

Lesson 1

How World War One Affected Alabama

This war is called a world war because over 100 countries were part of the conflict known as World War One. Not all of the countries sent soldiers to fight. Some sent materials and supplies to be used for the War and other countries pledged their support but did not provide any services.

The War started in 1914 and ended in 1918. The countries fighting were Germany, Turkey, Austria-Hungary and their supporters on one side and on the other side were Britain, France, Russia, the United States, Italy and their supporters.

The War affected Alabama in many ways.

1. Economical

Before the War, Britain had been buying large quantities of Alabama's cotton to use in their factories to make cloth. But once the War started, they had to start making materials for the War, so they stopped buying much cotton. Cotton was a big industry in Alabama. At that time, 3.7 million acres in Alabama were planted in cotton. This was over 1/3 of all the improved land in Alabama. The 1910 Census showed that 81,972 people in Alabama were making a living because of cotton. Many people grew and harvested cotton; others worked to manufacture items from cotton; and some worked to transport the cotton to other places. The Census showed that the population of Alabama was 2,138,093.

When Britain stopped buying the cotton, people did not have work so they looked for jobs in the North where manufacturing plants had begun to make materials for the War. Many cotton workers and other workers decided to try to find better jobs in the North. About 85,000 Blacks and 150,000 Whites left rural Alabama for these jobs in the North.

The United States entered the War in 1917. Congress opened three military bases in Alabama to train the soldiers so many jobs were created around these bases to support the troops. These bases were Camp Sheridan and Taylor Field in Montgomery; and, Camp McClellan in Anniston.

During the War the demand for iron products, timber, food, and fiber increased. Mobile became an important shipbuilding city. Birmingham was a leader in the production of iron and steel. The United States needed nitrates for ammunition and explosives, so two nitrate plants were built and a dam was under construction to supply needed electricity for the plants in Muscle Shoals. Prices of goods rose and the economy improved.

2. Troops and Volunteers in Alabama

Alabamians worked very hard during the War to support the troops. They joined groups like the Red Cross, YMCA, YWCA, and Four-minute Men and Women. Alabama women formed groups to sew clothing, can food and sell stamps as part of the war effort.

Many men joined the Armed Services or were drafted to fight and many were killed. There were approximately 74,000 draftees, 5,000 National Guardsmen and 7,000 other volunteers from Alabama who fought in WWI. More than 2,500 were killed in action and almost 4,000 lost their lives to wounds and disease.

The Alabama National Guard was called to serve in the War. When they were called to become part of the national forces they were renamed the 167th Infantry Regiment. These men from Alabama became a famous fighting group. Soon after the US entered the War on August 14, 1917, eight trains took the 3,677 men from Montgomery to New York for training. These men joined men from other states and the 167th Regiment became part of a larger group best known as the Rainbow Division. They trained for several months and then went to Britain for more training. During the training several men noted hardships in letters and diaries, including snowy weather, sleeping in hay lofts, and eating cold meals. Intensive training continued until late

February 1918, when the first men of the 167th entered the front-line trenches, beginning nine months of active participation in the war that included eight battles in France fighting the Germans.

The Rainbow Division fought hard and helped to win the war which ended on November 11, 1918. Alabama's 167th Regiment fought on the front lines without relief for 110 days. Many of the men were honored for their service. Corporal Sidney E. Manning of Flomaton, Alabama, received the Congressional Medal of Honor for leading his men after he was severely wounded on July 28, 1918. He is listed on the Columns at the Alabama Veterans Memorial Park as a Medal of Honor recipient from Alabama. Many other men received medals for bravery. General Douglas MacArthur was very impressed with the men from Alabama. (See his quote below).

July 26, 1918

“...the 167th Alabama assisted by the left flank of the 168th Iowa had stormed and captured the Croix Rouge Farm in a manner which for its gallantry I do not believe has been surpassed in military history. It was one of the few occasions on which the bayonet was decisively used.”

– Douglas MacArthur

Throughout France there are war memorials for Americans who fought in WWI to save their country from the Germans. One of the memorials in the Croix Rouge Farm area of France honors the soldiers of Alabama's 167th Regiment. When the soldiers returned home in May of 1919, they rode the train across Alabama and were welcomed home with large crowds.