

While researching 142 men and women from my community who served in WWI for a book I was writing (*Greene-Dreher in the Great War*), I discovered Charles Wesley Carlton, a YMCA Secretary in France and Italy. The selfless contributions of the men and women in non-government organizations during the war was as important to winning the war as the work of those who wore the military uniform.

Among the 61,000 YMCA workers who served during World War I was Charles Wesley Carlton. Charles was born in 1882 in LaAnna, the fourth of Lewis and Jessie Lancaster Carlton's seven children. His two younger brothers, James and John, would serve in the army during the war and return safely home.

Charles graduated from Greene-Dreher High School in 1903 and attended the Scranton Business College (SBC). After graduation he taught penmanship, bookkeeping, and spelling at the college until 1909. While he lived in Scranton, Charles was active in the community. He was elected President of Vesper Literary League, Scranton; received his license to preach as a lay minister at the Elm Park Methodist Church in Scranton and occasionally preached at the South Sterling Methodist Church; and was a member of the Scranton YMCA.

Furthering his education, Charles attended Wyoming Seminary in Kingston beginning in 1909. Wyoming Seminary was a Methodist college preparatory school and Charles excelled in his academic work, becoming an honor student. He took courses in Latin, Greek, French, English, Algebra and Geometry and was elected President of Seminary's YMCA Chapter.

In 1911, Charles enrolled in Syracuse University. Again, he excelled in his academic work and was inducted in Phi Beta Kappa, the nation's most prestigious honor society. He was elected president of his senior class, president of the university's chapter of the YMCA and selected editor for the university's newspaper. After graduating in 1914 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Charles remained at the university earning a Master of Arts degree in psychology in 1916 and became part of the university's faculty where he taught psychology.

Between 1915 and 1917, Charles was General Secretary for university's YMCA, scheduling programs, arranging for instructors, overseeing the management and financial aspects of the organization. In the fall of 1917 he served as Secretary for the YMCA in New York City, raising funds for the work of the YMCA both on the home front and on the front lines. The YMCA needed funds in their work to support the new enlistees at home, in training camps, on troop ships transiting the Atlantic and on the battlefield. It set up nearly 2000 centers to provide musical entertainment, movies, theatrical talent, dinner parties, social function, religious meetings, counselling, refreshments, showers, gyms, and facilitated sending telegrams to and from family. (1)

Between 1917 and 1921, Charles served as YMCA secretary and director in France and Italy. He travelled to his first assignment for the YMCA in France on a United States troop ship. The soldiers on board lived in crowded conditions and had limited movement onboard. The transit was slow in order to keep the ships in the convoy together and the threat of attack by German U-boats was ever present. Under these stressful conditions, he coordinated activities for the troops by providing movies and victrolas, organizing boxing matches, supplying writing paper, cigarettes, chocolate, lemons and sour pickles for seasickness and most importantly moral support through daily conversations with the troops onboard. Charles and the other YMCA secretaries were part of the only welfare organization which served our military on troop transports. (1)

While the principal welfare work of the YMCA was with the 2,000,000 men of the American Expeditionary Forces in France, they also served Allied soldiers. Charles was assigned to units of the French Army as a YMCA Secretary in January 1918. Early in the war, the French Army and the American YMCA formally agreed that the French would provide buildings, furniture, and utilities and the American YMCA would provide their secretaries to operate "Les Foyers du Soldat" (Home of the Soldier). Charles was assigned to Les Foyers du Soldat at Verdun from January to April 1918. Here, he welcomed French soldiers who were on leave, providing them a place to sleep, relax, eat, bathe, and be entertained with music or movies.

Charles' next assignment was with the Eighth Italian Army beginning in April 1918. He was with the army during the Battle of Vittorio Veneto from October 23 –

November 4, 1918 which was the last decisive battle for Austro-Hungarian Army. 51 Italian, 3 British, 2 French Division, 1 Czechoslovak and 1 U.S. Army infantry regiment fought 52 divisions of the Austro-Hungarian Army. The defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Army led to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and contributed to the end of the war.

After the Armistice, Charles remained in Italy providing relief work in Rome, Genova and Milan for the next three years. For his service during and after the war, Charles was awarded the Italian War Cross for Merit during the Battle of Vittorio Veneto and the Bronze Medal of the City of Rome.