would never dream of claiming to have been “natural-soldiers” – took in many of the sights and sounds of the Western Front appears to underscore that possibility even further. No less than other conflicts, the Great War sometimes provided soldiers with what philosopher J. Glenn Gray called “the enduring appeals of battle.” Among the many “secret attractions” Gray argued war offers its participants, one of the most important is its capacity to satisfy the human “lust of the eye,” a primitive “love of watching,” and especially watching “the


88 Dyer, *War*, 117 – 118. The “soldier-adventurer” is not to be confused with the psychopathic soldier – unlike the latter, the “soldier-adventurer is not without fear, and does not necessarily enjoy killing. Instead, he is merely adept at overcoming his fears.” Too, unlike the psychopath, the soldier-adventurer is accepted and highly admired by his peers, standing out from the rest of his “primary group” as someone endowed with greater emotional stability, physical and mental health and stamina, intelligence, practical skills, and initiative. For a synthetic discussion of the attributes of “soldier-adventurers” in modern war, see Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*, 185 – 191.

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No less than the participants of other wars, the soldiers and Marines of the AEF displayed a marked fascination with the sheer spectacle and panoply of war. In the midst of destruction and mortal danger, many professed to have found glimpses of a haunting beauty. Like many of his fellow servicemen, William Francis found himself mesmerized by the displays of multi-colored flares that illuminated the No Man’s Land at night. He thought them “beautiful – they sail through the air and then break in different colors, prettier than any fireworks I have ever seen.” The power and aesthetic effect of artillery barrages proved equally inspiring. “It was the most magnificent and terrifying sight that I have ever seen,” Frederick Edwards remarked about the barrage that preceded the Franco-American attack at St. Mihiel. Guy E. Bowerman waxed poetical about a massive artillery bombardment he watched near Verdun. He thought that “the flashes of the guns about us are beautiful,” and compared them to the “fiery crosses” he had read about in a Walter Scott novel. A few weeks later, he found himself captivated by the “wonderful sight” of anti-aircraft batteries at work. “The bursting shells were beautiful to see – big red blotches of flame way up in the heavens, like a tremendous Fourth of July.”

89 Gray, ch. 2, esp. 28 – 29, 51. For a comparative analysis of how “the joys of war” manifested themselves among American servicemen throughout the twentieth century, see Kindsvatter, American Soldiers, ch. 7, esp. 178 – 185. See also Linderman, The World Within War, ch. 6.

90 Francis, William, Private, 5th Marine Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, “Battle of Chateau-Thierry or ‘Belleau Woods’” (manuscript memoir), 3, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. See also Hockaday, James K. B., First Lieutenant, 354th Infantry Regiment, 89th (“Middle West”) Division, letter to brother, 28 August 1918, LMM, retrieved on 26 April 2006 from http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEnt.doc; Winslow, Francis, First Lieutenant, Company A, 6th Engineer Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 8 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.


spectacle.” The spectacle of aerial dogfights also captivated ground troops, all the more because of the relative novelty of the airplane. “Yesterday, as a sort of entertainment while eating, I calmly watched five of our planes butcher two German flyers, bringing them down out of the clouds in flames,” James Block reported in a letter to his parents. Perhaps most awe-inspiring of all were grand panoramas that featured large numbers of troops and


machines of war arrayed for a large-scale attack and poised to advance over the battlefield.

The Franco-American assault force assembled in preparation for the St. Mihiel Offensive (12 – 15 September 1918) furnished Ray Austin with one such tableaux. “It was a great sight,” he asserted,

that broad expanse of country dotted everywhere with men and tanks, bursting shells, rockets rising and bursting into white, red, green starts, Mont Sec looming dark and forbidding and showing here and there on its sides white puffs of smoke which told where our big 8 inch guns were dropping their shells – all in the gray light of early morning under the broken storm clouds against which the fast, low-flying airplanes were sharply silhouetted. Looking back toward Toul there was visible an expanse of country as great as that which could be seen to our front, spotted with batteries, hidden from observation by camouflage unless you knew where to look for them, roads black with columns of infantry, trucks, and wagons, and, in the distance, the great forts of Toul rising high above the intervening ground behind which the city rests securely.95

In the years and decades that followed the conflict, a number of soldiers devoted considerable energy to evaluating the nature of their wartime relationship with the home front. These assessments bolster the argument that the imperatives of self-censorship must have lingered closely behind the form and content of even the most sanitized pieces of soldier reportage of the nature of modern warfare. It was best, Norman Dunham thought, to “always try…[to] stop [the realities of battle] on this side [of the Atlantic] and save your Loved Ones at Home [from] the sights and sounds of war.”96 “What soldier worthy of the

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95 Austin, Ray B., Major, 6th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Division, letter to uncle, 17 September 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. See also Austin’s account of the Battle of Cantigny in the letter to his mother dated 1 June 1918. For additional examples, see Dettel, Clinton, 1st Ammunition Train, 1st Division, “My Experience with the First Division,” transcript of oral history interview conducted on 3 November 1986, 12; Ogden, Hugh W., Lieutenant-Colonel, Headquarters, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to wife, 16 February 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Wilson, T. Pryor, Private, Company A, 317th Infantry Regiment, 80th (“Blue Ridge”) Division, letter to “Lucy,” 23 December 1918, Folder 35, Box 69, Petersburg (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA; MacArthur, Charles, 149th Field Artillery Battery, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, War Bugs (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1929), 81; Baker, Horace L., Private, Co. I, 153rd Infantry Regiment, 39th (“Delta”) Division/Company M, 128th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, Argonne Days, 49; Langille, Leslie, Corporal, Battery B, 149th Field Artillery Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, Men of the Rainbow, 81.

name would add to the anxiety of his home people by...an unburdening of his own petty troubles?” T. Pryor Wilson asked, before confirming that this reluctance to compound the worries of the “home folks” ensured that soldiers’ “[h]ome letters were generally cheerful lies or half truths.” In consequence, he argued, the American home front’s notions of “what the men thought and how they felt,” whether in the camps or in the field, “was pitifully erroneous.” And few of these notions were more erroneous, Wilson went on, than the tendency of “the public at large” to visualize “the average American soldier as a light-hearted young hero, consciously and cheerfully fighting for his country.” So much, then, for the nonchalant levity with which many servicemen sprinkled their letters.

Horatio Rogers was even more forceful in acknowledging that his jaunty flippancy amounted to nothing more than an affectation, a kind of grin-and-bear-it mentality whose principal purpose was to throw a merciful veil over the eyes of the “home folks” and guard them against anxieties that an awareness of the “actualities of war” might engender in their minds. In late October 1918, at the height of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the artillery battery in which Rogers served was caught in the open by a vicious barrage. The combination of high-explosive rounds and gas shells inflicted severe losses on the unit and killed his best friend. The incident compounded the physical and mental exhaustion Rogers and his fellow gunners had already been feeling for weeks, and pushed the morale of the battery to the breaking point. “No one smiled and nothing seemed funny. Everyone went around with a furtive look, watching for a place to jump when the shelling began. Even

97 Wilson, T. Pryor, Private, 317th Infantry Regiment, 80th (“Blue Ridge”) Division, “Outside Ideas” (typescript memoir), 1, Folder 48, Box 57, Rockbridge County (Va.) Materials, Series VI: County Source Material, 1919 – 1927, RG 66, LVA.

98 Wilson, T. Pryor, Private, 317th Infantry Regiment, 80th (“Blue Ridge”) Division, “Outside Ideas,” 3, Folder 48, Box 57, Rockbridge County (Va.) Materials, Series VI, RG 66, LVA.
Chandler, [an NCO who was] the most reliable, hard-working, sane human I ever saw...admitted that he had ‘lost interest in the war.’” And yet, “I remember writing a letter home about this time, full of jokes and artificial optimism. It is a ghastly document as I read it now,” he concluded.\(^9\)

Occasionally, the reality behind the affected insouciance crept into letters home. Self-censorship always had to compete with the instinctive desire of servicemen to illuminate their lives at the front in such a way as to leave the “home folks” in no doubt about the enormity of the sacrifices combatants were making on behalf of the home front. In the same fire-eating letter in which he compared combat to an exciting game, the irrepressible Lemuel Shepherd assured his mother that “I don’t mean to make light of the war – not at all. It surely gets you at times – especially,” he added with reference to a poem by Robert Service, “when they bring in a fellow that’s ‘Part of him mud – part of him blood/Most of him – not at all.’” At once grave and vague, this cryptic allusion to battlefield carnage hinted at the more disagreeable aspects of combat without going into details.\(^10\)

Other examples of this pattern abound. Infantryman James Hockaday treated his brother to a lyrical description of the beauties of German “fireworks,” the thrill of watching airplanes, and the strange excitement of dodging artillery shells. Yet, he also acknowledged that only those who had not experienced it up close could think of combat as an adventure. 

“The fellow who says it is wonderful amusement and sport to stand out in the front line


\(^10\) Lest he disturb his mother too much, Shepherd hastened to revert to the tone of nonchalance that characterized the first part of his letter. “But the way to take this thing is like a business. Do everything you can to make your end of it better than the other fellow’s [sic] and then trust in God. And then I believe a lot in the theory that if a man believes he is not going to get hurt, why, he won’t.” Shepherd, Lemuel C., First Lieutenant, 5\(^{th}\) Marine Regiment, 2\(^{nd}\) (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 18 April 1918, Folder 30, Box 67, Norfolk (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.
trench and listen to the shells whistle and burst around you, is nothing but a damn fool,”
Hockaday asserted, “and you can doubt seriously whether he has really been in it. After you
get back, it is fun to talk it over, but while you are up there it is hell.”101 In his letters home,
John Barkley, the same soldier who boasted about how he “got myself some krauts,”
affected the persona of a devil-may-care fire-eater who thrived on combat, took pride in his
competence as a soldier, professed utter contempt for his German opponents, and cheerfully
urged his brother-in-law to enlist so as to be in the position to “[j]oin the fray and have some
real sport.”102 His courage and skill eventually earned him the Congressional Medal of
Honor in the last weeks of the war. For all that, he proved reluctant to talk about the
specifics of combat. Referring to the engagement for which he had been recommended for
the decoration, Barkley implied that the rosy picture he painted of front-line service were not
always consonant with reality. On the contrary, he hinted that his actions during the incident
had been so at odds with conventional notions of decency and fair play as to practically
make Barkley ashamed to relate the details of his feat to his brother. “Don’t think I am going
to tell you anything about that,” he explained. “[I]t is too bad to tell a civilized man. I played
them dirty every chance I got and this is not the first time I ever did this.”103

101 Like Shepherd, Hockaday was quick to dilute whatever anxiety his statement might have caused
with assurances that he was perfectly safe and that in spite of what he had written, front-line service was
something of a lark. “Don’t worry at all about me,” he declared confidently. “It is not so deadly up here as one
would think…Don’t think it is all so serious over here. I thank God that no matter how low a Yank may feel,
he always has a bit of humor left. I have never laughed so hard in all my life as I have at the experiences I have
had and stories I have heard.” See Hockaday, James K. B., First Lieutenant, 354th Infantry Regiment, 89th
(“Middle West”) Division, letter to brother, 28 August 1918, LMM, retrieved on 26 April 2006 from
http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersand DiaryEnt.doc.

102 Barkley, John L., Corporal, Company K, 4th Infantry Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to
mother, 7 April 1918; letter to unidentified recipient, 21 September 1918; letter to unidentified recipient, 6
November 1918; letter to unidentified recipient, 2 April 1919, LMM, retrieved on 26 April 2006 from
http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersand DiaryEnt.doc.

103 Barkley, John L., Corporal, Company K, 4th Infantry Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to
brother, n. d. (possibly late October or November 1918), LMM, retrieved on 26 April 2006 from
http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/ FileUploads/AmericanLettersand DiaryEnt.doc.
As the war progressed and soldiers became intimately familiar with the full panoply of the conflict’s horrors, soldiers’ ability to exercise self-censorship began to come under considerable strain. As a medical officer assigned to a British military hospital just behind the front in late summer 1917, Eugene Curtin became familiar with the human cost of modern warfare months before American soldiers entered combat in large numbers. It did not take long for his initial enthusiasm at the prospect of seeing the war up close to give way to trepidation about the butcher’s bill that the Western Front would likely extort from his compatriots. Describing his work with British, Canadian, and Australian wounded, Curtin admitted that “I hope and pray that something will happen to the Germans before many of our boys get into [combat] for the thought of them over here and going through that hell makes me more than blue.”104 “It is all horrible to think of,” he wrote a few weeks later in a letter that pushed the boundaries of self-censorship and official censorship alike by providing a fairly accurate, though by no means explicit indication of the effects of modern weapons on human tissue, “and I lie awake at night thinking what the next year will probably bring to my country.”105

For a generation of Americans brought up on lore of the Civil War, General William T. Sherman famous epithet proved popular with soldiers writing home. “You have heard what Sherman said – ‘war is hell,’” proclaimed Samuel Kent.106 The phrase allowed soldiers


105 Curtin, Eugene, Captain, U.S. Army Medical Corps, 2nd Division, Second (British) Army, British Expeditionary Force, letter to “Frank” (cousin), [?] September 1917. See also Curtin’s letter to uncle, 8 October 1917, letter to mother, 8 November 1917, letter to “Clare” (cousin), [?] December 1917, and letter to mother, 3 February 1918, all in Eugene Curtin Collection (AFC/2001/001/1379), retrieved on 3 September 2006 from http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cocoon/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01379.
to hint suggestively at the horrors of modern warfare without frightening their correspondents or violating the rules of censorship.\(^{107}\) “Sherman was sure right,” George Irwin declared. “[O]ne of the boys…said that if the devil could invent any worse hell than some poor fellows see over here, he would sure have to step around.”\(^{108}\) Some servicemen went as far as to suggest that the metaphor was hardly adequate to describe what they had to go through at the front. “Sherman was more than right,” Philip McIntyre declared, “but

\(^{106}\) Kent, Samuel M., Corporal, Company K, 128\(^{th}\) Infantry Regiment, 32\(^{nd}\) (“Red Arrow”) Division, entries for 30 May, 29 July, and 4 August 1918, “Diary of Samuel M. Kent,” 19, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\(^{107}\) For general examples, see Norris, Delmar L., Supply Company, Norris, Delmar L., Supply Company, 16\(^{th}\) Infantry Regiment, 1\(^{st}\) Division, letter to Idean (Nellie) Borders, 5 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Hackett, Clarence E., Corporal, Company B, 23\(^{rd}\) Infantry Regiment, 2\(^{nd}\) (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 16 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Duran, Loren D., Company K, 58\(^{th}\) Infantry Regiment, 4\(^{th}\) (“Ivy”) Division, “An Experience, and a Few Other Things I Have Liked” (typescript memoirs), 32, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Smith, John H., Sergeant, Machine Gun Company, 60\(^{th}\) Infantry Regiment, 5\(^{th}\) (“Red Diamond”) Division, letter to Frank X. Smith (brother?), 20 November 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Yensen, Arthur E., Wagoner, 7\(^{th}\) Engineer Train, 5\(^{th}\) (“Red Diamond”) Division, “War Log of an Underdog,” 187, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Moan, Ralph F., Corporal, Company K, 103\(^{rd}\) Infantry Regiment, 26\(^{th}\) (“Yankee”) Division, entry for 30 March 1918, “My Trip ‘Over There,’” (manuscript diary), 19 – 20, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Prentice, George A., Private First Class, Company H, 104\(^{th}\) Infantry Regiment, 26\(^{th}\) (“Yankee”) Division, letter to mother, 28 July 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Munder, Howard W., Munder, Howard W., Bugler, Company G, 109\(^{th}\) Infantry Regiment, 28\(^{th}\) (“Keystone”) Division, letter to parents, 20 July 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Hammond, Roy F., Private First Class, Company A, 310\(^{th}\) Infantry Regiment, 78\(^{th}\) (“Lightning”) Division, letter to father, 21 November 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI; Schiess, H., Sergeant, Company H, 315\(^{th}\) Infantry Regiment, 79\(^{th}\) (“Liberty”) Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 20 November 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Davies, Edward A., Sergeant, Company B, 315\(^{th}\) Infantry Regiment, 79\(^{th}\) (“Liberty”) Division, entry for 28 September 1918, “War Diary of Sergeant Edward A. Davies, Company B, 315\(^{th}\) Infantry, 79\(^{th}\) Division” (typescript), 25, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Gilbert, Gerald F., 313\(^{rd}\) Infantry Company, 304\(^{th}\) Sanitary Train, 79\(^{th}\) (“Liberty”) Division, entry for 1 October 1918, “History of My Experiences in the Army during World War I” (typescript diary), 71, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Hilton, Ernie G., Corporal, Headquarters Company, 353\(^{rd}\) Infantry Regiment, 89\(^{th}\) (“Middle West”) Division, letters to Grace, 20 November and 20 December 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI; Baker, Richard H., Private, Ambulance Corps, letter to mother, 17 May 1918, Folder 3, Box 67, Series VII, RG 66, LVA; Robertson, Dean, Private, 79\(^{th}\) Company, 6\(^{th}\) Marine Regiment, 2\(^{nd}\) (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to “Dear Folks,” 21 July 1918, LMM, retrieved on 26 April 2006 from http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEntries.doc; Judy, Will, Captain, Headquarters, 33\(^{rd}\) (“Prairie”) Division, diary entry for 9 July 1918, in A Soldier’s Diary, 105.

“Sherman were he alive would make an apology to hell” for comparing it with war. But it was only after the signing of the Armistice, when official censorship had been lifted and self-censorship could also be relaxed or dispensed with altogether, that one soldier was able to spell out precisely why many of his comrades believed the simile inadequate to convey what they had witnessed and gone through on the Western Front. “Sherman said war is hell,” Henry Davis remarked in a letter he composed a few weeks after the guns fell silent. But the famous general had lived too early to give a lasting answer or definition of war. He lived before steel factories could be sent through the air at a distance of 15 or 20 miles and then burst into a thousand pieces and cutting everything in its [sic] path, making a hole large enough to bury a wagon and four horses in…He lived before they used that hellacious gas, that makes everything wild, even kills vegetation, and sometimes ruins the soil for several years. He lived before they could fly just exactly over you and drop tons of powder, explosive glycerin, and cold steel, and machine gun bullets coming through the air with a whiz – and a sudden drop. I could tell you many things [that] would make your blood run cold, but I will tell you about it some day. It is not as exciting to tell or write…I sure know what war is about.

The final two lines of the Davis’s statement illustrate yet another reason why the experience of combat further distanced servicemen from the American home front. The desire to shield the delicate sensibilities of the “home folks” represented only one rationale behind the exercise of various forms of self-censorship among soldiers. Perhaps just as powerful was the determination, discernible in the correspondence, diaries, and post-war writings of soldiers, to forget some or all of the harrowing ordeals they had undergone – to

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109 McIntyre, Philip C., Captain, Company E, 29th (“Blue and Grey”) Division, letter to “Colonel Lyle,” 10 November 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

110 Mosher, Cyril B., Sergeant, 12th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to father, 16 June 1918, Folder 1, Cyril Mosher Papers, World War I Veterans; Survey Project, USAMHI.

block the ravages of combat from their own minds as much as from those of their families and friends back home.

Perhaps the most eloquent testimony of this tendency may be found in the diary of Ralph Moan, an infantryman who, like thousands of his fellow Doughboys, had supplied himself with a journal in which he intended to record his wartime experiences. But Moan’s career as a diarist came to an abrupt end in March 1918, at a point when he had been in France only a few months. After scribbling down a brief description of a particularly nasty trench-raid in which he had participated, Moan decided there was no sense in continuing to keep his journal. “Have decided to cut this diary out right now, for no man wishes after seeing what I have seen to recall them but rather wishes to forget,” the final entry read. “From now on all we see is HELL.”

Similarly, letters written to the “home folks” frequently contained pleas and excuses that were clearly intended to discourage family and friends from demanding to know too much. Recounting his initial experiences on a “quiet” sector of the front, George Browne attempted to put off his fiancée by promising to “tell you many of the terrible things when I get back,” and claiming that there was “[n]o use making this letter blue by reciting them now.” Only a few months later, after his unit had participated in the fierce fighting in Champagne, he could afford to be more blunt. “It’s no use trying to describe it and I wouldn’t want to,” he stated emphatically. In similar vein, George Irwin confessed to his

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112 Moan, Ralph F., Corporal, Company K, 103rd Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, entry for 30 March 1918, “My Trip ‘Over There,” (manuscript diary), 19 – 20, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

113 Browne, George E., Corporal, Company A, 117th Engineer Regiment, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to Martha I. Johnson (fiancée), 13 April 1918, in Snead, ed., An American Soldier, 80.

father that “[a] fellow gets so tired seeing some things that writing about them makes it worse.”\textsuperscript{115} Others were even more direct. “The real detail of the battle and the sights one sees are things that I for one want to forget as soon as possible,” Eugene Curtin claimed when writing about his experience of the last stages of the Passchendaele Offensive. For that reason, he announced, “I’ll not write about them….It’s not a sport or game anymore but just a terrible, bloody slaughter….If there ever was a hellish thing in this world its this war.”\textsuperscript{116}

When John H. Smith told his mother that “[u]pon my experiences on the battlefield I do not care to dwell as you would not find them pleasant reading,” it is possible he was being reticent for his own sake as well as hers.\textsuperscript{117} He would no doubt have agreed with John Covington who told his loved ones that some things were best left unsaid. “To express the battle and its horrors,” he wrote in the aftermath of the American attack against German positions in the St. Mihiel Salient, “should not be done here – in fact, I can not express it.”\textsuperscript{118} The bottom line, as George Irwin argued in a home-bound letter, was that war was so fundamentally obscene as to preclude any possibility of its ever being accurately described in terms compatible with common decency. “[T]o describe the things we have seen, one would


\textsuperscript{116} Curtin’s desire to divest himself completely of the memories of the war only grew with time. In the final weeks of the conflict, he categorically informed his mother he would not be bringing any war trophies back to the United States. “As regards souvenirs – I have given up in disgust collecting them…I have decided that when this war is over I’ll be so darn sick of it and willing to forget about it that I won’t want Boche pistols, shell cases or helmets staring me in the face twenty four hours each day.” Curtin, Eugene, Captain, U.S. Army Medical Corps, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division, Second (British) Army, British Expeditionary Force, letters to mother, 6 December 1917 and 23 September 1918, Eugene Curtin Collection, AFC/2001/001/1379, retrieved on 3 September 2006 from http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cocoon/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01379.

\textsuperscript{117} Smith, John H., Sergeant, Machine Gun Company, 60\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 5\textsuperscript{th} (“Red Diamond”) Division, letter to mother, 25 October 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{118} Covington, John W., First Lieutenant, 353\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Regiment, 89\textsuperscript{th} (“Middle West”) Division, letter to “Dear Home People,” 17 September 1918, Folder 18, Box 51, Culpeper County (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA.
have to descend to a vulgarity of speech that would hardly be permitted in decent society,”
he averred. “And for that reason, no one will ever want to describe it, nor would the others
want to hear.”119 Given the intensity with which some servicemen longed for some sort of
self-induced amnesia, one can understand the irritation and disgust with which some soldiers
reacted to the appetite of “home folks” for news from the war zone. “Christ! So they want
‘anecdotes, amusing or pathetic incidents, descriptions of daily life,’” Howard V. O’Brien
burst out in his diary. “[I]f I told them what daily life really is, they’d pass out!”120 Anyone
curious to see the war’s realities, he opined, would do well to “crawl half a mile on his belly
through a [trench], well floored with mud and human excrement. It’ll be at night, and he’ll
crawl over decomposing Germans, sleep in a mud-puddle, and eat his breakfast on the flank
of a horse nine days dead, scraping the corpse flies from his bread, when his hands aren’t
occupied on his own person. He’ll see ‘the Front,’ all right!”121

With censorship – both formal and self-imposed – inhibiting the development of
meaningful communication and mutual understanding between the American fighting and
home fronts, many servicemen came to harbor profound doubts concerning the reception of
their images of the war by the “home folks.” Such misgivings could only amplify the
alienation from the home front that warfare engendered in the minds of soldiers. At the
heart of these qualms was a seemingly simple question: even if soldiers could afford to be
perfectly candid in their reportage of front-line conditions, would the civilians want to listen
to them? T. Pryor Wilson was not sanguine about that point. “There are lots of thing that I

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119 Irwin, George J., Private, Ambulance Section No. 534, U.S. Army Ambulance Service, letter to
mother, 19 November 1918, in Turner, ed., Irwin Letters, 100.

120 O’Brien, Howard V., diary entry for 3 July 1918, in Wine, Women, and War, 136.

121 O’Brien, Wine, Women, and War, 175 – 176.
can tell you when I get back,” he admitted to a lady friend. But, he went on, “I will not try to write them to you, besides, I am not certain that you want to hear them or read them. Most all that I have seen has been cold, cruel, and filthy.”\textsuperscript{122} And even if the “home folks” proved willing to listen, would they be equally ready to believe what the Doughboys had to tell them? At least some soldiers would have agreed with James Christy who in the course of his combat experience became convinced that “[t]he people back home would never believe what we were going through.”\textsuperscript{123} Everett Reams took this assumption for granted. After he learned that his mother had one of his letters from the front published in a local newspaper, he felt it necessary to administer a gentle chiding. “You apologize for putting my letter in the paper. I do not object to the publishing, but think that people who read [it] will wonder when and where I became such a liar. I can’t expect people to believe the things I could tell, and because of this I have almost resolved not to say or write anything.”\textsuperscript{124}

To be sure, soldiers at the front generally agreed that the “home folks,” by virtue of their regular access to newspapers, had a superior understanding of the broader political and strategic dimensions of the war. “[Y]ou know ten times as much about the war as we do who are in it,” Hugh Ogden assured his wife. “We have a minute knowledge, microscopic in its intensity, of what goes on in this sector – but beyond it nothing at all. You might lick the Bosche to frazzle up in Flanders, or, contrariwise, you might make peace with him, and we

\textsuperscript{122} Wilson, T. Pryor, Private, Company A, 317\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 80\textsuperscript{th} (“Blue Ridge”) Division, letter to “Lucy,” 23 December 1918, Folder 35, Box 69, Petersburg (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

\textsuperscript{123} Christy, James P., Corporal, Company G, 165\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 42\textsuperscript{nd} (“Rainbow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{124} Reams, Everett, 320\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 80\textsuperscript{th} (“Blue Ridge”) Division, letter to mother, n. d. (possibly early 1919), Folder 40, Box 51, Culpeper County (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA.
would be none the wiser.”

But the home front’s grasp of the peculiar combination of squalor, physical danger, exhaustion, and stress that was the lot of the front-line soldier was another matter altogether. “I often wonder just how much fighting some of these fellows have done who sit down and write perfect newspaper editorials in letter form,” Cyril Mosher mused.

Servicemen, many of whom rarely saw a war correspondent anywhere near the firing line, thought they had sufficient reasons to doubt the veracity of whatever descriptions of combat appeared in stateside newspapers. “If there were any [war correspondents] covering the Third [D]ivision at any time they must have stayed close to division headquarters,” Charles Ash stated with disdain. “That is where they made a big mistake if they wanted to find out the views of the combat soldier.”

Troops who prided themselves on their status as combat veterans cautioned impressionable “home folks” about the dangers of accepting at face value the war yarns that individuals who had never been near or at the front were allegedly fond of spinning for the benefit of newspapers back home. “[T]hese war stories, letters sent from France, are everything, except real,” H. Schiess concluded, after perusing a batch of old newspapers that had been sent to him from the United States. “These damned Back Line [rear-echelon, or non-

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126 Mosher, Cyril B., Sergeant, 12th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 15 March 1918, Folder 2, Cyril Mosher Papers, World War I Veterans; Survey Project, USAMHI.

127 Ash, Charles P., Private First Class, Battery D, 18th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
combatant troops] and Paper Men send all kinds of war stories back [to] the States, and no one of these paper Frills ever seen a front,” he seethed. “It stands to reason, no one is willing to go to Hell, unless he has to. And the places we went [were] rough. You ain’t going there just for the fun of it, or to give the newspapers a war story of actual fighting. At these places, no newspaper would ever stick his nose in, as that most likely would be the end of his career.”

David Bareuther’s denunciation of the tales of combat that had been appearing in the American press throughout the war was even more damning because it accused non-combatants of lacking the special kind of humility that battle invariably stamped on its participants. “Anytime a fellow tries to tell you about getting stabbed with bayonets that have teeth like a saw, and any of the rest of the wild stories that are floating around America in magazines etc. – just make up your mind that he belongs to the Quartermaster or Ordnance Corps or some other shell proof job,” he advised his father. “Any ordinarily sane person that has really seen the real horrors of the war has been taken down a peg or two and has not got the nerve to go around and stuff the public.”

Convinced the American press was doing a poor job in illuminating the lives of combatants, soldiers could hardly be blamed for complaining, as Julian Gibbs did, that “[t]he public had no appreciation of what we had undergone. They thought it was almost a paid vacation, denied to them.” That much, at any rate, was evident from the prodigious energy soldiers expended in their letters trying to disabuse the “home folks” of the misconceptions...

128 Schiess, H., Sergeant, Company H, 315th Infantry Regiment, 79th (“Liberty”) Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 20 November 1918, World War I Veterans' Survey Project, USAMHI.

129 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to father, 12 December 1918, Folder 6, David Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans' Survey Project, USAMHI.

130 Gibbs, Julian, Corporal, Company K, 39th Infantry Regiment, 4th (“Ivy”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans' Survey Project, USAMHI.
that clouded their image of modern warfare. Apart from imperfect press coverage, two formidable obstacles complicated the efforts servicemen undertook to enlighten the “home folks” on this point. The dictates of censorship represented the first, obvious impediment to any attempt at bridging the gap that separated the dissonant notions that the home front and fighting front, respectively, entertained regarding the nature of front-line service. The second barrier may have been even more daunting, for it required soldiers to convince the “home folks” that warfare on the Western Front had little in common with the stock images of warfare in American popular culture.

William Langer believed that the readiness of so many Americans to volunteer or consent to be drafted even “after almost four years of war, after the most detailed and realistic accounts of the murderous fighting on the Somme and around Verdun, to say nothing of the day-to-day agony of trench warfare,” illustrated the extent to which many of his compatriots continued to visualize war as an opportunity for “adventure and heroism,” and a “great chance for “excitement and risk.” Exposure to the realities of the Western Front tended to dispel most of the illusions that many green recruits entertained at the moment of their induction into the military. No such corrective, however, was available to the civilians who remained “over here.” Instead, many of the “home folks” continued to visualize the war in Europe with reference to the familiar rhetoric, ideas, and images of war as a test of masculine courage, an escape from the ennui of modern bourgeois life, and an antidote to the materialist decadence and class frictions associated with the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the social order.132


The conceptualization of war as an essentially positive and morally elevating human endeavor reflected, in part, broader cultural attitudes toward military conflict evident in the culture, art, and literature in much of the Western world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But it also had specifically American roots. These reached back into the military history of the United States and exercised an enormous influence over the popular historical imagination of ordinary Americans. The popular memory, as well as the chronological proximity, of conflicts such as the Civil War, the pacification campaigns in the Trans-Mississippi West, and the Spanish-American War confirmed the notion that war was a spiritually and morally elevating activity. Veterans of such conflicts continued to occupy prominent positions in America’s public life. These individuals, as historian David Kennedy has noted, “remained powerful arbiters of popular values,” and “urged the young to regard reverently [the image] of war as an adventurous and romantic undertaking, a liberating release from the stultifying conventions of civilized life…. [T]he charismatic Theodore Roosevelt whole-heartedly embraced those precepts and preached them to his countrymen with unflagging gusto. What American had not heard the account of the old Rough Rider waving his hat and charging up San Juan Hill, gleefully projecting an image of battle as a kind of pleasingly dangerous gentlemen’s sport?”

Just how closely the “home folks” continued to cling to romanticized, nineteenth-century images of war as a highly individualized, heroic endeavor, may be judged by the

133 For European attitudes toward war in the years leading up to 1914, see Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 18 – 29; Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 115 – 135; Hew Strachan, *The First World War, Volume I: To Arms*, chaps. 2 and 12.

134 For the construction of the historical memory of the these conflicts in American culture, see especially Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way*, ch. 2; and Gerald F. Linderman, *Embattled Courage*, 266 – 297; Michael C. C. Adams, *Echoes of War: A Thousand Years of Popular History in Military Culture* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), ch. 5.

 naïveté of some of the notions that active-duty servicemen felt they had to correct. To the palpable exasperation of soldiers, elderly male relatives who had served in America’s past wars found it difficult to grasp the fact that “there is as much difference as day and night between present day War and the warfare of your time.”

John Covington, for example, tried to enlighten his uncle, a Civil War veteran, about the nature of mass industrialized warfare. “Your stories of the Civil War are still in my ears,” he wrote, “but nothing like we have to contend with now. The fighting men and equipment I have now will whip a whole Regiment of soldiers, using the same tactics and arms that they used in those days. This is not exaggerating at all.”

Foster Berger, a non-commissioned officer in an Army engineer regiment, found himself confronting the ghosts of the Civil War when commenting on his mother’s exhortations that he “make Old Glory wave.” Berger, who did in fact hold the honorary appointment as his unit’s color sergeant, gently reminded her that “the flag is not carried in this war.”

Recounting his experience of the 4th (Marine) Brigade’s attacks against Belleau Wood, Malcolm Aitken noted that “[t]here was none of this ‘gallant charge, with officer, drawn sword leading, and the COLORS the center of things,’ affair,” an admission that provoked his “Grandfather’s disgust.”

136 Smith, John H., Machine Gun Company, 60th Infantry Regiment, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, letter to James Coughlin (uncle), 23 July 1918; see also Smith’s letter to Belinda Coughlin (aunt), 22 June 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

137 Covington, John W, First Lieutenant, 353rd Infantry Regiment, 89th (“Middle West”) Division, letter to uncle and “Home People,” 14 August 1918, Folder 18, Box 51, Culpeper County (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA.

138 Berger, Foster, Sergeant, Headquarters Company, 103rd Engineer Regiment, 28th (“Keystone”) Division, letter to mother, 23 July 1918, in Richards, ed., Pennsylvania Voices, 86. American troops carried regimental and national colors into battle as late as the Spanish-American War. According to an order issued by the War Department in September 1917, unit “colors, standards, and guidons” were to be taken to France, but would not be carried into battle. Instead, they would be left in the rear and paraded on ceremonial occasions only.

139 Aitken, Malcolm D., Private, 67th Company, 5th Marine Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, “’Hinkey-Dinkey-Parley-Vous and Other Aspects (Important Matters) of Dec. 1917 – July 1919 OR” The
Troops serving at the front found it especially difficult to convey to the “home folks” two aspects of modern warfare in particular: the relative unimportance of the individual in shaping the fortunes of battle, and the rapid metamorphosis of modern warfare into something akin to an unsentimental business enterprise or an industrial process that reduced soldiering to little more than a form of squalid manual toil entailing the execution of repetitive, routine, mechanical tasks. “This war is not like those you have read of; this is a business,” Eugene Curtin lectured his mother.\footnote{Curtin, Eugene, Captain, U.S. Army Medical Corps, 2nd Division, Second (British) Army, British Expeditionary Force, letter to mother, 22 November 1917, Eugene Curtin Collection, AFC/2001/001/1379, retrieved on 3 September 2006 from \url{http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cocoon/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01379}.} John Evans elaborated on what Curtin might have meant. “The thing that impresses one the most... is the enormous business enterprise of getting us all where we are and the tremendous scale on which our Army is doing everything... The accounts... of the activities of the [Services of Supply] of our Army would astound even a Director of the United States Steel Corporation.”\footnote{Evans, John L., Major, Company A, 310th Machine Gun Battalion, 79th (“Liberty”) Division, letter to “Aunt Helen,” 14 August 1918, Folder 6, John L. Evans Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.} For Henry Van Ladingham, it was precisely this mechanical, business-like impersonality that set the war apart from the home front’s distorted perceptions of the struggle and made the conflict so repulsive. “There is, after all, a regularity, a practicalness, and every-dayness about a day here... that is far from anything remotely approaching our romantic, long-range ideas about that which, in America, constitutes ‘over there,’” he noted. “[T]here is quite a sufficiency of Marines Have Landed and Saved Paris,” Folder 1, 6, Malcolm D. Aitken Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
the machine-like relentlessness in all this concentrated and feverish effort to strongly suggest our worst fears about the horror of war.\textsuperscript{142}

In theory, the technological complexity some of the new weapon systems had the capacity to endow the conflict with some measure of excitement as a showcase of human ingenuity. But as Howard O’Brien found out, it could just as easily highlight the essential incompatibility of the war’s mundane reality with the romantic images of conflict cherished on the home front. “Wish the home folks could see us now,” O’Brien wrote in his diary while attending a training course for artillery officers in France. “\textit{Pas militaire} this plotting cosine of pressure curve in 4-cycle 16-valve motor, and replacing compound fractured gudgeon pins.”\textsuperscript{143} The practical problems O’Brien and his fellow students were required to solve were equally dreary, and equally devoid of martial splendor:

Typical ‘recitation’ is being given a couple of 15-ton guns, and told to take them out of a pond and over a road full of shell-holes, through swamp, to determined position. May take couple of days floundering in mud, and half a dozen tractors to find ‘answer.’ Got about as much ‘romance’ to it as hauling a busted street car out of Madison Ave. tunnel. Dungarees the uniform, and no bugles.\textsuperscript{144}

Reduced to a numbingly predictable industrial process, war acquired a reflexive, impersonal quality that stripped it of the last vestiges of excitement and gallantry while multiplying its discomforts and miseries. “[L]et me tell you,” explained Wallace J. Lamon to his parents in this regard, “that war is not a romantic past time where one charges the enemy, gets killed or not, with waving flags and shining swords, as the novelists and poets have pictured it. But work, good old hard, filthy, dirty, wet, sweaty, tiring work, punctuated

\textsuperscript{142} Van Landingham, Henry L., Sergeant, Base Hospital No. 45, letter to unidentified recipient, 16 September 1918, Folder 21, Box 82, Richmond (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

\textsuperscript{143} O’Brien, Howard, diary entry for 1 March 1918, in \textit{Wine, Women, and War}, 21.

\textsuperscript{144} O’Brien, Howard, diary entry for 2 March 1918, \textit{Wine, Women, and War}, 21 – 22.
with danger from the enemy’s many devilish contrivances to kill or maim you.” Above all, the transformation of war into an impersonal and highly specialized activity of industrial proportions appeared to render irrelevant the kind of heroic individualism that functioned as the bedrock of traditional, nineteenth-century conceptions of warfare. Some soldiers realized this as early as training-camp stage. “We shall never see again column after column rushing over the rampart with the flag they love, carried bravely in front of them!” William Judy lamented in his diary. “Men are brave today as in other years but the battle rages between steel mills, wheat fields and transport ships. That last sentimental sight on the battlefield, the battle flag, has gone the way of the saber, the dashing steed, and the two forces arrayed in plain view before one another.”

For some soldiers, conveying and rationalizing these prosaic truths to the “home folks” became important. Though he claimed he found it difficult to accept, Cyril Mosher was forced to admit to his mother that he was simply “a cog in a machine.” John Duffy confessed to his father that in the Aisne Offensive “I was only a rivet in this great machine.” His only consolation was the pride he took in knowing “that I was in the drive.” Irving E. Campbell rationalized his inconsequential role in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in comparable terms. “I have never said very much about my second, or Argonne scrap, for I don’t feel that I accomplished much in that fight,” he freely admitted. “But I was, at least,

145 Lamon, Wallace J., First Lieutenant, 26 December 1918, Folder 33, Box 51, Culpeper County (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA.

146 Judy, William, Captain, Headquarters, 33rd (“Prairie”) Division, diary entry for 14 September 1917, in A Soldier’s Diary, 19.

147 Mosher, Cyril B., Sergeant, 12th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 12 June 1918, Folder 3, Cyril Mosher Papers, World War I Veterans; Survey Project, USAMHI.

The simple act of “being there,” of “doing one’s bit,” had replaced the ideal of heroic individualism as the ultimate yardstick of a soldier’s contribution to victory. It is little wonder, then, that soldiers doubted the ability of the “home folks” to appreciate the reality they had discovered in France. Their doubts could only underscore how removed servicemen at the front had become from the mental universe the “home folks” inhabited.

IV. Turning Inward: Combat, Unit Allegiance, and the Dynamics of Front-Line Solidarity

Some servicemen consoled themselves with the thought their sufferings would become comprehensible to the “home folks” once the war came to an end and veterans of the front returned home. “[W]hile the papers can publish and articles be written it won’t be until her men come home that the U. S. will really know” what Americans had encountered on the Western Front, Cyril Mosher affirmed. Having chafed for so long at the limits that censorship, physical distance, and inarticulacy had imposed upon them, soldiers eagerly anticipated telling their war stories to the “home folks” in person. As Ernie Hilton put it, “[w]hen I get home I can tell you things that have happened with out some one to tell me the way to do it.” Indeed, many soldiers must have been desperate for a chance to share their experiences because such an exercise held out the prospect of helping them purge some inner demons. Irving Campbell, a veteran of the Meuse-Argonne who confessed that three

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149 Campbell, Irving E., First Lieutenant, 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd (“All-American”) Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 20 January 1919, Folder 21, Box 80, Richmond (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

150 Mosher, Cyril B., Sergeant, 12th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 12 June 1918, Folder 3, Cyril Mosher Papers, World War I Veterans; Survey Project, USAMHI.

weeks under artillery fire had gotten on his “nerves a little,” insisted he would tell his correspondent “all about it many times when I get back, until you appreciate how things may get on one’s nerves.” In all likelihood, the majority simply savored the prospect of recounting real and imagined exploits to family and friends. “Lots of the men here have been up to the front and have been wounded and they have some real interesting (lies) and tails [sic] to tell about,” Heber Warner cautioned his parents. “Men who have never been to the front will tell you all about it.” That did not appear to disturb him too much, however. “I suppose I will have a lot of that kind of stuff to put out when I get home,” he surmised.

This sentiment, however, found itself in stiff competition with another conviction. “I can picture the sorrow of the loved one when they get the word ‘Killed in Action,’” Edward Davies remarked in reaction to a burial service for several members of his company. “[B]ut I wonder if they can realize the living death their boys experienced before the long sleep came to them. No one who has not been through it can ever appreciate just what these boys endured.” The belief that “[o]ne will never know what war is until they have been through it” crystallized into an unshakeable article of the soldiers’ collective faith only after the war. It received its most eloquent articulation on the pages of memoirs and reminiscences penned by former Doughboys. Yet, the intensity and frequency with which ex-servicemen

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152 Campbell, Irving E., First Lieutenant, 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd (“All-American”) Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 20 January 1919, Folder 21, Box 80, Richmond (Va.), Series VII, RG 66, LVA.

153 Warner, Heber, Private First Class, Battery E, 120th Field Artillery Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letter to parents, 28 January 1919, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.


155 Lane, Frank C., Corporal, 110th Engineer Regiment, 35th Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 7 September 1918, LMM, retrieved on 26 April 2006 from http://www.libertmemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEnt.doc.
expressed variations on this theme in their post-war writings strongly suggest that it had become a vital part of their collective Credo even while the war was still in progress. “I wonder if the reader, if not an ex-service man, can half-way realize what a hardship this was as we lay prone on the wet ground, with the cold raindrops pattering on our helmets, which glistened ever and anon in the glow of German starlight shells,” Horace Baker mused a few years after the war.¹⁵⁶ His implicit willingness to believe that those who had stayed at home or served only behind the lines might be capable of grasping the hardships of the combat soldier’s life was something of an exception among his comrades. Donald Kyler, for example, emphatically denied the notion that the front-line experience could be understood by those who had not partaken in it. “No person, be he one in a high position, or in some noncombat branch or department of a modern war machine and not in close connection with the end product of that machine – killing – can possibly know things as they really are,” he pronounced. “That is the nature of war, and I suspect that it always has been.”¹⁵⁷

“I often wonder if the folks at home know or realize how wonderful the boys out here are, how they are fighting and suffering and dying,” William Van Dolsen wrote his aunt. “I think you do,” he added, but without much conviction.¹⁵⁸ After his division had been in line for several weeks and had suffered casualties, Van Dolsen no longer troubled to conceal his conviction that the realities of combat were beyond the comprehension of the “home folks.” In a letter in which he urged his sister to give the 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division “lots of


¹⁵⁷ Kyler, Donald D., Sergeant, Company D, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, “The Thoughts and Memories of a Common Soldier,” (typescript memoir), Preface, n. p., World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

¹⁵⁸ Van Dolsen, William, Captain, 166th Field Hospital, 117th Sanitary Train, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to aunt, 17 March 1918, Folder 1, William Van Dolsen Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
credit,” he asserted that “you at home have no idea how [the division] stood the pounding and of how she suffered.” Direct contact with non-combatants – especially those recently arrived from stateside training camps and thus still bearing the stamp of the “home folks” attitudes toward combat – tended to reinforce such convictions. After coming into contact with a group of greenhorn replacements in a military hospital in France, combat veteran Lloyd Foster marveled at the disjunction between their conceptions of front-line service and his. “It is very interesting to hear the new fellows talk about their ideas of the front that have never seen it yet. It is funny to hear them talk to us who have been through the mill. The fellows that say the most know the least.”

The bottom line was that their lack of empirical familiarity effectively barred the “home folks” from comprehending the mental universe of the Doughboy. “You will never know what war is like until you have some of these big shells drop around you,” Harold Currier assured his home people by way of explaining why he felt happy that he would never have to go up to the front again.

The function that combat played in distancing soldiers from the “home folks” had its corollary in its capacity to dissolve or break down altogether some of the barriers that had separated Doughboys from each other in civilian life. The conviction that the full import of what they had gone through could only be communicated to, and understood by, those who had experienced it themselves, laid the foundations for the parallel belief in the existence of a special emotional or spiritual bond that fused all combat veterans into an exclusive fraternity.

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159 Van Dolsen, William, Captain, 166th Field Hospital, 117th Sanitary Train, 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, letter to sister, 20 April 1918, Folder 3, William Van Dolsen Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

160 Foster, Lloyd, Private First Class, Company B, 125th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letter to parents, 22 October 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

161 Currier, Harold J., unidentified unit, 90th (“Alamo”) Division, letter to “Dear Folks,” 24 November 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
Grounded in the shared experience of working and suffering together through hardship, danger, and stress, this intense kinship provided soldiers with a pillar of identity all the more powerful for its tendency to amplify the differences separating servicemen from the mainstream of their civil society.

Scholars of the American military experience of the Great War have been skeptical of the notion that soldiers tended to self-consciously define themselves as members of a “front-line community” united by a common experiential legacy of shared tribulations and sufferings. To be sure, American war memoirs are replete with celebratory, retrospective reflections on the joys and sorrows of wartime comradeship. Leslie Langille’s tribute to the spirit of co-operation and amity he claimed had pervaded his parent unit, the 42nd (“Rainbow”) Division, is typical in this regard. That fraternal spirit, he noted, first manifested itself when the division was formed and assembled, and grew “into a real fellowship of men bound together by the greatest tie possible – that of suffering and dying together.”

Participation in combat completed the metamorphosis of the division’s personnel into a quasi-utopian community of spiritually elevated beings:

Those men were to be bound together in days to come into one fraternity that has lasted and will continue to last until the last ‘Rainbow’ has passed from this earth. They are Catholic, Jew, Protestant, Atheist, and every creed under the sun. Their brotherhood far surpasses any other form of fraternalism. It is real; it is from the heart; it is a fraternity through understanding and through having gone through Hades together. There is no hate, prejudice, or malice in the hearts of any of these men for any other people. They know what it is to have died and to be born again.162

Outside observers enthusiastically confirmed the existence of a soldierly fraternity of the kind described by Langille and others. Sara Crosley, a Red Cross nurse who had tended American wounded in a military hospital in France, thought those who came under her care

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during the war inhabited “a world set apart” and could not help but admire the exclusive fellowship she thought she had discerned among soldiers. Historians have not found such evidence convincing. In her study of the politicization of Doughboys, Jennifer Keene has emphasized the profound divisions among American servicemen – especially those pivoting on race, ethnicity, rank, socio-economic background, and military occupation – that even the shared experience of combat could not eradicate. At first sight, the persistence of such rifts throughout – and at times long after – the war appears to undermine nostalgic ruminations on comradeship such Langille’s. That these profuse assertions of wartime solidarity have come down to us chiefly through the literary medium of post-war memoirs and autobiographical fiction tends to undermine their credibility even further, given the suspicions that historians of the First World War harbor about the reliability of such sources.

The reservations notwithstanding, veterans appear to have enjoyed an exceptional sense of camaraderie. The fierce loyalty many soldiers developed to their units, as expressed in their keen interest and pride they took in keeping up with and recounting the battlefield exploits of the companies, regiments, and divisions in which they happened to is perhaps the best place to begin an examination of the realities of wartime comradeship among Doughboys.

163 Crosley, Sara W., Military Service Record, 5 March 1923, Folder 4, Box 1, Accomack County (Va.), Series I: Individual Service Records (Questionnaires), 1919 – 1924, RG 66, LVA.

164 Keene, Doughboys, passim.

165 A recent monograph that highlights the need for drawing careful distinctions between personal writings reflecting the experience of the Great War as opposed to its memory as articulated by the conflict’s British participants in particular is Watson, Fighting Different Wars.
As noted in Part I, military authorities had taken considerable pains to cultivate unit loyalties among soldiers undergoing training in stateside camps and cantonments. Such efforts, however, were hampered by the difficulty inherent in inspiring allegiance to recently created military organizations that lacked traditions and combat experience. Deployment to the Western Front and commitment to combat changed all that. Able to claim a tangible record of combat participation, divisions and their component units engendered in the minds of ordinary soldiers a degree of corporate loyalty that no amount of official manipulation could hope to match. The pride Everett Reams expressed in the combat record of his parent division and regiment shortly after the Armistice exemplified this phenomenon. “I can tell you now that I am and have been in the 80th Division,” he boasted. “I am proud of my Division. There is no division over here that did better work or did it more cheerfully. I have been over the top with them and have laid [sic] under barrages with them, but have never seen the time when they were not ready to laugh, sing, and joke, even when men were dying. Always willing to help each other in any way, and always ready for a fight. I am also proud to say that [the 320th Regiment] has never been forced to retreat.”

Reams was laying it a bit thick – his assertions to the contrary, many AEF divisions outperformed the 80th. That, however, was immaterial. What did matter was Reams’s belief in his unit and the personal relationship it fostered.

The self-congratulatory tribute Reams delivered in honor of his unit were part of a widespread phenomenon. From the lowest private upwards, soldiers who served in combat units developed a high degree of allegiance to their organizations – both as distinct administrative entities and as communities. “If hard fighting and heavy losses would

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166 Reams, Everett, 320th Infantry Regiment, 80th (“Blue Ridge”) Division, letter to mother, n. d. (possibly early 1919), Folder 40, Box 51, Culpeper County (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA.
necessarily make an outfit disheartened the First Division would certainly show it – with the possible exception of the 2nd Division, no American outfit has seen as much of the war as we have and none have been in line as long,” Ray Austin bragged to his mother. He took an almost childish delight in reporting the praise that the AEF’s commander-in-chief had heaped on the unit.\(^{167}\) In similar fashion, Ladislav Janda, a junior officer in the 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, rarely passed up an opportunity to avow the pride he felt for his regiment. “[W]atch the fighting 9th,” he urged his parents, “for this regiment has an enviable reputation and its not going to suffer now let me tell you.”\(^{168}\)

As career officers in the Regular Army concerned with the speed of promotion and the state of their professional record, the interest that Austin and Janda might be forgiven for the self-promotional flavor of their boasting.\(^{169}\) But fierce attachment to individual units was also very much in evidence among the men in the non-commissioned and enlisted ranks. No less than their officers, ordinary servicemen often used their letters home to advertise their association with specific divisions and trumpet the combat exploits of those units. “I don’t believe I ever told you that I am in the 2nd Division,” a proud Raymond Stenback remarked in a letter to his family. “When you read of it you know that I am with it. It is the highest and most honored of Uncle Sam’s divisions, [as] shown by writings by

\(^{167}\) Austin, Ray B., Major, 6th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to mother, 29 September 1918; see also Austin’s letter to uncle, 17 September 1918, both in World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\(^{168}\) Janda, Ladislav T., First Lieutenant, Company M, 9th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, letter to parents, 13 January 1918; see also Janda’s letter to parents, 12 May 1918, both in World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\(^{169}\) Austin had been serving as an officer in the 6th Field Artillery Regiment, one of the 1st Division’s organic artillery components, since 1913. See “Officers Who Have Served with the Sixth Field Artillery,” in *Sixth Field Artillery, 1792 – 1932* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Telegraph Press, 1933), 352.
General Pershing.” Soldiers who served in National Guard or National Army (Draft) Divisions did not yield an inch in universally claiming that theirs were the best divisions in the AEF. “I am proud to be one of the [32nd Division] as we made an exceptional record,” Lloyd Foster reported. “We drove the Boche’s best soldiers the farthest in the shortest time of any other Divisions. on the battle line. When I arrived at one of the hospital camps I was amused to see how the fellows saluted me, our Div. is the talk everywhere I go.” Absalom Norman was visibly miffed when he found out his mother was somewhat hazy about what division he was serving in. “I was quite surprised that you did not know what division I was with, for I told you early last fall, also put it on my address several times. It is the Camp Upton Division from New York City, the 77th Division.” He barraged her with corporate self-aggrandizement that would no doubt have impressed his superiors. “Our division has a grand record and our regiment also has an especially good name,” he assured her. “So you must get acquainted with the same…. There are many interesting things that you must know. I am going to send you with this letter an official list of the campaigns and battles in which we took part. Our Division has seen more service than any other National Army Division. We have many records to be proud of, both here and back home.”

The decision, made by GHQ-AEF only a few weeks before the Armistice, to authorize divisions to adopt distinctive unit insignia, helped crystallize strong divisional allegiances among soldiers. As explained in Part I, many divisions had adopted heraldic

170 Stenback, Raymond H., Private, 73rd Company, 5th Marine Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to family, 1 February 1919, Raymond Stenback Personal Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

171 Foster, Lloyd, Private First Class, Company B, 125th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letter to parents, 26 August 1918, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

172 Norman, Absalom W., Second Lieutenant, Battery F, Headquarters Company, 304th Field Artillery Regiment, 77th (“Liberty”) Division, letter to mother, 28 December 1918, Folder 38, Box 51, Culpeper County (Va.) Materials, Series VI, RG 66, LVA.
devices as early as the second half of 1917, months before they left their stateside training camps and cantonments for France. As initially conceived, such symbols were to fulfill the dual function of fostering a sense of *esprit de corps* among soldiers and, on a more practical level, assist in identifying divisional vehicles and property. Formal endorsement by the American military authorities in France, even if coming only late in the war, revealed how deeply soldiers cherished such devices. A doggerel poem written shortly after the war by a member of the 26th ("Yankee") Division articulated what the unit’s “YD” shoulder patch meant to its soldiers. “We ask for no cross nor medal, to us/ They hold no charm, / The highest honor we can wear, is/ The YD on our arm.” 173 Many soldiers explained to the “home folks” in loving detail the often nuanced meanings encoded in divisional emblems. “You wanted to know about the W that is our division insignia. It has quite a meaning,” Lloyd Goodman assured a correspondent while directing his attention to an explanatory diagram that accompanied the letter. “Our nick name is the Middle West division, and it also stands for the three generals we have had, generals Wood, Wright and Winn. In space One is our organization colors, ours orange & white, and in space two is white, which C Company alone is allowed to wear meaning the best company in the battalion.” Goodman was sure that “[i]t is one of the neatest looking insignias of any division, and can make more significance out of it than any other.” 174 David Bareuther was so enamored of the insignia of the 3rd Division he continued to wear its shoulder patch even after he had been transferred out of the organization. “[T]hat was my outfit I went thru hell with, so all the general orders in the world can’t keep the 3rd Div. insignia off my shoulders,” he reasoned. “It is three


174 Goodman, Lloyd B., Private, Company C, 314th Field Signal Battalion, 89th (“Middle West”) Division, letter to “Burt,” 21 April 1919, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
diagonal stripes of white on a field of blue. The blue for the battle field, the white represents those whose souls have gone on to the happy hunting ground, and the reason they are in three stripes is to signify the three major engagements in which the Division participated.”

Bareuther’s reluctance to part with such a deeply cherished symbol of corporate identity is not difficult to understand. In fact, it may not have been unique. After the Armistice, George O’Brien’s artillery regiment was detached from the 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, a formation with a distinguished combat record, and assigned to the 88th Division, a “rookie” outfit that arrived in France too late to take part in serious fighting. The reassignment was deeply unpopular. O’Brien and his fellow gunners registered their displeasure by putting off for as long as they could the required changes of patches. “We had to sew on [the 88th’s] insignia on our sleeves,” O’Brien explained. “For a while no one made a move to do so but now we have to. We certainly prefer the cross arrow.” No self-respecting soldier wanted to be deprived of such an important symbol of his status as a member of a community that served as his institutional and emotional home.

The sensitivity servicemen felt concerning real and imagined affronts directed against their organizations’ wartime record, and the stridency with which they defended the organizational reputations of their parent regiments and divisions, underscore the importance that unit loyalties assumed as a pillar of soldierly identity in the AEF. Intense and not always friendly rivalries could easily flare up between members of units vying for bragging rights. Hospitals and casual camps – facilities where soldiers who had recovered

175 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd (“Marne”) Division, letter to mother, 6 March 1919, Folder 6, David Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

176 O’Brien, George H., Corporal, Headquarters Company, 121st Field Artillery Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, letter to mother, 7 February 1919, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
from their wounds would wait for transfer to a unit – were especially noted as potential flash points. “Hospitals were the only places where soldiers met men who belonged to other divisions than their own,” Harold Woehl recalled. “In the hospitals, and more particularly in convalescent and casual camps the soldier got in touch with all of the A.E.F. Wherever soldiers congregated in hospitals or casual camps, battles were heatedly discussed, organizations criticized or praised, and the fate of the world settled generally. During these gabfests, the feeling for our own division grew very strong. We might have had fights with each other or between companies, but as opposed to other divisions we were a proud and united military family.”

At times, the spirit of competition could breed genuine bitterness and resentment, as was the case when soldiers of one division came to imagine that less battle-tested organizations were basking in publicity or good repute they had done little or nothing to earn. “It is quite a famous division in the newspapers for the same reason that the Marines were,” David Bareuther sneered when referring to the 77th Division of the National Army. “Not because they accomplished any wonderful feat, but because they had their press agent with them and they were New York’s own,” he alleged. Marine Raymond Stenback of the 2nd Division wrote in the same vein about the 42nd Division. “They are another outfit that claim they won the war and aren’t afraid to make their points known, when there aren’t any 1st or 2nd Division men around. There are some fierce scraps when men of the different divisions get together and start arguing. It is almost the war over again. Even when we get

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178 Bareuther, David G., Private, Company C, 5th Field Signal Battalion, 3rd ("Marne") Division, letter to mother, 11 December 1918, Folder 6, David Bareuther Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
back to the states there will always be trouble over who won the war,” Stenback predicted.179

On the surface, the attachment soldiers professed to such large, relatively abstract institutional entities as divisions appears as something of a mystery. First, the vast majority of AEF troops were effectively civilians in uniform who had no intention of making the Army their permanent career. They eagerly anticipated their post-war discharges, and had few tangible rewards to gain from championing the reputations of divisions or regiments. Second, the allegiance that soldiers developed to larger units by the time of the Armistice appears surprising in view of the relative indifference with which servicemen regarded higher formations in the early stages of their military service. As made clear in Part I, while servicemen were still undergoing training in stateside camps and cantonments, it was the company – a compact community of about two hundred and fifty men – that represented the largest unit with which a soldier could meaningfully identify. What, then, prompted soldiers, once they had reached the Western Front, to embrace the regimental and divisional levels of military organization as focal points of communal allegiance and individual identity?

The answer appears to be rooted in the effects that sustained combat service had on the composition of the smaller units – companies, platoons, squads – that had initially served as the foundation of soldiers’ unit allegiances. Given the toll that operations of the Western Front during the 1918 campaigning season were capable of taking on the personnel of company- and battalion-sized units, small organizations experienced enormous rates of personnel turnover. In turn, this development put an enormous strain on the continued

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179 Stenback, Raymond H., Private, 73rd Company, 5th Marine Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, letter to father [?], 11 April 1919, Raymond Stenback Personal Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
ability of these small units to function as the principal pivots of soldierly allegiance and group identity. High levels of attrition made it difficult, if not impossible, to maintain much in the way of a continuity of personnel that was essential for the cultivation of morale, *esprit de corps*, and basic comradeship among a unit's soldiers. “You felt like you was in a family, you knew everybody so intimately,” Clinton Dattel fondly remembered what it was like to serve in the company-sized unit that was his home during the war. He made clear, however, that this idyllic feeling did not last long as casualties mounted. “But then there came a time when you’d look around and this buddy would be gone and you wouldn’t know where they went or what happened, and first thing you know you’d be with a group of strangers.”

Servicemen whose wounds required hospitalization were likely to be assigned, upon recovery, to units other than those in which they had previously served, thus eroding even further the ability of small units to perpetuate the human bonds in which their original members' collective loyalties had been grounded. This practice had especially dire consequences for National Guard units whose regional or local character would be diluted even further as a consequence of high attrition rates. And drafts of replacements could

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180 Dattel, Clinton, 1st Ammunition Train, 1st Division, “My Experience with the First Division,” (transcript of oral history interview conducted on 3 November 1986), 20, World War I Veterans' Survey Project, USAMHI.

181 Harold Woehl’s meditation on the plight of replacements illustrates how the impersonal nature of personnel reassignments in the AEF rendered any attempts to cultivate a sense of “family” or “community” in small units. “REPLACEMENTS’ got the dirty end of things in the Army,” Woehl proclaimed. “They are shoved from pillar to post and back again. They acquire buddies one day and have to leave them the next day. – never to see them again. Their A.P.O. number is changed before they receive mail from the folks at home. They are trained for one branch of the army, only to be sent as a ‘REPLACEMENT’ to another service branch.” See [Woehl, Harold, Second Lieutenant], Company H, 126th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, entry for 15 September 1918, “Corporal Tanglefoot’s Diary,” Vol. 2, James McDaniels Papers, 128th Infantry Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

182 As Edward Schaffer, a National Guardsman from Connecticut, put it when discussing the effects of combat casualties on his locally-raised unit, “to hear the number of your buddies [who] have passed on killed wounded or captured is a greater strain than experienced in the regular army that is made up of men from all parts of America.” See Schaffer, Edward A., Corporal, Company C, 102nd Infantry Regiment, 26th (“Yankee”) Division, untitled reminiscences, 28, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
compensate for losses of manpower, but, as Peter F. Owen noted in his story of the combat experience of one Marine infantry battalion, they could not restore the loss of morale, combat efficiency, and practical training that high casualties had eroded. “Too many of the new replacements, [2nd Battalion of the 6th Marine Regiment] was a world of strangers with whom the bonds of comradeship had not been formed.” Having lost the solid hard core of its trained “old timers,” a unit of this kind could rapidly become a “cold, brittle, impersonal machine” that lacked the capacity to imbue its constantly changing personnel with any degree of collective allegiance, much less to continue to operate at high levels of battlefield effectiveness. Its men, instead of comprising a tightly-knit community, would become “just numbers, changing constantly.”

In these circumstances, servicemen may have begun to identify larger units and formations – regiments but especially divisions – as alternative anchors of allegiance. Identification with a large, fairly abstract organization such as a division might not have provided soldiers with a focus of emotional intimacy and closely-knit personal relationships that loyalty to a smaller unit could furnish. But the very impersonality of an AEF division – a formation of over 28,000 officers and men – offered a modicum of institutional continuity that platoons and companies could not provide. As a pivot of self-identification, loyalty to a regiment or division – articulated through displays of organizational symbols and expressions of pride in the unit’s battle honors – might not have been as emotionally fulfilling as satisfaction soldiers derived from belonging to small “primary groups.” Still, the increasingly ephemeral nature of such groups, helps to account, at least in part, for the

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183 Owen, To the Limit, 158.

emergence of the division as a focus of unit allegiance and a pillar of identity among servicemen. At the same time, as suggested by the professions of unit pride cited above, it would be unwise to discount the extent to which the institutional setting of a regiment or a division could provide servicemen with genuine emotional gratification. That much is clear from the reverence in which many servicemen held the memories and material relics of their war service for decades after the Armistice.\textsuperscript{185}

The capacity of front-line service to function as a catalyst of a distinct soldierly identity went beyond unit loyalties. In his study of the dynamics of discipline and obedience in the French 5\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division during the Great War, Leonard Smith notes that the practical challenges combat presented to individual survival, coupled with the physical environment in which front-line troops operated, was highly conducive to the relaxation of the bonds of formal military discipline and to a reduction of the hierarchical distance between soldiers of different ranks. At the front, officers and enlisted men lived, worked, and fought in close physical proximity, and were exposed to similar dangers. Also, the privileges that commissioned officers enjoyed by virtue of their rank tended to diminish in importance and relevance the closer one moved to the firing line. Finally, the peculiar conditions of life in the battle zone placed a premium on experience and practical know-how of soldiering, rather than on rank, as the chief determinant of the social standing that a soldier enjoyed among his immediate peers. Taken together, these variables rendered difficult, if not impossible, to maintain under combat conditions the rigidly hierarchical structure of social relations that prevailed in the stateside training camps or in units stationed

\textsuperscript{185} See for example Mossman, Vernon C., Sergeant, Headquarters Company, 18\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 1\textsuperscript{st} Division, addendum to Army Service Experiences Questionnaire; Penkalski, Joe L., Private First Class, Battery A, 6\textsuperscript{th} Field Artillery Regiment, 1\textsuperscript{st} Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, both in World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
far behind the line. The slackening of the bonds of discipline and rank at the front encouraged the emergence of a form of sociability grounded in a set of “horizontal” connections that linked officers, NCOs, and lower ranks “who shared common hardships and dangers.” These “horizontal” links frequently augmented or even defined the officially-sanctioned “vertical” links rooted in formal institutional hierarchies, and served as the basis of “sociability” that cut across distinctions of rank and formal status.186

When superimposed on the American military experience of the Great War, Smith’s model of front-line “sociability” helps to illuminate the extent to which active service encouraged American servicemen to perceive themselves as members of a distinct community, a fellowship whose corporate identity was rooted in the experience of shared sufferings and hardships commonly endured in combat. Much of the evidence attesting to the existence of such a form of self-identification comes from sources written after the war. Yet again, the frequency with which allusions to this phenomenon crop up in memoirs and reminiscences, combined with references to the same discernible in soldiers’ letters, indicate that wartime comradeship between individuals serving in the same unit was not solely the product of post-war nostalgia or idealized sentimentality on the part of veterans. Writing his mother shortly after the cessation of hostilities, Everett Reams provided made clear how much he and his fellow soldiers valued the relationships forged under fire. “Those that went through the mill can get together and talk over things and believe each other, for they have all been through and seen and felt,” he noted. Referring to his comrades, Reams asserted that “I have been over the top with them and have laid under barrages with them, but have never seen the time when they were not ready to laugh, sing, and joke, even when men were

186 Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience*, 79 – 89.
dying.… Who wouldn’t be proud to have fought, starved and endured all kinds of hardships with men like these?”\textsuperscript{187}

What allowed Reams to claim – even if in idealized form – the existence of a deeply-felt communion among combat soldiers were the practical conditions that prevailed in the battle zone. Troops new to the front quickly realized that the conventions of military courtesy and discipline that had been drummed into them in the camps and cantonments were visibly relaxed. In close proximity to the enemy, “discipline is more humane,” Arthur Yensen noted. “[W]e don’t have to salute an officer unless we want to; and if we miss reveille we don’t get two weeks in the kitchen.”\textsuperscript{188} Soldiers new to the front found this realization liberating. “I must say I liked the change,” Horace Baker admitted with reference to his transfer from a depot division and assignment to a combat unit. It was especially refreshing “to notice the absence of the angrily barked command that we had been used to in the old outfit.”\textsuperscript{189} One reason why martinets and pedants were so scarce at the front was because exposure to enemy fire, Harold Pierce observed, revealed the true qualities of the men in his unit and prompted a dramatic change in his fellow soldiers’ attitudes toward rank and authority:

I notice that the loud, shouting, cursing, mean officer and non-rights are quiet. The stiffly military men are also in the background. Military courtesy means little at the front. Discipline cannot be maintained by threats of court-martial under fire. We respect the man that gives the order, his ability and courage and the regard he has for his men, not the bars on his shoulders. The officers recognize the difference also. We have found that our superiors bleed the same as we, pray in fright, they fear and run as fast as we. It is more dangerous to be an officer judging by the casualties. And they have found that the inferior private that

\textsuperscript{187} Reams, Everett, 320\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 80\textsuperscript{th} (“Blue Ridge”) Division, letter to mother, n. d. (possibly early 1919), Folder 40, Box 51, Culpeper County (Va.), Series VI, RG 66, LVA.

\textsuperscript{188} Yensen, Arthur E., Wagoner, 7\textsuperscript{th} Engineer Train, 5\textsuperscript{th} (“Red Diamond”) Division, entry for 6 November 1918, “War Log of an Underdog,” 243, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

\textsuperscript{189} Baker, Horace L., Private, Co. I, 153\textsuperscript{rd} Infantry Regiment, 39\textsuperscript{th} (“Delta”) Division/Company M, 128\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Regiment, 32\textsuperscript{nd} (“Red Arrow”) Division, Argonne Days, 8.
caused them the most difficulty in camp by his lack of discipline is now the bravest and most dependable soldier and the good soldier who saluted properly and said ‘Yes Sir’ in the best military manner may now be very hard to get out of a dugout and very scarce when an attack is to take place. ¹⁹⁰

Officers and NCOs foolish enough to insist on adherence to “garrison” standards of discipline and deportment at the front risked being cut down to size in no uncertain terms by combat troops. During its march toward the Rhine in late fall of 1918, the commanding officer of one battle-hardened battalion of field artillery ran afoul of a corps commander “who probably had never before seen troops in a combat zone,” but who had the temerity to berate the artilleryman for the shabby appearance of his men, horses, and guns. “‘Major,’ said the general, ‘This outfit is the eyesore of the American Army.’ ‘Yes, sir,’ responded [the battalion commander], ‘It has been the eyesore of the German Army for the last eight months, sir.’ The general climbed back into his car and left without another word.”¹⁹¹ The message could not be more clear: among combat troops, practical dictates of military efficiency and practical utility would always take precedence over the dictates of spit-and-polish. Paul Ostertage, a gunner, learned that lesson even before his unit was committed to battle. After interacting with experienced combat veterans who had been assigned to train his artillery battery, he concluded that “[t]here is a marked difference between the officers and men who have been at the front and our outfits. They know very little close order drill on which we wasted so many months but they do know their game – artillery.”¹⁹²


¹⁹¹ Clark, John D., Second Lieutenant, Battery C, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, “My War,” 37, John D. Clark Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

¹⁹² Ostertage, Paul R., Sergeant, Battery D, 304th Field Artillery Regiment, 77th Division, letter to unidentified recipient, 24 May 1918, Folder 1, Paul R. Ostertage Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
Combat troops also took it for granted that the degree of respect and esteem that soldiers of inferior rank accorded to their superiors should depend on such variables as length of experience at the front and a proven record of professional competence under fire, rather than the artificial claims of deference based on seniority of rank. Kenneth Baker had nothing but contempt for a greenhorn second lieutenant who had been assigned to his company and who could not resist the temptation to assert the prerogatives of his rank.

“[T]he captain told me to deliver Lt. So-and-So to the company headquarters] at once.

I…said to the Lieutenant ‘This way,’ and he said ‘Sir’ in a way to let me know I was to say ‘Sir’ whenever I addressed him.” But the walk to the company’s forward position afforded Baker an opportunity to humble the upstart officer by demonstrating the irrelevance of rank as a determinant of individual survival and indicator of a man’s worth as a combat soldier.

As Baker and his charge approached the firing line,

a German shell came over and landed a short distance away. I heard it come and automatically made a slight duck, as you invariably did when shells came over. It landed a safe distance away and the lieutenant said, ‘Why did you duck?’ and I said ‘just from habit, some explode closer, and within range of their shrapnel.’ The lieutenant asked how I knew it was shrapnel, and I said most of the shells sent over by the Germans on this front at this time were shrapnel because it was more or less open fighting and they were interested in killing infantrymen or wounding them. He then asked how I knew it was a German 77 [mm round] and shrapnel, and I said, ‘by the sound,’ and didn’t elaborate any further. I could have said you will learn fast enough, if you live long enough, but then if I had said all of that I would have had to end with a ‘Sir’ and I had just about ran out of ‘Sirs’ for this guy. We soon arrived at ‘I’ Company and turned the lieutenant over to the buck private on the board who told the lieutenant that the ‘Cap’ would probably be in in a few minutes if he made it at all. He didn’t finish with a ‘Sir’ and the lieutenant didn’t say a word. He was catching on it might be better to have these fellows for friends, with so many bullets flying around.193

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193 Baker, Kenneth G., 107th Field Signal Battalion, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, “Oatmeal and Coffee,” (typescript memoir), 29, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. As another soldier implied, officers who continued to insist on “pulling rank” at the front did so at their own risk. Earle Poorbaugh claimed to “have heard dozens of men threaten to kill” an exceptionally unpopular first lieutenant “if they ever got him into combat.” Poorbaugh, Earl R., Sergeant, Company L, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI. See also Druce, Charles T., Private First Class, Company C, 130th Machine Gun Battalion, 35th Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
The relaxed discipline characteristic of units serving at or near the front had two effects. First, it certainly presented soldiers with numerous opportunities to thumb their noses military authority without fear of incurring formal retaliation or punishment. The leeway that officers gave their men in this regard grew in proportion to a unit’s proximity to battle. Having endured ten exhausting days under fire, the soldiers of Gerald Gilbert’s unit felt few inhibitions in openly cursing their cowardly officers. While marching back from the front to their rest billets “[e]verybody was grumbling and it became louder as each hour went by. Threats were loudly expressed against the officers and they were invited to come back and get their deserts.” Although the remarks were perfectly audible to the company commander, the officer recognized the futility of trying to put an end to this flagrant act of insubordination. “Capt[ain]. Ross stood by us, but he could do nothing alone.”

But flexible notions of discipline entertained by combat troops also promoted a corporate identity based on “horizontal” links of sociability that cut across distinctions of rank and encouraged servicemen to think of themselves as members of a community bound by a shared experience of the ordeal of battle. At bottom, combat reduced all soldiers, irrespective of their rank, to the lowest of common denominators, an equality grounded in the simple fact “that bullets and shells are no respecters of persons. Officers are just as liable to be hit as were private soldiers, and this tended to eliminate any distinction between officers and men.” Moreover, given the dangers that combat troops faced at the front, officers could not rely on threats of disciplinary action to keep their subordinates in line.

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194 Gilbert, Gerald F., 313th Ambulance Company, 304th Sanitary Train, 79th (“Liberty”) Division, entry for 2 October 1918, “History of My Experiences in the Army during World War I” (typescript diary), 72 – 73, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

195 Murphy, Paul, Corporal, Company H, 309th Infantry Regiment, 78th (“Lightning”) Division, “An Account of My Personal Experience in World War I” (typescript memoirs, 1 April 1963), 30, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
“Who would not rather be in jail than at the front[?]” Harold Pierce wondered. Imprisonment, he thought, “would be heaven compared to the front. Why we remain is a mystery, certainly not because we fear the officers who are as scared and as anxious to get away as we [are]…What officers can decently punish a man who has been in a shell hole with him under fire[?] He and the private are buddies, no caste now, the bullets see no difference and the shell does not inquire.”

Aside from diminishing the importance of formal discipline and deportment, sustained interaction under combat conditions also generated genuine sentiments of mutual respect and admiration between soldiers of different ranks. This sentiment, in turn, contributed to the notion that front-line troops comprised a self-contained community bound by ties other than the formal prescriptions of discipline and deference due to rank. The reception that John Clark’s unit of combat veterans accorded to a traveling theatrical performed by the troops of another division exemplified the loyalty that brave, competent, and fair-minded officers could inspire in their troops. Among the acts performed by the traveling troupe was a ditty that cast aspersions on the courage of commissioned officers. To the consternation of the performers – all members of a National Army (Draft) division – their audience of Regular Army soldiers welcomed the piece with a chilly silence followed by a round of hisses that continued until the performance came to an abrupt end. “The 82nd division men could not comprehend what had happened,” Clark recalled. “Everywhere else they had performed, the…verse dealing with officers had been most enthusiastically applauded. The trouble was that they had not performed before a Regular Army outfit,

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where the men and the officers held each other in mutual respect… I thought that the reception our men gave to the last verse of the song was the greatest compliment our officers could ever wish for.”

The self-identification of combat veterans as members of a unique front-line community governed by its own standards grew in proportion to their interaction with outsiders – soldiers whose service was confined to the areas behind the front or, worse yet, had never crossed the Atlantic in the first place. Assigned to an officer-training course after the Armistice, James Leach and a number of front-line veterans openly ridiculed the inexperienced instructors who presumed to teach grizzled warriors the intricacies of battlefield tactics. “Practically every man at the school had either just come from the front line, or had seen some fighting, and had had practical experience in taking machine gun nests, while not a single one of the instructors at the school had ever heard a big gun fire or a German bullet whistle past his head.” Leach recalled. “Hence the old and antiquated methods of taking a machine gun nest, methods which were never used, that they taught direct from the book, and not in the light of experience, were vastly amusing to us, and the replies of the instructor to questions of some of the class brought forth peals of laughter from the men who knew better.”

For the same reason, newly commissioned junior officers – “ninety-day wonders,” as the were commonly known – who had been posted to combat units after the Armistice to replace platoon and company commanders who had won their soldiers’ respect on the battlefield could expect little by way of welcome. In rationalizing the undisguised contempt they felt for the newcomers in their midst, the men

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197 Clark, John D., Second Lieutenant, Battery C, 15th Field Artillery Regiment, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, “My War,” 42, John D. Clark Papers, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

198 Leach, James A., First Lieutenant, Company M, 11th Infantry Regiment, 5th (“Red Diamond”) Division, “War Record” (typescript memoir), 22, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
of one infantry company made it clear that officers unfamiliar with the trials of combat were unworthy of their respect. “We now feel like old timers and look down upon the brand new officers…who have never experienced that ‘gone’ feeling in the insides when the [artillery shells] come loafing over and the machine gun bullets are whipping the ground.”

Encounters with soldiers who sat out the war in the United States affirmed combatants in the belief that front-line experience had endowed them with the attributes of a distinct community whose members subscribed to their own standards of behavior and discipline. After returning to the United States with a wound in December 1918, Edward Davies and his fellow convalescents were given a stern lecture on the importance of discipline by an officer who had never been to France and who spent the entire war on training duty in stateside camps. “Imagine the poor nut,” Davies recalled. “We knew more about discipline then he ever thought of.” He comforted himself with the thought that “we can show these powderpuff soldiers what real discipline is.” While sightseeing Paris with a friend some time after the Armistice, Percy Robert recalled, he had had the misfortune of running into an officer who had obviously spent most of the war on the western shore of the Atlantic. “He stopped us and asked us if we didn’t recognize an officer when we saw one. We said yes and saluted. He responded that the trouble with the A.E.F. soldiers is they

199 Day, Charles M., First Lieutenant, Company B, 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd (“All American”) Division, “B’ Company History from October 31st to Date (April 1st, 1919), 1, in file of John Frye, Donor, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.

never salute. While we were at the Front or [with the Army of Occupation] in Germany, we were never required to salute.”

In spite of the exclusivity that was its hallmark, the combatant community did dispose of mechanisms that facilitated the incorporation and socialization of new members. By late summer and early autumn of 1918, combat divisions that had sustained severe casualties during the previous weeks’ fighting were forced to absorb thousands of replacements. Many of the newcomers had been inducted into the armed forces only a few months or weeks previously, and were shockingly deficient in training. The batch of replacements that a regiment of the 32nd Division received in the middle of September exemplified what appeared to have been a widespread trend. “Most of these replacements were drafted in June 1918 – some were inducted as late as July 1918,” one “old timer” recalled. “They had been ‘poured’ into uniform and sent to training camps. At training camps they were given the necessary ‘shots’ and taught military courtesy (and little else). The rest of their brief army service was spent in the traveling which brought them into an A.E.F. replacement camp about September 1st.” The training that many of the replacements had received prior to their deployment to the Western Front had been so abbreviated that it barely sufficed to acquaint them with such basic skills as the use and maintenance of their rifles or imbue them with a knowledge of the simplest terms of command.

201 Roberts, Percy R., Private, Company E, 2nd Supply Train, 2nd (“Indianhead”) Division, untitled reminiscences, 7, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.


The initial reception that the nucleus of a unit’s combat veterans accorded to replacements could, at times, be chilly, with some of the experienced men never losing entirely the mistrust and contempt they felt for the newcomers. Of the “forty or fifty” draftees that Leslie Langille’s artillery battery received after the Champagne Offensive, some “later developed into real soldiers,” but many others “never got over the cold they developed when they got caught in the draft.” William Triplet was equally unimpressed with the “doleful dregs of the draft” that had been sent to his company to compensate for the crippling losses it had sustained in the opening phase of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. “These poor devils had been in the army only six weeks before they were herded above a transport and sent off to the war,” he remembered with a mixture of pity and contempt. “By the mournful, hang-dog look of them, none of them wanted to be here…They had never fired a weapon. And here they were in the front line with bayonets fixed.”

Once they had overcome their initial feelings of suspicion toward the novices in their midst, however, the “old salts” who comprised the backbone of the unit would frequently do their best to initiate the newcomers into their community. This process usually assumed the form of practical training intended to remedy the greenhorns’ ignorance of the basics of battlefield survival and soldiering skills. In Harold Woehl’s infantry company, the lower ranks took the initiative in providing their replacements with a crash course in

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marksmanship, small-unit tactics, gas drill, and the use of grenades. Older soldiers also did their best to convey to the newcomers practical hints on battlefield survival, advising them “on how to protect themselves and how to avoid being too bold and taking unnecessary chances.”

Discernible behind such prosaically practical training, however, was an attitude of paternal concern and solicitude that many of the “old timers” adopted in their dealings with their new charges. Herbert McHenry, himself a replacement who had been assigned to a combat-seasoned unit, was moved by the “kindly and considerate nature” of the treatment that the veterans extended toward the novices. The experienced officers and men, he claimed, did their best “to teach us to be real soldiers.” They did so in a way that went beyond imparting practical knowledge to new recruits. Instead, it also impressed the newcomers with the importance of the human relationships that cemented a unit’s morale, determined its combat effectiveness, and influenced its members’ chances of survival. It was not surprising therefore, that McHenry resorted to a familial metaphor when describing the relations between old soldiers and replacements in his unit. “The enlisted men taught us as though they were our elder brothers preparing us for a mighty task, and our officers were like fathers to sons in their deportment toward us. As they told us of the dangers of battle, and how to meet them, at times I thought I could detect a touch of pathos in their voices as

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207 Lauer, Edward T., Private First Class, Sanitary Detachment, 121st Artillery Regiment, 32nd (“Red Arrow”) Division, Army Service Experiences Questionnaire, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.
they described to us the deadly dangers ahead of us.”  

For their own part, older soldiers took care to smooth the assimilation of newcomers into the unit by institutionalizing the paternal or filial relationships they had developed with the replacements. “Great care was taken that ‘Buddies’ (both among the old-timers and the replacements) should always be in the same platoon,” Harold Woehl remembered. The principal purpose of this expedient was to ensure that “each platoon had experienced combat veterans to counsel and advise the untrained replacements in battle.” But while this arrangement served a practical end above all other considerations, it also functioned as a method for incorporating new recruits into the tightly-knit fabric of “horizontal” relationships that flourished among soldiers of various ranks under combat conditions and that served as one of the most important pillars of a distinct soldierly identity grounded in the commonly shared experience of front-line service.

V. Conclusion

Recalling his experiences in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, AEF veteran Thurmond Baccus described battle as an alien environment that appeared to exist within a moral order of its own, a milieu where “love of thy neighbor is forgotten, [and] a man stands before his world his true self – stripped of the falsities of a sheltered civilization.” Historians of the American experience of the Great War have consistently downplayed the importance of this

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208 McHenry, Herbert L., Private, Machine Gun Company, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, “As a Private Saw It: My Memories of the First Division, World War I” (typescript memoir), 29, World War I Veterans’ Survey Project, USAMHI.


210 Baccus, Thurmond J., Private First Class, Company C, 307th Field Signal Battalion, 82nd (“All American”) Division, typescript reminiscences, n. p., World War I Veterans’ Survey, USAMHI.
environment in shaping the attitudes and worldviews of the 1.3 million Doughboys who served on the Western Front. These scholars point to such factors as the brevity of active American participation in the war, the relatively light losses sustained by the AEF in combat, and the mobile character of the operations in which it participated, as evidence that encounters with modern warfare left only a faint imprint on the collective mindset of American servicemen. In terms of its utility as an analytical category capable of shedding light on the American experience of the First World War as a whole, these historians contend, combat must always lag behind such historiographical contexts the reformist impulse of the Progressive Era; the pervasive racial and ethnic tensions that plagued American society in the early twentieth century; the political education of servicemen; the sexual attitudes of soldiers; and Americans’ encounters with foreign cultures.

What impact, then, did combat have on the identities of AEF veterans? Any attempt to answer this question poses serious epistemological problems. In order to fully assess the impact of combat experience on Doughboy identity, it would be necessary to compare that experience with the impact of the factors stressed by other scholars. Such a comparison, however, presents methodological challenges whose scope transcend the boundaries of this study. Nevertheless, the evidence presented here indicates that historians would do well to reconsider their tendency to marginalize the importance of combat as an important formative influence on the collective mentality of Doughboys.

Far from being an inconsequential part of the American military experience of the Great War, front-line service had an enormous impact on the individual and collective psyches of AEF veterans, powerfully influencing their relationships with each other and with the home front. To be sure, Doughboys never became completely alienated from the families, friends, and communities they had left behind in the United States. The importance
servicemen attached to maintaining a lively correspondence with their loved ones back home makes that unmistakably clear. But the limitations inherent in this form of communication ensured that the formidable physical distance separating Doughboys serving in France from the “home folks” would be exacerbated even further by the attitudinal distance that rapidly grew between those who had remained “over here” and those who served and fought “over there.” Though eager to convey their experiences of front-line service to their loved ones, servicemen found modern that their efforts to describe the essence of modern warfare could never render full justice to the intensity, complexity, and viciousness of what they had witnessed in battle. Censorship – both formal and self-imposed – detracted even further from their ability to do so. Finally, the misconceptions that the “home folks” continued to profess with respect to the nature of armed conflict on the Western Front – this in spite of the sustained attempts of servicemen to correct them – indicated that the American home front was unable, or perhaps even unwilling, to understand and appreciate the enormity of the sacrifices and sufferings that Doughboys were undergoing on its behalf.

The home front’s inability to do so could only broaden the rift between the two spheres of the American war effort, and reinforce the tendency of soldiers to identify themselves as members of a community that stood apart from the mainstream of America’s civil society. Participation in combat reinforced such convictions by furnishing servicemen with a corpus of shared experiences conducive to the growth of “horizontal” links of sociability that cut across distinctions of formal rank. In addition, it also stimulated a strong sense of corporate identity based on pride in the collective accomplishments of specific regiments and divisions, entities that, until their deployment to Europe, had not been able to engage the allegiances of soldiers by virtue of the abstract role they had played in the daily life of servicemen in the stateside training camps. The high attrition rates that small units
suffered as a consequence of prolonged sojourns at the front, however, enhanced the degree of loyalty and self-identification that servicemen increasingly invested into their association with larger, but more permanent organizations. Soldiers boasted about the combat records of their parent units, jealously defended them from slights voiced by “outsiders,” complained when the collective recognition they believed to be their due was not forthcoming, and venerated the distinctive corporate symbols individual units had adopted to foster group pride and corporate identity. In effect, the rift of incomprehension that had opened between the home front and the fighting front encouraged the latter to turn inward – to look within the soldierly community they inhabited in wartime – in search of a set of meaningful, emotionally fulfilling identities whose intensity matched, and at times no doubt exceeded, whatever allegiance servicemen felt they owed to their parent society.
Conclusion

For the Doughboys who survived it, battle was hardly the final chapter of their war service. Before they returned home, thousands of soldiers underwent a range of additional shared experiences, all of which had the potential to influence the way they identified themselves in relation to each other, their parent society, and the wider world. After the Armistice, over 200,000 American troops marched into the Rhineland, where they established a zone of occupation and helped ensure Germany’s compliance with the terms of the ceasefire. Most left by the middle of 1919, leaving behind only a token force that remained in the region until 1923. In spite of its brevity, occupation duty provided Doughboys with numerous opportunities for interaction with the local German populace on a variety of levels. These ranged from formal dealings between the occupation authorities and German civic leaders, to the emotionally (and at times physically) intimate relationships many servicemen established with German civilians. Of the Doughboys who remained in France, approximately 1.6 million “participated in some way” in the educational programs that GHQ-AEF established in an attempt to counteract its troops’ frustration with the delays inherent in shipping them home. This educational system, its theoretical underpinnings rooted in Progressive pedagogical approaches, represented yet another effort on the part of reform-minded military leaders and their civilian allies to expose soldiers to the rhetoric of

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“uplift” and intellectual and civic betterment. At the same time, the AEF’s leadership instituted a series of leaves and recreation programs that allowed servicemen to travel through most of Western Europe and sample the customs and culture of the Old World.

There can be no doubt that these experiences must have left a visible imprint on Doughboys’ collective mentalities and identities. Nevertheless, there is a good reason for concluding this study with combat. This is because the post-Armistice peregrinations of Doughboys are tangential, both chronologically and thematically, to the story told here. Though they may be thought as a continuation – if not a culmination – of that story, it is also possible to see them in a different light, namely, as the collective departure point of a new narrative. This new story focuses on Doughboys’ efforts to come to terms with their war experience beginning with their post-Armistice activities in Europe. It continues with their return to the United States, and proceeds to their demobilization and return to civilian lives. From there, it moves on to former soldiers’ efforts to reintegrate into the American mainstream. The story culminates with the attempts ex-servicemen made as individuals and as members of veterans’ organizations to interpret and commemorate the meaning of their war experience. So important is this story that it requires a study of its own, one that fuses all these disparate thematic strands into a seamless analysis.


3 Meigs, Optimism at Armageddon, ch. 3.

4 While most of these subjects have received specialized attention from scholars, a general synthesis of American veterans’ responses to the aftermath of the war has yet to be written. On demobilization, see Keene, Doughboys, chap. 7. For veterans’ political activism in the interwar period, see Stephen R. Ortiz, “The ‘New Deal’ for Veterans: The Economy Act, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Origins of New Deal Dissent,” JMH 70 (April 2006), 415 – 438. See also William P. Dillingham, Federal Aid to Veterans, 1917 – 1941 (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1952). The emergence of veterans’ organizations is the subject, among others, of William Pencak, For God and Country: The American Legion, 1919 – 1941 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989); Thomas A. Rumer, The American Legion: An Official History, 1919 – 1989
In this particular study, its main focus confined to the experience of the Great War itself, I have argued that for American servicemen, participation in that conflict implied a drastic break with the foci of allegiance that had shaped their identities prior to 1917. Doughboys entered the war as the products of an intensely parochial society. Though powerful centripetal and integrative forces had been refashioning America’s socio-cultural, political, and economic landscape for decades, the local community remained the principal pivot of identity for ordinary Americans. The locality commanded an individuals’ emotional loyalty, served as the arbiter of cultural tastes, and dictated social behavior and moral norms. By the time the war ended, Doughboys had developed a collective identity grounded in two sources. The first revolved around the shared experience of military service spanning a spectrum that ranged from the emergence of a soldierly subculture in the training camps to the ordeal of combat. Second, as a direct consequence of the discomforts, sufferings, and hardships inseparable from those experiences, soldiers embraced a worldview that highlighted the existence of fundamental differences in the attitudes, mentalities, and values professed by Doughboys on the one hand and by the American home front on the other. For soldiers deployed to the European theater of operations, the home front in general became a “critical counter-norm,” a quintessence of the complacency, selfishness, and moral

hypocrisy servicemen believed their shared experience of common suffering had allowed
them to transcend.  

Doughboys’ view of the home front had a significant qualification. In theory, it made
the important distinction between the specific communities upon which soldiers depended
for moral and material support, and the abstract concept of a larger national community the
war had allegedly rendered vulnerable to subversion by a host of parasitic social elements.
Yet, this study has also argued that that division may have reflected the frustrations soldiers
increasingly felt with their own “home folks,” especially with respect to the inability or
unwillingness of the latter to appreciate the sacrifices of soldiers on the battle front.
Servicemen also resented what they perceived as civilians’ temerity in claiming that the home
front and fighting front were contributing equally to victory. Soldiers’ tendency to bifurcate
the home front into two distinct spheres thus functioned as a means of allowing Doughboys
to divert their muted resentment of their families and communities toward a more
convenient target, namely, the shadowy coalition of slackers, profiteers, corrupt politicians,
and duplicitous social reformers who had allegedly joined forces to exploit soldiers’ sacrifices
for their own gain. Viewed in this light, the sustained attack a substantial proportion of
Doughboys launched against the YMCA during and after the war testified to their collective
determination to find an outlet for the accumulated grievances they harbored toward the
home front as a whole.

The attitudes and worldviews that underpinned the Doughboy identity did not
always display uniformity or consistency. In this respect, they were no different from the

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5 For the concept of a “critical counter-norm” as a pillar of group identity, see Sarah Maza, _The Myth of
the French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary, 1750 – 1850_ (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London:
mentality of any other large group whose sense of corporate identity, instead of being rooted in a systematic and codified body of texts or formal statements of collective belief, is the sum total of the jumble of beliefs, experiences, values, and assumptions professed by individual members of the cohort. Its inchoate nature practically ensured that, in keeping with the worldviews professed by other distinct socio-cultural and professional groups in history, this identity would be riddled with “internal contradictions, extremist and moderate gradations, and differences among adherents and interpreters.” Not all of its tenets were known to, or accepted by, all Doughboys; nor is there any doubt that many servicemen would have been hard put to recognize this hodgepodge of shared convictions, prejudices, attitudes, and experiences as a “worldview” in the first place. Nevertheless, as this study has demonstrated, enough American soldiers and Marines of the Great War subscribed to the central precepts of this worldview to qualify it as the foundation of a clearly discernible collective identity.

Doughboys’ consciousness of belonging to a community that defined itself in contrast to the home front is the principal point of intersection between their own war experience and that of their European allies and enemies. As Michael Neiberg has noted, historians have become so adept at casting the First World War as the ultimate expression of militant nationalism that the national framework has naturally assumed pride of place among

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7 See, for example, Bendersky, The “Jewish Threat,” ch. 1, esp. 1 – 2.
analytical approaches to the conflict.⁸ The historiography the American experience of the Great War is a case in point. Scholars active in the field have consistently sought to interpret the war experience of Doughboys against the background of the broader patterns of the national development of the United States in the early twentieth century. It goes without saying that such attempts at contextualization are not only necessary but crucial to a full understanding of that experience. In their emphasis on situating events on the battlefield within a larger analytical framework, they are also fully in keeping with the best traditions of the “new military history.”⁹

Yet, this “nation-based” approach also presents a significant danger, one grounded in its tendency to overstress the general context at the expense of the experience it is supposed to frame. The dominance that the framework of Progressivism enjoys over the literature on America’s Great War experience is a case in point. Simply put, historians’ focus on the integrative legacies of the conflict have made little allowance for the possibility that the experience of military service in the Progressive Era could create conditions in which Doughboys would be identify themselves in accordance with definitions that did not always conform to the outlines of national allegiance.

Seen from this angle, the Doughboy identity was both more and less than the overarching national identity Progressive reformers sought implant in the minds of American soldiers. On the one hand, Doughboys invested much of their emotional

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⁸ Neiberg, “Toward a Transnational History of World War I.”

allegiance into relatively small, formal and informal communities that usually corresponded to the organizational units of the Army. On the other hand, their sense of distinctiveness from the home front, combined with the multifaceted soldierly subculture in which they partook, suggests that Doughboys formed a part of a much larger, transnational community of combatants representing all the belligerent nations whose armies fought in the Western Front. This last assertion must necessarily remain purely hypothetical until its accuracy is tested by means of a rigorous comparative analysis of the American, French, British and German experiences of the Western Front. Such an ambitious goal transcends the analytical limits of the present study. Nonetheless, it also illuminates the utility of inquiries such as this one as the basis for further explorations of the complex legacy the Great War bequeathed to its participants on both sides of the Atlantic.
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Veterans’ History Project


Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Missouri

Oral History Project (Interviews online at http://www.trumanlibrary.gov/oralhist).

Ted Marks interview
J. R. Fuchs interview

Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill


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Liberty Memorial Museum and Archives, Kansas City, Missouri

*American Letters and Diary Entries, World War One 1917 – 1919* (Collection online at [http://www.libertymemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEnt.pdf](http://www.libertymemorialmuseum.org/FileUploads/AmericanLettersandDiaryEnt.pdf)).

John L. Barkley  
John J. Bolin  
Arthur Bundy  
James E. Henschel  
James K. B. Hockaday  
Frank C. Lane  
Russel R. Peed  
Morris Pigman  
Dean Robertson  
Walter G. Shaw  
William Shoemaker  
Charles S. Stevenson  
Willar Thompson  
Joe S. Turner

**Miscellaneous Collections**


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*Current Opinion*  
*Forum*  
*The Literary Digest*  
*National Geographic*  
*The New Republic*  
*The News and Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.)  
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Theses, Dissertations and Unpublished Articles


Internet Resources


Biography

Sebastian Hubert Lukasik received his Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees in History from Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, in 1998 and 2000, respectively. In August 2002, he enrolled in the graduate program in History at Duke University, where he specialized in military history, American history, and German history. His dissertation research has been funded with fellowships and grants from the Graduate School and the Department of History at Duke University, the U. S. Army Military History Institute, and the George C. Marshall/Baruch Family Foundations. He has taught courses in military history and world history at Duke University and at the North Carolina State University in Raleigh. His post-dissertation plans include teaching history, learning to play the cello, acquiring a pet, and broadening his acquaintance with the languages and wines of France, Spain, and Italy.