early a century ago, thousands of young Alabamians departed our state, bound for the war-torn battlefields of France. Alabama troops fought in pivotal battles during the last year of World War I, often with distinction. On the home front, citizens from all walks of life worked in factories and participated in volunteer efforts to support the war. Just as World War I marked the emergence of the U.S. as a world power, it strengthened the ties between state and nation in a rebirth of patriotic fervor.

Next year will mark the centennial of American’s entry into World War I, a war that profoundly shaped the course of the 20th Century. More American servicemen died in World War I than in the Korean and Vietnam Wars combined, yet today, their sacrifices remain largely forgotten. Alabama’s newly formed World War I Centennial Committee is embarking on a statewide mission to educate our citizens, honor those who served and commemorate the centennial of the Great War.

Alabama World War I Centennial Committee

In the spring of 2016, the first meeting of the Alabama World War I Centennial Committee was held at the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery. The American centennial period will officially begin on April 6, 2017, one hundred years after the U.S. entered the war, and will extend through Armistice Day, November 11, 2018. The committee is co-chaired by Steve Murray, director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, and Maj. Gen. Perry G. Smith, adjutant general of the Alabama National Guard. Nimrod T. Frazer, author of Send the Alabamians, serves as honorary chairman. Comprised of more than 30 scholars and military, government and community leaders, the committee is tasked with planning and implementing commemorative programs, educational events, and initiatives throughout the state during the centennial period.

The group will work closely with the United States World War One Centennial Commission to ensure that the experiences and sacrifices of Alabamians during World War I are remembered and commemorated. The committee is also working to create a new generation of Alabama historians who can carry on the legacy of remembering our state’s role in World War I.

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World War I victory parade for the 167th Infantry regiment on Commerce Street (at the intersection with Tallapoosa Street) in Montgomery, Alabama, May 1919. (Photo courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama)
the Great War are remembered. The U.S. Commission was created by an act of Congress in 2013 to plan World War I commemorative events and activities throughout the centennial period. Its 12 members were appointed by the President and the leaders of the Senate and House of Representatives as well as the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and the National World War I Museum. All four living Presidents serve on the Commission as honorary chairs.

In attendance at the first meeting of the Alabama World War I Centennial Committee was U.S. Commissioner Monique Seefried. She remarked: “As a U.S. World War I Centennial Commissioner, I am proud that Alabama has taken this important first step towards honoring the Alabamians who sacrificed greatly in service to their country nearly a century ago.” Programs of the Alabama committee will include developing a comprehensive list of World War I monuments throughout the state, public programs, lectures, symposiums in partnership with scholars and educational institutions and the development of publications.

Alabama World War I Centennial Website Launched

In late summer, the committee launched a website hosted by the United States World War I Centennial Commission: www.worldwar1centennial.org/alabama. The site includes a wealth of information and resources about Alabama during World War I that will continue to be updated and enhanced with new content throughout the centennial period.

A key feature of the site is the Centennial Blog. Frequent new posts include details about the activities of the committee, projects happening around the state and fascinating collections and stories from the war. Over the next two years, the blog will grow to become a rich resource for discovering the wartime experiences of Alabamians and for staying up-to-date about centennial activities and events happening in communities around the state.

The site also includes an Alabama events calendar that is already populated with many activities scheduled over the next two years. The calendar is integrated with the U.S. Commission’s calendar, providing national promotion for activities happening in Alabama.
Committee Requests Information About Statewide WWI Monuments

At its fall meeting in Montevallo in October, the committee launched the *Alabama World War I Monuments and Memorials Project* to document all of our state’s WWI monuments and sites in their local communities. For the project to be a success, the committee is asking Alabamians from across the state to provide information about World War I monuments and sites in their local communities. These efforts will result in the development of an important new resource that will become a lasting legacy of Alabama’s World War I centennial commemoration. To participate, visit the “Monuments, Memorials, & Historic Sites” section of [www.worldwar1centennial.org/alabama](http://www.worldwar1centennial.org/alabama) to view an interactive map. If your local site(s) is not included, or if you have additional information or photographs to include, contact Graham Neeley at graham.neeley@archives.alabama.gov or call (334) 353-4629.

Community Participation Encouraged!

Of the 95,000 Alabamians who served in World War I, 3,000 became casualties. A century later, the Alabama World War One Centennial Commission is working to ensure that their service and sacrifices are remembered and that the causes and consequences of the Great War are understood by future generations of Alabamians. However, this small committee cannot do it alone. It needs the support and engagement of local communities and citizens who understand the significance of this centennial milestone and the importance of encouraging all Alabamians to remember the war and commemorate its legacy. To learn more about the Alabama World War I Centennial Committee and how you and your community can get involved, contact Amy Williamson at amy.williamson@archives.alabama.gov or (334) 353-4689.

Plan a WWI Community Observance in Your Municipality

By Mayor Gary Fuller, Opelika and Alabama World War I Centennial Committee Member

Alabama municipalities have a special opportunity in the next two years to honor the service and sacrifice of our residents who contributed to the Allied victory in World War I. A century ago, young men – and some women – left their hometowns to don a uniform and travel to a war zone that seemed very far away. From their arrival in France in late 1917 until the armistice of November 11, 1918, they comprised the forces that broke a four-year stalemate and ushered in a new period of peace.

One of the most memorable occasions of my life was attending the November 2011 dedication of a memorial in Croix Rouge, France, to the Alabamians in the 167th Infantry Regiment, a leading unit of the famed 42nd Rainbow Division. It is a moving tribute to the Alabamians who stepped on the world stage and demonstrated amazing courage under terrifying conditions.

Relatively few residents of our state will ever visit Croix Rouge and the other battlefields in France. This makes it incumbent upon us to commemorate at home the service of those overseas, as well as the many volunteers on the home front who grew victory gardens, made bandages for the Red Cross and promoted war bond drives.

I hope you will engage the resources compiled by the Alabama World War I Centennial Committee, on which I am pleased to serve, and start planning your community’s observance of this historic anniversary.