

THE NATIONAL WWI MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL

News Release

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Special Exhibition *The Volunteers: Americans Join World War I, 1914-1919* Opens April 5 at National World War I Museum and Memorial

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – The United States’ declaration of war against Germany in April of 1917 is often cited as a turning point in World War I. However, the involvement of American citizens in the war effort actually transpired immediately at the onset of the war through volunteer contributions that assisted in sustaining the Allied Powers in the early years of conflict. [*The Volunteers: Americans Join World War I, 1914-1919*](#), a new special exhibition at the National World War I Museum and Memorial, highlights these contributions from every day Americans who risked their lives in support of others.

Opening Tuesday, April 5, *The Volunteers: Americans Join World War I, 1914-1919* presents individual descriptions, documents and artwork detailing the ways in which Americans aided war efforts through humanitarian and military relief. Countless local, regional and national groups throughout the U.S. such as the American Field Service, the YMCA and the YWCA provided labor, food, entertainment and physical support to Allied forces. Additionally, the French Foreign Legion afforded Americans the earliest opportunity to fight on the front lines. The contributions of these men and women to war-torn countries was pivotal in the early stages of war.

“One of the common narratives is that public opinion was very much one of neutrality prior to the United States’ entry into World War I,” said National World War I Museum and Memorial Senior Curator Doran Cart. “While this is true to an extent, thousands of Americans did risk their lives and contributed to the war almost immediately at the onset. Through this exhibition, we share their incredible experiences.”

The efforts of the American Field Service are among those highlighted in the exhibition, which features images, stories and documents from its archives. American ambulance drivers played key roles in several battles during the early stages war, most notably in parts of France, and often served under extremely dangerous missions on the Western Front. The special exhibition was produced by the National World War I Museum and Memorial in collaboration with AFS Intercultural Programs, which also created a series of free downloadable [lesson plans](#).

“The contributions of Americans during the early stages of war are not often given a proper spotlight,” said National World War I Museum and Memorial President & CEO Matthew Naylor. “By telling their stories, we also continue our mission of providing unique and compelling special exhibitions that educate the public about the continued effects of World War I.”

The exhibition, located in Memory Hall at the Museum, runs through Oct. 2, 2016 before the exhibition then travels to other institutions. In April, the Museum will also launch a supplemental online version of the exhibition to provide an interactive experience featuring additional photos and stories from American volunteers. Principle funding for the exhibition was provided by the Florence Gould Foundation.

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The National World War I Museum and Memorial holds the most diverse collection of World War I objects and documents in the world and is the second-oldest public museum dedicated to preserving the objects, history and personal experiences of the war.

Media interested in covering any of the Museum's offerings should contact Mike Vietti at 816-888-8122 or mvietti@theworldwar.org.

About the National World War I Museum and Memorial

The National World War I Museum and Memorial is America's leading institution dedicated to remembering, interpreting and understanding the Great War and its enduring impact on the global community. The Museum holds the most diverse collection of World War I objects and documents in the world and is the second-oldest public museum dedicated to preserving the objects, history and experiences of the war. The Museum takes visitors of all ages on an epic journey through a transformative period and shares deeply personal stories of courage, honor, patriotism and sacrifice. Designated by Congress as America's official World War I Museum and Memorial and located in downtown Kansas City, Mo., the National World War I Museum and Memorial inspires thought, dialogue and learning to make the experiences of the Great War era meaningful and relevant for present and future generations. To learn more, visit theworldwar.org.

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