

REFLECTIONS – No. 6 (January 4, 2021)

The Draft in World War I

In 1917, as the United States prepared to enter into what was to be known as World War I (the war to end all wars), it was necessary to institute a military draft to obtain the necessary number of soldiers. President Woodrow Wilson signed a bill into law requiring all men between the ages of 21 and 30 to register. A total of 2.8 million men American men served in World War I.

Question: What were two nicknames for American soldiers in World War I? (Answer at bottom)

The first draft call for Nevada County was in August, 1917, with 350 men being called for military service. Out of the 350 men called, 73 did not pass the physical examination and 173 claimed an exemption.

Exemptions from military service were granted for a variety of reasons. Those who registered were put into five classifications.

1. Unmarried men or married men with children over age 16 were accepted for military service.
2. Married men with a dependent spouse or dependent children under age 16 were temporarily exempt.
3. Those who provided the only source of income for a family with children under 16 were temporarily exempt as were those employed in agricultural labor essential to the war effort.
4. Those who could prove that military service would cause extreme hardship to their families were exempt
5. State and federal officials, licensed pilots, members of the clergy, students preparing for the clergy, the disabled and morally unfit, and aliens were exempt.

Those who claimed an exemption had to appear before a local board to present their case and the local board made the decision to grant or deny the exemption.

There was much resentment among the people who saw members of their family being sent to war while other men got to stay home. They called those who stayed home “slackers” and harassed them. The government issued a small bronze pin that could be worn on the lapel which had the word “EXEMPT” with the national coat of arms and the letters U. S. at the bottom. The Prescott Daily News reported in the August 2, 1917 issue that the pins had been shipped from Washington to the local boards. Each man who had been rejected would receive one. Wearing one of these pins would let people know that the wearer had been examined and found to have a legitimate reason to be exempt from military service. There were strict penalties for giving false information to claim an

exemption. A picture of the pins is attached. These pins are now collector's items and are very hard to find.

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Daily Two-Minute Prayer

In 1918, the mayors of most cities in Arkansas asked residents to take two minutes every day to pray for the men fighting in World War I. In Prescott, the electricity was cut off every night at 9:00 p. m. for two minutes. During these two minutes of darkness, residents were asked to say a prayer for the soldiers who were away from home.

Answer to Question: Doughboys and Sammies

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Rainfall Record for 2020—75.6 inches. This is the third straight year of above-normal rainfall—2018 (80 inches); 2019 (74.3 inches). Normal is 52 inches.

Comments from readers—

1. Woodrow Wilson was by far the most evil person to ever serve as president of the US!!!!-- James
2. One of my Granpaws brothers was, as I understand it-- was eligible for the draft in both WWI & WWII. He was always well known in Nevada County for years--for to put it kindly, for his eccentricity. Stories abound about his fears regarding being drafted. He was said to have come up the strategy - - "I will act like I am insane--crazy as a bat". My granpaw said something like--well that ought to real easy for ya--cause you sure are--no need to act.-- Dan

REFLECTIONS NO 7 (JANUARY 11, 2021)

INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC IN NEVADA COUNTY IN 1918

The Spanish influenza epidemic began to appear in Nevada County in October, 1918. A state-wide quarantine was issued which was the most sweeping quarantine ever ordered in Arkansas. Every school, church, moving picture theater, and other places of public assembly were ordered closed until permission was given from the Board of Health to reopen. Little Rock reported 6,000 cases and 500 new cases in one day. In Prescott, 30% of the teachers and students had the flu when the quarantine went into effect.

Public funerals were prohibited in churches or homes. Only the immediate family could attend a burial. All stores except drug stores, soda fountains, cigar stores, food stores, and restaurants could be open only from 9:30 a.m. until 4 p.m. All business offices except banks must close before 4 p.m. If a college student in a dormitory or boarding house contracted the disease, nobody could leave that building.

A news report from Spain and England stated that many who recovered from the flu developed tuberculosis. Spain also complained about people calling the disease the Spanish flu, saying that it did not originate in Spain.

The government published in the newspapers advice on how to deal with the disease warning people to stay away from those who were infected. They also recommended that windows and doors be open to allow fresh air to circulate. They advised people to not over-dress or sit in a warm room heavily dressed. They claimed that 100,000 lives could be saved if people only dressed properly. Those who cared for flu victims were told to wear an apron or gown over their clothing and leave it in the room where the sick person was to avoid spreading the disease. Any cloth or handkerchief used by the victim should be burned. In looking through the Nevada County newspapers in October, 1918, masks were only recommended for nurses or those directly caring for a sick person. People were told to keep homes, offices, and workshops well ventilated, spend as much time as possible out of doors, walk to work if possible, and to make every effort to breathe in as much pure air as possible.

Drug stores used the flu epidemic to push remedies that might help. Some of those mentioned were Rexall cold tablets, Bromo Quinine, Cascara tablets, and Foley's Honey and Tar to soothe the throat. Guthrie's Drug Store advertised an atomizer spray that could be sprayed in the home to prevent influenza. Later on, Vicks Vap-o-Rub was promoted as an excellent medicine for influenza.

By late October, the state-wide quarantine was being gradually lifted. Libraries and movie theaters could be open for adults only, retail stores could be open on Saturday evenings, and colleges could reopen if there had been no cases on campus for three days.

A notable increase in deaths was reported in Nevada County in October, 1918 due to complications from influenza. Many who had the disease had mild cases and recovered. Pneumonia was the main complication that caused death.

This article only covers the month of October, 1918. This was just the first wave. The Spanish flu epidemic continued for about two years with two or three “waves” of cases. It is estimated that 500 million people were infected world-wide and that about 50 million people died. About 675,000 people died in the United States.

Comments from readers—

1. Thanks for this view of what a pandemic looked like in south Arkansas in 1918. It's interesting to contrast what was happening then vs now. There are more similarities than I would have thought, although there was more promotion of fresh air than we've seen in the Covid-19 event. Thanks for your interesting material! – Anonymous

2. What I am sharing comes from Mount Holly (Union County) history, but could easily be from any community. To set the stage, my husband and I reside in an old home built by “Jim King who taught school at Bethel and his wife Mattie Lewis King.” They bought 12 acres of land which had space to build a new house to replace the small log house they lived in. By the time they moved into the new house (our home now) they had two children, Marie and James, and welcomed baby Archie who was born in their new home in 1917. “In the fall of 1918, the terrible flu epidemic hit Mount Holly.” In October 1918, the “Jim King family had a new baby, John “Jake” Elias. All of the family except Marie and the baby took ill. When some of the neighbors could, they came and helped the family. Mr. Jim King died when the baby was 6 days old, leaving the mother very ill. The Rev. Marshall and the neighbors held a funeral in the home. Little Archie died 10 days after his father and the agony was repeated. Fearful of the death of Mattie, her family and friends of the church planned to place Marie and James in an orphanage. One of the aunts would raise baby Jake. Mattie King, full of faith in the Lord, pled with the people to let her keep her children if the Lord spared her life. She believed that even in poverty, God would provide the necessities of life. By His grace, she recovered and with God’s help, reared her three children. Since the bereaved widow had such strong faith, she borrowed money to go into the mercantile business. She was the first woman to attempt such a project in Mount Holly.”

This account inspires me to no end. Marie earned a college degree and taught abroad and in the Biology Department at SAU. Her two brothers were each separately and tragically killed. Marie never married and left her estate to the Presbyterian Church. She also established a scholarship at SAU for graduates of Mt. Holly who wanted to study biology. — Dr. Deborah Wilson, Professor of Psychology (SAU)

3. I know exactly who "Dan" is talking about when he says' "his Granpaw's brother". He was my great uncle. 😊— Neva

REFLECTIONS NO. 8 (JANUARY 18, 2021)

The Courthouse of 1912

Nevada County had over twice as many people in 1910 as it does today. It was decided back in 1910 that the county needed a new courthouse. Work began and in May of 1912, the new building was opened to the public. It was an elegant structure and was said to be completely fireproof. The building cost about \$60,000. Everyone had high praises for

the county judge and the contractor who did the work. A picture of this court house is attached. You would think a building such as this would last for many, many years.

In 1917, just five years after it was opened, the entire northeast corner of the building gave way leaving three large cracks entirely through the wall making it unsafe. That corner of the building had to be propped up with long poles until it could be repaired. Workers had to tear away the entire northeast corner of the building on each side up to the second window and the foundation had to be rebuilt. The contractor believed that this was the only part of the building that was dangerous, but there were numerous cracks on the interior from floor to ceiling.

In 1963, the county judge informed the people that the courthouse was unsafe and could not be repaired. The building was only about fifty years old. So, this beautiful building was torn down and the present court house erected in the same spot. It took about a year to construct the present court house and the cost was \$300,000. The present courthouse has a flat roof and is now 56 years old. It may soon be necessary to build a new court house, but with the population declining, the county may have to struggle along with the present building and just make needed repairs.

I don't know if it was poor construction or natural causes that caused the problems with the 1912 court house. I think the ground around Prescott is known to shift causing foundation problems with buildings, but having the entire corner give way only five years after construction leads me to believe poor construction may have been more to blame.

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Comments from readers—

1. What a beautiful building! -- Neva
2. It was a beautiful building!!!! – Judith
3. Some say that the water table being so close to the surface around Prescott causes problems with foundations on heavy buildings such as this courthouse.



REFLECTIONS NO. 9 (January 25, 2021)

Asleep on Duty

During World War I as American soldiers were fighting in France; four American soldiers were found asleep while on sentry duty in Paris. The penalty for this at that time was death by a firing squad. Imagine being involved in battles day after day with little opportunity for rest. Because of the danger of soldiers falling asleep, sentry duty was usually limited to two-hour stretches.

Sentry duty is an important job in the military. These soldiers stand guard while the rest are sleeping. They must be on high alert in case the enemy tries to do a sneak attack. Hundreds of men are depending on these sentries to do their job and warn them in case of danger. That is why the penalty is so severe for falling asleep while on sentry duty.

A court-martial was held for these four men and the sentence was death. General Pershing had authority to carry out the executions of these soldiers, but decided to refer their cases to the War Department and review by the president. The four men were Pvt. Forest Sebastian, Pvt. Jesse Cook, Pvt. Olon Ledoyen, and Pvt. Stanley Fishback. Several petitions were sent to the president asking him to spare the lives of these soldiers

After receiving recommendations from the investigation, President Wilson granted full pardons to Forest Sebastian and Jesse Cook. The other two soldiers were sentenced to three years in Leavenworth on charges of disobeying an officer. The president said the

pardons were granted because of the extreme youth of the men and that they had no conscious disregard to their duty. I could not find the ages of these soldiers.

This was the first case of its kind since America became involved in World War I. According to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, there are about a dozen offenses that can be punishable by death. The last execution in the military was carried out in 1961. Currently, there are four men on military death row:

Ronald Gray—murder and rape of a female soldier

Hasan Akbar—two murders, three attempted murders, and wounding of 14 others

Timothy Hennis—murder of a woman and two children

Nidal Hason—killed 13 at Ft. Hood, TX and wounding many others

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Comments on Nevada County courthouse—

1. What a beautiful building! -- Neva
2. It was a beautiful building!!!! -- Judith
3. Some say that the water table being so close to the surface causes foundation problems for heavy buildings like the 1912 courthouse.