

The Makin's TOBACCO & OF A Nation WORLD WAR I

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Curriculum

- 1. Identify why soldiers who fought in World War I wanted cigarettes. What benefits did cigarettes supposedly have for soldiers over other popular forms of tobacco such as cigars, pipes, and chewing tobacco?**

Cigarettes were considered so essential that they were included in standard rations for American troops.(1) Cigarettes were believed to calm the nervous tension of combat and to relieve the tedious and claustrophobic life in the trenches. They also were provided to wounded and dying soldiers as a “last earthly comfort.” Cigarettes were preferred by most soldiers over pipes and cigars for their ease of use, ready availability, and cleanliness compared to chewing tobacco.(2)

- 2. Discuss how public health organizations either embraced or resisted the distribution of cigarettes to soldiers in WWI. How were cigarette companies involved in these efforts?**

Many civic, fraternal, and public health organizations were involved in raising funds for the distribution of cigarettes to soldiers in World War I, including the American Red Cross, the Knights of Columbus, the Young Men’s Christian Association and Young Women’s Christian Association (which had both long opposed cigarette smoking), women’s auxiliaries of medical societies, and a host of “Tobacco Funds.” (3) The first of these, “Our Boys in France Tobacco Fund,” advertisements for which were published in leading newspapers, was set up by the American Tobacco Company.(2)

- 3. In World War I, what was the connection between music, patriotism, and tobacco?**

Few Americans could imagine the horrors of battle and the awful conditions in Europe, but by making a small sacrifice of a few coins, they could help provide a soldier overseas with a token of appreciation in the form of a cigarette or a pouch of tobacco.(4) The popular songs featured in the exhibition that implore people to donate to the various Tobacco Funds.(5)

4. Discuss the consequences of the increasing industrialization of society on the decades leading up to World War I.

Industrialization revolutionized the production of arms and supplies for the war effort and allowed for the massive artillery barrages and machine gun killing fields that were hallmarks of the conflict. As with bullets, shells, uniforms, and food stuffs, the mass production of cigarettes beginning in the 1880s made them inexpensive and widely available--and opened the door to the consumer culture that would engulf America after the war.(6)

5. Discuss the long-term impact of cigarettes on soldiers who took up smoking in World War I.

Because of their low cost, wide availability, and ease of use, cigarettes became the preferred method of tobacco consumption across the world, supplanting cigars and pipes of previous generations. (2) Through its association with soldiers, cigarette smoking also took on an air of sophistication and rugged manliness. The most devastating legacy of soldiers taking up smoking during the war was the insidious damage to their health.(7)

6. Who was Alton Ochsner and why is he important to this story?

Dr. Alton Ochsner was a thoracic surgeon who in the 1930s helped make the initial connection between lung cancer and cigarette use among soldiers who has taken up smoking in World War I.(8)

7. How did cigarette makers use the war to promote their products to the general public?

Cigarette advertisements during World War I featured images of the American flag, the bald eagle, the United States Capitol building, and the heroic doughboy in his round helmet and carrying a bayoneted rifle.(9) Equating the cigarette with the war effort deflected any objections to cigarette use by soldiers as unseemly or unhealthy and solidified the notion that, as General John J. Pershing (commander of the American Expeditionary Forces on the Western Front) remarked, tobacco was as crucial as bullets in winning the war.(10)

8. What changes did the war bring about in tobacco use among women?

Women participated the war effort as nurses and support staff. Some helped distributed cigarettes and other staples to the soldiers.(11) Such roles helped spark the gender revolution of the 1920s that saw more women smoking cigarettes. In addition, cigarette advertisers also increasingly targeted women.

9. According to Rick Richards, MD why did many in the military continue to take up cigarette smoking even into the 1980s?

One major reason was the discounted price of cigarettes in military commissaries, In addition soldiers were not permitted breaks as in many other workplaces. There was, however, an exception if one wished to smoke a cigarette. Many soldiers thus took up smoking in order to be able to have a break from work.(12)

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- ¹² “Observations on tobacco in the military (7:44)” Rick Richards, MD (Audio Clip.) The Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society: The Makin’s of a Nation Tobacco & World War I, <https://csts.ua.edu/wwi/the-lasting-wounds/>

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