

Slatington in World War I

Let's briefly look at the draft and registration procedures used by the United States in World War I.

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Draft registration

During World War I there were three draft registrations that registered millions of men for possible induction into the United States Army or Navy. Once all men had been registered, a lottery determined the order that men would be inducted. That order was subject to a man's specific draft classification.

The first draft registration, 5 June 1917, was for all men between the ages of 21 and 31 (basically persons born 1886-1896). "About 10 million men registered on this date." Interestingly, because of "specific opposition from Congress, 18–20-year-olds were initially exempt."

The second registration, 5 June 1918, was for all men who had reached the age of 21 after 5 June 1917 (basically persons born 1896-97). This was a "group of about one million men who had recently become old enough to be drafted during the preceding year."

The third registration, 12 September 1918, targeted men from the age of 18 through 45 who had not yet been registered (basically persons born 1873-1886 and 1897-1900). "Almost 14 million men registered on this date." This registration lowered the draft age to eighteen from twenty-one.

(For more detailed information, see, <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3172/> or https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscription_in_the_United_States.)

Registration was carried out at county, township and borough levels across the United States. While registration was being carried out, men could still enroll in the national guard, which was basically another way of enlisting in the army since the national guard units were going to be mobilized as the backbone of the newly-enlarged army..

Every man filled out a draft registration card. The 1917 (See Card A.pdf.) and 1918 (See Card B.pdf and Card C.pdf) draft registration cards differed slightly in the information required about each man. But, in general each registration card included this basic information:

- name
- birthdate
- address
- age
- employment
- occupation
- physical information such as height and weight

Once registration had been completed, the War Department determined how many men each state would have to provide to fill out the authorized strengths of all the state national guard and regular army units, and then additional army units would be created for the rest of the men.

That meant that there were quite a few calculations that had to take place for each state. For example, if the US was going to draft 687,000 men, and each state was credited for enlistments in the national guard unit, Pennsylvania was going to have to draft 60,859 men (*The Morning Call*, 14 July 1917). That also meant that for a projected total of 687,000 men, more than 1,374,000 men would have to be called for a physical examination to find the required number of men who could actually pass the physical examination. (Discussed below.) Another way of looking at the draft requirements was that “each city, county or state must furnish two-thirds of one percent of its paper population.” (*The Morning Call*, 12 July 1917)

After the initial registrations and the publication of the draft numbers, there were a lot of men who chose to enlist in the national guard or the regular army. That led to a recalculation of the city and county number of men needed for the initial draft. It turned out that Allentown had to supply 163 men, and the total for Lehigh County was set at 669. (*The Morning Call*, 23 July 1917)

It should also be mentioned that as men registered, many wanted to claim an exemption from being drafted, even though the exact exemption details had not yet been worked out. For example, *The Morning Call* reported on 6 June 1917 that of the initial registration of over 14,500 men in Lehigh County, only about 4,350 claimed no exemption. In other words, about 70% of the men claimed some sort of exemption from being drafted, which the men often listed on their registration cards.

Draft registration classifications

The basis for the draft carried out in 1917 was the Selective Service Act of 1917, also known as An Act to Authorize the President to Increase Temporarily the Military Establishment of the United States, 18 May 1917.

(<https://govtrackus.s3.amazonaws.com/legislink/pdf/stat/40/STATUTE-40-Pg76.pdf>)

Part of the draft process included dividing the men into different classes based on their marital status, job, physical condition, etc. I have found several different explanations of the classification regulations, which were pretty complicated. (See Draft Classifications.PDF.) Still, the explanations only differ in minor ways. Basically, if a man was unmarried with no dependents and physically fit, that man would be in classification level 1.

The draft process

In early summer 1917, men throughout the country were required to register for the draft. In each county in Pennsylvania, there were boards set up to run the process. For example, in Lehigh County, there were two district boards for Allentown, and the remainder of the county was divided into two additional boards for a total of four.

- Allentown city district 1 (wards 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14)
- Allentown city district 2 (wards 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11)
- Lehigh County district 1 (Alburtis, Coopersburg, Emaus, Fountain Hill, Macungie, South Allentown, Heidelberg, Lower Macungie, Lower Milford, Lowhill, Lynn, Salisbury, South Whitehall, Upper Macungie, Upper Milford, Upper Saucon, Weisenberg)
- Lehigh County district 2 (Bethlehem 5, 6, 7 wards; Coplay, Slatington 1, 2, 3 wards, Hanover Township, North Whitehall, Washington, Whitehall and the County Jail)

Once all the men had registered, in each district the registration cards were supposed to be shuffled, and each card was randomly assigned a number starting with 1 and going upwards. (Some registration districts in the US had thousands of men registered; some registration districts failed to shuffle the cards before assigning numbers.)

The actual draft began on Friday, 20 July 1917 at 9:49 AM and was completed by Saturday morning around 2 AM. The draft drawing took place in the public hearing room of the Senate office building where 10,550 black capsules had been placed in a large wide-mouthed, glass bowl sitting on an oak table. Each capsule contained a number, and Newton Baker (1871-1937), the secretary of war, while blindfolded, pulled out the first capsule.

The first number drawn was #258. This meant that all the men whose registration card had been numbered #258 had been drafted first. Newspapers then published the lists of men organized according to their "number," starting with #258.

Publication of the names of the drafted men seems to have taken place the first week of August.

The local draft boards then would summon the drafted men for a physical examination and classification in accordance with the five-classification system.

The first men drafted

Looking through the local Lehigh Valley newspapers, I was curious about the first men who were drafted in the area, i.e., the men who had #258. I was able to find some information on thirteen (13) men with #258 from Lehigh County, Berks County to the west, Northampton County to the east, and Carbon County to the north.

Clarence Henry Benner (1895-1989), born and living in Upper Milford Township in Lehigh County, was single and a farm laborer. He was inducted at Allentown on 2

November 1917 and served in France with Company G, 11th Infantry Regiment. He was severely wounded in the leg during the battle of St. Mihiel in September 1918. A roofer by trade, he was not married.

Willard Edgar Dutt (1889-1954), born and living in Allentown in Lehigh County, was married with three children. He was working as a lather (dry wall framing). He claimed an exemption, and he did not serve.

John Edward Milhime (1888-1949), born and living in Hokendauqua in Lehigh County, was listed as a seaman for the Pittsburgh Steamship Co. and single. He was later married with four children. He was inducted at Allentown on 2 November 1917 and served in the army at Camp Green, NC and Camp Meade, MD.

Remo Rege (1893-1970), born in Italy, living in Allentown in Lehigh County. He was a machinist at Bethlehem Steel. He enlisted in the army in December 1917, ordnance corps, and was discharged 9 August 1920. He did not serve overseas. He died in Paterson, NJ. The headline of his obituary read: "Remo Rege, 76, 1 in 1917 Draft" (*The News*, Paterson, NJ, 16 April 1970)

Arthur Hill (A.H.) Johnson (1894-1983), born Hollis, NY, living in Bangor in Northampton County was single. He was a student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He either enlisted or was inducted at Bangor on 4 September 1918 and served in the chemical warfare service until 19 December 1918 when he was discharged at Camp Sherman, OH. Later, he worked as an engineer for the Department of Public Works, State of New York.

Stephen Dozer (1893-1917), born in Austria, living in Bethlehem in Northampton County, was married with two daughters, working as an electrician at Bethlehem Steel. He had served for several years as a private in the US army before World War I. He died on 29 July 1917, just days after the draft, as a result of an accident at work.

Charles Franklin Trout (1888-1969), born in Kasca William village in Schuylkill County, was living in East Mauch Chunk in Carbon County and married with two children. He was employed as a fireman for the Central Railroad of NJ. Much later he was an engineer. He retired after working 49 years. He did not serve in the war.

Frank Levi Bender (1892-1960), born and living in Reading in Berks County, was married and listed as having three children (actually it appears that it was only two), and working as a baker. He was inducted at Reading on 29 August 1918 and served at Camp Greene, NC until discharged 6 December 1918. According to his obituary, he was a retired private investigator. He and his wife married in November 1908 when they were both sixteen. According to the marriage license and a news story, he was a circus acrobat at the time.

Charles Weidner Gehret (1889-1943), born in Earl Township in Berks County, living in Blandon in Berks County, was single and working as a farm hand. He later married and worked as an enameller. He was initially accepted, but the *Reading News* (13 August

1917) reported that he had been injured in a motorcycle accident. He was later accepted for service on 5 October 1917 according to the *Reading Times*, but he does not appear to have served.

Elmer K. Heist (1887-1939), born in Fleetwood, living in Reading in Berks County, silk weaver and single. He was inducted into the army at Reading and served from 20 September 1917 to 15 May 1919. He was part of the first group of men sent to Camp Meade, MD in September 1917. From 19 May 1919 he served overseas with Battery C, 320th Field Artillery. He later worked as a weaver at the Topton Silk Mills.

Amos Good Kiefer (1892-1975), born in Lancaster, living in Mohnton in Berks County, farmer, married with one child at the time (later there were three children). He was exempt from service.

John Earl Sponagle (1893-1966), born and living in Reading in Berks County, single, was working as a machinist with Columbia Cutlery Co. He was inducted into the army at Reading and served from 20 September 1917 to 25 May 1919 and was overseas from 25 April 1918 to 14 May 1919. He was in the 325th Machine Gun Company, which was part of the 325th Infantry Regiment, 82nd Infantry Division.

Clayton R. Tobias (1892-1981), born in Bern, living in West Leesport in Berks County, was a farmer and married (later there were two children). He claimed exemption because of a foot issue, and he failed to pass the physical examination. He was exempt from service.

Of the thirteen men from Lehigh County and vicinity who were drafted first in 1917 with the assigned number 258, only seven actually served in the army. Of those, three served in France. That's a small microcosm of how the draft impacted American men in the war.

The physical exam

After draft numbers had been posted, men were contacted to report to the local draft board for a physical exam. Quite a few men did not pass the physical exam, which was carried out by doctors assigned to the local boards and which was actually a pretty comprehensive overall assessment of a man's overall physical condition.

A World War 1 physical exam included height, weight, and chest measurements, and then checks of the following

- Vision and hearing
- Teeth
- Arms, legs, back, joints and muscles
- Heart
- Lungs
- Skin

Many men did not pass the physical exam. Thirty to forty percent of the men called for the physical exam were rejected. In some registration districts that number was even higher. Here were five of the main reasons that men were rejected.

(<https://www.military.com/history/top-5-reasons-americans-were-unfit-military-service-during-world-war-i.html>)

- "Mechanical problems, involving bones and joints and appendages of the hands and feet," including "weak feet."
- "Defects of the sense organs"
- Tuberculosis
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Heart conditions

Exemptions

As the county boards began their work on the physical exams, they also dealt with the issue of exemptions. For example, *The Morning Call* noted that "out of a total of 53 [men] who were before the board 49 asked for exemption (*The Morning Call*, 14 August 1917). Those who claimed an exemption were "given blanks for themselves, wives and neighbors. These must be returned in ten days, and the board must act on them in three days." The names of all men examined were published with a notation of "accepted" or "rejected" or if an exemption had been claimed.

The end result of the process was well expressed in *The Morning Call* headline of Friday, 17 August 1917: "County Draft Boards Had Busy Day but Got Few Men." There were very many rejections for physical disability, and few of the men called were willing to waive the right to claim an exemption. The majority of the men who had actually passed the physical exam still asked for an exemption from service.

Here was another summary result of the first draft examinations (*The Slatinton News*, 17 August 1917), "Drafted Men Take Examinations." As a result of the work of the exemption board of Lehigh County Division 1 which started work at the Allentown court house, "the biggest majority of the men accepted are asking for exemption [from the draft]." Here were some of the preliminary results regarding men from the Slatinton area:

- Men from this section who have been examined so far - 47
- accepted and filed no claim for exemption – 8
- accepted and filed claims for exemption – 18
- failed to pass – 20
- enlisted – 1

Dispatch of the first draftees

Originally, the first draft troops were scheduled to be sent to sixteen camps across the United States on Thursday, 6 September 1917. For men from Lehigh County, Fort

Meade in Maryland was the designated training site. (*The Morning Call*, 1 September 1917) That departure date was quickly changed to Wednesday, 19 September 1917 because there were water supply issues at the camp. (*The Morning Call*, 3 September 1917)

On Wednesday, 19 September, 398 drafted men from Lehigh County boarded a train bound for Fort Meade, MD. They were sent off with a large parade which marched down Hamilton Street in Allentown to the railroad station. A special train consisting of seven coaches departed at 10:14 AM for the camp. This was a few days after the men enrolled in the national guard had left for their camps. It was unclear at the time whether more men were going to be needed to fill out the seventeen national guard divisions. (*The Morning Call*, 20 September 1917).

Quite a few men from Slatington and the surrounding area were in this first contingent of men. The local men were feted in a banquet held at the Neff House in Slatington on Tuesday evening, 18 September. After the feast, a parade with three local bands and speechmaking took place. The following morning a motorcade of ten autos transported the men to Allentown for their departure. (*The Slatington News*, 21 September 1917) These were the men from Slatington and vicinity who set off for Camp Meade:

Walter S. Blose, Wharton R. Hallman, John A. Werley, Charles F. Mack, Arthur D. Hughes, Owen J. Williams, Ben Owens, Robert C. Youse, Richard A. Roberts, Alvin J. Henry, Ralph Green, William O. Remaley, Walter L. Williams, John T. Owens, William D. Reinsmith, Clayton Dorward, Edward A. Stettler, Allen J. Kern, Fred F. Thomas, Stanley F. Roberts, Elmer C. Kern, Alvin I. Crossley, Robert W. Lynn, Morris P. Schneck, Allen Davis, Charles F. Rohrbach, Calvin C. Kern, Thomas C. Snyder, Allen W. Peters, George E. Lilly, Lee Hill, Harry J. Stahley, Merwin A. Wannamaker.

Continuation of the draft

After the first draft, men continued to be called, examined and inducted throughout 1917 and 1918. Usually, men in the county were called in lots of 500 to meet the growing demands for more men for the army and navy. (The nascent air force was part of the army.)

The newspaper headline on 23 October 1917 read:

“Classification for Men to Be Drafted Fixes Order in Which All Men Will Be Called Soldiers Hereafter to Be Selected in Reverse Order in Usefulness to Nation Economically, Socially and Industrially.” It was clarified that men will be divided into five classifications (See above.) once registered, and that would be the order in which they were called for physical exams. (*The Morning Call*, 23 October 1917)

Basically, the process was being changed to make it easier to deal with the estimated 9 or 10 million men who had been registered. (*The Morning Call*, 29 October 1917) As it was explained, “the men of class one in which will be placed those of the least value at home and with the slightest obligations to dependents, will be called in the order of their

serial numbers until that class is exhausted ... when class one is exhausted, the same process will be applied to class two and down to class five.”

“Thus, a man whose serial number in the great war army lottery had led him to believe that he was among the last summoned may be assigned to the first class and ordered into service with the first quota.”

Then in September 1918, the draft age was lowered to 18 to include any young man who had reached the age of 18 on or before 12 September. In addition, the draft age was raised to include any man who had not yet reached the age of 46 as of 12 September. This essentially meant that men born 1873-1886 and 1897-1900 were now being registered.

It was estimated that this would result in another 500,000 draft registrations in Pennsylvania.

But what about in the entire US? *The Morning Call* headline on Friday, 13 September 1918, clearly indicated the impact of the latest draft registration: “Like a Mighty Army Thirteen Million Patriotic Americans Were Registered Yesterday.” That was a massive addition to the estimated 11 million that had already registered earlier.

You might wonder why the US was registering more men, when the war was going to end in two months.

Well, the answer is quite simply that no one suspected that the war was going to end in 1918. In fact, the allies (France, England, Belgium and the United States) had already begun planning for spring and summer 1919 offensives. With the declining ability of the French and British to maintain their army strength on the Western Front in Europe, the burden for the war effort in 1919 was going to fall increasingly on the Americans. And so, in September 1918, with the draft expansion, the Americans were preparing to meet that burden.

Some conclusions about the draft in World War I

The United States successfully set up and carried out a registration and draft process on a mass scale in an extremely short span of time. All told, it’s been estimated that between April 1917 (the US declaration of war) and November 1918 (the armistice ending the war) over 24 million men registered for the military. Over 4.5 million men actually served in the military during the war. See

<https://www.ctevans.net/WorldWar1/Data/Visuals/USArmy.html>.

This was an impressive accomplishment by the government administration of the time.

Some World War I information sources

- WW1 veterans service and compensation files (There are two different kinds of records, the short veteran's service record card, and the longer Pennsylvania Veteran's Compensation Application for World War I.)
- US Veterans Burial Cards
- US World War II draft registration cards

Other information sources

- Census records
- Obituaries
- Pennsylvania death certificates
- Find a Grave records

Newspapers

- The Slatington News
- The Morning Call
- The Allentown Leader
- The Allentown Democrat
- The Lehigh Press