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ANSWERING THE CALL TO ARMS: ESSEX COUNTY IN WORLD WAR I

By David Jett

THE YANKS ARE COMING!
On Sunday June 3, 1917, no evening services were held at "either of the churches" in town, reported the Tappahannock newspaper, *Tidewater Democrat*. Instead, citizens attended a union service at the courthouse presided over by Mr. Ernest L. Wright, a recent graduate of the College of William and Mary. The service, held under the auspices of the local chapter of the Red Cross Society, drew a large crowd with "many persons coming from a long distance." The meeting began with singing of the familiar hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers" and continued with a prayer by the Rev. Frank P. Berkley of Beale Memorial Baptist Church. Mr. William A. Wright, a young Tappahannock lawyer, spoke enthusiastically about the vital role of the Red Cross in wartime with its "spirit of love, patriotism and sacrifice." Both of the young Wright men would soon be in the service along with thousands of American doughboys shipping out for France with the American Expeditionary Forces. George M. Cohan's hit song of 1917 captured the resolution and patriotic fervor of the people of Essex as they pulled together with the rest of the nation to support the war: "And we won't come back till it's over, over there."

Although the Great War or World War, as it was then called, broke out in Europe when Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary on June 28, 1914, the United States did not enter the war until three years later. Under the administration of President Woodrow Wilson, the United States had remained neutral. Then in March of 1917, German U-boats sank four U.S. Cargo ships in the north Atlantic. At Wilson's urging, Congress declared war on Germany on April 6th, 1917. The American Expeditionary Force under commander in chief General John J. Pershing joined the Allies of Britain, France, Belgium, Russia and Italy to fight against the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey.

THE DRAFT

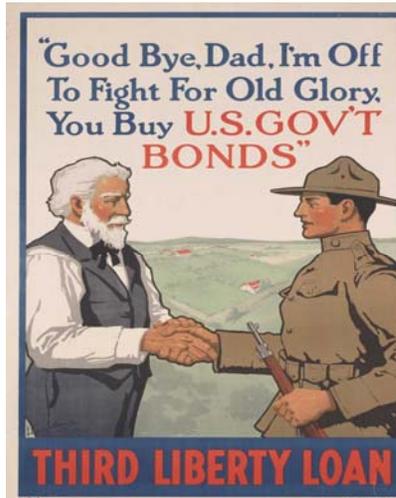
Six weeks after the declaration of war, the U.S. Congress passed the Selective Service Act, on May 18, 1917. The act required all men in the U.S. between the ages of 21 and 30 to register for military service. Within a few months, some 10 million men across the country had registered in response to the military draft. Many Essex men first registered for the draft on June 5th, 1917 in the various precincts around the county.

A total of 1,362 Essex men registered for the draft, of which 159 were accepted into the service. The members of the Selective Draft Board for Essex County were Justice of the Peace, R. J. Duke, Dr. J. M. Gouldin, both of Tappahannock and Judge Edward Macon Ware, Jr. of Dunnsville. Judge Ware was also Chairman of the Exemption Board. The first troops of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) began arriving on the European continent in June 1917.

In July, 1917, the people of Tappahannock formed a Home Guard company. The men drilled without arms or equipment until the draft so depleted their ranks that the company had to be dissolved.

The majority of the new conscripts still needed to be mobilized, transported and trained and the AEF did not begin to play a substantial role in the fighting in France until nearly a year later, during the late spring and summer of 1918. The steady and much needed influx of American troops revitalized the

decimated armies of the Allies in Europe and ultimately turned the tide for an Allied victory.



TROUBLE IN TAPPAHANNOCK

On June 23rd, 1917, as Tappahannock citizens prepared for the war effort, the worst fire in the history of the town broke out on Prince Street. The blaze started in the rear of J. L. Henley's Drug Store in the heart of the commercial district and spread through six businesses and the Post Office, consuming almost an entire block on the north side of the street. The adjacent historic Ritchie House survived, swathed in wet blankets.

Fear of enemy infiltration gripped the nation; just a week earlier Congress had enacted the Espionage Act. This new law allowed the government to censor publications sent through the mail and made it a crime to aid enemy nations or interfere with the draft. Two foreign men allegedly seen in Henley's Drug Store the day of the fire were suspected of being German undercover agents and arsonists. "The whole town blew up. They thought right away it was some German doings...", recalled townsman Robert B. Rouzie. The men, neither of whom spoke any English, were placed under house arrest at the Monument Hotel on Prince Street across from the courthouse and held there for several days. Finally a translator was found who determined they were not German agents but Swedish travelers who had no intentions of destroying Tappahannock. The foreign men were guests of Mr. Marceson, a man of German descent who had married a local woman; the couple made their home just outside of Tappahannock in the 18th century Mt. Clement house.



MODERN WARFARE

Essex servicemen who fought the Germans on the Western Front in Europe encountered increasingly mechanized fighting. The war theater consisted of a dividing line between opposing armies stretching 500 miles, from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier with France, of muddy, zig-zag trenches and barbed wire that made it difficult, if not impossible to cross defended ground. Weapons included rifles, pistols and rifled artillery and machine guns mounted in concrete pill boxes. Overhead flew Zeppelins carrying bombs and airplanes armed with machine guns.

Tanks, first developed in Britain in 1915, were unreliable in the beginning because of breakdowns, but were improved and used in larger numbers in the final battles of 1918, helping to end the stalemate imposed by trench warfare on the Western Front. Germany's advanced chemical industry spawned the use of poison gases, including chlorine and mustard gas. The Allies followed suit, making the use of gas masks by both sides essential, however, strategically, poison gas had no significant effect on the course of the war.



DECORATED FOR HEROISM

During the course of World War I, two Essex servicemen received the Distinguished Service Cross. This award, established by President Woodrow Wilson on January 2nd, 1918, is the second highest, after the Medal of Honor, that can be given to a member of the United States Army for extreme gallantry and risk of life in actual combat with an armed enemy force. First Lieutenant (Infantry) Hugh Campbell Parker of Mount Landing, at age 23 won the cross for "heroism in action during the battle of Bois des Ogons, France, October 10th, 1918. While his platoon was being held up by machine gun fire, and the casualties were becoming very heavy, he crawled forward to within bombing distance of the enemy, and by killing one and capturing two of the enemy with their machine guns, he enabled his platoon to continue its advance."

George Washington Sadler of Laneview, a chaplain in the Infantry, also was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross. Sadler, age 30, had been a Baptist missionary in Nigeria before the war. Because his family lived on both sides of the Essex and Middlesex county line near Laneview, Sadler is claimed as a favorite son by both counties. Family members ran a store in Middlesex and all were dedicated members of Glebe Landing Baptist Church. Sadler held the rank of First Lieutenant in the 3rd Division of the 13th Infantry. He was cited for extraordinary heroism while in action near Cunel, France in October, 1918. "Throughout this period, regardless of this personal safety, he gave first aid and assisted in the evacuation of the wounded from the field under heavy machine gun and shell fire and gas," the commander of his regiment stated in Sadler's recommendation for the Distinguished Service Cross.



Private Emmett Blanton of Pauls Crossroads was 28 and had worked as a farmer and merchant when he enlisted. He served in the Army in France from May 1918 to February 1919. Blanton suffered a shrapnel wound in the right thigh during action at the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in 1918 and received the Purple Heart.

CASUALTIES

The majority of casualties inflicted during the war were the result of artillery fire. Four Essex men were killed in action during World War I. Two of them were from the small community of Bestland, near Howertons and were members of Howertons Baptist Church: William Leonard Hall and Frank Smith Jeffries. Jeffries was 22 years old and working at a sawmill in Essex when he registered for the draft in 1917. Jeffries died in France on November 6th, 1918 just five days before the Armistice was signed, and is buried in the Howertons Baptist Church cemetery.

Hall was working as a street car conductor on the Newport News-Hampton line and registered for the draft in Newport News at age 25. He was a private in the Army.

T. Boughan Prince was born in Dunbrooke and was living there and working as a farmer when he registered for the draft at age 24, in June of 1917. While serving in Company F, 61st Infantry Regiment, he was killed in France on October 14, 1918 and is buried at Mount Zion Baptist Church, Dunbrooke.

Walter Bayard Sadler, Jr., a first lieutenant in the Army of the 82nd Division, 327th Infantry Regiment died in France on October 11th, 1918 and is buried in the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, Romagne, France.

Several more Essex men died in the service. The first man from the county to lose his life in World War I was an African-American, Randolph Fauntleroy of Center Cross, a private in the Stevedors Regiment, American Expeditionary Force. He died of a gunshot wound on February 4th, 1918.

Essex native, Thomas Waring Lewis (1891-1918), attended Virginia Polytechnic Institute and was living in Texarkana, Texas where he farmed and did farm demonstration work, when he enlisted on December 13th, 1917 at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. His father, Rev. Joseph Lewis wrote, "My son was taken with pneumonia from Jefferson Barracks while suffering with the disease, to Camp Custer in zero weather where he lived about a week. He died February 1st, 1918."

Private Logan Clifton Croxton, Company C, 701 Engineers died in France of influenza at the age of 23. An African-American man from Tappahannock, Croxton was buried in the Croxton-McGuire family cemetery, now a part of St. John's Episcopal Church cemetery. Many servicemen died from influenza which was first reported at Camp Funston (Ft. Riley) Kansas on March 31, 1918. The "Spanish Flu" epidemic claimed the lives of 550,000 Americans and more than 20 million people worldwide.

OFFICERS

Essex furnished more than fifteen officers during the war. Captain Earl Riddle Bissex of Ozeana and Captain Edward R. Wright of Tappahannock served in the U.S. Navy. Colonel Richard C. Croxton and First Lieutenant C. N. Temple were in the Army, Captain James Mack Dillard and Captain William Algar Shaw in the Army Medical Corps. In the Field Artillery branch of the Army were Captain John W. Faulconer, Jr. and First Lieutenant Denny D. Wright. Serving in the U.S. Marines were First Lieutenant Clarence H. Gresham and First Lieutenant Ernest Linwood Wright.

Captain Leslie C. Hammond of Mount Landing and Captain William A. Hammond of Kino were in the Army Transport Service. In the Infantry were First Lieutenant Thomas Boyd Taliaferro of Caret and First Lieutenant William Alfred Wright of Tappahannock. In the 25th Cavalry was Captain J.C. Taliaferro, Jr. and Lieutenant Everett K. Meade was in the Aviation Service.



Above: William A. Wright of Tappahannock is shown second from right with fellow soldiers in camp.

Right: First Lieutenant Wright, center, and friends in a garden in France.



SOLDIERS' STORIES

First Lieutenant in the Army Infantry, Thomas Boyd Taliaferro of Caret, was 24 and had earned a B.A. from the University of Richmond before he enlisted in Richmond on May 13, 1917. He trained at Fort Myer and Fort Lee in Virginia for a year, before sailing aboard the *U.S.S. Mercury* from Newport News to Bordeaux in June of 1918. Taliaferro fought in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, Sept. 26 - Nov. 1, 1918. He was wounded by machine gun fire near St. Juvin on Nov. 1, 1918 and was cared for in a field hospital and the American Red Cross Hospital near Paris. After recuperating, he sailed for the U.S. from Brest, France aboard the *S.S. Rotterdam* and arrived at Hoboken, New Jersey in February of 1919.

Taliaferro later wrote, "The site of death on every side became commonplace and held no horror for me whether the victim were enemy or comrade. My experiences have helped increase my ability to adjust myself more easily to any condition and circumstance and to bear responsibility with less effort." After the war, Taliaferro worked as a merchant, canner and a dealer in fish and oysters.

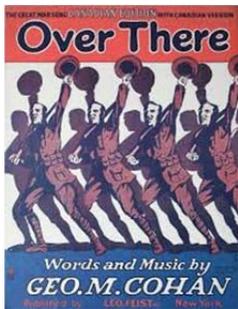
Thomas M. Evans of Laneview was inducted into the service on June 23rd, 1916 at Hampton, Virginia. He was a member of the 11th Field Artillery, Battery D. On July 10, 1917 he was listed as a private and a horse-shoer. By this time, the mechanization of war was making cavalry charges obsolete, but horses continued to serve in reconnaissance and in carrying messages. They also saw service pulling artillery, ambulances and supply wagons. Evans was a farmer after he returned to civilian life.

William A. Wright of Tappahannock, son of prominent Essex judge, Thomas Roane Barnes (TRB) Wright (1839-1914) was a recent graduate of Washington and Lee University, working as young lawyer in Tappahannock when he enlisted as a private in the Army in 1917. He was later commissioned as a first lieutenant in the Infantry. During two years of service he was on active duty at the front in France. In a letter home dated November 12, 1918 he wrote, "The last 48 hrs before the end, (our) sector...was very active. A drive had been planned and only the armistice could have stopped it ...The French flags are hanging from all windows and they (the French) are "imbibing"... the firing ceased sharply at 11 a.m. All was then quiet." After the war, Wright resumed the practice of law in Tappahannock. He went on to serve in the Virginia House of Delegates and the State Senate.

CHURCHES IN WAR TIME

The close-knit congregations of Essex Churches and church organizations contributed significantly to the war effort. Rev. Frank P. Berkley, pastor of Beale Memorial Baptist Church in Tappahannock was "instrumental in arousing his congregation to enthusiastic support of war-time measures," wrote Mrs. Edward Macon Ware of Rappahannock Christian Church at Dunnsville, who was chairman of a district consisting of thirteen Virginia counties in the United War Work drive. Beale Memorial Church had eleven men in the service, including Lieutenant Denny D. Wright, and William A. Passagaluppi in the Army, and Lieutenant Clarence A. Gresham of the Marines. Forty per cent of the congregation bought Liberty Bonds and the amount subscribed to various war causes was \$812.12. Howertons Baptist Church had eleven men in the service.

During World War I, great numbers of Armenians, an ethnic and Christian minority population living in the Caucasus Mountains within Turkey, were killed or exiled by the Turks. St. John's Episcopal Church in Tappahannock contributed \$195.59 to Armenian Relief. The Sunday School of Ephesus Baptist Church at Center Cross contributed \$225.00 to Armenian Relief and sent clothing valued at \$100.00 to the Belgians. St. Anne's Parish, with Episcopal churches at Iraville and Champlain, contributed to the Red Cross, Y. M.C.A. and Belgian and Armenian Relief. The rector, Rev. John Letcher Showell, cooperated with the government in its requests for special announcements and discourses. He preached patriotic sermons and led the congregations in special prayers for soldiers and sailors.



SCHOOLS PROMOTE PATRIOTISM

Essex public schools struggled with staffing during the war. Two principals volunteered for the service and fifteen teachers left the schools to work for the government. Although finding properly trained replacements was difficult, schools enlarged courses in history and placed special emphasis on understanding the causes leading to the war with Germany.

About one hundred patriotic addresses were delivered in the schools of the county and fifty special exercises were held for the purpose of instilling patriotism. Patriotic songs were sung and war literature studied. A program by the Junior Literary Club at the Dunnsville High School commencement program in June, 1917 included recitations of many poems featuring the flag and the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner."

Schools enthusiastically participated in the Red Cross drives; sixty junior auxiliaries with a total enrollment of 1,500 raised \$400.00. Liberty Loan programs and Thrift Associations were also organized in thirty schools and many Thrift Stamps sold by the children

The private African-American Rappahannock Industrial Academy, which opened in 1902 at Ozeana, furnished five students to the service. They were Howard Brooks, William McKinley Muse, George Roane, George W. Reed (volunteer) and Adolphus Bayton, a graduate. The average enrollment of the school was sixty during the war. Teachers and students took part in raising money for the Red Cross. Evidencing a patriotic spirit through the war, RIA students bought two Liberty Bonds, a dozen War Savings stamps and a number of Thrift Stamps.

THE RED CROSS

Essex citizens who remained on the home front energetically supported the Red Cross, a voluntary aid society for the relief of war victims. The American Branch of the Red Cross had been organized in 1881, with Clara Barton as its first president. Because of the great need that came with World War I, the organization grew rapidly in membership and activity, expanding from 107 local chapters in 1914 to 3,864 in 1918.

The Essex County Chapter of the Red Cross was organized at Tappahannock on July 13th, 1917. It was composed of nine branches located at Tappahannock, Millers, Lloyds, Loretto, Dunnsville, Center Cross, Howertons, Dunnbrooke and Rexburg. The six African American branches were referred to as "colored auxiliaries" at the time and were located at Tappahannock, St. Johns, Millers, Dunnsville, Center Cross and Ozeana. James M. Lewis was chairman of the Essex Chapter. Mr. Henry C. DeShields and Mrs. Fanny Sale were in charge of the Home Service section.

The Rappahannock Christian Church turned over the proceeds of its 1917 Thanksgiving supper to the Red Cross. The various branches of the Essex County Chapter raised approximately \$5,000.00 during the course of the war.

During the war, the hundreds of women members of the Essex Red Cross Chapter shipped 1,258 bandages, 202 sweaters, 441 pairs of wool socks, 300 refugee garments and 833 pounds of used garments for Belgium, among hundreds of additional items including hot water bags and Christmas boxes for the American servicemen in France.

Essex women and men played a vital role in food conservation. When a branch of the Council of Defense was organized in Tappahannock in May 15, 1917 to encourage food conservation, Mrs. W. E. Wright was appointed county chairman of the Woman's Committee whose work was to enroll housewives in the food saving programs. War gardens for increased production, canning and meatless meals were promoted by the government. In 1918, Dr. E. L. W. Ferry was appointed Food Administrator for the county.

In May, 1921 the Essex Red Cross Chapter was reorganized on a peacetime basis and the \$900.00 remaining in the treasury from wartime was supplemented by an additional \$900.00, so that Mrs. Anne Meek could be employed as a public health nurse.

LIBERTY LOANS

To help finance the fighting, the U.S. government sponsored the sale of bonds known as Liberty Loans. Posters, rallies and endorsements by Hollywood stars like Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford were organized to promote the bond sales. Subscribing to the Liberty bonds became a symbol of patriotic duty and introduced many citizens to the idea of financial securities for the first time.



Essex County generously supported the Liberty Loan campaigns; close to 1,000 Essex citizens subscribed over \$297,000 during the course of the war. The pupils of Dunnsville High School bought \$200.00 worth of War Savings Stamps and Trinity School near Millers Tavern bought \$50.00 worth of the stamps.

RETURNING TO A PEACETIME ESSEX

Mixed with the happiness of coming home safely were challenges for returning servicemen and their Essex families after the war. Adjusting to routine life after a period of strenuous activity and in some cases physical debility was difficult psychologically. Prices were soaring and labor expensive and difficult to obtain, since many workers had moved to cities to work in munitions factories, but the war had also been a learning and testing experience. As during the war, strong households, schools and churches prevailed in Essex, now improving and carrying forward the community. In September of 1919, fourteen Essex veterans organized Post Number 64 of the American Legion in Tappahannock.

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About the Author

David Jett holds a B.A. in the History of Art from Old Dominion University and a M.A. in Education from Hampton University. He received the Certificate in Museum Management from the Virginia Association of Museums. David has been Curator of Exhibits and Collections at Essex County Museum and Historical Society since 2004. He lives in Reedville, Virginia.

In Memoriam

Harold "Van" Van Arsdale Museum Founder

On June 2, 2016, one of the Essex County Museum Founders and continuous supporter, Harold "Van" Van Arsdale passed away. He was a very special person who was well liked by everyone. His commitment to improving our community, generosity with his time and financial support, and affable personality will be respectfully missed.

He and his wife, Judy, retired to Tappahannock in 1989 shortly after its Prince Street was officially recognized as a "Historic District." He founded the Beautification Committee which was instrumental in landscaping the Historic District. By the mid-1990's, he and several other historically-minded people decided to establish the Essex County Museum which opened in 1996 and he was a leader in the process and financing the purchase of the building where the museum is currently located.

Besides being a museum founder, he served as its president from 2003 to 2006 and led its merger with the Essex County Historical Society which was established in 1971. After serving as Essex County Museum and Historical Society president, he was docent coordinator for a couple of years and continued as a dedicated docent until 2016 when his health prevented him from continuing. In 2015 Van and Judy, who also served in several officer positions in the organization's early years, made a significant gift to the Museum to name its reception area in honor of their children, Andrea and Dean.

His enthusiastic drive and public service experience to accomplish worthwhile projects to benefit the community did not interfere with his wonderful sense of humor and joke telling. His smile and twinkle in his eye made him appear as an engaging person and people loved to talk to him. One of the Museum's visitors last year added a comment to his visitor registration form, "Van is funny!!"

Najah Carrington "Cacky" Taylor, Jr. Museum Docent

One of our long time, dedicated docents, Cacky Taylor died June 18, 2016, at the age of 86. Even when his health was failing last year, he did not want to resign as docent. Instead, he agreed to be a substitute.

His wealth of knowledge about local history was drawn upon as one of the narrators of the History of Tappahannock and Essex County produced by the Museum as a visitor orientation video.

His eloquence and quiet demeanor made him a popular docent among our visitors. His presence will be missed.

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Sally Acree	Hilda Fletcher	Joe Johnston	Cora Sue Spruill
Tommy Blackwell	Barbara Frazier	Linda Lumpkin	Rick Stott
Emily Brazell	John Frazier	Suzi Maggard	Carl Strock
Betty Jo Butler	Penny Geiger, <i>Docent Coordinator</i>	Joan Moore	Sandy Tate
Bill Croxton	Ron Geiger	Howard Reisinger	Pam Underhill
Carole Croxton	Peyton Guest	Barry Robertson	Lois Vaughan
Sarah Croxton	Patricia Haile	Patti Rowley	Priscilla Vaughan
Jessica Davis	Anita Harrower	Jane Schreiber	Helen Ware
Luther Derby	Gordon Harrower	Barbara Sethmann	JoAnn Ware
Keren Ellis	Bill Jester	Lewis Shepherd	Fred Woodard
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Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. until 3 p.m.

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