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ARTICLE

Disease and Dissent: Progressives, Congress, and the WWI Army Training Camp Crisis

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Abstract

In January 1918, Congress began public hearings on the American war effort in World War I due to widespread reports of gross inefficiency and incompetence within the War Department. In particular, unhealthy conditions and the outbreak of disease at hastily constructed training camps led to the deaths of thousands of newly drafted soldiers and prompted a public outcry. The criticism was led by Democratic Senator George Chamberlain, and the adversarial response of Secretary of War Newton Baker and President Wilson established a cleavage between the legislative and the executive branches during the last year of World War I that carried over into the postwar period. Furthermore, it highlights tensions within the progressive movement, as the use of expanded federal authority led some progressive Democrats to emphasize loyalty to the Wilson administration, while others continued to emphasize reform and governmental transparency.

Keywords: World War I; Army; progressivism; Congress; Woodrow Wilson

In the winter of 1917–18, over 5,000 American soldiers died in training camps in the United States. Crammed into unheated barracks; marching in the snow and mud, sometimes without shoes or overcoats; and without adequate medical staff, conscripted soldiers fell victim to epidemics of measles, mumps, and meningococcal meningitis. During the Progressive Era, reforming political leaders had supported major new public health initiatives, based on hard data and efficient, scientific management, but when the challenges of World War I led to extensive failures to care and protect the health of conscripted soldiers, the progressive leadership fractured, and the Wilson administration only belatedly took steps to improve conditions. This article examines political and military coordination in the first year of U.S. participation in World War I, with a public health crisis in army training camps being a divisive issue between Congress and the administration, and between progressive leaders previously united behind the war effort.

A central figure in the training camp crisis of late 1917 and early 1918 was Oregon Senator George Chamberlain, who had been a passionate defender of the Wilson administration and a staunch supporter of the War Department during the lead-up to

war, in the spring and summer of 1917. Senator Chamberlain would transition to become a senatorial muckraker of what he perceived to be War Department incompetence amid a public health failure in army camps. The shift in Chamberlain's views was the result of real failures by the War Department in its mobilization efforts and political missteps by the Wilson administration as it badly handled wartime congressional relations. The central issue of Chamberlain's criticism, and the core section of this article, was the poor public health conditions at U.S. Army camps, leading to the spread of infectious diseases among the poorly clothed and inadequately housed conscripts. Although creating a massive new infrastructure for a growing military was undoubtably a challenge in 1917, the flawed planning, inefficiency, and seeming lack of interest by military officers and Wilson administration officials in basic requirements was appalling. Unfortunately, for thousands of American soldiers, congressional investigations came too late to prevent their deaths from disease in overcrowded, poorly constructed training camps; and despite significant improvements in camp facilities as a result of congressional interest, the army would continue to have public health issues, and the first documented H1N1 "Spanish flu" case in the United States occurred at an army training camp in Kansas.

More importantly, Senator Chamberlain's hearings in early 1918 led to a new, more adversarial pattern in American civil-military relations, with Congress seeking to hold the administration accountable for the execution of military policies. Through aggressive questioning of senior military officials for a scandal-hungry press, Congress adapted its traditional task of oversight over the military to wartime and the age of mass media. This was a new dynamic of a Congress willing to challenge the policies, not the war itself, but the policies of the commander in chief in a time of war. Senator Chamberlain's technique of critiquing not the war, but American government inefficiency and negligence that put soldiers at risk, would subsequently be used by Democratic senators in World War II, the Korean conflict, the Cold War, and the post-9/11 Iraq War to push for governmental accountability.

Progressives and American Military Affairs

A cornerstone of the diverse progressive movement was the desire for more efficient government, and historical scholarship has examined progressive policies in detail, although research into the policies of the wartime period is more limited. World War I offered progressive leaders in the Wilson administration and Congress an opportunity to enact sweeping new programs, and many progressives endorsed enlarging the size of the federal bureaucracy as well as the vast expansion of the federal governmental policies into the economic and personal spheres of American life. Scholarship has examined the inconsistency of a progressive Wilson administration advocating for conscription, strict censorship, overt dissemination of government propaganda, and the suppression of civil liberties during 1917 and 1918, but comprehensive studies of the nuts and bolts of wartime administration are sorely lacking. In particular, examination of the War Department is very limited, despite the profound role the military and progressive civilian officials such as Secretary of War Newton D. Baker had during the era.

Academic assessments of World War I era civil-military relations and the coordination between the Wilson administration and Congress have shifted several times in the past century. Initial postwar narratives were wildly self-congratulatory, praising

American heroism at the battlefront and united effort on the home front. Frederic Paxson, writing in 1938, noted that "both parties avoided open political aggressiveness," through much of the fall 1918 midterm campaign and that only after the war, when Wilson overreached himself with the Versailles Treaty, did he truly lose congressional support.[1] In the 1960s, a new generation of historians modified the self-congratulatory narratives of the war, noting extensive disagreements over major wartime policies and the budget, although the Wilson administration ultimately prevailed on almost every issue. Seward Livermore's *Woodrow Wilson and the War Congress, 1916–18*, as well as the seminal *The American Military Experience in WWI* by Edward Coffman, both highlight Congress acting as an irritant and restraint on the Wilson administration, rather than Congress as a shaper of wartime policy.[2] In addition, 1960s historians also argued that wartime experiences dampened the self-confidence of the progressive movement as, in the words of Robert Wiebe in *The Search for Order, 1877–1920*, "Wartime rumors of division and disloyalty, hints of a festering radicalism, and labor violence cast more and more doubts on the desirability of further reform …"[3] More recent scholarship, such as Michael McGerr's *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870–1920*, notes that the war emboldened reformers: "U.S. participation in the Great War gave progressives their "hearts desire—the best opportunity they ever had to remake the nation along progressive lines."[4] At the same time, coercive measures used by the Wilson administration exposed internal contradictions within the progressive movement, as shown in Alan Dawley's 2003 work, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution*, "progressives in government stood by and watched as their friends and former associates who refused to support the war were denounced as traitors."[5] While many progressives in government did conform to the wartime atmosphere, this historiography slights the role of Congress, which despite ideological affinities and party loyalties, did not provide the Wilson administration free rein.

A bright spot in an otherwise dated historiography of the Wilson administration and World War I is the examination of progressive social programs in army training camps. In the past two decades, historians trained in social and cultural studies have identified World War I army training camps as a critical site where progressive social reformers sought to use conscription and compulsory "moral education" of soldiers to promote a broader reform agenda. Nancy Bristow's *Making Men Moral: Social Engineering during the Great War* (1996), and Cristopher Capozzola's *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (2008), both highlight the heavy-handed efforts of the wartime "Commission on Training Camp Activities" to promote behavioral and civic norms among the conscripted soldiers.[6] Nancy Gentile Ford skillful examines the ways military officers, social activists, and ethnic leaders worked to use army training as a way to inculcate "dual pride and dual identity," in conscripted soldiers.[7]

Within the federal government, the Wilson administration was similarly willing to use wartime powers to promote progressive social efforts and administrative reforms with mixed results.[8] Stephen Skowronek's *Building a New American State* argues that the scope of World War I revealed severe issues within the American government because of the, "weakness of its bureaucratic machinery for controlling the war effort."[9] Bobby A. Wintermute, in his work on the Army Medical Department similarly finds administrative weakness because the reforms of the Progressive Era were still too new, and authority of military doctors still limited by older customs of deference to military commanders.[10] The army's failure to apply basic public health knowledge, an area in which progressives had accomplished much needed reforms, highlights a disconnect

between progressive ideals, and the inept use of wartime executive power by the Wilson administration to achieve even basic standards of governmental efficiency.

Senator George Chamberlain and the U.S. Army

In the early twentieth century, Senator George Chamberlain of Oregon emerged as an important political leader of the progressive movement, a passionate booster of the American Army and during World War I, an unlikely critic of President Wilson's War Department. As such, the relationship between Senator Chamberlain and both President Wilson and Secretary of War Baker highlights the difficulties, such as balancing the needs for governmental transparency with military restrictions on information, that progressive leaders faced during the wartime period. Despite the prewar shared goals of progressive political leaders in both parties to create a more efficient and transparent government, by early 1918 the Wilson administration abandoned the spirit of investigation, inquiry, and debate, and instead attacked critics of wartime policies as obstructionist and partisan.

Senator George Chamberlain was born in 1854 into a wealthy family in Mississippi and attended Washington and Lee University in Virginia before relocating to Oregon in 1876, where he was apprenticed to a judge before taking the bar exam.[11] Politically ambitious and outgoing, Chamberlain won a seat in the Oregon legislature in 1880 and won the attorney general election in 1892 as a Democrat despite Oregon's strong Republican majority. Unlike progressives in East Coast urban areas or at universities, Chamberlain's progressive ideals needed to be balanced by the practical reality of politics in a state like Oregon, which relied heavily on agriculture and logging, had few major cities, and retained many vestiges of a frontier culture. Chamberlain's ability to attract bipartisan support despite his views as a progressive Democrat was a major factor in his successful campaign for Oregon governor in 1902, his re-election in 1906, and his winning a Senate seat in 1908. Initially assigned to minor committees such as the Committee on Geologic Survey, Chamberlain was able to join the Committee on Military Affairs after the 1912 election, when Democrats gained control of the Senate and Woodrow Wilson, a fellow progressive Democrat, entered the White House.[12] Chamberlain was a strong supporter of Wilson's candidacy and wrote to a friend, "I often congratulate myself that I was one of the original Wilson men and commenced a campaign for him a year before the Baltimore convention was held."[13] When the chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs unexpectedly died of pneumonia in 1913, Chamberlain stepped in as chairman and retained that position through 1919.[14]

Although his own military experience was limited to participation in two small militia call-ups in response to Indian attacks in 1870s Oregon, Chamberlain became a staunch advocate of a large, professional federal military. Chamberlain's personal papers contain his copy of American military theorist Emory Upton's *Military Policy of the United States*, and his notes in the margins and comments show a close reading of the text.[15] Shaped by Uptonian concepts, Chamberlain sought to expand the regular U.S. Army rather than National Guard units and volunteer forces, which Upton's ideology regarded as undisciplined and ineffective soldiers. In his first year as chairman of the Military Affairs Committee, he secured an extra fifty million dollars for the War Department budget as discretionary funding.[16] In 1914, Chamberlain submitted six bills to increase the number of officers on active duty, add 15,000 men to the total personnel strength, and develop a technical branch for specialized military skills such as combat engineering.[17] As the scale of World War I became evident, he supported an expanded U.S. Army of 250,000 regular

army troops and a new reserve system. He stated in 1915, during the National Defense Reorganization Act debate, that "to send 1,000,000 untrained soldiers against a division of trained men would simply mean to send 1,000,000 to their absolute and certain death. There is no question about that."[18] These views aligned with Wilson administration polices outlined by Secretary of War Lindley Garrison, and the *New York Times* reported that after a meeting between President Wilson and Senator Chamberlain there was, "entire harmony upon the general question of national defense."[19]

In the spring of 1916, Chamberlain again demonstrated his energetic support for a strong military and the Wilson administration by sponsoring a proposal to expand the regular army forces rather than the National Guard.[20] Faced with strong opposition in the House, he was only able to secure an expansion of the regular army to 175,000. After the compromise bill passed, a new secretary of war, Newton D. Baker, was appointed to lead the expanding War Department. Only forty-four years old in 1916, Baker's selection was surprising, because he was a former mayor of Cleveland, and a leader in progressive politics, who was known for his diligence in civic improvements such as public transportation and police reform.[21] Despite his credentials as a tireless urban reformer, he lacked any experience or knowledge of military affairs, and at multiple times during his life had declared himself a pacifist (fig. 1).[22]

In the spring of 1917, as the war in Europe became increasingly threatening to the United States, Chamberlain continued to support President Wilson and Secretary Baker. In February 1917, Senator Chamberlain wrote to Baker and offered to lead a volunteer regiment from Oregon if war was declared, but Baker declined the offer and personally thanked him via private letter.[23] Following the U.S. declaration of war on April 6, 1917, Chamberlain brought a "Selective Service" that is, conscription, bill to the floor on April 21, 1917, after personal consultation with the White House and Newton Baker.[24]

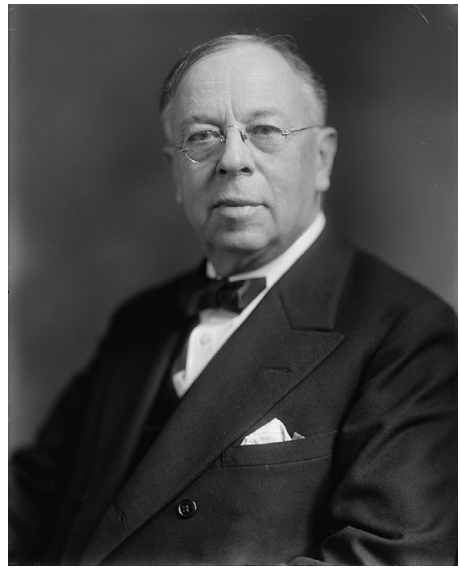

Fig. 1. Senator George E. Chamberlain circa 1920. Image taken from "Senator George E. Chamberlain," Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/pnp/hec/20300/20368r.jpg (accessed May 29, 2021).

Chamberlain also worked to advance other elements of President Wilson's wartime agenda: in July 1917, he introduced a military highways bill that would give the secretary of war authority to begin planning a national highway system to speed the movement of troops in times of war and benefit the economy in peacetime.[25] Senator Chamberlain's apparent submissiveness toward the administration led his opponents to label him as a lackey of President Wilson. Chamberlain responded, "I had rather be charged with following in the footsteps of the distinguished President of the United States in the conduct of this war, crawling, if you please, on my knees and licking the dust from his feet, as has been suggested here in the Senate, than to stand in opposition to him and to be consorting with and conspiring with and creating with the enemies of the President."[26]

Drafted into Squalor: The Training Camp Crisis of 1917–18

For the first year of American involvement in World War I, from April 1917 to April 1918, Secretary of War Newton Baker, young and inexperienced, relied heavily on senior military officers for advice and information.[27] Unfortunately, General Hugh Scott, chief of staff of the army in April 1917 had entered the army in 1876, and his experience was badly outdated for the type of war the United States needed to fight. General Tasker Bliss replaced Scott in September but was equally befuddled, with one observer noting that the general appeared "completed overwhelmed by the job" and that when presented with the details and technical aspects seemed "dazed."[28] In addition, Secretary Baker also frequently carried his progressive inclinations for reform into the military sphere, complicating the chain of command and confusing subordinates by creating new oversight boards and review panels with unclear lines of authority.[29] Moreover, the scale of modern warfare required an expansion of the War Department administration that Baker appeared to not fully comprehend. The prewar general staff, which was responsible for war planning and interdepartmental coordination numbered only forty-one officers, while the German Army used over 600 specially trained officers for the same functions.[30] The result of the poorly organized and ill-managed War Department staff was inefficiency throughout the war effort. For example, it took an average of six days for a telegraph cable from Pershing to reach the desk of the chief of staff and another three to four days for the response to reach France.[31] Despite these bottlenecks, according to Assistant Secretary of War Frederick Keppel, Newton Baker took the view that when faced with disputes, "if you leave them alone many things will settle themselves (fig. 2)."[32]

Administrative dysfunction in the War Department was particularly evident during the construction of new barracks and training areas for the massive, conscripted force authorized by Congress. In May 1917, Secretary Baker ordered the creation of an independent Cantonment Division of the Quartermaster Corps to work with a civilian Committee on Emergency Construction to provide adequate training facilities within six to twelve months.[33] By the summer of 1917, 200,000 civilian workers were constructing new army posts, each designed to hold 40,000 men for basic training. The quantity of material required by this construction project was immense, equivalent to building a city for 1.3 million people.[34] When the first draftees and newly commissioned officers arrived at the sometimes-unfinished camps in the fall of 1917, they drilled in their civilian clothes for weeks and wooden "prop" machine guns and broomstick rifles passed for actual weapons.[35] Over 700 British and French officers were sent to the United States to assist the training and provide firsthand accounts of trench warfare, but a shortage of equipment and specialized facilities hindered detailed instruction.[36]

Fig. 2. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker in 1924. Image taken from "Newton D. Baker," Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsc.03667/ (accessed May 29, 2021).

Ultimately, thirty-two entirely new Army camps were built to train and organize the newly conscripted soldiers and volunteers. A disproportionate number of the camps were located in the southern United States, based on the belief that the gentler winter climate would minimize the need for complex heating and insulation systems. But at many of these southern camps, such as Camp Greene near Charlotte, North Carolina, warmer winter weather created as many problems as it solved. After winter rains in December 1917, Camp Greene became a sea of mud with troops living in tents and sleeping on the ground. The "temporary" nature of the training camps also meant that many, like Camp Greene, did not have plumbing, but relied on open pit latrines which did not freeze in the winter, filled with "six or 8 feet of decaying, putrid, festering animal matter" (fig. 3)[37]

In the late fall of the 1917 the terrible conditions at many of the newly constructed army camps became public knowledge as soldiers wrote their families and legislators to report on the problems faced by soldiers at the camps. Soldiers drafted in the summer of 1917 had been instructed to bring one set of clothing, but when winter arrived and cold weather uniforms were unavailable, many of them were forced to have family members mail them winter jackets and pants.[38] In an extreme case of supply shortages, soldiers training at Camp Custer, Michigan, were forced to take turns wearing shoes for training because only 50 percent of the required shoes had arrived by the winter of 1918.[39] Personal hygiene also suffered and soldiers complained of not being to wash their one set of underwear for a month.[40]

Even in normal circumstances, the movement of tens of thousands of soldiers during the fall and winter would have exposed many men to diseases and illness, but army medical services were also poorly developed. Camp Pike, located seven miles from Little

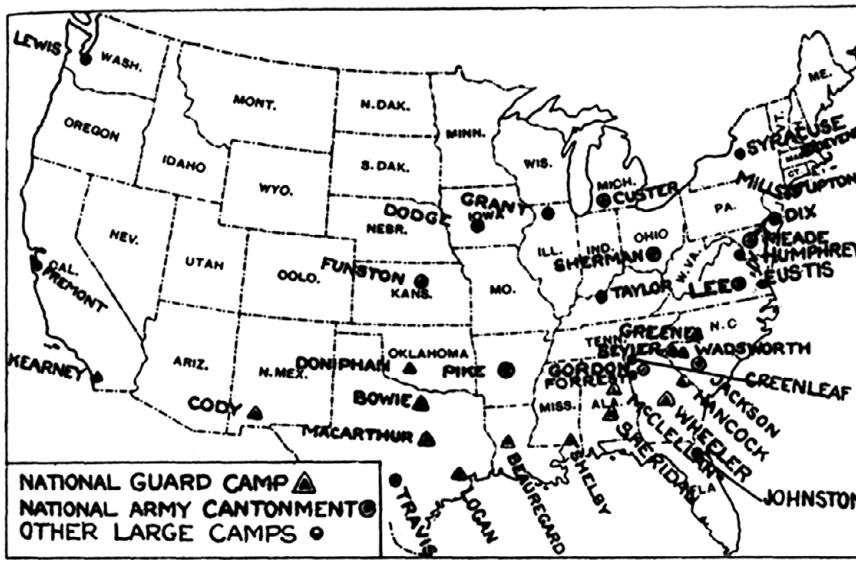

Fig. 3. World War I U.S. Army Training Camps in 1917. Image taken from U.S. Army Medical Department, Office of Medical History, "Map of U.S. Camp Sites," https://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/1918flu/ARSG1919/figures/ARSG1919CampMapp127fig22.jpg (accessed May 29, 2021).

Rock, Arkansas, was typical of the camps hurriedly built in the summer of 1917, with local newspapers filled with glowing statistics about millions of feet of lumber and thousands of workers, but little focus on quality of construction.[41] Accounts by soldiers were less positive, with many reporting they had to wear raincoats while sleeping due to the poorly built barracks roofs (fig. 4).[42]

Camp Pike received its first cohort of drafted men in September 1917, before the camp had been finished and by December 1917 it had 31,500 soldiers in training.[43] The poor design of the sewage system meant that treatment equipment was overwhelmed and raw sewage was collected in open cesspools, and by the spring of 1918 as the cesspools reached full capacity, the raw sewage was shunted directly into a local stream.[44] When the first draft increment arrived at Camp Pike in September 1917, they were exposed to a virulent measles outbreak, which infected 935 men in October; 1,826 in November; and 1,266 in December. A further outbreak of mumps in early 1918 also swept the camp, with 1,140 cases in January 1918.[45] Camp Pike's hospital was unprepared to meet such a large number of cases because the initial construction plan completed in September 1917 had specified a 500-bed hospital, but by October the number of soldiers hospitalized was already double this capacity.[46] Decreasing the amount of space per person in hospital wards and moving beds into hallways and screened (unheated) porches often caused further illnesses such as pneumonia.[47] During the winter of 1917–18, the heating system was described in army records as "very unsatisfactory," with poorly fitted equipment filling with condensation and occasionally bursting due to pressure imbalances.[48] Minor details, such as a lack of sputum cups for expectorate produced by lung infections forced soldiers to spit on the floors. Pharmacy services were also extremely basic due to a lack of trained personnel, and at one camp the role of pharmacist was given to a drafted bartender.[49] When Camp Pike received its first cohort of draftees in September 1917,

Fig. 4. Camp Pike, Arkansas in 1918. Image taken from Library of Congress, "Camp Pike, Arkansas," Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C. http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007664123/ (accessed May 29, 2021).

the medical staff consisted of twenty-six Medical Corps. Officers, two Sanitary Corps officers, and nineteen nurses.[50] The medical staff was not rapidly expanded and by December 1917, the ratio of soldiers to doctors was over 1,000 to 1.

Despite dozens of men dying every week from late November through January, the medical staff at Camp Pike devoted significant time and effort to poorly conceived programs aimed at protecting morality. Following instructions to safeguard drafted soldiers' "social hygiene," meaning venereal disease and alcohol, medical officers at Camp Pike hired private detectives to monitor the area around the camp and the city of Little Rock. On a weekly basis a report was sent to Washington, DC, that detailed the evidence private detectives had gathered on bootleggers and prostitutes in the vicinity of Camp Pike. The Camp Pike report of April 6, 1918, highlights the importance given to these moral issues, stating, "there is nothing more urgent than carrying out the war departments policy of giving the soldier an environment free from immorality and bootlegging."[51]

The result of this overburdened, poorly functioning, and misguided medical system was the death of hundreds of soldiers at Camp Pike alone. In October, 8 soldiers died, followed by 67 in November, 126 in December, 137 in January, 42 in February, 49 in March, and 41 in April. In total, 512 soldiers had died at Camp Pike during its first six months of operation. Although Camp Pike was more deadly than the average training camp, the overall deaths within the 32 training camps was 4,782 for the period from September 1917 through April 1918 (fig. 5).

At Camp Pike, and at the other camps, the bodies of men who had died were often placed outside due to a lack of morgue space until they could be shipped home.[52] The journey of the bodies home was a further indignity, with poorly built coffins and canvas bags used due to the large number of deaths. The Camp Pike undertaker used only one size of coffin, 69 inches, so tall soldiers had their shoes removed and were laid at a diagonal angle, with their knees and arms bent, in order to fit into the small space.[53] Personal belongings, including soldiers' keepsakes, watches, and money were also frequently missing due to what the army called "carelessness."[54] With dozens of men dying every month in many camps, embalming and postmortem preparation was cursory, and family members often opened the coffins shipped home to find bloated and distorted bodies, sometimes with bloody bandages and open wounds with pus exposed, leading some local medical authorities to order the corpses buried immediately, precluding

Camp	Deaths	Camp	Deaths
Green, NC	199	Devens, MA	77
Wadsworth, SC	60	Upton, NY	98
Sevier, SC	212	Dix, NJ	42
Hancock, GA	47	Meade, MD	103
Wheeler, GA	302	Lee, VA	22
McClellan, MS	40	Jackson, SC	185
Sheridan, MS	49	Gordon, GA	148
Shelby, AL	107	Pike, AR	512
Beauregard, LA	234	Custer, MI	96
MacArthur, TX	129	Sherman, OH	151
Doniphan, OK	183	Taylor, KY	167
Bowie, TX	308	Dodge, IA	196
Logan, TX	265	Funston, KS	183
Kearney, CA	86	Travis, TX	214
Fremont, CA	17	Lewis, WA	81
Cody, NM	193	Grant, IL	76

Fig. 5. Deaths Due to Disease at U.S. Army Camps from September 1917 to April 1918. Table data compiled from Major Albert Bowen, *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War: Volume IV* (Washington: GPO, 1928) and *Report of the Surgeon General, U.S. Army to the Secretary of War, 1918* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918); Major Albert G. Love, *The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War: Volume XV, Statistics* (Washington: GPO, 1925).

funerals.[55] In the understated words of a congressional complaint, "incidents such as this are difficult to explain."[56]

Despite these seemingly glaring statistics and numerous failings, the Medical Department and Secretary Baker acted slowly to rectify errors. Baker returned from a tour of new training camps in November 1917 and declared the health of the new soldiers as excellent, while the Surgeon General reported that conditions were "most satisfactory."[57] A Medical Corps. evaluation of Camp Pike from late January 1918 notes dryly that "many unsatisfactory conditions exist there," but concludes that "It is believed that conditions at Camp Pike will improve from now on."[58] While the U.S. Army was more healthy in World War I than during the Spanish-American War, by January of 1918 the army medical departments claim that "Mothers, fathers and wives may rest assured that their fighting men will not have to suffer privation and needless discomfort; that their health will be safeguarded to the fullest extent," was false.[59]

Congressional Investigations

By December 1917 the dysfunction of the War Department led Senator George Chamberlain to begin a series of investigations into mismanagement, fraud, and waste that eventually encompassed five Senate and House Committees. The initial impetus for these investigations were public inquiries. As Senator Chamberlain asserted, members of Congress "were overwhelmed with letters of complaint" about the War Department.[60]

In January 1918, Congress began public hearings and asked Secretary Baker to personally respond to allegations. In particular, the poor conditions of the hastily constructed training camps were a cause of public interest due to the outbreak of contagious diseases at several posts.[61] An investigation by Maj. Gen. William C. Gorgas, the army doctor responsible for eliminating the mosquito threat while building the Panama Canal, testified that errors had definitely occurred. Gorgas cited the poor construction of camp hospitals, a lack of trained nurses, and poor clothing as key factors. Gorgas's investigation revealed sharp discrepancies, such as over 300 soldiers having died at Camp Pike in Arkansas from September 1917 to early January 1918, while only 11 soldiers died at Camp Meade, Maryland.[62] The report found that as a result of management lapses and poor administration, there had been hundreds, if not thousands of preventable deaths.[63] This report caught the attention of others in Congress, and New Jersey Senator Joseph Frelinghuysen joined Chamberlain in his questioning of War Department, alleging "innumerable delays and almost inconceivable blunders" by the administration.[64] The inquiries by Senator Chamberlain, now backed by the army's own medical statistics opened a wedge between Congress and the Wilson administration, but it was the actions of Wilson and his secretary of war that would lead to a breakdown in relations between the two branches of government.

Secretary Baker attempted to blunt public criticism by announcing the formation of a "Military War Council" within the executive branch that would have authority to streamline the production and distribution of supplies, but Baker was vague and did not provide any details on what this council would do or how it would fix the salient issues. Secretary's Baker's condescending response to the concerned senators was that "all men are comfortable," and that any problems had been a result of unspecified "railroad delays."[65] In private, Secretary Baker was equally dismissive, observing about Congress in a letter to a close friend that, "their constituents do put them up to a lot of inquiries and requests which seem to bear a disproportionately small relation to winning the war."[66] President Wilson was even less responsive and made no public statements. Wilson did host Chamberlain and fellow progressive Democratic Senator Gilbert Hitchcock at a private White House dinner, but the president did not heal the growing rift in the Democratic Party, and instead widened the rift between the two branches of government. As Chamberlain recounted, "Senator Hitchcock and I both felt when we left the White House that we had made no impression on the President, as a matter of fact his manner indicated that he was impatient with us."[67]

With no apparent effort by either Secretary Baker or President Wilson to reform policies, Chamberlain upped the ante by engaging in direct public criticism of the administration. At a luncheon on January 21, 1918, organized by the non-partisan National Security League to honor Senator Chamberlain and Congressman Julius Kahn (R-CA) for their vital role in passing the 1916 Defense Reorganization Act, Chamberlain stated,

> the military establishment of America has fallen down. There is no use to be optimistic about a thing that does not exist. It almost stopped functioning, my friends. Why? Because of inefficiency in every Bureau and in every Department of the Government of the United States.[68]

The crowd gave the speech a standing ovation and the text of the speech was reprinted by media outlets throughout the country. The *New York Times* ran a front-page story the next day stating that mobilization had reached a "crisis" point due to the War

Department, "muddling along with old forms, methods, and procedures that are obsolete."[69] President Wilson wrote to Chamberlain and asked if the newspapers had quoted the speech correctly, to which Chamberlain replied in a private letter that his speech had been reported correctly but was extemporaneous and did not represent a premeditated attack or personal criticism of President Wilson.[70]

Rather than attempt to rebuild Democratic Party unity, President Wilson released a statement alleging that Senator Chamberlain's comments "distorted the truth" and attacking Chamberlain's motives, which Wilson claimed "sprang out of personal opposition to the administration's policies, rather than out of any serious intention to reform its practice."[71] These dismissive responses only piqued congressional interest, and to buttress and elaborate on his New York comments, Senator Chamberlain gave a three-hour speech on the Senate floor on January 24, 1918, to make his case for reform. Chamberlain argued that, "we have not been able to do what Great Britain has done and what France has done and what Italy has done and what every one of our allies has been able to do, and that is to retire these gentlemen who have not proved themselves up to the mark when it comes to getting ready for war."[72] Chamberlain continued with a series of personal stories, drawn from letters by family members of soldiers that described poor medical treatment and illness due to poorly built camps. In one heart-rending letter, Chamberlain recounted the story of a family that went to visit their son at training camp, only to find his dead body uncovered and laying in a hospital hallway.[73] Another letter stated that their son had gone to training camp and after dying of illness, his naked body was shipped home wrapped in a sheet, with a paper name tag attached with a safety pin.[74] The personal stories that Chamberlain cited in his speeches and in questioning of War Department officials and military officers were drawn from hundreds of letters addressed to Chamberlain by worried parents, soldiers, and concerned citizens, and in several cases sworn and witnessed affidavits. A woman from Brooklyn wrote that after visiting her son at nearby Camp Upton, and seeing him marching without shoes she became incredibly angry and that, "I am a poor wash woman and make my living at this, but I would starve myself to buy my boys shoes if the government cannot afford it."[75] Many letter writers also highlighted that the high number of deaths in camps was negatively impacting morale and hurting the war effort on the home front, "We sure don't want to be slackers but if this matter is not adjusted we are going to have some trouble getting our boys off to Camp Pike."[76]

To back up these anecdotal accounts, Chamberlain provided concrete numbers drawn from medical reports showing thirty-eight deaths from pneumonia from one training camp (Camp Beauregard) in the month of November 1917 alone. Camp Bowie in Texas reported similar numbers, with forty-two dead from pneumonia in November 1917. Many of these illnesses were compounded by a lack of cold weather clothing, especially coats and blankets. The situation was so severe that the commanding general of the Thirty-Sixth Division stationed in Texas coordinated with the local Red Cross to collect donated sweaters for his troops.[77] These systematic problems had a severe impact and Gorgas testified that between September 21, 1917. and January 18, 1918, 2,918 soldiers died in training camps of disease and illness. Tellingly, drafted soldiers and federalized National Guard personnel were dying at a rate double that of regular army troops assigned to camps built before 1917.[78]

Chamberlain also attacked the condescending tone of the Wilson administration, noting that President Wilson had remarked that "Nothing helpful or likely to speed or facilitate the war tasks of the Government has come out of such criticism and investigation," and argued that criticism only slowed the work of officials.[79] Chamberlain

stated that he was not fulfilling his personal responsibilities or his senatorial role if he became a "rubber stamp" for the administration. Chamberlain closed his lengthy speech by noting that despite his years of hard work, he felt betrayed by the administration, which had shunned him for daring to criticize not people, but policy failures. In a grandiose finale, Chamberlain compared himself to Caesar stabbed by Brutus, because Secretary Baker and President Wilson, men who he had respected and trusted, had chosen to attack his motives and character rather than deal with the problem.[80] Media coverage of Chamberlain's speech was extensive and very favorable, and the *New York Times* reported, "the people have lost faith in the War Department as at present organized. They would welcome legislation that relieved the department of a part of the heavy burden it has been staggering under, that promised concentration of authority, friction-less co-ordination, quick and satisfactory manufacture of equipment and munitions, new methods and new men, and a general acceleration of the conduct of the war."[81]

Faced with a barrage of congressional and public criticism, Secretary Baker considered resigning, but President Wilson and other cabinet officials convinced Baker to respond to congressional accusations with a vigorous defense. Baker, a former lawyer, attempted to discredit specific incidents and charges, while remaining vague on larger mobilization issues, in effect to win on technicalities without engaging in substantive debate. In six hours of feisty testimony in front of the Senate, Baker defended his record and concluded that "no army of similar size in the history of the world has ever been raised, equipped, or trained so quickly."[82] Baker noted that the unprecedented expansion of the army from a small force of 202,000 officers and men on April 1, 1917, into 1.6 million men on December 1, 1917, had been a difficult process and some degree of discomfort was inevitable.[83] Despite Baker's combative rebuttal, the dozens of witnesses, including many army officers forced to testify under oath, gave Congress and scandal-hungry reporters a thorough picture of War Department dysfunction and incompetence. Moreover, Secretary Baker's often snarky tone and condescending statements did not pass unnoticed, with the *New York Times* reporting, "his complacency and smartness of rejoinder when asked legitimate questions did not become an official with his powers and responsibilities."[84]

Contemporary accounts suggest an improvement in War Department activity following the hearings. Senator Gore of Oklahoma, home of one of the largest training camps remarked, "I was informed soon afterwards by one of the leading citizens of my town that within 24 hours after the Senator's [Chamberlain's] speech of criticism, conditions began to improve at Camp Doniphan; that the improvement was immediately noticeable."[85] Chamberlain's efforts also led soldiers and family members to deluge his office with numerous specific complaints and appeals about poor conditions and flawed policies, many of which were forwarded to the War Department for detailed responses.[86] In an attempt at transparency, in late April, the War Department began released a list of deaths in U.S. training camps every week.[87]

At Camp Pike, less than a week after Chamberlain's speech and Baker's testimony, a much more open and honest tone was shown in medical department reports. A January 30, 1918, report called for new barracks construction to be sharply accelerated, laundry facilities be expanded, more nurses added, and that sanitary conditions in the hospitals be improved immediately. The report also suggested medical staff inform training officers that heavy exercise in full clothing, training during inclement weather, and regulations to leave windows open were negatively impacting overall camp health.[88]

Stung by accurate and highly public criticism from Congress, major changes in the War Department administration occurred as Secretary Baker and President Wilson were able to persuade complaint Democrats to put pass bills to improve the War Department,

especially by creating two additional assistant secretary of war positions on April 6, 1918, to increase administrative oversight.[89] To resolve supply issues, Secretary Baker recalled to active duty Maj. Gen. George Goethals, builder of the Panama Canal, to serve as quartermaster general and impose efficiency on the supply system.[90] The general staff also received a boost with the appointment of Peyton March as chief of staff in March 1918. March, more than ten years younger than General Bliss or Scott, was irascible and blunt, with a strong domineering personality and a demanding work ethic, and he quickly energized the War Department with a sense of purpose, diligence and ruthless efficiency.[91]

Legacies and Impact

This article has presented a historical case study of the fracturing of elements of the progressive movement, as the stresses of World War I military expansion led to a public health crisis in army camps and personal animosities created tensions between loyalty to the Wilson administration and the need for reform. Although the Wilson administration did eventually make changes, their efforts came too late for thousands of American soldiers that died during the winter of 1917–18, and it was too late to avoid losing congressional support. Senator George Chamberlain was able to focus congressional attention on major flaws in the administration of the War Department and shine a spotlight on deaths in training camps. Looking at the role of Congress in World War I more broadly, we see that an initial spirit of deference to executive authority, which resulted in the granting of very large areas of authority, and huge budget allocations during the early months of the war, did not result in administration efficiency. After December 1917, Congress took a more adversarial role and focused public attention on very deadly and neglected problems.

After the war, the large number of training camp deaths and the congressional investigation was quietly buried in postwar histories produced by the War Department. As early as mid-1918, Surgeon General Gorgas attempted to sidestep the issue of camp deaths by using historical data from 1820 to 1917 that highlighted a gradual decline in disease rates and deaths among military personnel, rather than discuss the sharp increase in deaths from 1916 to 1917.[92] The official history written by the Army Medical Department does not seriously address the failures of late 1917, noting blithely, "Camps, hurriedly constructed, became crowded, and a series of epidemics of measles, mumps, and meningococcal meningitis passed through them. These were not too serious."[93] In the summer of 1918, the second wave of the Spanish flu, an H1N1 influenza, spread rapidly through the United States and military installations, presenting policy makers with a broader public health crisis.[94]

Explaining the harsh political response of the Wilson administration to Senator Chamberlain's accurate criticism highlights several aspects of the progressive movement's internal contradictions during World War I. Many progressive leaders, such as Secretary of War Baker, took criticism personally and ascribed bad motives to those that questioned policy. The primary men in this historical study were progressives that certainly saw themselves, in the words of Richard Hofstadter as "men of good will," engaged in a noble effort.[95] However, as David Trask has observed, within progressive leadership there was a "tendency to attribute evil rather than misjudgment to those who criticized."[96] This split persona, with laudable ideals for moving society and humanity forward to a better world often mixing with personal relationships tinged with raw and frequently base emotions of

anger, jealously, and vindictiveness, was clearly evident in 1917 and 1918. Wilson and Baker's desire for loyalty above all else from fellow progressives and their lack of support for legitimate investigations appear to have more in common with the actions of the bosses of a political machine than the leaders of a diverse progressive coalition.

Although the Wilson administration survived the exposure of what Senator Henry Cabot Lodge called, "enough information to defeat a dozen Administrations," the relationship was between the administration and Congress in World War I was irrevocably broken.[97] Without respectful coordination between the legislative and executive branches, Congress in World War I was forced to adopt a much more adversarial posture to make an impact on military policy and prevent unnecessary deaths among drafted soldiers. During the following century, congressional leaders, most notably Democratic senators, have followed in Senator Chamberlain's footsteps to investigate wartime spending and administration policies, targeting waste and inefficiency, rather than critiquing the war directly. During World War II, Missouri Senator Harry Truman chaired a special ongoing committee to investigate the National Defense Program, examining cost overruns and corruption in government contracting. The Truman Committee catapulted the relatively unknown senator to national attention as the watchdog of the War Department. In 1950, freshman Senator Lyndon B. Johnson chaired a Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, examining government spending after the outbreak of the Korean War. During the Reagan administration defense buildup in the 1980s, Democratic Senator Gary Hart established the Military Reform Caucus, whose members pushed for increased oversight and investigations of defense acquisitions. More recently, in 2007, Democratic Senators Jim Webb and Claire McCaskill worked to create what became the Commission on Wartime Contracting in Iraq and Afghanistan after reports that the Department of Defense had spent billions of dollars for minimal results due to poor planning, mismanagement, and fraud. In this respect, Senator Chamberlain's tactics for demanding accountability from the military and administration has continued to serve as a useful tool for progressive legislators long after the memories of Wilson administration incompetence have faded.

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