

Volume I, Chapter 3

Hell, Heaven, or Hoboken by Christmas

The service and sacrifice of the American soldier in
World War I

Michael Schafer



The Regular Army of the United States of America numbered approximately 137,000 soldiers when Congress approved President Woodrow Wilson's request for a War Declaration on April 2, 1917 (Ayres 1919). By Armistice Day on November 11, 1918, a mere nineteen months later, the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) exceeded 2,000,000 soldiers overseas, 1,390,000 of which fought valiantly in France along the Western Front (Ibid.). That the AEF was successful mobilizing such a fighting force of this magnitude in such short order raises a number of questions. Notably among them are: How did the United States accomplish the mobilization of 4,000,000 soldiers? What training could an AEF soldier expect to receive at home and abroad in preparation for war? How did the received training influence the mindset and psyche of the American soldier in battle? Through the lens of 80th Division soldiers, this chapter provides background on the mobilization and training of the AEF at home and abroad, as well as examining how that training influenced the psychological journey of American soldiers on the Western Front. Through the historical records of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) and soldiers' letters and personal memoirs, evidence of the shared sacrifice of the AEF demonstrated wide-sweeping emotions that accompanied the anticipation of battle, the exhaustion of modern warfare, and the pursuit of ultimate victory during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

As World War I reached its ultimate conclusion, General John J. Pershing, Commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) and the first Chairman of the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) promised that "time will not dim the glory of their deeds" (American Battle Monuments Commission 1938). Pershing's words acknowledge the heroic sacrifice of the AEF and the importance of preserving its deeds as part of the American memory. States, too, made valiant efforts to document the contributions of Americans in the "Great War." On January 7, 1919, Virginia Governor Westmoreland Davis created the Virginia War History Commission (VWHC) to record the history of Virginia's military, economic and political participation in World War I ("Historical Information"). Included in these records are thousands of letters written by AEF soldiers documenting their sacrifice. Newton B. Ancarrow, a resident of Richmond, Virginia and a Lieutenant in the 80th Infantry Division of the AEF, wrote frequently to his mother to express the myriad emotions he experienced in France. Other selected letters from the VWHC as well as memoirs of individual soldiers combine to create an amalgam of the soldier's experience from recruitment to Armistice Day that serves as the primary focus of this chapter.

The Crisis of 1917

At 8:35 in the evening on April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson appeared before a joint session of Congress to call for a formal declaration of war against Germany. The chamber burst into applause as the President, in articulating his case, stated, “The world must be made safe for democracy” (Wilson 1917). Included amongst the President’s numerous recommendations was the “immediate addition” of 500,000 men via the draft and the “organization and mobilization of all the material resources of the country to supply the materials of war” (*Ibid.*).

While Wilson’s address symbolized a landmark shift in American attitudes toward military intervention in European affairs, plans for American intervention were already in motion. Six weeks earlier, the War Department had vetted a plan for creating a national army of four million men through conscription and delivered it to the President urging his approval (Ayres 1919). It was clear to all in the War Department that should Congress pass the war declaration, they had a crisis on their hands; the United States was ill-suited for a war of this magnitude. Prior to April 1917, popular opinion opposed any American involvement “over there.” The regular army numbered fewer than 138,000, with 181,000



On April 2, 1917 President Woodrow Wilson call on Congress to declare war against Germany. “President Calls for War Declaration,” New York Times, April 3, 1917.

additional men in the National Guard, and was not suitably equipped or organized to engage successfully in World War I (*Ibid.*). The great task of placing on the front a sufficiently strong American army as quickly as possible fell upon the shoulders of Major General John J. Pershing, then appointed to command the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) (ABMC 1938, Ayres 1919). The monumental scale of the crisis would not be fully articulated until Pershing cabled the War Department from France in early July 1917 requesting 1,000,000 men by May 1918 and the contemplation of 3,000,000 men by 1919 (*Ibid.*).

The immediacy of such demands raises two fundamentally important questions that drive this chapter: First, how was the United States to create a well-trained four-million man fighting force so quickly? Second, how would this preparation influence the sense of shared sacrifice among American soldiers throughout the World War?

Activity: Analyzing Primary Sources

Students will read the New York Times coverage of President Woodrow Wilson's address to Congress on April 2, 1917. Students will analyze the New York Times coverage using a document analysis tool called SOAPStone.

Guiding Questions

1. Was the media's (New York Times) coverage of Wilson's address favorable or unfavorable?

2. What was the significance of Wilson's request for a war declaration?

Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to:

1. analyze a primary source.
2. interpret the significance of a primary source.

Teacher Planning

Time Required

30 minutes

Materials Needed

New York Times article "President Calls for War Declaration, Stronger Navy, New Army of 500,000 Men, Full Co-operation with Germany's Foes"

SOAPStone Source Analysis Sheet



Tap or click the icon to view the document.

Activity

1. Begin the activity by engaging the class with a brief class discussion about isolationism. Prompt students with the following question: What justifications are necessary for American involvement in foreign wars?

2. Direct students to read the [New York Times's coverage](#) of President Wilson's address to Congress.
3. Review each component of the SOAPSTone organizer with students.
4. Direct students to complete the SOAPSTone graphic organizer.
5. Direct students to record written responses to the following questions:
 - a. Was the media's coverage of Wilson's address favorable or unfavorable?
 - b. What was the significance of Wilson's request for a war declaration?
6. After students analyze the primary source, debrief the class, ultimately returning to the opening discussion: What justifications are necessary for American involvement in foreign wars?

Assessment

The following questions could be used to gauge student understanding of the primary source:

1. Do you think the media supported President Wilson's address? How do you know? What evidence leads you to that conclusion?

2. What reasons does President Wilson offer to justify American involvement in Europe? Are his reasons valid?
3. What is the significance of Woodrow Wilson's request for a Congressional declaration of war?

Assess students' understanding by monitoring their completion of the worksheet and reviewing their SOAPSTone and discussion responses.

Modifications

The New York Times coverage is quite long. For the purposes of time, you may wish to excerpt the coverage. Relevant subsections include: "Unreservedly With the Allies," "A Roar Answers No "Submission," "A World 'Safe for Democracy'"

Alternatively, you can place students in small groups (2-3 students per group) and have the students analyze a specific subsection of the coverage.

Training at Home and Abroad

The average American soldier received six months of training domestically and two months of training abroad before entering the battle line. This was generally followed by one month of continued preparation in a quiet sector of the battle line before being moved into an active sector. Individual experiences of the 1,390,000 men who fought in France and the 2,086,000 men who were shipped overseas, however, varied immensely. Soldiers drafted among the first million generally received two months more training, on average, than those drafted amongst the second million (Ayres 1919).

Although the duration of training received by an individual soldier was inconsistent, consistent application of training methods was necessary to mobilize an effective and unified fighting force. Before delving into the specific training of soldiers, it is important to acknowledge several significant administrative obstacles, including leadership and infrastructure, facing the War Department at the outset.

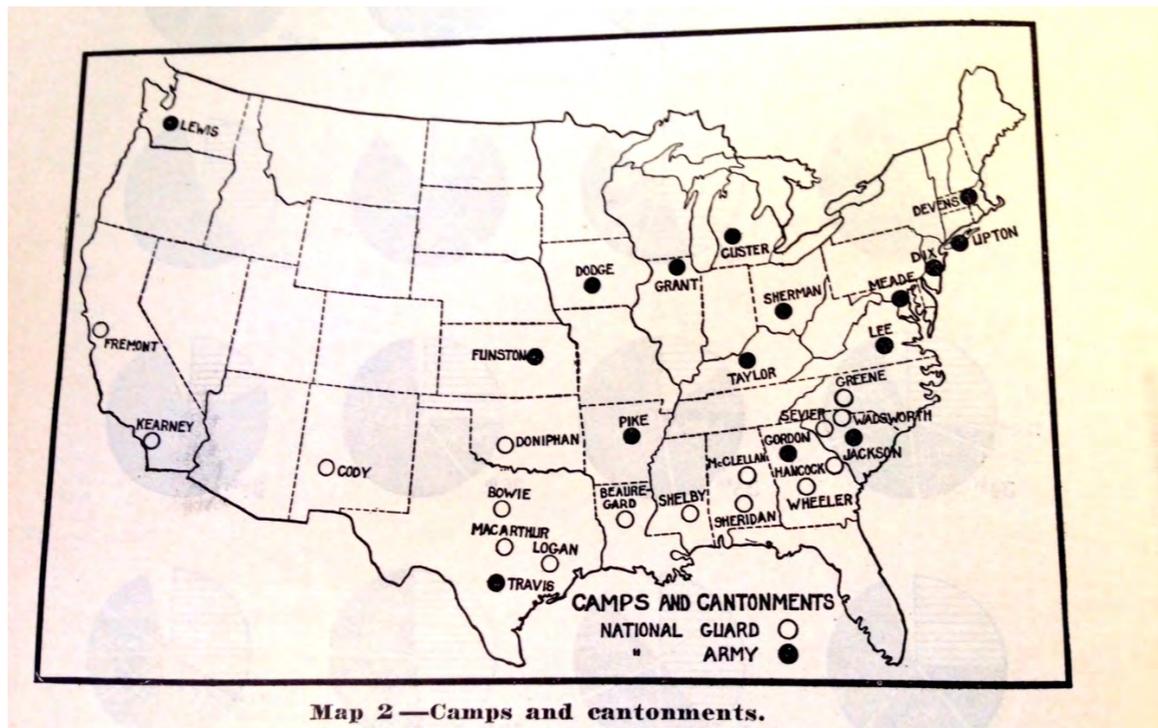
First, principles of military organization within the AEF called for one officer for every twenty soldiers. Thus, in order to lead an army of 4,000,000 soldiers, 200,000 officers were necessary. At

the time of the U.S. Declaration of War, the Regular Army had 6,000 officers. Inclusive of National Guard units, the AEF had a total of 20,000 officers at its disposal upon entering the war (*Ibid.*). This deficit required the War Department to train an additional 180,000 officers capable of leading men in battle. Numerous officers training camps, following the precedents of the **Plattsburg camps**, in different areas of the country quickly filled the leadership void (Kington 1997).

Second, facilities did not exist to house or train 4,000,000 soldiers immediately. In the few months following Wilson's war message, the War Department established thirty-two training areas with shelter for 1.8 million soldiers-in-training. Rapid construction of these camps began in May, 1917. Early on, tents provided housing for soldiers while more permanent wooden structures were erected. Additionally, the War Department needed to provide water, sewer, electricity, and vehicular access to these training centers, a massive financial investment in infrastructure, before a single soldier could be trained. Complicating matters further, training soldiers in new and developing methods of warfare, including artillery, aviation, engineering, chemical

warfare, and tanks, necessitated the separate establishment of special service schools (Ayres 1919).

The War Department not only faced leadership and infrastructure challenges, but it faced a logistical challenge as well. The 4,000,000 soldiers hailed from all regions of the country. Thus, strategic location and construction of camps and cantonments was necessary in order to maximize efficiency. This figure maps the regional distribution of training centers throughout the country.



In order to train and prepare 4,000,000 soldiers, it was necessary to build a massive infrastructure, taking the form of 32 camps and cantonments. Leonard P. Ayres, The War with Germany (1919), 28.

Without going into tremendous detail regarding military hierarchy, at the highest level the AEF organized soldiers into Divisions, consisting of 28,000 soldiers each. Generally speaking, the AEF

Making Local Connections

26 THE WAR WITH GERMANY.

TABLE 2.—Place of organization of divisions and sources by States.

Division.	Camp.	States from which drawn.
Regulars:		
1st.....	France.....	Regulars.
2nd.....	France.....	Regulars.
3rd.....	Greene, N. C.....	Regulars.
4th.....	Greene, N. C.....	Regulars.
5th.....	Logan, Tex.....	Regulars.
6th.....	McClellan, Ala.....	Regulars.
7th.....	MacArthur, Tex.....	Regulars.
8th.....	Fremont, Calif.....	Regulars.
9th.....	Sheridan, Ala.....	Regulars.
10th.....	Funston, Kans.....	Regulars.
11th.....	Meade, Md.....	Regulars.
12th.....	Devens, Mass.....	Regulars.
13th.....	Lewis, Wash.....	Regulars.
14th.....	Custer, Mich.....	Regulars.
15th.....	Logan, Tex.....	Regulars.
16th.....	Kearny, Calif.....	Regulars.
17th.....	Beauregard, La.....	Regulars.
18th.....	Travis, Tex.....	Regulars.
19th.....	Dodge, Iowa.....	Regulars.
20th.....	Sevier, S. C.....	Regulars.
National Guard:		
23th.....	Devens, Mass.....	New England.
27th.....	Wadsworth, S. C.....	New York.
28th.....	Hancock, Ga.....	Pennsylvania.
29th.....	McClellan, Ala.....	New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, Maryland, District of Columbia.
30th.....	Sevier, S. C.....	Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, District of Columbia.
31st.....	Wheeler, Ga.....	Georgia, Alabama, Florida.
32nd.....	MacArthur, Tex.....	Michigan, Wisconsin.
33rd.....	Logan, Tex.....	Illinois.
34th.....	Cody, N. Mex.....	Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota.
35th.....	Doniphan, Okla.....	Missouri, Kansas.
36th.....	Bowie, Tex.....	Texas, Oklahoma.
37th.....	Sheridan, Ohio.....	Ohio.
38th.....	Shelby, Miss.....	Indiana, Kentucky, West Virginia.
39th.....	Beauregard, La.....	Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana.
40th.....	Kearny, Calif.....	California, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico.
41st.....	Fremont, Calif.....	Washington, Oregon, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming.
42nd.....	Mills, N. Y.....	Various States.
National Army:		
76th.....	Devens, Mass.....	New England, New York.
77th.....	Upton, N. Y.....	New York City.
78th.....	Dix, N. J.....	Western New York, New Jersey, Delaware.
79th.....	Meade, Md.....	Northeastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, District of Columbia.
80th.....	Lee, Va.....	Virginia, West Virginia, Western Pennsylvania.
81st.....	Jackson, S. C.....	North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Porto Rico.
82nd.....	Gordon, Ga.....	Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee.
83rd.....	Sherman, Ohio.....	Ohio, Western Pennsylvania.
84th.....	Zachary Taylor, Ky.....	Kentucky, Indiana, Southern Illinois.
85th.....	Custer, Mich.....	Michigan, Eastern Wisconsin.
86th.....	Grant, Ill.....	Chicago, Northern Illinois.
87th.....	Pike, Ark.....	Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Southern Alabama.
88th.....	Dodge, Iowa.....	North Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Western Illinois.
89th.....	Funston, Kans.....	Kansas, Missouri, South Dakota, Nebraska.
90th.....	Travis, Tex.....	Texas, Oklahoma.
91st.....	Lewis, Wash.....	Alaska, Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nebraska, Montana, Wyoming, Utah.
92nd.....	Funston, Kans.....	Colored, various States.
93rd.....	Stuart, Va.....	Colored, various States.

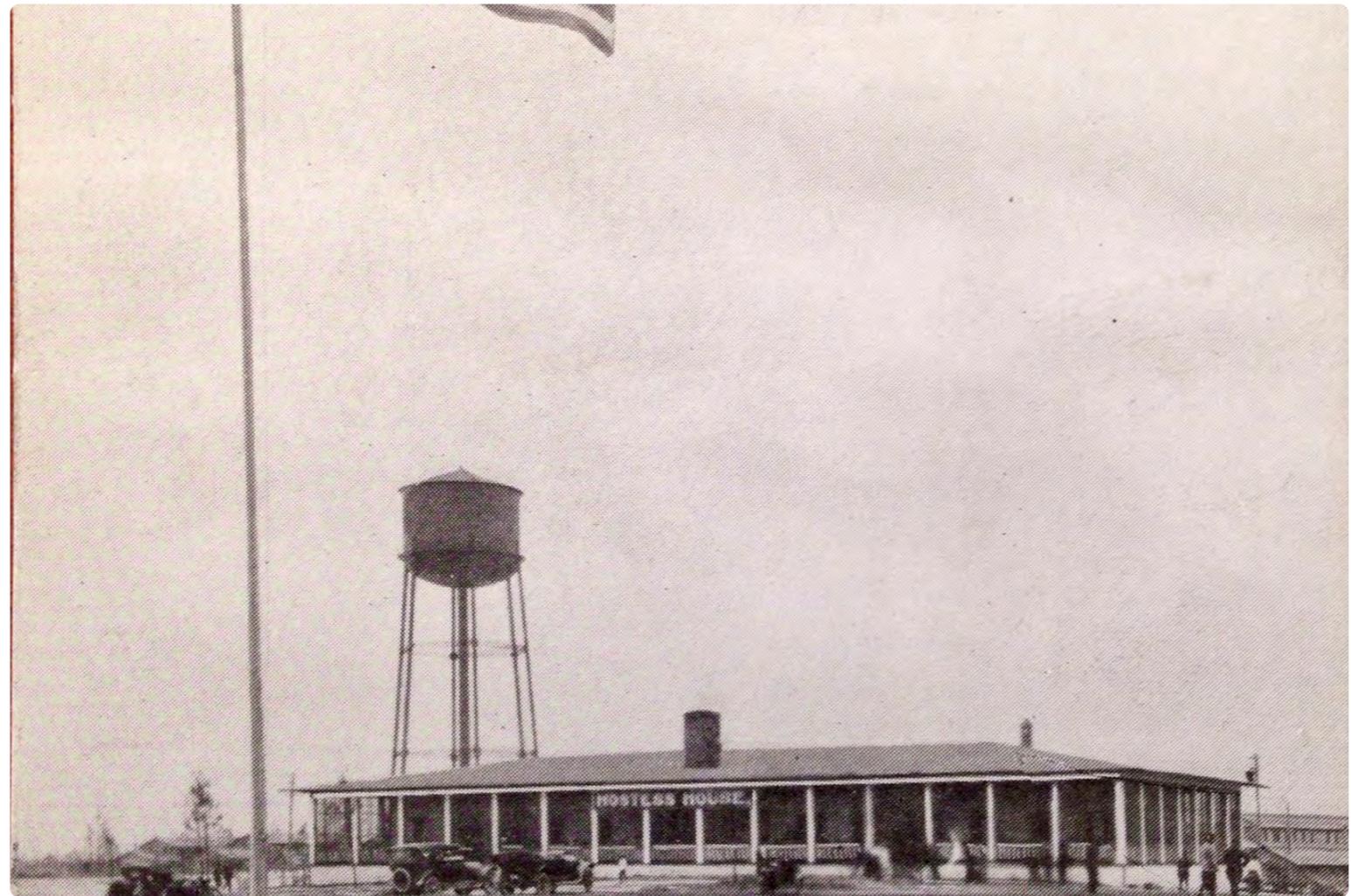
The AEF organized its divisions by region.

If you are curious to find out which Division draftees from your state were part of and where they were trained, search for your state among the National Army Divisions in Figure 3 (Ayres 1919). Additionally, if you would like to find out more about your Division's role in World War I, select and review the corresponding Divisional Summary of Operations in the World War.

organized its Divisions regionally. Therefore, new recruits that were not already part of the Regular Army (Divisions 1-20) or part of the National Guard (Divisions 25-50) in April 1917 were drafted into the National Army (Divisions 50-100) and placed in a Division based predominantly by residency status (*Ibid.*).

Camp Lee, located on the sand flats of Petersburg, Virginia, was one of these newly built training centers. Draftees sent to Camp Lee hailed from rural Virginia, West Virginia, and western Pennsylvania along the Appalachian Mountains. In the unpainted wooden barracks and training fields of Camp Lee, these frontiersmen in the old-fashioned American mold were forged into the 80th Division of the National Army, better known as the “Blue Ridge” Division.

The first of the “Blue Ridge” draftees rumbled in along the dirt roads of the unfinished camp in Petersburg during the last week of August and the first week of September 1917. The Commanding General of the 80th Division, Adelbert Cronkhite, in his first address to the new soldiers, acknowledged the gravity of the situation before them. In stark terms he forewarned his troops,



The Hostess House at Camp Lee, Virginia.



We are, entering into conflict with the most cruel enemy in the history of the world, an enemy whose means of encompassing death and destruction are so barbaric as to be unimaginable in war by human beings. We are entering into the most gigantic struggle which ever befell the lot of man, a struggle which involves

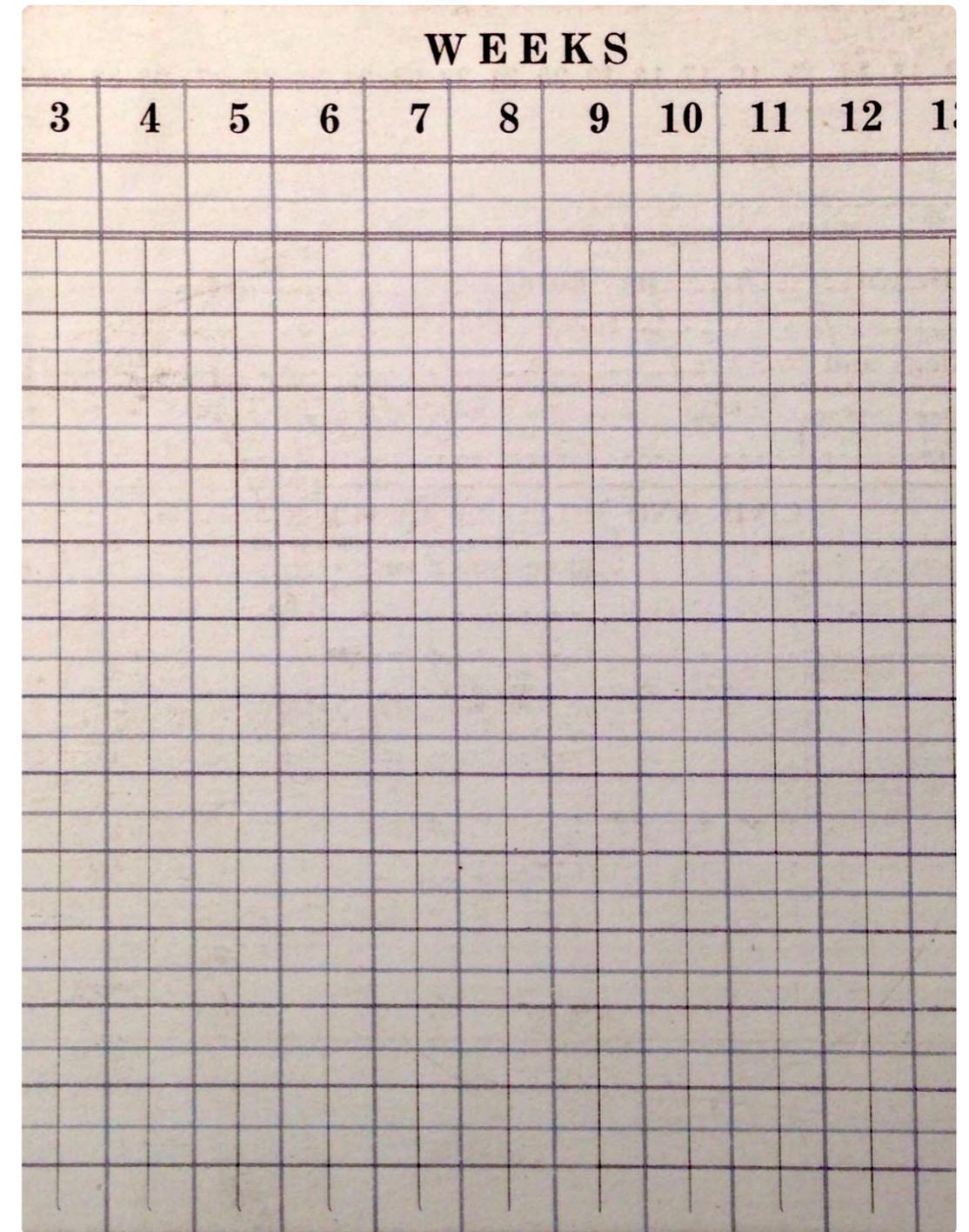
the safeguarding of all that makes life worth living; a struggle to enforce again the principles for which our forefathers fought, to suffer and possibly die in a strange land, that the horrors of war may not be brought to our doors. (1917)

Major General Cronkhite effectively communicated his point; this was a titanic struggle worthy of great sacrifice.

The camp molded aggressive and self-reliant infantry soldiers. As General Pershing pronounced in his *Statement of General Principles Governing Training of Units of the American Expeditionary Forces*, “The rifle and the bayonet are the principal weapons of the Infantry soldier. He will be trained to a high degree of skill as a marksman both on the target range and in field firing. An aggressive spirit must be developed until the soldier feels himself, as a bayonet fighter, invincible in battle” (Moore and Russell 1920). This meant the immediate commencement of intensive drilling in open-order fighting.

While soldiers received training and evaluation in a number of areas, including tactics, military law, and even rudimentary French language (see the first two images in the gallery), the bulk of their time was spent drilling and learning to competently and confidently use their rifle and bayonet (see the remaining images in the gallery). As the eventual date of disembarkation for the 80th Division approached, the pace and intensity of training accelerated. As Josiah C. Peck would record in his history of the 319th Infantry Battalion,

AEF Training Methods & Styles



These documents demonstrate evidence of AEF training methods and styles



Finally, in the last days of April and the first days of May, every day, including Sunday, became a working day, much time being spent on the rifle range and a short period in the divisional trench system which had been prepared near the Camp area. In the trenches, reliefs were made by battalions at night, and much of the routine work of trench warfare carried on, as under actual conditions. (1919)

Time spent training in trenches was not a unique experience to 80th Division soldiers; other Camps manufactured trench systems as well. Camp Lee's 8-mile network was, perhaps, the most extensive (Wiggins 2012). It was not, however, the intention of the commanding officers, specifically General Pershing, that AEF soldiers would spend much time constructing or occupying trenches while in France, rather quickly and aggressively advancing through, over, and around them (ABMC 1938). Thus, specific training for clearing and fighting from the trenches was rather limited, a decision that ultimately slowed the AEF advance and likely cost additional American lives.

The rapid buildup of an American fighting force would also need to take into consideration the changing face of war. To that end, both France and England provided instructors to enhance American training using new methods developed during the war. Although France and England could not afford to send significant numbers of instructors to the United States, the provided aid was of the utmost importance. France, specializing in artillery and

communications, delivered 286 instructors while Britain, focusing on gas and physical training and bayonet, provided 261 instructors to enhance the overall quality of the training in American camps and cantonments (Ayres 1919).

The camps and cantonments were not the only domestic training grounds of the AEF. Colleges and Universities nationwide took up the task of developing a Student Army Training Corps. At the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA, immediate support was thrown behind the President's request for a war declaration; Woodrow Wilson had graduated from UVA. Given the dramatic circumstances, the University made a formal statement,

That the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia recognizing that the United States is now in a state of war with a ruthless European power, hereby solemnly pledge to Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States, the loyal cooperation of his Alma Mater in the defense of that liberty, honor and independence which George Washington and Thomas Jefferson did so much to establish and maintain. (1919)

Part of that pledge included a contractual commitment to the War Department to educate between 1,000 and 1,500 future soldiers in many useful areas, including military science and tactics, reconnaissance surveying, telegraphy, and practical French (University of Virginia).

/



UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA RESERVE OFFICERS TRAINING CORPS.

Students in the University of Virginia's Reserve Officer Training Corps pose in front of the north side of the Rotunda. University of Virginia. "University of Virginia Reserve Officers Training Corps." Photograph. N.d. Virginia War History Commission Archives[Series V, Box 47, Folder 1]. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Whether at Camp Lee or the University of Virginia, the AEF training program quickly molded the characteristics of the diverse American populace into an enthusiastic and confident fighting force. As R. W. Mackey noted in his report, *History of Mustering, Camp Lee,*

Altogether, the spirit of enthusiasm, humor, energy, courage and intense desire to fight for the noblest ideals of our country were thoroughly in evidence during the process of mustering the soldiers at Camp Lee. Unquestionably, it was the possession of these national characteristics by the bulk of our country's young manhood that eventually threw the fear of God and America into the Hun. (1919)

After six months of training, soldiers at Camp Lee, as well as the other camps and cantonments around the nation, were eager to continue their training closer to the battle line.

Orders arrived on May 17, 1918.

Soldiers from Camp Lee entrained to Newport News, VA and Norfolk, VA for their eventual disembarkation from Hoboken, NJ. The first unit arrived in France on May 23, 1918, while the last unit of the 80th arrived on June 18. The Division remained in quiet sectors to receive additional

training from British instructors through the end of July. Generally speaking, American soldiers arrived ill-equipped to fight. While stationed in Calais, a port city across the English Channel from Dover, soldiers exchanged their American rifles (with Springfield rifles in short-supply, many soldiers were issued older, less-reliable weapons) for the more popular British Lee-Enfield rifle, received their gas masks and helmets, and heard lectures on the “horrors of gas” from British instructors. Shortly thereafter, the infantry was moved to the Samer Training Area east of Boulogne, while the artillery units moved on to Redon, near St. Nazaire, to receive further training (Peck 1919).

As the months of July and August passed, the desire to get to the front increased. Confidence was high, even if American soldiers remained largely untested in battle. “The American soldier is as a general rule, very keen for the trenches,” Lieutenant Newton B. Ancarrow of Richmond wrote in a July letter to his mother, “and I think that when the opportunity comes, he will prove himself quite worthy” (1918). Time, however, was the AEF’s greatest nemesis. Too little of it existed to properly train the many units in the teamwork “essential to success in battle.” Nevertheless, the 80th Division wanted desperately to “go over the top.”

Activity: Visual Discovery

Students will examine an image through visual discovery. Students will read a primary source document and evaluate the document using a SOAPStone graphic organizer. Students will

craft a description of American military training during World War I for a national textbook.

Guiding Questions

1. What was the experience of the typical soldier in training during World War I?
2. What areas of training did commanding officers in the AEF emphasize in the training of soldiers?

Learning Outcomes

The student will be able to:

1. analyze an image using visual discovery.
2. evaluate a primary source document developed for officers using a SOAPStone graphic organizer.
3. write a detailed description of soldier training incorporating evidence from primary sources.

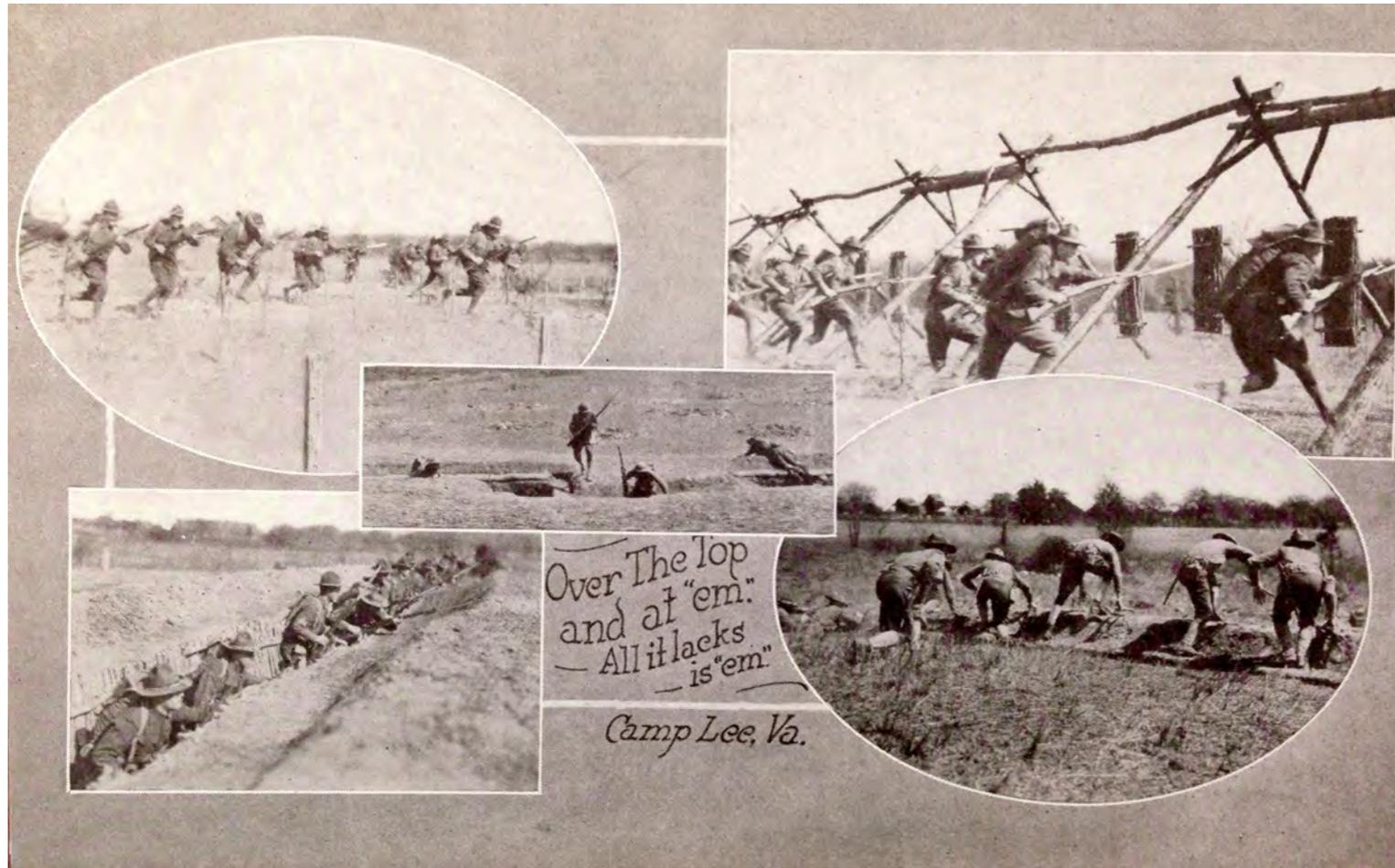
Teacher Planning

Time Required

45 minutes

Materials Needed

Visual Discovery Image



Activity

1. Display the image prominently in your room for all students to see.

2. Inform students that they will be using Visual Discovery to uncover new information.

3. Guide students through a series of questions:

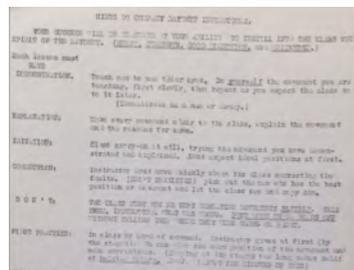
LEVEL 1 – Gathering Evidence

- What do you see in this image?
- What key details, or pieces of evidence, do you see?
- How would you describe the scene and the people?
- What would you hear or smell if you were part of this scene?

LEVEL 2 – Interpreting Evidence

- What do you think is the approximate date of this scene? Give one piece of evidence to support your answer.
- Where might this scene have taken place? Give two pieces of evidence to support your answer.

Bayonet Training Document



Tap or click the preview image to view the document.

SOAPStone Graphic Organizer



Tap or click the icon to view the document.

- c. What do you think is happening in this scene? Be prepared to support your opinion with two pieces of evidence.

LEVEL 3 – Making Hypotheses from Evidence

a. How do you think these people were feeling at this time and place?

b. Why do you think these people are going through these activities?

4. Direct students to read the bayonet training document.
5. Direct students to evaluate the bayonet training document using the SOAPStone graphic organizer.
6. Direct students to craft a detailed description of American military training in World War I.
7. After students analyze the primary sources, debrief the class.

Assessment

In the debriefing discussion, the following question could be used to gauge student understanding of the artifacts:

What was the typical experience for the American soldier in World War I?

Assess students based on their SOAPStone graphic organizer and descriptions of military training.

Modifications

Additional images from the chapter could be incorporated into the visual discovery activity to increase the depth of knowledge regarding soldier training.

Hell, Heaven, or Hoboken by Christmas

By July 1918, more than 1,200,000 American soldiers were stationed in France, widely distributed along the entire front (Moore and Russell 1920). General Pershing stubbornly opposed American amalgamation with British and French forces and steadfastly maintained that the American army was separate and distinct from the British and French armies (Lengel 2008). American units proved themselves throughout May-August fighting in relief of and alongside the Allies at Aisne-Marne and St. Mihiel. Confidence within the 80th Division grew as well after St. Mihiel. “We made quite a record for a Division which was half-filled with recruits,” Newton Ancarrow wrote home to his mother. “We were less than two months over here before we were ‘in’ as a fighting unit” (August 14, 1918). In August, rumors abounded that the war was almost over and it factored into the American attitude. Many soldiers took up the motto “Hell, Heaven, or Hoboken by Christmas” (Cleary 1918). Ancarrow was a believer. “I’m coming to believe it too. Somehow or other I don’t think it will last much longer. I can’t see how it can. The Bosch is losing men and we are increasing. They are bound to wake up some day, and I kind of think it will be soon” (August 14, 1918). Though vaguely accurate in his prediction, the young Lieutenant was able

to capture in a singular thought both the rising tide of American confidence and the naiveté of American inexperience. It is almost certain Lt. Ancarrow came to regret his statement during the ensuing two months.

In September, the independent American Army prepared itself for its first great attack – the Meuse-Argonne Offensive – scheduled to commence in the early morning hours of September 26, 1918. The plan required the American Army to advance northward between the Meuse River and the Argonne Forest toward the French town of Sedan, severing vital German supply lines and, ultimately, dividing the German army in half. At the same time, the French Army would also push northward, providing support west of the Argonne Forest. Capturing Sedan was an extremely difficult task. An elaborate system of defensive lines, including a near-continuous zone of trenches, concrete bunkers, barbed-wire entanglements, and other field fortifications, built by the Germans stood between the front line and the American objective in Sedan (Lengel 2008).

At 5:30 PM on September 25, Major General Adelbert Cronkhite announced the offensive would commence at 5:30 AM on September 26 with a barrage of artillery (*Ibid.*). Months of training did not prepare the “Blue Ridge” boys for the wave emotion they would feel anticipating H hour. Lt. Col. Ashby Williams of Roanoke remembered that moment vividly in his memoirs:

“I think every man’s heart beat a little faster at that announcement, at least mine did. It was especially annoying to have to listen to it beat in the silence that followed the announcement.... It was now a real, living, throbbing thought that in less than 12 hours we would go under an actual barrage and bare our breasts to the fire of the enemy’s guns and maybe the steel of his bayonet.” (1919)

Each soldier dealt with the anxiety of impending battle differently. As historian Edward Lengel points out in his book, *To Conquer Hell*, “Men prayed, held charms, or performed superstitious rituals. Some chatted. Some even napped. Officers carried out a thousand duties and worried if they would show fear or let down their men” (2008). The eagerness of many soldiers in the 80th to

get to the front was quickly subdued in the moments before the battle was to begin.

In the early hours of the offensive, the 80th Division, fighting as part of the First Army’s III Corps, advanced quickly through the flattened village of Béthincourt, stopping just short of Dannevoux. A constant bombardment of German artillery bogged the 80th down as it approached the 2nd line of German entrenchments, the Kriemhilde Stellung, more famously known as the Hindenburg Line. During the period from late September through the first week of October, there was growing evidence of disorganization and command confusion. According to Lengel, Green divisions, like the 80th, “blundered into German kill zones, froze under cover, or milled about under fire”(*Ibid.*) As Divisions advanced at different rates, the risk of fratricide increased, further slowing American progress, leaving soldiers exposed to powerful German counterattacks. The lack of coordinated training between units had negative consequences.

So did the unending bombardment of German high explosives, shrapnel, heavy howitzers, and noxious gases demoralize the Doughboys. Private Rush Young, a farmer from Loudon County, VA, changed profoundly over the course of one and a half weeks of fighting along the Meuse. This outgoing and good-humored soldier neared his breaking point on October 4, having heard repeatedly the cries of wounded comrades. He later reminisced in his memoirs, “If this had lasted much longer, we all would have

been crazy” (Young 1933). The Doughboys literally may not have been able to last much longer. Between October 4 and October 9, five of the hardest days of fighting, the 80th Division suffered 1,824 casualties. Major General Robert Lee Bullard, commander of the III Corps, refused to consider the Doughboy’s suffering (Lengel 2008). He demanded that the soldiers forge ahead.

And forge ahead they did, earning a Medal of Honor along the way. The 3rd Division, fighting along the 80th Division’s left flank, occupied a ridge a few hundred yards south of the Hindenburg Line. On October 7, John Lewis Barkley, a private from Kansas City, MO, was ordered to follow an unoccupied ridge to scout the German position behind a hill, an extremely risky mission. Barkley, accompanied by two signalmen, made his way covertly across the cratered terrain. He observed that the Germans were busily preparing a counterattack against his 3rd Division’s position. While communicating this information back to his superior, the signalmen’s line of communication was cut. On his way back to headquarters, he commandeered an abandoned French light tank and a German Maxim light machine gun and used it to successfully help thwart the German counterattack. The story of John Lewis Barkley’s courageous defense of an American position is best told in chapter 14 of his memoir, *Scarlet Fields: The Combat Memoir of a World War I Medal of Honor Hero*.

Further west, the 32nd Division was poised to challenge the Hindenburg Line atop Côte Dame Marie near Romagne, despite

the heavy barrage of German artillery shells. After several days of standstill fighting, the 32nd Division broke through on October 14, 1918 (Lengel 2008). By late-October, Doughboy morale was on the upswing (Anonymous 1918). The rising spirit of the 32nd Division was captured in several verses written by an anonymous soldier seen on the following page.

The morale of the 80th improved only after hearing one divine word: relief. On October 11, after two weeks of non-stop fighting, constant shelling, and sleeping in gas masks, General Pershing gave the orders to pull the 80th Division into reserve (Lengel 2008). Newton Ancarrow, writing home to his mother on October 15, 1918, was thankful. “We are now back for a rest,” he said, “and I don’t know how short it will be. We needed it as we have been living in woods, trenches and holes in the ground for a month and a half. I hadn’t seen a woman or a house that was standing for a month and something even worse I hadn’t until today, had a real bath since late in August.”

The war progressed quickly in the month of November as the German Army was in full retreat. On November 11, 1918, Germany signed an armistice to cease fighting. Many soldiers found themselves in a reflective mood, like First Lt. F. H. Vass. “At eleven o’clock, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month we ceased firing, and I hope the war is over,” he wrote to his mother, “and that peace and humanity will reign world without end, for the horrors of modern war are more than man can stand.” This

An anonymous soldier composed several uplifting verses documenting the sacrifice of soldiers in the 32nd Division of the AEF.

They did their bit in Texas
'Neath a boiling burning sun
Who drilled all day or worked all day
But whimpered not a one.
They crossed the sea to far off France
To do their little bit.

“Les Terrible” – The Frenchmen said

For the never, never quit.

They did a triell on Alsace

At Chateau Thierry too

And then again at Soissons

They drove the arrow through.

And in Le Forest de Argonne,

A defense line hard to take,

They drove a wedge a fatal wedge

And La Dame Marie did break.

And on the eleventh of November

Far beyond Dun-Sur-Meuse

When the armistice stopped all fighting

They were with the French poilus

Then on to Coblenz they started

To see the whole thing through

The fighting piercing arrow

Division Thirty-Two

Triell = German word for
duel

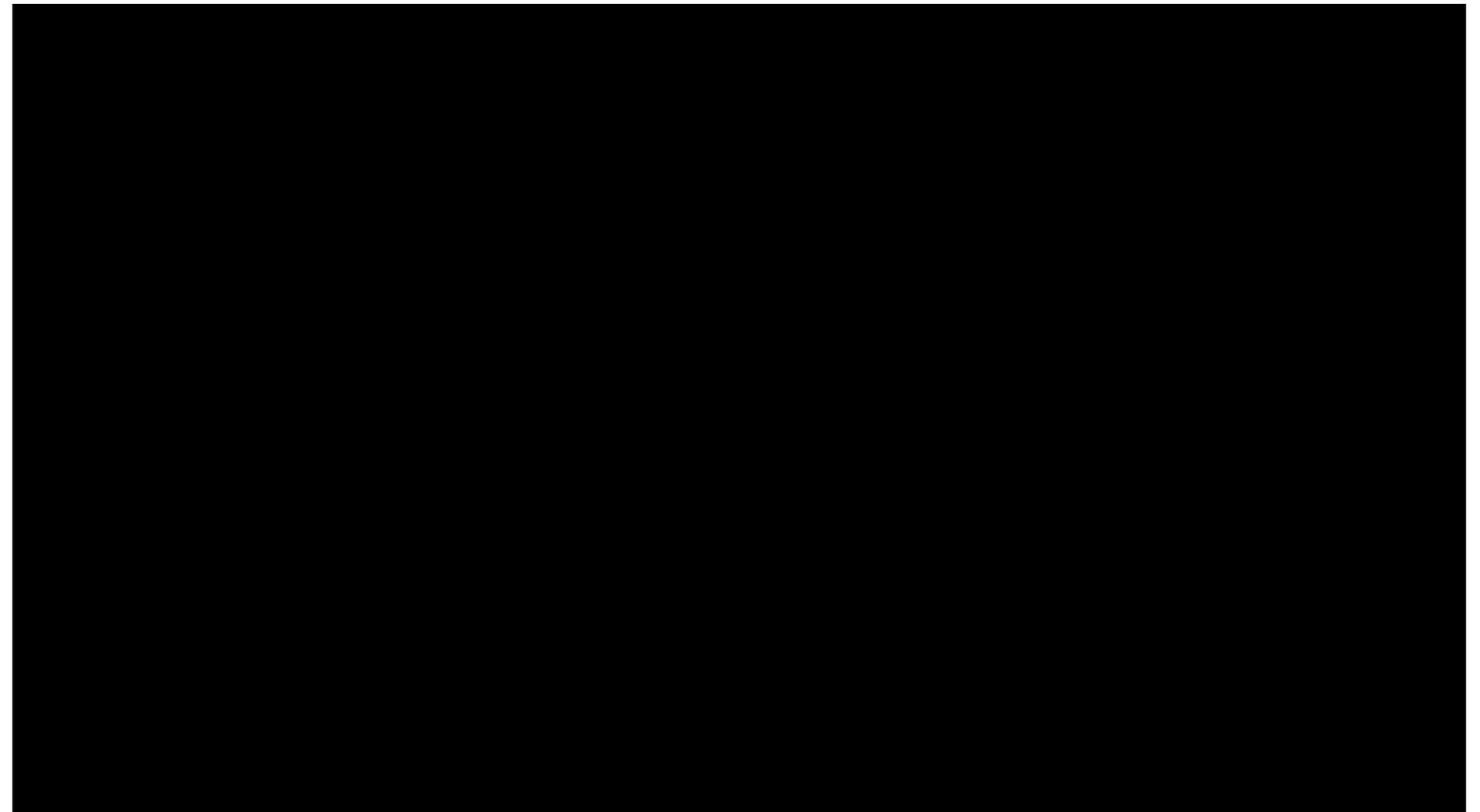
Poilus = a French soldier

reflective, somber tone was short-lived, however. As the Doughboys took stock of the sacrifices made in order to help win the war, the tone of voice used in many letters was decidedly self-assured – almost defiant. Consider this excerpt from an anonymous Virginia soldier’s letter composed on November 25, 1918:

If any of you doubt that [the AEF] is the finest Army in the World, ask the French, English and Italians. If there is still any doubt, ask the Imperial German government or William Hohenzollern or his cigarette fiend son the “Ex” Crown Prince. They found out what Uncle Sam’s boys could do at Chateau Thierry, Saint Mihiel, and near Verdun on the Meuse.

Conclusion

The soldiers of the 80th Division returned from the Great War with unbridled confidence, due to having never failed to reach an objective (Lengel 2008). The American Expeditionary Forces fought valiantly alongside the Allied forces, having overcome numerous obstacles in training and preparation. General Pershing had sought to mold aggressive and confident soldiers from the outset. Though each individual soldier's confidence would be severely tested between the banks of the Meuse and the Argonne Forest, they persevered despite taking 6,029 casualties in some of the most vicious fighting during the battle. Eight hundred eighty men, predominantly from Virginia, West Virginia, and western Pennsylvania, gave the ultimate sacrifice: their lives. Four hundred seventy three remain interred at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Romagne-Sous-Montfaucon, a constant reminder of the "glory of their deeds."



This video shows the headstones of several soldiers buried at the Meuse-Argonne. Video provided by The Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Michael Schafer (photographs and video production).

Bibliography

American Battle Monuments Commission. American Armies and Battlefields in Europe. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1938. <https://www.abmc.gov/news-events/news/world-war-i-historic-reference-book-now-available-abmcgov>

Ancarrow, Newton B. "Letter to Mother." July 2, 1918. *Virginia War History Commission [Series VII, Box 80, Folder 3]*. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Ancarrow, Newton B. "Letter to Mother." August 14, 1918. *Virginia War History Commission [Series VII, Box 80, Folder 3]*. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Ancarrow, Newton B. "Letter to Mother." October 15, 1918. *Virginia War History Commission [Series VII, Box 80, Folder 3]*. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Anonymous. "Anonymous Letters from Danville." November 25, 1918. *Virginia War History Commission [Series VII, Box 61, Folder 29]*. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Ayres, Leonard P. *The War With Germany: A statistical summary.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print., 1919.

Barkley, John L. *Scarlet Fields: The Combat Memoir of a World War I Medal of Honor Hero.* Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2012.

Cleary, James B. "Letter to Father," August 23, 1918. *Virginia War History Commission [Series VII, Box 80, Folder 28]*. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Cronkhite, Adelbert. "Message to the 80th Division." *Virginia War History Commission [Series III, Box 38, Folder 18]*. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

- Kington, Donald M. "The Plattsburg Movement and its Legacy." *Relevance* 6.4 (1997): n. page. Web. August 8, 2014.
- Lengel, Edward G. *To Conquer Hell*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008.
- Mackey, R. W. "History of Mustering." *Virginia War History Commission [Series IV, Box 43, Folder 2]*. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
- Moore, William E., and James C. Russell. *U.S. Official Pictures of the World War: Showing America's Participation*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print., 1920.
- New York Times. "President Calls for War Declaration." *New York Times*, April 3 1917: A1. Print.
- Peck, Josiah C. *The 319th Infantry A.E.F.* Paris: Herbert Clarke, 1919.
- University of Virginia. "The University of Virginia in the World War." *Virginia War History Commission [Series V, Box 47, Folder 1]*. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
- Vass, F. H. "Letter to Mother." November 11, 1918. *Virginia War History Commission Archives [Series VII, Box 61, Folder 35]*. 37219, State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.
- Virginia War History Commission. State Records Collection, The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. Last modified 2004. <http://ead.lib.virginia.edu/vivaxtf/view?docId=lva/vi00958.xml>
- Wiggins, F. M. "Fort Lee Archeological Center Takes Center Stage." *Progress-Index* [Petersburg, VA] October 24, 2012. Accessed August 9, 2014.
- Williams, Ashby. *Experiences of the Great War: Artois, St. Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne*. Roanoke, Va.: Stone Printing and Manufacturing, 1919.
- Wilson, Woodrow. "War Message." 65th Cong., 1st Sess. Senate Doc. No. 5, Serial No. 7624. Washington, D.C., April 2, 1917.
- Young, Rush Stephenson. *Over the Top with the 80th*. Washington, D.C.: privately printed, 1933.

Credits and Disclaimer

Please note that this chapter may contain links to third-party websites or videos embedded from such sites. These third-party websites are not controlled by the American Battle Monuments Commission nor subject to our privacy policy. ABMC provides these links and videos solely for our users' information and convenience. Once you follow a link to another site, you are subject to the policies of that site. ABMC does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of information on a linked website. ABMC does not endorse the organizations sponsoring linked websites and we do not endorse the views they express or the products or services they offer. ABMC cannot authorize the use of copyrighted materials contained in linked websites. Users must request such authorization from the sponsor of the linked website. ABMC is not responsible for transmissions users receive from linked websites. ABMC does not guarantee that outside websites comply with Section 508 (accessibility requirements) of the Rehabilitation Act.



AMERICAN BATTLE
MONUMENTS COMMISSION

“Time will not dim the glory of their deeds.”

GENERAL OF THE ARMIES JOHN J. PERSHING

LEARN NC

