

Falmouth In World War I

by Maria C. Ward

*The following article about Falmouth during World War I has been gleaned from reports in **the** Enterprise with additions from other Cape Cod journals and government publications.*

One hundred years ago this past spring, on April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. American participation in the war that had been raging in Europe since 1914 would last less than twenty months until an Armistice went into effect at the eleventh hour (Paris time) of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918. The date was remembered as Armistice Day from 1919 until the name of the holiday was changed to Veterans Day in 1954.

Participation in a foreign war was not universally welcomed on our shores. Isolationists and others complained about “paying for” a European conflict, giving up food from our tables, and risking American lives in a trench war that seemed never ending. Even after April 6th, they argued for keeping our resources at home and building up our defenses. “We hope that our president does not contemplate sending an army numbering in the millions across the water. A small expeditionary force may be advisable..... It is all well enough to tell about friendship of nations, but all such friendship is founded upon self-interest and alleged friendship has

not prevented allies from becoming enemies in the past.” (*Wareham Courier* reprinted in the *Enterprise* July 12, 1917.)

Countering isolationist arguments were the reports of famine in Europe plus the surge in submarine warfare which affected our commerce and took American lives. Even before the declaration of war in 1917, Americans were actively participating by joining the American Field Service and the Red Cross units in Europe. When a German U-boat sank the ocean liner *Lusitania* in 1915, it was a call to action.

And so, Falmouth organized.

The selectmen appointed a Public Safety Committee. At a mass meeting on March 30, 1917, George W. Jones was elected chairman in charge of Finance; H.V. Lawrence, Public Works; Dr. L.C. Jones, Public Health; Dr. Geo. W. Greene, Home Guard; Charles S. Burgess, Publicity; H.G. Haddon, Coast Patrol; and H.F. Hall and Howard Swift, Food Production.

A meeting of 67 citizens organized the Falmouth Home Guard on April 7, 1917. They voted to drill every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday at 7:30 p.m.

Because factories hired away farm laborers, food shortages were anticipated. Farming for local

sustenance was necessary as areas to the West and South were producing food for the allies. Thus, in April, G.W. Jones and H.V. Lawrence were tasked with finding land, seed, fertilizer, and/or capital to raise food in Falmouth. Back yard gardens were already the norm; now they were extended and called "War Gardens." Factories were asked to give farmers short-term laborers for planting, cultivating, and harvesting crops - paid for by the factories at their rate of pay. Instruction was given for canning and preserving food for home use.

But, of course, raising and training an army became a primary task with the passage on May 18, 1917, of the Selective Service Act of 1917. This required all males between the ages of 21 and 31 to register on June 5, 1917. (A subsequent law on September 12, 1918, extended the age group to 18 - 45.) Before war was declared, the Federal Army had only 121,000 soldiers, and only a mere 73,000 had volunteered since April. Contrary to the WWII draft classifications that ranged from 1A to 4F, there were five "Classes" in the 1917 law.

Class I: Eligible and liable for military service. Unmarried men with no dependents. Married registrants with independent spouse and/or one or more dependent children over the age of 16 with sufficient family income if drafted.

Class II: Temporarily deferred but available for military service. Married registrants with dependent spouse and/or dependent children under 16 with sufficient family income if drafted. [This

group was to be drafted only if Class I had been depleted. The Cape was the first district in New England to exhaust its supply of men in Class 1, due to the fact that so many men of draft age had previously enlisted in the Navy.]

Class III: Temporarily exempted but available for military service. Local officials. Registrants who provide sole family income for dependent parents and/or dependent siblings under 16. Registrants employed in agricultural labor or industrial enterprises essential to the war effort.

Entirely exempted in Class IV and V were those living in extreme hardship, state and federal officials, employed licensed pilots, clergy or those studying for the clergy, the "medically or morally unfit," criminals, and aliens.

Importantly, no substitutes could be hired to take the place of the draftee, as had been possible in the Civil War.

Falmouth's first draftees

From Falmouth

William F. Randall

Elmer Edward Davis

Constantine Tsiknas

William H. Houlihan

Merton B. Handy

Otto Solberg

Albert S. Robbins

Emmanuel F. Vantura

Form 1 **952** REGISTRATION CARD **2015**

1 Name in full Eugene Elwood Young Age, in yrs. 21

2 Home address Woods Hole Falmouth

3 Date of birth January 26 1896

4 Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? Natural born

5 Where were you born Orleans Mass U.S.A.

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject? Citizen

7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? Laborer

8 By whom employed? Marine Biological Lab

Where employed? Woods Hole

9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? no

10 Married or single (which)? Single Race (specify which)? Caucasian

11 What military service have you had? Rank none; branch _____; years _____; Nation or State _____

12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? _____

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

952 Eugene E Young
(Signature of registrant)

20-6-9. A

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? Tall Slender, medium, or stout (which)? Slender

2 Color of eyes? Blue Color of hair? Light Bald? no

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? no

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

John H. Kelley
(Signature of registrar)

Precinct 1
City or County Town Falmouth
State Mass

June 5-1917
(Date of registration)

WAR DEPARTMENT
Local Board Div. No. 43,
County Court House,
BARNSTABLE, - MASS.

Eugene Elwood Young's draft call-up was cancelled when the war ended.

Joaquin W. Driggs, Jr.
Freeman Kendrick Lovell
Joseph Robert Kershaw
Clarence A. Parker
Bernard W. Wright
William Savage

From West Falmouth
Hubbard Swift
Lester Avery Bourne
Ralph W. Landers
George W. Bassett

From Woods Hole
Cornelius P. Collins
Henry N. Walsh

From East Falmouth
John R. Augusta
Carlton B. Baker
Ernest C. Baker
Joseph Frank Marshall
Frank Rose Macedo

Manuel Louis Mederios, Waquoit
Louis B. Denham, West Tisbury

The draft was canceled almost immediately after the Armistice was signed in 1918.

The Public Safety Committee oversaw the registration and, when the town received the draft quota for the required number of local recruits, drew the names for assignment. That first “call for the National Army” occurred in September, 1917. Falmouth honored those 27 local men with a day-long rousing sendoff that had the State Guard, the B.F. Jones Post of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) veterans, the Falmouth Brass Band, town officials, and school children marching up Main Street to Depot Avenue and back to the Falmouth Hotel, at the corner of Shore and Main Streets. Shop owners were asked to close for the day so that everyone could turn out for the parade. There were speeches from the portico of the town hall described as “most appropriate,” giving the young men “excellent advice.” Afterwards automobiles convoyed the young men to Hyannis for their physicals and induction before they were transported to Camp Devens in Ayer, Massachusetts. There is a report of two men who passed the physicals but were rejected because of poor teeth.



Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

Falmouth Enterprise | Saturday, December 15, 1917 |

LETTER FROM CAMP DEVENS.

The editor has received the following interesting letter from one of the Falmouth boys at Camp Devens, who is at present quarantined:

Camp Devens, Mass.

December 9, 1917

Dear Mr. Burgess:—

Snow a cold snap and measles have invaded Camp Devens. The boys in Co. G don't mind the cold and snow, but are quarantined for two weeks on account of two cases of measles, and it hit them rather hard as the quarantine was placed just one hour before our passes were to be issued on Saturday. The two weeks will be up just two days before Christmas, that is, providing no more cases develop before the two weeks are up.

The Falmouth boys who are quarantined are: Corporals Albert S. Robbins, Lewis Studley, Henry N. Walsh and Privates Clarence A. Parker, Elton M. MacKenzie, Henry Mills and myself. We have all sorts of good wishes for the fellow who took sick and kept us here.

We are allowed to drill and do physical exercises but can't do anything else but take life easy. If we want to buy anything at the Post Exchange one of the guards has to get it for us. We have to miss going to the theatre, Y. M. C. A., and worst of all, home. We expect to get four days for Christmas, the order having just come through from Headquarters.

We have been having a cold snap in Ayer. The temperature has been between five and twenty degrees above zero every night for the past week. The ground has been covered with snow for over a week and last night we had a regular blizzard, leaving about five inches of snow to plough through.

We have plenty of steam heat in the barracks so can usually keep warm, but last night it was impossible as the wind blew in between all the windows and we were nearly frozen out, especially when the heat was turned off, to repair a leak in the main pipe.

Hope the town of Falmouth is still on the map and will probably be back again for Christmas and, if possible, sooner.

Will close with wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Yours for measles,

BOB KERSHAW.

To read J. Robert Kershaw's account of his battlefield experience in WW I go to museumsongreen.org. Click on Untold Tales of Falmouth, then on From Heaven to Hell via Hoboken.

The delay between the May Selective Service Act and this September call-up was caused by the need to build Camp Devens, from scratch,

starting June 18, 1917. The buildings were rudimentary; they lacked heat and equipment. The trainees needed heavy clothing. Calls went out to local groups for help. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) knit sweaters, Mrs. E.F. Lincoln organized the local ladies to send home-baked pies, and the local Red Cross chapter collected warm clothing and blankets for what was called The Old Colony Regiment, officially the 302nd Infantry. The *Enterprise* offices received and forwarded donations directly to the Camp "for the comfort of the Falmouth contingent."

The "home front" was also called upon to help fund the war effort through the purchase of Liberty Bonds and/or War Savings/Thrift Stamps. The Thrift Stamps cost 25 cents apiece and were



This section of a 51" x 10" photo titled Supply Co. 301st. Field Artillery...Camp Devens Mass.... 1917 is courtesy of Maureen Harlow-Hawkes, granddaughter of Lester Avery Bourne, who was among Falmouth's first 27 draftees. He drove a supply wagon.

affixed to a Thrift Card which held 16 stamps. When the card was full, worth four dollars, it could be converted (with an added few cents) to a War Savings Certificate, whose cost varied between \$4.18 and \$4.23. An accumulation of these certificates could then be converted into Liberty Bonds. They earned about 4% interest, compounded quarterly.

Local Boy Scouts sold the Thrift Stamps. Children were encouraged to invest in the stamps instead of hoarding their pennies. "Postmaster Jones ... offered a prize of five dollars to each school in the Village to the class selling the greatest number of War Savings stamps. ...the Village Grammar school sold approximately \$490. worth of Thrift Stamps and War Savings stamps. The largest number were sold by Arnold Dyer whose sales amounted to \$103.25. He was awarded the individual prize of \$1.00 offered by Principal Henry W. Hall, and the \$5.00 prize offered by Postmaster George W. Jones was awarded to the 5th and 6th grades."

Towns were encouraged to meet assigned quotas. In Falmouth, the first bond drive quota for June, 1917, was oversubscribed. The third Liberty Loan in April, 1918, had a quota apportioned to Falmouth of \$375,000. That was larger than the other four towns in the First Barnstable district combined. The campaign went for four weeks from April 6 to May 4.

In June, 1918, after President Woodrow Wilson declared a National War Savings Day, Falmouth held a town-wide, house-to-house, five-day campaign. The goal was to collect \$1,100. George Jones led the drive with Mrs. W.O.

Luscombe as "major of the women" of Woods Hole and Quissett and Mrs. L.C. Weeks as "major" of Falmouth Village and West and East Falmouth. In all, there were four "Liberty Loan Acts" passed in Washington.

Falmouth was involved in other nationwide programs. Herbert Hoover, the Wartime Food Administrator, declared "meatless Mondays" and "wheatless Wednesdays" to conserve food supplies. To combat hoarding, every household in Massachusetts was asked to file a report with the state food administrator on the amount of sugar and flour in their homes. The winter of 1917-18 was quite harsh in Falmouth. Ice closed Vineyard Sound and the Cape Cod Canal to navigation. No coal could be shipped. The state proclaimed "heatless Mondays." Washington ordered a Monday holiday be observed where

ONE NO-MEAT DAY

and TWO

NO-WHITE BREAD DAYS

EACH WEEK.

Every Household should observe this request
of the Government. **FOOD MUST BE SAVED**
FOR OUR SOLDIERS AND ALLIES.

U. S. FOOD ADMINISTRATION

S. L. HAMLIN,
STAPLE AND FANCY GROCERIES, FALMOUTH, MASS.
TELEPHONE 74.

From the *Enterprise* archives.

only war necessities could be produced. The Falmouth Fuel Committee did give permission on Mondays to anyone who needed to cut wood for fuel. A Falmouth Heights summer resident was excused from this Monday holiday as his shoe company had priority.

Everyone was expected to pitch in. A national anti-loafing law was passed. It required “the registration of all able-bodied males between the ages of 18 and 50 who are not engaged in some useful occupation at least 36 hours a week.”

The “weapons” of war were all around. Dirigibles flew out of the Chatham Coastal Aero Station. The coast was patrolled daily by hydroplanes, high speed patrol boats, looking for “Hun sea-tigers” (submarines). War vessels passed through the canal, which had opened in 1914. Booming guns could be heard as the fleet at sea did target practice. A coast patrol station was assigned to Woods Hole. John Veeder, the harbor master, was “appointed to look over suspicious boats entering any of our harbors.” The Secretary of the Navy authorized a \$1,000 reward to anyone with information leading to the discovery and capture of an enemy submarine base. Even a month before the declaration of war, a task force of 500 civilian power boats, adaptable for coast patrol work and submarine chasing, was sought for the First Naval District, which extended from Eastport, Maine to Chatham, Massachusetts. Many mariners, retired from the sea, became part of this Merchant Marine.

But what to do about Falmouth’s thriving summer tourist industry? Would tourists be frightened away by the threat of submarines

just offshore? There were at least two notable submarine incidents. In July, 1918, a tug, with three steel barges and a wooden barge in tow, was attacked just offshore from Orleans as spectators watched from shore. Above the headline in the *Boston Post* extra of July 22, 1918, was written:

The Hun showed himself in his true colors off our coast yesterday when without warning he shelled a totally defenceless craft carrying men and women engaged in peaceful pursuits. His act was as wanton in its nature as the sinking of the *Lusitania*. This latest exhibition of frightfulness will only strengthen our arms for the task ahead.

There was also the report from the *New Bedford Times* of swordfishermen in nine schooners on Georges Bank who were waylaid by a German submarine, allowed to board their dories, and then watch their schooners sunk. All hands survived, some at sea longer than others. While their fate was still unknown, the price of swordfish jumped from 32 to 46 cents a pound.

Less well known at the time was the encounter in July of 1918 between three whalers and a German U-boat as the whalers were returning to New Bedford, one with 600 barrels of oil. Captain Gonsalves of the schooner *A.M. Nicholson* pleaded successfully with the German captain who let them go with the admonition to “get back into port and don’t let me catch you out this way again.” The Germans then caught sight of a Norwegian steamer and left the whalers to sink it.

And so Falmouth joined a campaign to reassure summer visitors. "The fear of an attack on our coast resorts is gradually subsiding. Germany has no ammunition to waste on a pleasure resort like Falmouth. ... People ... will be as safe from attack at Falmouth this summer as they would be in the Rocky Mountains." An article from *The Boston Transcript*, reprinted in *The Enterprise*, stated: "The chances of any particular hotel or cottage being hit by a bomb are considerably smaller than they are of being struck by lightning. The skies will be as fair as ever, the seas as placid; and if the gray bulk of an American cruiser, or the gleam of the brass of an American 'chaser' sometimes moves athwart the seascape, it will make life at the shore all the more interesting and attractive. No one should change his summer plans."

All reports indicate that the summer of 1918 brought the usual summer crowds to Falmouth.

Rumors of an Armistice were rife. On Thursday, November 7, 1918, word was received of Germany's unconditional surrender. A new fire whistle let loose its first ever continuous blast. "... bells were rung, school children paraded the streets, and business was generally suspended. ... The only store on Main Street doing business on Thursday afternoon was the fireworks shop which had an opportunity to dispose of a considerable quantity of firecrackers, etc., left over from July 4th." By evening the report was contradicted, but most were sure it was just a matter of time. And so it was, as word came early Monday morning that the Armistice had been signed and the Kaiser had abdicated. "Schools were closed at noon and business generally suspended. Church

and school bells, including the old Lawrence Academy bell, were rung and the siren fire alarm whistle sounded at intervals throughout the day." An evening meeting filled town hall with an enthusiastic audience. There were speeches by the Rev. Henry Herbert Smythe, the Rev. Frank Baker, and Lieut. W. W. Brinkerhoff, the commandant of the Woods Hole Section, 2nd Naval District. George W. Jones led the audience singing "The Star Spangled Banner," "Over There," "Keep the Home Fires Burning," and "America." After the meeting, a free dance lasted until 1:30 a.m.

The next day, Tuesday, was observed as "Victory Day", a general holiday proclaimed by Massachusetts Governor Samuel W. McCall. The town's observance of the day was a parade, formed in the town farm field on East Main Street at the intersection with Scranton Avenue, proceeding "through Main Street, Locust Street, Palmer Avenue, returning through Main Street to the Memorial Library." There were 25 decorated automobiles, many school children, and representatives from the B. F. Jones Post G. A. R., the Women's Relief Corps, the Massachusetts State Guard, the Woods Hole and the Waquoit Chapters of the American Red Cross, the W.C.T.U., the Portuguese Club, the Megansett and West Falmouth Granges, the Outlook Club, the Junior Red Cross, the American Fund for French Wounded, the Tatakot Tribe, and high school cadets. Flags and bunting decorated every house. But there was very little cheering or waving of flags as the parade moved along, just relief that the war was over.

Those cheers were reserved for the following August, 1919, when Falmouth's Welcome Home Day honored the 225 local men who served in the war and the five who died. (Falmouth's population at that time was just over 3500.) Each serviceman received a bronze medal attached to a red, white and blue ribbon. The front of the medal read "Victory United States Forces 1917-1918." Written on the back: "Presented by the People of Falmouth, Mass., in Grateful Recognition of Patriotic Services in the World War." The day featured parades.

More than seventy autos and floats, all beautifully decorated, were in line and were greatly admired by the crowds all along the route. The parade formed on

the Heights road and proceeded around Grand Avenue, through Falmouth Village, thence to Woods Hole and return, disbanding at Lawrence High School. ... Never before has the town presented such a gala appearance.

Prizes were awarded for the best decorated cars and floats; dinner was served in a tent at the rear of Lawrence High School. All of this was followed by a baseball game in the Heights, an outdoor concert, fireworks, and a dance in the town hall from 9 p.m. until 1 a.m.

The War to End All Wars was finally over.

About the Author

Maria C. Ward has been a *Spritsail* editor since 2005.



Parade photos (Pages 11 and 12) by Chandler Jones, son of George W. Jones.

Courtesy Falmouth Museums on the Green.

