

Welcome to the AEF!



It took the United States 18 months from declaring war until effectively fighting in Europe. This eventual fighting happened only because of Allied supplies – weapons, ammunition, and transportation. The US supplied the Allies with war materiel, especially steel, copper, and other raw materials, as well as explosives. However, the Allied troops in Europe needed more than just supplies, and American troops arrived in the autumn of 1918. You will be a member of the American Expeditionary Force in Europe in your next class, and in order to set the stage, read your story below about the AEF and how you eventually made it “Over There”.

Selective Service

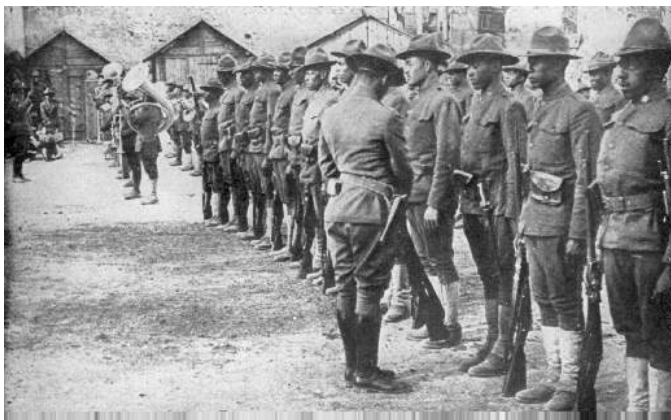
Even though the country had been preparing for war for over a year, the American army was inadequate at the outset of American involvement. In 1916, the American regular army numbered only 133,000 men, nowhere near the size necessary to fight in Europe, where the countries were mobilizing armies in the millions of soldiers. While some men (almost 2 million) answered Uncle Sam’s “I Want You” ad by volunteering, the nations’ armed forces were still too small to effectively fight in Europe.

The easiest way to raise an army quickly was through conscription. Congress passed Selective Service Act in May 1917. Men between 21 and 30 were required to register for military service (later in the war, the age range grew from 18 to 45). Over 9.5 million men registered on the first day, and 1.3 million names were pulled in a national lottery in late July. 3.5% of the population eventually served – less than in other countries, and less than in the Civil War. This is how you became part of the AEF – you were drafted.



Some Americans opposed the draft and American entry into the war. However, there were no draft riots as in the Civil War, probably because local cities and chambers of commerce tried to make the registration day festive, like a national holiday. Also, the draft was administered locally by civilians instead of by the military. An estimated 3 million Americans tried to evade registering for the draft. About 12% of those drafted did not show up when called. These people, called slackers, were often rounded up by authorities who would ask people to show their draft cards.

Conscientious objectors were also in opposition to the draft because of philosophical, moral, or religious reasons. Many were drafted, and some actually served on the front lines in Europe. Others had non-combat roles, like providing supplies and performing office tasks in the armed forces.



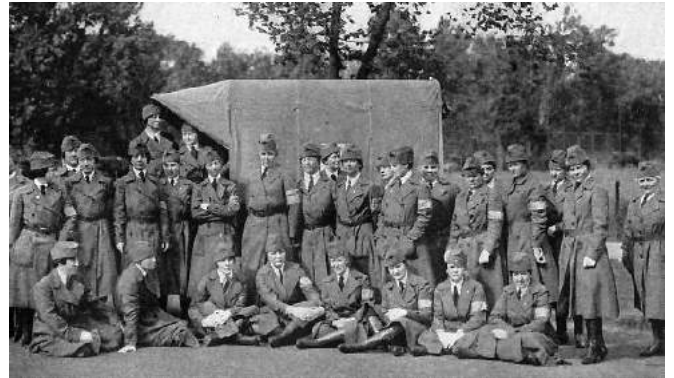
Some Americans have already entered the war as volunteers for other countries. A few Americans went to France to become fighter pilots, while others have joined the British and Canadian forces. While you may not have volunteered for the war, you are not in opposition to American involvement in stopping the evil German “Huns” and helping to make the world “safe for democracy”.

Diversity

The AEF was a diverse group, reflecting the growing

population of America. While most members of the AEF were white males, one out of five was foreign born. About 360,000 African Americans have joined the army, encouraged by African American leaders. They felt that black patriotism would possibly overcome racist prejudice in American society. African Americans serve in segregated units in the army. They will be assigned mostly non-combat duties, but there will be a few regiments that saw action. In the navy, African Americans are given menial roles, like cooks and engine men. Native Americans can not be drafted, but many have volunteered to fight, and will serve in the same units as whites. In fact, Native Americans volunteer at a better percentage than white Americans.

Women play an important role in the AEF, even though they are not drafted and not taken by the army. The navy allows female, so some 13,000 women will serve in the marines and navy as nurses, secretaries, telephone operators. Women also serve in the U.S. Army Signal Corps as phone operators. In fact, women will do almost everything except fight in the war.



“Black Jack”

The command of the AEF has been given to General John J. Pershing. Pershing began his adult life a schoolteacher in Missouri, but he decided to attend West point, from which he graduated in 1886. He graduated from West Point in 1886. Pershing saw duty against the Plains Indians with both the 6th and 10th Cavalry Regiments. The 10th was one of two black cavalry regiments commanded by white officers, and this is where Pershing’s nickname of “Black Jack” originated. Pershing later taught military tactics and mathematics at the University of Nebraska, where he also earned a law degree.

Near the turn of the century, Pershing served in the Spanish-American War and the Philippines Insurrection. His conduct in Cuba was so notable that his colonel commented, "I have been in many fights, through the Civil War, but Captain Pershing is the coolest man under fire I ever saw in my life." He also was a military advisor during the Russo-Japan War, and he led the unsuccessful Mexican Expedition to capture Pancho Villa.

Upon American entry in the Great War, Pershing was given the control of the AEF, along with the task of turning an unorganized and untrained mess into a fighting force. The Allied military leaders in Europe hoped to use U.S. troops as replacements for the heavy French and British losses, but Pershing has insisted that the American troops operate as a separate force under his command. He believes that the Americans must fight a different kind of warfare, what he calls mobile warfare. In his mind, the independent lone rifleman should be given a lot of independence of action. He thinks that if the American units can be put into the field and fight the way he trains them to fight -- with mobile tactics (on the move) -- they will show the British and French how to achieve swift and certain victory.

Training

Pershing wanted to get started organizing and training the troops as soon as he took command. Working quickly, the War Department has built 32 camps across the nation for the 1.3 million recruits. The camps are muddy, barren, and unpaved, and many barracks are not ready for the arriving recruits. Many soldiers have to sleep on the cold wet ground wrapped only in blankets. The army food is nothing like the food you have at home. The first winter was very difficult for many people, and disease spread though the camps quickly, including measles, meningitis, and pneumonia. You have remained healthy, however, and you are prepared to train in 1918. One recruit arrived at his Texas encampment and remarked ...

When we got off the train which stopped right in the camp, we were chased up to a barracks were we were examined for contagious diseases. We were then passed into a

room where we stripped and wrapped our clothes in a paper. Our names were taken and placed on the packages. These are sent home by the government. From then on it was all action. We passed through a shower bath and then went in single file to doctor after doctor ... our fingerprints were taken, all scars recorded and then they began to hand out clothes. We marched out the front door dressed like soldiers but feeling a long way from being one.

Since much of the military equipment has yet to be produced, you have been drilling with wooded replicas of weapons they would use in battle. In camp, you learn to drill, shoot, dig trenches, lay barbed wire and construct latrines. Many recruits are in for a shock as they had never left their homes before. Underprivileged men from the South have difficulty fitting in as some do not know their right foot from their left or how to write their names. With 8% of the American conscripts unable to speak or understand English, many immigrants have to be enrolled in basic English classes at the training facilities.



A few of your comrades explained their feelings of the training process in letters home to their families. One recruit mentioned “...from 7:30 to 10:45 we have infantry drill, bayonet drill and physical exercise. That doesn't mean 5 minutes drill and rest either... A total 20 minutes rest in that time. We generally have ... combat problems between 1:00 and 4:00 pm rain, mud or dust... [Then] 28 inch steps at 140 steps per [minute] on a hike of several miles...”. Another wrote to his girl, Agnes, “You probably are thinking the army has swallowed me up and that consequently all of my relations with civilization have been severed... After 10 weeks in the army I am, of course, getting accustomed to the life. But I can't say I like it.” In discussing his opinion of his officers, one of your friends told his mother that “I have saved a little money, and when I get back home I'm goin' to buy me two mules, and name on of 'em Corporal and the other one Sergeant; then I'm goin' to lick hell out of both of 'em!”

In training, you complain about the amount of time you're spending drilling in learning to fight. You have drills to advance and retreat, drills to learn how to use the bayonet, drills and throwing hand grenades and, most importantly, drills and had a put on the gas masks.

Beyond the drills, the food is and all that great either. Most of you would agree that your day-to-day rations are not all that appealing. An issue of the army newspaper *Stars & Stripes* included a description of the Army food:

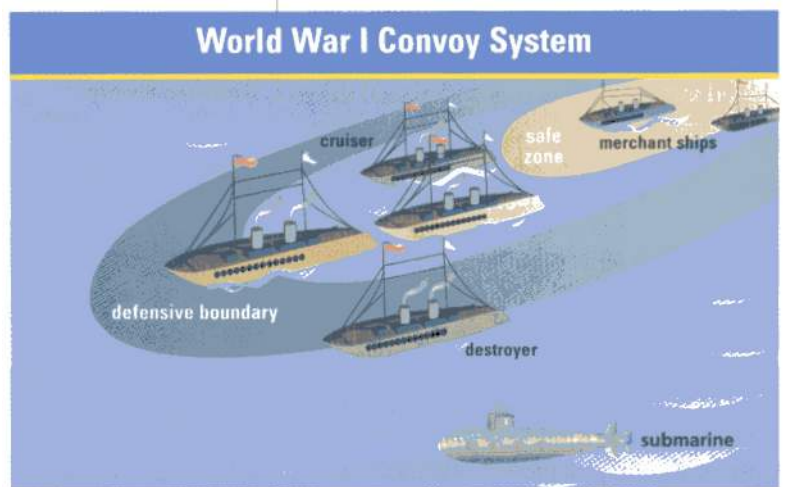
no more ham and eggs or grapefruit when the bugle blows for chow. No more apple pie or dumplings for we're in the army now; and they feed us beans for breakfast, and at noon we have 'em too, while at night they fill our tummies with a good old army stew.”

The Doughboys

Officially, you are a member of the American Expeditionary Force, but you are commonly called a “doughboy”. The term, used well before American entry into the Great War, has a variety of possible origins. Even back to the Civil War, the infantry wore round buttons on their uniforms that looked like “doughboys”, or pieces of dough that were popular in soup. One source points to the long hikes American soldiers had taken in the Mexican War, or even in Northern Mexico chasing Pancho Villa. After the marches, their sweaty bodies would get covered with dust, forming a doughy substance. It was also compared to adobe, the clay that was prevalent in the area, and a few phonetic changes turned it to “doughboy”. Another possible origin is that many infantrymen polished their belts with pipe clay, which resembled dough when it became wet. Also, even the lowest ranking members of the AEF were paid better than most soldiers – they were loaded with “dough”. Whatever the origin, you are proud to be fighting to make the world “safe for democracy”, and you take the name “doughboy” as a badge of honor.

Going Over There

Now that the AEF has been organized and you have been trained, the army has to be transported to France. This is a very dangerous task, as you know, since German U-boats roam the waters of the North Atlantic, especially off Ireland and Northern England. Merchant ships also need to arrive in Europe to supply the AEF as well as the Allied Powers. Navy Rear Admiral William Sims has suggested that merchant ships be protected by destroyers, which are fast-moving warships. The ships formed a convoy and cut a safe path through the Atlantic. The warships can keep German U-boats at bay using their guns and dropping depth charges (underwater explosives).



The trip over was a quite an experience for many men who had never been on the high seas before. Sergeant Edain Dirth of the 51st artillery wrote his reactions in his diary:

On July 15th, we started our voyage, at 7 am, on the transport Northern Pacific. The first day was quite thrilling with the destroyers dashing around us and a dirigible balloon and seaplane above.

But the second day -- wow ! Sick isn't a strong enough word. There were [also] a bunch of negro engineers on board from the deep south, a new experience for me.

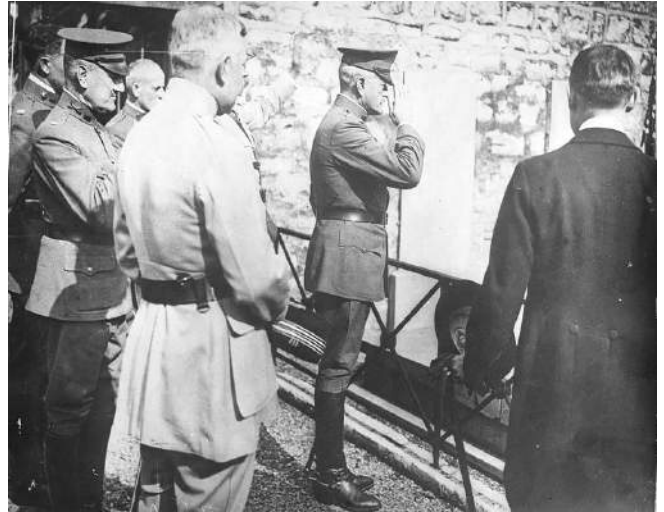
Our convoy left us and our boat and the sister ship, Great Northern, were hitting it along at a great rate. I was called upon to furnish two shifts or reliefs of twenty-four men each for watch guard. From then on to the end of the trip I was busy day and night, roosting reliefs and on the watch for submarines. At nite we slept on the deck and the guard was fortunate as the poor fellows who were sleeping below nearly suffocated. I got sick whenever I went below, but felt OK while I was on deck.

The convoy was a success, and losses to U-boats have dropped dramatically. You were safely moved over by U.S. transports, British ships, and some German ships that had been commandeered (taken over) by the American government. Welcome to France .. although it is not complete glorious. Private Hazen S. Helmrich pointed out the realities of war in Europe upon arrival:

We gathered by the rail of the shift in gaze the for the first time at the brilliantly lighted harbor and realize that we were in France. While we were waiting on the deck with the full equipment, the trainload of 500 wounded came in on the wharf beside us. They were brought on board at once. About half of them were suffering from gas poisoning. Their skin was yellow and their eyes were protected from the sun by paper shades. Many had both legs amputated.

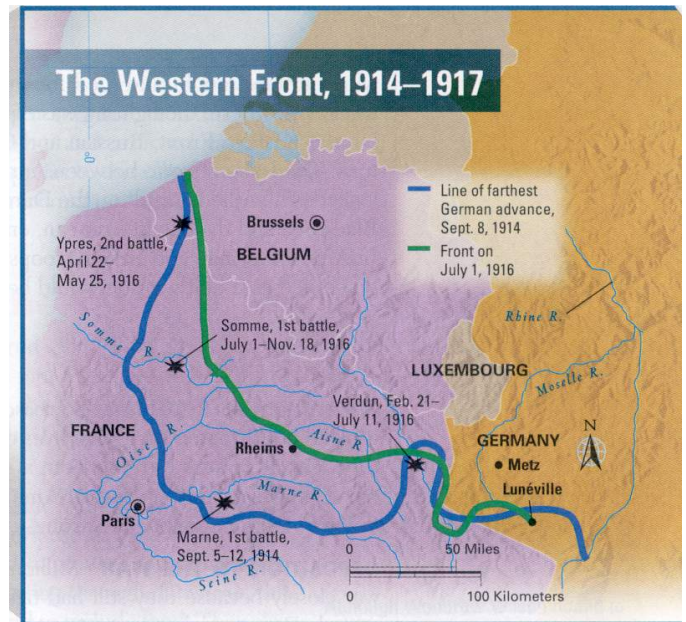
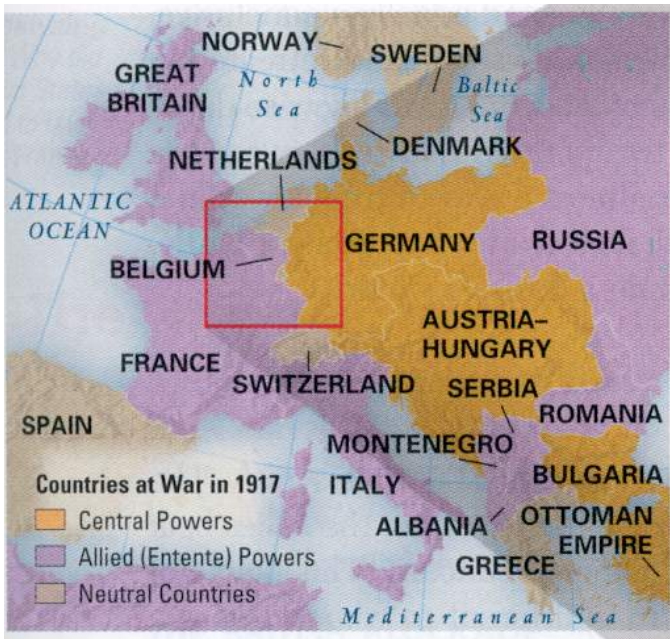
When you stepped on French soil, you feel a little bit scared, but you are also mentally prepared to take on the Kaiser and help your French and British allies. The arrival of the Americans is boosting the spirits of the French and helping make France's soldiers want to finish the war. I July 4, 1917, Parisian celebrate the arrival of you and your fellow troops of the American expeditionary force. One of the doughboys, Private Otis E Briggs, recalls how exciting it was in Paris:

Everyone is gathering along the streets to witness the parade, all dressed in their best. The parade starts, led by a representative detail of English and French troops. Next comes several thousand Negro stevedores and then the engineers followed by ambulances ... "Vive L'Amerique! Vive L'Amerique!" is shouted. The applause increases. We approach the reviewing stand. I was right! We are passing general purging who stands at ease watching with a critical eye.



You have heard that one member of the AEF visited the tomb of Marquis de Lafayette, the volunteer who helped the patriots in the American Revolution, and announced "Lafayette, we are here!" Even Gen. Pershing paid a visit to the tomb of the great French leader.

Now that you have finally made it to Europe, the British and French feel that you should be trained by them, since they have the experience in battling in the trenches. The Allied forces also feel that the US troops are inadequate. One historian remarked that your forces are "ranked 16th in the world, just behind Portugal". Lack Jack Pershing feels that America declared war independently and therefore will fight as an independent unit under your own flag. You and the rest of the doughboys plan to take the offensive in the war, since the current tactics of the Allies are obviously doing little to end the conflict. You will have more and more training until you see the action of the front lines. In your next class, you will be brought up to the Western Front – and you will experience life in the trenches of Europe.



Check out the Trench Warfare animation online and the "Life in the Trench" video to prepare for the Western Front in class!