

Federal Mobilization for World War I



Typical uniform worn during WW1

August 4, 1917 Governor of South Dakota, Peter Norbert, was notified that all South Dakota units would be called in federal service for World War I.

On August 5, 1917 the Governor called commanders of the South Dakota National Guard and notified them that their units were now mobilized for federal active duty. All 1,576 Soldiers would be called.

In fact, the entire membership of the National Guard of the United States was drafted into federal service for World War I. After war was declared in April 1917 National Guard units were first called into federal service by President Woodrow Wilson under the militia clause of the Constitution.

Most of these units mobilized at their local armories or in state military camps, and they began actively recruiting up to full wartime strength while conducting local patrols to defend against suspected German saboteurs.

In 1917 rules for activating National Guardsmen were quite different than they are today. Guardsmen could not be deployed overseas as militia since the Constitution stipulated that the militia could only be used to "execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrection, and repel invasions." To circumvent this restriction, the Army's Judge Advocate General determined that it would be necessary to draft each individual Guardsman into federal service, thus severing his ties to the state militia and freeing him for service overseas.

Just over 379,000 Guardsmen were drafted on August 5, 1917, more than doubling the size of the U.S. Army with the stroke of a pen.

Despite the fact that the United States military would swell to over 4 million men during the war, the brunt of the fighting in the trenches in France would be borne by the National Guard. All 18 National Guard divisions served overseas as part of the 43rd division American Expeditionary Forces; 12 of the 29 divisions that saw combat were from the Guard.

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