

Mattoon, Illinois's Involvement in WWI as Told Through *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, 1917-1918

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In February 1917, Germany announced that it would renew unrestricted submarine warfare and resumed their U-boat attacks on the shipping of neutral countries including vessels of the United States. Following this announcement President Woodrow Wilson and the United States government strongly condemned Germany's actions. A patriotic fervor swept the United States, with many calling on the government to declare war on Germany for violating the United States' neutrality. On February 9, 1917, in the central Illinois city of Mattoon, the Mattoon council No. 1057 of the Knights of Columbus placed an advertisement in *The Daily Journal-Gazette*. In the ad, the Mattoon Knights of Columbus pledged "its support to President Wilson" in response to Germany's unrestricted submarine warfare stating that "we do hereby pledge you our unswerving, loyal and patriotic support in this our nation's most serious crisis."¹

This advertisement placed by the Mattoon Knights of Columbus is the first example in *The Daily Journal-Gazette* of Mattoon's involvement in World War I. The focus of this paper is on Mattoon's response to the Great War as told through the Mattoon newspaper *The Daily Journal-Gazette* from 1917-1918. I have narrowed my research almost exclusively to only include stories and events covered in *The Daily Journal-Gazette* between February 1917 and December 1918 that in some way show a direct connection between the city of Mattoon and the Great War. Because of this my research should not be seen as an all-inclusive history of Mattoon during the war years, since this paper excludes many major and minor events in Mattoon's history that had no connection to the First World War.

Where Mattoon's involvement in the Great War is most obvious is in stories about the many patriotic rallies, gatherings, and parades that were held throughout 1917-1918. These drew large crowds and the full support of Mattoon's citizens. They began almost two months before the United States officially entered the war. On February 13, 1917, it was announced there would be a "Patriotic Rally" to be held on Washington's Birthday, February 22. The rally's purpose was to show Mattoon's support of the United States' severing of diplomatic relations with Germany as a result of their policy of unrestricted submarine warfare.² The rally was well attended by a sizable and spirited crowd at the Majestic Theater. During the rally a parade was held led by a brass band, flags were raised and hung all around, and, of course, many patriotic songs were sung, and several patriotic orations delivered by politicians. The main speaker at the rally was State Senator Frank Wendling from Shelbyville. Senator Wendling's speech called for the young men of Mattoon to prepare to answer the call of their country:

I believe that the hour has arrived in the history of our American nation when it behooves every patriotic citizen and more particularly the young manhood of this country to pay attention to that injunction that was inscribed upon one of the ancient temples, 'Know Thyself,' two words more

¹ "Knights of Columbus Back President Wilson." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, February 9, 1917.

² "Patriotic Rally Feb. 22." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, February 13, 1917.

intensely suggestive it has been said, than any two words ever uttered by the lips of man.³

Following the United States' declaration of war against Germany on April 6, 1917, Mattoon planned another "Patriotic Rally" and parade for April 19. Its stated purpose was to aid in the "effort to stimulate patriotism and further the recruiting of the army and navy to war strength."⁴ The parade proved to be a great success. An estimated 3,038 people participated in the parade, including 1,000 school children from Mattoon and the surrounding area as well as workers and members of local clubs. Many businesses closed for the day to allow their employees to participate in the parade.⁵ Interestingly, the local shop-men from the Illinois Central Railroad that participated in the parade were led by Frank Wise "who was born in Germany and had served three years in the German Army." He emigrated to the United States, in the 1890s, joined the United States Army and served during the Spanish-American War.⁶ The final rally held in 1917 was on September 5, and was intended as a send-off for Mattoon's first six young men called up by the draft. They were headed to Camp Taylor, Kentucky where they were to receive their training. Hundreds gathered at the train station to cheer for Thomas Morgan, James Edward Hill, John Marley, Joe E. Gray, Joseph Greenwood, and Orlie Rue who travelled in a special railroad car with a banner reading "Berlin or Bust" on its side.⁷ *The Daily Journal-Gazette* even published their pictures with short biographies in their September 5 edition (See Image 1, pg. 5).

In 1918 there were fewer large-scale patriotic rallies held in Mattoon than in 1917. The largest patriotic gathering was on March 2, 1918 when thousands gathered to hear patriotic music played by the Great Lakes Naval Training Station band that was "touring the country at the expense of the federal government in the interest of the war stamp and thrift stamp campaign."⁸ So many people came to hear the band play that "thousands" were turned away at the door because the Majestic theatre was too crowded.⁹ The final patriotic gathering and parade held in Mattoon during the war was not planned ahead of time as all the others had been. Instead it was completely spontaneous. On November 7, 1918, news arrived in Mattoon that there was a ceasefire declared with Germany and the Kaiser had capitulated and it was only a matter of time before the war would be over.

³ "Washington Day Observed." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, February 22, 1917.

⁴ "Patriotic Rally 19th." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, April 10, 1917.

⁵ "Parade is a Big Affair." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, April 19, 1917.

⁶ "Praise For Big Parade." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, April 20, 1917.

⁷ "Cheered as they Leave." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, September 5, 1917.

⁸ "Big Crowds Hear Jackies." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, March 2, 1918.

⁹ Ibid.

Mattoon's "First Quota" Off For Camp Taylor



THOMAS MORGAN.

Tom is a son of Mr. and Mrs. C. H. Morgan, 509 North Twenty-second street. He was a member of the Mattoon Fire Department until several weeks ago, when he resigned to take employment with the Big Four.

being only one day late. Having been called I made every possible effort to get in the first group to leave. I feel sure that I will come back when the war is over." Joe's call number was 460. His service number was 2611.

"I'm going into training first of all," said Tommy Morgan. "Later I may have to go to war. If so, I will be ready. This is going to be good for all of us. I might not have been ordered to service in the first army, if I had not volunteered. Soon after my examination I decided to offer my services with the first contingent." Morgan's call number was 853. His service number was 2049.

Eddie Hill's call number was 430. His service number was 2051. "I feel like going to war is expected of me, and so I volunteered to go today," said he.

"I'm mighty glad to get to accompany this first group of young men to their camp," said Mr. Kinzel on departing. "I think that each of the boys really wants to go to camp."

Friends Remember Joe.
Public Service Company employees, just before the interurban train departed, presented Joe Gray with a beautiful gold ring bearing the emblem of the Elks lodge, he being the secretary of the local lodge of the order and an active worker in the organization.

**THOSE EXEMPTED
BY LOCAL BOARD**



JAMES EDWARD HILL.

Ed is a son of Mr. and Mrs. R. C. Hill, 1824 Platt avenue. He was graduated from the Mattoon High School, the Charleston Normal School and the University of Illinois. He is well-known in baseball and other sports circles, being at one time a pitcher for the Moose team in the old City League.



JOSEPH GREENWOOD.

Joe is a son of Mr. and Mrs. A. L. Greenwood of 604 Shelby avenue. When his call for military service came he was working in the railroad yards at Rawlins, Wyo. He worked for the Illinois Central for a few months before going to Rawlins. Prior to that he worked for a number of years as a Big Four switchman, his fellow workers honoring him by electing him to the presidency of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen. He is a Knights Templar, his membership being with the local commandery.



JOHN MARLEY.

John is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Marley of Mooresville, Ind. For the past five years he has been employed in the J. W. Harris coal office. He attended the first officers' training camp at Fort Benjamin Harrison, after severing his connection with the Harris office.



ORCIE RUE.

Orlie is a son of Mr. and Mrs. J. A. Rue of 1217 Marshall avenue. He was widely known in athletic circles while a student of the University of Illinois. He was a member of the football team at the university and became famous by his superior playing. He was graduated from the Mattoon High School and later from the University of Illinois. He has been employed by the Public Service Company in its water department.



JOE E. GRAY.

Joe is a son of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Gray, 401 North Twenty-second street. For the past few years he has been employed in the accounting department of the Public Service Company. He has been prominent in the work of the Elks lodge, having been its secretary for several years.

LAWYERS IN PROTEST

MEMBERS OF BAR ASSOCIATION
TAKE EXCEPTIONS TO GER-
MANY'S WAR PROGRAM.

ARE NINE PROTESTS

Say Germany Has No Right to Sink
Merchant Vessels Without Due
Warning.

By The United Press.
Saratoga Springs, N. Y., Sept. 5.—
Protests against Germany's war pro-
gram as violating international law
were contained in the report of the
committee on international law, sub-
mitted to the American Bar Assoc-
iation in convention here today.

Nine Protests.
The protests were in nine sections
denouncing:
Sinking of merchant ships without
warning;
Assuming to close the seas to our
ships by proclamation;
Conspiracies conducted against the
country by German secret agents;
Wanton murder of civilians and non-
combatants;
Devastation of occupied regions;
Looting of occupied territory and

Image 1- "Mattoon's 'First Quota' Off for Camp Taylor," *The Daily*

Journal-Gazette, September 5, 1917.

Once this news began to spread “Bedlam broke loose” as workers left their jobs, school children and teachers left their classrooms and all poured into the streets to celebrate.¹⁰ An impromptu parade quickly formed, joined by six youths carrying a coffin with a sign attached saying, ““Here lies the kaiser.” Following the parade an effigy of the Kaiser was hung in front of city hall and “a boy with a shot gun, loaded with shells filled with shot, fired into the image four times, inflicting ‘wounds.’”¹¹ Although there were fewer large-scale patriotic rallies held in Mattoon in 1918 compared to 1917, this does not mean Mattoon’s patriotism or support for the troops had waned. It is clear from several different articles that whenever troops passed through town on the railroad, or when local volunteers and draftees boarded the train on their way to their units, a crowd always gathered to cheer and to give them a proper send-off.

There was a down side to the patriotic fervor that swept Mattoon and inspired patriotic rallies and parades. It also inspired anti-German sentiments and accusations of disloyalty began to be made against local citizens of German ancestry. In April 1917, it seems many people began to question the loyalty of local baker Fred Messmer. He was a recent German immigrant who had arrived in Mattoon in 1903. This questioning of his loyalty led Messmer to place a statement affirming his total loyalty to America in the newspaper throughout April:

When I left Germany several years ago and came to America, I left that country for good, and when I became an American citizen I entrusted the protection of myself and family to the United States and the Stars and Stripes, and I have certainly tried to conduct myself to show my gratitude and devotion to the country whose citizenship I am certainly proud to enjoy.¹²

Messmer goes on to affirm his willingness to answer his adopted country’s call if called upon to serve. “I give you my word that if the time shall come in the present crisis when America, my adopted country, should call me to the colors to help defend the flag which I have learned to love and respect, I will be ready to respond.”¹³ While some German immigrants like Fred Messmer were willing and happy to renounce their allegiance to Germany, others were not. On September 5, 1917, Frank A. Geeter, a son of German immigrants and a blacksmith with the Big Four railroad, committed suicide in his back yard by shooting himself in the head. In the article reporting his suicide Geeter’s wife claimed that Geeter, “worried over the war against Germany” and “he often said that he believed he would leave home to go and fight with the Germans.” He also worried that his son Charles would be called up and have to go and fight against Germany. Falling into a depression, Geeter began to drink heavily until his conflicting loyalties became too much and he committed suicide.¹⁴

People of German descent were not the only group whose loyalty was questioned in Mattoon. Throughout 1917-1918, several disloyalty trials were held to punish those that were not seen as patriotic enough by the authorities or their neighbors. On December 8, 1917, six local men were summoned to appear before Judge D. T. McIntyre to face charges of disloyalty. Lawson Reynolds a grocer was placed on trial because it was reported that he had “failed to buy a Liberty

¹⁰ “Town Goes Mad Over Good News.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, November 7, 1918.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “A Statement by Fred Messmer.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, April 14, 1917.

¹³ “A Statement by Fred Messmer.”

¹⁴ “F.A. Geeter is a Suicide.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, September 5, 1917.

bond. He did not join the Red Cross or contribute to it [and] he failed to subscribe to the Young Men's Christian association red triangle war fund." During the trial, Reynolds admitted he was wrong and that he would in the future appreciate "what the Y.M.C.A., the Red Cross and others are doing for the soldiers." Because of his youth Judge McIntyre decided to be lenient toward Reynolds and released him with the strong suggestion that Reynolds and his wife both join the Red Cross.¹⁵ W.E. Millar, a well-to-do sixty-five year old retired farmer who owned "\$150,000 worth of property," was charged with not contributing enough money to the different war and tornado relief funds. Millar was publicly shamed and ruthlessly lectured by the judge:

You have not done your duty. You are not a loyal American citizen. You have no worries because of sons about to go to war. You lost no members of your family, no property of any kind in the tornado disaster, to which you contributed \$15. No one here thinks of you as a loyal citizen. I don't know what they will say, whether they will ask you to move away or not.¹⁶

John W. Baker, "a veteran of the civil war and a retired farmer," was also accused of disloyalty and lectured by the judge, but not as severely as Millar had been. His crime was not buying any Liberty bonds, which he believed were not a good investment.¹⁷ Dr. J.C. Walker, "a physician," L.C. Young, "a hotel man and hardware dealer," and Vincent Broviak, "a retired employee of the Big Four," were all accused of making pro-German statements.¹⁸ The article does not state the punishment these three men received.

In February 1918, a much more serious case of disloyalty was presided over by Judge McIntyre in Mattoon. On February 25, 1918, both G.W. Walters and Emma Timm, members of the International Bible Students Association, were arrested on suspicion of treason and violating the Espionage Act. Both were charged with:

Unlawfully, wickedly, feloniously and traitorously mak[ing] certain false and disloyal statements and utterances, and publish[ing] certain disloyal pictures, papers and documents with the intent and purpose of discouraging enlistment in the army and navy of the United States, as well as to breed discontent and insubordination among its soldiers, and also to hinder, obstruct and prevent the collection of funds to support and carry on the work of the Red Cross...for the use of wounded and sick soldiers of said United States.¹⁹

Both Walters and Timm claimed that they were morally against war based on their religious beliefs and the International Bible Students Association also supported their pacifist view. Both also refused to lend any support to the war effort through contributions to any of the different war fund drives. There is no account of the actual trial given in the *Daily Journal-Gazette*, so it is not known what the actual outcome was. It would be reasonable to assume, however, that they both were

¹⁵ "Disloyal Citizens." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, December 8, 1917.

¹⁶ "Disloyal Citizens."

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Treason Charges are to be Pushed." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, February 25, 1918.

found guilty by Judge McIntyre, given the fact he set both Walters' and Timm's bonds at "\$1,000" and continuously referred to both of them as "traitors" during the arraignment.²⁰

Following the United States' declaration of war against Germany in April 1917, Mattoon became the center of the area's military mobilization efforts. On March 23, 1917, the government announced that the local recruiting station in Mattoon would become the headquarters for the Terre Haute recruiting district. Following the move recruits from Kankakee, Champaign, Hillsboro, Effingham, and other local stations would be sent to Mattoon for their medical examinations and to consolidate the recruits before they were sent on the railroad to their respective training camps.²¹ Initially hundreds of local volunteers, and then, after the draft was enacted in May 1917, hundreds of draftees, were processed through the Mattoon recruiting station and shipped out to their camps from the Mattoon train station. One of the first volunteers was nineteen-year-old Lawrence Whitfield, a "colored youth" who operated a "West Side shoe shining parlor." He volunteered on April 12, 1917, for the Colored Infantry, the first man of color from Mattoon and the surrounding area to enlist.²²

There is no definitive list of all the men from Mattoon who served in the armed forces during the Great War. The lists of draftees and volunteer found in *The Daily Journal-Gazette* from 1917-1918 are too repetitive and incomplete to give an exact number. It is safe to say, however, that over one hundred Mattoon men served in the United States armed services during the war. From the variety of letters publish in *The Daily Journal-Gazette* from 1917-1918, we can also conclude that the majority of those men never made it overseas. Most remained instead stationed in the United States until the war's end.

Not all of the Mattoon men who were drafted were willing to give up their civilian lives and serve in the armed forces. On January 11, 1918, Odes Bosley was arrested as a deserter. Bosley had deserted Company L, Fifth Illinois Infantry at Camp Logan, Houston, Texas in November and traveled to Mattoon because of "an attachment for a Mattoon woman."²³ Eight days after Bosley's arrest Norbert Bence, ironically the son of Mattoon's truant officer, was arrested for failing to register for the draft. Bence claimed he was not twenty-one when the draft was enacted and because of this the authorities gave him the chance to prove his age before being placed on trial.²⁴ In May 1918, authorities arrested Charles Prichard for attempting to dodge the draft. After learning he would be drafted once his number was drawn Prichard secluded himself by refusing to read any newspapers, receive any mail, or go to any public places in an attempt to claim he had no knowledge of being called for service.²⁵ Prichard's attempt failed and he was sent to Jefferson Barracks to begin his military training.

In May 1917, Mattoon's leaders announced that Mattoon was seeking selection by the State of Illinois for the site of a mobilization camp for Illinois troops where draftees and volunteers could be concentrated in one place to prepare to go to war. Mattoon was one of twenty-seven Illinois towns, which included Mattoon's neighbor Charleston, being considered for the camp by the state authorities.²⁶ On May 22, 1917, Mattoon published a list of reasons why it would be the most ideal spot for the military camp:

²⁰ "Treason Charges are to be Pushed."

²¹ "Headquarters for Recruiting Station." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, March 23, 1917.

²² "Mattoon Colored Man Joins Army." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, April 12, 1917.

²³ "Bosley Arrested on Desertion Charge." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, January 11, 1918.

²⁴ "Evades the Draft Act." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, January 19, 1918.

²⁵ "Prichard is in Jail." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, May 17, 1917.

²⁶ "Work Hard for Camp." "Charleston is After Concentration Camp," *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, May 22, 1917.

Mattoon is located on two big railroad trunk lines. Mattoon has a water supply that is not equaled by any other city in the state outside of Chicago...Mattoon is so located that its railroad facilities place it in touch with all directions of the state. Mattoon was a concentration camp during the civil war. Mattoon can supply a big military camp with all needed electric power...Mattoon has no malaria. Mattoon or the surrounding territory have no ponds of stagnant water to make breeding places for typhoid mosquitoes. Mattoon is in great corn and oats growing district and closely adjacent to hay producing territories.²⁷

Mattoon was one of the final four Illinois cities being considered for the camp by the state board who were scheduled to come visit the Mattoon site on May 26, 1917.²⁸ However, on that day the Great Tornado of 1917 hit the northern part of Mattoon at about 3:30 p.m., devastating everything in its path. It is estimated that in Mattoon alone “sixty people were killed, and five hundred homes demolished and others seriously damage.”²⁹ The major damage caused by the tornado effectively ended Mattoon’s chances of getting the concentration camp. The state officials determined that Mattoon would not have enough laborers to build and work in the camp because they would be too busy reconstructing the area damaged by the tornado.³⁰ In a sadly ironic twist, Mattoon did in a way receive a military camp. In Peterson Park a refugee encampment was built to house those left homeless by the tornado. The Illinois National Guard sent “six hundred tents...with them came 2,000 cots, hundreds of army kitchens for outdoor cooking, kitchen implements, and hospital supplies.”³¹

The people of Mattoon also provided both material and financial support for the war. The Mattoon Hospital Aid Society had been gathering medical supplies to send to France since before the United States entered the war. In May 1917, the Society began to organize a local chapter of the Red Cross after learning the United States government would only take medical supplies from the Red Cross.³² In August 1917, Mattoon’s newly formed Red Cross sent several boxes of medical supplies over to France. The boxes held a wide array of medical materials: 1061 rolls of medical bandages that required 553 yards of gauze to make; 144 sponges; 18 pillows; 36 hospital shirts; 9 knitted sweaters; and 25 knitted scarves.³³ In December 1917, the Mattoon Red Cross sent “6500 gauze sponges.”³⁴ Throughout 1917-1918, the local chapter held several memberships drives. *The Daily Journal-Gazette* aided the Red Cross’s efforts by publishing several advertisements (See Images pg. 13). By July 1917, the Mattoon chapter of the Red Cross had recruited nine hundred and fifty pledged new members.³⁵

Mattoon also provided funds for the war effort by participating in Liberty Bond drives. Between 1917 and 1918 there were four major Liberty Bond drives held in Mattoon. *The Daily Journal-Gazette* played an active role in each of these drives by placing several advertisements

²⁷ “Mattoon is After Camp.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, May 21, 1917.

²⁸ “May Visit Site May 26.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, May 25, 1917.

²⁹ J.P. Carey, “The Central Illinois Tornado of May 26, 1917,” *Geographical Review* 4, no. 2 (August, 1917): 123, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/207291>.

³⁰ “Won’t Consider Mattoon in Plans for Army Camp.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, June 4, 1917.

³¹ “Mattoon Lays Plans for Rise Out of Wreck.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 29, 1917.

³² “Plan to Organize Red Cross Chapter.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, May 14, 1917.

³³ “Boxes Sent by Red Cross.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, August 18, 1917.

³⁴ “Red Cross Notes.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, December 13, 1917.

³⁵ “Red Cross Campaign Ends Successfully.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, July 31, 1917.

promoting Liberty Bonds (See Images pg 14). The first drive was held in May 1917, just before the tornado struck the city. After that, the newspaper focused its coverage on the recovery from the storm so there was no articles saying how much was raised. We do know that on May 4 the National Bank of Mattoon requested \$50,000 worth of Liberty loan bonds from the Federal Reserve Bank in Chicago.³⁶ The second drive was held in October 1917. Mattoon, along with the smaller townships that surrounded the city, raised \$695,200, which exceeded their \$492,000 goal. Coles County as a whole fell just \$99,800 short of its \$1,370,250 allotment.³⁷ The third Liberty bond drive was held in May 1918, and met with overwhelming success. Mattoon township “oversubscribed its quota fifty percent,” raising \$417, 250. The total subscription for Coles County was \$1,054,200, which was \$274,000 more than its quota.³⁸

**Would
 you leave
 your son
 to die neglected on some
 foreign battlefield? If
 not, help the RED
 CROSS to care for him if
 he falls.
 JOIN
 TODAY**

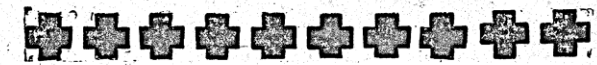
39

³⁶ “Subscribe to War Loan.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, May 4, 1917.

³⁷ “Comes Near its Quota.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, October 29, 1917.

³⁸ “CO. Total is \$1,054,200,” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, May 6, 1918.

³⁹ Images: *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, July 22, 1917, pp. 27, 28



Join The Red Cross Today!

Enlist in The Army Of Humanity!

Do **YOUR** part to secure skilled aid for the boys of our county who will soon be in the trenches and for their families at home.

Mail this Coupon today to Mrs. H. F. Kendall, secretary, Mattoon, Illinois.

Date.....
 Please enroll my name as a member of the American Red Cross
 I enclose the sum of One Dollar therefor.
 Name.....
 Street No.....
 City..... State.....
MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO AMERICAN RED CROSS



**WILL YOU STAND AND
 FIGHT—OR RUN?**

The war is coming directly home to YOU. When it does, will you be proud or ashamed? Thankful or filled with wild regret?

The war is soon to be brought home to every man and woman in Illinois. Every county, every township and city precinct, every city block is to furnish its share of men who will fight under the Stars and Stripes. Many of these brave sons of Illinois will fall in battle.

When word comes back that YOUR son or YOUR brother or YOUR neighbor has been hurt you will be thankful that you have done YOUR share in easing his pain and aiding in his recovery, if you are a member of the Red Cross.



Men

Tomorrow—Saturday, October 27—is the last day of the Second Liberty Loan Campaign. Millions in many thousands of dollars await of its quota.

"Would you rather loan Uncle Sam some money at 4 per cent. interest (even if you have to borrow it) or would you rather pay tribute for the rest of your natural life to a man in uniform with the decoration of the Prussian eagle around the collar of his coat?"

It happened in Belgium; do you want it to happen here?

It's up to you—and tomorrow is "The Day of Judgment."

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?

THE NATIONAL BACK OF MATTERS
CENTRAL SAVINGS TRUST AND SAVINGS BANK
THE STATE NATIONAL BANK

Buy

U. S. GOVERNMENT BONDS
of the
SECOND LIBERTY LOAN

SAFE and **sound** as the dollar in your pocket, U. S. Government Liberty Bonds are the surest means of protecting *your family* from the ravages of war.

Lend your money to the Government and support the military, Naval and Air Forces of the United States, who are *fighting for you*. It is the *best and safest investment* you can make.

The Government will pay you \$4 interest every year on each \$100 of Liberty Bonds of the Second Liberty Loan of 1917, and as security you have all the resources of the United States.

BUY LIBERTY BONDS TODAY!

LIBERTY BONDS WILL HELP SUPPORT YOUR ARMY

LIBERTY BONDS WILL HELP SUPPORT YOUR NAVY

How and Where to Buy U.S. Government Bonds

1. Ask U. S. Government Bonds.
2. Buy 4 per cent interest.
3. Except from serial issue.
4. Sold on installment, \$5 down on each \$100, if desired.
5. \$100 and \$500.
6. Available in some bonds bear higher interest rate.
7. Money May 15, 1917, but not to be redeemed by Gov. until Nov. 15, 1927.
8. Any remainder need not be converted into cash at any time.
9. Place your order, give through representative (Salesman, Promoter or Sub-agent) name and address. Show us and particulars to be desired.

THE NATIONAL SAVINGS COMPANY
is the only dealer of U.S. Government Bonds, the largest one of them.

⁴⁰ Images: *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, October, 13, 1917, pp. 14, 26.

The fourth and final Liberty bond drive was held in October 1918, and again Mattoon gave more than their quota. Mattoon gave \$635, 750, which exceeded their quota of \$597,600.⁴¹

The local men that were members of the United States armed forces represented the most direct connection the city of Mattoon had to the Great War. These Mattoon men, stationed throughout the United States and France, represented all the branches of the military; the Army, the Marine Corps, and the Navy. Throughout 1917-1918 many of these servicemen wrote a steady stream of letters back home to their family and friends. Several of these letters were passed on to *The Daily Journal-Gazette* who published them for the curious public to read. A letter from Verne E. Allen to his sister in Mattoon was the first soldier's letter to be published in the newspaper, appearing on November 22, 1917. Allen wrote from Camp Cody, in New Mexico, where he was training as a machine gunner. From the letter's tone it seems that Allen was bored with life in a training camp and was eager to "get a whack at 'Kaiser Bill'."⁴² On May 1, 1918 the newspaper published a humor-filled letter from John F. Lane, who was serving "'somewhere' in France" with the First Provisional Company, Thirteenth Engineers, A.E.F., to his sister, T.J. Alabaugh. Lane opens his letter with a brotherly jab at his sister, "Here I am again somewhere in France. I know where but you don't Ha ha. Some kidder. Ah! Can't say much, you know over here. It's not over there any more."⁴³ Before going to France it appears that Lane was not very supportive of the Red Cross, but now he is full of praise for the organization. "Never will I forget the Red Cross...if I ever get out of this I will always be glad to donate to the Red Cross for they are here, there and every place waiting with a helping hand, always with something good to eat which is good too."⁴⁴ In a letter from David L. Tomlin, who was serving on the transport ship the *U.S.S. Louisville*, to his parents, Tomlin describes a moment of excitement during his voyage over to France, "[e]verything went smooth until we were out about a week, then we sighted something that looked like a periscope. Several shots were fired from other boats, but we did not get a chance to shoot any. No harm was done to us as the 'submarine' was a piece of floating spar, but we took no chances."⁴⁵

In a letter from Lawrence E. Kunkler, who was serving with the 150th Field Artillery Battery A, A.E.F., to his parents, Kunkler describes a German plane crashing, "[t]he other day a German plane burst into flames and fell over 2,000 feet to the ground...One German, a captain, jumped out while it was in the air. He was dead when they got to him. The other fell with the machine. He and the machine were burned to a crisp."⁴⁶ In a letter to his brother Moran, Leo C. Moran describes the gas training that he had received at Camp Fremont, California:

Last Saturday morning I took my last gas test and came out alive. It was the—gas test [sic] and is a deadly gas. If your mask has a leak in it when you enter the gas house, you might as well say farewell to the world, as it causes suffocation. There were eighty-seven of us who took it and we were all lucky as no one was gassed. I have taken four different tests and passed all without any trouble. I have five months gas drill and I can put my mask on in four and three-quarters seconds after the command is given. We are

⁴¹ "Coles CO. Over Top." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, October 21, 1918.

⁴² "Receives a Letter from Her Brother." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, November 22, 1917.

⁴³ "John F. Lane Writes Letter to His Sister." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, May 1, 1918.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ "Letters from Soldiers Boys." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, June 26, 1918.

⁴⁶ "Letters from Soldiers Boys." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, July 10, 1918.

supposed to get them on in seven seconds at the longest, and the record of the camp is four and a quarter and is held by a young man in my troop.⁴⁷

Private Farley J. Wilkinson, a soldier in the 80th Co. 2nd Batt. 6th Regt. U.S. Marines, A.E.F., described in a letter to his parents what a night attack looked like: “The first night-battle one sees, looks as if the world was coming to an end. The sky all lit up with rockets and flares of all colors, shells screeching and bursting, machine guns going spat! spat!, the whirl of unseen air planes, occasionally dropping a bomb in the distance.”⁴⁸

Not all letters and reports were filled with good news and good health. The people of Mattoon quickly became well aware of the realities and horrors of war as reports of casualties began to arrive. In August 1917, Paul Rutherford McVey became the first man from Coles County killed in the war. McVey was from Charleston and had been serving in the 50th Battalion Canadian Infantry since April 1916. The article does not say where he died, other than “on the battle front in France”, or how he was killed.⁴⁹ Mattoon’s first casualty in the war came the following month. John Moore had been born in Mattoon but had left the city when he was four. He had been a constant visitor, however, as many of his closest friends lived there and he was well known throughout the city. Moore had been serving as an ambulance driver in France for the French Army since February 1917. During an attack Moore was gassed and because of this he was sent back to the United States to recover. In an interview he described his experience:

You are simply ‘gassed’ without knowing it. A day or so later the face and hands become blotched, the blotches grow rapidly; the third day after the first blotch appears convulsions set in, and vomiting. The simultaneous vomiting and convulsion causes death by strangulation...I just got a sniff of it when our ambulance was running up pretty close to the line of action, but it was enough to sicken me.⁵⁰

In February 1918, Corporal Roy Matthews became the first Mattoon man to die in the war. The thirty-five year old Matthews was not killed in action, but died from a severe attack of pneumonia.⁵¹ In June 1918, a bullet wounded Private Theodore T. Baker, a machine gunner serving in the Marines, in the jaw. Baker described his wound in a brief postcard to his mother, E.M. Baker, “I am slightly wounded in the jaw...Bullet wound; on my way to rest camp. I am still able to growl, so you may know I am all right. We had some time of it.”⁵² On July 19, 1918, a machine gun bullet wounded Lieutenant Robert Rayburn during “the Soissons battle.” He described his wound in his letter to his cousin, C.H. Douglas, from a hospital in France. “The bullet entered at my knee and passed up my leg imbedding itself in the groin. Took two operations to find it.”⁵³ In July 1918, another Mattoon man serving in the Marine Corps, Private Farley J. Wilkinson, received “a little hole” in his left arm from a machine gun while going “over the top.” Wilkinson explained, however, that the wound was not serious. “It didn’t touch the bone so it don’t amount to much. I never left the field, but kept at it until we were relieved, in fact I didn’t know it

⁴⁷ “Letters from Soldiers Boys.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, July 31, 1918.

⁴⁸ “Letters from Soldiers Boys.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, August 27, 1918.

⁴⁹ “First Coles County Man Killed in War.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, September 8, 1917.

⁵⁰ “John Moore Gets Gassed.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, September 19, 1917.

⁵¹ “Corporal Matthews Dies from Pneumonia.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, February 20, 1918.

⁵² “Mattoon Boy is Wounded.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, July 1, 1918.

⁵³ “Letters from Soldiers Boys.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, August 19, 1918.

had gone clear through until the next day. The Lord was good to me, is the only reason I am here, as well as I am.”⁵⁴ On September 8, 1918, Mrs. Isaac Ervin received a message from the War Department informing her that her husband, a member of Company C, 102d Infantry, “had been seriously wounded in action in France” on July 24. The article goes on to say that the information from the War Department regarding the severity of the wound was not accurate. It seems that the day after receiving his wound Ervin had written to his wife telling her “he had been wounded in the left arm but that it was not serious.” Then, the day before the message from the War Department arrived, Mrs. Ervin got another letter from her husband telling her “that he was getting along fine.”⁵⁵

In November 1918, V. L. Reed received a letter from France written by Mattoon native Estle Clifton of Company M, 130th Infantry explaining how Reed’s son Rosamond Reed had been killed in action on September 29, 1918. In his letter Clifton recounts how Reed was killed and his admiration for his bravery:

Mr. Reed, Skeet [Skeet was Rosamond’s nickname] was a brave and a good soldier. He died fighting bravely on September 29, while leading his men over the top. He always did his duty as a soldier, and didn’t fear the whole German army. And if I have to die in the war I want to meet death like Skeet did. He died like a man and for his country.⁵⁶

Clifton goes on to explain where he and Skeet’s comrades buried him, “We dug a grave about a mile behind the battle ground and put a wooden cross over it. Skeet’s identification tag, his company number and regiment number were placed upon it.”⁵⁷ Mattoon’s final causality of the war was Sergeant Lawrence Scott Riddle. In a sad twist of fate Riddle was killed in action while in France on November 10, 1918, just “one day before the signing of the armistice.”⁵⁸ Today out of all of the men of Mattoon who served during World War I it is Riddle’s name that is the most remembered, since both the American Legion Lawrence Riddle Post 88 and the Riddle Elementary School are named after him.

There were also a few lighter moments found in *The Daily Journal-Gazette* concerning Mattoon’s involvement in World War I. In May 1918, a British tank loaded on a flatbed railroad car passed through Mattoon on its way to St. Louis. The newspaper gives a humorous account of what happened after the train stopped for a short time in Mattoon for repairs:

The Tank had no guards. Its hatches were unlocked, and a large number of persons entered it for an interior inspection. The machine guns found inside the tank were inspected. One or two of them were discharged, the bullets entering the ground. The indications were that one machine gun had been stolen, there being provisions inside the car for six.⁵⁹

Another interesting event, which happened to also involve newly developed technology for the war, occurred on August 20, 1917. A United States military balloon with six soldiers in the basket

⁵⁴ “Letters from Soldiers Boys.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, August 21, 1918.

⁵⁵ “Husband Seriously Wounded in France.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, September 13, 1918.

⁵⁶ “Died Bravely for Country.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, December 16, 1918.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ “Riddle Memorial Services are Held.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, December 7, 1918.

⁵⁹ “Many Disappointed at Not Seeing Tank.” *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, May 9, 1918.

surprised the Ames family, who lived on a farm just north of Mattoon, as it dropped down toward their house. When it was one hundred feet from the ground one of the soldiers yelled out a question. He asked how far away were they from Terre Haute. It seems that the balloon crew, who had left St. Louis earlier that day, were lost. After passing the Ames' house the balloon passed over Thomas Seaman's house. As they flew over the house "the men in the balloon called to members of the family to ask if breakfast was ready to serve. Mr. Seaman chatted with the men for a minute or so, following the balloon on foot for a short distance."⁶⁰

There is almost nothing that has been published on the history of Mattoon during World War I. *The Daily Journal-Gazette* from 1917-1918, however, proved to be a rich source of information on Mattoon's involvement in the Great War. *The Daily Journal-Gazette* showed that Mattoon, Illinois was heavily involved throughout the Great War both on the home front, through patriotic rallies and parades, involvement in the raising of war funds, and being central toward the region's military mobilization, and on the war front by sending its young men to serve in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. Although this paper should not be viewed as an all-inclusive history of Mattoon's involvement in World War I, hopefully it can serve as a starting point for anyone interested in researching and writing such a history or for that matter any history of Mattoon.

⁶⁰ "U.S. Army Balloon is Near City." *The Daily Journal-Gazette*, August 20, 1917.