

**HISTORY OF THE Y.M.C.A. IN THE
LE MANS AREA: SUMMARY OF
SERVICE Y.M.C.A. IN THE
EMBARKATION CENTER FROM
DECEMBER 1918 TO JULY 1919**

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REGIONAL STUFF AT LE MANS

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SUMMARY OF SERVICE



IN THE EMBARKATION CENTER

From DECEMBER 1918
to JULY 1919

COMPILED AND EDITED BY REGIONAL STAFF AT LE MANS

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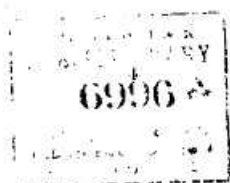
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Credit is accorded to the U. S. A. Signal Corps for much of the photography appearing in this history.

Acknowledgment is also made to the *Stars and Stripes* for the use of cuts of divisional insignia.

Certain valuable statistical information is submitted through the courtesy of A. E. C. General Headquarters.

N. B.: In submitting lists of personnel in connection with each unit of the region, excepting those serving particular divisions, it was found to be impracticable, because of the constant changes taking place, to make up any one list to cover the whole period, hence those appearing herein should be understood to be the personnel serving as of June, 1919.



HISTORY OF THE Y. M. C. A.

LE MANS—A MILITARY CENTER



LE MANS has been a military center from medieval times and was the training center for soldiers of three nations during the recent war. French artillery was trained in the region, and after the beginning of the World War, Belgian troops were brought here for re-organization and training. When America entered the war it was only natural that her troops should train in this historic spot.

After many troops had passed through Le Mans it became the training area for the Eighty-third Division in command of Major-General Glenn. After the signing of the armistice, G. H. Q., A. E. F., searched for a center where, during the process of demobilization, the American Army could be sent to complete final arrangements for sailing for America. From a geographical standpoint no more central place could be found, because Le Mans is almost equally distant from the embarkation points, Bordeaux, Brest, St. Nazaire and Le Havre, with direct railway communication to each. Therefore, it was chosen as the center for embarkation troops.

Up until this time the Le Mans area was a part of the S. O. S., but on December 15, 1918, it was taken from that branch and made a separate unit known as the American Embarkation Center, or the A. E. C. The region consisted of the following camps and areas: Le Mans Depot Division (Classification Camp, Spur Camp, Camp Etat, Overhaul Park, Salvage Camp, Parigne-L'Evegne, and several other units in and about the city.) Forwarding Camp, Belgian Camp, and these areas: Ecommoy, La Suze, Alencon, Sable, Conlie, Ballou, Montfort, La Ferre-Bernard, Mayenne, Laval, Chateau-Gontier and Rennes. All except the last three are Divisional areas.

In making Le Mans the Embarkation Center for the movement of troops on the part of the army, brought a corresponding change in the Y. M. C. A. organization, and the Le Mans region was established, which from the baby region grew to be the largest in the whole A. E. F.

WELFARE WORK IN A. E. C.

By BRIG. GEN. GEORGE S. SIMONDS, U. S. Army Commander



THE AMERICAN Embarkation Center was established in Le Mans (Sarthe), on December 15, 1919, to provide a concentration point at which a maximum of 200,000 transient troops per month could be received, cared for, prepared in detail to meet embarkation requirements and dispatched to various ports.

In July, 1918, the Second Depot Division formed from the Eighty-third Division was established in Le Mans and began to function as a replacement depot about August 1. It continued as such until after the armistice. With the beginning of the movement of troops homeward, they commenced to arrive in the Le Mans areas preparatory to embarkation. The flow thus started in the opposite direction. Instead of preparation for service at the front it became a center of preparation of the troops for return to the United States and to their normal pursuits. To meet the new problems the American Embarkation Center was organized as above stated.

To care for the large number of troops to be sent through, eight divisional billeting areas were organized. These, with the Forwarding Camp, Belgian Camp, Classification Camp and a number of smaller camps provided for a maximum capacity of about 325,000 men.

By June 30, 1919, a total of about 625,000 officers and enlisted men passed through the center for embarkation to the United States. To administer such an establishment it was necessary to provide a headquarters and staff of considerable magnitude. This was done with a general staff in control, organized along the lines of the general staff at general headquarters. In addition to the usual military problems of providing food, clothing and shelter, and administration in general, the special problems were presented of reëquipping and reclothing the men coming from the front; of delousing and cleaning them up; of cleaning up the records of organizations, which in the exigencies of the service were necessarily in arrears, and of the thousands of individual casualties who, through separation from their organizations, required special measures taken with regard to their records; and the great problem of providing for the physical and moral welfare of these great numbers who no longer had the incentive of training for the great struggle of the ages, but were, nevertheless, confronted with the no less important question of preparation for return to their normal pursuits, which had been so abnormally disturbed, and to which disturbance the nation had so nobly responded.

All of these problems were worked out through the ways and means provided by the military organization which was charged with their solution. And it is only the latter one, *i. e.*, the provision for the welfare of the returning troops that will be touched upon here. This is worthy of special mention in this summary, for the reason that in the solution of this problem the aid was invoked of all the civilian societies operating in the A. E. C. The Y. M. C. A., the American Red Cross, the Knights of Columbus, the Jewish Welfare Board and the American Library Association were all represented. In accordance with the general policy announced from General Headquarters, the activities of all these societies were placed under the control of the first section of the General Staff, G-1, and a sub-section with staff officers in control was charged with direct supervision of the work. The chief of the sub-section was held directly responsible for the co-ordination of the various welfare activities; that proper military control was exercised; that the civilian heads were given proper support; and that proper results were obtained.

Without exception every society responded whole-heartedly to the plan provided. Each and every one fell into the general scheme, they met with a high degree of efficiency every demand made upon them, and they cooperated in a fine spirit with the military authorities and with each other.

The magnitude of this work has far exceeded anything that was at first contemplated and the results speak for themselves. This feature of the work of the A. E. C. is worthy of special mention, for it differs somewhat from the general military problem and it has furnished here a striking example of what can be accomplished through the non-military agencies where they are brought under one control, where their efforts are co-ordinated, and where they cooperate as they have done so cordially and so effectively here.

The writer desires to make of record the high appreciation the military authorities of these headquarters have of the aid which the members of these civilian societies have rendered to the army in this center, from the very beginning of its existence. It has been a fine exemplification of the spirit of working for the great results which has animated the A. E. F. throughout its magnificent undertaking and accomplishment in the Great War. And particular appreciation is due the women of these societies, who have toiled so earnestly and efficiently in this work, and in fulfilling so faithfully the high traditions of American womanhood have kept ever before us the ideals for which we fought.

FOREWORD

By O. L. FERRIS, Regional Director



THE PROBLEM of organization for the effective carrying on of the "Y" program in the American Embarkation Center was unusually difficult, due to the very rapid changes in the military plans and the consequent speedy movement of the troops in and out of the area. Combat Divisions arrived with little previous advice and took their departure on short notice, often contrary to pre-arranged plans. Divisions came into the area and remained for a period of four months, while others spent less than a week here. Aside from the regular combat Divisions the problem of handling the large numbers of casuals and S. O. S. troops was stupendous, from a welfare standpoint particularly, inasmuch as the latter classes were not accompanied by a static welfare personnel as were the regular organized Divisions.

¶ A glance at the map of the region reveals the all-comprehensive nature of the "Y" service here. The maximum service seems to have been reached in the months of March and April, at which time there were over 300 "Y" stations throughout the area, and in addition thereto there were operating at that time 15 rolling canteens, which made over 500,000 services to troops not reached by the regular stationary units.

¶ The statistical summary for the seven months which mark the operation of the American Embarkation Center reveals a rapid growth of the organization, and the figures therein combined show in a telling way the tremendous quantity of material brought to play in the "Y" activities. These can be classed primarily into four great groups: Entertainment, Athletic, Religious and Educational, each serving in its peculiar way, but each one correlated with all the others.

¶ The statistics herein shown only begin to tell the story of the wide extent and volume of the activities that fell under these departmental heads. The canteen service was considered purely an Army service, though conducted by the "Y," up to the first of April, when it was turned back to the Army. Its stupendousness can best be understood by the tabulation of figures which show the large volume of merchandise that was handled.

¶ At no time prior to June in the history of this region was there an adequate supply of men and women secretaries to serve the troops, and the figures of personnel serving fell far short of telling the story.

The untiring efforts and sacrificial spirit of the men and the women secretaries are known only to those who were intimately associated with them, and the human interest stories and commendatory letters are multitudinous. Those quoted herein are not to be considered of a personal nature, but rather as illustrating only these intimate phases of the Y. M. C. A.'s contact with the A. E. F.

¶ The ability of the "Y" secretary to associate with him the soldier detail made it possible to handle the tremendous task. It would have been quite impossible without this assistance on the part of the Army, its officers and men. The quality of service has been well understood by those who observed the places of trust in which these details were placed and by those who observed the character of these men, many of whom were decorated for bravery on the field of battle. Faithful service to the "Y" was often rewarded by discharge from the Army and advent into the "Y" as a regular secretary.

¶ The uniform success of the women secretaries is one of the outstanding lights of "Y" service. No task was found too small or too large, too difficult, too arduous, nor too complicated for the woman secretary to handle successfully. It would have been impossible to put over the "Y" program as was done without the women secretaries. Their success and the demand for their services are clearly demonstrated by the figures which reveal the steady growth in numbers of women secretaries in the region.

¶ The problem of billeting in the outlying areas of the Le Mans region constantly taxed the resourcefulness of the "Y," not only in taking care of its personnel comfortably, but in providing necessary space for its activities.

¶ The entire lack of anything but the ordinary small living room in many of the French villages made it necessary to erect tents in scores of places. The quaintness of many of these small rooms and halls that were available and the way in which they were adapted as "Y" huts, as well as the unusually attractive decorations and re-arrangements that transformed them, is the best testimony of the resourcefulness of the respective secretaries. The conversion of dreary French cafes, of ancient stone barns, of ugly fish markets, and of gloomy town halls into cheery "Y's" is a memory that will long live in the minds of the secretaries and of the soldiers that were thrown together in these stations.

¶ The Y. M. C. A. organization in the region falls into three periods; the months of December and January under the regional directorship of Mr. D. W. Weist, of Cleveland, Ohio, the months of February,