

The Draft Board

On a warm summer day in the summer of 1914, a shot was fired which echoed and reëchoed across the mighty oceans and through the great continents.

It started a conflagration which involved the world and was known as the World War. At first the war spread over the plains and mountains of Europe, but soon it extended to Asia and Africa, and the islands of the sea. In a short time it spread to the farthest parts of the world.

For months and years our country looked on and acted the part of the innocent bystander. While some realized the great conflagration would sooner or later involve us in the struggle, we hoped against hope that it would pass us by. Vain hope! We maintained our strict neutrality even when our rights were violated; our happiness and peace trodden underfoot. At last it was seen that we could no longer avoid our plain duty if we wished to preserve our sovereign dignity and the President advised and Congress acted by declaring that a state of war existed and passed a war measure called the conscription bill, requiring all males between the ages of 21 and 31 to register for war purposes. Later amendments were passed requiring males over 18 years of age and to 45, inclusive, to register. Draft Boards for districts and counties were organized to register and number the ten millions of men who were required to register. In our county the Sheriff, W. S. Gove, and the County Auditor, C. O. Edge, were selected by the Governor of Iowa and the President to act as members of the Local Board. Also Dr. E. F. Besser was selected as the third member of the Board. The Board organized in 1917 by the selection of W. S. Gove as chairman and C. O. Edge as secretary. Mr. Gove acted as chairman until his death in August, 1918, at which time he was succeeded by C. O. Edge as chairman. T. J. Patton who had been the clerk of the Local Board was then appointed a member of the Local Board and was selected as the secretary and these two with Dr. E. F. Besser continued as the Local Board until the finishing up of the work.

On June 5, 1917, the first great registration was held all over the United States. In this county over 2,500 men registered on that date. In the different registrations held, there was a grand total of nearly 6,000 men registered. Our Local Board entered upon its duties at once and on August 2, 3, and 4 physically examined nearly 500 men and later in the month examined 200 additional men and was ready for the first call for troops.

In September, 1917, we sent eleven men, the vanguard of the nearly 1,600 sent from this county, and later during the same month we sent 92 or 93 men, and at different times the county furnished its quota until the final call for November 11, 1918. On that date we had our men assembled at the Court House waiting for further orders, but the signing of the armistice on that date rendered it unnecessary for them to entrain.

The registering and classification of men required a vast amount of work, as each man was allowed to file claims for exemption in classes as provided for by the rules governing their cases, there being Classes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

In the classification we were ordered to send the questionnaires out on a certain date, with instructions to return them within seven days. This plan for classification was provided for after the first troops had been sent in September, 1917, and the first ques-

tionnaires were mailed out about December 9, 1917, and began to come back on December 15, 1917. The Local Board began at once to classify them and forwarded some of them that same day to the District Board at Des Moines, Iowa. Our Board was the first one in the Southern District of Iowa to forward questionnaires. The District Board reviewed them at once and we were informed on December 17, 1917, of its findings.

It might be mentioned here that the Local Board passed on the question of dependency and the District Board on the question of occupation. All questionnaires having occupational claims were sent to Des Moines even if they had claims on dependency. The most deferred class governed the final classification. For instance, if a registrant was placed in Class 4 by the Local Board on dependency and the District Board placed him in Class 2 or 3 on occupation, he would still be in Class 4, while if the local board placed registrant in Class 2 or 3 on dependency and the District Board placed him in Class 4 on occupation, the latter class would govern.

It is impossible to narrate the many incidents in connection with the work. The many pathetic, the many humorous. Some were anxious to be placed in Class 1 when they should have asked to be deferred. Some, it seemed, should not have asked for exemption and did. But on the whole, the Local Board was proud of the many who seemed so willing to go and wanted to safely pass the physical examination. The 1587 stars on the service flag speak a language of themselves. It shows to the citizens of the future that Jasper County did her full share and furnished her full quota on every call and helped to fill out the quotas of some other counties who were short of men to fill their quotas. And the 53 gold stars. How can we speak of them? They represent 53 of Jasper County's best and noblest. When the call came for them to answer to their country's need, it was not theirs to question why. Theirs only to answer, Here. And now they sleep the last long sleep. Some sleep in Flanders field where poppies blow, some sleep in the English churchyard, and some sleep in the cemetery of their own home town. But be it near, or be it far, where they are sleeping the years of their manhood away, their lives will ever be remembered by a grateful people. As the years of the future stretch out into the unknown centuries, they will stand with the men of Bunker Hill and Saratoga and Yorktown, of Gettysburg and Vicksburg and Appomattox. We will ever hold their memory dear.

May the Great God of the Universe so will it, that there may never again be a call for like services. But if again, in future years, the call may come, we who have looked into the eager, brave and noble faces of the young manhood of America know that there will be no danger to our country, no alarm for our safety, as we gather at our firesides. But they will stand together as they have in the past, with faith to stand for the right, as God gave them to see the right, with the free blue sky above their heads and freedom's soil beneath their feet.