

Vacans supported their troops overseas

By Sabine Goerke-Shrode

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The years 1917 and 1918, when the United States sent troops to the European battlefields, also brought much change to the people back home. Nationally and locally, efforts were under way to support the war and the young men fighting overseas in particular.

By June 1917, calls to subscribe for a Liberty Bond came up, and Vacans subscribed generously. They also rallied for the Red Cross Fund. Its goal was to raise \$100,000,000 throughout the country. Vacaville was allotted \$5,000 and by July, its citizens were just \$600 short. The pressure on everybody in this small community to contribute was evident when the Vacaville Reporter announced on July 6, 1917: "It is expected the coming week will see the full amount subscribed. There are a number well able to give who have not done so. It is hoped that they will see their duty and contribute liberally within the next few days. Not only is it a great cause, but Vacaville's name is at stake. We cannot afford to fail."

Food shortages were another concern. On June 29, 1917, a letter to the editor suggested some creative solutions: "Now that Vacaville has oversubscribed for the Liberty Bond and is hard at it for the Red Cross, why not try something else?

"Let us have three food-saving days a week.

"On Wednesday let us save as much wheat as possible. Ask the stores and bakeries to sell graham bread, which is the whole wheat and no waste, or better still, rye bread, and every housewife who knows how should bake cornbread on Wednesday ...

"On Thursday of every week let us do without potatoes Did you ever stop to think that if one day a week not a potato was used, how many pounds would be saved in Vacaville?

"Friday is fish day. Let us make it a big fish day. ... Use eggs, but save the meat, so that the cold storage plants will be full by winter. ...

"To the wife who reads it: Do you not think it a good and easy plan? Don't wait for your neighbor to start it, but tell her you are going to do your part on next Wednesday and keep it up." The letter was signed by "Doing My Bit."

The Red Cross held a prominent column in each Reporter edition, announcing sales of potted plants to raise funds, knitting classes and plans to send Christmas parcels with gifts such as writing paper, tobacco, dominoes and handkerchiefs to each and every soldier.

By October 12, nearly 300 of Solano County's contingent of 356 men had left for the training camps spread throughout the country. Incidentally, on the same day, the Vacaville Reporter also wrote about an outbreak of anthrax, which killed several hundred head of cattle belonging to Sheriff J. J. McDonald and to C. M. Hartley. Asa Hyde, an employee of the McDonald Ranch, had become infected and died from the disease.

On Nov. 9, an appeal went out to Vacaville women from Mrs. Edward C. Crystal, Chairman of the Vacaville chapter. "I wish that I might be able to impress upon each and every one of you the great need we have for Red Cross workers, in the sewing room, in the knitting section, in the surgical dressings department, ... and last, but not least, workers who neither sew nor knit, but can aid by monthly contributions of money."

The money, she continued, was not only intended for the American soldiers but also to aid the French who had fought for the last three years. "Of course we are all anxious to see our boys in America taken care of, but they will all be reasonably well cared for, while thousands of soldiers in Europe will have no way of keeping warm except by the clothing they have."

A Red Cross Christmas membership drive was announced on Dec. 14, urging every citizen and every alien to join "sometime between Monday morning and Christmas Eve." The committee behind the drive consisted of Mr. F. B. McKevitt, Mr. Chas. H. Forster, Mr. George Akerly, Mr. Rogers, Miss Edith Harbison and Miss Allen.

The drive was very successful; 850 new members had signed up by Dec. 28.

By that time, many young men were stationed somewhere in France and glad to receive a package from home. On Nov. 26, 1917, Walter H. Woods wrote a letter to the Red Cross that was published on Dec. 21: "To the kind Ladies and Members of the Vacaville Red Cross. Just a few lines of thanks for the kit that you sent me, and which was received in good shape. I hardly know how to thank you, for you have no idea how us boys appreciate a gift in any kind from the U.S.A. and friends at home. Thanking you once more will close. From a Vacaville Soldier Boy in France."

Underneath this little letter was the first announcement for a new campaign. This time, the call went out to contribute 25 cents for a tobacco kit, because "Boys in France Call

For Tobacco.

"The American boys in France want some good old American tobacco and Vacaville is appealed to do its share in seeing that they have this comfort. Only a smoker knows the comfort of a good smoke and none can realize how much it means to the men under nervous tension in the trenches and while undergoing all manner of hardship at the front.

"The Reporter has arranged with the American Tobacco Company of New York whereby for every 25 cents contributed by the people of Vacaville the company will supply tobacco and cigarettes to the value of 45 cents, all put in neat paper boxes, send the same to France, and enclose with each package a stamped postal with your name on it, so that the soldier who receives it can write a little message."

On Jan. 18, 1918, some \$89 was sent to provide 356 tobacco kits. By the end of the fund drive, on May 24, the six-months-long campaign raised \$300. At that time, tobacco became part of the rations issued to the soldiers.

On July 19, 1918, the Vacaville Reporter published one of those postal cards, self-addressed to Bert Evans: "Friday, June 21, 1918 - Dear Sir: I received your package of smokes and was very much pleased. Tobacco is hard to get over here. It is great to know that the people at home are caring for us in some way while we are over there fighting. Thanking you kindly, I remain a friend and soldier. F. Ledwirth."

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