



# THE UNITED STATES WORLD WAR ONE CENTENNIAL COMMISSION

## CASE SUMMARY

**Bombardment, barrage, curtain-fire,  
mines, gas, tanks, machine-guns,  
hand-grenades - words, words, but  
they hold the horror of the world**

*Erich Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front*

### APRIL 1917

For the past three years, the great powers of Europe have waged a global conflict that threatens to unravel the very fabric of civilization. The once pastoral landscapes of Europe have been reduced to a burnt and barren wasteland, choked with the bodies of millions of men who

were once the hope of a generation. From the plains of eastern Africa to the coast of China, armies have battered each other on battlefronts largely unchanged since the outbreak of the First World War, the first-ever global conflict in human history.

America has stayed neutral in the conflict. But on April 6, 1917, driven by German attacks on U.S. shipping, Congress declares war on Germany. Over the next eighteen months, almost five million American men and women will leave their homes, classrooms, assembly lines, and offices to offer their lives in defense of the principles of freedom and liberty in places they have never seen and for people they have never met.

**"General, these are American regulars.  
In a hundred and fifty years they have  
never been beaten. They will hold."**

*Colonel Preston Brown*

### MAY 1918

The first troops of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) arrive in Paris in July 1917, giving heart to its beleaguered French and British allies. By November the first doughboys have been blooded in combat. Knowing that the coming waves of U.S. troops will turn the tide of war, Germany launches a series of offensives in early 1918 intended to drive Britain and France to an armistice before the Americans arrive in force. By May the Germans are only 50 miles from Paris. U.S. soldiers and Marines rush into the breach, holding the line at Château-Thierry and driving the enemy out of Cantigny and the Belleau Wood.

**"The American blow in the Argonne  
decided the war for the Allies."**

*German General Erich Ludendorff*

### NOVEMBER 1918

The final, inexorable drive to defeat the Germans begins. On September 26, 1918, more than a million AEF troops muster in northeast France, the Meuse River on their right and the Argonne

Forest on their left. In the face of unending artillery barrages, clouds of poisonous gas, and withering machine gun fire, the doughboys launch the largest battle in American history, the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Forty-seven days later, the Americans have circled the vital rail hub of Sedan. Germany sues for peace, and at 11:00 a.m. on November 11 – the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month – the guns fall silent.

**“We shall fight for the things  
which we have always carried  
nearest our hearts”**

*Woodrow Wilson*

## JUNE 1919

With the Treaty of Versailles officially ending the war, the United States emerges as one of the world’s leading economic and military powers. America’s industrial might, mobilized to end a global conflict, reengineers to lead a growing global economy. Millions of Americans who had hardly traveled beyond their home county now return from the war as global citizens. Women, African-Americans, immigrants, and other ethnic minorities, having made vital contributions to the war effort at home and abroad, claim a new place in American society.

In the peace, the United States re-affirms its commitment to those values that shape our national character and will inform our domestic and foreign policy to this day – self-determination, consent of the governed, freedom from oppression, and the rule of law. The First World War shows the world that America is committed to champion and defend those values abroad in the name of global peace.

**“No one who serves our nation  
should be forgotten. It’s never  
too late to say thank you.”**

*President Barack Obama, at the Medal of Honor ceremony for World War I soldier Henry Johnson*

## OUR MISSION

World War I was the most consequential event of the 20th century. The stories of the 4.7 million Americans who served, and the sacrifice of the 204,000 American wounded and 116,516 dead, cannot be confined to a book or film. Their story, almost a century old, must provide every American with an opportunity for meaningful reflection upon how our past choices shape our nation today and influence our future decisions.

Established by an act of the 112th Congress and signed by President Obama in 2014, ***The United States World War I Centennial Commission*** was established to **honor** those Americans who served during the First World War, **educate** the citizenry to increase the national understanding of the causes and consequences of the conflict, and **commemorate** those events of nearly a century ago that continue to shape us as Americans.

Central to the formation of the Commission is raising **\$50 million** for the construction of the World War I Memorial in what is now Pershing Park in Washington, D.C. This structure, once completed, will provide not only the appropriate recognition for those who served in the First World War as those who served in later wars, but will bring those events of the past into the present, serving to inspire and inform our future actions as individuals and as a nation.

The work of ***The United States World War I Centennial Commission*** receives no taxpayer dollars and is made possible only through the generous contributions of individuals, corporations, and foundations. The Commission’s efforts provide each passing generation of Americans with an opportunity to reaffirm that the sacrifices of our past cannot be simply forgotten or relegated to volumes of history. In recalling **what we have done**, we often discover **that which is still to be accomplished**.



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