

## 1917- April 6 - 2017 100th Anniversary of U.S. Involvement in World War I

April 6th, 2017 marks the 100th anniversary of the United States Congress declaring war on Germany and Austria-Hungary, an act that joined the armed forces of the U.S. with those of Great Britain, France, Russia, and Italy to defeat the Central Powers: Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria.

When war broke out in 1914, the United States had a policy of neutrality. Many people in the U.S. saw the war as a dispute between “old world” powers that had nothing to do with them. Also, public opinion on the war was often split as there were many immigrants who had ties to both sides.

When the Germans sank the Lusitania in 1915, a passenger ocean liner with 159 Americans on board the public opinion in the United States toward the war began to change. This act killed 1,198 innocent passengers. When the United States finally entered the war two years later, the cry “Remember the Lusitania” was used on military recruitment posters and to unite the people against the Germans.

In January of 1917, the British intercepted and decoded a secret telegram sent from German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmerman to the

German ambassador in Mexico. He proposed that Mexico ally with Germany against the United States. He promised them the territories of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.

The Zimmerman Telegram was the final straw. On April 2, 1917 President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany. In his speech he said that the U.S. would go to war to “fight for the ultimate peace of the world.” On the evening prior to the speech, President Wilson had a quiet conversation with Frank Cobb of the New York World newspaper. President Wilson is reported to have told Mr. Cobb, “Once led into war, our people will forget that there ever was such a thing as tolerance; ruthless brutality will enter into the very fiber of our national life, infecting Congress, the courts, the policeman, the man in the street.”

True to President Wilson’s prediction, American society became less and less tolerant of citizens who disagreed with their government’s actions. Also at risk were several million Americans of German ancestry. At this time, German Americans were the largest ethnic group in Wisconsin, accounting for more than 45 percent of the state’s foreign born population.

During World War I there were three registrations. In the years 1917 and 1918, about 24 million men living in the United States completed a military draft registration card. This number was close to 25 percent of the total U.S. population of approximately 100 million in 1917-1918.

This is the Historical Society's database of men from Williams Bay who entered the military during the first World War:

Ganord A. Andell  
Col. John Atkins  
Donald Kenneth Baker  
Maynard E. Baker  
Warren D. Burdick  
James Drabek  
Ivar P. Ericson  
Jesse Wilbur Gardner  
Elmer K. Hansen  
Victor Hansen  
Howard Albert Henne  
Theodore Roosevelt Johnson  
Paul Burrill Jenkins  
Henry J. Kenyon  
James Kochy  
Allen R. Lackey  
Richard John Oetjen  
Elmer Pierson  
Axel J. Sandberg  
Leslie E. Sawyer  
Oscar Otto Stenstrom  
Joseph Emanuel Wendell  
Albert Wheeler  
Frank Edward Williams  
Webster Wanamaker Williams

Interesting Facts about the United States in World War I:

- The United States had 4,355,000 military personnel involved in World War I. It suffered 322,000 casualties including 116,000 soldiers killed.
- The U.S. Navy played a major role in helping to blockade Germany, keeping out supplies and hurting Germany economically.
- The U.S. forces that were sent to Europe during World War I were called the America Expeditionary Forces (AEF).
- The nickname for U.S. soldiers during the war was "doughboy."

Information about ancestors who registered for the draft or served in the U.S. military is available on The Wisconsin Veterans Museum website. World War I draft registration records can be search for free at [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) or at [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) with an Ancestry membership.