

First large scale deployment of servicemen from Iron County in World War I.

by Jay M. Jones



Photo by R. D. Adams of the parade in Cedar City in September 1917 honoring the first men from Iron County drafted to serve in World War I. Photo courtesy SUU Special Collections.

September 3, 1917 was a day of a grand parade, speeches and music, and a community dance in Cedar City as Iron County prepared to send 46 young men into military service in World War I.

Ten days earlier, the Iron County Record published the names of 49 men from Iron County selected to fill (with three potential replacements) the county's quota of 46 for the first wave of the draft for World War I.

Of the 49, 16 were from Cedar City, 8 from Parowan, 14 from the Escalante Valley, and 11 from other towns in the county.

The draftees did not all depart at once – the training camp at Camp Lewis (later Fort Lewis) Washington was still finishing construction and did not have the capacity to immediately handle all of the men being drafted from surrounding states.

The parade was led by a brass band, followed by the servicemen on horseback, then Red Cross volunteers, followed by farmers with farm produce and a banner which read, "These Will Win the War."

The Cedar City celebration was remarkable enough that one early volunteer already in the service, upon hearing about it, complained that the volunteers had not received such a send-off.

War-time experiences varied for those honored in this parade. Some examples:

- Alma Richards from Parowan, a gold medal winner in the 1912 Olympics, went to officer training school near San Francisco. Arriving in France two weeks before the end of the war (November 1918), he stayed in France through the summer of 1919. He was awarded medals by General Pershing in several events in track and field competitions among the American servicemen in France.
- Fernleigh Gardner from Cedar City served in France and was seriously injured from a poison gas attack. He experienced breathing problems the rest of his life.
- Lionel Dover from Cedar City was killed Sept. 29, 1918 in the early days of the Argonne offensive. His family was not notified of his death until two months later.
- Henry Melling Jones from Enoch lost his life Aug. 6, 1918 from wounds suffered in combat.
- Claude Heist from the Escalante Valley was severely wounded in the Argonne offensive when a machine gun bullet lodged near his heart. He died in Texas 3 years after the war.
- Corlett Simkins, a courier, was awarded the French Croix de Guerre for assisting a Belgian family whose home had been hit by German artillery.
- Lehi M. Jones from Cedar City was sent to Texas to manage horses for the army. Horses were used extensively at the time for logistics supply and for moving artillery.
- Leon Davis from Kanarra served in Siberia, and was involved in skirmishes there against the Bolsheviks.
- Jesse Roundy of Kanarra and Earl Urie of Cedar City were among those sent to lumber camps in the state of Washington to supply Sitka Spruce to make airplanes for the war effort. The demand for this light and strong wood was high enough that the army sent some troops to the lumber camps to help supply the requirements.
- Leland Stapley of Kanarra was a bugler in the 91st Division. He recorded in his diary accounts of combat action in France. Others from the original Iron County draft list that he mentions as part of his unit include Wells Williams of Kanarra and Stan Benson and John Mitchell of Parowan.

Nearly 300 men from Iron County served in the military during World War I. Many civilians supported the war effort by contributing to war bonds, red cross drives, and other supporting causes.

Since then, thousands from Iron County have served in active duty posts during our nation's wars. Veterans Park in Cedar City provides a tribute for those who have made such tremendous sacrifices.