

Photo of the Month

Rogers Doughboys



Seargent Floyd Key of Rogers (pictured at left)
& a friend, France, 1918
Neg. # N007684

“WAR IS HERE. Every man, woman, boy or girl should do personal service for our country. The soldier who faces the enemy does heroic service for his county. The private citizen who produces food or feed performs an equally necessary service for our country and our country’s allies.” This appeal from Arkansas Governor Charles H. Brough was published shortly after the United States entered the Great War – or World War I as it was later known – as a member of the Allied Powers on April 6, 1917. It reflected the patriotism that swept the nation and the recognized need for unity and support from all citizens.

This war was a modern, mechanized conflict which demanded a major national effort to achieve victory and sacrifice became a constant companion in many homes. The horrors of trench warfare on the western front in France, Flanders, and Belgium were well engrained in the public consciousness since the war’s beginning in 1914. By 1917, the effects of gas, machine guns, tanks, and the filth of trench life were a part of life for a soldier at the front. Stalemate between the Allied Powers of the United Kingdom, France and the Russian Empire and the Central Powers of the German Empire, the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Kingdom of Bulgaria consumed the lives of soldiers at an alarming rate.

At the war’s outset, Great Britain recruited volunteers with the slogan “join with your pal.” But after many families and neighborhoods lost an entire generation of young men, the practice of allowing relatives and neighbors to serve together was discontinued by the British Army. Given the devastating cost of the war, it was hoped that the fresh manpower and vast resources of the United States would help the Allies break the stalemate.

Entering the war must have been a sobering prospect for the nation as well as for each individual, but patriotism flourished in the face of the difficult task of preserving freedom for the United States and bringing peace to the world. Many Benton County residents answered the call to service and volunteered for duty with the National Guard, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps beginning in April 1917. A poem included in an early war edition of the *Rogers Democrat* captured the mood:

“Blue and crimson and white it shines,
Over the steel tipped, ordered lines.
Hats off! The colors before us fly;
But more, the flag is passing by.”

By June 5, 1917, the first draft registration for men between the ages of 18 and 30 was held in Benton County and 2,173 men enrolled with the draft board. A total of 278 men registered from Rogers in the Esculapia Township district. The registration board for this district included W.H. Cowan, Frank Owens, John McClelland, and Erwin Funk.

An article from the *Rogers Democrat* indicated, however, that the county fell short of its enrollment goals by almost 1,000 men. A new Army conscription system was issued and based upon census data to reach the required draft numbers. By 1918, men between the ages of 18 and 45 were eligible for service, and an estimated number of 3,300 residents of Benton, Carroll, Madison, and Washington counties went to war. Nationally, approximately 4.7 million men saw service. Arkansas accounted for 72,000 of this number of personnel. Of this total, 1,400 were women. The mobilization cost the government over \$2,000 to equip, train, transport, and feed each soldier.

Joe Hathaway was the first Rogers man to be drafted. However, he was rejected for service following his physical. H.L. Stroud’s son, Ben, was the first Rogers and Benton County draftee inducted into the service. The first group of Rogers draftees, which also included Charles Applegate, John W. Bryant, Howard Cady, Earl Logan, Otis Key, Charles Martin, and Carl Sager, departed on September 18, 1917

for Camp Pike near Little Rock.

Camp life and training was typically short and intense, which lasted only several months. Drill occurred on rough ground and recruits were first only given pick handles or pine limbs to use in maneuvers before being issued 1903 Springfield rifles. Many of these men were assigned to the 87th Division, or "Acorn" Division, which was made up of draftees from Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The division landed in France on September 16, 1918.

Of the Northwest Arkansas National Guard units, the 1st Arkansas Infantry Regiment mobilized as the 153rd Infantry Regiment of the 39th Division in April 1917. Likewise, the 2nd Arkansas Infantry went on active service in September 1917. The 39th or "Delta" Division was made up of troops from Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi and went overseas on July 31, 1918. The 142nd Field Artillery, as part of the "Delta" Division, trained at Fort Beauregard, Louisiana to field 155mm howitzers, but saw only limited action. They did however serve in the post war occupation forces.

Pictured at right is a photograph of a Rogers Doughboy taken "over there" in France in 1918. Sergeant Floyd Key is standing at left in the photograph, but we don't know the name of his fellow soldier. The unidentified soldier appears to be wearing the insignia of the 87th division on his left shoulder.

The term Doughboy originally referred to American infantrymen. Its use dated from the Mexican-American War of 1846-47 and many explanations for the expression's origins exist. Some historians attribute it to uniform buttons that resembled dough dumplings. Others believe that it related to the dust covered feet of infantryman that often looked doughy after becoming wet. Eventually, all servicemen in the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I came to be called Doughboys.

But beyond the patriotism, uniforms, and public support, service in the "cause of freedom" came at a cost by the end of the war on November 11, 1918. Approximately 36 Benton County soldiers died in camp or in action. Of this number, eight were from Rogers. The first Rogers Doughboy killed in action was Corporal William Minter Batjer of the 16th Division. In June 1918, a German artillery shell landed on his dugout near Cantigny, France and killed him and another soldier. The Rogers American Legion Post 100 was named in his honor. The J.E. Raney family of Route 1 in Rogers also lost their son, Bryan E. Raney. The message from the War Department simply stated, "Deeply regret to inform you that Private Bryan E Raney infantry, is officially reported as killed in action on Sept 16th."

Many more Doughboys returned home forever changed by the experience of the Great War. Some won decorations for valor and others proudly displayed their status as veterans through organizations such as the American Legion and the Veteran of Foreign Wars. While the "war to end all wars" fell short of its promise to future generations, the people who answered the call of duty during a time of crisis to defend their nation should be remembered for the sacrifices made on foreign soil.