



Passchendaele, Oct. 1917 (photo by Lt. J.W. Brooke, courtesy IWM)

# On the Wire

Official Newsletter of the Great War Association Winter 2026

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Members of the GWA:



First, I'd like to thank you, the membership, for placing your confidence in me to serve as the GWA's President. It is a position I do not take lightly, and I will strive to keep this organization on a path of progress. I am here for the entire membership, with open lines of communication and no hidden agendas. I am a very approachable person and am always willing to talk and hear your thoughts, comments and concerns.

In the short time I have been at the head of the G8, the board has been diligently working to make your whole experience at any event a fun and safe one.

Some of the items we have been addressing and plan on having in place for the Spring 2026 event:

- PA / Bullhorn communication system for the Friday evening safety briefing
- Pigtales for each side's stores
- Better sandbags

(cont. on p. 2)



Photo courtesy of Joey LaCroix, IR92

## In This Issue

President's Message . . . . .	1
From the Secretary's Desk . . . . .	3
Treasurer's Report . . . . .	4
Facebook Updates . . . . .	4
GWA Bank Statements. . . . .	5
Notes from the Entente Unit Representative . . . . .	10
From the CP Combat Commander . . . . .	11
Registration & Check-In Updates . . . . .	14
The Mutiny. . . . .	15
A History of the YMCA in the Great War. . . . .	17
Announcements & Miscellany . . . . .	32

## **President's Message**

(cont. from p. 1)

- Streamlining registration, printing trench passes when you check in

Other items that we have been discussing:

### **Long Range Site Development Plan**

I have asked the Combat Commanders to work on a long-range site development plan that will serve as a guide for the GWA to make site improvements, position new bunkers, battlefield obstacles, trenches, etc. Our goal is to continue to develop the site to ensure that it continues to evolve and be challenging, but remain safe.

In addition, I have asked the CP and Allied reps to look at the overall state of the existing trenches, including maintenance, abandoned positions, unnecessary trash, and debris.

The respective reps and combat commanders are also working on an overall existing site plan with locations of current units and their respective trench locations.

### **Roads**

The Site Committee will be working on a plan and gathering quotes to repair the site road network. Once they have a plan and quotes in hand, they will present to the board for review.

### **Trench Builds and Repairs**

I will be working with the Combat Commanders and the respective Trench Masters and Reps to hopefully come up with a streamlined way for review and approval of trench builds & repairs.

These are just a few of the items the board is addressing at this time. We will continue to work toward making improvements on the field and behind the scenes to make your experience as safe and as fun as possible.

### **Town Hall Meeting Reminder:**

Remember, we have a "Town Hall Meeting" at 0800 on Sunday after the April Event at the monument. This is the time to voice your concerns and have them heard in person by the President, both the Allied and CP Representatives and any other G8 members who are available.

In addition, I want to hear your ideas. Feel free to email me, at [president@greatwarassociation.org](mailto:president@greatwarassociation.org). Your opinion matters.

I look forward to serving as your President, and hope I can do as good a job as my predecessors.

Respectfully,

David Strichko – GWA President

## FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

Fellow GWA Members,

First, thank you for your continued confidence in me as your Secretary, and thank you especially for the outpouring of support and trust SO many of you conveyed to me after the Fall event and ballot hiccups.



Secondly, I want to tell you how excited I am about the G8 you've all put in place. In a very short time, we've gotten right down to the business of doing everything we can to make events, and being a GWA member in general, as enjoyable and low-friction as possible; we all agree that's why we're here. President Strichko covered the highlights in his column, so I won't repeat them here - but improvements are forthcoming all the way around.

Mostly, though, I'd like to thank the vast majority of the male membership for the gallantry you've shown to your female counterparts at events, and say a word or two about safety. A great many of you have shown yourselves to be true gentlemen, and in turn, I hope you've found that most of us ladies are here for the same reasons you are [except maybe your husbands didn't drag you to your first event, insisting "Come on, you'll have fun." Dammit - ours were right.]. We enjoy dressing up in heavy wool and miserable boots to spend a nerdy WWI weekend in the rain with our nerdy WWI friends, in as historically accurate a manner as possible, just like you do — and we do what we can in our supporting roles to make the experience positive for everybody, without causing drama. There have been a couple of bumps in the road along the way that have gotten some attention, and that's unfortunate - but for the most part, the members of this organization look out for one another and just want to enjoy a break from reality a couple times a year.

Safety is important at events, and we talk about it a lot: safety briefing, safe angles, safety rules, etc. I've heard 'safe' in an interpersonal, psychological context a time or two lately though, and that's where I feel like I've gotta say something. In no way is a GWA event an unsafe environment for any female, full stop. In fact, I'd argue that there are fewer safer places a gal could be in Cumberland County than the Newville site during events — because we ladies are surrounded by dads, and brothers, and uncles, and grandpas. If one of us genuinely felt fearful or in danger because of something some doofus did or said, one earnest yell for help and guys would come hustling to the rescue, and be willing to beat some ass if any harm had been done. Allied or CP, Jerrys or Doughboys, poilus or boche, huns or Tommies, or whatever, most of you are good boys that Momma raised to stand up for others and do the right thing. The biggest actual safety issue we gals face at events is that some don't wear helmets — which needs to change. *Ladies: if you are anywhere on site where airborne results of combat could possibly reach you during an event, you have to be wearing a steel helmet on your head just like the gents, per GWA safety regulations.*

Now then. Enjoy the rest of the issue. Jay Callaham has authored an absolutely fascinating article about the YMCA, and I bet you'll come away with at least one thing you didn't know before; there are a couple of accounts of what sounds like a pretty memorable scenario on the CP side in November... And there are some important messages and updates from the G-8 as well. As always, please feel free to reach out with questions, comments, concerns, suggestions, submissions for the Spring issue, whatever, at [secretary@GreatWarAssociation.org](mailto:secretary@GreatWarAssociation.org).

Respectfully,

Erica Miller, GWA Secretary



(Photo courtesy E. Miller)

## TREASURER'S REPORT



Thank you for electing me as the GWA Treasurer. We have formed a Finance Committee including two GWA members: Susan Spencer and Ryan Hunneshagen. We recently held our first meeting, which was very successful. The committee will be working on developing a budget, as well as exploring investment opportunities to generate additional income.

I have opened both a checking account and a money market account so that idle funds can begin earning interest. All vendor accounts have been updated with the new financial information and our new PO Box, which is now based in Newville. The bank we are using is conveniently located near me and also has a branch in Newville.

I was able to acquire a free laptop that will be used exclusively for the Treasurer's duties. This laptop will be passed on to the next elected Treasurer with all relevant documents and information already in place. We have also begun using QuickBooks financial software, which will likewise be transferred to the next Treasurer.

Two major supply purchases have already been made: 300 pigtales and 3,000 sandbags. The next major task—one we all love—is completing the group's taxes. I am not anticipating any issues, as Bryn did an excellent job getting everything organized and squared away during his term.

The two most recent bank statements are on the following pages for your viewing. I am interested in speaking with a licensed financial advisor if we have any in the GWA. Please feel free to email me at [treasurer@greatwarassociation.org](mailto:treasurer@greatwarassociation.org).

Thank you,

Jennifer Domitrovich  
Treasurer

## EXCITING FACEBOOK UPDATE!

We're thrilled to announce that the Great War Association now has full control over the [GWA Facebook Page](#). To foster a more engaged and informed community, we've also launched a new group, [Great War Association - Official](#), that is exclusive to dues-paying members. Join us to connect with fellow members and see important organizational updates in a more secure and interactive environment!

Use the in-text links above, or the QR codes below to get there.

GWA Facebook Page



GWA Facebook Group



## REACH OUT TO YOUR G-8

Contact your G-8 officers directly:

President David Strichko:  
[president@GreatWarAssociation.org](mailto:president@GreatWarAssociation.org)

Vice President David Horton:  
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CP Representative Duffy Bowers:  
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## NOTES FROM THE ENTENTE MEMBER REPRESENTATIVE



Fellow Entente and Allied Members,

First and foremost, thank you for the trust you placed in me at the November event. I'm truly grateful for your votes and for the opportunity to serve as your

Entente/Allied Member Representative. It's an honor to step into this role, and I take the responsibility seriously.

My commitment is simple: I am here to represent all Entente and Allied members—across units, nationalities, impressions, and experience levels. Whether you've been reenacting for decades or just joined your first event, your voice matters, and I intend to listen.

One of the things I've heard loud and clear is the desire to continue improving the site itself. Our events are only as good as the ground we fight and play on, and there's real opportunity to make meaningful, practical improvements. Priorities like repairing and maintaining roads, expanding and enhancing No Man's Land with additional shell holes and obstacles, and making the terrain more immersive and functional are areas I strongly support and will advocate for. These kinds of improvements

benefit everyone—both in realism and in safety—and help ensure our events remain something we're proud to attend year after year.

I also want to be clear about accessibility and communication. I believe this position should come with an open door. If you have concerns, ideas, or suggestions—big or small—I want to hear them. The best way to reach me at first is by text at 719-291-6728, or email at [entente-rep@greatwarassociation.org](mailto:entente-rep@greatwarassociation.org). I'm usually available for a phone conversation, and happy to talk in person at events as well.

This organization works best when members feel heard and represented. I'm looking forward to working with the rest of the G-8, with unit leadership, and with you to keep the Great War Association moving forward in a positive, constructive direction.

Thank you again for your confidence and support. I look forward to serving you.

Respectfully,

Scott Miller  
Entente / Allied Member Representative  
Great War Association

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

2026 Spring Tactical

**April 17-18**

2026 Fall Tactical

**November 6-7**

INFO ON UNIT-SPONSORED EVENTS AND SITE CLOSURES CAN BE FOUND ON THE WEB SITE:

[HTTP://WWW.GREATWARASSOCIATION.ORG](http://www.GREATWARASSOCIATION.ORG)

# FROM THE CP COMBAT COMMANDER



Reenactors der Zentrilmächte,  
Meine Herren und Damen,

I hope everyone had a blessed Christmas and great New Year. The Fall event was excellent and I couldn't have been more proud of your actions and the memories created! I am a reenactor veteran of many different eras and I think that the Erste Weltkrieg is the very best reenacting to be had right now. I would like to thank my nemesis and great friend, Bret Werner, for making the past two years a very enjoyable time and the hard work of his staff working very well with us on the "right side" of history (we are of course on the Eastern side of France as everyone knows).

Combat was very good, especially on Saturday morning! I really enjoyed observing the fight around the RIR236/IR92 area and watching the Bavarian mortar crew chew up the Allies occupying the IR92 trenches. Not everything happened according to the tactical plan, but that's not the important part – what's important is that we have a good tactical construct and junior leaders (on both sides) take the initiative to exploit opportunities. The third counterattack went beautifully and the French told me that they were retiring orderly only to turn around and notice that the CP forces were almost upon them, extending the counterattack well beyond our trenches. Ausgezeichnet! This is exactly what I expect from our men! I couldn't be prouder of each of you and your conduct!

I have to admit that I rarely get surprised as I'm the one developing scenarios creating "helmet fires" for y'all, but Saturday night caught me completely off guard. That night will go down as one of my most "zoney" moments of reenacting history (at this point 43 years of experience). The bottom up "end of war scenario" where the Soldaten created soldiers' unions demanding conditions upon the abdication of unsere Kaiser was exceptional! I was floored as armed Soldaten pushed into my Hauptquartier demanding I sign a document at gunpoint.

This was no planned scenario, but developed in first person as I'm sure it happened across the German Army in November 1918.



It left me speechless afterwards and deeply moved for days contemplating all the momentous decisions that had to be made with little to no forethought. Thank you to everyone who created and participated in this exceptional historical scenario – I for once was placed within my own "helmet fire." I would especially like to thank my son, Doug, Ryan Hunneshagen, Ryan Colchin, and my 2.Zugführer, Steve Lehman, for their quick reactions to suppress this rebellion at the loss of a lot of 'red' blood. I look forward to a full report on this scenario from those who created it, but I can say it was fantastic! Great job to Andrew Flynn and David Bolton for your vision and initiative in putting this together (along with so many others). This happened in real life and it was a once in a lifetime opportunity to experience the deep layers that people experienced as they got caught up in historical actions beyond their comprehension.

We are growing! I was stunned to view the Appell area and compare and contrast the two opposing sides. It's very difficult to determine exact numbers as many reenactors do not check in at registration (something we must rectify), but as I compared the two armies, my estimates were that we were either on par with the Entente or stronger. To be honest,

(continued on p. 12)

## FROM THE CP COMBAT COMMANDER

(continued from p. 11)

I've never seen a more balanced battlefield as far as numbers, but I must admit that I consider our combat power much greater than the Allies, even when we are outnumbered. That does not in any way take away from those of our friends who reenact on that side – many of these men (and women) reenact alongside of us in different eras. Many of the Entente are graduates of my WWII Kriegsschule and they are very strong leaders. However, I consider the Zentrilmächte tactics superior and more advanced (on a broader scale) than the Entente. Regardless of the situation, I am very satisfied with the efforts of each of you to grow our side of the hobby and the great things we are doing together is making a significant impact on our numbers and experiences. Let's keep this up – we are on a great path!

As we grow, I want to announce a few appointments and promotions for my staff. Oskar Schmitt (Charlie Smith) of IR124 is being promoted to Leutnant to serve as my Adjutant and Ryan Hunneshagen of IR23 is being promoted to Vizefeldwebel. "Doc" Fryman of 8.Kurassier will retain Oberleutnant and serve as our Communications Officer and senior staff officer. I recognize that these are not necessarily historical positions, but we live in a reenacting hobby where my number one priority is developing our next generation of leaders and this is a step in that direction. This also starts putting us on the road to developing from a Kompagnie into a Bataillon. As many of you know, my plan is to expand into a Bataillon of two Kompagnie of three Züge each with a Bataillon general support Sturmzug. We are growing in units and these are being placed more and more to the North. There will be a time when we restructure our Kompagnie into six Züge and redesignate ourselves as a Bataillon. I originally stated that I believed we would double in five years and I think we are close to that in just over two. In the spirit of developing future leaders, my son recommended that each line Zug provide a young reenactor (who has no real leadership responsibilities) be assigned to the Kompagnie as a

liaison and runner. He would serve in this position for one event and then rotate back to the Zug (his unit) to be replaced by another young runner at the next event. Each would be billeted in the Hauptquartier for the duration of the event (we have six bunks). The dual purpose of this experiment is 1) to provide energetic young men as runners to ensure better communications as well as 2) allowing these young reenactors to experience the hobby at this higher level. This plants the seeds for leadership development at a young age at a time when they aren't taken up by leadership responsibilities. In my mind, we must take the opportunities we have to develop as many of our future leaders as possible BEFORE they are picked for these positions, but an investment means that you have to give up something today for a far better return later. This is a GREAT opportunity for your Soldaten and they will receive personal attention from our proven leaders. Please consider investing in this opportunity for your men and our future!

I want to thank Aaron Sterling of IR459 for his excellent, consistent coordination of our fires capabilities. This is a very thankless job and I run him silly sometimes, but it's a testament to him and many of you for your selfless dedication that makes our hobby so rewarding. There are so many of you that do such great work and I cannot let our vehicle drivers go unnoticed! What a great capability they bring with their impressions and vehicles! I am so humbled by all the little impressions which give our hobby a rich experience for us all from the RK to our Feldgeistlicher, unser Kaiser, cobblers, cooks, Feldpost attendants, mortar crews, Maschinengewehr gunners, bomb slingers, board carriers, Flammenwerfers, box makers, staff officers, telephone operators and wiremen, pilots, Kriegsmarine staff officer, interrogator, Zugführer (I found out that the plural for Zugführer is Zugführer) all the way to our drill masters. I am so proud of you all! It's the little things that bring out the excellence!

(continued on p. 13)



## FROM THE CP COMBAT COMMANDER

(continued from p. 12)



I would also be very remiss if I did not congratulate the ONLY GWA member to ever be awarded the Pour le Merit: Feldwebelleutnant Tomas Tassel (Tom Galleher - but everyone knows him as Skampi). Skampi has served this organization from its beginning in just about every position possible and at 130 years old, he's the last living veteran of the Great War who actually met the Kaiser. But seriously, this is a great opportunity to recognize Tom for his selfless service and I want people to see this award being worn rather than be a "retirement award." If anyone sees him wearing his uniform without this neck jewelry, he owes them a Bier (and demotion to staff officer from me) for being out of uniform. Honestly, Skampi, we're so blessed to have you and thank you for your leadership and our friendship! Herr Blau Max!

Lastly, I want to speak briefly about the Spring event. Bret and I have coordinated fully on the tactical scenarios over the past two years where we knew when and where each of us conducted operations. However, we decided that it's time to let loose the reins on our leaders and allow a force on force event to provide better opportunities for y'all. We will have three tactical objectives throughout the weekend and our job (and theirs) is to control all three as long as possible for the entire event. One objective will be within our lines, one within their lines, and the third at a distance far from both of our lines. The object is to principally teach the tactical principles of "mass" and "economy of force." To be strong everywhere means to be weak everywhere so we need to figure out when and where to be weak to be strong when and where we need to be for tactical purposes. This should provide for opportunities and vulnerabilities that are fluid and fleeting for both sides. We will not coordinate anything so our victories and defeats will be based upon your ability to adapt quickly and take advantage of fleeting opportunities. I can't wait!

We are three months out – start getting your uniform, gear, and grenades prepared – we will need every last one of you in the field in the coming months! Bis später!

*„Wir haben einen Willen; Sieg oder Tod!“*

Mike Landree  
Otto Landrik  
Hauptmann u. Kompagniechef



(Photo courtesy of Eric Mink, IR92)



# REGISTRATION & CHECK-IN UPDATE

For the past four events, you've become increasingly familiar with the new and improved registration and check-in processes. We're pleased to announce even more improvements intended to further streamline the process, upgrade record-keeping, and ensure everybody gets the correct trench pass, while lightening the load on unit commanders, who already have their hands more than full during the run-up to event start time.

We'll still be using the RegFox system you're used to, and you'll still be able to create an account on that platform, if you like, so you don't have to re-enter all of your information for every event registration. (Unit-sponsored events will also continue to use the same system, so that's a plus for those of you who do other timelines too.) But we'll be printing trench passes on-demand, at check-in, to make sure everybody has theirs in their possession. Trench passes will be validated at safety formation and potentially at random throughout the event, to make sure all are checked in. If you don't have a trench pass in hand, you'll be directed back to the registration shack to check in and get one.

Why do we care? Several reasons.

- **Safety.** Check-ins make sure we know who is physically on site AND have their emergency contact's information in case it's needed. (Emergency contact info will be printed on the trench pass, so please don't list yourself as your own emergency contact.)
- **Insurance.** The insurance agency requires us to estimate number of attendees at events, so accurate counts matter.
- **Record keeping and bylaw compliance.** GWA Bylaws mandate that all active units field 6 or more members at events: that means 6 or more guys who actually show up, not just 6 or more who register.
  - Over the past 4 events, on average, only 64% of registrants have checked in - so there are a handful of units that we can't verify have met their attendance numbers.
  - By number registered, there are 4 units that have not met requirements over those events — but by number of members who actually checked in, there are 10 units that wouldn't meet numbers.
  - **Moving forward, we will be crediting unit attendance based on number of members checked in.**



(Photo courtesy of Eric Mink, IR92)

# THE MUTINY

by Rodney Schuyler, IR92

7. November. 1918. It started with a piece of paper and a pair of nails. The young pioneer discretely shoved them into my hand and asked if I would hang these up. Before I could follow up he was already walking away, heading to the next unit. Gefreiters Dannenhauer and Nowak were with me. We looked at each other and Dannenhauer looked over the flyer. It was a list of demands for Herr Hauptmann and the army overall.

I was unsure what to do. My loyalty to my kameraden, the regiment and the army remained strong, however I'd heard rumors of an armistice, revolution in cities across the nation including Braunschweig, and even talk of the Emperor's abdication. My thoughts raced to home. Was my family ok?

Gefreiter Dannenhauer and Nowak understood the gravity of the situation and offered to collect information for me. I agreed and sent to speak to the men and find out more about these conspirators. I decided that I would keep this information secret from our commanders for now.

My attention returned to the evening attack. Our morning probes had been costly and unsuccessful, and the men were increasingly anxious about the assault scheduled for 20:30. That afternoon Gefreiters Dannenhauer and Nowak reported their findings. They'd determined that these mutineers were not Bolsheviks, which was an important stipulation for many of the men, and the goal of the mutiny was to prevent more foolish attacks, and ultimately preserve the integrity of the army. To me it was now clear. The army needed to be saved to protect the Fatherland from the Western allies and the Bolshevik threat in the east. I didn't want to see any more bloodshed and death of brave German youth in senseless attacks whose objectives lie in the negotiating table.

Gefreiters Dannenhauer and Nowak went among the Gruppen and took a vote from the men regarding their support for delivering the demands. After receiving a supermajority vote, we agreed that most of us would join the mutiny.

I was restless for the remainder of the evening and set about preparing for the assault as normal as I could. My thoughts raced... I respected Herr Feldwebel-Luetnant and our Sergeant, what would happen to them when the moment came? What if they resisted? I didn't want to see them in harm's way. We'd served in too many battles together and they'd always gotten us through. Gefreiter Dannenhauer had pulled me aside earlier and informed me that the mutineers said they could kill any officers who resisted, but that he would not do that to me, and I couldn't let that happen to our leaders either.

20:15. The time came. The Company had gathered in the forward trench and were getting ready to head to the jump off point. While gathered around Herr Feldwebel-Luetnant, he asked "are we ready?" I stopped him and said "Skampi, there won't be an attack" He looked confused, then alarmed, then he reached for his pistol. I put my hand on his wrist and said "Please sir, don't do this." He realized what was happening, gave a grin, and the men departed. We passed Sergeant Zohlner and a similar scene played out, thankfully without incident and our company made our way out of the trenches.

Musketier Kirsch formed the men into a column of 2 on the road. There were nearly 20 of us. I took my place at the head of the column and we began our march up toward the Hauptquartier. As we climbed the hill, we saw a shadowy column of men ahead. Who were they? Revolutionaries? Counterrevolutionaries? I then heard singing, and saw a red banner reading "Schlus mit dem Krieg". Our confidence rose and our men joined them in singing Die Internationale as we met and turned toward the Hauptquartier. Musketier Kirsch brought the men to a halt on the road while a motley crew of Germans and Hungarians marched up to deliver the demands to Herr Hauptmann.

# THE MUTINY

(continued from p. 15)

The following moments were tense. I loved and respected Herr Hauptmann. We all did, and none of us wanted to see him harmed either. Chants of “Schlus mit dem Krieg” broke out and emotions ran high among the men outside the Hauptquartier as a small group of representatives entered the bunker to talk with Herr Hauptmann. I left our men in formation on the road with Musketier Kirsch, while I waded into the crowd to look for familiar faces, help make sure things stayed under control, and get an idea of who was in charge.

Suddenly, our Kameraden of IR23 appeared between our men and the crowd gathered in front of the Hauptquartier. Verdamnt! Tension spiked as the Silesians stood at the ready with their weapons. I went amongst my friends and begged them to put their weapons away. We were here to save the country, to save the nation, to save our homes! The last thing I wanted was for Germans to kill Germans.

Then the order to fire came. The Silesians fired a crisp volley into the mass of mutineers. I cried out as men dropped in heaps of feldgrau on the ground. Distraught, I returned to our lines. Then... Musketeer Kirsch ordered our men to fire. A devastating volley was fired into IR23 and the carnage continued. Grenades were thrown, and chaos reigned. I joined the protest because I thought it would save lives. Now my Kameraden were murdering each other...

Amidst the horror, Herr Hauptmann emerged. With an aura that only Hauptmann Landrick could summon, the firing ceased and the men eventually fell silent. He said he'd heard our demands and could agree with many of them and said he would work with us. But then, like the father of the men that he is, he reminded us of our duty. He reminded us that it does not matter who is in power in the government. That the army is not political, and that the army only serves the people and the nation, that we must continue to do our duty.

The men understood. Then someone in the crowd declared that we should all eat together. I didn't fully understand what he meant or where he was directing the men to go, so I decided to take my men back to our lager. Suddenly in the dark I heard a machinegun firing. It was the counter revolutionaries. They had lured men away with the promise of food and camaraderie and then gunned them down mercilessly. This fratricidal crime only added to a night of senseless bloodshed and tragedy.

The men of IR.92 fulfilled their duty to the very end and marched home after the armistice on the 11th. The mutiny at the front served to be a grim preview of the violence that would ravage our nation through the following year. I pray this new year for peace for my country and the men who served it.

Uffz. Reinhold Klein

9K. Braunschweigisch Infanterie Regiment Nr. 92

20. December. 1925

*Author's note: Thank you to the folks who planned this scenario and everyone who played along and contributed in your own ways. This was probably one of the greatest bits of mass improv theater any of us will ever be part of. Thanks for helping make the Fall 2025 event a memorable one!*



# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

by Jay Callaham



These days, we think of the YMCA as a nice gym, maybe with a swimming pool, summer camps, and physical and religious activity. Unknown to many, “The Y” originated in the 1840s in the British Empire, came to America in the 1850s, and has been a part of every war involving American Soldiers from the War Between the States to the end of the Great War – World War 1, and beyond, when it became a founding body of the United Services Organization – the USO.\*

During WW1, approximately 26,000 YMCA staff and volunteers performed Y work, providing comfort to US soldiers. American Detachment leaders in Europe had the title of “Secretary.” American Secretaries and other volunteers, male and female, under the sponsorship of the World Alliance in Geneva, had been sent to Europe at the beginning of the Great War to care for prisoners held by both sides. It is safe to say that YMCA efforts directly helped hundreds of thousands of POWs during the war. That was just the beginning.

When the US officially entered the war in 1917, the “Y” was ready, thanks to Mr. Edward Clark Carter, an American who was the General Secretary of the Y in India when the war began. Mr. Carter had come to France with troops from India early in the war. The right man was in place to organize the staffing and execute the planning of that organization before the US was officially involved.

For example, while organizational bureaucrats back in the USA were debating whether a Christian organization should provide tobacco products to the soldiers, Mr. Carter, knowing the desirability of “smokes” among the troops, was already scouring the neutral nations of Europe and other regions for every cigarette or package of pipe tobacco that could be procured, as well as establishing supply networks for the future. **HE** knew what was needed.



(continued on p. 18)

# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 17)



Mr. Carter was at work weeks before the War Work Council of the YMCA had even notified him that he was to be in charge.(1) Mr. Carter started the process of organizing, literally months before the Council “three thousand miles away” in New York finally acted to start sending him people for staff, and actually giving the authority to negotiate purchases of all things necessary from building materials to sporting equipment.

“The Y” was the first such Welfare Service organization to offer its services to the US military when war was declared in April, 1917. There was a good deal of lively discussion in Army Command regarding the use of civilians in the combat areas, many opposing it. Also, many organizations were considered by some officers to be too likely to spread “progressive ideas” among the troops. Others feared that these organizations would become magnets for “slackers,” “shirkers,” pacifists, and religious zealots.(2) One of the most anti-service organization officers, Gen. Peyton March, declared: *“No man should be permitted to enter or become a member of any noncombat organization who was capable of carrying arms!”* (3) Later on, one of his complaints about the work done by the Y in the combat zones would be that: *“Front line soldiers were more focused on getting goodies and treats, distracted by endless bickering over the cost of cigarettes instead of concentrating on the enemy in front of them* - - - (4) This issue, interestingly, ultimately led to the US Army adopting a ration of four cigarettes per soldier per day, later upped to twelve per day. (This continued well into the later eras, as those of us can attest, remembering the 4-pack of cigarettes contained in C-Rations until into the 1970s!) At one point, the US Military bought out the entire production of Bull Durham tobacco products for one year!\*



General Pershing was finally convinced of the value that the Y could bring. At first, he wanted Y people brought into the military, giving them actual military ranks. A Secretary would have the rank of Captain and so on. Mr. Carter, who had at first thought commissions to be a good idea, later nixed that notion,

(continued on p. 19)



# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 18)

pointing out that making actual officers of his people would put a damper on relationships with the enlisted personnel. It could also lead to friction when issues arose between the organization and military personnel when someone might try to “pull rank” rather than do good-faith cooperating. It was agreed that YMCA (and all other welfare organizational personnel in the war zones) would fall under military regulations and be governed by military law, but would not hold military rank.



Uniforms were authorized. Female personnel had fairly specific uniform designs to differentiate canteen workers from hut personnel, transportation staff, entertainment division, nursing, education and other specializations. While the female volunteers tended to stick to the guidelines pretty closely, headgear varied wildly. Generally, the women's uniforms consisted of a blue-gray skirt and jacket with lighter blue collar, white blouse with various colors of necktie, and a variety of headgear. Some uniforms were made from Army Olive Drab material similar to that used by officers.

Helmets and gas masks were mandated for wear near the Front, especially in the “Alert Zones,” generally within 5 miles of the Front. Many adopted the French “Adrian” style helmet, regardless of to what troops they were attached. Others wore the British Brodie or similar American M1917.

Photographic and artifact evidence indicates that the vast majority of helmets were worn “as issued,” though some have turned up with YMCA insignia custom-made or painted on.



The uniform for male personnel was laid out in an order from General Secretary Carter: A E F-Y M C A, Paris, October 16, 1917. To the Adjutant-General, A. E. F. Headquarters, France. *“In reply to your letter. No. 3409, of October 11th, asking for the information of the Commander-in-Chief what we have prescribed regarding uniforms for Y M C A workers, I am to send the following: ‘All regular full-time secretaries of the A E F-Y M C A in France, should wear the regulation United States Army uniform with U. S. Army buttons. The cloth used in the uniform may be either that generally worn by enlisted men, or that worn by officers, according to the individual choice of the secretaries concerned.*

(continued on p. 20)



# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 19)



*'Whenever desired, the secretary may wear the leather or web belt. The regulation service hat should be worn. All secretaries who are now wearing caps should replace them with service hats as soon as possible.'*

*'U. S. in bronze should invariably be worn on the right-hand side of the collar and the letters 'Y M C A' in bronze on the left-hand side of the collar; the Red Triangle, with the letters, 'Y M C A' embossed in red on a dark blue background, are to be worn on the right arm, just above the elbow.'*



*'Secretaries may wear either canvas or leather leggings or woolen puttees. Boots that lace through entire length are authorized only outside of French cities or in inclement weather. As you will remember, an inquiry has just been made from your office as to whether there would be any objection to YMCA Secretaries wearing on their campaign hats a hat-cord of red and dark blue intertwined. The wearing of the uniform by all full time YMCA workers who hold YMCA Identity Books is obligatory.'* There were also mentions of Y men wearing black cords on the campaign hats.

*'The full details of the YMCA women workers' uniform have not been finally worked out. Information as to what we decide finally to prescribe in this regard will be forwarded to you in a few days. Sincerely yours, E. C. Carter.'* (5)



Photographic and artifact evidence demonstrates that the male uniforms varied widely. Some wore the Model 1910 or 1916 blouse with the standing collar, others a more British style of tunic with lapels and collared shirt with necktie. The Campaign Hat was specified, but Overseas caps and visor caps were also quite common. They weren't supposed to wear the shoulder strap with the Sam Browne belt, but some did. Very few images or artifacts show a hat cord of any type being worn.

# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 20)



Variety is the spice of life! The fellow in the helmet with the Small Box Respirator is wearing the patch of the Entertainment Division.



## The Y Commission from General Pershing:

On August 28, 1917, the Y received its commission under General Orders no. 26-II-1, *"to provide for the amusement and recreation of the troops by means of its usual program of social, physical, educational and religious activities."* On September 6, 1917, it was granted authority under General Orders No. 33, *"to establish exchanges for the American troops in France" . . . "operated along the lines of post exchanges whose places they were intended to fill."* (6)

By this order, the YMCA was given the job of oversight of the US Military Exchange and Canteen System, as well as coordinating the supply system for other volunteer support organizations like the Salvation Army, Jewish Welfare Board, Knights of Columbus and similar charities.

The Y established more than 1,500 canteens and post exchanges, and with thousands of "Huts" attached to specific units, fed and entertained more troops during World War 1 than did any other welfare organization. Y volunteers even went into the front lines to support "their Boys." At least eight were Killed in Action, one by a German sniper. Two were "killed by brigands." Two female YMCA volunteers were among those killed in action due to bombing and artillery.(7)

Some of the friction that caused soldier complaints about the YMCA came from their operation of the exchanges and canteens. By agreement with the Army, the Y was supposed to have exclusive rights to operate canteens within a given area. This didn't always work, because the Army continued to establish its



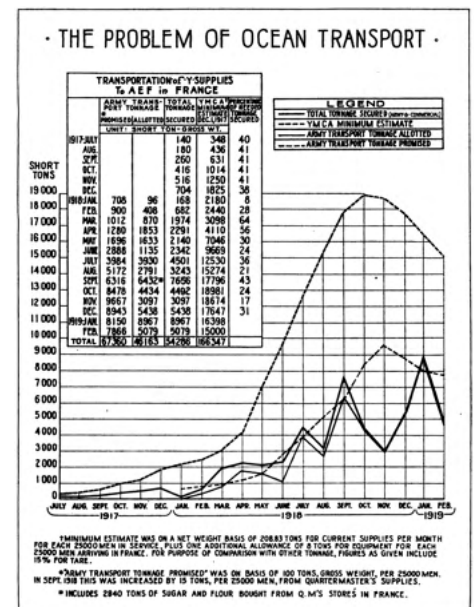
# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 21)

own, often in relatively close proximity to those of the Y. Army canteens had the advantage of not having to pay transportation costs and other overhead that were imposed on the Y.

So a soldier buying a pack of cigarettes for a nickel at the Army canteen would be quite upset at the Y canteen just a short distance down the road for charging seven cents! Often, soldiers felt that the goodies should have been given to them at no charge, not understanding that the Army expected a certain return on the items provided by it to the canteen system. A great deal of material, like hot chocolate, other treats, and especially paper, envelopes, etc., WAS given away, but the charged-for stuff is what was remembered. Cocoa, sandwiches, and other food was regularly given away to troops on the move. Another Y service was that of sending money back home from soldiers' pay.

There were also some unfortunate situations where a soldier would purchase a carton of cigarettes or a box of candy, and would find a nice note inside from someone at an organization back home that had donated the item for free distribution to the troops. Such cases always resulted in refunds, and the incidents were investigated by the Army. In every documented case, the items were among those provided by the Army, and had come in cases that were not marked as being sourced from donated goods.(8) The fact is that the Army never came through with more than 30 – 35% of the transport promised, by sea or ground, which caused additional strain on the system, and friction in the field. The chart shows the required tonnage of material vs what was actually allotted by sea. The ground transport situation was no better.(9)



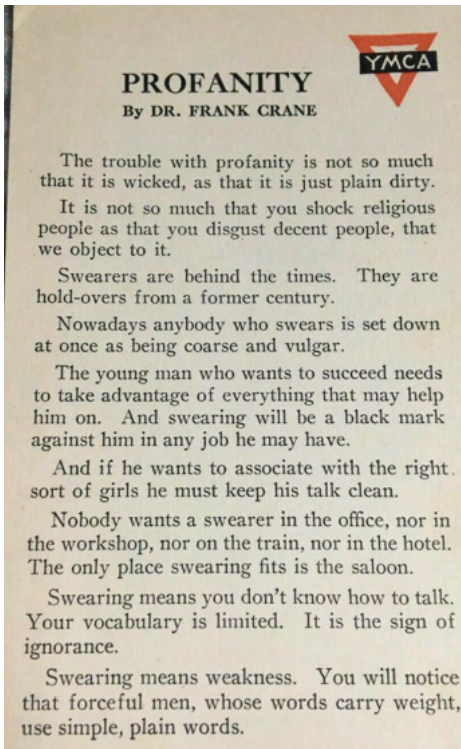
Being a Christian organization, it was to be expected that a goodly number of Y men were ministers, deacons, etc. Naturally, there was a desire to bring religious activity to the troops, especially in attempts to distract them from the readily available vices of the Zone of Combat. Mr. Carter's directives on this were quite explicit. Of course, religious activity was to be made available to troops of ALL Faiths, with equal accommodation to the needs of a particular belief system so far as was practical. There were to be no deceptive practices, like delivering a Sermon when some other entertainment was advertised. Dr. Katherine Mayo points this out quite well in her excellent book That Damn Y, while describing the excellent work of Dr. Maitland Alexander on page 285: "He did not spring a sermon or a prayer meeting on the men, under a smoke-screen of movies or vaudeville, as



# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 22)

*some lamentable dodo elsewhere would occasionally break loose and do; and this in spite of Carter's most absolute prohibition, in spite of the men's unflinching resentment — of the unflinching shock to their native good taste."*



Ms. Mayo's book is a good read. She came to it from a very anti-Y perspective until she actually got to see the organization in action and became an unabashed admirer. She highlighted the good and the bad and often used the terms "Dodo" or "Human Lemon" to describe substandard Y people. She also made the point that even the most mediocre volunteers still rendered better service than having NO service would have done.

Religious work was very important to the Y, and religious activities were quite popular with the troops. The Y handed out pocket Bibles and songbooks, and published hundreds of thousands of religious pamphlets on topics ranging from Profanity to Gambling, Alcohol Abuse to Womanizing, and other vices. At the various Huts, massive efforts were made to ensure comfortable, affordable alternatives to the seedier activities that soldiers all too often engaged in.

The Y volunteers who were assigned to specific regiments and divisions, often travelled with them and in some cases, not only delivered goodies into the front lines, but sometimes even went "over the top" with the troops in attacks. One sterling case was: *"The commanding officer of the 9th Infantry, 2d Division, wrote to the Chief Secretary on September 19, 1918, in part as follows: "In the recent operations of September 12th to 16th Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ went over the top with the assaulting battalion of the regiment, took care of the wounded on the field, and when the battalion was halted to re-form at its first objective, took possession of a German kitchen, reorganized it with four German prisoners as kitchen police, and fed over four hundred men with coffee, steaks, rice and potatoes. Meanwhile he was ministering to the wounded and spent the night with those who were not evacuated until the next day. The following day he went on with his usual work of supplying troops with cigarets (sic) and other articles."* (10)

The photo is of Billy Levere, author of My Hut, A Memoir of a YMCA Volunteer in World War One, who became something of a legend among the troops that he served in the 26<sup>th</sup> "Yankee" and 3<sup>rd</sup> "Rock of the Marne" Divisions.

Another mention: *"A major of the 101st Infantry, 26th Division, recommending a secretary for the Distinguished Service Cross wrote: "During the fierce fighting at Molleville Farm, Houppy Bois and Beheu Bois, October 25d to 21st inclusive, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, a Y M C A man, although wounded by a shell fragment, refused to leave*



(continued on p. 24)

# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 23)

*his boys, as he called them, and stayed with them during the intense artillery and machine gun fire. He brought them cigarettes (sic) and hot chocolate, each trip being made under continual hail of shells and bullets. He ministered to the men of the battalion in every way possible, giving great assistance in rendering first aid. His courage and devotion to this entirely voluntary duty, his utter disregard of his personal safety, that he might be of help to others, merits the highest praise."*<sup>(11)</sup>

There were other cases of Y volunteers accompanying troops on patrols into No-Man's-Land and engaging in other front-line activities. While there were surely some "dodos" among the 26,000 Y volunteers who served in Europe, it's clear that in most cases, the vast majority of troops were quite appreciative of the efforts of the Y on their behalf. This is demonstrated by the fact that, after the Armistice, when the US Army adopted various shoulder sleeve insignia for the different units, they allowed the supporting YMCA volunteers to actually wear the unit patches. If you look at the photos of female volunteers, you'll see that even the women of the Y were allowed that privilege.

Also, the sheer valor of the YMCA frontline personnel did not go unrewarded in other ways. At least 319 Citations and Decorations were rendered to US YMCA Personnel during the war, including four Distinguished Service Crosses, two Distinguished Service Medals, forty one Croix de Guerre, and many others. <sup>(12)</sup>

The cost in life wasn't cheap. Some 92 Y volunteers died in service overseas, including six men and 2 women who were listed as Killed in Action. 123 men and 5 women were disabled, listed as Wounded and Gassed. Many others died of disease and accidents in service overseas and in home camps. Two men were "killed by Brigands."<sup>(13)</sup>



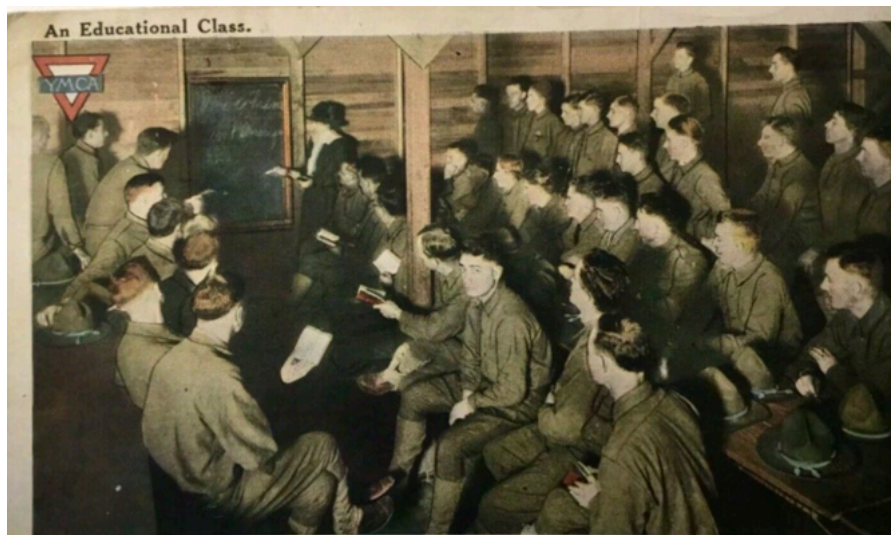
Other services rendered by the Y included basic education for the approximately 30% of AEF soldiers who were illiterate. The Y hosted language lessons, athletic events, and myriad other activities and services. Entertainments, anticipating "Bob Hope" type shows, were arranged.

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# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

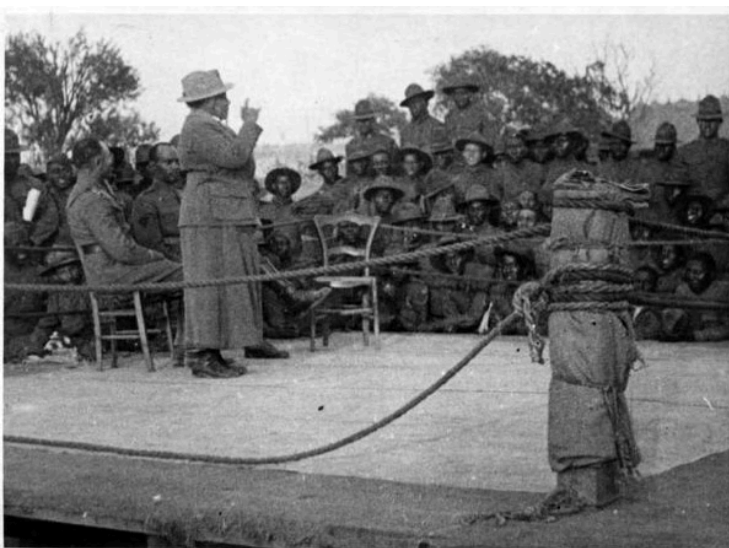
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The Army Educational Plan had impressive results. *"The results of this ambitious plan, as initiated by the YMCA and later operated by the Army reached the following proportions: Soldiers attending lectures in France aggregated 1,440,000, including 750,000 at general educational lectures, 300,000 at agricultural lectures, 230,000 at lectures citizenship, 160,000 at lectures on business subjects."*

*"Soldiers regularly attending schools: Post Schools, 150,000; Divisional Schools, 55,000; Army Schools, 362,300 ; Agricultural Schools, 100,000; Farm School, Allerey, 2500; Vocational Schools, 5800; American University, Beaune, 6000; French Universities, 7000; British Universities, 2100; a grand total of nearly 700,000 men enrolled for systematic instruction. 800 officers and 1300 other ranks were placed in 38 British institutions. They represented about 100 American universities and colleges."*<sup>(14)</sup>

This was, unfortunately, the height of "Jim Crow" in the United States, so the Negro Troops were in segregated units and consequently had their own YMCA organization. The biggest problem for the Y in this regard was finding competent black personnel to serve in the various leadership positions. Fortunately, they had an able administrator in John Hope, President of Morehouse College who headed the "Colored Secretaries Department." He made a special trip to the US and placed Mr. William L. Anderson in charge of Negro Leave Centers in France, assisted by Mrs. Helen L. Curtis, widow of a former American Consul in Liberia.<sup>(15)</sup>



The Y also did superhuman work stateside in camps, railway stops, at ports of embarkation, and points in between. They did the same in all theaters of the war, and POW camps – on both sides – were beneficiaries of their services. They employed staffs of volunteers, paid staff, local hired workers, volunteer and assigned soldiers, even Central Powers POWs, who were generally glad of the chance to get out of the camps and have access to better food! The total

(continued on p. 26)



# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 25)



number of people involved in Y efforts throughout the war will never be known.

The logistical accomplishments were nothing short of miraculous. The Y took over factories in France to manufacture food items, tin cans for jam, boxes for shipping and storage and other materials. They acquired huge garage operations for the thousands of vehicles of all types that were employed. To quote from War Work of the American YMCA pg. 194: "*Eagerly grasping whatever cars could be secured in its great need, the Y found itself operating twenty makes of touring cars, 22 makes of trucks and five of motorcycles. This made the*

*problem of furnishing supplies and spare parts a very serious one. The total motor equipment purchased was about 2200 vehicles of all descriptions, costing \$1,647,000.*"

The Y wasn't alone in providing services to the troops during the Great War. The American Red Cross sent 23,822 nurses and hundreds of canteen workers to the War Zones. The Knights of Columbus sent 1075, the Jewish Welfare Board, 189 workers. The YWCA and other organizations were also represented. Needless to say, it created chaotic situations with so many groups competing for limited resources.

The Salvation Army, which gained well-deserved credit for the work of its "Doughnut Lassies" had a total of only about 254 workers in France! An interesting note is the following: "*We have sold ninety per cent of all the doughnuts we ever fried,*" *laughed Major Barker, head of the Overseas Salvation Army, as reported. "But the ten per cent we gave away are the ones you hear about."*<sup>(16)</sup>



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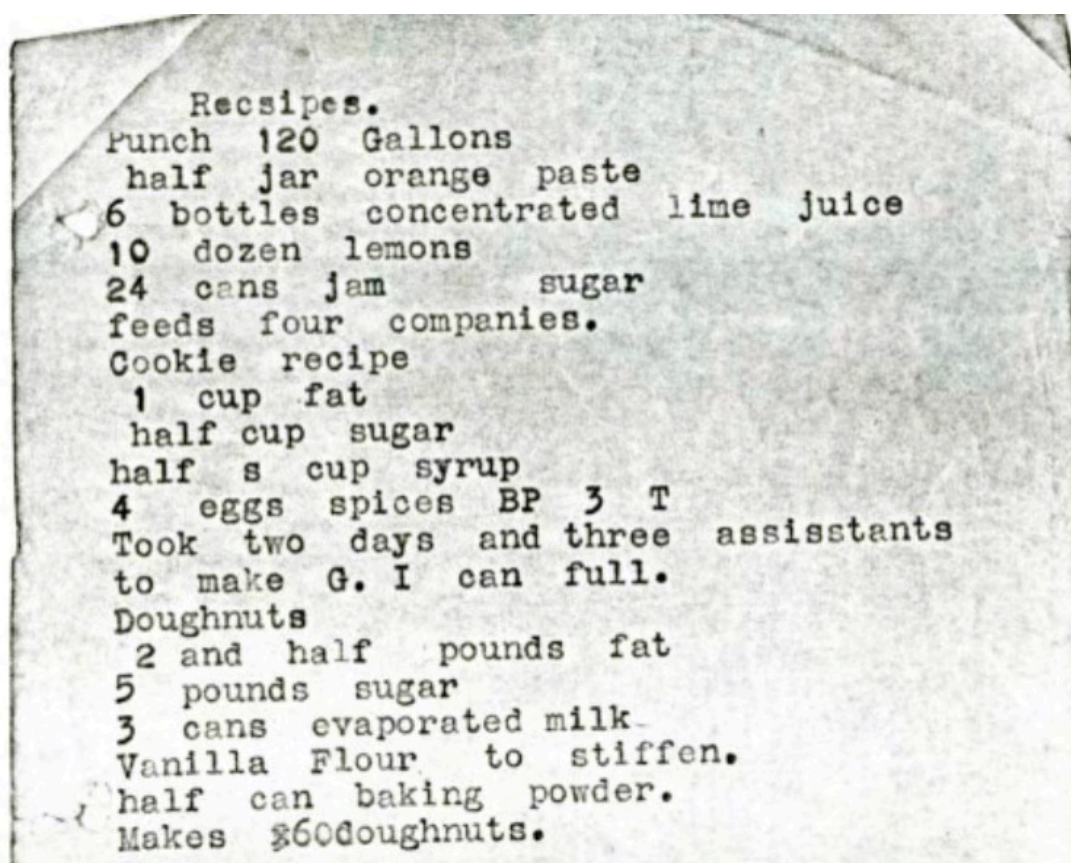
# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 26)

Speaking of doughnuts, Y Secretary Billy Levere in his book My Hut claims to have been the first of the American service organization people to make doughnuts for the troops of the AEF! That probably happened spontaneously in several places as materials came available, but it's interesting, just the same.

A fascinating read is the Diary of a YMCA Canteen Worker, Mary Paxton Keeley's Diary – July 3, 1918 – June 29, 1919. It's available online in its original typed form. She was a professional journalist, the first to graduate from the University of the Missouri School of Journalism, and so has a very readable diary. She makes frequent mention of making doughnuts for the Y and has some fantastic stories. An online link is provided in the Bibliography.

Here's part of the recipe page from Ms Keeley's Diary.



An interesting fact is that some of the service organization volunteers were armed. It makes sense. They were driving around through an active War Zone with cars, trucks, motorcycles, carts, and wagons laden with things like tobacco, chocolate, coffee and other valuables. Some carried large sums of cash that they

(continued on p. 28)



# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 27)



had gotten via sales of goods, as well as payroll money that the Y would wire home to families of Doughboys on request. The accompanying photo is of a Salvation Army officer, and was kindly provided by the National Headquarters of the Salvation Army in Washington, D. C. Remember, the Salvation Army is a church and all SA officers are ordained Ministers. This fellow is clearly wearing a sidearm along with his helmet and Small Box Respirator (aka Gas Mask).

Even Dogs were sometimes used by the Y to carry cigarettes and other goodies to their boys at the front.



Well, I haven't even touched on the massive work of the Y in other theaters of operations around the world. Four American Y volunteers were taken prisoner by the Bolsheviks while serving our troops in Russia! I've avoided the statistics regarding the enormous amount of money that was collected and spent on behalf of our troops. It was staggering. The logistics, I've barely touched on. There were also many hostels established by the Y. Some were opened to provide affordable housing for Doughboys in Rest Areas, others to provide FREE lodging near medical facilities for families of wounded troops. The Y did a LOT!

Other nations had their own YMCA organizations that were at work not only in the European theater, but also, quite literally, around the world.

The British Y did gargantuan service in all theaters. There was a great deal more to the service of those fine men and women than meets the eye. The American Y had no monopoly on Valor and Sacrifice. In the words of Sir Arthur Yapp, K.B.E.: *"Twelve members of the Y. M. C. A. have won the Victoria Cross, 5 the D.S.O., 25 the D.C.M., 55 the M.C., and 55 the M.M., whilst registered at headquarters are the names of 1,225 who have made the supreme sacrifice. We think of many whose war work for the Y. M. C. A. has earned the title of 'Gunga Din.'"*<sup>(17)</sup>

(continued on p. 29)



# A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR

(continued from p. 28)

The YMCA was a lot more than a recreational entity back then, and the true value of its service to the American military in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries cannot be calculated. It's an incredible story of service and sacrifice.



Tour Truck for sightseeing operated by the YMCA for Doughboys who had leave in Paris. One of many types of vehicles acquired by the Y. The dog seems unimpressed.

The Y, near and at the FRONT!

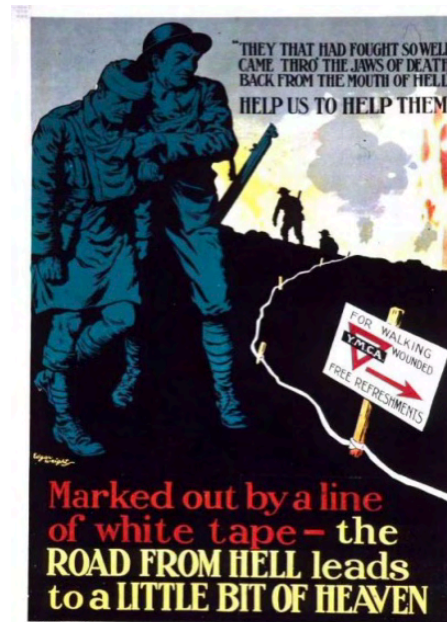


Y. M. C. A. worker serving hot chocolate to Yanks and Poilus in front line.

## A HISTORY OF THE YMCA IN THE GREAT WAR: ENDNOTES

### END NOTES:

\*The Asterisk\* Okay, when you see an Asterisk \* as a notation, it means that this is something that I read somewhere at some-time since I started researching the YMCA in the Great War several years ago, but didn't note it at the time, and could not find it while doing more detail research for this article. Not great scholarship, I know, so take it at face value. Also, I've accumulated photos, mostly online, over a period of years and, regrettably, in only a few cases am able to give a proper attribution. My bad. I was researching for my own use and hadn't considered actually publishing the fruits of my research until recently. I meant no infringement on any copyright, and most of these photos are in the public domain at any rate.



1. Mayo, "That Damn Y." A Record of Overseas Service, Houghton Mifflin Company, Pages 14, 15
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6. Bibliolife, Summary of World War Work of the American YMCA, pg. 26
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8. Ibid. Vol. 1, pg 571
9. Ibid. Vol. 2 Plate VIII, facing page 291
10. Ibid. Vol. 2, pg 140
11. Ibid. Vol. 2, pg 138
12. Bibliolife, Summary of World War Work of the American YMCA, pg. 149
13. Ibid. pg 148-149
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15. Ibid, pg. 197
16. Mayo, "That Damn Y." A Record of Overseas Service, Houghton Mifflin Company, pg 386
17. Yapp, The Romance of the Red Triangle, Hodder & Stoughton, New York, George H. Doran Company, 1918, pg 68



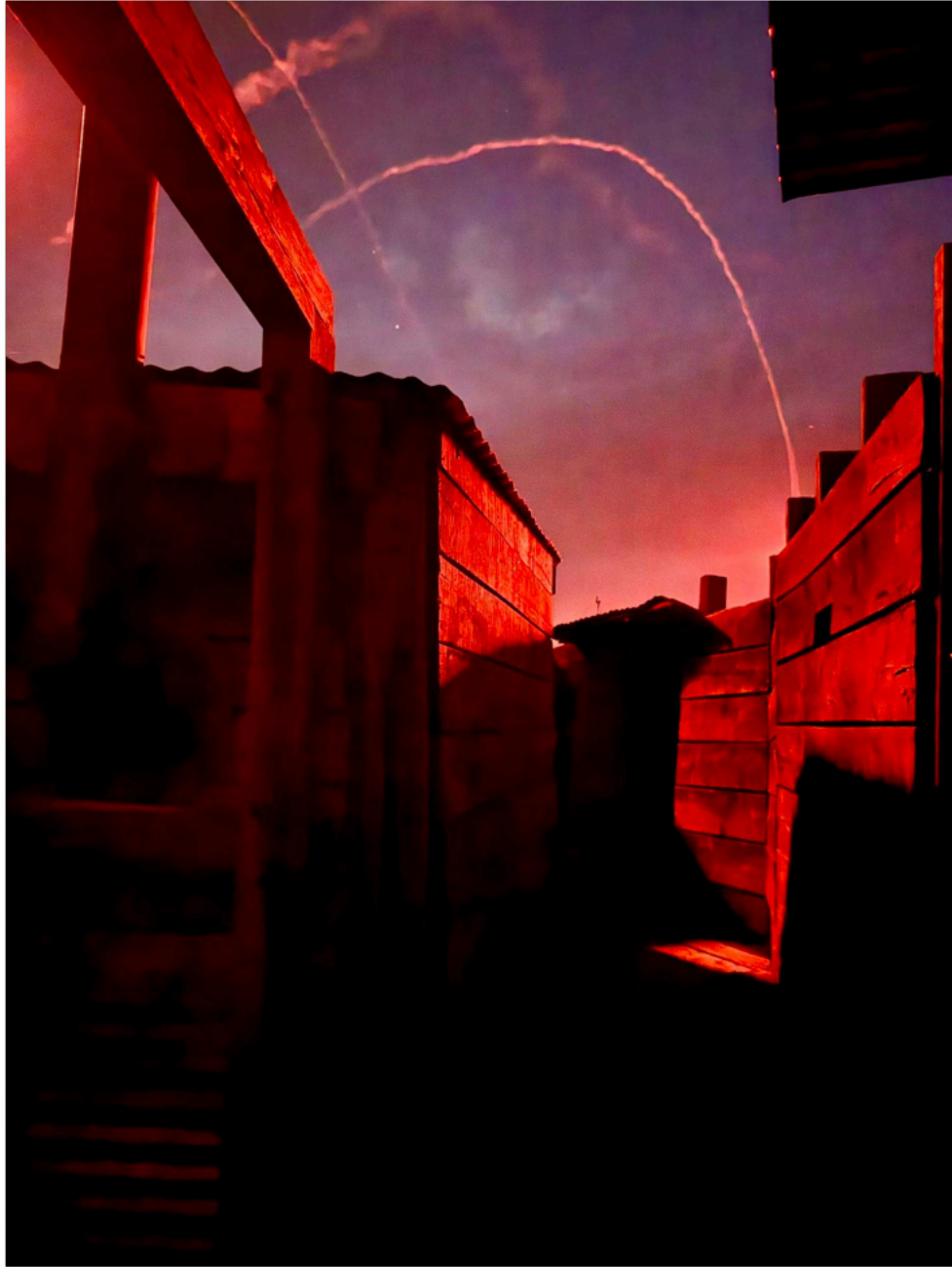
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7. Diary of a YMCA Canteen Worker, Mary Paxton Keeley's Diary - July 3, 1918 - June 29, 1919 (Some GREAT reading and fascinating anecdotes!) [Keeley, Mary Paxton Papers | Collections | Missouri Over There](#)
8. Yapp, Sir Arthur K., K.B.E., The Romance of the Red Triangle, The Story of the Coming of the Red Triangle and the Service Rendered by the Y.M.C.A. to the Sailors and Soldiers of the British Empire, Hodder & Stoughton, New York, George H. Doran Company, 1918 [The romance of the red triangle; the story of the coming of the red triangle and the service rendered by the Y. M. C. A. to the sailors and soldiers of the British empire : Yapp, Arthur Keysall, Sir, 1869- \[from old catalog\] : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)



## ANNOUNCEMENTS & MISCELLANY



(Photo courtesy Eric Mink, IR92)

Spring 2026 Issue of On the Wire will publish in early April. Please have submissions to [secretary@GreatWarAssociation.org](mailto:secretary@GreatWarAssociation.org) by March 31.