
Sustaining the Will to Fight: The American Army in World War I

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The question of sustaining an army in the field can take many forms, encompassing how armies raise, train, lead, and deploy their forces. A nation's available resources obviously matter, but so do politics which often plays an important role in determining how any country fights its wars. This essay will consider how political concerns and debates within 1917 America introduced a host of issues that ultimately shaped how the United States sustained its army during World War I. Wartime military officials faced the challenge of sustaining both the ability, as well as the will to fight, in a way that the civilian population supported. In some cases wartime political compromises represented nothing more than short-term agreements to quell internal disagreements. Many other decisions or policy innovations initiated long-term reforms within the US military that throughout the twentieth century influenced how the armed forces viewed the question of sustaining a force in the field. In this respect the First World War, a conflict so often undervalued in American military history, was in reality a turning point in the institutional development and outlook of the US Army.

The United States entered World War I at the height of the Progressive Era, a twenty-year period of legislative and societal reform from 1900-1920. Prevailing Progressive ideals heavily influenced how the United States mobilised its manpower resources, especially when some pre-war activists like Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, a former Progressive mayor of Cleveland, took leading roles in mobilising the wartime force. The Progressive Movement was quite disparate, taking on a variety of causes and proposing an equally diverse range of solutions to the problems of corrupt politicians, ineffective government, urban slums, assimilating immigrants and curbing the excesses of big business. Despite these differences most middle-class Progressive reformers nonetheless subscribed to a set of common ideals: a Progressive ethos that sought to make politicians more responsive to the will of the people; trusted a reformed government to use its power wisely; wanted to avoid fracturing the nation along class or ethnic lines; believed in using education to

shape behaviour; based its reforms on the concrete findings of sociological investigations; and above all cherished efficiency in all large-scale endeavours.¹ Adhering to these values, Progressives initiated a period of legislative reform that dramatically reshaped the American government, workplace, and urban environment at the beginning of the twentieth century. These same ideals ultimately played a large role as well in determining how the United States raised and sustained its wartime army during World War I.

Conscription, so controversial a topic in Australia during the First World War, aroused little opposition within the United States.² President Woodrow Wilson had concrete economic, political, and military reasons for accepting the draft as the most logical way for the United States to raise the bulk of its wartime force.³ Economically, Wilson worried that the best and the brightest would be the first to volunteer, robbing essential wartime industries of their workers and managers. Politically, the effort by former president Theodore Roosevelt, a long-time Republican critic and rival of the Democratic Wilson, to raise a regiment of volunteers and take them to France threatened to undermine the federal government's unilateral control of the war effort. By giving the federal government clear control over who went into the army and who went overseas, the draft solved both these problems. Militarily, the draft would also ensure that the army continued to receive the numbers of men that it needed when news of casualties came home. Entering the war in 1917, Wilson and his military commanders were fully aware of the mass slaughter underway along the Western Front. America's road to war had been long and full of controversy, and Wilson was unsure how firmly committed the nation was to fighting. By successfully pressing Congress to enact a draft while the initial enthusiasm for war was high, Wilson avoided the problem of an inevitable sag in enlistments as the war wore on. The political ideals popularised during the Progressive Era, especially the faith that the government was the best arbitrator of the public good played a key role in helping Wilson secure conscription legislation.

1 For overviews of Progressivism and the reform movements associated with it see Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivism, 1890s-1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1998); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

2 When the United States declared war on Germany, the Regular Army consisted of 121,797 enlisted men and 5791 officers. The National Guard, whose units were controlled by state governors until President Woodrow Wilson drafted them into federal service, stood at 174,008 enlisted men and 7612 officers. The total force raised during the war numbered 4,412,533, including 462,229 sailors, 54,690 marines, and 2294 Coast Guard troops. Of the 3,893,340 soldiers inducted during the war, 2,810,296 (72%) were conscripted. Overall, twenty per cent of the draft-eligible male population (18-45) served in the military.

3 For an overview of the decision-making process behind the draft, see John W. Chambers, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 41-71.

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To popularise the draft among the American people, the government took heed of the common perception that a draft forced reluctant men into the army. The government renamed conscription 'selective service', and insisted that it bore little resemblance to drafts of the past. Reiterating the Progressive faith in efficiency and governmental administration, authorities repeatedly told the American public that selective service was a modern management technique designed to ensure that the nation mobilised in the most efficient way possible.⁴ In this formulation it was the government, not the individual, who was the better judge of where one could best serve the war effort.

The nation's last experience with conscription had been in the final two years of the US Civil War from 1863-65, a period punctuated with bloody anti-draft riots in which rioters protested the over-reach of the federal government into their private lives.⁵ Hoping to prevent another similarly violent reaction to the draft, and unsure how much attitudes towards federal government activism had truly changed, Provost Marshal Enoch H. Crowder emphasised the democratic elements of the conscription process. In the Civil War the wealthy were able to avoid service by paying another to serve in their place. This time, every man, regardless of his class status, faced the same risk of going to war. Last time, federal agents had registered and selected men; in World War I the federal government funnelled its requests for troops through 4647 local boards. Echoing the Progressive faith in the importance of civic engagement, the same ideals that had mobilised middle-class reformers to undertake community reforms nationwide throughout the last decade, local committees of 'friends and neighbours' both chose soldiers and granted exemptions for the wartime national army.⁶

Although 24 million men eventually registered for the draft without incident, millions then took advantage of their right to request a deferment because of their occupation or support of dependents. Eventually, over 65 per cent of those who registered received deferments or exemptions from service. The largest proportion (43 per cent) of deferments

4 The Selective Service system contained five classifications. Class I was composed of men eligible to serve immediately. Class II and III included temporarily deferred married men and skilled workers in industry and agriculture; Class IV contained married men with economic dependents and key business leaders, while those unable to meet physical and mental requirements were placed in Class V. After 15 December 1917, Class I registrants with the appropriate skills could still volunteer for the Surgeon General's, Engineers, Signal, and Quartermaster's branches. Draft-eligible men could enlist in the navy or marines until 27 July 1918. All voluntary enlistment ceased in August 1918. At the end of the same month, Congress extended the draft-eligible ages from 21-30 to 18-45: Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 191; Office of the Provost Marshal General, *Second Report of the Provost Marshal General to the Secretary of War on the Operations of the Selective Service System to December 20, 1918* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1919), 22, 227.

5 See Iver Bernstein, *The New York City draft riots: Their significance for American society and politics in the age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

6 Office of the Provost Marshal General, *Second Report of the Provost Marshal General to the Secretary of War on the Operations of the Selective Service System to December 20, 1918*.

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went to married men who were the sole providers of their families. As one applicant succinctly noted, 'No one wants to take care of another man's wife'.⁷ Not all married men with dependents received deferments, however. Crowder left it up to local draft boards to determine which wives could work to support themselves and which could not. In this way, the actual process of conscription departed dramatically from the Progressive rhetoric used to sell it to the American people. Most local boards contained a mix of county clerks, sheriffs, lawyers or businessmen along with a physician capable of conducting medical examinations. The composition of these local boards put the local professional elite firmly in control of deciding the fate of each community's lower and working classes.⁸ Maintaining white supremacy, removing labour agitators, and ensuring that immigrants did their fair share of fighting all influenced decisions that individual local boards rendered on deferment requests.⁹

When the war entered its second year the Provost Marshal began explicitly using occupational deferments as a way to funnel needed workers into war-related industries when he issued a 'work or fight' on 17 May 1918.¹⁰ This order stated that any man who received an occupational deferment risked induction into the military if a local board discovered he was either unemployed or working in a non-essential sector. Crowder claimed that this order forced 137,000 men to switch jobs in the final months of the war, a negligible number in a workforce of nearly 35 million. Crowder's larger point was that sustaining a mass army in the field required an equally committed civilian army of industrial and agricultural workers in the rear working diligently. The power to conscript gave the government a way to pressure draft-eligible men to work in occupations that served the national interest, furthering the Progressive goals of efficiency and civic engagement.

The principle that conscription could serve the dual purpose of mobilising both military and economic manpower outlasted the war. It reappeared in similar form during World War II, another conflict that required total mobilisation of the nation's military and industrial resources. During the Korean and Vietnam Wars, wars that demanded many fewer men

7 D. Clayton James and Anne Sharp Wells, *America and the Great War, 1914-1920* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1998), 34.

8 See especially Jeanette Keith, *Rich Man's War, Poor Man's Fight: Race, Class and Power in the Rural South during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), for how local boards operated in the South, as well as Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), and David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

9 By 1918, in response to increased pressure from Congressional and business leaders, the War Department urged local boards to grant more industrial and agricultural exemptions to protect the national economy. With congestion and breakdowns on the nation's railway lines threatening to bring the war effort to a standstill, Wilson granted a blanket exemption for all railway workers and men in the merchant marine. Otherwise, local boards still determined who received a deferment and who went to war.

10 Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, 189-7.

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and much less active support from industry, the government 'channelled' bright students into university by offering them draft deferments. By exempting university students from the draft the government deliberately took steps to ensure that the nation continued to produce the industrial and scientific leaders it needed to prevail against the Soviet Union during the Cold War.¹¹

Conscription was just the beginning, not the end, of sustaining the World War I wartime force. Within the army traditionally-minded commanders clashed almost immediately with more Progressively-oriented officers over how to absorb incoming recruits. The reform-minded faction, heavily influenced by the Progressive emphasis on efficiency and the notion of using scientific data to make informed decisions, stressed the importance of collecting information about incoming personnel in the hopes of making more enlightened use of the skills that citizen soldiers had already acquired. Recognising the army's increasing demand for skilled labour, these officials rightly argued that sustaining the wartime military required more than training infantry and artillery. Men with experience in engineering, transportation, communication, and even clerical work were in high demand, and identifying these men early on could be crucial to the army's later success. Experiments aimed at streamlining the absorption of skilled men into the wartime army, however, mostly failed. Enamoured with the ideas of scientific management then popular in civilian factories which promised to increase productivity by correctly matching men with jobs appropriate to their particular abilities or aptitude, the Committee on the Classification of Personnel devoted huge amounts of time to collecting data on the skills that incoming recruits possessed.¹² This Committee proved more adept at collecting information than in disseminating it—most of it never reached training camp officers in timely enough fashion for them to use. By the time many officers got these personnel reports most recruits had already left the camp or been assigned. Much to their chagrin interrogators also discovered that they could not always trust a man to answer truthfully—men almost invariably exaggerated their skill level. To protect the veracity of their results, the Committee decided to implement hands-on tests for men claiming engineering, carpentering, metal-work, or driving skills. This further delay in compiling useful information meant most training camp officials simply assigned men using the same criteria they had always used—an imperfect match between available positions and a general impression of a man's physical traits and the occupations popular in the region from which he came.

11 George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

12 Memorandums for the chief of staff, 28 May 1918, file # 10195-20, and 29 July 1918, file # 7519-122, both in Entry 296, Record Group 165, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (NARA). Lt. Col. H.E. Stephenson, 'Procurement of Occupational Specialists by Selective Service in the World War', 7 October 1932, lecture at the Army War College, Curriculum Files, US Army Military History Institute Archives, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Similarly the four hundred psychologists working for the Psychological Division collected a vast amount of so-called scientific data about recruits' native intelligence that had little concrete influence on the assignments given to incoming troops. Over the course of the war, army psychologists administered nearly 1.7 million intelligence tests to incoming recruits, thanks to the early intervention of Robert M. Yerkes, a Harvard professor and president of the American Psychological Association who convinced the Surgeon General to adopt the tests.¹³ Army psychologists developed two sets of tests, an Alpha series for literate recruits and a Beta exam for illiterate recruits or those with poor English-speaking skills. There were immediate problems with these exams. First, many commanders did not trust them. 'I am not convinced that the stupid man, with proper training and leading, is necessarily going to give way in the trenches', wrote one officer.¹⁴ Wartime psychologists never presented any direct evidence linking intelligence with performance on the battlefield, and many officers resented this intrusion by so-called experts into a domain traditionally under their control. Second, the tests tended to measure one's educational background and familiarity with middle-class values and lifestyles rather than native intelligence. One Alpha exam asked soldiers to correctly identify seven-up as a game played with cards, Philadelphia as the place where the Declaration of Independence was signed, and that General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox in 1865 to end the US Civil War.¹⁵ Illiterate men received a version of these same questions in a pictorial exam that asked them to draw in the missing features of particular scenes (Figure 1). These questions included adding a horn to a phonograph, a ball to the hand of a man in a bowling alley, and the filament to a light bulb.

Men also completed exams asking them to replicate patterns, solve mathematical word problems, and to recognise antonyms and synonyms. Other tests demanded that they unscramble words in a sentence, such as translating 'certain some death of mean kinds sickness' to 'some kinds of sickness mean certain death', and then determine whether the statement was true. There was also a test of common sense that asked a soldier to decide if he won a million dollars whether he would pay off the national debt, contribute to various worthy charities, or give it all to some poor man (the correct answer was to contribute to various worthy charities). Keeping the money for oneself was not an option.

- 13 For a more complete discussion of the intelligence test program, see Jennifer D. Keene, 'Intelligence and Morale in the Army of a Democracy: The Genesis of Military Psychology during the First World War', *Military Psychology* 6 (1994), 235-54.
- 14 Col. Henry A. Shaw, Medical Corps, to the surgeon general, 12 December 1917, file # 702, box 1090; Entry 37, Record Group 407, NARA. See also John Carson, 'Army Alpha, Army Brass, and the Search for Army Intelligence', *Isis* 84:2 (1993), 278-309; Daniel J. Kevles, 'Testing the Army's Intelligence: Psychologists and the Military in World War I', *Journal of American History* 55:3 (December 1968), 565-81.
- 15 For examples of alpha and beta intelligence tests, see *Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences* XV (Washington, DC: GPO, 1921).

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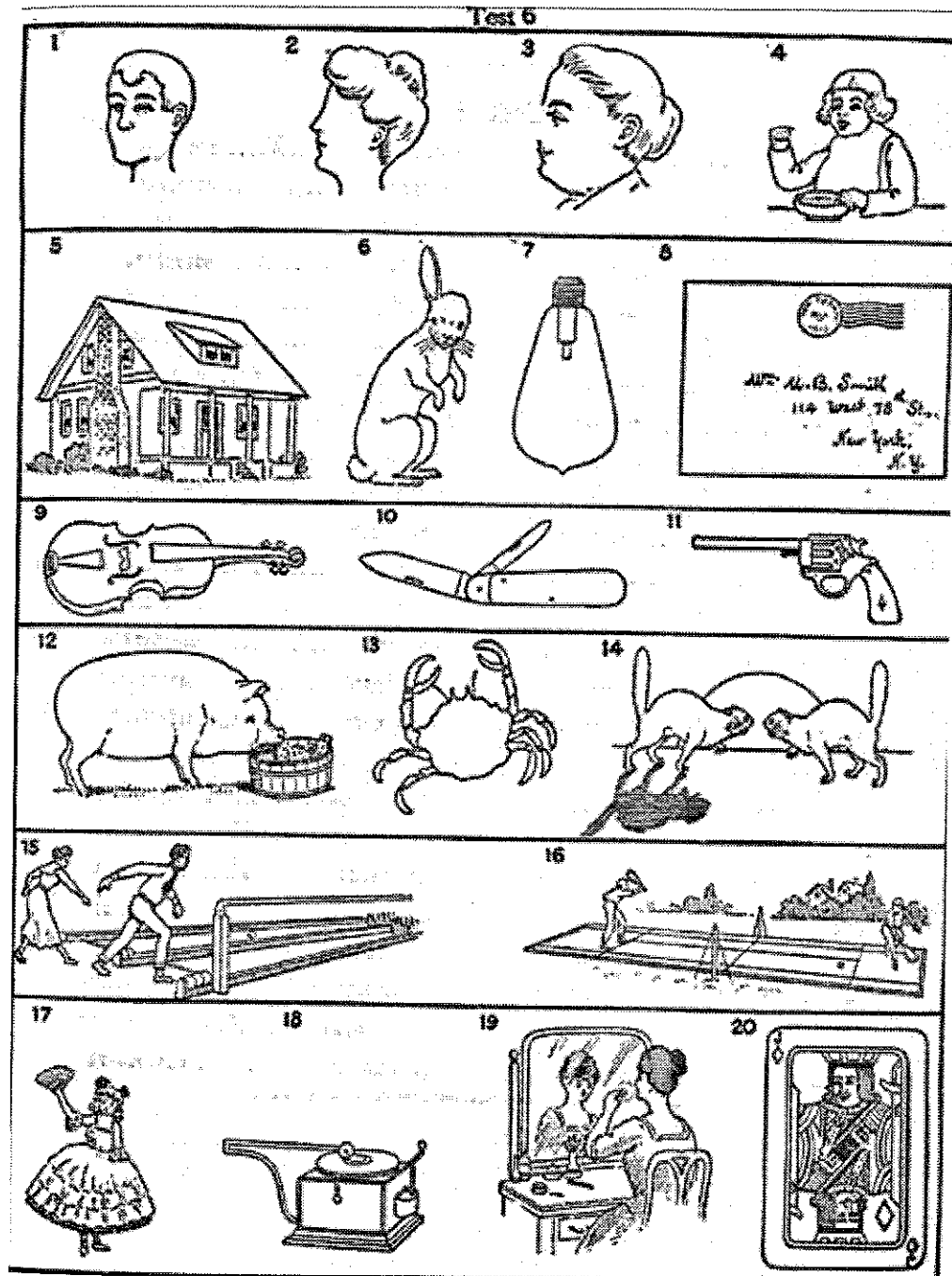


Figure 1: During World War I psychologists administered pictorial intelligence tests to illiterate recruits in an attempt to help the army quickly assess the aptitudes of incoming recruits. This test, which asked soldiers to fill in the missing item, proved a better measurement of class and educational background than innate intelligence. Source: *Memoirs of the National Academy of Science XV* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1921), 256.

These tests failed to serve as any kind of democratic measuring stick that could quickly and efficiently uncover hidden aptitude among the conscripted population. The tests were not completely useless, however. By measuring educational background, they did help training camp commanders identify appropriate candidates for officer training school.¹⁶

Even more importantly, despite its failure to live up to advocates' promises, this initial disappointing experimentation in classification and intelligence testing did not prevent the military from accepting the general principle that if implemented correctly occupational and psychological testing could help the army sustain its strength over the course of a long war. By the Second World War, intelligence and occupational testing was no longer in its infancy and the military enthusiastically embraced more sophisticated versions of these exams to match recruits with the appropriate job.¹⁷ Psychological testing expanded beyond predicting how well an individual might perform a particular job to include testing the efficiency of training methods, the design of equipment, and how men adapted to different environments. The second time around Army psychiatrists went even one step further, claiming that subjecting each incoming recruit to psychiatric testing and collecting an accurate history of family mental disease could help the military weed out the mentally weak. By rejecting those deemed likely to breakdown under the stress of battle, military psychiatrists argued that they were helping the army sustain its fighting efficiency.¹⁸ Recognising the growing influence of psychology within the military, in 1946 the American Psychological Association established a Division of Military Psychology to foster research that could specifically serve the needs of the armed forces.

In World War I sustaining the wartime force also required taking stock of the polyglot ethnic and racial character of the American army. Nearly one in five soldiers was foreign-born, one in ten was black. The Military Intelligence Division, initially organised to investigate German espionage at home and within the army, soon evolved to also include a vast network of internal spies filing reports about the activities of immigrant and African American soldiers whose non-American birth or black skin made their loyalty

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- 16 See Keith Gandall's recent work, *The Gun and the Pen: Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and the Fiction of Mobilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), for how this 'rationalised' approach to selecting officer candidates challenged the traditional class-oriented approach, in effect helping to democratise the process of selecting officer candidates in the US army.
- 17 J.E. Driskell and B. Olmstead, 'Psychology and the Military Research Applications and Trends', *American Psychologist* 44:1 (1989), 43-54.
- 18 Eli Ginzberg, *The Ineffective Soldier: Lessons for Management and the Nation*, 3 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). This claim came under attack after the war when dissenting psychiatrists claimed that every man had a breaking point which these tests could not accurately predict.
- 19 Mark Ellis, Race, *War and Surveillance: African Americans and the United States Government during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 74-100. Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), ch. 1.

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and 'American-ness' immediately questionable.¹⁹ Besides rooting out potentially disloyal soldiers, military officials also discovered that the linguistic and educational deficiencies of many immigrants meant that they would need to initiate remedial training programs before sending these men overseas. In the second year of the war when the demand for reinforcements became acute, the Progressive-style approach to assimilating and educating immigrants in civilian society enjoyed a surge of popularity within the wartime army.²⁰ Many Progressives had worked in the philanthropic urban settlement house movement which offered a range of social services to immigrant communities such as English-language classes, childcare, and employment bureaus. Progressives wanted to provide immigrants with the skills that they needed to become informed voters and productive workers, and social-welfare reformers organising recreational activities within the training camps soon convinced the army to adopt some of their techniques. Army officials embraced these proven approaches, not out of concern with the larger social question of assimilating immigrants to ensure national unity, but because they could not afford to relegate one-fifth of their manpower resources to the rear.

The 77th Infantry Division, which drew in a large number of drafted men from New York City, illustrated the problems of drawing recruits from over 40 different nationalities who often had only elementary English skills. 'Imagine the difficulties of teaching the rudiments of military art to men, however willing, who couldn't understand; officers have had sometimes to get right down on their hands and knees to show by actual physical persuasion how to "advance and plant the left foot"', one officer noted with exasperation.²¹ In one company men arranged themselves by linguistic groups so that when an English command was given each corporal could quickly translate it for their squad in time for the men to perform the required manoeuvre. When a new captain arrived in the company and decided to re-group the men by height, chaos reigned on the drill field until he realised his mistake.

To ensure that foreign-speaking soldiers received the language skills that they needed to fight effectively, the Assistant Secretary of War Frederick Keppel (a philanthropist and former dean of Columbia University who joined the War Department for the duration of the war) eventually instructed training camp commanders to give all foreign-speaking soldiers three hours of English instruction a day for four months. Men learned critical military vocabulary such as 'rifle', 'tent', 'guard', 'tank', 'march', 'aeroplane', 'howitzer' and

20 Nancy Gentile Ford, "'Mindful of the Traditions of His Race": Dual Identity and Foreign-Born Soldiers in the First World War American Army', *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16:2 (1997), 35-57, and Nancy Gentile Ford, *Americans All! Foreign-born Soldiers in World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2001).

21 Christopher M. Sterba, *Good Americans: Italian and Jewish Immigrants during the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 115.

'Red Cross'. Civics, history, science, conversational French, and instruction in geography, especially showing recruits how to read maps in the war zones, became part of the training camp curriculum as well.

In the spring of 1918 the army began assigning incoming foreign-speaking troops to developmental units before transferring them to national army units. Developmental units were created to rehabilitate men initially considered unfit either physically or mentally for service. Illiterate or foreign-speaking soldiers fell into this classification. In outlining the virtues of the new program, one army bulletin reiterated the Progressive faith in education to create a more harmonious and efficient community. 'Instead of distributing the non-English speaking men among the English speaking and thus creating confusion and misunderstanding, they can be grouped, handled and controlled together, and the wastage which has existed of time, money and foreign human material can be brought to an end', this bulletin predicted.²² After a successful experiment in Camp Gordon, Georgia, that grouped men who spoke the same language together for intensive English-language tutoring while providing a normal schedule of drilling, the War Department ordered 35 training camps to institute the same system to prepare foreign-speaking soldiers for service abroad. After completing their six-week courses of specialised instruction, the men were formed into platoons that eventually went overseas as replacement troops. Grouping the men into platoons, the War Department believed, would give these men a social support network overseas that would prevent them from feeling isolated or too disconnected from their cultural traditions and language, ensuring that their morale stayed high. At the same time the small size of a platoon would allow these troops to continue improving their English language skills as they interacted with others in their companies or regiments.

Trying to minimise manpower losses to venereal disease was yet another crucial way that the US army sought to sustain its wartime force. To combat this problem another wartime partnership formed between military officials and Progressive reformers, whose mutual interest in combating the disease arose from different concerns. Army officials wanted to make sure that trained men remained fit to fight. Social hygiene reformers who had tackled this problem in civilian society before the war worried that too much drinking and unprotected sex among soldiers would undermine both the moral fibre and physical health of American youth, ruining their military careers and corrupting American society when they returned home. Despite his own reputation as a reputed ladies man, General John J. Pershing nonetheless took a hard line against sexual adventurism among his troops to prevent venereal disease from crippling his army. Punishment for contracting venereal disease was severe and humiliating relegation to a venereal unit in a stateside training camp for the duration of the war.

22 Ford, *Americans All*, 86.

The Commission on Training Camp Activities (CTCA) spearheaded the wartime anti-venereal campaign.²³ The civilian reformers who worked for the CTCA were charged with enforcing sections 12 and 13 of the Selective Service Act which prohibited the sale of liquor to men in uniform and allowed the president to outlaw prostitution around training camps. Under the direction of Raymond Fosdick, a Progressive who had investigated police corruption, prostitution, and alcohol abuse before the war, the CTCA tried to instil middle-class principles of clean living by creating vice-free zones around training camps. 'Young men spontaneously prefer to be decent, and ... opportunities for wholesome recreation are the best possible cure for irregularities in conduct which arise from idleness and the baser temptations', stated Secretary of War Baker in support of Fosdick's mission.²⁴

In partnership with army medical officers and community welfare organisations active in the training camps such as the Young Men's Christian Association, Jewish Welfare League and Knights of Columbus, the CTCA launched a multi-faceted attack on vice. Active in the social hygiene and park reform movements before the war, the middle-class Progressive reformers who joined the CTCA encouraged the mostly working-class soldier population to eschew saloons and brothels. They used a variety of approaches to accomplish these goals. A steady program of athletic competitions tried to help soldiers burn off sexual energy through boxing, baseball and football competitions. Realising that soldiers were only one side of the equation, the CTCA closed-down red light districts throughout the nation and organised patrols to troll the streets looking for prostitutes or working-class girls seeking some excitement in the vicinity of training camps. Most innovatively, camp welfare workers relied on their Progressive faith in education to institute the army's first comprehensive sex education program. While urging abstinence, the CTCA was also realistic and counselled soldiers to practice safe sex if they succumbed. A series of pamphlets and films tried to clearly establish the link between alcohol, prostitutes and venereal disease in soldiers' minds. The Instruction Laboratory of the Army Medical Museum also developed lantern slide lectures that made practically every argument officials could devise to persuade soldiers to avoid temptation. One presentation began by posing the question 'why should a man expect a woman to be decent if he is not?'²⁵ After considering the double-standard that allowed men to sow wild oats but labelled women who engaged in risky sexual behaviour as whores, the slides quickly moved to key mistakes that men made, including sleeping with prostitutes after a night of drinking and then trusting illicit pharmacists who sold

23 Nancy Bristow, *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering During the Great War* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

24 Ford, *Americans All*, 89.

25 The venereal disease instructional lantern slide lecture is located in World War I Lantern Slide Training Sets, Set F-C3, Otis Historical Archives, National Museum of Health and Medicine, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, DC.

useless potions claiming to cure venereal disease. Graphic photographs showed soldiers how to identify venereal disease sores on their genitalia and summarised the cleansing treatments available in army medical facilities immediately after unprotected intercourse. Medical officers, however, had no intention of ending the lecture on the positive note that some treatment was available. Instead, the final slides relied on a combination of guilt and patriotism to discourage soldiers from sleeping with prostitutes. One slide (Figure 2) showed the devil keeping a scorecard of how many innocent babies were born blind and women diseased by men who had engaged in extramarital intercourse with prostitutes. The lecture concluded with the admonishment that each soldier owed it to his father, mother, sweetheart, and his country to stay clean for the duration of the war, as a final image flashed on the screen of Uncle Sam pointing his finger at the audience and demanding their 'pep, punch and patriotism'.

Sustaining the wartime army, therefore, focused quite a bit on soldiers' bodies: where their physical presence might best serve the war effort, at home or in the army; their occupational and mental abilities; their ethnicity; their health. The wartime debate within the General Staff over protecting soldiers' political rights as citizens during the war revealed growing interest in the other ways that soldiers might help sustain the war effort beyond being mentally and physically fit to serve in an appropriate capacity within the wartime force. Unlike in the Australian Imperial Force, where soldiers actually voted on the 1916 and 1917 conscription referendums, discussions over polling soldiers remained mostly hypothetical in the American Army. Except for a few state contests, overseas soldiers did not vote in the US Army.²⁶ The discussions that army officials had on the topic nonetheless revealed their certainty that soldiers' political views might serve a useful purpose in sustaining the war effort. 'It is not unlikely that the time may come when our soldiers in the field, in the aggregate, may be able to see more clearly what the necessities of the situation require more than do the voters at home', Colonel D. W. Ketcham, the acting chief of the War College Division, cautioned in February 1918. 'In such an event, they should not be deprived of their right of suffrage, not only because it is their right, but because their deprivation, at such a time, might seriously endanger the interests of the nation.'²⁷ Pershing urged the War Department to simplify the proposal to have 48 different state delegations collecting votes overseas by only polling overseas troops in national elections, but officials soon abandoned all election schemes as unworkable.

26 Captain Charles H. Collins, 'Soldier Voting', August 1942, 1-2, 7, 17, file # 7200-X, Thomas File; Entry 310, Record Group 165, NARA.

27 Memorandum for the chief of staff, 4 February 1918, file # 10288-10, Entry 296, RG 165, NARA.



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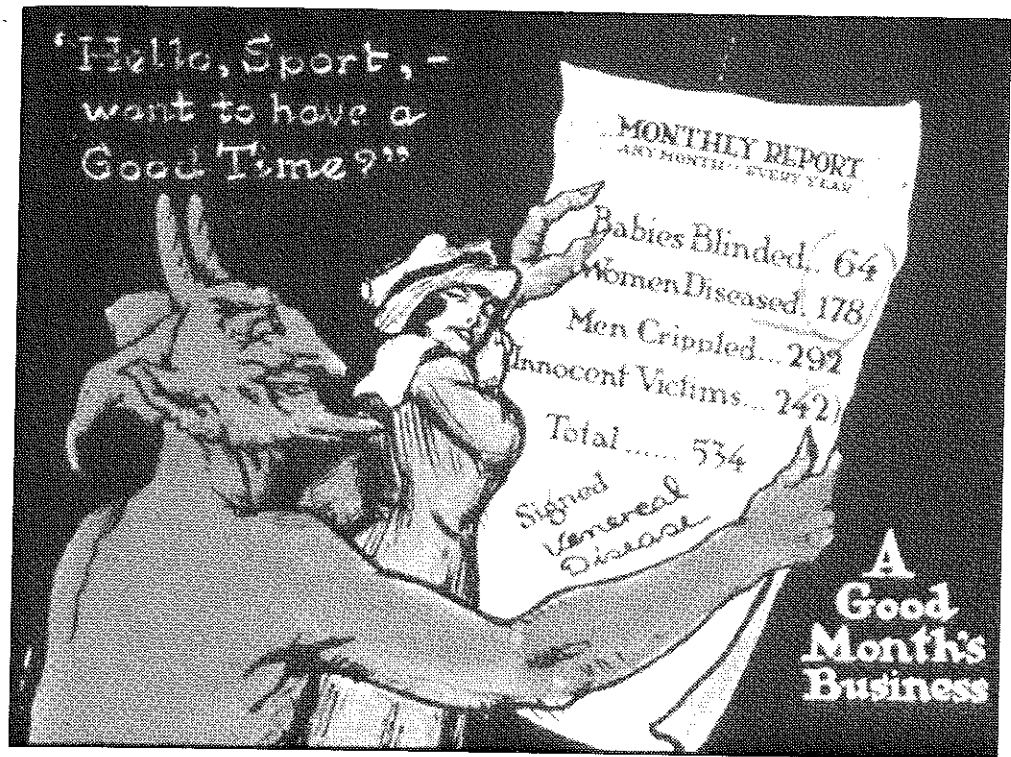


Figure 2: Part of an anti-venereal disease lecture designed to lessen manpower losses to sexually-transmitted diseases, this lantern slide image depicted wayward girls who offered to sleep with soldiers as doing the devil's work. It urged soldiers to think of the innocent victims who would suffer for their wartime transgressions. Source: World War I Lantern Slide Training Sets, Set F-C3, Otis Historical Archives, National Museum of Health and Medicine, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, DC.

The group of reform-minded army officers responsible for establishing the Morale Branch, however, were more successful. This wartime organisation, formed in 1918, began with the high hopes of establishing systematic political education as part of every soldier's training. Anticipating a long war, they believed that the US Army needed to prepare for the challenge of sustaining the will to fight among its civilian soldier force. Simply put, these officials felt without ideological devotion to a clear political cause, men would soon lose their motivation to continue the struggle or perhaps even mutiny. 'The citizen soldier of a democracy is entitled to understand the cause in which he fights, and the reasons and principles underlying the policy of the government ...', Colonel E.L. Munson of the Medical Corps argued, because 'unless he understands and believes in them he is always potentially dangerous.'²⁸ The morale problems and outbreaks of pacifist sentiment which

28 'Suggestions For Morale Officers', Morale Circular No. 1, 'Morale Circular, 1918-1919' folder, box 77; Entry 310, RG 165, NARA.

plagued Allied armies gave US Army officials ample reason to heed this advice.²⁹ French and British advisers recommended that the Americans learn from their mistakes and use systematic political education to enhance morale before matters got out of hand.

Pointing to captured German documents that outlined the German army's extensive political education program, Major General J.F. Morrison, Director of Training in the War Plans Division, and Munson lobbied for a formal morale program throughout the winter of 1918. When the Chief of Staff rejected Morrison's suggestion that the American Army simply mimic the German system, Morrison changed tactics. Rather than abandon the idea Morrison joined forces with Munson, who was independently lobbying for a broad morale program, and with Intelligence Division officials who already were monitoring citizen soldier opinion. In the spring these officials held an 'Informal Conference on Morale', and included Assistant Secretary of War Keppel on their guest list. The meeting swayed Keppel and his support proved crucial.³⁰ He immediately ordered the War Plans Division to examine morale programs within the Allied armies. At the end of this comprehensive study in May 1918, the War Plans Division created the Morale Division, which became an independent bureau in the fall of 1918. It operated for the rest of the war, creating political education programs and monitoring citizen soldier opinion about the war and military life.

Because the Morale Division formed late in the war, and failed to survive the postwar budget cuts in the peacetime Regular Army, its goals and activities have usually merited little more than a casual aside in most histories of the American war effort. Yet rather than a footnote involving an ultimately failed idea, the Morale Branch deserves to be re-cast in a central role for the way that it revolutionised the place of soldier opinion within the army, transforming it from an afterthought of most commanders into a powerful force shaping policy within the military from this point onward.

When these reformers first made their case to the War Department that citizen-soldiers' opinions mattered, they did so because they expected to mould those views to produce dedicated crusaders for democracy on the battlefield. 'This country is grossly materialist where the military service is concerned', Munson argued. 'It thinks only in terms of men,

29 American officials viewed pacifist political propaganda as the main reason for the mutinies which swept through the French Army in 1917: 'Morale and Discipline in the French Army in the Spring of 1917', file #8121-X; Entry 6, RG 120, NARA.

30 'Informal Conference on Morale', 12 April 1918; 'Report on Second Conference of Morale', 15 May 1918: both in box 131, Entry 310, RG 165, NARA; Thomas M. Camfield, "'Will to Win': The US Army Troop Morale Program of World War I", *Military Affairs* 41 (October 1977), 125-8; Memorandum for the Surgeon General, 2 March 1918, file #7519-107; Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 26 February 1918, file #7519-106; Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 29 August 1918, file #80-1(25): all in Entry 296, RG 165, NARA.

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money, and munitions, which it assumes makes the soldier ... We give the ability to fight, and let the will to fight look out for itself. This is neither logical [n]or practical. Few are born fighters', he asserted.³¹ The founders of the Morale Branch urged their colleagues to build morale systematically rather than leaving it to officers in the field, who had many other demands on their time.

Yet like all good Progressives, these reformers believed that effective policies needed to be based on hard data. Urban reformers had run successful campaigns to enact laws that improved trash collection, provided injured workers with compensation, and ensured that children drank clean milk by pioneering sociological studies into the correlation between disease and filth; worker injury and employer negligence. In similar fashion, Morale Branch officials set out to assess the state of morale before they developed solutions for how to improve or sustain it by undertaking a series of wide-ranging surveys of soldier opinion. The Morale Branch kept most of its investigations secret because officials feared that if they became common knowledge citizen soldiers might inundate them with criticism. The Morale Branch rarely surveyed soldiers openly, but instead distributed confidential lists of questions which their operatives asked soldiers informally as they circulated through the ranks.³² Few citizen soldiers therefore ever knew that the army was monitoring their thoughts.

When these investigations revealed widespread dissatisfaction among the troops on a host of policies, army officials then had the choice of either ignoring or placating an enlisted force that expressed dissatisfaction with many aspects of military life. The effort to systematise the creation of morale in the wartime army in order to sustain its fighting capacities thus inadvertently created an indirect dialogue between citizen soldiers and policymakers that resulted in many compromises and concessions on the army's part. When viewed from this perspective, this nascent effort to sustain the army in the field by surveying and considering soldiers' opinions on a variety of topics had the unintended effect of securing a key Progressive goal. Begun in the name of enhancing efficiency, sustaining the will to fight instead became a step towards democratising the army by making it more responsive to the preferences of its enlisted ranks.

In convincing his superiors to establish the Morale Branch, Munson had concentrated primarily on an anticipated problem, sustaining the will to fight during a protracted war. Ironically, however, the first few morale conferences focused almost exclusively on the

31 Memorandum for the Surgeon General, file #7519-107, Entry 296, RG 165, NARA.

32 For instructions and list see 'Confidential Questionnaire', Camp Grant file, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA. For concerns about confidentiality see Colonel E.L. Munson to Morale Officers, 6 February 1918, 'Cases for Investigation, February' folder, box A8, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

disciplinary and morale problems that field investigations had uncovered in domestic training camps. When psychologists, intelligence officers, General Staff policymakers, and the Committee on Public Information officials, none of whom had even visited the Western Front, met to define the scope of military morale work, they invariably fell to discussing the problems they had personally observed stateside. All worried that the harsh reception recruits received during their first few days in camp set the wrong tone. Captain E.R. Padgett recommended that morale workers take steps to ensure that men understood the meaning of selective service, arguing 'we could at least implant among them the idea that they are not conscripts, taken in the draft, but men selected through the draft to serve the Government, and therefore, they have been honoured—which to most of them, I dare say, is a brand new idea.'³³ Others suggested that training camp officials introduce the concepts of military discipline gradually to avoid unnecessarily discouraging men who entered the camps enthusiastic to do their part. The empathetic perspective that morale advocates offered often annoyed more traditionally oriented military officials who dismissively accused them of trying to turn military training into summer camp. How much influence they gained to shape training camp policy, therefore, depended in large part on the receptivity of the camp commander to their findings. Almost as an afterthought, the Morale Branch initiated the concentrated propaganda and education campaign through camp newspapers, prepared officer lectures, camp song sessions, movies, plays, and religious services that it had pledged initially to create.

The Morale Branch never crossed the Atlantic, partly because Pershing remained sceptical of the assertion that only politically-motivated soldiers could fight well. Though he rejected the idea of assigning morale workers to cultivate political conviction among his troops, Pershing agreed to let Brigadier General D.E. Nolan, who headed the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) Intelligence Bureau, circulate a soldiers' newspaper which accomplished the same task, perhaps more effectively. *The Stars and Stripes* began publishing a weekly issue in February 1918. General Headquarters expected the paper to keep morale high in the AEF by providing soldiers the news from home which they coveted and information about the activities of soldiers themselves. The paper strove to 'interpret the spirit of a great Democracy at war for a just cause', reminding soldiers about the war's larger purpose to counter the demoralising effects of poor weather, bad food, and difficult fighting conditions.³⁴ To a remarkable degree, the paper remained editorially independent during the war even though the editors were required to send each week's

33 Memorandum for Captain Perkins, 30 August 1918, Camp Meade file, box A10, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

34 Alfred E. Cornebise, *The Stars and Stripes: Doughboy Journalism in World War I* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 8.

copy to a GHQ Board of Control that reviewed the material. Immensely popular among the troops, the eight-page newspaper boasted a circulation of 560,000, including 70,000 copies distributed in the United States.

The editors encouraged soldiers to write letters and submit stories to the paper, having received permission from Pershing's staff for 'the encouragement of individuality of expression consistent with tolerance and sanity of view'. Humorous vignettes about the absurdities and inconveniences of army life helped the men blow off steam and prevented these grumblings from becoming anything more serious, the paper's editors argued. The paper poked fun at non-commissioned and junior officers, noting that second lieutenants had a difficult time in the war with 'with mere majors and captains ranking him out of his bed or girl at every turn'.³⁵ Unlike stateside morale officers who kept their investigations secret, the paper openly solicited complaints and comments from soldiers. Once criticism became rolling in, however, the paper risked losing its credibility as a legitimate expression of enlisted men's opinion if it failed to offer some response. Accordingly the *Stars and Stripes* mounted minor campaigns during the war to protest unjust army policies or capricious officers. Upon hearing that some officers forbade their men from writing more than one letter a week, the *Stars and Stripes* angrily denounced any officers who tried to lessen their censorship duties. This prohibition, the *Stars and Stripes* noted with satisfaction, countermanded an AEF general order stating that writing 'home frequently and regularly, to keep in constant touch with family and friends, is one of the soldier's most important duties'.³⁶ The paper also criticised discourteous officers who failed to properly return enlisted men's salutes. The paper never, however, uttered a word against the highest-ranking levels of leadership or the strategy pursued. Instead, it tended to lionise the army's commanding generals.

In the wake of the armistice the paper became bolder, publishing a host of soldiers' complaints concerning officer privileges and blaming poor sanitation in the embarkation camps for the rising death rates from influenza among homeward-bound troops. This provoked an immediate response from Pershing who ordered the paper to stop printing 'criticism of any kind'.³⁷ Captain Mark Watson replied that as soon as the paper stopped printing the 'humorous, harmless grouches of the soldiers just at that time will *The Stars and Stripes* be regarded as a GHQ organization'.³⁸ Watson won the right to continue

35 Ibid., 79.

36 John T. Winterich (ed.), *Squads Write! A Selection of the Best Things in Prose, Verse & Cartoons from the Stars and Stripes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 17.

37 Corneise, *The Stars and Stripes*, 10-11.

38 Ibid., 10.

publishing mild criticism, but only after agreeing to cease commentary on the filthy state of embarkation camps. Repeated stories about disease-ridden embarkation camps was hurting, not helping, morale, thereby undermining the primary reason for publishing the *Stars and Stripes*, AEF Headquarters pointed out. Changing course, the paper now offered readers official assurances that the improvements in sanitation and housing conditions were imminent.

Pershing did not want the army's dirty laundry aired in public, but he did finally authorise investigations of soldier opinion overseas. The wartime innovation that stateside reformers had introduced of monitoring soldiers' views now revealed its full capacity to become a transformative force within the military. Thanks to the host of confidential surveys that overseas army officials undertook, Pershing and his commanders became acutely aware of citizen soldiers' complaints concerning both the demobilisation process and army life in general. Internal disagreement arose, however, over how the army should respond to soldiers' grievances. Traditionalists saw nothing remarkable in the grumbling of a demobilising army, but the reforming vanguard urged commanders to ease soldier discontent. Secret morale investigations drew attention to aspects of military life which GHQ policymakers rarely considered. Their subsequent uncertainty about the true importance of soldier opinion revealed their inexperience analysing this kind of information.³⁹

Some AEF policymakers expressed scepticism about the significance of investigators' findings, especially if their own policies came under fire. Major General J.W. McAndrew, the AEF Chief of Staff, dismissed citizen officers' request for a speedier review of citation lists for military honours and Brigadier General H.B. Fiske, head of AEF training, rejected any suggestion that he tone down the post-war training program. Other commanders and officials, however, argued that the time had come to consider the role that veteran opinion was likely to play in future political battles such as postwar defence funding and the army's desire to create a universal training program among civilian men. To further these postwar goals Major General James Harbord, the head of the Service of Supply, and Lieutenant Colonel J.A. Baer, a key AEF Inspector General, now lobbied for an immediate response to these disturbing field reports.⁴⁰ In a long report to Secretary Baker, CTCA

39 Memorandum for General McIntyre, 14 February 1919 and 13 March 1919, file #1010(17), Entry 8, RG 165, NARA. See also individual camp reports in Camp Grant, Camp Funston and Camp Travis files, Entry 377, RG 165, NARA.

40 Harbord to McAndrew, 31 January 1919, and McAndrew's reply to Harbord, 3 February 1919; James Harbord Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Memorandum on the morale of reserve officers, 11 October 1919, file # 21660-T, Entry 6, RG 120, NARA; Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 25 February 1919, folder # 266, Entry 22, RG 120, NARA.

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chairman Fosdick warned that unless the strenuous training program was revised then disgruntled soldiers would likely return home and 'prejudice a new generation against military preparation of any kind', including universal military training. Lieutenant Colonel R.W. Chase agreed that the army would benefit in the long-run if it ended some of the officer privileges that many enlisted men denounced, so 'the men leave the service with a proper attitude towards it, an attitude which will make them supporters of the Army and not antagonists'.⁴¹

A report from Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, Jr, summarising the results of an official meeting in Paris among twenty non-Regular Army officers to discuss plummeting morale, finally convinced Pershing to side with the reform-minded faction in his staff. Like Fosdick, this panel advised Pershing to reduce the training load, award more decorations, publish the debarkation schedule, and expand recreational facilities.⁴² Unable to ignore the cumulative force of this advice, Pershing sent excerpts from Fosdick's report to all his commanding generals telling them that it 'gives, as few papers do, the point of view of the American civilian who has not been in the Army for more than a year ... [and who] makes up the major part of our officer and enlisted personnel in the Army today'. In setting their training schedules Pershing urged his commanders to respect Fosdick's advice and minimise the number of hours troops drilled each day. He now agreed that such concessions to enlisted opinion were necessary so that the men returned 'to the United States enthusiastic over their military experience'.⁴³

During the war Pershing had refused to appoint morale officers to overseas units, but he now agreed that these officers were needed so that GHQ could respond effectively to soldiers' complaints. Because these morale officers continued to monitor soldier opinion secretly, however, few soldiers ever knew that their superiors were taking their views into consideration when setting post-war personnel and training policies. Taking matters into their own hands now that censorship limitations were gone, soldiers communicated their criticisms freely with their families, newspapers and their elected representatives. When policy changes came, troops credited outside lobbying from politicians for bringing about the reforms that they sought. Little did citizen soldiers realize that in the name of sustaining

41 Memorandum for the Director of Operations, 8 April 1919, file # 1010-32, Entry 8, RG 165, NARA; Raymond Fosdick, Commission on Training Camp Activities, to Secretary of War Newton Baker, 17 April 1919, 3, 'F, 1919' folder, Newton Baker Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Fosdick, Memorandum on Morale in the AEF, 1 February 1919, file #80-34(2), Entry 65, RG 165, NARA.

42 'First Meeting of the Caucus of the American Legion', 15 March 1919, reprinted in file #5777, Thomas File, Entry 310, RG 165, NARA.

43 Robert Davis, Adj. Gen., 'Morale in the AEF', 14 February 1919, 'Fifth Army Corps: Other Intelligence Reports' folder, box 16, Charles Summerall Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, 25 February 1919, folder # 266, Entry 22, RG 120, NARA.

the wartime force, some of the most important steps taken, first to monitor soldiers' thoughts and desires, and then to respond to them, had occurred during the war.

Like the wartime-initiated reforms in how the military selected and sorted manpower, the effort to systematise the morale-building process outlived the war. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Regular Army officers attending the Army War College examined ways to improve morale within conscripted units by considering the problems unearthed by morale and intelligence investigators during World War I. These officers studied the attitudes and behaviours of citizen soldiers during the past war to perfect their preparations for building the next mass army, diligently drawing pertinent lessons for the future from the army's first sustained interaction with a conscripted citizen force. The army, claimed Major Donald H. Connolly, needed to unravel how the army had dampened citizen soldiers' initial enthusiasm for military service and 'saw develop an opposition to officers in general and the regular army in particular, that lasted for years after the war'.⁴⁴ Course studies with titles like 'Morale and Propaganda', 'Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Use of Rewards', and 'The Individual Mind in Relation to Military Service', would have been inconceivable before the war.

The army finally had a chance to put these lessons to the test in World War II. Picking up where the Morale Division left off in 1919, the soldier opinion studies undertaken by Samuel Stouffer and his colleagues in the Research Branch of the Information and Education Division of the War Department provide some clues about how much influence civilian soldiers wielded within this wartime army.⁴⁵ The sophistication of the Stouffer studies was vastly superior to the rudimentary efforts of morale investigators in World War I, but their intent was the same. Hoping to perfect the collaboration between citizen soldiers and the army, the Stouffer group provided commanders with detailed reports on the issues that concerned soldiers, including how some army policies inadvertently hurt morale. To counter infantrymen's feelings that their service was undervalued, for instance, the Chief of Staff initiated a systematic campaign to improve the prestige of the Infantry by raising their pay, awarding them distinctive medals, and publicising the feats of infantrymen throughout the service.

44 Major Donald H. Connolly, 'Control of Men as Part of an Officer's Training', 5 May 1929, 5, file # 357-18. Other studies or lectures at the Army War College using World War I experience to examine problems of morale and leadership among wartime troops include lectures by Major General Eli A. Helmick, 'Relation of Psychology to Leadership', file #293A-61, Command Course No. 61, 1924-25; 'The Individual Mind in Relation to Military Service', file #341A-26, G-1 Course, 1927-28; 'Morale in Armies', G-1 Course, 1928-29; all in the Curriculum Files, US Army Military History Institute Archives, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

45 For examples of the Research Division's work, see Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*, vol. 1: *Adjustment During Army Life*, and vol. 2: *Combat and Its Aftermath*, Studies in Social Psychology in World War II (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1949; reprint, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965).

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After World War II surveying the opinions of enlisted personnel within the armed forces was standard practice. In the Korean War, social scientists carefully monitored troops' reactions to de-segregation and discovered that racial prejudice decreased as a result of living and working in an inter-racial environment, allowing the military to cast aside once and for all the claim that it could not de-segregate without causing mutiny in the ranks. In Vietnam, soldiers were regularly polled on their levels of combat stress to gauge how long a soldier could remain effective on the battlefield.⁴⁶ As recently as 2002 researchers from the Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences claimed that their surveys kept a 'finger on the pulse of soldiers' to provide 'timely information that Army leaders need to make informed decisions'.⁴⁷ Just like their predecessors in World War I who collected data on soldiers' skills and intelligence, the Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences still faces the problem of disseminating its data in a timely manner, promising that the introduction of web-based surveys will reduce the time it takes for their studies to reach commanders in the field. Unlike early Morale Branch workers, however, present-day social scientists make no secret of the fact that they are surveying troops. Instead, they openly acknowledge that their surveys 'give soldiers the opportunity to "tell it like it is" to the chain of command—all the way to the top'. These surveys have initiated an explicit dialogue between troops and their commanders on a host of issues ranging from unit cohesion over their period of deployment, the impact of cultural awareness training, motivation to serve, retention, and women in combat. Troops know that their opinions are being solicited, and they expect to be heard. Sustaining an army now includes systematically and scientifically taking enlisted men's opinions into account, a practice whose origins lie in World War I.

Taken together, the innovative personnel practices introduced during World War I played an important role in helping the US Army sustain its fighting capacity throughout the twentieth century. On the homefront the Progressive reform impulse died out around 1920, but within the military many of its ideals lived on and continued to shape how the armed forces selected, utilised and motivated its wartime troops in future conflicts. The drive for efficiency, the desire to base policy on scientific data, and faith that education could shape behaviour all emerged as key principles that the military embraced from this point onward as essential to sustaining men in the field.

⁴⁶ See A. David Mangelsdorff (ed.), *Psychology in the Service of National Security* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006); David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Soldier Groups and Negro Soldiers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952).

⁴⁷ Alma G. Steinberg, Morris P. Peterson, Sidney F. Fisher, 'How Army Research Institute Surveys Support Army Transformation', *Army AL&T* (July-August 2002), 19-20.