

10-1-2017

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### Recommended Citation

McCormick, Arley (2017) "Our Doughboys, Part II of III: Draft and Mobilization," *Huntsville Historical Review*. Vol. 42: No. 2, Article 7.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/huntsville-historical-review/vol42/iss2/7>

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**Our Doughboys  
Part II  
Draft and Mobilization**

*By Arley McCormick*

After nearly three years of political hand wrenching and German stiff arms, Germany finally hit the American pocketbook - exports. That could not be tolerated. America declared war on April 6, 1917 and President Wilson appointed General “Black Jack” Pershing to command the American Expeditionary Force. Our national resolve was demonstrated in June 1917 when General Pershing arrived in France with a portion of the 16th Infantry Regiment, and in a demonstration of solidarity with the French, they marched down the Avenue des Champs-Elysees pausing at the tomb of Gilbert du Motier (Marquis de Lafayette) where they reportedly uttered the famous line, “Lafayette we are here.” The morale of the French people was temporarily bolstered. In reality, it would be nearly six months before an American unit would enter the trenches. Trench warfare was not General Pershing’s preferred method for prosecuting and ending the war, but while the Alabamians would get a taste of trench warfare, it would be a war of maneuver that claimed the lives of Madison County’s sons, husbands, and fathers.



The AEF arrives in France 1917.

The president and congress wrestled for nearly three and a half years preceding the declaration of war, debating the merits and struggling to agree on expanding the Army, Navy, and Merchant Marine force. The debate results was little more than paper ideas with no one to execute them, but that changed after the declaration of war. Compromises were reached. The Army Air Corps was nonexistent and would be under-manned, under-equipped, and of limited use during the war. Similarly, the Merchant Marine fleet would not be adequate. America, in general, would be a vassal to the French and British war industry and depended heavily on their machine guns and other equipment. Tanks, trucks, motorcycles, and bicycles were added to the equipment lists of units along with tactical telephones. But, American manpower remained the deciding factor. It took over a month of political bickering and trading to agree on a draft bill, mobilization structure, and how to split the war chest sufficiently enough to guarantee each elected representative a share for his state. The Rainbow Division was one illustration of how the war pie was cut.

Each politician wanted something for his district yet the most inspired decision was the President's alone. How would he market a war he didn't want, justify to the American people the sacrifice of blood of America's youth on a European battlefield for the first time, and keep the eye of a nation on the prize, "*Keeping the world safe for democracy*"? President Wilson was a novice with regard to selling anything but himself and he knew he had to capture the hearts of Americans on an issue far more sacred than the women's right to vote.





He turned to a Missourian with a knack for marketing - George Creel. Creel joined the Committee of Public Information and quickly infused a sophisticated and deliberate approach to pursue and win the support of Americans. The mood of the nation was already inclined toward supporting the Entente and he selected written passages that supported powerful visual images to shape hate for the Kaiser and his sadistic army, to induce loyalty to the cause, and to prompt ordinary Americans to action. Some acted on his messages too aggressively by painting the doors of German/American residents yellow or physically attacking suspected agents of the Kaiser. George Creel recognized the power of literature. The literary world had taken sides early in the conflict. British authors like Arthur Conan Doyle and Arnold Toynbee supported the propaganda departments either under contract or with written emotion. Nearly every prize winning and bestselling novelist became an unsolicited war



correspondent. Their editorials were printed in American newspapers as were lesser known German and French authors. Consequently, Americans were exposed to the thoughts of the greatest writers of the age who aggressively supported their governments. Even American ex-



patriots living in France offered a perspective to the American public. George Creel capitalized on their words and in some cases solicited their thoughts on different subjects. As Creel's images and words hit placards and newspapers, it is doubtful any

American ever inquired regarding who made that happen and the majority rapidly bought into sacrifice. George Creel, more than anyone, shaped the public perception of an American war that would only succeed with American sacrifice at home and in France.

When war was declared, many of the young men of Madison County were well established in the community. Ben Hope had a solid beginning in life. He was living in a small house on Mill Street and employed as a machinist with Huntsville Manufacturing. The trade he chose assured him of a career path that would provide for a future family. Percy Crunk was born a year after Ben and worked as a weaver for the same company while living on Washington Street. Edgar Freeman was born in February 1892 to George and Jinnie Freeman while they were living in Centerville, Bibb County, Alabama before moving to Huntsville, presumably for employment. Kirk Satterfield and Dock Hill lived in Huntsville and worked in the cotton industry too. Opal Roberts was just a teenager who wanted to serve. All the future servicemen in the county could watch the American drama unfold



Trains similar to this one transported Huntsville soldiers to their training in Montgomery.

in the newspaper along with other residents and only imagine the impact the war would have on the community. Their families waited nervously for the draft and it was a relatively short wait.

On May 18, 1917, Congress passed the Selective Service Act, which authorized the President to draft men into military service. Federal Judicial

Districts were the President's instruments for selecting the young men to serve. Huntsville was located in Federal District number 25 and had jurisdiction over approximately 30 local boards that would be expected to register approximately 5,000 men. A local Huntsville judge expected 4,000 residents of the district would qualify for the draft. The registrations began on June 5th, 1917, and men between the ages of 21 and 31 lined up on the courthouse lawn under tents while Red Cross volunteers took their names and vital information. Many enlisted: Opal H. Roberts was a teenager who convinced his parents to let him enlist in the Army in answer to the declaration of war. He was 16 years 7 months old and with his parents' consent, joined the Army. There were many others who did not wait for the draft.

Additional registrations followed the next year on June 5, 1918, Aug. 24, 1918, and September 12, 1918. The final draft included men 18 through 45, (those born between 1872 and September 1900) and it didn't matter if they were native born, naturalized, or alien.



Private Ben Hope

The local draft board, presumably, selected a random number of men that met the physical standards and didn't qualify for an authorized exemption. Kirk Satterfield and Dock Hill were among them and once the draftees signed the enlistment papers and took the oath of enlistment, the boys from Huntsville were transported to Vandiver Park in Montgomery and assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry.

When the trains left the Huntsville Depot, the new civilian clad soldiers did not knowingly lose contact with their

communities. But, in fact, once in uniform, their day was filled with military matters and their only contact with the community they left behind was through letters from home. After their departure, the Huntsville community would grow without them. The Red Cross expanded, the Rotary Club was established, and there were at least six conventions a year held in the growing city. Gasoline prices soared to 24 cents a gallon and there were so many cars on the road that one observer noted that they could be seen in the ditches near Gurley every day. Victory gardens were planted, parties for departing troops were held, and the local government expanded to provide more services to the population. The mill industry employed nearly 4,000 employees and contributed \$13.5 million in payroll to the community. The war was an inconvenience that interrupted life only when the paper was delivered to the door.

There was no Gold Star Mothers club and wouldn't be one for two more years. Each mother just wanted their son to return home safely.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama, recalled from the Texas border, was guarding various facilities around Alabama against sabotage and espionage when the unit began receiving a new complement of soldiers. The

regiment's authorized strength for rifle companies was increased from 65 men to 150, then to 250. As the boys from Madison County joined the other Alabama National Guardsmen, the strength grew to 3,720, including 112 officers. Many Alabamians not selected to be included in the 4th were sent to Macon, Georgia to become the nucleus of the 31st (Dixie) Division.



Private Opel H  
Roberts

In their transition to soldiers, the draftees responded to the Quartermaster call and proceeded to the clothing issue station. An old corporal eyed their physique and tossed all the clothing they needed for three days at their chest along with other personal field equipment. The fitting process began after the issue and it was pretty much a free-for-all as the recruits found others that had been issued clothing too large or too small. Through a barter and trading episode, each eventually found a decent fit, although not necessarily a Gentleman's Quarterly fit. Some never found a decent fit. Sergeants familiar with the proper wearing of a uniform educated the new soldiers, often with the accompaniment of a swagger stick across the legs or back when the draftees didn't follow instructions.

Shortly after arriving at the park there was another major event in their life. From this time forward, they would possess a personal and constant companion, the short barreled Springfield rifle or the 1917 American Enfield. Their military skills training would last nearly seven months with weeks of training in the U.S. before their deployment, and then weeks of tutelage under English and French Non-Commissioned officers in Europe before the young army took their place in the trenches.

Once assigned to a company, the real training began, and many of Huntsville draftees found their new home to be Company D, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion for marching, marching, and marching to the left, to the right, to the rear, to the left and right oblique, and for ten miles at a time. Many thought they would wear their boots out before they saw France. Then bayonet training - running to meet the adversarial straw-filled bag, parry, thrust and hold, twist, extract and on to the next unsuspecting bag. Over and over they would parry, thrust, hold, twist and extract, perfecting every nuance of the technique of killing the straw-filled bag. The training schedule also



included marksmanship, a prerequisite desired by General Pershing, and guard duty - the art of watching, staying awake in the darkest and coldest nights. France could certainly be cold and miserable!

They became reasonably competent at reporting the sounds and articles often perpetrated by sergeants testing their ability to follow orders. When they were relaxing, no doubt, they thought of family, comfortable homes and occasionally, they were able to go to the canteen and enjoy a beer with their new uniformed friends.

With the Gentleman's Quarterly uniform fit, the boys transitioned to soldiers quickly. Each day started with 0530, i.e., 5:30 a.m. reveille, a roll call formation, police call around the living quarters, i.e., picking up debris, and breakfast.

There was a regimen of three meals a day and for some it was a serious breach of their personal experience. Army chow was nourishing but not like their mama used to make. They would eat it or go hungry. As they trained, they also took their place on the company duty roster which included kitchen police, a passive term that defined the mess hall detail and included washing floors, dishes, and eating utensils, pots and pans and anything else the Mess Sergeant ordered them to do. The last man to report for the detail was designated "the pots and pans man." His day started at 0400 hours, military time for 4:00 a.m., and ended when the corporal said he was released; normally around 2300 hours, i.e., 11:00 p.m. After the war was over, those who made it home would not find their training in Montgomery a tale worth telling, even if they were inclined to talk about the war at all.

On August 14, 1917, the War Department published an order changing the name of the 4th Alabama Infantry Regiment to the 167th United States Infantry Regiment. The flag of the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama was retired and the 167<sup>th</sup> unfurled a new one at a review

presided over by Colonel William Preston Screws, an officer with long standing ties to the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama. It was also announced that the brigade would report to the 42nd “Rainbow Division,” an amusing moniker that met with little fanfare. Douglas McArthur, then Chief of Staff of the Division, is credited with coining the moniker because the Division was composed of organizations from twenty-six states. On August 28, 1917 a force of 3,677 officers and men left Montgomery on eight trains for Camp Mills, Long Island to join its new division.

Camp Mills was situated in Hoboken, New York and the camp had been expanded to accommodate thousands of troops arriving from training camps across the United States. The 167<sup>th</sup> continued to train and equip as they waited for their departure date to Europe. The camp was crowded with 31,000 troops at one time, all marching, improving their living conditions, and rehearsing that awful bayonet drill. It was common knowledge that the 167<sup>th</sup> Alabamians were the former 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry.

One unit joining them at Camp Mills was the 49<sup>th</sup> New York regiment, the same regiment that the Rebels of the 4<sup>th</sup> Alabama had routed at first Bull Run during the Civil War. Historians write, with exaggeration, that when routed the 49<sup>th</sup> didn’t stop running till they got to New York City. Upon their arrival at Camp Mills a rumor was circulated that the 167<sup>th</sup> was going to raid them while they slept. The New York unit stayed awake all night and called out repelling formations twice in the night on false reports of the Alabamians attacking. The incident was investigated and it was determined the Alabamians were sleeping comfortably all night and never attempted to disturb the Yankees from New York.

Ben Hope and the others from Madison County received an excellent orientation on the pride and history of the 167<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment.

While training at Camp Mills, British and French soldiers, most of them recovering from wounds received on the front certifying their experience with trench warfare, attempted to orient the recruits on the proper conduct of military operations in France. While it wasn't to General Pershing's liking, in the spirit of Entrant cooperation, all the American soldiers received the orientation.



Training at Camp Mills

In the early days of American participation in the war, equipping the doughboys was problematic because the American manufacturing system was slowly catching up with the requirement and the production of personal items like pistol belts, packs, and canteens were well behind the mobilization schedule. Consequently, the allies were providing the equipment. The Brigade would receive machine guns and helmets once it landed in France or England.

On October 22, 1917 the 167<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry had finally reached the head of the queue for deployment. The Regiment traveled by train to board ferryboats destined for the Brooklyn or Hoboken piers where they would load troop ships to ports of Liverpool, England or Brest, France.

They departed under direction not to reveal their unit to anyone, yet the harbor was so crowded with ships they managed to communicate across short expanses of water to other ships and in this manner, learned where other troops were from. The troop ships skirted near the coast of the eastern seaboard until reaching Nova Scotia, then east across the North Atlantic below Greenland and Iceland. Just north of Ireland the ships separated with a portion

docking at Liverpool, England and the others continuing north around Scotland and down the English coast to Brest, France. They were not bothered by German submarines although daily exercises practicing what to do in the event one was spotted were performed. There was the standard sea sickness and health issues related to being jammed onto troop ships.

The welcome in France was brief and cheerful, but the southern boys could not help but notice the young French girls didn't look young at all. After over three years of war, they seemed pale and tired, smiling and waving but worn out. They certainly did not compare to the little beauties so fondly remembered from the magazines and pictures circulating at home. There was good reason. The home front in Britain and particularly France, where the country was occupied by multiple nations and colonial troops fighting the Kaiser and his hordes, displayed visible evidence of war in every village including Paris. War was not simply an inconvenience, it was life and death measured sometimes by the hour, and every day when a baguette could be the last meal.

The Alabama Battalions made their way to the villages of Uruffe and Gibeauveix where the accommodations ranged from barns to semi-wooden structures. As soon as they were assigned a place to sleep, the drills began. The rifle range consumed a lot of their time and as expected, the marching drill which, by now, was expected. Occasionally if the conditions were right, the big guns firing at the front could be heard.

On December 12, many of their officers joined the regiment after completing the French and English training on warfare in France. There was a brief interlude before they marched for two days, halting at the villages of St. Blin, Domremy, (the birthplace of Joan d'Arc), Humberville, and Vesaignes. They were clustered near

Chaumont where the American Expeditionary Forces' Headquarters were located.

The billeting arrangements were rudimentary and uncomfortable, but as Christmas approached, they were supplied with a liberal amount of excellent rations: roasted turkey, cranberries, figs, dates and other abundant delicacies. Cooks spent all night preparing a Christmas meal and the brigade ate heartily. American styled Christmas trees were decorated with items available and they shared the time with the local villagers that had given up their homes, barns, and other structures to house the soldiers from Dixie. It was their first Christmas in France and no one knew at the time but it would be their last. In 1919 the survivors would spend Christmas Day on the Rhine River in Germany.

On December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1917 they were on the move again and with each kilometer the front got closer, but their training was not complete. Now the villages of Faverolles, Marac, and Leffonds and Villiers-sur-Suize would be their new home and training site.

New Year's Day, 1918 was just another day of drill in the cold and snow. Astute leaders anticipated the war was going to change, primarily because the war of attrition had accelerated due to the American presence. The Entente leadership was getting nervous and called for the Americans to hurry onto the line. General Pershing held to the principle of committing American units under American command and to an American sector, but training was still incomplete.

Cold, miserable wooden shacks served as the non-commissioned officers' quarters at Gondrecourt while they learned the tactical applications of the Chauchat automatic rifle, hand grenades, Stokes' mortars, (one-pounders) and machine guns. Tactical communications with telephones and flag signals as well as the application of small tanks was part of the curriculum. And no one

could escape the technical appreciation of trench construction. Many wondered how France could accommodate one more trench. Standard exercises regarding the bayonet and musketry were stressed, but nothing held their attention more than demonstrations illustrating protection against gas attack.

The Germans launched tear gas first to cause soldiers to get sick and vomit and avoid the protective mask. Then they followed a short time later with mustard or nerve gas to incapacitate those sickened by the riot gas. One gas casualty essentially eliminated three soldiers from the battlefield. Two soldiers carried the patient in a litter to the hospital field station. For five weeks they trained.

While non-commissioned officers received intense training, the other American troops of the brigade, under the supervision of American and French officers, trained seven and a half hours a day on similar subjects. All the while the cold, wind, and rain made for gloomy days. Marksmanship training received the most attention. Competitions were held between companies and sharpening that skill proved useful in the campaigns ahead.

In late January and February, the gloom of winter broke for only a few days and the Madison County Doughboys rejoiced optimistically, anticipating the miserable winter was over. Instead, the occasional blue skies and warmer temperatures seemed to be a trick of Mother Nature, because just as the weather seemed to get better and warmer, it became worse. Huntsville boys dried their cold wet leather boots by the fire, sometimes for too long. Their boots began to fall apart until soldiers were practically marching in their socks. The only positive assurance was that the Germans were just as miserable.

The French command finally received General Pershing's approval. He had previously allowed American battalions to work under the command authority of the British Expeditionary Force.

On the night of February 18, 1918, the 167<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry Regiment loaded the battalions onto railroad cars (referred to as the 40 and 8 because one car could transport 40 men or 8 horses). The Huntsville boys' destination was Fontenoy.

On February 22, one battalion marched to Drouville and on February 24 the first elements of the Alabama brigade entered the trenches. Training was over and the killing was about to start. Huntsville's sons were in reserve.

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